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Integrating Ecotheology into Islamic Education: A Multicultural Perspective Study among Kindergarten Students

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Abstract

This study examines the integration of ecotheology in early childhood Islamic education through a multicultural perspective at Al-Hikmah Kindergarten, Samarinda, East Kalimantan. The study is based on the view that the ecological crisis is not only related to physical environmental damage, but also reflects a lack of ethical, spiritual, social, and cultural awareness in caring for nature. This research employs a case study qualitative design. Data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews with the principal and Islamic education (PAI/IMTAQ center) teachers, as well as documentation including lesson plans, school programs, and child development assessment formats. The observation subjects were 17 kindergarten B students aged 5–6 years. The findings show that ecotheological values—such as tauhid (oneness of God), khalifah (stewardship), amanah (trust), mizan (balance), rahmah (compassion), and cleanliness ethics—are integrated through prayers, illustrated stories, visual media, IMTAQ center activities, role modeling, habits such as handwashing, proper waste disposal, plant care, outdoor activities, and cultural practices. The school's proximity to the Mahakam River and Kampung Ketupat provides concrete ecological and cultural learning spaces, while the students' multicultural backgrounds strengthen cooperation, tolerance, mutual assistance, and respect for diversity. This article emphasizes that integrating ecotheology in early childhood Islamic education should be concrete, enjoyable, contextual, and inclusive, enabling children to recognize nature as God's creation, care for the environment, use resources wisely, and live harmoniously in a diverse society.

Keywords: Ecotheology; Islamic Education; Multicultural Education; Kindergarten Children; Environmental Awareness

1. Introduction

The global ecological crisis has become one of the major challenges in contemporary education. Climate change, environmental pollution, ecosystem degradation, loss of biodiversity, and unsustainable human lifestyles indicate that environmental issues are not merely technical problems, but also matters of education, ethics, culture, and spirituality. Environmental damage often stems from a human perspective that views nature solely as an object of exploitation, rather than as a living space that possesses value, order, and moral responsibility. Therefore, education holds a strategic position in shaping ecological knowledge, attitudes, values, and behaviors from an early age.

UNESCO emphasizes that Education for Sustainable Development plays an important role in helping learners develop the knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes necessary to build a sustainable life. Sustainable education is not only aimed at providing information about the environment, but also at developing learners' ability to reflect on their actions and understand their impacts on social, cultural, economic, and ecological aspects, both locally and globally (UNESCO, 2017). This idea is reinforced through Education for Sustainable Development: A Roadmap, which positions education as a crucial pathway to drive transformation toward a more just, peaceful, and sustainable society (UNESCO, 2020). In a more practical framework, UNESCO has also developed the concepts of Green School and Greening Curriculum (UNESCO, 2024a) as efforts to integrate sustainability principles into school governance, learning environments, curriculum, teaching, facilities, and community engagement (UNESCO, 2024b).

The urgency of ecological education becomes even more significant when linked to early childhood education. Environmental awareness should not only be introduced when children enter primary or secondary education. Kindergarten-aged children are at a critical developmental stage for shaping values, habits, curiosity, empathy, social sensitivity, and emotional connection with nature. At this stage, children learn through concrete experiences, observation, imitation, play, stories, images, songs, movement, and habituation. Therefore, environmental education for early childhood must be delivered through approaches that are close to children's world, rather than through abstract conceptual explanations. The National Association for the Education of Young Children emphasizes that early childhood education practices must align with children's developmental stages, consider individual uniqueness, socio-cultural context, active learning, and meaningful experiences. This principle is important in the context of eco-theological integration because kindergarten children are not yet able to understand ecological theology concepts theoretically (Children, 2020). However, they can understand values of caring for God's creation through simple experiences such as washing hands, disposing of waste properly, caring for plants, observing animals, cleaning the classroom, and participating in outdoor activities.

Recent studies on early childhood environmental education highlight the importance of building children's relationship with nature from an early stage. Ardoin and Bowers show that early childhood environmental education contributes to the development of environmental awareness, affective connections with nature, and early behaviors that support ecological care (Ardoin & Bowers, 2020). Barrable and Booth emphasize that children's connectedness with nature is related to well-being and the formation of positive relationships with the environment (Barrable & Booth, 2020). Bascopé, Perasso, and Reiss demonstrate that sustainable education at the early stage requires pedagogical approaches that are aligned with children's world (Bascopé et al., 2019).

Johnstone also shows that nature-based early childhood education can support children's social, emotional, and cognitive development (Johnstone et al., 2022).

In Islamic education, ecological awareness has strong theological and ethical foundations. The Qur'an affirms that corruption on land and sea is linked to human actions, so the ecological crisis can be understood as a moral and spiritual issue, not merely a technical one (Q.S. Ar-Rūm [30]: 41). Nature is not understood merely as a material object to be utilized by humans, but as God's creation that contains order, balance, and signs of His greatness. Islamic ecological thought is related to the concepts of tauhid, khalifah, amanah, mizan, rahmah, ihsan, and the prohibition of fasad. Nasr explains that in Islamic cosmology, nature is understood as a meaningful reality connected to revelation and divine signs (Nasr, 1978). This perspective positions nature not simply as a resource, but as part of the cosmic order that must be respected and preserved.

Studies on religion and ecology in the Indonesian context show that the relationship between humans and nature cannot be separated from beliefs, culture, social practices, and local experiences. Bagir, Northcott, and Wijsen show that studies of religion and ecology do not only operate at the level of doctrine, but are also related to lived practices, ecological justice, and socio-cultural contexts (Bagir et al., 2021). In recent years, the integration of eco-theology in Islamic education has gained increasing attention. Rohman, Taufikin, as well as Wakhidah and Erman emphasize that Islamic education has great potential to strengthen ecological awareness through curriculum, religious pedagogy, and learning practices (Rohman et al., 2024), (Taufikin, 2025), (Wakhidah & Erman, 2022).

However, most of these studies still focus on Islamic education in general, Islamic religious education curricula, secondary schools, higher education, or conceptual studies. Studies that specifically examine how eco-theological values are integrated into Islamic education at the kindergarten level remain limited. This gap is important because pedagogical approaches for early childhood differ from those for older learners. Kindergarten children cannot be taught eco-theology concepts through abstract theological explanations. They require stories, images, songs, prayers, role modeling, habituation, play, observation, nature exploration, and direct practice.

This gap indicates that the integration of eco-theology in early childhood Islamic education has not yet been sufficiently understood as a concrete, contextual, and developmentally appropriate pedagogical practice. In fact, kindergarten children do not learn values through abstract concepts, but through experiences that can be seen, practiced, imitated, and habituated. Therefore, this article offers novelty by positioning Islamic eco-theology not merely as a normative discourse or religious curriculum, but as an early childhood learning practice connected to hygiene habits, local ecological experiences, cultural activities, and multicultural social interactions. Thus, this article expands the study of Islamic eco-theology into the domain of early childhood education through a case study at an Islamic kindergarten situated within the local context of the Mahakam River and Kampung Ketupat in Samarinda.

Another important dimension in this article is the multicultural perspective. Early childhood education does not occur in a socially neutral space. Children come with diverse family backgrounds, languages, cultures, ethnicities, social habits, and religious experiences. Banks explains that multicultural education aims to provide equal learning opportunities for all learners and to develop the ability to understand, appreciate, and live within diversity (Banks, 2019). In the Indonesian context, multicultural education is highly relevant because Indonesian society is shaped

by diversity in religion, ethnicity, language, culture, and local traditions (Hanurawan & Waterworth, 1997), (Wibowo, 2023), (Setiawan, 2024), (Kusumawati & Hasanah, 2024).

This study takes place at TK Al-Hikmah Samarinda, an Islamic early childhood education institution located on Jalan Tanjung Jone, Masjid area, Samarinda Seberang, Samarinda City, East Kalimantan. Geographically, the school is located near the Mahakam River and Kampung Ketupat. This proximity provides an important ecological and cultural context, as children live in a riverside community directly connected to water, environmental hygiene, social activities, and local community life. Socio-culturally, the students come from diverse ethnic backgrounds, particularly Bugis, Banjar, Javanese, and others. This condition makes TK Al-Hikmah a relevant setting to examine how Islamic education, eco-theology, local wisdom, and multicultural education are integrated in early childhood learning.

In the context of TK Al-Hikmah, the multicultural perspective is reflected not only in the ethnic diversity of students, but also in educational programs and practices that connect religious values, local culture, nationalism, social care, and ecological awareness. This can be seen in activities such as traditional clothing events, cultural performances during the August 17th celebration, monthly Jumat Berbagi (Friday Sharing), the practice of making ketupat during the IMTAQ center at the end of Ramadan, and the habituation of water conservation when washing hands and performing ablution according to Sunnah guidance.

These practices show that multicultural education in early childhood needs to be developed through concrete, participatory experiences that are aligned with children's socio-cultural contexts. This principle is in line with Banks' view that multicultural education aims to provide equal learning opportunities and foster appreciation for diversity (Banks, 2019), and also aligns with the principle of developmentally appropriate practice, which emphasizes meaningful, active, contextual, and socially responsive learning experiences (Children, 2020).

Based on this background, this article aims to analyze the integration of eco-theology in early childhood Islamic education through a multicultural perspective at TK Al-Hikmah Samarinda. The focus of the study is directed at three aspects: first, the eco-theological values introduced in Islamic education at the kindergarten level; second, the strategies used by teachers to integrate eco-theological values through learning, habituation, outdoor activities, and school culture; third, the contribution of the multicultural perspective in fostering environmental awareness, cooperation, and appreciation for diversity among kindergarten children.

The research questions of this article are: first, what eco-theological values are integrated into Islamic education for kindergarten children at TK Al-Hikmah Samarinda? Second, how do teachers integrate eco-theological values through learning, habituation, outdoor activities, and school culture? Third, how does the multicultural perspective contribute to fostering environmental awareness, cooperation, and appreciation of diversity among kindergarten children?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Eco-theology and Islamic Environmental Ethics

Eco-theology is an approach that connects religious understanding with human ecological responsibility toward nature. In the Islamic context, eco-theology does not only discuss the practical relationship between humans and the environment, but also positions nature as God's

creation that carries spiritual, ethical, and cosmological value. Nature is not understood as a material object that can be freely exploited, but as *ayat kauniyah* that reflect the greatness, order, and wisdom of Allah. Nasr emphasizes that within the tradition of Islamic cosmology, nature is a meaningful reality connected to the principle of revelation. Nature can be read not only physically, but also symbolically and spiritually as signs of God's greatness (Nasr, 1978). This perspective is important in building the foundation of Islamic eco-theology because the ecological crisis is not only caused by technical failures in environmental management, but also by a crisis in how humans perceive nature.

Islamic environmental ethics are generally built upon several key concepts: *tauhid*, *khalifah*, *amanah*, *mizan*, *rahmah*, *ihsan*, and the prohibition of *fasad*. *Tauhid* affirms that all of nature is created by Allah and exists within a unified divine order. *Khalifah* indicates that humans have the role of stewards of the earth. *Amanah* emphasizes that the environment is a trust from God that must be preserved. *Mizan* teaches the importance of balance in nature, while *rahmah* fosters compassion toward all creatures. The prohibition of *fasad* has a strong normative basis in the Qur'an.

"Corruption has appeared on land and at sea as a result of what people's hands have done. Through this, Allah lets them taste part of the consequences of their actions so that they may return to the right path" (Q.S. Ar-Rūm [30]: 41).

This verse affirms that ecological destruction cannot be separated from human behavior that disrupts the balance of creation. In the context of Islamic education, this verse is important not only as theological legitimacy, but also as a pedagogical foundation that ecological responsibility is part of religious responsibility (Rohman et al., 2024). Therefore, religious learning for early childhood can be directed toward building awareness that caring for the environment is not an additional activity outside religion, but a concrete manifestation of *tauhid*, *amanah*, and gratitude in everyday life. Foltz shows that studies of Islam and ecology have developed through various pathways, such as Islamic environmental ethics, environmental law, natural resource conservation, water management, animal protection, and critiques of the modern ecological crisis. This conceptual foundation needs to be translated into educational practices that fit the learners' context (Foltz, 2004). For kindergarten children, concepts like *khalifah*, *amanah*, and *mizan* cannot be delivered abstractly, but need to be presented through simple experiences such as throwing trash in its proper place, washing hands, caring for plants, loving animals, and maintaining cleanliness in the school environment.

2.2 Eco-theology in Islamic Education

Islamic education provides broad space for integrating eco-theological values. Ideally, Islamic education does not only teach religious knowledge, ritual worship, and normative memorization, but also shapes character, social responsibility, care for others, and environmental awareness. In this context, eco-theology can expand the orientation of Islamic education from individual piety toward ecological and social piety. Rohman explains that the integration of eco-theology into the Islamic Religious Education and Character curriculum can strengthen environmental education in Indonesia (Rohman et al., 2024). Taufikin also emphasizes that ecological awareness can be developed through Islamic religious pedagogy (Taufikin, 2025). Wakhidah and Erman show that environmental education content already exists within the Islamic Religious Education curriculum in Indonesia, although its implementation still needs to be strengthened (Wakhidah & Erman,

2022). More recent studies also indicate that eco-theology is increasingly developing as an important approach in Islamic education. Aini and Hasanah show that students' environmental awareness can be understood through the perspective of Islamic eco-theology, particularly in the relationship between religious understanding and ecological concern (Aini & Hasanah, 2025). Fitriani emphasizes that integrating eco-theology in Islamic education requires an interdisciplinary approach to respond more comprehensively to ecological crises (Fitriani, 2026). Nuraeni also explains that green Islamic education can serve as an integrative strategy to incorporate eco-theological values into the Islamic curriculum in addressing the global environmental crisis (Nuraeni, 2025).

In addition, Khomisah discusses the design of environmentally conscious Islamic education curricula through an eco-theological approach (Khomisah, 2025). Nugroho shows that wasathiyah values can be transformed through ecological awareness and Islamic educational spaces oriented toward sustainability (Nugroho, 2025). Meanwhile, In'ami critiques the paradox of modern eco-theology in Islamic education and emphasizes the importance of maintaining a balance between ecological awareness and theological foundations (In'ami, 2026). This body of research strengthens the position of this article that the integration of eco-theology in Islamic education is not only relevant at the conceptual and curriculum levels, but also needs to be translated into concrete pedagogical practices starting from early childhood education. Other recent studies further reinforce the role of eco-theology in Islamic education. Abdussyukur shows that eco-theology can be mapped into Islamic Religious Education materials, learning models, and curriculum relevance at the secondary school level (Abdussyukur, 2025). Mustofa emphasizes that eco-theological values can be integrated into the Islamic Religious Education curriculum through a green Islamic education perspective (Mustofa, 2025). Syafaruddin positions eco-theology as a conceptual framework in Islamic education (Syafaruddin, 2025), while Sapitri, Hamami, and Muttakin show that integrating eco-theology into Islamic Religious Education can support the formation of students' spiritual, social, and cognitive character (Sapitri et al., 2025).

In the context of early childhood, integrating eco-theology into Islamic education needs to be formulated in simpler and more concrete ways. Children are not taught the concept of khalifah through theoretical definitions, but through activities like taking care of the school environment. They are not taught amanah through abstract explanations, but through the responsibility of disposing of waste properly. They are not taught rahmah as a conceptual term, but through habits such as caring for plants, not harming animals, and helping friends.

2.3 Multicultural Education Perspective

A multicultural perspective is important because eco-theology-based Islamic education takes place within a diverse social space. Children do not come to school as uniform individuals. They bring different family backgrounds, languages, ethnicities, cultures, habits, and social experiences. Therefore, early childhood Islamic education needs to be developed inclusively so that the Islamic values taught do not close off diversity, but instead foster mutual respect, cooperation, and harmonious living in differences. Banks (2019) explains that multicultural education is an idea, an educational reform movement, and a process aimed at providing equal learning opportunities for all students. In the Indonesian context, multicultural education is highly relevant because society lives within diversity in religion, ethnicity, language, culture, and local traditions. Hanurawan and Waterworth, Wibowo, Setiawan, Kusumawati & Hasanah emphasize tolerance, moral values, and

appreciation of differences in education (Hanurawan & Waterworth, 1997), (Wibowo, 2023), (Setiawan, 2024), (Kusumawati & Hasanah, 2024).

In eco-theology-based Islamic education, a multicultural perspective expands the meaning of environmental care. Protecting nature is not only understood as an individual obligation of a Muslim, but also as a shared responsibility of people living in diverse communities. Children learn that friends from different ethnicities, languages, or cultures share the same responsibility to maintain cleanliness, care for plants, avoid littering, and live harmoniously.

2.4 Kindergarten Children and Developmentally Appropriate Learning Practices

Kindergarten children have developmental characteristics that differ from learners at the primary, secondary, or higher education levels. They learn through concrete experiences, physical activities, play, stories, images, songs, imitation, and direct interaction with their environment. Therefore, value-based learning, including eco-theological and Islamic values, must be adapted to their developmental stage. The National Association for the Education of Young Children emphasizes the importance of developmentally appropriate practice in early childhood education (Children, 2020). This approach requires teachers to consider general child development, individual uniqueness, and the social and cultural context in which children live. This principle is highly relevant to eco-theological integration because kindergarten children more easily understand values through direct activities such as observing plants, touching soil, disposing of trash, washing hands, listening to stories about God's creation, and imitating teachers' behavior.

Studies in early childhood environmental education also show that direct experiences with nature are essential for children's development. Ardoin and Bowers emphasize that early environmental education can help shape awareness, attitudes, and early behaviors that support environmental care (Ardoin & Bowers, 2020). Barrable and Booth (2020) show that children's relationship with nature contributes to well-being. Johnstone finds that nature-based education can support children's social, emotional, and cognitive development (Johnstone et al., 2022).

3. Research Methodology

This research methodology section describes in detail how the study was conducted. The research design, participants, instruments, and data analysis techniques are explained.

3.1. Research Design

This study employed a case study qualitative design (Creswell, 2018). The qualitative approach was chosen because the study aims to gain an in-depth understanding of the integration of ecotheology in Islamic early childhood education through learning practices, habituation, social interactions, school culture, and activity documentation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The case study design was selected as the research focuses on a single educational institution, namely TK Al-Hikmah Samarinda, allowing the researcher to examine the educational phenomenon in a contextual, in-depth, and case-bound manner (Yin, 2018).

3.2. Participants of the Study

This research was conducted at TK Al-Hikmah Samarinda, located on Jalan Tanjung Jone, Masjid area, Samarinda Seberang, Samarinda City, East Kalimantan. Geographically, the school is situated near the Mahakam River and Kampung Ketupat. The proximity to the Mahakam River is

an important context, as riverbank environments are closely tied to the social, ecological, and cultural life of the local community.

From a socio-cultural perspective, TK Al-Hikmah exists within a multicultural community. Most students come from Bugis backgrounds, alongside children from Banjar, Javanese, and other cultural groups. The main informants in this study were Arsiana Oktavia, the principal of TK Al-Hikmah, and Fitriani, the Islamic education (PAI) teacher responsible for the IMTAQ learning center. Observations were conducted in TK B, consisting of 17 children aged 5–6 years. These children were selected because they were directly involved in IMTAQ center activities, hygiene habituation, cultural activities, plant introduction, and environmental learning around the school. Field research was carried out on November 3, 2025. To ensure research ethics, children's names are not disclosed in this article. Any documentation involving children was used with institutional permission and with careful attention to child identity protection.

3.3. Instruments

The primary instrument in this qualitative study is the researcher. The researcher plays a direct role in observing the learning process, conducting interviews, collecting documentation, interpreting the data, and formulating the research findings. In addition, several supporting instruments were used, including observation guidelines, interview guidelines, documentation guidelines, lesson plans (RPP), child development assessment formats, and photographic documentation. The observation guidelines were developed to record the behavior of 17 kindergarten B students aged 5–6 years during learning activities, hygiene routines, cultural activities, and social interactions within the school environment. The interview guidelines were prepared for two key informants: the school principal and the Islamic education (PAI/IMTAQ center) teacher. The documentation guidelines were used to review two lesson plans, one child development assessment format, school programs, and 12 photographs of activities relevant to the research focus.

The observation guidelines were used to capture how ecotheological values were integrated into both classroom learning and daily routines. The interview guidelines were used to obtain in-depth information from the principal and the PAI/IMTAQ teacher. The documentation guidelines were used to collect visual and written evidence, including activity photos, lesson plans, school programs, and assessment formats.

3.4. Data Analysis Techniques

The data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, which consists of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification (Miles et al., 2014). In the data condensation stage, all data from observations, interviews, and documentation were selected and organized according to the research focus. Data related to ecotheological values, teaching strategies, hygiene practices, environmental activities, multicultural interactions, and child development were retained as the main data..

In the data display stage, the data were organized into several key themes: ecotheological values, pedagogical strategies, ecological practices, multicultural perspectives, and child development. In the conclusion drawing stage, findings from observations were compared with interview and documentation data to identify patterns, relationships, and meanings. The validity of the data was strengthened through source triangulation, technique triangulation, member

checking, and audit trail documentation. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing data obtained from the principal, the PAI/IMTAQ teacher, observations of kindergarten B students, and school documents. Technique triangulation was carried out by cross-checking observation, interview, and documentation data to ensure that the findings did not rely on a single source. Member checking was conducted by reconfirming interview results and key findings with the principal and the PAI/IMTAQ teacher to ensure that the interpretations remained consistent with the field context.

An audit trail was also maintained by storing observation notes, interview summaries, activity photos, lesson plans, assessment formats, and school program documents. This step was intended to ensure transparency of the research process, strengthen data credibility, and confirm that the conclusions were grounded in traceable empirical evidence.

4. Results

4.1 The Context of TK Al-Hikmah as a Multicultural Islamic Kindergarten

The research findings show that TK Al-Hikmah Samarinda is an Islamic early childhood education institution that has a strong social, cultural, and ecological context. The school is located on Jalan Tanjung Jone, Masjid area, Samarinda Seberang, Samarinda City, East Kalimantan, and is situated near the Mahakam River and Kampung Ketupat. This proximity provides an important learning context because children live in a riverside community environment that has a direct relationship with environmental cleanliness, social life, community activities, and local culture.

The physical environment of the school supports the early childhood learning process. Documentation shows the presence of classrooms, a school yard, plants, handwashing facilities, trash bins, and visual messages about cleanliness. Socially and culturally, students come from Bugis, Banjar, Javanese, and other cultural backgrounds. This diversity is reflected in school activities that introduce traditional clothing, Indonesian culture, national celebrations, and collective activities.

The principal emphasized that the environmental and cultural context of the school is an important part of children's learning. She stated: "We habituate children to maintain cleanliness from the beginning because cleanliness is not only a school rule, but also part of moral character. The school environment which is close to the Mahakam River becomes an opportunity for children to learn to care for their surrounding environment." (Arsiana Oktavia, Principal of TK Al-Hikmah, interview, November 3, 2025).

4.2 Ecotheological Values Introduced in Islamic Education

The results of observation and documentation show that ecotheological values in Islamic education at TK Al-Hikmah are introduced through activities that are simple, concrete, and close to children's lives. Teachers do not use the term "ecotheology" directly to children, but translate Islamic ecological values into language and practices that are easy to understand. These values are reflected in IMTAQ center learning activities, illustrated stories, prayers, hygiene habituation, plant introduction, handwashing, throwing trash in its place, and maintaining the school environment.

The PAI/IMTAQ teacher explained that ecological values are introduced through simple religious language that is close to children's experience. She stated: "In the IMTAQ center, we introduce to children that plants, water, rivers, and the environment are creations of Allah.

Children understand religious values more easily if they directly see and do." (Fitriani, PAI/IMTAQ Teacher, interview, November 3, 2025).

The value of tawhid is introduced through simple explanations that nature, plants, water, animals, and humans are creations of Allah. The value of khalifah is introduced through encouragement for children to take responsibility in maintaining the environment. The value of *amanah* appears in children's habituation to throw trash in its place, take care of shared belongings, and maintain the school environment. The value of *mizan* is introduced through comparisons between clean and dirty environments, while *rahmah* is introduced through habituation of caring for plants, friends, and the environment.

Observation results show that the introduction of tawhid and *amanah* values is carried out through simple activities that are close to children's experience. In IMTAQ center activities, the teacher connects images of plants, water, and the school environment with statements that all creations of Allah must be maintained. Children are then directed to mention examples of behaviors in maintaining Allah's creations, such as not damaging plants, not throwing trash carelessly, and maintaining classroom cleanliness. Through these activities, ecotheological values are not presented as abstract theological explanations, but as concrete experiences that can be understood by children through images, simple conversations, and direct practice.

Table 1. Ecotheological Values Introduced to Kindergarten Children

No	Ecotheological Values	Form of Introduction	Field Evidence
1	Tauhid	Children are introduced to the idea that nature is a creation of Allah	Storytelling, prayer, observation of plants, IMTAQ center learning
2	Khalifah	Children are encouraged to care for the environment	Teacher guidance to dispose of waste and maintain cleanliness
3	Amanah	Children are habituated to be responsible for the environment	Practice of disposing of waste and maintaining school facilities
4	Mizan	Children recognize clean and dirty environments	Simple discussions and observation of the school environment
5	Rahmah	Children are encouraged to care for plants, peers, and the environment	Plant care activities and group cooperation
6	Cleanliness ethics	Children are habituated to live cleanly	Handwashing, disposing of waste, and maintaining classroom cleanliness

4.3 Learning Strategies for Integrating Ecotheology

The research findings show that teachers integrate ecotheological values through learning strategies that are appropriate to early childhood characteristics. These strategies include prayer, illustrated stories, visual media, role modeling, habituation, group activities, environmental introduction, and direct practice. Teachers do not place environmental education as a separate subject, but integrate it into learning routines and school life.

Prayer is used as an opening activity to build religious awareness. Illustrated stories are used to introduce good behavior, cleanliness, and gratitude to Allah. Visual media such as pictures, storybooks, letter cards, and tree-shaped hijaiyah help children understand values concretely. Teacher role modeling and daily habituation become the main strategies because early childhood learns through repetition and imitation.

4.4 Environmental Habituation through Daily School Practices

Environmental care habituation at TK Al-Hikmah is carried out through simple activities that are repeated and close to children's lives. Documentation shows practices of handwashing, throwing trash in its place, recognizing plants, and maintaining the cleanliness of the school environment. These activities become a concrete form of ecotheological education because children not only hear messages about cleanliness, but also perform direct actions.

The teacher emphasized that habituation is more easily accepted by children when it is carried out repeatedly in school routines. She explained: "Children are not enough to only be told that cleanliness is important. They must be directly habituated, such as washing hands, throwing trash in its place, and taking care of plants. If it is done every day, children begin to understand that maintaining cleanliness is part of good behavior." (Fitriani, PAI/IMTAQ Teacher, interview, November 3, 2025).

Handwashing activities are related to the value of *taharah*, personal hygiene, and the moral of maintaining health. Throwing trash in its place becomes an important practice in environmental habituation. The message board "Let's Throw Trash in Its Place" strengthens habituation through visual messages that are easily understood by children. The school environment, which is equipped with plants, also becomes a medium for ecological learning because children can recognize plants as creations of Allah and learn that plants need to be cared for.

In handwashing activities, the teacher guides children to use water sufficiently and close the tap after finishing. Some children are seen reminding each other when water is still flowing, while the teacher provides reinforcement that saving water is part of good behavior and in accordance with Islamic teachings. In other activities, children are directed to throw trash in its place after using paper, food plastic, or remaining class materials. When there are children who have not put trash in its place, the teacher does not scold, but invites the child to take the trash again and put it into the trash bin. This habituation pattern shows that ecotheological education in kindergarten takes place through repetition of actions, role modeling, and gentle correction.

4.5 Outdoor Learning in a Local Ecological Context

The local context of TK Al-Hikmah is one of the important strengths in the integration of ecotheology. The school is located near the Mahakam River and Kampung Ketupat, so the surrounding environment can be used as a learning resource. Outdoor activities provide opportunities for children to recognize the real environment, not only through pictures or stories. Activities such as picking up trash around the banks of the Mahakam River, in the Kampung Ketupat area, become concrete examples of locality-based ecological learning. Children are not only told that trash must be thrown in its place, but are invited to see the environment and participate in maintaining cleanliness. In outdoor activities, the teacher plays a role in connecting children's experiences with Islamic values that maintaining rivers, roads, plants, and the surrounding environment is part of good moral behavior.

In outdoor activities, children are invited to observe the environment around the school, including plant areas, the yard, and surrounding spaces related to the life of the Mahakam riverside community. The teacher directs children to see the difference between clean and dirty environments, then invites them to mention simple actions that can be done, such as throwing trash in its place, not stepping on plants, and maintaining cleanliness after playing. In activities

related to Kampung Ketupat, children are introduced to the practice of making ketupat as part of local traditions that are close to community life. This activity not only introduces local culture, but also builds cooperation, patience, motor skills, and appreciation for children's social environment.

4.6 Multicultural Classroom Interaction and Cultural Activities

The multicultural aspect at TK Al-Hikmah appears through the background of students and school activities that introduce cultural diversity. Children come from Bugis, Banjar, Javanese, and other cultural backgrounds. This diversity is not positioned as a separating difference, but as part of shared life in school. Teachers habituate children to play together, cooperate, help each other, and participate in activities without differentiating friends.

The principal explained that cultural activities are used to introduce diversity to children from an early age. She stated: "Children here come from diverse family backgrounds. Therefore, activities such as traditional clothing and national celebrations are used to teach that differences must be respected. Children learn to play, cooperate, and respect each other." (Arsiana Oktavia, Principal, interview, November 3, 2025).

Documentation of traditional clothing activities shows that the school provides space for children to recognize cultural diversity. Children wear traditional clothing and regional attire in school activities. This activity becomes a form of multicultural learning that is appropriate for children's age because it is carried out visually, participatively, and enjoyably. In the context of Islamic education based on ecotheology, this multicultural value is important because environmental care is understood as a shared responsibility of all children.

Based on observation, interviews, and documentation results, multiculturalism at TK Al-Hikmah Samarinda appears not only in the ethnic diversity of students, but also in cultural activities, national activities, social activities, local wisdom, inclusive school culture, and ecological habituation.

Table 2. Forms of Multiculturalism at TK Al-Hikmah Samarinda

No	Multicultural Aspect	Forms at TK Al-Hikmah
1	Ethnic diversity	Bugis, Banjar, Javanese, and other ethnic groups
2	Diversity of family backgrounds	Differences in home habits, family language, and social experiences
3	Cultural symbols	Traditional clothing and cultural attributes
4	Arts and cultural performances	Arts and cultural performances during the commemoration of August 17
5	National activities	Commemoration of Independence Day and strengthening togetherness
6	Social activities	Friday Sharing held monthly
7	Local wisdom of Kampung Ketupat	The practice of making ketupat for Eid at the IMTAQ center at the end of Ramadan
8	Inclusive social interaction	Playing together, cooperating, helping each other, and not discriminating among peers
9	Inclusive school culture	All children are given equal opportunities in school activities
10	Shared ecotheology	Maintaining cleanliness, caring for plants, disposing of waste, and conserving water during wudu in accordance with the sunnah

4.7 Assessment of Child Development

Assessment of child development at TK Al-Hikmah is carried out through observation of children’s behavior in learning activities, habituation, and social interaction. The child development assessment format is used to record children’s achievements in religious-moral, social-emotional, language, cognitive, motor, and environmental care aspects. In this research context, assessment is not only directed at children’s ability to answer questions, but also at their involvement in real activities.

In the religious-moral aspect, children are assessed based on their ability to recognize nature as Allah’s creation, follow prayers, show good behavior, and maintain cleanliness. In the social-emotional aspect, children are assessed based on their ability to cooperate, take turns, help friends, and participate in group activities. In the environmental care aspect, children are assessed based on their habit of throwing trash in its place, maintaining personal cleanliness, and responding to teacher directions in caring for the environment.

Table 3. Assessment Indicators for Ecotheology-Based Islamic Learning

No	Developmental Aspect	Indicator	Observed Activities
1	Religious–moral	Children recognize nature as a creation of Allah	Prayer, storytelling, plant observation
2	Social-emotional	Children cooperate and care for peers	Group activities and cultural activities
3	Language	Children recount experiences in maintaining cleanliness	Simple reflection after activities
4	Cognitive	Children differentiate between clean and dirty environments	Picture discussion and environmental observation
5	Motor skills	Children perform simple physical activities	Handwashing, disposing of waste, caring for plants
6	Environmental Awareness	Children maintain environmental cleanliness	Disposing of waste in its proper place
7	Multicultural attitude	Children respect peers from different backgrounds	Traditional clothing, playing together, group work

5. Discussion

5.1 Ecotheology as Value-Based Islamic Education

The findings of this study show that the integration of ecotheology in Islamic education at Al-Hikmah Kindergarten takes place as a process of value education that is simple, concrete, and close to children’s daily lives. The values of tauhid (oneness of God), khalifah (stewardship), amanah (trust), mizan (balance), rahmah (compassion), and cleanliness ethics are not taught as abstract theological concepts, but are translated through learning activities and daily habituation. Children are introduced to the idea that nature, plants, water, rivers, and the surrounding environment are creations of Allah that must be cared for.

These findings are in line with Nasr (1978), who argues that nature in the Islamic tradition is not understood as neutral material objects, but as a reality with spiritual meaning. This view is

reinforced by Bagir, Northcott, and Wijzen (2021), who emphasize that the relationship between religion and ecology must be present in social practices and everyday life experiences. These findings also extend the studies of Aini and Hasanah (2025), Fitriani (2026), Khomisah et al. (2025), Nugroho et al. (2025), Nuraeni et al. (2025), and In'ami et al. (2026), which generally position ecotheology in Islamic education within the domains of ecological awareness, curriculum design, interdisciplinarity, and value transformation. This article adds that ecotheology can also be implemented at the early childhood education level through simple practices such as prayer, storytelling, cleanliness habits, caring for plants, disposing of waste, and outdoor learning. At Al-Hikmah Kindergarten, ecotheology is present not as lectures about the environment, but as a school culture manifested through habits of cleanliness and care for nature.

5.2 Ecotheological Pedagogy Appropriate to Child Development

The success of ecotheology integration in kindergarten children greatly depends on the suitability of the learning approach with the child's developmental stage. Teachers do not teach ecotheology using academic terminology, but through experiences that can be seen, touched, practiced, and repeated by children. Activities such as handwashing, disposing of waste, caring for plants, listening to illustrated stories, observing visual media, and participating in outdoor activities represent forms of pedagogy that are appropriate for early childhood characteristics.

These findings align with the principle of developmentally appropriate practice from the National Association for the Education of Young Children (2020). Early childhood education must consider general child development, individual uniqueness, and the social and cultural context in which the child lives. Ardoin and Bowers (2020), Barrable and Booth (2020), and Johnstone et al. (2022) also emphasize that environmental education for young children is effective when it involves direct experience and positive relationships with nature.

5.3 School Culture as an Islamic Learning Environment

The integration of ecotheology at Al-Hikmah Kindergarten is not only carried out through classroom learning, but also through school culture. The presence of trash bins, handwashing facilities, plants, cleanliness message boards, and cleaning activities shows that the school environment functions as an ecological learning space. Children do not only receive verbal messages from teachers, but also interact with a school environment that supports clean and environmentally caring behavior.

These findings are consistent with the concepts of Green School and Greening Curriculum developed by UNESCO (2024a, 2024b). A green school does not only teach environmental topics as learning materials, but also integrates sustainability principles into governance, facilities, learning processes, and school culture. In the context of Al-Hikmah Kindergarten, these principles are present in simple forms appropriate to children's age.

5.4 Mahakam River and Kampung Ketupat as Local Ecological Learning Contexts

One of the strengths of this study is the local context of Al-Hikmah Kindergarten, which is located near the Mahakam River and Kampung Ketupat. This proximity provides pedagogical opportunities to use the surrounding environment as a learning resource. The river, roads, yard, plants, and public spaces are not merely geographical settings, but also ecological learning spaces that help children understand the importance of maintaining environmental cleanliness.

From an Islamic ecotheological perspective, activities related to maintaining environmental cleanliness can be interpreted as learning about amanah and khalifah in language understandable to children. Children may not yet understand the theoretical concept of khalifah, but they can understand that humans must care for the environment. Thus, locality becomes a bridge between theological values and concrete actions.

5.5 Multicultural Perspective in Ecotheology-Based Islamic Education

Al-Hikmah Kindergarten is situated in a multicultural social environment, with students from Bugis, Banjar, Javanese, and other cultural backgrounds. This diversity is an important context, as environmental education is not only related to the relationship between humans and nature, but also to relationships among humans. Children learn that caring for the environment must be done together with friends from different cultural backgrounds. These findings are in line with Banks (2019), who explains that multicultural education helps learners understand and appreciate diversity. In the context of Al-Hikmah Kindergarten, multicultural education is not taught as a theoretical concept, but through concrete activities such as playing together, group activities, Independence Day cultural events, and the use of traditional clothing.

The ten multicultural aspects found at Al-Hikmah Kindergarten indicate that ecotheology-based Islamic education is not only oriented toward children's relationship with nature, but also toward their relationships with others within a diverse social space. Ethnic diversity, family backgrounds, cultural symbols, Independence Day performances, national activities, Friday Sharing, ketupat-making practices, inclusive social interaction, inclusive school culture, and shared ecological habits show that multiculturalism is present in children's daily learning experiences. Thus, multiculturalism is not taught as an abstract concept, but experienced through activities such as playing, sharing, cooperating, respecting others, learning about culture, and caring for the environment together. This is consistent with Banks' idea that multicultural education is not only about recognizing diversity, but also about providing equal learning opportunities, fostering mutual respect, and strengthening social interaction in diverse societies (Banks, 2019).

Cultural performances during Independence Day celebrations strengthen the national dimension of multicultural education. Children are introduced to Indonesia's cultural diversity through performances, clothing, songs, movements, and shared activities. These activities help children understand that cultural differences are part of national life that must be appreciated. At the same time, these activities build children's confidence, togetherness, and ability to appreciate their peers' performances. In early childhood contexts, such experiences are more effective than theoretical explanations about diversity, as young children learn through concrete, visual, playful, and experiential activities. This principle aligns with developmentally appropriate practice, which emphasizes active, meaningful, play-based learning that is responsive to children's social and cultural contexts (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2020).

The monthly Friday Sharing program extends multicultural education into the domain of social care. Through sharing activities, children learn that living together requires not only the ability to respect differences, but also concern for others' needs. The value of sharing teaches empathy, generosity, and social responsibility. In Islamic education, this activity aligns with the development of social morality, while from a multicultural perspective, it strengthens awareness that all children are part of a school community that depends on one another. The practice of making ketupat during the IMTAQ center activities is an important finding because it connects

Islamic education with the local wisdom of Kampung Ketupat in Samarinda Seberang. Al-Hikmah Kindergarten does not exist in a neutral social space, but within a community that has cultural and economic identity as a producer of ketupat wrappers. When children are introduced to ketupat-making practices, they not only learn about Eid traditions, but also about local culture, appreciation of local skills, cooperation, and the integration of Islamic values within cultural traditions close to their lives.

The ecotheological dimension within multicultural practices at Al-Hikmah Kindergarten is reflected in habits of environmental care and water conservation. Children from different cultural backgrounds are accustomed to washing hands, disposing of waste, caring for plants, maintaining classroom cleanliness, and using water wisely during ablution. The habit of conserving water in accordance with the Sunnah shows that Islamic ecotheology is not only about caring for plants or cleaning the environment, but also about the wise use of natural resources. In a hadith narrated by Ibn Mājah, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) warned against excess in ablution and emphasized that wastefulness is not justified even when one is at the bank of a flowing river.

Water conservation habits are also aligned with the principles of sustainable education. UNESCO defines Education for Sustainable Development as an approach that develops knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes for building a sustainable life (UNESCO, 2020). Within the Green School framework, sustainability principles must be integrated into school governance, facilities, learning, culture, and community involvement (UNESCO, 2024a). Therefore, practices such as conserving water during ablution, mindful handwashing, caring for plants, and disposing of waste properly can be understood as simple forms of sustainable education in early childhood.

Thus, the multicultural perspective in this article expands the meaning of Islamic ecotheology. Ecotheology not only shapes ecological ethics, but also socio-multicultural ethics. Children learn that caring for Allah's creation must be done together with peers from diverse cultural backgrounds. They also learn that differences in ethnicity, family language, habits, and culture do not hinder cooperation in maintaining cleanliness, caring for the environment, sharing, and living harmoniously. At this point, ecotheology-based Islamic education at Al-Hikmah Kindergarten functions as a space for forming ecological, social, religious, and multicultural character from an early age.

5.6 Theoretical and Practical Implications

Theoretically, this study expands the scope of Islamic ecotheology into early childhood education. Previous studies on Islamic ecotheology have largely focused on conceptual aspects, Islamic education curricula, secondary education, or higher education. This study shows that ecotheological values can be integrated at the kindergarten level when translated into practices appropriate to child development. Practically, Islamic kindergarten teachers can integrate ecotheological values through simple activities that already exist in school life. Teachers do not need to create a separate subject about the environment. Ecological values can be incorporated into IMTAQ center activities, thematic learning, handwashing routines, waste disposal, plant care, introduction to the school environment, and outdoor learning activities.

6. Conclusion

This study shows that the integration of ecotheology in Islamic education at the kindergarten level can be carried out through learning that is concrete, simple, enjoyable, and appropriate to

children's developmental stages. At Al-Hikmah Kindergarten Samarinda, the values of tauhid (oneness of God), khalifah (stewardship), amanah (trust), mizan (balance), rahmah (compassion), and cleanliness ethics are not taught through abstract theological concepts, but are translated into learning activities and daily habituation, such as prayer, illustrated stories, visual media, IMTAQ center activities, role modeling, handwashing, disposing of waste properly, caring for plants, and outdoor activities. This study has limitations because it was conducted in only one Islamic early childhood education institution, namely Al-Hikmah Kindergarten Samarinda, with the number of observed subjects limited to 17 children in Kindergarten B aged 5–6 years. Therefore, the findings of this study are not intended to be widely generalized to all Islamic early childhood education institutions. The findings are more appropriately understood as a contextual description of the practice of integrating ecotheology in Islamic early childhood education within a school that has specific ecological, cultural, and social backgrounds. Future research can be conducted in several Islamic early childhood education institutions or kindergartens with different regional characteristics in order to obtain broader comparisons regarding models of ecotheology integration, Islamic education, and multicultural education in early childhood.

The context of Al-Hikmah Kindergarten, which is located in Samarinda Seberang near the Mahakam River and Kampung Ketupat, provides local strength for ecological and multicultural learning. The riverside environment becomes a relevant learning resource to introduce children to the importance of maintaining cleanliness and caring for the environment. A multicultural perspective is also an important aspect, as students come from Bugis, Banjar, Javanese, and other cultural backgrounds. Activities such as wearing traditional clothing, cultural and art performances during the August 17 Independence Day celebration, monthly Friday Sharing, the practice of making ketupat during IMTAQ center activities, group activities, and collaborative learning help children recognize differences, cooperate, share, respect others, and appreciate local wisdom. In the context of ecotheology, children are also accustomed to maintaining cleanliness, caring for plants, disposing of waste properly, and using water sparingly during ablution in accordance with the Sunnah.

Theoretically, this study expands the scope of Islamic ecotheology into early childhood education. Practically, this study emphasizes that Islamic kindergarten teachers can integrate ecological values without adding new subjects, but through habituation, school culture, outdoor activities, visual media, storytelling, prayer, and role modeling. This study recommends that Islamic early childhood education institutions strengthen the integration of ecotheological values in lesson plans (RPP), IMTAQ center activities, daily habituation, school programs, and child development assessment.

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