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The Role of Akidah Akhlak Teachers in Shaping Students' Ecological Awareness: A Qualitative Study Based on Religious Ecopedagogy

Fatimah Azzahra,[1]* Laily Masruroh[2]
[1,2] Universitas Hasyim Asy'ari, Tebuireng, Jombang, Jawa Timur, Indonesia
*fatimaazahr08@gmail.com

Abstract

This study aims to analyze the role of Akidah Akhlak teachers in shaping students' ecological awareness, to identify the forms of ecological awareness developed among students, and to examine how the integration of religious values and instructional practices contributes to environmental character formation within Islamic education. This study employs a qualitative case study design to explore the phenomenon in depth within a natural educational setting. Data were collected through classroom observations, in-depth interviews with key stakeholders including teachers, school leaders, and students, and documentation of institutional programs and learning activities. The data were analyzed using an interactive model involving data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing, supported by thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns. Data validity was ensured through triangulation techniques and member checking. The findings reveal that students' ecological awareness is effectively developed through the integration of theological values into learning processes, supported by teacher role modeling, habituation practices, and institutional programs. Teachers function not only as knowledge transmitters but also as moral and spiritual guides who translate religious teachings into concrete environmental practices. Students' ecological awareness is manifested through the integration of cognitive understanding, affective attitudes, and behavioral actions, as reflected in their active participation in environmental programs such as waste management, greening activities, and sustainable practices. The study also identifies challenges related to inconsistent behavioral habits among some students, which are addressed through reinforcement strategies combining intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. This study introduces the concept of religious ecopedagogy as an integrative framework that combines Islamic theological values with experiential environmental education. It highlights the role of theological habituation in transforming ecological awareness from conceptual understanding into lived behavior, offering a new perspective that bridges religious education and environmental sustainability. Theoretically, this study contributes to the development of an integrative model that connects cognitive, affective, and psychomotor dimensions within the framework of Islamic education and environmental pedagogy. Practically, it provides insights for educators and educational institutions in designing value-based and experience-oriented learning strategies to foster sustainable ecological character. The findings also offer a reference for developing holistic educational policies that integrate religious values with environmental awareness in addressing global ecological challenges.

Keywords:
Akidah Akhlak, ecological awareness, religious ecopedagogy, Islamic education, environmental character, qualitative case study.

Introduction

In the context of escalating global environmental crises, education is increasingly recognized as a strategic instrument for fostering sustainable ecological awareness. Environmental degradation, including pollution, deforestation, and climate change, is not merely an ecological issue but also reflects a moral and spiritual crisis in human interaction with nature. Therefore, education should not be limited to the transmission of knowledge; rather, it must function as a systematic effort to shape awareness, attitudes, and responsible behavior toward the environment. In this regard, education can be understood as a structured process aimed at stimulating individuals' internal capacities to achieve holistic development across cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains (Ashari et al., 2025).

Within the framework of Islamic education, this holistic orientation is further strengthened through the integration of intellectual, spiritual, moral, and social dimensions. Islamic education does not merely emphasize the acquisition of knowledge but also prioritizes the formation of religious character grounded in the values of faith and morality. Previous studies have demonstrated that integrating religious values into the learning process significantly contributes to students' character development, including their environmental awareness and social responsibility (Hidayat & Sundari, 2014; Novitasari, 2024). Furthermore, value-based education rooted in spirituality has been shown to enhance the affective dimension of learners, which is often overlooked in conventional instructional approaches.

In this context, the subject of Akidah Akhlak holds a strategic position in fostering students' ecological awareness. It provides a theological foundation that emphasizes human responsibility as khalifah on earth, requiring individuals to preserve environmental balance. Ecological awareness, therefore, is not limited to cognitive understanding but encompasses the integration of knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors in everyday life (Yuniarto, 2013). Contemporary research also highlights that ecopedagogical approaches, which integrate ethics, spirituality, and experiential learning, are effective in cultivating students' environmental consciousness (Kopnina & Cherniak, 2016; Misiaszek, 2020).

However, prior studies indicate that environmental education in schools is often implemented in a fragmented manner and tends to focus primarily on cognitive aspects. The internalization of ecological values into students' daily behavior remains limited due to the lack of integration between religious values, instructional practices, and habitual activities (Neolaka, 2008). Moreover, the role of teachers as key agents in the educational process has not been fully optimized in connecting religious teachings with contemporary environmental issues. In fact, teachers play a crucial role not only as facilitators but also as motivators and role models in shaping students' character (Djamarah, 2014).

In Islamic educational institutions, particularly madrasahs and pesantren-based systems, the role of teachers extends beyond instructional

duties to include moral and spiritual guidance as murabbi. Research by Fauzi (2020) demonstrates that curriculum and instructional integration in pesantren-based madrasahs contributes to holistic student development through value-based habituation. Similarly, Fauzi et al. (2022) emphasize that the development of teachers' competence, commitment, and motivation significantly influences the creation of transformative educational environments grounded in religious values. These findings suggest that the success of character education, including ecological awareness, is highly dependent on the teacher's ability to internalize and consistently model these values.

Despite these contributions, a significant research gap remains. Most previous studies have examined environmental education and religious character education separately, without deeply exploring their integration within the context of Akidah Akhlak learning. In addition, limited attention has been given to how teachers transform theological values into concrete ecological practices in educational settings. This gap highlights the need for a more integrative approach that bridges religious teachings and environmental education.

This study offers a novel contribution through the concept of religious ecopedagogy, which integrates Akidah Akhlak values with environmental education practices aimed at character formation. This approach emphasizes the synergy between theological understanding, teacher modeling, and behavioral habituation as a unified educational process. Therefore, this study not only examines the role of teachers descriptively but also analyzes the process of internalizing ecological values within instructional practices.

The objectives of this study are threefold: first, to analyze the role of Akidah Akhlak teachers in shaping students' ecological awareness; second, to identify the forms of ecological awareness developed among students; and third, to examine how the integration of religious values and instructional practices contributes to fostering environmentally responsible character. The findings of this study are expected to contribute theoretically to the development of religious ecopedagogy and provide practical insights for educational institutions in integrating Islamic values with sustainable environmental education.

Method

This study employed a qualitative research approach, which aims to generate descriptive data in the form of words and narratives derived from interviews, observations, and documentation rather than numerical data. Qualitative research is particularly appropriate for examining social and human phenomena in their natural contexts, allowing researchers to interpret meanings, perspectives, and experiences in depth (Rukin, 2021). In line with this, qualitative inquiry emphasizes contextual understanding and interpretive analysis, enabling the exploration of how ecological awareness is constructed through religious learning processes (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The research design adopted in this study is a qualitative case study, focusing on an in-depth exploration of the role of Akidah Akhlak teachers in shaping students' ecological awareness within a specific educational setting. A case study approach allows for a comprehensive understanding of complex social interactions and educational practices in real-life contexts (Yin, 2018). This design is particularly relevant for investigating how religious values are internalized and translated into environmental behavior through pedagogical practices.

The research participants consisted of key stakeholders involved in the implementation of Akidah Akhlak learning, including the vice principal of curriculum affairs, Akidah Akhlak teachers, and students. Participants were selected using purposive sampling, based on their roles, experiences, and direct involvement in the teaching and learning process. This sampling technique ensures that selected informants possess rich and relevant information related to the research focus (Palinkas et al., 2015). The inclusion of multiple participants from different roles enables data triangulation and enhances the depth of analysis.

Data were collected through three main techniques: observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Classroom observations were conducted to examine how teachers integrate Islamic values into instructional practices and how students demonstrate ecological awareness in their daily behavior. In-depth interviews were carried out with the vice principal, teachers, and students to capture their perspectives, experiences, and reflections on environmental education within the Akidah Akhlak subject. Documentation included institutional records, lesson plans, activity reports, and photographs related to environmental programs, serving as complementary data sources to strengthen the findings (Sugiyono, 2022). These multiple data collection methods are essential in qualitative research to ensure comprehensive and credible data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

The data analysis process followed an interactive model involving data collection, data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing (Moleong, 2020). Data reduction involved selecting, focusing, and simplifying raw data to identify relevant themes. Data display was conducted through systematic organization of information to facilitate interpretation, while conclusion drawing involved synthesizing findings into meaningful patterns and insights. Additionally, thematic analysis was applied to identify recurring patterns related to teacher roles, ecological awareness, and value internalization (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

To ensure the trustworthiness of the data, this study employed several validation strategies, including source triangulation and technique triangulation (Sugiyono, 2022). Triangulation was conducted by comparing data obtained from different participants and data collection methods to verify consistency. Furthermore, credibility was strengthened through prolonged engagement in the field and member checking, where participants were given the opportunity to confirm the accuracy of the findings (Lincoln & Guba,

1985). Dependability and confirmability were also maintained by documenting the research process systematically, ensuring transparency and methodological rigor.

Ethical considerations were carefully addressed throughout the research process. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, and their consent was obtained prior to data collection. Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured by not disclosing participants' identities in the research report. These ethical principles are essential in qualitative research to protect participants and maintain research integrity (Orb, Eisenhauer, & Wynaden, 2001).

Results and Discussion

Results

The Role of Akidah Akhlak Teachers in Shaping Ecological Awareness

The findings indicate that ecological awareness among students is constructed through the integration of religious values within Akidah Akhlak learning. Environmental education in this context does not stand as a separate subject but is embedded within religious instruction. Based on information from the Vice Principal for Curriculum Affairs, the effectiveness of this process largely depends on the teacher's ability to contextualize Qur'anic verses and Hadith with contemporary environmental issues. This approach ensures that students perceive environmental concerns not merely as socio-economic problems but as an integral part of Islamic teachings.

The internalization of ecological values is reinforced through consistent real-life modeling by teachers. One prominent example is demonstrated by Mr. Muhammad Nurfadli, an Akidah Akhlak teacher, who applies spontaneous exemplary behavior by keeping personal waste when no trash bin is available. He stated:

> "*As a form of role modeling, I always try to dispose of waste properly. If I have small waste, such as a pen wrapper or other items, and there is no trash bin in the classroom, I keep it in my pocket or bag first. After I find a trash bin, I dispose of it properly*." (Interview, November 3, 2025)

This behavior is recognized by students, such as Arjuna Ikhsanul Umam and Nur Isna Fitriyani, who stated that teachers who are willing to sweep and pick up trash become a strong motivating factor for students to act similarly without feeling forced. This finding highlights that teacher modeling plays a crucial role in shaping students' ecological behavior through implicit learning processes.

Furthermore, ecological awareness is strengthened by a solid theological foundation. Teachers emphasize that cleanliness is not merely an aesthetic value but a religious obligation, as reflected in the Hadith "ath-thahuru syatrul iman." This understanding has been internalized by students, as evidenced by their perception that maintaining cleanliness represents

obedience to religious teachings. Therefore, ecological awareness is not only constructed at the cognitive level but also develops into a character trait manifested in daily behavior through the integration of instruction, role modeling, and consistent habituation.

Students' Ecological Awareness

The findings reveal that students' ecological awareness is reflected in their understanding, attitudes, and behaviors toward the environment. Students recognize that environmental care is part of Islamic teachings and a responsibility as Muslims. This is illustrated by a student, Arjuna, who stated that "caring for the environment can be understood as self-awareness not to litter." Similarly, another student, Intan, described environmental care as "an attitude of not harming nature," while Azza emphasized that humans have a responsibility to protect the environment as khalifah on earth.

These understandings are translated into active participation in various environmental programs organized by the madrasah. Mrs. Elok Wardaniyah explained the existence of the program "Tukar Sampah Jadi Berkah," which allows students and the community to exchange waste for certain needs.



Figure 1. Ecological Awareness Program Implementation

As shown in Figure 1, ecological awareness is developed through practical experience. In this context, the role of the teacher extends to that of a motivator who transforms students' perspectives on waste. Through the "Tukar Sampah Jadi Berkah" program, theoretical concepts of cleanliness are translated into participatory actions, enabling students to directly experience the positive impact of environmentally responsible behavior.

In addition, the madrasah organizes environmental awareness events and practical activities, where students participate as "pasukan semut" to educate the community. Student involvement is further reinforced by Mr. Muhammad Nurfadli, who stated that students are actively engaged in cleaning activities, including river clean-up actions and waste management during parades.

Students themselves confirmed this participation. Arjuna Ikhsanul Umam shared his experience during a parade by stating that he participated in "picking up and cleaning trash to keep the area clean." Moreover, students are involved in other activities such as composting, tree planting, and greening programs. These activities received positive responses, as students expressed that they feel happy because they can "learn to care for the environment and create a positive impact."



Figure 2. Student Greening Activities

As illustrated in Figure 2, students' ecological awareness extends beyond the cognitive domain. Teachers guide students to practice compassion toward all of Allah's creations through greening activities. This demonstrates that teachers successfully transform theoretical knowledge into active and participatory character formation.

However, the findings also reveal challenges in the form of varying levels of awareness among students. Mrs. Elok Wardaniyah stated that "there are still students who do not sort waste and mix it together." To address this issue, the madrasah implements a reward and punishment system through classroom cleanliness assessments, using stickers as reinforcement to strengthen habituation.

The Comprehensive Role of Teachers in Developing Ecological Awareness

The findings demonstrate that the role of Akidah Akhlak teachers in shaping students' ecological awareness is carried out holistically through the integration of religious values, role modeling, habituation, and institutional support. Teachers do not merely deliver instructional content but gradually instill awareness through practical experiences. They emphasize that ecological awareness is a collective responsibility that must be continuously internalized by students.

Teachers play a central role in transforming theological values into daily practices. One example is the implementation of policies encouraging students

to bring tumblers to reduce single-use plastic waste. In classroom management, teachers establish cleanliness as a prerequisite for the learning process. Mr. Muhammad Nurfadli stated:

> "*If the classroom is still dirty, I will not start the lesson… they learn through habits, not just theory.*" (Interview, November 3, 2025)

This practice represents a form of theological contextualization, where cleanliness is not merely a slogan but a condition for attaining the blessing of knowledge. As a result, students are encouraged to maintain classroom cleanliness independently as part of their spiritual readiness for learning.

Furthermore, teachers direct students toward practical waste management activities, such as ecobrick production and compost processing. The availability of compost facilities in each classroom indicates that teachers provide opportunities for students to directly practice environmental ethics. This experiential approach broadens students' perspectives by balancing religious understanding with environmental action.



Figure 3. Classroom Composting Facilities

The provision of composting facilities serves as an instrument for habituating students to manage organic waste independently. Beyond fostering discipline, teachers also build awareness based on belief and lived experience. Mr. Muhammad Nurfadli emphasized that "*caring for the environment is not only about morality, but it must also be believed… as part of faith.*"

This approach influences students' emotional attitudes, as they begin to feel empathy and concern toward environmental conditions. This is reflected in a student's statement, Intan, who said:

> "*I feel sad because there are still many people out there who do not care about environmental cleanliness.*" (Interview, November 3, 2025)

In addition, teachers recognize that the development of ecological character requires external synergy. Collaboration with parents is essential to ensure that environmental habits developed in the madrasah are consistent with those practiced at home. This finding indicates that the role of Akidah

Akhlak teachers has expanded beyond classroom instruction to become a driving force in building a broader culture of environmental awareness within the educational ecosystem.

Discussion

The Role of Akidah Akhlak Teachers in Environmental Character Formation

The integration of ecological values into Akidah Akhlak learning demonstrates that environmental character formation is inseparable from its theological foundation. The findings indicate that teachers do not position environmental issues as supplementary material, but rather as an integral manifestation of akhlakul karimah. The emphasis on humility in interacting with nature reflects an effort to transform exploitative attitudes into ethical responsibility. By instilling the understanding that the environment is a divine trust from Allah, teachers successfully shift students' perspectives from merely maintaining cleanliness to preserving faith-based responsibility toward nature. This finding reinforces the argument that religious values can function as a strong moral foundation for environmental ethics .

This result supports the concept of the teacher as a murabbi as proposed by Ramayulis (1994), in which the teacher is not limited to transmitting knowledge but is also responsible for holistic moral and spiritual development. In the ecological context, this role is reflected in the transformation of environmental care practices into acts of worship. Activities such as cleaning, planting, and waste management are not perceived as routine tasks but as meaningful expressions of religious devotion. This aligns with the principle of exemplary behavior, where modeling becomes more effective than verbal instruction in shaping student character.

In addition, the ecological culture developed within the madrasah is strengthened through routine and collaborative activities involving both teachers and students. These practices indicate that environmental awareness is not only delivered at the conceptual level but is also internalized through consistent habituation. This finding is consistent with experiential learning theory, which states that knowledge becomes meaningful when learners are directly involved in real-life experiences (Kolb, 1984). Furthermore, research in environmental education emphasizes that sustained behavioral change requires continuous practice and social reinforcement (Ardoin, Bowers, & Gaillard, 2020).

The effectiveness of ecological awareness formation is also supported by the ability of Akidah Akhlak teachers to perform multiple instructional roles simultaneously. In accordance with Djamarah (2014), teachers act as informators who convey religious principles, motivators who foster students' intrinsic awareness, organizers who coordinate environmental programs, and evaluators who monitor and reinforce student behavior. This multidimensional role aligns with contemporary perspectives on teacher effectiveness, which highlight the importance of integrating cognitive,

affective, and behavioral dimensions in character education (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020).

Students' Ecological Awareness in Theoretical and Practical Dimensions

Students' ecological awareness in this study represents the internalization of the concept of khalifah fil ardh, in which humans are entrusted with the responsibility to preserve environmental balance. The findings reveal that students perceive the environment not as an object of exploitation but as a moral and spiritual responsibility. This awareness extends beyond cognitive understanding and is reflected in attitudes and behaviors that demonstrate care for the environment .

This finding is consistent with the theoretical framework of ecological awareness, which encompasses cognitive, affective, and conative dimensions (Yuniarto, 2013). From a sociological perspective, this awareness is constructed through the understanding that humans are part of an interconnected ecological system. The ecocentric perspective observed in this study positions humans as guardians of environmental sustainability, in line with ecological principles discussed by Soemarwoto as cited in Siahaan (2004).

The practical manifestation of ecological awareness is evident in students' active participation in environmental programs such as the "Tukar Sampah Jadi Berkah" initiative. This program not only develops students' practical skills in waste management but also introduces the concept of a circular economy grounded in religious values. Previous studies have shown that integrating sustainability practices into school activities can significantly enhance students' environmental responsibility and long-term behavioral change (Wals, 2019).

However, the findings also indicate that ecological awareness is not evenly distributed among all students. The persistence of unsorted waste behavior suggests that habitual patterns and lifestyle factors remain significant challenges in environmental education (Neolaka, 2008). To address this issue, the madrasah implements a reward and punishment system as a form of external reinforcement. This approach is consistent with behaviorist theory, which emphasizes that behavior can be shaped through systematic reinforcement (Skinner, 1953). The combination of intrinsic religious motivation and extrinsic institutional support creates a more comprehensive framework for character formation.

Religious Ecopedagogy as an Integrative Educational Model

The relationship between the role of Akidah Akhlak teachers and students' ecological awareness demonstrates that environmental character is formed through a structured process of theological habituation. One of the distinctive findings of this study is the transformation of students from passive recipients into active contributors through practices such as ecobrick production and plastic reduction programs .

This transformation indicates that the role of teachers extends beyond classroom instruction to influence students' behavior in broader social

contexts. Collaboration with parents further strengthens this process by ensuring consistency between school and home environments. This finding aligns with ecological systems theory, which states that human development is influenced by interactions across multiple social environments (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Furthermore, the formation of ecological awareness in this study supports the framework proposed by Novitasari (2024), which emphasizes the integration of knowledge, attitudes, and behavior as the foundation of environmental consciousness. Through experiential activities such as ecobrick production and waste management, students not only gain cognitive understanding but also experience affective transformation that leads to concrete action. This supports the argument that experiential learning is more effective than theoretical instruction in internalizing values (Kolb, 1984).

Innovative programs such as educational tourism and eco-based learning activities position students as active participants in the learning process. In this context, teachers act not only as knowledge providers but also as facilitators who empower students to become agents of environmental change. The reinterpretation of the Hadith "ath-thahuru syatrul iman" expands its meaning beyond physical cleanliness to include broader environmental responsibility. This interpretation reflects the principles of ecopedagogy, which emphasize critical, transformative, and action-oriented environmental education (Misiaszek, 2020).

Overall, these findings confirm the successful implementation of a religious ecopedagogy model. As conceptualized by Irianto et al., this model integrates cognitive understanding, affective engagement, and psychomotor action within a unified educational framework. The teacher's role as a central figure ensures that ecological awareness is not temporary but becomes a deeply embedded character trait in students' daily lives.

This study offers a novel contribution through the development of a religious ecopedagogy framework within the context of Akidah Akhlak learning, which systematically integrates Islamic theological values with experiential environmental education practices. Unlike previous studies that tend to separate religious character education from environmental education, this study demonstrates that ecological awareness can be more effectively developed through a process of theological habituation, namely the internalization of faith, morality, and the responsibility of humans as khalifah into everyday actions. Another key novelty lies in redefining the role of teachers, not merely as knowledge transmitters, but as *murabbi* who transform religious teachings into concrete ecological practices through role modeling, habituation, and value-based reinforcement.

The contributions of this study are both theoretical and practical. Theoretically, it enriches the discourse of Islamic education by proposing an integrative conceptual model that connects cognitive, affective, and psychomotor dimensions in fostering ecological awareness grounded in religious values. This model extends the field of ecopedagogy by incorporating

spirituality as a central foundation of environmental education. Practically, this study provides insights for educational institutions, particularly madrasahs, in designing learning processes that go beyond knowledge acquisition toward the formation of ecological character through real programs, school culture, and collaboration with families. Therefore, this study contributes to the development of a holistic, contextual, and sustainable educational approach in addressing global environmental challenges.

Conclusion

This study finds that the formation of students' ecological awareness is strongly shaped by the holistic synergy between the strategic role of Akidah Akhlak teachers and institutional support within the madrasah. The findings reveal that the impact of theological habituation, through role modeling, value internalization, and consistent practice, is greater than previously assumed. This challenges the conventional view that environmental education is primarily cognitive and instead highlights the central role of religious values in fostering sustainable ecological behavior. As a result, ecological awareness is not only understood conceptually but is transformed into a lived character reflected in students' daily practices.

This study contributes to the academic discourse by reinforcing previous findings on the importance of value-based education in character formation, while also questioning approaches that separate environmental education from religious and moral dimensions. Furthermore, it introduces the concept of religious ecopedagogy as an integrative framework that connects cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains through theological grounding. This contribution enriches the field of Islamic education and environmental education by offering a more holistic and transformative approach to developing ecological awareness.

However, this study is limited by its focus on a specific case and a relatively small sample, which restricts the generalizability of the findings. Therefore, further research involving larger and more diverse samples is needed to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the implementation and impact of religious ecopedagogy in different educational contexts. Future studies are also recommended to explore comparative approaches, longitudinal impacts, and the integration of ecological values across various subjects and educational levels to strengthen the sustainability of environmental character education.

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