

Empowering Community Through Sacred Rituals: A Participatory Action Study on Funeral Management in Islamic Traditions

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ABSTRACT

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Cadaver management, Community-based training, Participatory Action Research (PAR)

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This research focuses on increasing knowledge, skills, and community participation in the management of bodies in accordance with Islamic sharia through training and mentoring at the Taklim Council. The main objective of this study is to explore the effectiveness of community-based training in building individual competencies and strengthening social solidarity within the Muslim community. This study uses a qualitative method with a Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach, which involves the active participation of community members at the Thariqul Falah Taklim Council, Toboleu Village, Ternate City. The data were collected through participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and focused group discussions, then analyzed using Miles and Huberman's interactive analysis technique consisting of three stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawn/verification. The results of the study showed that the training succeeded in improving the participants' theoretical knowledge, practical skills, and confidence in caring for the body, as well as strengthening the sense of collective responsibility and community solidarity. The implications of this study emphasize the importance of a participatory approach and flexibility in the implementation of community-based training to ensure the sustainability and effectiveness of future religious education programs.

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INTRODUCTION

The management of the body in the Islamic tradition is not only a religious ritual, but also a reflection of the human values inherent in the Muslim community (Alkrenawi, 2021; Behr, 2021; Osman & Ismail, 2021; Rusdi et al.,

2022). In various regions, including Indonesia, the practice of body management is still faced with challenges, especially related to the lack of adequate understanding and skills among the community (Yahaya et al., 2021; Sulaiman et al., 2021; Ridhwan & Kadir, 2021; Susilawati & Astuti, 2022). According to data from the Ministry of Religious Affairs, most Muslim communities in certain areas do not fully understand the procedures for handling bodies in accordance with Islamic law (Hassan et al., 2021; Iqbal & Mohammed, 2021; Mahfud & Munir, 2021; Wijaya & Khoir, 2022). This phenomenon reflects an imbalance between spiritual needs and practical capacity in carrying out religious obligations (Razak et al., 2021; Muhammad et al., 2021; Ahmad & Ali, 2021; Chuanchen, 2023). This is where education-based interventions, such as training and assistance in the management of mortuary, are important to ensure that every individual in the community can carry out this task correctly and responsibly (Zainuddin et al., 2021; Rahman et al., 2021; Said et al., 2021; Norman & Paramansyah, 2024). This research is based on the theory of adult education which emphasizes the importance of contextual and participatory learning to improve community competence in religious contexts (Abdullah et al., 2021; Hamid et al., 2021; Osman et al., 2021; Maulidah et al., 2023). Thus, this study not only contributes to the Islamic education literature, but also offers practical solutions to strengthen social cohesion in the Muslim community (Ibrahim et al., 2021; Mohamed et al., 2021; Sani & Yusof, 2021; Hasanah & Hefniy, 2023).

The main problem that this research focuses on is the lack of adequate understanding and skills among the Muslim community in caring for the body in accordance with Islamic sharia (Zuhdi et al., 2021; Kamal et al., 2021; Saad et al., 2021; Ansori et al., 2023). Although the management of the body is an obligatory obligation, many people still feel doubtful and unconfident in carrying out this task (Ismail et al., 2021; Latif et al., 2021; Idris & Rahim, 2021; Hamidah, 2023). This inability not only has an impact on the implementation of less than perfect rituals, but can also reduce the sense of solidarity and collective responsibility within the community. In addition, another challenge arises from the low level of participation in the training programs organized, which is caused by various factors, including time constraints and access to information. This problem is urgent to overcome because the funeral care is an integral part of the religious obligation that must be fulfilled by every Muslim community. Therefore, this study aims to explore the effectiveness of training and mentoring in improving knowledge, skills, and community participation in the management of corpses.

Previous research has shown that community-based training has a significant impact on improving religious literacy and practical skills. Smith et al. (2020) in *the Journal of Religious Education* found that training programs in mosques are able to strengthen people's understanding of religious rituals, including funeral arrangements, which ultimately increases their participation in religious activities. In addition, Al-Qarni et al. (2021) in *the International Journal*

of Islamic Studies stated that training involving active community participation not only improves individual competence, but also strengthens social networks and community solidarity. A study by Ibrahim and Aziz (2020) published in the *Global Journal of Community Development* confirms that flexibility in training, both in terms of time and method, is a key factor in the success of community-based education programs. However, these studies have not fully explored how such training can be applied in specific contexts such as funeral care in Muslim communities in Indonesia, especially in regions with diverse socio-cultural characteristics.

The gap between this study and previous research lies in the lack of exploration of funeral management training in the context of Muslim communities in Indonesia, especially in areas with unique religious traditions and practices. Previous research has underlined the importance of community-based training, but there has been no study that specifically examines the effectiveness of such training in improving knowledge and skills in the management of corpses. In addition, there has not been much research exploring how factors such as local culture, participation rates, and community support can affect the success of such training. This research will fill this gap by providing an in-depth analysis of how mortuary management training can be tailored to local contexts and how participatory approaches can increase community engagement in a sustainable manner.

This research offers novelty in several important aspects. First, this study is one of the first to integrate the Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach in the context of funeral management training in the Indonesia Muslim community, an approach that has not been widely applied in similar studies. Second, this study explores how training can be adapted to local needs and conditions, including adaptation to unique local cultures and traditions, which are often overlooked in community-based training programs. Third, the study also proposes a flexible training model, taking into account time constraints and accessibility, which could serve as a model for similar programs in various other Muslim communities. This novelty has made a significant contribution in expanding the literature on Islamic education and community-based training, as well as offering innovative approaches that can be adapted in other contexts.

The main purpose of this study is to examine the effectiveness of training and mentoring in increasing knowledge, skills, and community participation in funeral management in accordance with Islamic law. In addition, the study also identifies factors that support and hinder the success of training, and provides recommendations for the development of more effective and sustainable training programs. By achieving this goal, it is hoped that this research can have a real positive impact on the Muslim community, especially in ensuring that each body can be cared for with proper respect in accordance with Islamic teachings, while strengthening social bonds within the community.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative method with a Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach, which was chosen for its ability to actively involve participants in every stage of the research, from planning to evaluation (Chevalier & Buckles, 2021; Bradbury, 2020; Coghlan & Brydon-Miller, 2020). This approach allows researchers to work with the community to understand the problem at hand, develop relevant solutions, and implement the necessary actions, which ultimately not only generates knowledge but also empowers the community directly (Greenwood & Levin, 2020; Kemmis et al., 2020; McIntyre, 2021). The PAR approach was chosen over other methods such as surveys or experiments because this research focuses on the process of social change and community empowerment in the context of funeral care. By using PAR, researchers can work closely with the community to identify problems, develop solutions, and implement relevant actions, ultimately not only generating knowledge but also empowering the community directly.

Data were collected through several comprehensive data collection techniques, including participatory observations, in-depth interviews, and focus group discussions. The location of this research is at the Thariqul Falah Taklim Council located in Toboleu Village, Ternate City, North Maluku, Indonesia. The selection of this location was based on the need to understand how the funeral is carried out in a Muslim community that is steeped in local religious values and traditions. A total of 20 participants who are active members of the Taklim Council were involved as respondents in this study. This number was chosen to ensure that the data obtained was rich and diverse enough to provide a comprehensive picture of the impact of training on the community. In-depth interviews are conducted directly on-site, with each interview lasting between 30 to 60 minutes, and participatory observation conducted during the implementation of the training.

For data analysis, this study uses Miles and Huberman interactive analysis techniques which consist of three main stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawn/verification (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2018; Saldaña, 2021; Hesse-Biber, 2020). First, data collected from interviews, observations, and focus group discussions are reduced through a process of selection, focusing, and simplification, to identify the information most relevant to the research objectives (Miles et al., 2018; Yin, 2020; Flick, 2018). After reduction, the data is then presented in the form of structured narrative text, diagrams, or tables, which makes it easier for researchers to see the patterns, relationships, and dynamics that appear in the data. The final stage is conclusion drawing and verification, where the researcher compiles an interpretation of the data that has been analyzed and ensures that the conclusions drawn are consistent with the existing data. This process is iterative in nature, with researchers returning to the data and analysis results at regular intervals to ensure that the research findings are valid and trustworthy. This analytical technique was chosen because of its ability

to capture the complexity of qualitative data and provide a deep understanding of how training affects knowledge, skills, and solidarity within the community.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This study revealed several significant findings related to training and assistance in the management of bodies at the Taklim Council, which are compiled in the following sub-sections. Each sub-section is complemented by live excerpts from the interviews, as well as relevant tables and charts to support the narrative and provide a clear visual representation of the findings.

Improvement of Participants' Knowledge and Skills

The first finding identified was the improvement of participants' knowledge and skills in the management of bodies in accordance with Islamic law. Before the training, participants generally feel unsure about the correct procedures in handling corpses. However, after attending the training, there was a significant improvement in terms of their confidence and understanding.

For example, P1 states:

"Before participating in this training, I really doubted how to bathe the body properly. But after participating in each session, I now feel more confident and know the steps to take." (Interview, 2024).

This is echoed by the P2 statement:

"I used to hear a lot about the funeral procession, but I never really knew how to do it. Now, after the training, I not only know the theory, but also the practice." (Interview, 2024).

The results of the interviews showed a significant improvement in the participants' understanding and skills related to funeral management after participating in the training. Participants who previously felt unsure and inexperienced now show greater confidence in carrying out the task. The training also succeeded in changing the participants' views on the responsibility of funeral care, from what was previously considered the responsibility of the family only, to the collective responsibility of the Muslim community. However, there are several challenges related to time constraints and participation that still need to be overcome, showing that although this training is effective, flexibility is needed in implementation so that all participants can participate optimally. In addition, this training also succeeded in strengthening solidarity in the community, where participants felt more connected to each other and more prepared to work together in caring for the bodies in their neighborhood.

To give a more concrete picture, the following table presents a comparison between participants' knowledge and skill levels before and after training:

Table 1. Comparison between Knowledge and Skill Levels

Category	Before Training (%)	After Training (%)
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Theoretical Knowledge	45%	85%
Confidence	50%	80%
Practical Skills	40%	90%

The table showed significant improvements in three main categories— theoretical knowledge, confidence, and practical skills—after participants took the mortuary management training. Before the training, only 45% of the participants had sufficient theoretical knowledge, but after the training, this figure increased sharply to 85%. A similar increase occurred in terms of confidence, where before the training only 50% of participants felt confident in taking care of the body, but after the training, this figure increased to 80%. The most significant improvement was seen in practical skills, where before the training only 40% of participants felt capable of carrying out this task well, and after the training this figure jumped to 90%. This interpretation shows that the training is very effective in improving the participants' theoretical understanding, confidence, and practical skills.



Figure 1. Mortuary Management Training

This improvement is in line with the experiential learning theory put forward by Kolb (1984), where direct experience plays a very important role in deepening understanding and skills. In this context, the training successfully translates theory into practice, giving participants the opportunity to practice directly and gain feedback, ultimately strengthening their skills. The following is a picture of the funeral management training.

Awareness of the Importance of Funeral Management as a Shared Responsibility

The second finding showed an increase in participants' awareness of the importance of funeral care as a shared responsibility in the Muslim community.

Before the training, many participants considered that the management of the body was only a close family task. However, this training opens up a new perspective on collective responsibility in this process.

P3, for example, reveals:

"I always thought that the task of taking care of the body was the responsibility of the immediate family. After attending this training, I realized that it is the responsibility of all of us as Muslims to help in this process." (Interview, 2024)

In line with that, P4 stated:

"In our environment, not everyone knows how to take care of the body. Through this training, we now know that we have to help each other and make sure all processes are in accordance with the teachings of Islam." (Interview, 2024)

The results of this interview indicated a significant change in the participants' perception of the responsibility of managing the body. Before the training, participants tend to think that the management of the body is a task that is only an obligation of the immediate family. However, after the training, they began to understand that this responsibility should be borne collectively by the entire Muslim community. The training succeeded in instilling a new awareness that the management of the body is part of a shared obligation, and it is important for all members of the community to be involved in this process to ensure that all procedures are carried out in accordance with Islamic teachings. This collective awareness reflects an increase in religious understanding and the strengthening of social ties within the community. The figure below shows a scheme of changes in participants' perceptions before and after the training regarding the responsibility of funeral care:



Figure 2. Scheme for Changing Participants' Perceptions Before and After Training

This awareness can be explained through the theory of social cohesion put forward by Durkheim (1912), where collective involvement in religious rituals not only strengthens religious identity but also increases a sense of solidarity and shared responsibility within the community. This training serves as a catalyst to strengthen social bonds and expand participants' understanding of the importance of participation in funeral care.

Challenges in Training Implementation: Participation and Sustainability

The findings further identified the challenges faced during the implementation of the training, especially in terms of sustainable participation and continuity of training. Many participants face difficulties in committing to lengthy training due to time and resource constraints.

P5 reveals:

"I would love to attend all the sessions, but work and responsibilities at home often keep me from attending. This training is very useful, but unfortunately, not everyone can fully participate." (Interview, 2024).

The P6 statement adds another perspective:

"I feel this training is very important, but it might be more effective if it is done at a more flexible time or with modules that can be accessed at any time." (Interview, 2024).

The results of these interviews showed that there were challenges in full participation during the training, caused by time constraints and other responsibilities faced by the participants. Although the training is considered very beneficial, there are significant barriers related to the availability of time, so not all participants can attend all sessions. In addition, there is a need for flexibility in the implementation of training, both in terms of time and format. Participants proposed that the training be structured with a more flexible schedule or accompanied by modules that can be accessed at any time, to allow for wider and optimal participation. This interpretation highlights the importance of adaptation in the implementation of training in order to accommodate the needs and limitations of participants, as well as ensure that the benefits of training can be felt optimally by all participants. The following table shows the statistics of participant participation during the training.

Table 2. Statistics of Participant Participation During Training

Training Sessions	Number of Participants Present (%)
Session 1	90%
Session 2	75%
Session 3	60%
Session 4	50%

This table shows the trend of decreasing participant participation during the training. In the first session, the attendance rate of participants was quite

high, reaching 90%. However, as time went by, there was a significant decrease in the number of participants who attended. In the second session, participation decreased to 75%, and continued to decrease to only 60% in the third session. In the fourth session, the number of participants who attended reached the lowest point, which was 50%.

Interpretations of these data indicate that although the initial enthusiasm of participants is quite high, various factors such as time, other responsibilities, and possibly fatigue or difficulty in maintaining commitment lead to a decrease in participation. This emphasizes the importance of considering factors such as flexibility, time, and duration of training to ensure that participation remains high throughout the program. Adjustments in the training format, such as adopting shorter sessions or using distance learning methods, may be needed to maintain a more stable level of engagement.

This challenge emphasizes the importance of flexibility in the implementation of training. The flexibility of time and accessibility of training modules are key to overcoming barriers to participation. The development of online or hybrid-based training can be an effective solution to increase participation and continuity. This approach supports a continuous learning theory that emphasizes the importance of accessibility and flexibility to ensure that participants can continue learning despite time constraints.

The Effect of Training on Community Solidarity

The latest findings reveal that this training has a positive impact on community solidarity. Many participants reported that this training not only improved individual skills but also strengthened a sense of community and mutual cooperation in the community.

For example, P7 states:

"Through this training, I feel more bonding with other community members. We learn and work together, and it makes us feel closer to each other." (Interview, 2024).

P8 added:

"I see how this training connects us as a community. Now, if someone dies, we know who to contact and how to work together to take care of the body." (Interview, 2024).

The results of this interview revealed the positive impact of training on social solidarity and cohesion within the community. Participants felt an improvement in their social bonds with other members of the community, which was strengthened through the learning process and working together during the training. This training not only improves individual skills in funeral care, but also strengthens relationships between community members, creating a stronger sense of togetherness. In addition, this training helps to build a more structured network of cooperation within the community, so that when there is a fatality,

community members are better prepared and know how to coordinate effectively. This interpretation shows that this kind of training has a significant added value in strengthening social bonds and increasing community readiness in facing collective responsibility.

This positive impact can be explained by using the theory of social cohesion which states that joint activities, such as funeral care training, can strengthen social networks and solidarity within the community. These findings suggest that training not only serves to improve practical skills but also strengthens social bonds, which are crucial in the context of interdependent societies that prioritize collective values.

This study shows that training and assistance in the management of bodies at the Taklim Council has a significant impact on improving knowledge, skills, and community solidarity. These findings are in line with previous studies that emphasized the importance of community-based training in improving religious literacy and ritual skills. For example, research by Smith et al. (2020) in the *Journal of Religious Education* found that training programs involving active community participation are able to strengthen social cohesion and build individual confidence in carrying out religious duties. Similarly, a study by Al-Qarni et al. (2021) published in the *International Journal of Islamic Studies* confirms that collectively implemented training is able to change the perception of responsibility from individuals to shared responsibility, which contributes to the strengthening of social networks within the community.

However, the challenges of participation and continuity found in this study are also reflected in research conducted by Ibrahim and Aziz (2020) in the *Global Journal of Community Development*, which shows that flexibility in training time and methods is the key to the success of long-term training programs, especially in the context of communities that have limited time and other responsibilities. Therefore, the results of this study not only confirm previous findings, but also provide important implications for the development of more adaptive and sustainable training programs, which can overcome the challenges of participation and ensure the sustainability of their positive impact on communities.

This research makes a significant contribution to understanding and developing effective community-based training strategies, especially in the context of funeral management in accordance with Islamic law. Through an in-depth qualitative approach, this research not only shows an increase in individual knowledge and skills, but also reveals how this kind of training can strengthen social solidarity and cohesion within the community. In addition, the study highlights the importance of flexibility in training design to address participation and sustainability challenges, offering practical insights for the development of more inclusive and sustainable training programs. This contribution is relevant for religious education practitioners, training program developers, and policymakers who want to improve ritual literacy and

strengthen social bonds within Muslim communities.

CONCLUSION

This research reveals that training and assistance in the management of corpses at the Taklim Council not only succeeded in improving the knowledge and practical skills of the participants, but also strengthened the sense of collective responsibility and solidarity in the community. These findings suggest that community-based training can serve as an effective tool to change individuals' perceptions of religious responsibility, from initially individualistic to more collective. A key lesson that can be learned is the importance of actively engaging the community in religious training, to not only improve technical competence but also build stronger social bonds and support the implementation of religious rituals in accordance with Islamic values. From a theoretical perspective, this study enriches an understanding of the role of community training in strengthening social cohesion, while from a practical perspective, it provides insight into how training programs can be designed to achieve optimal outcomes.

This research makes a significant contribution to the existing literature by offering a new perspective on how community-based training can overcome challenges in the implementation of religious rituals, such as the handling of corpses. Through an in-depth qualitative approach, this study renews the perspective on the importance of flexibility and accessibility in training programs to increase participation and sustainability. However, this study has limitations, especially in the limited scope of one community and the methods used, which may not fully reflect the variation of conditions in other communities. In addition, factors such as gender differences and age of participants have not been fully explored. Therefore, further research is needed to broaden this understanding, taking into account wider variations in contexts and demographics, as well as exploring more inclusive training methods. Future research can also provide a stronger basis for more effective and responsive policy-making to the needs of the Muslim community in comprehensively managing religious rituals.

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