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Integrating Islamic Eco-Theology into Religious Education: A New Paradigm for Curriculum Development

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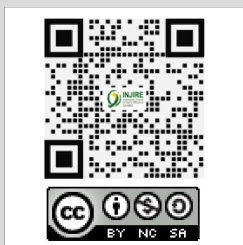
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Abstract

The global environmental crisis demands a transformative educational approach, particularly in Islamic Religious Education (IRE), which has traditionally been anthropocentric. This conceptual study proposes a paradigm shift by integrating Islamic eco-theology into IRE curriculum development. Through qualitative analysis, utilizing library research and conceptual analysis of primary Islamic sources and curriculum theory, we construct a framework based on a Theo-Eco-Centric paradigm—positioning the God-human-nature relationship as foundational. The framework aims to cultivate an Eco-Conscious Muslim who internalizes the values of khalifah (stewardship) and amanah (trust) as environmental ethics. This is operationalized through systematic integration across core IRE subjects (Aqidah, Akhlak, Fiqh, History), employing transformative pedagogies like project-based learning and critical eco-theology circles, and authentic assessment via portfolios and scenario-based evaluations. The study concludes that this framework represents a significant reorientation of IRE, empowering it to address contemporary ecological challenges. As a conceptual proposal, it requires future empirical validation. The research contributes to Islamic educational reform and broader interfaith dialogues on sustainability.

Keywords: Curriculum Development, Eco-Theology, Educational Paradigm, Islamic Religious Education, Sustainability Education

Abstrak

Krisis lingkungan global menuntut pendekatan pendidikan yang transformatif, khususnya dalam Pendidikan Agama Islam (PAI) yang selama ini bersifat antroposentris. Studi konseptual ini mengusulkan pergeseran paradigma melalui integrasi prinsip-prinsip ekoteologi Islam ke dalam pengembangan kurikulum PAI. Melalui analisis kualitatif dengan studi pustaka dan analisis konseptual terhadap sumber Islam primer dan teori kurikulum, dikembangkan kerangka kerja berbasis paradigma Teo-Eko-Sentris yang menempatkan relasi Tuhan-manusia-alam sebagai landasan. Kerangka kerja ini bertujuan membentuk Muslim Berkesadaran Ekologis yang menginternalisasi nilai khalifah dan amanah sebagai etika lingkungan. Hal ini diwujudkan melalui integrasi sistematis ke dalam mata pelajaran inti PAI (Aqidah, Akhlak, Fiqh, Sejarah), penggunaan pendekatan pedagogi transformatif seperti pembelajaran berbasis proyek dan halaqah kajian ekoteologi kritis, serta penilaian autentik berupa portofolio dan evaluasi berbasis skenario. Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa kerangka kerja ini merepresentasikan reorientasi signifikan bagi PAI untuk menghadapi tantangan ekologis kontemporer. Sebagai sebuah proposal konseptual, kerangka ini memerlukan validasi empiris di masa depan. Penelitian ini berkontribusi pada reformasi pendidikan Islam dan dialog antaragama yang lebih luas tentang keberlanjutan.

Kata Kunci: Ekoteologi, Paradigma Pendidikan, Pendidikan Agama Islam, Pendidikan Keberlanjutan, Pengembangan Kurikulum

Introduction

The 21st century is unequivocally defined by a global environmental crisis, characterized by climate change, biodiversity loss, and resource depletion (Krause, 2024; Kumar, 2023). This crisis is not merely a technological or political challenge but, at its core, a profound moral and spiritual one. It calls into question humanity's relationship with the natural world and demands a fundamental reorientation of values and worldviews (Jenkins et al., 2016; Mukhsin et al., 2024). Within this context, education, particularly religious education, is summoned to play a pivotal role. For generations, religious education has been instrumental in shaping moral character and spiritual consciousness (Croitoru & Munteanu, 2014; Erricker & Erricker, 2000; Wenas & Verana, 2024). However, its potential to foster a robust ethical stance towards environmental stewardship remains largely untapped, often sidelined by a more anthropocentric curriculum focused primarily on human-God and human-human relationships.

In the field of Islamic Education, this gap is particularly evident. While the Qur'an and the Prophetic traditions (*Sunnah*) are replete with principles of environmental ethics such as the concepts of *khalifah* (stewardship), *mizan* (balance), and the prohibition of *israf* (wastefulness) these principles have not been systematically integrated into the mainstream religious education curriculum (Gulzar et al., 2021; Kurbiyanto et al., 2024). The current curriculum in many Muslim-majority countries often treats environmental issues as a peripheral topic rather than a central theological and ethical imperative (Mukhsin & Alfani, 2024). This approach fails to leverage the powerful motivational force of faith in cultivating ecologically responsible behaviors among students, resulting in a disconnect between religious identity and environmental practice. This disconnect persists despite global educational initiatives like UNESCO's Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), which calls for integrating sustainability across all learning but often lacks deep engagement with specific religious ontologies (Rieckmann, 2017).

The literature on bridging eco-theology and Islamic education curriculum reveals three interconnected domains: the emergence of Islamic eco-theology, the integration of environmental education in religious curricula, and the theoretical foundations of curriculum transformation. Islamic eco-theology, pioneered by scholars such as (Nasr, 1996), underscores that the environmental crisis stems from humanity's spiritual disconnection from nature, which in Islam is viewed as a collection of divine signs (Dallh, 2024; Hancock, 2019). (Central Qur'anic principles such as *mizān* (balance), the prohibition of *isrāf* (excess), and the practice of *himā* (protected zones) provide a robust theological foundation for ecological ethics (Foltz, 2003). However, as noted by (Guessoum, 2010; Iqbal, 2000), a significant theory-practice gap persists, as these theological insights remain insufficiently embedded within institutional frameworks like education.

In the realm of religious curricula, studies show that while Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) has been widely adopted, its incorporation into Islamic education remains limited (Brennan, 2010; Spencer, 2017). Comparative analyses in Indonesia and Malaysia indicate that environmental themes are treated superficially, often reduced to moralistic lessons on cleanliness or tree planting rather than rooted in the theological and jurisprudential dimensions of eco-Islamic thought (Amzat, 2022; Arbain & Tamam, 2017; Hanafiah et al., 2020). This indicates a lack of structural and pedagogical models for integrating eco-theology into Islamic Religious Education. Comparative studies across faith traditions (e.g., Jenkins et al., 2016) show similar struggles, highlighting a common need for frameworks that translate theological principles into curricular structures.

Addressing this requires engagement with curriculum theory, particularly (Schiro, 2012) ideologies of curriculum, advocating a paradigm shift from Social Acclamation to Social Reconstruction, positioning Islamic education as a transformative response to ecological crises. Drawing on (Kuhn, 1962) paradigm shift theory and Wiggins & McTighe's (2005) Understanding by Design, the literature suggests that embedding eco-theological principles through backward design aiming to cultivate ecologically responsible *khalifahs* can operationalize this shift. Despite rich insights across theology, education, and curriculum theory, these fields have yet to converge

into a cohesive framework (Kokotsaki et al., 2016; G. Wiggins, 2011; G. P. Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). The existing approaches largely result in the peripheral inclusion of environmental themes, not a fundamental rethinking of the curriculum's epistemological basis.

This study proposes that the integration of *Islamic eco-theology* offers a transformative solution to this problem. Islamic eco-theology can be defined as an interpretive framework that examines Islamic theological sources to construct an ethical discourse on the relationship between God, humans, and the natural environment (Abadi et al., 2022). It posits that nature (*ayat kauniyyah*) is a fundamental sign of the Divine, and that human beings, as God's vicegerents on Earth, have a sacred duty (*amanah*) to protect and sustain it (Mursalat & Muliana, 2025). Moving beyond a mere green add-on, this approach calls for a theological re-reading that places ecological consciousness at the heart of Islamic faith and practice. This study argues that moving beyond peripheral inclusion requires a paradigm shift in curriculum development: from an anthropocentric to a *theo-eco-centric* framework. This shift fundamentally reframes the objectives, content, and pedagogy of IRE by making the God-human-nature relationship its central, organizing principle, rather than an added topic.

The central argument of this study is that integrating Islamic eco-theology into religious education is not merely an additive process, but necessitates a *paradigm shift* in curriculum development (Rohman et al., 2024). This new paradigm challenges the prevailing anthropocentric orientation and reframes Islamic education within a holistic, eco-centric or more precisely, *theo-eco-centric* framework. The novelty of this approach lies in its potential to: reframe learning objectives; namely to include the development of ecological virtue (*akhlak al-bi'iyah*) as a core outcome of religious learning; restructure contents that weave principles of eco-theology seamlessly into the core subjects of *Aqidah* (theology), *Fiqh* (jurisprudence), and *Akhlak* (ethics); and revitalize pedagogy which employs experiential, project-based learning that connects faith with real-world ecological action. This constitutes a shift from curriculum *reform* to curriculum *reconstruction*.

This study is guided by the following research questions: (1) What are the core principles of Islamic eco-theology that are relevant to religious education?; (2) How can these principles be operationalized into a coherent curriculum framework for Islamic Religious Education?; (3) How does this proposed framework represent a fundamental reorientation (*paradigm shift*) from existing approaches?

Methods

This study employs a qualitative research design, primarily utilizing a library research approach and conceptual analysis. The central objective is not to gather new empirical data but to construct a coherent and theoretically sound framework for integrating Islamic eco-theology into the religious education curriculum. This design was selected because the research aims to address a complex conceptual problem a paradigm shift in curriculum development which necessitates a deep analysis of textual sources and a theoretical synthesis, as informed by the work of Creswell (Creswell, 2009).

The data for this research consists entirely of textual materials, collected through a systematic and critical review of two main categories of sources. The primary sources include the foundational texts of Islam, namely the Al-Qur'an and the authentic Hadiths of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). These texts are meticulously examined to extract verses and traditions that articulate core principles of environmental ethics, such as human stewardship (*khalifah*), the concept of cosmic balance (*mizan*), and the prohibition of waste (*israf*). The secondary sources encompass a wide range of academic literature, including scholarly books and journal articles on Islamic eco-theology and environmental ethics, academic texts on curriculum theory, development, and paradigm shifts in education, and relevant publications on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). Additionally, official Islamic Religious Education curriculum documents from Indonesia and Malaysia were included to provide a critical baseline analysis of current practices.

The data collection procedure is carried out through a documentary review (Mogalakwe, 2006). Sources are identified via systematic searches across major academic databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar using a set of targeted keywords, including Islamic eco-theology, environmental ethics in Islam, Islamic education curriculum, curriculum integration, and paradigm shift in education. The search was limited to publications from 1990 to 2024 to capture the development of modern Islamic environmental discourse and contemporary curriculum theory. Inclusion criteria were: peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly books, and official curriculum documents directly addressing Islamic education, eco-theology, or sustainability. Excluded were non-academic commentaries and sources not available in English, Arabic, or Bahasa Indonesia.

The collected data is then analyzed using a combination of thematic analysis and conceptual synthesis (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Naeem et al., 2023; Thomas & Harden, 2008). The process begins with familiarization and coding, where the researcher immerses themselves in the textual data, reading and re-reading the sources to gain a deep understanding. Significant statements, concepts, and arguments related to the research questions are identified and assigned initial codes, for instance, Qur'anic concept of *khalifah* or critique of anthropocentric curriculum. Following this, the codes are collated and grouped into potential themes that form the essential pillars of the proposed curriculum framework. For example, various codes related to *khalifah*, *amanah* (trust), and *akhlak al-bi'iyah* (environmental morality) are synthesized into an overarching theme such as Theological and Ethical Foundations.

The crucial stage of theoretical integration and framework construction then follows. In this phase, the developed themes from Islamic eco-theology are integrated with established principles from curriculum theory, such as Schiro's curriculum ideologies or Wiggins & McTighe's Understanding by Design model (G. Wiggins & McTighe, 2012). The analysis specifically focuses on how these eco-theological themes can be translated and operationalized into core curriculum components, including Goals and Objectives, Content Selection, Learning Experiences, and Assessment Strategies. This synthesis ultimately results in the proposed conceptual framework for a new curriculum paradigm. Throughout the entire analytical process, the developing framework is continually refined through iterative critical reflection and preliminary consultations with two experts in Islamic education and curriculum development, ensuring its internal coherence, logical consistency, and theoretical robustness against the research questions and the existing body of literature.

It is important to acknowledge that this study is conceptual in nature. The methodology is designed for theoretical construction and framework development, not empirical testing. While this approach is appropriate and necessary for proposing a foundational paradigm shift, the resulting framework requires future empirical validation through case studies, pilot implementations, and broader expert review to assess its practicality and impact in diverse educational settings.

Results

Through a systematic conceptual analysis, this study reconstructs the core components of an Islamic Religious Education (IRE) curriculum based on the principles of Islamic eco-theology. The findings are presented as an integrated architectural framework, detailing the fundamental shifts required across all curriculum dimensions.

The Foundational Worldview: A Tripartite Theo-Eco-Centric Paradigm

The analysis reveals that the current, implicit anthropocentric worldview must be replaced by a robust Theo-Eco-Centric paradigm. This paradigm rests on three interconnected theological pillars derived from the primary sources, as synthesized in Table 1.

Table 1. The Three Pillars of the Theo-Eco-Centric Paradigm

Pillar (Principle)	Core Conceptualization	Curricular Implication & Pedagogical Goal
Tawhid as Cosmic Unity (الوحدانية الكونية)	The principle of Divine Oneness extends beyond theology to cosmology. It affirms all creation is unified in origin, submission to Divine law, and purpose as a sign (<i>ayat</i>) of the Creator.	To teach students to see the universe not as a collection of resources, but as a single, sacred, and interconnected whole. Harming any part is a violation of this cosmic <i>Tawhid</i> .
Khalifah as Ethical Stewardship (الخلافة الأخلاقية)	The concept of human vicegerency is redefined from dominion to profound ethical responsibility. Humans are positioned within the natural community as responsible trustees (<i>amin</i>), accountable for their guardianship.	To foster a deep sense of individual and collective responsibility for maintaining the integrity of the natural world.
Amanah as a Binding Covenant (الأمانة العهدية)	The trust (<i>amanah</i>) is framed as a binding covenant (<i>'ahd</i>) between humanity and God, with nature as the subject of that trust. Breaching it through exploitation/waste (<i>israf</i>) is a theological transgression.	To imbue environmental ethics with the weight of a sacred contract, making ecological protection a non-negotiable aspect of faith.

The first pillar is Tawhid as Cosmic Unity (الوحدانية الكونية), where the principle of Divine Oneness extends beyond theology to cosmology (Hussain, 2024). It affirms that all creation, from galaxies to microorganisms, is unified in its origin, its submission to Divine laws, and its purpose as a sign (*ayat*) of the Creator. A curriculum based on this pillar teaches students to see the universe not as a collection of resources, but as a single, sacred, and interconnected whole, where harming one part is a violation of this cosmic Tawhid.

The second pillar is Khalifah as Ethical Stewardship (الخلافة الأخلاقية), redefining the concept of human vicegerency from one of dominion to one of profound ethical responsibility (Mehira & Benoumessad, 2025). This finding positions the human not above nature, but as a responsible member within the natural community, tasked with maintaining its integrity. The Khalifah is a trustee (*amin*) who will be held accountable for their guardianship on the Day of Judgment. This translates to a curriculum goal of fostering a deep sense of individual and collective responsibility.

The third pillar is Amanah as a Binding Covenant (الأمانة العهدية), framing the trust that humanity accepted as a binding covenant (*'ahd*) between humanity and God, with the natural world as the subject of that trust (Greene, 2004). Breaching this trust through exploitation and waste (*israf*) is not merely an environmental mistake but a theological transgression. This pillar imbues environmental ethics with the weight of a sacred contract, making its protection a non-negotiable aspect of faith.

The Reconstructed Components of the Curriculum

The overarching aim of the reconstructed curriculum is to form an Eco-Conscious Muslim whose faith is manifested through ecological virtue. This target profile is characterized by three core competencies. The first competency is that of the Eco-Literate Believer, who possesses a deep understanding of Qur'anic verses and Prophetic traditions related to the environment and can articulate the Islamic basis for sustainability (Ali & Agushi, 2024; Amalia, 2024). The second is the Ethically-Driven Steward, who internalizes the values of *khalifah* and *amanah*, demonstrating empathy towards all creation and a commitment to justice in human-environment interactions (F.

Rahman, 2017; R. Rahman et al., 2025). The third competency is the Active Change Agent, who is equipped and motivated to implement practical, faith-based solutions to environmental challenges in their local and global communities (Lee & Kong, 2014).

To achieve this profile, the findings provide a detailed mapping for integrating eco-theology into the standard subjects of IRE, moving beyond superficial addition to deep conceptual fusion.

Table 2. Content Integration

Core Subject	Redefined Focus	Key Content Modules (Examples)
Aqidah (Theology)	From proving God's existence to understanding His wisdom through creation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Book of Universe (Kitab al-Kaun): A thematic study of <i>Ayat Kauniyyah</i> and their correlation with <i>Ayat Qawliyyah</i> (scriptural verses). - The Ethics of Knowing: The link between the pursuit of scientific knowledge and the responsibility of the <i>Khalifah</i>.
Akhlak (Ethics)	From exclusive focus on interpersonal ethics to inclusive cosmic ethics.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Akhlak al-Bi'iyah (Environmental Ethics): A new sub-discipline covering rights of animals (<i>haq al-hayawan</i>), rights of plants, and ethics of resource use. - Virtues of the Steward: Cultivating gratitude (<i>shukr</i>), contentment (<i>qana'ah</i>), and simplicity (<i>zuhd</i>) as antidotes to consumerism.
Fiqh (Jurisprudence)	From ritual purity to ecological purity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Fiqh al-Bi'ah (Environmental Jurisprudence): A dedicated module on the <i>ahkam</i> (rulings) related to water conservation in <i>wudu</i>, ethical treatment of animals in <i>halal</i> slaughter, and the sin of pollution. - Reviving Hima & Harim: Studying Islamic legal instruments for establishing protected zones for wildlife and water sources.
Tarikh (History)	From political history to the history of ecological civilization.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Green Civilization of Islam: Examining historical models of sustainable urban planning, water management (<i>qanats</i>, <i>sabil</i>), and agricultural practices in Muslim civilizations. - Biographies of Stewardship: Studying the lives of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and his companions as exemplars of environmental sensitivity.

The findings necessitate a move from passive reception to active and transformative engagement. A spectrum of pedagogical strategies is proposed, beginning with *Eco-Ibadah* (Ecological Worship), which involves reframing daily practices. For example, this includes teaching *wudu* with an emphasis on the spiritual and ethical imperative of using water sparingly, even if from a flowing river (Dewi et al., 2024).

Another key strategy is the use of Critical Eco-Theology Circles, which are facilitated discussions where students analyze contemporary environmental issues such as climate injustice

or species extinction through the lens of Islamic texts, thereby developing their own faith-based critiques and positions (Bock, 2024; Poudel, 2025).

Finally, the pedagogical spectrum includes Community-Based Green Projects (CBGP). These are long-term, faith-motivated initiatives such as The Mosque Zero-Waste Initiative, The Islamic Community Garden, or The Youth Water Guardians Program, where learning is fundamentally embedded in real-world action (Al kahfi & Qonitah, 2025; Maslani, 2023).

Assessment Reformation: Measuring Virtue and Impact

To align with the new goals, assessment must be fundamentally reformed to capture behavioral and dispositional changes. One proposed instrument is The Eco-Khalifah Portfolio, a comprehensive compilation documenting a student's journey. This portfolio includes reflections on nature (*tafaqqul*), research papers on *Fiqh al-Bi'ah*, photos or videos of their participation in green projects, and self-assessment of their personal consumption habits (Ansyar, 2025; Ma'rufah, 2025).

A second key method involves Scenario-Based Authentic Assessments. This approach presents students with complex, real-world ethical dilemmas, such as a conflict between economic development and conserving a forest. Their responses are then evaluated based on the demonstrated ability to apply eco-theological principles to navigate these scenarios (Sabatini, 2022; Seren Smith et al., 2018).

Finally, the reformation includes implementing 360-Degree Feedback for Ecological Virtue. This strategy involves gathering input from teachers, peers, and family regarding a student's demonstrated attitudes and behaviors towards the environment. This feedback is structured using rubrics based on Islamic virtues like compassion (*rahmah*) and responsibility (*mas'uliyah*) (Hancock, 2019; Waldman & Atwater, 1998).

Implications and Implementation Considerations

The proposed framework presents a comprehensive vision for a theo-eco-centric paradigm in IRE. To clarify its operational core, we define the target outcome the Eco-Conscious Muslim as a learner who: (1) cognitively understands the Islamic ecological paradigm (Eco-Literate Believer) (Amalia, 2024; Cutter-Mackenzie, 2003), (2) affectively internalizes its ethics as a sacred trust (Ethically-Driven Steward) (Berebon, 2025), and (3) behaviorally engages in faith-based ecological action (Active Change Agent) (De Caluwe & Vermaak, 2003). Key pedagogical constructs are likewise specified: Eco-Ibadah refers to the intentional reframing of ritual acts (e.g., wudu, zakat) to consciously embody principles of conservation and compassion (Mulasari et al., 2024); the Eco-Khalifah Portfolio is an authentic assessment tool compiling reflections, project evidence, and self-audits to document the development of ecological virtue (*akhlak al-bi'iyah*) (Cafaro, 2015).

While comprehensive, the framework's conceptual nature is its primary limitation. Its full validity can only be established through future empirical piloting. Acknowledging this, the framework is designed to be modular. Institutions may adopt it incrementally, starting with, for instance, integrating Critical Eco-Theology Circles (Bergmann, 2021) into the *Aqidah* curriculum or launching a single Community-Based Green Project (Cieslik, 2016; Shandas & Messer, 2008) before attempting school-wide transformation. Significant implementation challenges are anticipated, including the need for specialized teacher professional development in eco-theology, potential resistance to curriculum overload, and the logistical complexity of assessments like 360-degree feedback. These challenges do not invalidate the paradigm but highlight the necessity of phased implementation, contextual adaptation, and supportive policy frameworks. The following discussion section will further theorize these considerations and situate the framework within broader academic discourse.

Discussion

As a conceptual study, the findings presented above constitute a theoretically constructed framework for reorienting Islamic Religious Education. The following discussion does not provide empirical validation but rather situates this proposed framework within broader academic discourses, elucidates its philosophical underpinnings, addresses potential critiques, and explores its transformative implications and pathways for future empirical testing.

Theoretical Convergence: Bridging Islamic Ethics and Ecological Pedagogy

Our framework synthesizes Islamic eco-theology and progressive curriculum theory into what we term Tawhidi Ecology Pedagogy a pedagogical approach where the principle of Divine Oneness (*tawhid*) fundamentally structures the integration of ecological consciousness across all learning domains (Choudhury, 2014). This moves beyond Bernstein's (2000) collection curriculum model (where environmental topics are separate) to an integrated one, correcting the modern epistemological deviation that separates religious knowledge from environmental ethics (Al-Ramahi & Davies, 2002). The novelty lies not in identifying this convergence, but in operationalizing it into a detailed curricular architecture with defined components (objectives, content, pedagogy, assessment).

The conventional approach of adding environmental topics as separate modules represents what Bernstein would classify as a collection curriculum maintaining strong boundaries between traditional religious knowledge and ecological concerns (Bernstein, 2000). Our framework proposes an integrated curriculum that creates organic connections between these domains, facilitating what he terms recontextualization - where ecological principles are not external additions but internal reorientations of Islamic knowledge itself. This integration mirrors the Islamic philosophical tradition where, as argued by Al-Attas, knowledge is fundamentally unitary (*tawhid*) and cannot be arbitrarily compartmentalized (Al-Attas, 1980). The separation of religious knowledge from environmental ethics thus represents a modern epistemological deviation that our framework seeks to correct.

The development of *Fiqh al-Bi'ah* (Environmental Jurisprudence) in our framework represents what can be termed an eco-jurisprudential turn in Islamic education. This expands the traditional scope of *fiqh* beyond its predominant focus on ritual purity (*taharah*) and interpersonal transactions (*mu'amalat*) to include what Sardar calls the *fiqh* of cosmic relations. This expansion is not merely topical but methodological. It requires applying the established principles of *maqasid al-shari'ah* (higher objectives of Islamic law) - particularly the preservation of life (*nafs*), intellect (*'aql*), progeny (*nasl*), wealth (*mal*), and religion (*din*) to contemporary ecological crises (Sardar, 1985). As our findings demonstrate, environmental protection becomes a prerequisite for achieving all these objectives, thus moving from the periphery to the center of Islamic legal concern.

Philosophical Foundations: Deconstructing the Modernist Binary

The proposed paradigm shift challenges deep-seated assumptions in modern educational philosophy, beginning with a move beyond the rigid nature-culture divide. Modern education, influenced by Cartesian dualism, has largely maintained a strict separation between nature as object and culture as subject. Our framework, rooted in Islamic cosmology, deconstructs this binary. As Nasr contends, nature in Islam is *ayat* (sign) simultaneously a natural phenomenon and a cultural symbol, an empirical reality and a spiritual metaphor (Nasr, 1996). This perspective carries profound pedagogical implications. For instance, when students study a river, they encounter it not merely as a hydrological system (scientific knowledge) but also as a source of purity for wudu (ritual knowledge), a testament to God's generosity (theological knowledge), a trust requiring protection (ethical knowledge), and a historical source of civilization (historical knowledge). This multi-dimensional approach embodies what some educational philosophers term transdisciplinary

integration, where knowledge domains interact to create new understanding beyond their individual boundaries (Hoffmann et al., 2017).

Furthermore, this framework seeks to reclaim a foundational cosmological narrative. Modern education predominantly operates within a disenchanted cosmological narrative where nature is seen as mechanistic and devoid of spiritual significance. Our framework reclaims what Berry called the cosmological story, but from an Islamic perspective (Saniotis, 2006). The universe is understood as what Ibn Arabi described as the self-disclosure of God (*tajalli*), where every creature is a letter in the Great Qur'an of creation. This cosmological reorientation addresses what environmental educator David Orr (1992) identified as the root of the ecological crisis—not a failure of information but a failure of narrative. Islamic eco-theology provides precisely this alternative narrative, capable of inspiring genuine ecological commitment (Lewin et al., 2023).

Addressing Potential Critiques and Challenges

A rigorous discussion must anticipate and address potential objections to the proposed framework. One significant critique could arise from postmodern ecological thinkers, who might argue that the framework's emphasis on human responsibility (*khalifah*) retains a subtle anthropocentrism. However, this perspective misinterprets the Islamic position underpinning our model. As elucidated in our findings, the concept of *khalifah* within this framework is fundamentally theocentric, not anthropocentric. Human accountability is derived from the recognition of humanity's role within a creation that is ultimately the domain of God (Kilner, 2015; Narulita, et al., 2023). This aligns with what Izzi Dien describes as a responsibility-centered ethos, which is distinct from a human-centered one (Izzi Dien, 2000).

Beyond theoretical critiques, the practical implementation of such a significant curricular restructuring inevitably encounters several challenges. A primary concern is teacher readiness (Petko et al., 2018), as most contemporary Islamic studies instructors are trained in traditional disciplines and may lack the preparation required for this integrative, eco-theological approach. Addressing this gap necessitates the development of comprehensive teacher education programs that synergize eco-theological literacy with transformative pedagogical skills. Furthermore, institutional resistance is a common barrier to paradigm shifts, often stemming from structural inertia and the pressures of standardized testing regimes (Jónasson, 2016). A strategic, phased implementation beginning with pilot programs and demonstration schools is therefore essential to foster acceptance and demonstrate viability. Another practical hurdle is the risk of curriculum crowding (Sun et al., 2015), where the addition of substantial ecological content could overwhelm an already dense syllabus. It is crucial to reiterate, however, that our framework advocates for deep integration rather than mere additive inclusion. This approach of weaving eco-theological principles into the core fabric of existing subjects has the potential to create a more coherent, meaningful, and ultimately streamlined educational experience, rather than compounding the curricular load.

Pathways for Implementation and Future Research

Translating this theoretical framework into practice requires acknowledging and strategizing around key challenges. Teacher readiness necessitates new professional development modules that combine eco-theological literacy with transformative pedagogy for example, a workshop series on Facilitating Critical Eco-Theology Circles or Designing Eco-Ibadah Learning Sequences. To address institutional resistance, a phased, modular approach is advisable. A school might begin by piloting a single Community-Based Green Project (CBGP) like a Mosque Garden within the *Akhlak* curriculum, generating tangible outcomes before scaling up. Concerns about curriculum crowding can be mitigated by the framework's integrative nature; it does not add new subjects but reshapes existing ones. For instance, teaching wudu through the lens of water conservation (*fiqh al-bi'ah*) enriches, rather than expands, the standard content.

These implementation steps point directly to a robust agenda for future empirical research. Priority should be given to: (1) Design-based research to develop and refine teacher training modules; (2) Case studies of pilot programs in diverse Islamic schools to document contextual adaptations and barriers; and (3) Action research partnerships with educators to co-create and evaluate specific lesson plans or assessment tools like the Eco-Khalifah Portfolio. This empirical work is essential to validate, adjust, and ultimately realize the paradigm shift proposed here.

This framework contributes to global dialogues by offering a model for faith-based curriculum reconstruction that is both theologically deep and pedagogically operational. It moves beyond simply adding Islamic examples to universalist ESD (Education for Sustainable Development) frameworks; instead, it demonstrates how a specific religious worldview can generate its own unique, internal logic for sustainability education. This provides a template for other faith traditions, advancing truly pluralistic, South-North knowledge dialogues in ecological education (Barnett & Parnell, 2016). Our specific contribution is the detailed curricular blueprint from worldview to assessment that makes this internal logic actionable in classrooms.

Conclusion

The framework developed in this study proposes a fundamental reimagining a cosmological turn in Islamic education's purpose for the Anthropocene. By systematically integrating eco-theological principles across all curriculum dimensions, it offers a pathway for Islamic Religious Education (IRE) to address ecological crises while being deeply rooted in tradition. This transforms students from passive recipients of knowledge into active, ethically-engaged stewards (*khalifah*).

As a conceptual proposal, this framework's primary contribution is theoretical providing a coherent, theologically-grounded blueprint for change. Its practical validity must now be tested. Future research should focus on empirical pilot studies in diverse Islamic school contexts, the co-design of teacher training modules in eco-theology and transformative pedagogy, and comparative analyses with other faith-based sustainability education models. Initial implementation could adopt a modular approach, starting with specific components like Critical Eco-Theology Circles or a single Community-Based Green Project.

Despite the need for further validation, the urgency of the planetary crisis calls for serious engagement with such paradigmatic rethinking. Islamic education, with its rich resources of ecological wisdom, is uniquely positioned to contribute to this necessary global educational transformation.

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