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Curriculum of Compassion: Integrating Love-Based and Ecological Values in Contemporary Islamic Studies

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Abstract

This article explores the integration of love-based pedagogy and ecological consciousness within contemporary Islamic studies curricula. As global challenges intensify, Islamic educational institutions face increasing pressure to balance traditional religious knowledge transmission with urgent environmental stewardship and compassionate human development. Drawing upon contemporary Islamic scholarship and educational theory, this article examines how compassion-centered approaches and ecological values can be meaningfully incorporated into Islamic studies programs. The discussion analyzes theoretical frameworks supporting this integration, practical implementation strategies, and potential transformative outcomes for students and communities. This integration represents not merely curricular innovation but a return to fundamental Islamic principles of rahmah (mercy), ihsan (excellence), and khalifah (stewardship). The findings suggest that embedding these values within Islamic education fosters holistic spiritual development while equipping students to address contemporary environmental and social crises through an authentically Islamic lens.

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INTRODUCTION

Contemporary Islamic education stands at a critical juncture, confronting unprecedented environmental degradation, social fragmentation, and spiritual disconnection that demand pedagogical transformation. Traditional Islamic studies curricula, while preserving essential religious knowledge, increasingly require renewal to address the multifaceted crises facing Muslim communities and humanity at large. The integration of love-based and ecological values into Islamic studies represents not a departure from tradition but rather a revitalization of core Islamic principles that emphasize compassion, mercy, and responsible stewardship of creation. As Ahmed and Ullah (2021) argue, Islamic educational institutions must reclaim the holistic vision of classical Islamic scholarship, which seamlessly integrated spiritual development with ethical engagement with the natural world. This curricular transformation emerges from the recognition that authentic Islamic education cannot remain confined to textual analysis divorced from lived experience and contemporary challenges (Muhsyanur and Mustapha, 2023).

The concept of compassionate pedagogy within Islamic education finds deep roots in the prophetic model of teaching, characterized by gentleness, patience, and genuine concern for students' holistic development. Contemporary scholars have increasingly emphasized the centrality of love (mahabbah) and mercy (rahmah) as foundational principles that should permeate all aspects of Islamic learning environments. Halstead and Haydon (2022) demonstrate that compassion-centered approaches in religious education foster not only academic achievement but also emotional intelligence, ethical sensitivity, and social responsibility among students. This pedagogical orientation aligns with the Qur'anic emphasis on the Prophet Muhammad as "a mercy to the worlds" (21:107), suggesting that mercy and compassion should constitute the very essence of Islamic educational practice. Furthermore, integrating love-based values challenges prevalent authoritarian teaching methods that have historically characterized some Islamic educational contexts, replacing them with nurturing environments conducive to authentic spiritual and intellectual growth.

Ecological consciousness within Islamic studies curriculum responds to the urgent environmental crisis threatening planetary survival and disproportionately affecting vulnerable Muslim-majority regions. The Islamic tradition contains rich theological and ethical resources for environmental stewardship, including the concepts of tawhid (divine unity), khalifah (stewardship) (Muhsyanur, 2024), and mizan (balance), which together articulate a comprehensive environmental ethic. Mangunjaya and McKay (2020) highlight how contemporary Islamic environmental theology draws upon classical jurisprudence and Qur'anic exegesis to develop robust frameworks for ecological responsibility and sustainable living. However, despite this theological foundation, environmental education remains marginalized in many Islamic studies programs, relegated to occasional mentions rather than integrated as a core curricular component. Addressing this gap requires systematic curricular redesign that positions ecological literacy and environmental ethics as essential

dimensions of Islamic learning, inseparable from spiritual development and religious knowledge.

The integration of compassionate and ecological values represents a methodological shift from content-focused to values-based Islamic education that prioritizes character formation and ethical action alongside knowledge acquisition. This transformation reflects broader trends in global education toward holistic, transformative learning that prepares students not merely for professional success but for meaningful contribution to societal flourishing. Memon and Zaman (2023) observe that contemporary Islamic educational philosophy increasingly emphasizes the cultivation of spiritually grounded, socially responsible graduates who embody Islamic values in addressing real-world challenges. This curricular evolution necessitates moving beyond rote memorization of religious texts toward critical engagement with Islamic sources that enables students to derive ethical guidance applicable to contemporary environmental and social issues. Such an approach honors the dynamic interpretive tradition within Islamic scholarship while equipping students with tools for creative problem-solving rooted in authentic Islamic principles.

Implementing love-based and ecological values within Islamic curricula requires careful attention to pedagogical methods, assessment practices, and institutional culture that together create coherent learning environments. Experiential learning, service-learning, and community engagement emerge as particularly effective pedagogies for cultivating compassion and ecological consciousness, as they connect abstract religious principles with concrete action and reflection. According to Waghid and Smeyers (2021), Islamic education benefits significantly from pedagogical approaches that emphasize dialogue, critical reflection, and practical application rather than passive reception of transmitted knowledge. Environmental education within Islamic contexts proves most effective when students engage directly with environmental issues affecting their communities, applying Islamic ethical frameworks to develop contextually appropriate solutions. Similarly, compassion cultivation requires more than theoretical discussion of mercy and love; it demands structured opportunities for students to practice compassionate action and reflect upon their experiences through an Islamic lens.

This article examines both the theoretical foundations and practical dimensions of integrating love-based and ecological values into contemporary Islamic studies curricula. The discussion proceeds in two main sections: first, exploring the theological and pedagogical frameworks that justify and support this curricular integration; second, analyzing implementation strategies and examining potential transformative outcomes for students, institutions, and communities. Throughout this analysis, the article draws upon recent scholarship in Islamic education, environmental theology, and compassionate pedagogy to illuminate pathways toward more holistic, responsive, and ethically grounded Islamic educational practice (Mufida Nur Tsuraya, Muhammad Fadhil Afif, Muthia Mufida Anwar,

Syamsuddin Semmang, Nurfaika Nurfaika, Muhsyanur Muhsyanur, n.d.). The overarching argument maintains that this curricular transformation serves not as accommodation to secular environmental or progressive educational trends but rather as authentic recovery of comprehensive Islamic vision that has always integrated spiritual cultivation, ethical development, and responsible engagement with creation.

DISCUSSIONS

Theological and Pedagogical Foundations for Compassionate and Ecological Islamic Education

The Qur'anic worldview establishes compassion and mercy as divine attributes that fundamentally define the relationship between Allah, humanity, and creation, thereby providing theological grounding for compassion-centered Islamic education. Every chapter of the Qur'an except one begins with the invocation "In the name of Allah, the Most Compassionate, the Most Merciful," emphasizing divine mercy as the primary lens through which Muslims should understand reality and conduct themselves. This theological centrality of rahmah extends to human relationships, with the Qur'an repeatedly commanding believers to embody compassion, forgiveness, and kindness in their interactions. As Siddiqui (2020) explains, classical Islamic scholarship understood compassionate character development as the ultimate aim of religious education, with knowledge acquisition serving primarily as a means toward ethical and spiritual transformation. Contemporary Islamic education that integrates love-based pedagogy thus recovers this classical emphasis, recognizing that cultivating compassionate dispositions constitutes authentic Islamic learning rather than supplementary moral education.

Islamic environmental theology derives from the fundamental doctrine of tawhid (divine unity), which establishes Allah as the sole creator and sustainer of all existence, with humanity appointed as khalifah (stewards) responsible for preserving and maintaining creation. This stewardship theology, extensively elaborated in classical Islamic jurisprudence, positions environmental care not as optional virtue but as religious obligation integral to faith and worship. The Qur'anic concept of mizan (balance) further emphasizes that humans must maintain equilibrium in their use of natural resources, avoiding waste and excess that disrupt divinely established cosmic order. Foltz et al. (2021) demonstrate that contemporary Islamic environmental ethics draws upon these foundational concepts to develop comprehensive frameworks addressing climate change, biodiversity loss, and resource depletion through distinctly Islamic perspectives. Integrating these theological insights into Islamic studies curricula enables students to understand environmental stewardship as essential religious practice rather than secular concern, fostering intrinsic motivation for ecological responsibility grounded in spiritual conviction.

Pedagogical approaches emphasizing compassion and love align with contemporary educational research demonstrating that positive emotional climates significantly enhance

learning outcomes, student engagement, and character development. The prophetic model of teaching exemplifies compassionate pedagogy through the Prophet Muhammad's well-documented gentleness, patience, and individualized attention to students' diverse needs and learning styles. Historical accounts describe how the Prophet created psychologically safe learning environments where students felt comfortable asking questions, making mistakes, and expressing confusion without fear of humiliation or punishment. Rahman and Ali (2022) argue that recovering this prophetic pedagogical model represents a crucial corrective to authoritarian teaching methods that have sometimes characterized modern Islamic educational institutions, replacing fear-based motivation with intrinsic desire for learning rooted in love for knowledge and teacher. Compassionate pedagogy recognizes students' emotional and spiritual dimensions alongside intellectual development, creating holistic learning environments where all aspects of human potential can flourish.

The integration of ecological and compassionate values finds justification in the Islamic principle of *ihsan*, typically translated as "excellence" or "spiritual beauty," which encompasses both vertical relationship with Allah and horizontal relationships with creation. *Ihsan* demands not merely avoiding harm but actively working for the flourishing of all beings, recognizing the intrinsic value Allah has bestowed upon every creature and element of creation. This principle bridges ecological and compassionate concerns, establishing that authentic Islamic practice requires both mercy toward fellow beings and responsible care for environmental systems that sustain life. Contemporary Islamic scholars increasingly emphasize that environmental degradation and social injustice stem from the same spiritual deficiency: failure to embody *ihsan* in relation to Allah's creation. Nasr (2023) articulates how classical Islamic philosophy understood the natural world as *ayat* (signs) revealing divine beauty and wisdom, making environmental destruction tantamount to spiritual blindness that prevents recognition of God's presence in creation. Educational approaches cultivating *ihsan* thus necessarily integrate compassionate ethics and ecological consciousness as complementary dimensions of comprehensive Islamic practice.

Implementation Strategies and Transformative Outcomes in Islamic Educational Contexts

Effective curricular integration of compassionate and ecological values requires systemic changes encompassing course content, pedagogical methods, assessment practices, and institutional culture rather than merely adding discrete units or courses. Core Islamic studies courses, including Qur'anic exegesis, hadith studies, Islamic jurisprudence, and theology, must explicitly address themes of mercy, compassion, and environmental stewardship throughout their syllabi rather than treating these topics as peripheral concerns. This integration involves highlighting relevant Qur'anic verses and prophetic traditions, examining classical scholarly discussions of compassion and environmental

ethics, and facilitating critical engagement with how these principles apply to contemporary challenges. Hassan and Khalil (2021) recommend backward design approaches that begin by identifying desired outcomes related to compassionate character and ecological consciousness, then designing learning experiences and assessments aligned with these goals. Such systematic curricular redesign ensures that compassionate and ecological values permeate students' entire Islamic educational experience rather than appearing as isolated components disconnected from broader religious knowledge.

Experiential learning methodologies prove particularly effective for cultivating compassion and ecological awareness, as they engage students emotionally and practically rather than merely intellectually. Service-learning projects that connect Islamic studies with community needs enable students to embody compassionate values through concrete action, whether volunteering at shelters, tutoring disadvantaged youth, or supporting refugee communities. Environmental service-learning might involve community gardens, conservation projects, or environmental education initiatives that allow students to practice environmental stewardship while serving their communities. Zaman and Ashrafi (2020) document how service-learning in Islamic educational contexts significantly enhances students' sense of religious purpose, social responsibility, and connection between faith and action. Critical reflection following service experiences helps students articulate how their actions embody Islamic principles, recognize systemic dimensions of social and environmental issues, and develop more sophisticated understanding of how Islamic ethics address complex contemporary challenges. These experiential pedagogies transform abstract religious concepts into lived experience, fostering lasting commitment to compassionate and ecological practice.

Assessment practices must evolve beyond traditional examinations measuring knowledge recall to include evaluation of dispositional development, ethical reasoning, and practical application of compassionate and ecological values. Portfolio assessments documenting students' growth in compassionate practice and environmental engagement provide richer evidence of learning than conventional testing while encouraging ongoing reflection and self-assessment. Reflective journals, where students examine their emotional responses to course material and track their efforts to embody Islamic values in daily life, cultivate metacognitive awareness and intentional character development. Performance assessments requiring students to apply Islamic ethical frameworks to real environmental or social issues demonstrate higher-order thinking while preparing them for authentic challenges they will face beyond the classroom. Ibrahim and Mohd (2022) emphasize that assessment methods themselves communicate curricular priorities; therefore, evaluating compassionate and ecological outcomes signals that these dimensions constitute essential rather than supplementary aspects of Islamic learning. Comprehensive assessment approaches honor the holistic nature of Islamic education by measuring spiritual, ethical, and practical development alongside intellectual achievement.

The transformative potential of integrating compassionate and ecological values extends beyond individual student development to encompass institutional renewal and community impact. Students educated through compassion-centered, ecologically conscious curricula emerge as religious leaders, educators, and community members equipped to address contemporary challenges through authentically Islamic perspectives that honor both tradition and urgent present needs. These graduates model for their communities how Islamic faith motivates environmental activism, social justice work, and compassionate service, potentially catalyzing broader cultural shifts within Muslim societies. Institutional commitment to these values transforms Islamic educational institutions themselves into models of compassionate community and environmental sustainability, with campus operations, interpersonal relationships, and organizational culture reflecting the principles taught in classrooms. Ahmad and Yusuf (2023) observe that Islamic schools and universities pioneering this curricular integration often become regional leaders in environmental sustainability and social engagement, demonstrating practical viability of values-based Islamic education. This ripple effect suggests that thoughtful curricular reform within Islamic studies programs can contribute significantly to addressing environmental crises and social fragmentation afflicting contemporary societies while remaining faithful to authentic Islamic principles and aspirations.

CONCLUSION

The integration of love-based pedagogy and ecological values within contemporary Islamic studies curricula represents both recovery of authentic Islamic educational tradition and necessary innovation addressing unprecedented contemporary challenges. This curricular transformation finds firm grounding in core Islamic theological concepts including rahmah, tawhid, khalifah, and ihsan, which together articulate comprehensive vision of compassionate, ecologically responsible religious practice. Effective implementation requires systemic changes encompassing course content, pedagogical methods, assessment practices, and institutional culture, with experiential learning emerging as particularly powerful approach for cultivating compassionate disposition and ecological consciousness. The transformative outcomes extend beyond individual student development to potentially catalyze broader renewal within Muslim communities and Islamic institutions, demonstrating practical viability of values-based education addressing urgent social and environmental needs. While challenges inevitably accompany such comprehensive curricular reform, the theological authenticity and practical necessity of this integration suggest that Islamic educational institutions can no longer defer this essential work. Ultimately, curricula of compassion grounded in ecological consciousness honor the holistic Islamic vision where spiritual development, ethical formation, and responsible stewardship of creation constitute inseparable dimensions of authentic faith and learning.

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