

## **Islamic Classroom Management as a Laboratory of Empathy and Ecological Awareness**

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### **Abstract**

This research is motivated by the need for a classroom management model that not only focuses on academic achievement but also cultivates empathy and environmental awareness. In the context of Islamic education, the classroom should serve as a living space where children learn to internalize spiritual, social, and ecological values in a holistic manner. The purpose of this study is to describe and analyze how Islamic classroom management can function as a space for nurturing empathy as well as fostering ecological awareness in early childhood. This study employs a qualitative approach with a case study design. The primary data sources consist of classroom teachers and early childhood students, while the school principal serves as a secondary data source. Data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation, followed by data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing as analytical techniques. The findings reveal two main results. First, Islamic classroom management can serve as a space for developing empathy through activities such as sharing, collaboration, and Islamic habituation that nurture children's social sensitivity. Second, the integration of Islamic values in learning activities encourages the emergence of children's ecological awareness, such as caring for plants, conserving water, and maintaining environmental cleanliness. The novelty of this research lies in the concept of the Islamic classroom as an affective-ecological laboratory an approach to classroom management that combines spiritual character formation with concrete ecological practices. The study recommends that early childhood education institutions develop a Green Islamic Class program that contextually integrates Islamic values, empathy, and ecology, as well as provide teacher training for its effective implementation.

**Keywords:** classroom management, ecology, empathy, islamic classroom.

### **Introduction**

Early childhood education serves as a crucial foundation in shaping children's character and personality. At this stage, children are in their golden age, a period highly sensitive to moral, social, and spiritual values instilled through their surrounding environment. One of the most influential spaces in this process is the classroom a place where children interact, learn, and imitate the behaviors of adults around them (Erik Wijaya & Farah Nuraini, 2023: 10). Therefore, classroom management should not merely function as an academic setting but also as a living space that fosters empathy and social awareness from an early age.

In the context of Islamic education, classroom management should be rooted in holistic Islamic values that encompass spiritual, moral, social, and ecological dimensions. Islam teaches not only the relationship between humans and Allah (*hablun minallah*), but also harmonious relationships with fellow human beings and with nature (*hablun minannas* and *hablun minal 'alam*) (Hikmah, Nurul., 2022: 914). Therefore, the classroom needs to be designed as a space that cultivates empathetic awareness toward other beings while instilling ecological responsibility. Values such as compassion, mutual help, trustworthiness, and gratitude can serve as the foundation for daily habits and practices in children's learning environment.

Although Islamic values often serve as the foundation of educational institutions' visions, their implementation at the classroom level frequently falls short of reflecting a gentle, empathetic, and ecological Islam. In practice, early childhood learning activities are still largely centered on formal routines such as memorizing prayers, religious symbols, or cognitive exercises, while affective and spiritual dimensions receive limited opportunities for exploration. As a result, children tend to recognize religious symbols without understanding the ethical and ecological meanings behind them (Ngiu et al., 2021: 1432). In fact, humanistic Islamic classroom management can serve as a laboratory for character formation, where children learn to internalize values through direct experience, empathetic interactions, and care for their surrounding environment. Therefore, it is essential to examine how Islamic classroom management can function as a space for nurturing both empathy and ecological awareness.

Based on this background, this study aims to analyze and describe how Islamic classroom management is implemented in the context of early childhood education so that it can serve as a laboratory for empathy and ecological awareness. The research focuses on two main aspects: first, how Islamic classroom management can shape children's empathetic behavior; and second, how Islamic values are integrated into classroom activities to foster ecological awareness from an early age. The findings are expected to provide a theoretical contribution to the development of an Islamic classroom management model oriented toward the formation of early childhood spiritual-ecological character.

### **Methods**

This study employs a qualitative case study design, aiming to analyze and gain an in-depth understanding of how Islamic classroom management can serve as a space for fostering empathy and ecological awareness in early childhood. The primary data sources are classroom teachers and young children, while the school principal serves as a secondary data source, providing contextual information on policies and institutional support. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation to explore learning practices, social interactions, and

activities oriented toward empathy and ecological values. Data analysis was conducted using an interactive approach, including data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. Through this approach, the study is expected to provide a comprehensive depiction of Islamic classroom management patterns that nurture spiritual, social, and ecological values in early childhood.

### **Results**

This section presents the research findings on Islamic classroom management as a laboratory for empathy and ecological awareness, obtained through observation, interviews, and documentation in an early childhood education setting. The findings illustrate how Islamic values are implemented in classroom management practices, whether through daily routines, social interactions, or thematic activities designed by teachers. From the overall analysis, it appears that the research findings revolve around two main, mutually reinforcing focuses that cannot be separated, namely:

#### **Islamic Classroom Management as a Space for Fostering Empathy in Early Childhood**

The research findings indicate that classroom management based on Islamic values can foster children's empathetic attitudes from an early age. According to interviews with classroom teachers, daily learning activities consistently integrate moral values into classroom routines, such as greeting others, sharing stationery, and helping peers in need. Teachers serve as primary role models in demonstrating empathetic behavior, for example, by using gentle language, giving praise to children who show care, and addressing conflicts between peers in a calming manner. Classroom observations revealed that children began to exhibit simple forms of empathy, such as patting a crying friend on the back, sharing snacks, and helping to tidy up toys together. In this context, the classroom functions as an empathy laboratory, where children learn to understand others' feelings through direct interaction, symbolic play, and collaborative activities.

The school principal, as a secondary data source, emphasized that the Islamic classroom management approach not only cultivates positive social behavior but also reinforces children's spiritual habitus. This is evident in the increased use of expressions such as "sorry," "thank you," and "please" in children's daily conversations within the school environment. Thus, these findings indicate that Islamic classroom management plays a significant role in nurturing empathy in early childhood through teacher modeling, value habituation, and a warm, caring classroom atmosphere.

Table 1 Islamic Classroom Management as a Space for Fostering Empathy in Early Childhood

Aspect	Research Findings	Data Source	Implementation
Core Values Instilled	Empathy, compassion, helping others, patience, respecting others' feelings	Classroom teachers and young children	Children help friends, comfort peers who are crying, share snacks
Classroom Management Strategies	Islamic habituation in daily routines (greetings, prayers, sharing), use of gentle language, teacher modeling	Classroom observation and teacher interviews	Teachers model empathetic behavior; children spontaneously imitate
Supporting Media and Activities	Islamic stories, role-playing, group activities, animated films	Classroom observation	Children learn to understand others' feelings through shared play
Teacher's Role	Primary model of empathetic behavior; provides positive feedback for prosocial behavior	Teacher and principal interviews	Teachers praise children who help peers and gently correct inappropriate behavior
School Support	Warm and spiritual classroom environment; culture of mutual respect	Principal interview	Increased positive interactions and polite social habits
Impact on Children	Children show improved empathetic behavior, confidently say sorry and thank you	Observation and documentation	Children spontaneously express "thank you," "sorry," and "please"

In daily classroom life, various simple activities naturally foster the development of children's empathy. Children are seen sharing toys without quarrelling and playing together in a warm, friendly atmosphere. They also collaborate in role-playing activities, such as running a vegetable shop or taking care of dolls, which help them understand others' feelings and roles. In the shop-playing activity, children learn to be fair, patiently wait for their turn, and communicate politely, while in caring for dolls, they imitate behaviors of affection, attention, and responsibility, similar to how parents care for a child. Small moments, such as a child helping a friend put on shoes, demonstrate social sensitivity arising from daily Islamic habituation, in line with the teaching of *ta'awun* mutual help in goodness. Similarly, when children wash dishes together, they learn cooperation, role-sharing, and appreciation for collective effort. All these activities show that empathy is not taught through lectures but cultivated through real experiences that nurture care, compassion, and togetherness in an Islamic classroom environment.



Figure 1 Classroom as a Space for Fostering Empathy

### **Integration of Islamic Values in Classroom Management to Foster Ecological Awareness**

The research findings indicate that Islamic values are applied not only in human-to-human relationships but also in the relationship between humans and nature (*hablun min al-alam*). According to interviews with classroom teachers, activities such as maintaining environmental cleanliness and disposing of waste properly are incorporated into daily learning routines, accompanied by the teaching of their religious significance. Teachers often relate these activities to Islamic teachings, for example, the hadith stating that cleanliness is part of faith and the prohibition against littering.

Observations show that children begin to demonstrate basic ecological awareness, such as reminding friends not to step on plants, using water sparingly during ablution (*wudhu*), and actively participating in planting activities in the school garden. This process is reinforced through the use of thematic learning media that connect natural concepts with the values of *tauhid* (monotheism), so that children understand the environment not only physically but also spiritually.

The school principal added that the Green Islamic Class program serves as a concrete example of how Islamic classroom management can contribute to environmental education. The principal noted that this approach helps shape children's character to be caring and responsible toward nature, viewing it as a trust (*amanah*) from Allah. Thus, this demonstrates that Islamic classroom management is effective as a means of fostering ecological awareness in early childhood through the integration of spiritual values, practical classroom activities, and the support of a sustainable school ecosystem.

Table 2 Integration of Islamic Values in Classroom Management to Foster Ecological Awareness

Aspect	Findings Research	Data Source	Implementation
Core Values Instilled	Trustworthiness ( <i>amanah</i> ), gratitude, responsibility toward nature, moderation (avoiding <i>israf</i> )	Classroom teachers and young children	Children maintain cleanliness, conserve water, care for plants
Classroom Management Strategies	Integration of environmental themes with Islamic teachings, habituation of cleanliness, resource conservation	Classroom observation and teacher interviews	Children are involved in watering plants and sorting waste
Supporting Media and Activities	<i>Green Islamic Class (Green Habit, Green Project, Green Space)</i>	Classroom teachers and principal	Planting classroom plants, eco-art activities
Teacher's Role	Facilitator of ecological and spiritual awareness; linking natural activities to the value of <i>tauhid</i>	Teacher interviews	Teachers guide children to understand that nature is Allah's creation
School Support	Supports environmentally friendly policies and provides space for teacher innovation	Principal interview	Green Islamic Class program becomes part of school culture
Impact on Children	Children develop awareness and practice of environmental care	Observation and documentation	Children remind peers not to litter and actively participate in eco-friendly activities

Various nature-based learning activities serve as a platform for children to recognize, appreciate, and love the environment. In the eco-print activity, children not only develop creativity and fine motor skills but also gain awareness that nature provides beauty to be used without causing harm. In clay pottery activities, children learn to value elements of the earth as Allah's creation, which can be utilized wisely. Planting flowers together in the school garden becomes a spiritual experience that teaches responsibility and care for living beings, showing children that nurturing plants is part of safeguarding life.

When children play in the rice fields and learn to plant rice, they understand natural cycles and the importance of gratitude for the sustenance Allah provides through the earth. Similarly, in making lion head collages from leaves, children are guided to use natural materials creatively while learning the value of *amanah* (trustworthiness) in caring for the environment. All of these activities reflect the integration of Islamic values with an ecological approach, where the classroom becomes a living space that nurtures gratitude, responsibility, and love for nature as part of worship and care for Allah's creation.



Figure 2 and 3 Fostering Ecological Awareness from an Early Age

## Discussion

### Islamic Classroom Management as a Space for Fostering Empathy in Early Childhood

The research findings indicate that Islamic classroom management plays a crucial role in fostering empathy in early childhood through role modeling, habituation, and a classroom atmosphere filled with care and affection. Teachers serve as the primary models for children in demonstrating empathetic behaviors, such as speaking gently, helping peers, and giving recognition for prosocial actions. These findings align with Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1977), which posits that children primarily learn through observing and imitating models around them. In this context, the teacher's empathetic behavior functions as a social stimulus that children internalize through observation, imitation, and positive reinforcement. In addition to role modeling, social interaction-based learning in the classroom also supports the development of children's empathy. Activities such as role-playing, group work, and simple discussions about peers' feelings allow children to learn to understand others' perspectives. This aligns with Vygotsky's theory of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), where children's socio-emotional abilities can develop optimally through guidance from more competent adults (Suardipa, 2020: 85). Teachers act as scaffolders, providing support so that children can identify and express their feelings and then adjust their responses appropriately to social situations.

The development of children's empathy observed in this study also illustrates how empathy progresses from simple emotional reactions to other-oriented empathy (Salsabila et al., 2021: 67). Children in the Islamic classroom demonstrate basic empathetic abilities, such as comforting a sad friend or sharing stationery, which serve as the foundation for the development of moral empathy at later stages.

Consistent habituation through Islamic activities, such as greetings, collective prayers, and helping one another, provides repeated practice opportunities, making empathetic behavior an integral part of daily routines.

From the perspective of moral development, the formation of children's empathy can also be linked to the moral theories of Lawrence Kohlberg and Carol Gilligan. Kohlberg views moral development as a progression of moral reasoning from obedience-based orientation to social orientation while Gilligan emphasizes the importance of the ethics of care (Ibda, 2023: 53). In an Islamic classroom, values such as compassion, forgiveness, and respect for others are instilled through gentle interaction and language. This helps children understand morality not merely as a set of rules but as an expression of genuine care for others, aligning with the concept of *akhlaq al-karimah* in Islamic education.

A warm and supportive classroom environment also proves to be a key factor in developing empathy. According to Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, children's behavior is shaped by interacting layers of their environment from the microsystem (teachers and peers) to the macrosystem (school culture and religious values) (Ady Dharma, 2023: 118). A principal who supports an Islamic culture and teachers who nurture affection create an emotionally safe learning environment, enabling children to express and develop empathy more naturally. This illustrates that Islamic classroom management is not merely an individual teacher's effort but part of a broader educational ecosystem that nurtures emotional and moral growth.

Conceptually, Islamic education places the formation of *akhlaq* and the heart (*tarbiyyah al-qalb*) at the core of the learning process (Fahrudi, 2022: 41). Islamic classroom management that integrates prayers, greetings, and helping behaviors is essentially a form of affective education, combining spiritual and social dimensions. These values cultivate the awareness that helping a friend is not only a social obligation but also an act of worship and obedience to Allah. Thus, the classroom becomes a laboratory for empathy, where children not only acquire knowledge but also experience and internalize human values within a spiritual framework.

Ultimately, these findings emphasize that fostering empathy in early childhood cannot rely solely on cognitive instruction; it must occur through role modeling, habituation, and a supportive environment. Teachers serve as central figures who convey Islamic values through daily interactions, while a school culture emphasizing compassion and cooperation forms the foundation for genuine empathy. Through this approach, Islamic classroom management functions effectively as an affective-*tarbiyyah* space, nurturing children to be sensitive, caring, and morally upright from an early age.

### **Integration of Islamic Values in Classroom Management to Foster Ecological Awareness**

The research findings indicate that Islamic classroom management not only shapes children's social behavior but also fosters ecological awareness from an early age. Teachers integrate Islamic values such as trustworthiness (*amanah*), gratitude, and responsibility toward nature into classroom routines, for example, through activities like maintaining cleanliness, planting, and using water sparingly. These habituations instill the spiritual understanding that nature is a trust from Allah that must be preserved. This approach aligns with the Islamic view of humans as *khalifah fil-ardh* (stewards of the earth), as mentioned in QS. Al-Baqarah [2]:30. In the educational context, this theological framing forms the basis for developing an ecological character rooted in faith, rather than merely moral or social concern (Lubis, 2022: 90).

From the perspective of value education theory, this process can be explained through the concept of value internalization, which emphasizes that values become part of one's personality when individuals understand and experience them in real-life contexts (Harahap & Isya, 2020: 26). Teachers play a crucial role as facilitators of values, helping children understand the connection between caring for the environment and religious teachings. Through simple reflections, such as linking cleanliness to the hadith "*an-nadhafatu minal iman*" (cleanliness is part of faith), children learn that ecological behavior is not merely a worldly action but also a form of spiritual obedience.

The research findings also indicate that the integration of Islamic values into environmental learning is carried out through concrete and enjoyable activities, such as the Green Islamic Class project. In these activities, children are directly involved in planting, sorting waste, and decorating the classroom using natural and recycled materials. This experiential learning process reflects David Kolb's experiential learning theory, which asserts that knowledge and attitudes are formed through direct experiences that are processed into personal reflection and meaning (Martono et al., 2023: 163). For example, when children water plants while being reminded to say "*bismillah*" and "*alhamdulillah*", they are not only learning basic biology but also developing gratitude and responsibility toward Allah's creation.

From a developmental psychology perspective, the emergence of environmentally caring behavior in children can be linked to Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, which emphasizes that children's behavior is shaped by interactions across multiple layers of their environment from the microsystem (teachers and peers), the mesosystem (relationships between school and family), to the macrosystem (cultural and religious values) (Zubaidillah, 2018: 97). In this study, the school principal and institutional policies supporting the Green Islamic Class program act as reinforcing factors, ensuring that ecological values are consistently embedded throughout the school system. Thus, children's ecological

awareness is not merely the result of teacher instruction in the classroom but also a product of an environmentally friendly Islamic school culture.

Moreover, this Islamic ecological approach can be understood through the perspective of Islamic eco-theology, which views the relationship between humans and nature as a spiritual connection grounded in love and responsibility. According to Seyyed Hossein Nasr, the modern environmental crisis stems from a spiritual crisis, where humans have lost awareness that nature is a manifestation of God's greatness. Therefore, Islamic education must instill ecological tauhid awareness, recognizing that all of Allah's creation is interconnected and subject to His laws (Maftukhin, 2016: 344). In the classroom context, when children are encouraged to care for the school garden and treat small animals gently, they are essentially learning about tauhid rububiyah acknowledgment of Allah's majesty and compassion in all creation.

The cultivation of ecological awareness through Islamic values also aligns with the concept of green pedagogy, which emphasizes the integration of cognition, affect, and action in environmental education (Wahyuni et al., 2023: 3621). Sterling (2001) argues that sustainable education is not merely the transfer of ecological knowledge but should also foster reflective awareness and spiritual values that drive behavioral change (Paige, 2017: 293). In this context, the learning activities conducted by teachers already reflect this integration: children understand cleanliness concepts (cognitive), feel joy in caring for nature (affective), and demonstrate concrete actions to protect the environment (action).

Furthermore, the development of ecological behavior in early childhood can also be explained through behavioral ecology theory, which emphasizes the importance of the social environment in shaping repeated habits berulang (Webber et al., 2023: 877). When activities such as eco-art are conducted consistently, children learn through reinforcement that maintaining cleanliness and caring for nature are behaviors that are appreciated. In the context of Islamic education, this reinforcement comes not only from teachers or peers but also from the awareness that Allah favors servants who are clean and care for the environment.

Thus, the integration of Islamic values in classroom management has proven effective in fostering ecological awareness in early childhood because it combines spiritual, social, and cognitive dimensions into a unified learning experience. Islamic classroom management transforms the learning space into more than just a place for transferring knowledge; it becomes a microcosm of Islamic life, where children learn to love, protect, and respect nature as Allah's creation. The Green Islamic Class program serves as a concrete example of how environmental education can be Islamized without losing its scientific value, while simultaneously enriching children's spirituality through their interaction with nature.

## Conclusion

This study demonstrates that Islamic classroom management plays a crucial role in shaping empathetic character and ecological awareness in early childhood through habituation, role modeling, and contextual learning experiences. The findings highlight two main points: first, Islamic classroom management functions as a space for fostering empathy, where children learn to understand and feel the emotions of others through simple activities such as sharing, cooperating, and helping one another. Teachers act as role models and facilitators, instilling values of compassion, patience, and respect for others. Second, the integration of Islamic values into learning activities nurtures children's ecological awareness, reflected in behaviors such as caring for and preserving nature, planting, creating works from natural materials, and conserving resources.

The novelty of this study lies in the concept of the Islamic classroom as an affective-ecological laboratory a learning space that not only instills spiritual values but also connects them with concrete ecological experiences. Classroom management is no longer seen merely as a managerial strategy but as a process of character formation through lived Islamic experiences that cultivate empathy and responsibility toward nature. This approach shows that early childhood Islamic education can lay the foundation for nurturing a generation that is both gentle-hearted and environmentally conscious. Based on these findings, it is recommended that early childhood education institutions develop classroom management programs that integrate Islamic, social, and ecological values, such as through Green Islamic Class activities or environmentally focused habituation practices. Teachers should receive guidance in implementing learning models that link religious values with ecological care in a contextualized manner. Furthermore, future research could examine the broader application of empathy-and environmentally-friendly Islamic classroom concepts at the elementary school level to assess the continuity of their influence on children's character development in subsequent stages.

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