

Teachers' Perceptions of Environmental Education in Islamic Kindergartens

Syefriani Darnis

Department of Early Childhood, Faculty of Education, University of Trilogi, Jakarta, Indonesia

Email: ipung@trilogi.ac.id

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Abstract. The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of Islamic Kindergarten teachers towards environmental education in their learning activities. A case study method was used to gain an in-depth understanding of the views, experiences, and challenges faced by teachers in implementing environmental education. Data collection was conducted through observation of two Islamic Kindergartens and interviews with 15 teachers in East Jakarta. The results showed that most Islamic Kindergarten teachers have a good awareness of the importance of environmental education. Teachers instill Islamic values with an environmental perspective, which are believed to help students, especially early childhood, develop environmental awareness and concern for preserving nature, using creative and interactive teaching methods. The methods such as storytelling, games, and outdoor activities are used to convey environmental education materials to children. However, teachers face various challenges, including limited resources, a lack of appropriate teaching materials, and limited time in the learning schedule. This study emphasizes the importance of improving training and providing adequate resources for kindergarten teachers to optimize the integration of environmental education into the curriculum. Furthermore, collaboration between schools, teachers, parents, and local communities are needed to support effective environmental education programs. This study provides an important contribution to the development of educational policies that are responsive to environmental issues and opens up opportunities for further research on the effectiveness of teaching methods in environmental education in kindergarten.

Keywords: *Teacher, Islamic Kindergarten, Environmental Education*

INTRODUCTION

The issue of environmental degradation has become a global concern due to its far-reaching impact on human life and ecosystem sustainability. Air pollution, water pollution, reduced biodiversity, and climate change highlight the need to cultivate a generation with ecological awareness from an early age [1]. Environmental Education is a learning process designed to enhance human knowledge, skills, awareness, and caring attitudes toward the environment, fostering responsible behavior in preserving nature [2]. Environmental education is recognized as an effective approach to developing attitudes, knowledge, and skills for environmental stewardship from childhood [3].

Early childhood education, particularly kindergarten, plays a crucial role in instilling early attitudes and values toward environmental conservation [4]. In Islamic-based kindergartens, environmental education has the potential to be unique due to its integration with Islamic values, which emphasize humanity's mandate as a caliph responsible for preserving nature [5]. This integration not only provides ecological insight but also strengthens children's moral and spiritual foundations, fostering a respect for the environment as part of God's creation. However, the success of environmental education is greatly influenced by the perceptions and practices of educators, the primary actors in the learning process [6]. Teachers with a strong understanding of environmental education concepts will be able to integrate them creatively and meaningfully into teaching and learning activities [7]. Conversely, a lack of in-depth understanding and limited resource support can be major obstacles to the effective implementation of environmental education [8].

In the Indonesian context, particularly in Islamic kindergartens, research on teachers' perceptions of environmental education remains limited, particularly in exploring their direct experiences, challenges, and the learning strategies they employ. This highlights the need to strengthen the empirical basis in this area to inform the development of educational policies and practices that are more responsive to environmental issues.

Research on environmental education in early childhood education has been extensively conducted in various contexts, but still reveals relevant gaps:

Previous research has generally focused on public or regular schools with a general integration of environmental education, without a thorough examination of the role of cultural and religious values in environmental learning. Many studies only assess children's level of environmental knowledge or program effectiveness, without considering how cultural or religious background influences educators' perceptions.

Research focusing on Islamic-based kindergartens is still relatively limited, particularly regarding teachers' perceptions of implementing environmental education. Most previous studies have focused on elementary school or non-formal education contexts, thus under-representing how Islamic values are integrated into environmental practices at an early age.

Most previous studies have focused on children, such as measuring children's awareness or attitudes toward the environment, but few have directly explored teachers' perceptions as the primary subjects in environmental education implementation. Yet, teachers' perceptions are a crucial factor influencing the process and quality of environmental learning.

The limitations of research regarding the obstacles faced by teachers in its implementation, such as limited teaching resources, time, and professional training support, make this study important because it empirically shows real challenges in the field as a basis for policy recommendations.

Thus, this study aims to fill this gap through an in-depth case study approach to the perceptions of Islamic kindergarten teachers in East Jakarta. The focus is not only on the "what" (what teachers think), but also on the "how" (their experiences, strategies, and challenges in implementing environmental education), and the "why" (why these factors are important in the context of integrating Islamic values and environmental education). This study is expected to provide a current contribution to the literature on environmental education and Islamic religious education at the early childhood education level, while also serving as a strong reference for developing more contextual and sustainable policies and curriculum design.

METHODS

This research employed a qualitative approach with a case study method. The qualitative approach was chosen because this study aimed to deeply understand the perceptions, experiences, and challenges of Islamic kindergarten teachers in implementing environmental education in learning activities. A qualitative approach allows researchers to explore meanings, interpretations, and social realities from the perspectives of participants [9]. The case study method is used to comprehensively explore phenomena within real-life contexts, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident [10]. Case studies allow researchers to gain an in-depth understanding of environmental education practices in Islamic kindergartens and the contextual factors that influence them.

Study Area

This research was conducted at two Islamic kindergartens located in East Jakarta (Amaryllis Islamic Preschool and Al Baidho Islamic Preschool). The locations were selected using purposive sampling, considering that both schools have integrated Islamic values into their curriculum and have activities related to environmental education. Purposive sampling is used in qualitative research to select participants deemed to have the most knowledge and understanding of the phenomenon under study [11]. The study subjects consisted of 15 Islamic kindergarten teachers actively involved in the learning process. These teachers were selected because they are key actors in implementing environmental education in the classroom and have direct experience in designing and implementing learning.

Procedures

The research procedure was carried out through several stages, as follows:

Preparation Stage. The researcher conducted a literature review related to environmental education and Islamic education for early childhood, developed research instruments in the form of observation guidelines and semi-structured interview guidelines, and obtained research permits from the school.

Data Collection Stage. Data collection was conducted using the following techniques:

Observation. Direct observations of learning activities were conducted to understand how environmental education was integrated into learning activities. Observation in qualitative research aims to obtain contextual data in a naturalistic manner [12].

Semi-Structured Interviews. Interviews were conducted with 15 teachers to explore perceptions, experiences, strategies, and challenges in implementing environmental education. Semi-structured interviews allowed flexibility in gathering in-depth information [13].

Documentation. Documents such as the curriculum, lesson plans, and activity documentation were used as supporting data to strengthen the results of the observations and interviews.

Data Validation. To ensure the credibility and validity of the data, this study employed source and method triangulation techniques by comparing data from observations, interviews, and documentation [14]. Furthermore, member checking was conducted by reconfirming the interview results with participants to ensure the accuracy and appropriateness of data interpretation.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted interactively and continuously from the beginning of data collection until the study's completion. The analysis technique refers to the interactive analysis model proposed by Miles and Huberman [15], which includes:

Data Reduction. The process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, and transforming raw data from the field.

Data Display. The reduced data is presented in the form of descriptive narratives and thematic categorizations to facilitate understanding of patterns and relationships between categories.

Conclusion, Drawing and Verification. The researchers identified key themes, patterns, and relationships emerging from the data and conducted ongoing verification to ensure the consistency and validity of the findings.

Through these analysis stages, a comprehensive picture was obtained of Islamic kindergarten teachers' perceptions of environmental education, the learning strategies used, and the challenges faced in their implementation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

Based on the results of observations, interviews with 15 teachers, and documentation studies in two Islamic kindergartens in East Jakarta, several main themes were found related to teachers' perceptions of environmental education in learning activities, namely: (1) teachers' awareness of the importance of environmental education, (2) integration of Islamic values in environmental education, (3) learning methods used, and (4) challenges in implementation.

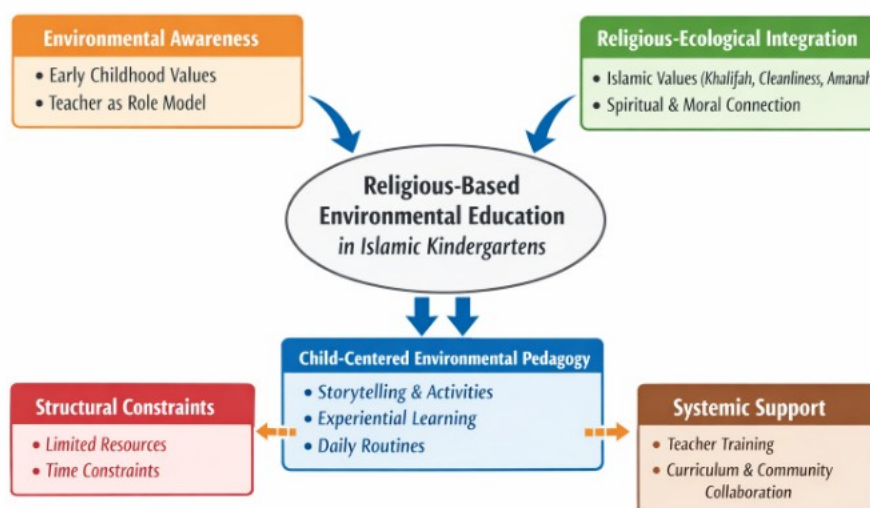


Figure 1. Religious-based environmental education flow cart

Teacher Awareness of the Importance of Environmental Education

Most teachers have a positive perception of the importance of environmental education from an early age. Teachers understand that developing a caring character must begin with simple habits that are consistently instilled.

One teacher stated:

“I think environmental education is very important to teach from kindergarten, because at this age children are forming habits. If they are accustomed to disposing of trash properly and caring for plants from a young age, these habits will carry over into adulthood.” (T3)

Another teacher added that environmental education is not just about cleanliness, but also fostering a sense of responsibility:

"Children need to be taught that protecting the environment is part of our responsibility as humans. So it's not just about cleaning, but also about learning to appreciate nature." (T7)

Observations show that routine activities such as class duty, watering plants, and sorting waste have become part of daily school activities.

Integration of Islamic Values in Environmental Education

Research findings indicate that teachers not only teach general environmental concepts but also integrate them with Islamic values. Teachers link environmental material to teachings about cleanliness, trustworthiness, and the role of humans as caliphs on earth [16].

One teacher explained:

"We usually relate it to Islamic teachings, for example, that cleanliness is part of faith. This way, children understand that protecting the environment is also part of worship." (T1)

Another teacher said:

"We often tell stories about how Allah created the beautiful world, so we must protect it. Children understand more easily when we connect it with Islamic stories." (T10)

This integration is evident in storytelling activities that include Islamic-themed stories and the use of religious terms to explain environmental concepts [17].

Learning Methods

Teachers use a variety of creative and interactive methods to deliver environmental education materials, tailored to the characteristics of early childhood learners who learn through play [18].

Storytelling Method

The storytelling method is used to introduce environmental concepts in a simple way.

"If it's through stories, the children are more focused. We usually use hand puppets or pictures to make them more interested." (T5)

Educational Games

Games such as sorting waste or classroom cleanliness competitions are strategies for building positive habits [19].

"We created a game of sorting organic and inorganic waste. The children enjoy it because it feels like a competition, but they are actually learning." (T12)

Outdoor Activities

According to teachers, activities such as gardening and watering plants are the most effective methods [20].

"The children enjoy it most when they are taken outside the classroom, for example, to plant or water flowers. From there, they learn directly how to care for plants." (T8)

Observations show that outdoor activities provide concrete experiences that help children understand the concept of environmental conservation in a practical way [21].

Challenges in Implementing Environmental Education

Although teachers have positive perceptions and strive to be creative in their teaching, they face several challenges.

Limited Resources

Several teachers expressed limited learning media and supporting facilities.

"We want to create more environmental activities, but sometimes we're limited by the availability of tools and materials." (T6)

Lack of Specific Teaching Materials

Teachers also stated that there are not many modules or textbooks available that specifically integrate environmental education with Islamic values for early childhood.

"There are still few specific teaching materials that combine environmental education with Islamic values, so we have to find or create our own." (T14)

Limited Time

The busy learning schedule makes it difficult to integrate environmental materials optimally [22].

"Learning time in kindergarten is limited, so we have to adapt to the themes already in the curriculum." (T2)

Need for Development and Support

Teachers expressed the need for specialized training and support from various parties to improve the quality of environmental education in Islamic kindergartens.

"If there were specialized training on environmental education for kindergarten teachers, that would definitely be very helpful." (T9)

Furthermore, collaboration with parents and the community is considered crucial to ensure the continuation of environmental awareness at home [23].

"If it's taught at school but not practiced at home, the results will be less than optimal. So, collaboration with parents is necessary." (T11)

Overall, the research results indicate that:

Islamic kindergarten teachers have a good awareness of the importance of environmental education.

Environmental education is integrated with Islamic values to strengthen children's moral and spiritual understanding.

The learning methods used are creative and interactive, such as storytelling, games, and outdoor activities.

Key challenges include limited resources, teaching materials, and learning time.

Improved teacher training and collaboration with parents and the community are needed to support more effective implementation.

Discussion

This study aims to explore Islamic kindergarten teachers' perceptions of environmental education in learning activities. The results indicate that teachers have a high awareness of the importance of environmental education, integrate Islamic values into learning, use creative and interactive methods, and face a number of structural challenges in its implementation. These findings can be analyzed from a theoretical perspective and compared with previous research as follows.

Teachers' Awareness and the Role of Early Childhood Education

The findings indicate that most teachers recognize the importance of environmental education from an early age. This aligns with early childhood cognitive development theory, which emphasizes that early childhood is a critical period for the formation of values and habits [24]. Environmental education at this stage serves as the foundation for developing long-term ecological attitudes [25]. Similarly, Davis [26] emphasized that early childhood education plays a strategic role in developing early ecological literacy [26]. This study supports this view by showing that Islamic kindergarten teachers consciously develop simple habits such as disposing of waste properly, caring for plants, and keeping the classroom clean, as a form of fostering environmentally conscious behavior. Furthermore, high teacher awareness supports the view that teachers' perceptions and beliefs significantly influence pedagogical practices in the classroom [27]. In this study, teachers' positive perceptions of environmental education contributed to the active integration of environmental materials into daily learning activities [28].

Integration of Islamic Values and Environmental Education

One of the main contributions of this study is the finding regarding the integration of Islamic values in environmental education. Teachers not only convey general ecological concepts but also relate them to Islamic teachings on cleanliness, trustworthiness, and the role of humans as caliphs on earth. This finding expands the literature on environmental education, which has previously focused largely on secular or science-based approaches [29]. In the context of Islamic kindergarten, a religious approach provides a moral and spiritual dimension that strengthens the internalization of environmental values. This also aligns with the concept of values-based education, which states that learning that integrates moral or religious values can deepen students' meaning and commitment to social and environmental issues [30]. By linking environmental protection to worship, teachers help children build an emotional and spiritual connection with nature [31], which, according to [32], is a crucial factor in developing long-term pro-environmental behavior.

Child-Centered and Experiential Learning Approaches

The teaching methods used by teachers—such as storytelling, educational games, and outdoor activities—reflect a child-centered learning approach. This approach is consistent with constructivist theory, which emphasizes that children construct knowledge through direct experience and interaction with the

environment [33]. Outdoor activities such as planting and watering plants provide concrete experiences that support experiential learning, as proposed by Kolb [34]. Previous studies have shown that experiential learning has a significant impact on increasing environmental awareness and attitudes in early childhood [35]. These research findings support the argument that interactive and contextual methods are more effective than passive instructional approaches in early childhood environmental education.

Challenges in Implementation

Although teachers demonstrated strong commitment, this study identified several key challenges, including limited resources, a lack of teaching materials integrated with Islamic values, and limited learning time. These findings align with research by Julie Ernst (2009), which found that a lack of professional training and resources are key barriers to implementing environmental education in schools [36]. Related early-childhood work has also highlighted a community-of-practice approach for strengthening educators' capacity for nature-based early learning [37]. Furthermore, curriculum limitations and administrative pressures often limit teachers' innovation in integrating environmental issues [38]. In the context of Islamic kindergartens, the limited teaching materials specifically integrating environmental education and religious values indicate the need for more contextual and systematic curriculum development. This underscores the importance of policy support and ongoing training for teachers to ensure optimal integration of environmental education.

Implications for Policy and Practice

The findings of this study have several important implications. First, there is a need to develop teacher training programs that focus on integrating environmental education and Islamic values into early childhood learning. Second, providing contextual learning resources based on religious values can strengthen the implementation of environmental education in Islamic kindergartens. Third, collaboration between schools, parents, and local communities is essential to ensure the sustainability of environmentally conscious behaviors outside of school. Conceptually, this study contributes to the development of a model of environmental education based on religious values in early childhood education. Empirically, this study adds to the literature on how teachers' perceptions shape environmental education practices in the context of faith-based schools, a topic relatively underexplored in previous research.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to explore Islamic kindergarten teachers' perceptions of environmental education in learning activities. Based on the results, it can be concluded that Islamic kindergarten teachers have a positive awareness and perception of the importance of environmental education from an early age. They understand that developing an environmentally conscious character needs to begin with simple habits consistently instilled in children. The research findings also indicate that environmental education in Islamic kindergartens is unique through the integration of Islamic values into the learning process. The concept of environmental protection is not only taught as a social responsibility but also as part of religious and moral values, such as the mandate and the role of humans as caliphs on earth. This integration strengthens the spiritual and ethical dimensions of early childhood environmental education. In practice, teachers use creative and interactive learning methods, such as storytelling, educational games, and outdoor activities. This approach aligns with the developmental characteristics of early childhood, who learn through direct experience and play. However, this study also identified several challenges faced by teachers, including limited resources, a lack of teaching materials integrated with Islamic values, and time constraints within the curriculum structure. These challenges demonstrate the need for systemic support to ensure optimal implementation of environmental education. Overall, this research provides an empirical contribution to the development of religious-based environmental education in early childhood education and enriches the literature on the role of teacher perceptions in the implementation of environmental education in faith-based schools.

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