

Synergy of Islamic Values and Nature School in Building Students' Spiritual-Ecological Character

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ABSTRACT

This research is motivated by the importance of integrating spiritual education and ecological concern in building students' character in the midst of the challenges of moral degradation and environmental crises. Many educational institutions still focus on academic achievement so that the formation of spiritual-ecological character has not been optimally developed. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the synergy of Islamic values and the concept of nature schools in building the spiritual-ecological based character of students in Sayogya (Yogyakarta Nature School). This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study design. The research subjects consisted of five people, namely one school principal or foundation head and four teachers who were selected through purposive sampling. The data collection technique was carried out through in-depth interviews and documentation, then analyzed using qualitative data analysis through data reduction, data presentation, and conclusions drawn. The results of the study show that Sayogya integrates Islamic values through the habituation of faith, morals, worship, and ukhuwah in students' daily activities. The concept of nature schools is applied through real-life experience-based learning such as gardening, animal husbandry, nature conservation, and social interaction with the surrounding community. The synergy between Islamic values and nature-based learning forms the spiritual-ecological character of students which is characterized by the growth of gratitude, responsibility as a caliph on earth, concern for the environment, and simple living behavior. These findings show that the integration of Islamic education and the concept of natural schools can be an effective holistic educational model in shaping a religious, moral, and ecological conscious generation in responding to current educational challenges.



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A. INTRODUCTION

Education from an Islamic perspective has the main goal of forming people who are faithful, knowledgeable, and of noble character (Wibowo, Umi, Widjaja, Utomo, & Kusumojanto, 2022). Islamic values emphasize that humans are caliphs on earth who have the responsibility to maintain the balance of nature as a mandate from Allah SWT (Ghafar, Imtihanah, Shiddiq, & Wilujeng, 2025). According to Smagulov (2023) Education ideally not only emphasizes the cognitive aspect, but also builds strong spiritual and moral character, including ecological awareness as part of worship and bondage to God.

In addition, the concept of modern education requires contextual, meaningful, and being able to develop the overall potential of students (Depasquale et al., 2024). Schools should ideally be able to be spaces that shape character through real experience, not just through theory (Talens, 2026). In this context, the concept of nature schools exists as an

educational approach that places nature as a learning medium, so that students can build life skills, social sensitivity, and concern for the environment through direct learning (Hr, Makassar, & Rahman, 2025).

However, the current educational reality shows that the learning process in many schools still tends to be formalistic and oriented solely towards academic achievement (Jandra & Mujad, 2025). Islamic (2025) Saying that character education is often just a slogan or an additional program without consistent implementation. As a result, students do not get learning experiences that touch on aspects of spiritual values in depth, and do not feel the connection between science and the responsibility to protect the environment.

On the other hand, ecological crisis phenomena such as environmental pollution, plastic waste, forest destruction, and climate change are on the rise (Suhartini, Nursobah, & Basri, 2025). This condition shows that the ecological awareness of the community is still low, including in the younger generation. In many cases, students do not have environmentally caring habits, such as littering, not maintaining cleanliness, and not understanding that taking care of nature is part of moral and religious values.

The impact of the weak integration of spiritual and ecological education can be seen from the emergence of various negative behaviors such as individualism, low social empathy, and a reduced sense of responsibility for the environment (Tabatabai, Simforoosh, & Hospital, 2023). The character of students that should be formed through education is not optimally developed. This is a serious threat because the younger generation who have lost their spiritual-ecological awareness will find it difficult to face global challenges related to the sustainability of life (Putra, Rafii, & Ansusa, 2025).

In addition, this impact also has the potential to reduce the effectiveness of Islamic education in forming *kamil* (perfect human beings). If Islamic values are understood only textually without being applied in concrete actions, then education will lose its substance (Hidayati, Fakhruddin, Yulianto, & Prihatin, 2023). In fact, Islam teaches that cleanliness is part of faith, protecting the earth is a mandate, and destroying nature is a prohibited act. Thus, an educational model is needed that is able to connect religious values with real daily life practices (Rashid, Karobari, & Rahman, n.d.).

In this context, Sekolah Alam Yogyakarta (SAYOGYA) is an example of an educational institution that integrates nature-based learning with character values. SAYOGYA utilizes nature as a learning laboratory, as well as developing religious habits that shape students' awareness that protecting the environment is part of worship (G. Islamic, Ishaq, & Dayati, 2024). This kind of learning model is interesting to learn because it has the potential to create the character of students who are not only academically intelligent, but also have a strong spirituality and high ecological concern.

Therefore, this study is important to conduct an in-depth study of the synergy between Islamic values and the concept of nature schools in building spiritual-ecological character based on students at SAYOGYA. Unlike previous studies that generally examine Islamic character education or nature schools separately (Of & Education, 2019), this study offers a more integrative perspective by explaining how the values of faith, morals, worship, and brotherhood are internalized through nature-based learning experiences, thereby forming students' spiritual-ecological character holistically. Contextually, this study expands the study of Islamic character education by presenting an integrated ecological framework between Islamic education and education that places awareness as *khalifah fil ardh* as the foundation for character formation. Practically, this study provides an empirical overview of educational practices at SAYOGYA that can be used as a reference for Islamic educational institutions in developing contextual learning models that integrate the formation of morals, spirituality, and concern for the environment. Thus,

this study is expected to enrich the literature on Islamic character education based on nature schools while providing an alternative educational model that is relevant in addressing the challenges of the moral and ecological crises in the contemporary era.

B. METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study design. The qualitative approach was chosen because this research aims to deeply understand the process, meaning, and implementation of the synergy of Islamic values and the concept of natural schools in building spiritual-ecological-based characters in students (Achjar et al., 2023). The case study is used because the research focuses on one specific object, namely SAYOGYA (Sekolah Alam Yogyakarta) as an educational institution that has characteristics in integrating nature-based learning with the formation of religious character and environmental concern.

The research was conducted on December 9-23, 2025, located at SAYOGYA (Yogyakarta Nature School), Jl. Puspita No. 18, Beran Kidul, Tridadi, Sleman Regency, Special Region of Yogyakarta. The research subjects included school/foundation principals and teachers/mentors selected using purposive sampling based on their direct involvement in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of the application of Islamic values and the nature school concept at SAYOGYA. To minimize potential bias and increase the objectivity of the findings, the study employed triangulation techniques through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. This allowed information obtained from informants to be corroborated with school documents, such as the institution's profile, curriculum, program activities, and documentation of learning activities. Furthermore, interview results were analyzed comparatively across participants to identify similarities and differences in information before drawing conclusions. However, this study has limitations because the informants were only internal school stakeholders. Therefore, the perspectives of students, alumni, parents, and the surrounding community were not accommodated, so the findings reflect more internal views regarding program implementation. Future research is recommended to involve various stakeholders to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of the synergy of Islamic values and the nature school concept in building spiritual-ecological character.

Table 1. Theme and Respondent Description

No	Theme	Responden
1	Application of Islamic Values in Sayogya	IDN,A,MF,EF,DM
2	Nature School Concept in Sayogya	IDN,A,MF,EF,DM
3	Formation of Spiritual-Ecological Character of Students through Islamic Synergy and Nature School in Sayogya	IDN,A,MF,EF,DM

School/foundation principals were chosen because they play a role in formulating the vision, policies and development of school programs, while teachers/instructors were chosen because they were directly involved in implementing learning and building student character. The data collection process is carried out until data saturation is reached, that is, when subsequent interviews

no longer produce new information, themes or categories that are relevant to the research focus. Thus, the number of informants was deemed adequate because they were able to provide data that was consistent, repeatable, and sufficient to answer the research questions.

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Research Result

1. Application of Islamic Values in Sayogya

The results of the study show that Sayogya places faith as the main root of education, especially in the early childhood phase (5-9 years). Faith is understood as an aspect that is not immediately visible, but becomes a determinant of the direction of children's behavior and character in the long run. This understanding is in line with the informant's view that faith is like a hidden root of a plant but determines the quality of the fruit. Faith education in Sayogya is not only delivered theoretically, but is built through everyday narratives, first-hand experience, and faith strengthening through natural activities.

In addition, Sayogya uses a reflective approach by introducing nature as evidence of God's greatness. Every natural activity is directed at fostering gratitude, an awareness of monotheism, and an understanding that all creation is connected to the Creator. This shows that faith is not taught as a dogma, but as a living consciousness that grows through real experience.

"moral education becomes a dominant part of school culture, especially through habituation and example" (interview with EF December 23, 2025)

Teachers (pamong) position themselves as second parents, so that observations of student behavior are carried out in-depth and consistently. Morality is not only understood as an attitude of manners, but also includes morals towards oneself, family, society, and nature.

The practice of moral coaching is carried out through intense teacher-parent collaboration. Sayogya does not use report cards, but rather observation-based narrative reports that are discussed in "progress discussions". This process reflects that morality is not just the result of academic learning, but the result of overall character growth. In addition, moral strengthening is carried out through direct interaction with the community, such as visiting residents, mosques, or presenting village elders. This strengthens the value of manners while training students to be able to live harmoniously in society.

In the aspect of worship, the results of the study show that Sayogya instills the habit of worship through daily routines such as dawn prayers, dhikr, murojaah, and early study. Learning activities begin with an evaluation of basic worship such as dawn prayers and continue with religious activities according to the child's developmental age. Uniquely, Sayogya instills the concept of worship that is in harmony with nature, for example, the meaning of prayer time is not only based on the clock, but also based on natural signs. This shows that worship is not only ritual, but also builds ecological sensitivity and cosmic awareness as God's beings (Science, 2024).

Sayogya developed ukhuwah through a community-based education system, where schools are understood as "common homes". Interaction between students and relationships with teachers are built in families, so that children not only learn to work together, but also learn to be responsible in collective life. The power of this social relationship can be seen from the "parent school" approach, where communication

between home and school is carried out openly. This emphasizes that ukhuwah is not only built in the classroom, but also in a culture of mutual reinforcement.



Figure 1. Islamic Activities in Sayogya

As shown in Figure 1, the implementation of Islamic values at Sayogya is not only realized through the delivery of religious material in the classroom, but also through various routine habituation activities. Activities such as communal prayer, murojaah (religious study), diniyah studies, and worship assistance demonstrate that the internalization of faith, morals, worship, and brotherhood takes place in daily activities. This finding supports the interview results that Islamic education at Sayogya emphasizes the process of habituation and role models rather than theoretical learning, thus making Islamic values more easily internalized in students' behavior.

2. Nature School Concept in Sayogya

Sayogya is a nature school founded by five initiators in 2019. This school has students from kindergarten to high school with a total of about 40-50 students and accompanied by around 20 pamong/teachers. Sayogya was born from the spirit of nature-based education, reciprocal education, and talent mapping. Unlike formal schools, Sayogya is not oriented to numbers or academic achievement alone, but emphasizes on the child's growth process in real life. This school views nature as the main learning space, not just a complementary learning object.

"Conservation is an explicit part of the curriculum through nature conservation programs, children are directly involved in field activities such as harvesting, caring for cages, growing animal feed, and cultivating crops" (Interview with A December 9, 2025)

The concept of a nature school in Sayogya is realized through cultivation activities such as gardening, managing rice fields, raising cattle, chickens, and sheep. Learning is carried out from the beginning to the end of the process, for example, students supervise livestock from a young age until they are ready to be slaughtered. It builds an understanding of the realities of life and ecological responsibility. Another interesting finding is the existence of nature-based creative projects such as making a herbarium from wildflowers which are then processed into artworks, book dividers, and stickers. This activity shows that nature schools not only develop physical-ecological aspects, but also creativity and productivity.

Sayogya instills the principle of "reality awareness", which is learning activities that are adapted to the surrounding natural and social conditions. For example, when the

rambutan season arrives, students learn to harvest rambutan, communicate with residents, and cultivate crops as economic activities. Children are also given space to take the initiative in planning activities. In addition, the school emphasizes real engagement with the village community. Sayogya does not impose specific facilities such as horseback riding or archery, but prioritizes the natural potential that already exists in the local village, such as farms, rivers, fish ponds, and cattle ranches (Roetzel & Roetzel, 2023).



Figure 2. Nature Learning Activities in Sayogya

Figure 2 shows that nature is utilized as the primary learning space in the learning process at Sayogya. Student activities taking place directly in the natural environment demonstrate the application of experiential learning, where students gain understanding through practice, observation, and interaction with the environment. This visualization supports the research finding that the nature school concept at Sayogya is oriented not only toward mastery of material but also toward developing life skills, creativity, and environmental awareness through real-life experiences.

3. Formation of Spiritual-Ecological Character of Students through Islamic Synergy and Nature School in Sayogya

Sayogya's living culture is even formulated in three words: *"Be Grateful – Grow – Develop"*, which affirms that gratitude is the early stage of character formation. Gratitude then translates into tangible behaviors such as cultivation, conservation, and good use of nature (thayyib). In practice, the use of nature is carried out in a cyclical manner, for example, organic waste is returned to fertilizer so that it forms a pattern of sustainability. It shows that spirituality and ecology are integrated into real action

"The spiritual-ecological character in Sayogya is understood as a character formed from the realization that man and nature are both creatures of God, and humans are entrusted to take care of nature" (Interview with MF December 9, 2025)

This awareness is instilled from the beginning through the narrative that nature is a expanse of God's sustenance and grace, so it should not be exploited destructively. This concept places spirituality not only as a vertical relationship (hablum minallah), but also as an ecological relationship as a form of social worship and the responsibility of the caliph fil ardh. The results of the study show that Sayogya builds spiritual-ecological character through one main value, namely gratitude. Gratitude is understood as the awareness of God's blessings that arise through nature. Children are trained to see that

food, water, plants, and animals are not just economic resources, but evidence of God's love.

Spiritual-ecological character is also formed through simple habits of living and being close to nature. Children are involved in animal care, animal husbandry, food processing, and maintenance of the school environment. This activity makes students feel directly that nature provides the necessities of life, so as to foster a sense of security, non-consumptive and not afraid of shortages. In addition, character formation is carried out through the example of pamong. Children learn from what teachers do, such as caring for the cages, cleaning the environment, or managing livestock. Thus, spiritual values do not stop at study, but become the ethos of life.

Sayogya uses an observation-based evaluation system, not numbers. The observation is made with reference to the five main relationships referred to as the five dharmas: the relationship with Allah, the family, the self, society, and nature. Evaluation is carried out through progress discussions involving all teachers and parents for 1-2 hours per child. This model proves that spiritual-ecological character cannot be measured by written exams, but must be understood through changes in behavior, manners, social issues, and real ecological responsibility (Veronica, 2025).

In addition, the results of the study show that the synergy of Islamic values and the concept of nature schools in Sayogya also shapes the character of responsibility and ecological awareness of students through direct involvement in daily activities that are integrated with spiritual values. Students are not only taught to keep the environment clean, but are also guided to understand that every action against nature has a value of worship and moral consequences. Activities such as caring for plants, cleaning cages, managing organic waste, and maintaining the cleanliness of the learning area are a means of habituation for students to be responsible for the surrounding environment. Through this process, students learn that nature is not only a resource that is utilized, but a mandate that must be maintained as a form of gratitude to Allah SWT. This habituation consistently strengthens the formation of spiritual-ecological character which is reflected in the attitude of care, discipline, and awareness of students in maintaining a balance between humans, nature, and God.



Figure 3. Gardening Activities in Sayogya

As seen in Figure 3, gardening activities serve as a concrete implementation of spiritual-ecological character development at Sayogya. Through direct involvement in planting, caring for, and utilizing garden produce, students learn about responsibility, cooperation, gratitude for God's blessings, and the importance of preserving nature as a

trust. Thus, gardening activities serve not only as a learning activity but also as a medium for internalizing Islamic values, manifested in environmentally conscious behavior.

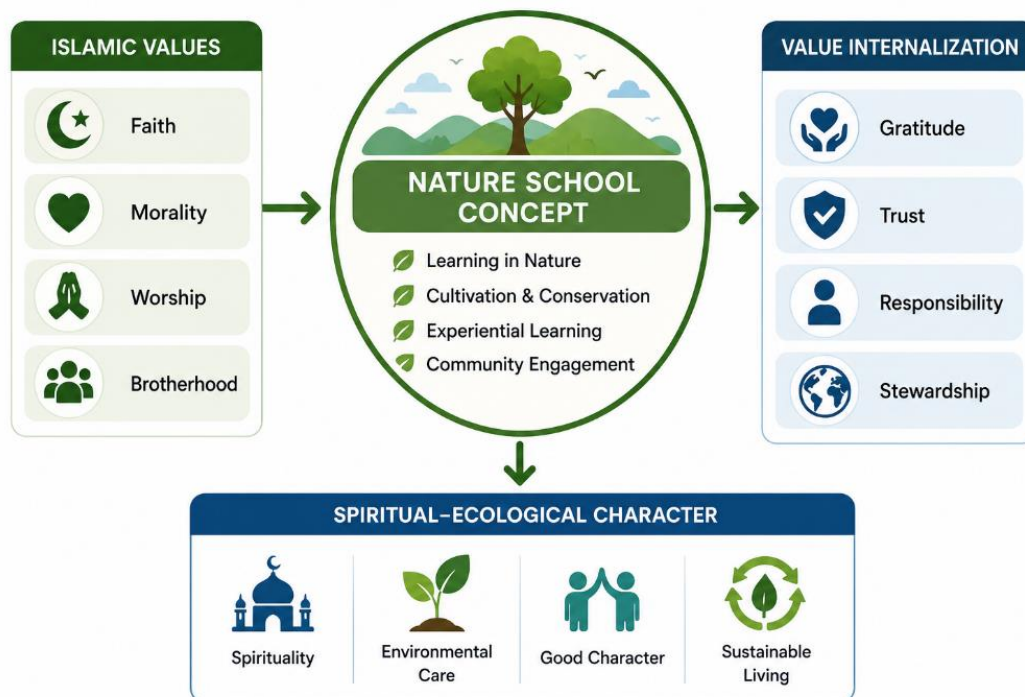


Figure 4. Conceptual Model of the Synergy between Islamic Values and the Nature School Concept in Developing Students' Spiritual-Ecological Character.

As shown in Figure 4, the formation of students' spiritual-ecological character at SAYOGYA is the result of the synergy between Islamic Values, the School's Nature Concept, and Value Internalization. Islamic values, including faith, morals, worship, and brotherhood, serve as the foundation for the entire educational process, and are then implemented through nature-based learning, cultivation and conservation activities, experiential learning, and student involvement in community life. These learning experiences encourage the internalization of values such as gratitude, trust, responsibility, and stewardship, which are manifested in an attitude of gratitude to Allah, responsibility as a caliph on earth, and concern for the environment. The synergy of these three components produces a spiritual-ecological character characterized by the development of spirituality, concern for the environment, morals towards others and nature, and sustainable living behavior. Thus, this model concept shows that character formation at SAYOGYA does not occur through the transfer of knowledge alone, but through the integration of Islamic values, nature-based learning experiences, and continuous habituation.

Discussion

The results of the study show that the synergy between Islamic values and the concept of nature schools in Sayogya plays an important role in shaping the spiritual-ecological character of students. The integration of the values of faith, morals, worship, and ukhuwah combined with nature-based learning creates a holistic educational process, where students not only gain a theoretical understanding of religion but also experience the practice of these values directly in daily life. These findings answer the research objective that the formation of spiritual-ecological character can be done effectively

through the integration of religious education and real experiences in nature (Maher et al., 2022).

Instilling Islamic values through a contextual approach has been shown to help students understand the relationship between humans, God, and the environment more fully. When students are invited to garden, take care of animals, and take care of the environment while instilling the value of gratitude and responsibility as caliphs on earth, spiritual values do not stop at the cognitive realm but develop into behavioral awareness. This shows that character education will be more meaningful if it is developed through real experiences that are close to students' lives (Yu & Reiss, 2025).

In addition, the culture of life applied in Sayogya through the principle of "be grateful, grow, develop" shows that the formation of spiritual-ecological character requires consistent habituation. The character of concern for the environment that grows in students is the result of the internalization of religious values that are manifested in daily actions. Thus, these findings confirm that schools have a strategic role in building spiritual and ecological awareness simultaneously.

The findings of this study are in line with the research Han (2025) which states that nature schools are able to shape students' character through direct experiential learning and interaction with the environment. In the study, it was explained that nature schools provide space for students to develop responsibility, independence, and social concern through real activities. The results of the study in Sayogya reinforce this finding by showing that natural learning becomes stronger when combined with Islamic values.

In addition, this research also supports this opinion Pangrazio (2026) that nature-based learning is able to increase students' ecological awareness through hands-on experience in maintaining and utilizing the environment. However, this research makes an additional contribution by showing that ecological awareness is not only shaped by environmental activities, but also by spiritual foundations in the form of gratitude, trust, and responsibility to Allah SWT.

On the other hand, the results of this study are also relevant to the research Trummer (2025) Regarding character education based on environmental fiqh, which emphasizes the importance of connecting religious teachings with nature conservation practices. The difference is that the research at Sayogya shows a more integrated implementation model in the daily school culture, so that spiritual-ecological values are not only taught as material, but also become a culture of student life. Thus, this study expands the understanding that the integration of religious education and environmental education can be applied practically through the concept of nature schools.

Practically, the results of this study show that the educational model in Sayogya can be used as an alternative in the development of character education in schools. The integration between Islamic values and nature-based learning can help schools build the character of students who are religious while caring for the environment. This model is relevant to answer the challenges of modern education that often focuses too much on academic aspects and does not provide room for character building (Pienimäki, Marttila, & Pienimäki, 2025).

Theoretically, this study reinforces the view that character education will be more effective if it is done holistically through the integration of spiritual, social, and ecological aspects. It is not enough to provide religious education only in the form of teaching materials, but it needs to be linked to real experience so that the values taught can be internalized in student behavior. These findings also support Islamic education theory that emphasizes the balance of human relationships with Allah, fellow humans, and nature (Li, Yu, Li, & Li, 2024).

In addition, this research provides a direction for the development of a more contextual and applicative Islamic education curriculum. Values such as gratitude, trust, and ecological responsibility can be integrated into learning activities so that students have a complete learning experience. This opens up opportunities to design more relevant educational models in the face of moral problems and current environmental crises.

This research has several limitations that need to be considered. First, the research was conducted only on one educational institution, namely Sayogya, so that the results of the research could not be generalized widely to all nature schools or other Islamic educational institutions. Each school has different cultural characteristics, systems, and environments, so implementation results can vary.

Second, this study uses a qualitative approach with a limited number of participants in the principal and teachers. The data obtained emphasizes the perspective of education managers and has not yet thrilled deeply the experiences of students and parents as an important part of the formation of spiritual-ecological character. This limitation causes the results of the study not to fully capture the overall dynamics that occur.

Third, this research focuses on the implementation process and has not measured the long-term impact on student character development. Therefore, the effectiveness of this educational model in forming spiritual-ecological character in a sustainable manner still needs to be further researched with a longitudinal approach or other more comprehensive evaluation methods.

Based on the results and limitations of this study, further research is recommended to involve more educational institutions in order to get a broader picture of the application of the synergy of Islamic values and the concept of natural schools in building students' character. Comparisons between schools can provide a deeper understanding of the factors that affect the successful implementation of this educational model.

Further research is also recommended to involve students and parents as research subjects so that the data obtained is more comprehensive. The student's perspective can provide an idea of the learning experience they are feeling, while the parent's perspective can show the influence of school education on a child's behavior at home. In addition, advanced research can use a mixed-methods approach to measure the effectiveness of spiritual-ecological character formation more objectively. Thus, the results of the study not only describe the implementation process but can also show the level of success of the educational model in shaping the character of students in a real and sustainable manner.

D. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

This study shows that spiritual-ecological character formation at SAYOGYA occurs through a synergy between Islamic values and the nature school concept, which is implemented in an integrated manner in the learning process, habituation, and nature-based learning experiences. This synergy allows for the internalization of spiritual values while fostering environmental awareness, thus developing students' character holistically. The main contribution of this study is to offer a conceptual model of the integration of Islamic education and nature schools as an approach to spiritual-ecological character formation that enriches the study of Islamic character education. This model can serve as a reference for educational institutions in developing education that integrates religious dimensions, character, and environmental awareness in accordance with the challenges of 21st-century education.

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