

Integration of Eco-Spirituality Values in Environmental Care Habituation Programs in Elementary Schools

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Abstract

The increasingly complex environmental crisis requires an educational approach capable of strengthening students' moral and spiritual awareness alongside ecological knowledge. This study focuses on integrating eco-theology-based environmental issues into Islamic Religious Education (PAI) and its impact on shaping students' ecological character through the AKULAKU program (Take, Collect, Sort, Create, and Money) at SDN 2 Dompu. A case study approach was employed in this research. The principal, PAI teachers, classroom teachers, and students served as informants for data collection through in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation. The research findings reveal that the integration of eco-theology is realized through school culture, the AKULAKU program, and PAI learning, which instills the values of caliphate, trust, cleanliness as part of faith, and responsibility toward the environment. The formation of students' ecological character is achieved through the integration of habituation, role modeling, and waste management practices that foster ecological awareness, responsibility, and environmental concern. This study proposes a school-based eco-theology integration model to simultaneously connect religious, ecological, pedagogical, and socio-economic dimensions. Islamic Religious Education has proven capable of serving as a tool for transforming environmental awareness through contextual, participatory, and sustainable learning processes, as affirmed by the research findings.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The global environmental crisis is a major challenge of the 21st century that threatens the sustainability of human life. Issues such as pollution, increasing plastic waste, climate change, and ecosystem degradation demonstrate that the ecological crisis is not only a technical problem but also a moral, cultural, and spiritual one. The UNEP (2024) reports that global waste production has reached over 2.3 billion tons per year and is projected to increase to 3.8 billion tons by 2050. In Indonesia, waste generation has exceeded 69 million tons per year, with the majority not yet optimally managed (M. Sutalhis, 2024).

Resolving the environmental crisis requires changes in values, ethics, and character, in addition to regulations and technology (UNESCO, 2022). In Islam, humans as stewards (khalifah) are obligated to maintain the balance of nature, as emphasized in Q.S. Al-A'raf:56 and Q.S. Al-Baqarah:30. Education plays a role in building ecological awareness through the internalization of values and the habituation of environmentally friendly behavior (Safiqo & Ghofur, 2025). Therefore, Islamic Religious Education not only shapes individual

piety but also social and ecological responsibility as a form of worship and trust (Dedi Eko, 2025).

The integration of environmental education into Islamic Religious Education has been shown to enhance students' ecological awareness (Hidayati et al., 2025). Although studies on environmental education within Islamic Religious Education have developed and school culture plays a significant role in character education, research linking Islamic eco-theology with waste management programs in schools to build ecological character remains very limited.

Strengthening ecological character is an urgent necessity due to the persistent gap between religious understanding and environmentally responsible behavior (UNESCO, 2022). Knowledge of cleanliness as an Islamic teaching has not always been translated into daily ecological practices (OECD, 2025). This condition underscores the importance of sustained internalization of values. In this context, eco-theology offers an approach that integrates the values of *khalifah* (stewardship), *amanah* (trust), and the prohibition against damaging the earth into character education (Salamuddin, 2017).

SDN 2 Dompu has developed the AKULAKU Program (Take, Collect, Sort, Create, Money) as an environmentally-themed educational innovation based on character. This program integrates waste management with the development of eco-friendly knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors in line with the principles of sustainable education (Muliana et al., 2026). Initial observations and interviews indicate that habituation, role modeling, and direct experience serve as means of internalizing the values of eco-theology and human responsibility as stewards in preserving nature (Safiqo & Ghofur, 2025).

Interviews indicate that students have developed the habit of sorting waste both at school and at home. They perceive cleanliness as part of Islamic teachings and a mandate as stewards (*khalifah*) on earth (Q.S. Al-A'raf:56; Q.S. Al-Baqarah:30). The integration of eco-theology values through contextual learning and continuous habituation strengthens students' ecological character (Asiah & Negara, 2024). This is evident in their habit of maintaining cleanliness and actively participating in the AKULAKU Program without waiting for teacher instructions.

Various studies indicate that value-based religious environmental education can enhance ecological awareness among participants (Pananrang, 2026). However, the integration of eco-theology with Islamic Religious Education remains limited, particularly at the elementary school level. Previous research has largely employed survey methods and curriculum analysis, leaving the process of internalizing values through learning experiences underexplored. Therefore, the study on the AKULAKU Program at SDN 2 Dompu is expected to provide conceptual and empirical contributions to the development of Islamic Religious Education based on ecological character.

The novelty of this research lies in the development of an eco-theology integration model based on the AKULAKU Program, which combines theological, pedagogical, ecological, and economic dimensions in shaping students' ecological character. This model aligns with the Education for Sustainable Development paradigm, which integrates environmental, social, economic, and cultural aspects (UNESCO, 2024). The integration of religious education, environmental education, and character education through school-based waste management represents a conceptual and practical contribution that remains rarely found in previous studies.

This study aims to analyze the integration of eco-theology in Islamic Religious Education through the AKULAKU Program at SDN 2 Dompu, as well as its impact on strengthening students' ecological character. Furthermore, the study formulates an integration model that connects religious values, educational practices, and the formation of

ecological behavior in elementary schools, in line with the Education for Sustainable Development paradigm, which emphasizes the integration of environmental, social, and moral aspects in education (Muliana et al., 2026).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Islamic Eco-Theology in Educational Perspective

The global environmental crisis has spurred the development of the concept of eco-theology as a response to ecological damage caused not only by technical and economic factors but also by human perspectives on nature. Eco-theology examines the relationship between religious beliefs, spiritual values, and ecological responsibility (Jenkins et al., 2021). From an Islamic perspective, humans are positioned as stewards of nature through the principles of tawhid (the oneness of God), khilafah (vicegerency), amanah (trust), and mizan (balance), so that maintaining environmental balance is a divine trust that must be realized in daily life (Nasr, 2018; Mangunjaya, 2022).

The Qur'an positions humans as khalifah fi al-ardh, tasked with responsibly caring for and managing the earth (Q.S. Al-Baqarah: 30). The relationship between humans and nature is part of devotion to Allah. According to Khalid (2023), current environmental damage is also triggered by a spiritual crisis that distances humans from their ecological awareness. Therefore, eco-theology emphasizes the integration of religious values and environmental concern as a solution to this crisis.

The development of eco-theology indicates a shift from an anthropocentric paradigm toward a theo-ecocentric one, which views humans as part of an interdependent system of God's creation, rather than absolute rulers over nature (Taylor et al., 2021). From an Islamic perspective, this paradigm affirms that all creatures are signs (ayat) of Allah that must be respected and preserved to sustain the continuity of life.

Various studies indicate that the implementation of eco-theology in education still faces obstacles because religious learning is more oriented toward rituals and individual morality, while the ecological dimension has not received adequate attention (Mangunjaya & McKay, 2020). This condition highlights the need for an educational transformation that can connect theological values with tangible environmental conservation practices.

Research on the implementation of eco-theological values in formal education, particularly at the elementary school level, remains limited. Most studies focus on conceptual aspects and theological discourse, so their application in learning practices has not been extensively explored. Therefore, further research is needed to bridge the concept of eco-theology with applicable educational models to strengthen students' ecological character.

2.2. Islamic Religious Education and the Internalization of Environmental Values

Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in the modern era is no longer merely about conveying religious teachings, but also plays a role in social transformation and character building of students (Halim, 2021). (Fauzan & Suniarti, 2025) state that PAI is an educational process that shapes individuals who are faithful, pious, and of noble character, enabling them to implement Islamic values in daily life. According to (Fattahuddin et al., 2025), Islamic education must respond to various humanitarian issues, including the environmental crisis. Therefore, the development of PAI cannot focus solely on cognitive aspects but must integratively balance the relationship between humans and God (habl min Allah), among humans (habl min al-nas), and with

the environment (*habl min al-'alam*) so that learning becomes more contextual and applicable.

(Anggraeni et al., 2025) emphasize that the internalization of religious values is more effective through students' direct experiences. In line with this, (Elsi Sirampun, 2024) explains that experience-based learning produces more meaningful understanding through a combination of real practice and critical reflection. This approach serves as an important foundation for integrating environmental issues into Islamic Religious Education.

Various studies indicate that the integration of environmental education into Islamic Religious Education can enhance students' ecological awareness (Hidayat et al., 2024). However, most studies still focus on curriculum and classroom learning, while the internalization of eco-theological values through school culture and habit-forming programs based on real-life experiences remains rarely explored. This situation highlights the need for more in-depth research on the practice of ecological education within the school environment.

2.3. Ecological Character of Students

(Mada et al., 2024) define ecological character as the values, attitudes, and behaviors that reflect concern and responsibility for environmental sustainability. Its formation depends not only on knowledge but also on habituation, role modeling, and continuous social experiences. (UNESCO, 2024) categorizes ecological character into three main dimensions: ecological awareness, ecological responsibility, and ecological action.

The three dimensions affirm that awareness of the importance of environmental preservation must be realized through concrete actions. In Islam, the values of maintaining cleanliness, avoiding waste, conserving natural resources, and the prohibition of damaging the earth are part of *akhlaq al-bi'ah* (environmental ethics) that shape ecological character. Thus, concern for the environment is part of implementing Islamic teachings in daily life.

Ecological character in Islamic education encompasses spiritual, social, and environmental dimensions, with the primary orientation being responsibility to Allah SWT. However, various studies indicate that there is still a gap between environmental understanding and the actual behavior of students (Steg & Vlek, 2009). Therefore, the formation of ecological character requires continuous internalization of values through habituation, role modeling, school culture, and direct involvement in real-life experiences.

2.4. Interconcept Relationships

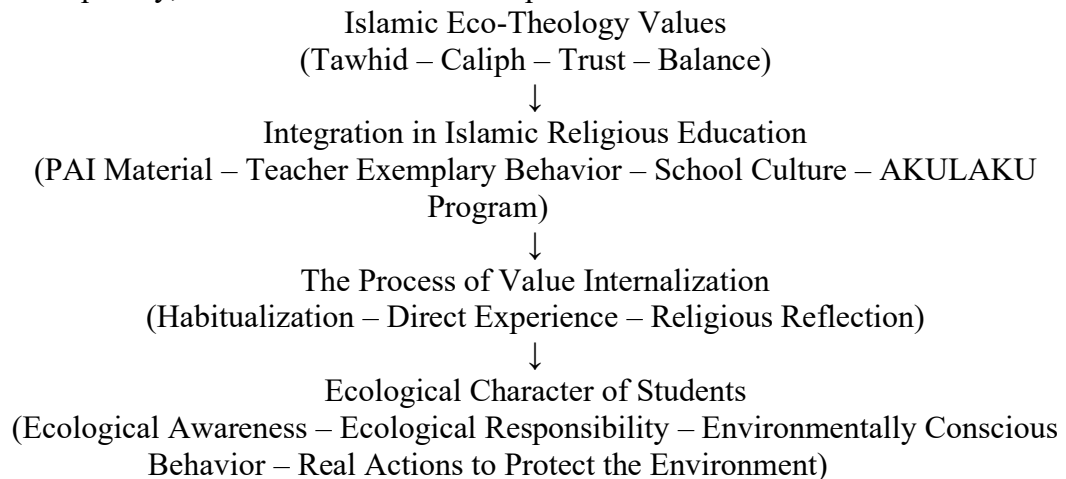
Students' ecological awareness can be built through the internalization of Islamic eco-theological values such as *tawhid*, *caliph*, *trust*, and *mizan*. These concepts serve as a normative foundation for developing environmental education within Islamic Religious Education. Through learning and school culture, theological values are transformed into real experiences, enabling students to understand and apply ecological responsibility in their daily lives.

The formation of ecological character occurs through a continuous process of value internalization carried out through habituation and direct experience. This process fosters the development of awareness, concern, responsibility, and concrete actions in protecting the environment. Thus, the integration of eco-theological values in Islamic Religious Education becomes a crucial factor in shaping students' ecological character through the cultivation of values and consistent behavioral habituation.

2.5. Research Conceptual Framework

This research conceptual framework is based on the belief that the principles of eco-theology in Islam serve as a normative foundation for Islamic Religious Education. The integration of these values is carried out into three main aspects: learning content, school culture, and environmental habituation programs known as AKULAKU (Take, Collect, Sort, Create, Money). The educational process and direct experience in managing the school environment interact with Islamic theological values, thereby shaping students' ecological character. Increased environmental awareness, responsibility towards nature, environmentally friendly behavior, and habits of maintaining cleanliness are tangible forms of internalizing ecological values resulting from this integration.

Conceptually, the flow of that relationship can be described as follows:



3. RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design to deeply examine the process of integrating environmental issues (eco-theology) into Islamic Religious Education (PAI) materials and how this strengthens students' ecological character at SDN 2 Dompu. The research focus on meaning, experience, social interaction, and the internalization process of values was the reason for selecting the qualitative method, as these aspects cannot be measured quantitatively. (Robert K. Yin, 2018) asserts that the case study design allows researchers to understand a phenomenon comprehensively within a real-life context. The implementation of the AKULAKU program (Collect, Gather, Sort, Create, Money) within the school environment became the focus of contextual exploration through this approach. This specific setting was chosen because it enables in-depth data collection on the dynamics of program implementation.

3.1. Research Design

The research design employed is a single case study. This design was chosen because the research focuses on a specific case, namely the implementation of the AKULAKU program at SDN 2 Dompu. The case study design allows for an in-depth exploration of the phenomenon under study by considering the interrelationships between the social, cultural, institutional, and educational practices occurring within the school environment.

3.2. Location and Data Source

The research was conducted at SDN 2 Dompu, Dompu Regency, West Nusa Tenggara. The location was chosen based on the existence of the AKULAKU program, which integrates waste management with character building and religious values. The research data sources consist of: The research informants include one

principal, one Islamic Religious Education teacher, three homeroom teachers, and twelve students who are actively involved in the AKULAKU program. Informants were selected using purposive sampling technique based on their involvement and knowledge of the program's implementation.

1. Primary data: obtained through in-depth interviews with the principal, PAI teachers, classroom teachers, and students involved in the AKULAKU program.
2. Secondary data: obtained from school documents, such as the school's vision and mission, AKULAKU program SOPs, activity reports, and other supporting documentation.

3.3. Data Collection Techniques

The data was collected using three main techniques:

1. In-depth interview: conducted in a semi-structured manner to explore informants' experiences, views, and practices regarding the integration of eco-theology in school programs.
2. Participatory observation: carried out to observe the implementation of the AKULAKU program, interactions among school members, and students' ecological behaviors.
3. Documentation study: used to examine official school documents, activity photos, and program archives relevant to the research.

3.4. Research Instrument

The main instrument of the research was the researcher themselves (human instrument), who played a role in planning, collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data. To support the data collection process, semi-structured interview guidelines, observation sheets, and documentation formats were used.

3.5. Data Validity Technique

Data validity is maintained through the following techniques:

1. Source triangulation: comparing information from the principal, Islamic Education teacher, classroom teacher, and students.
2. Technical triangulation: comparing the results of interviews, observations, and documentation.
3. Member check: confirming interview results with informants to ensure the accuracy of meaning.
4. Referential adequacy: using documents and field notes as supporting evidence for data interpretation.

3.6. Data Analysis Techniques

The data analysis was conducted interactively following the Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña model (Miles et al., 2014), which includes:

1. Data reduction: selecting, focusing, and simplifying data relevant to the research focus.
2. Data display: organizing data in the form of narratives, matrices, and thematic categories.
3. Conclusion drawing and verification: identifying patterns, relationships between concepts, and continuously verifying findings throughout the research process.

3.7. Research Ethics

Prior to data collection, researchers obtained official permission from the school and informed consent from informants to participate in the study. All informants' identities were disguised to maintain data confidentiality. Informants were given the freedom to discontinue participation at any time without any consequences.

3.8. Reasons for Method Selection

The qualitative approach with a case study design was chosen because this research aims to understand the process, meaning, and internal dynamics of eco-theology values within the real context of schools. This method allows for an in-depth exploration of educational practices, school culture, and the experiences of educational actors that cannot be reduced to mere numbers or statistical variables. Therefore, the chosen method is considered the most appropriate for generating a comprehensive understanding of the integration of environmental issues in Islamic Education (PAI) materials and its influence on shaping students' ecological character.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Integration of Eco-Theology Values through the AKULAKU Program in School Culture

The AKULAKU Program (Take, Collect, Sort, Create, Money) at SDN 2 Dompu represents the implementation of eco-theology values through character education-based waste management. This program not only teaches systematic environmental management but also fosters ecological awareness through the active involvement of all school members in planned and sustainable activities.

This finding aligns with the perspective of Islamic eco-theology, which views humans as *khalifah fi al-ardh* (stewards on earth) who are obligated to maintain the balance of nature (Mardiyah et al., 2025). Within this framework, the environment is understood as a trust that must be preserved, not as an object of exploitation. These values are manifested through activities of waste collection, gathering, sorting, and utilization in the AKULAKU Program.

The principal stated that the AKULAKU Program serves as a medium for character education because students learn to manage waste while fostering responsibility towards the environment. This finding reinforces the opinion (Hidayat et al., 2024) that environmental education based on religious values can enhance ecological awareness. This study shows that the internalization of values becomes more effective when supported by school culture and sustained habituation, so that ecological character develops through real experience, not just classroom learning.

The "Work" and "Money" dimensions in the AKULAKU Program present a new perspective that integrates environmental awareness with creativity, productivity, and economic value. This finding indicates that environmental education based on eco-theology is able to connect ecological, spiritual, social, and economic dimensions in an integrated manner, in line with the Education for Sustainable Development paradigm which emphasizes the integration of environmental, social, and economic aspects in building sustainable behavior (UNESCO, 2022).

4.2. Internalization of Eco-Theology Values in Islamic Religious Education Learning

The integration of environmental issues in Islamic Religious Education reflects a shift in learning from a normative to a transformative approach. Religious values are no longer conveyed as separate concepts but are connected to students' ecological experiences through the AKULAKU Program. This approach aligns with the view of (Haryono et al., 2025) that Islamic education must be able to respond to contemporary human issues, including the environmental crisis.

Research findings indicate that Islamic Religious Education learning at SDN 2 Dompu not only serves as a transfer of knowledge but also shapes students' socio-ecological awareness and behavior. Teachers integrate the concepts of caliph and

trusteeship with AKULAKU activities, enabling students to understand that environmental stewardship is part of implementing Islamic teachings.

The constructivist perspective affirms that the internalization of religious values is more effective through real experiences. Students' involvement in the AKULAKU Program allows them to connect Islamic teachings with environmental conservation practices. Thus, the concept of cleanliness as part of faith does not stop at textual understanding but is manifested in actual behavior within the school environment.

(Guna et al., 2026) and (Mustofa et al., 2025) show that environmental issue-based religious learning is more effective in shaping ecological behavior than textual approaches. The findings of this study extend these results by demonstrating that the internalization of environmental values becomes stronger when supported by school culture and sustainable habitual programs, making ecological education more contextual and comprehensive.

4.3. Habituation as a Mechanism for the Formation of Ecological Character

The habituation process emerged as a key finding in shaping the ecological character of students through the AKULAKU Program. Routine activities such as waste management and sorting gradually build environmental awareness through direct experience, not merely through teacher instructions. This finding aligns with (Raudhatul Firdausiah, 2026), who states that character is formed through repeated social experiences.

The research results indicate that habituation serves as a bridge between conceptual understanding and real action. One student admitted to being accustomed to sorting waste due to the AKULAKU activities and teacher guidance. In fact, some students have begun to maintain environmental cleanliness on their own initiative without waiting for instructions, demonstrating the internalization of ecological values.

This study shows that the combination of religious education, habituation, teacher role modeling, and direct experience can reduce the gap between ecological knowledge and action (knowledge-action gap). Ecological character is not formed instantly but through a consistent and continuous social and pedagogical process.

Although the AKULAKU Program has had a positive impact, the level of internalization of ecological values still varies among students. Some students still require reinforcement and guidance so that ecological behavior develops into intrinsic awareness. This indicates that the formation of ecological character is influenced by the consistency of school programs, family environment, and community culture on an ongoing basis.

4.4. Ecological Character as a Manifestation of Ecological Piety

Research findings indicate that students' religious awareness serves as a foundation for the formation of ecological character. Students are able to associate environmental concern with the religious values they have learned, so that environmental preservation is understood as part of spiritual responsibility. From the perspective of eco-theology, this condition reflects the formation of ecological piety, which is piety manifested through care for the environment.

The concept of ecological piety expands the meaning of piety, which is not only oriented toward ritual worship and personal morality, but also includes ecological responsibility. These findings show that religious values can be an effective basis for shaping environmentally friendly behavior when integrated with students' real-life experiences. Therefore, Islamic Religious Education needs to be positioned as a means of social transformation that fosters care for nature as part of a spiritual mandate.

Findings Matrix Table

Theme	Key Findings	Empirical Indicators
Eco-Theology Integration	The values of caliphate, trustworthiness, and cleanliness are integrated through AKULAKU	Waste collection, sorting and processing activities
PAI Learning	Environmental material is contextualized with Islamic teachings	Linking the material of the caliph with waste management practices
Habituation	Internalization of values through routine activities	Weekly programs and involvement of the entire school community
Ecological Character	Ecological awareness and responsibility emerge	The habit of sorting waste and maintaining cleanliness without instructions

The findings on ecological piety expand the meaning of piety from individual ritual and moral aspects toward social and ecological responsibility. This research shows that environmentally conscious behavior is a manifestation of religious values as well as a form of ethical responsibility for the sustainability of life.

Theoretical Contributions, Practical Contributions, and Research Implications
Theoretically, this study strengthens the concept of eco-theology by demonstrating that Islamic theological values can be implemented through systematic educational programs. These findings also enrich the theory of character education by affirming that ecological character is formed through the integration of spiritual values, real-life experiences, school culture, and sustainable habituation.

Practically, this research produces a model of eco-theology integration through AKULAKU Program, which has the potential to be applied in other schools. The model shows that environmental education becomes more effective when combined with religious values, real activities, and socio-economic benefits for students. The pedagogical implications of this study emphasize the need for more contextual and transformative Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning through direct learning experiences. From a policy perspective, environmental education needs to be fully integrated into school culture so that the formation of ecological character takes place sustainably, not merely as incidental activities. This research indicates that the integration of eco-theology through the AKULAKU Program contributes to shaping students' ecological character through the internalization of values that holistically combine theological, pedagogical, ecological, and socio-economic dimensions.

5. CONCLUSION

This study shows that the integration of environmental issues (eco-theology) in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) at SDN 2 Dompu takes place through a synergy between religious learning, school culture, and the AKULAKU program (Take, Collect, Sort, Create, Money). This integration enables Islamic values such as khalifah (stewardship), amanah (trust), and responsibility for preserving the environment to be internalized through real experiences, thus contributing to the formation of students' ecological character, marked by increased awareness, concern, and responsibility toward the environment.

Conceptually, this study affirms that ecological character is not formed solely through environmental education or religious education separately, but through the integration of spiritual values, habituation, role modeling, and direct experience within the school culture.

These findings expand the study of eco-theology by demonstrating that Islamic theological values can be concretely operationalized through school programs that connect religious, ecological, pedagogical, and socio-economic dimensions.

In practical terms, this study implies that environmental education will be more effective if integrated with religious values and implemented through participatory, contextual, and sustainable programs. The AKULAKU program can serve as an alternative model for strengthening ecological character that is relevant for implementation in primary education institutions.

This study has limitations as it was conducted at a single location using a case study approach, so its findings are not intended for broad generalization. Therefore, future research is recommended to involve more schools using a comparative or mixed methods approach to examine the long-term effectiveness of integrating eco-theology in shaping students' ecological character. Thus, the integration of eco-theology into Islamic Religious Education (PAI) has the potential to become a relevant educational strategy in building a generation that is both religious and responsible for environmental sustainability.

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