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Islamic Ecotheology in Action: Evaluating a Community-Led Tree-Planting Framework for Transformative Environmental Education

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ABSTRACT

Escalating environmental crises necessitate ethical and spiritual approaches alongside technical solutions. In Muslim-majority communities, Islamic teachings offer a robust theological foundation for stewardship centered on khalifah (vicegerency) and amanah (trust). This study investigates Islamic ecotheology as a transformative educational framework, examining how its principles foster environmental literacy through community-led tree-planting initiatives in ⁶mpanua Village, South Sulawesi, Indonesia. Adopting an empirical qualitative case study design, data were gathered via in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis with seven key informants, including village administrators, religious leaders, and residents. Thematic analysis revealed three core dynamics: first, khalifah and sadaqah jariyah doctrines provide the primary theological motivation for environmental responsibility; second, ecotheological values are operationalized through collective tree planting, fusing sacred duty with ecological practice; and third, participation enhances faith-mediated environmental literacy—encompassing knowledge, affective concern, and pro-environmental behaviors—while fortifying community cohesion. Consequently, integrating Islamic ecotheology into community conservation provides a culturally resonant model for faith-based environmental education. This framework demonstrates how religious values and grassroots action effectively extend environmental literacy beyond formal schooling, offering a scalable blueprint for sustainable environmental governance.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The twenty-first century confronts humanity with an unprecedented ecological crisis (Upreti, 2023). Accelerating climate change, large-scale deforestation, soil degradation, biodiversity loss, and freshwater scarcity collectively signal that global ecosystems are under severe anthropogenic stress (Fletcher et al., 2024). Scientific assessments confirm

that human activities—particularly unsustainable resource extraction, industrial agriculture, and fossil fuel combustion—are the principal drivers of this deterioration (Diaz et al., 2019; Ripple et al., 2020). Yet the roots of the crisis extend beyond technical and institutional dimensions: they are fundamentally philosophical and ethical. Scholars across disciplines increasingly recognize that technological and regulatory approaches alone are insufficient to motivate the deep behavioral and cultural changes necessary for ecological sustainability. Growing evidence suggests that ethical and spiritual frameworks, including religious belief systems, can catalyze such transformation by shaping moral worldviews, establishing communal norms, and providing a sense of sacred responsibility that secular frameworks often cannot replicate (Jenkins et al., 2018).

Among the world's major religious traditions, Islam occupies a particularly significant position in relation to the global environmental agenda, with approximately 1.8 billion adherents predominantly concentrated in biodiversity-rich and climate-vulnerable regions. Islamic ecological thought is grounded in a rich theological corpus (Bsoul et al., 2022; Hamdan, 2026). The Qur'an portrays humans as *khalifah fi al-'ard* (vicegerents on earth), entrusted by God with the care and stewardship of creation (*Q.S. Al-Baqarah: 30*) (Khasani, 2025). This concept is complemented by *amanah* (trusteeship), framing the natural world as a divine loan to be managed responsibly, and the prophetic tradition of *sadaqah jariyah* (ongoing charity), which explicitly encourages environmental care such as tree planting (Blankinship et al., 2025; Nur et al., 2025). These theological resources form the basis of Islamic ecotheology, a field that reinterprets doctrine through an ecological lens. In part, ecotheology emerged in response to Lynn White's thesis that Abrahamic religions bear culpability for the ecological crisis by sanctioning human dominion over nature (Taylor et al., 2016; Wojcik, 2023). Muslim scholars counter that the anthropocentrism White criticized is a distortion of authentic Islamic teachings, which mandate stewardship rather than exploitation (Saputra et al., 2023; Zuhdi et al., 2024).

Despite its theoretical richness, Islamic ecotheology has been criticized for remaining largely at the level of scriptural exegesis and philosophical argumentation, with insufficient attention to empirical dimensions—specifically, how these ideas are received, internalized, and enacted by ordinary Muslim communities (Mustofa et al., 2025; Rani et al., 2025; Shefer-Mossensohn, 2025). This gap is particularly significant because the translation of theological principles into lived practice is neither automatic nor guaranteed; it depends on social processes of meaning-making, community leadership, and culturally embedded practices.

Indonesia presents a critical geographic and sociological context for investigating this empirical gap. As the world's largest Muslim-majority nation—home to over 230 million Muslims—and a global biodiversity hotspot, Indonesia sits at the immediate intersection of Islamic faith and acute ecological vulnerability (Irawan, 2022; Yakub et al., 2023). The country faces severe environmental challenges, including deforestation, land degradation, and climate-induced disasters, particularly in regions like Sulawesi. While recent scholarship demonstrates that Islamic values can enrich environmental

education and conservation (Gunagraha et al., 2025), empirical studies examining how these values are operationalized at the rural village level through participatory ecological practices remain scarce.

To address this gap and conceptualize how faith moves from doctrine to action, this study is theoretically anchored at the intersection of Islamic ecotheology, transformative learning theory, and environmental literacy. Transformative learning theory by Mezirow posits that deep, durable learning occurs when individuals critically reflect on and revise their taken-for-granted frames of reference, often catalyzed by disorienting dilemmas or affectively significant encounters (Fleming, 2022; Hoggan & Hoggan-Kloubert, 2022). We argue that religiously framed, participatory ecological practice can function as precisely such a catalyst: by embedding tree planting within the theological vocabulary of khalifah, amanah, and sadaqah jariyah, conservation is reframed from an ostensibly secular activity into a matter of ultimate moral and spiritual concern (Iriawan et al., 2026). Furthermore, we draw on the construct of environmental literacy—comprising ecological knowledge, affective concern, cognitive/practical skills, and pro-environmental behavior (Law et al., 2023; Maleknia & Zamani, 2025; Maurer & Bogner, 2020). While environmental literacy is traditionally operationalized in formal schooling, this study extends the construct to an informal, faith-based community setting. Conceptualizing Islamic ecotheology as a transformative educational framework allows this study to examine tree planting not merely as conservation behavior, but as a pedagogical event with observable learning outcomes.

This study empirically investigates these dynamics through a case study in Pompanua Village, Bone Regency, South Sulawesi. Pompanua offers a theoretically rich case: a predominantly Muslim rural community that has experienced localized ecological pressures (such as seasonal flooding and soil degradation) and subsequently mobilized organized, religiously framed tree-planting initiatives led jointly by local religious leaders (ustadz) and village administrators. Examining this community provides grounded insights into how Islamic ecotheology functions as a practical, transformative educational framework for environmental learning and collective action.

The study pursues three interrelated research questions:

1. How do community members in Pompanua Village understand and frame their environmental responsibilities in relation to Islamic theological values?
2. In what ways are Islamic ecotheological principles concretely manifested in the collective practice of tree planting?
3. What are the observable impacts of these faith-based practices on community members' environmental literacy — including their ecological knowledge, attitudes, and pro-environmental behaviors?

In addressing these questions, this study contributes to the growing interdisciplinary literature on religion, ecology, and environmental education, while offering practical insights for faith-based environmental interventions across Muslim-majority societies.

2. METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research paradigm, which is appropriate for developing a deep, contextual understanding of social phenomena as they are experienced and interpreted by participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Specifically, we adopted an empirical qualitative case study approach. A case study methodology is particularly well-suited for this inquiry as it allows for an in-depth, holistic examination of Islamic ecotheology as a lived, community-led practice within a real-world, bounded context. Philosophically, this qualitative inquiry aligns with Islamic epistemological values by prioritizing consultative engagement (shura) and recognizing community members as active agents of knowledge rather than passive subjects.

The study was conducted in Pompanua Village (Desa Pompanua), located in Bone Regency (Kabupaten Bone), South Sulawesi Province, Indonesia. Pompanua is a predominantly Muslim rural community where residents depend primarily on agriculture and small-scale trade. The village was selected through purposive site selection because community members, in collaboration with local government and religious leaders (ustadz), had independently initiated faith-framed tree-planting activities, providing a naturally occurring case of Islamic ecotheology in action at the grassroots level. South Sulawesi has faced severe environmental pressures in recent decades, including deforestation and soil degradation, lending ecological urgency to this local conservation effort and making Pompanua a theoretically compelling case.

Participants were selected using purposive sampling to recruit key informants with direct involvement in tree-planting initiatives and relevant expertise in religious leadership, village governance, or community organizing. Sampling was guided by the principle of data saturation, the point at which additional interviews yielded no new thematic insights regarding ecotheological framing or environmental literacy outcomes. A total of seven key participants were interviewed (Table 1). Participant codes (P1–P7) are used throughout this article to protect anonymity while enabling the tracing of individual perspectives across findings. Written or verbally informed consent was secured from all participants prior to data collection.

Table 1. Demographics and Roles of Key Informants

Code	Role	Gender	Key Contribution / Primary Analytic Focus
P1	Village Head	Male	Administrative perspective on community environmental programs
P2	Religious Leader (Ustadz)	Male	Islamic theological framing and scriptural grounding of conservation
P3	Community Leader	Male	Social mobilization, collective action, and local leadership dynamics
P4	Female Resident	Female	Grassroots participation, domestic ecology, and household perspectives
P5	Male Resident	Male	Youth involvement and practical engagement in tree-planting activities
P6	Female Resident	Female	Perceived spiritual benefits and affective dimensions of planting
P7	Youth Leader	Male	Intergenerational motivation, environmental awareness, and future vision

To achieve methodological triangulation and enhance the credibility of findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), three complementary qualitative data collection methods were employed:

1. Participant Observation: Conducted across multiple field visits during planning, preparation, and execution phases of community tree-planting activities. Observational records documented community dynamics, participation patterns, leadership behaviors, and informal exchanges that revealed how religious values were enacted in practice. While in-depth interviews focused on seven key informants, participant observation captured the broader collective behaviors and interactions of the wider community. Field notes were written immediately following each session.
 2. Semi-Structured Interviews: In-depth interviews were conducted individually with all seven key informants using an interview guide informed by Alvarez-Guayara et al.'s (2026) environmental literacy framework (evaluating ecological knowledge, affective concern, cognitive skills, and pro-environmental behaviors). Questions explored participants' understandings of Islamic environmental ethics, motivations for tree planting, and perceived transformations in environmental awareness. Interviews were conducted in Bahasa Indonesia and the local Bugis dialect as appropriate, audio-recorded with consent, and transcribed verbatim. To preserve cultural nuances, Bugis terms and idioms were translated into Bahasa Indonesia and English with cross-verification by a bilingual local researcher.
 3. Document Analysis: Village administrative records, religious sermon manuscripts (*khutbah*), study circle notes (*pengajian*), and photographic evidence of conservation events were analyzed. These documents provided contextual historical data and served to corroborate or elaborate interview narratives and observational findings.
- Data analysis followed the interactive model of Miles et al. (2014): data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. In the condensation phase, raw transcripts and field notes were systematically analyzed through open coding, followed by axial coding to identify core themes aligned with transformative learning and environmental literacy. Data display involved organizing codes into thematic matrices to facilitate comparative analysis across participant roles. Conclusions were drawn iteratively, continuously testing emerging interpretations against the complete dataset.

To ensure research trustworthiness and rigor (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), the study employed source triangulation (comparing perspectives across different community roles) and method triangulation (cross-referencing interview data with observational and documentary evidence). Furthermore, member checking was conducted by sharing draft thematic summaries with key participants (P1, P2, and P7) to confirm that interpretations accurately reflected their lived experiences and intentions.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Analysis of interview transcripts, observational field notes, and documents revealed three overarching themes that illuminate how Islamic ecotheological values are

understood, enacted, and experienced in Pompanua Village. These themes are summarized in Table 2 and elaborated in subsequent subsections.

No	Theme	Sub-themes	Representative Codes
1	Theological Grounding of Environmental Duty	Khalifah concept; Amanah (stewardship); Sadaqah jariyah	Responsibility, trusteeship, divine mandate, moral obligation
2	Collective Praxis of Ecotheological Values	Participatory planting; Religious leadership; Community mobilization	Gotong royong, collective action, mosque-led campaigns, joint programs
3	Growth of Environmental Literacy	Cognitive/affective shift; Behavioral change; Social solidarity	Environmental awareness, reduced deforestation, mutual care, shared identity

Theme 1: Theological Grounding of Environmental Duty

Across all interviews, participants articulated their understanding of environmental responsibility through an explicitly theological frame. The concept of *khalifah* emerged as the foundational principle. As P1 (Village Head) explained:

"In Islam, we are reminded that we are khalifah on this earth. That means we are responsible. We cannot destroy what God has entrusted to us. When we plant trees, we fulfill that responsibility." (P1, Village Head)

This understanding of *khalifah* was not restricted to formal religious leaders but was shared across participants regardless of educational background or social role. P4 (Female Resident) articulated a similar conviction, rooting it in the concept of *amanah*:

"The land is amanah from God. If we damage it, we damage what God gave us. My grandmother always said: do not take more than you need and always give back to the earth." (P4, Female Resident)

Religious leaders drew upon specific hadith traditions to connect tree planting with the Islamic concept of *sadaqah jariyah* (ongoing charity). P2 (Religious Leader) regularly invoked well-known hadith to frame ecological action as an act of worship:

"The Prophet, peace be upon him, said that if a Muslim plants a tree and a human, a bird, or an animal eats from it, it becomes sadaqah for him. So, every tree we plant here is not just for the forest. It is our ibadah, our worship, continuing forever." (P2, Religious Leader)

The Qur'anic verse Ar-Rum: 41 was cited by P2 and P3 as a Qur'anic warning that human negligence toward the environment constitutes moral failure. This verse — often translated as describing corruption appearing on land and sea because of human conduct — was invoked in sermons as direct scriptural evidence that environmental destruction is a spiritual and moral transgression. Documentary analysis of *khutbah* manuscripts confirmed these themes were systematically communicated through formal religious occasions, reinforcing their salience in everyday ecological discourse.

Observational data corroborated the interview findings: during tree-planting activities, participants frequently invoked religious language — offering prayers (*doa*) before planting, invoking God's blessing on the work, and framing the activity in conversation as an act of devotion. This convergence of interview, documentary, and observational evidence suggests that the theological framing of environmental duty is

deeply embedded in community culture rather than being a surface-level rhetorical overlay.

Theme 2: Collective Praxis of Islamic Ecotheological Values

The second theme concerns how Islamic ecotheological values were enacted in concrete social practice. The tree-planting program in Pompanua Village was not a spontaneous grassroots initiative but a structured, multi-stakeholder program with clearly delineated roles and responsibilities. Village government, religious figures, youth organizations, and community members each contributed distinct resources and capacities to a collaborative endeavor rooted in the spirit of *gotong royong* (communal cooperation).

The program comprised three sequential phases. In the preparation phase, the village government coordinated logistical planning, including site surveys, procurement of seedlings, and community socialization. P1 described the government's role as that of a convener and resource mobilizer, explaining that the government could not force participation but could open the door, invite people in, organize the program, prepare the tools, and work with religious leaders to spread the word.

In the implementation phase, tree-planting was conducted collectively over designated community days, with participants including village officials, religious leaders, women's groups, youth associations, and individual households. Observations revealed that the collective nature of the activity was itself perceived as significant: beyond the ecological function of planting trees, the act of working alongside neighbors and community leaders was experienced as an expression of Islamic solidarity and communal belonging.

Religious leaders played an essential role as moral catalysts. Their involvement lent the program spiritual authority and expanded its reach beyond those already environmentally motivated. P3 (Community Leader) emphasized this dynamic:

"When the ustadz [religious teacher] comes to plant trees with us, people see that this is serious. That this is not just a government program — it is something Islam asks of us. Then they come." (P3, Community Leader)

In the post-planting maintenance phase, community members established informal monitoring groups to ensure the survival and health of planted trees. This sustained commitment beyond the planting event itself indicated that participation had generated genuine ownership of the conservation effort rather than one-time compliance with an external mandate.

Document analysis of village program records confirmed that the tree-planting initiative was formally integrated into the village government's environmental program portfolio, signaling institutional commitment and enabling resource allocation for seedlings, tools, and follow-up monitoring. The integration of religious motivation, community leadership, institutional support, and collective labor created a multi-layered praxis that concretized Islamic ecotheological values in community life.

Theme 3: Growth of Environmental Literacy through Transformative Learning

The third theme addresses the observed impacts of Islamic ecotheologically grounded tree-planting activities on participants' environmental literacy. Consistent with the theoretical framework outlined in Section 1.1, findings from interviews and observations indicate that participation in religiously framed conservation activities produced meaningful and multi-dimensional learning outcomes, mapping onto the cognitive (knowledge), affective (attitudes and values), and behavioral (action) domains conventionally used to define environmental literacy.

The most consistently reported outcome was a deepened cognitive and affective sense of personal and collective responsibility for the natural environment — evidence of what Mezirow terms perspective transformation. Participants described a shift from viewing environmental protection as an external obligation, imposed by government regulations or public health concerns, to experiencing it as an internal moral and spiritual imperative. P5 (Male Resident) articulated this shift:

"Before, I never thought much about the trees. They were just there. But after I learned that planting a tree is sadaqah, and after we planted together, I started to feel: this tree is my responsibility. I checked it. I water it. I tell my children not to break its branches." (P5, Male Resident)

This shift in perspective translated into observable behavioral change. Several participants reported concrete behavioral changes following their participation in the program, including a reduction in the casual cutting of trees on communal land, increased attention to waste disposal practices, and greater vigilance regarding land burning — a common practice in South Sulawesi agriculture that contributes to deforestation and air pollution. P6 noted that when she now sees someone about to burn, she thinks of their *amanah* and speaks up — a response she would not have given before participating in the program.

The social and participatory dimensions of environmental literacy also emerged prominently in the data. Multiple participants noted that collective participation in tree planting had strengthened community bonds and generated a shared environmental identity. P7 (Youth Leader) described the intergenerational dimension of this transformation:

"We want the next generation to have clean air and green land. Planting together shows the young people: this is what we do. This is who we are as a Muslim community. We care for Allah's earth." (P7, Youth Leader)

Observational data confirmed that participants maintained continued engagement with planted trees long after the formal program events had concluded, including regular watering, protective fencing of saplings, and communal discussion of tree health during informal gatherings. These sustained behaviors suggest that the environmental literacy generated by the program extended beyond the immediate event horizon.

Taken together, these findings suggest that the tree-planting program functioned as a genuine transformative educational encounter: a reframing of everyday ecological relations through sacred meaning (*khalifah*, *amanah*, *sadaqah jariyah*), followed by critical reflection, collective action, and durable behavioral integration — the sequence Mezirow identifies as characteristic of transformative learning.

Discussion

The findings of this study offer empirical evidence that Islamic ecotheological principles function as a robust motivational architecture and informal educational framework for environmental action in Muslim-majority communities. By synthesizing the core findings, this discussion addresses the study's primary research questions regarding how theological framing (RQ1), collective tree-planting practices (RQ2), and faith-mediated educational outcomes (RQ3) interact to foster environmental literacy.

Islamic Ecotheology as a Motivational Architecture for Environmental Action

Addressing RQ1, the empirical data reveal that the theological concept of *khalifah* translates abstract doctrine into a concrete ethical obligation with practical behavioral implications. This finding corroborates and extends the work of Basri et al. (2024), demonstrating that Islamic doctrine mandates active environmental stewardship rather than passive acceptance of ecological degradation.

Particularly significant is the role of *sadaqah jariyah* in motivating tree-planting behavior. By framing each planted tree as an act of perpetual charitable worship, local religious leaders created a theological incentive structure that transcends the immediate ecological benefits of conservation. This finding resonates with Jenkins et al.'s (2018) assertion that religious motivation for environmental behavior operates through distinct pathways from secular concern. While secular environmentalism typically mobilizes through appeals to rational self-interest, collective welfare, or aesthetic values, religious environmentalism draws upon the motivational forces of sacred duty, divine accountability, and spiritual reward. Understanding these distinct motivational pathways has profound implications for designing environmental education programs within faith communities.

The Role of Religious Leadership and Institutional Integration

In relation to RQ2, a distinctive feature of the Pompanua case is the authoritative involvement of local religious leaders (*ustadz*) working alongside village administrators. This dynamic highlights the mediating role of religious authority in translating theological principles into communal practice. While lay participants demonstrated genuine internalization of Islamic ecological values, the data consistently indicate that public acts by religious figures—such as leading prayers before planting sessions and delivering environmentally themed sermons (*khutbah*)—amplified the legitimacy and reach of conservation efforts.

This dynamic aligns with research by Febrianingsih et al. (2025), who emphasize that the practical impact of Islamic ecotheology depends substantially on the extent to which religious scholars actively communicate these values. Religious leaders in Pompanua function as 'moral entrepreneurs' who construct and promulgate normative frameworks that shape community behavior. Their strategic use of traditional religious channels (*khutbah*, *pengajian*) represents an effective form of informal environmental education. Furthermore, integrating tree planting into formal village governance (e.g., resource

allocation and monitoring) created institutional conditions favorable to long-term sustainability, offering a replicable model for faith-based environmental governance.

Participatory Conservation as Transformative Environmental Education

Addressing RQ3, this study demonstrates that Islamic ecotheology functions not only as a motivational resource but as a transformative educational framework. Read through the lens of transformative learning theory (Hoggan & Hoggan-Kloubert, 2022), the Pompanua program instantiates a recognizable sequence of perspective transformation:

1. Disorienting Re-framing: An affectively significant encounter—reframing tree planting as *sadaqah jariyah*—destabilizes a taken-for-granted, technocratic view of conservation.
2. Critical Reflection: Supported by *khutbah*, *pengajian*, and peer dialog, participants revise their cognitive frames of reference regarding human-nature relationships.
3. Habituated Practice: Sustained collective action (planting, monitoring, and informal peer correction) consolidates the new perspective into everyday practice.

Scholars of environmental education have long advocated for place-based learning rooted in specific ecological and social contexts (Hernandez Gonzalez, 2023). The Pompanua tree-planting initiative exemplifies this approach: participants enacted stewardship in their immediate surroundings, tending trees planted with their own hands. The resulting learning was not merely cognitive, but embodied, social, and spiritual qualities strongly associated with durable pro-environmental commitment.

Cultivating Faith-Mediated Environmental Literacy

Synthesizing across all three research questions, this study proposes that environmental literacy in faith-based rural settings is best conceptualized as an emergent property of interacting theological, social, and institutional processes. Standard environmental literacy frameworks (Guerrero & Sjöström, 2025) were predominantly developed within secular, formal educational settings and often treat literacy as an additive outcome of scientific information delivery.

Our empirical findings suggest a Faith-Mediated Environmental Literacy Model, where literacy dimensions are cultivated through integrated spiritual and community mechanisms:

1. Cognitive Dimension: Cultivated through scripturally grounded teaching (*khutbah*, *pengajian*).
2. Affective Dimension: Deepened through communal rituals and sacred framing (e.g., prayers before planting).
3. Behavioral Dimension: Sustained through collective, monitored practice embedded in village structures.

This tripartite process offers a more textured account of religiously mediated environmental literacy, proving that secular assessment frameworks require theoretical adaptation when applied to faith communities.

Implications for Environmental Policy and Practice

The findings carry practical implications for environmental policy in Muslim-majority contexts:

1. Faith-Based Curricula Integration: Islamic educational institutions (*madrasah*, *pesantren*) and community groups are well-positioned to serve as hubs for ecotheological education that bridges theological knowledge and ecological practice.
2. Collaborative vs. Didactic Approaches: The most effective environmental education in rural Muslim communities is collaborative and practice-based rather than purely didactic. Shared ecological labor, explicitly framed through theological language, generates deeper commitments than information-delivery alone.
3. Engaging Local Religious Leaders as Co-Designers: Environmental NGOs and government agencies seeking to advance conservation should engage local religious leaders not merely as passive spokespersons, but as co-designers who can adapt ecological initiatives to locally resonant theological frameworks.

Several limitations of this study merit acknowledgment. First, the single-site case study design limits the direct ²¹generalizability of findings to urban communities or regions with different socio-religious dynamics. Future research should employ comparative case study designs across multiple sites, including urban centers, peri-urban areas, and regions facing acute ecological crises—to evaluate how varying institutional contexts influence ecotheological engagement. Second, the study captures participants' perspectives at a relatively early stage of the conservation program. Longitudinal studies are needed to assess whether attitudinal and behavioral changes are sustained over time and whether planted trees yield measurable ecological outcomes (e.g., survival rates and microclimate regulation). Integrating quantitative ecological metrics with qualitative social data would provide a more holistic evaluation. Finally, while gendered dynamics were observed, dedicated research is warranted to fully explore the specific roles and contributions of women in faith-based environmental mobilization.

4. ¹⁹CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that Islamic ecotheology provides a robust, culturally embedded, and transformative educational framework for cultivating environmental literacy within Muslim-majority societies. By examining a community-led conservation initiative in Pompanua Village, South Sulawesi, Indonesia, the research reveals three mutually reinforcing processes: the activation of theological doctrines—specifically *khalifah*, *amanah*, and *sadaqah jariyah*—as primary motivators for ecological responsibility; the operationalization of these sacred duties through collective, multi-stakeholder tree-planting actions; and the resulting enhancement of cognitive, affective, and behavioral environmental literacy alongside strengthened community cohesion.

The findings offer a significant theoretical contribution by providing nuanced empirical evidence of how Islamic ecotheological principles function in a rural village

setting, bridging the gap between abstract clerical discourse and grassroots implementation. By demonstrating that faith-mediated frameworks can effectively catalyze sustainable pro-environmental behaviors through spiritual incentives and localized governance, this study expands traditional, secular-oriented environmental literacy models and presents a scalable blueprint for faith-based environmental governance in non-formal educational contexts.

The findings carry practical implications across multiple domains. For educators and environmental program designers, the study offers evidence that participatory, community-based, and faith-integrated approaches are significantly more impactful in Muslim communities than conventional, information-deficit models. For policymakers and environmental organizations, it highlights the strategic necessity of engaging local religious leaders (*ustadz*) and institutions not merely as passive informants, but as key partners in environmental governance and conservation planning. Ultimately, the Pompanua case suggests that the mosque and the forest, the prayer mat and the seedling, are not in tension with one another. In communities where faith and daily life are deeply intertwined, the most powerful environmental education may be that which teaches people to see tending the earth as an act of worship—and, in doing so, cultivates the holistic literacy that sustains that care across generations.

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