

## **Analysis of Eco-Theology Understanding of Islamic Boarding Schools in North Sumatra**

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### **Abstract**

*This study aims to analyze the understanding and application of eco-theology in Islamic Boarding Schools in North Sumatra. Eco-theology connects religious teachings with human responsibility towards environmental stewardship, and in the Islamic context, it is based on the teachings of the Qur'an and hadith. The research used a qualitative method involving direct observation and in-depth interviews with Islamic Boarding Schools in the South Tapanuli region. The findings indicate that although Islamic Boarding Schools serve as pillars of religious education, the implementation of eco-theology concepts remains limited, particularly in terms of environmental management, such as river cleanliness and sanitation practices. The study concludes that there is a need to enhance environmental awareness in Islamic Boarding Schools through structured greening and waste management programs.*

**Keywords:** *Eco-Theology, Islamic Boarding Schools, Environment, North Sumatra, Waste Management*

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Environmental issues and climate change have become global concerns over the past few decades. Problems such as environmental degradation, deforestation, air pollution, and water contamination are increasingly alarming due to their significant impact on the balance of ecosystems and human life. One of the main causes of this damage is human actions that often neglect their responsibility toward nature. In this context, eco-theology becomes relevant as it offers a theological perspective that calls upon humanity to be more responsible in preserving and caring for nature as a trust from God. In Indonesia, a country with a Muslim majority, attention to environmental issues has also begun to rise, particularly within the Islamic boarding school environment, which plays a crucial role in shaping the moral and ethical values of the Muslim community.

Islamic Boarding Schools in Indonesia, including in North Sumatra, are known as traditional Islamic educational institutions that play a major role in shaping public understanding of religious teachings, including how Islam teaches the importance of environmental conservation. The concept of “*an-nazhafah minal iman*,” which means cleanliness is part of faith, is one of the teachings that encourages Muslims to maintain cleanliness and environmental sustainability. However, the reality shows that not all Islamic Boarding Schools consistently apply this concept in their daily lives. This can be observed from the environmental conditions in some Islamic Boarding Schools that do not pay sufficient attention to cleanliness and sustainability, particularly in waste management and natural resource conservation around the Islamic Boarding Schools. For instance, in the South Tapanuli region of North Sumatra, some Islamic Boarding Schools are located near rivers, but waste management and sanitation in those areas are still far from the eco-theology standards expected (Maulida & Ali, 2023).

Eco-theology is an approach that connects religious teachings with concern for the environment. In Islam, the concept of eco-theology is based on the teachings of the Qur'an and hadith, which emphasize that humans have a moral and religious responsibility to maintain the balance of nature. For example, in the Qur'an, there are many verses that highlight the importance

of preserving nature and not exploiting natural resources (Arifin, 2024). These verses describe nature as God's creation that must be treated with respect and preserved. Therefore, eco-theology is not only about environmental awareness but also about spiritual responsibility to sustain the lives of humanity and all of God's creatures.

In the context of Islamic Boarding Schools, the implementation of eco-theology should be part of the educational curriculum, which not only teaches religious teachings theoretically but also how these teachings are applied in daily life. For example, Islamic Boarding Schools can teach the importance of planting trees, maintaining environmental cleanliness, and managing waste properly. Given the growing population, the need for oxygen and green spaces becomes more urgent. Every human being requires about 0.5 kg of oxygen per day, while one mature tree can only produce around 1.2 kg of oxygen per day (Maulida & Ali, 2023). If the population continues to grow without sufficient tree planting, the threat of oxygen shortages and other health problems will become more evident in the future.

However, the reality in many Islamic Boarding Schools in North Sumatra shows that awareness of the importance of eco-theology is still low. For example, in one Islamic Boarding School in South Tapanuli, researchers found that human waste was being disposed of directly into the river flowing near the Islamic Boarding Schools. This clearly contradicts the principles of eco-theology, which teach the importance of preserving the environment, particularly water as a source of life. In fact, the river is not only a water source for the Islamic Boarding Schools students but also for the surrounding community, who rely on the river for their daily needs. Therefore, this research aims to analyze the extent to which Islamic Boarding Schools in North Sumatra have implemented the concept of eco-theology in daily life and the factors that hinder its application.

Furthermore, this research is essential to highlight the role of Islamic Boarding Schools in shaping public understanding of the importance of protecting the environment. Islamic Boarding Schools hold a strategic position in building ecological awareness among students and the surrounding community, especially in rural areas that still have rich biodiversity. As educational institutions that teach Islamic values, Islamic Boarding Schools should be at the forefront of environmental conservation efforts, whether through reforestation programs, waste management, or education on the importance of maintaining cleanliness and environmental sustainability (Arifin, 2024). However, the challenges faced by Islamic Boarding Schools in implementing eco-theology are not insignificant. One of the main issues is the lack of awareness and understanding of the importance of environmental preservation, both among the students and the Islamic Boarding Schools administrators themselves.

Another problem that Islamic Boarding Schools encounter in applying eco-theology is the limited availability of facilities and resources that support environmental conservation efforts. Many Islamic Boarding Schools, especially those in rural areas, still face infrastructure limitations, such as waste management facilities, proper sanitation systems, and access to clean water. In addition, the lack of training and educational programs on eco-theology is also one of the factors hindering the implementation of this concept in Islamic Boarding Schools. Therefore, this research will also identify the factors that act as obstacles to the application of eco-theology in Islamic Boarding Schools and seek appropriate solutions to address these challenges.

The objective of this research is to analyze the understanding and application of eco-theology in Islamic Boarding Schools in North Sumatra, with a focus on how Islamic Boarding Schools manage their surrounding environment, particularly in terms of waste management, reforestation, and water cleanliness. This research also aims to provide recommendations to Islamic Boarding Schools and relevant institutions to enhance awareness and understanding of the importance of environmental conservation as part of religious teachings. In the long term,

this research is expected to assist Islamic Boarding Schools in developing more structured and sustainable programs in their efforts to preserve the environment.

Eco-theology is a highly relevant approach in the context of today's environmental challenges. Islamic Boarding Schools, as Islamic educational institutions, play a very strategic role in building ecological awareness among Muslims. However, to implement eco-theology effectively, commitment is needed from all parties, including the students, Islamic Boarding Schools administrators, and the surrounding community. This research is expected to be a starting point in raising awareness and understanding of the importance of protecting the environment as part of human religious and moral responsibility.

## RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach aimed at describing and analyzing the understanding of eco-theology in the context of Islamic Boarding Schools in the South Tapanuli region. This approach was chosen because qualitative research allows for an in-depth exploration of individual or group views and attitudes in their interaction with the environment, particularly in terms of their understanding of eco-theology. The methods used include field observation and in-depth interviews to obtain relevant empirical data.

### Research Subjects

The research subjects are students, teachers, and Islamic Boarding Schools administrators located in South Tapanuli. These subjects were selected based on their role in implementing and practicing the concept of eco-theology in daily life at the Islamic Boarding Schools. The students and administrators of the Islamic Boarding Schools serve as the main sources of data, as they actively participate in Islamic Boarding Schools activities related to environmental management and eco-theology-based education.

### Research Location

The study was conducted at Islamic Boarding Schools located in the South Tapanuli region. This area was chosen due to its strategic geographical conditions, being in a mountainous region and near a large river, which influences the surrounding environment. Islamic Boarding Schools in this area have characteristics that are interesting to study, especially in relation to their interaction with the natural environment, particularly in the use of natural resources such as water and trees. Additionally, South Tapanuli is a region rich in natural resources but also faces environmental challenges such as deforestation and water pollution. Therefore, this region is a relevant location for researching the implementation of eco-theology concepts in the daily life of Islamic Boarding Schools.

### Data Collection Techniques

The data collection techniques in this study involve two main methods: observation and in-depth interviews. Observations were conducted directly at the Islamic Boarding Schools to understand how eco-theological practices are implemented in daily life. The researcher observed the surrounding environment of the Islamic Boarding Schools, including cleanliness, waste management, reforestation, and activities related to environmental conservation. This observation method allows the researcher to directly observe the behavior of students and Islamic Boarding Schools administrators concerning their understanding and implementation of eco-theology. The observation was carried out in a non-participatory manner, where the researcher did not directly engage in Islamic Boarding Schools activities but observed from the outside to ensure the objectivity of the research results (Sugiyono, 2018).

In-depth interviews were conducted with the students, teachers, and Islamic Boarding School administrators. This method was used to explore their understanding of eco-theology,

how this concept is taught in the Islamic Boarding Schools, and the challenges faced in implementing eco-theology within the Islamic Boarding Schools environment. The interviews were semi-structured, with open-ended questions allowing respondents to freely express their views. The interview questions covered topics such as their understanding of the obligation to protect the environment within Islamic teachings, the role of Islamic Boarding Schools in environmental education, and the practical measures they take to maintain cleanliness and environmental sustainability in the Islamic Boarding Schools. This method was adopted to obtain detailed and in-depth data from the perspective of the research subjects (Moleong, 2021).

### **Data Analysis Techniques**

The data obtained from observations and interviews were analyzed using qualitative descriptive analysis techniques. The analysis began with data reduction, where the data were grouped and simplified based on the main themes that emerged from the observations and interviews. Afterward, the data were presented in a descriptive narrative form, providing an overview of how the concept of eco-theology is understood and applied in the Islamic Boarding Schools under study. This analysis process involved identifying patterns and relationships between variables related to the implementation of eco-theology in the Islamic Boarding Schools.

In this research, eco-theology theory was used as the analytical framework to assess the extent to which Islamic Boarding Schools in South Tapanuli have applied the principles of eco-theology in their daily activities. This theory emphasizes the important role of religion, especially Islam, in shaping environmental awareness. According to eco-theology theory, humans have a moral and religious responsibility to protect nature as a trust from God (Maulida & Ali, 2023). In the context of Islamic Boarding Schools, this theory is relevant for examining how religious values about the environment are taught and applied.

### **Data Validity**

To ensure the validity of the data, the researcher used triangulation techniques. Triangulation was conducted by comparing data obtained from observations, interviews, and Islamic Boarding Schools documents related to environmental programs. In this way, the validity of the research results can be enhanced because the data are sourced from various complementary perspectives. In addition, interviews were conducted with various parties who play different roles in the Islamic Boarding Schools (students, teachers, administrators), allowing for a diverse range of viewpoints in the data analysis.

### **Research Instruments**

The primary tools used in this research were interview guides and observation instruments. The interview guide contained a list of questions prepared based on the research objectives and eco-theology theory. The observation tool was in the form of field notes to record direct observations at the Islamic Boarding Schools, including photo documentation of the Islamic Boarding Schools's environment to support the observational results.

### **Statistical Model**

Although this research is qualitative, simple descriptive statistical analysis was also used to describe the environmental characteristics of the Islamic Boarding Schools, such as the number of trees planted, cleanliness conditions, and the level of environmental awareness among the students. This quantitative data supports the qualitative analysis results and provides a clearer picture of the environmental conditions at the Islamic Boarding Schools.

By using a descriptive qualitative method through observation and interviews, this study aims to provide a deeper understanding of the application of the eco-theology concept in Islamic Boarding Schools in South Tapanuli. The research also seeks to explore the role of Islamic Boarding Schools in instilling environmental awareness values in students, as well as identifying the challenges faced in implementing eco-theology in the Islamic Boarding Schools. Through

this qualitative analysis, the researcher hopes to contribute to the literature on eco-theology in the context of Islamic education, particularly in Indonesia.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### **The Implementation of Eco-Theology in Islamic Boarding Schools in North Sumatra**

Research findings indicate that the implementation of eco-theology in Islamic boarding schools in North Sumatra is still in its early stages. Some Islamic Boarding Schools have started to integrate the concept of eco-theology into their education, but this is still limited to Islamic Boarding Schools that have a higher awareness of environmental issues. These Islamic Boarding Schools utilize religious teachings to instill awareness about human responsibility as stewards (khalifah) of the Earth. Hadiths about cleanliness and the importance of protecting the environment, such as “*At-thuhuru syathru al-iman*” (cleanliness is part of faith), are increasingly being used as a foundation in environment-based education (Jauhariyah & Mahmudah, 2023).

This study also found that several Islamic Boarding Schools have implemented environmental programs, such as greening initiatives, community-based waste management, and utilizing vacant land to improve the economic situation of the Islamic Boarding Schools. One successful example of a program implemented is the “Green School,” which involves students and teachers in maintaining the cleanliness of the Islamic Boarding Schools environment. This program has shown positive results in raising the awareness of the students about the importance of caring for the environment as part of their faith and responsibility as Muslims.

However, the implementation of eco-theology still faces various challenges. The majority of Islamic Boarding Schools in North Sumatra remain focused on classical religious education without integration with contemporary issues such as ecology. Several factors that influence the lack of eco-theology implementation in Islamic Boarding Schools include limited access to information about environmental issues, lack of support from external parties, and resource limitations within the Islamic Boarding Schools environment (Amalia et al., 2023). Generally, Islamic Boarding Schools that have implemented eco-theology are those that have support from the community and the government, especially regarding the provision of resources for environmental management.

### **Utilization of Islamic Teachings in Environmental Education**

In the context of Islamic Boarding Schools, Islamic teachings play an important role in shaping the behavior and environmental awareness of the students. Eco-theology, as an approach that connects environmental issues with theology, is starting to be applied by utilizing verses from the Qur'an and the sayings of the Prophet that emphasize the importance of caring for nature. For example, a hadith narrated by Ahmad states, "If the Day of Judgment has come and one of you has a seedling in hand, he should plant it even if it is already on fire," serves as an important foundation in teaching students to remain concerned about the environment, even in difficult situations (Rochmah & Suwandi, 2023).

These teachings are beginning to be implemented in several Islamic Boarding Schools through the study of the Qur'an and hadith that connect the command to maintain cleanliness and environmental sustainability as part of moral and spiritual responsibility. This effort is also complemented by practical activities such as waste management, reforestation, and outreach to the surrounding community about the importance of caring for the environment. One Islamic Boarding Schools in Tanjung Sari, North Sumatra, for example, has successfully involved students in various environmentally-based activities, ranging from tree planting to productive economic waste management (Anwar et al., 2023).

In addition to the principle of cleanliness, the Qur'an and hadith contain many values that can be applied in environmental education. For example, in Surah Al-A'raf verse 31, Allah says, "Eat and drink, but do not be excessive. Indeed, Allah does not like those who are excessive." This verse teaches the importance of living simply and not being excessive in utilizing natural resources. In environmental education, this verse can serve as a guideline for teaching students about the importance of conserving natural resources by not exploiting or using them excessively.

Another relevant principle is the concept of mizan or balance, as mentioned in Surah Ar-Rahman verses 7-9, which emphasizes the importance of maintaining balance in God's creation. Humans are commanded not to disrupt the balance of nature, as disrupting balance means violating God's decree. This mizan principle can be taught to students to build awareness that actions that damage the environment, such as illegal logging, water pollution, and the use of harmful chemicals, are forms of violation against God's command to maintain the balance of nature.

Several Islamic Boarding Schools in North Sumatra have utilized these values to teach students about nature conservation. One example is the reforestation program of vacant land around the Islamic Boarding Schools, which is carried out by students under the guidance of the Islamic Boarding Schools's management. In this program, students are taught to plant trees and care for plants as part of their responsibility as stewards on earth. Such programs not only help conserve nature but also provide practical lessons to students about the importance of caring for the environment.

### **Challenges in Implementing Eco-Theology**

Although there has been positive development in the application of eco-theology in Islamic Boarding Schools, this study also found several challenges that need to be addressed. One of the main challenges is the lack of awareness about the importance of environmental conservation among students and teachers. Most Islamic Boarding Schools still focus on religious curricula that have not fully linked Islamic teachings with environmental issues (Oktafia et al., 2024).

In addition, the limited infrastructure of Islamic Boarding Schools, such as the lack of cleanliness facilities and limited green spaces, is a hindering factor in efforts to raise environmental awareness. Many Islamic Boarding Schools still face issues regarding environmental cleanliness, such as disorganized waste disposal and insufficient access to clean water. This indicates that there is still a need for more serious efforts to enhance environmental awareness through a more holistic religious education (Halim et al., 2024).

The limited support from external parties, such as the government and non-governmental organizations, also poses a challenge in the implementation of eco-theology in Islamic Boarding Schools. Many Islamic Boarding Schools in rural areas still lack access to information and environmental programs that could support them in applying the concept of eco-theology. However, the role of Islamic Boarding Schools as traditional Islamic educational institutions is very important in shaping environmental awareness among the community (Ali & Bahtera, 2024).

However, there are several Islamic Boarding Schools that have successfully overcome these challenges by engaging the local community and collaborating with environmental organizations. For example, Islamic Boarding Schools that partner with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the environmental field have been able to develop community-based waste management programs involving both students and the surrounding community. By involving the community, these Islamic Boarding Schools have been able to create a strong synergy in their efforts to preserve the environment.

**Collaborative Efforts in Implementing Eco-Theology**

To address these challenges, collaborative efforts are needed among various parties, including Islamic Boarding Schools, the community, the government, and environmental organizations. One strategic step is to integrate eco-theology into the religious education curriculum, not only at the Islamic Boarding Schools level but also in other Islamic schools. In addition, training for teachers and students on the importance of caring for the environment from a religious perspective should also be strengthened through various training and outreach programs (Safei & Himayaturohmah, 2023).

The government can play an important role in providing support to Islamic Boarding Schools in the form of infrastructure and resources that support environmental programs. Several government programs focusing on environmental conservation and environmental education can be integrated with Islamic Boarding Schools programs to strengthen the implementation of eco-theology. Thus, Islamic Boarding Schools can become the frontline in efforts to preserve the environment in Indonesia, especially in North Sumatra, which has high biodiversity (Nurhasanah et al., 2024).

This research shows that eco-theology is beginning to be implemented in several Islamic Boarding Schools in North Sumatra, although its application varies between one Islamic Boarding Schools and another. Islamic teachings about the importance of caring for the environment through hadith and the Qur'an serve as the main foundation for developing environmental awareness among students. However, challenges such as limited infrastructure, lack of awareness, and minimal external support remain the main obstacles to the comprehensive implementation of eco-theology in Islamic Boarding Schools.

To address these challenges, collaborative efforts are needed among various parties, including Islamic Boarding Schools, communities, and the government. By strengthening the integration of eco-theology in the Islamic Boarding Schools curriculum and providing adequate resource support, Islamic Boarding Schools can become agents of change in environmental preservation. In the future, Islamic Boarding Schools are expected to be more active in promoting environmental awareness among students and the community, as well as playing a greater role in efforts to maintain sustainable ecosystems and environments.

**CONCLUSION**

The conclusion of this research shows that the integration of eco-theology in Islamic Boarding Schools, particularly in North Sumatra, has great potential in shaping students' awareness of the importance of environmental conservation, although significant challenges still arise in the implementation process. Eco-theology, which connects religious understanding with ecological responsibility, is beginning to be introduced and applied in several Islamic Boarding Schools through learning activities, Qur'an studies, and relevant hadiths related to environmental issues.

Islamic Boarding Schools that are more open to change and have adequate support tend to be more advanced in their efforts to implement environmentally-based programs, such as reforestation, waste management, and teaching based on religious teachings that support environmental sustainability. However, most Islamic Boarding Schools in this region still face obstacles in the comprehensive implementation of eco-theology. Limited access to information, lack of resources, and challenges in designing curricula relevant to local socio-economic conditions are the main barriers to introducing this concept more broadly.

Moreover, the awareness of students and Islamic Boarding Schools administrators regarding the importance of environmental conservation still needs to be improved, given that

many Islamic Boarding Schools have yet to actively practice environmental maintenance. Another emerging challenge is the dominant focus of Islamic Boarding Schools education on classical fiqh teachings, which often do not provide sufficient space for contemporary issues such as climate change and environmental degradation. Nevertheless, local initiatives that have been implemented by some Islamic Boarding Schools show that the concept of eco-theology has great potential to develop and be applied more widely, especially if supported by strong collaboration among Islamic Boarding Schools, communities, and government and environmental organizations.

In this context, Islamic Boarding Schools play a strategic role as agents of change that can educate the young Muslim generation about the importance of environmental conservation, not only as a social obligation but also as part of their faith and responsibility as stewards of the earth. Steps to create more environmentally friendly Islamic Boarding Schools include integrating eco-theology values into the educational curriculum, increasing awareness and knowledge about the importance of environmental conservation through religious studies, and implementing programs that encourage environmental preservation within the Islamic Boarding Schools itself. Additionally, it is also essential to involve the local community in these efforts, considering that Islamic Boarding Schools in North Sumatra are usually closely connected with the surrounding community, meaning that success in maintaining the Islamic Boarding Schools environment will positively impact the environmental conditions of the wider community.

As environmental awareness continues to develop among Islamic Boarding Schools, it is hoped that students will not only understand the importance of caring for nature but also be able to apply these principles in their daily lives and inspire the community to be more environmentally conscious. Collaboration and support from external parties, both government and non-government organizations, are crucial to help Islamic Boarding Schools access better resources and create policies that support the application of eco-theology. Although its implementation still requires time and sustained efforts, the introduction of eco-theology in Islamic Boarding Schools is an important first step in responding to global environmental challenges, especially in areas with biodiversity wealth such as North Sumatra. In the future, there needs to be more intensive efforts to integrate these values into all aspects of Islamic Boarding Schools life, including teaching patterns, daily activities, and the management of natural resources owned by these Islamic Boarding Schools. Thus, eco-theology will not only remain a theoretical discourse but will also become an integral part of the life of students and Islamic Boarding Schools as a whole.

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