

Environmental Ethics in Islamic Religious Education: Promoting Sustainable Behaviors among Students in Nigeria

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Abstract	Environmental degradation, climate change, deforestation, pollution, and unsustainable resource consumption have become major global concerns requiring immediate educational responses. In Nigeria, environmental challenges such as desertification, flooding, waste mismanagement, deforestation, and pollution increasingly threaten ecological sustainability and public well-being. Islamic Religious Education (IRE) has the potential to contribute significantly to environmental awareness and sustainable behaviors by integrating environmental ethics grounded in Islamic teachings. This study examines the role of environmental ethics in Islamic Religious Education in promoting sustainable behaviors among students in Nigeria. Using a qualitative literature review approach, the study analyzes scholarly publications, educational reports, and Islamic environmental perspectives related to sustainability education. The findings indicate that Islamic environmental ethics positively influence students' awareness, attitudes, and behaviors toward environmental conservation through teachings emphasizing stewardship (<i>khalifah</i>), responsibility (<i>amanah</i>), moderation (<i>wasatiyyah</i>), and prohibition of environmental destruction (<i>fasad</i>). Islamic Religious Education provides opportunities to encourage environmentally responsible behaviors such as waste reduction, water conservation, sustainable consumption, and community environmental participation. However, challenges including limited environmental integration in curricula, insufficient teacher preparedness, inadequate educational resources, and weak environmental awareness among communities remain obstacles to implementation. The study concludes that strengthening environmental ethics within Islamic Religious Education can contribute significantly to fostering sustainable student behaviors in Nigeria. Effective implementation requires curriculum reform, teacher professional development, community involvement, and integration of religious teachings with contemporary environmental challenges.	
Keywords	Environmental Ethics, Islamic Religious Education, Sustainable Behaviors, Environmental Sustainability, Nigeria, Islamic Education, Environmental Awareness, Student Behavior	



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1. INTRODUCTION

Environmental degradation has emerged as one of the most pressing global challenges of the twenty-first century. Climate change, biodiversity loss, deforestation, desertification,

environmental pollution, and resource depletion increasingly threaten ecological balance, economic stability, and human survival. The growing environmental crisis has encouraged governments, educational institutions, and international organizations to seek effective strategies for promoting environmental awareness and sustainable behavior among younger generations. Education is widely recognized as one of the most important instruments for cultivating environmental responsibility and encouraging behavioral transformation toward sustainability.

The significance of environmental education has gained increasing global attention through the framework of sustainable development. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization emphasizes that education for sustainable development plays a crucial role in equipping learners with knowledge, values, attitudes, and behaviors necessary for addressing environmental challenges. Educational institutions are expected not only to transfer scientific knowledge regarding environmental issues but also to foster ethical responsibility and behavioral commitment toward environmental preservation. In this regard, religious education can serve as a valuable mechanism for strengthening environmental ethics because religious teachings often emphasize moral responsibility, stewardship, and ethical relationships between humans and nature.

In the context of Islam, environmental ethics occupies an important position within religious teachings. Islamic perspectives on environmental sustainability emphasize that humans are entrusted by God to act as stewards (*khalifah*) of the Earth and are responsible for protecting ecological balance. The Qur'an repeatedly highlights the importance of maintaining harmony, avoiding wastefulness, and preventing environmental destruction. Islamic teachings promote principles of responsibility (*amanah*), moderation (*wasatiyyah*), justice (*adl*), and environmental preservation as integral aspects of human conduct. According to Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Islamic environmental ethics provides a spiritual and moral framework for addressing ecological crises by emphasizing the sacred relationship between humanity, creation, and divine responsibility.

The concept of environmental ethics within Islamic teachings becomes increasingly relevant in educational settings, particularly within Islamic Religious Education (IRE). Islamic Religious Education aims not only to develop students' religious understanding but also to shape moral character, ethical behavior, and social responsibility. Through Islamic

Religious Education, students can develop awareness regarding environmental stewardship and understand sustainability as part of religious obligation. Environmental ethics integrated into Islamic education may encourage students to practice environmentally responsible behaviors such as conserving water, reducing waste, planting trees, maintaining cleanliness, and respecting ecological systems.

The relevance of environmental ethics in Islamic Religious Education becomes particularly important in the context of Nigeria, where environmental degradation poses serious social and ecological challenges. Nigeria faces multiple environmental issues, including desertification in northern regions, flooding in coastal areas, oil pollution, deforestation, waste management problems, and declining biodiversity. Rapid urbanization, industrial activities, poor environmental governance, and population growth further intensify environmental vulnerability. Environmental challenges in Nigeria not only affect ecosystems but also threaten food security, public health, and socioeconomic stability. Consequently, educational interventions aimed at fostering sustainable environmental behaviors among young people are urgently needed.

Nigeria also possesses a large Muslim population, particularly in northern regions, making Islamic Religious Education a potentially influential platform for promoting environmental ethics and sustainability awareness. Islamic schools and religious educational institutions hold important positions in shaping students' moral values, social attitudes, and behavioral patterns. Through religious teachings, students can develop stronger ethical commitment toward environmental preservation based on spiritual motivation and religious responsibility. According to Fazlun Khalid, Islamic ecological principles can motivate sustainable behavior because environmental care is framed not merely as social responsibility but also as religious devotion.

Student behavior represents a critical component in achieving sustainability goals. Sustainable behavior refers to actions that contribute positively to environmental preservation and minimize ecological harm. Such behaviors include waste reduction, recycling, energy conservation, water efficiency, responsible consumption, biodiversity protection, and participation in environmental activities. According to Albert Bandura, behavioral development is strongly influenced by educational experiences, social modeling, and value internalization. When students receive environmental ethics education grounded

in meaningful moral and spiritual values, they are more likely to develop long-term sustainable habits and attitudes.

Islamic Religious Education can play a transformative role in shaping students' environmental ethics by integrating ecological teachings into religious curricula and pedagogical practices. Teachers may introduce Qur'anic verses concerning environmental stewardship, discuss Islamic perspectives on ecological justice, and encourage practical environmental actions within schools and communities. For example, concepts such as avoiding waste (*israf*), protecting natural resources, maintaining cleanliness (*taharah*), and preserving public welfare (*maslahah*) can be contextualized within modern sustainability discussions. Such integration helps students understand that environmental responsibility is not separate from religious life but rather an essential aspect of Islamic ethical conduct.

Despite its potential benefits, integrating environmental ethics into Islamic Religious Education also presents several challenges. One major challenge concerns curriculum limitations and insufficient emphasis on environmental themes within religious education programs. In many educational settings, environmental education remains primarily associated with science subjects rather than moral or religious instruction. Consequently, opportunities for integrating Islamic ecological ethics into religious curricula may be underutilized. Furthermore, teachers may lack sufficient training and pedagogical resources necessary for effectively incorporating sustainability topics into Islamic Religious Education.

Another challenge relates to broader social and cultural attitudes toward environmental responsibility. Environmental degradation in Nigeria is influenced by economic pressures, weak institutional governance, inadequate infrastructure, and limited public awareness. Students' environmental behaviors are often shaped by family practices, community norms, and social environments outside schools. Therefore, schools alone may face limitations in promoting sustainable behavior unless educational efforts are supported by communities, religious institutions, and government policies.

The growing global emphasis on sustainability education highlights the importance of interdisciplinary approaches that combine scientific understanding with ethical and spiritual perspectives. Islamic Religious Education provides opportunities for fostering holistic environmental awareness that integrates knowledge, morality, and practical action. Through meaningful educational experiences, students may develop stronger ecological

consciousness and understand sustainability as both a civic and spiritual responsibility.

This study aims to examine the role of environmental ethics in Islamic Religious Education in promoting sustainable behaviors among students in Nigeria. Specifically, the study explores how Islamic teachings related to environmental ethics influence students' environmental awareness and behavioral practices. The study also investigates challenges associated with integrating sustainability themes into Islamic Religious Education and identifies opportunities for strengthening environmental ethics within educational settings. By examining these issues, the research contributes to broader discussions regarding sustainability education, environmental ethics, and the role of religious education in addressing ecological challenges.

The findings of this study are expected to provide valuable insights for educators, policymakers, curriculum developers, and Islamic educational institutions in Nigeria and beyond. The study emphasizes the importance of integrating Islamic environmental ethics into educational practices to foster environmentally responsible citizens capable of contributing to sustainable development. Ultimately, strengthening environmental ethics in Islamic Religious Education may serve as an effective strategy for encouraging sustainable student behaviors while reinforcing moral and spiritual values grounded in Islamic teachings.

2. METHODS

This study employs a qualitative research approach using a literature review method to examine the role of environmental ethics in Islamic Religious Education (IRE) in promoting sustainable behaviors among students in Nigeria. A qualitative approach is considered appropriate because the research seeks to understand conceptual relationships, educational practices, ethical perspectives, and contextual factors influencing students' environmental behaviors through interpretative analysis of scholarly literature. According to John W. Creswell, qualitative research enables researchers to investigate social and educational phenomena by exploring meanings, experiences, and contextual interpretations. This approach is particularly relevant for analyzing how Islamic environmental ethics contributes to students' behavioral development within educational contexts.

The study adopted a literature review design because it provides opportunities to

synthesize existing scholarly findings, theoretical discussions, and educational practices concerning environmental ethics, Islamic Religious Education, sustainability education, and student behavior. According to Lawrence A. Machi and Brenda T. McEvoy, literature review research helps researchers identify patterns, compare perspectives, evaluate evidence, and discover research gaps within a specific field of inquiry. Through this method, the study develops a comprehensive understanding of how Islamic Religious Education may influence sustainable environmental behavior among students in Nigeria.

The data sources for this study consist of secondary data obtained from peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, conference proceedings, educational reports, and policy documents. Scholarly publications were retrieved from reputable academic databases, including Scopus, Google Scholar, ScienceDirect, ERIC (Education Resources Information Center), and SpringerLink. These sources were selected because they contain high-quality literature related to environmental ethics, Islamic education, sustainability education, student behavior, and environmental awareness. The literature selection process followed several stages. First, relevant publications were identified using keywords such as “environmental ethics,” “Islamic Religious Education,” “sustainable behavior,” “Islamic environmental ethics,” “environmental sustainability,” “student behavior,” and “Nigeria.” Boolean search operators such as AND and OR were employed to refine search results and improve relevance. Second, identified literature was screened based on titles, abstracts, and relevance to the research objectives. Third, full-text analysis was conducted to extract relevant findings related to environmental ethics integration, Islamic educational practices, sustainability awareness, and student environmental behavior.

The inclusion criteria prioritized scholarly works published between 2015 and 2026 to ensure contemporary relevance and academic quality. Peer-reviewed journal articles indexed in international databases were prioritized, particularly studies discussing Islamic education, environmental sustainability, environmental ethics, and behavioral change among students. Studies lacking direct relevance to educational settings or environmental ethics were excluded from the analysis. The data analysis process employed thematic analysis. According to Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, thematic analysis is an effective qualitative method used to identify recurring themes, categorize findings, and interpret patterns within collected data. In this study, the literature was systematically categorized into major themes,

including: (1) Islamic environmental ethics and ecological responsibility, (2) environmental ethics in Islamic Religious Education, (3) sustainable student behaviors, (4) educational challenges in environmental sustainability, and (5) opportunities for strengthening sustainability through religious education in Nigeria. To ensure trustworthiness and reliability, triangulation of sources was conducted by comparing findings across multiple scholarly references and educational reports. According to Norman K. Denzin, triangulation strengthens research validity by verifying interpretations through diverse perspectives and sources. Priority was given to peer-reviewed academic publications and authoritative educational documents to enhance analytical rigor and credibility.

Ethical considerations in this study focused on maintaining academic integrity and proper acknowledgment of cited works. Since the study exclusively relied on secondary data and published literature, no direct human participants were involved, minimizing ethical concerns regarding participant confidentiality and informed consent. Nevertheless, the researcher ensured accurate citation practices and objective interpretation of findings. Overall, the qualitative literature review method adopted in this study provides a systematic framework for understanding how environmental ethics in Islamic Religious Education can promote sustainable behaviors among students in Nigeria. Through comprehensive synthesis of scholarly literature, the study aims to generate evidence-based insights into sustainability education, ethical learning, and the role of Islamic values in fostering environmentally responsible behavior among future generations.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal that environmental ethics integrated into Islamic Religious Education (IRE) significantly contributes to promoting sustainable behaviors among students in Nigeria. Islamic teachings concerning environmental responsibility, stewardship, moderation, and social accountability positively influence students' awareness and attitudes toward ecological sustainability. In educational settings where Islamic values are linked to environmental issues, students demonstrate greater concern regarding environmental protection, waste management, water conservation, cleanliness, and responsible use of natural resources. Islamic Religious Education provides a moral and spiritual foundation that enables students to perceive environmental preservation not merely

as a civic obligation but also as a religious responsibility.

The analysis indicates that the concept of *khalifah* (stewardship) constitutes one of the strongest Islamic ethical principles shaping sustainable student behavior. Islamic teachings emphasize that humans are entrusted by God to serve as caretakers of the Earth and must preserve ecological balance rather than exploit nature irresponsibly. Students exposed to Islamic environmental ethics increasingly understand that protecting the environment represents an act of worship and moral accountability. According to Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Islamic ecological ethics emphasizes the sacred relationship between humanity and nature, encouraging humans to respect the environment as part of divine creation. In the Nigerian educational context, integrating the concept of stewardship into Islamic Religious Education encourages students to develop environmental sensitivity and awareness of ecological responsibility.

Another significant finding concerns the role of Islamic ethical values in shaping students' attitudes toward moderation and sustainable consumption. Islamic teachings strongly discourage wastefulness (*israf*) and extravagance, encouraging individuals to adopt balanced and responsible lifestyles. In many Nigerian schools, environmental education supported by Islamic values has contributed to students' willingness to reduce waste, conserve water, and practice cleanliness within school environments. Students increasingly understand that overconsumption and environmental neglect contradict Islamic moral principles. This finding aligns with arguments proposed by Fazlun Khalid, who emphasizes that Islamic ethics promotes ecological moderation and responsible resource use as essential elements of sustainable living.

The study further demonstrates that Islamic Religious Education positively affects students' behavioral engagement in environmental conservation activities. Schools integrating environmental ethics into Islamic Religious Education often involve students in practical sustainability programs such as school sanitation campaigns, tree planting activities, waste collection projects, water conservation practices, and environmental awareness campaigns. Such experiential learning opportunities strengthen students' understanding of environmental stewardship by translating theoretical religious teachings into practical action. According to Albert Bandura, behavioral learning is strongly influenced by observation, participation, and repeated practice. Therefore, students are more likely to

internalize sustainable behaviors when environmental ethics are reinforced through direct participation and consistent educational experiences.

Furthermore, the findings reveal that Islamic Religious Education contributes to students' moral reasoning regarding environmental responsibility. Students who receive environmental ethics education grounded in Islamic teachings demonstrate stronger ethical awareness concerning environmental degradation, pollution, and resource misuse. Many students increasingly perceive ecological destruction as a form of moral wrongdoing and social injustice. The Islamic prohibition of *fasad* (destruction or corruption on Earth) serves as an important ethical framework encouraging environmental responsibility. In classroom discussions, students frequently connect Qur'anic teachings concerning environmental balance with contemporary environmental problems such as flooding, desertification, deforestation, and pollution affecting Nigeria.

The Nigerian context makes environmental ethics in Islamic Religious Education particularly important due to widespread ecological challenges experienced across different regions of the country. Northern Nigeria faces increasing desertification and water scarcity, while southern regions encounter flooding, oil pollution, and waste management problems. Rapid urbanization, population growth, and industrial expansion intensify environmental pressures, creating urgent need for educational interventions that cultivate sustainability awareness among younger generations. Since a significant proportion of Nigeria's population practices Islam, Islamic Religious Education possesses substantial potential to influence environmental attitudes and behaviors positively. Religious institutions and schools often enjoy strong social legitimacy and moral authority, making them valuable platforms for promoting environmental responsibility.

The findings also indicate that environmental ethics within Islamic Religious Education strengthens students' emotional connection to environmental preservation. Religious values often influence emotions, identity formation, and moral commitment more deeply than purely scientific information. Students exposed to Islamic environmental ethics frequently express feelings of responsibility, gratitude, and moral obligation toward protecting nature. This emotional dimension plays an important role in sustaining environmentally responsible behaviors over time. According to environmental education scholars, emotional engagement significantly influences long-term behavioral commitment because students who feel

emotionally connected to environmental issues are more likely to adopt sustainable lifestyles.

Despite these positive findings, several challenges remain in implementing environmental ethics effectively within Islamic Religious Education in Nigeria. One major challenge concerns curriculum limitations. In many educational institutions, environmental sustainability topics remain primarily concentrated within science subjects, with limited integration into religious education curricula. As a result, opportunities for linking Islamic values to environmental conservation may not be fully utilized. Teachers may focus predominantly on theological or ritual aspects of Islamic education while overlooking broader ethical themes related to sustainability and environmental justice. This limitation reduces the transformative potential of Islamic Religious Education in fostering environmentally responsible behaviors.

Teacher preparedness also emerged as an important challenge affecting effective implementation. While many Islamic Religious Education teachers possess strong religious knowledge, some lack sufficient environmental literacy or pedagogical strategies necessary for integrating environmental sustainability into classroom instruction. Teachers may require additional training to contextualize Islamic teachings concerning stewardship, moderation, and environmental justice within contemporary ecological issues. According to Michael Fullan, educational reform and curriculum innovation require continuous teacher professional development and institutional support to ensure effective implementation. Without adequate training, educators may struggle to facilitate meaningful environmental learning experiences.

Another challenge involves broader socioeconomic and environmental realities affecting students' behaviors outside educational settings. Environmental degradation in Nigeria is frequently driven by structural factors such as poverty, weak environmental governance, inadequate waste infrastructure, and limited public awareness. Students may encounter contradictory experiences in their communities where environmental neglect, poor sanitation, and unsustainable practices remain widespread. Consequently, the effectiveness of school-based environmental ethics education may be limited unless supported by families, religious institutions, local communities, and government policies promoting sustainability practices.

Parental and community involvement also plays an essential role in reinforcing sustainable student behaviors. Students whose families encourage environmental responsibility are more likely to adopt positive environmental habits consistently. In many Nigerian Muslim communities, mosques and religious leaders hold influential positions in shaping moral behavior and public attitudes. Therefore, collaboration among schools, religious institutions, parents, and local communities may strengthen environmental ethics education and create supportive environments for sustainability practices. Religious sermons, community environmental campaigns, and mosque-based environmental education programs may complement formal school instruction and reinforce students' ecological awareness.

The findings further suggest that integrating environmental ethics into Islamic Religious Education promotes more holistic educational experiences. Rather than separating environmental concerns from moral and spiritual values, Islamic Religious Education encourages students to understand sustainability as interconnected with faith, ethics, and social responsibility. This holistic approach aligns with contemporary educational perspectives emphasizing interdisciplinary and value-based learning. Students become more capable of connecting environmental issues with broader moral questions concerning justice, equity, responsibility, and collective welfare.

Moreover, environmental ethics education within Islamic Religious Education contributes to sustainable development goals by encouraging environmentally conscious citizenship among young people. Students who internalize Islamic ecological principles are more likely to participate in environmental protection efforts, advocate for sustainable practices, and influence others positively within their communities. Such behavioral transformation is particularly important for countries such as Nigeria, where environmental sustainability challenges increasingly affect economic stability, public health, and social welfare. Overall, the findings demonstrate that environmental ethics in Islamic Religious Education possesses substantial potential for promoting sustainable behaviors among students in Nigeria. Islamic teachings concerning stewardship, moderation, moral accountability, and environmental justice provide powerful ethical foundations for cultivating environmental responsibility. However, effective implementation requires stronger curriculum integration, teacher professional development, community

collaboration, and supportive policy environments. Through meaningful integration of environmental ethics into Islamic Religious Education, schools may contribute significantly to developing environmentally responsible future generations capable of addressing Nigeria's growing ecological challenges.

4. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that environmental ethics integrated within Islamic Religious Education (IRE) plays an important role in promoting sustainable behaviors among students in Nigeria. Islamic teachings emphasizing stewardship (*khalifah*), responsibility (*amanah*), moderation (*wasatiyyah*), and the prohibition of environmental destruction (*fasad*) provide strong moral and spiritual foundations for encouraging environmentally responsible attitudes and actions. Students exposed to Islamic environmental ethics demonstrate greater awareness of ecological sustainability and are more likely to engage in positive environmental behaviors such as waste reduction, cleanliness, water conservation, and participation in environmental protection activities.

The findings indicate that Islamic Religious Education contributes not only to students' religious understanding but also to their moral development and environmental consciousness. By integrating environmental ethics into religious instruction, students increasingly perceive environmental preservation as both a social obligation and a spiritual responsibility. Practical environmental activities supported by Islamic values further strengthen behavioral engagement and encourage students to apply religious principles in daily life. In the Nigerian context, where environmental challenges such as desertification, flooding, pollution, and deforestation continue to intensify, Islamic Religious Education offers a valuable platform for sustainability education and ecological awareness.

However, several challenges continue to limit effective implementation. Insufficient curriculum integration, limited teacher preparedness, inadequate educational resources, and unsupportive community environments may reduce the impact of environmental ethics education. Therefore, strengthening environmental sustainability within Islamic Religious Education requires curriculum reform, teacher professional development, community participation, and stronger institutional support. Collaboration among schools, families, mosques, and policymakers is essential to reinforce sustainable behaviors consistently.

Ultimately, environmental ethics in Islamic Religious Education can serve as an effective strategy for fostering environmentally responsible future generations in Nigeria. By combining religious values with sustainability education, educational institutions can contribute significantly to addressing environmental challenges while simultaneously strengthening students' moral, ethical, and spiritual development in accordance with Islamic teachings.

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