



## Empowering Islamic Boarding School Students Through Self-Defense Training for Personal and Spiritual Resilience

Fajli Aijat Mau<sup>1\*</sup>, Muhammad Riski Aditia<sup>2</sup>, Kevin Dimitar<sup>3</sup>, Luki Saputro<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Department of Islamic Education. Institut Agama Islam Depok Al-Karimiyyah. Indonesia

<sup>2,3,4</sup> Department of Islamic Education. Al-Syifa Islamic Boarding School. Indonesia

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### ABSTRACT

*This community service program was carried out to enhance the physical, emotional, and spiritual resilience of students (santri) at Pesantren Assyifa through integrated self-defense training. Recognizing the increasing psychological and social challenges faced by adolescents in pesantren, this program combined martial arts education with Islamic character development. Over the course of eight weeks, 36 santri participated in bi-weekly training sessions that included basic self-defense techniques, leadership drills, and reflective discussions on prophetic values such as patience (sabr), courage, and self-control. The program successfully improved student discipline, confidence, and peer cooperation, as measured through pre- and post-assessments and observational rubrics. Participants reported greater self-awareness and felt more empowered to respond to threats both physically and ethically. The pesantren administration expressed strong interest in continuing the initiative as part of the formal extracurricular curriculum. This activity not only strengthened the personal capabilities of santri but also aligned with the broader goal of fostering holistic Islamic education that nurtures the body, mind, and soul. The combination of physical practice and moral reflection proved to be a sustainable and transformative approach to santri empowerment.*

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\* Corresponding author: [aijatfajli@gmail.com](mailto:aijatfajli@gmail.com)

## INTRODUCTION

Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) have long been pillars of Islamic education in Indonesia, playing a vital role in shaping the spiritual, moral, and intellectual foundation of the nation's youth. In addition to religious instruction, pesantren are increasingly being called upon to

equip their students (santri) with life skills that promote independence, discipline, and resilience in facing contemporary social challenges (Azra, 2019). The rapidly changing social environment, rising cases of bullying, self-insecurity among adolescents, and exposure to radical ideologies underscore the need to empower santri not only intellectually and spiritually, but also physically (Hadi et al., 2021; Muttaqin et al., 2022).

Self-defense training has been widely recognized as an effective method for instilling self-discipline, emotional regulation, and physical confidence among youth (Ng & Chan, 2021). For santri, such training can serve as a bridge between physical strength and spiritual growth, aligning with the prophetic tradition of developing holistic personal excellence (*tazkiyatun nafs*). This is particularly relevant in the pesantren context, where character-building is not just a complementary aspect but a core educational goal (Muhaimin, 2020). Therefore, integrating self-defense education with religious values can reinforce santri's resilience in both physical and moral dimensions.

The urgency of this initiative is further strengthened by the increasing psychological vulnerability of adolescents, including students in religious schools, due to stress, peer pressure, and digital exposure (Santoso & Marzuki, 2020). Self-defense is not only a protective skill but also a therapeutic medium that enhances mental wellbeing and promotes a positive self-image (Kim et al., 2021). Moreover, martial arts practice has been associated with a reduction in aggressive behaviors and an increase in pro-social attitudes, both of which are essential for fostering harmonious living in pesantren communities (Lakes & Hoyt, 2020; Ibrahim et al., 2023).

This community service program seeks to empower students at Pesantren Assyifa through a structured self-defense curriculum that integrates physical training with spiritual and character education. The aim is to cultivate personal resilience, discipline, leadership, and emotional stability among santri, enabling them to become well-rounded individuals capable of navigating life's challenges while upholding Islamic values. As Hasan et al explain, strengthening youth through holistic empowerment initiatives is key to building a morally grounded and socially responsible Muslim generation (Hasan et al., 2022)

Furthermore, the introduction of self-defense training aligns with broader national goals in youth development, health promotion, and education transformation. The Indonesian Ministry of Education has encouraged schools, including pesantren, to incorporate physical education programs that not only promote fitness but also instill discipline and national character (Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 2021). Hence, this program not only meets internal educational needs but also contributes to national character development.

The integration of self-defense training into pesantren life offers a strategic response to emerging threats against youth stability, including bullying, mental health deterioration, and moral fragility. Through this initiative, santri at Pesantren Assyifa will gain the tools to protect themselves, both physically and spiritually, while reinforcing their commitment to Islamic ethics and community leadership. This program contributes to the broader framework of Islamic education reform and aligns with the *maqashid al-shariah* in promoting the protection of life (*hifz al-nafs*), intellect (*hifz al-'aql*), and dignity (*hifz al-'irdh*) (Ismail & Arifin, 2021).

## METHOD

The implementation of this community service program will be carried out through a structured and integrated approach that combines physical training, character building, and Islamic values education. The method consists of five main stages:

### **1. Needs Assessment and Coordination**

Objective: To understand the needs, expectations, and existing capacity of the pesantren.  
Activities:

- a. Conducting interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) with pesantren leaders, teachers, and selected santri.
- b. Identifying specific behavioral, emotional, and physical challenges faced by students.
- c. Establishing cooperation through a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the management of Pesantren Assyifa.
- d. Coordinating with martial arts instructors, school counselors, and Islamic educators.

### **2. Program Design and Curriculum Development**

Objective: To prepare a balanced curriculum integrating self-defense techniques with character and spiritual development. Activities:

- a. Designing a 6–8 week training module tailored for adolescents (age 13–18), focusing on:
- b. Involving experts in martial arts, Islamic education, and psychology.
- c. Developing a participant handbook and visual learning media.

### **3. Training Sessions**

Objective: To deliver the training program in a systematic and engaging manner.

Duration: 2 sessions per week, 90 minutes per session, over 8 weeks.

Activities:

- a. Conducting opening ceremony and orientation for all participants.
- b. Running training sessions in three segments; Warm-up and physical conditioning; Self-defense instruction and practice; Reflection and integration with Islamic values (led by ustadz)
- c. Encouraging peer mentoring and group discipline.
- d. Involving santri in simple leadership roles during each session (e.g., timekeeper, motivator).

### **4. Monitoring and Mentoring**

Objective: To ensure the effectiveness of the program and provide personal support to students.

Activities:

- a. Weekly feedback collection from trainers and students using observation sheets and reflection journals.
- b. Providing one-on-one mentoring sessions with selected students showing emotional or behavioral improvement needs.
- c. Mid-program evaluation through focus groups with santri and ustadz.

### **5. Evaluation and Sustainability Planning**

Objective: To assess the outcomes and prepare for program continuation or replication.

Activities:

- a. Conducting pre-test and post-test measurements on students' confidence, discipline, and physical competence.
- b. Using questionnaires and Likert-scale surveys to gather participant feedback.
- c. Holding a closing ceremony with martial arts demonstrations and certificates.
- d. Submitting a final report to the pesantren with recommendations for program continuation.

- e. Training 1–2 pesantren teachers to become peer-trainers to ensure sustainability.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### *Program Execution Overview*

The community service program titled "Empowering Islamic Boarding School Students Through Self-Defense Training for Personal and Spiritual Resilience" was implemented at Pesantren Assyifa over a period of eight weeks, from April 8 to June 1, 2025. The sessions were conducted twice a week, each lasting 90 minutes, combining physical training in basic self-defense techniques with character-building reflections rooted in Islamic values. The program included 36 santri (20 male, 16 female), aged 13–18, selected based on the recommendations of the pesantren administrators. The sessions were facilitated by two martial arts instructors and supported by two Islamic education teachers who helped contextualize the training spiritually.

### *Learning Impact and Results*

The success of the training program was measured using both qualitative and quantitative indicators:

| Session  | Activities                                                        |
|----------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Week 1–2 | Introduction, stretching, safety protocols, mental focus drills.  |
| Week 3–4 | Basic blocking, evasion, and break-free techniques.               |
| Week 5–6 | Pair practices, confidence-building drills, and leadership tasks. |
| Week 7   | Group simulation and scenario-based self-defense.                 |
| Week 8   | Final demonstration, reflection circle, and certificate awarding. |

Spiritual Component: At the end of each session, a 15-minute reflection connected the concept of mujahadah, patience (ṣabr), and physical discipline with the teachings of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), especially from hadiths related to strength and self-mastery..

### *Measurable Success Indicators*

| Indicator                                                      | Target             | Result                                                   |
|----------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|
| Attendance rate                                                | ≥ 90% average      | 94.6% attendance rate                                    |
| Santri self-confidence score (pre-post test)                   | ≥ 20% increase     | 31.4% increase on average                                |
| Physical skill mastery (basic techniques)                      | ≥ 75% proficiency  | 82% proficiency achieved                                 |
| Emotional discipline (measured through self-reflection rubric) | ≥ 60% improvement  | 68% improved reflection scores                           |
| Trainer satisfaction                                           | ≥ 80% satisfied    | 92% reported high engagement                             |
| Continuation interest (by pesantren)                           | Willing to sustain | Pesantren agreed to continue program with internal staff |

### Participant Feedback Summary

A post-program feedback survey was distributed using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). Below is a summary of the results:

| Feedback Statement                                                  | Average Score (out of 5) |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| The training improved my self-confidence                            | 4.7                      |
| I feel more disciplined and responsible                             | 4.6                      |
| The spiritual reflection helped me understand Islamic values better | 4.8                      |
| The trainers were respectful and inspiring                          | 4.9                      |
| I would recommend this program to other santri                      | 4.8                      |

### CONCLUSION

The program achieved its intended objectives in enhancing the personal and spiritual resilience of santri through self-defense education. The integration of physical discipline with Islamic character building proved to be both relevant and impactful. Based on measurable outcomes and overwhelmingly positive feedback, the pesantren has expressed commitment to continue this initiative with support from internal educators trained during the project.

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