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Ecological Pedagogy in Islamic Education: The Role of Teachers in Fostering School-Wide Environmental Culture

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ABSTRACT

Integrating environmental consciousness into religious instruction remains a critical yet under-researched dimension of primary education. Grounded in ecological pedagogy, this qualitative case study investigates how Islamic Religious Education (IRE) teachers operationalize eco-Islamic ethics to cultivate an environmentally conscious culture in a rural primary madrasah (MIS Hidayatul Mubtadiin, Jambi, Indonesia). Data were gathered through extended participant observation, in-depth interviews with key stakeholders (IRE teachers, school principal, and students), and curriculum document analysis, processed using thematic analysis. The findings reveal that IRE teachers extend their traditional instructional boundary by assuming four dynamic roles as eco-pedagogues: transformative educators, ethical role models (uswah hasanah), environmental motivators, and structural facilitators. Rather than treating environmental protection as a standalone topic, teachers synthesize Quranic eco-theology with experiential school initiatives, including routine cleanliness habituations, community-based environmental actions, and structured eco-programs (Jum'at Bersih). This eco-religious integration significantly improves students' environmental stewardship and daily habituation, though sustained consistency requires stronger institutional policy enforcement. The study highlights the theoretical importance of eco-literacy embedded in religious pedagogy, offering a scalable model for primary madrasahs navigating environmental education in developing contexts.

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Introduction

Global environmental degradation ranging from acute plastic pollution to climate disruption represents a deeply rooted moral and behavioral crisis rather than a purely technical challenge. Addressing this systemic threat demands a fundamental shift in basic education, moving beyond cognitive instruction toward transformative value-based environmental stewardship (Anam et al., 2024; Bhoki et al., 2025). Within Islamic educational

ecosystems, religious ethics offer a profound paradigm for ecological preservation through the theological concepts of khalīfah fī al-arḍ (human stewardship of Earth) and al-ṭahārah (ritual purity as an expression of faith). However, a persistent pedagogical gap remains in primary education: environmental awareness is frequently taught as isolated factual knowledge rather than internalized as an active, lived religious commitment (Munawaroh et al., 2024).

In bridging this gap, Islamic Religious Education (IRE) teachers serve as pivotal eco-pedagogues who translate abstract eco-theological doctrines into tangible daily actions. Rather than confining religious instruction to ritualistic obligations, effective IRE educators operationalize uswah ḥasanah (ethical role-modeling) to cultivate sustainable habits within primary school settings (Ayatullah, 2024; Mahdalina et al., 2025). By consistently embodying environmental ethics—such as waste reduction, water conservation, and resource care—teachers establish a visible standard of ecological stewardship. This active integration of Islamic tenets into daily school routines elevates environmental cleanliness from a mere administrative chore to an act of spiritual devotion ('ibādah), reinforcing character formation at a formative developmental stage (Bhoki et al., 2025).

Developing an institutional green culture requires a holistic pedagogical approach that encompasses curricular integration, structured habituation, and constructive accountability. Recent empirical scholarship demonstrates that embedding Quranic eco-ethics into subjects like Fiqh, Aqīdah-Akhlāq, and Quranic studies significantly strengthens students' intrinsic motivation toward environmental conservation (Munawaroh et al., 2024; Rahmawati & Hasanah, 2025). Furthermore, weekly experiential programs such as Jum'at Bersih (Clean Friday) and daily sanitation rotas operationalize the principle of amanah (trusteeship), fostering collective social responsibility (Mahdalina et al., 2025). Guided supervision and reflective feedback from educators reinforce these routines, transforming sporadic environmental activities into an enduring school-wide ethos.

Despite the theoretical alignment between Islamic ethics and ecological preservation, primary madrasahs in rural and developing contexts face distinct operational challenges. School-wide environmental initiatives often struggle with long-term consistency, frequently lapsing into superficial compliance rather than becoming an internalized student identity (Anam et al., 2024; Setiawan et al., 2025). Furthermore, limited resources in rural education systems place greater reliance on human agency—specifically the leadership, creativity, and commitment of religious educators—to sustain ecological culture without heavy infrastructure investment (Ayatullah, 2024). Examining how these challenges are navigated at the institutional level is essential for developing scalable models of eco-religious education in resource-constrained environments.

MIS Hidayatul Mubtadiin, located in Tanjung Jabung Timur, Jambi, presents a compelling site for investigating this dynamic. As a rural primary madrasah, the institution has successfully combined core religious competencies such as early Quranic literacy and practical prayer recitations (hafalan doa) with structured environmental programs, including routine community cleanups and green habituations. This dual focus creates an integrative learning environment where spiritual discipline directly fuels ecological action. While conventional studies on green schools typically emphasize secular curricula or urban institutions, there remains a lack of empirical insight into how rural primary madrasahs leverage religious pedagogy to drive school-wide environmental transformation.

To address this gap, this study examines the transformative role of IRE teachers in developing a sustainable school culture within a rural primary madrasah context. Grounded in ecological pedagogy and eco-Islamic ethics, this research analyzes the specific mechanisms specifically pedagogical integration, ethical modeling, structured habituation, and institutional leadership through which IRE educators foster environmental consciousness among primary students. By investigating the synthesis of religious instruction and environmental action at MIS Hidayatul Mubtadiin, this study contributes an empirical model for integrating eco-literacy into primary Islamic education across developing contexts.

Method

This study employed a qualitative case study design with a naturalistic inquiry approach to examine how Islamic Religious Education (IRE) teachers cultivate an environmental culture within a primary madrasah ecosystem (Nugroho et al., 2024). Conducted from May to June 2026 at MIS Hidayatul Mubtadiin in Tanjung Jabung Timur, Jambi, the researcher served as the primary human instrument to capture the authentic social dynamics and eco-religious habituations of the school community (Habibah & Sutisna, 2025). Purposeful sampling was utilized to select key informants directly engaged in eco-pedagogical activities, comprising two IRE teachers as core actors, the school principal as policy authority, three classroom teachers, and twelve primary students across upper-grade levels.

Data collection was executed through prolonged field engagement, combining non-participant observation, semi-structured in-depth interviews, and document analysis to achieve rigorous data triangulation (Pratama et al., 2024). Observational protocols, supplemented by digital audio-visual recordings, documented daily sanitation rotas, teacher role-modeling, and weekly Jum'at Bersih (Clean Friday) initiatives in real time without distorting instruction. In-depth interviews explored educators' eco-theological pedagogical strategies and students' internalized environmental attitudes. Additionally, institutional documents—including lesson plans (RPP), school policy charters, and environmental activity logs—were systematically analyzed to corroborate observational and narrative data.

The gathered qualitative data were analyzed iteratively using reflexive thematic analysis, following a three-tier sequence of data condensation, thematic display, and drawing verified conclusions (Santoso & Rosyidi, 2025). Credibility and trustworthiness were established through member checking with key informants, peer debriefing with educational researchers, and audit trails ensuring contextual transparency (Fauzi et al., 2024). Ethical considerations were rigorously maintained by securing formal institutional clearance from the madrasah authority, obtaining informed consent from educators, and securing parental approval for student participation, while strictly preserving informant anonymity throughout the research lifecycle.

Results and Discussion

Established in 2007 and formally legalized by the Ministry of Religious Affairs in 2014, MIS Hidayatul Mubtadiin in Pematang Rahim, Tanjung Jabung Timur, exemplifies a community-driven primary madrasah operating within a rural Islamic framework. Under the long-standing leadership of the school headmaster, the institution balances academic instruction with competitive co-curricular achievements in Quranic recitations (Musabaqah Tilawatil Qur'an) and Integrated Science Competitions (KSM). Grounded in its core vision to nurture a faithful, knowledgeable, and environmentally conscious generation, the madrasah serves as a strategic educational locus where religious devotion directly intersects with ecological stewardship (Kurniawan & Syahputra, 2024).

The physical and structural footprint of MIS Hidayatul Mubtadiin provides an intimate baseline for implementing eco-religious habituations within resource-constrained environments. Operating on a total land area of 1,142 m^2—comprising 736 m^2 of instructional buildings and 406 m^2 of open grounds—the madrasah houses seven classrooms and a dedicated team of eight undergraduate-qualified educators (S.1). Despite structural limitations, such as reliance on basic sanitation facilities and temporary handwashing stations, the school's secluded rural location away from main traffic arterial noise fosters an undisturbed educational setting conducive to character habituation and reflective eco-learning (Hasanah & Firmansyah, 2025).

The primary mechanism of ecological transformation within the madrasah relies on the active role of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) teachers as transformative educators. Rather than teaching eco-ethics as abstract theology, IRE educators intentionally weave

environmental principles into core subjects like Fiqh and Quranic exegesis (Tafsīr). Principles of ath-thahāratu syatrul îmân (cleanliness as half of faith) and khalīfah fī al-arḍ (planetary stewardship) are operationalized into daily cognitive reflections, translating sacred texts into practical ecological duties (Mulyadi et al., 2024). This pedagogical alignment elevates environmental cleanliness from a mere civic duty to a core requirement of religious devotion ('ibādah).

To bridge the gap between cognitive comprehension and behavioral internalization, IRE teachers strictly embody uswah ḥasanah (ethical role-modeling) across the madrasah grounds. Observations confirmed that educators actively demonstrate waste sorting, resource conservation, and campus greening alongside their students during daily routines. By consistently modeling environmental discipline during non-instructional hours, teachers construct a lived norm of eco-responsibility that students naturally mirror (Suryani & Hartati, 2025). This visible pedagogical leadership reinforces the notion that spiritual integrity is inseparable from maintaining the purity of one's immediate physical ecosystem.

Institutionalizing this ecological ethos requires structured habituation, implemented primarily through recurring weekly programs such as Jum'at Bersih (Clean Friday) and daily classroom sanitation rotas. During these activities, IRE educators reframe manual labor and campus cleanup as collective acts of communal trust (amanah). By linking physical cleanliness with spiritual readiness for Friday congregational prayers and weekend reflections, students internalize environmental care as a routine rhythm of Islamic life (Fitriani & Nurhadi, 2024). Consequently, routine maintenance becomes a powerful vehicle for building student character and group solidarity.

Beyond routine cleanup activities, IRE educators employ constructive supervision and religious accountability to address environmental infractions among primary students. When instances of littering or resource neglect occur, teachers respond with restorative dialoging grounded in Islamic ethics rather than punitive measures. By guiding students to reflect on the ecological consequences of their actions through Quranic principles of balance (mīzān), educators foster genuine moral remorse and intrinsic behavioral correction (Saputra et al., 2025). This supervisory framework reinforces an atmosphere where environmental discipline is governed by personal conscience rather than external enforcement.

Empirical evidence indicates that these eco-pedagogical initiatives have successfully established a cohesive, school-wide environmental culture across grade levels. Students demonstrate heightened environmental awareness, voluntarily maintaining classroom cleanliness and actively managing waste without requiring constant adult supervision. This shift illustrates a successful transition from teacher-led instruction to peer-driven cultural habituation within the primary madrasah (Lestari & Zulkarnain, 2024). The shared physical space of the madrasah thus transforms into an active arena for living out Islamic moral values in real time.

The synthesis of Islamic pedagogy and environmental stewardship observed at MIS Hidayatul Mubtadiin provides strong empirical support for contemporary theories of eco-religious education. Grounding environmental care within indigenous religious values allows primary schools to construct resilient moral frameworks that secular eco-literacy models often struggle to achieve in traditional communities (Azizah & Wahyudi, 2025). By positioning environmental action as an intrinsic religious obligation, the madrasah successfully mobilizes student engagement without depending heavily on external funding or complex technological infrastructure.

Furthermore, this study highlights the distinct advantage of rural madrasahs in leveraging strong community cohesion to reinforce environmental initiatives. The historical co-development of MIS Hidayatul Mubtadiin between school administrators and local village stakeholders creates a supportive social ecosystem where values practiced at school are echoed at home (Rahmat et al., 2024). Parents and community members reinforce the madrasah's eco-religious expectations, creating a continuous feedback loop of character

formation that extends beyond the physical school boundaries into the broader rural environment.

Despite these positive outcomes, the findings also reveal persistent structural challenges that threaten the long-term sustainability of the school's environmental culture. Limited physical infrastructure—such as damaged handwashing stations and the absence of formal waste-sorting facilities—places an disproportionate reliance on human effort and manual labor (Wibowo & Pratiwi, 2025). Without institutional upgrades to support basic sanitation infrastructure, maintaining high levels of environmental discipline risks inducing fatigue among educators and student leaders over extended periods.

Additionally, ensuring pedagogical continuity across non-religious subjects remains an ongoing institutional hurdle for the madrasah leadership. While IRE teachers actively integrate eco-theology into their lessons, general classroom teachers often treat environmental programs as secondary administrative tasks rather than core curricular objectives (Farida et al., 2024). Bridging this interdisciplinary divide requires systemic professional development to equip all teaching staff with cross-curricular eco-pedagogical strategies, ensuring a fully integrated learning environment.

To overcome these structural limitations, the madrasah administration must formalize environmental stewardship into written institutional policies and strategic planning documents. Embedding green benchmarks into the madrasah's long-term operational framework guarantees that environmental programs remain active regardless of leadership transitions or staffing changes (Hidayat & Setyawan, 2026). Furthermore, establishing formal partnerships with regional educational and environmental agencies can secure the infrastructure support necessary to sustain these grass-roots educational initiatives.

In conclusion, the eco-pedagogical framework executed by IRE teachers at MIS Hidayatul Mubtadiin demonstrates how religious instruction can serve as a powerful catalyst for environmental culture in primary education. By systematically integrating Quranic ethics, ethical role-modeling, structured habituation, and restorative supervision, educators successfully transform abstract theological doctrines into lived ecological habits (Kurniawan & Syahputra, 2024; Mulyadi et al., 2024). This empirical model offers valuable operational insights for primary madrasahs seeking to cultivate sustainable green cultures within resource-constrained environments across developing nations.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that Islamic Religious Education (IRE) teachers serve as pivotal eco-pedagogues capable of driving systemic environmental culture within rural primary madrasahs. By moving beyond conventional rote learning, educators operationalize eco-Islamic ethics—specifically the concepts of khalīfah fī al-arḍ (planetary stewardship) and al-ṭahārah (purity as faith)—into daily school realities. The synthesis of four dynamic roles (transformative educator, ethical role model through uswah ḥasanah, environmental motivator, and structural facilitator) enables teachers to bridge the long-standing gap between abstract theological doctrine and practical ecological habituation. Through integrated Quranic exegesis (Tafsīr), structured experiential activities such as Jum'at Bersih, and restorative moral supervision, environmental care is elevated from a mere administrative routine to an intrinsic expression of religious devotion ('ibādah). Consequently, the empirical evidence from MIS Hidayatul Mubtadiin provides a viable framework showing that value-based religious instruction can successfully foster sustainable student behavior even within resource-constrained educational environments.

From a theoretical perspective, this research enriches the literature on eco-pedagogy by offering a contextualized model of Eco-Islamic Ethics tailored for primary education in developing nations. It validates that indigenous religious paradigms can construct resilient moral frameworks for environmental stewardship, serving as a powerful alternative to secular

eco-literacy models. Practically, the findings offer an operational blueprint for madrasah administrators, school leaders, and religious education policymakers. It highlights that cultivating a green school culture does not strictly depend on heavy technological or capital infrastructure, but rather on human agency, ethical leadership, and structured habituation. Educational authorities can leverage these insights to design professional development programs that equip religious educators with cross-curricular eco-pedagogical competencies, thereby scaling eco-religious initiatives across basic education systems.

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