

Faith-Based Ecological Counselling: Integrating Spirituality and Sustainability for Muslim Students

Poradnictwo ekologiczne oparte na wierze:
Integracja duchowości i zrównoważonego rozwoju w pracy ze studentami muzułmańskimi

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Abstract: The global ecological crisis demands transformative innovations in Islamic higher education to cultivate environmentally responsible behaviours grounded in spiritual values. This study explores a faith-based ecological counselling model that integrates Islamic spirituality with sustainable behaviour change among Muslim students. Employing a qualitative design with a phenomenological approach and multiple case studies at Sultan Thaha Saifuddin State Islamic University of Jambi and Maulana Malik Ibrahim State Islamic University of Malang, data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observations, reflective eco-journals, and focus group discussions (FGDs), and analysed using thematic analysis with NVivo. Findings reveal that interventions such as *Green Reflection Circles*, *Spiritual Eco-Walks*, and *Eco-Journal Counselling* effectively fostered spiritual-ecological values in students' beliefs and actions. Behavioural transformation was observed across cognitive (enhanced ecological literacy), affective (strengthened empathy toward nature), and practical (eco-friendly lifestyle practices) domains. Nevertheless, challenges emerged, including pedagogical gaps and limited institutional support for mainstreaming sustainability education in campus settings. This research contributes to the theoretical development of Islamic counselling for sustainability and recommends structured counsellor training and curriculum integration for ecological literacy and action. Future directions include designing quantitative instruments, expanding research contexts, and adopting longitudinal approaches. The study aligns with SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption), and SDG 13 (Climate Action), while reinforcing *Green Campus* initiatives within Islamic higher education institutions.

Keywords: ecological counselling, spiritual ecology, sustainable behaviour, Islamic higher education, Muslim students, SDG 4, SDG 12, SDG 13

Streszczenie: Globalny kryzys ekologiczny wymaga wprowadzenia transformacyjnych innowacji w islamskim szkolnictwie wyższym, w celu kształtowania odpowiedzialnych ekologicznie zachowań zakorzenionych w wartościach duchowych. Niniejsze badanie przedstawia oparty na wierze model poradnictwa ekologicznego, który łączy duchowość islamską ze zrównoważoną zmianą zachowań wśród studentów muzułmańskich. W ramach jakościowego projektu badawczego, opartego na podejściu fenomenologicznym i wielu studiach przypadków prowadzonych na Państwowym Islamskim Uniwersytecie im. Sultana Thahy Saifuddina w Jambi oraz Państwowym Islamskim Uniwersytecie im. Maulany Malika Ibrahima w Malang, zebrano dane poprzez pogłębione wywiady, obserwacje uczestniczące, refleksyjne eko-dzienniki oraz dyskusje w grupach fokusowych (FGD). Następnie przeanalizowano je za pomocą analizy tematycznej z wykorzystaniem NVivo. Wyniki wskazują, że interwencje takie jak Zielone Kręgi Refleksji, Duchowe Eko-Spacery oraz Poradnictwo oparte na Eko-Dziennikach skutecznie rozwijały u studentów wartości duchowo-ekologiczne, odzwierciedlające się zarówno w ich przekonaniach, jak i działaniach. Transformację behawioralną odnotowano w trzech domenach: poznawczej (zwiększona wiedza ekologiczna), afektywnej (pogłębiona empatia wobec natury) oraz praktycznej (ekoprosocjalne praktyki życia codziennego). Niemniej jednak pojawiły się pewne wyzwania, w tym luki pedagogiczne oraz ograniczone wsparcie instytucjonalne dla włączania edukacji na rzecz zrównoważonego rozwoju do głównego nurtu działań uczelni. Niniejsze badanie wnosi wkład w rozwój teoretyczny islamskiego poradnictwa na rzecz zrównoważonego rozwoju i rekomenduje ustrukturyzowane szkolenia dla doradców oraz włączenie treści dotyczących wiedzy ekologicznej i działań prośrodowiskowych do programu kształcenia. W przyszłości sugeruje się opracowanie narzędzi ilościowych, poszerzenie kontekstów badawczych oraz zastosowanie podejść longitudinalnych. Badanie pozostaje zgodne z Celem Zrównoważonego Rozwoju 4 (Jakość edukacji), Celem 12 (Odpowiedzialna konsumpcja i produkcja) oraz Celem 13 (Działania w dziedzinie klimatu), jednocześnie wspierając inicjatywy Zielonych Kampusów w islamskich instytucjach szkolnictwa wyższego.

Słowa kluczowe: poradnictwo ekologiczne, ekologia duchowa, zrównoważone zachowania, islamskie szkolnictwo wyższe, studenci muzułmańscy, Cel Zrównoważonego Rozwoju 4, Cel Zrównoważonego Rozwoju 12, Cel Zrównoważonego Rozwoju 13

Introduction

The global ecological crisis has become one of the most critical threats to the sustainability of life on Earth. Climate change, biodiversity loss, pollution, and environmental degradation can no longer be viewed merely as physical or technical issues. Rather, these phenomena signify a profound rupture in the moral and spiritual relationship between humanity and nature (Rockström et al. 2023; Calvin et al. 2023; Sadowski 2025). The increasing complexity of ecological destruction affects not only the physical environment but also the psychosocial, spiritual, and moral dimensions of individuals, particularly the younger generation in higher education.

As both members of academic communities and agents of social change, students are expected to possess not only ecological literacy but also spiritual consciousness that can inspire genuine commitment and concrete action toward sustainability. This calls for a holistic and

transformative educational approach—one that engages not only the cognitive domain but also the affective, ethical, and spiritual dimensions—forming the foundation for sustainable ecological behaviour (Koger 2011; Doherty and Clayton 2011).

Islamic Higher Education Institutions (*Perguruan Tinggi Keagamaan Islam*, PTKI) hold a strategic role in shaping a generation that is intellectually capable and spiritually aware of sustainability challenges. Muslim students bear a dual mandate: as members of the global community responsible for addressing environmental issues, and as *khalifah fil ardh*, entrusted with maintaining *mīzān* (balance) by grounding the unity of humanity, God, and nature in the principle of *tawhid* (‘Izz al-Dīn 2000; Nasr 1976). Within this context, Islamic values are fundamental to advancing sustainability education in PTKI (Gade 2019).

Institutions such as Sultan Thaha Saifuddin State Islamic University of Jambi (UIN Jambi) and Maulana Malik Ibrahim State Islamic University of Malang (UIN Malang) have pioneered eco-spirituality programs. These initiatives integrate counselling with *tafakkur* (spiritual reflection on nature) as a transformative form of ecological education. However, such efforts remain fragmented, lacking a coherent conceptual model and systematic interventions. The absence of a comprehensive counselling framework that unites spiritual and ecological dimensions has limited the optimal development of sustainable behaviours among students (Doherty and Clayton 2011; UNESCO 2020).

Although ecological awareness has started to grow through these initiatives, long-term behavioural changes remain limited. One key challenge is the lack of counselling approaches that deeply address affective and spiritual dimensions. Many students experience eco-anxiety or value dissonance between religious teachings and modern lifestyles but receive insufficient counselling support. Integrating theological, moral, and affective aspects into counselling is therefore essential to fostering ecological behaviour rooted in Islamic values.

While the global discourse on *Education for Sustainable Development* (ESD) has advanced significantly (Sterling 2010; UNESCO 2020), the integration of Islamic spiritual values into counselling practices in PTKI remains minimal. Current counselling approaches tend to be individualistic and psychological, neglecting the transcendental dimension of human relationships with God and nature. Islamic principles such as *tawhid*, *khalifah*, and *amanah* offer a robust spiritual foundation for developing faith-based ecological awareness.

This gap presents two key issues. First, the limited integration of Islamic spiritual values in ecological counselling frameworks results in technical approaches that fail to foster holistic ecological awareness. Second, there is a lack of structured, empirically tested Islamic-based ecological counselling models within PTKI. Challenges such as eco-anxiety, environmental

ethics crises, and value dissonance demand counselling approaches that are promotive, preventive, and value-oriented.

Developing an Islamic ecological counselling model has therefore become an urgent need. Such a model should integrate systemic approaches, spiritual ecology, and principles of sustainable behavioural change relevant to the lives of PTKI students. This approach not only meets the demand for value-based counselling but also strengthens PTKI's strategic role in advancing the global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production), and SDG 13 (Climate Action).

This study aims to explore ecological counselling practices within PTKI and propose a practical, systematic intervention model grounded in Islamic values. Conceptually, this study broadens the field of guidance and counselling by introducing spiritual ecology as a novel approach. Practically, it provides a roadmap for developing sustainability counselling curricula and programs within PTKI. Sociologically, the proposed model empowers Muslim students to serve as ecological and social change agents in their communities.

This study holds profound significance as it responds to the multidimensional challenges of the contemporary environmental crisis through an interdisciplinary and value-integrative framework. The need for innovation in sustainability education grounded in religious and spiritual values—particularly within Islamic contexts—remains pressing, as these dimensions have yet to be systematically embedded within guidance and counselling services in Islamic Higher Education Institutions (UNESCO 2020).

Existing literature on ecological counselling has predominantly evolved within secular paradigms. Scholars such as Thomas J. Doherty and Susan Clayton (Doherty and Clayton 2011) and Pihkala (Pihkala 2020) have advanced the field by examining the psychological dimensions of *eco-anxiety*, yet their frameworks often lack an integration of spirituality as a transformative force. Meanwhile, other faith traditions, including Christianity and Buddhism, have begun to articulate spiritually rooted ecological approaches (Hitzhusen and Tucker 2013). Within Islamic scholarship, contributions by Nasr (Nasr 1976), Gade (Gade 2019), and Muhammad Muhammad (Muhammad et al. 2024), have provided essential theological and ethical foundations but have not extended to practical applications within counselling and psychosocial education. Consequently, counselling practices in Islamic higher education remain largely confined to addressing academic or personal concerns, with limited attention to students' eco-social and spiritual transformation (Wekke and Hamid 2013; Zarkasyi 2020; Asrori et al. 2025).

This research seeks to bridge this theoretical and practical gap by integrating the concept of Islamic spiritual ecology—anchored in the principles of *tauhid* (divine unity), *khalifah* (stewardship), and *rahmah* (compassion)—with established behaviour change theories such as the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen 1991) and the Transtheoretical Model of Change (Prochaska and DiClemente 1983). It further incorporates behavioural, systemic, and narrative counselling approaches to construct a holistic ecological counselling model tailored to the spiritual and developmental needs of Muslim students. This model represents a substantive *novelty*, offering an integrative and context-sensitive framework for sustainability-oriented counselling within Islamic higher education. By doing so, the study positions counselling not merely as a remedial service but as a transformative educational process that aligns faith, ecological ethics, and psychosocial well-being within the mission of Islamic universities.

1. Literature Review

The global ecological crisis has catalysed the emergence of interdisciplinary approaches to sustainability, including within the field of counselling. One particularly innovative and relevant framework is *ecological counselling*, which synthesizes insights from psychology, environmental studies, and spirituality to cultivate ecological awareness and promote sustainable behavioural change. Within the context of PTKI, this approach is particularly significant as it offers the potential to integrate Islamic values—such as *tawhid*, *khilafah*, and *amanah*—with contemporary behavioural change theories. This literature review outlines the conceptual foundation of ecological counselling, the spiritual-ecological principles embedded in Islam, behavioural change theories, and the integrative framework that underpins the development of spiritually informed ecological counselling models in PTKI.

1.1. Ecological Counselling: Definition and Development

Ecological counselling is a multidisciplinary counselling approach that explores the complex relationship between individuals and their physical, social, psychological, and spiritual environments. Pope and Vasquez emphasize that ecological counselling extends beyond intrapsychic concerns to encompass broader ecological issues such as environmental degradation, ecosystem collapse, and *eco-anxiety* (Pope and Vasquez 2016).

Eco-anxiety, defined as anxiety arising from environmental threats, is increasingly prevalent among younger generations, including university students, as the climate crisis deepens. Doherty and Clayton (Doherty and Clayton 2011) refer to this phenomenon as *environmental grief*, a profound sense of loss triggered by ecological devastation (Cunsolo and Ellis 2018). These realities highlight the urgent need for counselling approaches that are not

solely remedial, but also preventive and transformative—aimed at cultivating ecological awareness and encouraging sustainable lifestyles.

Within PTKI, ecological counselling has evolved into a spiritually grounded approach known as *spiritual ecological counselling*. This framework combines ecological sensitivity with Islamic spiritual values, drawing on the principles of *tawhid*, *khilafah*, and *amanah*. As Gade (Gade 2019), observes, Islam embodies an ecotheological perspective that affirms the sanctity of nature as God’s creation, while positioning humans as stewards of the earth, as reflected in Qur’anic verses such as al-Baqarah 2:30 and al-Rūm 30:41.

1.2. The Spiritual-Ecological Perspective in Islam

Islamic spiritual ecology views nature as a sacred trust (*amanah*) from God, whose preservation is both a moral and spiritual duty. This perspective is grounded in several key concepts:

- 1) *Tawhid* – As Nasr (Nasr 1976). emphasizes, *tawhid* is not only the doctrine of divine unity but also the recognition that all creation is a manifestation of God’s will, as illustrated in Ali ‘Imran 3:190–191. This awareness demands that humans act as responsible custodians of the earth.
- 2) *Khilafah* – Humans are designated as vicegerents (*khalifah*) of God on earth al-Baqarah 2:30, entrusted with maintaining ecological balance (*mīzān*) and avoiding corruption al-A‘rāf 7:56.
- 3) *Rahmatan lil ‘alamin* – Islam underscores a universal ethic of compassion, extending even to the natural world al-Anbiyā’ 21:107. Prophet Muhammad exemplified this ethic through environmental teachings, such as prohibiting water waste and encouraging tree planting.
- 4) Cosmological Ethics – Nature is perceived as a spiritual community that interacts dynamically with humans (Gade 2019). Contemplative reflection (*tafakkur*) on creation al-Ghāshiyah 88:17–20 fosters deep ecological consciousness.

In practice, PTKI students—such as those at UIN Jambi and UIN Malang—often possess strong religious foundations but exhibit inconsistencies in ecological behaviour. Spiritual ecological counselling can serve as an intervention that bridges personal piety with environmentally responsible actions.

1.3. Behavioural Change Theories

Shaping sustainable ecological behaviour requires robust psychological models. Two key frameworks are particularly relevant:

1) Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB).

Ajzen (Ajzen 1991) posits that behavioural intentions are determined by three factors: (a) *attitudes toward the behaviour*—the belief that eco-friendly behaviour yields positive outcomes; (b) *subjective norms*—the perceived social pressure to act; and (c) *perceived behavioural control*—the belief in one’s capacity to take action. Within PTKI, Islamic ecological literacy can reinforce positive attitudes, create campus-level social norms, and enhance students’ confidence in adopting sustainable practices.

2) Transtheoretical Model (TTM).

Prochaska and DiClemente (Prochaska and DiClemente 1983) propose six stages of behavioural change: *precontemplation* (lack of awareness), *contemplation* (recognition of the need to change), *preparation* (planning), *action* (implementation), *maintenance* (sustaining new behaviours), and *termination* (habitual integration). Field observations indicate that many PTKI students remain at the contemplation and preparation stages. Counselling interventions rooted in TTM can therefore be tailored to student readiness—such as integrating Islamic values during contemplation and reinforcing personal commitment during the action stage.

1.4. Conceptual Integration: Spiritual Ecology, TPB, and TTM

Integrating Islamic spiritual ecological principles (*tawhid*, *khilafah*, *rahmah*) with behavioural change theories (TPB and TTM), alongside contemporary counselling paradigms (behavioural, systemic, and narrative approaches), creates a holistic framework for ecological counselling in PTKI. This integrated model not only facilitates individual behaviour change but also strengthens collective campus norms aligned with the *Green Campus* movement and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 4 – Quality Education; SDG 12 – Responsible Consumption and Production; SDG 13 – Climate Action).

2. Research Methodology

2.1. Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative exploratory approach with a phenomenological framework and a multiple-case study design. The primary focus is to examine the practice of ecological counselling within two PTKI, namely UIN Jambi and UIN Malang. A phenomenological approach was chosen to capture the essence of subjective experiences among students and counsellors, particularly concerning the integration of Islamic spiritual-ecological values into counselling processes that promote sustainable behavioural change.

The multiple-case study design enables a comparative analysis between the two institutions, which differ in their geographical settings, cultural contexts, and approaches to implementing *Green Campus* initiatives, yet share a common Islamic value framework. As emphasized by Yin (Yin 2009), multiple-case studies strengthen theoretical replication, while Van Manen's hermeneutic phenomenological perspective (van Manen 2023) allows for an in-depth exploration of existential experiences within both spiritual and ecological dimensions.

The main unit of analysis is the practice of ecological counselling, which involves the interaction between counselling lecturers (*Bimbingan dan Konseling* – BK), students, institutional policies, and the broader cultural environment. Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews, participant observations, focus group discussions (FGDs), student reflective journals, and institutional documentation.

All collected data were analysed using the thematic phenomenological approach by Braun and Clarke (Braun and Clarke 2006), designed to identify logical and philosophically grounded patterns of meaning. This methodological framework not only provides empirical insights but also contributes to conceptual innovation by proposing an Islamic value-based ecological counselling model aimed at shaping students' character as agents of ecological and social change.

2.2. Research Sites

The study was conducted at two PTKI that reflect the diverse dynamics of Islamic higher education in Indonesia:

- 1) Sultan Thaha Saifuddin State Islamic University of Jambi (UIN Jambi) – Located in eastern Sumatra, this institution is characterized by its humid tropical ecosystem and multicultural social landscape. Since 2021, the university has implemented a *Green Campus Berbasis Nilai Islam* (Green Campus Based on Islamic Values) program, incorporating eco-theological themes into its Islamic counselling services.
- 2) Maulana Malik Ibrahim State Islamic University of Malang (UIN Malang) – Known as a pioneer of the *green campus* movement, this university integrates science, humanities, and Islamic spirituality. It has developed a reputation for eco-counselling innovations, eco-literacy training, and the reinforcement of Islamic cosmological values such as *tawhid*, *khilafah*, and *rahmah*.

The selection of these two campuses is based on their differing approaches to sustainability policy implementation, while both remain exemplary in their integration of

Islamic spirituality. This study seeks to bridge the gap between spiritual values, students' psychological needs, and the demand for sustainable ecological behaviour in PTKI.

2.3. Informants and Sampling Techniques

Informants were selected through a combination of purposive and stratified sampling to ensure the inclusion of individuals directly involved in counselling, sustainability initiatives, or religious activities. Four main categories of informants were identified:

- 1) Muslim Students (10–12 participants per campus), actively engaged in religious activities, environmental organizations, or counselling programs.
- 2) Islamic Counselling Lecturers (BK) (2 participants per campus) with prior experience integrating Islamic values into counselling practices.
- 3) University Leadership (1 participant per campus), such as Vice Rectors or Deans of Student Affairs.
- 4) Parents (2 participants per campus), whose children actively participate in spiritual or environmental initiatives.

Following Sharp's (Sharp 2003) *information-rich cases* principle, participants were selected for their capacity to provide deep, contextually relevant insights into how Islamic spirituality shapes students' green identity.

2.4. Data Collection Procedures

Four complementary data collection methods were applied:

- 1) In-Depth Semi-Structured Interviews – Conducted with students, counselling lecturers, university leaders, and parents, each lasting 45–60 minutes.
- 2) Participant Observation – Conducted over approximately four weeks at each campus to observe green campus activities, counselling sessions, and environmental *dakwah* initiatives.
- 3) Student Reflective Journals – Students maintained journals over a two-week period to document shifts in spiritual and ecological awareness.
- 4) Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) – Organized into 6–8 participant groups (students and counselling lecturers) with sessions lasting approximately 90 minutes.

The use of multiple methods allowed for triangulation, increasing both the validity and depth of the data.

2.5. Analysis Data

Data analysis followed Braun and Clarke's six-phase Thematic Analysis framework (Braun and Clarke 2006):

- 1) Familiarization – Repeated reading of interview transcripts, reflective journals, and observation notes.
- 2) Initial Coding – Generating codes linked to spirituality, ecology, and counselling themes.
- 3) Theme Identification – Grouping related codes into subthemes such as Islamic ecological awareness, behavioural change, and counselling roles.
- 4) Theme Review – Evaluating the coherence and relationships among themes.
- 5) Theme Naming and Definition – Developing operational definitions and thematic interpretations.
- 6) Report Compilation – Constructing the final analysis with illustrative quotations from informants.

NVivo software was employed to support coding, theme visualization, and the mapping of conceptual interrelationships, thereby improving both rigor and transparency. The integration of manual thematic analysis and NVivo facilitated the development of a comprehensive conceptual framework for Islamic spiritual-ecological counselling.

3. Research Findings

3.1. Manifestations of Spiritual Ecology in Students' Beliefs and Behaviours

The research findings reveal that integrating spiritual-ecological values into counselling practices within PTKI significantly influences students' ecological consciousness and behavioural transformation. This conclusion is supported by triangulated data derived from eco-journals (students' reflective writings), eco-walk activities, and *tafakur alam* (nature contemplation) sessions, all facilitated within spiritually oriented counselling frameworks.

Through eco-journals, most students documented that direct engagement with nature during *tafakur alam* nurtured a profound awareness of *tauhid* as a spiritual foundation for environmental stewardship. Nature was no longer perceived as a mere resource to exploit but as a sacred creation of Allah deserving respect, care, and protection. One student reflected:

“I feel ashamed for having neglected the environment all this time. After learning that caring for the earth is an act of worship, I now regularly sort waste and reduce plastic use.” (Student, UIN Jambi, Eco-journal)

Eco-walks conducted mindfully around the campus fostered reflective and contemplative experiences, catalysing tangible behavioural changes such as reducing single-

use plastic bottles, conserving energy, participating in eco-volunteering, and forming the “Green Muslim Youth” community. This shift was reinforced by an understanding of *khalifah* (ecological stewardship) as a spiritual mandate inherent to Muslim identity.

Spiritual reflection through *tafakur* and counselling dialogues further expanded students’ notion of piety, transitioning from a focus on ritual devotion to a broader concept of ecological piety. The principle of *rahmatan lil ‘alamin* found expression in compassion toward all living beings and the cultivation of interfaith ecological solidarity. A student from UIN Malang wrote:

“As I sat under a tree and observed the birds, I felt like part of the harmony of God’s creation. I aspire to be a Muslim who brings mercy, not destruction.”
(Student, UIN Malang, Tafakur Alam)

This reflective process gave rise to an *ecological Muslim identity*—students who ground every ecological action in faith. These findings resonate with the *Theory of Planned Behaviour* (Ajzen 1991), which posits that attitudes and normative beliefs shape intentions and behaviours. NVivo data visualization of eco-journal entries revealed a consistent alignment between *tauhid*-based awareness, ecological empathy, and pro-environmental practices.

The spiritual dimension of counselling proved particularly effective, not only in fostering cognitive understanding but also in nurturing a transcendental connection with nature. Consequently, students’ ecological behaviours became more authentic, intentional, and sustainable, with spiritual ecology serving as the cornerstone of their environmental ethos.

3.2. Models of Spiritual Ecology-Based Counselling

The implementation of spiritually grounded ecological counselling within Islamic higher education is manifested through the development and application of three principal intervention models: Green Reflection Circles, Spiritual Eco-Walks, and Eco-Journal Counselling. These models were collaboratively designed by lecturers in Islamic guidance and counselling, students, and environmental facilitators, taking into account cultural contexts, levels of religiosity, and students’ psychosocial needs.

1) Green Reflection Circles

Serve as reflective forums conducted in small student groups situated in campus green spaces such as gardens, educational farms, or lakeside areas. In these sessions, students sit in a circle and are guided by a counsellor or facilitator to discuss their spiritual experiences in perceiving nature as a manifestation of divine creation (*ayat kauniyah*). The dialogic process represents a narrative and existential counselling approach, allowing students to interpret

ecological experiences through the lens of Islamic values such as *tawhid* (unity of God), *khalifah* (stewardship), and *rahmah* (compassion) (Gade 2019; Nasr 1976). This reflective engagement not only deepens spiritual awareness but also fosters ecological empathy and a sense of social responsibility toward sustainability. Field data reveal that students increasingly recognize environmental degradation as a violation of Islamic ethical and spiritual principles (Interview, 2025).

2) Spiritual Eco-Walks

Involve slow, mindful walks in nature accompanied by spiritual contemplation (*tafakur alam*). These activities take place in campus green zones or designated *ecotherapy* forests. Each participant receives selected Qur’anic verses related to the creation of nature—such as Surah. al-A‘rāf: 56, Ṭāhā: 114, and al-Hijr: 19–20—and is encouraged to observe natural phenomena while documenting their reflections in an *eco-journal*. Observational data indicate that *eco-walks* significantly enhance inner calmness and strengthen students’ spiritual connection with nature. They become more conscious of their existential interdependence with the ecosystem and are motivated to undertake concrete environmental actions such as waste sorting, reducing plastic use, and initiating campus-based environmental campaigns (*Eco-Journal Analysis*, 2025).

3) Eco-Journal Counselling

represents a reflective, writing-based counselling practice in which students routinely record their spiritual-ecological experiences and insights throughout the semester. These journals are qualitatively analysed to trace changes in perception, value orientation, and behavioural patterns concerning environmental stewardship. Counsellors facilitate the reflective process by posing guiding questions such as, “*What is the spiritual meaning of your experience in nature today?*” or “*How is your relationship with God manifested through your interaction with the environment?*” NVivo-assisted analysis generated core themes including “nature as a mirror of faith,” “ecological sin,” and “spiritual responsibility for the Earth.” This model demonstrates that the integration of spirituality with ecological counselling serves as an effective medium for fostering sustainable behavioural transformation (Braun and Clarke 2006).

To complement these three approaches, a Spiritual FGD is conducted as a collective interpretive space that reinforces shared ecological-spiritual values. This forum brings together students, counsellors, and religious scholars to engage in reflective dialogue about Islamic eco-ethics and sustainability. The model draws upon systemic and transformative counselling

paradigms that emphasize interdisciplinary collaboration and ecological solidarity (Epstein and Van Voorhis 2001).

The integrated framework of these counselling practices is summarized below.

Table 1: Spiritually Based Ecological Counselling Program Models

Model	Objectives	Core Activities	Theoretical Foundation	Schedule / Duration	Indicators of Success
Green Reflection Circles	Strengthen spiritual awareness and ecological empathy.	Reflective group discussions in campus green areas, exploring nature as <i>ayat kauniyah</i> .	Narrative and existential counselling; Islamic ecological theology (<i>tawhid, khalifah, rahmah</i>) (Gade 2019; Nasr 1976).	Biweekly throughout the semester.	Increased understanding of eco-ethical principles; enhanced reflective religiosity; student-led environmental initiatives.
Spiritual Eco-Walks	Internalize Qur’anic ecological messages and promote sustainable action.	Contemplative walking (<i>tafakur alam</i>), reciting Qur’anic verses, observing and journaling reflections.	Ecotherapy and spiritual reflection model; Qur’anic ecological paradigm (Qur’an 7:56; 20:114; 15:19–20).	Monthly, 1–2 hours per session.	Enhanced calmness, reduced eco-anxiety, and active participation in green campus activities.
Eco-Journal Counselling	Facilitate continuous reflection linking faith and environmental behaviour.	Writing personal eco-spiritual reflections guided by counselling prompts.	Phenomenological writing therapy integrated with Islamic spiritual values (Braun and Clarke 2006).	Weekly journaling for one semester.	Positive shifts in ecological perception and spiritually grounded behavioural transformation.
Spiritual FGD	Strengthen collective ecological-spiritual awareness and commitment.	Discussion involving students, lecturers, and scholars on Islamic eco-ethics and sustainability.	Transformative counselling and systemic collaboration paradigm (Epstein and Van Voorhis 2001).	At the end of each semester.	Emergence of eco-ethical solidarity and collaborative sustainability projects.

These ecological counselling programs are grounded in the principles of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) and Islamic Value-Based Counselling, integrating cognitive, affective, and psychomotor dimensions within the broader framework of sustainability education. Conceptually, this practice repositions counselling in Islamic higher education not merely as a remedial service, but as a transformative platform for ecological and spiritual character formation. Accordingly, the findings underscore the urgency of developing contextual, participatory, and spiritually rooted ecological counselling curricula that are

responsive to the local cultural and spiritual identity of students in Indonesia's Islamic higher education institutions.

3.3. Indicators of Behavioural Change

The findings indicate that the practice of *Ecological Counselling*, which integrates the principles of Islamic spiritual ecology, has significantly influenced students' behavioural transformation across three major dimensions: cognitive, affective, and practical. These dimensions interact dynamically, forming a transformative learning process that facilitates the internalization of Islamic values into students' ecological awareness and behaviour. This transformation emerges through active participation in three core programs—*Green Reflection Circles*, *Spiritual Eco-Walks*, and *Eco-Journal Counselling*—which serve as experiential platforms for ecological reflection and action.

1) Cognitive Dimension (Cognitive Shifts)

Cognitive transformation is reflected in the students' enhanced understanding of the fundamental principles of Islamic ecospirituality, such as *tawhīd* as the foundation of ecological consciousness, human responsibility as *khalifah fi al-Ard*, and the ethical meaning of *rahmatan lil-ʿĀlamīn* in the context of environmental preservation. Analysis of *eco-journals* and in-depth interviews reveals that students have begun to integrate Qur'anic verses—such as Surah al-Aʿrāf 7:56 and al-Rūm 30:41—into their interpretation of contemporary ecological issues.

A participant from UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang stated,

“I used to think waste was merely a hygiene issue. After the reflection and *tafakkur al-nature* sessions, I realized that littering is actually a form of betrayal of the trust (*amānah*) given to us as *khalifah*.”

NVivo visualizations further corroborate these findings, showing a high frequency of nodes such as “responsibility as *khalifah*,” “Qur'anic awareness,” and “environmental crisis.” This indicates that students' understanding extends beyond rational ecological awareness, encompassing a theological and moral consciousness rooted in the Islamic worldview.

2) Affective Dimension (Affective Shifts)

Affective transformation manifests in heightened emotional sensitivity and spiritual empathy toward the natural world and living beings. This dimension is evident in *eco-journal* entries containing emotionally charged expressions such as, “I feel guilty wasting food,” “I cried when I saw the polluted river,” and “I felt God's presence when I touched the wet soil.”

Data from FGDs with lecturers and parents indicate that students developed a stronger sense of *spiritual presence* and *eco-empathy*—a deep spiritual connection with nature as God’s creation. This resonates with Hoot and Varga’s (Veisson et al. 2011) assertion that *spiritual ecology* cultivates moral sensitivity and ecological empathy. Consequently, the affective dimension reflects not only emotional engagement but also a deepening of religious consciousness as a moral foundation for ecological ethics in Islam.

3) Practical Dimension (Behavioural or Practical Shifts)

Behavioural change represents the most tangible indicator of the effectiveness of *Ecological Counselling*. Students demonstrated lifestyle changes aligned with sustainable practices, such as reducing plastic use, carrying reusable bottles, sorting waste, and participating actively in *green campus movements*.

Participant observations show that students who consistently joined *eco-walks* and *green reflection circles* voluntarily engaged in campus reforestation, ecological advocacy, and *eco-Islamic youth* community initiatives. These behavioural changes correspond to the *action* and *maintenance* stages of the *Transtheoretical Model* (Prochaska and DiClemente 1983), reflecting a transition from awareness to sustained behavioural commitment.

4) Synthesis and Implications

Thematic analysis using NVivo demonstrates strong interrelations between religious consciousness, Islamic ecological literacy, and students’ green practices. The generated word clouds and frequency graphs highlight dominant keywords such as “*khalifah*,” “God’s creation,” “responsibility,” and “green behaviour.”

These findings affirm that the integration of counselling with Islamic spiritual ecology effectively facilitates holistic behavioural transformation—encompassing not only cognitive understanding but also emotional engagement and practical action. The cognitive, affective, and practical dimensions collectively reinforce one another as key indicators of the success of *Ecological Counselling* in fostering sustainability grounded in Islamic values within Islamic higher education institutions.

3.4. Institutional Support and Pedagogical Gaps

Institutional support for ecological counselling practices at UIN Jambi and UIN Malang has been substantial, as reflected in *green campus* policies, eco-campus declarations, and mosque-centred character-building programs. Nonetheless, field observations highlighted critical pedagogical gaps:

- 1) Limited integration of eco-spiritual activities into the formal curriculum.

- 2) Absence of a comprehensive Islamic ecology-based counselling module.
- 3) Lack of structured training for counselling lecturers in spiritual-ecological approaches.
- 4) Insufficient infrastructure, such as reflective gardens and eco-friendly counselling spaces.

Although UIN Malang has introduced an *eco-living camp*, it remains disconnected from formal counselling programs. At UIN Jambi, *tafakur alam* initiatives are primarily managed by informal student communities.

These findings underscore the urgent need for a systemic and sustainable pedagogical ecosystem. As Gade (Gade 2019) asserts, modern Islamic education must revitalize the integration of spiritual values, cosmological ethics, and ecological responsibility within all dimensions of learning.

4. Discussion

4.1. The Role of Spiritual Ecology in Fostering Environmental Awareness

The findings of this study underscore that Islamic spiritual values, when systematically integrated into ecological counselling practices, exert a profound influence on enhancing students' ecological awareness. By merging spiritual dimensions with environment-centred counselling approaches, ecological understanding is not only formed through rational and cognitive processes but is also rooted in inner contemplation, the principle of *tauhid*, and a transcendental relationship with nature as a divine creation.

Activities such as eco-journals, eco-walks, and green reflection circles demonstrate significant shifts in students' perceptions at UIN Jambi and UIN Malang. NVivo-based analysis of students' reflective narratives highlights a growing use of spiritually charged concepts—such as *amanah* (trust), *fitrah* (primordial nature), *rahmah* (compassion), and *khalifah* (stewardship)—to articulate their connection with the natural environment. This finding reinforces the argument that spiritual ecology functions as a value-internalization framework that bridges cognitive awareness with actionable ecological commitments (Nasr 1976; Gade 2019).

These insights resonate with the *Theory of Planned Behaviour* (Ajzen 1991), which posits that behavioural intentions are shaped by subjective norms, attitudes, and perceived control, all of which are strongly influenced by personal belief systems. Within the PTKI context, these norms are further reinforced by Islamic teachings on *amanah* and *khalifah*,

motivating students to adopt sustainable practices when these values are reactivated through reflective, spiritually grounded counselling sessions.

Concrete behavioural changes were observed among participants of spiritual eco-walks, who began adopting zero-waste lifestyles, reducing resource wastage, and engaging in environmental advocacy on social media platforms. This aligns with the findings of Loughland et al., who argue that spiritually driven environmental awareness demonstrates greater long-term resilience compared to awareness derived solely from technical or informational approaches (Loughland, Butt, and Nithyanandan 2020).

Nevertheless, a critical gap remains between students' spiritual awareness and their technical ecological literacy, particularly in practical domains such as waste management, recycling, and local biodiversity conservation. This highlights the need for counsellors and educators to integrate religious narratives with ecological science to foster holistic and transformative environmental consciousness (O'Brien and Selboe 2015).

Thus, spiritual ecology emerges as a vital bridge between religious values and ecological literacy, establishing a robust ethical foundation for sustainable behavioural transformation. This opens avenues for the development of integrative, faith-informed counselling frameworks in Islamic higher education.

4.2. Counselling as a Bridge to Sustainable Behaviour

Ecological counselling that harmonizes spiritual and psychosocial dimensions plays a pivotal role in facilitating students' transition toward sustainable behaviour. The three core interventions—Green Reflection Circles, Spiritual Eco-Walks, and Eco-Journal Counselling—function not only as reflective exercises but also as strategic vehicles for cultivating ecological awareness and actionable commitment.

This approach aligns with the *Transtheoretical Model of Change* (Prochaska and DiClemente 1983), wherein students exhibited progression from pre-contemplation to action and maintenance phases following participation in counselling sessions. Reflective journal data indicate that students who were initially indifferent toward environmental issues gradually developed commitments to low-carbon lifestyles, including reducing single-use plastics and initiating campus-based green initiatives.

The counselling framework in this study operates across three dimensions:

- 1) Cognitive – Students gain an enriched understanding of the link between Islamic principles (*tauhid, khalifah, rahmatan lil 'alamin*) and ecological responsibilities.

- 2) Affective – Direct engagement in eco-walks and *tafakur alam* deepens their emotional and spiritual connection with nature as a divine trust.
- 3) Practical – Students implement tangible, pro-environmental actions as expressions of spiritual accountability.

These findings support Capstick et al.'s argument that value-oriented, psychosocial interventions are more effective in inducing behavioural change compared to normative, information-based approaches (Capstick et al. 2015). Within the PTKI context, this approach is particularly impactful due to its alignment with students' religious identities. Narrative counselling through eco-journals further enables students to reconstruct their personal narratives as ecological change agents.

Field data from both UIN Jambi and UIN Malang emphasize that counsellor's function not merely as information providers, but as facilitators of transformation, emotional mentors, and mediators between Islamic values and ecological realities. However, structural challenges persist, including limited sustainability curricula, insufficient eco-counselling training for Islamic counselling lecturers, and the absence of formalized eco-counselling modules.

Therefore, ecological counselling emerges as a transformative pedagogical strategy that bridges spiritual awareness with concrete ecological behaviour, positioning counselling as a key driver of sustainable Islamic education.

4.3. Innovation in Islamic Educational Psychology

This study contributes to the theoretical advancement of Islamic Educational Psychology by proposing a sustainability-oriented paradigm of Islamic counselling. The integration of Islamic spiritual values with environmental psychology and behaviour change theories generates both conceptual and practical innovations within PTKI.

The principal innovation is the formulation of an Islamic Ecological Counselling Model, which emphasizes the interconnectedness of humans, nature, and divine values. This model is rooted in the principles of *tauhid*, *khalifah*, and *rahmatan lil 'alamin*, while employing eco-journals, eco-walks, and green reflection circles as mechanisms for internalizing ecological ethics. Students are positioned as active agents in cultivating faith-based ecological consciousness (Nasr 1976; Gade 2019).

Empirical observations indicate transformative changes in three key domains:

- 1) Spiritual reorientation toward nature, with a recognition that environmental destruction constitutes a violation of *khalifah* responsibilities.

- 2) Affirmation of Islamic ecological identity, wherein pro-environmental behaviour is integrated into acts of worship.
- 3) Value-to-practice integration, exemplified by participation in zero-waste initiatives, campus gardens, and environmental education programs.

This innovation addresses critical gaps in Islamic educational psychology, which has historically overlooked human-environment interrelations. It also aligns with the global agenda of SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 13 (Climate Action), providing a holistic, faith-informed framework. As Ahmad and Owoyemi emphasize, the success of Islamic counselling must be measured not only in terms of psychological well-being but also through its contributions to social and ecological balance (Abd-Elsalam and Binay 2024; Ahmad and Owoyemi 2012).

Thus, the proposed model offers a prototype for Green Islamic Counselling that is adaptive, context-sensitive, and future-focused, reinforcing PTKI's role as a civilizational agent that integrates faith, knowledge, and sustainable action.

4.4. Relevance to the SDGs and the Green Campus Movement

This study highlights the strategic alignment of spiritual ecology-based counselling with the global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production), and SDG 13 (Climate Action). Within PTKI, the model not only enhances individual awareness but also embeds spiritual values that drive collective sustainability practices.

SDG 4 is reflected in the transformative educational approaches employed in Green Reflection Circles, Eco-Journal Counselling, and Spiritual Eco-Walks, all of which foster critical thinking, spiritual reflection, and ecological ethics (UNESCO 2020). SDG 12 is realized through increased awareness of responsible consumption, waste reduction, and sustainable lifestyle choices, while SDG 13 is manifested in students' involvement in Islamic value-based environmental initiatives, such as tree-planting campaigns and climate-change advocacy.

This model is also in harmony with the ethos of the Green Campus Movement, which promotes environmentally conscious, socially equitable, and future-oriented academic environments. As Sterling (Sterling 2010) emphasizes, sustainability education grounded in local and spiritual values has deeper transformative potential than purely technocratic approaches.

In sum, this study not only advances the conceptual understanding of Islamic ecological counselling but also provides a contextually relevant framework for supporting SDG implementation and green campus initiatives in Islamic higher education.

Conclusion

This research underscores that spiritually integrated ecological counselling is not only effective but also transformative and contextually grounded in cultivating environmental awareness and sustainable behaviour (*green behaviour*) among students in Islamic higher education institutions (PTKI). The integration of Islamic spiritual values with psychosocial approaches has been shown to foster multidimensional change—cognitive (ecological literacy), affective (emotional and moral sensitivity), and behavioural (green practices). Models such as Spiritual Eco-Walks, Green Reflection Circles, and Eco-Journal Counselling have proven particularly effective in internalizing sustainability values rooted in *rahmatan lil 'alamin*, while simultaneously advancing the paradigm of Islamic counselling toward an ecological and holistic orientation.

The findings also reveal that counselling within PTKI functions as a strategic instrument for sustainable character education, directly supporting the global agenda of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) and contributing to the achievement of SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production), and SDG 13 (Climate Action).

From a theoretical standpoint, this study contributes to the development of an integrative counselling framework that unites spiritual consciousness with ecological responsibility, offering a conceptual foundation for curriculum development, counsellor training, and institutional counselling policies within PTKI. Practically, this research advocates for the design of environmentally conscious guidance and counselling (BK) curricula, the implementation of interdisciplinary counsellor training, and the creation of digital modules or Islamic eco-counselling platforms to facilitate scalable impact.

Although this study adopts a case study approach with limited institutional scope, its model demonstrates significant potential for replication across various PTKI, provided contextual adjustments are made. By adopting this framework, PTKI can position themselves as pioneers in shaping eco-conscious Muslim counsellors, embodying the role of *khalifah fil ardh* (stewards of the earth) who are capable of addressing global environmental challenges through meaningful and value-driven local initiatives.

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