

# The Role of Islamic Education in Sustainable Development and Ecology (SDGs)

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## ABSTRACT

This study explores the pivotal role of Islamic education in promoting sustainable development and ecological awareness in alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Islamic teachings emphasize the principles of stewardship (khalifah fil-ardh), justice (adl), and balance (mizan), which resonate with contemporary sustainability concepts. By integrating these values into educational curricula, Islamic education can foster environmental ethics, responsible resource management, and social welfare. This paper highlights how Islamic educational institutions, including schools and universities, contribute to sustainability through curriculum design, green campus initiatives, and community engagement programs. Furthermore, the study examines the challenges and opportunities in embedding sustainability principles within Islamic pedagogy, emphasizing innovative approaches such as eco-pesantren, project-based learning, and digital platforms for environmental campaigns. The findings underscore that Islamic education not only supports moral and spiritual development but also plays a strategic role in shaping environmentally conscious generations who contribute to achieving global sustainability targets.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Sustainable development has become a global issue that has received serious attention in the 21st century. The United Nations (UN) formulated the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as a shared agenda to achieve human well-being, social justice, and environmental sustainability (Aisi, Susanto, & Isa, 2025; Kushnir & Nunes, 2022). The SDGs encompass 17 strategic goals, ranging from poverty alleviation and quality education to action on climate change. In this context, education plays a vital role in shaping public awareness and behavior toward sustainability. Education is not merely the transfer of knowledge but also the formation of character, enabling humans to live in harmony with nature (Mujahid, 2021; Qomarudin & Zuhri, 2025). Indonesia, as the world's most populous Muslim country, has a moral and strategic responsibility to support the

achievement of the SDGs. However, reality shows that environmental damage, overexploitation of natural resources, and social injustice persist. Floods, forest fires, pollution, and land degradation are evidence that public ecological awareness is suboptimal. Furthermore, Islamic education, which should teach the values of balance and responsibility for the earth, often focuses on ritual aspects, while the socio-ecological dimension is underserved (**Kopnina, 2020**).

The main problem is the lack of integration between Islamic values and the principles of sustainable development in the education system. Many Islamic educational institutions have not systematically incorporated the concepts of *khalifah fil-ardh* (caretaker of the earth), *adl* (justice), and *mizan* (balance) into their curriculum or learning practices (**Mahmad Robbi & Mahmud, 2020; Syafiqurrohmah, 2020**). As a result, even though students understand religious teachings, they do not yet fully appreciate the importance of preserving the environment as part of their religious obligations. Furthermore, there is still a lack of innovation in learning methods that can link ecological issues with Islamic values, such as the use of conservation-based project-based learning, *eco-pesantren*, or digital technology-based environmental campaign programs. One strategic solution is to integrate education for sustainable development into Islamic education, at the school, *madrasah*, *pesantren*, and university levels (**Chaleta, Saraiva, Leal, Fialho, & Borralho, 2021; Khan et al., 2022**). Islamic education has a strong foundation in fostering ecological awareness, as the Quran and Hadith teach humans to uphold their mandate as caliphs on earth. Islamic principles such as the prohibition on causing harm (*fasad*), the encouragement of frugality (*israf*), and the importance of maintaining the balance of nature must be instilled through the curriculum and educational practices. Learning innovations such as *eco-pesantren*, Islamic boarding school-based waste management, reforestation, and the use of digital technology for environmental campaigns are concrete steps that can be taken.

Several studies have examined the relationship between Islamic education and environmental issues. A study by Albirruni (**Albirruni, 2024**) stated that Islamic boarding schools can become pioneers in environmental education through the *eco-pesantren* concept. Another study by Faruqi et al. (**Faruqi, Ma'afi, & Munandar, 2023**) shows that integrating Islamic values with environmental education increases students' awareness of climate change issues. However, most research still focuses on the local scope and lacks a comprehensive link to the SDGs. Furthermore, studies on innovative digital technology-based learning methods in Islamic environmental education are still limited. This opens up opportunities for further research emphasizing the strategic role of Islamic education in achieving the SDGs, particularly in ecological aspects. This study is planned to use a descriptive qualitative approach using literature review and field observation methods. Data were collected through document analysis related to the SDGs, Islamic education curricula, and environmental education practices in Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) and Islamic schools. Interviews with teachers, *pesantren* administrators, and environmental activists were also conducted to gain in-depth perspectives. Data analysis was conducted Thematically, this study aims to identify patterns of integration of Islamic values with sustainability principles.

This study aims to: (1) explain the concept of sustainable development and its relationship to Islamic values; (2) analyze the role of Islamic education in supporting the achievement of the SDGs, particularly in the ecological aspect; and (3) identify innovative strategies for developing sustainability-oriented Islamic education. This study is important because environmental issues increasingly need to be addressed holistically. Islamic education, as the moral foundation of Muslim society, must be able to make a real contribution to internalizing sustainability values in

the younger generation. If Islamic education successfully integrates sustainability values into the curriculum, this can strengthen global efforts to preserve the earth. The novelty of this research lies in its integrative approach that explicitly and practically connects the concept of sustainable development (SDGs) with Islamic educational values. Furthermore, this study emphasizes the importance of innovative learning methods, such as eco-pesantren (Islamic boarding schools), the use of digital technology for environmental education, and project-based learning approaches that engage students in concrete environmental conservation activities.

## 2. METHODS

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach to explore in depth the role of Islamic education in supporting sustainable development, particularly in ecological aspects relevant to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Creswell, 2022; Huberman & Jhonny, 2014; Sugiyono, 2010). This method was chosen because it allows researchers to understand the phenomenon holistically through a naturalistic perspective. Primary data were obtained through in-depth interviews with Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers, Islamic boarding school administrators, and community leaders involved in environmentally-based programs. Secondary data were obtained from official SDGs documents, Islamic education curricula, scientific articles, and reports on the implementation of eco-pesantren programs in Indonesia.

Data collection techniques included: Semi-structured interviews to explore the views of teachers and administrators of Islamic educational institutions on the integration of Islamic values with the principles of sustainability. Participatory observation in Islamic boarding schools and Islamic schools that implement environmentally friendly programs, such as waste management, reforestation, and water conservation. Documentation studies of modules, curricula, and educational policies related to ecology. Data analysis was conducted thematically using the Miles and Huberman model, which includes data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. Data validity was maintained through triangulation of sources, methods, and theories to ensure the reliability of the information. The research steps began with problem identification and literature review, followed by field data collection, thematic analysis, and the development of strategic recommendations related to strengthening Islamic education in supporting the SDGs.

## 3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### **The Concept of Sustainable Development and Islamic Values**

Sustainable development is a modern development paradigm that focuses on meeting the needs of the current generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. This concept emphasizes a balance between economic, social, and environmental aspects. This idea was officially adopted by the United Nations (UN) in the form of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which consist of 17 global goals covering poverty alleviation, inequality reduction, quality education, and ecosystem protection (Friedman et al., 2020). The SDGs emerged as a response to the environmental crisis, social inequality, and the impacts of exploitative development. Sustainable development emphasizes the importance of maintaining ecosystem balance through wise natural resource management, pollution prevention, and carbon emission reduction to address climate change (Maryanti et al., 2022). This principle aligns with the universal value of intergenerational justice, which states that the current generation should not over-exploit resources, thereby sacrificing the rights of future

generations. This is where the role of education, particularly religious-based education, becomes crucial in fostering sustainable awareness and behavior.

From an Islamic perspective, the concept of sustainable development is not new. The values that underpin the SDGs have been present in Islamic teachings for 14 centuries. The Qur'an and Sunnah provide clear guidelines on how humans should relate to nature. Humans are positioned as *khalifah fil-ardh* (custodians of the earth), not as rulers who can exploit nature at will. As stated in Surah Al-Baqarah, verse 30, Allah says: "Indeed, I intend to make you a *khalifah* (vicegerent) on earth." This concept embodies the meaning of responsibility and trust that humans must uphold to maintain the continuity of life. In addition to the concept of *khalifah*, Islam also teaches the principle of *mizan* (balance) (Mustofa, 2016). In Surah Ar-Rahman, verses 7-8, Allah affirms: "And Allah has raised the heavens and set the balance (of justice) so that you may not upset the balance." This principle is highly relevant to the idea of sustainability, which demands a balance between human needs and the preservation of nature. Excessive exploitation of natural resources, deforestation, and environmental pollution are all violations of the scale commanded by Allah (Mustofa, 2016).

The prohibition of corruption on earth is also an important principle in Islamic teachings. Allah says in Surah Al-A'raf, verse 56: "And do not cause corruption on the earth after it has been set in order." This verse shows that preserving the earth is the obligation of every human being, and environmental destruction is a sin. Therefore, the concept of sustainability in Islam is not only a matter of social ethics, but also part of worship and obedience to Allah (Al-Mahali & Jalaluddin Abdur Rahman ibn Abi Bakr al-Suyuti, 2017). Furthermore, Islam also emphasizes the prohibition of excessive use of resources. Surah Al-A'raf, verse 31, reminds us: "Eat and drink, but do not be excessive. Indeed, Allah does not like those who waste." This principle supports the concept of sustainable consumption, which is one of the indicators of the SDGs. Thus, Islamic values related to resource management are very much in line with the principles of reduce, reuse, and recycle, which are echoed in modern sustainability issues. If we relate this Islamic principle to the *maqasid sharia* (objectives of sharia), a strong harmony is clearly visible. *Maqasid sharia* includes the protection of religion (*hifz al-din*), life (*hifz al-nafs*), intellect (*hifz al-'aql*), descendants (*hifz al-nasl*), and property (*hifz al-mal*). All of these goals will be difficult to achieve without environmental sustainability. Ecosystem damage can threaten human life (life), destroy resources (property), and damage the future of generations (descendants) (Izzati, Arfa, Pebriansyah, Na'im, & Asnawi, 2024). Therefore, protecting the environment and realizing sustainability is an integral part of the *maqasid sharia*.

These principles need to be internalized through Islamic education so that they become more than theoretical concepts, but also shape concrete attitudes and behaviors in everyday life. Islamic education must be able to teach that preserving the environment is a form of worship that is rewarded, while destroying it is a major sin. By linking spiritual values and ecological ethics, Islamic education can make a significant contribution to achieving the SDGs, particularly in ecological aspects such as clean water management, renewable energy, and biodiversity conservation. In practice, strengthening this awareness can be done through a curriculum that includes sustainability materials, environmentally friendly practices in schools and Islamic boarding schools, and the habituation of environmentally conscious behaviors such as water conservation, waste management, and reforestation. Furthermore, the integration of technology in learning can also support the dissemination of environmental education based on Islamic values, such as the use of digital media for energy-saving campaigns or environmental

management simulations based on the teachings of the Quran. With a solid understanding of the harmony between Islamic teachings and the principles of sustainability, Islamic education has great potential to be a key driver in creating a generation that is not only academically intelligent but also possesses a strong ecological awareness. This awareness will ultimately lead Muslims to become pioneers in protecting the earth in accordance with the mandate given by Allah.

### **The Role of Islamic Education in Supporting SDGs and Ecology**

Education plays a strategic role in shaping individual awareness, knowledge, and skills to achieve sustainable development. Islamic education, as a system based on religious values, has significant potential to support the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly in the areas of ecology and environmental sustainability (**Susanto & Syahrudin, 2024; Yahuda, Susanto, Widodo, & Kolis, 2024**). In this context, Islamic education not only transfers religious knowledge but also instills values of responsibility towards the earth, in accordance with the principle of *khalifah fil-ardh* (caretaker of the earth). Islamic education can support the SDGs by integrating sustainability values into the curriculum. Religious subjects such as *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence), *aqidah* (belief), and *tafsir* (interpretation of the Quran) can be modified to link Quranic verses that discuss nature and the environment with global issues such as climate change, pollution, and natural resource conservation. For example, *tafsir* lessons could discuss Surah Al-A'raf, verse 56, which prohibits causing damage on earth, and then relate it to waste management practices or reforestation. This can foster an understanding that protecting the environment is part of worship.

Beyond the curriculum, the role of Islamic educational institutions such as madrasas and Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) is also crucial. *Pesantren*, for example, can pioneer environmental education through the *eco-pesantren* concept. This concept emphasizes environmentally friendly practices within the *pesantren* environment, such as 3R-based waste management (Reduce, Reuse, Recycle), renewable energy utilization, reforestation, and water conservation. Thus, students not only understand religious values theoretically but also practice them in their daily lives. This practice will foster a culture of environmental awareness rooted in Islamic teachings. Furthermore, project-based learning methods can be an effective strategy. Through this method, students or students are involved in real-life activities such as creating a school garden, managing an organic garden, or conducting energy-saving campaigns. These activities not only hone practical skills but also instill a sense of responsibility for the environment. In this context, teachers act as facilitators, guiding and providing an understanding that each activity has spiritual value and contributes to achieving the SDGs (**Kioupi & Voulvoulis, 2020**).

Islamic education can also play a role by strengthening digital literacy on environmental issues. In the digital age, environmental campaigns based on Islamic values can be conducted through social media, educational videos, or learning apps. For example, creating educational content about the prohibition of *israf* (excessive behavior) linked to energy and water conservation. This strategy can attract the interest of a younger generation familiar with technology, thus spreading the message of sustainability more widely. It is also important to pay attention to family and community education. Islamic education occurs not only in schools or Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*), but also in the home and community. Through religious study groups (*masjid taklim*), sermons, and religious study groups (*pesantren*), sustainability issues can be conveyed by emphasizing the verses of the Quran and Hadith. For example, the

hadith of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) stating that planting trees is charity demonstrates the importance of individual contributions to environmental preservation. With these strategies, Islamic education can be a significant agent of change in realizing sustainable development. Integrating Islamic values with sustainability principles not only strengthens students' character but also provides real solutions to the global environmental crisis.

### **Innovative Islamic Education Strategies for Environmental Sustainability**

To optimize the role of Islamic education in supporting sustainability, innovative strategies are needed that are applicable, contextual, and relevant to the dynamics of the times. The issue of sustainability is not merely an academic discourse, but rather an urgent need that must be addressed by all sectors, including Islamic education. Environmental challenges such as climate change, pollution, deforestation, and the clean water crisis demand a new paradigm in education, one that emphasizes not only cognitive aspects and religious rituals but also fosters ecological awareness based on Islamic values. In this context, Islamic education has great potential because it teaches the principles of *khalifah fil-ardh* (caretaker of the earth), *mizan* (balance), and the prohibition of *fasad* (destruction), which align with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). One key strategy is the development of a sustainability-based curriculum. This curriculum not only focuses on the ritual aspects of worship but also includes material on environmental ethics, resource management, and social responsibility. For example, in the Morals subject, teachers can teach the topic "Ethics Towards the Environment," which emphasizes the obligation to maintain balance (*mizan*) and the prohibition of destruction (*fasad*). This material can be enriched with verses from the Quran, such as Surah Ar-Rahman, verses 7-8, on the balance of nature, and Surah Al-A'raf, verse 56, on the prohibition against destroying the earth. In this way, students understand that protecting the environment is not just a social obligation, but also a form of worship that is rewarded (Al-Maraghi, 1946; Shihab, 2002).

In addition to strengthening the curriculum, implementing the *eco-pesantren* and green school concepts is the next strategic step. The *eco-pesantren* concept integrates Islamic teachings with environmental conservation practices in daily life at the pesantren. For example, waste management is carried out through the 3R principle (Reduce, Reuse, Recycle), the use of renewable energy such as solar panels, tree planting, and the utilization of vacant land for organic gardens. This not only creates a clean and healthy environment but also trains students to live simply and responsibly. On the other hand, the green school concept emphasizes the use of environmentally friendly technology in schools, reducing the use of single-use plastics, and efficient water management. The implementation of these two concepts will provide students with concrete examples that Islamic teachings can be realized in everyday ecological practices. The use of digital technology is also an equally important strategy in supporting sustainability education. Online learning platforms can be used to disseminate material on environmental ethics from an Islamic perspective. Teachers can develop interactive modules containing multimedia content, such as educational videos, animations, or environmental management simulations based on Quranic values. Furthermore, social media can be used as a means of environmental awareness campaigns. Creative content such as infographics about Quranic verses discussing nature, educational videos about the prohibition of *israf* (excessive behavior), or podcasts on Islamic ecotheology can attract the attention of a younger generation familiar with digital technology. In this way, sustainability messages can reach a wider audience and shape positive public opinion (Kioupi & Voulvoulis, 2020).

The next innovative strategy is a community-based approach. Islamic education cannot thrive without community support. Therefore, synergy between educational institutions and the community must be strengthened. Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) and madrasas (Islamic schools) can partner with local communities to implement environmental conservation programs, such as reforestation initiatives, integrated waste management, or clean water provision in drought-prone areas (Herdiyanti, Janah, & Susanto, 2025; Susanto, Yahuda, Basuki, & Kadir, 2023). Through this activity, students will learn directly about social responsibility while strengthening communal solidarity. This approach also aligns with the spirit of the SDGs, which emphasize cross-sector collaboration. Furthermore, strengthening the role of teachers and other educators is key to the successful implementation of sustainable education. Teachers serve not only as instructors but also as facilitators and role models in fostering environmental stewardship. Therefore, teachers must be given special training to integrate sustainability values into the learning process. For example, Islamic jurisprudence teachers can link material on purification (thaharah) with water conservation, while Islamic exegesis (tafsir) teachers can discuss verses about nature in the context of the environmental crisis. Thus, every religious subject can serve as a means of internalizing sustainability values.

Furthermore, an experiential learning approach must be developed. Students should be encouraged to participate directly in environmental conservation activities. Examples of these activities include tree planting, waste bank management, water conservation, and greening projects around schools or Islamic boarding schools. Through these real-life experiences, students not only understand the theory but also experience the positive impacts of ecological actions. Direct experience will foster a stronger sense of environmental stewardship than lectures or classroom discussions alone. A final strategy that should not be overlooked is strengthening national education regulations and policies. The government can encourage the integration of sustainability values into Islamic education through regulations, curriculum guidelines, and school and Islamic boarding school development programs. Policy support will provide legitimacy and clear direction for educational institutions in implementing sustainability-based programs. Furthermore, the government can provide incentives to schools or Islamic boarding schools that successfully implement environmentally friendly practices, for example through awards or assistance with facilities.

By implementing these innovative strategies, Islamic education will not only become a means of developing noble morals but also a powerful force in maintaining the sustainability of the earth. Integrating Islamic values with the principles of sustainability will create a generation that is both religious and environmentally conscious. This generation will understand that preserving nature is a form of obedience to God and a manifestation of the concept of khalifah fil-ardh. Thus, the global vision of the SDGs can be achieved without neglecting Islamic identity. Islamic education is not merely dogmatic teaching, but a transformative movement capable of providing real solutions to global challenges. Ultimately, the success of this strategy depends on the commitment of all parties: educational institutions, the government, the community, and the students themselves. Without collaboration, the goal of realizing an Islamic education that supports sustainable development will be difficult to achieve. However, with strong synergy and the use of innovation, Islamic education can emerge as a pioneer in integrating spirituality, morality, and ecological awareness towards a more sustainable future for the earth.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Islamic education plays a strategic role in supporting the achievement of sustainable development goals (SDGs), particularly in the areas of ecology and environmental preservation. Islamic teachings, through the concepts of khalifah fil-ardh (vicegerent), mizan (balance), and the prohibition of fahas (destruction), align with modern sustainability principles. This study confirms that the integration of Islamic values into the curriculum, innovative learning methods such as project-based learning, and the application of the eco-pesantren concept can foster students' ecological awareness. Digital technology-based strategies also play a crucial role in expanding the reach of Islamic environmental education. Thus, Islamic education not only fosters moral and spiritual development but also makes a tangible contribution to addressing the global environmental crisis. The success of these efforts depends on collaboration between educational institutions, the community, and the government to promote policies that support the integration of sustainability values into the Islamic education system. Further research is recommended using a quantitative or mixed-method approach involving a larger number of respondents from various Islamic educational institutions to measure the effectiveness of integrating sustainability values into learning.

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