

Research

Sufism learning through problem solving learning strategy in Indonesia islamic boarding school

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Abstract

This study aims to determine the effectiveness of the implementation of Problem solving learning strategy as one of the alternative active learning solutions in Sufism taught in pesantren or boarding school. A learning strategy known as 'problem solving' places a strong emphasis on the active participation of students in creating challenges, which encourage analytical and reflective thinking, especially in Sufism. The method used is a qualitative research method with the type of field research that is in Indonesia, Jember, East Java at Nurul Huda Islamic Boarding School, this research was conducted. Through participant observation the researcher has collected data, as well as through in-depth interviews, and documentation studies. The research findings show that (1) Problem Solving Learning Strategy is able to be a solution so that students are actively involved in the learning process in tasawuf lessons at Nurul Huda Islamic Boarding School; (2) This strategy is able to change the mindset of students from just accepting the concepts of tasawuf to being able to solve spiritual problems independently; (3) a significant impact on students' cognitive and spiritual was found. Over all the Strategy was able to become a passive to active learning solution, fostering a more participatory and team-orientated learning environment, encouraging students to investigate the principles of Sufism in their daily lives. These results highlight the importance of using cutting-edge teaching strategies to improve the standard of teaching in pesantren, particularly on Sufism subject matter.

Keywords: Strategy; Problem Solving Learning; Sufism; Islamic Boarding School; Indonesia

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1. Introduction

As one of the studies in Islam, Sufism is a branch of science that examines how self-control and spiritual practices can result in the development of noble morals, spiritual intimacy with Allah, and purity of soul. Sufism is often taught only as a transfren of knowledge so that the learning process is less attractive because it is not varied. The difficulty of choosing the appropriate strategy to be applied in learning Sufism is a challenge for educators to make the learning material well received by students Research by Djunaidi et al., (2021), Ananda Muhamad Tri Utama (2022). This obstacle was finally solved by one of the educational institutions that implemented the Problem Solving Learning strategy in Sufism. According to Jusubaidi et al., (2024), Amanda Agni Oktavia Ramadhani et al., (2024), the strategy can be an alternative because it is able to encourage students to ask critical questions and actively engage in in-depth discussions about the concepts of Sufism so as to create a more critical, dynamic and in-depth learning environment in their spiritual journey.

Previous studies on the Problem Solving Learning Strategy are extensive, for example, research by Uyuni & Adnan (2020), Nugroho & Nailufaz (2022), Soleman et al., (2020), Supriyanto et al., (2022), Jusubaidi et al.,

(2024) which showed that the Problem Solving Learning Strategy can improve students' conceptual understanding and spiritual appreciation of Sufism in Islamic boarding schools. Then research Zhang & Zhang (2020) which says this strategy involves a dialogical process between teachers and students. According to Amanda Agni Oktavia Ramadhani et al., (2024), this strategy allows for the exchange of ideas, deep reflection, and critical exploration of Sufism themes, such as *ihsan*, *tazkiyah an-nafs*, and *maqamat* 'spiritual levels'. Research by Amanda Agni Oktavia Ramadhani et al., (2024) also found that the application of Problem Solving Learning in the subject of Sufism morals in pesantren strengthened students' ability to think critically and reflectively. It can be concluded that this strategy not only helps students in understanding the concepts of Sufism in depth, but also enhances their critical thinking skills and spiritual awareness through active dialogue.

This study aims to determine the implementation of the Problem Solving Learning Strategy in improving students' understanding and appreciation of the concepts of Sufism in Islamic boarding schools. According to Archer-Kuhn et al., (2020), Thambu et al., (2021), Pong (2021) In the context of education, students' deeper understanding and spiritual appreciation require interactive and reflective learning strategies that allow students to dive into meaning in a more personal and transformative way. Research by Ihsan & Permana (2021), Dalim et al., (2022) dan Gulnaz (2020) shows that pesantren using this strategy are better able to analyse concepts of Sufism such as *maqamat* and *ihsan*, and apply their understanding in daily life through an active reflection process. This research will make a new contribution to the field of Islamic education, particularly in terms of applying active learning strategies in a pesantren environment that prioritises spiritual teaching.

The science of Sufism requires not only memorisation and theoretical understanding, but also deep spiritual appreciation. This is because the Problem Solving Learning strategy allows students to not only passively receive teachings, but also ask challenging questions, explore the meanings of Sufism, and reflect on their own spiritual experiences. The focus of this research is (1) How is the Problem Solving Learning Strategy implemented in the learning of Sufism at the Islamic Boarding School?; (2) To what extent is this strategy able to change the mindset of students from just accepting the concepts of Sufism to being able to solve spiritual problems independently?; (3) what are the implications of the Problem Solving Learning Strategy on students' cognitive and spiritual?. By integrating Problem Solving Learning in Sufism in Islamic boarding schools, it is hoped that students will not only understand the concepts of Sufism theoretically, but also be able to reflect and internalise spiritual values through active, reflexive dialogue and apply them in real life.

2. Methodology

Focus and location of research, is the object of study and location that limits the extent to which this research will be conducted (Pandit et al., 2026), (Tong et al., 2025), (Olawade et al., 2025). This research focuses on optimising the learning of Sufism through problem solving learning strategies at the Nurul Huda Islamic Boarding School Jember East Java Indonesia, because this institution is a traditional Islamic educational institution that has a strong focus on teaching religious sciences, including Sufism (*Ilmu Tasawuf*). This Islamic Boarding School implements a holistic education strategy, which includes intellectual, spiritual, and social aspects for its students. Students at Nurul Huda are learners involved in full-time education, who live in the boarding school. They are the main object of this study, where the effect of Problem Solving Learning strategy on their ability to understand and apply the concepts of Sufism in daily life.

In this study, researchers used qualitative with field studies as an approach. Qualitative research is research that explains findings based on facts in the field based on the behaviour and events of the reality of the surrounding environment (Groen & Harbach, 2026), (Mehta et al., 2026), (Olawade et al., 2025), (Muzari et al., 2022). Meanwhile, a field study is a research strategy that aims to reveal and analyse to understand a phenomenon of individuals, groups or certain situations (Gonsalo et al., 2026), (Pinault & Moreau, 2025), (Assessment et al., 2024). Through this research method and approach, researchers reveal how to optimise Sufism learning through problem solving learning strategies.

Participants refer to people or groups who actively participate in research, they participate by providing information, experiences, or data related to the research subject (Burns et al., 2020). This study involved nineteen participants, consisting of one institutional leader, two Sufism teachers, eight students, two Counselling teachers, and six student guardians. The determination and selection of informants as representation in research is an important point in fulfilling the requirements of qualitative research. This is in line with the writing of Muzari et al., (2022) which states that the existence of informants is one of the elements of validity of qualitative research results. The depiction, description and evidence revealed regarding the optimisation of Sufism learning through problem solving learning strategies are based on two sources, namely primary sources and secondary sources.

Primary sources include field data in the form of observation results, documentation, in-depth interviews with participants, while secondary data are obtained from literature studies, critical reviews of previous research, visual, audio visual and video data related to the application of problem solving learning strategies.

Table 1. Research Participants

No	Name	Education Level/Position/Institution	Province of Origin/Civil Service Status/Certification Status
1	R1	Master's/ Madrasah Principal /Nurul Huda Islamic Boarding School	East Java/Non-Civil Servant/Certified
2	R2	Bachelor's/ 1 st Religion Teacher/Nurul Huda Islamic Boarding School	East Java/Non-Civil Servant/Certified
3	R3	Bachelor's/ 2 st Religion Teacher /Nurul Huda Islamic Boarding School	East Java/Non-Civil Servant/Certified
4	R4	Bachelor's/ 3 st Religion Teacher/Nurul Huda Islamic Boarding School	East Java/Non-Civil Servant/Certified
5	R5	Bachelor's/General Teacher/ Nurul Huda Islamic Boarding School	East Java/Non-Civil Servant/Certified
6	R6	Bachelor's/General staff/ Nurul Huda Islamic Boarding School	East Java/Non-Civil Servant/Certified
7	R7	Bachelor's/ 1 st Guidance Counselor/ Nurul Huda Islamic Boarding School	East Java/Non-Civil Servant/Certified
8	R8	Bachelor's/ 2 st Guidance Counselor/ Nurul Huda Islamic Boarding School	East Java/Non-Civil Servant/Certified
9	R9	Bachelor's/ 3 st Guidance Counselor/ Nurul Huda Islamic Boarding School	East Java/Non-Civil Servant/Certified
10	R10	Student/ 10 first-grade students / Nurul Huda Islamic Boarding School	East Java/Non-Civil Servant/Non-Certified
11	R11	Student/ 10 second-grade students / Nurul Huda Islamic Boarding School	East Java/Non-Civil Servant/Non-Certified
12	R12	Student/ 10 third-grade students / Nurul Huda Islamic Boarding School	East Java/Non-Civil Servant/Non-Certified
13	K1	Master's/ Supervisor I/ Nurul Huda Islamic Boarding School	East Java/Civil Servant/Certified
14	K2	Master's/ Supervisor I/ Nurul Huda Islamic Boarding School	East Java/Civil Servant/Certified

Data collection is the process of using exploratory and interactive techniques to collect detailed and descriptive information about the phenomenon under study (Taherdoost, 2021), (Ganesha & Aithal, 2022) (Castro et al., 2025). In this study, researchers collected data by means of observation, interviews and documentation. Observation is to directly observe the process of applying Problem Solving Learning in teaching Sufism, starting from planning, implementation, question and answer, critical discussion of the concepts of Sufism and reflection, in-depth interviews were conducted with teachers to explore in-depth data on how they view the effectiveness of applying this strategy and how they guide students, while interviews with students to obtain their views on the learning experience and how this strategy helps them in understanding and applying the teachings of Sufism in real life, interviews with student guardians to obtain responses from the impact of the results of teaching Sufism on students' real lives. Documentation was done by screening documentation in the form of learning records, assessments and academic evaluation results to see the development and changes of students before and after the implementation of this strategy. According to aherdoost (2022) structured and varied qualitative data collection will provide a thorough and comprehensive overview.

Data analysis is to learn more about the experiences, attitudes, or actions of participants in a particular situation(Priore et al., 2025), (Spiele et al., 2025), (Adeseye et al., 2025), (Mezmir, 2020), (Dierckx de Casterlé et al., 2021). The researcher analyses all the data that has been obtained by means of triangulation which aims to

evaluate the findings of observation, interview and documentation data that have been carried out during the research. The focus of this analysis lies on how the strategy was implemented and how it affected their critical thinking skills, spiritual appreciation, and engagement in learning Sufism.

3. Results

3.1. Optimisation of Problem Solving Learning strategy in tawauf learning

In practice, teachers at Pesantren Nurul Huda teach the concept of Sufism through providing material which is then developed by students into relevant questions. Observation data obtained that students involved in this strategy showed an increase in understanding to a higher level compared to the traditional lecture strategy. In addition, interviews with teachers and students revealed that they felt more challenged to investigate the concepts of Sufism independently.

Responses about the implementation of Problem Solving learning R1, R2, R10, R11 regarding

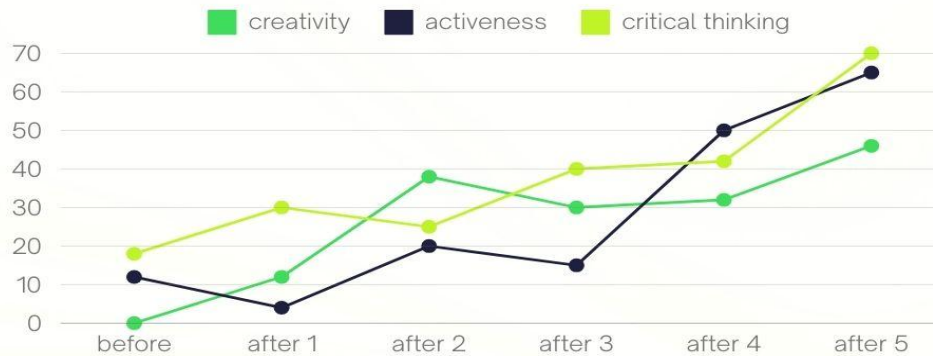
We saw an improvement in the understanding of the concepts, especially because the students were trained to think critically. For example, they are better able to relate the theory of Sufism to everyday life. I also see an improvement in students' confidence when participating in class discussions.

This strategy is very effective, especially in provoking student engagement. They become more active in asking questions and criticising the material. By formulating their own questions, they are not just passively receiving information, but also trying to understand and reflect on the material in depth, especially in the context of the study of Sufism which requires reflective thinking.

Yes, I became more active and confident. Before I only listened to the teacher, but now I can be directly involved by giving questions and answers. It feels like learning in a more fun and challenging way.

Based on the informants' statements, the implementation of the Problem Solving Learning strategy had a positive impact on both teachers and students. Teachers saw an increase in students' active engagement and deep understanding, especially in connecting the concepts of Sufism to real life. Students felt this strategy increased their confidence, as they could more freely ask questions and think critically. Although there were obstacles at the beginning of the implementation, especially in getting all students actively involved, this strategy overall succeeded in improving the quality of learning in Pesantren Nurul Huda. So the researcher drew a graph as follows:

increase after implementation of problem posing learning strategy in Sufism subject



Finding result

3.2. Change in Students mindset from merely accepting sufism concepts to being able to solve spiritual problems independently

The researcher found that Students were able to play a more active role in solving their spiritual problems when the Problem Solving Learning approach was used. They were able to evaluate and apply these ideas in the context of everyday life rather than just passively memorising and accepting Sufi teachings. Relation to Contextual Understanding: here Students demonstrate a stronger understanding of the core ideas of Sufism through the process of discussion and analysis of learning challenges. They can relate Sufi concepts such as tawakkal, patience, and zuhud to the actual circumstances they face. These are in accordance with R7, R8, R11, R12 said:

The change in the mindset of students here has been very noticeable in recent years. In the past, students were more likely to accept the concept of Sufism passively, meaning they just absorbed the teachings given without really understanding their essence. However, over time and the development of learning methods, they began to be invited to think critically. Now, they not only accept the concepts, but are also able to reflect on them and relate them to their personal spiritual experiences.

The change is very visible. Whereas students used to rely more on teacher guidance to overcome spiritual problems, many of them are now able to find their own solutions through a deeper understanding of the teachings of Sufism. They are more independent in seeking answers to spiritual questions that arise in their daily lives.

It can be concluded that there has been an important change in the way students think about understanding Sufi ideas. Previously only receiving instruction, students are now able to deal with spiritual issues on their own. The use of problem-solving techniques and interactive teaching strategies, which encourage critical and autonomous thinking in students, are the main drivers of this change. The capacity of students to handle life's obstacles wisely and with greater spiritual awareness is also enhanced by this change

3.3. Implications of Problem Solving Learning Strategy on students' cognitive and spirituality

The results of observations show some of the impacts of the problem solving learning strategy on students' cognitive, namely an increase in students' critical thinking skills, organization of concept understanding, creative thinking skills. Students become more confident in discussions, more critical of information, and more collaborative and open to different perspectives. It also forms a stronger academic identity and reduces students' dependence on a single authority, making them more independent individuals in the learning process. In accordance with the results of interviews with R3, R4, R5, R9, R10 guardians as follows;

Yes, their understanding of the material is deeper. Students who are actively involved in formulating questions usually have a better understanding than students who only receive the material passively.

Problem Solving helps them not only understand the surface of the material, but also more complicated concepts, especially in Sufism learning which requires deep reflection.

Now I feel more challenged to raise questions, opinions and find my own answers, rather than in the past I only listened to the material, as well as memorising which often made me bored. It makes me understand the material better, because I really have to think about what I'm learning.

He often tells me how his daily life is related to Sufism lessons at school. This development makes me excited to take him to a higher education later.

The results are very positive. My child is not inferior and afraid to come forward because he feels comfortable learning with an active teacher.

This shows that Problem Solving Learning has a positive impact on students' cognitive abilities. Teachers noted an increase in students' critical thinking skills and concept understanding, as well as their creativity in solving problems. Students themselves felt more challenged to think deeply, more independent in learning, and better able to understand complex material. They also reported that the strategy helped improve their critical thinking and asking relevant questions, which in turn improved their understanding of the lesson, and positive comments from guardians on their children's positive development proved that the strategy is proven to improve students' cognitive development

4. Discussion

4.1. Implications of Problem Solving Learning Strategy on students' cognitive and spiritual development

At Nurul Huda Islamic Boarding School, Problem Solving Learning is a strategy that strongly emphasizes students in asking questions and provoking or stimulating their curiosity. This strategy also brings students from a passive to an active role, because information is no longer obtained only from the teacher but is obtained independently by exploring and compiling or formulating problems as a trigger for further discussion. So that in the context of pesantren education, this strategy is effective for increasing student involvement and understanding of complex material, such as sufism. As research by Djunaidi et al., (2021), Abitolkha & Mas'ud (2021) revealed this strategy is very suitable for learning that requires deep thinking such as sufism, because it can encourage students to think critically and explore the deeper meaning of the concept taught. Teachers at Nurul Huda Islamic Boarding School are right in choosing this learning strategy as a solution to the obstacles of providing understanding to students about Sufism.

The steps in implementing the Problem Solving Learning strategy at Nurul Huda Islamic Boarding School have shown its maximality as an effective way of learning even though there are several obstacles encountered, such as lack of time or the dominance of certain active students but this can be minimized and found solutions as this strategy continues to be applied. As some steps in its application in Sari et al., (2021) research, namely first, introduction and orientation; the teacher provides a basic understanding or introduces the material to students and provides sufficient context and background examples. Second, problem identification; after understanding the initial material, students are asked to identify issues, statements or questions related to the material. This stage is to foster student curiosity and active involvement.

Third, discussion formation and reflection; the teacher acts as a facilitator who directs the course of the discussion so that it remains focused on the learning objectives, at this stage students share their thoughts, respond to friends' questions and try to find solutions or understand other perspectives. Fourth, analysis and synthesis; students are asked to analyze the answers or information obtained from group discussions and reflections and link the questions that arise with relevant theories or basic principles. Fifth, assessment and follow-up; the teacher provides feedback on the students' thinking process as an evaluation of the discussion results. As research by (Anna et al., 2023) revealed this strategy offers a more interactive and reflective approach in the learning process.

4.2. Change in students' mindset from merely accepting Sufism concepts to being able to solve spiritual problems independently

Early Sufism learning at Nurul Huda often involved rote learning, where instructors delivered Sufi doctrines and learners memorized them. This approach placed a strong emphasis on accepting what was taught without much room for criticism. Without considering the significance or context of the lessons in their own lives, the students usually imitate the work of previous scholars. According to Hidayat et al., (2023), Edy & Maryam (2022) In the classical Islamic education tradition, where the teacher is considered the main source of information,

this is a common learning pattern. But there are drawbacks to this pattern, especially in terms of helping students build their capacity for independent thinking. Without attempting to relate the teachings to their own spiritual circumstances or experiences, they often turn to teachers or books for answers to their spiritual problems. However, the researcher's findings in the interview results show that there has been an important change in the way students think about understanding Sufi ideas. Previously only receiving instructions, students are now able to deal with spiritual problems on their own. The use of problem-solving techniques and interactive teaching strategies, which encourage critical and independent thinking in students, are the main drivers of this change. The capacity of students to handle the social behaviors of life sensibly and with greater spiritual awareness is also at the forefront

Here are some factors that play an important role in the change of students' mindset including Better Participatory Learning Techniques; Open debates, contextual studies, and real-world applications are just some of the more participatory ways of teaching Sufism in Nurul Huda. In addition to imparting knowledge, teachers act as mentors who help students understand and apply Sufi teachings on a personal level. Better Interactive Teaching Methods; At Nurul Huda, Sufi learning now uses a more participatory approach, including open dialogue, contextual study, and real-world application. The teacher acts as a facilitator who helps students understand and apply Sufi teachings on a personal level in addition to being an information provider. Application of problem solving learning strategies; this approach helps students recognise the spiritual problems they face and find answers based on their own interpretation of Sufi teachings. Rather than simply accepting responses from others, students are encouraged to dare to ask questions and seek answers through deep contemplation.(Elizabeth et al., 2025) Influence of Personal Experience; Students' daily spiritual encounters make them more confident in understanding and resolving spiritual issues. They are encouraged to take all the lessons learnt and apply them to actual situations they face.

4.3. Implications of Problem Solving Learning Strategy on students' cognitive and spiritual well-being

Learning Tasawwuf using Problem Solving Learning strategy has a significant cognitive impact, especially in improving students' critical thinking skills. According to GARBA (2024) with this strategy, students are encouraged to actively ask questions, analyse complex concepts, and explore the deeper meaning of the teachings of Sufism. This process requires students to not only understand the material superficially, but also involves analytical, evaluative, and reflective thinking skills in dealing with the spiritual issues presented. In the research of X. Zhang et al., (2023) revealed that through the exploration of questions they create themselves, students develop the ability to identify problems, evaluate answers, and find solutions or new, deeper understandings. As a result, this learning strengthens students' critical thinking skills, making them smarter in understanding spiritual concepts and more skilled in logical and reflective thinking.

According to Li et al., (2024) students gain a deeper understanding of the subject through framing and discussing questions. Students who learn using problem-solving techniques gain a stronger understanding of complex Sufi concepts. Improved student learning outcomes in Sufi material enabled students to express concepts more effectively and methodically. In addition, in the research of Akmam et al., (2024) this strategy has an impact on students' creative thinking skills, namely they are encouraged to face challenges from various points of view. Students learn to see problems from various points of view, which in turn hones their creativity in proposing new solutions or ideas.

Students who study Sufism and use the Problem Solving Learning Strategy become much more spiritualised. Students are encouraged to actively formulate and solve problems related to spiritual values that they encounter in their daily lives. Their understanding of the teachings of Sufism becomes more critical and reflective as a result of this process. Student learning using the Problem Solving strategy shows greater awareness of the importance of living a life based on Sufism values and deeper spiritual knowledge, this is according to research conducted in various Islamic educational institutions (Suharyat et al., 2024). In addition, according to Abitolkha & Mas'ud, (2021), Remiswal et al., (2021) students often have a greater understanding of how Sufism relates to their daily lives, making their spirituality more applicable and significant. As a result, the use of Problem Solving Learning approach in Sufism education proves to be beneficial in helping students grow spiritually, increase their critical awareness of spiritual principles, and be wiser in living their daily lives, this has a significant impact on the spiritual life of Nurul Huda Islamic Boarding School students.

5. Conclusion

This strategy optimises the learning of Sufism in terms of concept understanding, creative thinking, critical thinking, and discussion. Through its application, students become more critical in analysing the meaning of Sufi

teachings and are able to develop it through their daily spiritual experiences. A deep understanding of Sufism is strengthened as the learning process becomes more dynamic and engaging. The main learning factors in the success of this strategy are students' enthusiasm for innovative teaching strategies, students' active participation, teachers' skills in facilitating discussions, a comfortable learning environment, and the suitability of the materials or sources. The change in students' mindset is also increasingly evident, which initially only received the transfer of knowledge, from passive to active. The impact of cognition and spirituality is that from a cognitive point of view, students show an increase in analytical, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills in understanding Sufi ideas. From a spiritual perspective, students reported an increase in their understanding of spirituality, appreciating Sufi teachings, and applying them in daily life.

This research makes a substantial scholarly contribution to the fields of education and Sufism, particularly in terms of creating cutting-edge teaching methods for teaching Sufism in the pesantren environment. This discovery expands the use of creative pedagogy in Sufism education, which previously focused only on memorisation and lectures. The Problem Solving Learning Strategy has proven to be useful in improving students' understanding and appreciation of Sufism lessons, and can be used in teaching Sufism in various pesantren.

Some limitations in the research on Problem Solving Learning Strategy on Sufism in Islamic Boarding School include, this research was only conducted in one Islamic Boarding School with a limited number of participants, this research only focuses on the application of the Problem Solving Learning strategy without comparing the strategy with other Sufism learning strategies, so it is hoped that further research can expand the research subject by involving more pesantren from various regions to get a more comprehensive picture and further research can make comparisons between various learning strategies to determine which strategy is most effective in the context of learning Sufism in pesantren.

Acknowledgements: The author would like to thank all the Nurul Huda Islamic Boarding School teachers and supervisors who have provided their support in data collection.

Author contributions Alfina Wildatul Fitriyah (AWF) and Misbah Zulfa Elizabeth (MZE) were responsible for the idea and writing the manuscript. Mustaqim (M), Abdullah Shodiq (AS), Achmad Yusuf (AY) and Irwan Abdullah (IA) reviewed the manuscript and supervised the overall work. Misbah Zulfa Elizabeth (MZE), Zarkasi (Z), and Alfina Wildatul Fitriyah (AWF) were involved in data collection, data analysis, and contributed to idea generation. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Funding: This research did not receive funding for open access.

Data Availability: Supporting data on the findings in this study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

Declarations

Human Ethics and Consent to Participate Declarations: Ethical clearance number 1095 from KH Yazid Karimullah institute, Jember, Indonesia.

Consent for Publication: All participants gave their statements voluntarily and consciously. Before participating, all individuals were given information about the purpose of the study, the procedures to be followed, and their right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. All data collected during the survey was kept confidential, used solely for analytical purposes, and stored securely to prevent misuse of information.

Competing Interest: The authors declare no competing interests.

Consent to Participate: All Respondents voluntarily and consciously agreed to provide valid information for the completeness of the data required in this study.

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