



THE DEVELOPMENT OF ECO-TAHFIZ
IN MALAYSIA:
Bridging Islamic Education and Environmental
Sustainability

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Abstract: The Eco-Tahfiz initiative in Malaysia integrates Islamic education with environmental sustainability, offering a faith-based educational model that aligns with national priorities and global sustainability goals. This study examines the development of the Eco-Tahfiz initiative, focusing on its key drivers, challenges, and prospects through a qualitative methodology. The key enablers for the Eco-Tahfiz initiative include institutional support, integrating environmental themes into Islamic education, and alignment with cultural-religious values. Key barriers identified include limited teacher training, insufficient integration of intrinsic values, and the predominantly theoretical application of *Fiqh al-Bi'ah*. To address these challenges, the study proposes inter-agency collaboration, leadership engagement, teacher capacity building, community participation, and a structured Eco-Tahfiz Action Plan to enhance the initiative's implementation and relevance across broader Muslim educational contexts.

Keywords: Environmental Education, Education for Sustainable Development, Islamic Education, *Fiqh al-Bi'ah*, Eco-Tahfiz.

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Introduction

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY is an increasingly urgent global priority, and education plays a critical role in shaping values and behaviors necessary to address ecological challenges. In Malaysia, initiatives such as the Sustainable Schools Environmental Award (SSEA) have effectively fostered environmental awareness within mainstream schools. Inspired by these achievements, the Eco-Tahfiz model integrates sustainability education into the

traditional *tahfiz* curriculum, offering a distinctive approach to reconciling Qur'anic memorization with ecological consciousness.

Grounded in Islamic teachings, the Eco-Tahfiz model embodies Qur'anic principles of environmental stewardship and the interconnectedness of all life. These principles align with the ethical and spiritual foundations of *tahfiz* institutions, offering a transformative opportunity to instill environmental responsibility among students. By incorporating practical sustainability practices, such as waste reduction, renewable energy utilization, and tree planting, the model encourages students to develop habits that reflect their spiritual obligations and environmental responsibilities.

Moreover, Eco-Tahfiz fosters broader community engagement in environmental stewardship. Through workshops, initiatives, and institutional collaboration, sustainability practices extend beyond classrooms, spreading their influence to families and local communities. This model strengthens Malaysia's position as an educational innovator, leveraging its rich Islamic heritage to integrate faith-based learning with modern sustainability principles. Its potential to inspire similar global initiatives reinforces Malaysia's role in advancing inclusive and sustainable education.

Despite growing environmental education and sustainable development research, faith-based educational models remain underexplored. While initiatives such as the Eco-Schools program¹ and UNESCO's Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) framework extensively documents sustainability in secular schooling systems; these frameworks lack integration with Islamic teachings emphasizing environmental ethics.

Scholars such as Yusuf al-Qaradhawi and Mikdar Rusdi have examined Islamic environmental jurisprudence (*Fiqh al-Bi'ah*), underscoring the ecological dimensions of Islamic teachings. However, these contributions remain largely theoretical, lacking

¹ Foundation for Environmental Education (FEE), "Eco-Schools," 2017, <http://www.fee.global/eco-schools-1/>.

structured implementation in educational settings.² This study bridges the gap by operationalizing *Fiqh al-Bi'ah* within tahfiz institutions, making it a pragmatic model for environmental education in Islamic pedagogy.

Furthermore, while governmental initiatives like SSEA have enhanced environmental education, they lack tailored approaches for *tahfiz* institutions. The Eco-Tahfiz model addresses this gap and offers actionable policy recommendations for integrating sustainability within Islamic education. By merging Islamic theology, environmental ethics, and contemporary education, this research introduces a faith-based sustainability paradigm that reshapes the discourse on environmental responsibility within religious education. It contributes to academic scholarship, policy frameworks, and community engagement strategies that can be adopted at national and international levels, fostering a generation of environmentally conscious, ethically grounded leaders.

This study employed a qualitative research design to examine the Eco-Tahfiz initiative in Malaysia. The document analysis component involved a comprehensive review of relevant national and international policy frameworks. At the same time, field observations at selected Tahfiz institutions focused on identifying sustainable practices and integrating environmental themes within the curriculum. Specifically, fieldwork was conducted at one Eco-Tahfiz institution in Sabah, Malaysia, to provide contextual depth and strengthen the study's empirical foundation. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, which systematically categorized key findings related to the development of the Eco-Tahfiz initiative, with particular emphasis on its driving factors, challenges, and strategic recommendations. All themes were developed through a rigorous triangulation process, cross-referencing data from document analysis and field observations, thereby enhancing the findings' credibility, coherence, and contextual richness. As interviews were not conducted, future studies could explore stakeholder perspectives to enrich the

² Mikdar Rusdi, *Pemeliharaan Dan Pemuliharaan Alam Sekitar Menurut Perspektif Al-Qur'an*, 1st ed. (Penerbit UTHM, 2010); Yūsuf al-Qaradhāwī, *Ri'āyah Al-Bi'ah Fi Syar'i'ah Al-Islām*, 1st ed. (Kaherah: Dār al-Shurūq, 2001).

findings. Ethical considerations were carefully addressed, including the acquisition of informed consent from participating institutions and the assurance of data confidentiality. The methodological approach provided a structured examination of the Eco-Tahfiz model, highlighting its practical applications and inherent challenges within Malaysia's Islamic education system. By offering empirically grounded insights, this study makes a meaningful contribution to the broader discourse on faith-based environmental education. It supports the formulation of replicable policies and practices in comparable educational settings worldwide.

Religion and Environmental Education

The term 'environment' has a distinct lexical meaning in Arabic. According to *Lisān al-'Arab*, the word *al-bī'ah* (environment) etymologically derives from the noun *bawwā'a*, originating from the root word *bā'ā*. This word conveys various meanings, such as a house or dwelling place (*al-manzil*) and the residence of a community (*manzil al-Qaūm*), typically located in a valley or near a hill.³ This indicates that the term environment refers to human habitation and everything surrounding it. Furthermore, Arabic dictionaries such as *al-Wasīt* and *al-Šiḥāḥ* define *al-bī'ah* as a state or condition (*al-hāl*), whether positive or negative. Notably, *al-Wasīt* elaborates on *al-bī'ah* by categorizing it into three contexts: the natural environment (*bī'ah ṭabi'iyyah*), the social environment (*bī'ah ijtimā'iyyah*), and the political environment (*bī'ah siyāsiyyah*).⁴ These definitions collectively highlight the multidimensional scope of the environment within human life.

Although the specific term *al-bī'ah* does not appear in the Qur'an or Hadith,⁵ its derivatives, which imply "placing

³ Ibn Manzūr and Muḥammad Ibn Mukkaram Ibn 'Ali, *Lisān Al-'Arab* (Beirut: Dar al-Sadir, n.d.).

⁴ Abī Naṣr Ismā'īl bin Ḥamād Al-Jūhari, *Al-Šiḥāḥ*, vol. 1 (Kāherah: Dār al-Ḥadīth, 2009); Ibrāhīm Anīs et al., *Al-Mu'Jam Al-Wasīt*, 4th ed., vol. 1 (Majma' al-Lugho: Maktabah al-Shurūq al-Dauliyyah, 2004).

⁵ Mawil Izzi Dien, *The Environmental Dimensions of Islam* (Cambridge: The Lutterworth Press, 2000).

something in a specific location surrounded by particular circumstances or conditions,"⁶ are present in various Qur'anic verses. Examples include *Al-Hajj* (22:26), *Āli-Imrān* (3:121), *Yūnus* (10:87), and *Al-A'rāf* (7:74). The Qur'an's use of a rich lexicon for *al-bī'ah* underscores the divine intention to encourage humanity to explore its contexts and essence. Furthermore, the environmental elements in Islam align seamlessly with scientific perspectives, as illustrated by references to ecological and ecosystem interdependencies within the Qur'an. These include the reliance of humans and animals on water and vegetation (Qur'an, 79:30–33), the dependence of plants on rainwater (Qur'an, 16:10–11), the reliance of humans on animals (Qur'an, 16:5), and the significance of aquatic life for human sustenance (Qur'an, 16:14). These correlations underscore the Qur'an's holistic and comprehensive approach to understanding the environment.

Moreover, the natural environment is closely related to aspects of faith ('aqīdah), worship ('ibādah), morality (akhlāq), and prophetic traditions (sīrah). Regarding the aspect of faith, for instance, every Muslim must believe that Allah S.W.T is the Creator of all things. In the aspect of worship, there are specific prohibitions imposed by Allah S.W.T, such as the prohibition against hunting animals during the state of pilgrimage rites (*ihrām*) (Al-Qur'an, 5:95). As for morality, every Muslim is encouraged to exhibit environmentally friendly behavior, as every good deed is rewarded by Allah S.W.T (Al-Qur'an, 16:97). Lastly, the aspect of prophetic traditions highlights numerous accounts in the Qur'an involving prophets and their interactions with the environment, such as the story of Prophet Sulaiman, who was granted the ability to understand the language of birds (Al-Qur'an, 27:16). These prophetic narratives should serve as valuable lessons in fostering sustainable practices, as the prophets exemplified profound faith, exceptional morality, and unwavering devotion in their worship of Allah S.W.T. Environmental education, or *al-tarbiyah al-bī'iyyah* in Arabic, is a critical concept for addressing human interactions with environmental quality and challenges from psychological,

⁶ Rusdi, *Pemeliharaan Dan Pemuliharaan Alam Sekitar Menurut Perspektif Al-Qur'an*.

pedagogical, and sociological perspectives. The term has gained international recognition, with high-impact journals such as the *Journal of Environmental Education* and *Environmental Education Research* adopting it as their primary focus. These journals reflect the growing academic interest in exploring environmental education's theoretical and practical dimensions.

The evolution of environmental education as a global concept can be traced back to the International Workshop on Environmental Education (EE) held in Carson, Nevada, in 1970. This workshop marked the starting point for in-depth discussions on European environmental education, culminating in subsequent workshops and conferences. Notable examples include the Intergovernmental Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm, Sweden (1972); the Workshop on EE in Belgrade, Yugoslavia (1975); the Intergovernmental Conference on EE in Tbilisi, USSR (1977); and a related conference in Moscow (1982). These events contributed to the global dissemination and refinement of environmental education concepts. Among them, the Tbilisi Declaration (1977), building upon the Belgrade Charter (1975), provided a global framework for environmental education.⁷ This framework established five primary objectives: to foster awareness, knowledge, attitudes, skills, and active participation among individuals and social communities to ensure environmental sustainability.⁸ These objectives underline the global significance of environmental education and its adaptability to diverse national contexts.

Implementing environmental education, both formally and informally, within and beyond educational institutions, is essential for fostering critical thinking, identity development, and actionable responses to environmental issues. This integrative approach seeks to provide all citizens equitable access to

⁷ Kathleen Aikens, Marcia McKenzie, and Philip Vaughter, "Environmental and Sustainability Education Policy Research: A Systematic Review of Methodological and Thematic Trends," *Environmental Education Research* 22, no. 3 (April 2, 2016): 333–59, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13504622.2015.1135418>.

⁸ Günter Eulefeld, "The UNESCO-UNEP Programme in Environmental Education," *European Journal of Science Education* 1, no. 1 (1979): 113–18, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0140528790010114>.

environmental education, ensuring no gaps in its delivery. Initiatives such as the ASEAN Environmental Education Action Plan (AEEAP 2014–2018) emphasize this synergy by promoting collaboration among policymakers, private sectors, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and stakeholders.⁹ Similarly, Malaysia's National Environmental Policy (NEP, 2002) reflects this integrated approach to education and policy.

The relationship between environmental education and Sustainable Development (SD) further underscores its importance. Scholars have proposed various typologies to connect these domains, such as "Environmental Education and Sustainable Development",¹⁰ "Sustainability and Environmental Education",¹¹ and "Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)".¹² Among these, ESD has emerged as the most globally recognized framework due to its formal endorsement for advancing sustainable development. However, its prominence has sometimes created ambiguity regarding traditional environmental education concepts.¹³ Despite this, the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD 2005–2014) resolution emphasized using ESD to integrate human capital and economic, social, and

⁹ ASEAN Secretariat, *Asean Environmental Education Action Plan 2014–2018* (Jakarta: The ASEAN Secretariat, 2014).

¹⁰ Alexandar Ramadoss and Poyya Moli, "Biodiversity Conservation through Environmental Education for Sustainable Development- a Case Study from Puducherry, India," *International Electronic Journal of Environmental Education* 1, no. 2 (2011): 97–111, <http://dergipark.ulakbim.gov.tr/iejeegreen/article/view/1087000019/1087000014>.

¹¹ Johan Öhman, "New Ethical Challenges within Environmental and Sustainability Education," *Environmental Education Research* 22, no. 6 (2016): 765–70, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13504622.2016.1165800>.

¹² Derek Anderson, Holly Mathys, and Tanya Cook, "Religious Beliefs, Knowledge, and Teaching Actions: Elementary Teacher Candidates and World Religions," *Religion & Education* 42, no. 3 (September 2, 2015): 268–88, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15507394.2014.944063>.

¹³ Michele Biasutti, "An Intensive Programme on Education for Sustainable Development: The Participants' Experience," *Environmental Education Research* 21, no. 5 (2015): 734–52, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13504622.2014.921805>.

environmental sustainability across educational levels.¹⁴ As a result, environmental education and ESD function as complementary agents driving sustainable development.

Another critical aspect of environmental education is its connection to local wisdom. Community- or place-based environmental education often incorporates the sustainable environmental practices of local communities. For instance, indigenous communities practice sustainable foraging, such as sourcing food from forests without harming ecosystems. In Malaysia, the Curriculum Development Center emphasizes integrating local cultural elements familiar to students into environmental education. These cultural traditions, which promote environmental sustainability, exemplify local wisdom that should be incorporated into scientific learning to enhance the engagement level of ecological education and be relevant for students.

Furthermore, religious teachings, such as those in Islam, contribute to local wisdom by fostering a sense of stewardship among individuals as caretakers of the environment. This demonstrates that local wisdom in environmental education is not solely derived from inherited cultural traditions but also from religious principles that inspire community practices toward sustainable environmental practices. This cohesive approach ensures that environmental education addresses universal sustainability goals and localized cultural and religious contexts. As a result, it becomes a robust tool for fostering a deeper understanding of the interdependent relationship between humans and the environment while empowering individuals to contribute to its preservation actively.

The Eco-School Program

The term eco-school (ecology school) is employed in various forms, including green school, sustainable school, and sustainability school. The diversity of these terms reflects the

¹⁴ John Huckle and Arjen E. J. Wals, "The UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development: Business as Usual in the End," *Environmental Education Research* 21, no. 3 (2015): 491–505, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13504622.2015.1011084>.

dynamic and evolving body of knowledge in this field. Despite the terminological variations, they all share a common objective: to promote environmental values within the school context while aligning with the goals established by environmental education policies. Eco-schools are programs designed to directly influence the school community by fostering an appreciation for the environment and transforming these values into concrete practices. They are not merely labels for educational institutions promoting positive attitudes but are also mechanisms to enhance knowledge, awareness, and morally responsible environmental actions. If the program fails to address the psychological aspects of the school community —its knowledge, attitudes, and practices— its intended outcomes are unlikely to be achieved.

Eco-schools also offer students opportunities to actively engage with and address environmental issues both within and beyond the school environment.¹⁵ Such programs can nurture students' sense of care and responsibility for the environment through direct involvement and consistent participation alongside teachers and the local community. In this context, the local community includes school staff, authorities, NGOs, private sector entities, and other organizations.¹⁶ The National Association of Independent Schools,¹⁷ an eco-school should incorporate five key elements: efficient resource utilization, a healthy environment, an ecology-centered curriculum, nutritious food, and sustainable community practices. Similarly, the Foundation for Environmental Education,¹⁸ outlines 11 themes to guide schools in implementing the eco-school concept, including biodiversity and nature, global citizenship, health and well-being, climate change, waste

¹⁵ Christina Katsenou, "Exploring Pupil Participation within a Sustainable School," *Cambridge Journal of Education* 43, no. 2 (2013): 243–58, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0305764X.2013.774320>.

¹⁶ Seda Tönük and Kutlu Sevinç Kayihan, "A Study on Sustainable Use of School Sites at (Primary) Eco-Schools in Istanbul," *Journal of Environmental Planning and Management* 56, no. 7 (2013): 919–33, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09640568.2012.709179>.

¹⁷ National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS), "What Is Green School?," 2017, <https://www.nais.org/articles/pages/what-is-a-green-school/>.

¹⁸ Foundation for Environmental Education (FEE), "Eco-Schools."

reduction, marine and coastal environments, water, school grounds, transportation, and energy conservation. These elements and themes together highlight the comprehensive approach needed to fulfill eco-schools' objectives. However, for these goals to be successfully achieved, the implementation of eco-school programs must be aligned with local values, as each school exists within its own unique environmental and cultural context.

In Malaysia, the Sustainable School Environmental Award (SSEA) program was officially introduced in 2005 to promote environmental sustainability within schools. Managed by the Department of Environment (DOE), the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, the Ministry of Education Malaysia (MOE), and the Institute for Environment and Development (LESTARI) at the Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), SSEA oversees a variety of environmental initiatives, including environmental hero projects, Environmental Recreation Activities (PRIAS), and the Safety, Health, and Cleanliness program.¹⁹ SSEA represents a rebranding of previously implemented environmental activities, such as awareness campaigns and tree planting, which, while conducted in schools, were not formally recognized as major school programs until the establishment of SSEA in 2005. The participation categories in the SSEA program are limited to two school types: primary and secondary schools registered under the Ministry of Education Malaysia (MOE). The selection process involves two screening levels: at the state and national levels, using report evaluations and school monitoring methods.²⁰

Furthermore, starting from the 2013/2014 session, schools that meet the state-level criteria will be awarded bronze (certificate) and silver (certificate), while at the national level, only one school will receive the gold medal (the highest award), alongside other

¹⁹ Jabatan Alam Sekitar and Kementerian Sumber Asli dan Alam Sekitar and Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia and Institut Alam Sekitar dan Pembangunan Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, *Garis Panduan Pelaksanaan Dan Penilaian Sekolah Lestari-Anugerah Alam Sekitar (SLAAS)*, 3rd ed. (Selangor: Gempita Maju Sdn. Bhd, 2012).

²⁰ Jabatan Alam Sekitar and Kementerian Sumber Asli dan Alam Sekitar and Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia and Institut Alam Sekitar dan Pembangunan Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.

special certifications, including those for sustainable greening, co-curriculum, curriculum, planning and management, and schools with potential in sustainability. Four key components are also assessed in forming a sustainable school: greening, curriculum, co-curriculum, and planning and management. The greening component focuses on transforming the school environment by introducing flora and fauna, such as building gardens and ponds, while the planning and management component centers on documentation processes, including creating vision and mission statements, strategic action plans, budgeting, and reporting systems. The curriculum component involves integrating environmental education across various subjects and creating diverse activities related to environmental awareness. The co-curriculum emphasizes implementing awareness programs and activities involving school clubs, associations, and sports, incorporating sustainable practices.²¹ The synergy of these four components encompasses various dimensions, such as knowledge, awareness, attitudes, and active involvement, all of which aim to drive the objectives of education for sustainable development (ESD).

Table 2. Names of Eco-Schools among ASEAN Member States²²

ASEAN Member States	Names of Eco-Schools
Brunei Darussalam	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Green Schools Initiative • Eco-Clubs Initiatives
Cambodia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Sala Kuma Metrei</i> (Child-Friendly Schools)
Indonesia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eco-schools (Adiwiyata Program)
Lao PDR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Green, Clean, and Good Quality Schools
Malaysia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Sekolah Lestari-Anugerah Alam Sekitar</i> (Sustainable School Environment Award)
Myanmar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clean, green, and esteemed schools
Philippines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustainable and Eco-friendly Schools
Singapore	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • President Award for the Environment

²¹ Kamariah AK, "Awards and Sustainable School-Environmental Award 2009/2010," *ERA Hijau* 3 (2011): 17–19.

²² ASEAN Secretariat, *Asean Environmental Education Action Plan 2014-2018*, 7–10.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ministry of Education Centre of Excellence for Environmental Education • Ministry of Education Programme for School based Excellence and Niche Programme Status in Environment Education • EcoFriend Award • PUB Watermark Award
Thailand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eco-Schools
Vietnam	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Green, Clean, and Beautiful School

In addition to Malaysia, ASEAN member states, as stated above, have undertaken initiatives to establish eco-school programs specifically tailored to their respective contexts. Each member state has formulated its interpretation and focus on developing these programs. Eco-school programs in ASEAN have consistently functioned as platforms for environmental education. Consequently, in addition to establishing eco-school programs in each ASEAN member state, Indonesia has garnered international recognition for implementing the Eco-Pesantren program, attracting attention from faith and environment organizations and the World Bank. This program, grounded in Islamic teachings, seeks to educate the Muslim community about sustainability principles outlined in the Qur'an and Hadith, which are subsequently translated into environmentally sustainable practices.²³ The Eco-Pesantren program aligns closely with the objectives of eco-school programs. Its primary focus is on providing a spiritual foundation for students to understand the concept of sustainable environments, particularly through the lens of the human relationship with the Creator (God). Thus, the concept of Eco-Pesantren could be implemented and expanded in Malaysia to enhance the promotion of Islamic values alongside environmental consciousness within the community. One promising avenue for development is the Eco-Tahfiz concept.

²³ Fachruddin Majeri Mangunjaya, "Developing Environmental Awareness and Conservation through Islamic Teaching," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 22, no. 1 (2011): 36–49, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jis/etq067>.

Development of Eco-Tahfiz in Malaysia: Drivers

The Eco-Tahfiz Program represents a groundbreaking initiative that merges Qur'anic memorization with environmental sustainability, creating an innovative model for integrated education. This program aims to cultivate a generation of *huffāz* who are proficient in Qur'anic recitation and profoundly aware of their ecological responsibilities. By emphasizing Islamic principles such as stewardship (*khalifah*) and trusteeship (*amānah*) over the earth, the Eco-Tahfiz Program fosters a sense of environmental accountability in students. This section will further explore the drivers behind the development of the Eco-Tahfiz Program, including governmental and institutional support, which highlights the crucial role of policies and resources in facilitating the program's growth; integration of Islamic and environmental education, demonstrating how the blending of spiritual and ecological teachings strengthens the curriculum; cultural and religious influences, showcasing the resonance of environmental stewardship within Islamic values and Malaysian society; and frameworks and policies for Eco-Tahfiz development, which examine the structural approaches needed to ensure the program's sustainability.

Governmental and Institutional Support

The remarkable growth of tahfiz education in Malaysia is supported by robust governmental and institutional efforts. The Malaysian government has demonstrated unwavering commitment by establishing policies and structures to elevate tahfiz education nationwide. Agencies such as JAKIM (Department of Islamic Development Malaysia) and state-level organizations, including MAIN (State Islamic Religious Councils) and JAIN (State Islamic Religious Departments), play pivotal roles in managing and promoting tahfiz education. JAKIM's efforts to standardize curricula and provide comprehensive teacher training ensure that Tahfiz's education is aligned with national goals and priorities. At the state level, MAIN and JAIN focus on localized administration, overseeing the registration, monitoring, and governance of tahfiz institutions to address community-specific

needs. These structured collaborations have laid a strong foundation for integrating broader developmental concepts, such as sustainability, into tahfiz education frameworks.

A significant development within this framework is the emergence of Eco-Tahfiz, championed as a model for combining Qur'anic memorization and Islamic values with environmental stewardship. Supported by the government and institutional stakeholders, Eco-Tahfiz initiatives emphasize eco-friendly practices such as energy efficiency, water conservation, waste management, and renewable energy usage. These practices are embedded into the daily operations of tahfiz schools, fostering a holistic educational environment where students are nurtured to become *khalifah* (stewards) of the earth, as espoused in Islamic teachings. JAKIM's leadership in curriculum design ensures that these principles are seamlessly integrated into the tahfiz syllabus, positioning Eco-Tahfiz as a key driver for sustainable development within Islamic education.

The government's commitment to advancing tahfiz education, particularly through the Dasar Pendidikan Tahfiz Negara (National Tahfiz Education Policy), further supports the Eco-Tahfiz concept. This policy provides a comprehensive framework that aligns tahfiz education with national development agendas, emphasizing environmental sustainability as a core value. Initiatives under the policy, such as accreditation systems, standardized curricula, and career pathways for tahfiz graduates, reflect a holistic approach to development. By positioning Eco-Tahfiz as a central pillar, the policy ensures that students are spiritually informed and equipped with the knowledge and skills to contribute meaningfully to the nation's sustainable future. Through governmental and institutional support, tahfiz education in Malaysia continues to evolve, with Eco-Tahfiz serving as a transformative driver that aligns Islamic education with sustainability and environmental stewardship goals. This integration of traditional values with modern practices underscores Malaysia's forward-thinking approach to fostering a generation of leaders who embody spiritual, intellectual, and environmental excellence.

Integration of Islamic and Environmental Education

Integrating environmental education into the Malaysian Islamic education system is a key driver of the Eco-Tahfiz Program. The Education Act 1996 (Act 550) mandates Islamic Education as a core subject for Muslim students, creating opportunities to incorporate environmental principles within this framework. Additionally, environmental education is supported as a Cross-Curriculum Element (CCE), ensuring its values are embedded across various disciplines. This alignment provides a strong foundation for the Eco-Tahfiz Program to exemplify a holistic approach to education, combining spiritual guidance with ecological consciousness.

The Eco-Tahfiz Program serves as a second driver of sustainable education by integrating Islamic teachings with practical environmental knowledge. Students are taught the moral and spiritual importance of sustainability by studying Qur'anic verses and hadith that emphasize the protection of Allah's creation. This understanding is reinforced with lessons on contemporary environmental issues, such as deforestation, climate change, and pollution, providing a dual perspective that blends faith with science. By linking these aspects, the program nurtures students who view ecological preservation as essential to their faith and personal responsibility.

In addition to fostering awareness, the Eco-Tahfiz Program emphasizes experiential learning to strengthen Islamic and environmental education integration. Schools within the program adopt practices such as permaculture farming, rainwater harvesting, and creating green spaces as part of their daily operations. These initiatives allow students to engage with sustainable practices actively, transforming theoretical knowledge into actionable solutions. This hands-on approach ensures that students develop practical skills while fostering a lifelong commitment to environmental stewardship, deeply rooted in Islamic values.

By blending Islamic principles with real-world applications, the Eco-Tahfiz Program creates a transformative framework for addressing global environmental challenges. This integration

prepares students to respond to contemporary issues and instills in them the leadership qualities required to drive change within their communities. As the second driver of sustainable education, the Eco-Tahfiz Program demonstrates how the fusion of Islamic and environmental education can produce spiritually grounded individuals dedicated to building a sustainable future.

Cultural and Religious Influences

Eco-theology emphasizes the role of religion in shaping human interactions with the environment. Drawing from Qur'anic teachings and prophetic traditions, eco-theology highlights sustainability, conservation, and responsible use of resources as essential Islamic values. Prominent scholars have emphasized religion's ethical guidance in fostering environmental awareness and action.

Local wisdom also plays a critical role in enriching environmental education within the Eco-Tahfiz Program. Cultural traditions rooted in sustainable practices complement Islamic teachings, offering a holistic perspective on ecological responsibility. By integrating these elements, the program fosters a connection between students and their communities, promoting spiritually and environmentally meaningful practices.

Development of Eco-Tahfiz in Malaysia: Barriers

Environmental education is essential for cultivating awareness, attitudes, and behaviors that support sustainable development. In Malaysia, integrating environmental principles into educational frameworks has garnered significant attention. However, multiple challenges hinder the effective implementation of these initiatives, particularly in aligning environmental education with religious, social, and institutional priorities. This section examines the barriers to establishing an Eco-Tahfiz model in Malaysia. It critically evaluates the inconclusive approaches to environmental education in schools, the integration challenges between environmental education and Islamic education, the limitations inherent in existing sustainability programs, and the need for enhanced practicality and contemporary relevance in the development of *Fiqh al-Bī'ah* (Islamic environmental

jurisprudence). These barriers underscore the necessity of adopting a comprehensive and holistic framework that integrates spiritual and practical dimensions to address the multifaceted challenges of sustainability.

Environmental and Islamic Education in Malaysia: A Gap Yet to be Bridged

Integrating environmental education into Islamic education has been proposed as a promising approach in schools. This integration is logical because principles, values, and behaviors associated with environmental responsibility align closely with the foundational aspects of Islamic education, including belief ('aqīdah), worship ('ibādah), and morals (akhlāq).²⁴ Western scholars advocate for including spiritual values in environmental education to enhance its impact.²⁵ Empirical evidence further supports this, showing that the spiritual aspect positively influences environmental education outcomes.²⁶

A study by Hazura²⁷ involving 425 Muslim students in Kedah and Penang revealed a significant relationship between students' religious appreciation and their pro-environmental attitudes and behaviors. Religious appreciation emerged as the most influential factor shaping students' behaviors toward environmental conservation. Islamic education teachers (GPI) are pivotal in integrating environmental values into their teaching. However, Salbiah et al.²⁸ identified areas where some GPI respondents faced

²⁴ Ghazali Basri, *Pendidikan Islam: Huraian Konsep Dan Aplikasi* (Institut Darul Ehsan (IDE) Research Centre Sdn. Bhd, 2017).

²⁵ Almut Beringer, "Reclaiming a Sacred Cosmology: Seyyed Hossein Nasr, the Perennial Philosophy, and Sustainability Education," *Canadian Journal of Environmental Education* 11, no. 1 (2006): 26–42.

²⁶ Tiwi Kamidin et al., "Unsur Ekopsikologi Dalam Pendidikan Alam Sekitar Bagi Meningkatkan Amalan Gaya Hidup Mesra Alam," in *Prosiding Persidangan Kebangsaan Pembangunan Dan Pendidikan Lestari* (Institut Pendidikan Guru Kampus Tuanku Bainun, Bukit Mertajam Pulau Pinang, 2012).

²⁷ Hazura Ab Bakar, "Hubungan Antara Penghayatan Agama, Nilai Hidup Dan Pengetahuan Alam Sekitar Pelajar Muslim Dengan Sikap Dan Tingkah Laku" (PhD Thesis, Universiti Sains Malaysia, 2009).

²⁸ Salbiah Mohamed Salleh @ Salleh, "Pembinaan Konstruk Instrumen Penilaian Kendiri Akhlak Guru Pendidikan Islam Menurut Pandangan Pakar,"

challenges, such as engaging in environmental activities like litter collection and equipment repair. This divergence between teachers' environmental attitudes and their teaching responsibilities may hinder the effective integration of environmental education into Islamic education. Addressing this gap is crucial, as GPI strongly influences the development of students' moral values toward the environment.²⁹

Eco-School Program Lacks Integration of Intrinsic Values

The Sustainable Schools-Environmental Awards Program (SLAAS), launched in 2005, is a collaborative initiative involving the Department of Environment (DOE), the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, the Ministry of Education Malaysia (KPM), and the Institute of Environment and Development (LESTARI). The program includes the Nature Hero Project, the Environmental Leisure Project (PRIAS), and the 3K (Safety, Health, and Happiness) program.³⁰

The sustainable schools initiative comprises four key components: greening, curriculum, co-curriculum, and planning and management. Greening focuses on transforming school grounds with flora and fauna while planning emphasizes developing action plans, budgets, and documentation systems. The curriculum integrates environmental education into teaching activities, and the co-curriculum promotes awareness through clubs and extracurricular activities.³¹ However, the program's emphasis on external and instrumental values often sidelines intrinsic and spiritual dimensions, which are critical for long-term sustainability.

UMRAN-International Journal of Islamic and Civilizational Studies 5, no. 3 (2018): 1–11, <https://doi.org/10.11113/umran2018.5n2.186>.

²⁹ Mohd Kassim Tusin, "Kualiti Guru Pendidikan Islam Sekolah Menengah Di Sabah" (PhD Thesis, Universiti Malaysia Sabah, 2010).

³⁰ Jabatan Alam Sekitar and Kementerian Sumber Asli dan Alam Sekitar and Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia and Institut Alam Sekitar dan Pembangunan Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, *Garis Panduan Pelaksanaan*.

³¹ AK, "Awards and Sustainable School-Environmental Award 2009/2010."

The Development of Fiqh al-Bī'ah in Malaysia Requires Greater Practicality and Contemporary Relevance

Efforts to develop *Fiqh al-Bī'ah* (Islamic environmental jurisprudence) have garnered significant attention from local and international scholars. Yusuf al-Qarādāwī³² outlined eight principles of environmental care derived from the Qur'an and Hadith, including greening the earth (*takhdīr*), planting (*tashīr*), improving the environment, maintaining cleanliness (*taṭhīr*), conserving natural resources, demonstrating kindness (*iḥsān*) toward the environment, protecting against harm (*fasād*), and maintaining ecosystem balance (*tawāzun*).

Despite these foundational principles, discussions on *Fiqh al-Bī'ah* often remain theoretical and insufficiently address contemporary environmental challenges. A more pragmatic and targeted framework is required, focusing on climate change and flood management. Incorporating climate change jurisprudence into *Fiqh al-Bī'ah* aligns with global priorities, including SDG 13 (Climate Action), and supports Malaysia's goal of achieving carbon neutrality by 2050. Embedding such frameworks into educational curricula can enhance their relevance and applicability, bridging the gap between Islamic environmental principles and modern sustainability challenges. By addressing pressing global issues like global warming and carbon emissions, *Fiqh al-Bī'ah* has the potential to inform national policies and inspire individual action.

Development of Eco-Tahfiz in Malaysia: Recommendations

Developing the Eco-Tahfiz program in Malaysia is crucial in integrating environmental stewardship into Islamic education. By adopting sustainability principles within tahfiz institutions, this program nurtures students' spiritual growth and cultivates their responsibility toward environmental conservation. However, the effective implementation of Eco-Tahfiz requires collaborative efforts among educational authorities, administrators, teachers, parents, and the broader community. This section provides recommendations focusing on centralized programs,

³² al-Qarādāwī, *Ri'āyah Al-Bī'ah Fi Syarī'ah Al-Islām*.

administrative leadership, teacher training, community involvement, and formulating actionable plans to ensure the program's long-term success.

Collaboration for Enhancing Environmental Education in Tahfiz Schools

The Sustainable Schools-Environmental Awards Program has been implemented since 2005 across Malaysian schools. However, tahfiz educational institutions have not yet fully engaged with this initiative at the national level. To address this, JAKIM and MAIN/JAIN should collaborate to organize similar programs tailored to tahfiz schools, fostering greater environmental awareness among their students. A comprehensive understanding of environmental sustainability, resource management, and its positive implications for daily life must be instilled in students.³³ Transforming culture and practices in these institutions requires patience and commitment from all stakeholders involved.

Despite these efforts, challenges remain due to limited resources and inadequate facilities, which hinder the prioritization of environmental preservation in tahfiz schools.³⁴ Additional investment in environmentally friendly infrastructure is crucial for these institutions to support and sustain conservation efforts. By addressing resource gaps, tahfiz schools can align themselves with national environmental agendas, creating a more holistic approach to sustainability in Islamic education.

School Principals' Acceptance of the Eco-Tahfiz Program

The school administration is fundamental to ensuring the success and continuity of any educational agenda. Research by

³³ Mohd Syahidan Zainal Abidin, Mahani Mokhtar, and Mahyuddin Arsat, "Education for Sustainable Development from the Lenses of Malaysian School Leaders: A Preliminary Study," *Asian Education and Development Studies* 12, no. 2/3 (2023): 150–65, <https://doi.org/10.1108/AEDS-01-2023-0011>.

³⁴ Arita Hanim Awang, "Physical Learning Ecosystem and Built Environment of Tahfiz Institutions in Malaysia: A Systematic Review," *Journal of Architecture, Planning and Construction Management* 9, no. 2 (December 27, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.31436/japcm.v9i2.354>.

Yusak and Jumahat³⁵ highlights the pivotal role of principals in implementing school programs. In the context of Eco-Tahfiz, the principal's acceptance and active involvement are essential for guiding teachers and students toward achieving program objectives. A principal who understands and aligns the Eco-Tahfiz vision with the school's mission can effectively communicate these goals to all stakeholders, fostering a shared commitment to environmental sustainability.³⁶

Furthermore, setting Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) related to environmental preservation can inspire students and teachers to participate actively in sustainability initiatives. The principal's commitment to environmental conservation is a powerful example for the entire school community. A principal who embodies such values fosters a culture of environmental consciousness, motivating students to adopt sustainable practices and strengthening the overall impact of the Eco-Tahfiz program.³⁷

Comprehensive Teacher Training

Teachers are the primary implementers of educational programs, and their preparation is critical for the success of the Eco-Tahfiz agenda. Equipping teachers with the necessary knowledge, skills, and resources ensures they can effectively deliver program objectives.³⁸ Training programs organized by

³⁵ Shamsul Mohamed Yusak, Tajulashikin Jumahat, and Norwaliza Abd Wahab, "Amalan Kepimpinan Moral Dan Kecerdasan Spiritual Pemimpin Sekolah Terhadap Iklim Sekolah Berkesan: Satu Kerangka Konseptual," in *Seminar Nasional Pengurusan Dan Kepimpinan Pendidikan Ke-28*, 2021.

³⁶ Salwati Su@Hassan, Mohd Rafi Yaacob, and Norhisham Mohd Kasim, "Kepimpinan Keusahawanan Pengetua: Kajian Kes Koperasi Cemerlang Sekolah Negeri Selangor," *ICELAM* 3, no. 2–13 (2023), <https://myjms.mohe.gov.my/index.php/icelam/article/view/24350>.

³⁷ Claudia Nannu Beruin and Norazah Mohd Nordin, "Kepimpinan Transformasi Pengetua Dan Hubungannya Dengan Komitmen Guru Sekolah Menengah," *Malaysian Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities (MJSSH)* 8, no. 4 (2023): 1–17, <https://doi.org/10.47405/mjssh.v8i4.2272>.

³⁸ Syed Lamsah Syed Chear and Melor Md Yunus, "Strategi Penerapan Kemahiran Abad Ke-21 Dalam Latihan Guru Prasekolah," *Southeast Asia Early Childhood Journal (SAECJ)* 8, no. 1 (2019): 1–10, <https://doi.org/10.37134/saecj.vol8.no1.1.2019>.

JAKIM and JAIN/MAIN can give teachers a deeper understanding of Eco-Tahfiz, enabling them to integrate its principles into classroom activities. Such initiatives also create platforms for knowledge exchange among tahfiz institutions, fostering a collaborative approach to sustainability education.³⁹

The rapid adoption of advanced technologies in post-COVID-19 education has posed challenges for many educators, particularly in tahfiz schools. Comprehensive training can help teachers develop sustainable strategies for integrating Eco-Tahfiz principles into their teaching practices. Additionally, it prepares new teachers to navigate the unique demands of this program, ensuring its long-term viability and relevance.⁴⁰

Community Support

The involvement of the Parents and Teachers Association is vital for the sustainability of the Eco-Tahfiz program. While schools play a central role in implementation, parents and the surrounding community significantly influence students' ability to sustain environmental preservation efforts at home.⁴¹ One of Eco-Tahfiz's key objectives is to nurture a sense of environmental responsibility in each student. The Parents and Teachers Association (PTA) can further support this goal by providing funding and resources for program activities and materials.⁴²

Community support extends beyond financial contributions. Active participation from parents and local organizations reinforces the importance of environmental sustainability among

³⁹ Chelva Letchmanan and Aslina Saad, "Keberkesanan Bengkel Dalam Meningkatkan Kemahiran Teknologi Maklumat Dan Motivasi Guru Terhadap Proses Penilaian Dalam Talian," *Muallim Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities* 5, no. 2 (2021): 137–49, <https://doi.org/10.33306/mjssh/127>.

⁴⁰ Nurulhuda Md Hassan et al., "Perspektif Guru Terhadap Kemahiran Berfikir Aras Tinggi Dalam Kalangan Pelajar," *Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* 3, no. 2 (2021): 50–56, <https://doi.org/10.36079/lamintang.jhass-0302.237>.

⁴¹ Ni Kadek Santya Pratiwi, "Pentingnya Peran Orang Tua Dalam Pendidikan Karakter Anak Usia Sekolah Dasar," *ADI WIDYA: Jurnal Pendidikan Dasar* 3, no. 1 (2018): 83–91, <https://doi.org/10.25078/aw.v3i1.908>.

⁴² Zaidi Tajuddin et al., "Penentu Sosial Penglibatan Komuniti Dalam Projek Kebun Komuniti Bandar," *SARJANA* 34, no. 1 (2019): 56–68, <https://ejournal.um.edu.my/index.php/SARJANA/article/view/19542>.

students. Collaboration between schools and communities ensures that Eco-Tahfiz principles are consistently practiced within and beyond the classroom. This collective effort strengthens the program's impact and promotes a culture of environmental stewardship at the grassroots level.

Formation of the Eco-Tahfiz Development Action Plan

The Eco-Tahfiz development action plan represents a structured approach to implementing sustainable practices in tahfiz schools. Insights from activities conducted at one of the schools in Malaysia, such as Smart Farming, Vertical Gardening, and Hydroponic Planting, demonstrate the program's potential to inspire broader adoption across the country. These activities, combined with intellectual engagements like the Eko-Islam forum and *Laskar Alam* book studies, align closely with the principles of Islamic ecology, emphasizing the interconnectedness of faith and environmental stewardship.

Further research and feedback are essential for the Eco-Tahfiz initiative to achieve its full potential. While initial findings underscore the program's feasibility and relevance, an in-depth examination of its sustainability and scalability is needed. By addressing these aspects, the Eco-Tahfiz agenda can evolve from its early stages into a nationwide movement, fostering a culture of environmental responsibility among future generations.

The Way Forward: Formulating Thrusts and Strategies of Eco-Tahfiz Action Plan

Developing the Eco-Tahfiz action plan is an essential step to fully realize the Eco-Tahfiz agenda. Although the project is still in its early phase, its effectiveness has already been demonstrated through alignment with Eco-Tahfiz's mission and vision. One of the primary objectives of this agenda is to instill a spirit of sustainability within individuals, manifesting through their actions and efforts to preserve the environment. This section outlines the foundational thrusts and strategies for successfully formulating and implementing the Eco-Tahfiz action plan.

Thrust 1: Principle of Tawhid

The foundation of Islam is *tawhid* (unity), which serves as the cardinal principle of the Islamic faith and governs all aspects of life, including environmental ethics. *Tawhid* signifies that the entire universe is created, sustained, and controlled by One Supreme Being, shaping the relationship between God, humans, and nature. Within this framework, Muslims are duty-bound to maintain harmony with the ecosystem, and in doing so, they glorify God. Every ecosystem component has an assigned role; its loss or extinction results in ecological crises. Awareness of God's knowledge of both visible and hidden actions motivates Muslims to avoid irresponsible behavior, such as the overconsumption of natural resources. Thus, *tawhid* provides the ideological foundation for a balanced and sustainable approach to environmental conservation.

Thrust 2: Principle of Stewardship and Trusteeship

The Qur'anic concept of stewardship, or *khalifah*, positions humans as vicegerents on earth, tasked with building and preserving civilization while glorifying nature. As stewards, humans must balance their freedom with ethical responsibilities, as breaching these boundaries through greed or overconsumption harms nature and humanity. The practice of gratitude (*syukur*) can counteract greed, fostering an appreciation for the earth's resources as divine blessings. As trustees of the environment, humans are reminded of their accountability to God and nature, emphasizing that their actions must reflect gratitude and restraint to maintain ecological balance.

Thrust 3: Principle of Fiqh al-Bi'ah

The principles of *Fiqh al-Bi'ah* (Islamic environmental jurisprudence), as outlined by Yusuf al-Qaradhawi,⁴³ emphasize the preservation of nature as a core component of Islamic ethics. Schools can implement this principle through Eco-Tahfiz activities such as planting, greening, and environmental care, which not only improve living standards but also align with the program's

⁴³ al-Qaradhawī, *Ri'āyah Al-Bi'ah Fi Syarī'ah Al-Islām*.

goals. The concept of purification (*taharah*), central to Islamic teachings, governs efforts to combat land, air, and water pollution. The Qur'an and Hadith provide clear directives for cleanliness and environmental care, such as avoiding water pollution and proper waste disposal. When applied in contemporary contexts, these principles guide efforts to address modern environmental challenges such as chemical pollution.

Thrust 4: Principle of Akhlaq

The moral foundation of environmental ethics in Islam highlights the importance of using natural resources responsibly and avoiding exploitation, materialism, and greed. The teachings of Prophet Muhammad, such as prohibiting the unnecessary destruction of trees and crops during war, underscore the ethical use of resources. Islamic values such as *qana'ah* (contentment), *syukur* (gratitude), and *tu'awun* (cooperation) encourage sustainable practices, while the principle of *ihsan* (compassion) instills mindfulness in human actions. These values counteract harmful attitudes like greed (*takathur*), which leads to resource exploitation and environmental degradation, reinforcing a sustainable and ethical environmental approach.

Strategy 1: Integrated and Cross-Curriculum Approach

An integrated cross-curriculum approach adds value by incorporating sustainability elements into the learning process. This strategy aims to produce students capable of sustainable thinking and equipped to face global challenges. Through project-based learning and collaborative activities, students develop a holistic understanding of environmental issues and their interconnectedness with various aspects of life. Assessment of sustainability education should be holistic, emphasizing values, ethics, and responsibility. This approach nurtures students' attitudes toward environmental stewardship, embedding sustainability within their learning journey and fostering a more profound commitment to ecological preservation.

Strategy 2: Extracurricular Program

Extracurricular activities complement classroom learning by providing opportunities for students to practice environmental conservation. These activities balance academic growth with personality development, fostering students' talents, responsibility, and love for the environment. The Eco-Tahfiz program adapts elements of the Sustainable School Program with added Islamic principles, emphasizing nature conservation as taught by the Prophet. Competitions and eco-curriculum projects can motivate students to develop skills and creativity in environmental preservation, instilling a sustainable identity that aligns with Islamic teachings. By combining moral values, integrated learning, and community engagement, the Eco-Tahfiz action plan provides a comprehensive framework for nurturing environmentally responsible individuals who embody the principles of Islamic ecology.

Conclusion

The Eco-Tahfiz program represents a groundbreaking initiative integrating religious education with environmental stewardship. It offers students a unique opportunity to deepen their understanding of Islamic teachings while fostering a profound sense of environmental responsibility. This dual approach not only supports students' moral and spiritual growth but also aligns with global educational trends that emphasize sustainability, ethical values, and social responsibility. Through Qur'an memorization and religious instruction, students develop a strong ethical foundation for cultivating well-rounded, socially responsible individuals.

On a global scale, educational systems increasingly recognize the importance of sustainability and environmental education. Eco-Tahfiz contributes to this movement by teaching students to appreciate and protect the environment, fostering a spiritually conscious and environmentally responsible generation. This approach resonates with international educational frameworks, such as the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which advocate for quality education that nurtures

individuals capable of making positive contributions to society and the planet.

However, while Eco-Tahfiz's theoretical framework and aspirations are well articulated, the absence of clearly defined and concrete sustainability practices in many implementations remains a critical gap. Without concrete actions like incorporating eco-friendly infrastructure, adopting sustainable daily practices, and promoting student-led environmental initiatives, the program risks remaining theoretical rather than transformative.

To strengthen its impact and long-term viability, it is essential to move beyond theorization and embed measurable sustainability elements into the program's core activities. Furthermore, ongoing evaluations and monitoring are necessary to ensure alignment with Islamic values and global sustainability standards. Future research should also prioritize fieldwork-based studies to provide in-depth, contextual insights into the practical outcomes of Eco-Tahfiz across diverse educational and cultural settings.

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