

# The Implementation of Islamic Religious Education Teaching Methods Based on Sustainable Education Theory in Madrasah

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## Abstract

Islamic Religious Education and sustainable education are two essential and interrelated elements that cannot be separated in the learning process. Sustainable education plays a vital role in ensuring that ethical values and sustainability principles are instilled in students, enabling educational institutions to remain relevant and contribute to the development of a society that is more environmentally and socially conscious. This study aims to analyze the implementation of Islamic Religious Education teaching methods based on Sustainable Education Theory in State Madrasah Aliyah in Medan City. This research adopts a case study approach with data collection techniques, including in-depth interviews with Islamic Religious Education teachers, madrasah principals, and students, as well as participatory observation and document analysis. The data were analyzed qualitatively using data triangulation and source triangulation techniques to ensure the validity of the results. The findings reveal that the understanding of teachers, principals, and students regarding the concept of sustainable education is not yet fully optimal. The teaching methods are still predominantly project-based, with limited exploration of other methods that could strengthen the integration of sustainable education into the Islamic Religious Education curriculum. However, this study underscores the need for a more holistic and sustainability-oriented learning model within religious education in Indonesia and recommends the use of alternative methods such as problem-based learning, classroom discussions, field activities, community service, thematic learning, and collaboration with communities actively engaged in sustainability issues. These recommendations hold the potential to significantly enhance students' understanding and practice of sustainability, offering a hopeful path towards a more holistic and sustainability-oriented learning model within religious education in Indonesia.

**Keywords:** Islamic Religious Education, Sustainable Education, Madrasah Aliyah, Project-Based Learning.

Education is one of the main pillars that shape the character and understanding of society, including in the context of Islamic Religious

Education (PAI). Education not only functions as a means of knowledge transfer but also serves as a tool to build awareness of the importance of

sustainability in social and environmental aspects. In the modern era, the challenges faced by the global community, such as climate change, natural resource crises, and social inequality, demand a more holistic educational approach. Education must produce individuals who are not only academically excellent but also critically aware of their role in maintaining environmental sustainability and promoting social justice. Islamic Religious Education plays a strategic role in this regard, as religious values contain ethical and moral principles that support sustainable development. As noted by Auliya Hamidah Haris Poernomo and Nan Rahminawati (2022), as well as Manasia, Ianos, and Chiciooreanu (2019), in the modern era, education functions not only as a transfer of knowledge but also as an essential medium for building awareness of sustainability.

In this context, the theory of Sustainable Education, or Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), becomes increasingly important to integrate into the curriculum, including religious education. This theory emphasizes the importance of learning that focuses not only on cognitive aspects but also on developing social, economic, and environmental awareness. Altmeyer (2021) and Kondrla (2023) assert that applying ESD in the religious education curriculum can enrich students' learning experiences by instilling a deeper awareness of sustainability-related global issues. Therefore, ESD-based teaching methods are expected to produce a generation that is not only intellectually intelligent but also socially and environmentally conscious, capable of acting as agents of change in their communities.

Several studies have shown a positive relationship between ESD-based approaches and increased student engagement and understanding in recent years. According to Chinedu, Wan Mohamed, Ajah, and Tukur (2018) and Sharma and Monteiro (2016), sustainable education can enhance students' active participation in the learning process. This participation allows students to engage directly in discussions and

activities relevant to real-life situations. It enables them to understand better global issues such as climate change, equality, and sustainable development. Furthermore, findings from Chinedu, Mohamed, and Ajah (2018), Chinedu, Wan Mohamed, et al. (2018), Effeney and Davis (2013), as well as Sharma and Monteiro (2016), emphasize that education that integrates sustainability principles can facilitate more relevant and contextual learning for students. This approach helps students understand how the knowledge they learn in class can be applied in real life, while simultaneously building their critical awareness of issues affecting their environment and society.

Thus, the implementation of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) in Islamic Religious Education is not only vital but also pivotal in cultivating a generation that is both conscious and equipped to address global challenges. By integrating ESD into religious education, students are expected to develop a deeper comprehension of religious values that extend beyond the realm of personal worship. This approach encourages them to recognize the broader implications of these values in fostering social responsibility, preserving environmental sustainability, and advancing justice within their communities and the wider society. Moreover, it prepares students to act as agents of change, capable of contributing meaningfully to the collective efforts required to achieve a more sustainable and equitable world.

Meanwhile, the research by Hassan and Ratnakar (2011) shows that community involvement in sustainable education significantly contributes to the effectiveness of ESD programs. Active community participation involves the school and encompasses the important role of parents and the surrounding community in supporting sustainability-focused learning activities. This underscores the importance of a collaborative approach in building students' awareness of global issues, particularly in the environment and society. In the context of religious education, the role of the

community becomes increasingly important as the religious values taught in schools can be strengthened through practical application in everyday life. With community involvement, students not only receive theoretical knowledge but can also practice their religious teachings in a broader social context, thereby reinforcing the application of religious values in community life.

In Indonesia, particularly at the Madrasah Aliyah level, implementing Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teaching methods based on ESD is still in its early stages. Research by Poernomo and Rahminawati (2022) reveals that although various initiatives have been to integrate sustainable education into the madrasah curriculum, many challenges still need to be addressed. The main challenges faced include limited resources, both in terms of funding and facilities, as well as insufficient support from stakeholders, including the government and the wider community. This creates a gap between the planned sustainable education policies and their actual implementation in the field. Additionally, a lack of deep understanding among teachers and madrasah staff regarding the concept of ESD is one of the main obstacles to more effective adoption of this approach.

Therefore, this research explores how ESD-based PAI teaching methods are implemented in State Madrasah Aliyah in Medan City. Through a case study approach, this research will delve deeper into the implementation process, the challenges teachers, principals, and students face, and the impact on students. Thus, this study is expected to contribute significantly to the development of PAI teaching models that not only emphasize religious aspects but also integrate sustainability principles, which align with today's global challenges.

Based on this research's findings, recommendations are expected to be produced that can be used to develop a more responsive PAI curriculum to sustainability issues. These recommendations are expected to help madrasahs and stakeholders improve the effectiveness of sustainable education

implementation in the madrasah environment so that students not only understand religious teachings deeply but also have a high level of social and environmental awareness and actively participate in maintaining the sustainability of their communities.

## METHODOLOGY

This research employs a case study approach (Whittaker, 2000) to analyze the implementation of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teaching methods based on Sustainable Education Theory in schools. This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to deeply understand the context, process, and outcomes of the teaching method implementation in a real and complex educational environment. The following are the subsections of this research methodology:

### 1. Research Design

This study is designed as a case study focusing on applying PAI teaching methods based on Sustainable Education Theory. A case study was chosen because it enables the exploration of phenomena in their original context using various data sources. This exploratory study aims to investigate ESD's application in madrasah environments and describe the process and challenges faced in its implementation. This study uses a qualitative approach emphasizing collecting rich and detailed descriptive data to understand how sustainable education is applied in three State Madrasah Aliyah in Medan City.

### 2. Sample and Research Location

The research was conducted in three State Madrasah Aliyah located in Medan City. The selection of madrasahs was conducted through purposive sampling, a technique based on criteria relevant to the research objectives. The criteria for selecting schools include:

- Availability of Innovative PAI Programs: Madrasahs with PAI teaching programs have demonstrated innovations in teaching methods and the integration of sustainable education.

□ Experience in Implementing ESD: Madrasahs that already have experience in implementing sustainable education in their curriculum or teaching activities.

The research sample consists of 15 informants selected based on specific criteria:

□ PAI Teachers: Selected based on teaching experience and involvement in sustainable education training. A total of five teachers were interviewed.

□ Madrasah Principals: Selected based on their position, managerial experience, and vision related to sustainable education. Three principals were involved.

□ Students: Selected based on their grade level and active participation in learning activities related to sustainable education. Seven students participated in this study.

### 3. Research Instruments

The research instruments used consist of several data collection methods designed to gather in-depth information from various sources:

□ In-Depth Interviews: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with PAI teachers, madrasah principals, and students to provide flexibility in exploring respondents' views and experiences related to implementing ESD in PAI teaching. The questions focused on their understanding of sustainable education, the teaching methods used, and the challenges faced in implementing ESD.

□ Participatory Observation: The researcher directly observed the teaching process in classrooms applying PAI methods based on ESD. This observation included teacher-student interactions, the use of teaching materials, and how sustainable education principles were applied in teaching activities. Observations were also made regarding the madrasah environment, such as facilities that support environment-based learning.

□ Document Analysis: The documents analyzed include curriculum, syllabi, and teaching materials used in PAI lessons. This analysis aims to assess the extent to which the

concept of sustainable education has been integrated into the teaching materials.

### 4. Data Analysis Techniques

The data obtained from interviews, observations, and document analysis were analyzed qualitatively using thematic analysis. The data analysis process includes the following stages:

□ Data Transcription: Recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim to facilitate further analysis.

□ Initial Coding: After transcription, the researcher conducted initial coding to identify key themes that emerged from the data. Coding was done by marking sections of the transcripts relevant to the research objectives.

□ Identification of Main Themes: Based on the coding results, the researcher identified the main themes related to implementing sustainable education-based teaching methods, the challenges faced, and their impact on students. These themes were further analyzed to find patterns and relationships between the emerging themes.

□ Data Triangulation: To ensure the validity of the findings, the researcher conducted data triangulation. Triangulation was done by comparing information obtained from interviews, observations, and document analysis. Triangulation was also conducted using different data sources, namely teachers, madrasah principals, and students, to obtain a more comprehensive perspective.

□ Data Interpretation: After identifying the themes, the data were interpreted to uncover the meaning of the findings. The researcher sought to understand how the implementation of ESD in PAI teaching influenced students, teachers, and the school environment, as well as the factors that supported or hindered the implementation's success.

With this detailed analysis method, the research is expected to provide deeper insights into the implementation of sustainable education-based teaching methods in State Madrasah Aliyah and provide practical

recommendations that can be used by education stakeholders to improve the effectiveness of sustainable education programs in madrasahs.

## RESULTS

This study reveals several important findings related to implementing Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) in the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teaching methods at State Madrasah Aliyah in Medan City. These findings are organized based on key themes derived from interviews, observations, and document analysis.

### 1. Teachers' Understanding and Implementation of ESD

Based on interviews with several PAI teachers, their understanding of ESD is still limited to the integration of environmental issues with religious values. Teacher A stated that integrating religious values with environmental issues is crucial in the context of PAI learning. For example, Teacher A uses a community-based project method, where students are directly involved in activities related to environmental issues, such as tree planting projects, to help students understand the tangible impacts of the lessons they receive. This project-based approach effectively increases student engagement as they can see the real results of these activities. This aligns with research suggesting that active student participation in environmental projects can raise their awareness of the importance of sustainability (Altmeyer, 2021; Chen, 2023; Saleem & Dare, 2023).

However, Teacher B highlighted challenges related to time constraints within the curriculum, which make it difficult to integrate ESD content thoroughly. Teachers often have to cover much material in a limited time, leaving insufficient space to address sustainability issues comprehensively. This shows that despite efforts by teachers to implement ESD, limitations in time and curriculum remain significant barriers (Altmeyer, 2021; Sobrinho et al., 2023).

### 2. Challenges in Curriculum and Resources

Findings from Teacher C indicate that while there are initiatives in implementing ESD, such as tree-planting activities, the PAI curriculum in madrasahs has not fully supported the integration of sustainability values. Teachers D and E also emphasized that students prefer interactive and project-based learning methods because they find it easier to grasp the material when directly involved in practical activities. However, another challenge is the lack of resources to develop more comprehensive ESD-based teaching methods, such as limited supporting facilities and relevant teaching materials. Teacher E stated that the PAI curriculum needs to be updated to be more responsive to the needs of sustainable education. This is supported by previous research emphasizing that curriculum flexibility and resource availability are critical factors in the successful implementation of ESD (Kondrla, 2023; Okyere-Manu et al., 2022).

### 3. Support from Madrasah Principals and School Policies

Interviews with madrasah principals revealed that although there is awareness of the importance of sustainable education, budgetary policies often hinder its implementation. Principals A, B, and C emphasized that while their madrasah visions already include sustainable education, strict government budget management regulations often limit their ability to change teaching programs significantly. This shows that educational policies at the state madrasah level are still highly influenced by government regulations, particularly in budget management (Chen, 2023; Saleem & Dare, 2023). The principals agreed that community and parental support is essential to ensure that ESD can be effectively implemented in the madrasah environment.

In addition, the principals also stressed the need for teacher training to ensure they are competent to implement PAI teaching methods based on ESD. They suggested that the Ministry of Religious Affairs provide more structured and sustainable training programs for teachers, particularly related to sustainable education.

Such training is crucial, as teachers are at the forefront of implementing ESD principles in the classroom (Stillwell, 2021; Altmeyer, 2021).

#### 4. Students' Perceptions of ESD in PAI Learning

Interviews with students revealed that most were highly interested in project-based learning methods that integrate sustainability principles. Student A stated that activities such as tree planting helped them understand the importance of environmental conservation. Students B and C expressed that they preferred learning through group discussions and projects rather than lectures, as these methods made them more active and easier for them to understand the material. This indicates that more interactive and contextual learning approaches can enhance student engagement in the learning process, in line with previous research suggesting that project-based learning can increase student involvement in global issues (Chinedu et al., 2018; Sharma & Monteiro, 2016).

However, Student D highlighted challenges in understanding the terms often used in sustainable education, such as unfamiliar environmental concepts. These challenges can be addressed by strengthening teaching materials and providing students with more simplified and relevant learning experiences, allowing them to better grasp sustainability concepts (Chinedu et al., 2018).

#### 5. Support from the Community and Parents

Support from the community and parents is considered a crucial factor in successfully implementing ESD in madrasahs. Students F and G stated that activities involving the community, such as collaboration with village officials, can enhance their participation in sustainability projects. They recognized that the success of such projects greatly depends on the support of the surrounding community, particularly regarding funding and involvement in field activities. This underscores the importance of cooperation between schools, parents, and the community in realizing sustainability-focused

education (Kondrla, 2023; Okyere-Manu et al., 2022).

These findings show that while efforts to implement ESD in PAI teaching at madrasahs are underway, several challenges still need to be addressed, including curriculum, resources, policy support, and community involvement. However, with the commitment of schools and the support of stakeholders, the implementation of ESD in religious education can continue to be developed to produce a generation that cares about environmental and social sustainability.

## DISCUSSION

Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) equips students with the skills, knowledge, attitudes, and values needed to participate in sustainable development. ESD aims to raise awareness of sustainable development, convey sustainability-related values, and promote sustainable behavior (Chinedu, Mohamed et al., 2018; Manasia et al., 2019; Sharma & Monteiro, 2016). Education focusing on sustainable development can create citizens capable of critical thinking in evaluating the complexities of sustainable development issues. These individuals are expected to bring the necessary transformations towards a sustainable future by promoting political, social, and economic changes (Hassan & Ratnakar, 2011).

Regarding the use of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teaching methods based on sustainable education, as evidenced by the interviews, it was found that teachers do not fully understand how to use PAI teaching methods based on sustainable education. It is widely known that education is not merely an end in itself but also an essential driver for achieving all other sustainable development goals (SDGs). According to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, UNESCO's current ESD for 2030 program focuses on strengthening ESD's contribution to achieving all 17 SDGs, emphasizing policy, learning environments,

teachers and educators, youth, and communities (Yang et al., 2024).

Regarding integrating sustainable education into the curriculum and Islamic religious education learning, as mentioned in the interviews, this integration has not been fully implemented in all madrasahs. Sustainable education can be integrated into the Islamic religious education curriculum. As shown in the research by Burmeister, Schmidt-Jacob, & Eilks (2013), despite the challenges in its implementation in schools, approaches can be taken by raising students' awareness of environmental and social issues. Further research by Kondrla (2023) and Stillwell (2021) found that Islamic education can contribute to achieving sustainable development goals by continuously promoting sustainability values among students. Another study by Cai et al. (2022) revealed that an optimal framework is needed to integrate environmental ethics into religious education. This framework is necessary to enhance students' understanding of religion and to develop environmental awareness among students.

Regarding the teaching models used to integrate sustainable education into Islamic religious education learning, as noted in the interviews, project-based learning is the most widely used model. This is consistent with Auliya Hamidah Haris Poernomo and Nan Rahminawati (2022) findings, which revealed that the teaching model that involves exemplification by all members of the school community is highly effective in educating students about sustainable education. In addition, environmental modifications such as increasing green spaces, planting trees, providing handwashing stations and trash bins, and enhancing the mosque as a support for environment-based learning can be implemented. For the teaching approach used by PAI teachers on environmental topics, a student-centered approach can be applied using inquiry methods and an approach through inductive, integrated, emotional, and habitual learning.

In terms of support for creating Islamic Religious Education teaching methods based on sustainable education, it is necessary to garner support and encourage voluntary action. Research conducted by Begum, Liu, Qayum, & Mamdouh (2022) stated that environmental education aims to highlight that human morality is not limited to social relationships but also includes our responsibility to future generations, animals, and other forms of life. Educational institutions are one of the most critical and ideal places where environmental education and ethics can be taught. Within educational institutions, a micro-environment can be created, serving as a birthplace for enlightenment and the development of future leaders. Those within educational institutions must be at the forefront of educating and implementing environmental sustainability (Abdulrazak & Ahmad, 2014; Büssing et al., 2018; Hagevik et al., 2015; Nousheen et al., 2022).

Some individuals know the actions that must be taken toward sustainability, but they lack the moral awareness to drive them toward real action. Moral awareness is a moral compass that guides decision-making. According to Geiger et al. (Geiger et al., 2019), the absence of moral awareness and behavior has led to environmental degradation. Jie (2004) stated that a lack of knowledge, low commitment, and limited environmental awareness are inherent in the failure of environmental and moral education, partly due to the passive nature of moral education, which makes morality seem distant, general, and vague. This underscores the urgent need for more effective environmental and moral education, as schools and higher education institutions play a crucial role in instilling values and fostering critical behaviors toward sustainable education.

## CONCLUSION

The combined understanding of madrasah principals, teachers, students, and the community regarding sustainable education is

crucial in creating a sustainable educational environment. On the other hand, the current moral education should aim to transform individual personalities to align with values, attitudes, and behaviors that foster love for the environment. The findings of this study indicate that environmental knowledge alone cannot change people's behavior toward the environment. However, when environmental knowledge is combined with moralistic values, religion, and habituation, individual behavior toward the environment may change. This study found that implementing Islamic Religious Education teaching methods based on sustainable education is still less effective in madrasahs and possibly even in schools of equivalent levels, such as high schools (SMA)

and vocational schools (SMK). Most madrasah principals, teachers, and students still have only a basic understanding of environmental issues and are less committed to them. Their understanding and efforts largely stem from their experiences with environmental issues in their local surroundings. The government, specifically the Ministry of Religious Affairs or local governments, needs to continually promote and organize activities or training on environmental awareness sustainably so that the education taking place in madrasahs can adopt the values of sustainable education within the madrasah community. Furthermore, environmental education should also be extended to the broader community to facilitate the integration of ethics, values, skills, and attitudes toward sustainability.

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