

THE CONSCIOUSNESS ELEMENTS OF ECO-THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION IN PESANTREN'S CULTURE

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Abstract

The increasingly urgent global ecological crisis demands a holistic approach, including spiritual and moral dimensions in education. This study focuses on how elements of eco-theological consciousness are cultivated within the educational culture of Islamic boarding schools (pesantren), and how these elements shape the ecological behavior of pesantren communities. In this context, pesantren, as traditional Islamic educational institutions, hold significant potential to instill ecological consciousness grounded in religious values. This interdisciplinary research integrates theological, sociological, and educational approaches, which are still rarely examined in a comprehensive manner within the pesantren context. Employing a paradigmatic approach grounded in constructivism and interpretivism, this qualitative study was conducted at two pesantren recognized for their strong ecological culture: Subulussalam in Banyuwangi and Nurul Qornain in Jember. The findings suggest that eco-spiritual consciousness in pesantren is built upon two main pillars: cognitive and value-based elements. At Nurul Qornain, ecological cognition stems from fiqh-based (Islamic jurisprudential) understanding, while at Subulussalam, it arises from theological aesthetics. Both pesantren also demonstrate the internalization of values that shape a collective ethos—cleanliness as worship and beauty as an expression of faith. Therefore, ecological consciousness in pesantren is not merely a matter of verbal instruction, but a cultural praxis that is sustainably transmitted across generations. These findings make a significant contribution to the development of faith-based environmental education.

Keywords: Consciousness; Eco-theology; Pesantren; Culture; Education.

Abstrak

Krisis ekologi global yang kian mendesak menuntut pendekatan holistik, termasuk pendekatan spiritual dan moral dalam pendidikan. Penelitian ini fokus pada



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bagaimana elemen kesadaran eko-teologis terbangun dalam budaya pendidikan pesantren, dan bagaimana elemen tersebut membentuk perilaku ekologis warga pesantren? Dalam konteks ini, pesantren sebagai institusi pendidikan Islam tradisional memiliki potensi besar untuk menanamkan kesadaran ekologis berbasis nilai-nilai keagamaan. Penelitian interdisipliner ini memadukan pendekatan teologis, sosiologis, dan pendidikan yang masih jarang dikaji secara terpadu dalam konteks pesantren. Dengan pendekatan paradigmatis konstruktivisme dan interpretatif, penelitian dilakukan secara kualitatif di dua pesantren yang memiliki budaya ekologis kuat, yakni Pesantren Subulussalam Banyuwangi dan Nurul Qornain Jember. Temuanya dapat dikonklusikan bahwa kesadaran eco-spiritual pesantren dibangun atas dua pilar utama, elemen kognisi dan nilai. Di Nurul Qornain, kognisi ekologis bersumber dari pemahaman fiqhiyah, sedangkan di Subulussalam dari estetika teologis. Kedua pesantren juga menunjukkan internalisasi nilai yang membentuk etos kolektif, yakni kebersihan sebagai ibadah dan keindahan sebagai ekspresi iman. Dengan demikian kesadaran ekologis di pesantren bukan sekadar ajaran verbal, melainkan praksis budaya yang diwariskan secara berkelanjutan. Temuan ini memberi kontribusi signifikan bagi pengembangan pendidikan lingkungan berbasis keagamaan.

Kata Kunci: *Kesadaran; Eko-Teology; Pesantren; Budaya; Pendidikan.*

A. Introduction

The current ecological crisis is a pressing global challenge that demands immediate action. The rapid deterioration of the environment—marked by climate change, massive deforestation, water and air pollution, and declining biodiversity—has significantly impacted the sustainability of human life and Earth's ecosystems (El-Sayed & Kamel, 2020; Forzieri et al., 2022; Hoegh-Guldberg, O. et al., 2019; Ogidi & Akpan, 2022; Saxena, 2025). According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), uncontrolled human exploitation of natural resources has led to a rise in global average temperatures, threatening the survival of future generations (*Climate Change 2021*, 2021). This ecological crisis is not merely a technical issue solvable through technology alone; it is also a moral and spiritual problem requiring holistic understanding and action, involving a paradigm shift in humanity's relationship with nature.

In the Indonesian context, traditional Islamic educational institutions, particularly pesantren (Islamic boarding schools), hold strategic yet underutilized potential in addressing environmental challenges. These institutions are not only centers of religious learning but also social entities that shape the moral and ethical values of Muslim communities. With their vast numbers and widespread distribution across the archipelago, pesantren can serve as effective agents of

change in fostering ecological awareness among young Muslims (Herdiansyah et al., 2018; Irawan, 2022; Karman et al., 2023; Subaidi et al., 2023).

Islam itself contains strong teachings on environmental stewardship, such as the concept of *khalifah* (stewardship), which positions humans as Earth's caretakers responsible for its preservation (Rahmat et al., 2025). In Islamic teachings, the environment is not merely an object but a divine creation entrusted to humanity (Khotimah et al., 2025a). Therefore, pesantren, with their strong religious foundation, are highly relevant in developing eco-theological education as a basis for ecological consciousness.

Previous studies have explored the relationship between religious education in pesantren and environmental awareness. Anshori and Pohl (2022) emphasize the importance of integrating environmental education into pesantren curricula to equip students with a comprehensive understanding of conservation. Hidayat (2023) expands this idea by highlighting eco-theology as an educational paradigm linking Islamic religious values with ecological awareness and action, making faith a driving force for environmental protection.

Syihabuddin et al. (2023) further argue that the theological principles of *tawhid* (divine unity) and *khilafah* (stewardship) provide a strong foundation for motivating pesantren communities to engage in environmental conservation. However, these studies remain largely conceptual and have yet to deeply examine how the socio-cultural consciousness of pesantren can systematically and sustainably internalize and actualize eco-theological education.

A notable weakness in pesantren culture regarding ecological awareness lies in their education system, which remains heavily focused on normative and ritualistic aspects. The curriculum, predominantly centered on classical Islamic texts (*kitab kuning*) and jurisprudence (*fiqh*), rarely incorporates environmental education as an integral component (Maslani, 2023). Additionally, the lack of human resources with environmental expertise and inadequate eco-friendly facilities hinder the development of a tangible ecological culture. Consequently, ecological awareness in pesantren has yet to become ingrained in daily practices, limiting their role in environmental mitigation and adaptation (Quddus, 2020).

Amid growing interest in eco-theology as an integrative paradigm connecting religious teachings with ecological consciousness, this approach positions religion as a primary source of inspiration and motivation for environmental preservation—not merely as ritualistic doctrine (M. T. Habib & Rahmatullah, 2025). It views humans as *khalifah*, entrusted with the moral responsibility to protect God's creation. Eco-theological education in pesantren aims to foster holistic awareness, combining cognitive, affective, and conative dimensions to promote sustainable

ecological behavior (Khotimah et al., 2025b). Thus, pesantren are expected to reconstruct their religious paradigm—shifting from fragmented spirituality to a unified framework integrating spiritual, social, and ecological dimensions.

Several eco-theological initiatives in pesantren include integrating environmental values into religious curricula (Albar et al., 2024), launching greening programs (Reza Bakhtiar Ramadhan & Aris Risdiana, 2021), waste management systems (Herdiansyah et al., 2016), organic farming (Keilbart, 2021), and environmental awareness campaigns led by santri (students) (Hasan et al., 2022). These efforts not only benefit the local environment but also cultivate a collective ecological identity within pesantren communities.

To deeply examine the foundations of eco-theological consciousness in pesantren culture, social consciousness theory provides a relevant and comprehensive framework. Social consciousness refers to the state in which individuals or groups recognize their interconnectedness with the social and ecological environment and are motivated to continuously develop a culture of collective well-being. Horkheimer and Adorno (2016) conceptualize this as the "Dialectic of Enlightenment," arguing that human rationality evolves in dialogue with mythic conceptions from earlier times (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2016).

What was once deemed rational may later be regarded as myth, and vice versa, depending on its alignment with human interests (Stögner, 2025). Applying this framework, pesantren eco-theology can be understood as an autonomous consciousness shaped by actors' dialectical engagement with their religious and environmental realities.

Additionally, Max Weber's perspective on the integration of religious spirit as an ideal consciousness for collective welfare (Mills, 2020) offers further theoretical grounding. While Weber's work did not specifically address Islamic educational contexts, this study extends his framework to analyze how pesantren's transcendental religious consciousness fosters ecological awareness.

This research aims to identify and analyze the foundations of eco-theological education in two renowned environmentally conscious pesantren: Pesantren Subullussalam (Banyuwangi) and Pesantren Nurul Qornain (Jember). Both institutions have received multiple awards for their environmental initiatives, making them ideal case studies.

By examining these pesantren, this study seeks to formulate an ecological consciousness rooted in religious values. Its novelty lies in its integrative approach, combining theological, sociological, and educational perspectives—an underexplored synthesis in existing literature. The findings are expected to enrich

academic discourse while offering practical contributions for pesantren leaders and policymakers in developing faith-based environmental education.

B. Research Methods

This study employs a qualitative approach with a multi-site case study design, focusing on two pesantren (Islamic boarding schools) as the units of analysis: Pesantren Subullussalam in Banyuwangi and Pesantren Nurul Qornain in Jember. The selection of these research sites is based on their distinctive ecological awareness practices. Both institutions are known for actively integrating environmental values into daily activities, such as organic waste management, water conservation, and the cultivation of spiritual principles in environmental stewardship through religious education.

The research was conducted from January to December 2024, allowing sufficient time for the researcher to adapt, conduct in-depth observations, and establish rapport with participants, ensuring that the collected data accurately reflects real-world conditions. Data was gathered through participant observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis, enabling cross-verification of information. To ensure data validity, this study employs triangulation strategies, including methodological triangulation (using multiple data collection techniques) and source triangulation (interviewing diverse informants such as pesantren leaders, teachers, students, and surrounding community members). Additionally, member checking was conducted by reconfirming interpretations with participants to ensure the researcher's understanding aligned with their intended meanings. A well-documented audit trail was also maintained to allow systematic retracing of the analytical process. Data analysis follows Miles & Huberman's thematic model, encompassing data reduction, data display, and conclusion verification.

C. Result and Discussion

The foundation of eco-theological consciousness in pesantren educational culture can be traced through the role of its cultural actors. As established in literature, pesantren as religious institutions with strong Islamic character position kyai (Islamic scholars) as the most dominant cultural actors (Supriyanto et al., 2025). Sociologically, all forms of consciousness within pesantren, including eco-theological consciousness in its education system, originate from the kyai's perspectives and interpretations, which subsequently influence the entire pesantren community.

Drawing upon Bass and Gardner's theory (Gray & Pratt, 2025), cultural actors' consciousness is constructed through two fundamental elements: cognition and values. These elements serve as the foundation of self-awareness for both kyai and santri (students). This study analyzes these two elements as the basis of eco-theological consciousness in two pesantren. At Pesantren Subullussalam Banyuwangi, the analysis was conducted through the statements and perceptions of KH. Hambali Mu'thy and his students. Meanwhile, at Pesantren Nurul Qornain Jember, the analysis focused on the thoughts of Kiai Yazid Karimullah and the pesantren community.

The Cognitive Foundations of Pesantren's Eco-Theological Consciousness

Cognition constitutes the fundamental element of consciousness derived from subject knowledge, serving as the primary basis for human awareness of reality. Within this research context, eco-theological consciousness emerges as a cognitive manifestation formed through conceptual understanding that is taught, transmitted, and internalized by pesantren educational actors, particularly the kyai (Islamic scholars) and santri (students). When cognition is regarded as the rational representation of consciousness, it follows that pesantren's eco-theological consciousness originates from the rationality of faith deeply embedded in Islamic educational value structures.

As one research site, Pesantren Nurul Qornain demonstrates how cognition of fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence) teachings - particularly regarding thoharah (ritual purification) - has shaped a spiritually-oriented ecological consciousness. Within fiqhyyah tradition, thoharah transcends mere ritual cleansing from hadats (ritual impurities) and najis (physical impurities); it symbolizes spiritual purity and systematic maintenance of personal and environmental cleanliness. This awareness forms the foundation guiding kyai's leadership and pedagogical approaches while establishing a normative framework for comprehensive pesantren environmental management.

This fiqhyyah conception finds validation among prominent Islamic scholars. Yusuf al-Qaradawi, for instance, asserts that cleanliness in Islam encompasses multiple aspects including clothing, places of worship, body, and even minute details like hands and head (Al-Qaradawi & Daud, 2016). Furthermore, KH Marzuqi and KH Maimun Zubair emphasize Prophet Muhammad's meticulous attention to cleanliness, including the practice of siwak (tooth-cleaning) as part of dental hygiene sunnah (Marzuqi & Zubair, 2015). This tradition has evolved beyond moral teaching into cultural cognitive structures shaping environmentally-friendly religious thought and behavior.

Ahmad Khobir's research substantiates these findings, demonstrating that thoharah education significantly influences students' development of hygienic and clean behaviors (Hodila et al., 2025). His study recommends expanding thoharah learning systems as instruments for cultivating santri character that integrates health, cleanliness, and religiosity. This evidence confirms that fiqh cognition in pesantren contexts extends beyond normative aspects, developing into ecological consciousness integrated with spirituality and social praxis. Such understanding fosters awareness that purity correlates fundamentally with environmental health (Hidayati, 2025).

From critical philosophy's viewpoint, Herbert Marcuse argues that human consciousness repressed by capitalist systems produces merely instrumental relationships with nature. However, pesantren education reveals what Marcuse terms "non-repressive consciousness" (O'Connor, 2018) - an alternative form that regards nature not as exploitable object but as spiritual partner requiring protection and respect. Fiqh knowledge about bodily and spatial cleanliness establishes foundations for liberating spiritual-ecological relationships that honor divine creation.

Conversely, Pesantren Subulussalam develops distinct eco-spiritual cognition through theological aesthetics - the understanding that beauty constitutes divine manifestation. The belief that "Allah is Beautiful and loves beauty" (الله جميل يحب) forms the conceptual and practical basis for creating physically and spiritually beautiful pesantren environments (Agitoğlu, 2018). Here, beauty transcends artistic elements, representing divine blessing and human-environment harmony.

In theological aesthetics studies, Andi Herawati posits that beauty concerns not merely form but philosophical perspectives on human existence and its relationship with cosmos and Creator (Herawati, 2015). Islamic tradition comprehends beauty not as superficial appearance but as profound spiritual expression (M. M. Habib & Ullah, 2025). Seyyed Hossein Nasr identifies beauty among religion's four spiritual pillars alongside truth, virtue, and prayer, considering it harmonious cosmic order's reflection that elevates humans toward God (Katkova & Fauzan, 2025).

Unlike Nasr's metaphysical conceptualization, Kyai Hambali at Pesantren Subulussalam articulates beauty in empirical, practical terms. For him, beauty manifests in pesantren's tangible condition - clean, orderly, comfortable spaces for all inhabitants. This beauty permeates content and form, idea and appearance, unifying diversity and perfection even in transcendental dimensions. It constitutes not merely mental impression but inherent quality in consciously nurtured reality

(Singh, 2025), aligning with Herman Bavinck's theological aesthetics that views beauty as unity and perfection's pinnacle (Bavinck & Williams, 2019).

Kyai Hambali's beauty-principled pesantren management can be analyzed through Max Weber's lens of religious work ethics. In *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Weber posits that religiously-motivated social action generates value-rational orientation (wertrational) (Danz, 2024). Thus, maintaining pesantren cleanliness and beauty stems not from economic motives or tradition but as faith manifestation and spiritual responsibility toward creation. Here, kyai and santri function not merely as moral agents but as theological conviction-driven ecological transformers.

Both Pesantren Nurul Qornain and Subulussalam exhibit distinct religious cognitions producing contextual yet spiritually-grounded ecological consciousness. Fiqhiyyah cognition yields cleanliness consciousness as worship praxis, while theological aesthetic cognition generates beauty consciousness as divine creation love. Both unite in pesantren's distinctive eco-theology spirit - consciousness rooted in religious knowledge and manifested in daily ecological practices.

The Values Element of Pesantren's Eco-Theological Consciousness

Values constitute the internal structure that directs human behavior toward specific moral orientations (Gray & Pratt, 2025). Within pesantren contexts, eco-spiritual values transcend mere verbal teachings, emerging instead through prolonged sublimation of religious doctrine, social experiences, and daily practices. These values form a distinctive religious-ecological habitus that differentiates pesantren communities from other educational institutions. This study reveals that pesantren cultivate ecological consciousness not only through cognitive knowledge but more profoundly through affective values that guide collective environmental actions.

Under Kyai Yazid's leadership, Pesantren Nurul Qornain demonstrates how eco-spiritual values rooted in fiqhiyyah understandings of thoharah (ritual purification) shape student life. From this foundational teaching emerges a core value: environmental cleanliness as religious obligation. Kyai Yazid emphasizes that maintaining cleanliness constitutes worship (ibadah), while neglect represents sin - transforming hygiene from worldly virtue to spiritually-binding practice.

This value manifests concretely in students' daily routines. Environmental maintenance activities - from mosque floor cleaning to plant watering and waste management - are performed as religious acts rather than administrative duties. During dawn lectures, Kyai Yazid frequently reiterates hadiths and scholarly opinions on cleanliness's integral connection to faith: "*Al-nadhafatu min al-iman*

(Cleanliness is part of faith). We often quote this hadith but rarely position it as worship. Scholars agree that '*al-tuhuru shatru al-iman*' (purification constitutes half of faith)" (Interview, KH Yazid Karimullah, 2024).

Thus, eco-theological values function not as abstract doctrines but as living principles pulsating through daily practices, creating collective environmental responsibility (Speidl, 2025). This conception aligns with Seyyed Hossein Nasr's view that classical Islamic values express metaphysical structures binding humans and nature (Rouzati, 2025). When thoharah is practiced as spiritual experience rather than routine, it transforms into values guiding human-earth relations. For Nurul Qornain, cleanliness becomes core ecological education value - not mere health procedure but ecological piety.

Contrastingly, Pesantren Subulussalam develops eco-spiritual values from theological aesthetics. Guided by Kyai Hambali, the institution bases its culture on the principle that "Allah is Beautiful and loves beauty" (Interview, KH Hambali, 2024). Here, beauty is not merely metaphysical concept but practically embodied in pesantren governance and culture.

Kyai Hambali conceptualizes beauty as tangible representation of divine values. Consequently, maintaining environmental aesthetics becomes spiritual pedagogy. The researcher observed how beauty values are institutionalized in education systems: students learn to cherish orderly, clean, green environments. Small gardens serve not as decorative elements but as concrete expressions of divine values - plant care and space organization become spiritual practices.

Kyai Hambali emphasizes in his lectures that beautifying the pesantren constitutes gratitude to God and respect for creation: "This value forms awareness that beauty belongs to worship" (Interview, KH Hambali, 2024). This perspective resonates with Max Weber's concept of "religious ethics" - when internalized as values, religious spirit becomes transformational social force (Calia, 2025). At Subulussalam, beauty values evolve from private ideals into collective ethos directing community behavior.

Theologically, these values align with Bavinck's view of beauty as unity between form and content - not just spiritual imagery but visible glory and shining perfection in empirical world (Bavinck & Williams, 2019). Kyai Hambali's architectural harmony, symmetrical gardens, and orderly daily schedules reflect deeply internalized values where eco-spirituality emerges not as crisis response but inherent religious practice.

D. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that eco-spiritual consciousness in pesantren education culture rests upon two interdependent pillars: cognition and values. At Pesantren Nurul Qornain, cognitive foundations derive from fiqhiiyah, particularly thoharah teachings embedded in curriculum and daily practices. Conversely, Pesantren Subulussalam's cognition grows from theological aesthetics framing beauty as divine attribute to internalize in life's order. This consciousness transcends religious concept memorization, becoming operational framework for human-environment relations as worship manifestation.

These cognitive foundations are supported by value elements that sublimate teachings into collective ethos. Nurul Qornain prioritizes cleanliness-care as worship form, while Subulussalam centers on beauty as educational spirit. Crucially, these values thrive not merely in kyais' teachings but in daily praxis, becoming transgenerational cultural inheritance.

Thus, pesantren's eco-spiritual consciousness emerges not merely from contemporary ecological concerns but from longstanding scholarly traditions and religious practices. Cognitive elements provide epistemological foundations, while values form affective-moral orientations institutionalized in cultural practices. When harmonized, they enable pesantren to cultivate religious communities that are spiritually devout and ecologically practical - positioning Islamic boarding schools as relevant laboratories for environmentally-conscious religious education amid global ecological crises.

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