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Developing Cadres of Student Preachers Through Simulations Religious and Open Evaluations at the At-Tahdzib Islamic Boarding School's Preaching Assembly

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Abstract

Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) serve as religious educational institutions and platforms for preparing students (santri) to contribute to da'wah (Islamic outreach) within the broader community. This community service report examines the development of da'wah cadres, an initiative carried out by the Majelis Dakwah Pesantren At-Tahdzib (MDPA) at the Pesantren At-Tahdzib in Rejoagung, Ngoro, Jombang, Indonesia. Launched around 2017, the program addresses the need to equip students who may feel hesitant when asked to speak in public religious forums. Key activities include simulations of religious events, practice sessions for short sermons (approximately seven minutes per student), rotating speaking opportunities, and open feedback provided by mentors. Evaluation focuses on five aspects: etiquette (adab), intonation, content, self-confidence, and body language. This report employs a descriptive-reflective approach, drawing on practitioners' notes as well as photographic and video documentation. Observations indicate that the program provides a consistent space for practice and feedback; students have become more confident in speaking and more organized in their delivery. These observations, however, are not yet supported by quantitative pre- and post-training measurements. The analytical framework incorporates experiential learning, observational learning, Islamic communication etiquette, and feedback theory. The report highlights the value of simulations and open feedback in pesantren-based da'wah development and recommends more robust documentation and evaluation for future initiatives.

Keywords*: Da'wah cadre development; Santri; Ceremony simulation; Open feedback*

INTRODUCTION

The success of an Islamic boarding school (*pesantren*) in the realm of *da'wah* (Islamic outreach) education can be gauged by the students' mastery of Islamic subject matter, their readiness to communicate and convey religious messages, and their ability to tailor their delivery to the needs of their audience. This requires continuous development through practical training, the cultivation of proper conduct (*adab*), mastery of content, and performance evaluation. The training of future *da'i* (Islamic preachers) serves as a bridge between the educational process within the *pesantren* and the needs of *da'wah* in the wider community.

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Mastery of religious knowledge does not always go hand in hand with the confidence to present it in public. Based on the training experience at *Pesantren At-Tahdzib*, some students still feel insecure when asked to perform *da'wah*. Ultimately, the goal is for these students to be able to take on active roles in religious activities beyond the *pesantren* environment. Effective *da'wah* skills encompass the courage to speak, the ability to deliver content in a coherent manner, clear intonation, good conduct, and body language that reinforces the message. Students must engage in hands-on practice, receive feedback, and learn from the performances of their peers.

Previous studies on *da'wah* training for *santri* (Islamic boarding school students) emphasize the management of such activities through planning, organizing, implementation, as well as monitoring and evaluation. For instance, some studies examine the management of *da'wah* training as part of an effort to prepare future *da'i* within the *pesantren* environment;[1] the use of communication materials, vocal techniques, body language, simulations, and feedback as elements of training.[2] The development of *da'wah* cadres requires an integration of knowledge, practical opportunities, and evaluation. Reports from the MDPA – the *Da'wah* Council of the *Pesantren At-Tahdzib* – describe the use of comprehensive simulations of religious ceremonies as a training environment. These sessions include open evaluations, allowing other participants to learn from both the performances and the feedback provided by the instructors.

MDPA is an organization operating under the auspices of the *Pesantren At-Tahdzib* in Rejoagung, Ngoro, Jombang. Established around 2017, it was created to support the founder's vision of preparing *santri* to serve their religion through *da'wah*. The program targets both male and female students across the school levels present at the boarding school, including *Madrasah Tsanawiyah*/MTs (Islamic Junior High School), *Sekolah Menengah Pertama*/SMP-IT (Integrated Islamic Junior High School), *Madrasah Aliyah*/MA (Islamic Senior High School), and *Sekolah Menengah Kejuruan*/SMK (Vocational High School). Approximately 70–90 male students and 90–100 female students are involved.

MDPA's training program utilizes simulations of religious ceremonies and practical public speaking. These simulations encompass an opening, the recitation of the Holy Quran, the chanting of *Shalawat Wahidiyah*, formal remarks, a *mau'izhah hasanah* (religious sermon) or *Wahidiyah* lecture, and a closing. The structure and format of the proceedings are tailored to the specific type and level of the ceremony being simulated. During the lecture sessions, students take turns speaking, with each allotted approximately seven minutes. Following each presentation, instructors provide direct critiques and suggestions in front of the other participants. Evaluations focus on five key aspects: *adab*, intonation, the content of the lecture, confidence, and body language. These activities typically take place on Sunday mornings, following Friday prayers, and – for certain specific events – on Thursday evenings (*malam Jumat*).

The sustainability of cadre development is central to the institutional framework of the MDPA. In July 2025, NU Online Jombang reported the launch of MADAPA (*Majelis Alumni Da'wah Pesantren At-Tahdzib*), an organization for alumni designed to strengthen the MDPA and ensure the continuity of its *da'wah* efforts. The coverage highlights the collaboration between members and alumni, as well as a development approach that focuses on mental readiness.[3]

This article focuses on the training of *santri* as *da'i* (preaching/proselytizing) cadres through the simulation of religious ceremonies at the MDPA (*Madrasah Diniyah*/Religious School) of the *Pesantren At-Tahdzib*. The discussion covers the execution of these simulations, the practice of delivering sermons, open evaluations by instructors, and observations regarding the students' confidence and the coherence of their presentations. The article serves as both documentation and a reflection on the training practices already in place, as well as a resource for the future development of the program.

METHOD

This mentoring initiative employs a descriptive-reflective approach to present the practices used in training *da'wah* cadres within the MDPA program, a program that has been in operation since approximately 2017. The material for this account is drawn from information provided by the organizers, as well as available photographic and video documentation. This approach maps out the various activities, target participants, stages of simulation, evaluation mechanisms, and the observations made by the organizers.

From a pedagogical perspective, MDPA activities can be analyzed through the experiential learning framework developed by David A. Kolb. The learning process encompasses concrete experience, reflective observation, the formation of understanding, and experimentation.[4] Concrete experience occurs when students take on roles in organizing an event or delivering a lecture, while reflective observation takes place as they watch the performances of their peers and listen to evaluations from their mentors. This experiential learning framework serves as a lens through which the existing practices can be examined.

RESULTS

Execution of a Religious Ceremony Simulation

Santri practice executing a sequence of events modeled after religious activities at various levels. This sequence typically includes an opening, the recitation of verses from the Holy Quran, the chanting of *Shalawat Wahidiyah*, formal remarks, a *mau'izhah hasanah* or *Wahidiyah* lecture, and a closing. The program structure and the nature of the remarks are tailored to the specific scenario being enacted, for instance, a ceremony held at the regency or provincial level.

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These simulations provide students with the opportunity to familiarize themselves with the flow of an event and to perform their assigned roles accordingly. Students practice delivering lectures while also gaining experience in navigating the structure of a religious program, encompassing an opening, an introduction, formal remarks, the core content, and a conclusion. This simulation-based approach serves as a defining characteristic of the MDPA training program, distinguishing it from standard public-speaking exercises that focus solely on an individual's isolated performance.

Lecture Practices and Cadre Rotation

The lecture session is an essential component of the simulation. Typically, about ten students are given the opportunity to present material, with each person allotted approximately seven minutes. These presentations take place in front of other participants, allowing the students to gain experience speaking before an audience within a supportive, developmental environment. The roster of presenters is rotated in subsequent sessions to ensure that other students also have the chance to present.

Given the limited time, students must carefully select and organize their material to ensure it can be delivered concisely. This time constraint is significant, as it allows mentors to focus on the content and the logical flow of the lectures. While the courage to present and the ability to deliver material are interconnected aspects of the training process, they remain distinct; a student might possess the confidence to speak but still need to refine the structure of their material, or conversely, they might have well-prepared content but require more experience to present it with self-assurance.

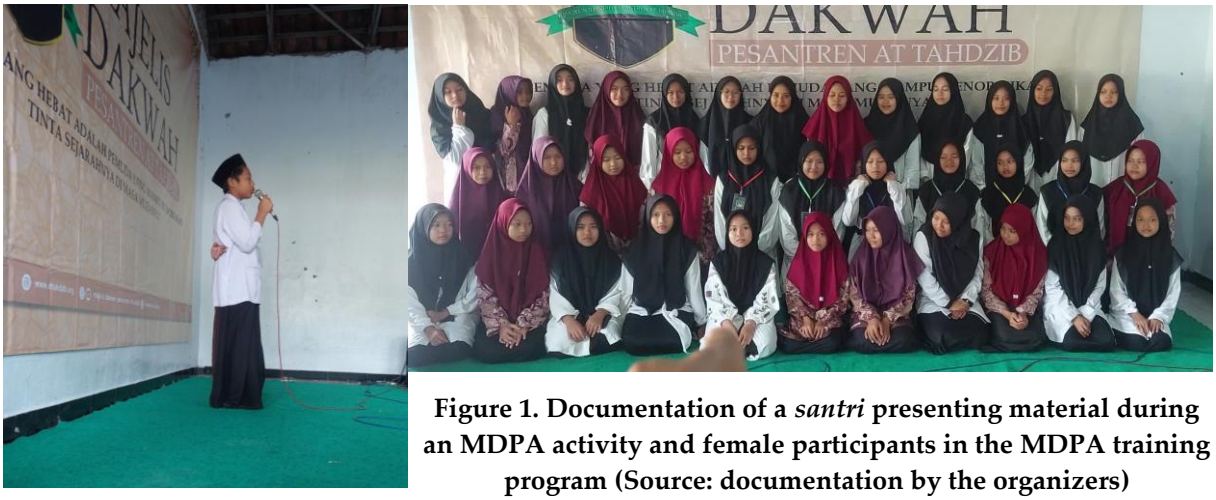


Figure 1. Documentation of a *santri* presenting material during an MDPA activity and female participants in the MDPA training program (Source: documentation by the organizers)

Open Evaluation by the Advisor

Once a student has finished their presentation, the instructor provides an evaluation, including critiques and suggestions, directly in front of all the participants. Five key aspects are assessed: *adab*, intonation, the content of the speech, confidence, and body language. *Adab* relates to one's attitude and politeness; intonation concerns the clear modulation of the voice; speech content pertains to the material and its logical

flow; confidence refers to one's readiness to perform; and body language involves gestures that support the delivery of the message.

This open evaluation is directed at the student who has just presented, while the other participants learn from the instructor's comments and observe specific aspects of the performance that warrant attention. This evaluation mechanism turns an individual student's performance into a collective learning opportunity. In the practice of MDPA, these evaluations are delivered orally; there is currently no information to confirm the use of standardized score sheets or written rubrics.

Observed Results

Based on the observations of the organizers, *santri* frequently demonstrated encouraging improvements in courage and self-confidence when performing on stage. The content they presented also became more organized, coherent, and direct. These observations are linked to the practice opportunities provided, the rotation of performances, and the feedback given by the mentors following each presentation.

These findings are presented as qualitative observations by the organizers. There is currently no quantitative data measurements, proficiency scores, or individual progress records – to indicate the specific magnitude of improvement. It is not known whether all students experienced the same degree of change or a specific percentage-based increase in their abilities. The accounts provided by the organizers serve as the basis for documenting the students' growing confidence in performing and the improved coherence of their material throughout the mentoring process.

Support and Activity Documentation

According to the organizers, various stakeholders within the *Pesantren At-Tahdzib* support the existence and activities of the MDPA, viewing them as an integral part of the ongoing development of *santri* at the institution. The specific forms of support provided by each party should be detailed based on verifiable documentation or reliable accounts. Available documentation, consisting of photographs and videos of the activities, illustrates the students' performances and their active participation.

The coaching experience, which has spanned several years, includes systematic documentation. Records of when sessions took place, the types of simulations used, the participants involved, and summaries of evaluations make it easier for the organization to track the program's progress. While photos and videos help illustrate the nature of the activities, they do not provide evidence of the extent to which the participants' abilities have changed.

DISCUSSION

Simulation as Experiential Learning

MDPA training can be understood as a form of experiential-based learning (E-BL). Participants receive guidance, assume specific roles, and deliver live presentations.

E-BL unfolds through a cycle that encompasses concrete experience, reflection, the formation of understanding, and subsequent experimentation. Simulations and speeches serve as concrete experiences; observing the performances of other participants and receiving evaluations from instructors provide opportunities for reflection; and the chance to perform again at a later time offers space to apply the feedback received.

The strength of the MDPA simulation lies in exercises that mirror a sequence of religious ceremonies. Students practice delivering content and assuming specific roles within the structure of an event. This simulation offers a broader experience than isolated public-speaking exercises, helping students understand *da'wah* as an organized religious activity.

Open Evaluation and Observational Learning

Learning within the MDPA framework takes place through two avenues: active practice for students whose turn it is to perform, and observation for the other participants. Individuals can learn by observing the actions of others and the consequences that follow. Participants who observe the performance and the mentor's evaluation have the opportunity to identify effective presentation techniques, as well as shortcomings that should be avoided. The actions of a single cadre can serve as a learning resource for the entire group.

Open evaluation is also related to the concept of feedback that depends on its quality and the way it is delivered, including its effectiveness in helping participants understand their current performance level and the steps needed for improvement. MDPA feedback and suggestions will better support the learning process if they are specific, focused on behaviors that can be improved, and delivered in a manner that upholds the dignity of the *santri*.

Etiquette and Clarity as Elements of the Quality of *Da'wah*

Adab, intonation, the content of a sermon, courage, and body language are five aspects that demonstrate *da'wah* skills, understood as a combination of attitude, substance, mental readiness, and delivery style. *Adab* in *da'wah* conveys religious messages and entails moral responsibility. Evaluating *adab* serves to remind *santri* that how they conduct themselves before an audience is an integral part of their training.

Communication principles found in the Quransuch as *qawlan sadidan* (truthful/sound speech), *qawlan layyinan* (gentle speech), and *qawlan balighan* (effective/eloquent speech), provide an ethical orientation regarding truthfulness, gentleness, and precision in the delivery of a message. These Quranic communication principles are rooted in honesty, propriety, and responsibility. The accounts found in Sunan Abi Dawud illustrate the clarity of the Prophet's speech, which was easily understood by his listeners. A presentation should be delivered in a clear and organized manner. Focusing on the content and the logical flow of the material ensures that the message is conveyed directly, without unnecessary complexity.

Aspects such as intonation and body language pertain to both verbal and nonverbal communication. When used appropriately and in the right context, these elements enhance the clarity of the message. While confidence is an important quality, it cannot substitute for the necessity of accurate content and responsible delivery. An evaluation framework, such as the MDPA, that considers these five aspects can be developed into a more structured guide for training and development.

The Position of MDPA in the Study of *Da'wah* Training for *Santri*

This report concerns the processes of planning, organizing, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating within the study of training management for *da'wah santri* activities.[5] The primary connection lies in the concept of *pembinaan* (development/ coaching) as a process that requires the management of activities and evaluation. The available MDPA reports lack the comprehensive documentation necessary to assess all management functions in detail. This analysis is therefore limited to methods such as simulations, role-switching, lecture-based practice, and evaluations, all of which can be described based on the experiences of those who implemented them.

Previous research also positions simulation and feedback as part of practice-based learning.[6] Similar to the MDPA approach, these methods involve practicing performance and evaluating communication skills. The distinction lies in the fact that the MDPA model specifically utilizes speech exercises integrated with simulations of religious ceremonies, incorporating a more comprehensive set of roles. This article documents a unique form of training based on the MDPA experience. It does not claim that the ceremonial model is more effective than other models; a comparative assessment would require an appropriate evaluation design and comparable data.

Program Limitations and Development

The observed changes in the participants' confidence and the coherence of their material presentation represent a significant experience; however, this has not yet been supported by pre- and post-training measurements. Consequently, this article cannot quantify the extent of the improvement or the long-term impact of the activities. This limitation highlights the need for more robust documentation in future cycles to substantiate the value of the training experience provided.

MDPA could consider maintaining activity records that include the date, type of simulation, number of participants, roles assumed, and a summary of the instructor's evaluation. If it aligns with the organization's needs, the evaluation criteria, covering demeanor, intonation, content, confidence, and body language, could be formalized into a simple rubric with clear descriptive criteria. Feedback could also be summarized to serve as improvement targets for students when they next take their turn. Such improvements would assist instructors in monitoring the learning process and provide stronger data for compiling activity reports and assessing the development of *da'wah* cadres over time.

The MDPA practice demonstrates the potential for developing *da'wah* cadres through hands-on experience, observational learning, and open evaluation. The program's sustainability can be strengthened by ensuring consistent, rotating opportunities for participants to present, alongside improved record-keeping of activities and evaluation outcomes. With more systematic documentation, these training practices will be easier to reflect upon and further developed as an integral component of *pesantren*-based *da'wah* education.

CONCLUSION

The training of *da'wah* cadres is conducted by the MDPA at the *Pesantren At-Tahdzib* using a model that incorporates simulations of religious ceremonies, practical public speaking exercises, rotating presentation opportunities, and open evaluations by the instructors. These simulations provide *santri* with hands-on experience in fulfilling various roles throughout an event, from the opening, Quranic recitation, and *shalawat Wahidiyah* (prayers/invocations), to delivering remarks, *mau'izhah hasanah* or *Wahidiyah* lectures, and the closing. The public speaking practice allows students to hone their ability to present material before an audience, while evaluations are based on five criteria: *adab*, intonation, content, confidence, and body language.

According to the organizers, this training creates a space for students to build courage and self-confidence, as well as to develop a more coherent style of presenting material. Furthermore, the open evaluation process allows the experiences of individual students to serve as learning opportunities for their peers. While the training has been implemented, it currently lacks quantitative data comparing performance before and after the sessions. Future development should focus on more systematic documentation and traceable evaluation processes, which would strengthen the sustainability of the MDPA's cadre-building efforts through more comprehensive evidence of implementation and reflection.

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