

Strategies and Challenges in Implementing Pesantren-Based Da'wah Education

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the implementation of pesantren-based curriculum in da'wah education at Madrasah Aliyah Mamba'ul Ulum, Jambi City, Indonesia. Positioned at the intersection of formal Islamic schooling and classical pesantren traditions, the curriculum reflects a dynamic integration of national educational standards with Kitab Kuning-based instruction. Employing a qualitative case study approach, the research investigates key aspects of curriculum execution, identifies structural and pedagogical challenges, and analyzes strategic responses adopted by the institution. Findings reveal that da'wah education is embedded within formal instructional hours and reinforced through experiential practices such as student sermons, daily worship routines, and muhadhoroh sessions. Despite facing constraints—particularly among non-residential students lacking pesantren backgrounds, limited Arabic proficiency, and resource shortages—the madrasah implements a tiered strategy comprising monthly, semester-based, and annual programs to cultivate da'wah competencies progressively. The integration of textual and contextual learning, supported by Arabic language development, enhances students' rhetorical, spiritual, and social capacities. The study concludes that the pesantren curriculum serves not only as a vehicle for religious knowledge transmission but also as a transformative framework for shaping communicative and ethically grounded da'i and da'iyah. These findings underscore the importance of adaptive, participatory, and experience-based approaches in sustaining relevant and impactful da'wah education within contemporary Islamic schooling. This study offers a model for integrating pesantren traditions with modern educational demands in da'wah education.

INTRODUCTION

Pesantren, as traditional Islamic educational institutions, have long played a pivotal role in shaping the character, spirituality, and intellectual development of Muslim communities in Indonesia. Recent studies highlight that pesantren not only serve as centers for classical Islamic scholarship (kitab kuning), but also function as nurturing grounds for da'wah activities rooted in Islamic values and local wisdom (Astuti et al., 2023; Kurniawan & Puspitasari, 2025). However, evolving social dynamics, technological advancements, and contemporary demands necessitate a transformation of pesantren curricula to remain relevant and responsive to the challenges of modern da'wah. In the face

of globalization, digitalization, and shifting social norms, pesantren curricula must transition from traditional and textual approaches toward more systematic, integrative, and competency-based da'wah frameworks (Kusmuwati, 2024; Fuad et al., 2024). This transformation encompasses not only curricular content and structure but also pedagogical methods, da'wah communication strategies, and the empowerment of santri as agents of social change.

Da'wah education constitutes a foundational pillar in cultivating the character and spiritual resilience of Muslim youth. Amid the accelerating currents of globalization and modernization, challenges to Islamic values have grown increasingly complex. Prior research underscores the strategic role of Islamic educational institutions, such as madrasahs, in preserving, contextualizing, and transmitting Islamic teachings to students (Hidayah et al., 2023; Shara Dalimunthe et al., 2023). Effective da'wah education requires a curriculum that fosters deep understanding of Islamic principles while equipping students with critical thinking skills, scholarly argumentation, and the ability to convey religious messages in a relevant and impactful manner (Maulana & Abdillah Subarkah, 2024). Consequently, the implementation of pesantren-based curricula in da'wah education warrants comprehensive examination spanning curriculum design, instructional practices, and their influence on students' da'wah competencies.

Da'wah education also serves as a strategic approach for integrating pesantren curricula into formal education systems. Within pesantren, da'wah education transcends mere transmission of religious knowledge; it cultivates students' communicative, argumentative, and reflective capacities to articulate Islamic values wisely and contextually (Falaah et al., 2025). Therefore, pesantren curricula must undergo a paradigm shift from traditional models to more integrative, adaptive, and da'wah-competency-based frameworks. This transformation involves restructuring curricular components, strengthening da'wah content, and embedding pedagogical methods that promote critical thinking and Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) (Nasution, 2024). The integration of da'wah education into pesantren curricula reflects a systematic effort to address contemporary challenges. In the midst of modernization and digitalization, pesantren are expected not only to preserve scholarly traditions but also to innovate communicative and contextually relevant da'wah methodologies (Hakim, 2019; Munajah, 2021). Thus, da'wah education within pesantren curricula must extend beyond textual mastery to encompass the development of social, emotional, and rhetorical competencies essential for effective da'i.

Although Madrasah Aliyah Mamba'ul Ulum in Jambi City has successfully integrated the national curriculum with a pesantren-based framework to enhance da'wah education through experiential practices such as public sermons, muhadhoroh sessions, and daily worship routines, the implementation of the pesantren curriculum within this context continues to face significant challenges. Chief among these is the heterogeneity of student backgrounds, particularly those originating from general education systems or non-residential environments, which impedes their ability to comprehend classical Islamic texts that require advanced interpretive skills. Furthermore, limitations in instructional time, the availability of qualified educators, and the adequacy of supporting facilities collectively hinder the effectiveness of da'wah programs. These issues underscore the urgent need for structured and context-sensitive strategies to ensure that the objectives of da'wah education are achieved in an inclusive and optimal manner for all learners.

Although the pesantren and national curricula have been formally integrated at Madrasah Aliyah Mamba'ul Ulum in Jambi City to strengthen da'wah education through practical activities such as public sermons, muhadhoroh sessions, and daily worship routines, the effectiveness of this implementation remains constrained by several critical challenges. The foremost issue lies in the diverse educational backgrounds of students, particularly those from general schools or non-pesantren environments, which limits their ability to comprehend classical Islamic texts that demand advanced interpretive skills. Additionally, constraints related to instructional time, the availability of qualified teaching personnel, and insufficient supporting infrastructure further hinder the optimal realization of

da'wah education objectives. These challenges highlight the necessity for context-sensitive and sustainable implementation strategies to ensure that da'wah education within the madrasah setting can be delivered effectively and inclusively.

METHODS

This study aims to systematically and factually describe the implementation, challenges, and strategic approaches of pesantren-based curricula in da'wah education. The research was conducted at Madrasah Aliyah Mamba'ul Ulum, Jambi City, with a focus on exploring the contextual and holistic practices of da'wah education embedded within the pesantren curriculum. A qualitative case study design was employed to investigate these practices in depth (Creswell, 2007). The participants consisted of the school principal, Islamic studies teachers, and students. These individuals were purposively selected due to their direct involvement in the planning and execution of the da'wah curriculum, as well as their experiential engagement in pesantren and school-based da'wah activities. Data were collected through multiple instruments, including in-depth interviews, direct observations, and document analysis. The data analysis process involved three key stages: (1) data reduction, aimed at filtering and refining information obtained from interviews and observations; (2) data presentation, which organized findings into coherent narratives and tabular formats; and (3) conclusion drawing, based on the synthesis and interpretation of the analyzed data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Implementation of Pesantren Curriculum in Da'wah Education

Modern education is a system that evolves alongside the advancement of time, technology, and the needs of a global society. Unlike traditional education, which focuses primarily on memorization, teacher authority, and one-way instruction, modern education emphasizes a flexible, participatory approach that utilizes technology as a primary instructional tool. One of its core characteristics is the shift from passive to active learning, where students are encouraged not only to receive information but also to think critically, engage in discussion, solve problems, and collaborate with peers. The learning process is designed to cultivate creativity, independence, and adaptability to change.

Previous studies also emphasized that modern education helps students master technological literacy and apply modern tools in the learning process (Nurkholis, 2013). In today's fast-paced, technology-driven era, such competencies are essential. Therefore, modern education should be introduced to students from an early stage to deepen their understanding of technological developments. Modern education based on Islamic values integrates contemporary educational principles with Islamic teachings as moral and spiritual foundations (Khoerunnisa et al., 2021). This approach incorporates technological advancement, curriculum innovation, and active learning methodologies while maintaining Islamic ethics, morality, and faith as guiding principles.



Figure 1. Students' Preaching Practice Activities within the Da'wah Program

The implemented pesantren curriculum encompasses subjects such as fiqh, hadith, tafsir, tauhid, Arabic literature, and Sufism. In addition, students' interests and talents are nurtured through activities like public speaking, Islamic arts, and extracurricular learning sessions. The integration of the Ministry of Religious Affairs curriculum with classical Islamic texts (Kitab Kuning) enriches students' scholarly insight, particularly in understanding classical Arabic texts.

Challenges and Strategic Implementation of Pesantren Curriculum in Da'wah Education

Several challenges were identified in the implementation of the pesantren curriculum, particularly among non-residential students who lack prior exposure to pesantren-based education. These students often struggle to comprehend Kitab Kuning materials, which require advanced proficiency in Arabic grammar. Moreover, the predominance of normative approaches in curriculum development has led to insufficient emphasis on affective dimensions and practical da'wah skills. Limitations in time allocation, teaching personnel, and supporting facilities further hinder the optimal execution of the program. To address these challenges, the madrasah has adopted a structured and tiered implementation strategy. This strategy includes monthly, semester-based, and annual programs designed to cultivate the character of future da'i and da'iyyah from an early stage. Monthly programs involve activities such as memorization assessments of daily prayers, sermon rehearsals, and preaching practice during religious events like Isra' Mi'raj and the Prophet's Birthday (Maulid Nabi). Semester-based programs engage students in major school events such as Teacher's Day and Independence Day celebrations, where they serve as public speakers. Meanwhile, annual programs including collective night prayers (tahajjud), cemetery visits (ziarah kubur), and regular muhadhoroh sessions serve as intensive platforms for nurturing students with strong da'wah potential.

The structured and tiered implementation strategy reflects that da'wah education at the madrasah is not solely reliant on theoretical instruction, but also emphasizes the development of da'wah mentality and skills through direct experience and habitual worship practices. In addition to the previously mentioned da'wah programs, Madrasah Aliyah Mamba'ul Ulum also adopts a habituation approach as part of its strategy to internalize da'wah values. This habituation is carried out through daily religious activities such as Dhuha prayer, congregational obligatory prayers, and collective Tahajjud prayer. These practices are not only intended to establish spiritual routines but also serve as a medium for character formation and student discipline. Within the context of da'wah education, habitual worship functions as a moral foundation that reinforces the religious messages conveyed through sermons and other spiritual activities.

Table 1. Key Findings on the Implementation, Challenges, and Strategic Approaches of the Pesantren Curriculum in Da'wah Education

Aspect	Results	Description
Implementation	<p>Preaching is mandatory for Grade XII students prior to graduation</p> <p>Da'wah activities are scheduled within formal instructional hours</p> <p>Teachers are alumni of pesantren institutions</p> <p>Subjects include: fiqh, hadith, tafsir, tauhid, Arabic literature, and Sufism</p> <p>Daily worship routines and muhadhoroh sessions are regularly practiced</p>	<p>Da'wah is conducted directly in the surrounding community as part of experiential learning</p> <p>The national curriculum is integrated with classical Islamic texts (Kitab Kuning) to broaden students' scholarly horizons</p>
Challenges	<p>Non-residential students struggle to comprehend classical Islamic texts (Kitab Kuning)</p> <p>Limited proficiency in Arabic grammar</p> <p>Predominance of normative approaches in curriculum development</p> <p>Shortage of qualified teachers and inadequate facilities</p> <p>Public skepticism toward the effectiveness of Islamic education</p>	<p>Students' non-pesantren backgrounds pose a major challenge</p> <p>There is a need for enhanced resources and more contextually responsive approaches</p>
Strategy	<p>Monthly programs: prayer memorization tests, sermon rehearsals, and student preaching activities</p> <p>Semester-based programs: participation in major school events</p> <p>Annual programs: collective Tahajjud prayer, cemetery visits (ziarah kubur), and intensive muhadhoroh sessions</p> <p>Development of talented da'i and da'iyah candidates</p>	<p>A gradual strategy to cultivate da'wah competencies</p> <p>Activities are designed to shape students' character, spirituality, and da'wah communication skills</p>

Table 1 presents a summary of the key findings from the study, encompassing three critical aspects: curriculum implementation, implementation challenges, and the strategic approaches adopted by the madrasah. In terms of implementation, the study found that da'wah education is formally integrated into the instructional schedule through student preaching activities, habitual worship practices, and the reinforcement of subjects based on classical Islamic texts (Kitab Kuning).

The main challenges identified include the limited pesantren background of non-residential students, the dominance of normative approaches in curriculum development, and constraints related to human resources and supporting facilities. To address these issues, the madrasah employs a tiered strategy through monthly, semester-based, and annual programs designed to progressively develop students' da'wah competencies. These strategies include sermon practice, khutbah training, collective night prayers (tahajud), and the cultivation of talented da'i and da'iyyah candidates. The findings indicate that the implementation of the pesantren curriculum at this madrasah is not merely theoretical but also experiential and transformative in nature.

The integration of the national curriculum with the pesantren curriculum has also had a positive impact on students' intellectual breadth. Through the study of Kitab Kuning, students are required to engage with classical Arabic texts rich in fiqh, theology (aqidah), and Sufism. This process demands strong proficiency in Arabic grammar, prompting the madrasah to place special emphasis on Arabic language development through literature, conversation, and textual comprehension. Such efforts enhance students' ability to deliver da'wah in a scholarly and argumentative manner, rather than relying solely on normative discourse. Nonetheless, challenges in curriculum implementation persist. In addition to the non-pesantren background of some students, limitations in human resources and infrastructure remain significant obstacles. Not all teachers possess a strong pesantren background, necessitating ongoing professional development and training. Furthermore, time constraints within the formal instructional schedule hinder the full optimization of da'wah activities. Therefore, continuous evaluation and innovation are essential for designing flexible yet effective programs.

Overall, the implementation of the pesantren curriculum in da'wah education at Madrasah Aliyah Mamba'ul Ulum, Jambi City, reflects a balanced educational model that integrates theory and practice, spirituality and social skills. Through a contextual, participatory, and experience-based approach, the madrasah has successfully fostered a learning environment that prepares young Muslims to become active agents of da'wah within their communities.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that the implementation of the pesantren curriculum in da'wah education at Madrasah Aliyah Mamba'ul Ulum, Jambi City, represents a dynamic integration between formal education systems and classical Islamic scholarly traditions. These findings align with the perspective of Kadarsih et al. (2024), which views policy implementation as a process of translating normatively formulated decisions into contextually grounded practices. In the madrasah context, such decisions are manifested through formal scheduling of da'wah activities, the appointment of pesantren alumni as teachers, and the reinforcement of subjects rooted in classical texts (Kitab Kuning).

The requirement for Grade XII students to engage in da'wah practice prior to graduation reflects a practice-based approach that emphasizes the internalization of da'wah values and skills through direct experience. This strategy not only enhances students' rhetorical competencies but also fosters social sensitivity and spiritual awareness that contribute meaningfully to the community. These findings support the view that effective da'wah education must transcend cognitive domains and engage affective and psychomotor dimensions of learners (Nurjadid et al., 2025). However, the challenges encountered in curriculum implementation reveal a gap between curricular design and student readiness. Non-residential students from general education backgrounds often struggle to comprehend classical Arabic texts, which form the core of the pesantren curriculum. This phenomenon reinforces critiques of the dominance of normative approaches in Islamic education, which frequently overlook the diversity of student backgrounds and learning needs (Hadiyanto &

Agama Islam, 2025). Additionally, limitations in human resources and infrastructure further weaken the overall effectiveness of the da'wah curriculum.

The implementation strategies adopted by the madrasah demonstrate an adaptive response to these challenges. Monthly, semester-based, and annual programs are systematically designed as pedagogical mechanisms to gradually build students' da'wah competencies. Activities such as muhadhoroh, collective tahajud prayers, and cemetery visits (ziarah kubur) serve not only as religious rituals but also as platforms for social and spiritual learning that reinforce students' Islamic identity. This approach aligns with experiential learning theory (Mustagfirin et al., 2025), which emphasizes the importance of direct experience in shaping understanding and skill development. Furthermore, the integration of the national curriculum with the pesantren curriculum enriches students' intellectual horizons by combining textual and contextual approaches. Mastery of Kitab Kuning requires advanced Arabic grammar skills, making Arabic language development a critical component in supporting the success of da'wah education. In this regard, the madrasah functions as an epistemic space that bridges Islamic scholarly traditions with the demands of contemporary da'wah.

Da'wah education also serves as a medium for cultivating social capital, strengthening the relationship between individuals and their communities. The role of teachers as facilitators and mentors is crucial in linking the curriculum to students' lived realities. Teachers who are alumni of the pesantren possess a deep understanding of local contexts and Islamic scholarly traditions, enabling them to transform instructional content into meaningful learning experiences. This supports the notion that the quality of education is highly dependent on educators' capacity to manage the learning process reflectively and contextually (Azmi et al., 2025). Overall, the implementation of the pesantren curriculum in da'wah education at Madrasah Aliyah Mamba'ul Ulum is not merely a matter of curricular integration, but a reconstruction of Islamic educational approaches that respond to contemporary challenges. Through adaptive, participatory, and experience-based strategies, the madrasah demonstrates significant potential as a model for transformative and sustainable da'wah education.

CONCLUSION

The implementation of the pesantren curriculum in da'wah education at Madrasah Aliyah Mamba'ul Ulum, Jambi City, demonstrates a strong integration between the national curriculum and the scholarly traditions of pesantren. Through an experiential and application-oriented approach, the madrasah has successfully delivered da'wah education that goes beyond theoretical instruction, embedding real-world practice within the community. Student preaching programs, daily worship routines, public speaking exercises (muhadhoroh), and other religious activities serve as effective platforms for shaping communicative and morally grounded da'i and da'iyah. Despite facing several challenges such as the non-pesantren background of some students, limited human resources, and the dominance of normative curricular approaches the strategies employed by the madrasah have proven responsive and progressive. Monthly, semester-based, and annual programs, systematically designed, provide a solid foundation for developing students' da'wah competencies in a comprehensive manner. Thus, the pesantren curriculum implemented at Madrasah Aliyah Mamba'ul Ulum not only enriches students' intellectual horizons but also reinforces the madrasah's role as a nurturing center for young Muslims prepared to serve as da'wah agents within a multicultural and dynamic society. This study underscores the importance of innovation and adaptability in the implementation of da'wah education to ensure its continued relevance and broad impact.

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