
THE ROLE OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN FOSTERING STUDENTS' SPIRITUAL ECOLOGICAL RESPONSIBILITY

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the role of religious education in shaping students' sense of spiritual ecological responsibility. A Systematic Literature Review (SLR) with a qualitative approach was employed to identify, select, and synthesize relevant scholarly works that explore how religious education can foster ecological awareness and ethical behavior among students. The literature reviewed includes peer-reviewed journal articles, educational reports, and theoretical frameworks on environmental ethics in religious education. The selection process involved setting inclusion criteria based on relevance, academic credibility, and publication date, ensuring that only the most pertinent and recent literature was analyzed. The findings suggest that integrating Islamic values—such as amanah (trustworthiness) and khalifah (stewardship)—into religious education enhances students' ecological awareness and fosters more responsible environmental behavior. These results underscore the importance of value-based educational models in cultivating a generation that is not only spiritually grounded but also environmentally conscious.

Keywords: Religious Education, Spiritual Ecological Responsibility, Environmental Awareness.

INTRODUCTION

Basically, "education" cannot be separated from the environment, because since humans are born, they immediately interact and need the environment to grow and develop into adult humans. So the human mindset has been constructed by everything that happens around the environment. Thus, the existence of the environment becomes the obligation of every human being to maintain all the potential that is owned by the environment itself. However, in reality, there has been a separation between the world of education and its environment, and it has even been forcibly uprooted from the life of its environment. Based on the reality, Islamic educational

institutions should implement education based on the environment so that every step of the world of Islamic education is a form of absorption of the environmental world that it occupies and everything that happens in the environment is a manifestation of everything learned in education (Obaid, 2013, p.141).

Education must be able to change beliefs, values, and understanding of the importance of maintaining and preserving the environment to keep it quality and healthy. At the same time, the above beliefs, values, and understanding are implemented in a more tangible struggle. At a more concrete level, environmental education needs to be supported by environmental leadership, to encourage capacity, attitudes, and practical experience to realize sustainability and environmental justice (Witoelar in Budimanta, 2005: v) through an interdisciplinary approach in managing the environment.

UNESCO, in 1970, explained that environmental education is a process of introducing various values and explaining concepts to develop the attitudinal abilities and skills needed to understand and appreciate the reciprocal relationship between humans, culture, and the biophysical environment (Herdiansyah, 2018, p. 51).

Through the Qur'an, Islam provides a view of the relationship between humans and the environment. The Qur'an teaches that the universe is a sign (ayat) of the greatness of Allah SWT. which must be respected, preserved, and maintained (Aripin & Mardani, 2024, p. 3). This research aims to explore the concept of ecotheology in the Qur'anic perspective and to examine the implementation of environmental education based on Qur'anic values. Various previous studies have discussed environmental education in Islam, but most studies have only discussed the concept of ecology, while this study specifically integrates the values of the Qur'an and theology in environmental education (ecotheology). For example, the article entitled "Islam, Ethics and Ecology: Verses of Quran Obligation to Preserve the Environment" by Ipin Tajul Aripin and Dede Aji Mardani in 2024. In the article, researchers only revealed the concept of environmental ethics in Islam, which only contains verses that discuss the environment, not yet to its implementation (Aripin & Mardani, 2024).

Islam emphasizes the importance of the concept of balance (mizan) and the responsibility of humans as caliphs on earth in maintaining environmental sustainability (Takhim & Purwanto, 2018). Values such as justice, responsibility, and simplicity taught in Islam have great relevance in environmental education, as they help shape behaviors that care for nature and available resources. In an Islamic perspective, religious values can strengthen ecological awareness by linking environmental issues with spiritual responsibilities. Islamic scholars and academics also emphasize the importance of integrating religious teachings with environmental issues to build a collective

consciousness that supports sustainability (Aboul-Enein, 2018). Islamic values can serve as a moral and ethical foundation for environmental education, thus encouraging people to act wisely and responsibly towards the environment (Nurulloh, 2019).

Education and the environment have an inseparable relationship. From birth, humans interact with the environment to grow and develop, shaping their mindset. Therefore, maintaining the potential of the environment is the obligation of every individual. However, the reality is that there is still a separation between the world of education and the environment, even tending to be different from everyday life. Islamic educational institutions should implement environment-based education so that every learning process is a reflection of interaction with the surrounding environment.

METHOD

This research method uses a qualitative approach with Systematic Literature Review (SLR) as the main method. This approach was chosen to systematically explore and analyze various relevant literature regarding the role of religious education in fostering students' ecological responsibility spiritually. SLR was conducted with the following steps: (1) Literature Identification: A source search was conducted through academic databases such as Google Scholar, Scopus, and ScienceDirect with the keywords “role of religious education”, “religious education in fostering responsibility”, “students' spiritual ecological responsibility”, and “ecological responsibility” in the range of 2005 to 2025; (2) Study Selection: Relevant studies were selected based on the criteria of the role of religious education, i.e. studies that addressed the role of religious education in fostering students' spiritual ecological responsibility. Studies that did not fit the topic or had weak methodology were excluded; (3) Data Extraction: Key information from each selected study was collected and analyzed, including research objectives, methods, results, and recommendations; (4) Data Analysis and Synthesis: The data obtained were thematically analyzed to identify research trends, gaps in the literature, as well as the role of religious education in spiritually fostering students' ecological responsibility; (5) Reporting of Results: The results of the SLR were presented in the form of a summary of key findings as well as strategic recommendations for educators and policy makers in fostering students' ecological responsibility spiritually (Kitchenham, B. (2004).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Relationship between Religious Education and Ecological Responsibility

Islamic religious education has strategic potential in shaping students' ecological awareness because the values contained in its teachings explicitly encourage human responsibility for nature.

Values such as trust, khalifah, and ihsan are integral parts of Islamic teachings that are very relevant to the issue of environmental conservation. The value of trust places humans as responsible guardians of the earth and all its contents, because the earth is a trust from Allah SWT that must be guarded and maintained responsibly (Mubiar, A., et al., 2023). Islam also teaches that humans are caliphs (leaders) on earth (QS. Al-Baqarah: 30), who are mandated by God to manage and preserve nature fairly and wisely. This caliphate responsibility is not only social, but also spiritual, as it is part of worship to Allah. The values of spirituality in Islam, such as tawhid, tawazun (balance), and rahmatan lil 'alamin, form an ecological ethic that guides the behavior of Muslims in interacting with nature. The concept of tawhid, which emphasizes the unity of creation, builds an understanding that humans, nature and all living things are bound in a harmonious system under the rule of Allah. This encourages respect and responsibility for the environment as part of servitude to God (Muhamad, J., et al., 2024).

The integration of Islamic values into environmental education creates a religious ecological framework. For example, the principle of ihsan, which is doing good in the best way possible, extends not only to humans but also to nature. In practice, this can be realized in an energy-saving attitude, not littering, to actively maintaining cleanliness as part of faith (al-nazhafah minal iman) (Mubiar, A., et al., 2023). Religious education not only functions as a transfer of knowledge, but also as a transformation of values and character building. According to Idris et al., Islamic education can transform the teachings of the Qur'an about the environment into concrete actions through a learning process that touches the cognitive, affective, and spiritual aspects of students. This makes religious education a moral force in changing the paradigm of exploitative human-nature relationships into ethical and harmonious relationships (M. Idris, et al., 2022).

Implementation of Environmental Education based on Quranic values

Dr. Ahmad Shabir, an expert on Islamic education, stated that education based on religious values has great potential in shaping the character of students who care about the environment. He emphasized that in Islam there are many teachings that teach the importance of protecting nature, one of which is the concept of mizan which teaches about the balance of nature, as well as the prohibition against damage (fasad) mentioned in the Qur'an. Practical activities such as reforestation and waste management, are very effective in helping students realize how important it is to maintain the balance of nature and prevent the waste of natural resources (Habibah, et.al., 2025).

Islamic education learning materials that focus on ecological spirituality include an explanation of Islamic teachings that emphasize the importance of environmental conservation. In the aspect of Islamic belief ('aqidah), ecological spirituality-oriented learning is closely related

to the cultivation of the concepts of tawhid uluhiyah, rububiyah, rahmaniyah, and mulkiyah. This includes the belief that Allah Swt. is the only substance worthy of worship (Mohammad Muchlis, 2017).

Learning approaches that actively involve students are also very important, especially in religious education that focuses on environmental awareness. This method gives students the opportunity to discuss, give opinions and find solutions to the environmental problems they face. In this way, students not only receive information, but also become agents of change. Teachers can facilitate discussions on local environmental issues, such as waste management or pollution, and invite students to propose solutions based on Islamic teachings. Students can also take part in determining environmental projects at school, such as recycling or greening programs (Mahrus, 2024).

The thematic learning model can also be used to implement environmental education with an approach that uses themes to connect the various contents of subjects in one particular theme or topic with daily experiences, so as to provide meaningful experiences for students. For example, when explaining the theme of the importance of environmental conservation, learning will be guided by an approach that refers to the values of the Qur'an, Hadith, Aqidah (belief), Fiqh (Islamic law), Akhlak Tasawuf, and Islamic Cultural History (SKI) (Mohammad Muchlis, 2017).

The Role of Religious Education Teachers as Agents of Change

Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers have a strategic position as agents of change in shaping students' ecological awareness through Islamic values. As exemplary figures in educational institutions, PAI teachers not only transfer religious knowledge, but also play a role in shaping spiritual characters who care about the environment. Islamic values such as amanah, khalifah, and ihsan can be internalized through the learning process to form a strong ecological awareness. Strategies used by teachers include integrating religious material with environmental issues through contextual approaches, such as discussions of Qur'anic verses about nature, case studies of environmental damage, and involving students in environmental conservation projects based on spiritual values (Mubiar, A., et al., 2023).

In addition, the pedagogical competence of PAI teachers is the key to success in conveying ecological values. Teachers who are able to link the teachings of tawhid and the concept of khalifah with the responsibility to protect nature will create a learning experience that is not only informative, but also transformative. In this context, the role of teachers as role models is very important; teachers' daily behaviors such as saving energy, being active in greening activities, and maintaining cleanliness will become concrete examples that shape students' ecological awareness affectively and spiritually. This is in line with the constructivistic view which emphasizes that

meaningful learning occurs when students see a real connection between the material learned and their daily lives.

Religion teachers also play a role in curriculum development and school activities based on Islamic and environmental values. Strategies that can be used by PAI teachers in instilling these values include integration of religious materials with environmental issues, habituation of ecological attitudes at school, and exemplary daily behavior. Akidah lessons, for example, can relate environmental damage as a form of violation of the concept of tawhid, while Akhlak lessons emphasize that maintaining cleanliness and natural beauty is a form of practicing faith (Mubiar, A., et al., 2023). This is reinforced by the findings in the study of Januaripin et al. (2024) which confirmed that the spiritual approach based on Islamic ethics is able to encourage students' ecological behavior and form a harmonious relationship between humans and nature.

The study by Shidqi and Syairozi (2024) at SMK Negeri 14 Central Jakarta also showed that PAI teachers play an important role in the success of the Adiwiyata program, which aims to instill the habit of maintaining cleanliness and care for the school environment. PAI teachers not only teach religious teachings verbally, but also involve students in real activities such as garden creation, waste management, and class cleaning pickets, all of which are based on Islamic values such as cleanliness as part of faith.

With this approach, PAI teachers act as a bridge between Islamic teachings and ecological awareness, forming learners who are not only spiritually obedient but also socially and ecologically responsible.

Challenges and Constraints in Integrating Environmental Education in Religious Education

Resistance to new interpretations from religious groups is still a major problem, especially among certain people who prefer to maintain traditional ways of thinking. In addition, there is also a clear discrepancy between spiritual awareness and environmental action, where a good understanding of religion is not always applied in concrete actions to preserve nature (Thomson, 2025). Another challenge in incorporating environmental values is the lack of teaching materials and practical guides, as well as the lack of resources and training for teachers. This is a major obstacle to implementing an environmentally-focused curriculum. Teachers often have to find their own ways to connect religious teachings with environmental issues, but this is not always done in a consistent or organized way (Wildan, 2024). Another challenge is that some parents and community members resist changes in the curriculum, especially if they do not understand the benefits of environmentally-focused learning. Therefore, it is important to improve

communication and provide explanations to parents and the community so that they support this new approach and reduce resistance to it (Lubis, R. K. 2024)

Impact of Religious Education on Students' Environmental Behavior

Religious education integrated with ecological values contributes significantly to the transformation of students' environmental awareness and behavior, especially in shaping meaningful ecological spirituality. In this context, ecological spirituality refers to the dimension of religious appreciation that not only affects the vertical relationship between humans and God (*habl min Allah*), but also extends to horizontal relationships with nature (*habl min al-'alam*) as a concrete form of human servitude and leadership on earth (*khalifah fil ardh*). This means that when religious teachings are understood and implemented in an environmental context, ecological awareness is born, which is not just moral ethics, but a form of worship that has a transcendental dimension.

Wildan's research (2024) shows that although the integration of ecological values in the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) curriculum at the primary level is not structurally optimal, the impact remains significant on student behavior when learning is done creatively and contextually. Teachers who are able to link Islamic teachings such as the importance of cleanliness (*nazhafah*), the prohibition of doing damage (*fasad*), and the command to maintain balance (*mizan*) with concrete actions, are able to foster new awareness among students. For example, activities such as cleaning schools or planting trees are not simply understood as routine tasks, but as a form of good deeds and a manifestation of the value of *tawhid*, where nature is seen as God's creation that must be preserved.

Meanwhile, Nurulloh (2019) emphasized that the success of internalizing ecological values in religious education is highly dependent on the creation of a conducive religious climate in the educational environment. This climate involves structural (institutional policies), cultural (instilled habits), and pedagogical (learning methods) aspects, all of which are directed at shaping students as ecologically conscious religious people. Indicators of the success of this process include changes in student behavior: not littering, saving energy and water, protecting plants, and being active in environmental conservation activities based on spiritual motivation, not just disciplinary encouragement. These behaviors reflect ecological spirituality, which is the awareness that protecting the environment is part of the responsibility as a servant and *khalifah* of Allah on earth.

In the theoretical framework, the process of forming this behavior can be explained through a value transformation approach that combines the cognitive (religious knowledge), affective (appreciation of values), and psychomotor (direct practice) domains. Religious education that instills teachings such as QS. Al-A'raf: 56 "Do not cause damage to the earth after Allah has

repaired it" or QS. Ar-Rum: 41 "There is destruction on land and sea because of human hands" not only provides verbal understanding, but also forms axiological awareness, that protecting the environment is part of faith commitment. This is in line with al-Ghazali's opinion that awareness (*wijdan*) is a bathiniyah charity that encourages real action in everyday life.

Thus, it can be concluded that the impact of religious education on students' environmental behavior is not only cognitive, but comprehensive changing the paradigm of thinking, shaping attitudes, and encouraging ecological actions rooted in Islamic spirituality. The integration of environmental values into PAI learning is a strategic effort in building a generation that is not only ritualistically religious, but also has ecological responsibilities as part of a complete and contextual religious practice. In the current era of climate crisis, this kind of approach is very relevant and urgent to be widely applied in Islamic educational institutions.

Analysis

Islamic religious education can be a strategic foundation in shaping students' ecological awareness and responsibility. By integrating fundamental values such as *amanah*, *khalifah*, and *ihsan*, religious education acts as a transformation agent that not only transfers knowledge, but also internalizes ecological spirituality. This analysis is in line with Character Formation Theory, where religious values are transformed into environmentally sound concrete actions (Idris, et al., 2022). An active and contextualized learning approach, as supported by Social Constructivism Theory, allows students to actively construct their understanding of nature conservation, making it an integral part of faith (Mahrus, 2024). Furthermore, this discussion strengthens Environmental Education Theory by adding the dimension of Islamic ecotheology, which views nature as God's creation that must be preserved as a form of worship. Finally, through the Behavior Change Theory, it can be concluded that Islamic religious education succeeds in encouraging pro-environmental behavior change in students, where concern for nature is not just a moral obligation, but a reflection of a deep spiritual commitment (Shidqi & Syairozi, 2024).

CONCLUSION

This study shows that religious education has a strategic role in shaping students' ecological responsibility through the integration of Islamic values. Values such as *amanah*, *khalifah*, and *ihsan* not only provide moral understanding, but also build spiritual awareness that encourages students to behave more environmentally consciously. By implementing an active and contextual learning approach, students can internalize these values in real actions, such as environmental conservation activities and waste management, which make them agents of change in society.

Challenges in integrating environmental education into the religious education curriculum need to be addressed through the development of relevant teaching materials and training for teachers. Support from parents and the community is also very important to create a conducive environment for this learning. Thus, effective religious education will not only produce religious individuals, but also an ecologically responsible generation, ready to face environmental challenges in the current era of climate crisis. The integration of ecological values in Islamic education is an important step towards sustainability and balance between humans and nature.

There is a need to develop a religious education curriculum that clearly integrates ecological values, so that students can understand the relationship between faith and environmental responsibility. In addition, teacher training should focus on active and participatory teaching methods, as well as involving parents and communities in environmental education programs. Practical activities such as tree planting and waste management should also be conducted to provide students with hands-on experience. Further research on the long-term impacts of this ecological value-based education would be very useful in identifying best practices and challenges in its implementation.

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