

INTEGRATION OF ENVIRONMENTAL THEOLOGY IN THE PERSPECTIVE OF SPIRITUAL ECOLOGY THROUGH A LOVE-BASED CURRICULUM AT MI ARROSIDIYAH REJOTANGAN TULUNGAGUNG

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Abstract

The escalating global environmental crisis reflects not only ecological degradation but also a moral and spiritual decline, making the integration of environmental values into education an essential field of study. Previous studies have widely discussed environmental education and religious-based learning; however, limited research has specifically examined the integration of environmental theology within the framework of spiritual ecology through a love-based curriculum at the elementary education level, particularly in Islamic primary schools. This study seeks to address how environmental theology can be integrated into a love-based curriculum to foster ecological awareness and spiritual responsibility among students. Employing a qualitative approach with a case study design, this research was conducted at MI Arrosidiyah Rejotangan Tulungagung as the locus of study. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentation involving the school principal, teachers, students, and curriculum developers selected through purposive sampling. Data analysis followed the Miles and Huberman interactive model, including data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal a novel model of spiritually grounded ecological education that integrates compassion, responsibility, and environmental stewardship into daily learning practices. This study recommends the development of policy frameworks and curriculum guidelines that strengthen the integration of environmental theology and character education, while future research should explore broader implementation contexts and longitudinal impacts.

Keywords: Environmental Theology, Spiritual Ecology, Love-Based Curriculum

INTRODUCTION

The global environmental crisis has evolved into a multidimensional issue that affects not only ecological aspects but also the social, economic, and spiritual dimensions of human life. Phenomena such as climate change, deforestation, environmental pollution, and biodiversity loss indicate that the Earth is currently experiencing an ecological emergency that requires serious and comprehensive responses. From a religious perspective, this crisis is not merely understood as the result of technical errors or unsustainable development policies but also as a reflection of humanity's moral and spiritual crisis in perceiving and treating nature. Therefore, the environmental crisis can essentially be viewed as a manifestation of the deterioration of the relationship between humans, God, and nature as His creation (Lintang Dewi Fi'liya Putri & Brillian Zaki Ramadhan Ahmadi, 2025).

In line with this perspective, various modern scientific approaches that have been employed to address environmental problems are considered insufficient in providing comprehensive solutions. These approaches tend to be technocratic and oriented toward the exploitation of natural resources for economic development, often neglecting the ethical and spiritual dimensions of human-environment relations. The anthropocentric paradigm that dominates modern thought has positioned humans as the center of all interests, reducing nature to an object that can be utilized without limits. This mindset has proven to be one of the primary factors exacerbating the global environmental crisis, as it disregards the principles of ecological balance and sustainability (Jannah, 2025). The limitations of such scientific approaches indicate the need to integrate non-material values, particularly spiritual and religious values, into efforts to resolve environmental problems. Religion, as a value system, plays a strategic role in shaping human moral awareness and environmental ethics. In Islam, nature is viewed as an integral part of human life that must be

protected and preserved as a form of spiritual responsibility. Qur'anic values such as the concept of *khalifah* (stewardship), the prohibition against causing destruction (*fasād*), and the principle of balance (*mīzān*) provide a strong ethical foundation for human interaction with the environment. Therefore, integrating religious values into environmental education is crucial for fostering ecological awareness grounded in spirituality (Isfahani, 2025). In this context, the concept of environmental theology emerges as an approach that integrates religious teachings with ecological awareness. Environmental theology emphasizes that nature is part of God's creation and possesses sacred value; therefore, it must be treated with responsibility and respect. This approach not only highlights the relationship between humans and God but also extends it to the relationship between humans and nature as part of an interconnected cosmic system. Consequently, environmental theology provides a conceptual framework that positions humans as *khalifah*, entrusted with the responsibility of maintaining ecological balance and sustainability (Setiadi, 2026).

Furthermore, the environmental theology approach cannot be separated from the perspective of spiritual ecology, which emphasizes the interconnection between ecological and spiritual dimensions in human life. Spiritual ecology views environmental crises not only as a consequence of poor natural resource management but also as a result of the spiritual crisis of modern humanity, which has lost awareness of the sacred relationship among humans, nature, and God. From this perspective, environmental conservation is not merely an ecological act but also a spiritual practice that reflects faith and moral responsibility. Therefore, spiritual ecology serves as an important bridge connecting science, values, and human praxis in sustaining environmental integrity (Rusnatun, 2020).

In addition, the concept of integral ecology asserts that environmental crises must be understood holistically as the result of imbalanced relationships between humans and nature. This approach emphasizes the unity of ecological, social, and spiritual dimensions in understanding and addressing environmental issues. Integral ecology encourages humanity to shift its paradigm from exploitation toward harmony with nature by placing spiritual values at the foundation of sustainable environmental relationships. Thus, solutions to environmental crises should not be limited to technical measures but must also involve a comprehensive transformation of human values and consciousness (Haward & Minorum, 2021).

Within the educational context, integrating the values of environmental theology and spiritual ecology is particularly important, especially at the elementary education level. Elementary education represents a strategic phase in the formation of students' character and fundamental values, including ecological and spiritual awareness. Through integrated education, students not only acquire environmental knowledge but also develop attitudes and behaviors that reflect concern for nature as part of their moral and spiritual responsibilities. Therefore, religious value-based environmental education should be systematically incorporated into the Islamic education curriculum (Juhari et al., 1978).

One innovative educational approach relevant to this context is the development of a love-based curriculum. This curriculum emphasizes the values of compassion, care, and responsibility as the foundation of the learning process. In the perspective of Islamic education, love is understood not merely as an emotion but also as a spiritual value that encourages individuals to maintain harmonious relationships with God, fellow human beings, and nature. Consequently, a love-based curriculum can serve as an effective medium for integrating environmental theology and spiritual ecology into the learning process, thereby fostering students' ecological and spiritual awareness simultaneously (Cosmas Buru & Riyanto, 2025).

Although numerous studies have discussed environmental theology, spiritual ecology, and environmental education, research specifically examining the integration of these concepts within a love-based curriculum at the Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (Islamic elementary school) level remains relatively limited. Most existing studies focus on conceptual aspects or higher levels of education, leaving a gap in understanding how such integration is implemented in elementary educational practice. Yet, elementary education plays a crucial role in establishing the foundational values and character of students, including spiritually grounded ecological awareness.

Based on the foregoing discussion, this study aims to examine the integration of environmental theology from the perspective of spiritual ecology through a love-based curriculum at MI Arrosidiyah Rejotangan, Tulungagung. This research is expected to contribute theoretically to the development of Islamic education concepts grounded in spiritual ecology, as well as practically to the development of curriculum models capable of integrating spiritual values and environmental awareness in a holistic manner. Therefore, this study is not only relevant within academic discourse but also carries important implications for fostering a generation equipped with ecological and spiritual awareness to address the challenges posed by the global environmental crisis.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design aimed at gaining an in-depth understanding of the integration of environmental theology from the perspective of spiritual ecology through a love-based curriculum at MI Arrosidiyah Rejotangan, Tulungagung. This approach was selected because it enables the exploration of meanings, values, and educational practices within their natural and contextual settings. Research participants were selected purposively and included the madrasa principal, classroom teachers, subject teachers, students, and curriculum developers who were directly involved in the implementation of the learning process.

Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis, including lesson plans, curriculum documents, and school activities related to environmental education and spiritual values. The collected data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles and Huberman, which consists of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification conducted continuously throughout the research process. To ensure data trustworthiness, this study employed source and method triangulation, member checking, and an audit trail to enhance the validity, credibility, and transparency of the research process.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Concept of a Love-Based Curriculum at MI Arrosidiyah

The results of interviews with the principal revealed that the love-based curriculum at MI Arrosidiyah was developed as an educational approach emphasizing the values of compassion, care, responsibility, and respect for all living beings. The principal explained that the concept of love is not merely understood as an emotion but as a fundamental value in the educational process, manifested through daily attitudes and behaviors within the school environment.

The principal stated:

"We implement a love-based curriculum as the foundation for students' character development. Love for Allah, fellow human beings, and nature is integrated into every school activity and learning process."

Findings from interviews with educational staff and teachers indicated that the values of love are integrated into learning activities through approaches that emphasize positive emotional relationships between teachers and students. Teachers serve not only as instructors but also as mentors who provide exemplary models of care and empathy.

One teacher explained:

"We encourage students to help one another, maintain classroom cleanliness, and respect the environment. All of these practices are connected to the value of love as part of worship."

Meanwhile, interviews with students showed that they understand the concept of love as caring for one another and protecting the environment. Most students stated that they are taught not to damage plants, to dispose of waste properly, and to help friends in need.

Therefore, the concept of a love-based curriculum at MI Arrosidiyah can be understood as an educational approach that integrates spiritual and social values into the learning process to develop students who care for others and the environment.

Integration of Environmental Theology from the Perspective of Spiritual Ecology

Based on interviews with the principal, the integration of environmental theology from the perspective of spiritual ecology is implemented through the understanding that nature is a trust (*amanah*) from God that must be protected and preserved. The principal emphasized that environmental stewardship is part of every individual's moral and spiritual responsibility.

The principal explained:

"We teach students that caring for the environment is a form of worship. Nature is Allah's creation and must be protected; therefore, maintaining cleanliness and environmental sustainability is part of our religious responsibility."

Interviews with teachers revealed that environmental theology is integrated through the combination of religious teachings and environmental concepts in classroom learning. Teachers connect Qur'anic verses concerning the creation of nature with practical activities such as tree planting, maintaining cleanliness, and conserving water.

One teacher stated:

"When teaching about Allah's creation, we encourage students to understand that protecting nature is an expression of gratitude to God."

Meanwhile, students demonstrated a good understanding of the importance of environmental conservation as part of religious teachings. They stated that damaging the environment is a negative act that can harm other living beings.

These findings indicate that the integration of environmental theology from the perspective of spiritual ecology at MI Arrosidiyah has fostered awareness that the relationship between humans and nature is not only ecological but also spiritual.

Implementation in Learning Activities

The results of interviews with the principal showed that the implementation of the love-based curriculum and the integration of environmental theology are carried out through contextual and experiential learning strategies. Learning activities take place not only in classrooms but also through practical activities involving direct interaction with the environment.

The principal stated:

"We strive to create meaningful learning experiences so that students not only understand theories but also practice the values being taught."

Teachers explained that environmental-based learning is implemented through various school programs, including:

- Environmental cleanliness programs
- Tree-planting activities
- Waste management programs
- Green school initiatives
- Water and energy conservation practices

One teacher explained:

"We involve students in maintaining the school garden and sorting waste. These activities are considered part of the learning process rather than merely extracurricular activities."

Interviews with students indicated that they actively participate in environmental programs at school. Students reported that these activities help them better understand the importance of environmental conservation and make them feel happy to contribute to maintaining school cleanliness.

Thus, the implementation of the love-based curriculum and the integration of environmental theology at MI Arrosidiyah are conducted through contextual, participatory, and experiential learning approaches.

Impact on Students

The results of interviews with the principal indicated that the implementation of the love-based curriculum and the integration of environmental theology have had positive impacts on students' attitudes and behaviors. These changes are reflected in students' increased concern for environmental cleanliness and sustainability.

The principal stated:

"We have observed significant changes in our students. They have become more disciplined, more environmentally conscious, and more responsible."

Teachers also reported improvements in students' ecological awareness and social attitudes. Students have become more active in maintaining classroom cleanliness, caring for plants, and reminding their peers to comply with environmental regulations.

One teacher stated:

"Students are now more aware of the importance of not littering. They even remind one another when someone violates environmental rules."

Interviews with students revealed that they feel responsible for protecting the environment as part of their religious teachings. Students also reported applying environmentally friendly habits at home, such as disposing of waste properly and conserving water.

These findings demonstrate that the integration of environmental theology from the perspective of spiritual ecology through a love-based curriculum has positively influenced:

1. Environmental awareness and care
2. Discipline and responsibility
3. Spiritual awareness toward nature
4. Ecological behavior in everyday life

Therefore, the implementation of the love-based curriculum at MI Arrosidiyah has not only contributed to students' cognitive development but has also fostered character formation and sustainable spiritual awareness.

DISCUSSION

Analysis of the Integration of Environmental Theology and Spiritual Ecology

The findings of this study indicate that the integration of environmental theology from the perspective of spiritual ecology at MI Arrosidiyah functions not merely as a learning approach but also as an educational paradigm that positions the relationship between humans and nature within a framework of spiritual values and moral responsibility. This integration demonstrates a synergy between theological values and ecological awareness, fostering the understanding that environmental stewardship is both an act of worship and a divine trust (*amanah*) entrusted by God (Widiastuty & Anwar, 2025). These findings are consistent with previous studies suggesting that the environmental crisis is fundamentally a manifestation of the spiritual crisis of modern humanity, as humans tend to perceive nature solely as an object of exploitation devoid of sacred value. From the perspective of spiritual ecology, nature is viewed as a reflection of the Divine presence and possesses a religious dimension that must be respected and protected (Tri, 2024).

Furthermore, studies on Islamic ecotheology have demonstrated that the principles of environmental conservation in Islam are rooted in the concept of human responsibility as *khalifah* (stewards) on Earth. This concept emphasizes that preserving environmental sustainability constitutes an integral part of religious ethics and humanity's moral responsibility toward both God and nature (Rahmayani et al., 2025). Therefore, the integration of environmental theology into elementary education can serve as an effective strategy for fostering students' ecological character from an early age through the internalization of spiritual values within the learning process.

Love-Based Curriculum as a Transformational Approach

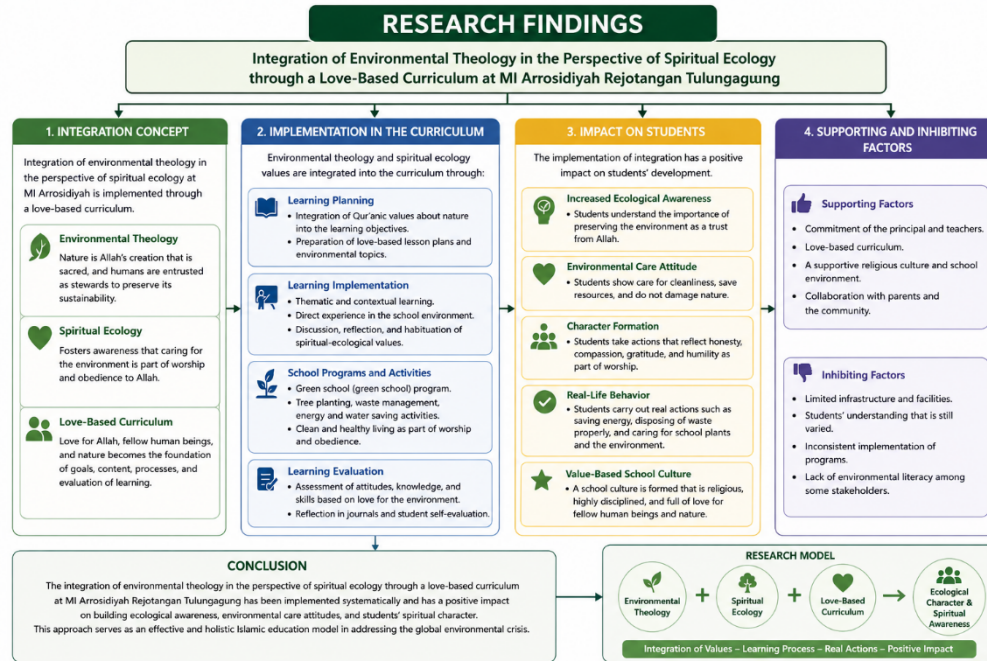
The love-based curriculum implemented at MI Arrosidiyah represents a transformational educational approach because it has the capacity to reshape students' mindsets and behaviors through the internalization of values such as compassion, care, and responsibility. This approach positions love as the core value of the educational process, guiding students to develop empathy toward both fellow human beings and the environment (Zulkifli, 2023). Research on environmentally oriented education has shown that the development of students' ecological awareness is influenced not only by environmental knowledge but also by moral and spiritual values cultivated through educational processes. Educational approaches that integrate cultural and spiritual values have been proven to foster sustainable environmentally responsible behaviors (Rahmayani et al., 2025). The transformational nature of this approach is reflected in students' behavioral changes, including increased environmental concern, greater discipline in maintaining cleanliness, and stronger responsibility in carrying out assigned tasks (Jenderal et al., 2025). These changes indicate that the love-based curriculum functions not only as a learning strategy but also as an effective model of character education (Yulisinta et al., 2024).

Implications for Islamic Education from the Perspective of Spiritual Ecology

The findings of this study demonstrate that Islamic education plays a strategic role in fostering ecological awareness through the integration of religious values into the learning process. The integration of environmental theology from the perspective of spiritual ecology offers an educational model that is highly relevant to contemporary global challenges, particularly those related to environmental crises (Jenderal et al., 2025). Studies on spiritual ecology in Indonesia have shown that educational approaches integrating religious, cultural, and environmental values are capable of creating harmony among humans, nature, and God. Such harmony provides a foundation for developing sustainable and responsible ecological behavior (Rahmayani et al., 2025). Within the context of madrasa education, this approach contributes to curriculum development that extends beyond academic achievement to encompass character formation and students' spiritual awareness. Education that integrates religious values with scientific knowledge has the potential to produce a generation characterized by strong ecological awareness and a high sense of social responsibility.

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The love-based curriculum implemented at the madrasa has successfully integrated spiritual and environmental values into the learning process. This integration has not only enhanced students' understanding of the importance of environmental conservation but has also fostered attitudes of care, discipline, and responsibility toward nature. The implementation of the love-based curriculum through experiential learning activities demonstrates that education integrating spiritual and environmental values can generate positive behavioral changes among students. These changes are reflected in the increased ecological awareness and social responsibility of students in preserving and protecting the environment. Therefore, the integration of environmental theology from the perspective of spiritual ecology through a love-based curriculum can serve as an effective educational model for fostering students' ecological character from an early age.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and discussion, it can be concluded that the integration of environmental theology from the perspective of spiritual ecology through a love-based curriculum at MI Arrosidiyah Rejotangan, Tulungagung, has made a significant contribution to fostering students' ecological awareness. The love-based curriculum implemented at the madrasa has successfully integrated spiritual and environmental values into the learning process. This integration has not only enhanced students' understanding of the importance of environmental conservation but has also cultivated attitudes of care, discipline, and responsibility toward nature.

The implementation of the love-based curriculum through experiential learning activities demonstrates that education integrating spiritual and environmental values can generate positive behavioral changes among students. These changes are reflected in the increased ecological awareness and social responsibility of students in preserving and protecting the environment. Therefore, the integration of environmental theology from the perspective of spiritual ecology through a love-based curriculum can serve as an effective educational model for fostering students' ecological character from an early age.

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