Enhancing the Capacity of Da'i in Safari Ramadhan: Humanist and Contextual Da'wah Strategies in Rural Communities

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ABSTRAK

Program Pengabdian kepada Masyarakat ini bertujuan untuk meningkatkan kapasitas para da'i yang terlibat dalam kegiatan Safari Ramadhan di Kecamatan Samalanga melalui pendekatan dakwah humanis dan kontekstual. Kegiatan ini dilaksanakan dalam bentuk pelatihan intensif yang melibatkan para narasumber dari berbagai pondok pesantren lokal. Materi pelatihan meliputi penguatan pemahaman Islam moderat, strategi dakwah berbasis empati dan budaya lokal, serta teknik komunikasi yang persuasif. Metode pelatihan dirancang secara partisipatif, mencakup ceramah interaktif, diskusi kelompok, simulasi khutbah, dan refleksi pengalaman lapangan. Hasil kegiatan menunjukkan bahwa para da'i mampu mengembangkan strategi dakwah yang lebih adaptif, seperti penggunaan bahasa daerah, penyampaian kisah inspiratif, dan integrasi kearifan lokal dalam isi ceramah. Dampak awal yang teridentifikasi di masyarakat antara lain meningkatnya partisipasi jamaah, terbentuknya ruang dialog sosial-religius, serta tumbuhnya kepercayaan terhadap peran da'i muda. Kegiatan ini membuktikan bahwa pembekalan yang kontekstual dapat menghidupkan kembali fungsi sosial dakwah secara efektif. Oleh karena itu, program ini relevan untuk direplikasi sebagai model dakwah berbasis pemberdayaan masyarakat yang lebih inklusif dan berkelanjutan.

ABSTRACT

This Community Service Program aims to enhance the capacity of da'i participating in Safari Ramadhan activities in Samalanga District through a humanist and contextual da'wah approach. The program was carried out in the form of intensive training involving speakers from various local Islamic boarding schools (pondok pesantren). The training materials focused on strengthening the understanding of moderate Islam, da'wah strategies based on empathy and local culture, as well as persuasive communication techniques. The training method was designed to be participatory, including interactive lectures, group discussions, sermon simulations, and reflective sessions based on field experiences. The results of the program indicate that the da'i were able to develop more adaptive da'wah strategies, such as the use of local languages, the delivery of inspiring stories, and the integration of local wisdom into their sermons. The initial impacts observed in the community include increased congregation participation, the emergence of socio-religious dialogue spaces, and growing trust in the role of young da'i. This activity demonstrates that context-based training can effectively revitalize the social function of da'wah.

Therefore, this program is relevant to be replicated as a model of community-based da'wah that is more inclusive and sustainable.

INTRODUCTION

Ramadan is a strategic momentum in the life of Muslims, filled not only with spiritual worship but also serving as a productive space to strengthen Islamic da'wah in a comprehensive manner. In various regions across Indonesia, one of the enduring religious traditions is Safari Ramadan, a mobile da'wah activity in which preachers (da'i) travel to remote villages throughout the holy month of Ramadan (Arahman, 2023). This activity serves a dual function: conveying Islamic teachings to the community while simultaneously building social ties, absorbing community aspirations, and reinforcing the relationship among religious scholars (ulama), the Muslim community, and the government.

Nevertheless, the effectiveness of Safari Ramadan is highly dependent on the quality of the da'i involved. In rural contexts, a uniform or purely textual approach to da'wah is insufficient. Preachers face various challenges such as cultural differences, the educational background of the community, limited access to information, and resistance to changes in social values (Ahmad Ghulusy, 1987); (Idris, 2023). Therefore, a da'wah strategy is required that not only relies on religious texts but also engages with the psychological, cultural, and social aspects of the community. This underscores the urgent need for a humanistic and contextual approach to da'wah.

The humanistic approach to da'wah emphasizes the importance of empathy, dialogue, and respect for human dignity. Da'wah should not be judgmental or negate the diversity of understandings that exist within society. Rather, it must open up space for encounter and the reinforcement of Islam's universal values such as compassion (rahmah), justice, and tolerance. Meanwhile, contextual da'wah requires preachers to understand the socio-cultural conditions of the communities they are addressing, including language, local traditions, and everyday concerns. In rural communities, this is particularly important as Islamic values are often rooted in unwritten traditions and local wisdom (Nor Ipansyah et al., 2024).

Unfortunately, many da'i participating in Safari Ramadan lack sufficient preparation to apply this approach. A significant number rely solely on memorized da'wah material without fully understanding the context of their audience. As a result, their messages are often ineffective, and may even lead to resistance or misunderstanding (Surbakti et al., 2023). This indicates the need for systematic efforts to enhance the capacity of da'i, especially in terms of communication skills, social context awareness, and mastery of applicable da'wah content relevant to community needs.

This community service program seeks to address these challenges by providing preparatory training for da'i assigned to the Safari Ramadan. The training not only covers Islamic scholarship but also focuses on a more inclusive, adaptive, and locally-rooted approach to da'wah. The training is designed participatively, involving religious leaders, academics, and social practitioners who understand the dynamics of rural communities. Participants will be equipped with various communicative da'wah methods, constructive rhetorical strategies, and thematic materials tailored to community needs, such as health da'wah, Islamic economic empowerment, and strengthening Islamic family values.

By improving the capacity of da'i through this initiative, Safari Ramadan is expected to become more than an annual ritual. It will evolve into a grounded da'wah platform that resonates with the hearts of the people and creates meaningful social transformation. This article will further discuss how the preparatory training was designed and implemented, and how it impacted

da'wah strategies in rural communities. The activity also aims to serve as a replicable model for other regions to organize more meaningful and contextually relevant Safari Ramadan programs.

METHOD

This Community Service Program (Pengabdian kepada Masyarakat or PKM) adopts a participatory and contextual approach, prioritizing active participant engagement and taking into account the socio-cultural conditions of the rural communities targeted by the da'wah efforts. The program is carried out in several structured phases: needs assessment, training planning, implementation of the training, and evaluation of outcomes.

The first phase is the needs assessment, conducted through preliminary observation and discussions with local da'wah institutions, religious leaders, and mosque administrators in the rural areas designated for the Safari Ramadan. The objective is to gain insights into the challenges of conducting da'wah in these communities, the characteristics of the audiences, and the most appropriate approaches to be adopted. This information serves as the foundation for designing relevant training materials and methods for the da'i.

The second phase is the training planning, collaboratively designed by the PKM implementation team and resource persons including academics, da'wah practitioners, and community figures. The training content focuses on three main areas: (1) Strengthening moderate Islamic understanding; (2) Strategies for humanistic and contextual da'wah; and (3) Persuasive and constructive da'wah communication skills. In addition, participants are provided with thematic modules such as health-related da'wah, economic empowerment of the Muslim community, and current socio-religious issues.

The third phase involves the implementation of the da'i training, conducted through interactive workshops, focused group discussions (FGDs), sermon/lecture simulations, and role plays. This phase is carried out intensively over 2–3 days using an andragogical approach that encourages participants to actively engage in discussions, ask questions, and directly practice the materials presented. The training takes place in a training center or Islamic boarding school (pesantren) with adequate facilities.

The final phase is the evaluation, which includes both process and outcome evaluations. Process evaluation is conducted through observations during the training, while outcome evaluation is carried out by comparing participants' understanding before and after the training using pre- and post-tests. In addition, feedback from participants and community partners is collected as qualitative data to assess the program's usefulness. With this systematic and participatory implementation method, the training is expected to produce a tangible impact in improving the quality of da'wah to be more relevant, communicative, and responsive to the spiritual needs of rural communities during Safari Ramadan.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Description of the Training Activities

The preparatory training for da'i assigned to the Safari Ramadan program held at Dayah Jamiah Al-Aziziyah Samalanga was part of a strategic effort to enhance the quality of da'wah that does not rely solely on textual strength but also incorporates social and cultural sensitivity. The three-day program involved 40 participants, consisting of senior santri, Islamic boarding school teachers, and students of Islamic studies who were assigned to preach across various regions. The training was designed to prepare them not only as religiously knowledgeable preachers but also

as individuals equipped with effective communication skills and approaches suited to the characteristics of rural communities.

The speakers delivering the training were drawn from the prominent Islamic boarding school of Dayah Jamiah Al-Aziziyah in Samalanga. These speakers are experienced figures in the field of da'wah, possessing a deep understanding of social contexts and the practical challenges faced by da'i in the field. Their presence was crucial—not only to provide substantive material but also to serve as role models and sources of real-world insights into preaching among grassroots communities. Their knowledge, grounded in lived experience, offered invaluable perspectives beyond what can be gained from theoretical learning alone.

The training materials were organized into three interrelated main themes. First, strengthening the understanding of moderate Islam. This session emphasized the importance of interpreting Islam as a religion of rahmah—compassion, tolerance, and social justice. In light of the growing trend of harsh, textual, and divisive preaching styles, this training reminded participants of the importance of maintaining the spirit of wasathiyah or religious moderation. These messages are especially critical when da'i engage with communities that are diverse in background, understanding, and tradition.

Second, strategies for humanistic and contextual da'wah. In this session, participants were guided to understand that da'wah is not merely about delivering sermons or quoting verses and hadith, but is also the art of understanding people and building social relationships. The focus was placed on empathy-based preaching approaches, the use of constructive language, and the selection of themes relevant to the community's conditions. A da'i who delivers a sermon without grasping the community's emotional and social state cannot foster a meaningful connection. Hence, it is essential for preachers to be socially observant, culturally aware, and responsive with appropriate methods.

Third, the topic of communication techniques and da'wah rhetoric. Participants were trained to organize sermons that are well-structured, logical, and emotionally resonant. The emphasis was not merely on content delivery, but on how to communicate the message in a way that is received and internalized by the audience. Trainers introduced techniques such as storytelling, use of analogies, voice modulation, and body language to enhance communicative effectiveness. In rural contexts, how a message is delivered is often more impactful than the message itself. Therefore, grounded and emotionally engaging rhetoric becomes a key success factor in da'wah.

The training method was not one-directional, but highly participatory and andragogical. Materials were presented through interactive lectures interspersed with open dialogue. Participants were not passive listeners but were actively involved in group discussions, case studies, and collective reflections. One particularly effective method was sermon simulation. In this session, participants practiced delivering da'wah in front of their peers and received direct feedback from the trainers and fellow participants. This exercise enhanced their confidence, precision in language use, and sensitivity to audience responses.

Such a participatory training approach proved effective in enhancing participants' capacities. This was evident from their increasing engagement throughout the program and the shift in their perspectives on da'wah practice. Whereas previously some participants believed it sufficient to merely deliver textual religious content, after the training they began to recognize the importance of understanding community dynamics, adopting gentle approaches, and incorporating relevant contemporary issues (Udin et al., 2021). Some participants even began

structuring their sermons thematically, addressing local issues such as early marriage, youth roles, family health, and the importance of children's education.

From observations and brief interviews with participants, it was evident that the training not only improved their preaching skills but also fostered a new awareness of their roles as da'i. They no longer saw da'wah as a formal obligation, but as a social mission requiring heartfelt engagement, empathy, and social intelligence. One participant stated that after attending the training, he felt more confident and better prepared to engage with the complexities of community life.

Analytically, this initiative demonstrated that da'i capacity building is not merely about adding knowledge but involves a transformation in mindset and social engagement. Humanistic and contextual da'wah strategies have proven to be not only more effective but also more sustainable, as they build communicative bridges between da'i and society. When da'i are able to approach communities with compassion and culturally attuned methods, Islamic messages are more readily accepted and practiced.

Thus, the preparatory training provided through this initiative stands as a crucial milestone in developing da'i cadres who are not only intellectually competent but also socially and emotionally mature. They emerge as frontline agents of transformation, conveying Islamic values not as rigid dogma, but as living inspiration embedded in the daily lives of rural communities.

Developed Da'wah Strategies

One of the most significant outcomes of the preparatory training for da'i participating in the Safari Ramadan program was the formulation of da'wah strategies that are more grounded and contextually relevant, particularly within rural communities. The da'i who participated in the training not only gained theoretical insights into da'wah approaches but also began to formulate concrete strategies tailored to the socio-cultural conditions of the communities they would engage with. These strategies emerged from reflective sessions throughout the training, enriched by input from trainers affiliated with Islamic boarding schools in Samalanga—individuals with long-standing experience working directly with local communities and deep familiarity with indigenous wisdom (Aang Burhanuddin, 2020); (Agus et al., 2020); (Jumriah Komala Sari et al., 2024); (Hilmi & Choiriyah, 2022).

The first strategy developed was the use of local language as the primary medium of da'wah. Although the da'i generally possessed strong proficiency in delivering sermons in formal Indonesian, the training emphasized the importance of prioritizing local languages—especially Acehnese—when conveying religious messages. The use of local language allows for stronger emotional resonance and helps create psychological closeness between da'i and congregants. In rural contexts, speaking the local language is often regarded as a gesture of respect toward communal identity and cultural heritage. Accordingly, the da'i were encouraged to deliver sermons in Acehnese while selectively and contextually incorporating Arabic religious terms to ensure accessibility and prevent perceptions of exclusivity.

An analysis of this approach suggests that language is not merely a tool for communication, but a medium of meaning-making. When da'i employ local language, the religious message no longer feels foreign or imposed from above; rather, it becomes embedded in everyday discourse. This has a direct impact on increasing audience engagement and reducing resistance to sensitive religious topics. In some cases, local language use even enables da'i to deliver subtle yet poignant social critiques without offending the community's sensibilities.

The second strategy involved the use of local stories and narratives as da'wah tools. During training sessions, participants were guided to adopt storytelling-based preaching methods. Trainers from the pesantren introduced techniques for integrating inspirational stories into sermons—drawing from the lives of prophets, companions, and respected local figures. Participants were then tasked with collecting and reconstructing folktales or real-life experiences that carry moral and religious values and aligning them with Islamic teachings.

This approach was well received and proved especially effective in maintaining audience attention, particularly among elders and children. In rural communities, the tradition of storytelling remains strong. Stories serve not only as entertainment but as vehicles for transmitting values, teachings, and lived experiences. As such, the stories delivered by the da'i are not mere illustrations but function as bridges between religious texts and the lived realities of their audiences. Analytically, the use of local narratives functions as a da'wah medium that unites the normative and cultural dimensions of Islam, enabling religious messages to be received without creating cultural dissonance.

The third strategy centered on integrating local wisdom and cultural values into sermon content. During group discussions, participants identified various forms of local wisdom in Samalanga, such as kenduri (communal feasts), meuseuraya (communal work), village deliberation traditions, and customary practices aligned with Islamic principles. Rather than negating these traditions, da'i were encouraged to use them as platforms for delivering religious messages in a more contextualized manner.

For example, when discussing the importance of zakat or charitable giving, da'i were advised to link the message to meugang—a local tradition of sharing meat before Ramadan. Similarly, when addressing the concept of ukhuwah islamiyah (Islamic brotherhood), they could refer to the local custom of community cooperation in building balai pengajian (religious study halls). This strategy promotes the understanding that Islam does not seek to replace local cultures but to enhance and sanctify good traditions. As a result, the community perceives Islamic teachings as part of their own way of life, not as something foreign or imposed.

The fourth strategy emphasized the use of dialogue and persuasive approaches, rather than confrontational ones. In multiple simulation sessions and discussions, da'i were trained to deliver social criticism or moral advice gently, without judgment, and with an emphasis on respect. They were encouraged to move away from harsh, rhetorical, and fear-based preaching styles, which often trigger resistance. The persuasive approach is considered more suitable for rural communities, which value tradition, dignity, and harmonious social relations.

Trainers stressed that the success of da'wah should not be measured by the number of verses or hadith quoted, but by how deeply the message resonates and gradually transforms community behavior. In communities where kinship and collective identity are highly valued, building trust is more important than demonstrating religious authority. Therefore, da'i were encouraged to engage as community companions rather than merely as issuers of religious verdicts.

An analysis of these strategies reveals that the success of da'wah largely depends on the da'i's ability to be part of the community's lived experience rather than external observers. Effective da'wah is not one that "storms in" with grand rhetoric, but one that "seeps into" people's hearts through humane, communicative, and relevant engagement. The strategies developed through this training signify a crucial shift from normative models of preaching toward more transformative and dialogical approaches.

These da'wah strategies reflect an integrative spirit that brings together religious texts, social experience, and local culture. This approach not only enhances the da'i's communicative effectiveness with the community but also strengthens Islam's presence as a religion that harmonizes with local realities without compromising its doctrinal core. Equipped with these strategies, the Safari Ramadan conducted by young da'i becomes more than a yearly preaching ritual—it becomes a catalyst for rooted and sustainable social transformation within rural communities.

Initial Impact of the Safari Ramadhan Program on Rural Communities

The Safari Ramadhan program implemented by young da'i (Islamic preachers) who had undergone intensive preparatory training left a profound impression on local communities. During the first two weeks of Ramadhan, these da'i were deployed to various villages with core responsibilities such as delivering tarawih sermons, Friday khutbahs, dawn religious lectures (pengajian subuh), and mentoring mosque youth groups. In practice, the program served not only as a platform for delivering religious messages but also as a medium for fostering dialogue between the da'i and community members, strengthening social bonds, and reviving a structured religious atmosphere in villages that had begun to experience a decline in organized Islamic activities (Kodoatie et al., 2018); (Wijaya, 2023).

The most visible initial impact was the significant increase in community participation in religious activities during Ramadhan. Several villages that previously only held tarawih prayers without accompanying sermons became more vibrant with the presence of da'i who offered fresh, practical, and easily understood material. Sermons delivered in the local language, combined with a humanistic and non-patronizing approach, made people feel more comfortable and engaged. In some mosques, there was a noticeable increase in congregants, including youth who had previously shown little interest in religious events. This indicates that the developed dakwah strategies were effective in reaching a wide demographic.

Beyond increased participation, the Safari Ramadhan initiative also strengthened Islamic social values in everyday community life. Sermons often emphasized the importance of harmony, avoiding gossip (ghibah), educating children with compassion, and fostering mutual assistance and social empathy during the holy month. Several community members interviewed expressed that the messages deeply touched and motivated them to improve family and neighborly relationships that had previously become strained. In some villages, da'i even initiated communal iftar gatherings and encouraged mosque youth to take a more active role in organizing tadarus sessions and supporting orphans.

Another notable impact was the emergence of open discussion spaces between the community and the young da'i on everyday life issues. After tarawih or dawn sermons, many residents would approach the da'i for informal consultations regarding family matters, children's education, household finances, and even minor local disputes. This shows that the da'i were no longer seen merely as sermon-givers but had begun to be trusted as spiritual and social partners. In several locations, they were even requested to mediate community conflicts or give input on customary decisions intersecting with Islamic values.

From a sociological perspective, this marks the re-emergence of the da'i's strategic role in the village's social fabric, a role that had been gradually eroded by the dominance of local administrative or political figures. Community trust grew because the da'i approached them not with authoritative or didactic tones, but as empathetic and open dialogue partners. This is a

significant outcome of the implemented dakwah strategies, which were grounded in respect for local wisdom and the compassionate delivery of religious teachings.

Analysis of these initial outcomes suggests that Safari Ramadhan is not merely a ceremonial religious activity, but also a potential medium for social transformation. When the public begins to respond positively to religious messages that directly address everyday challenges, the dakwah has successfully bridged the gap between text and context. The effectiveness of the da'i is thus measured not by the number of verses quoted, but by the depth of their influence on community attitudes, thought patterns, and behavior. Many community leaders observed that this year's Safari Ramadhan felt different—the da'i did not just preach; they participated in communal activities, from helping with mosque maintenance to guiding children in tadarus recitation.

Moreover, some villages have begun drafting plans for sustained collaboration with the pesantren (Islamic boarding schools) where the da'i originated. These efforts aim to continue religious engagement beyond Ramadhan through monthly pengajian, youth training programs, or village-level Islamic discourse sessions. This indicates that Safari Ramadhan has opened new avenues for dynamic relationships between religious educational institutions and local communities. In the long run, such relationships could become the foundation for building rural communities that are religiously rooted, tolerant, and morally resilient.

Nevertheless, certain challenges remain. In some areas, a segment of the community initially felt hesitant to accept the young da'i, often due to their relatively young age or limited experience. However, their polite and communicative approach gradually reduced these reservations. Several Safari Ramadhan participants acknowledged learning valuable lessons in the field, especially in earning community trust and responding wisely to complex social dynamics. This underscores the mutual learning aspect of the program—beneficial not only for the communities but also for the da'i themselves as emerging agents of change.

Considering these various dynamics, it can be concluded that the Safari Ramadhan program, grounded in humanistic and contextual dakwah training, has generated significant positive initial impacts on rural communities in Samalanga. The initiative has not only enhanced the community's spiritual experience during Ramadhan but also contributed to building social networks, fostering collective spirit, and encouraging the emergence of an inclusive and grounded Islamic discourse. These impacts must be further nurtured and expanded to evolve into a sustainable dakwah movement capable of responding to contemporary challenges and the real needs of society.

CONCLUSION

The preparatory program for da'i participating in Safari Ramadhan in Samalanga District demonstrates that capacity-building efforts must go beyond the mastery of religious content to include socially and culturally relevant approaches tailored to rural community contexts. Through participatory and contextual training, the da'i were equipped with humanistic dakwah strategies emphasizing persuasive communication, the use of local language, and the incorporation of storytelling and indigenous wisdom as mediums for conveying religious messages. This proved effective in fostering closer relationships between da'i and congregants and increasing public participation in religious activities during Ramadhan.

The dakwah strategies developed during this program successfully addressed field challenges with greater adaptability, without compromising the core substance of Islamic teachings. The presence of polite and communicative young da'i was well-received, generating new trust in their role as both spiritual and social partners. The initial outcomes of Safari Ramadhan include increased religious awareness, the creation of dialogical spaces between da'i and community members, and the emergence of grassroots initiatives aimed at sustaining Islamic engagement. Therefore, this program has not only created a conducive environment for dakwah during Ramadhan but also opened pathways for developing an inclusive, participatory, and contextual dakwah model. Such programs should be replicated in other regions, particularly in rural areas that require grounded and transformative dakwah approaches. The support of pesantren, religious institutions, and community leaders is crucial to ensure that initiatives like these can grow into powerful, far-reaching, and sustainable social movements.

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