

Ecological Ethics in Islamic Religious Education Textbooks: A Qualitative Representation Analysis

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Abstract

Keywords:

Ecotheology;
Conservation;
Textbook; IRE
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Environmental conservation issues have become a central concern in the discourse of Islamic education, particularly in efforts to internalize sustainability values into Islamic Religious Education (IRE) learning in higher education. This article aims to analyze the representation of ecological conservation values in two commonly used IRE textbooks, employing a qualitative analysis approach grounded in Islamic ecotheology. Data were obtained through document analysis of the IRE textbook published by the Ministry of Research, Technology, and Higher Education (Kemristekdikti) and the textbook authored by Dr. Nurhasanah, as well as through Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with five IRE lecturers from four universities. The findings indicate that conservation values are more dominantly presented implicitly, with the category of "Khalifah and Trust (*Khalifah and Amānah*)" emerging as the most prominent narrative, while "Ecological Spirituality" receives minimal explicit attention. These differences in presentation style yield important pedagogical implications, especially regarding the lecturer's role in interpreting implicit values. The contribution of this article lies in offering the Islamic ecotheology framework as both an analytical and pedagogical approach to strengthening value-based sustainability education within the Islamic tradition. These findings underscore the importance of transforming the IRE curriculum from a normative narrative to a more contextual and reflective, transformative approach.

Abstrak

Kata kunci:
Ekoteologi;
Konservasi; Buku;
PAI.

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Isu konservasi lingkungan menjadi perhatian utama dalam diskursus pendidikan Islam, khususnya dalam upaya menginternalisasikan nilai-nilai keberlanjutan ke dalam pembelajaran Pendidikan Agama Islam (PAI) di perguruan tinggi. Artikel ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis representasi nilai konservasi ekologis dalam dua buku ajar PAI yang umum digunakan, dengan menggunakan pendekatan analisis kualitatif berbasis ekoteologi Islam. Data diperoleh melalui studi dokumentasi terhadap buku PAI terbitan Kemristekdikti dan buku karya Dr. Nurhasanah, serta Focus Group Discussion (FGD) bersama lima dosen PAI dari empat perguruan tinggi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa nilai-nilai konservasi lebih dominan disajikan secara implisit, dengan kategori "Khalifah dan Amanah" sebagai narasi paling menonjol, sementara "Spiritualitas Ekologis" kurang mendapat perhatian eksplisit. Perbedaan gaya penyajian ini memunculkan implikasi pedagogis penting, terutama peran dosen dalam menafsirkan nilai tersirat. Kontribusi artikel ini terletak pada tawaran kerangka ekoteologi Islam sebagai pendekatan analitis dan pedagogis dalam menguatkan pendidikan keberlanjutan berbasis nilai keislaman. Temuan ini menegaskan pentingnya transformasi kurikulum PAI dari narasi normatif menuju pendekatan transformatif yang kontekstual dan reflektif.

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INTRODUCTION

Environmental conservation has become a primary concern in global discourse, especially in addressing the challenges of climate crisis, ecosystem degradation, and the overexploitation of natural resources. These phenomena demand active engagement from various sectors, particularly the education sector, in cultivating ecological awareness and promoting sustainable behavior. In line with this, Islamic Religious Education (IRE) at the university level holds strategic potential as a medium for internalizing profound spiritual values, including environmental conservation (Komariah & Nihayah, 2023; Susilawati et al., 2022; Zuhriyah et al., 2024). As a tradition that emphasizes the sanctity of creation, order, and human responsibility as stewards (khalifah) on Earth, Islam offers theological and ethical principles that can serve as the foundation for fostering ecological consciousness (Ali & Agushi, 2024; Wani & Azhar, 2024). Consequently, IRE serves a dual function by conveying the normative teachings of religion while also equipping students with a contextual and responsive religious framework for addressing contemporary human and environmental challenges, including the ecological crisis.

However, in practice, numerous studies have shown that this potential is yet to be fully realized in IRE classrooms. Research by Ega Nasrudin found that within the integration of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into IRE instructional materials in higher education, the dimension of environmental protection remains underrepresented compared to social inclusion and economic growth (Nasrudin et al., 2025). Meanwhile, a study by Muhamad Parhan emphasized the need for a transformative pedagogical model within IRE that is adaptive to the challenges of Society 5.0 (Parhan et al., 2024). Other studies in Malaysia have shown that conservation values can be integrated through Islamic value-based approaches (Zabidi et al., 2021). In the Indonesian context, the integration of sustainability principles in Islamic higher education remains suboptimal (Desmaniar et al., 2022; Suyadi et al., 2022).

This gap is also evident in Islamic educational approaches, which tend to lack systematic links between religious teachings and environmental crises. Several studies have underscored the importance of cultivating ecological piety among students (Hidayat et al., 2024; Muhson et al., 2024; Nuruzzaman et al., 2023). Yet, the narrative of environmental conservation in Indonesian IRE remains weak and fragmented (Nazar et al., 2024). This is despite the fact that IRE plays a vital role in supporting the achievement of the SDGs in a more holistic manner (Khoiriyah et al., 2023). Conceptually, the Islamic perspective on environmental sustainability provides a strong theological basis for the development of environmentally conscious curricula (Bsoul et al., 2022; Gulzar et al., 2021). Practically, the development of Islamic environmental education curricula, such as those implemented in Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*), can offer effective models that integrate religious values with sustainability principles. (Khusni Albar et al., 2024; Suprpto, 2020; Susilawati Sj et al., 2021).

In this context, Islamic ecotheology emerges as a relevant and constructive conceptual approach. Theologically, environmental conservation in Islam is rooted in a

spiritual framework that sees the relationship between humans, God, and nature as a unified system. At least six core values form the basis of this framework: Ecological Tawhīd, Khalīfah and Trust, Ethical Taskhīr, Iṣlāḥ and Anti-Fasād, Ḥifz al-Bī'ah (environmental protection as a maqāṣid), and Ecological Spirituality (Khuluq & Asmuni, 2025; Maftukhin, 2017; Nazar et al., 2023). These values affirm that protecting the environment is not merely a moral obligation but a form of worship, prophetic responsibility, and eschatological accountability.

This study adopts an Islamic ecotheological approach to examine environmental conservation as a spiritual value embedded in university-level IRE textbooks. Specifically, it investigates how ecological values are represented, either explicitly or implicitly, in two widely used textbooks: one published by the Ministry of Research, Technology, and Higher Education (Kemenristekdikti) and another authored by Dr. Nurhasanah. The analysis follows six main ecotheological categories mentioned above and employs a qualitative, exploratory approach to evaluate the depth of conservation values integration and its contribution to developing a more contextual and sustainability-oriented IRE curriculum. The novelty of this research lies in its critical application of Islamic ecotheology as a lens for textbook content analysis, which is a dimension rarely explored in contemporary Islamic education literature.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative exploratory approach, aiming to thoroughly investigate how environmental conservation values are represented in IRE textbooks at the university level. The qualitative nature of this research allows for a contextual understanding of phenomena, the interpretation of implicit meanings within texts, and the exploration of content depth that may not be captured through quantitative metrics. In this context, content analysis is selected as the primary technique for examining and interpreting meanings embedded in instructional materials, particularly those related to Islamic-based conservation values.

The study focuses on two IRE textbooks widely used across Indonesian universities. The first is the Islamic Religious Education textbook published by Kemenristekdikti, which serves as a national standard reference and is utilized in both public and private higher education institutions. This textbook represents an institutional approach to IRE material development and reflects broader policy directions in Islamic higher education. The second is a textbook authored by Dr. Nurhasanah, specifically the 7th edition (2018), which has been consistently reprinted and widely adopted as both a primary and supplementary reference. Together, these two texts represent commonly used and influential teaching materials from both institutional and individual-academic perspectives.

Data were collected through document analysis by closely examining the full content of both textbooks. Researchers conducted intensive and repeated readings of each chapter and sub-chapter, with a focus on religious narratives relevant to environmental issues. Texts containing Qur'anic verses, hadith, ethical values, moral

appeals, and behavioral guidance were analyzed to identify whether they convey conservation values, either explicitly or implicitly.

For classification purposes, researchers developed a thematic coding sheet based on an Islamic ecotheological framework. This framework is synthesized from three primary sources: Maftukhin (2017), Abu Nazar et al. (2023), and Khuluq & Asmuni (2024). From these references, six categories of conservation values were established as the analytical lens:

Table 1
Value category in conservation

| No | Value Category | Description | Sources |
|----|-------------------------|---|-----------------------------------|
| 1 | Ecological Tawhīd | The belief that nature is a manifestation of God's creation that must be respected. | Maftukhin (2017); Irfan AN (2023) |
| 2 | Khalifah and Trust | Humanity is given a spiritual mandate to steward and prosper the Earth. | Irfan AN (2023) |
| 3 | Ethical Taskhīr | Nature is subjected to human use, but governed by ethical limitations. | Irfan AN (2023) |
| 4 | Iṣlāḥ and Anti-Fasād | Calls for environmental repair and the prohibition of ecological destruction. | Irfan AN (2023) |
| 5 | Ḥifẓ al-Bī'ah | Environmental protection as part of the contemporary objectives (maqāṣid) of Islamic law. | Khuluq & Asmuni (2021) |
| 6 | Ecological Spirituality | Faith internalization expressed in ecological practices such as water conservation and frugality. | Maftukhin (2017) |

All relevant narratives in the textbooks were classified according to these categories and analyzed in terms of frequency, mode of presentation (explicit or implicit), and depth of message delivery. The data analysis process followed the Miles and Huberman (1994) model, which includes three stages: data reduction to filter relevant content, data display through tables and thematic descriptions, and drawing interpretive conclusions (Milania & Murniati, 2022). Thematic analysis was applied to identify patterns and tendencies in the representation of conservation values within the textbooks.

To enrich and triangulate the content analysis findings, this study also included a series of Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) to gather interpretive insights from IRE practitioners regarding the conservation values identified in the textbooks. The FGDs were conducted online and involved five IRE lecturers from four different public universities in Indonesia: Universitas Negeri Padang (a teacher-training institution),

Politeknik Negeri Bandung (a vocational institution), Universitas Tadulako (an academic university), and IAIN Manado (an Islamic studies institution). Participants were selected based on having over five years of teaching experience in IRE and active involvement in curriculum development centered on moderation or sustainability. Discussion results were recorded and analyzed using thematic analysis, focusing on confirmations, clarifications, and differing perceptions related to the document analysis.

The FGDs were conducted over two online sessions via Zoom, each lasting approximately 40 minutes. The sessions were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis: data familiarization, initial coding, theme searching, theme reviewing, theme defining, and report writing (Byrne, 2022). From the transcripts, several key themes emerged: (1) the dominance of normative-instructional narratives in IRE textbooks, (2) the absence of explicit emphasis on ecological issues, (3) the need for action-based learning strategies, and (4) the strategic role of lecturers in interpreting implicit values. These themes served to confirm or challenge the earlier document analysis findings and provided additional perspectives for interpretation.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Analysis of Category Distribution Across Chapters

The analysis of two IRE textbooks reveals that ecological conservation values, grounded in the framework of Islamic ecotheology, are distributed across nearly all chapters in both textbooks. However, there are noticeable variations in terms of intensity and depth of distribution across different value categories and chapters. The six categories used in this analysis are derived from the Islamic ecotheological framework: Ecological Tawhīd, Khalīfah and Trust, Ethical Taskhīr, Iṣlāḥ and Anti-Fasād, Ḥifẓ al-Bī'ah, and Ecological Spirituality.

1. Textbook by Kemenristekdikti

The distribution of ecological conservation content in this textbook shows a strong tendency toward chapters discussing science and the environment. The most frequently appearing category is Khalīfah and Trust, followed by Iṣlāḥ and Anti-Fasād. This suggests that the authors consistently emphasize human responsibility for the Earth, while simultaneously warning against ecological degradation through Islamic narratives. On the other hand, the categories of Ḥifẓ al-Bī'ah and Ecological Spirituality appear less frequently and are scattered across chapters, indicating that the integration of environmental maqāṣid and ecological piety into religious consciousness has yet to be fully optimized.

2. Textbook Authored by Dr. Nurhasanah

This textbook presents a more even distribution of conservation values across nearly all chapters, with consistent emphasis on the categories of Khalīfah and Trust and Ecological Tawhīd. Chapter II (The Nature of Human Beings), Chapter IV (Concept of Divinity), and Chapter XV (Islamic Education) are the most densely packed with ecotheological values, both explicitly and implicitly. Notably, this book also weaves

Ecological Spirituality into themes of worship and moral conduct, as seen in Chapter VII (Ethics, Morality, and Character) and Chapter V (Faith and Devotion). This indicates that the value orientation of the book is more transformative, aiming to foster spiritual attitudes that contribute to ecological awareness.

3. Comparative Patterns

Quantitatively and thematically, both textbooks prominently feature two key categories: Khalifah and Trust and Iṣlāḥ and Anti-Fasād, which reflect the Islamic imperative to protect and repair the Earth. However, Dr. Nurhasanah’s textbook demonstrates a more holistic and transformative tendency by embedding conservation values within the context of character development and students’ religious awareness. In contrast, the Kemenristekdikti textbook leans toward a normative-instructional approach, presenting conservation values as moral imperatives within Islam that are more informative in nature but not yet fully directed toward contextualized student action in sustainability practices.

Quantitative Analysis of the Findings

A quantitative analysis was conducted to identify the intensity of ecological conservation value distribution within the IRE textbooks, based on the six core categories outlined in the Islamic ecotheological framework. This data is presented by calculating the frequency of relevant quotations found in each textbook.

1. Total Findings per Textbook

Table 2

Finding per textbook

| No | Textbook | Findings | EksPLICIT | Implicit |
|----|------------------|----------|-----------|----------|
| 1 | Kemenristekdikti | 104 | 32 | 72 |
| 2 | Dr. Nurhasanah | 122 | 52 | 68 |

The data shows that Dr. Nurhasanah’s textbook contains a higher number of conservation-related references compared to the Kemenristekdikti textbook. This difference suggests that Dr. Nurhasanah’s textbook integrates ecotheological values more intensively and extensively throughout its chapters.

2. Distribution of Findings by Category

Tabel 3

Distribution by Category

| No | Ecotheological Value Category | Kemenristekdikti | Dr. Nurhasanah | Total |
|----|-------------------------------|------------------|----------------|-------|
| 1 | Ecological Tawḥīd | 16 | 20 | 36 |
| 2 | Khalifah and Trust | 23 | 24 | 47 |
| 3 | Ethical Taskhīr | 18 | 20 | 38 |
| 4 | Iṣlāḥ and Anti-Fasād | 16 | 20 | 36 |
| 5 | Ḥifẓ al-Bī’ah | 16 | 20 | 36 |
| 6 | Ecological Spirituality | 15 | 18 | 33 |
| | TOTAL | 104 | 122 | 226 |

From the combined total of 226 quotations, Khalifah and Trust dominates with 47 references. This indicates that the narrative of human responsibility as stewards of the Earth is the most prevalent in integrating conservation values into IRE textbooks. This theme consistently appears in discussions surrounding human roles in relation to nature, whether in the context of religious worship, knowledge, or social interaction. The dominance of this value reflects an anthropo-theocentric approach in which humans are positioned as primary agents entrusted to preserve the balance of creation as part of a divine mandate.

The remaining five categories, namely *Ecological Tawhīd*, *Ethical Taskhīr*, *Iṣlāḥ and Anti-Fasād*, *Ḥifẓ al-Bī'ah*, and *Ecological Spirituality*, demonstrate a relatively balanced distribution, ranging between 33 to 38 references. These findings suggest that conservation values are not interpreted narrowly but rather within a broad spectrum: from faith in God as the Creator (Tawhīd), to ethical use of natural resources (Taskhīr), prohibitions against environmental harm (Anti-Fasād), environmental protection as a core objective of Islamic law (Maqāṣid), and spiritual awareness of the natural world as a sign of divine greatness (Spirituality).

This balanced distribution reflects that both textbooks present ecotheological values through a comprehensive and interdisciplinary format, combining theological foundations with ethical praxis. It shows that IRE in higher education is not merely cognitive and normative but also serves as a vehicle for cultivating ecological consciousness within the framework of Islamic spirituality. This approach opens the way for the integration of religious knowledge and environmental concerns in a holistic and transformative manner.

Thus, the findings support the view that IRE has strategic potential as a medium for the internalization of ecological conservation values. The equilibrium between theological and practical values in the distribution indicates that IRE content can evolve into a robust educational tool for sustainability based on faith. Nevertheless, pedagogical reinforcement remains essential to ensure that these values are meaningfully understood and reflected in students' attitudes and behaviors toward environmental issues.

3. Relative Distribution by Category

Table 4
Distribution Percentage

| Ecotheological Value | Percentage (%) |
|-------------------------|----------------|
| Ecological Tawhīd | 15,9% |
| Khalifah and Trust | 20,8% |
| Ethical Taskhīr | 16,8% |
| Iṣlāḥ and Anti-Fasād | 15,9% |
| Ḥifẓ al-Bī'ah | 15,9% |
| Ecological Spirituality | 14,6% |

The data on relative distribution shows that the category of Khalifah and Trust dominates, accounting for 20.8% of the total 226 references. This dominance affirms the central role of humans as God's vicegerents on Earth within the Islamic educational narrative, where ecological responsibility is framed as a spiritual and moral mandate. Meanwhile, the categories of *Ethical Taskhīr* (16.8%), *Ecological Tawhīd* (15.9%), *Iṣlāḥ and Anti-Fasād* (15.9%), and *Ḥifẓ al-Bī'ah* (15.9%) are almost equally distributed, indicating

that conservation values are conveyed in a balanced manner. These values are not limited to a single perspective, but instead encompass elements of faith, ethical use of resources, moral commitment to repair, and the preservation of the environment within the framework of *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*.

On the other hand, Ecological Spirituality appears with the lowest proportion at 14.6%, although its presence remains significant. This suggests that ecological awareness rooted in spiritual depth and a transcendent relationship between humans and nature is still represented in the textbooks, albeit less prominently than other categories. These findings indicate that the narrative of conservation in IRE textbooks encompasses theological, ethical, and spiritual dimensions in a relatively balanced way. This creates opportunities for the development of a curriculum that is not only cognitively informative but also character-building and behavior-transforming in ecological terms.

From this analysis, it is evident that both textbooks demonstrate a commitment to representing environmental conservation values, though with differing styles and depths. The Kemenristekdikti textbook tends toward moderate intensity with broader but less integrated distribution, while Dr. Nurhasanah's textbook shows higher frequency and a more cohesive integration of spiritual and pedagogical dimensions. These findings reinforce the argument that ecological narratives in Islamic Religious Education are not only normatively relevant but are also emerging as strategic theological and pedagogical tools for fostering sustainability awareness among university students.

Analysis of Explicit and Implicit Representations

This section examines how ecological conservation values are conveyed in two IRE textbooks, namely those published by Kemenristekdikti and authored by Dr. Nurhasanah, through two modes of representation: explicit (directly stated) and implicit (indirectly conveyed through context, narrative, or moral values).

1. Total Distribution of Explicit and Implicit Representations

Tabel 5

Total Distributin by Type

| No | Textbook | EksPLICIT | Implicit | TOTAL |
|----|----------------|-----------|------------|------------|
| 1 | Kemristekdikti | 32 | 72 | 104 |
| 2 | Dr. Nurhasanah | 54 | 68 | 122 |
| | | 86 | 140 | 226 |

The data reveal that the majority of conservation values are delivered implicitly. Out of 226 total references, 140 (61.95%) are presented implicitly, while only 86 (38.05%) are explicitly articulated. This indicates that conservation values tend to be embedded within general religious narratives and are rarely framed as direct instructions or thematically focused content.

2. Comparison of Presentation Styles Between Textbooks

The textbook published by Kemenristekdikti emphasizes conceptual narratives that are explicitly presented in specific chapters, especially those related to science and Islamic education, while ecological messages are more often conveyed implicitly through moral teachings, ethical guidance, and discussions of human responsibility toward nature. For example, terms such as "prospering the earth" and "social responsibility" are used in academic discussions on science, which, while relevant to conservation, do not explicitly reference environmental issues.

In contrast, Dr. Nurhasanah’s textbook contains a higher proportion of explicitly stated values (54 references), particularly in chapters discussing Khalifah, morality, and knowledge. However, it also consistently embeds ecological values implicitly through discussions of faith, reason, and human roles. For instance, when discussing human duties as servants and stewards of God, ecological responsibility is implied as part of one's spiritual calling.

3. Distribution of EksPLICIT-ImplICIT Representation by Category

Table 6

Distribution of Presentation Mode by Value Category

| No | Category | KEMRISTEKDIKTI | | Dr. Nurhasanah | |
|-------|-------------------------|----------------|----------|----------------|----------|
| | | EksPLICIT | ImplICIT | EksPLICIT | ImplICIT |
| 1 | Ecological Tawhīd | 8 | 8 | 12 | 8 |
| 2 | Khalifah and Trust | 7 | 16 | 14 | 10 |
| 3 | Ethical Taskhīr | 4 | 14 | 9 | 11 |
| 4 | Iṣlāḥ and Anti-Fasād | 9 | 7 | 9 | 11 |
| 5 | Ḥifẓ al-Bī’ah | 4 | 12 | 5 | 15 |
| 6 | Ecological Spirituality | 0 | 15 | 5 | 13 |
| TOTAL | | 32 | 72 | 54 | 68 |

The table above demonstrates that both textbooks predominantly communicate ecological conservation values implicitly, with 140 of the 226 references conveyed indirectly (72 from Kemenristekdikti and 68 from Dr. Nurhasanah), compared to only 86 that are presented explicitly. This pattern suggests that ecological narratives are more frequently embedded within broader religious discussions, such as those on morality, responsibility, and faith, rather than being addressed directly as environmental topics. The implication is clear: effective pedagogical strategies are required to uncover and interpret these implicit values.

A closer look reveals that Dr. Nurhasanah’s textbook features more explicit references (54) than the Kemenristekdikti textbook (32). This suggests a more intentional effort to directly embed ecological values, particularly in categories such as Ecological Tawhīd (12 explicit references), Khalifah and Trust (14), and Ecological Spirituality (13 implicit references). In contrast, the Kemenristekdikti textbook relies more heavily on implicit delivery, especially in categories like Ethical Taskhīr and Ecological Spirituality, which are entirely conveyed through indirect narratives.

The dominant use of implicit representation has significant implications for the teaching and learning process. If ecological values are not explicitly highlighted, their interpretation becomes highly dependent on the instructor’s ability to extract, contextualize, and communicate them. Without a critical approach, students may fail to recognize the ecological messages embedded in the text. Therefore, it is essential to design pedagogical strategies that bring these implicit values to the surface, whether through thematic interpretation, value analysis, or contextual problem-based learning.

Discussion

Integrating Ecological Conservation Values into Islamic Education

Ecological conservation values have been integrated into the narrative of Islamic education in higher education, not merely as complementary content, but as a substantive component of Islamic epistemology. The six primary categories in Islamic

ecothology are reflected in IRE textbooks through both explicit and implicit forms. These narratives reinforce the Islamic vision of humans as guardians of the Earth, entrusted with a divine mandate to reform (islāḥ) rather than to corrupt (fasād) it. As Irfan Abu Nazar asserts, the Qur'anic concept of khalīfah fī al-arḍ forms the spiritual core of sustainable development. (Nazar et al., 2023).

This narrative is built upon a theological foundation integrated with scientific reasoning. Maftukhin emphasized the need for epistemological and ontological integration between religion and science, as modeled by thinkers such as Muhammad Iqbal and Said Nursi (Maftukhin, 2017). Their approach encourages Islamic education to go beyond the transmission of doctrinal belief and instead cultivate ecological responsibility as an expression of divine values that are active, creative, and moral. This enriches IRE with reflective dimensions that are increasingly relevant to contemporary challenges.

In practice, conservation values such as mahabbah (love), iḥsān (benevolence), and qanā'ah (contentment) have already been introduced in school curricula not only through religious education but also science subjects, particularly via project-based learning and hands-on experiments (Zabidi et al., 2021). At the university level, institutions like Telkom University have begun to integrate environmental protection into IRE instruction, although this dimension has not yet become dominant (Nasrudin et al., 2025). These developments signal a pedagogical shift toward an Islamic education that is more responsive to sustainability concerns.

Moreover, in a time when environmental degradation is escalating, there is a growing call to categorize Ḥifẓ al-Bī'ah (environmental preservation) within the ḍarūriyyāt tier of maqāṣid al-sharī'ah, as ecological threats now endanger the very foundations of religion, life, intellect, lineage, and wealth (Khuluq & Asmuni, 2025). This argument strengthens both the theological and normative legitimacy of integrating ecological awareness into Islamic education. By positioning environmental stewardship as a core objective of Islamic law, the educational narrative acquires a strong spiritual and juridical foundation for shaping students' ecotheological character.

Ultimately, this integration forms a unified narrative and pedagogical approach in which environmental conservation is not merely a matter of personal morality, but a collective mandate for Earth stewardship. Islamic education holds great potential to become a pillar of ecological transformation through its theological, ethical, and practical dimensions. Through curricula that unite the teachings of tawḥīd, maqāṣid, and sustainability, students are not only nurtured as faithful individuals but also as change agents who are ethically and ecologically responsible stewards of the planet and caretakers of humanity's shared future.

The Dominance of the "Khalīfah and Trust" Narrative: A Symbol of Human Responsibility

Among the six categories of ecological conservation values analyzed in the two IRE textbooks, Khalīfah and Trust emerged as the most dominant, accounting for 47 out of 226 total references (20.8%). This finding highlights the centrality of the human role as leader and divine trustee of nature in shaping Muslim students' ecological awareness. This value encompasses two key dimensions: the ontological responsibility of humans as God's vicegerents on Earth (khalīfah fī al-arḍ), and the ethical-prophetic mandate to safeguard creation as an expression of servitude to God. This narrative is reinforced by the theological view that humans are active moral agents charged with sustaining the earth through the principle of islāḥ (restoration) and avoiding fasād (corruption) (Nazar

et al., 2023). Within the Qur'anic ecotheological framework, humans are positioned as divine partners in building ecological civilization.

Further analysis reveals differing styles of representation between the two textbooks. Dr. Nurhasanah's textbook presents this value explicitly, embedding the concepts of khalifah and amānah directly within instructional content. By contrast, the Kemenristekdikti textbook conveys these values implicitly, embedding them within broader themes such as work ethics, social justice, and Islamic personality development. Despite the stylistic differences, both books show that Khalifah and Trust is consistently integrated into diverse teaching contexts.

The dominance of this narrative also serves as a pivotal entry point for the development of students' ecological character. The role of the khalifah not only teaches responsible environmental management, but also cultivates the spiritual awareness that protecting the earth is a form of faith and moral obligation. Ecological stewardship thus becomes an extension of piety that transcends ritual observance, manifesting in daily ethical conduct within both natural and social environments. In the midst of global ecological crises, this role is increasingly vital as a foundation for shaping public ethics among Muslim students.

In conclusion, the "Khalifah and Trust" narrative is not only the most statistically prominent but also theologically and pedagogically foundational. It serves as an ethical compass that guides Muslim students in understanding their roles amid the complexities of the modern world. More than doctrine, this value forms the core of prophetic ecological piety, which encourages students to become believers who are responsible, spiritually conscious, and committed to sustaining life for all.

Ecological Spirituality: A Weakness or a Transformative Potential?

In this study, Ecological Spirituality holds the lowest representation among the six ecotheological categories, comprising only 14.6% of the combined references. This statistic raises a critical question: does this low proportion reflect a lack of pedagogical emphasis on the spiritual dimension of environmental awareness in IRE, or does it point to an untapped transformative potential? Given that spirituality constitutes the deepest foundation of consciousness in Islam, this underrepresentation suggests a lack of pedagogical strategies that explicitly elevate the transcendent dimension as the core of ecological responsibility.

In its essence, spirituality in Islam is not limited to ritual worship but embodies an existential relationship between humans and the universe as God's creation. The thought of Muhammad Iqbal and Said Nursi emphasizes that authentic faith inspires active engagement in sustaining the harmony of creation. Nursi, for instance, regarded nature as a divine book to be read spiritually rather than merely conquered technically. Thus, Islamic education must move beyond the mere transmission of teachings to become a space for consciousness transformation (Maftukhin, 2017).

Unfortunately, ecological spirituality is often only implied and rarely highlighted in direct connection with environmental preservation. While Dr. Nurhasanah's textbook includes discussions of ritual practices such as ablution, cleanliness, and modesty, these are not explicitly linked to ecological responsibility as a form of spiritual devotion. Meanwhile, the Kemenristekdikti textbook devotes little to no dedicated space for spiritual reflection on nature, allowing the ecological aspect of spirituality to remain submerged within general moral discourse, which fails to engage students' affective and existential realms.

The spiritual dimension, especially in terms of *ihsān* (excellence) and *taṣawwuf* (Sufism), holds a key position in Islamic ecotheology, yet it remains the least explored in formal educational practice. In reality, this aspect could be a powerful lever for transformation, as it resonates with the inner awareness that motivates humans to do good to all of creation as an act of devotion to Allah. Ecological *taṣawwuf*, which promotes values like *zuhd* (asceticism), *shukr* (gratitude), and *raḥmah* (compassion toward living beings), is deeply relevant in shaping a spiritually grounded ecological character (Zulkifli et al., 2023).

This aligns with critiques that IRE often remains overly focused on cognitive and normative dimensions, while affective and reflective spiritual aspects are largely neglected. A proposed alternative is a spiritual experience-based learning model that fosters an inner connection between humans and nature through contemplative worship (*tafakkur*), reflective rituals, and engagement with *kauniyah* verses (signs of God in nature). This strategy is believed to be more effective in cultivating ecological awareness derived from divine consciousness rather than merely moral or social obligation (Susilawati Sj et al., 2021).

Therefore, the limited presence of Ecological Spirituality in IRE materials is not merely a shortcoming but also a signal of immense transformative potential, provided that it is properly harnessed. Islamic education must develop pedagogical strategies that make the spiritual dimension of ecology explicit. Reflective, integrative, and transformative learning models may offer a solution to elevate this value from an implicit discourse into an active driving force for behavioral change and ecological consciousness among students.

Implications of Explicit vs. Implicit Presentation Styles

The differing presentation styles of ecological conservation values in the two IRE textbooks under study carry significant implications for instructional effectiveness. The Kemenristekdikti textbook tends toward a normative-instructional approach, characterized by a predominantly implicit delivery style (72 out of 104 references). In contrast, Dr. Nurhasanah's textbook exhibits a transformative-reflective character, with a higher proportion of explicit representations (54 out of 122 references), particularly within the categories of Ecological Tawḥīd and Khalifah and Trust. The tendency toward implicit delivery poses a risk of students' limited understanding if not accompanied by pedagogical strategies that can unpack and enliven these latent meanings.

The explicit style found in Dr. Nurhasanah's textbook enables students to immediately recognize ecological values as integral to Islamic teachings. For instance, in chapters discussing the human role as *khalifah*, the book presents environmental narratives as concrete appeals for action, not merely moral concepts. Conversely, in the Kemenristekdikti textbook, conservation values are often embedded within broader academic-religious discourse, such as discussions on science and social responsibility, without directly referencing environmental preservation. This underscores the urgent need for pedagogical reinforcement so that implicit values can be comprehensively understood and meaningfully internalized.

In this context, the role of the lecturer becomes crucial. Instructors are not merely transmitters of content but interpreters of values. They are expected to extract ecological messages embedded in religious texts and relate them to contemporary issues. This process must be grounded in contextual pedagogy, wherein conservation is presented

not as an abstract discourse but as a lived ethical and spiritual practice relevant to students' real-world experiences.

This point is supported by research which reveals that the integration of sustainability values into IRE has not yet been fully optimized due to predominantly textual and cognitive teaching approaches (Nasrudin et al., 2025). It underscores the need for pedagogical transformation so that environmental values are internalized through value-based, action-oriented learning projects. Similarly, Parhan (2024) promotes a higher-order thinking pedagogy that combines logic, emotion, and socio-ecological contextualization within the framework of Society 5.0 (Parhan et al., 2024).

Zabidi et al. (2021) also contribute by demonstrating that Islamic conservation values can be integrated across disciplines, including science and character education textbooks in Malaysia (Zabidi et al., 2021). This model enables students to bridge theological narratives with ecological practices more widely and practically, especially when supported by project-based or experiential learning strategies. From the perspective of Irfan Abu Nazar, conservation values such as *taskhīr* and *iṣlāḥ* hold little meaning without contextual and applicable interpretation. He emphasizes the importance of value exegesis (*tafsīr qiyam*), not merely at the linguistic level but as spiritual and social acts reflecting the divine mandate of humans toward the Earth (Nazar et al., 2023). Therefore, the success of ecological education in the IRE context depends heavily on the lecturer's ability to bridge text and context, narrative and praxis, value and action.

These insights are echoed by the FGD participants, who consistently noted that most IRE textbooks tend to present conservation values normatively and concealed within general Islamic ethical narratives. One discussant from Polban stated, "Students often don't realize that discussions on proper conduct toward nature are environmental issues. They think it's just standard Islamic ethics." This statement clarifies how the dominance of implicit presentation may obscure the educational objectives of conservation, unless these objectives are actively brought to light by lecturers through contextualized methods. Furthermore, if the goal is to raise awareness of ecological issues, the majority of lecturers in the FGD suggested revising instructional materials to include dedicated sections that explicitly address ecological themes. This would ensure that sustainability messages are more easily recognized and understood by students from diverse academic and cultural backgrounds.

Pedagogical Recommendations: Ecotheological-Based Learning Strategies

To conclude this analysis, it is crucial to propose practical and strategic recommendations to address the insufficient integration of ecological conservation values, particularly the dimension of ecological spirituality, within Islamic Religious Education (IRE) at the higher education level. An ecotheological approach in Islamic education must move beyond conceptual narrative and evolve into concrete pedagogical strategies that engage the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor dimensions of student learning.

First, we recommend the use of thematic ecological *tafsīr* modules, which involve the development of learning materials based on *āyāt kauniyyah* (natural signs) and the Qur'an's macro-ecological narratives through a thematic interpretation approach (*tafsīr mawḍū'ī*). These modules not only interpret Qur'anic verses about nature but also encourage students to reflect on the interconnectedness of *tawḥīd* (oneness), *khalifah* (stewardship), and sustainability. Lecturers can employ value-based hermeneutics to

guide students in understanding Qur'anic ecological messages in context, integrating current environmental case studies as material for spiritual reflection (*tafakkur*).

Second, implementing Project-Based Learning (PBL) grounded in ecotheology is a highly recommended strategy. Through this approach, students move beyond theoretical knowledge and engage in real-world projects that connect IRE values with environmental conservation efforts. Examples include: campus waste audits guided by Islamic principles, digital campaigns on "Islam and Zero Waste," or revitalizing green spaces in Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*). This model offers experiential learning that synthesizes faith, knowledge, and action.

Third, we advocate for the development of interdisciplinary studies between IRE and environmental sciences. This may involve collaboration across academic programs or courses, such as integrating IRE with Social Ecology, Environmental Ethics, or Green Entrepreneurship. These cross-disciplinary efforts broaden students' perspectives and reinforce the notion that Islam is not confined to spiritual life but also permeates resource management, public policy, and daily ecological behavior. Such collaboration creates space for dialogue between Islamic epistemology and modern science under a unified sustainability framework.

Fourth, there is a pressing need to restructure learning outcome assessments to reflect ecological spirituality, not only in terms of theoretical understanding but also in the internalization of values and behavioral change. Assessments may include reflective journals that capture students' post-learning ecological awareness, observation rubrics for environmentally conscious worship practices, and evaluations of student participation in religiously based conservation projects. These alternative assessments help gauge the extent to which the learning process touches students' affective and transformative domains.

All these strategies rest on the core assumption that IRE is not merely about the transmission of knowledge, but about the transformation of consciousness. Ecotheological learning demands synergy between the sacred text and the lived context of the Earth, bridging the inspiration of revelation with the reality of the ecological crisis. In this endeavor, the lecturer acts as both spiritual and intellectual facilitator, responsible for building bridges between the sky and the soil, between heaven and Earth, within the classroom. Through the implementation of these strategies, Islamic Religious Education can become a catalyst for ecological transformation, producing graduates who are not only personally pious, but also ecologically and socially responsible stewards of the Earth under the guidance of *tawhīd*.

To further illustrate the interpretive patterns discussed above, the following chart presents the overall distribution of ecotheological values across the two IRE textbooks analyzed. The visualization shows the number of references assigned to each of the six key categories: Ecological *Tawhīd*, *Khalīfah* and Trust, Ethical *Taskhīr*, *Iṣlāh* and Anti-Fasād, *Ḥifẓ al-Bī'ah*, and Ecological Spirituality. This distribution not only reinforces the narrative dominance of *Khalīfah* and Trust but also makes visible the underrepresentation of Ecological Spirituality, which appears least frequently among the categories.

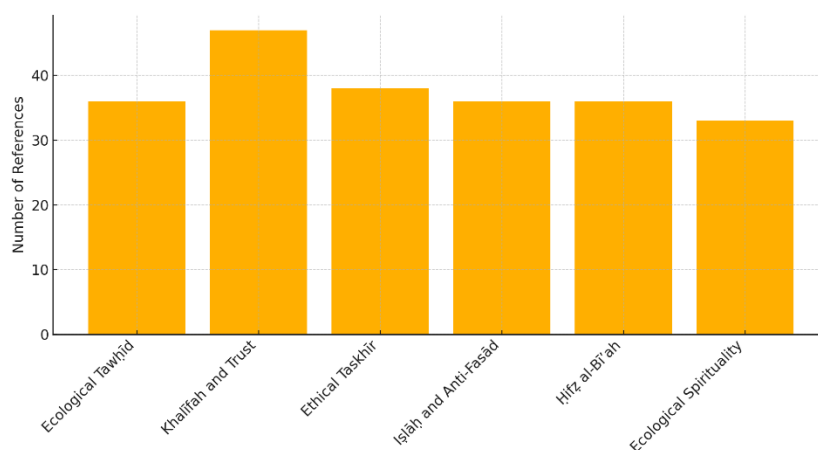


Figure 1 Distribution of Ecotheological Values in IRE Textbooks.

Taken together, the findings of this study reveal several critical insights that contribute both theoretically and pedagogically to the development of IRE textbooks in higher education. First, the dominance of the Khalifah and Trust narrative confirms its central role in shaping the ecological consciousness of students through theological and moral imperatives. Second, the minimal representation of Ecological Spirituality, points to a significant pedagogical gap and highlights the need to reframe environmental ethics as part of students' spiritual formation. Third, the strong tendency toward implicit value delivery across both textbooks suggests that instructors must play an active interpretive role to ensure ecological messages are fully internalized. Finally, this study offers an original contribution by applying the Islamic ecotheology framework as both an analytical and pedagogical lens, an approach rarely explored in current Islamic education literature.

These insights not only address key gaps in sustainability education within IRE, but also open new directions for curriculum innovation grounded in spiritual and theological values.

CONCLUSION

This study finds that ecological conservation values in IRE textbooks at the higher education level are predominantly presented implicitly, embedded within ethical and moral Islamic narratives without explicit reference to environmental issues. The most striking finding is the low articulation of ecological spirituality, despite the dominance of the Khalifah and Trust category. The fact that over 60% of conservation-related content appears in implicit form suggests that, although these values are embedded in the text, their meaning and relevance rely heavily on the interpretive capacity of educators. This signals an epistemological gap that may hinder the transformative internalization of conservation values.

This research contributes to the enrichment of Islamic education discourse by employing Islamic ecotheology as an analytical lens for analyzing textbook content. In doing so, it not only confirms the presence of sustainability values within the IRE curriculum but also critiques the dominance of normative-instructional approaches, which fall short of fostering ecological awareness at the level of transformative learning. The inclusion of interpretive dimensions through Focus Group Discussion (FGD) triangulation strengthens the argument that explicit and contextual pedagogical strategies are essential for moving conservation values beyond cognitive domains into axiological awareness and ecopedagogical praxis.

Despite yielding significant findings, this study has certain limitations in scope and data coverage. The analysis is confined to two IRE textbooks used in higher education, with FGD participation limited to five lecturers from three institutions. As such, the generalizability of these results remains limited. Future research is encouraged to include a wider variety of textbooks from multiple educational levels and institutional settings, and to involve other stakeholders such as students, curriculum designers, and policymakers. With a multidimensional approach, more effective strategies can be developed for integrating conservation values into Islamic education that truly impact curriculum transformation for sustainability.

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