



THE EFFECT OF ISLAMIC VALUES–BASED ASSERTIVE TRAINING ON ASSERTIVENESS AMONG BOARDING SCHOOL STUDENTS

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Abstract

Assertiveness plays a critical role in adolescents' social adjustment, especially in boarding schools where hierarchical interactions and peer influences are strongly embedded. Limited assertiveness skills increase students' vulnerability to psychological pressure, difficulty refusing negative peer demands, and challenges in expressing their needs appropriately. This study examined the effectiveness of Islamic values–based Assertive Training in improving assertiveness among boarding school students. A quasi-experimental pre–post test with control group design was conducted involving 93 dormitory students from a public (government-run) boarding school in Gowa Regency. Assertiveness was measured using the 38-item Assertive Behavior Scale (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.896$). Data analysis using paired t-test showed a significant increase in assertiveness scores in the intervention group ($t(45) = -14.694$, $p = 0.001$; Cohen's $d = 2.17$), indicating a very large effect size. Conversely, the control group showed no meaningful improvement ($t(46) = -0.904$, $p = 0.371$). Post-test comparison using independent t-test also revealed significantly higher assertiveness scores in the intervention group compared to the control group ($p = 0.001$). These findings demonstrate that Islamic values–based Assertive Training effectively enhances students' interpersonal communication abilities and internal motivation for appropriate self-expression. The intervention model is recommended as a promotive–preventive strategy to strengthen adolescents' social competence within Islamic boarding school contexts.

Keywords: adolescents, assertive training, boarding school, Islamic values, interpersonal communication.

Abstrak

Asertivitas memainkan peran penting dalam penyesuaian sosial remaja, terutama di pesantren yang memiliki pola interaksi hierarkis dan pengaruh teman sebaya yang kuat. Keterbatasan keterampilan asertif meningkatkan kerentanan siswa terhadap tekanan psikologis, kesulitan menolak tuntutan negatif dari teman sebaya, serta tantangan dalam mengekspresikan kebutuhan mereka secara tepat. Penelitian ini mengkaji efektivitas Pelatihan Asertif berbasis nilai-nilai Islam dalam meningkatkan asertivitas pada siswa pesantren. Penelitian menggunakan desain kuasi-eksperimental pre–post test dengan kelompok kontrol yang melibatkan 93 siswa asrama dari sebuah pesantren negeri (dikelola pemerintah) di Kabupaten Gowa. Asertivitas diukur menggunakan Assertive Behavior Scale versi 38 item (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0,896$). Analisis data menggunakan uji paired t-test menunjukkan peningkatan signifikan pada skor asertivitas kelompok intervensi ($t(45) = -14,694$, $p = 0,001$; Cohen's $d = 2,17$), yang menunjukkan ukuran efek yang sangat besar. Sebaliknya, kelompok kontrol tidak menunjukkan peningkatan yang berarti ($t(46) = -0,904$, $p = 0,371$). Perbandingan post-test menggunakan uji independent t-test juga menunjukkan skor asertivitas yang secara signifikan lebih tinggi pada kelompok intervensi dibandingkan kelompok kontrol ($p = 0,001$). Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa Pelatihan Asertif berbasis nilai-nilai Islam efektif dalam meningkatkan kemampuan komunikasi interpersonal siswa serta motivasi internal mereka untuk mengekspresikan diri secara tepat. Model intervensi ini direkomendasikan sebagai strategi promotif–preventif untuk memperkuat kompetensi sosial remaja dalam konteks pesantren.

Kata kunci: remaja, pelatihan asertif, pesantren, nilai-nilai Islam, komunikasi interpersonal.

Introduction

Adolescence is a developmental period marked by heightened sensitivity to social evaluation, peer influence, and identity formation. In boarding school environments, these dynamics become even more pronounced due to intensive daily interactions, structured routines, senior–junior hierarchies, and limited parental presence. Such environments may create conditions that challenge adolescents' ability to communicate assertively, negotiate interpersonal boundaries, and maintain psychological well-being. Evidence shows that students living in residential school systems often face difficulties in expressing their thoughts and emotions appropriately, partly due to strong group norms and power relations that shape communication patterns (Nugrohoand & Ainyfardhana, 2018). Research from diverse cultural contexts confirms that boarding environments intensify peer influence and create distinct developmental pressures, as adolescents navigate heightened social dynamics with limited parental support (Martin et al., 2014). In boarding school environments, these dynamics become even more pronounced due to intensive daily interactions, hierarchical social structures (Zhong et al., 2024), structured routines, senior–junior hierarchies, and limited parental presence.

Assertiveness is recognized as a crucial social skill enabling individuals to communicate their needs, defend their rights, and express opinions clearly without violating others' boundaries. Limited assertiveness in adolescents has been linked to increased susceptibility to social pressure, passivity, and maladaptive coping patterns, which may escalate interpersonal conflicts and psychological distress (Nuha et al., 2024). Previous studies demonstrate that peer pressure significantly predicts maladaptive social behaviors among adolescents, including bullying, verbal aggression, and social exclusion, highlighting adolescents' vulnerability when assertive skills are underdeveloped (Huriati et al., 2025). Studies have consistently shown that low assertiveness is associated with difficulties in resisting peer pressure, challenges in decision-making, and higher vulnerability to victimization or negative peer influence (Yuliana et al., 2024). Therefore, strengthening assertiveness is essential for promoting adolescents' resilience, emotional regulation, and social competence.

Assertive Training is an evidence-based behavioral intervention widely implemented to improve expressive communication, emotional clarity, and interpersonal effectiveness across diverse cultural contexts. International systematic reviews have confirmed the effectiveness of assertiveness training in enhancing communication competence, reducing anxiety and stress, and improving overall psychological well-being among adolescents and young adults (Omura et al., 2017; Speed et al., 2018). Structured assertive training programs using role-play, behavioral rehearsal, modeling, and feedback have been shown to significantly increase students' assertiveness in both Western and non-Western contexts (Larsen & Jordan, 2017; Parray & Kumar, 2022). Studies from Asian contexts, particularly relevant to collectivist cultures, demonstrate that assertiveness training remains effective even in settings where cultural norms traditionally emphasize social harmony over individual expression (Omura et al., 2019). Other studies emphasize that assertive training contributes to improvements in students' self-confidence, social interaction skills, and sustained behavioral change with effects maintained over time (Anuar et al., 2024; Parray & Kumar, 2022; Putri & Darmayanti, 2025; Rahma et al., 2025). These findings from multiple countries and cultural contexts affirm that assertive training is a foundational intervention for shaping adaptive communication and emotional competence in adolescence.

In Islamic educational contexts, assertiveness is not only a behavioral skill but also a moral practice aligned with Islamic teachings. Islamic values emphasize responsible communication, empathy, self-control, and the avoidance of harm to others. The prophetic guidance on restraining harmful speech and maintaining respectful interpersonal behavior illustrates the importance of ethical communication in Islam (Saifullah et al., 2025). Character education grounded in Islamic principles, including *ṣidq* (truthfulness), *amanah* (trustworthiness), *ihsan* (excellence), and *rahmah* (compassion), has been found effective in fostering moral development, empathy, and prosocial behavior among students (Mappanyompa et al., 2025). These values serve as an ethical foundation that may enhance the internalization and sustainability of behavioral changes achieved through assertive training.

Although assertive training and Islamic character education have both been studied extensively, empirical research integrating the two approaches remains limited. Existing studies tend to examine assertive training as a standalone behavioral intervention or focus solely on the moral-spiritual aspects of Islamic education without linking them to assertiveness outcomes. Furthermore, studies applying quasi-experimental designs to evaluate Islamic values–based assertive training specifically within boarding school environments are scarce. Most available research on Islamic boarding schools focuses on bullying dynamics, moral education, or character formation, with limited attention to assertiveness as a measurable psychosocial skill (Pasaleron et al., 2023). This gap indicates a need for interventions that simultaneously strengthen interpersonal communication skills and align with the cultural religious identity of Islamic educational institutions. This study draws on Peplau's Interpersonal Relations Theory which emphasizes the role of therapeutic relationships and collaborative goal-setting in facilitating behavioral change (Hildegard E. Peplau, 1952). In

the context of this intervention, Peplau's phases of orientation, identification, exploitation, and resolution are integrated into the assertive training sessions to foster trust, self-awareness, and sustained skill application among participants

Given these gaps, there is a clear need to examine how an intervention that integrates behavioral assertive training with Islamic moral principles can enhance adolescents' assertiveness in boarding school settings. An integrative approach is expected to produce stronger internal motivation for positive behavioral change, increased moral awareness, and more sustainable improvements in communication patterns among students.

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to analyze the effect of Islamic values–based Assertive Training on the assertiveness of boarding school students in a senior high school setting. Specifically, the study aimed to determine whether the intervention leads to significant improvements in assertiveness compared to students who do not receive the training.

Methods

This study employed a quasi-experimental pre–post test with control group design to evaluate the effect of Islamic values–based Assertive Training on students' assertiveness. A total of 93 adolescents residing in a public senior high school dormitory participated in the study, consisting of 46 students in the intervention group and 47 students in the control group. The sample size was determined based on population availability and ethical eligibility, and participants were selected using purposive sampling with voluntary consent. The use of purposive sampling may limit the generalizability of the findings, as the participants were not randomly selected. Inclusion criteria were: (1) students living in the boarding school dormitory, (2) actively enrolled in grade X, (3) able to communicate verbally, and (4) willing to participate. Students who were ill or absent during the intervention schedule were excluded.

Data on assertiveness were collected using the Assertive Behavior Scale, a 38-item Likert-type instrument measuring verbal expression, emotional clarity, boundary-setting, and self-advocacy skills. The instrument had previously undergone psychometric evaluation and demonstrated strong reliability with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.896. Construct validity had been confirmed through expert judgment and item–total correlation analysis. Higher scores indicated greater assertiveness.

The intervention consisted of five structured sessions delivered over five meetings. Each session integrated behavioral assertive training techniques such as role-play, modeling, rehearsal, and feedback with Islamic moral principles. Session 1 focused on identifying emotional triggers and practicing assertive expression; Session 2 emphasized articulating needs and preferences; Session 3 involved developing refusal skills for unreasonable or negative peer demands; Session 4 centered on receiving and delivering opinions assertively; and Session 5 provided evaluation and reinforcement. Islamic values incorporated into the sessions included *sidq* (truthfulness), *amanah* (responsibility), *rahmah* (compassion), and *adab al-kalām* (proper manners in speech). The researcher functioned as facilitator, consistent with Peplau's interpersonal relations theory, offering guidance, therapeutic communication, and constructive feedback.

The intervention was delivered by a certified mental health nursing specialist, assisted by general nurses (Ners) who had received prior training on the Islamic values–based assertive training module. Each session lasted approximately 45–60 minutes. To ensure intervention fidelity, the implementation was evaluated before and after the intervention using standardized procedures, and adherence to the intervention protocol was monitored throughout the sessions.

Data were collected through pre-test and post-test assessments administered to both groups. The intervention group received the full training, while the control group continued routine activities without additional programs. Data processing included coding, scoring, and checking for completeness before statistical analysis. Normality testing was conducted using the Shapiro–Wilk test. Because assertiveness scores were normally distributed, paired t-tests were used to examine within-group changes, and independent t-tests were used to compare post-test scores between groups. A significance level of 0.05 was applied.

Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the institutional ethics committee, and the research adhered to principles of autonomy, confidentiality, beneficence, and non-maleficence. Participation was voluntary, with written informed consent from students and permission from school authorities. Respondents were assured of privacy, anonymity, and the right to withdraw at any time without academic consequences. The study was conducted at a senior high school with a boarding school system in South Sulawesi. Confidentiality during group sessions was ensured by establishing clear group rules at the outset, emphasizing non-disclosure of personal information shared within the group, and conducting all sessions in a private setting without recording identifiable data.

Results

A total of 93 students participated in this study, consisting of 46 students in the intervention group and 47 in the control group. Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the respondents.

Table 1. The Characteristics of the Respondents

Characteristics	Category	Intervention (n = 46)	Control (n = 47)	Total (n=93)
Gender	Male	30 (65.2%)	21 (44.7%)	51 (54.8%)
	Female	16 (34.8%)	26 (55.3%)	42 (45.2%)
Age	14 years	2 (4.3%)	5 (10.6%)	7 (7.5%)
	15 years	38 (82.6%)	35 (74.5%)	73 (78.5%)
	16 years	6 (13.0%)	7 (14.9%)	13 (14.0%)
Class	X.1	15 (32.6%)	16 (34.0%)	31 (33.3%)
	X.2	16 (34.8%)	16 (34.0%)	32 (34.4%)
	X.3	15 (32.6%)	15 (31.9%)	30 (32.3%)
Religion	Islam	45 (97.8%)	44 (93.6%)	89 (95.7%)
	Christian	1 (2.2%)	3 (6.4%)	4 (4.3%)

Tabel 1 shows the distribution of gender, age, class level, and religion shows that both groups were comparable at baseline. Most students were 15 years old (78.5%) and the majority identified as Muslim (95.7%). Gender distribution differed slightly between the groups, but overall, the demographic profiles indicate balanced characteristics suitable for comparison. Before the intervention, both groups showed comparable assertiveness levels. Table 2 presents descriptive statistics for pre-test assertiveness scores.

Table 2. Assertiveness Pre-test Scores

Group	n	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Intervention	46	95	148	115.48	11.115
Control	47	80	141	114.91	11.799

Table 2 shows the pre-test assertiveness scores for both groups. The intervention and control groups demonstrated similar mean scores and variability, indicating that both groups began the study with comparable assertiveness levels prior to receiving the intervention. This similarity supports the validity of post-test comparisons.

Table 3. Assertiveness Post-test Scores

Group	n	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Intervention	46	104	152	126.09	9.053
Control	47	80	136	115.53	11.710

Table 3 shows the post-test assertiveness scores after the intervention. The intervention group experienced a notable increase in mean assertiveness scores, while the control group showed only a minimal change. This suggests that the Islamic values–based Assertive Training had a positive effect on improving assertiveness.

Table 4. Paired t-test for Assertiveness (Intervention Group)

Variable	Mean Diff	SD	SE	t(df)	p-value*
Assertiveness Pre–Post	–10.609	4.897	0.722	-14.694 (45)	0.001

* Paired t-test

Table 4 shows the results of the paired t-test for the intervention group. A significant improvement in assertiveness was observed ($p = 0.001$). The negative mean difference reflects an increase in assertiveness scores from pre-test to post-test, confirming the effectiveness of the intervention.

Table 5. Paired t-test for Assertiveness (Control Group)

Variable	Mean Diff	SD	SE	t(df)	p-value*	Cohen's d =
Assertiveness Pre–Post	- 0.617	4.679	0.683	-0.904 (46)	0.371	2.17

* Paired t-test

Table 5 shows that the control group did not experience a significant change in assertiveness ($p = 0.371$). The minimal difference between pre-test and post-test scores indicates stable assertiveness levels in the absence of intervention. The effect size analysis revealed a Cohen's d of 2.17, reflecting a very large effect of the intervention on students' assertiveness.

Table 6. Independent t-test of Post-test Assertiveness Scores

Group	Mean	SD	t(df)	p-value*	Mean Diff
Intervention	126.09	9.053	-4.856 (91)	0.001	-10.555
Control	115.53	11.710			

* Independent t-test

Table 6 shows the comparison between the intervention and control groups at post-test. A statistically significant difference was found ($p = 0.001$), with the intervention group having substantially higher assertiveness scores. This confirms that the Islamic values–based Assertive Training produced a meaningful improvement compared to routine activities.

The results consistently demonstrate that the Islamic values–based Assertive Training significantly enhanced students' assertiveness. In contrast, the control group showed no meaningful change, highlighting the effectiveness of the intervention in strengthening interpersonal communication skills among boarding school students.

Discussions

The findings of this study demonstrate that Islamic values–based Assertive Training is effective in significantly increasing assertiveness among boarding school students. The intervention group showed a marked improvement in assertiveness scores, while the control group experienced no meaningful change. These results provide empirical support for the integration of behavioral assertive training techniques with Islamic moral principles as a culturally grounded approach to promoting psychosocial competencies in adolescents.

The significant increase in assertiveness observed in the intervention group aligns with existing evidence emphasizing the effectiveness of assertive training in strengthening students' communication skills, self-expression, and confidence. Several studies highlight that structured assertive training particularly those incorporating modeling, role-play, feedback, and behavioral rehearsal effectively enhances adolescents' assertive behavior and interpersonal communication (Nuha et al., 2024; Nabila et al., 2025). These studies support the notion that adolescents benefit from repetitive practice of verbal

assertion, emotional labeling, and appropriate boundary-setting, which are core components of the intervention delivered in this study.

Beyond the behavioral mechanisms, the integration of Islamic values played a crucial role in strengthening the internal motivation of students to practice assertive behavior. Islamic teachings emphasize ethical communication, compassion (rahmah), truthfulness (sidq), responsible behavior (amanah), and avoidance of harm through words and actions. Literature on Islamic character education consistently demonstrates that values-based interventions can improve moral reasoning, empathy, and prosocial behavior among adolescents (Mappanyompa et al., 2025; Rozikin & Muali, 2025). These principles reinforce the moral and spiritual dimensions of assertiveness, framing it not merely as a communication skill but as an ethical obligation to maintain respectful and honest interactions.

The results of this study also correspond with evidence showing that internalizing Islamic values contributes to reducing harmful communication patterns. Islamic teachings explicitly discourage verbal or physical harm, as emphasized in hadith-based approaches to character development (Saifullah et al., 2025). By grounding assertive communication in the prophetic model of respectful and truthful speech, the training helped students understand assertiveness as congruent with religious identity, enhancing their willingness to practice it consistently.

Another relevant explanation for the improved assertiveness in the intervention group is the unique social dynamics of boarding schools. Boarding school environments, especially those characterized by hierarchical senior–junior structures, often present challenges related to peer pressure and communication barriers (Nugrohoand & Ainyfardhana, 2018). Students frequently struggle to express disagreement or refusal assertively within such environments. Therefore, skill-based and values-based assertive training is particularly relevant for this context, equipping students with the ability to communicate needs and boundaries appropriately despite social hierarchies.

The lack of significant improvement in the control group further strengthens the conclusion that the changes observed were attributable to the intervention rather than natural developmental progression. Similar findings have been documented in previous studies where students who did not receive targeted assertiveness training showed no meaningful change in interpersonal skills or communication patterns (Karyanti et al., 2015; Salau et al., 2023).

The magnitude of improvement in the intervention group also reflects the advantage of combining cognitive, behavioral, and spiritual dimensions in a single intervention. Studies indicate that multi-dimensional training programs those addressing cognition, behavior, and moral values tend to produce stronger and more sustainable changes (Acetylena & Sirojuddin, 2025; Naqiyah, 2022; Sa'diatul Wafa et al., 2025; Yuniarsih & Hidayat, 2024). Similar findings have been reported in community-based nursing interventions combining psychological techniques with spiritual values, which demonstrated significant reductions in adolescents' stress levels and improved self-regulation (Rasmawati et al., 2023). By integrating Islamic values with behavioral training, this study's intervention provided students with both skills and ethical motivation to communicate assertively.

While most students showed positive changes, a small number exhibited minimal or no improvement. This phenomenon is consistent with studies noting that individual factors such as personality traits, peer group dynamics, prior experiences, and social position within the school environment can influence responsiveness to psychosocial interventions (Oktaviani et al., 2024). Some students may require longer or more intensive training, individualized guidance, or follow-up reinforcement to achieve optimal outcomes. These findings suggest the importance of continuous psychosocial support and character development initiatives in boarding schools.

Overall, the results of this study reinforce the importance of culturally and religiously contextualized approaches to adolescent skill development. Islamic values based Assertive Training offers an effective promotive preventive model that aligns with the cultural-religious identity of students while addressing their psychosocial needs. This model has substantial potential for broader implementation in Islamic boarding schools, religious educational institutions, and community mental health programs. However, several directions for future research are warranted to strengthen the evidence base and optimize intervention delivery.

First, longitudinal studies with extended follow-up periods (6-12 months) are needed to assess the sustainability of assertiveness gains and identify factors that support long-term behavioral maintenance. Such studies could examine whether booster sessions, peer support groups, or integration with existing character education programs enhance retention of skills.

Second, qualitative research exploring students' lived experiences of the intervention would provide valuable insights into the mechanisms of change, cultural meaning-making processes, and perceived barriers or facilitators to practicing

assertive behavior in everyday contexts (e.g., through focus group discussions or in-depth interviews). Understanding students' subjective experiences could inform more nuanced, student-centered intervention refinements.

Conclusions

This study highlights the potential of Islamic values–based Assertive Training as a strategic approach to strengthening adolescents' interpersonal competence in Islamic boarding school settings. Beyond demonstrating effectiveness, the findings suggest important implications for educational policy and practice. Schools may consider integrating assertive training grounded in Islamic values into student development programs as a preventive and promotive mental health strategy. For practice, teachers, school counselors, and boarding supervisors can be equipped with structured assertive training modules to foster respectful, confident, and ethically grounded communication among students. At the curriculum level, incorporating assertiveness and interpersonal communication skills aligned with Islamic moral principles may support holistic character education and enhance students' psychosocial resilience. Such integration is particularly relevant in boarding school environments, where close social interactions and hierarchical relationships require students to communicate their needs while maintaining respect and harmony.

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