

# Integration Of Khalifah Fi Al-Ardh Values in Islamic Education For Strengthening Ecological Awareness Among Students at MAN 4 Tasikmalaya

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**Abstract:** This study examines the integration of the concept of *Khalifah fi al-Ardh* (vicegerency on earth) within Islamic Education (PAI) as a framework for cultivating ecological awareness among students at MAN 4 Tasikmalaya, West Java. Rooted in the Qur'anic mandate of stewardship over the natural world, this research investigates how Islamic theological values can be systematically embedded into educational praxis to foster environmentally responsible behaviour among adolescent learners. Employing a qualitative case study methodology, data were gathered through in-depth interviews, classroom observation, and documentary analysis involving teachers, students, and school administrators. The findings reveal that schools which consciously integrate *Khalifah fi al-Ardh* principles into curriculum design, co-curricular activities, and institutional culture demonstrate measurably stronger ecological awareness among their students. Three interconnected pedagogical mechanisms were identified: (1) the theological grounding of environmental ethics in Islamic doctrine, (2) the contextualisation of stewardship values through project-based and experiential learning, and (3) the reinforcement of green behaviour through school-wide environmental programmes. The study concludes that an Islamic education paradigm anchored in *Khalifah fi al-Ardh* theology represents a transformative and culturally resonant approach to ecological education in Muslim-majority societies. These findings carry significant implications for Islamic educational policy, curriculum development, and the broader agenda of sustainable development in Indonesia.

**Keywords:** Khalifah fi al-Ardh; Islamic education; ecological awareness; environmental ethics; sustainable education; MAN 4 Tasikmalaya.

## Introduction

The global ecological crisis of the twenty-first century — encompassing climate change, biodiversity loss, deforestation, and environmental degradation — has prompted urgent scholarly and policy discourse on the role of education in cultivating sustainable attitudes and behaviours. Within the Indonesian context, where environmental challenges are acutely felt across its vast archipelago, the question of how formal schooling can become a catalyst for ecological responsibility has emerged as a pressing priority. Islamic education, as the dominant religious educational tradition in the world's most populous Muslim-majority nation, occupies a strategic position in this endeavour (Khalid, 2020; Koehrsen, 2021).

The concept of *Khalifah fi al-Ardh* — derived from the Qur'anic injunctions in Surah al-Baqarah (2:30) and Surah Sad (38:26) — establishes a theological foundation for human stewardship of the earth. This doctrine posits that human beings are divinely entrusted with the guardianship (*amanah*) of the natural world, obligating them to manage ecological resources with justice, wisdom, and accountability before God (Khalid, 2020; Gulzar et al., 2021). Far from being an abstract theological construct, the concept of *khalifah* carries profound implications for how Islamic education can be operationalised as a vehicle for environmental ethics.

Despite the conceptual richness of this theological framework, empirical research on the systematic integration of *Khalifah fi al-Ardh* principles into formal Islamic schooling remains scarce, particularly at the madrasah level. Madrasah Aliyah Negeri (MAN) institutions in Indonesia represent a critical site of inquiry, as they combine rigorous Islamic studies with the national curriculum, rendering them uniquely positioned to bridge theological values and contemporary ecological concerns (Wakhidah & Erman, 2022; Rohman et al., 2024). MAN 4 Tasikmalaya, situated in one of West Java's most educationally active regions, offers a compelling case for examining how this integration unfolds in practice.

This study therefore addresses the following research question: How is the concept of *Khalifah fi al-Ardh* integrated within the Islamic Education curriculum and school culture at MAN 4 Tasikmalaya, and what is its impact on the ecological awareness of students? The paper proceeds by reviewing the theoretical and theological underpinnings of *Khalifah fi al-Ardh*, describing the research methodology, presenting empirical findings, and offering a discussion of implications for Islamic educational theory and environmental education policy.

## Literature Review

### 1. Theological Foundations: Khalifah fi al-Ardh in Islamic Thought

The concept of *khalifah* occupies a central position in Islamic theology and philosophy. In its Qur'anic usage, it signifies a divinely appointed representative or trustee who bears moral responsibility for the earth's preservation (Khalid, 2020). Classical scholars including al-Ghazali, Ibn Khaldun, and Ibn Rushd elaborated upon this concept as a framework for ethical governance, emphasising that the discharge of stewardship obligations is inseparable from righteous character (*akhlaq*) and God-consciousness (*taqwa*) (Nasr, 2021). Contemporary Islamic environmental thinkers such as Seyyed Hossein Nasr have extended this discourse to articulate an Islamic eco-theology that challenges modern anthropocentrism and proposes a theocentric ethic of creation care (Rahmat, 2025).

The Qur'anic verses most directly relevant to ecological stewardship include 2:30, which announces humankind's appointment as God's vicegerent on earth; 7:56, which prohibits corruption (*fasad*) upon the earth after its reform; and 30:41, which attributes environmental disaster to the consequences of human transgression. These passages constitute a coherent doctrinal basis for an Islamic environmental ethic rooted in accountability, balance (*mizan*), and the prohibition of waste (*israf*) (Khalid, 2020; Gulzar et al., 2021).

## 2. Islamic Education and Environmental Ethics

Islamic education (*tarbiyah Islamiyah*) has traditionally been conceived as the holistic formation of the human person — intellectually, spiritually, and morally — in accordance with divine guidance (Rohman et al., 2024; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Contemporary Islamic educational theorists have argued for the integration of values-based learning that addresses the full spectrum of human responsibility, including ecological stewardship (Hasan et al., 2024; Wakhidah & Erman, 2022).

Research in Muslim-majority educational contexts has demonstrated that religiously grounded environmental education can be highly effective in cultivating pro-environmental attitudes and behaviours (Rahman & Jalil, 2021; Abd Rahman et al., 2020). Studies conducted in Malaysia, Turkey, and Indonesia suggest that students whose environmental education is explicitly linked to Islamic theological principles exhibit stronger environmental concern and greater readiness for sustainable action than those who receive secular environmental instruction alone (Rohman et al., 2024; Husniati et al., 2022).

In the Indonesian context, research on the intersection of Islamic education and environmental awareness remains underdeveloped at the secondary level, with most empirical studies focusing on higher education and pesantren (Wakhidah & Erman, 2022; Juliani et al., 2024). The madrasah system — which enrolls millions of students across the country — represents a largely untapped site for investigating how theological ecological values translate into pedagogical practice and student outcomes at the secondary level.

## 3. Ecological Awareness: Conceptual Framework

Ecological awareness, as conceptualised in this study, encompasses three interrelated dimensions: cognitive (knowledge of ecological systems and environmental issues), affective (concern and care for the natural world), and behavioural (concrete environmentally responsible actions) (Anggraini et al., 2022; Taisir et al., 2024). This tripartite framework, informed by environmental education theory, provides a structured lens through which to evaluate the impact of *Khalifah fi al-Ardh* integration on student development.

## Method

This research adopts a qualitative case study design (Yin, 2018), which is appropriate given the contextually embedded and interpretive nature of the phenomena under investigation. The case study approach allows for a detailed examination of how *Khalifah fi al-Ardh* values are operationalised within a specific institutional setting, capturing the complexity of processes that cannot be adequately studied through survey or experimental methods.

The research site is MAN 4 Tasikmalaya, a state Islamic senior secondary school (Madrasah Aliyah Negeri) located in Tasikmalaya City, West Java Province. The school was purposively selected on the basis of its documented engagement with environmental programmes and its institutional emphasis on character education rooted in Islamic values. The study was conducted from January to May 2025.

Participants comprised twelve Islamic Education (PAI) teachers, six school administrators (including the principal and curriculum coordinator), and forty students drawn from grades X, XI, and XII. Participants were selected through purposive and snowball sampling to ensure informational depth and representational diversity across grade levels and subject areas. Data were collected through: (1) semi-structured in-depth interviews with teachers and administrators; (2) focus group discussions with students; (3) systematic classroom observation of PAI lessons; and (4) documentary analysis of curriculum documents, lesson plans (*RPP*), and school environmental policy documents.

Data analysis followed an inductive reflexive thematic analysis procedure (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Byrne, 2022), involving systematic coding, category development, and theme construction. Member checking and triangulation across multiple data sources were employed to enhance the trustworthiness and credibility of

findings. Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant institutional authorities prior to fieldwork.

## Results and Discussion

### 1. Theological Anchoring of Ecological Ethics in PAI Curriculum

The analysis of curriculum documents and lesson plans revealed that the concept of *Khalifah fi al-Ardh* was explicitly referenced across multiple PAI units, particularly within the topics of Islamic environmental ethics (*akhlaq bi al-bi'ah*), Qur'anic exegesis, and Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh al-bi'ah*). Teachers consistently articulated the Qur'anic narrative of human stewardship as the theological foundation of their environmental instruction. One senior teacher observed:

*“When students understand that they are God’s vicegerents on this earth, they realise that caring for the environment is not merely a civic obligation but a religious duty — a form of worship. This theological grounding transforms how they relate to nature.” (Teacher interview, March 2025)*

This finding aligns with Rahmat’s (2025) argument that an Islamic eco-theology grounded in the concept of *khalifah* generates a qualitatively different form of environmental motivation than secular ecological education, as it situates environmental care within a comprehensive cosmological and eschatological framework. Students who internalise their identity as trustees of creation exhibit a sense of moral urgency about ecological responsibility that transcends utilitarian or aesthetic rationales for environmental protection.

### 2. Contextualisation through Project-Based and Experiential Learning

A second significant finding concerns the pedagogical strategies employed to translate *Khalifah fi al-Ardh* principles from abstract theology into experiential learning. Teachers at MAN 4 Tasikmalaya reported employing a range of project-based activities, including school garden management, waste reduction campaigns, tree-planting initiatives, and water conservation projects, all framed explicitly within the theological discourse of stewardship. These activities were integrated into PAI assessment frameworks, ensuring that ecological engagement was treated as a measurable learning outcome.

Focus group discussions with students indicated high levels of engagement and affective investment in these projects. Participants described experiencing a deepened sense of connection to the natural world and a heightened consciousness of their moral responsibility as Muslims. As one eleventh-grade student remarked:

*“When we planted trees and were taught that this is an act of sadaqah jariyah — a perpetual charity that continues to benefit others — I felt that looking after nature is something truly meaningful. It is not just an assignment; it is worship.” (Student FGD, April 2025)*

This pedagogical approach resonates with scholarship on values-based environmental education (Rohmatulloh, 2023; Muin et al., 2025) and Islamic pedagogical traditions that emphasise the integration of knowledge, values, and action (*tafakkur*, *tadabbur*, and *amal*). The experiential dimension of learning was found to be particularly effective in bridging the cognitive and behavioural dimensions of ecological awareness.

### 3. Institutional Culture and School-Wide Environmental Programmes

The third key finding pertains to the role of institutional culture in reinforcing *Khalifah fi al-Ardh* values beyond the classroom. MAN 4 Tasikmalaya has developed a comprehensive school environmental policy (*Adiwiyata*), which mandates green school practices including waste sorting, energy conservation, and the maintenance of biodiversity within the school grounds. Documentary analysis revealed that these institutional policies were explicitly linked to Islamic values in school policy documents, with quotations from the Qur'anic tradition used to frame environmental responsibilities.

Interview data with administrators confirmed that the integration of Islamic environmental ethics into institutional culture was a deliberate strategy, reflecting the school leadership’s conviction that ecological responsibility must be cultivated as a habitual disposition (*akhlaq*) rather than as an abstract intellectual knowledge. The principal articulated this vision as follows:

*“We want our students to leave this school as true khalifah — not merely in word, but in daily practice. The environment they live in is their first responsibility as God’s representatives on earth.” (Principal interview, February 2025)*

This finding supports the view that sustainable ecological education requires alignment between curriculum content, pedagogical practice, and institutional culture (Muzakki et al., 2025; Zebua et al., 2024). The case of MAN 4 Tasikmalaya illustrates how Islamic values can serve as a unifying thread that connects classroom instruction with school-wide practice and community engagement.

#### 4. Impact on Student Ecological Awareness

Triangulated data from interviews, focus groups, and observation converge in indicating that students at MAN 4 Tasikmalaya demonstrate notably strong ecological awareness across all three dimensions of the conceptual framework: cognitive, affective, and behavioural. Students exhibited sophisticated understanding of ecological systems and environmental issues, framed consistently within Islamic theological discourse. Affectively, they expressed deep personal care for the natural world, motivated by a sense of divine accountability. Behaviourally, the majority reported consistent engagement in environmentally responsible practices both within school and in their home communities.

These outcomes suggest that the integration of *Khalifah fi al-Ardh* values into Islamic education can produce a holistic form of ecological awareness that is simultaneously rooted in religious conviction and responsive to contemporary environmental challenges. The theological grounding of ecological ethics appears to function as a powerful motivational resource that sustains environmental commitment over time, as students understand ecological stewardship not merely as a cultural norm but as a divine obligation.

#### Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that the systematic integration of *Khalifah fi al-Ardh* principles into Islamic Education at MAN 4 Tasikmalaya constitutes a transformative pedagogical approach that effectively cultivates ecological awareness among secondary school students. Three interconnected mechanisms drive this process: the theological grounding of environmental ethics within Islamic doctrine, the contextualisation of stewardship values through experiential and project-based learning, and the reinforcement of green dispositions through a coherent institutional culture.

These findings carry significant implications for Islamic educational policy and practice in Indonesia and beyond. Curriculum developers should prioritise the explicit integration of *Khalifah fi al-Ardh* principles across all levels of Islamic schooling, supported by teacher professional development that equips educators to navigate the intersection of theology and ecology with pedagogical sophistication. Institutional leaders should cultivate school environments that embody Islamic environmental values in their everyday operation, thereby reinforcing the ecological dispositions formed in the classroom.

Future research should extend this inquiry to other madrasah contexts, examine the long-term behavioural outcomes of theologically grounded ecological education, and explore the potential for *Khalifah fi al-Ardh*-based environmental education to contribute to Indonesia's national sustainable development agenda. The present study affirms that Islamic education, when faithfully anchored in its theological heritage, possesses remarkable capacity to address the urgent ecological challenges of our time.

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