Elderly as Agents of Da'wah Management: Strengthening Islamic and Cultural Values through Local Wisdom in Rural Communities of Bantul

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Keywords: Da'wah Management, Elderly Participation, Local Wisdom, Participatory Approach, Rural Community	Da'wah is the process of conveying essential Islamic values to all generations, including the elderly. In rural communities, the elderly play a central role as guardians of tradition and sources of wisdom, making them potential agents of da'wah. However, modernization and institutional approaches often marginalize this role. On the other hand, rural communities are rich in local wisdom such as the yasinan (recitation of the Qur'an, tahlil (communal prayer gathering), and the majelis ta'lim (Islamic study groups), which are natural platforms for Islamic teachings. This study aims to optimize the role of the elderly in da'wah by integrating local wisdom into a participatory management framework. The approach used was a descriptive qualitative approach with a community-based participatory design in Mulyodadi Village. Data were collected through participant observation, in-depth interviews, and focus group discussions, then analyzed thematically with a focus on forms of da'wah, challenges, and participatory strategies. Triangulation was used to ensure the validity of the findings. The results showed that da'wah bil hal (through role models) was the most effective method for elderly participation, where they contributed by encouraging congregational worship, joining study groups, and serving as moral role models. Mulyodadi Village demonstrates strong potential for developing an elderly-based da'wah model supported by local wisdom, religious institutions, and the village government. In conclusion, the participatory da'wah management model significantly empowers the elderly, contributing to the preservation of Islamic values and rural cultural heritage.

Introduction

Da'wah is the process of conveying, instilling, and internalizing Islamic values, and it is not limited solely to the younger generation or to formal preachers (Zargar, 2023). Beyond that, da'wah provides a broad space of devotion, including for the elderly. In rural contexts, elderly people often occupy an important social and cultural position as respected figures (Garcia-Mendez *et al.*, 2025). They serve as guardians of tradition, moral reminders, and sources of wisdom transmitted across generations (Kitayama *et al.*, 2020). Their local knowledge, life experience, and cultural practices are often intertwined with Islamic values, thus shaping a form of da'wah that is close to the everyday life of the community.

However, the dynamics of modernization and the rapid pace of social change bring particular challenges. The role of the elderly in da'wah is often marginalized, as da'wah activities tend to be more focused on formal and institutional approaches (Ahmad, 2023). The

elderly are frequently positioned merely as recipients of da'wah, rather than as active agents capable of initiating and driving da'wah activities based on local wisdom. This condition reflects a gap in da'wah management, especially regarding the empowerment of the elderly as potential agents of da'wah.

Meanwhile, local wisdom that thrives within rural communities holds cultural wealth that is not only socially valuable but also deeply infused with Islamic messages (Vazques-Atochero, 2025; Sobaya et al., 2023; Pesurnay, 2018). Traditions such as regular Qur'anic study circles, yasinan, tahlilan, customary advice, and religiously nuanced art forms have long functioned as effective means of da'wah, being contextual, grounded, and inclusive. As both actors and inheritors of these traditions, the elderly are in a strategic position to revitalize forms of da'wah that resonate with the cultural fabric of their communities.

Unfortunately, specific da'wah management models designed to optimize the role of the elderly through local wisdom remain very limited. Current practices of da'wah are still dominated by top-down, formalistic approaches that pay little attention to the cultural roots of society (Arahman, 2024; Arwan et al., 2023). On the other hand, participatory approaches — where the elderly are actively involved in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of da'wah — are still rarely applied. Yet such approaches have the potential to strengthen a sense of ownership, enhance the sustainability of programs, and preserve local values that have long been integrated with Islamic teachings.

Therefore, it is necessary to conduct a study that integrates three main aspects: da'wah management, the role of the elderly, and local wisdom within a participatory framework. This study is expected to provide a comprehensive understanding as well as formulate an applicable da'wah management model. Ultimately, the research aims not only to strengthen the role of the elderly in da'wah but also to preserve Islamic values and the cultural heritage of rural communities in a sustainable manner.

The central problem addressed in this study is how to optimize the role of the elderly as agents of da'wah in rural communities by integrating local wisdom into participatory da'wah management. This overarching issue can be further elaborated into three guiding questions: First, what forms of local wisdom – based da'wah are practiced by the elderly in rural contexts? Second, what challenges and opportunities shape the involvement of the elderly in da'wah activities? Third, how can a participatory da'wah management model be developed to strengthen the active role of the elderly while preserving both Islamic values and local cultural traditions?

The main objective of this study is to formulate a participatory da'wah management model that empowers the elderly as active agents of da'wah through local wisdom in rural communities. Specifically, the research aims to describe the existing practices of elderly involvement in da'wah, to analyze the factors that support and hinder their participation, and to design an implementable framework that integrates Islamic values with rural cultural traditions. This research is significant both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, it contributes to the field of da'wah studies by expanding the discourse on da'wah management to include the elderly and local wisdom as integral components. Practically, the findings are expected to provide guidance for religious leaders, community organizers, and policy makers in developing da'wah programs that are more inclusive, participatory, and culturally grounded. By empowering the elderly as da'wah agents, this study not only strengthens the transmission of Islamic teachings but also contributes to the sustainability of rural cultural heritage.

Methods

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach with a community-based participatory framework or Participatory Action Research (PAR). PAR is a collaborative, democratic, and action-oriented approach to inquiry in which researcher and participants work together to investigate a problem, reflect on it, and take action to improve the situation (Chevalier & Buckles, 2019). The research was conducted in Mulyodadi Village, a rural community characterized by strong agrarian traditions (Kartawisastra et al., 2021) and rich religious-cultural practices (Syamsuri & Syafitri, 2019). This location was selected purposively because of its potential to showcase the integration of elderly participation, local wisdom, and da'wah activities. Data collection relied on three main techniques: (1) Observation, to capture real-life practices of elderly involvement in religious and communal activities such as Qur'anic study circles, congregational prayers, and local traditions including yasinan and tahlilan; (2) In-depth interviews, conducted with elderly participants, religious leaders, community organizers, and village government representatives to gain insights into perceptions, challenges, and opportunities related to elderly-centered da'wah; and (3) Focus Group Discussions (FGD), involving mixed groups of elderly men and women, to validate findings and encourage participatory reflection on possible or alternative models of da'wah management.

Data analysis followed a thematic approach. The process included data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification (Miles et al., 2019). Themes were developed around three guiding research questions: existing forms of elderly-based da'wah, challenges and opportunities for participation, and the construction of a participatory da'wah management model. Triangulation of data sources and methods was applied to ensure validity and credibility (O'Leary, 2009). Ethical considerations were maintained by securing informed consent, ensuring confidentiality, and respecting cultural-religious sensitivities of the elderly participants (Kvale, 2018). The participatory nature of the research not only positioned the elderly as research subjects but also as co-creators of knowledge, thereby aligning with the overarching aim of developing an inclusive, culturally grounded, and sustainable da'wah management model.

Results

Insights from the community engagement activities revealed that da'wah is a universal obligation that transcends age and gender. Even in later stages of life, the spirit of da'wah is expected to remain alive, beginning from the smallest circle — namely the family—and then extending outward to the surrounding community. For the elderly, da'wah should not be regarded as a limitation, but rather as a meaningful form of devotion that reflects both spiritual resilience and social contribution.

The most effective form of da'wah for elderly people is da'wah bil hal — da'wah through concrete actions, role modeling, and lived examples. This method is considered highly suitable for the elderly due to the natural decline in physical and cognitive capacities that often accompanies aging. Rather than relying solely on abstract sermons or written texts, the elderly find it easier to absorb and embody Islamic teachings when they are conveyed through tangible actions, social engagement, and community-based practices. While other methods such as da'wah bil lisan (verbal preaching) and da'wah bil risalah (written communication) still hold value, their effectiveness may be limited for elderly individuals who experience hearing, vision, or concentration difficulties. By contrast, da'wah bil hal emphasizes empathy, social interaction, and accompaniment, thereby fostering a sense of dignity and active participation among the elderly in religious life.

Examples of effective practices include encouraging family members and neighbors to perform congregational prayers at the mosque, actively participating in communal religious gatherings such as study circles and collective remembrance (dhikr), and serving as moral

exemplars through speech, manners, and everyday behavior. Testimonies from participants also highlighted the importance of direct approaches, such as personally inviting elderly women to attend religious study sessions or join mosque activities. Such strategies resonate with the communal and familial culture of rural society, where personal closeness and direct engagement are highly valued.

Based on observations and data collected, Mulyodadi Village demonstrates significant potential for developing elderly-centered da'wah activities. Several factors can be highlighted: First, agrarian community typology – as the majority of residents are farmers, agricultural life can be used as an entry point for da'wah. Messages can be delivered during breaks in farming activities or through analogies drawn from agricultural experiences, making Islamic teachings more relatable and easily understood. Second. support from religious institutions – the abundance of mosques, prayer houses, and Qur'anic study groups provides institutional support for elderly engagement. These venues offer spaces for social gathering, spiritual growth, and intergenerational learning.

Third, opportunities for tailored programs – specific programs for the elderly, such as senior majelis taklim, Qur'an recitation improvement classes, or morning and evening dhikr sessions, can be developed. Such initiatives not only strengthen religious knowledge but also address social needs by reducing loneliness and fostering community solidarity. Fourth, role of village government – The local government of Mulyodadi can play a facilitative role by allocating village funds or collaborating with religious leaders and community organizations. This institutional support is crucial to ensure the sustainability and inclusivity of elderly-focused da'wah initiatives.

Discussion

Based on the field findings above, the in-depth analysis reveals several important points. First, community meaning-making of da'wah (a co-constructed understanding). The data indicate that community members view da'wah as a universal obligation that transcends age and gender. This understanding is not merely theological but emerges from the lived experiences of Mulyodadi residents. Through group discussions and field interactions, a shared awareness emerged that elderly individuals retain strong spiritual capacity, da'wah begins within the closest circle – especially the family, and the elderly are respected as custodians of wisdom and moral guidance. Within a PAR framework, this meaning is

understood as a social construct arising from everyday community life, rather than from abstract academic interpretation.

Second, identifying the problem (the gap between da'wah methods and elderly needs). Through observation and reflective dialogue, a gap becomes apparent between conventional da'wah methods and the conditions of the elderly: the elderly face physical limitations (hearing, vision, and stamina), verbal or written da'wah methods are often less effective, and yet they still possess strong potential as moral exemplars. This gap was not identified solely by researchers but emerged collaboratively through conversations with Mulyodadi community members who expressed both their challenges and aspirations to stay engaged in religious practices.

Third, thematic analysis (da'wah bil hal as the most grounded method). Community dialogue consistently highlighted da'wah bil hal as the most suitable method for elderly individuals for several reasons: Alignment with the conditions of aging – concrete actions, behavioral modeling, and social interaction are more accessible for the elderly than lengthy sermons or complex texts; Alignment with rural social character – as an agrarian village, Mulyodadi values interpersonal closeness and mutual support. Preaching through exemplary conduct or personal invitations is more readily accepted and emulated; and Empowering the elderly as subjects, not objects – this method positions the elderly not as passive recipients but as active carriers of moral values who continue to contribute meaningfully to the community.

Fourth, community voices (relevant and contextual practices). During participatory dialogues, community members shared practical examples such as encouraging family and neighbors to pray congregationally, acting as models of good manners and ethical behavior, personally inviting elderly women to join study groups, and participating in dhikr and other communal religious gatherings. From a PAR perspective, these examples represent local wisdom that should inform future interventions and programming.

Fifth, contextual analysis of potentials and social capital in Mulyodadi. Participatory observations reveal several strengths and social assets supporting elderly-centered da'wah: Agrarian lifestyle as an entry point – farm work naturally creates moments for informal interaction. Agricultural experiences and metaphors can help make Islamic teachings relatable and grounded; Abundant religious infrastructure – mosques, prayer houses, and Qur'anic study groups function as safe spaces for the elderly to learn, gather, and share experiences; Opportunities for tailored programs. There is a clear demand for elderly-focused religious classes, Qur'an reading improvement sessions, and morning and evening dhikr programs; and

Support from village government. Local authorities can help through funding allocations and partnerships with religious leaders. Such support strengthens the sustainability of elderly-focused da'wah efforts.

Sixth, critical reflection (power relations and the role of the elderly). PAR emphasizes critical examination of power dynamics. Several reflections arise: Elderly individuals are often positioned as recipients rather than decision-makers; In Mulyodadi, however, their voices directly shape the framework of action-based da'wah; and the researcher's role becomes that of facilitator, ensuring that solutions are community-driven. This reflection helps avoid top-down interventions and protects the agency of the elderly.

Last but not least, action-oriented recommendations (co-created with the community), among others: Establish an elderly da'wah group – a participatory forum for planning, learning, and mutual support; Strengthen da'wah bil hal activities – including home visits, prayer companionship, and peer mentoring among elderly individuals; Integrate agrarian themes into da'wah content – using agricultural metaphors and daily experiences to make religious messages more relatable; Develop elder-friendly programs in mosques and prayer houses – improved seating, lighting, sound systems, and age-appropriate schedules; and Foster collaboration with village government and local organizations – for funding, outreach, and long-term sustainability.

Conclusion

This community engagement activity highlights that the role of the elderly in da'wah is both essential and irreplaceable. With the appropriate approach — particularly *da'wah bil hal* integrated with local wisdom — the elderly can remain active contributors to spiritual life while simultaneously serving as role models for younger generations. Da'wah bil hal emerges as the most effective method for elderly involvement, as it prioritizes role modeling, tangible action, and meaningful social interaction that align with their needs and limitations. Through this method, Islamic teachings are not only communicated but also embodied in daily life, making them more accessible and transformative. The case of Mulyodadi Village illustrates that rural communities hold tremendous opportunities for enhancing elderly-centered da'wah. Realizing this potential requires synergy among the elderly, religious leaders, and village authorities. By fostering such collaboration, it is possible to create an environment that supports the spiritual and social well-being of the elderly, ensuring that the spirit of da'wah remains vibrant throughout all stages of life.

The PAR analysis of Mulyodadi Village demonstrates that elderly da'wah is not merely a spiritual endeavor but also a means of social empowerment. Through da'wah bil hal, the elderly is given space to remain active, respected, and meaningful members of the community. PAR ensures that elderly individuals are positioned as subjects of change, while local wisdom, social structure, and institutional support converge to shape inclusive and sustainable da'wah programs.

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