

## Religious Education and Eco-Theology: Reorienting Spirituality toward the Ecological Crisis

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### ABSTRACT

This study explores the integration of eco-theology within Islamic Religious Education (IRE) as a means to reorient spirituality in response to the current ecological crisis. The main problem addressed is the gap between religious understanding and environmental awareness among learners, which contributes to the lack of ecological ethics in Muslim communities. The objective of this research is to formulate a conceptual framework that connects Islamic theological values—such as *tawhīd* (divine unity), *khalāfah* (stewardship), and *amānah* (moral responsibility)—with ecological consciousness through IRE. The study employs a qualitative-descriptive approach with literature analysis, drawing on classical Islamic sources and contemporary eco-theological discourses. The findings indicate that eco-theology can serve as a transformative foundation for IRE, promoting a holistic spirituality that integrates faith, ethics, and environmental care. The conclusion emphasizes that reorienting Islamic spirituality through eco-theological principles encourages sustainable living and strengthens moral responsibility toward the environment.

**Keywords:** islamic religious education, eco-theology, spirituality, environmental ethics, sustainability

### INTRODUCTION

The global ecological crisis has become one of the most urgent challenges of the 21st century, manifesting in climate change, deforestation, species extinction, and resource depletion. These environmental degradations are not merely scientific or technological issues but also moral and spiritual ones [1], [2]. Within the Islamic perspective, ecological imbalance signifies a deviation from the divine principles governing the relationship between humans, nature, and the Creator. The Qur'an portrays nature (*al-'ālam*) as a collection of divine signs (*āyāt Allāh*) that invite human beings to reflect upon and preserve them. However, modern civilization—shaped by anthropocentrism and materialism—has separated humans from this sacred awareness, resulting in exploitation and ecological destruction [3], [4]. Therefore, there is an urgent need to reconstruct Islamic theology in a way that harmonizes spirituality and ecological responsibility. One promising approach to this reconstruction is through eco-theology, a theological paradigm that integrates ecological ethics within the framework of religious education [5].

Eco-theology in Islam is deeply rooted in the principle of *tawhīd* (divine unity), which asserts that all existence is interconnected within God's creation. The Qur'an emphasizes humanity's role as *khalīfah*

(steward) on earth, entrusted with maintaining environmental balance and avoiding corruption (*fasād*) (Q.S. Al-A'rāf [7]: 56). Thus, environmental destruction is considered not only an ecological violation but also a moral and theological failure. In this light, Islamic Religious Education (IRE) holds a vital role in reorienting learners' spirituality toward ecological awareness [6], [7]. It can serve as a transformative tool for restoring the ethical relationship between humans and nature, based on Islamic teachings about stewardship, moderation, and gratitude [8], [9], [10].

The significance of integrating eco-theology into religious education has been widely discussed in previous research. Tomlinson [11] highlights that *ecological religious education* opens new possibilities for pedagogical transformation by emphasizing spiritual and ethical responses to ecological problems. Similarly, Chamberlain [12] earlier underscored that religious education must evolve beyond doctrinal instruction to include ecological consciousness as a core moral responsibility. In a more recent study, Sun [13] conducted a content analysis of religious education curricula in Ghana, demonstrating how eco-theological content effectively fosters environmental awareness among students. Meanwhile, Bial and Tari [14] examined how Christian religious educators can nurture

ecological concern in youth through value-based pedagogy, showing that faith-based ecological education enhances moral and behavioral change toward environmental care. These studies collectively affirm that religious education—regardless of tradition—plays a crucial role in shaping ecological ethics and sustainable behavior. However, research specifically contextualized within Islamic education remains limited, particularly regarding the integration of eco-theology into pedagogical frameworks.

Islamic Religious Education, ideally, should not only impart religious knowledge but also cultivate moral and spiritual sensitivity toward all aspects of creation. However, conventional PAI curricula often prioritize ritual and doctrinal aspects, neglecting ecological and ethical dimensions. This disconnection between theology and ecology results in a fragmented worldview, where spirituality becomes detached from environmental responsibility. Therefore, this study aims to reorient IRE by incorporating eco-theological principles that bridge faith and ecological ethics. Such an approach aligns with the Qur'anic view that caring for the environment is a form of worship and moral duty.

In conclusion, the ecological crisis requires not only technological solutions but also theological and educational responses. By adopting an eco-theological orientation, Islamic Religious Education can cultivate spiritually grounded ecological consciousness. This reorientation restores harmony between humans, nature, and the Creator—forming the foundation for sustainable living inspired by divine values. Therefore, eco-theology should be recognized as a vital paradigm for reforming Islamic education in addressing contemporary environmental crises.

## RESEARCH METHODS

This study applies a qualitative-descriptive method using a library research (*literature study*) approach [15], [16], [17], [18]. This methodological design aims to explore, analyze, and synthesize eco-theological principles within the framework of Islamic Religious Education (IRE). According to Sugiyono [19], qualitative research focuses on understanding phenomena through meaning, context, and interpretation rather than numerical data. Nazir [20] explains that library research is conducted by analyzing data obtained from books, journals, documents, and other relevant sources to form theoretical understanding and conceptual development.

The research process consists of five main stages: identifying the problem and defining objectives; collecting relevant literature; analyzing and classifying data; synthesizing eco-theological concepts with Islamic education theories; and concluding and formulating educational implications.

### 1. Problem Identification

The research begins with identifying the central issue—namely, the gap between spiritual education and ecological awareness in Islamic learning. This stage includes a critical review of the

ecological crisis as both an environmental and theological problem within the Islamic worldview, where humans are regarded as *khalifah* (stewards) responsible for maintaining environmental harmony.

To bridge this conceptual gap, the researcher positions the problem identification stage as a foundation for theoretical exploration that connects ecological awareness with Islamic spirituality. This stage not only frames the urgency of the ecological crisis in moral and theological dimensions but also prepares a systematic pathway toward developing an integrated framework of Islamic education and eco-theology. By doing so, the study ensures that subsequent stages—such as literature review, data analysis, and conceptual synthesis—are guided by a clear understanding of the problem's roots and relevance to contemporary educational practice.

### 2. Literature Collection

The data are collected from both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include the Qur'an, Hadith, and classical Islamic scholarship, while secondary sources include academic books, journal articles, and previous studies on eco-theology, environmental ethics, and religious education. As stated by Zed [21], library research involves the systematic identification, documentation, and critical analysis of information relevant to a particular problem, making it suitable for theoretical studies such as this one.

This stage establishes the theoretical and conceptual backbone of the research [22], [23], [24]. By carefully selecting and critically examining literature from both Islamic and interdisciplinary perspectives, the researcher ensures that the discussion is grounded in authentic theological sources while engaging with modern environmental and educational discourse. This integrative approach enables a comprehensive understanding of how eco-theological thought can enrich Islamic Religious Education, both in substance and pedagogical direction.

### 3. Data Analysis

The analysis uses content analysis techniques as proposed by Krippendorff [25], which involve identifying recurring themes, interpreting meanings, and categorizing concepts into theological, ethical, and pedagogical dimensions. The focus of analysis is to connect the Islamic principles of *tawhīd* (divine unity), *khilāfah* (stewardship), and *amānah* (moral trust) with educational practices in fostering ecological consciousness.

Through this analytical process, key patterns and correlations begin to emerge between theological principles and educational methodologies [26], [27], [28], [29]. The findings from the content analysis serve as a bridge toward developing a new conceptual synthesis that harmonizes spiritual consciousness with environmental responsibility [30], [31]. Consequently, the analysis not only interprets existing data but also provides a constructive

framework for reorienting Islamic education toward ecological ethics and sustainability [32], [33].

#### 4. Conceptual Synthesis

Following Moleong [34], the synthesis process in qualitative research aims to build a comprehensive conceptual framework rather than test hypotheses. In this stage, various findings from the literature are integrated to form an eco-theological model for Islamic Religious Education that harmonizes faith, ethics, and environmental awareness within educational praxis.

#### 5. Conclusion and Educational Implications

The final stage interprets the synthesized framework and concludes its educational implications. As Syaodih Sukmadinata asserts, educational research must offer constructive solutions to current moral and social challenges. In this context, the study provides insights into how eco-theology can be incorporated into Islamic education to develop spiritual and ecological responsibility among learners.

This concluding phase not only encapsulates the outcomes of the theoretical synthesis but also projects their practical relevance within contemporary educational settings. By translating eco-theological insights into actionable educational implications, the research seeks to bridge the gap between conceptual understanding and pedagogical practice. This ensures that Islamic Religious Education does not merely convey doctrinal knowledge but also cultivates moral sensitivity and ecological awareness among learners, aligning educational objectives with the broader vision of sustainable and spiritually grounded human development.

### RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this research reveal that eco-theological integration within Islamic Religious Education (IRE) can reorient the spiritual and ethical framework of learners toward environmental consciousness. The synthesis of theological principles with educational theories produces three core findings: the rediscovery of *tawhīd* (divine unity) as a cosmological foundation of ecological ethics; the reinterpretation of *khilāfah* (stewardship) as a pedagogical framework for moral responsibility; and the operationalization of *amānah* (moral trust) as an educational principle guiding sustainable living practices.

#### 1. Tawhīd as the Foundation of Ecological Ethics

The study identifies *tawhīd* as a theological principle that inherently rejects dualism between humans and nature. Within Islamic epistemology, all of creation (*al-khalq*) manifests the divine will (*irādah Allāh*), indicating that environmental care is an act of worship (*ibādah*) and gratitude (*shukr*). This finding aligns with Chamberlain's [12] assertion that the recognition of divine unity offers a coherent moral basis for environmental ethics in religious education. Similarly, Tomlinson [11] emphasizes that

ecological religious education transforms faith from doctrinal abstraction into an experiential awareness of interconnectedness.

This implies that the degradation of the environment results not merely from scientific or political failure but from a fragmented spiritual worldview. When the oneness of God is separated from the oneness of creation, ecological responsibility diminishes [35], [36], [37], [38], [39]. Therefore, *tawhīd* provides the metaphysical grounding that restores harmony between the spiritual and natural orders, positioning ecological care as a manifestation of faith (*īmān bi al-'amal*).

#### 2. Khilāfah as the Pedagogical Expression of Moral Responsibility

The second finding interprets *khilāfah* as an educational concept reflecting moral leadership and accountability. In the Qur'anic narrative, humans are entrusted with the role of stewards, responsible for maintaining the balance (*mīzān*) of the earth (Q.S. Al-Raḥmān [55]: 7–9). Educationally, this stewardship can be translated into learning processes that cultivate ethical awareness, critical thinking, and community engagement toward sustainable action [40], [41].

The result corresponds with Biaf and Tari's [14] findings that religious educators play a strategic role in developing ecological concern among youth by integrating ethical values into instructional design. Likewise, Sun [13] argues that eco-theology in curriculum design fosters environmental literacy by transforming moral reflection into concrete action. Thus, *khilāfah* not only denotes authority but also moral restraint, guiding learners to see environmental care as an expression of devotion and leadership accountability.

#### 3. Amānah as an Ethical Imperative in Education

The third major finding highlights *amānah* as a moral trust that extends beyond interpersonal ethics into ecological responsibility [42], [43], [44]. Every resource—land, water, energy, and biodiversity—is part of a divine trust bestowed upon humanity [39], [45]. Neglecting or exploiting these trusts unjustly constitutes moral corruption (*fasād*), as warned in Q.S. Ar-Rūm [30]: 41: "*Corruption has appeared on land and sea because of what the hands of men have earned.*"

Scientifically, this can be understood through the socio-ethical mechanism of responsibility—where moral awareness functions as a regulator of human behavior. The Qur'anic concept of *amānah* aligns with contemporary ecological ethics that advocate accountability and sustainability [46], [47]. Therefore, embedding *amānah* in educational practices encourages learners to perceive every action affecting the environment as a test of faith and integrity [10], [48].

Comparing this study's findings with previous research, the eco-theological framework offers a more integrated view of spirituality and ecology. Tomlinson [11] and Chamberlain [12] both highlight

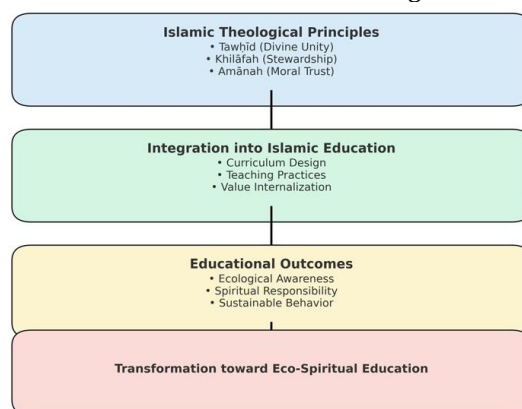
the potential of religious education to internalize ecological values through reflective pedagogy. Meanwhile, Sun [13] and Biaf & Tari [14] focus on teacher roles and curriculum content in shaping ecological awareness. This research extends those discussions by providing a theological foundation that connects *tawhīd*, *khilāfah*, and *amānah* into a holistic educational model.

Theoretically, the eco-theological approach in Islamic education redefines the objectives of learning—not merely to produce intellectually capable individuals, but spiritually responsible ones who recognize their divine and ecological interdependence [9], [49], [50]. The result also supports the growing global trend toward *eco-pedagogy*, which emphasizes sustainability, moral reasoning, and transformative spirituality.

#### 4. Implications for Islamic Religious Education

The integration of eco-theological principles in Islamic education holds significant pedagogical implications. First, curriculum design should incorporate ecological themes within Qur'anic interpretation, *fiqh al-bi'ah* (Islamic environmental jurisprudence), and *akhlāq* (moral education). Second, learning activities must shift from memorization to reflection and participation in environmental stewardship. Third, teacher training programs should include ecological literacy as part of professional competence [8], [45].

By aligning these dimensions, Islamic education can become a transformative medium that cultivates both faith and environmental responsibility. In this way, eco-theology does not stand as an abstract theology but as a living pedagogy—one that responds to the ecological crisis through faith-based ethical reform.



**Figure 2.** Conceptual Framework of Islamic Eco-Theology in Education

This figure illustrates the conceptual relationship between Islamic theological principles and ecological education. The framework integrates three key foundations—*tawhīd* (divine unity), *khilāfah* (stewardship), and *amānah* (moral trust)—as the spiritual basis for developing ecological consciousness. These theological values are then operationalized through educational domains, including curriculum design, teaching practices, and value internalization, leading toward learners' ecological responsibility and sustainable behavior. The model emphasizes that Islamic education serves as a transformative medium linking faith, knowledge, and environmental ethics.

#### CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the integration of eco-theology within Islamic Religious Education offers a transformative paradigm for reorienting spirituality toward ecological awareness. The theological synthesis of *tawhīd* (divine unity), *khilāfah* (stewardship), and *amānah* (moral trust) establishes a moral-ethical foundation for nurturing environmental responsibility among learners. Unlike previous studies—such as Tomlinson, Chamberlain, and Sun—which primarily addressed ecological religious education in general or from Christian and global educational contexts, this research presents a distinctive contribution by

formulating an Islamic-based eco-theological framework that explicitly integrates Qur'anic values with pedagogical practice. The novelty of this study lies in its conceptual model that links theological principles to curriculum design, instructional practice, and value internalization, making it adaptable for Islamic education institutions facing contemporary environmental challenges.

Furthermore, this study reinforces the notion that ecological ethics are not peripheral but central to Islamic spirituality, positioning environmental care as a form of *ibādah* (worship) and moral duty.

Recommendations: Future research should empirically test the proposed conceptual framework through curriculum implementation and pedagogical experimentation in various Islamic educational settings. Moreover, interfaith and interdisciplinary collaborations could further enrich the eco-theological discourse, fostering a broader culture of ecological spirituality and sustainability across educational systems.

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