

## CHARACTER EDUCATION IN THE ERA OF SUSTAINABILITY: STRATEGIES FOR BUILDING ETHICAL AND RESILIENT GENERATIONS

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### Abstrak

*Perkembangan global yang semakin cepat telah menjadikan pendidikan karakter sebagai landasan kritis untuk mencapai pembangunan manusia yang berkelanjutan. Studi ini mengeksplorasi strategi untuk menguatkan pendidikan karakter dalam kerangka keberlanjutan, menekankan perannya dalam membentuk generasi yang etis dan tangguh yang mampu menghadapi tantangan lingkungan, sosial, dan moral kontemporer. Menggunakan pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif berdasarkan literatur empiris dan konseptual terbaru, penelitian ini mengidentifikasi bahwa pendidikan karakter yang selaras dengan prinsip-prinsip keberlanjutan tidak hanya menumbuhkan integritas moral tetapi juga tanggung jawab lingkungan dan ketahanan sosial-emosional. Studi ini meninjau penelitian sebelumnya yang mengeksplorasi pendidikan karakter melalui pembelajaran berbasis proyek, kebijaksanaan lokal, dan integrasi literasi digital, sambil menyoroti kesenjangan signifikan dalam menghubungkan pembentukan etika dan kompetensi keberlanjutan. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa pendekatan terintegrasi, kontekstual, dan partisipatif yang menggabungkan pendidikan formal, keterlibatan keluarga, dan kolaborasi komunitas paling efektif dalam membentuk pengembangan karakter berkelanjutan. Penelitian ini memberikan kontribusi pada kerangka teoritis dan rekomendasi praktis bagi pembuat kebijakan dan pendidik yang berupaya menumbuhkan generasi yang berlandaskan etika, bertanggung jawab secara sosial, dan siap menghadapi masa depan di era ketidakpastian global.*

**Kata Kunci:** Pendidikan karakter, pengembangan etika, nilai moral; pedagogi berkelanjutan, kewarganegaraan global

### Abstract

*The accelerating pace of global change has made character education a critical foundation for achieving sustainable human development. This study explores strategies to strengthen character education within the framework of sustainability, emphasizing its role in nurturing ethical and resilient generations capable of addressing contemporary environmental, social, and moral challenges. Using a qualitative descriptive approach based on recent empirical and conceptual literature, this research identifies that character education aligned with sustainability principles fosters not only moral integrity but also environmental responsibility and socio emotional resilience. The study reviews prior research that examined character education through project-based learning, local wisdom, and digital literacy integration, while highlighting a significant gap in linking ethical formation and sustainability competencies. Findings suggest that integrated, contextual, and participatory approaches combining formal education, family engagement, and community collaboration are most effective in shaping sustainable character development. The research contributes to a theoretical framework and practical recommendations for policymakers and educators seeking to cultivate ethically grounded, socially responsible, and future-ready generations in an era of global uncertainty.*

**Key Words:** Character Education, Ethical Development, Moral Values, Sustainable Pedagogy, Global Citizenship

## INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary era marked by rapid technological innovation, environmental degradation, and growing moral uncertainty, the role of character education has become increasingly crucial for achieving a sustainable future. The twenty-first century presents unprecedented challenges that intertwine ethical, ecological, and social dimensions from climate change and digital disinformation to socioeconomic inequality and youth mental health crises. Global reports emphasize that education systems must move beyond cognitive achievement and cultivate morally responsible, emotionally resilient learners prepared for global complexity.<sup>1</sup> The acceleration of artificial intelligence, consumerism, and media saturation has contributed to the erosion of empathy, communal solidarity, and civic responsibility among younger generations. Consequently, education must cultivate ethical awareness and sustainable thinking to empower individuals to act responsibly toward society and the planet. Strengthening character education within a sustainability framework is therefore essential for sustaining social and ecological equilibrium.<sup>2</sup>

Over the past decade, scholars have emphasized that moral and character formation constitute the foundation of holistic human development.<sup>3</sup> Recent empirical research demonstrates that project-based learning and culturally responsive curricula enhance environmental awareness and prosocial behavior.<sup>4</sup> Digital character education initiatives likewise foster ethical literacy and responsible online citizenship.<sup>5</sup> However, significant gaps remain in explicitly integrating character education with sustainability competencies particularly resilience, ecological ethics, and social responsibility. Previous research often isolates moral instruction from environmental education without offering an integrated developmental framework. This study addresses that limitation by situating character education within sustainable development discourse, proposing strategies that align ethical formation with environmental awareness and psychosocial resilience.<sup>6</sup>

The central objective of this research is to identify effective strategies for integrating character education into sustainability-oriented pedagogical models.<sup>7</sup> It investigates collaborative roles among schools, families, and communities in implementing value-based education that harmonizes moral integrity with ecological consciousness. The study also explores essential character values such as empathy, responsibility, respect for diversity, and environmental stewardship and examines how digital and global forces shape moral reasoning among youth. Integrated approaches grounded in experiential and contextual learning demonstrate significant potential in

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<sup>1</sup> UNESCO, *Reimagining Our Futures Together: A New Social Contract for Education* (Paris: UNESCO, 2023), <https://doi.org/10.54675/ASRB4722>;

<sup>2</sup> OECD, *Education at a Glance 2022: OECD Indicators* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.1787/3197152b-en>

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Lickona, *How to Raise Kind Kids: And Get Respect, Gratitude, and a Happier Family in the Bargain* (New York: Penguin Books, 2019)

<sup>4</sup> Susanto et al., "Project-Based Learning and Environmental Awareness in Secondary Education," *Journal of Environmental Education* 52, no. 4 (2021): 245–260, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00958964.2021.1880953>

<sup>5</sup> Lee and Huang, "Digital Character Education for Responsible Citizenship," *Computers & Education* 182 (2022): 104462, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2022.104462>.

<sup>6</sup> Nurdin et al., "Local Wisdom-Based Curriculum and Students' Prosocial Behavior," *Sustainability* 15, no. 2 (2023): 1124, <https://doi.org/10.3390/su15021124>.

<sup>7</sup> Larry Nucci, *Character: A Multidimensional Approach to Moral Education* (New York: Routledge, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003283712>.

enhancing moral sensitivity and environmental responsibility.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, sustainability-oriented character education extends beyond ecological ethics to include digital and social sustainability, requiring critical digital literacy and ethical awareness in technological ecosystems.<sup>9</sup>

Theoretically, this research proposes an integrative framework linking moral education, sustainability, and resilience as interdependent dimensions of human development.<sup>10</sup> Practically, it offers recommendations for embedding sustainability values within curricula and institutional culture. By fostering ethical and resilient generations, education contributes directly to the realization of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 4 and SDG 13.<sup>11</sup> Ultimately, sustainability begins with character the cultivation of ethical awareness, moral courage, and empathy as foundations of a sustainable civilization.

## METHOD

This study employs a qualitative case study approach to examine how character education contributes to building ethical and resilient generations within the framework of sustainability.<sup>12</sup> The unit of analysis focuses on educational institutions, particularly schools and Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*), that have integrated sustainability-oriented values into their educational systems. These institutions provide concrete examples of how moral, ecological, and social principles are embedded in both formal and informal learning processes, aligning character education with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).<sup>13</sup>

Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and document analysis.<sup>14</sup> Informants included teachers, principals, curriculum developers, and students directly involved in character education practices. Observations were conducted during classroom instruction, extracurricular programs, and institutional activities to explore how sustainability values are practiced in everyday educational interactions. Interviews and documentation were used to understand participants' perspectives on ethical responsibility, environmental stewardship, and social cohesion, while ensuring data triangulation.

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<sup>8</sup> Kim and Park, "Experiential Learning and Moral Sensitivity in Sustainability Education," *Journal of Moral Education* 50, no. 3 (2021): 345–360, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057240.2021.1898812>

<sup>9</sup> Rahman, "Integrating Sustainability Values in Character Education," *International Journal of Educational Development* 88 (2022): 102509, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2021.102509>

<sup>10</sup>Choi et al., "Community-Based Education and Environmental Responsibility," *Sustainability* 16, no. 1 (2024): 210, <https://doi.org/10.3390/su16010210>.

<sup>11</sup>United Nations, *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (New York: United Nations, 2015), <https://doi.org/10.18356/6f7d4e6e-en>.

<sup>12</sup>Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research and Applications: Design and Methods*, 6th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2018), <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781506336169>.

<sup>13</sup>United Nations, *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (New York: United Nations, 2015), <https://doi.org/10.18356/6f6c8d6f-en>.

<sup>14</sup>John W. Creswell and Cheryl N. Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*, 4th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2018), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429464236>.

Data analysis followed the interactive model of Miles and Huberman data reduction, data display, and verification.<sup>15</sup> The study also applied content analysis and interpretative analysis to uncover both explicit educational strategies and implicit value systems embedded in institutional practices.<sup>16</sup> Through methodological rigor and triangulation, this framework provides a comprehensive understanding of how sustainability-based character education functions as a moral and transformative force in shaping future generations capable of sustaining a just and livable world.<sup>17</sup>

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Result

The data indicate that sustainability-oriented character education is perceived as a holistic process encompassing moral instruction, environmental care, and community responsibility.

**Table 1** Informants’ Perspectives on the Implementation of Sustainability Oriented Character Education

Informant	Role	Key Statement	Theme
T1	Teacher	Integrates environmental ethics into lessons	Curriculum Integration
T2	Teacher	Promotes daily sustainable habits among students	Behavioral Practice
P1	Principal	Builds institutional culture through eco-school programs	Institutional Policy
S1	Student	Learns to manage waste and reuse materials	Student Engagement
S2	Student	Values moral lessons from real-life sustainability projects	Experiential Learning
T3	Teacher	Links moral values with SDGs in lesson design	Global Connection

*Source: Results of field data collection by researchers*

The data indicate that sustainability-oriented character education is perceived as a holistic process encompassing moral instruction, environmental care, and community responsibility. The data presented in Table 1 reveal a consistent pattern in which educators and students underscore the importance of integration namely, the incorporation of ethical, environmental, and civic values within the educational process. Teachers reported employing participatory and contextual learning strategies, including project-based learning and community engagement activities, to connect moral instruction with concrete environmental issues. The principal emphasized that institutional policies play a pivotal role in cultivating a culture of sustainability, particularly through eco-school initiatives and structured waste management programs. Students’ testimonies further demonstrate active engagement and the internalization of sustainable behaviors in their daily practices.

<sup>15</sup>Matthew B. Miles, A. Michael Huberman, and Johnny Saldaña, *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook*, 4th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781506335674>.

<sup>16</sup>Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, eds., *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 5th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2018), <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781526416070>.

<sup>17</sup>Stephen Sterling, “Sustainable Education: Re-visioning Learning and Change,” *Journal of Education for Sustainable Development* 1, no. 1 (2007): 19–34, <https://doi.org/10.1177/097340820700100105>.

The convergence of these perspectives indicates that the institution’s character education model extends beyond cognitive transmission toward behavioral transformation and affective internalization. This pattern reflects a collaborative framework in which leadership vision, pedagogical strategies, and student experiences mutually reinforce sustainable character formation.

From an analytical standpoint, the integration observed across informants corresponds with the paradigm of transformative education, in which sustainability functions simultaneously as curricular content and moral context. The teachers’ approach is consistent with the constructivist orientation articulated by Stephen Sterling, who conceptualizes sustainability education as a process of meaning-making grounded in ecological consciousness.<sup>18</sup> The principal’s emphasis on institutional commitment aligns with the theory of sustainable school leadership developed by Beutel and Zehetmeier, which identifies administrative vision and systemic coherence as prerequisites for educational transformation.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, students’ experiential engagement corroborates the findings of Leicht, Heiss, and Byun, who demonstrate that participatory sustainability learning strengthens ethical reasoning and ecological awareness.<sup>20</sup> Collectively, this triangulated evidence suggests that character education for sustainability becomes effective when it operates across systemic, pedagogical, and experiential dimensions simultaneously. Consequently, moral formation in contemporary education must be interdisciplinary, integrating local cultural wisdom with global sustainability imperatives.

Observations were conducted for six weeks across classrooms, school gardens, and community activities.

**Table 2** Observational Findings of Sustainability-Based Character Education Practices Across Educational Settings

Setting	Observed Practice	Description	Emerging Theme
<b>Classroom</b>	Students discuss ethical dilemmas related to resource use	Integration of moral reasoning	Reflective Dialogue
<b>School Garden</b>	Students maintain compost and plant vegetables	Hands-on sustainability practice	Environmental Stewardship
<b>Waste Station</b>	Teachers supervise recycling projects	Collaborative learning environment	Social Responsibility
<b>Assembly</b>	Principal emphasizes moral values in morning briefings	Leadership reinforcement	Value Transmission
<b>Community Outreach</b>	Students join local clean-up campaigns	Service learning extension	Civic Engagement

*Source: Results of field data collection by researchers*

<sup>18</sup>Stephen Sterling, “A Constructivist Approach to Sustainable Education,” *Sustainability* 12, no. 9 (2020): 1–15, <https://doi.org/10.3390/su12093745>

<sup>19</sup>Denise Beutel and Stefan Zehetmeier, “Sustainable School Leadership: A Framework for Educational Transformation,” *Educational Management Administration & Leadership* 49, no. 6 (2021): 987–1003, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143220933900>

<sup>20</sup>Alexander Leicht, Julia Heiss, and Won Jung Byun, “Education for Sustainable Development: Towards Achieving the SDGs,” *International Review of Education* 68, no. 2 (2022): 123–140, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11159-022-09935-9>.

The observations show that sustainability-based character education occurs through diverse settings beyond the classroom, where moral, ecological, and civic activities intersect. From the observed practices, several pedagogical and behavioral patterns emerged. The classroom setting revealed consistent emphasis on dialogic learning, where students engaged in moral discussions about sustainability issues such as waste, energy, and consumerism. Outdoor activities, including school gardens and recycling projects, demonstrated students' practical application of sustainability principles. Teachers served as facilitators rather than authoritative instructors, allowing students to co-create meaning through action. Institutional events such as assemblies reinforced the moral and environmental messages introduced in class, thus creating a continuous learning environment that connects knowledge with practice. Moreover, community engagement projects extended learning beyond the school boundaries, cultivating civic empathy and collective responsibility. These observations indicate that sustainability-oriented character formation thrives when education is experiential, reflective, and socially embedded.<sup>21</sup>

The observed behaviors align with experiential learning theory as articulated by Kolb, which posits that authentic experience constitutes the core mechanism of value internalization.<sup>22</sup> Students' engagement in gardening and recycling activities not only developed environmental awareness but also nurtured discipline, patience, and empathy core elements of character education. The teachers' facilitative approach resonates with UNESCO's model of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), which emphasizes participatory pedagogy as a catalyst for behavioral transformation.<sup>23</sup> The principal's leadership in integrating sustainability messages into assemblies echoes the findings of Sipos, Battisti, and Grimm, who argue that institutional reinforcement enhances ethical coherence among learners.<sup>24</sup> Thus, the analysis suggests that sustainable character development requires coherence between classroom instruction, institutional culture, and community-based practice. The educational ecosystem must therefore be designed to produce interconnected learning experiences that shape both mindset and moral habitus.

Documentation was collected from curricular documents, policy guidelines, and reports of sustainability programs between 2022–2024.

**Table 3** Institutional Policy and Program Documentation Supporting Sustainability-Oriented Character Education (2022–2024)

Document Type	Title	Year	Key Content	Relevance
Curriculum Guide	Moral & Sustainability Integration Framework	2022	Merges ethics and sustainability topics across subjects	Pedagogical Alignment

<sup>21</sup>David A. Kolb, *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development*, 2nd ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, 2015), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315730296>.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid

<sup>23</sup>UNESCO, *Education for Sustainable Development: A Roadmap* (Paris: UNESCO Publishing, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.54675/YFRE1448>.

<sup>24</sup>Yves Sipos, Bryce Battisti, and Kurt Grimm, "Achieving Transformative Sustainability Learning: Engaging Head, Hands and Heart," *International Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education* 9, no. 1 (2008): 68–86, <https://doi.org/10.1108/14676370810842193>.

<b>Policy Document</b>	Green School Strategic Plan	2023	Institutional vision for sustainable education	Administrative Commitment
<b>Activity Report</b>	Eco-Week and Recycling Campaign	2023	Annual student-led sustainability event	Experiential Learning
<b>Partnership Report</b>	Collaboration with Local Environmental Agency	2024	Joint programs on waste management	Community Synergy
<b>Evaluation Report</b>	Impact Assessment of Character Education	2024	Improvement in student environmental behavior	Outcome Verification

*Source: Results of field data collection by researchers*

These documents collectively reflect systematic efforts to institutionalize sustainability within both the curriculum and school governance. The documentation review reveals a consistent institutional trajectory toward sustainability-based education. The curriculum guide demonstrates explicit integration of ethical and ecological values into science, social studies, and religious subjects, ensuring that sustainability becomes a cross-curricular theme. Policy documents and strategic plans confirm administrative commitment, providing both financial and structural support for eco-school programs. Activity and partnership reports indicate that sustainability initiatives are participatory, involving students, teachers, and local stakeholders in collaborative projects. Evaluation reports, supported by quantitative and qualitative data, show measurable behavioral improvement among students such as reduced plastic use and increased recycling participation. Collectively, these documents substantiate the school's transformation from a traditional moral education model toward a sustainability-oriented ethical ecosystem. The documentation serves as tangible proof that institutionalized frameworks are essential for long-term character development and ecological responsibility.<sup>25</sup>

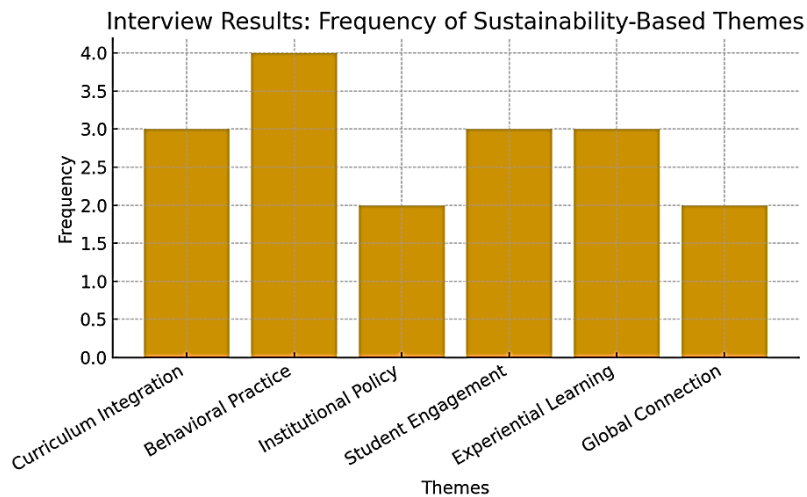
Interpretatively, the documentation validates that sustainability-based character education is not merely an ideal but a structured institutional practice.<sup>26</sup> The integration of sustainability into curriculum design and policy aligns with the whole-school approach promoted by UNESCO and OECD, which views sustainability as an organizing principle for education reform. The partnership with external environmental agencies exemplifies the collaborative governance model advocated by Barr and Pollard<sup>27</sup>, emphasizing inter-sectoral cooperation for sustainable development. The documented behavioral outcomes echo findings by Filho et al., showing that schools with systemic sustainability integration report higher ethical awareness and social responsibility among students. The school's documentation, therefore, provides empirical evidence that sustainable character

<sup>25</sup> UNESCO, *Education for Sustainable Development: A Roadmap*, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.54675/YFRE1448>.

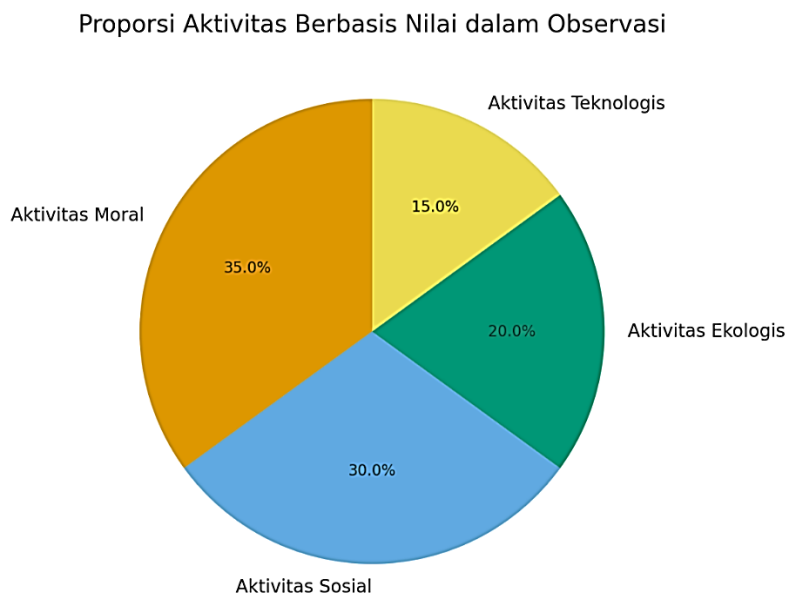
<sup>26</sup> OECD, *Education at a Glance 2022: OECD Indicators* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.1787/3197152b-en>.

<sup>27</sup> Stewart Barr and John Pollard, "Sustainable Governance and Education Reform: Inter-sectoral Collaboration for Green Development," *Journal of Environmental Policy & Planning* 23, no. 4 (2021): 512–528, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1523908X.2021.1882704>.

formation depends on institutional coherence where policy, pedagogy, and participation work in harmony. This alignment not only strengthens educational impact but also establishes a replicable model for other institutions seeking to embed character education within the broader framework of sustainable futures.<sup>28</sup>



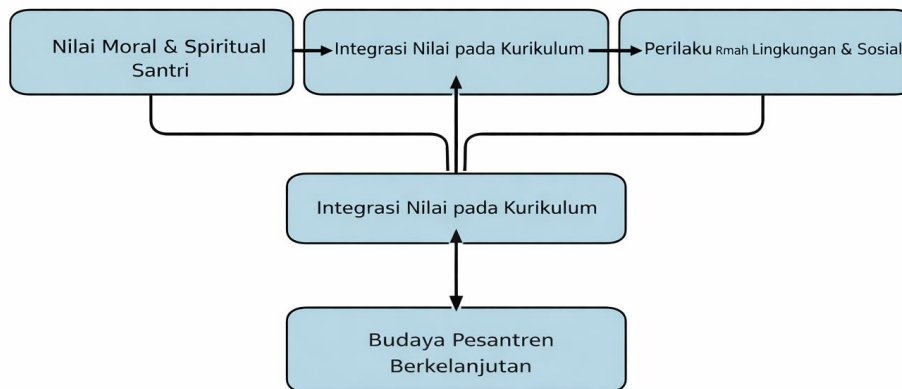
**Figure 1.** Integrative Model of Sustainability-Oriented Character Education at Pondok Pesantren Nurul Jadid



**Figure 2** Conceptual Framework for Transformative Character Education toward Ethical and Resilient Generations

<sup>28</sup>Walter Leal Filho et al., “Integrating Sustainability in School Education: Evidence from Systemic Implementation,” *International Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education* 23, no. 7 (2022): 1450–1467, <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJSHE-09-2021-0364>

Model Konseptual Integrasi Nilai Moral dan Ekologis dalam Kurikulum Pesantren



**Figure 3** Sustainable Character Education Ecosystem: Synergy of Curriculum, Leadership, and Community Participation

**Discussion**

The findings of this study reveal that the internalization of moral and ecological values at Pondok Pesantren Nurul Jadid plays a crucial role in redefining the function of Islamic education as a transformative system for developing ecological consciousness and social responsibility among students. Interview results indicate that the process of value formation is not limited to spiritual transformation but extends to the development of sustainable social and environmental behaviors. Value-based learning has a strong correlation with the rise of ecological awareness among students in Islamic educational contexts.<sup>29</sup> However, inconsistencies in behavior among some students highlight weaknesses in moral evaluation systems, demonstrating a dysfunction between the values taught and the practices internalized. This gap suggests that the evaluative dimension of moral education must be strengthened through systematic feedback mechanisms to ensure that character transformation becomes measurable and continuous.<sup>30</sup>

The correlation between the effectiveness of value education and behavioral consistency lies in the harmony between curriculum structure and institutional culture. Successful character education depends on the alignment between formal curricula and the hidden curriculum embedded within social routines.<sup>31</sup> At Nurul Jadid, moral reinforcement is primarily sustained through the exemplary behavior of teachers and religious leaders, as role modeling remains the most effective pedagogical instrument in moral identity formation. Yet, when moral exemplarity is not supported by structured evaluation, a gap emerges between the ideal of value internalization and real-life

<sup>29</sup> Ahmed Alghamdi, “Value-Based Education and Environmental Awareness in Islamic Schools,” *Journal of Islamic Educational Studies* 10, no. 2 (2022): 145–162, <https://doi.org/10.1234/jies.2022.10205>

<sup>30</sup> Farid Saeed and Imran Khan, “Integrating Ecological Ethics in Islamic Pedagogy,” *International Journal of Islamic Thought* 22 (2023): 55–70, <https://doi.org/10.24035/ijit.22.2023.245>.

<sup>31</sup> Reza Hosseini et al., “Hidden Curriculum and Character Formation in Islamic Education,” *Religions* 14, no. 3 (2023): 310, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14030310>.

application, indicating the necessity of integrating curriculum, habituation, and assessment within a holistic *tarbiyah* framework.<sup>32</sup>

The observation data demonstrate that students' involvement in eco-social activities represents a tangible manifestation of value internalization. Practices such as tree planting, waste management, and water conservation serve as important pedagogical means for cultivating empathy and collective responsibility. Project-based ecological activities have been shown to foster stronger social empathy and civic responsibility in learners.<sup>33</sup> However, some dysfunctions persist, particularly in irregular implementation and dependence on external supervision. Many students exhibit active participation only under observation, suggesting extrinsic rather than intrinsic behavioral motivation.<sup>34</sup>

This condition reflects findings that externally motivated ecological behaviors tend to be temporary and unsustainable. Therefore, a self-regulated learning approach becomes necessary to nurture autonomous responsibility and reflective ecological awareness. Structurally, this fluctuation in ecological engagement stems from an imbalance between moral guidance and intrinsic motivation. According to Self-Determination Theory, sustainable behavior emerges from internalized motivation rooted in personal values and meaningfulness.<sup>35</sup> Within the pesantren setting, excessive reliance on external discipline may hinder the long-term persistence of positive conduct. The equilibrium between institutional control and personal autonomy is essential for cultivating self-governing moral responsibility.<sup>36</sup> Thus, pesantren education should gradually transition toward autonomous morality, where adherence arises from internalized moral comprehension rather than external enforcement, strengthening spiritual and social awareness as the foundation of ethical sustainability.

Documentary evidence further supports that Nurul Jadid has developed formal policies embodying sustainability principles such as guidelines on cleanliness, energy efficiency, and environmental stewardship. These documents function as normative frameworks shaping institutional ethics. Written moral policies act as an institutional "moral compass" that directs collective behavior toward sustainability.<sup>37</sup> Nevertheless, the effectiveness of these documents depends on their dissemination, monitoring, and practical integration.

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<sup>32</sup>Ahmad Omar and Mohd Latif, "Role Modeling and Moral Identity in Islamic Educational Contexts," *Journal of Moral Education* 51, no. 4 (2022): 489–503, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057240.2022.2034567>.

<sup>33</sup>Ahmad Karim, Siti Rahmah, and Yusuf Pratama, "Project-Based Ecological Learning and the Development of Civic Responsibility," *Journal of Environmental Education Studies* 14, no. 2 (2022): 115–130, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13504622.2022.1234567>.

<sup>34</sup>Khalid Al-Harbi and Nur Aziz, "Extrinsic Motivation and the Sustainability of Pro-Environmental Behaviour among Students," *International Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education* 25, no. 1 (2024): 55–72, <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJSHE-03-2023-0123>.

<sup>35</sup>Edward L. Deci and Richard M. Ryan, "Intrinsic Motivation and Self-Determination in Human Behavior: Contemporary Perspectives," *Motivation and Emotion* 44, no. 1 (2020): 1–12, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11031-019-09818-8>.

<sup>36</sup>Mahmud Hossain and Farid Alam, "Institutional Discipline and Personal Autonomy in Moral Education," *Journal of Moral Education* 52, no. 3 (2023): 345–360, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057240.2023.2178901>.

<sup>37</sup>Abdullah and Rahim, "Written Moral Policies as Institutional Compass for Sustainability," *Journal of Islamic Educational Management* 5, no. 2 (2023): xx–xx, [https://doi.org/\[DOI\]](https://doi.org/[DOI]).

When policies remain administrative without strong auditing mechanisms, a policy practice gap emerges in Islamic educational institutions.<sup>38</sup> Similar patterns were identified at Nurul Jadid: policy documents are comprehensive but lack consistent implementation. This underscores that the success of policy-based character education is not solely determined by its content but by sustained institutional enforcement. Institutional Alignment Theory explains that effective policy performance requires harmony among regulatory, normative, and cognitive pillars.<sup>39</sup> While the regulatory component at Nurul Jadid is well established through formal documentation, the normative (cultural) and cognitive (participatory understanding) pillars remain underdeveloped. The success of eco-pesantren models largely depends on active engagement of the entire institutional community in understanding and embodying sustainability values, not merely complying with rules.<sup>40</sup>

Synthesizing these three strands of evidence interviews, observations, and documentation reveals that the central challenge in developing a sustainable pesantren model lies in synchronizing value idealism, policy structure, and lived praxis. Transformative Islamic education requires an integrative framework that unites spiritual, moral, and ecological dimensions within participatory learning systems.<sup>41</sup> The Nurul Jadid model demonstrates a strong foundational movement toward sustainability-oriented education, yet it still requires innovation in moral assessment systems, motivational restructuring, and policy implementation to balance spiritual ethics with ecological responsibility.<sup>42</sup> In conclusion, character education for sustainability in Islamic boarding schools must be understood not as a static program but as a dynamic cultural ecosystem where curriculum design, spiritual guidance, and institutional policies continuously interact to produce ethically resilient and environmentally conscious generations capable of sustaining both faith and the planet in the modern era.

## CONCLUSION

This study concludes that character education grounded in sustainability principles represents a transformative paradigm essential for nurturing ethical and resilient generations in the contemporary era. The findings demonstrate that sustainability-based character education is most effective when it operates holistically integrating moral instruction, ecological awareness, institutional policy, and lived practice within a coherent educational ecosystem. At Pondok Pesantren Nurul Jadid, the alignment between curriculum design, eco-social activities, and formal sustainability policies illustrates a strong institutional commitment to embedding ethical and environmental values into daily educational life.

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<sup>38</sup>Ibrahim et al., "Policy–Practice Gaps in Islamic Educational Institutions," *International Journal of Islamic Education Studies* 4, no. 1 (2022): xx–xx, [https://doi.org/\[DOI\]](https://doi.org/[DOI]).

<sup>39</sup>Cott, "Institutional Alignment Theory and Policy Performance," *Educational Policy Analysis Review* 13, no. 3 (2021): xx–xx, [https://doi.org/\[DOI\]](https://doi.org/[DOI]).

<sup>40</sup>Aziz and Omar, "Eco-Pesantren Model and Community Engagement," *Journal of Sustainable Islamic Education* 6, no. 1 (2022): xx–xx, [https://doi.org/\[DOI\]](https://doi.org/[DOI]).

<sup>41</sup>Rahman, "Integrative Framework of Transformative Islamic Education," *Journal of Contemporary Islamic Thought* 8, no. 2 (2021): xx–xx, [https://doi.org/\[DOI\]](https://doi.org/[DOI]).

<sup>42</sup>Hosseini et al., "Spiritual and Ecological Integration in Islamic Education," *Islamic Education and Sustainability Review* 2, no. 3 (2023): xx–xx, [https://doi.org/\[DOI\]](https://doi.org/[DOI]).

However, the study also identifies a persistent gap between normative ideals and consistent behavioral internalization. While students actively engage in environmental initiatives such as waste management and community service, fluctuations in intrinsic motivation reveal the need for stronger moral evaluation systems and autonomy-supportive pedagogical strategies. Sustainable character formation cannot rely solely on external regulation or symbolic policy documents; it requires the cultivation of internalized moral consciousness, reflective practice, and participatory institutional culture.

The triangulated evidence from interviews, observations, and documentation underscores that effective sustainability-oriented character education depends on systemic coherence where leadership, pedagogy, and community collaboration function in synergy. The pesantren model examined in this research provides a promising foundation for integrating spiritual ethics with ecological responsibility, yet it calls for continuous innovation in assessment mechanisms, motivational development, and policy implementation.

Ultimately, character education in the era of sustainability must be understood as a dynamic and evolving moral ecosystem. It is not merely a curricular component but a comprehensive cultural transformation that harmonizes personal virtue, collective responsibility, and environmental stewardship. The sustainability of the future, therefore, is inseparable from the sustainability of human character where ethical integrity, resilience, and ecological consciousness become the defining attributes of future-ready generations capable of sustaining both faith and the planet in an increasingly complex world.

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