

Integrating Ecotheology and Participatory Learning to Foster Students' Ecological Awareness

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Abstract. *This study examines the internalization of Islamic ecotheological values through participatory learning at Madrasah Tsanawiyah Sunan Pandanaran Yogyakarta. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, this study explores how theological principles are transformed into ecological awareness and behavior. The results show that Islamic ecotheology functions as an ontological foundation that reconstructs students' paradigms from an anthropocentric theological perspective to an ecocentric one. Pedagogical strategies that include contextual reinterpretation, integration of cosmic empathy, and prophetic examples (uswah) serve as tools for deep internalization, changing students' motivation from extrinsic obedience to autonomous spiritual trust (amanah). Furthermore, this study identifies participatory learning as a crucial pedagogical mediation to bridge the gap between values and actions. By involving students in reflective dialogue and collective ecological projects, schools successfully fostered a stable and autonomous ecological habitus. This discussion synthesizes these findings with transformative learning theory, highlighting that the eschatological spiritual dimension provides a more sustainable basis for environmental preservation than a purely technical approach. This study contributes a conceptual model for integrating spiritual values into practical ecological action, offering a transformative framework for Islamic religious education in response to the contemporary environmental crisis.*

Keywords: *Islamic Ecotheology; Internalization; Participatory Learning; Transformative Pedagogy; Value Action Gap.*

Abstrak. Penelitian ini mengkaji internalisasi nilai-nilai ekoteologi Islam melalui pembelajaran partisipatif di Madrasah Tsanawiyah Sunan Pandanaran Yogyakarta. Dengan pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif, penelitian ini mengeksplorasi bagaimana prinsip-prinsip teologis diubah menjadi kesadaran dan perilaku ekologis. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa ekoteologi Islam berfungsi sebagai landasan ontologis yang merekonstruksi paradigma siswa dari perspektif teologis antroposentris menjadi ekosentris. Strategi pedagogis yang meliputi reinterpretasi kontekstual, integrasi empati kosmis, dan teladan nabi (*uswah*) berfungsi sebagai alat untuk internalisasi yang mendalam, mengubah motivasi siswa dari kepatuhan ekstrinsik menjadi kepercayaan spiritual yang otonom (*amanah*). Selain itu, penelitian ini mengidentifikasi pembelajaran partisipatif sebagai mediasi pedagogis yang krusial untuk menjembatani kesenjangan antara nilai dan tindakan. Dengan melibatkan siswa dalam dialog reflektif dan proyek ekologi kolektif, sekolah berhasil menumbuhkan habitus ekologi yang stabil dan otonom. Pembahasan ini mensintesis temuan-temuan tersebut dengan teori pembelajaran transformatif, menyoroti bahwa dimensi spiritual eskatologis menyediakan dasar motivasi yang lebih berkelanjutan untuk pelestarian lingkungan daripada pendekatan teknis semata. Penelitian ini menyumbangkan model konseptual untuk mengintegrasikan nilai-nilai spiritual ke dalam tindakan ekologi

praktis, menawarkan kerangka kerja transformatif untuk pendidikan agama Islam dalam menanggapi krisis lingkungan kontemporer.

Kata kunci: Ekoteologi Islam; Internalisasi; Pembelajaran Partisipatif; Pedagogi Transformatif; Kesenjangan Nilai Aksi.

A. INTRODUCTION

Islam places environmental protection as part of religious practice, with nature understood as a sign of God that demands ethical responsibility from humans as *khalifah fi al-ardh* (Issn et al., 2024). The principles of *tawhid*, *khalifah*, and *akhirah* form the theological basis of environmental ethics in Islam, but in the context of education, these values often remain at the cognitive and normative levels (Fathurahman et al., 2021; Simanjuntak et al., 2023). Religious education tends to emphasize mastery of concepts and texts, while space for reflection, direct experience, and real ecological practices is still limited. This condition causes a knowledge action gap, which is the gap between students' theological understanding and their ecological behavior in daily life (Rahmadani et al., 2024). Thus, the main problem is not the absence of ecotheological values, but rather the weakness of pedagogical strategies that can internalize these values into sustainable ecological attitudes and actions.

Although the Qur'an and Hadith provide a clear normative framework regarding human responsibility towards the environment such as the concept of human ecological leadership (*khalifah*) and the prohibition of damaging nature (Khasani, 2025b, 2025a), these values are often conveyed in educational practice as declarative knowledge divorced from the context of action. As a result, the cognitive transmission of ecotheological values does not automatically result in changes in the ecological behavior of students. This issue points to a pedagogical failure, not a moral contradiction in Islamic teachings. Religious learning tends to stop at explaining texts and their normative meanings, without accompanying learning strategies that enable students to reflect on, experience, and practice these ecotheological values in their daily lives (Hamilton & Marckini-polk, 2023). It is this lack of participatory space that widens the gap between students' theological understanding and ecological behavior, necessitating a pedagogical approach that is deliberately designed to bridge the transformation of values into concrete ecological actions (Madina, 2021; M.Thoyyib, et.al., 2016).

However, The effectiveness of Islamic education in shaping the ecological character of students cannot depend solely on textual understanding and the transmission of normative knowledge (Anggraini.G et, 2022). Although modern Islamic educational institutions have integrated digital technology to enrich learning resources and access to information, this digital integration serves as a complementary tool, not the main determinant of value transformation (Shahida, 2023). The main challenge lies in the stages of internalization and praxis, where religious values have not been fully mediated into concrete ecological behavior (Rohmah, 2024). This condition confirms that mastery of religious knowledge whether through conventional or technology based approaches does not automatically encourage environmental awareness and action among students (Africa & Ramirez, 2024; Gitmiwati, 2024).

In this context, participatory learning is positioned as a pedagogical mediation mechanism that bridges theological knowledge and ecological action (Molina-motos, 2019). Unlike traditional approaches that are one way and focus on memorization, participatory learning activates students as subjects of learning through a process of reflection, dialogue, and decision-making based on religious values (Dancis et al., 2023; Heid et al., 2008). Through involvement in critical discussions, solving environmental problems at school, and collective action, ecotheological values are not only understood cognitively but also

mediated through contextual learning experiences (Quay et al., 2020). This pedagogical mediation process enables a deeper internalization of values, thereby potentially shaping students' ecological awareness and behavior in a sustainable manner (Vega et al., 2024).

Participatory learning in eco-theology education works through stages of value internalization that include cognitive understanding, affective appreciation, and psychomotor manifestation in real actions, as described in the value internalization model that emphasizes the interconnection between knowledge, attitudes, and behavior (Goga et al., 2023; Laksono et al., 2022). Through the active involvement of students in the learning process, the role of teachers shifts from information deliverers to facilitators who mediate the process of constructing environmental awareness as part of religious practice and moral responsibility (Ulfan & Hasan, 2023; Zeng et al., 2024).

Within this framework, participatory learning provides a pedagogical space that allows the environmental curriculum to be practiced repeatedly in the context of school life (Bulić, 2024). This practice serves as a habit forming mechanism that supports the transition of values from the level of understanding to relatively stable ecological attitudes and actions (Qi, 2025; Rakhmat, 2022; Siregar et al., 2024). With the availability of participatory space, the process of internalizing values takes place gradually without relying on external control, so that theological values regarding nature conservation can be interpreted and realized reflectively in the daily activities of students (Faizah et al., 2023; Sunarya & Darmawan, 2018).

A number of previous studies have shown a strong focus on environmental education, but they still have significant limitations, particularly in three main aspects. First, the religious spiritual dimension is often treated normatively and has not been explored in depth as a theoretical basis for the formation of ecological awareness. Second, participatory learning practices are rarely analyzed as pedagogical mechanisms that systematically mediate the transformation of religious values into ecological behavior. Third, studies integrating Islamic ecotheology with participatory learning practices still lack support from a structured conceptual framework based on empirical analysis. These limitations open up space for this study to formulate a conceptual framework that integrates Islamic ecotheological values with a participatory learning approach in an effort to build ecological awareness among students.

Based on this framework, this study conceptually aims to analyze: (1) the position and role of Islamic ecotheology in shaping students' ecological awareness; (2) pedagogical strategies for utilizing ecotheology as a foundation for learning in the process of internalizing ecological values; and (3) the relationship between participatory learning and the effectiveness of internalizing ecotheological values. The integration of these three aspects is expected to contribute conceptually to the development of ecotheology studies in Islamic education, particularly through the formulation of a participatory learning-based value internalization model, as well as offering pedagogical implications for learning innovations that emphasize strengthening the spiritual dimension in responding to the environmental crisis.

B. RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach within an instrumental case study framework to examine the internalization of ecotheological values through participatory learning methods in Islamic education (Rashid et al., 2019). The research was conducted at MTs Sunan Pandanaran, Sleman, Yogyakarta, which was purposively selected due to its application of participatory learning practices within an Al-Qur'an Hadith curriculum that incorporates environmental themes. A qualitative approach was adopted to trace the process of internalization analytically by exploring meanings, interactions, and learning experiences of the research subjects as they engage in participatory classroom

activities (Antonia et al., 2023; Chowdhury & Shil, 2021). Through this design, the study systematically examines how ecotheological values are interpreted, enacted, and gradually formed into students' ecological awareness based on actual pedagogical practices in the field, while the researcher actively engaged in the learning context and employed reflexive practices to critically examine assumptions, interactions, and emerging interpretations.

The data sources in this study consist of primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained through the participation of 30 eighth grade students, with the number of participants determined based on data saturation, indicated by the recurrence of similar themes and the absence of new analytical insights during data collection. The students were purposively selected based on their cognitive maturity and relatively stable learning experiences, which enabled an indepth exploration of ecological awareness. In addition, Al-Qur'an Hadith teachers (two teachers) were involved as key informants and were selected based on their direct engagement in implementing participatory learning practices related to ecotheological content. Secondary data were collected through documentation studies, including syllabi, lesson plans (RPP), records of school environmental programs and activities, and relevant literature on ecotheology and participatory learning. To ensure ethical research conduct, informed consent was obtained from all participants, and anonymity was maintained throughout the research process. The integration of these data sources strengthened contextual understanding and enhanced the depth of the analysis.

To obtain credible and comprehensive data, this study used three main data collection techniques, namely participatory observation, in depth interviews, and documentation studies. Participatory observation was conducted to directly observe the participatory based Al-Qur'an Hadith learning process and the ecological behavior of students in their daily activities in the school environment. (Handayani et al., 2020). In depth interviews were conducted with students and teachers to explore their perceptions, motivations, and personal reflections on the internalization of theological values regarding the environment in learning practices (Faozi & Purwanto, 2024). In addition, documentation studies are used to examine curriculum policy and implementation, including syllabi, lesson plans, and records of school environmental activities related to the application of ecotheology. (Chin et al., 2023). The use of these three techniques enables data triangulation, thereby increasing the validity and depth of research findings.

The data analysis in this study followed the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, consisting of iterative cycles of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction began with open coding of field notes, interview transcripts, and documents. These initial codes were then clustered into preliminary categories based on conceptual similarity and continuously compared across data sources. Through this constant comparative process, the categories were refined and consolidated into analytical themes that represent patterns of ecotheological values and participatory learning practices. Data display was conducted using thematic narratives and analytic matrices to examine relationships among themes and to support systematic interpretation. Conclusions were developed progressively by comparing emerging themes with the original data and revisiting earlier analytical decisions.

To enhance trustworthiness, source and method triangulation were applied by cross checking data from students, teachers, and relevant documents. Member checking was conducted by sharing preliminary thematic summaries with selected participants, who were asked to confirm the accuracy and relevance of the interpretations based on their experiences. These methodological steps ensured that the identified relationship between participatory learning practices and the internalization of ecotheological values was derived from transparent and verifiable analytical procedures.

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. The Position and Role of Islamic Ecotheology in Shaping Students' Ecological Awareness

Research findings indicate that Islamic ecotheology serves as an ontological foundation that reconstructs students' paradigms from an anthropocentric view to an ecocentric theological one. Cognitively, there is a shift from the perception of nature as an object of exploitation to a structured understanding of *khalifah fi al-arḍ* as the holder of a moral mandate from the Creator (Munn, 2002).

Table 1. Typology of Students' Ecotheological Internalization

Domain	Internalization Level	Key Characteristics of Change	Evidence from Observations & Interviews
Cognitive	Conceptual Awareness	A shift from fragmented, anthropocentric knowledge toward a structured, ecocentric awareness based on Qur'anic principles.	Students can articulate the concept of <i>khalifah</i> as a responsibility to protect, not to dominate.
Affective	Value Internalization	Transformation from extrinsic motivation (compliance with rules) to intrinsic spiritual trust (<i>amanah</i>).	Emergence of "cosmic empathy" feeling a sense of religious guilt when witnessing environmental damage.
Psychomotor	Stable Habitus	Environmentally friendly behavior becomes an automatic, stable, and autonomous habit without constant supervision.	Spontaneous actions such as waste sorting and water conservation integrated into daily religious routines.

The background to this shift is rooted in the integration of the doctrine of monotheism, which views nature as a sacred entity, not merely a commodity. The logical consequence of this repositioning is the emergence of an ecological religious identity in which the destruction of nature is considered a denial of spiritual values. This is in line with the argument (Nasr, 2016) that the global ecological crisis is actually a manifestation of the spiritual crisis of modern humanity. Compared to contemporary issues regarding secular environmentalism, ecotheology provides a more transcendent and sustainable basis for motivation because it stems from eschatological beliefs (Kaufmann et al., 2025).

2. Pedagogical Strategies: Utilizing Ecotheology as a Foundation for Internalizing Values

The pedagogical strategy in this madrasah goes beyond the simple transfer of knowledge; rather, it serves as an instrument of consciousness transformation through three main pillars:

a. Contextual Reinterpretation:

Teachers linked ecological verses to the reality of the school environment to trigger a deconstruction of mindsets. One teacher stated:

"Kami mengajarkan ekologi sebagai bagian dari tauhid. Menghancurkan alam berarti merusak tanda-tanda kebesaran Allah.

(We teach ecology as part of Tawhid. Destroying nature means destroying the signs of Allah's greatness.)" (Interview, October 17, 2025).

This is in line with the principle of transformative learning, which emphasizes revising one's frame of reference to become more reflective. (Grainger, 2015)

b. Cosmic Empathy Integration:

Deep reflection on environmental damage transforms extrinsic compliance into intrinsic spiritual responsibility. One student in an interview revealed a shift in his perception:

"Dahulu, saya beranggapan menjaga tanaman hanya urusan petugas kebersihan, melalui diskusi ayat tentang lingkungan, saya menyadari ini adalah cerminan iman saya. (Previously, I thought that taking care of plants was only the responsibility of the janitor, but through discussing verses about the environment, I realized that this is a reflection of my faith.)" (Interview, October 15, 2025).

c. Habituation Through Exemplary Behaviour (Uswah):

The integration of theological values and daily practices creates deep internalization. This strategy is effective in shaping stable and autonomous behavior rooted in students' self identity, as in the concept of habitus, which emphasizes spontaneously internalized actions. (Neolaka et al., 2022).

This strategy is motivated by the need for a religious education model that is not merely normative and textual. As a result, schools no longer need a strict monitoring system (punishment/reward) because values have been internalized into character. In the context of contemporary pedagogy, this strategy supports Grainger's (2015) theory of Transformative Learning, which emphasizes that lasting behavioral change only occurs when there is critical reflection on old values that have been deconstructed.

3. The Relationship Between Participatory Learning and the Effectiveness of Internalization

Participatory learning was found to have a strong causal relationship with the depth of internalization of values through direct experience. Active involvement in ecological projects triggers a change in mindset where students view nature as a spiritual entity that must be preserved. This effectiveness is reflected in the psychomotor domain in the form of autonomous ecological habituation. This differs from previous studies which often report a value action gap where strong religious understanding is not directly proportional to actual behavior. (Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2010).

This study indicates that participatory methods encourage environmentally friendly behavior to emerge spontaneously. Dialogical spaces and concrete actions serve as catalysts that transform normative knowledge into transformative ecological literacy, while also breaking down barriers (gaps) between theological understanding and practical application.

D. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Islamic ecotheology in madrasahs not only serves as normative material, but also functions as an ontological foundation that reconstructs students' ecological awareness from an anthropocentric paradigm to an ecocentric theological one. Through a qualitative lens, it was found that this transformation occurs when the values of *tawhid* and *khalifah* are no longer understood as static texts, but as a moral compass that underlies students' religious identity. The integration of pedagogical

strategies that include contextual reinterpretation, cosmic empathy, and exemplary behavior (*uswah*) enables deep internalization, where responsibility for the environment is interpreted as a manifestation of autonomous faith.

The results of the analysis show a close relationship between the application of participatory learning and the effectiveness of forming ecological habitus. This study shows that participatory spaces function as crucial pedagogical mediators. The active involvement of students in dialogue and concrete action acts as a catalyst that bridges the knowledge-action gap, transforming declarative knowledge into reflective life experiences. Thus, spontaneous environmentally friendly behavior is the result of a dialectical process between theological understanding and consistent field practice.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the development of a Transformative Ecological Literacy model in Islamic education. These findings offer an alternative to conventional environmental education approaches that tend to be technical and secular, by proving that spiritual eschatological dimensions can provide a more sustainable basis for motivation. This contribution reinforces the urgency of repositioning a prophetic values based curriculum that emphasizes participatory experiences as the main strategy for addressing the global ecological crisis through theology based character education.

This study is limited to a single qualitative case, so its findings reflect a specific institutional and pedagogical context and cannot be generalized broadly. The focus on qualitative interpretation also prioritizes depth of internalization processes over longitudinal measurement of behavioral change. Future research may employ comparative or mixed-method designs across different Islamic educational settings to examine the sustainability of ecological habitus and to further refine the integration of ecotheological values and participatory learning in Islamic education.

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