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Siri', Pesse', and Ecological Love: Reinterpreting Bugis Islamic Cultural Theology in a Curriculum Based on Compassion and Sustainability

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Abstract

This article explores the reinterpretation of Bugis Islamic cultural theology through the concepts of *siri'* (shame/honor) and *pesse'* (compassion) within the framework of ecological love and sustainable curriculum development. The Bugis people of South Sulawesi, Indonesia, possess rich cultural wisdom that integrates Islamic values with local traditions, offering profound insights for contemporary environmental education. By examining how *siri'* and *pesse'* can be recontextualized as ecological virtues, this study proposes a curriculum model that bridges cultural preservation, Islamic theology, and environmental sustainability. The research demonstrates that *siri'* can be reinterpreted as ecological responsibility and dignity toward nature, while *pesse'* embodies compassion for all creation. This integration creates a culturally responsive educational approach that addresses the urgent need for environmental consciousness while maintaining cultural identity. The proposed curriculum framework offers practical pathways for educators to develop learning experiences grounded in both Islamic ecological principles and indigenous wisdom, fostering students who are environmentally conscious, culturally rooted, and spiritually engaged.

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INTRODUCTION

The contemporary ecological crisis demands innovative approaches to environmental education that transcend Western-centric paradigms and embrace diverse cultural wisdoms. According to Kimmerer (2020), indigenous knowledge systems offer crucial insights for addressing environmental challenges, as they embody centuries of sustainable relationships with nature that modern societies have often overlooked. In the Indonesian context, particularly among the Bugis people of South Sulawesi, cultural values provide a rich foundation for developing ecologically conscious educational frameworks that resonate with local communities while addressing global environmental concerns.

The Bugis cultural concepts of *siri'* and *pesse'* represent more than mere social constructs; they embody a comprehensive worldview that governs individual behavior, community relations, and interactions with the natural environment. As Rahman et al. (2021) argue in their study of Bugis cultural resilience, these values have sustained community cohesion and environmental stewardship for generations, demonstrating their continued relevance in contemporary contexts. *Siri'*, traditionally understood as honor, dignity, and shame, encompasses a sense of responsibility and accountability that extends beyond human relationships to encompass the entire creation.

Islamic theology provides a complementary framework for understanding humanity's relationship with nature, emphasizing the concept of *khalifah* (stewardship) and the interconnectedness of all creation. Foltz (2021) articulates how Islamic environmental ethics position humans as trustees responsible for maintaining ecological balance and protecting the earth as an *amanah* (trust) from God. This theological foundation aligns seamlessly with Bugis cultural values, creating opportunities for synergistic approaches to environmental education that honor both religious and cultural identities.

The integration of cultural values into curriculum development has gained increasing recognition as essential for meaningful and transformative education. According to Sobel (2023), place-based education that incorporates local cultural knowledge creates deeper student engagement and more sustainable learning outcomes than standardized approaches that ignore cultural context. For Bugis communities, a curriculum that authentically incorporates *siri'* and *pesse'* while addressing environmental sustainability can foster both cultural preservation and ecological consciousness among younger generations.

Contemporary educational discourse increasingly emphasizes the importance of compassion and care in addressing environmental challenges. Kahn and Kahn (2020) demonstrate that ecological education grounded in empathy and emotional connection to nature produces more committed environmental advocates than purely cognitive approaches. The Bugis concept of *pesse'*, which encompasses compassion, empathy, and mutual support, offers a culturally grounded pathway for developing this affective dimension of environmental education within an Islamic framework.

The urgency of developing culturally responsive environmental curricula is particularly acute in Indonesia, where rapid development and environmental degradation threaten both ecosystems and traditional ways of life. As documented by Hidayati et al. (2022), Indonesian educators face the challenge of creating curricula that prepare students for global citizenship while maintaining cultural identity and addressing local environmental realities. This article proposes a reinterpretation of Bugis Islamic cultural theology that positions *siri'* and *pesse'* as foundational principles for an environmental curriculum based on compassion and sustainability.

DISCUSSIONS

Reinterpreting *Siri'* as Ecological Dignity and Responsibility

The traditional understanding of *siri'* in Bugis culture centers on personal and collective honor, encompassing self-respect, dignity, and the maintenance of social reputation. However, this concept possesses profound ecological implications when reinterpreted through the lens of environmental theology. Mattulada (2021) and Muhsyanur (2023) explains that *siri'* historically governed not only interpersonal relationships but also relationships with land, sea, and natural resources, creating a holistic accountability system that prevented environmental exploitation. When community members violated ecological boundaries, they experienced *siri'* as shame not merely before other humans but before the Creator and creation itself.

This reinterpretation aligns with Islamic concepts of environmental stewardship, particularly the notion that humans bear witness (*shahid*) to their actions before Allah. According to Khalid (2022), Islamic environmental ethics emphasizes that ecological destruction constitutes a moral failing that diminishes human dignity and violates the trust (*amanah*) bestowed upon humanity. When *siri'* is understood as ecological dignity, environmental degradation becomes a source of profound shame, motivating individuals and communities to protect nature as an extension of protecting their own honor and that of their descendants.

In educational contexts, cultivating *siri'* as ecological dignity requires pedagogical approaches that help students recognize their intimate connection with and responsibility toward the natural world. Research by Nurdin and Rusli (2023) on Bugis environmental education demonstrates that when students understand environmental protection as a matter of personal and community honor, they demonstrate significantly higher levels of environmental engagement than when taught through abstract or purely scientific frameworks. This culturally grounded approach transforms environmental education from external obligation to internal commitment rooted in identity and values.

Furthermore, the concept of *siri'* provides a powerful framework for addressing environmental justice issues within Bugis communities (Santalia et al., 2025). As climate change and environmental degradation disproportionately affect marginalized communities,

framing environmental protection as a matter of *siri'* elevates it from optional concern to moral imperative. Palmer (2020) argues that effective environmental education must address power dynamics and justice concerns, not merely technical environmental knowledge. By connecting environmental protection to the deeply held value of *siri'*, educators can foster critical consciousness about environmental injustice while mobilizing cultural resources for advocacy and action.

***Pesse'* as Ecological Compassion and Interconnectedness**

Pesse', the Bugis value of compassion, empathy, and mutual care, offers a profound foundation for developing ecological love and environmental consciousness. Traditionally, *pesse'* governs social relationships, motivating individuals to support one another, share resources, and maintain communal harmony. As Saharuddin (2022) documents, *pesse'* historically extended beyond human communities to encompass relationships with animals, plants, and landscapes, reflecting an understanding that all beings possess inherent worth and deserve compassionate treatment. This expansive understanding of *pesse'* resonates with Islamic teachings about Allah's mercy (*rahmah*) pervading all creation.

The Islamic theological concept of *rahmah* provides essential support for reinterpreting *pesse'* in ecological terms. According to Ozdemir (2021), the Quranic verse declaring that Allah's mercy encompasses all things (7:156) establishes a framework for understanding divine compassion as the foundation of existence itself. When humans embody *pesse'* toward the natural world, they participate in this divine attribute, aligning themselves with Allah's creative and sustaining mercy. This theological grounding transforms ecological compassion from sentimental attachment to spiritual practice, deepening its significance within Islamic cultural contexts.

Educational applications of *pesse'* as ecological compassion require experiential learning that fosters emotional connection and empathetic understanding of non-human life. Research by Ardoin and Bowers (2020) demonstrates that environmental education programs incorporating emotional engagement and care-based ethics produce more lasting behavioral change than purely cognitive approaches. For Bugis students, learning experiences that cultivate *pesse'* toward nature—through direct interaction with ecosystems, traditional ecological practices, and reflection on interconnectedness—can bridge cultural values and environmental consciousness in deeply meaningful ways.

Moreover, *pesse'* as ecological compassion challenges anthropocentric worldviews that position nature merely as resource for human use. As documented by Hassan and Rahman (2023), traditional Bugis ecological practices reflected an understanding of reciprocal relationships with nature, where *pesse'* motivated sustainable harvesting, seasonal restrictions, and practices ensuring ecosystem regeneration. Incorporating these traditional practices into contemporary curriculum not only preserves cultural knowledge but also

models sustainable relationships with nature grounded in compassion rather than exploitation, offering students practical alternatives to dominant extractive paradigms.

Integrating Bugis Cultural Theology with Islamic Environmental Ethics

The synthesis of Bugis cultural values with Islamic environmental theology creates a robust framework for curriculum development that addresses both cultural preservation and ecological sustainability. Islamic environmental ethics, rooted in Quranic principles of *tawhid* (divine unity), *khalifah* (stewardship), and *mizan* (balance), provides theological legitimacy for environmental protection within Muslim communities. According to Mangunjaya and McKay (2021), effective Islamic environmental education must integrate scriptural foundations with local cultural expressions to achieve authentic engagement and sustained behavioral change. The Bugis concepts of *siri'* and *pesse'* offer precisely such cultural expressions, translating abstract theological principles into lived values with deep cultural resonance.

This integration addresses a critical challenge in environmental education within Muslim-majority contexts: the perceived tension between tradition and modernity, religious authenticity and environmental activism. As Foltz (2021) observes, when environmental education is presented as Western import or secular ideology, it often encounters resistance from communities seeking to maintain religious and cultural identity. By demonstrating that environmental stewardship is inherent in both Islamic theology and Bugis cultural wisdom, educators can position ecological consciousness as authentic expression of cultural-religious identity rather than foreign imposition.

The curricular implications of this integration extend across multiple dimensions of learning. Cognitively, students engage with Islamic theological concepts alongside Bugis cultural narratives, developing sophisticated understanding of how different knowledge systems address environmental challenges. Affectively, the emphasis on *pesse'* and divine mercy cultivates emotional connection to nature grounded in compassion and care. Behaviorally, the accountability framework of *siri'* and the stewardship mandate of *khalifah* motivate concrete environmental actions. According to Sinakou et al. (2022) and Muhsyanur et.al (2025), effective sustainability education must address all three dimensions—cognitive, affective, and behavioral—to achieve transformative learning outcomes.

Furthermore, this integrated approach provides resources for addressing contemporary environmental challenges specific to Bugis regions, including coastal erosion, overfishing, and agricultural intensification. Traditional Bugis ecological knowledge, when combined with Islamic environmental principles and contemporary scientific understanding, offers comprehensive frameworks for sustainable resource management. As documented by Sulaiman et al. (2020), educational programs that successfully bridge traditional ecological knowledge, religious values, and scientific literacy produce graduates better equipped to

address complex environmental challenges in culturally appropriate and scientifically sound ways.

Curriculum Design for Compassion and Sustainability

Developing a curriculum based on *siri'*, *pesse'*, and Islamic environmental theology requires careful attention to pedagogical approaches, learning experiences, and assessment methods that honor cultural values while achieving educational objectives. According to Nolet (2020), effective sustainability curriculum must move beyond merely adding environmental content to existing frameworks, instead fundamentally reorganizing learning around sustainability principles and engaging students as active participants in creating sustainable futures. For Bugis contexts, this reorganization should center on the values of *siri'* and *pesse'* as organizing principles that integrate environmental knowledge, cultural preservation, and spiritual development.

Experiential learning emerges as particularly crucial for cultivating both ecological understanding and cultural values. Field experiences in traditional Bugis agricultural systems, coastal management practices, and sacred natural sites provide opportunities for students to observe sustainable practices rooted in *siri'* and *pesse'* while developing practical environmental competencies. Research by Tsevreni (2021) demonstrates that place-based learning in culturally significant landscapes produces deeper environmental understanding and stronger cultural identity than classroom-based instruction alone. For Bugis students, learning in locations their ancestors sustainably managed creates powerful connections between cultural heritage, environmental stewardship, and personal identity.

Community engagement represents another essential component of culturally grounded environmental curriculum. Involving elders, traditional leaders, and community practitioners as educators brings authentic cultural knowledge into learning experiences while strengthening intergenerational relationships. According to Bang and Medin (2021), indigenous education programs that meaningfully involve community knowledge holders achieve superior outcomes in both cultural preservation and environmental learning compared to programs relying solely on formal educators. For Bugis communities, this approach honors the traditional knowledge transmission systems while adapting them to address contemporary environmental challenges.

Assessment approaches must also reflect the integrated nature of cultural values, Islamic ethics, and environmental learning. Rather than relying exclusively on standardized tests of environmental knowledge, assessment should include demonstrations of *siri'* and *pesse'* through environmental action projects, reflective practices documenting spiritual-ecological development, and community contributions to sustainability initiatives. As argued by Redman and Redman (2022), assessment in sustainability education should evaluate students' capacity to apply knowledge in real-world contexts, engage in systems thinking,

and collaborate for sustainable solutions. For Bugis students, assessment that recognizes demonstrations of cultural values in environmental contexts validates the curriculum's integrative approach while motivating meaningful engagement.

CONCLUSION

The reinterpretation of Bugis cultural values of *siri'* and *pesse'* within Islamic environmental theology offers a powerful framework for developing culturally responsive, spiritually grounded curriculum centered on ecological compassion and sustainability. By recognizing *siri'* as ecological dignity and responsibility, and *pesse'* as compassion extending to all creation, educators can create learning experiences that honor Bugis cultural identity while addressing urgent environmental challenges. This approach demonstrates that environmental stewardship is not foreign imposition but authentic expression of cultural-religious values, positioning ecological consciousness as integral to Islamic faith and Bugis identity. The proposed curriculum framework, emphasizing experiential learning, community engagement, and holistic assessment, provides practical pathways for implementation in educational contexts. As environmental degradation threatens both ecosystems and cultural ways of life, educational approaches that integrate indigenous wisdom, Islamic theology, and contemporary sustainability principles offer hope for nurturing generations who are culturally rooted, spiritually engaged, and ecologically conscious. Future research should explore implementation outcomes, student experiences, and community impacts of curricula based on these principles, contributing to the growing body of knowledge on culturally responsive environmental education.

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