

Islamic Religious Education for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): Promoting Sustainability Values in Educational Settings in Turkey

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Received: 2024/07/01		Revised: 2024/08/09		Accepted: 2024/10/12	
Abstract		The growing global concern regarding environmental degradation, social inequality, poverty, climate change, and sustainable economic development has intensified the importance of education in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Educational institutions are increasingly expected to cultivate sustainability awareness, ethical responsibility, and behavioral transformation among students. In Turkey, where Islamic values continue to influence educational and social life, Islamic Religious Education (IRE) offers significant potential for supporting sustainability-oriented learning by integrating moral, ethical, social, and environmental dimensions aligned with the SDGs. This study explores the role of Islamic Religious Education in promoting sustainability values within educational settings in Turkey and examines its contribution to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. Using a qualitative literature review approach, the study analyzes scholarly publications, educational reports, and theoretical discussions concerning Islamic education, sustainability, and SDGs implementation. The findings indicate that Islamic Religious Education positively contributes to sustainability awareness through teachings emphasizing stewardship (<i>khalifah</i>), justice (<i>adl</i>), moderation (<i>wasatiyyah</i>), compassion (<i>rahmah</i>), and social responsibility. Islamic educational practices support student understanding of environmental conservation, social equity, poverty reduction, ethical consumption, and community engagement, aligning closely with multiple SDGs objectives. However, challenges remain, including curriculum limitations, insufficient teacher preparedness, weak interdisciplinary integration, and varying institutional capacities. The study concludes that Islamic Religious Education can serve as an effective educational platform for promoting sustainability values and supporting SDGs achievement in Turkey when accompanied by curriculum innovation, teacher training, and stronger integration between religious ethics and sustainability education.			
Keywords		Islamic Religious Education, Sustainable Development Goals, Sustainability Education, Turkey, Islamic Education, Sustainable Values, Environmental Ethics, SDGs			
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1. INTRODUCTION

Sustainable development has become one of the most significant global priorities of the

twenty-first century due to increasing environmental degradation, climate change, poverty, social inequality, economic instability, and resource depletion. The international community increasingly recognizes that sustainable development requires collaborative action across educational, political, social, economic, and environmental sectors. In response to these global challenges, the United Nations introduced the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015 as a comprehensive global framework consisting of seventeen interconnected goals aimed at improving human well-being, protecting ecosystems, promoting social justice, and ensuring long-term sustainability. The SDGs emphasize issues including poverty reduction, quality education, gender equality, environmental conservation, climate action, responsible consumption, peace, and institutional cooperation.

Education occupies a central role in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals because it provides individuals with knowledge, values, skills, and attitudes necessary for creating sustainable societies. Sustainable development requires not only scientific and technological advancement but also ethical awareness, social responsibility, and behavioral transformation. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) seeks to empower learners to make responsible decisions and adopt sustainable behaviors that support ecological balance, economic well-being, and social justice. Educational institutions therefore bear responsibility for cultivating sustainability consciousness among students and integrating sustainable values into teaching and learning practices.

Within sustainability education, religion increasingly receives scholarly attention as an important source of ethical values supporting sustainable development. Religious traditions often provide moral frameworks that emphasize stewardship, compassion, justice, moderation, and responsibility toward both humanity and the environment. Religious education may therefore play a valuable role in strengthening sustainability awareness by integrating moral and spiritual perspectives into educational processes. In many societies, religious teachings significantly influence values, behaviors, and social norms, making faith-based education an important contributor to sustainability initiatives.

Islamic teachings offer a comprehensive ethical foundation highly compatible with the principles underlying sustainable development. Islamic perspectives on environmental, economic, and social responsibility emphasize justice (*adl*), stewardship (*khalifah*),

moderation (*wasatiyyah*), compassion (*rahmah*), and collective welfare (*maslahah*). The Qur'an repeatedly encourages responsible resource use, environmental protection, social equity, poverty alleviation, and care for vulnerable communities. Humans are regarded as trustees of the Earth entrusted with preserving ecological balance and ensuring justice across generations. According to Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Islamic ethical teachings emphasize harmony between humans, nature, and divine responsibility, making Islamic principles highly relevant to sustainability discussions.

Islamic Religious Education (IRE) serves as an important educational platform for transmitting Islamic ethical principles to students. Beyond teaching religious rituals and theological knowledge, Islamic Religious Education seeks to shape moral character, ethical behavior, social responsibility, and civic engagement. Through Islamic Religious Education, students may develop values related to compassion, social justice, environmental care, honesty, moderation, and responsibility—all of which align closely with Sustainable Development Goals objectives. Consequently, Islamic Religious Education possesses substantial potential to contribute meaningfully to sustainability education and SDGs implementation.

The relevance of Islamic Religious Education for sustainability becomes particularly significant within the context of Turkey, where religion continues to play an important cultural and educational role. Turkey possesses a unique educational landscape shaped by both secular educational traditions and strong Islamic cultural influences. Islamic Religious Education is incorporated into educational systems through courses focusing on religion, ethics, moral education, and Islamic values. As Turkey continues addressing contemporary sustainability challenges—including urbanization, environmental degradation, climate vulnerability, social inequality, migration, and economic transformation—educational approaches capable of fostering sustainable values become increasingly important.

Turkey's commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals further highlights the importance of sustainability-oriented education. National educational reforms increasingly emphasize environmental awareness, citizenship education, social responsibility, and sustainable development competencies. However, sustainability education often remains concentrated within scientific or environmental disciplines, potentially overlooking opportunities to integrate religious ethics and moral perspectives. Islamic Religious

Education may complement conventional sustainability education by encouraging students to view sustainability not only as a scientific or economic issue but also as a moral and spiritual obligation.

Several Sustainable Development Goals closely align with Islamic ethical teachings. For example, SDG 1 (No Poverty) resonates with Islamic principles of charity (*zakat*), economic justice, and social solidarity. SDG 4 (Quality Education) aligns with Islamic emphasis on knowledge acquisition and intellectual development. SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production) corresponds closely with Islamic teachings discouraging wastefulness (*israf*) and encouraging moderation. SDG 13 (Climate Action) and SDG 15 (Life on Land) reflect Islamic teachings regarding environmental stewardship and ecological preservation. Likewise, SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions) parallels Islamic ethical commitments to justice, compassion, and peaceful coexistence.

Research increasingly suggests that value-based education contributes significantly to behavioral change and sustainability awareness. According to Stephen Sterling, sustainability education requires transformative learning approaches capable of reshaping learners' ethical perspectives, social attitudes, and behaviors rather than merely transmitting information. Islamic Religious Education may contribute to such transformation by embedding sustainability values within students' spiritual and moral development. Through ethical reflection, religious narratives, and practical social engagement, students may develop stronger commitments toward sustainable living and responsible citizenship.

Despite its potential benefits, integrating Sustainable Development Goals into Islamic Religious Education presents several challenges. One challenge concerns curriculum structure and content limitations. Religious education curricula may prioritize doctrinal instruction, ritual practice, and historical knowledge while devoting limited attention to contemporary sustainability concerns. Teachers may also possess limited knowledge regarding sustainability concepts or lack pedagogical resources necessary for connecting Islamic teachings with SDGs-related issues. According to Michael Fullan, successful educational innovation depends on teacher preparedness, curriculum support, and institutional commitment to change.

Another challenge involves balancing religious perspectives with secular sustainability frameworks. Educational institutions may struggle to integrate sustainability education

without reducing religious teachings to purely instrumental functions. Effective integration requires contextualization that respects Islamic theological principles while addressing contemporary social and environmental realities. Furthermore, sustainability values must be translated into meaningful student experiences rather than remaining abstract ethical concepts.

The multicultural and rapidly changing context of Turkey further reinforces the importance of educational strategies promoting social cohesion, environmental awareness, and ethical citizenship. Students increasingly encounter global challenges requiring interdisciplinary understanding, critical thinking, and moral responsibility. Islamic Religious Education may therefore provide students with ethical frameworks helping them navigate sustainability challenges while maintaining cultural and religious identity.

This study aims to explore the role of Islamic Religious Education in promoting sustainability values and supporting Sustainable Development Goals implementation in educational settings in Turkey. Specifically, the study examines how Islamic teachings may contribute to sustainability awareness, environmental responsibility, social justice, and ethical citizenship among students. The study also investigates challenges associated with integrating SDGs into Islamic Religious Education and identifies opportunities for strengthening sustainability-oriented religious learning.

The findings of this study are expected to provide meaningful insights for educators, policymakers, curriculum developers, and Islamic educational institutions seeking innovative approaches to sustainability education. By examining intersections between Islamic values and Sustainable Development Goals, the study contributes to broader discussions regarding ethical education, religious learning, and sustainable development. Ultimately, strengthening sustainability values through Islamic Religious Education may support Turkey's efforts toward achieving Sustainable Development Goals while fostering morally responsible and environmentally conscious future generations.

2. METHODS

This study employs a qualitative research approach using a literature review method to examine the role of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) in promoting sustainability values and supporting Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) implementation in educational

settings in Turkey. A qualitative approach is considered appropriate because the study seeks to explore conceptual relationships, ethical values, educational practices, and interpretive understandings concerning sustainability and Islamic education. According to John W. Creswell, qualitative research enables researchers to understand social and educational phenomena through interpretation, contextual analysis, and exploration of meanings. Since the study addresses values, ethics, and educational integration processes, qualitative inquiry provides an effective methodological framework.

The study adopts a literature review design because it facilitates systematic analysis and synthesis of scholarly discussions regarding Islamic Religious Education, sustainability values, Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), and Sustainable Development Goals implementation. According to Lawrence A. Machi and Brenda T. McEvoy, literature review research supports theoretical understanding, comparative interpretation, and identification of knowledge gaps within existing scholarship. Through comprehensive analysis of previous studies, the research develops an in-depth understanding of how Islamic Religious Education may contribute to sustainability-oriented learning in Turkey.

The study relies exclusively on secondary data derived from peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly books, educational reports, conference proceedings, policy documents, and academic publications. Relevant literature was retrieved from reputable academic databases, including Scopus, Google Scholar, ScienceDirect, SpringerLink, and ERIC (Education Resources Information Center). These databases were selected because they provide reliable and internationally recognized scholarly resources relevant to sustainability education, Islamic studies, and educational development.

The literature identification process involved several stages. First, relevant studies were identified using keywords such as "Islamic Religious Education," "Sustainable Development Goals," "Islamic education and sustainability," "Education for Sustainable Development," "religious education and SDGs," "Turkey," and "sustainability values." Boolean operators including AND and OR were employed to improve search precision and relevance. Second, literature screening was conducted by examining titles, abstracts, and keywords to ensure alignment with the study's objectives. Third, selected full-text articles underwent detailed reading and analysis to identify themes concerning sustainability ethics, Islamic values, curriculum integration, educational practices, and SDGs implementation.

The inclusion criteria prioritized peer-reviewed scholarly publications published between 2015 and 2026 to ensure relevance to contemporary sustainability discourse and SDGs implementation. Foundational theoretical works concerning sustainability education, Islamic ethics, and educational reform were also included where conceptually necessary. Publications unrelated to educational settings, Islamic values, or sustainability themes were excluded from analysis.

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis. According to Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, thematic analysis enables researchers to identify recurring themes, organize conceptual categories, and interpret meaningful patterns across qualitative data. In this study, findings were categorized into several themes, including: (1) Islamic ethical values related to sustainability, (2) SDGs integration in Islamic Religious Education, (3) sustainability awareness among students, (4) educational challenges and barriers, and (5) opportunities for sustainability-oriented religious education in Turkey.

To ensure reliability and credibility, source triangulation was applied through comparison of findings across multiple academic sources and educational documents. According to Norman K. Denzin, triangulation strengthens validity by ensuring consistency and interpretive rigor across diverse perspectives. Priority was given to peer-reviewed and internationally indexed sources to improve academic reliability.

Ethical considerations focused on academic integrity, objective interpretation, and proper acknowledgment of scholarly sources. Since the study exclusively relied on secondary data and published literature, no direct participants were involved. Nevertheless, the researcher maintained responsible citation practices and analytical transparency throughout the study.

Overall, the qualitative literature review method adopted in this research provides a systematic framework for understanding how Islamic Religious Education may contribute to sustainability values and Sustainable Development Goals implementation in educational settings in Turkey. Through comprehensive synthesis of scholarly literature, the study seeks to generate meaningful insights into sustainability-oriented education grounded in Islamic ethical principles.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that Islamic Religious Education (IRE) plays a meaningful role in promoting sustainability values and supporting the implementation of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in educational settings in Turkey. Islamic teachings integrated into educational practices contribute significantly to students' understanding of environmental responsibility, social justice, ethical behavior, moderation, and collective welfare, all of which closely align with the principles embedded within the SDGs framework. The integration of sustainability-oriented Islamic values encourages students to view sustainable development not only as an environmental or political responsibility but also as a moral and spiritual obligation grounded in religious ethics.

One of the strongest findings concerns the contribution of Islamic ethical teachings to environmental sustainability awareness among students. Islamic Religious Education introduces ethical principles emphasizing stewardship (*khalifah*), responsibility (*amanah*), balance (*mizan*), and moderation (*wasatiyyah*), which collectively shape students' understanding of ecological sustainability. Students increasingly recognize environmental care as part of religious duty rather than merely social expectation. Islamic teachings encourage responsible use of resources, avoidance of wastefulness (*israf*), protection of biodiversity, and preservation of ecological balance. According to Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Islamic ethics promotes harmony between humanity and nature by emphasizing that environmental preservation reflects spiritual responsibility toward divine creation. Within Turkish educational settings, these values support sustainability consciousness by helping students connect ecological behavior with ethical and spiritual principles.

The findings further reveal that Islamic Religious Education contributes significantly to students' awareness of social sustainability, particularly regarding justice, compassion, poverty alleviation, and community responsibility. Several Sustainable Development Goals—including SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 2 (Zero Hunger), SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions)—closely align with Islamic moral teachings. Islamic Religious Education promotes social solidarity through concepts such as *zakat* (charitable giving), *sadaqah* (voluntary charity), social justice (*adl*), and care for marginalized populations. Students exposed to these teachings often demonstrate stronger empathy, civic engagement, and willingness to participate in social welfare activities. In Turkey, where educational institutions increasingly emphasize citizenship and social

responsibility, Islamic Religious Education supports the development of ethically responsible and socially conscious learners.

Another important finding concerns the role of Islamic Religious Education in encouraging responsible consumption and sustainable lifestyles among students. Sustainable Development Goal 12 emphasizes responsible consumption and production patterns as essential for long-term environmental sustainability. Islamic teachings strongly discourage excessive consumption, wastefulness, and greed while encouraging moderation, gratitude, and balanced living. Students learning Islamic ethical principles increasingly understand sustainability as reflected in everyday actions, including food consumption, water conservation, energy use, and waste management. Religious narratives emphasizing accountability before God further strengthen students' awareness regarding ethical consumption choices. According to sustainability scholars, value-based education significantly enhances behavioral change because ethical beliefs often influence long-term habits more effectively than information alone.

The Turkish educational context provides unique opportunities for integrating Islamic Religious Education with sustainability-oriented learning. Turkey occupies an important position between secular educational frameworks and Islamic cultural traditions. Religious and moral education remains an established component of school curricula, creating opportunities to contextualize sustainability themes within ethical and spiritual discussions. Students in Turkey increasingly face environmental and social challenges related to urbanization, climate change, migration, resource management, and social inequality. Consequently, Islamic Religious Education may contribute meaningfully by helping students interpret contemporary sustainability challenges through ethical and religious perspectives.

The findings also indicate that Islamic Religious Education strengthens students' ethical citizenship and social participation, both of which are central dimensions of Sustainable Development Goals implementation. Students increasingly understand that sustainability involves not only environmental preservation but also ethical decision-making, peaceful coexistence, respect for diversity, and community cooperation. Islamic teachings emphasizing justice, compassion, honesty, and social responsibility contribute to positive citizenship behaviors that support sustainable societies. In multicultural educational environments, students exposed to ethical discussions through Islamic Religious Education

often demonstrate stronger awareness concerning social responsibility and collective welfare.

Another notable finding concerns the role of Islamic Religious Education in fostering holistic sustainability understanding. Unlike conventional sustainability education, which may focus predominantly on scientific knowledge and technical solutions, Islamic Religious Education introduces moral and spiritual dimensions supporting deeper ethical engagement. Students increasingly perceive sustainability as interconnected with personal morality, social ethics, and spiritual responsibility. According to Stephen Sterling, transformative sustainability education requires shifts in values, worldviews, and ethical perspectives rather than merely information transmission. Islamic Religious Education contributes to such transformation by encouraging students to internalize sustainability as a moral obligation embedded within religious identity and daily practice.

However, despite these positive contributions, several challenges remain regarding the integration of Sustainable Development Goals into Islamic Religious Education in Turkey. One major challenge concerns curriculum limitations. In many educational settings, sustainability education remains concentrated within environmental science, geography, or civic education subjects, while Islamic Religious Education often focuses primarily on theology, rituals, moral instruction, and historical dimensions of Islam. Consequently, opportunities for explicitly linking Islamic ethics with sustainability concepts may not always be fully utilized. Curriculum frameworks may require greater interdisciplinary integration to ensure sustainability themes become more visible within religious education.

Teacher preparedness also emerged as a significant challenge influencing implementation effectiveness. Many Islamic Religious Education teachers possess strong theological expertise but may have limited knowledge regarding Sustainable Development Goals, environmental education, or sustainability-oriented pedagogical approaches. Teachers may struggle to contextualize religious teachings within contemporary sustainability issues such as climate change, biodiversity loss, environmental degradation, and social inequality. According to Michael Fullan, educational transformation depends substantially on teacher professional development, institutional support, and pedagogical innovation. Therefore, professional training programs emphasizing sustainability integration may strengthen educators' capacity to implement SDGs-oriented Islamic Religious Education more

effectively.

Another challenge concerns balancing religious identity with secular sustainability frameworks. Since Sustainable Development Goals are globally framed within secular international development discourse, some educational institutions may encounter difficulties integrating SDGs without oversimplifying religious teachings or reducing Islamic ethics to instrumental functions. Effective implementation requires contextual approaches that preserve theological authenticity while simultaneously engaging with contemporary sustainability challenges. Students should be encouraged to critically reflect upon the relationship between Islamic ethics and global sustainability concerns without perceiving them as competing frameworks.

Institutional capacity and educational inequality also affect implementation. Schools in urban regions may possess greater access to sustainability resources, digital learning materials, environmental initiatives, and interdisciplinary programs compared to schools in underserved areas. Unequal institutional support may therefore influence the quality and effectiveness of sustainability-oriented Islamic Religious Education across different regions of Turkey.

Parental and community involvement emerged as another important factor influencing sustainability values among students. Families, religious communities, and local institutions significantly shape students' environmental attitudes, ethical behaviors, and social participation. Students receiving reinforcement of sustainability values at home and within religious communities often demonstrate stronger behavioral commitment toward sustainable practices. Mosques, community organizations, and religious leaders may therefore play supportive roles in strengthening sustainability education beyond formal school environments.

The findings further suggest that Islamic Religious Education supports several dimensions of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), particularly regarding ethical awareness, global citizenship, social responsibility, and long-term behavioral transformation. Students increasingly demonstrate greater sensitivity toward environmental protection, poverty alleviation, social justice, and responsible consumption when sustainability themes are contextualized within Islamic teachings. Such educational experiences contribute positively to achieving Sustainable Development Goals by strengthening ethical awareness

alongside academic understanding.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that Islamic Religious Education possesses significant potential for promoting sustainability values and supporting Sustainable Development Goals implementation in educational settings in Turkey. Islamic ethical principles related to stewardship, justice, moderation, and compassion closely align with sustainability objectives and encourage students to adopt responsible behaviors supporting ecological, social, and economic sustainability. However, stronger curriculum integration, teacher training, interdisciplinary collaboration, and institutional support remain necessary to maximize these contributions. By integrating sustainability principles into Islamic Religious Education, Turkey may strengthen efforts toward developing environmentally conscious, socially responsible, and ethically grounded future generations capable of contributing meaningfully to sustainable development.

4. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Islamic Religious Education (IRE) contributes significantly to promoting sustainability values and supporting the implementation of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in educational settings in Turkey. Islamic teachings emphasizing stewardship (*khalifah*), justice (*adl*), moderation (*wasatiyyah*), compassion (*rahmah*), responsibility (*amanah*), and social solidarity provide a strong ethical foundation for sustainability-oriented learning. Through Islamic Religious Education, students increasingly develop awareness concerning environmental protection, social justice, responsible consumption, poverty reduction, and ethical citizenship, all of which closely align with multiple Sustainable Development Goals.

The findings indicate that Islamic Religious Education contributes not only to students' religious understanding but also to their moral, social, and environmental consciousness. Sustainability values embedded within Islamic teachings help students understand sustainable development as both a civic responsibility and a spiritual obligation. Students exposed to sustainability-oriented Islamic education demonstrate stronger awareness regarding ecological preservation, social responsibility, and ethical behavior in everyday life. In the Turkish educational context, Islamic Religious Education provides valuable opportunities for integrating moral and spiritual perspectives into sustainability education

while supporting national commitments toward Sustainable Development Goals implementation.

However, several challenges continue to affect effective implementation. Curriculum limitations, insufficient teacher preparedness, weak interdisciplinary integration, and unequal institutional capacity may reduce opportunities for connecting Islamic teachings with contemporary sustainability issues. Additionally, balancing religious perspectives with global sustainability frameworks requires thoughtful educational approaches preserving both theological integrity and practical relevance.

Therefore, educational institutions and policymakers in Turkey should strengthen curriculum reform, teacher professional development, interdisciplinary collaboration, and community involvement to maximize the contribution of Islamic Religious Education toward sustainability education. Ultimately, integrating Sustainable Development Goals into Islamic Religious Education can support the development of environmentally conscious, socially responsible, and ethically grounded students capable of contributing positively to sustainable development while maintaining strong moral and spiritual values.

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