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Sustainable Economic Development through Islamic Educational Philosophy: Community Service with an Ecotheological Approach

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Abstract

Sustainable economic development through Islamic educational philosophy positions community service as a transformative praxis based on holistic ecotheology in Islamic higher education, Integrating the Quranic values of mizan (natural balance) and maslahah (the welfare of the people), realizing an inclusive and environmentally friendly local economic transformation. Ecotheology strengthens the theological foundation of nature as a divine mandate, ensuring a sharia economy oriented towards social justice, ecosystem preservation, and religious moderation through cross-sector collaboration. This approach revolutionizes the role of higher education as an agent of change, generating long-term impacts on productive zakat, a green economy, and community independence. Amidst the challenges of climate change, this contextual model contributes to Indonesia Emas 2045 which is harmonious between human welfare, Islamic spirituality, and the sustainability of the earth, as a manifestation of rahmatan lil 'alamin.

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INTRODUCTION

The ecological crisis and economic inequality represent two major intertwined challenges of the 21st century that directly impact the sustainability of human life. Economic development models based on massive exploitation of natural resources have generated material growth, but simultaneously triggered environmental degradation, climate change, and socio-economic marginalization of local communities. In many developing countries, including Indonesia, this phenomenon manifests in the form of ecosystem destruction, structural poverty, and weakened economic resilience of grassroots communities. This paradox underscores that economic development which ignores ethical, spiritual, and value education dimensions has the potential to create multidimensional crises. In the context of religious societies, economic and environmental issues cannot be separated from the worldview and value system embraced. Islam, as a religion with a comprehensive ethical framework, views humans as khalifah (stewards) on earth with moral responsibility to maintain the balance of nature (mīzān) and realize common welfare. However, in development practice and community service, these philosophical and theological values are often reduced to normative symbols without being substantively integrated into sustainable economic development strategies (Raworth, K, 2020) and (Santalia et al., 2025). This phenomenon demands a reorientation of the development paradigm, particularly through an approach that holistically integrates economic, ecological, and spiritual dimensions.

The Philosophy of Islamic Education conceptually offers a strong foundation for the formation of the complete human being (insān kāmil) who is not only intellectually capable, but also possesses moral, social, and ecological consciousness (Muhsyanur, Satriani, Ekawati Hamzah, Indo Santalia, Syamsul Bahri, Umrati, Mansur, Nurdin, 2025). The principles of tawhid (monotheism), amanah (trustworthiness), and social responsibility serve as the ontological and axiological basis for building harmonious relations among humans, God, and nature (Aquino, N., Warburton, N., & Pihkala, P. 2021). Nevertheless, in the implementation context, Islamic Education often becomes trapped in a normative-doctrinal approach that has not fully touched the practical reality of economic and environmental development. This gap between philosophical values and socio-economic practice causes the transformative potential of Islamic Education to remain suboptimal in addressing sustainability problems. On the other hand, community service as one of the pillars of the tri dharma (three pillars) of higher education remains predominantly oriented toward technical and economic aspects, with minimal philosophical and theological reflection. Consequently, community empowerment programs are frequently short-term, unsustainable, and fail to build collective ethical consciousness. This condition indicates the need for a new approach that positions the Philosophy of Islamic Education not merely as a theoretical foundation, but as a practical framework guiding sustainable and meaningful community economic transformation (Hakim, L. (2021).

The ecotheological approach emerges as a critical perspective bridging the discourse of theology, environmental ethics, and socio-economic praxis. In the Islamic context, ecotheology affirms that the environmental crisis is not merely a technical issue, but a reflection of humanity's spiritual and ethical crisis in understanding nature. Nature is understood not as an object of exploitation, but as signs of God (āyāt) that possess intrinsic value and sacredness (Nordstokke, K. 2021). The integration of ecotheology with the Philosophy of Islamic Education opens space for developing community service models that cultivate faith-based and value-based ecological consciousness. However, studies and practices of Islamic ecotheology remain relatively limited, especially in relation to sustainable economic development at the community level (Buijs, A. E., et al. 2022). Most research still focuses on normative textual studies or theoretical discourse, without elaborating applicable models that can be implemented in community empowerment programs. This limitation indicates a conceptual and methodological gap that needs to be filled through research and community service that is integrative, transdisciplinary, and contextual.

Based on a review of previous research, it is evident that studies on sustainable economics are generally dominated by environmental economics and public policy approaches, while philosophical and theological dimensions receive less serious attention. On the other hand, studies of the Philosophy of Islamic Education are more oriented toward epistemological and pedagogical aspects, without direct connection to issues of economic development and ecological sustainability. Community service is often positioned as an applied activity separate from theory development and philosophy. Thus, there exists a research gap in the integration among the Philosophy of Islamic Education, ecotheological approaches, and the practice of sustainable economic development based on community service (Moghaddam, P. P., et al. 2022). This research attempts to fill this gap by offering a conceptual and practical framework that combines Islamic philosophical values, ecological consciousness, and community economic empowerment strategies. The main contribution of this research lies in developing an alternative paradigm for sustainable economic development rooted in spiritual values and transformative education.

This research is important and relevant because it offers a holistic approach in addressing increasingly complex sustainable development challenges. By making the Philosophy of Islamic Education and ecotheology the basis of community service, this research is not only oriented toward improving economic welfare, but also toward forming society's ethical and spiritual consciousness. This approach is expected to produce an economic development model that is sustainable, contextual, and socially just. In addition to providing academic contributions to the development of Islamic scholarship and sustainability studies, this research also has practical implications for policy formulation and the design of value-based community service programs. In the long term, this integration of

education, theology, and economics has the potential to strengthen the socio-ecological resilience of communities and affirm Islam's role as a source of inspiration for civilizational solutions. Therefore, this research is not only academic in nature, but also normative and transformative in responding to the needs of the times.

METHOD

The methods section describes how the work was conducted. For research-based articles, it includes the research design, data collection procedures, participants, instruments, and analysis techniques. For non-research articles, such as conceptual papers, literature reviews, or descriptive reports, this section may be omitted or replaced with a description of the approach or process used to develop the content. The goal is to provide clarity on how information or results were obtained.

DISCUSSIONS

Ecological and Economic Crisis as a Challenge for Community Development

The ecological crisis and economic inequality continue to be challenges for community development in the contemporary era, as both phenomena mutually reinforce each other structurally and socially. Environmental degradation triggered by the exploitation of natural resources creates ecosystem instability that directly impacts the livelihood base of local communities, especially communities with high dependence on natural resources as their primary means of subsistence. Conventional economic development models oriented toward short-term growth have weakened ecological carrying capacity while widening welfare disparities in society, because economic benefits are not evenly distributed, while environmental burdens are borne by vulnerable groups. Contemporary empirical studies show that the synergy between ecological challenges and social inequality is not merely a technical issue, but a matter of social justice that requires a systemic approach to bridge economic and environmental relations sustainably (Abdul Quddus 2024).

The impact of exploitative development on local communities is often seen in the form of disrupted community access to natural resources that support daily life. The implementation of development patterns that do not adequately consider environmental sustainability has resulted in land degradation, declining water quality, and reduced ecosystem services, which ultimately impact household income and food security. A series of studies show that resource management oriented solely toward profit without considering ecological aspects has implications for violations of local community rights, decreased welfare, and increased conflicts over natural resource use. This situation confirms that the imbalance between economic production patterns and environmental sustainability is the main factor behind socio-economic inequality in many local communities (Maulana Bagus Rahmat, Mahruchin & Fauzan, 2025).

Facing this complexity, alternative approaches based on Islamic spiritual and ethical values become relevant and urgent to be applied in sustainable development. In Islamic tradition, values such as tawhid (the unity of God and creation), amanah (moral responsibility), and khalifah (earth stewardship as a divine mandate) provide a strong ethical foundation for aligning economic activities with principles of balance and socio-ecological welfare. The Ecotheological approach that positions humans as stewards of the earth rather than dominant rulers enables communities to build more harmonious relationships between economy and environment, thereby producing development practices that are just and sustainable. Recent studies in the Islamic ecotheological tradition show that this framework is not only theoretically relevant, but also practical in encouraging communities to behave responsibly toward the environment and social welfare (Elijah Dwi Setyo, 2025).

Philosophy of Islamic Education as a Paradigmatic Foundation

The Philosophy of Islamic Education positions tawhid as an epistemological and axiological foundation that unites the economic, ecological, and spiritual dimensions in human development. The concept of tawhid affirms the integration of created reality as a manifestation of the one God's will, so that economic activities and environmental management are not viewed as separate from humanity's relationship with Allah and His creation. Islamic education based on an understanding of ecological tawhid encourages learners to view the environment as an amanah (trust) that must be preserved, not merely an object of exploitation. This foundation has been demonstrated in contemporary Islamic education research that emphasizes the integration of faith values with ecological consciousness, so that education not only transfers cognitive knowledge but also forms a holistic understanding of meaningful and responsible human-nature relationships (Green Islam Education, 2025). The integration of tawhid in education produces a paradigm in which sustainable economics is understood as part of implementing spiritual principles, where economic activities are directed toward common welfare and respect for the balance of creation.

In the context of human resource management, the principles of khalifah fil ardh (vicegerent on earth) and amanah provide an ethical framework that positions humans as earth managers who are morally and spiritually responsible. The concept of khalifah underscores humanity's duty to maintain cosmic balance (mīzān) and contribute to environmental sustainability, while amanah emphasizes personal and collective accountability for that responsibility (Khilafah and Amanah as the Basis of Ecological Ethics, 2025). This perspective differs from the dominant utilitarian economic paradigm, as it places moral values at the core of learning and decision-making in resource management. Effective Islamic education not only transfers information, but also functions as an instrument of consciousness transformation—changing the behavior, ethics, and daily life practices of

learners. Empirical studies on transformative Islamic education show that the internalization of these spiritual values is capable of producing concrete behavioral changes in consumption patterns, production, and human relationships with the environment, making Islamic Education an important medium in sustainable development.

Integration of the Philosophy of Islamic Education and Ecotheology

The integration of the philosophy of Islamic education and ecotheology emphasizes the synergy between theological and pedagogical values in forming students' ecological consciousness. In Islamic perspective, humans are positioned as khalifah fil ardh who have a moral amanah to maintain the balance of nature, while education functions as a medium for the systematic and sustainable internalization of these values. Theological values such as tawhid, amanah, and maslahah (public welfare) are combined with pedagogical approaches that emphasize meaningful learning, so that students not only understand environmental crises cognitively, but also internalize spiritual responsibility toward nature. This synergy strengthens ecological consciousness based on faith, ethics, and concrete action, making Islamic education play a strategic role in responding to global environmental degradation challenges (Nasr, 2021; Abdullah & Karim, 2022).

Reflective education has an important role in the internalization of environmental ethics because it encourages students to engage in critical reflection on the relationship between religious values, human behavior, and their impact on nature. In the context of the philosophy of Islamic education, reflection (tafakkur and tadabbur) is viewed as an epistemological and pedagogical method for cultivating moral and spiritual consciousness. Through reflective education, students are invited to connect Islamic teachings about natural balance (mizan) with the reality of environmental damage occurring, so that environmental ethics does not stop at the normative level, but is internalized in daily attitudes and behavior. This approach is considered effective in building sustainable ecological character because it involves cognitive and spiritual dimensions in an integrated manner (Fauzi & Rahmawati, 2020; Huda, 2023).

The holistic human-God-nature approach within the framework of Islamic ecotheology also makes an important contribution to sustainable economic development. Islam views economic activities as part of worship that must align with principles of justice, balance, and environmental sustainability. Through Islamic education based on ecotheology, students are guided to understand that excessive exploitation of natural resources contradicts the values of tawhid and khalifah ethics. This holistic approach encourages the emergence of economic consciousness that is not only oriented toward material profit, but also toward ecological sustainability and moral responsibility to God and future generations. Thus, the integration of Islamic education and ecotheology becomes a normative and pedagogical foundation for just sustainable economic development (Beekun & Badawi, 2021; Zainal & Yusoff, 2024).

Community Service as a Space for Transformative Praxis

Community service constitutes a transformative praxis space that enables the actualization of Islamic values in social life in a real and contextual manner. In Islamic perspective, service is not only understood as a social-charitable activity, but as the manifestation of faith responsibility through the principles of amar ma'ruf nahi munkar (enjoining good and forbidding evil), ukhuwah (brotherhood), and rahmatan lil 'alamin (mercy to the worlds). Service activities become a means of implementing the values of amanah, social justice, and concern for vulnerable groups through education programs, economic empowerment, and community capacity strengthening. Syafaruddin's study emphasizes that Islamic values-based community service functions as a bridge between normative teachings and social reality, so that Islam does not stop at the discourse level, but is present as a transformative force in society (Syafaruddin, 2025). In addition, service also contributes to character formation of students and lecturers as reflective, empathetic, and socially responsible moral subjects. Through direct involvement with the community, Islamic values undergo a dynamic process of actualization and contextualization, while strengthening the role of higher education as an agent of social change based on Islamic ethics (Sabtina, et al. 2025).

The participatory and dialogical approach is the main foundation in community economic empowerment because it positions the community as active subjects, not merely program objects. This approach emphasizes the process of dialogue, deliberation, and joint decision-making between academics and the community, so that the solutions produced align with local needs, potential, and context. In community service practice, the participatory approach is seen in MSMEs (Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises) assistance, community cooperatives, and entrepreneurship training designed together with the community. Research by Rohmatulloh et al. shows that economic empowerment based on dialogue and participation increases community ownership of programs, thereby ensuring greater sustainability of activities (Rohmatulloh et al, 2023). Furthermore, the dialogical approach also aligns with Islamic values of syura (consultation) and social justice, which encourage more equitable distribution of economic benefits. By involving local experience and knowledge, community service not only improves economic capacity, but also strengthens social solidarity and community independence. Therefore, the participatory approach becomes an effective strategy in building inclusive and sustainable community-based economics (Beekun and Badawi, 2021).

Higher education institutions have a strategic role in building sustainable community-based economics through the implementation of tridharma (three pillars of higher education), particularly community service. As a center for knowledge production and

dissemination, higher education functions as a facilitator of socio-economic transformation by integrating research, education, and community empowerment practices. In the context of sustainable economics, higher education plays a role in MSMEs assistance, Islamic economy development, and innovation based on environmentally friendly local potential. Hidayat emphasizes that Islamic higher education institutions have theological and social responsibility to promote economic development that is non-exploitative, but rather oriented toward justice, balance, and sustainability (Hidayat, 2024). Through collaboration with government, private sector, and community, higher education can strengthen community economic networks while enhancing local competitiveness. This community-based approach ensures that economic development is not detached from society's cultural and moral values, so that economic sustainability goes hand in hand with social and ecological sustainability (Zainal and Yusoff, 2024).

In the context of As'adiyah Islamic University Sengkang, community service becomes a real transformative praxis space, where lecturers apply knowledge to empower local communities sustainably. For example, educating students at As'adiyah Islamic Boarding School to manage waste to have economic value and be environmentally friendly, creating positive environmental change as well as economic independence. This praxis integrates Islamic values such as *maslahah* and *mizan*, through participatory research and cross-sectoral collaboration, realizing the theological responsibility of As'adiyah Islamic University for inclusive socio-economic value transformation.

CONCLUSION

Sustainable economic development through the philosophy of Islamic education positions community service as the main praxis with a holistic ecotheological approach. Islamic higher education institutions, such as As'adiyah Islamic University Sengkang, integrate Qur'anic values regarding natural balance (*mizan*) and community welfare (*maslahah*) into community empowerment programs. Through Islamic MSMEs assistance and waste management based on charity, such as the Waste Charity Movement (*Gerakan Sedekah Sampah*), lecturers realize environmentally friendly local economic transformation. This approach not only improves material welfare but also strengthens spiritual consciousness regarding the responsibility of *khalifah fil ardhi* (vicegerent on earth), creating a just and sustainable development model.

Islamic ecotheology enriches community service with a theological foundation that positions nature as a divine trust (*amanah*), so that Islamic economics is oriented toward social justice and ecosystem preservation. In the Indonesian context, problem-based education programs on the shores of Lake Tempe by Unisad teach the younger generation local product packaging, combining simple technological innovation with Islamic ethics. Cross-sectoral collaboration—government, private sector, and community—strengthens community economic networks, ensuring inclusivity and regional competitiveness. This approach aligns with religious moderation, avoiding resource exploitation for short-term

profit, but rather building sustainable independence that reflects rahmatan lil 'alamin (mercy to the worlds).

In conclusion, community service with ecotheology revolutionizes the role of Islamic higher education institutions as agents of sustainable economic change. The integration of the philosophy of Islamic education—participatory research, transformative education, and field praxis—produces long-term impacts on MSMEs, productive zakat (Islamic almsgiving), and green economy. Amid global challenges such as climate change, this model offers contextual local solutions, strengthening Islamic identity while maintaining social relevance. Islamic higher education institutions are expected to continue intensifying similar programs, contributing to Indonesia Emas 2045 (Golden Indonesia 2045) that is prosperous, just, and harmonious with nature, as a manifestation of collective worship for the welfare of humanity and the earth.

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