

# Fiqh al-bi'ah and religious character: An integration model of Islamic education for a sustainable future

Achmad Husaen Sastra Negara<sup>1\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

\*Corresponding author email: [achmad.husaen@umy.ac.id](mailto:achmad.husaen@umy.ac.id)

## Abstract

This study explores the integration of *fiqh al-bi'ah* into Islamic religious education to foster environmental awareness and cultivate religious character committed to sustainability. Amid intensifying global ecological crises, education must move beyond technocratic approaches and address ethical and spiritual motivation. Using a qualitative case study design, this research investigates the experiences of teachers, principals, and students at MTsN Tambakberas Jombang and MTsN 2 Kediri, institutions known for environmentally oriented programs grounded in Islamic values. Data were collected through 24 semi-structured interviews, eight weeks of participant observation, and curriculum document analysis. Thematic analysis using NVivo 12 generated 186 initial codes that were refined into four major themes. Findings indicate that 78% of students linked environmental responsibility to theological concepts such as *khalifah* and *amanah*, yet consistent behavioral transformation was observed in only 44% of participants. Structural and cultural barriers limited sustainability beyond school settings. The study contributes theoretically by positioning *fiqh al-bi'ah* as a pedagogical framework for religious character education and offers practical recommendations for curriculum integration and institutional reinforcement.

## Keywords

Religious character, Fiqh al-bi'ah, Environmental sustainability

## Introduction

The global environmental crisis has intensified in recent decades, manifesting through climate change, pollution, biodiversity loss, and ecological degradation. These challenges threaten not only environmental sustainability but also social stability and human well-being. International discourse increasingly emphasizes that technological and policy-based solutions alone are insufficient, highlighting the need for education that addresses ethical values and character formation (UNESCO, 2017; Sterling, 2020).

Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) has been promoted globally to cultivate ecological literacy. However, many ESD initiatives remain technocratic, emphasizing knowledge acquisition while neglecting moral motivation. Consequently, increased

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environmental awareness does not always translate into sustained pro-environmental behavior.

Religious education holds a strategic role in addressing this gap, as it shapes worldview, moral orientation, and behavior. In Islam, environmental responsibility is deeply embedded in theological principles. The Qur'an presents nature as a sign of God (*āyah*), emphasizes balance (*mīzān*), and prohibits corruption (*fasād*). Humans are entrusted as *khalifah*, bearing moral responsibility for environmental stewardship.

These principles are articulated in contemporary Islamic thought through *fiqh al-bi'ah*, which integrates legal, ethical, and spiritual dimensions of human–environment relations (Foltz, 2003; Izzi Dien, 2013). Despite its normative strength, *fiqh al-bi'ah* remains underutilized in formal Islamic education, which often prioritizes ritual and cognitive aspects over ecological ethics (Abdullah, 2018).

This study aims to explore how *fiqh al-bi'ah* can be integrated into Islamic religious education to develop religious character responsive to environmental sustainability, focusing on its potential and challenges within Indonesian madrasahs.

## Theoretical framework

### *Fiqh al-bi'ah and maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*

Although *fiqh al-bi'ah* is a contemporary term, its principles are rooted in classical Islamic jurisprudence governing land, water, and resource management. From the perspective of *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*, environmental preservation supports essential objectives such as the protection of life, intellect, and property (Kamali, 2008; Auda, 2016). Environmental degradation threatens these objectives, making ecological responsibility a core Islamic concern rather than an optional ethical addition.

Islamic scholars argue that sustainability aligns with Islamic values of justice (*‘adl*), balance (*mīzān*), and moderation (*wasatiyyah*) (Chapra, 2001). Nasr (1996) further frames the environmental crisis as a spiritual crisis rooted in the desacralization of nature. Within this framework, *fiqh al-bi'ah* bridges divine guidance and human ecological responsibility.

### *Religious character education in islam*

In modern educational theory, character comprises moral knowledge, moral feeling, and moral action (Lickona, 2012). In Islam, character (*akhlāq*) refers to deeply internalized moral qualities that guide spontaneous ethical behavior. Character formation involves knowledge, habituation, exemplary conduct, and spiritual discipline.

However, contemporary schooling often fragments character education, emphasizing cognitive achievement over moral habituation. This gap results in high religious literacy without corresponding ethical sensitivity, particularly in environmental contexts. Integrating *fiqh al-bi'ah* into character education offers a means of grounding ecological responsibility in religious identity.

### *Islamic environmental ethics and critique of secular paradigms*

Islamic environmental ethics challenge anthropocentric and instrumental views of nature. The Qur'an affirms intrinsic value and divine purpose in creation. Scholars such as Nasr (1996) and Foltz (2003) critique secular sustainability approaches that neglect spiritual dimensions, offering a theocentric alternative emphasizing accountability, gratitude, and intergenerational responsibility.

### *Conceptual framework*

The integration of *fiqh al-bi'ah* into religious character education operates at three levels: normative values provided by Islamic jurisprudence, pedagogical translation into learning processes, and institutional culture reinforcing habituation and role modeling. This framework highlights the importance of consistent value reinforcement within educational environments.

## **Method**

This study employed a qualitative case study approach following Stake (1995) and Yin (2018) to explore how *fiqh al-bi'ah* is integrated into Islamic education. The research was conducted at MTsN Tambakberas Jombang and MTsN 2 Kediri, selected purposively because of their environmentally oriented programs explicitly linked to Islamic values. Participants consisted of four Islamic education teachers, two school principals, and eighteen students from grades VIII and IX. Data were collected through twenty-four semi-structured interviews lasting between forty-five and sixty minutes, eight weeks of participant observation, and document analysis of curriculum materials and environmental program reports.

Data analysis was conducted using NVivo 12 software following Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis framework. The analysis process began with familiarization and open coding, resulting in 186 initial codes. These codes were subsequently grouped into twenty-three sub-themes and synthesized into four major themes. To enhance credibility and reproducibility, two researchers independently coded thirty percent of interview transcripts, achieving an inter-coder agreement of 87 percent. Discrepancies were resolved through discussion, and data triangulation was conducted across interviews, observations, and documents to ensure validity (Tracy, 2019).

The theoretical framework informing this study was developed through a structured literature search in the Scopus database using the Boolean string (“Islamic education” OR “religious character”) AND (“fiqh al-bi'ah” OR “Islamic environmental ethics”) AND (“sustainability” OR “environmental education”). The search was limited to peer-reviewed English-language journal articles published between 2010 and 2024 in the subject areas of Education, Religious Studies, and Environmental Ethics. The last search was conducted on 12 October 2025. Inclusion criteria comprised studies addressing Islamic environmental ethics in educational contexts and discussions of religious character formation related to sustainability. Exclusion criteria included purely

theological discussions without educational application, non-peer-reviewed publications, and inaccessible full texts. From 112 initial records, 64 were retained after abstract screening, and 29 informed the theoretical framework.

## Results

The analysis revealed four major themes derived from 186 initial codes. First, internalization of environmental values as religious obligation emerged strongly among participants. Approximately 78 percent of student respondents explicitly linked environmental care with theological concepts such as *khalifah* and *amānah*. However, only 41 percent demonstrated advanced theological reasoning beyond memorized terminology, indicating varying depth of internalization. Second, transformation of environmental behavior showed differentiated outcomes. Consistent pro-environmental behavior was observed in 44 percent of students, while 39 percent displayed situational compliance limited to school settings, and 17 percent showed minimal behavioral change. Waste management and water conservation practices were the most frequently observed improvements.

Third, structural and cultural barriers limited implementation. Limited instructional time was mentioned in 83 percent of teacher interviews, variations in teacher competence appeared in 67 percent of responses, and low environmental awareness within families and communities was identified in 72 percent of cases. These constraints reduced sustainability beyond institutional boundaries. Fourth, adaptive school strategies played a reinforcing role. Both schools integrated environmental values into weekly sermons, ritual practices, teacher role modeling, and environmental competitions, strengthening ecological awareness within daily religious life. Institutional reinforcement correlated with greater behavioral consistency among students.

## Discussion

The findings demonstrate that integrating *fiqh al-bi'ah* reframes environmental responsibility as a theological imperative rather than merely a secular policy obligation. This reframing aligns with the *maqāsid* framework articulated by Kamali (2008) and Auda (2016), situating ecological preservation within the protection of life and societal welfare. At the same time, the persistence of inconsistent behavior reflects the well-documented value–action gap in environmental education literature (Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002). Awareness and moral cognition do not automatically generate sustained practice.

In contrast to technocratic ESD approaches described by UNESCO (2017) and Sterling (2020), this integration model embeds sustainability within religious identity and spiritual accountability. The findings resonate with Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory, emphasizing that character formation occurs across interrelated contexts including school, family, and community. Furthermore, Nasr's (1996) critique

that environmental crisis stems from spiritual desacralization finds empirical resonance here: when ecological ethics are religiously internalized, motivation strengthens, yet sustained transformation requires institutional coherence and social reinforcement.

Thus, effective integration of *fiqh al-bi'ah* must operate simultaneously at normative, pedagogical, and institutional levels. Without coherence across these dimensions, ecological religiosity risks remaining symbolic rather than transformative.

## Implications

Theoretically, this study positions *fiqh al-bi'ah* as a pedagogical framework for religious character education. Practically, it highlights the need for curriculum integration, teacher training, and community involvement to strengthen sustainability-oriented Islamic education.

## Conclusion

This study demonstrates that integrating *fiqh al-bi'ah* into Islamic religious education enhances ecological awareness and strengthens moral reasoning among students. Nevertheless, sustainable behavioral transformation requires holistic support encompassing pedagogy, institutional culture, and social context. Islamic education, grounded in ethical and spiritual foundations, holds significant potential to cultivate environmentally responsible religious character when ecological responsibility is internalized as divine trust rather than external obligation.

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