

Eco-Islamic Pedagogy: An Inclusive Islamic Religious Education Model for the Ecological Challenges of the 21st Century

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ABSTRACT

The global ecological crisis, manifested in climate change, pollution, and biodiversity loss, is not merely a scientific problem but also a profound moral and spiritual challenge that requires multisectoral responses, including from Islamic Religious Education (IRE). Traditionally, IRE has been predominantly textual and ritualistic, often failing to foster ecological awareness grounded in Islamic values. Eco-Islamic Pedagogy offers an alternative educational approach by integrating ecological principles theologically, ethically, and practically. It adopts a theocentric, ecocentric, contextual, inclusive, and transformational framework, positioning nature as a divine creation entrusted to human stewardship. This study employs a qualitative approach through library research, aiming to analyze and synthesize relevant literature on the subject. Despite challenges such as limited teacher training and resistance to paradigm shifts, strategic opportunities arise through the flexibility of the “Merdeka Curriculum” and growing global awareness of sustainability education. With adequate policy support and cross-sector collaboration, Eco-Islamic Pedagogy has the potential to become a relevant, progressive, and impactful model of Islamic education, fostering a generation of devout and environmentally conscious Muslims.

Keywords: Islamic Religious Education, ecology, eco-Islamic pedagogy

1 Introduction

Today’s ongoing global ecological crisis is the consequence of systemic damage to various environmental components. Climate change, air and marine pollution, water scarcity, and biodiversity loss are no longer marginal issues. The impacts of climate change are evident in the melting of polar ice, rising sea levels, and increasingly unpredictable extreme weather events [1]. Plastic and industrial waste further degrade aquatic ecosystems, threatening marine life and human health [2]. The water crisis affects billions, putting them in a state of water stress, while massive deforestation transforms tropical forests from carbon sinks into emission sources [3]. These issues are cross-sectoral and demand interdisciplinary solutions, including from the education sector [4].

Unfortunately, religious education, particularly Islamic Religious Education (IRE), often neglects ecological issues. Religious education, which should foster character and spiritual values, frequently focuses only on normative and ritual aspects. In fact, Islam is rich in sustainability and environmental ethics, such as the concepts of *khalifah fil ardh* (human stewardship of the Earth), *tawazun* (balance), and the prohibition of *fasad fi al-ardh* (corruption on Earth) [5]. However, these values have yet to be systematically integrated into IRE curricula. As a result, students often lack spiritually grounded ecological awareness and fail to view environmental protection as a form of worship and faith [6].

To address this gap, a new pedagogical approach is needed, one that bridges Islamic values and ecological awareness in a contextual way [7]. One proposed model is Eco-Islamic Pedagogy, an educational approach that integrates ecological principles theologically, ethically, and practically. This model positions Islamic teachings as the ethical foundation for environmental stewardship, using active learning

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methods such as Qur'anic reflection on nature, case studies of environmental crises, and eco-friendly practices in schools. Nature is viewed as *ayat kauniyah*, signs of God's greatness, that must be respected and preserved as part of a believer's relationship with the Divine [8].

Eco-Islamic Pedagogy is characterized by a theocentric (God-centered) and ecocentric (nature-centered) orientation, contextual and humanistic approaches, inclusivity, and a transformative focus [9]. Teachers serve as spiritual eco-educators guiding students to view environmental issues as religious responsibilities. Cross-disciplinary collaborations, such as between IRE and natural or social sciences, enrich this approach, enabling the integration of science and Islamic values. Supported by the flexible Merdeka Curriculum and rising global awareness of sustainability, Eco-Islamic Pedagogy has great potential as an innovative and timely educational approach [10].

2 Literature Review

The discourse on the relationship between Islam and ecology has experienced significant development over the past decade. Agustin et al. [5] affirm that Islamic teachings encompass strong sustainability principles, such as the concept of *khalifah* (stewardship of the earth), *tawazun* (balance), and the prohibition of *fasad* (corruption and destruction) of the environment. Djazuli [11] further reveals that the Qur'an and Hadith mandate humans to preserve ecological harmony as an integral part of faith and worship. By definition, Islamic environmental education is an effort to instill awareness and responsibility toward the environment, as well as to practice Islamic teachings in the management and preservation of nature [12]. In the context of education, Januaripin and Rahtikawati [10] highlight that Islamic education remains predominantly normative and ritualistic, often failing to actualize ecological values within the teaching and learning process. Similarly, Hudha et al. [13] emphasize the urgency of implementing character education based on environmental ethics rooted in Islamic teachings to address contemporary ecological crises. Supporting this perspective, Choiriyah and Maghribi [14] argue for a collaborative approach that integrates Islamic religious education with environmental science in order to develop an educational model that is responsive to global issues. Theoretically, Eco-Islamic Pedagogy is grounded in several key frameworks:

- Transformative Learning Theory [5], which emphasizes the importance of critical consciousness and behavioral change through deep reflection. In this context, eco-social pedagogy based on Islamic values aims to transform students' ecological awareness.
- Contextual Teaching and Learning Theory [15], which connects learning with the learners' real-life experiences. Ecological issues such as climate change and pollution, therefore, become contextual learning materials that carry religious significance.
- Islamic Environmental Theology, built upon the concepts of *tawhid* (the oneness of God), *khilafah* (stewardship), and *amanah* (trust and responsibility), which frame ecological ethics within an Islamic paradigm [7].
- The Interdisciplinary Paradigm proposed by Mahrus [16], which calls for collaboration between religious education and environmental science as a holistic approach to tackling the ecological crisis.

The conceptual framework of this study is constructed on the premise that the global ecological crisis is a multidimensional challenge that necessitates an educational response, particularly from the sector of Islamic religious education. Eco-Islamic Pedagogy, therefore, is proposed as an inclusive model that integrates theological, ethical, and pedagogical dimensions to foster ecological consciousness and responsibility among learners in the 21st century.

3 Research Methods

This study employs a qualitative approach using the library research method. It aims to gain a comprehensive understanding of the topic through the analysis of relevant academic sources. This method is suitable for studies that emphasize conceptual exploration rather than empirical or numerical data. Data were collected from secondary sources such as books, scholarly journals, articles, research reports, and official documents related to the topic. The data were analyzed using descriptive-qualitative methods to identify patterns of thought, interrelated concepts, and the evolution of discourse in the field [17].

4 Results and Discussion

The Ecological Crisis from a Global and Islamic Perspective

The global ecological crisis, encompassing climate change, biodiversity loss, water scarcity, and pollution, is not just a scientific or political issue but also a moral and spiritual dilemma. From an Islamic perspective, this crisis reflects a distorted relationship between humans and nature that deviates from fundamental religious principles. Islam does not view nature as a resource to exploit but as a sacred creation of Allah that must be preserved. Human environment relations are framed within tawhid (the oneness of God), which teaches that all of creation submits to divine will and is bound by a cosmic harmony that humans must uphold [10].

Key Islamic concepts such as khilafah (stewardship), amanah (moral responsibility), and mas'uliyah (accountability) offer a strong theological foundation for ecological consciousness [18]. The Qur'an contains many verses urging the preservation of environmental balance (QS Ar-Rum: 41), prohibiting corruption on Earth (QS Al-A'raf: 56), and declaring that all creatures glorify Allah (QS Al-Isra: 44) [19]. The Prophet Muhammad saw also emphasized environmental care, as in the hadith: "If a Muslim plants a tree or sows seeds, and a bird, person, or animal eats from it, it is considered charity for him" (HR Muslim No. 1552) [20]. These teachings affirm that environmental sustainability is an integral part of faith and worship, not a secular concern isolated from religious values [13].

Islamic Education and Its Transformative Role

Islamic Religious Education (IRE) plays a strategic role in shaping the character and morality of students. Its primary aim is to foster faith, piety, and a morally upright and socially responsible individual. As such, IRE should be a vehicle for instilling ecological awareness rooted in Islamic teachings. Character development based on religiosity and environmental care aligns with the goals of national education and Islam's vision as a mercy to all creation (rahmatan lil 'alamin). However, this ideal is not yet fully reflected in current educational practices [21].

Conventional IRE tends to be trapped in a textual-doctrinal approach, focusing on rote memorization and ritual worship without addressing real-life contexts such as ecological crises. This normative teaching often lacks critical reflection and concrete action [22]. This highlights a pedagogical gap between Islam's rich ecological values and the education system's inability to articulate them effectively. Thus, a pedagogical reform in IRE is essential—one that incorporates sustainability values into Islamic teachings through interactive, contextual, and transformative learning strategies [23]. This reform can make IRE not only a tool for spiritual development but also a driver of socio-ecological change rooted in Islamic values.

The Concept of Eco-Islamic Pedagogy

Eco-Islamic Pedagogy is a conscious effort to integrate ecological values into Islamic education theologically, ethically, and practically [16]. It aims to nurture a generation of Muslims who are not only spiritually devout but also environmentally responsible as stewards of Allah's creation. This model sees Islam as a holistic value system that addresses global environmental challenges.

Key characteristics of Eco-Islamic Pedagogy include:

1. Theocentric and Ecocentric: Emphasizing God (Allah as Al-Khaliq) and recognizing nature as a creation with intrinsic value, fostering a harmonious relationship between humans, nature, and the Divine [24].
2. Contextual and Humanistic: Designing lessons relevant to students' realities. Ecological issues such as climate change, pollution, and deforestation become subjects of religious reflection and real-life application [25].
3. Inclusive and Collaborative: Encouraging interdisciplinary and inter-perspective collaboration, including the integration of Islamic and environmental sciences [14].
4. Transformational: Prioritizing the transformation of consciousness, values, and behavior, not merely the transmission of religious knowledge [16].

Its theological and philosophical foundations lie in tawhid, khilafah, amanah, and mas'uliyah, strengthened by Qur'anic verses and prophetic traditions that promote sustainability and prohibit environmental harm. Thus, Eco-Islamic Pedagogy offers a reflective and solution-oriented Islamic education model for the 21st-century ecological crisis [26].

Implementing Eco-Islamic Pedagogy in IRE

To implement Eco-Islamic Pedagogy in Islamic Religious Education, a holistic approach is needed, from teacher lesson planning to classroom practices. Teachers act not just as content deliverers but as spiritual eco-educators integrating faith and environmental stewardship in character building. This includes developing lesson plans that incorporate ecological competencies, sustainability indicators, and affective learning objectives linked to environmental ethics. The curriculum can be modified to include “Islam and the Environment” as themes, covering tawhid, khilafah, and ethical treatment of living beings [27].

Instructional strategies include:

1. Qur’anic Reflection: Students contemplate verses related to nature (e.g., QS Ar-Rum: 41, QS Al-A’raf: 56) to build spiritual awareness of the Earth’s condition.
2. Environmental Case Studies: Current issues like floods, air pollution, and water crises become topics of discussion linked to Islamic ethics and human stewardship.
3. Green Practices: Activities like tree planting, waste reduction programs, or “charitable recycling” (e.g., waste banks) as applications of Islamic teachings on charity and social responsibility [28].

Media tools may include environmental documentaries, ecological Qur’anic commentaries such as *Tafsir Al-Misbah*, and prophetic stories of environmental stewardship (e.g., Noah, Solomon, and Muhammad saw).

Cross-disciplinary collaboration (e.g., IRE with science or social studies) reinforces the idea that science and religion can work together to solve real-world issues. This makes IRE more dynamic, relevant, and socially transformative [5].

Challenges and Opportunities

Despite its promise, Eco-Islamic Pedagogy faces several implementation challenges. Chief among them is the lack of teacher training [29]. Many IRE teachers lack the pedagogical and ecological literacy required for this interdisciplinary approach. Some still view environmental issues as the sole domain of science, not religion. Additionally, institutional resistance to change and the absence of integrative teaching materials remain obstacles [30].

Nonetheless, strategic opportunities abound. First, Indonesia’s Merdeka Curriculum provides flexibility for context-based and project-based learning, including ecological and sustainability themes. Second, public awareness of environmental issues is growing, creating momentum for eco-conscious education. Third, global trends like UNESCO’s Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) offer frameworks for cross-sector collaboration and support the legitimacy of Eco-Islamic Pedagogy as a future-oriented educational model [31].

5 Conclusion

This study affirms that the global ecological crisis, spanning climate change, biodiversity loss, water scarcity, and pollution, is not just scientific or political but a moral and spiritual challenge requiring a holistic response, including from religious education. Islamic Religious Education (IRE) holds great potential for spiritual and social transformation but remains largely textual and ritualistic, falling short of addressing environmental issues.

Eco-Islamic Pedagogy offers a viable solution by integrating Islamic values and ecological principles theologically, ethically, and practically. It is theocentric, contextual, humanistic, inclusive, and transformational, placing Islamic teachings at the core of addressing 21st-century ecological challenges. Implementation requires integrative curriculum design, active learning strategies, contextual media, and interdisciplinary collaboration. While challenges persist, such as limited teacher training and institutional inertia, opportunities like the Merdeka Curriculum and growing ecological awareness provide a solid foundation for making Eco-Islamic Pedagogy a relevant, solution-oriented, and impactful model of Islamic education for shaping a devout and environmentally responsible Muslim generation.

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