

## Embedding Ecotheology in Contextual Islamic Education: Enhancing Students' Eco-Literacy through Experiential Learning

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### ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to analyze the pedagogical process of instilling ecotheological values in context-based Islamic Religious Education (IRE) learning and to explore its contribution to strengthening students' ecological literacy within the Islamic school environment. This study responds to the limited integration of ecological values in Islamic educational practices, particularly in connecting Qur'anic teachings on environmental preservation with students' real-life environmental experiences. Using a qualitative case study approach, the research was conducted at MTs Negeri 11 Tasikmalaya involving IRE teachers and students as participants. Data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and documentation, and analyzed using an interactive analysis model comprising data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings indicate that ecotheological values are instilled through the contextualization of Qur'anic teachings on human responsibility toward nature, combined with experiential learning activities grounded in environmental issues affecting the students. This integration not only facilitates students' conceptual understanding of ecological principles but also encourages the internalization of ecological awareness and environmentally responsible behavior in their daily lives. Contextual learning further creates meaningful learning experiences by connecting religious knowledge with students' authentic environmental realities. This study highlights that integrating ecotheology, contextual learning, and experiential pedagogy contributes to the development of students' ecological literacy across cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions. Therefore, this research demonstrates the importance of innovatively developing Islamic education by positioning ecological values as an integral component of sustainable character education.

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### INTRODUCTION

Global environmental problems such as climate change, pollution, and ecosystem degradation have become increasingly complex and urgent issues that must be addressed systematically. The low level of ecological awareness among society, including students, is one of

the main factors contributing to environmental damage (Tilbury, 2015). Education plays a strategic role in fostering such awareness through learning processes that are not merely cognitive, but also oriented toward the development of attitudes and behaviors (UNESCO,2007). In this context, strengthening eco-literacy is essential as it refers to an individual's ability to understand ecological systems and to act responsibly toward the environment (Berkowitz et al, 2005).

From an Islamic perspective, the relationship between humans and the environment has long been an integral part of religious teachings. Humans are positioned as khalifah (stewards) on earth, bearing moral and spiritual responsibility for maintaining the balance of nature. This concept has developed within the study of ecotheology, an approach that integrates theological values with ecological awareness (Zulfikar, 2025). These values can, in fact, serve as a strong foundation in education, particularly in Islamic Religious Education (IRE) learning. However, in practice, IRE learning in Islamic schools still tends to focus on cognitive and normative aspects and has not yet fully integrated environmental issues into students' real-life contexts (Wijayanto et al., 2025).

One strategy to address these problems is the Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) approach. This approach emphasizes the relationship between learning materials and students' real-life experiences, thereby making the learning process more meaningful (Johnson, 2014). By implementing the contextual approach, students not only gain a theoretical understanding of concepts but also develop the ability to apply them in their daily lives. A number of studies have shown that contextual learning can enhance student participation and encourage the development of positive attitudes and behaviors (Amalia et al., 2024).

Integrating ecotheology into contextual-based Islamic Religious Education (IRE) is a promising strategy to enhance students' eco-literacy. This integration emphasizes how spiritual values in Islamic education can effectively foster environmental awareness and nurture environmentally responsible character. Studies suggest that ecopedagogy and eco-literacy in this context not only build awareness but also strengthen Islamic values centered on environmental conservation, thereby supporting sustainable character development (Amaliati et al., 2024; Wijayanto et al., 2025).

Nevertheless, studies that specifically integrate Ecotheology into contextual-based Islamic Religious Education (IRE) learning to strengthen students' eco-literacy remain limited. Most previous studies have focused more on conceptual aspects or curriculum development, rather than on the direct implementation of learning in the classroom. Therefore, this study is important to fill this gap by examining how integrating Ecotheology into contextual-based IRE learning can be implemented and how it can strengthen students' eco-literacy in Islamic schools.

Based on these issues, this study aims to explore the pedagogical process of instilling Ecotheological values through contextual Islamic Religious Education (IRE) learning, identify the instructional strategies teachers use to connect Islamic teachings with students' environmental realities, and examine how this process strengthens students' eco-literacy. This study is expected to enrich the discourse on environmentally based Islamic education by positioning Ecotheology not merely as a normative religious value, but also as a contextual and applicable pedagogical approach in fostering students' ecological awareness. Furthermore, the findings of this study may serve as a reference for teachers in designing IRE learning that is more relevant to sustainability issues and contemporary environmental challenges.

### **METHOD**

This study employs a qualitative case study design to gain an in-depth understanding of the implementation of ecotheological integration in contextual Islamic Religious Education (IRE) learning and its impact on strengthening students' eco-literacy. The research was conducted from January to March 2025 at MTs Negeri 11 Tasikmalaya, West Java. The selection of this research site was based on the consideration that the Islamic school has begun to integrate environmental values into IRE instruction.

The subjects in this study were three Islamic Religious Education (IRE) teachers and 60 seventh-grade students from an Islamic junior high school or Madrasah Tsanawiyah (MTs). The selection of subjects was carried out using a purposive sampling technique, namely by identifying informants with relevant understanding and experience in implementing eco-theology-based learning. The IRE teachers were selected because they serve as implementers of the learning process, while the students were chosen to identify the impact of the learning on strengthening eco-literacy.

The research procedures were carried out in three stages: preparation, implementation, and data analysis. In the preparation stage, the researcher designed research instruments in the form of observation guidelines and interview protocols based on indicators of ecotheology integration and eco-literacy. In the implementation stage, the researcher directly observed the contextual-based Islamic Religious Education (IRE) learning process, conducted in-depth interviews with teachers and students, and collected documents such as lesson plans, student worksheets, and documentation of learning activities.

The data in this study consist of qualitative materials, including descriptions of the learning process, interview results, and supporting documents. The data were collected through semi-structured interview techniques, participatory observation, and document analysis. The research instruments include observation sheets to examine the implementation of the learning process, interview guides to obtain more in-depth information, and documentation sheets to collect supporting data (Creswell, 2009).

**Table 1.** Research instruments for the integration of ecotheology and eco-literacy

Number	Variable	Indicator	Data collection technique	Instrument
1	Integration of Ecotheology in Islamic Religious Education (IRE) Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Relating the material to Qur'anic verses about the environment.</li> <li>▪ Integrating environmental conservation values into Islamic Religious Education (IRE) materials.</li> <li>▪ Using contextual examples related to the environment</li> </ul>	Observation, Document analysis	Observation sheet
2	Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Relating the material to real-life situations</li> <li>▪ Engaging students in hands-on learning experiences</li> <li>▪ Applying values in everyday life</li> </ul>	Observation, Interview	Observation sheet, Interview guide
3	Eco-Literacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Understanding environmental concepts</li> <li>▪ Having an environmentally conscious attitude</li> <li>▪ Having environmentally friendly behavior</li> </ul>	Observation, Interview	Observation sheet, Interview guide
4	Supporting Data	Lesson Plan, Worksheet	Document analysis	

Data analysis employed Miles and Huberman's interactive model, comprising data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction entailed selecting and distilling information pertinent to the research focus. Data display featured an organized, descriptive narrative. The conclusion drawing involved interpreting the findings to address the research questions.

The validity of the research data was tested through source and technique triangulation, namely by comparing data from observations, documentation, and interviews, as well as by rechecking information with informants. On the other hand, the researcher also conducted member checking to ensure the data were consistent with field reality. Thus, this research method was designed to produce data that are reliable, valid, and relevant to the objective, namely, analyzing the integration of ecotheology into contextual-based Islamic Religious Education (IRE) learning and its impact on strengthening students' eco-literacy.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The research findings demonstrate that embedding ecotheology within contextual Islamic Religious Education (IRE) is evident not only in specific lesson content but also in the active cultivation of ecological values during routine classroom interactions. Observations reveal that teachers consistently relate IRE topics to environmental problems that directly impact students' daily lives. For example, when addressing the role of humans as khalifah (vicegerents) on earth, the teacher moves beyond a standard interpretation of Qur'anic verses and encourages students to assess the school surroundings, often cluttered with plastic waste after recess. In one class, the teacher asked, "If humans are khalifah, does allowing litter to accumulate fulfill Allah's trust (amanah)?" This question spurred a critical debate among students about the connection between worship and ecological stewardship.

The implementation demonstrates that learning meaningfully combines theological and ecological principles. This reflects the core of ecotheology, which highlights the intrinsic link between spiritual values and human responsibility for the environment (Zulfikar, 2025). Thus, learning goes beyond cognitive development to cultivate students' ecological spiritual awareness. Furthermore, interviews and observations reveal that teachers apply a contextual learning strategy through structured discussions and hands-on experiences. Students analyze environmental issues in their community and devise solutions rooted in Islamic values. Activities include keeping the classroom clean, separating waste, and monitoring environmental conditions as part of the curriculum.

This approach has been shown to enhance students' engagement in learning. Students do not merely understand concepts theoretically, but are also able to relate them to their own lives. This aligns with the Contextual Teaching and Learning theory, which emphasizes the importance of real-life experiences in the learning process (Chayati et al., 2025), and is supported by findings that contextual learning can improve students' positive attitudes and behaviors (Amaliati et al., 2024). Furthermore, these findings indicate an improvement in students' eco-literacy, encompassing knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors. This is observed in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Improvement of students' eco-literacy

Number	Aspect	Indicator	Finding
1	Knowledge	Understanding the concept of the environment in Islam	Students are able to explain the concept of the caliph (khalifah) and protect the environment.
2	Attitude	Care for the environment	Students demonstrate awareness of maintaining cleanliness.
3	Behavior	Demonstrating environmentally friendly actions	Students dispose of waste properly and conserve water

Table 2 shows that improvements in eco-literacy occur across all aspects of knowledge, attitudes, and behavior. It can be seen that the attitude aspect achieved the highest score compared to the other aspects. This indicates that integrating ecotheology into learning does not merely increase students' understanding but also fosters concern and environmental awareness. Meanwhile, the behavioral aspect also shows an improvement, indicating the implementation of these values in daily life.

The findings indicate that integrating ecotheology into context-based Islamic Religious Education (IRE) learning is effective in fostering students' eco-literacy holistically. This is consistent with the concept of eco-literacy, which emphasizes integrating knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors to build ecological awareness (Kumala & Saputri, 2026). In addition, this study's results support previous findings that Islamic value-based education can enhance students' environmental awareness (Amaliati et al., 2024).

From an implementation perspective, the success of ecotheology integration is strongly influenced by teachers' strategies in linking instructional content to students' life contexts. Contextual learning enables students to gain a deeper and more applicable understanding of the material. This reinforces the view that contextual learning can enhance the relevance and meaningfulness of education (Pratiwi & Purwanto, 2026).

Thus, integrating ecotheology into context-based Islamic Religious Education (IRE) learning is not merely about increasing students' understanding of the material, but also about fostering a sustained commitment to environmental care. Learning becomes more meaningful when it connects religious values to students' lives, ultimately addressing the challenges of education in an era of environmental crisis.

Although the research results indicate that integrating ecotheology into contextual-based Islamic Religious Education (IRE) learning is effective in improving students' eco-literacy, several limitations need to be considered. First, the implementation of learning still heavily depends on teachers' competence and creativity in connecting the material to environmental contexts. This has the potential to create inconsistencies in classroom practice across different classes, especially if teachers do not yet have a strong understanding of ecotheology and contextual learning. These findings indicate that strengthening teacher capacity is an important factor in the successful integration of ecological values in learning (Tilbury, 2015).

Second, this study employs a qualitative approach with a limited subject pool, so the generalizability of the findings remains restricted to the Islamic school under investigation. Therefore, further research is needed, using a quantitative or mixed-methods approach, to measure the effectiveness of ecotheology integration on a broader, more measurable scale. This is important for strengthening the external validity of the research findings and providing a stronger empirical foundation for the development of educational policy.

Third, although students' knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors have improved, the observed behavioral changes remain short-term and limited to the school environment. It cannot yet be determined whether these changes will persist over the long term or extend beyond the learning context. This indicates that strengthening eco-literacy requires a sustainable, comprehensive approach fully integrated into school culture (Permata et al., 2023).

Furthermore, integrating eco-theology into Islamic Religious Education (IRE) learning still faces challenges in developing systematic, standardized teaching materials. Most teachers continue to develop learning content independently, without specific curriculum guidelines for environmental education grounded in Islamic values. This condition indicates the need to develop structured learning models and instructional tools to ensure consistent implementation across various Islamic schools.

Nevertheless, this study contributes by demonstrating that integrating ecotheology is not merely conceptually relevant but also applicable in Islamic Religious Education (IRE) in Islamic schools. The strength of this research lies in its focus on direct classroom implementation through a contextual approach, thereby providing a concrete illustration of how ecological values can be internalized in the learning process. Therefore, this study opens up opportunities for the development of more innovative and sustainable ecotheology-based IRE learning models.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that instilling ecotheological values in contextual-based Islamic Religious Education (IRE) learning occurs through a pedagogical process that connects Islamic teachings on the relationship between humans and the environment with students' real-life experiences. This process is realized through the integration of Qur'anic values regarding ecological responsibility, the use of environmental issues as a learning context for students, and the implementation of experiential learning activities. These findings indicate that IRE learning does not only function as a space for transmitting religious knowledge, but also as a space for the internalization of ecological values relevant to students' social and environmental realities.

This study also demonstrates that the interconnection between ecotheology, contextual learning, and experiential learning forms a pedagogical mechanism that promotes the development of students' eco-literacy across cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions. In this context, ecotheology does not remain merely a normative religious discourse, but functions as a pedagogical bridge that helps students interpret environmental issues as part of their spiritual and social responsibilities. Thus, the main contribution of this study lies in reinforcing the perspective that integrating ecological values into Islamic education should be constructed through contextual and reflective learning experiences to become more meaningful for students.

The implications of this study highlight the importance of developing Islamic Religious Education (IRE) learning that is not only oriented toward conceptual understanding of religious

teachings but also toward fostering ecological awareness through a contextual learning approach. However, this study is limited to a single Islamic school context with a qualitative approach, so it cannot yet represent the diversity of implementation within the broader context of Islamic education. Therefore, future research may examine the application of an eco-theology-based learning model across various educational levels and contexts, as well as explore its relationship with strengthening students' sustainability character in greater depth.

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