

# Faith-Driven Pedagogy for Sustainable Futures: Integrating Spiritual Values into Transformative Education Models

Ratna Utami Nur Ajizah<sup>1</sup>, Wardatul Ummah<sup>2</sup>, Irfan Jauhari<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Institut Agama Islam Riyadlotul Mujahidin Ngabar Ponorogo, Jl. Sunan Kalijaga Ngabar Siman Ponorogo 63471, Jawa Timur, Indonesia Fax (0352) 3140309., <sup>2</sup>Doctoral Program in Islamic Studies, Postgraduate UIN Ponorogo Jl. Pramuka No.156 Ronowijayan, Siman, Ponorogo, Jawa Timur 63471, Indonesia., <sup>3</sup>MTsN 1 Ponorogo Kec. Jetis, Kab. Ponorogo, Jawa Timur 63473, Indonesia.

Corresponding author

[ratnautaminurajizah@gmail.com](mailto:ratnautaminurajizah@gmail.com), [wardatulummah83@gmail.com](mailto:wardatulummah83@gmail.com), [irfanjauhari.mjp@gmail.com](mailto:irfanjauhari.mjp@gmail.com)

**Abstract:** This qualitative study explores how faith-based values can be integrated into transformative education models to cultivate sustainable mindsets and ethical leadership. The research seeks to understand educators' and students' experiences in applying spiritual principles such as compassion, justice, and stewardship within teaching and learning contexts. Using a phenomenological approach, data were collected through semi-structured interviews and classroom observations in faith-oriented educational institutions. Thematic analysis was employed to identify recurring patterns and meanings associated with the integration of faith and sustainability in pedagogy. Findings reveal that faith-driven pedagogy nurtures holistic education, strengthens ethical awareness, and promotes oriented behavior. This study contributes to the field of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) by offering an empirically grounded framework that highlights the transformative role of spirituality in building equitable and sustainable futures.

**Keywords:** Ethical leadership, faith-based education, phenomenology, spirituality, sustainable development.

## Introduction

Modern education faces increasingly complex challenges in shaping a generation that is not only intellectually capable but also ethically grounded and environmentally responsible. The moral crisis, social inequality, and global ecological degradation of recent decades reveal the limitations of conventional education models that prioritize cognitive and competitive aspects while neglecting the spiritual and moral dimensions of human development (Lange, 2023). Within this multidimensional crisis, there is an urgent need to establish a more holistic educational paradigm—one that integrates knowledge, values, and action within the framework of sustainable living.

One promising approach in addressing these challenges is transformative education. Through critical reflection and meaningful learning experiences, transformative education seeks to reshape learners' consciousness, fostering greater

sensitivity to humanity, justice, and moral responsibility (Clugston & Corcoran, 2023). However, many transformative education models remain focused primarily on rational and psychological aspects, often overlooking the integration of spiritual values that serve as the foundation of ethical life—particularly within faith-based educational contexts.

Spiritual values such as compassion, justice, honesty, and stewardship are not merely theological ideals; they have direct implications for character formation and sustainable behavior. Within faith-based education, these values function both as sources of inspiration and as guiding principles for cultivating ecological and social awareness (Amrullah et al., 2025; Basri et al., 2024; Marshall, 2025). The integration of spirituality into sustainable education adds deeper meaning that transcends academic achievement, connecting learning with broader moral and humanitarian dimensions. Consequently, education does not only

produce knowledgeable individuals but also ethical citizens who care about the sustainability of life and the welfare of others.

Although the conceptual relationship between spirituality and sustainability has been widely discussed, empirical research exploring how faith-based values are practiced within sustainable education remains limited. Most existing studies have concentrated on curriculum design or educational policy, while the lived experiences of teachers and students in applying spiritual principles within transformative learning contexts are rarely examined (Riskawati et al., 2025; Usman et al., 2025). Understanding these subjective experiences is essential for uncovering the deeper meanings embedded in faith-driven learning processes that nurture ethical awareness and ecological consciousness. Such insights can illuminate how spirituality operates as a transformative force in shaping sustainable mindsets and moral character.

Moreover, the growing global emphasis on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) underscores the need for approaches that are not only rational and outcome-oriented but also ethical and spiritual. Integrating faith-based values within ESD provides opportunities to develop educational models that emphasize spiritual consciousness and character formation rather than mere academic success (Aschenbrenner, 2023). This integration strengthens learners' commitment to social justice, ecological responsibility, and intergenerational solidarity three essential pillars for building a sustainable and humane future.

In light of this context, the present study aims to explore how faith-based values can be integrated into transformative education models to foster sustainable mindsets and ethical leadership. The focus is on the lived experiences of educators and students as they apply spiritual principles such as compassion, justice, and stewardship within teaching and learning processes. Using a phenomenological approach, this research seeks to reveal the meanings, patterns, and practices through which spirituality functions as a transformative power in constructing equitable, ethical, and sustainable educational futures. By understanding how spirituality shapes human

consciousness and behavior in educational settings, this study aspires to contribute to the development of transformative pedagogies that promote not only intellectual growth but also moral and ecological awareness

## Materials and Methods

### Study area

This study was conducted in three faith-oriented educational institutions located in Ponorogo, Indonesia—two *Madrasah Tsanawiyah* (Islamic junior high schools) and one general Junior High School (*Sekolah Menengah Pertama*). These institutions were selected purposively because they explicitly integrate religious and moral values into their curricula and teaching practices, while also being actively involved in programs for character formation and environmental sustainability. Each institution represents diverse socio-religious contexts, encompassing both Islamic traditions and general education frameworks grounded in moral and spiritual values. This educational context provided a natural setting to explore how spiritual principles are applied within teaching practices, learning processes, and school culture to promote sustainable awareness and ethical leadership among educators and students.

### Procedures

#### *Research Design*

This research employed a qualitative approach (Ceswell, 1991; Sugiyono, 2013) using a phenomenological design to explore the lived experiences of educators and students in integrating faith-based values into transformative educational practices. The phenomenological method was chosen for its strength in capturing subjective meanings and personal reflections derived from spiritual experiences in the teaching and learning process.

#### *Participants*

Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure representation of rich and relevant experiences. A total of 18 participants were involved, consisting of 9 educators and 9 students from the selected institutions. Inclusion criteria

required participants to: (1) be actively engaged in learning activities that incorporate moral, spiritual, and sustainability-oriented values; and (2) have a minimum of one year of experience within their respective institutions. Ethical clearance for this study was granted by the university's ethics committee, and all participants provided written informed consent prior to data collection.

#### *Data Collection*

Data were collected over a period of four months through semi-structured interviews (DiCicco-Bloom et al., 2006) and classroom observations (Spradley, 1980).

- **Interviews:** Conducted face-to-face, each session lasted approximately 45–60 minutes. The interviews explored participants' perspectives, experiences, and reflections on the integration of faith values, moral responsibility, and sustainability awareness in the teaching-learning process.
- **Observations:** Conducted during classroom sessions and school-based activities such as *morning devotion*, religious study sessions (*kajian keagamaan*), and environmental stewardship programs. Field notes were taken to document pedagogical interactions and contextual indicators, serving as supporting data for triangulation with interview findings.

#### *Credibility and Ethical Considerations*

To ensure data credibility, triangulation of sources and methods was applied by comparing interview transcripts, observation records, and institutional documentation. Member checking was performed with selected participants to validate interpretations, while researcher reflexivity was maintained through journaling to minimize interpretive bias. All data were securely stored, and participants' identities were anonymized to protect confidentiality.

#### **Data analysis**

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis (Fathan et al., 2025), following the six-phase framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (1) familiarization with the data, (2) generation of initial codes, (3)

searching for themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the final report (Braun & Victoria Clarke, 2022). All interview transcripts and observation notes were systematically coded using NVivo 12 software.

Emerging themes were categorized into three major dimensions: spiritual values in pedagogy, ethical awareness and moral leadership, and sustainability consciousness in learning. The themes were interpreted within the theoretical framework of transformative education and faith-based pedagogy.

This analytical process revealed meaningful patterns that illustrate how faith-driven pedagogy functions as a transformative force in cultivating sustainable awareness and ethical leadership within junior-level educational institutions in Ponorogo.

## **Results and Discussion**

### **Spiritual Values as the Core of Pedagogical Practice**

The findings reveal that faith-driven pedagogy in Ponorogo's faith-based educational institutions is deeply rooted in the lived expression of spiritual values such as compassion (*rahmah*), justice (*'adl*), and stewardship (*amanah*) (Khotimah et al., 2024; Marshman et al., 2024; Sen, 2009). These principles are not treated as abstract moral teachings but as practical, lived realities that shape the ethos of both the classroom and the broader institutional culture. Educators internalize and model these values through their daily interactions, teaching methods, and approaches to discipline (Pallathadka et al., 2023). Rather than viewing spirituality as a separate subject (Rim et al., 2019), they embed it in all aspects of learning from the tone of communication to the structure of classroom dialogue.

Typically, lessons begin with short prayers, reflective discussions, or moral narratives that connect academic material to ethical and ecological consciousness. For instance, teachers often introduce science or geography lessons with scriptural reflections on the harmony of creation, encouraging students to see knowledge as part of a divine trust. Through this pattern, learning is reframed not as the pursuit of grades or status but

as an act of worship, gratitude, and responsibility toward creation. Students consistently emphasized that such an approach allows them to perceive education as both an intellectual and spiritual journey. One student shared, "Studying science feels like discovering God's creation it makes me grateful and more careful with nature." This expression captures a key transformative moment where spiritual awareness and cognitive understanding intersect, transforming learning from a mechanical task into a form of spiritual engagement. These experiences reveal that when spirituality is embedded in pedagogy, it deepens students' intrinsic motivation and emotional connection to learning, producing outcomes that go beyond academic performance.

Moreover, the findings show that educators view spirituality as the foundation of moral formation rather than an additional moral component. They intentionally cultivate a classroom environment grounded in humility, honesty, empathy, and mutual respect. This moral ecology reflects the broader values of their faith communities, where education is seen as a means of nurturing not only the mind but also the soul. Through this environment, students learn that ethical behavior is not imposed by authority but emerges from inner awareness and collective responsibility.

The study also observed that educators employ dialogic and participatory pedagogies that invite students to reflect on real-life moral dilemmas and relate them to both scientific reasoning and scriptural understanding. In one observed session, students analyzed an environmental issue plastic waste pollution by integrating Quranic principles of stewardship with ecological data. The discussion led to the conclusion that caring for the Earth was both an act of intellect and an act of worship. Such exercises illustrate that faith-based pedagogy does not suppress critical thinking; instead, it expands it by integrating moral, spiritual, and analytical reasoning. Students are encouraged to think ethically rather than merely recall doctrinal statements, which cultivates moral agency and reflective judgment.

This dialogic method also aligns with the principles of transformative learning theory, particularly Mezirow's notion of critical reflection

(Jack Mezirow, 1991; Mezirow, 1990). However, the context here adds a spiritual dimension: reflection is not only intellectual but also devotional. Students are invited to interpret their experiences through faith-based meaning-making processes, leading to deeper transformation in worldview and behavior. In this way, spirituality acts as a catalyst for critical consciousness, linking personal faith to social and environmental ethics.

Another significant finding concerns the emotional and relational atmosphere within these classrooms. The consistent use of spiritual language such as blessings, gratitude expressions, and invocations creates an emotionally safe and inclusive learning environment. Students reported feeling "valued," "respected," and "connected," both to their teachers and peers. This sense of belonging enhances socio-emotional well-being and fosters positive academic engagement. Research participants indicated that when teachers express care and compassion as extensions of their faith, students feel more motivated to reciprocate with respect, discipline, and diligence.

From a psychological perspective, this environment contributes to what scholars term spiritual well-being (Hartman, 2019; Mazumdar & Mazumdar, 2025), which encompasses inner peace, purpose, and a sense of connectedness with others and the environment. Within this context, spirituality becomes a unifying force that integrates emotional, ethical, and intellectual dimensions of learning (Bunthawee, 2024). It nurtures what respondents frequently described as "meaningful learning" a process through which knowledge gains relevance because it is grounded in moral purpose and spiritual awareness.

The findings also underscore how institutional culture reinforces this pedagogical orientation. School activities such as environmental clean-ups, charity drives, and community outreach are designed as extensions of spiritual practice. Teachers emphasize that sustainability is not only a global agenda but also a religious obligation rooted in stewardship (*amanah*) and gratitude for divine creation. This institutional alignment ensures that sustainability is internalized as part of students' faith identity, not just as a curricular theme. Thus, faith and sustainability merge into a single moral

framework, guiding both thought and action. Further analysis indicates that the integration of spirituality and pedagogy promotes long-term ethical development. Students who experience faith-based learning report a heightened sense of accountability not only to their teachers or institutions but also to God and the community. This transcendent accountability fosters consistent moral behavior even outside formal learning settings. For example, some students mentioned adopting environmentally friendly habits at home, inspired by school discussions on stewardship and compassion. Such continuity between belief and behavior represents the ultimate aim of transformative faith-based education: turning values into lived commitments.

Additionally, the study highlights the role of teachers as moral exemplars. Their authenticity and consistency in embodying spiritual values enhance credibility and trust. Students observe how teachers resolve conflicts, show patience, or admit mistakes, interpreting these acts as moral lessons in themselves. This modeling of virtue creates an implicit curriculum where ethical behavior is learned through observation and relational experience rather than instruction alone. In sum, the results illustrate that spirituality functions as the nucleus of pedagogical design in these institutions. It permeates classroom interactions, learning content, and institutional ethos, transforming faith from belief into pedagogical practice. This approach nurtures not only intellectual competence but also moral clarity, emotional intelligence, and ecological awareness. It aligns with global calls for Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) by integrating faith-based ethics into sustainability education bridging the gap between knowledge and virtue.

Thus, in the context of Ponorogo's faith-based institutions, spirituality emerges as both foundation and framework for transformative education. It harmonizes mind, heart, and action, ensuring that learning becomes a process of becoming developing individuals who think critically, act ethically, and live sustainably. In this way, spiritual pedagogy contributes not only to personal transformation but also to the creation of a morally conscious and ecologically responsible society.

### **Ethical Awareness and Transformative Leadership among Educators and Students**

The findings of this study indicate that ethical awareness stands as a central pillar in the faith-based educational experience, developing through reciprocal interactions between educators and students. Rather than emerging from formal instruction or disciplinary codes, ethical consciousness grows organically from everyday encounters, shared reflection, and lived modeling. Teachers perceive their vocation as a moral and spiritual calling an act of service (*khidmah*) and stewardship (*amanah*) while students internalize these attitudes through continuous observation and active participation. In this sense, leadership is not imposed through hierarchical authority but cultivated through moral influence, consistency, and relational integrity.

Educators' testimonies consistently emphasize a paradigm shift from instructive teaching which focuses on transmitting knowledge to formative teaching, which seeks to nurture ethical discernment and spiritual maturity. One teacher stated, "*Teaching is not about controlling students; it's about guiding them to discover what is right.*" This reflection encapsulates the essence of transformative pedagogy, where education becomes a shared moral journey rather than a process of behavioral regulation. Students echo this sentiment, explaining that their involvement in service-oriented activities, such as community outreach, charity initiatives, environmental clean-ups, and school-based sustainability programs, helps them understand leadership as a form of ethical action and responsibility.

These findings align with Mezirow's transformative learning theory (Jack Mezirow, 1991; Mezirow, 1990), which posits that critical reflection on moral experiences leads to perspective transformation. Within faith-based contexts, however, this transformation extends beyond rational reflection it encompasses spiritual awakening and moral reorientation. Ethical leadership, therefore, emerges not as an external requirement but as a natural expression of lived faith. It grows from internalized values such as compassion, justice, humility, and responsibility, which guide students to act ethically even in the

absence of supervision. Furthermore, the data reveal that faith-based education nurtures collective moral agency, not merely individual ethical awareness. Teachers intentionally create collaborative learning settings where students are encouraged to take moral initiative. For instance, several schools reported that students independently organized peer-led initiatives such as environmental campaigns, mutual aid programs, and mentoring groups without explicit teacher instruction. Educators interpreted this as a “shift from compliance to conviction.” Students no longer practiced ethical behavior to gain approval but because they perceived it as integral to their identity and faith. This transformation reflects the internalization of moral reasoning, where values become self-regulating forces that shape personal and collective conduct.

Teachers play a crucial role in facilitating this moral agency through reflective pedagogical practices (Baytar et al., 2022). Many educators incorporate structured reflection into their teaching routines, using journaling, group discussions, and peer feedback sessions to engage students in ethical inquiry. These reflective activities create what participants describe as “moral spaces” dialogic environments where ethical dilemmas are explored openly rather than prescribed through authority. Within these spaces, students learn to articulate moral perspectives, listen to others, and evaluate actions through ethical and spiritual frameworks. Such processes strengthen critical thinking, empathy, and communal trust, transforming the classroom into a laboratory of ethical learning. This participatory approach also reinforces the concept of servant leadership, which is rooted in humility, empathy, and care for others (Demeke et al., 2024; Jiang & Wei, 2024). Teachers model servant leadership by demonstrating fairness, listening attentively, and sharing decision-making responsibilities with students. This inclusive dynamic allows students to experience leadership as a collective moral endeavor, not a means of control. Consequently, leadership is redefined from positional power to ethical influence the ability to inspire others through integrity, compassion, and example.

Another important finding concerns the relationship between ethical leadership and perceived justice within the institutional environment. Students who observed consistent fairness, transparency, and respect in teacher-student interactions reported higher motivation and stronger identification with ethical principles. In classrooms where educators practiced inclusive decision-making inviting students’ opinions, acknowledging mistakes, and promoting open dialogue students developed collaborative leadership characterized by tolerance, respect for diversity, and mutual accountability. This dynamic illustrates that moral authority is not derived from control but from credibility and trustworthiness.

The study also highlights that faith-based ethical leadership fosters a sense of communal responsibility extending beyond school boundaries. Students involved in social and environmental projects often viewed their actions as expressions of *ibadah* (worship) and social duty. One student reflected, “*Helping others is not only kindness; it’s a form of gratitude to God.*” This integration of faith and ethical practice demonstrates that transformative leadership, in this context, is deeply relational and transcendent connecting personal virtue with social transformation. Teachers, in turn, reported that they experience professional growth through these moral exchanges. Their role shifts from being instructors to mentors and co-learners, engaged in mutual reflection with students. This reciprocity enhances educators’ self-awareness and reaffirms their sense of moral purpose. As one teacher expressed, “*When I see students acting responsibly without being told, I realize that transformation has happened not only in them but also in me.*” Such experiences affirm that ethical leadership is not unidirectional; it is a shared journey of growth and transformation within a moral community.

From a theoretical standpoint, these dynamics resonate with both transformative learning theory and virtue ethics. Mezirow’s model explains how reflection transforms perspectives (Jack Mezirow, 1991), while virtue ethics emphasizes habituation of moral character through example and practice. Faith-based pedagogy, as observed in this study, bridges these frameworks by embedding reflection within spiritual and communal contexts. The result

is a model of leadership formation that is both introspective and action-oriented grounded in faith yet responsive to real-world challenges such as social injustice and environmental degradation.

Moreover, the intertwining of spirituality, ethics, and leadership contributes to what can be termed transformative moral ecology a network of relationships in which individuals and communities co-develop moral capacities. Within this ecology, ethical awareness functions as both a personal disposition and a social force that sustains justice, cooperation, and compassion. The reciprocal nature of learning and teaching in faith-based institutions thus becomes a microcosm of moral society, demonstrating how education can serve as a vehicle for ethical renewal and sustainable transformation.

In summary, the findings affirm that ethical awareness and transformative leadership within faith-based education are not abstract ideals but embodied realities emerging from daily practices of reflection, dialogue, and mutual care. Educators serve as moral exemplars, while students become active agents of ethical change. Leadership develops through relational trust, moral courage, and shared commitment to spiritual values. By cultivating ethical influence rather than positional authority, faith-based pedagogy forms individuals capable of guiding others with empathy, wisdom, and integrity.

Thus, in the context of Ponorogo's faith-driven educational institutions, leadership is reimagined as a moral vocation rather than a hierarchical role. It reflects a synthesis of intellect, spirituality, and action producing leaders who not only think critically but also act compassionately and live responsibly. This integration of ethical awareness and transformative leadership contributes to the broader mission of building communities rooted in justice, sustainability, and faith-based morality, offering a model of education that transforms both the learner and the world they inhabit.

### **Sustainability Awareness as a Manifestation of Spiritual Stewardship**

The study also found that sustainability awareness is conceptualized as a sacred responsibility within faith-based educational institutions in Ponorogo. Teachers and students alike interpret ecological care

not merely as a civic duty or curricular requirement but as a spiritual mandate rooted in the Islamic concept of *khalifah fil ardh* humankind's role as stewards of the Earth (Saputra et al., 2024; Syihabuddin & Nadhifah, 2024). Within this theological framework, environmental responsibility becomes intertwined with spiritual virtues such as gratitude (*syukur*), justice (*'adl*), and trustworthiness (*amanah*). Teachers frequently remind students that caring for nature is part of *ibadah* (worship), a concrete way to express devotion and obedience to the Creator. This moral framing transforms sustainability from an abstract policy concept into a living expression of faith.

Classroom observations revealed multiple ways in which this worldview is translated into pedagogical practice. Environmental lessons are often delivered through participatory and experiential learning. Students engage in hands-on sustainability projects such as recycling initiatives, tree-planting drives, and water conservation campaigns. These activities are not presented merely as school programs but as acts of worship, emphasizing that protecting the environment is a means of fulfilling one's duty to God. One teacher explained, "When we plant a tree, we do not only save the earth we continue the act of creation that Allah entrusted to us." This statement encapsulates the deep spiritual resonance of environmental education within these schools: ecological action is understood as continuation of divine stewardship rather than secular activism.

Through these experiences, students develop what can be termed eco-spiritual consciousness a state of awareness that unites ecological ethics with inner moral sensibility (Hermawansyah, 2025; Tarekegn & Alemu, 2025; Wahyuli et al., 2025). This consciousness manifests as gratitude toward creation, empathy for all living beings, and a sense of moral obligation to maintain balance (*mizan*) in the natural world. Students often describe environmental care as "a way to thank God for His blessings" or "a test of how responsible we are as His creation." Such perspectives illustrate that environmental awareness becomes deeply internalized, shifting from external motivation (such as school rules) to internal conviction grounded in faith.

The integration of spirituality into sustainability education also redefines the very meaning of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). Instead of focusing solely on behavioral outcomes or scientific literacy, ESD in these faith-based institutions centers on ethical transformation the alignment of actions with moral and spiritual principles. Teachers frequently use scriptural references, prophetic traditions, and moral storytelling to frame environmental issues as questions of justice, compassion, and stewardship. For instance, lessons on waste management are linked to the Qur'anic principle of moderation (*wasatiyyah*), while discussions on deforestation are connected to the sin of corruption (*fasad*) on Earth. This approach allows students to interpret sustainability within a coherent moral universe, rather than as a detached technical subject.

In many schools, sustainability education is ritualized through collective practices that fuse faith and environmental care. Rituals such as *Jumat Bersih* (Clean Friday) or *Sedekah Alam* (Environmental Charity) embody the union of devotion and stewardship. During these events, students clean their surroundings, plant trees, or distribute reusable goods, all while engaging in prayer and moral reflection. Teachers explained that these activities aim to "make sustainability both real and joyful," fostering a sense of community and shared purpose. Students confirmed that the integration of ritual and environmental care made learning more meaningful: "We don't just learn about the environment we live it." This ritualization of sustainability transforms environmental ethics from episodic lessons into habitual moral practice, sustained by collective memory and spiritual rhythm.

Theological narratives play a critical role in deepening this moral ecology. Educators often refer to the Qur'anic notion that humans are trustees of the Earth, not its owners. Through this lens, nature is viewed as an entrusted gift (*amanah ilahiyyah*) that demands accountability, not exploitation. Teachers emphasize that environmental neglect constitutes a moral violation, while caring for nature represents fulfillment of divine trust. Students are encouraged to reflect critically on their own behaviors consumption habits, waste production, and lifestyle

choices through the question: "Are we honoring or betraying our trust?" Such moral questioning transforms sustainability from a scientific issue into a spiritual and ethical discourse, cultivating deep self-awareness and moral responsibility.

In several classroom discussions, environmental themes were analyzed alongside theological principles of *tawhid* (unity of God) and *rahmah* (compassion). Teachers guided students to recognize that harming nature disrupts the harmony of creation, which is a manifestation of divine unity. This integrative perspective expands sustainability beyond human-centered ethics toward a cosmocentric spirituality, where all forms of life are interconnected within God's design. Students thus come to perceive the environment not as an external resource but as a sacred trust demanding reverence. This moral reframing anchors sustainability within a holistic spiritual worldview that motivates enduring behavioral change.

Data also revealed that teachers deliberately nurture reflective and dialogic spaces in which students can connect ecological issues to their personal faith journeys. Reflection journals, group discussions, and thematic prayers are commonly used to help students internalize lessons. For example, after participating in a reforestation project, students were asked to write reflections on "What does planting a tree mean in the eyes of God?" Such activities prompted introspection, transforming environmental care into a process of self-renewal and moral growth. One student wrote, "Each time I plant something, I feel as if I am renewing my promise to protect life." This reflective integration reinforces sustainability as a continuous moral commitment rather than a temporary school assignment.

Furthermore, this spiritually embedded sustainability education nurtures a sense of collective moral agency within the school community. Teachers, students, and staff perceive themselves as partners in fulfilling a divine mission to preserve the Earth. This shared purpose strengthens communal ties and generates long-term commitment to sustainable living practices. For instance, several schools have adopted environmentally conscious policies reducing plastic

use, composting organic waste, and conserving water not merely for efficiency but as acts of collective worship. This institutionalization of eco-spiritual values demonstrates how faith-based frameworks can sustain ecological ethics beyond individual behavior, embedding them within organizational culture.

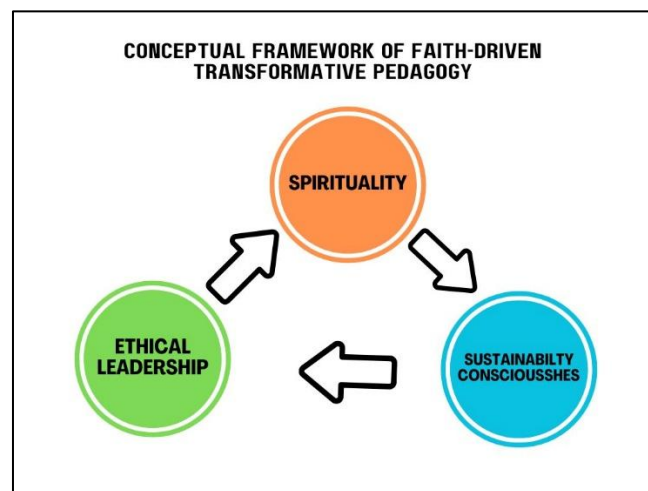
The findings underscore a crucial point: when sustainability is framed as part of divine trust (*amanah ilahiyyah*), it transcends the status of a temporary project or moral trend. It becomes a permanent moral habit, deeply intertwined with personal and collective identity. By grounding sustainability in spiritual meaning, educators cultivate not only environmental awareness but also humility, gratitude, and reverence for life. These virtues anchor sustainable behavior in the moral core of the self, making ecological care a natural

extension of one’s faith rather than an externally imposed obligation.

In this way, the integration of spirituality and environmental ethics constructs what may be called a holistic ecology of faith a worldview in which protecting nature is synonymous with fulfilling religious duty. Within this ecology, sustainability education becomes a transformative process that unites knowledge, emotion, and action under a sacred moral purpose. It shapes learners who think ecologically, feel spiritually connected, and act ethically in service of creation. Ultimately, by redefining sustainability through spiritual consciousness, these institutions demonstrate that enduring environmental change is not achieved merely through information, but through faith-informed transformation of the human heart.

**Table 1. Emerging Themes and Representative Participant Statements**

Theme	Description	Representative Quote
Spiritual values in pedagogy	Integration of compassion, justice, and stewardship in classroom practices and moral reflection.	“Every subject connects to faith – even math reminds us to be precise and honest.” (Teacher 3)
Ethical awareness and leadership	Moral modeling and participatory projects fostering responsibility and empathy.	“We learn leadership not from rules, but from how our teachers act.” (Student 7)
Sustainability as spiritual stewardship	Framing ecological care as a form of religious devotion and gratitude.	“Planting trees is part of worship because it keeps God’s creation alive.” (Student 2)



**Figure 2. Conceptual Framework of Faith-Driven Transformative Pedagogy**

This conceptual model illustrates the interrelationship between spiritual values, ethical

leadership, and sustainability consciousness within faith-based transformative education. Spirituality

functions as the central axis, shaping both moral awareness and ecological responsibility, which together generate transformative educational outcomes.

### Discussion

The results collectively demonstrate that faith-driven pedagogy serves as a transformative educational model capable of integrating spirituality, ethics, and sustainability into a coherent and holistic framework of learning. This model redefines the aims of education by transcending the instrumental and outcome-oriented tendencies of conventional Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). Whereas traditional ESD frameworks often prioritize technical competencies, behavioral indicators, and measurable outputs, faith-based transformative education situates sustainability within the deeper realm of spiritual consciousness and moral accountability. The findings of this study affirm that when spirituality becomes the core of pedagogy, education evolves from a cognitive process into a moral-spiritual formation that nurtures ethical awareness, ecological sensitivity, and compassionate leadership.

One of the key insights emerging from this research is that spiritual transformation serves as the foundation for sustainable and ethical behavior. The educators in faith-based institutions in Ponorogo embody values such as compassion (*rahmah*), justice (*'adl*), honesty (*sidq*), and stewardship (*amanah*) not merely as ideals to be taught but as living principles manifested through daily pedagogical practices. This consistent embodiment establishes what may be called a moral ecology of learning, in which students internalize values through observation, participation, and reflection. The teachers' authenticity expressed through humility, empathy, and fairness—creates an environment where ethical leadership emerges naturally rather than being externally imposed. Hence, moral exemplarity becomes the most effective pedagogical tool, as it translates abstract values into observable and imitable behaviors.

This finding supports the growing theoretical argument that spiritual and ethical development are mutually reinforcing dimensions of transformative

education. Spirituality provides the ontological foundation the “why” of moral behavior while ethics represents its practical manifestation the “how” of responsible action. Together, they form a dialectical relationship in which inner transformation leads to outward moral agency, and moral action, in turn, deepens spiritual insight. In this light, education becomes not only a process of knowing and doing but also of being and becoming. Such an integrative understanding aligns with holistic educational philosophies that view human development as encompassing the intellectual, emotional, social, and spiritual dimensions of existence.

Furthermore, the positioning of sustainability as a spiritual mandate has profound implications for students' intrinsic motivation and behavioral consistency. When ecological care is framed as part of divine trust (*amanah ilahiyah*), students perceive sustainability as an act of gratitude (*syukur*) and worship (*ibadah*), not as a moral burden or institutional requirement. This reorientation shifts environmental education from compliance-based learning toward value-driven commitment. The results indicate that this internalization produces long-term attitudinal change—students engage in pro-environmental behaviors even beyond the classroom context because they see such actions as expressions of faith. This insight reinforces existing scholarship suggesting that enduring environmental ethics must appeal not only to reason but also to moral imagination and spiritual meaning.

At a theoretical level, this study expands the discourse on Education for Sustainable Development by situating it within the moral-spiritual dimension of transformative education. While previous research in ESD has emphasized systems thinking, participatory learning, and critical reflection, the present findings suggest that spiritual transformation is the missing dimension that gives moral depth and emotional resonance to these pedagogical strategies. Faith-driven pedagogy provides a metaphysical framework that situates sustainability within a sacred moral order, thereby connecting personal transformation with collective well-being and ecological harmony. This conceptual integration bridges two often separate domains

spiritual pedagogy and sustainability science revealing that genuine social change is rooted in the transformation of human consciousness. In other words, sustainable futures require not only technological innovation but also spiritual regeneration.

The synergy among spirituality, ethical awareness, and ecological consciousness can be described as a recursive cycle of transformative learning. Reflection on spiritual principles leads to ethical action, ethical action reinforces inner moral growth, and moral growth sustains the motivation to act responsibly. This cyclical process embodies Mezirow's concept of perspective transformation, yet it extends beyond rational reflection to include affective and transcendent dimensions of learning. In faith-based contexts, reflection becomes a spiritual discipline an act of self-examination guided by divine values thereby linking intellectual inquiry with moral purification. This synthesis makes transformative learning both personally meaningful and socially relevant.

From a practical standpoint, the findings suggest that faith-based education can function as a catalyst for cultivating sustainable mindsets and ethical leadership, even in broader secular contexts. The pedagogical strategies identified in this study reflective journaling, dialogic inquiry, moral modeling, integration of faith-based narratives, and community-oriented stewardship offer replicable approaches for educators seeking to infuse sustainability education with deeper moral grounding. These methods encourage not only cognitive understanding but also emotional engagement and ethical accountability. When applied thoughtfully, they can enhance mainstream educational systems by reintroducing the moral-spiritual dimension that modern secular schooling often overlooks.

Moreover, the faith-driven model emphasizes community as a site of moral learning. Sustainability and ethics are not treated as individual pursuits but as collective commitments embedded in school culture. Practices such as *Jumat Bersih* or *Sedekah Alam* demonstrate how ritual and collaboration can transform moral values into shared habits. This aligns with socio-constructivist views that knowledge and values are co-created

through participation and dialogue. However, faith-based pedagogy deepens this process by rooting collective learning in shared transcendence—a sense of belonging not only to a community of people but also to the broader moral order of creation. This spiritual sense of community cultivates empathy, solidarity, and a sustained commitment to social and ecological justice.

The implications of these findings extend beyond religious education. They invite a rethinking of the epistemological assumptions underlying sustainability education. Modern pedagogical frameworks often rely on cognitive and behavioral change models that assume rational self-interest as the primary motivator. By contrast, faith-driven pedagogy recognizes the moral and affective dimensions of human motivation that people act sustainably not only because it is rational but because it is morally and spiritually fulfilling. This insight challenges the reductionist tendencies of modern education and opens possibilities for integrative epistemologies that embrace spirituality as a legitimate source of knowledge and ethical reasoning.

Additionally, the study underscores the importance of teacher formation and spiritual integrity in sustaining transformative pedagogy. The credibility of moral education depends largely on the authenticity of educators who embody the values they teach. Faith-based institutions provide a model of professional identity in which teaching is viewed as both vocation and moral responsibility. This has potential implications for teacher education programs, suggesting that professional development should include not only pedagogical skills but also spiritual self-awareness and ethical reflection. In this way, educators become agents of transformation, capable of bridging intellectual learning with moral growth.

Finally, this research reveals that spirituality, when authentically embedded in education, functions simultaneously as a transformative force and a sustaining framework for ethical learning. Faith-driven pedagogy educates the intellect while awakening the conscience, creating harmony between thought, feeling, and action. It nurtures individuals who are not only knowledgeable but also compassionate, reflective, and morally

grounded. Such individuals embody the very goals of transformative education: personal enlightenment, social responsibility, and ecological stewardship.

In conclusion, the findings of this study position faith-driven transformative education as a credible and robust paradigm for reimagining sustainability education in the 21st century. By uniting spirituality, ethics, and sustainability within one pedagogical continuum, it offers a model that is intellectually rigorous, morally grounded, and spiritually uplifting. The implication is clear: education that transforms must reach beyond cognition to the spiritual and moral core of the learner. Only then can it generate the depth of conviction necessary to build societies that are just, compassionate, and sustainable. Faith-driven pedagogy, therefore, is not merely an alternative approach it is a renewal of the moral purpose of education itself, reawakening its power to shape hearts, minds, and futures in alignment with the sacred trust of sustaining life on Earth.

### Conclusions

This study concludes that faith-driven transformative pedagogy provides a holistic model that integrates spirituality, ethics, and sustainability into meaningful learning. By embedding values such as compassion, justice, and stewardship, educators transform classrooms into moral and spiritual communities where ethical leadership and sustainability awareness emerge organically. Theoretically, these findings extend the discourse of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) by positioning spirituality as a transformative foundation for ethical and ecological consciousness. Practically, they suggest that integrating faith-based values into teaching can foster more empathetic, responsible, and sustainability-oriented generations affirming that spirituality is not peripheral but essential for shaping ethical education and sustainable futures.

### References

- Amrullah, A. M. K., Murfi, A., Fauzi, A., & Basri, B. (2025). Integrating Islamic Education with Environmental Programs: Strategies for Sustainable Character Development at SMAN 2 and 7 Malang Indonesia. *Qualitative Report*, 30(3), 3276–3287. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2025.6020>
- Aschenbrenner, M. (2023). Urban environmental ethics and coastal transformations: remapping the Hauraki Gulf Tikapa Moana, Auckland, Aotearoa New Zealand, in a process of marine spatial planning. *Maritime Studies*, 22(3), 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40152-023-00321-5>
- Basri, S., Adnan, Y., Widiastuty, L., Asrul Syamsul, M., & Indar, I. (2024). Islamic Environmental Ethics: A Cultural Framework for Sustainable Resource Management and Global Ecological Stewardship. *Diversity: Disease Preventive of Research Integrity*, 5(2), 86–93. <https://doi.org/10.24252/diversity.v5i2.52342>
- Baytar, E. M., Ouchaouka, L., & Saqri, N. (2022). Secondary school teachers' uses of ICT. *Procedia Computer Science*, 203, 621–626. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.procs.2022.07.090>
- Braun, V., & Victoria Clarke. (2022). *Thematic Analysis A Practical Guide*. Sage Publications Ltd.
- Bunthawee, J. (2024). *Integrating Religious Principles into Education for Enhancing Quality of Life in Contemporary Society*. 2, 27–45. <https://so14.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/AJHSI>
- Creswell, John W. (1991). Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches/John W Creswell. -3rd ed. *Muqarnas*, 8, 94–102.
- Clugston, R. M., & Corcoran, P. B. (2023). *Ethical and Spiritual Values for Transformative Sustainable Development: The Earth Charter Vision*. 709–731. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-99-3802-5\\_39](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-99-3802-5_39)
- Demeke, G. W., van Engen, M. L., & Markos, S. (2024). Servant Leadership in the Healthcare Literature: A Systematic Review. *Journal of Healthcare Leadership*, 16, 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.2147/JHL.S440160>
- DiCicco-Bloom, B., education, B. C.-M., & 2006, undefined. (2006). The qualitative research interview. *Wiley Online Library*, 40(4), 314–321. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2929.2006.02418.x>
- Fathan, A. A. S., Rohim, F., & Fathan, Z. R. (2025). Sufi Spiritual Values in the Qur'an: A Thematic Exploration of Tazkiyah al-Nafs. *Syaikhuna: Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Pranata Islam*, 16(02), 358–377. <https://doi.org/10.62730/SYAIKHUNA.V16I02.7694>
- Hartman, T. (2019). Using the Charas for Emotional, Physical, and Spritual Well-Being. In *Journal of Physics A: Mathematical and Theoretical*. ST. Martin's Essentials. <https://doi.org/10.1088/1751-8113/44/8/085201>
- Hermawansyah, H. (2025). Eco-Pesantren-Based Islamic Education Management. *Fitrah: Jurnal Studi Pendidikan*, 16(1), 102–114. <https://doi.org/10.47625/fitrah.v16i1.982>
- Jack Mezirow. (1991). Transformative Dimensions of Adult

- Learning. In *Jossy-Baass Inc., Publishers* (Vol. 93). Jossy-Baass Inc., Publishers. <https://doi.org/10.1177/003463739609300121>
- Jiang, X., & Wei, Y. (2024). Linking servant leadership to followers' thriving at work: self-determination theory perspective. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 15. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2024.1384110>
- Khotimah, K., Taembo, M., Hipni, M., & Lutfitasari, W. (2024). Sustainable Character Formation in Eco-Pesantren: a Linguistic and Spiritual Ecology Perspective Under the SDGs Framework. *Journal of Lifestyle and SDGs Review*, 5(1), e02519. <https://doi.org/10.47172/2965-730x.sdgsreview.v5.n01.pe02519>
- Lange, E. A. (2023). Transformative Sustainability Education: Reimagining Our Future. In *Canadian Journal of Education/Revue canadienne de l'éducation* (Vol. 47, Issue 2). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.53967/cje-rce.6729>
- Marshall, H. (2025). Integrating sustainability into religious education. *Journal of Beliefs and Values*, 00(00), 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13617672.2025.2504983>
- Marshman, C., Allen, J., Ling, D., & Brand, G. (2024). 'It's very values driven': A qualitative systematic review of the meaning of compassion according to healthcare professionals. *Journal of Clinical Nursing*, 33(5), 1647–1665. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jocn.16998>
- Mazumdar, P., & Mazumdar, N. (2025). The role of spiritual well-being in consciousness for sustainable consumption. *Social Responsibility Journal*, 21(9), 2112–2132. <https://doi.org/10.1108/SRJ-06-2024-0390>
- Mezirow, J. (1990). *Fostering Critical Reflection in Adulthood*. Jossy-Baass Inc., Publishers.
- Pallathadka, H., Ibraheem, S., Al-Hawary, S., Muda, I., Surahman, S. H., Abdel, A., Al-Salami, A., & Nasimova, Z. (2023). The study of Islamic teachings in education: With an emphasis on behavioural gentleness. *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies*, 79(1). <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v79i1.8193>
- Rim, J. I., Ojeda, J. C., Svob, C., Kayser, J., Drews, E., Kim, Y., Tenke, C. E., Skipper, J., & Weissman, M. M. (2019). Current Understanding of Religion, Spirituality, and Their Neurobiological Correlates. *Harvard Review of Psychiatry*, 27(5), 303–316. <https://doi.org/10.1097/HRP.0000000000000232>
- Riskawati, T., Salim, W., Hidayat Putro, H. P., & Ginting, H. (2025). Faith-driven leaders in a non-theocratic country: internalizing Muhammadiyah values in local governance. *Asia Pacific Journal of Public Administration*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23276665.2025.2571898>;WGROU P:STRING:PUBLICATION
- Saputra, A., Triani, E., & Nasution, N. F. (2024). Human Nature in Building Social Relationships in the Perspective of Hasan Hanafi Islamic Theology. *Pharos Journal of Theology*, 105(5), 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.46222/pharosjot.105.510>
- Sen, A. (2009). *The Idea of Justice*. The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- Spradley, J. (1980). Participant Observation. In *Journal GEEJ* (Vol. 7, Issue 2). United States of America.
- Sugiyono, D. (2013). *Metode Penelitian Kuantitatif, Kualitatif, dan Tindakan*.
- Syihabuddin, M., & Nadhifah, A. M. (2024). The Role of Environmental Verses in Responding to The Climate Crisis; A Comparative Dialogical Study of the Qur'an and the Bible. *Jurnal Religi: Jurnal Studi Agama-Agama*, 20(02), 1412–2634. <https://doi.org/10.14421/rejusta.v20i2.5834>
- Tarekegn, M., & Alemu, A. (2025). God, Human and Nonhuman Nature: An Eco-spiritual Imagination in an Ethiopian Novel, Zigora. *Ethiopian Renaissance Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, 12(1), 134–152. <https://doi.org/10.4314/erjssh.v12i1.7>
- Usman, T., Bahraeni, & Nurhilalayah. (2025). Exploring Islamic-Oriented Cooperative Learning through Faith-Driven Collaboration in among University Students in Islamic Education Courses. *International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research*, 24(9), 922–939. <https://doi.org/10.26803/ijlter.24.9.44>
- Wahyuli, E. F., Hussein, A. S., Suryadi, N., Noermijati, & Hanafiah, M. H. (2025). Eco-spiritual experience quality and tourist loyalty: a serial mediation model in Indonesian eco-spiritual destinations. *Journal of Ecotourism*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14724049.2025.2558957>;REQUES TEDJOURNAL:JOURNAL:RECO20;WGROU P:STRING: PUBLICATION