

Multicultural Islamic Religious Education Based on Ecotheology to Build Students' Ecological Awareness

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Abstract

Purpose – This study aims to analyze the implementation of multicultural Islamic Religious Education based on ecotheology in building students' ecological awareness, and to identify the role of school culture and teachers in internalizing sustainability values.

Design/Methodology/Approach – This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design conducted at SMP Mizani Wanajaya, Majalengka. Data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation, then analyzed using an interactive analysis model comprising data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification.

Findings – The results show that the implementation of multicultural Islamic Religious Education based on ecotheology is carried out through the integration of Islamic values oriented toward trust (amanah), balance, benefit (maslahah), and compassion for all creatures into the learning process, school culture, and habituation activities. Learning is not only focused on cognitive mastery but also encourages students to develop environmental concern through contextual activities such as waste management, greening, water conservation, and clean-living habituation. School culture functions as a hidden curriculum that strengthens the internalization of ecological values through exemplary behavior, collaboration, and the participation of the whole school community, while teachers act as facilitators, motivators, role models, and agents of change in connecting Islamic teachings with contemporary environmental issues.

Originality/Value – This study produces a conceptual model of multicultural Islamic Religious Education based on ecotheology that integrates the spiritual, multicultural, and ecological dimensions as a single unit in shaping students who are religious, inclusive, environmentally responsible, and committed to sustainable development.

Keywords: Islamic Religious Education; multicultural education; ecotheology; ecological awareness; sustainable education

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I. INTRODUCTION

Climate change, environmental degradation, biodiversity loss, pollution, and the uncontrolled exploitation of natural resources have become one of the greatest challenges of the twenty-first century. These problems are no longer understood merely as technical issues that can be solved through scientific and technological approaches, but as a multidimensional crisis related to how humans view nature, systems of value, ethics, and moral responsibility in utilizing the environment. International organizations position education as a primary instrument in building a society capable of achieving sustainable development through changes in students' ecological knowledge, attitudes, values, and behavior. Education is therefore directed not only toward producing academically excellent human resources, but also individuals who possess ecological awareness, social responsibility, and commitment to the sustainability of life (UNESCO, 2020; UNESCO, 2021).

From an Islamic perspective, concern for the environment is not a new concept, but an integral part of religious teaching rooted in the principles of tawhid (the oneness of God), khilāfah (stewardship), amānah (trust), mīzān (balance), and raḥmah (compassion). These principles position human beings as khalifah (stewards) responsible for maintaining the balance of nature and avoiding all forms of destruction (fasād) that threaten the continuity of life. Therefore, the relationship between humans and

the environment carries not only an ecological dimension, but also spiritual, ethical, and theological dimensions that are interrelated. In recent years, this paradigm has developed into the study of ecotheology, an approach that connects religious teachings with environmental ethics through the integration of spiritual values into educational practice and social life. Various studies show that ecotheology can serve as a conceptual foundation for the transformation of Islamic education toward the formation of more sustainable ecological behavior (Syafaruddin, 2025; Taufikin, 2025; Sapitri, Hamami, & Muttakin, 2025).

The development of ecotheology studies in Islamic education shows an increasing trend, in line with the growing attention to the issue of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). Islamic Religious Education (PAI) is considered to hold a strategic position because it not only functions to transmit religious knowledge, but also to internalize moral, spiritual, and social values that can become the foundation for environmentally friendly behavior. Through the integration of the concepts of *khilāfah*, *amānah*, *mīzān*, and environmental conservation ethics into the learning process, PAI has the potential to build ecological awareness that does not stop at the cognitive level, but develops into a moral commitment in daily life. A number of recent studies show that integrating ecotheology into curricula and school culture is able to increase students' concern for environmental conservation, strengthen contextual learning, and build linkages between Islamic teachings and sustainability practices (Rohman et al., 2024; Taufikin, 2025; Sapitri et al., 2025).

At the same time, Indonesian society faces a highly pluralistic social reality, marked by diversity in religion, ethnicity, culture, language, and local traditions. This condition makes multicultural education one of the important approaches in building an inclusive, democratic, and harmonious life. Multicultural education is not only oriented toward strengthening tolerance between groups, but also toward developing students' ability to appreciate differences, build empathy, engage in dialogue, and cooperate within a plural social life. In recent developments, multicultural education has expanded its paradigm, no longer limited to relationships among humans, but also encompassing the relationship between humans and the living environment as a shared space that must be collectively preserved. Thus, ecological and multicultural issues share common ground in the values of justice, responsibility, solidarity, and sustainability that form the foundation of shared life (Banks, 2019; UNESCO, 2020; Qamariah, Ilyasin, & Bahrani, 2025).

The relationship between multicultural education and ecological awareness becomes increasingly relevant when the environmental crisis is understood as an issue that transcends geographical, cultural, and religious boundaries. The impacts of climate change, pollution, and ecosystem destruction are felt by the entire society regardless of social identity, so that addressing them requires cross-cultural, cross-religious, and cross-generational collaboration. In this context, Islamic Religious Education is not sufficient if it merely shapes students who are religious on an individual level, but also needs to develop ecological responsibility as part of the manifestation of inclusive Islamic values. Integrating a multicultural perspective into PAI enables students to understand that protecting the environment is a form of shared responsibility grounded in respect for human diversity and the sustainability of all living creatures. Thus, religious learning becomes more contextual because it connects theological dimensions with the social and ecological realities faced by contemporary society.

This transformation demands a paradigm shift in PAI learning from an approach dominated by knowledge transfer toward learning that is transformative, reflective, and experience-based. Students need to be involved in activities that allow them to directly experience the connection between Islamic values and environmental conservation, such as conservation projects, waste management, school greening, energy conservation, and community-based collaborative activities. This approach is in line with the development of twenty-first century pedagogy, which emphasizes the importance of authentic learning, experiential learning, project-based learning, and the development of sustainability competencies as part of the goals of global education. Therefore, the integration of ecotheology into multicultural Islamic Religious Education not only enriches the substance of learning, but also expands the function of PAI as a vehicle for shaping ecological character rooted in Islamic values while remaining relevant to the global challenges of the twenty-first century.

Developments in environmental education studies over the past two decades show a paradigm shift from a conservation approach toward a transformative approach that positions education as a means of building students' sustainability competencies. According to UNESCO (2020, 2021), twenty-first century education must be able to develop systems thinking, anticipatory competency, normative, collaborative, and strategic thinking as a foundation for facing the global environmental crisis. This view is reinforced by Brundiers et al. (2021), Wals (2020), and Rieckmann (2020), who explain that sustainability education is no longer oriented toward the transfer of knowledge about the environment, but toward the transformation of ways of thinking, value systems, and behavioral change that enable

students to actively participate in creating a sustainable society. Thus, learning about the environment needs to be built through the integration of cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects so as to produce ecological awareness that is reflective and sustainable.

In the context of religious education, developments in international research show growing attention to the relationship between religion, spirituality, and environmental sustainability. Grim and Tucker (2014) introduced the paradigm of religion and ecology as an approach explaining that religious traditions possess a strong source of values for building environmental ethics. Furthermore, Taylor (2020) and Jenkins, Berry, and Kreider (2018) affirm that the ecological crisis is essentially a moral and spiritual crisis that requires a cross-disciplinary approach, including religious education. Therefore, various educational institutions have begun to integrate ecological values into religious learning as part of shaping sustainability character. This perspective shows that religious education has a strategic contribution in building ecological awareness because it is able to connect environmental responsibility with the transcendental values that students believe in.

In the study of Islamic Religious Education, research on ecotheology has also developed quite rapidly over the past five years. Rohman et al. (2024) argue that integrating ecotheological values into the Islamic Religious Education curriculum can strengthen the connection between Islamic teachings and environmentally friendly behavior through reinforcing the concepts of *tawhid*, *khilāfah*, *amānah*, and *mīzān*. In line with this, Taufikin (2025) shows that ecotheology-based learning has a positive impact on increasing students' ecological awareness because the learning process is not only oriented toward conceptual understanding, but also toward real experience in protecting the environment. A systematic study conducted by Sapitri, Hamami, and Muttakin (2025) shows that the implementation of ecotheology in Islamic Religious Education contributes to the development of students' spiritual, social, and ecological character, although most studies are still oriented toward concept development and have not extensively examined its integration with the multicultural education paradigm.

On a different note, multicultural education studies have developed as a response to the increasing complexity of global society marked by diversity in religion, culture, language, and social identity. Banks (2019) explains that the main goal of multicultural education is to build social justice through the development of mutual respect, inclusivity, and the ability to live together in a plural society. This view is reinforced by Nieto and Bode (2018), who emphasize that multicultural education must go beyond the dimension of tolerance toward socially just transformation. In the Indonesian context, multicultural education has largely been developed as a strategy for strengthening religious moderation, national character, and preventing radicalism. However, most studies still place environmental issues as a theme separate from multicultural education, so that the relationship between social diversity and ecological responsibility has not received adequate attention.

Based on these developments, it can be understood that research on Islamic Religious Education, multicultural education, and environmental education has progressed, but each still runs on a relatively separate track. Some research focuses on strengthening religious character through Islamic Religious Education, other research emphasizes multicultural education as a strategy for building tolerance, while research on ecotheology is more directed toward shaping environmental ethics from an Islamic perspective. The integration of these three approaches into a single, coherent conceptual framework remains relatively limited. Yet the challenges of twenty-first century education show that character formation requires a holistic approach that simultaneously connects the spiritual, social, cultural, and ecological dimensions so that students are equipped to face increasingly complex global problems.

Based on the synthesis of the literature, the research gap of this study can be identified in three main aspects. First, research on ecotheology-based Islamic Religious Education is generally still oriented toward the internalization of environmental values without comprehensively linking it to the multicultural education paradigm. Second, multicultural education research more often develops aspects of tolerance, diversity, and religious moderation, while the ecological dimension has not been positioned as an integral part of students' multicultural competence. Third, there is not yet much research offering a conceptual model that integrates Islamic theological values, multicultural education principles, and the building of ecological awareness within a single paradigm of Islamic Religious Education learning. As a result, PAI learning still tends to develop these three aspects partially, so it has not been able to produce a learning framework that is responsive to both the environmental crisis and multicultural society simultaneously.

Based on this gap, the novelty of this study lies in the development of the paradigm of Multicultural Islamic Religious Education Based on Ecotheology as a conceptual framework that integrates the theological, pedagogical, social, and ecological dimensions within the learning process. Unlike previous research, which mostly examines the relationship between Islamic Religious Education

and ecotheology, or between Islamic Religious Education and multicultural education, separately, this study positions these three dimensions as an interacting system in shaping students' ecological awareness. This paradigm does not merely view environmental conservation as the implementation of religious teaching, but also as a social practice built through respect for diversity, ecological justice, collaboration, and shared responsibility within a multicultural society.

Theoretically, this study is expected to contribute to the development of Islamic Religious Education scholarship through the formulation of a conceptual model that connects the theory of Islamic education, multicultural education theory, and ecotheology theory from the perspective of sustainable development. This model is expected to enrich academic discourse on the transformation of Islamic Religious Education in the era of climate crisis, while also serving as a basis for developing curricula, learning strategies, school culture, and education policies that are more adaptive to the agenda of Education for Sustainable Development. In addition, this study is also expected to expand the study of the relationship between religion and the environment, which has thus far been dominated by a normative approach, toward a more contextual and applicable pedagogical approach.

Based on the above description, this study aims to analyze how the paradigm of Multicultural Islamic Religious Education based on ecotheology can build students' ecological awareness, to identify the conceptual dimensions that shape this paradigm, and to formulate a model for strengthening Islamic Religious Education that is relevant to the challenges of a multicultural society and sustainable development in the twenty-first century.

II. METHOD

This study used a qualitative approach with a case study design. This approach was chosen because it enables the researcher to obtain an in-depth understanding of the implementation of multicultural Islamic Religious Education based on ecotheology in building students' ecological awareness within a real school context. Qualitative research is oriented toward uncovering meaning, process, experience, and social interaction that cannot be explained through quantitative data alone (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

The research was conducted at SMP Mizani Wanajaya, Majalengka, which was selected purposively on the consideration that the school has integrated environmental care values into Islamic Religious Education learning activities, school culture, and various habituation programs that support the formation of students' character. The choice of location also took into account the diversity of students' social backgrounds, thereby enabling an examination of the implementation of multicultural Islamic education in the context of shaping ecological awareness.

Research subjects consisted of the school principal, the Islamic Religious Education teacher, the vice principal for curriculum affairs, and students, selected using purposive sampling. Informants were selected based on their involvement in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of learning and school programs related to strengthening religious character, multicultural values, and environmental concern.

Data collection was conducted through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Participatory observation was carried out to obtain a picture of learning activities, school culture, the interaction of school members, and the implementation of programs related to environmental concern. Semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with all informants to obtain information regarding their understanding, experience, learning strategies, and challenges in integrating ecotheological and multicultural values into Islamic Religious Education. Documentation was used to complement the research data through analysis of curriculum documents, teaching modules, lesson plans, school programs, activity photographs, rules of conduct, and various other supporting documents (Yin, 2018).

Data validity was established through source triangulation, technique triangulation, and member checking. Source triangulation was carried out by comparing information obtained from the school principal, teachers, and students, while technique triangulation was carried out by comparing the results of observation, interviews, and documentation. Furthermore, member checking was carried out by reconfirming the findings with several key informants to ensure consistency between the data obtained and their field experience. This step aimed to increase the credibility and validity of the research findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Data analysis was conducted interactively using the model of Miles, Huberman, and Sald  a (2020), which comprises three stages: data condensation, data display, and drawing and verifying conclusions. All data from observation, interviews, and documentation were first transcribed, then coded according to themes related to the implementation of multicultural Islamic Religious Education based on ecotheology. The data were then analyzed through a process of categorization and

interpretation to identify patterns of relationships between concepts, thereby producing a comprehensive picture of implementation strategies, supporting and inhibiting factors, and their contribution to shaping students' ecological awareness.

This study observed the principles of research ethics. Prior to data collection, the researcher obtained permission from the school and communicated the research objectives to all informants. Each informant provided voluntary informed consent, and their identities were kept confidential to ensure privacy and comfort throughout the research process.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

A. Integration of Ecotheology Values in Islamic Religious Education Learning

The integration of ecotheological values into Islamic Religious Education learning is a systematic process that connects Islamic teachings on the relationship between humans and God (*ḥabl min Allāh*), between humans (*ḥabl min al-nās*), and between humans and nature (*ḥabl min al-'ālam*) with students' learning experiences. This paradigm positions the environment not merely as an object to be exploited, but as an *amanah* (trust) from Allah that must be preserved. Ecotheological values are grounded in the principles of *tawhid* (oneness of God), *khilāfah* (stewardship), *mīzān* (balance), *maṣlaḥah* (benefit), and *raḥmatan lil 'ālamīn* (compassion for all creatures), which become the ethical foundation for students in understanding that protecting the environment is an integral part of practicing Islamic teaching. Various studies show that strengthening the spiritual dimension in environmental education is able to increase environmental concern, social responsibility, and sustainable behavior more effectively than learning oriented solely toward cognitive aspects (Begum et al., 2021; Bensaid, 2023; Huang, Pagano, & Marengo, 2024). This is consistent with Mohamed (2014), who demonstrates that Islamic eco-ethics is embedded within communal religious practice rather than being a purely individual concern. This perspective aligns with the concept of Education for Sustainable Development, which positions education as an instrument of behavioral change toward a sustainable society (UNESCO, 2020; UNESCO, 2021; Brundiers et al., 2021).

In practice, the integration of ecotheological values can be carried out through the development of teaching materials that connect verses of the Qur'an and hadith with contemporary environmental issues. Material on the creation of nature (QS. Al-Baqarah: 30), the prohibition against causing destruction on earth (QS. Al-A'raf: 56), the balance of nature (QS. Ar-Rahman: 7–9), and the concept of *amanah* and human responsibility as *khalifah* can be contextualized with issues of climate change, environmental pollution, waste management, water conservation, and biodiversity preservation. This contextual approach enables students to understand that Islamic teaching has strong relevance to the various ecological problems faced by modern society, so that religious learning does not stop at the normative level but develops into a reflective process that encourages students to connect Islamic values with the realities of daily life (Rohman et al., 2024; Sapitri et al., 2025). Rohman et al. (2024) further explain that religious education has great potential to build ecological awareness if environmental values are systematically integrated into learning objectives, teaching materials, methods, and evaluation, a finding reinforced by Mu'min, Khutomi, and Abu Bakar (2025), who show that a mindfulness eco-theology perspective is able to connect spiritual awareness with ecological concern through a process of religious reflection that drives behavioral change in students.

Learning strategies also need to be directed toward participatory and collaborative learning experiences. Approaches such as project-based learning, problem-based learning, service learning, inquiry learning, and experiential learning can be used to integrate religious concepts with environmental conservation practice. For example, students may be given projects to audit school cleanliness, manage organic and inorganic waste based on the 3R principle (reduce, reuse, recycle), make compost, carry out greening, or design energy-saving campaigns grounded in Islamic values. Through these experiences, students not only gain knowledge about the environment, but also develop critical thinking, problem-solving, collaboration, communication, and social responsibility skills as part of twenty-first century sustainability competencies (Rieckmann, 2020; Wals, 2020; UNESCO, 2021; Lutfauziah, Al-Muhdhar, Suhadi, & Rohman, 2023; Djirong et al., 2024).

Beyond classroom learning, the internalization of ecotheological values also requires reinforcement through school culture. Habituating students to maintain environmental cleanliness, reduce the use of single-use plastics, conserve water and electricity, care for plants, and maintain public facilities represents a concrete form of implementation that strengthens students' learning experience. From the perspective of Islamic education, this habituation is part of the process of *ta'dīb*, which aims to shape character through continuous practice. According to Maslani, Muhajir, and Fadillah (2023), the internalization of environmental values is more successful when students obtain direct, repeated experience in school life, a view reinforced by Anshori and Pohl (2022), who emphasize that the success of environmental education in Islamic educational institutions is determined not only by the formal curriculum, but also by school culture, leadership, and the exemplary behavior of the entire school community.

The role of the Islamic Religious Education teacher is a determining factor in the success of integrating ecotheological values. Teachers function not only as deliverers of material, but also as role models (*uswah hasanah*), learning facilitators, motivators, and agents of social change. According to Muhammad, Rahayu, and Fitriani (2024) and Musa et al. (2024), teacher exemplary behavior in maintaining cleanliness, using resources wisely, and showing concern for the environment provides a stronger influence than the verbal delivery of material. This is in line with social learning theory, which emphasizes that student behavior develops through observation, imitation, and interaction with the social environment. The success of ecotheology-based education is therefore determined not only by curriculum quality, but also by the quality of exemplary behavior and the culture built by the entire school community (Gay, 2018; Banks, 2019; Bensaid, 2023).

Nevertheless, the integration of ecotheological values in Islamic Religious Education still faces various challenges. Several studies show that environmental material in religious learning is often still incidental, not yet structured within learning outcomes, and not yet supported by teaching tools specifically integrating an ecotheological perspective. On the other hand, some teachers still regard environmental issues as the responsibility of natural or social science subjects, so they have not yet made it an integral part of Islamic Religious Education. These conditions indicate the need for curriculum development, improved teacher competence, provision of contextual teaching materials, and strengthened school policy so that the integration of ecotheological values can be implemented more systematically and sustainably (Djirong et al., 2024; Rohman et al., 2024; Sapitri et al., 2025).

Based on this synthesis, the integration of ecotheological values into Islamic Religious Education learning is not merely the addition of material about the environment, but a transformation of the learning paradigm that connects the spiritual, moral, social, and ecological dimensions in an integrated manner. This approach enables Islamic Religious Education to contribute more broadly to shaping students who possess not only individual piety, but also social and ecological piety as part of implementing Islamic teaching in facing the challenges of sustainable development in the twenty-first century.

B. School Culture as a Medium for Internalizing Ecological Awareness

School culture is one of the most effective instruments for internalizing ecological values in students because character formation takes place continuously through habituation, social interaction, and daily experience. Unlike classroom learning, which has time constraints, school culture allows students to directly experience environmental conservation practices in various academic and non-academic activities. Environmental education is therefore not merely positioned as learning material, but becomes part of the school's identity, reflected in policy, rules of conduct, physical environment, and the behavior of the entire school community. Various studies show that schools able to consistently build a culture of environmental care achieve a higher success rate in shaping students' ecological character compared to schools that only integrate environmental issues into specific subjects (Wakhidah & Erman, 2022; Aulia et al., 2024; Ahmad, Yusuf, & Hidayat, 2024).

An environmentally oriented school culture is built through the integration of ecological values into all educational activities. This can be realized through habituating classroom cleanliness, waste management based on the 3R principle (reduce, reuse, recycle), greening the school environment, water conservation, energy saving, and using open spaces as learning media. These activities are not merely administrative routines, but a character education process that allows students to gradually develop positive habits. Research on environmentally conscious Islamic schools shows that continuous habituation is able to shape ecological behavior because students undergo a process of value transformation through real practice, rather than only through theoretical delivery of concepts (Sabtina & Mahariah, 2025; Juliani, Nasution, & Harahap, 2024; Lutfauziah et al., 2023).

From a multicultural education perspective, school culture also functions as a social space that fosters collective responsibility for the environment. Ecological concern is not viewed as an individual responsibility alone, but as a form of cooperation among the entire school community regardless of religious background, ethnicity, culture, or social status. The school environment becomes a shared learning space that develops values of mutual cooperation, mutual respect, social concern, and shared responsibility for sustaining life. Thus, multicultural education and environmental education meet at the point of forming collaborative character oriented toward the common good. This approach reinforces the idea that the success of ecological education is greatly influenced by the quality of social interaction built within the school community (Parker, 2018; Parker, Prabawa-Sear, & Kustiningsih, 2018; Wakhidah & Erman, 2022).

The success of school culture in shaping ecological awareness cannot be separated from the role of the hidden curriculum. Environmental care values are more easily internalized when students observe consistency between school policy, teacher behavior, and daily practice. A clean school environment, the availability of waste-sorting facilities, the use of eco-friendly learning media, and the involvement of the entire school community in conservation activities provide real experiences that strengthen the process of value internalization. A study on the internalization of ecotheology in Islamic schools shows that the transformation

of students' character occurs through three stages, namely value transformation, value transaction, and trans-internalization, so that students not only understand the importance of protecting the environment, but also make it part of their daily habits (Sabtina & Mahariah, 2025; Alnashr, Fauziah, & Rahmawati, 2022).

Effective school culture also requires the support of school leadership committed to developing sustainable education. The school principal plays a role in formulating policy, allocating resources, building partnerships with the community, and creating a school climate that supports the implementation of environmental programs. On the other hand, collaboration among teachers, education staff, students, parents, and the community is an important factor in ensuring that ecological values do not stop at the school environment, but are also applied in family and community life. Research on curriculum development for environmental education in Islamic educational institutions shows that the success of environmental programs is greatly influenced by the synergy between school leadership, organizational culture, and the participation of all stakeholders (Lutfauziah et al., 2023; Fahlawi & Pertiwi, 2024; Tohawi, Ridwan, & Amin, 2024).

Nevertheless, the development of an ecotheology-based school culture still faces various challenges. Some schools still regard environmental programs as incidental activities carried out only to meet certain program indicators, so they have not been fully integrated into the school's organizational culture. In addition, limited supporting facilities, low environmental literacy, the absence of systematic evaluation, and a lack of community involvement remain obstacles in building a sustainable ecological culture. Therefore, a more comprehensive school policy, strengthened teacher capacity, adaptive curriculum development, and partnerships with various parties are needed so that school culture truly becomes a medium for the sustainable internalization of ecological values (Hayati, Ramadhani, & Fauzan, 2025; Rohman et al., 2024; Tohawi et al., 2024).

Based on the synthesis of various studies, school culture does not merely serve as a complement to the learning process, but constitutes an educational ecosystem that determines the success of internalizing students' ecological awareness. The integration of school policy, habituation, exemplary behavior, participation of the school community, and a supportive physical environment produces a more holistic educational process compared to learning that takes place only in the classroom. Therefore, strengthening an ecotheology-based school culture is an important strategy in developing multicultural Islamic Religious Education capable of producing students who are religious, inclusive, and environmentally responsible.

C. The Role of Teachers in Building Students' Ecological Awareness

The Islamic Religious Education teacher holds a strategic position as the main actor in integrating Islamic values with ecological awareness through contextual and transformative learning. In the twenty-first century educational paradigm, teachers are no longer positioned as the sole source of knowledge, but as facilitators, mentors, motivators, and agents of change capable of developing meaningful learning experiences for students. This role becomes increasingly important when environmental issues are viewed as moral and humanitarian concerns requiring a values-based educational approach. Islamic Religious Education teachers are therefore required to connect Islamic teachings on trust, justice, balance, and benefit with the various ecological problems currently faced by society, so that students gain an understanding that protecting the environment is part of implementing religious teaching (UNEP, 2021; OECD, 2023; UNESCO, 2024).

In the learning process, teachers act as learning designers who develop teaching tools based on environmental issues, so that Islamic Religious Education material is not only oriented toward mastering religious concepts, but also builds students' ability to critically analyze environmental problems. Integrating issues of climate change, waste management, water conservation, biodiversity preservation, and sustainable living into material on *aqidah*, morals (*akhlak*), *fiqh*, and *Qur'an* and *Hadith* enables students to understand the connection between Islamic values and global challenges. Research shows that learning based on real-world issues is able to improve critical thinking, environmental literacy, and responsible decision-making compared to learning that focuses only on textual delivery of material (Leal Filho, Salvia, Mifsud, Paço, & Veiga Ávila, 2023; Boeve-de Pauw & Van Petegem, 2022; Ardoin, Bowers, & Gaillard, 2020).

In addition to designing learning, teachers also serve as role models in building a culture of environmental care at school. Exemplary behavior is one of the educational strategies with a strong influence on students' character formation, because values taught are more easily internalized when demonstrated through real behavior. A teacher's consistent attitude in maintaining cleanliness, reducing the use of single-use items, saving energy, utilizing eco-friendly learning media, and participating in conservation activities provides students with an authentic learning experience. According to Bandura's (1986) Social Cognitive Theory, much learning occurs through observation and imitation of figures regarded as authority. This finding is reinforced by research from Boeve-de Pauw and Van Petegem (2022), which shows that teacher exemplary behavior is an important predictor in shaping students' pro-environmental behavior.

Teachers also function as facilitators of reflection who help students connect religious values with their daily life experience. Reflection is an important part of transformative learning because it encourages students to evaluate their thoughts, attitudes, and behavior toward the environment. Through discussion activities, case studies, project-based learning, and reflection on *Qur'anic* verses related to the creation of

nature and human responsibility, teachers can facilitate the emergence of awareness that environmental conservation is part of every individual's moral responsibility. This reflective approach has proven able to increase ecological citizenship—awareness to actively participate in sustaining the environment as part of social and spiritual responsibility (Stevenson, Nicholls, & Whitehouse, 2022; Sterling, 2021; Wals, 2021).

Teachers' success in building ecological awareness is also influenced by their professional competence. Teachers need to possess environmental literacy, an understanding of Education for Sustainable Development, the ability to develop innovative learning media, and skills in integrating interdisciplinary approaches into Islamic Religious Education learning. Several studies show that improving teacher competence through continuous training has a significant influence on the quality of implementing environmental education in schools. Therefore, teachers' professional development is one of the important prerequisites in optimizing the implementation of multicultural Islamic Religious Education based on ecotheology (UNESCO, 2024; OECD, 2023; Evans, Stevenson, Ferreira, & Davis, 2023).

On the other hand, teachers also face various challenges in integrating ecotheological values into learning. These challenges include limited teaching tools that connect religious education with environmental issues, dense learning outcomes, lack of training on sustainability education, and not yet optimal school policy support. These conditions cause the implementation of environmental education to often still depend on the creativity and initiative of individual teachers. Several studies emphasize that the successful integration of environmental education requires systemic support through curriculum development, provision of learning resources, improved teacher competence, and school policies oriented toward sustainable development (Leal Filho et al., 2023; UNESCO, 2024; OECD, 2023).

Based on the synthesis of various studies, Islamic Religious Education teachers hold a multidimensional role in building students' ecological awareness—as educators, facilitators, innovators, motivators, role models, and agents of social transformation. The success of implementing multicultural Islamic Religious Education based on ecotheology is determined not only by curriculum quality, but also by teachers' ability to integrate Islamic values with ecological realities through contextual, reflective learning oriented toward real action. Strengthening teacher competence therefore becomes a key strategy in producing students who possess not only strong religiosity, but also ecological awareness, social concern, and commitment to environmental sustainability as part of implementing Islamic teaching.

IV. CONCLUSION

Multicultural Islamic Religious Education based on ecotheology is a relevant learning approach for addressing the environmental crisis while strengthening students' character formation in the era of sustainable development. The integration of Islamic values oriented toward amanah (trust), mīzān (balance), maṣlaḥah (benefit), and raḥmatan lil 'ālamīn (compassion for all creatures) with the principles of multicultural education expands the function of Islamic Religious Education—not only as a medium for strengthening individual religiosity, but also as a means of building social responsibility and ecological awareness. Contextual, reflective, and experience-based learning provides students the space to connect religious teaching with environmental issues, so that Islamic values become internalized in daily attitudes and behavior.

The success of implementing multicultural Islamic Religious Education based on ecotheology is determined not only by curriculum substance, but is also influenced by a supportive school culture, teacher exemplary behavior, school leadership, and the collaboration of the entire school community in building a sustainable educational ecosystem. School culture functions as a hidden curriculum that strengthens the internalization of values through habituation, while teachers act as facilitators, motivators, role models, and agents of transformation connecting the spiritual dimension with ecological reality. The synergy of these various components enables the formation of a learning environment that fosters the development of ecological awareness, social concern, and students' ability to make responsible decisions regarding the environment.

The theoretical contribution of this study lies in the development of a conceptual model of multicultural Islamic Religious Education based on ecotheology that integrates the spiritual, multicultural, and ecological dimensions into a single, mutually reinforcing educational framework. Unlike previous research, which generally discusses environmental education, multicultural education, or Islamic Religious Education separately, this study shows that these three dimensions have a complementary relationship in shaping students who are religious, inclusive, and environmentally aware. This conceptual model enriches the study of Islamic Religious Education by introducing an ecotheological perspective as a transformative approach relevant to the agenda of Education for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Practically, the results of this study provide implications for schools, teachers, and policymakers to develop curricula, learning strategies, and school cultures that integrate ecotheological values more systematically. Strengthening teacher competence, providing contextual teaching materials, and fostering collaboration among schools, families, and communities are important steps in sustainably building students' ecological awareness. Future research is recommended to use a mixed-methods approach or experimental research across various levels of education and social contexts to test the effectiveness of the multicultural Islamic Religious Education model based on ecotheology in improving environmental literacy, pro-environmental behavior, and students' sustainability character.

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