

Ecological Failures in Child Protection: An Islamic Educational Critique of School, Family, and Community Dynamics

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Abstract

Purpose –Psychological vulnerability among elementary school-aged children is increasingly prominent as a serious issue within educational ecology. Various studies indicate that academic pressure, unhealthy social dynamics, and inadequate school support contribute to heightened risks of mental well-being disorders in children. This study analyzes the failure of educational ecology—encompassing schools, families, and communities—in protecting vulnerable children by integrating Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory with Islamic education frameworks as an ethical analytical tool.

Design/Methodology/Approach – The method employed is a systematic literature review of scientific publications, policy documents, and relevant primary and secondary Islamic educational sources.

Findings – Findings reveal that schools remain predominantly focused on academic achievement, families exhibit limited literacy in detecting child vulnerability, and communities often treat child-related issues as merely domestic concerns. By mapping ecological layers to Islamic values, the study demonstrates that microsystem failures reflect a deficit of *rahmah* (compassion), mesosystem fragmentation breaches the collective *amanah* (trust), and exo/macrosystem oversights violate the ethical objective of *hifz al-nafs* (preservation of life/soul).

Originality/Value –This study emphasizes the need for harmonious educational ecological relationships and proposes "ethical-legal audits" to ensure school policies prioritize child protection as a moral and pedagogical imperative. It contributes to strengthening a holistic, humanistic, and Islamically grounded educational paradigm through cross-sector collaboration.

Keywords: Educational Ecology, Vulnerable Children, *Rahmah*, *Hifz al-Nafs*, Islamic Education, Systematic Literature Review

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I. INTRODUCTION

Psychological vulnerability among elementary school-aged children represents a serious issue that is increasingly receiving attention in studies on education and child protection (Rahman, 2025). Various studies indicate that academic pressure, unhealthy social relationships, and weak support systems in educational environments contribute to the rising risk of mental well-being disorders in children (Lin & Sun, 2025). This phenomenon underscores that elementary education faces not only pedagogical challenges but also humanitarian ones concerning the safety and sustainability of children as subjects of education (Fu et al., 2024). Therefore, child vulnerability must be understood as a systemic problem involving the entire educational ecology.

In educational practice, schools, families, and communities often operate partially in fulfilling their roles. Schools tend to emphasize educational success on academic achievement and formal discipline, while children’s psychological well-being has yet to be adequately integrated into the learning system. On the other hand, families do not always possess sufficient literacy and capacity to recognize signs of child vulnerability, while communities frequently view child-related issues as private matters that require no collective involvement (Putri et al., 2025). This situation indicates weak

relationships across layers of educational ecology, leaving children vulnerable without adequate protection systems.

The educational ecology approach views child development as the result of dynamic interactions among interconnected environments, ranging from family and school to community and the value systems encompassing them (Ady Dharma, 2023). Disharmony or failure of any element within this ecology has the potential to create spaces of vulnerability for children. Several studies have discussed the importance of ecological approaches in education and child protection, yet most remain focused on psychological aspects or general education policies (Salsabila, 2018). Research specifically analyzing failures in educational ecology while positioning Islamic education perspectives as an analytical framework remains relatively limited. This reveals a research gap that needs to be addressed to enrich discourses on child protection-oriented education.

The Islamic education perspective provides a strong ethical and normative foundation for understanding educational responsibilities toward children (Janah, 2025). Concepts such as children as a trust (*amanah*), the principle of *rahmah* (compassion), and the objective of protecting the soul (*hifz al-nafs*) affirm that education is not merely about transmitting knowledge but also safeguarding the dignity, safety, and well-being of learners (Idris & Abshor, 2024). In this context, the Islamic education perspective serves not only as moral values but also as an analytical framework for interpreting failures in school-family-community relationships in protecting vulnerable children. Thus, failures in educational ecology can be understood as both pedagogical and ethical failures.

Based on this background, this study aims to describe and analyze failures in educational ecology in protecting vulnerable children through an examination of the roles of schools, families, and communities from an Islamic education perspective. This research employs a descriptive qualitative approach using library research methods, through a review of scientific literature, policy documents, and relevant Islamic educational sources. This study is expected to provide conceptual contributions to the development of a more holistic educational paradigm oriented toward child well-being and grounded in humanistic and Islamic values.

The current educational landscape for elementary-aged children faces a systemic crisis where the protective layers of school, family, and community are increasingly fragmented. This study utilizes Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory as a structural map, but elevates the analysis by integrating Islamic educational ethics as a normative filter. In this integrated framework, each ecological layer corresponds to a specific Islamic mandate. The microsystem (the immediate school and home environment) is viewed as the primary site for *Rahmah* (compassion), where the child's *Amanah* (sacred trust) is nurtured. The mesosystem (the relationship between home and school) reflects the Quranic principle of *Ta'awun* (pious cooperation), suggesting that a failure in communication is a failure of collective religious duty. Furthermore, the exosystem and macrosystem—which involve policies and cultural norms—are analyzed through the lens of *Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah*, specifically *Hifz al-Nafs* (the preservation of life and soul).

By establishing these connections at the outset, this research moves beyond a secular sociological critique. It argues that the "Failure of Educational Ecology" is not merely a bureaucratic breakdown, but a departure from the ethical obligations of *Hifz al-Nafs* and *Rahmah* that should safeguard every vulnerable child.

II. METHOD

This research employs a qualitative-descriptive design (Creswell, 2013). It aims to provide a conceptual analysis of failures in educational ecology from an Islamic perspective, focusing on the roles of schools, families, and communities. The study focuses on describing and interpreting meaning rather than testing hypotheses (Sugiyono, 2022).

Data sources consist of secondary data from library research (Zed, 2008). Literature was sourced from Google Scholar, Scopus, and Moraref using keywords: "*educational ecology*," "*child protection*," and "*Islamic education*." Inclusion criteria were limited to peer-reviewed articles and books from the last ten years (2015–2025) focusing on elementary-aged children. Analysis is enriched by policy documents (PISA 2022, TPPK regulations) and primary Islamic sources, including the Qur'an, Hadith, and contemporary educational literature.

Data collection followed a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) process: identification, screening for thematic relevance, eligibility assessment, and classification (Moleong, 2017). This ensured that the selected sources directly addressed the interaction between the layers of educational ecology and Islamic child-protection values.

Data analysis utilized qualitative techniques including data reduction, theme categorization, and interpretive analysis (Krippendorff, 2004; Miles, 1994). Findings were categorized into the roles of

schools, families, and communities. The interpretation stage used Islamic principles—specifically *hifz al-nafs* (preservation of the soul) and *rahmah* (compassion)—as the primary framework to analyze systemic failures in protecting vulnerable children.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Theoretical Mapping of Educational Ecology: An Islamic Synthesis

According to Bronfenbrenner, child development occurs within a complex ecology consisting of interconnected layers of systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). In this study, these layers are analyzed not only as sociological structures but as ethical spheres of responsibility. The **microsystem**, representing the immediate environments of family and school, is the primary site for the implementation of *rahmah* (compassion). It is within this space that daily experiences are formed—through parenting patterns and teacher-student dynamics—which in an Islamic view are a sacred *amanah* (trust) to nurture the child's soul.

Above the microsystem lies the mesosystem, which consists of the network of relationships connecting these environments, such as parent-teacher collaboration. From an Islamic perspective, the mesosystem represents the principle of *ta'awun* (pious cooperation). When these connections are fragile, children experience a "failure of protection" that disrupts their emotional stability (Bronfenbrenner, 2006). Furthermore, the exosystem (policies) and macrosystem (cultural values) are mapped against the objective of *hifz al-nafs* (preservation of the soul). This framework emphasizes that child development is the result of continuous reciprocal interactions where the preservation of a child's safety and dignity must be the overarching priority of the entire system (Victoria & Eliasa, 2024; Anugrah, 2025).

Risk and Trend Overview: The Failure of Ecological Safety

Globally, international reports indicate that approximately one in seven children live with mental health conditions requiring serious attention (WHO, 2024). This widespread burden is often a symptom of an ecological failure where the "safety net" of schools and families is weakened by academic pressure and inequality. In Indonesia, violence and bullying remain pervasive, occurring across homes and schools (KemenPPPA, 2024). This phenomenon indicates that children's environments harbor high risks for psychological development, often exacerbated by a "culture of silence" that neglects the Islamic mandate to protect the vulnerable.

Data from the 2022 National Assessment and PISA 2022 findings show that bullying—verbal, social, and digital—is still experienced by a large proportion of students (OECD, 2023). This reflects a breakdown in the **microsystem**, where teachers often lack the training to recognize early signs of vulnerability (KPAI, 2024). From an Islamic lens, this capacity gap is a breach of the *amanah* to safeguard children. While programs like *Roots* use peer influence to foster empathy and reduce bullying, the Indonesian Child Protection Commission (KPAI) asserts that violence in education remains an "iceberg phenomenon," where reported cases represent only a small fraction of actual incidents (UNICEF & Kemendikbudristek, 2023; KPAI, 2024).

School Protective Framework and Normative Foundations

The school protective framework serves as a crucial foundation for creating safe, inclusive educational environments that support optimal student development. In this context, various models and policies are designed to ensure that schools not only fulfill academic functions but also provide spaces that protect, empower, and respect every child's dignity. These protective efforts are continuously strengthened through the integration of global approaches, national policies, and relevant religious values, enabling comprehensive and sustainable protection practices in schools.

The Child-Friendly Schools (CFS) model emphasizes that student safety is a prerequisite for quality learning (UNICEF, 2003). In Indonesia, this is reinforced by Ministry Regulation No. 46 of 2023 (PPKSP), which mandates the formation of Violence Prevention and Handling Teams (TPPK). Implementation data shows that while TPPK formation rates exceed 90%, many teams still lack the technical skills for substantive protection. This gap between administration and implementation suggests that the system lacks the "soul" of protection—a gap that can be bridged by the Islamic principle of *hifz al-nafs*.

Integrating *maqāsid al-sharī'ah* into school policy positions the protection of life and dignity as an ethical objective that must be realized in every interaction (Anugrah, 2025). The principles of *rahmah* (compassion) and *maṣlahah* (public good) further emphasize that education must nurture humanity rather than just academic intellectualism (Al-Attas, 1980). By incorporating these values, schools move beyond "administrative compliance" to a paradigm where every student is treated as a sacred trust,

ensuring that the school protective framework is both legally robust and ethically grounded (Nata, 2016).

Bridging the Gaps: School, Family, and Community Collaboration

Research findings affirm that schools cannot work alone. A child's mental health is heavily influenced by the **mesosystem**—specifically the quality of parenting and home-school communication. The Islamic education perspective reinforces this logic through the concept of family *amanah* to protect the *hifz al-nafs* of the child. Collaboration between parents and teachers is not merely a moral obligation but a strategic necessity to prevent violence. When families and schools share aligned goals based on *rahmah*, the potential for negligence in monitoring children's conditions is significantly minimized.

Furthermore, networks between schools and community services—such as health centers and local NGOs—are recognized by the OECD as effective strategies to expand support access. In the digital era, this "community ecology" must also encompass digital well-being to address cyber-bullying. Failure in child protection often emerges in the "in-between" areas: weak communication and absence of responsive community referral mechanisms. By building strong cross-sector partnerships, schools can bridge these gaps, transforming the educational ecology into a mutually supportive "web of safety" that protects children at home, at school, and in public spaces.

Synthesis: Ethical and Legal Audits of Educational Ecology

From the perspective of *maqāsid al-sharī'ah*, failures in the educational ecosystem to protect children are not merely technical or administrative issues, but constitute violations of *syariat's* ethical objectives. When schools fail to provide safe environments, *hifz al-nafs*—the protection of life and safety—is compromised. This affirms that child protection is a moral mandate inherent in the entire educational process, irreducible to mere SOP fulfillment or procedural compliance.

From the perspective of *maqāsid al-sharī'ah*, failures in the educational ecosystem are violations of the sacred objectives of the faith. When a school fails to provide a safe environment, it fails the mandate of *hifz al-nafs*. This ethical framework aligns with Indonesia's Law No. 35 of 2014, which establishes child protection as a non-negotiable legal right. The state, parents, and communities are the three primary pillars of this protection; if any one pillar fails, the entire system collapses.

In the context of school governance, integrating Islamic values and national law allows for "ethical-legal audits." Schools must examine whether their policies—such as disciplinary codes and reporting mechanisms—truly protect children or instead create openings for structural violence. Ultimately, the integration of *maqāsid* provides the moral orientation, while national regulations offer the operational guidance. Through this combination, child protection can be implemented more meaningfully, moving the ecology from a state of "failure" to a state of "inclusive protection" for every vulnerable child.

Practical Implications in Islamic Education

Efforts to strengthen child protection in schools must begin with enhancing the internal capacity of educational units. Early detection training becomes a strategic first step, as many violence cases are not apparent on the surface and can often only be recognized through behavioral changes, decreased learning motivation, or signs of emotional stress. Teachers and educational staff need to be trained to read these indicators sensitively, enabling interventions before problems escalate into more serious issues.

Additionally, schools need to implement restorative discipline approaches as alternatives to punitive discipline practices. Restorative discipline emphasizes relationship restoration, dialogue, and accountability, thereby reducing the potential for stigma and structural violence against students. Through this approach, schools can manage conflicts without damaging children's dignity while fostering more humane and inclusive learning environments.

Student well-being monitoring also becomes a crucial component of the protection framework. Monitoring student well-being should not only focus on academic aspects but also mental health, emotions, and social relationships. Schools that conduct regular monitoring through simple assessments or structured observations will have sufficient data to identify student needs and develop more targeted interventions.

The existence of referral SOPs serves as the main support when schools encounter cases or indications of violence. These SOPs must include clear workflows, available referral institutions, and principles of confidentiality and child safety. Without strong SOPs, schools tend to handle cases on an ad hoc basis, increasing the risk of procedural errors or negligence. Therefore, developing and disseminating referral SOPs is an essential part of child protection management.

Policy audits that potentially contain elements of violence also need to be conducted at the school level. Many disciplinary regulations, punishment systems, or discipline mechanisms unconsciously include psychological violence or discrimination elements. Through periodic audits, schools can review child-unfriendly policies and replace them with regulations that better support student safety and positive, constructive development.

Beyond the internal school domain, strengthening child protection requires well-connected community service networks. WHO-UNICEF guidelines emphasize the importance of expanding community-based services capable of providing physical, mental, and social health support for children. Collaboration between community health centers, psychosocial counselors, and local social institutions becomes crucial for providing comprehensive referrals for students needing further assistance.

Integrated community-based services will improve help accessibility for children, especially those facing multiple risks at home, in social environments, or in the digital world. When these services are networked with schools, assistance flows become clearer, and responses to cases can be faster. Thus, a comprehensive protection ecosystem can be formed, providing stronger security for students.

Cross-actor partnerships, as recommended by OECD, become another important element. Schools can establish cooperation agreements with mental health service providers for professional counseling, as well as with digital literacy institutions to address risks such as cyberbullying, exposure to harmful content, or gadget addiction. These partnerships not only expand school capacity but also provide students with more comprehensive support.

Within this partnership framework, parents and communities need to be positioned as co-producers of child protection. Their role is not merely as intervention objects but as parties who jointly build, maintain, and evaluate child protection systems with schools. Their involvement can take the form of routine dialogues, joint learning forums, or early reporting of potential risks. When parents and communities feel they have meaningful roles, the protection system becomes stronger and more sustainable.

Islamic ethics offers analytical instruments that enrich this entire process. The principles of *hifz al-nafs* (protection of life) and *rahmah* (compassion) can serve as indicators in evaluating school policies and practices. By using these two principles, schools can assess whether their policies truly protect children's physical and psychological safety or instead harbor potential dangers. When Islamic ethics is combined with national legal standards and policies, the school policy evaluation process gains both moral depth and normative firmness.

IV. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that psychological vulnerability in children does not occur in isolation but results from systemic failures within the educational ecology comprising schools, families, and communities. Currently, schools often prioritize academic achievement and formal discipline over emotional well-being; families frequently lack the literacy to recognize early symptoms of distress; and communities continue to view child protection as a private, domestic domain rather than a collective responsibility. The ecological approach reveals that the failure of any single element creates significant vulnerability spaces for children. By synthesizing this with an Islamic education perspective, this study concludes that these ecological breakdowns are fundamentally moral failures in fulfilling the trust to protect children. Specifically, failures in the microsystem reflect a deficit of *rahmah* (compassion); fragmented school-family mesosystems represent a breach of collective *amanah* (trust); and policy-level blind spots violate the core ethical objective of *hifz al-nafs* (preservation of the soul).

To address these systemic failures, this research recommends three strategic steps. First, schools must integrate child protection into their curriculum, governance, and culture by prioritizing psychological well-being and prioritizing teacher training on early vulnerability detection grounded in *rahmah*. Second, families require capacity building in mental health literacy and parenting education, supported by joint learning forums facilitated by schools to encourage their roles as equal partners. Third, communities must be actively engaged through supportive networks involving religious figures, social institutions, and neighborhood organizations. Through cross-actor collaboration and regular "ethical-legal audits," educational units can ensure policies align with both national law and the mandate of *hifz al-nafs*. By strengthening school-family-community synergy and positioning Islamic values as ethical guidelines, child protection can evolve into a more robust, humanistic, and sustainable educational agenda.

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