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Local Eco-Theological Genius Interfaith Religious Teachers in Indonesia: A Study in Multireligious Schools

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Abstract

The global ecological crisis demands an educational approach transcending mere cognitive knowledge and fostering environmental spirituality. This study examines how religious teachers from six recognised faiths in Indonesia (Islam, Christianity, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism) instil inclusive values and environmental awareness through religious instruction at multireligious primary schools. A qualitative approach was employed using a case study method at two elementary schools. Data were collected through classroom observations, in-depth interviews, and curriculum document analysis. The findings reveal that each teacher cultivates a unique pedagogical model grounded in their religious teachings and primordial identity, consistently fostering attitudes of tolerance, compassion, and ecological responsibility among students. The local genius embodied in their teaching practices demonstrates the significant potential of interfaith education to nurture a practical form of eco-theology in early education settings. This study affirms the urgency of strengthening religious values and local wisdom as the foundation for spiritual and ecological transformation from a young age.

Keywords: ecotheology; local genius; primary education; religious pluralism; religious teachers

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INTRODUCTION

The current global environmental crisis has become a multidimensional problem threatening humankind's survival (Jagadisan, 2024). The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change warns that climate change has spread systematically and caused increased natural disasters, damage to biodiversity, and worsened socio-economic inequality. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change warns that impacts have spread systematically and caused increased natural disasters, damage to biodiversity, and worsened socio-economic inequality (*Chapter 6 Climate Change in: Yearbook on the African Union Volume 4 (2023)*, n.d.). While technocratic solutions and international policies continue to be pursued, the dimensions of values and spirituality are often neglected in public discourse (Negri, 2021). The root of ecological problems lies not only in the exploitation of natural resources but also in a crisis of values in understanding the relationship between humans and nature (Mastaler, 2011). In this context, a cross-disciplinary approach is essential, including the field of religion as a source of meaning, morality, and collective ethical motivation.

Ecotheology, a branch of theological thought that unites religious spirituality with ecological responsibility, is here to fill that void (Canete et al., 2025). In this perspective, humans are not only seen as dominant actors in nature, but as an integral part of the ecosystem created by God (Pérez Andreo et al., 2025). Therefore, caring for the earth is an ethical imperative inherent in religious spirituality (Risamasu, 2025). This concept has developed rapidly in Christian theology since the 1960s through Lynn White Jr.'s critique of domination theology (Chuvieco & Karnawalski, 2025), as well as through the teachings of Pope Francis in his encyclical Laudato Si' (Lynch et al., 2025). In Islam, the thoughts of Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Fazlun Khalid emphasise the importance of understanding Qur'anic cosmology in developing environmental ethics (Algar, 1995; Sadiqa & Rafi, 2022). Hindu and Buddhist traditions also teach the principles of ahimsa and inner harmony as part of a spiritual relationship with nature (Hazama, 2023; Zappulli, 2023). On the other hand, many indigenous communities in Indonesia have long practised local wisdom in maintaining harmony with nature, such as customary laws protecting forests (pangale) or the concept of humans as part of the universe (Lanzoni, 2024; Nuhidayah et al., 2020).

However, in a socially diverse country such as Indonesia, discussions about eco-theology cannot be separated from the context of religious diversity and educational dynamics. (Mancini, 2009). Schools are strategic spaces for shaping children's character and ecological awareness from an early age. (Corsino & Fuller, 2021)In multireligious education, schools that allow teachers from various religions to be present also provide opportunities to form an inclusive and intercultural ecological spirituality. (Santono, 2023). This means that the religious values taught in the classroom are doctrinal, exclusive, and open to building interfaith ecological solidarity. In this case, spiritual teachers play a key role as agents of values, guardians of traditional wisdom, and designers of ethical transformation in the educational process. (Jefferson & Sifferd, 2022).

Unfortunately, eco-theological studies in the context of multireligious education in Indonesia are still minimal. Previous studies have focused more on aspects of character education. (Rohman et al., 2024), multicultural education (Cholil & Parker, 2021), or harmony among religious communities (Jung, 2013; Syam & Basyid, 2024)However, it has not explicitly examined the role of interfaith religious teachers in instilling ecological values in primary schools. Some studies linking religion and the environment tend to be normative-theological or practical-spiritual within specific religious communities, rather than in the pluralistic realm of formal educational institutions. Therefore, an important gap has not been widely addressed, namely, how religious teachers with different faith backgrounds, through their respective teachings and approaches, develop inclusive ecological awareness in formal educational settings.

This paper aims to fill this gap by highlighting the role of religious teachers from the six official religions in Indonesia (Islam, Christianity, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism) in instilling spiritual-ecological values in multireligious primary schools. The research focuses on how religious teachers' primordial identity and local wisdom shape teaching patterns that encourage students to care for the environment and respect religious diversity. The emphasis on primordial identity and local genius allows this study to capture educational practices' subjective and contextual dimensions that cannot be understood solely through textual analysis. Thus, this article addresses how different religious values

can coexist and contribute together in shaping practical eco-theology in the world of education.

Conceptually, this paper is based on the theory of primordial identity. (Gusfield, 1996; Нурпейсова & Толен, 2024), who believe that religious and cultural ties are a strong source of moral and social orientation, as well as the concept of local genius, which refers to the ability of local communities to develop unique solutions to social problems (Alim et al., 2023). In the context of religious teachers, both are manifested in pedagogical practices that reflect their respective faith traditions while remaining open to diversity. (Anselmus Dami et al., 2023)In addition, eco-theology explains how religious spirituality manifests in concrete actions to care for the environment. (Canete et al., 2025)With this framework, religious teachers are not only positioned as curriculum implementers but also as subjects of ethical transformation who present ecological narratives in their respective religious languages and symbols.

The urgency of this research is becoming increasingly apparent in light of two important factors. First, environmental damage in Indonesia is becoming more widespread due to the ecological crisis and weak public awareness of the importance of environmental ethics. (Nathaniel, 2021). Second, increasing socio-religious polarisation in public discourse can hinder interfaith cooperation in resolving common issues. (Soderborg & Muhtadi, 2023). In this situation, multireligious primary education becomes a potential space for building ecological spirituality from an early age through a collaborative approach. Religious teachers, as representatives of faith communities, play a strategic role in bridging universal and particular values that exist in society.

Considering this background, this article aims to: (1) identify expressions of eco-theological values in the teaching practices of interfaith religious teachers in multireligious primary schools; (2) analyse the role of primordial identity and theological teachings in shaping an inclusive ecological approach; and (3) reveal the local genius that develops in the interfaith learning process that encourages ecological awareness among students. This article seeks to enrich the discourse on religious education and eco-theology by addressing these questions while offering a relevant practical model for developing tolerant, contextual, and environmentally conscious religious education.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed an interpretive qualitative approach using a collective case study design to explore interfaith religious teachers' practices in fostering ecological awareness within complex social, cultural, and religious contexts. This approach enabled an examination of the subjective meanings underlying teachers' actions, including the religious symbols, narratives, and theological values incorporated into their teaching. The study was conducted at two private primary schools, SD Taman Harapan and SD Bina Budi Mulia, which implement multireligious religious education.

The research focused on three interconnected aspects: the expression of ecotheological values in teaching practices, the role of primordial identity and theological teachings in shaping inclusive ecological approaches, and the manifestation of local genius in interfaith learning. These aspects were examined through the practices of teachers representing six recognised religions in Indonesia: Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism. The research was conducted over approximately five months, from September 2022 to January 2023.

Subject

Participants were selected through purposive sampling based on the schools' implementation of multireligious education, religious diversity, and commitment to interfaith dialogue and environmental awareness. The main participants were six religious teachers, each representing one of the six recognised religions in Indonesia. School principals and religious education coordinators from both schools were also involved as additional informants to provide institutional perspectives on educational policies, programme implementation, and teachers' autonomy in developing teaching methods.

Each religious teacher participated in 2–3 in-depth interview sessions, conducted individually and through focus group discussions. This selection enabled the researchers to obtain diverse perspectives on how religious teachings and personal identities inform ecological awareness in multireligious educational settings.

Instruments

Data were collected using semi-structured interview guidelines, classroom observation guidelines, and document analysis guidelines. Before fieldwork, the researchers reviewed relevant literature and school curriculum documents to establish the institutional context of religious education and environmental programmes.

Interviews were conducted with the six religious teachers, school principals, and religious education coordinators. They explored teachers' experiences and perspectives on religious teachings related to environmental responsibility, religious identity, and interfaith interactions. Each religious teacher participated in 2–3 interview meetings, allowing the researchers to explore relevant themes through individual interviews and focus group discussions.

Classroom observations examined teaching methods, learning materials, communication approaches, and theological symbols and values in teacher–student interactions. The observations were moderately participatory, with researchers present without disrupting lessons, followed by informal discussions with teachers and students. Document analysis covered curricula, syllabi, lesson plans, school project notes, and environmental activity records. These documents complemented the interview and observation data and helped identify the integration of religious and ecological values in curricular and extracurricular activities.

Data Analysis

Data were analysed using the interactive model of Miles and Huberman (2000), comprising data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. During data reduction, interview, observation, and documentary materials were selected and classified into four main themes: expressions of ecotheological values, primordial identity, religious symbols in environmental narratives, and interfaith pedagogical strategies.

In the data display stage, the organised information was presented through descriptive narratives and comparative matrices to identify similarities and differences in teachers' practices across the two schools. This comparison also highlighted distinctive pedagogical approaches and expressions of local genius within each religious tradition.

Conclusions were subsequently drawn and verified by examining recurring patterns and relationships across the data. Data triangulation was employed by comparing interview accounts, classroom observations, and documentary evidence. Interpretation involved three stages: restatement, description, and interpretation. Participants' statements were first reformulated neutrally, then examined within their social and religious contexts, and finally interpreted through the frameworks of primordial identity and local genius to understand how teachers' religious teachings and identities informed ecotheological values in educational practices.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The expression of eco-theological values in the teaching practices of interfaith religious teachers

The findings show that religious teachers representing Islam, Protestant Christianity, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism consistently incorporate values associated with ecotheology into their teaching. Although the term “ecotheology” is rarely used explicitly in lessons, its principles appear in concern for the environment, compassion for living beings, simplicity, and respect for God's creation. These values are expressed through classroom activities, student assignments, and school programmes that promote ecological awareness (direct observation, 21–22 December 2022). At both SD Taman Harapan and SD Bina Budi Mulia, religious education therefore presents ecological responsibility as part of everyday religious practice, rather than merely as a theological concept.

The formal curricula of both schools connect religious learning with social, national, and environmental values. Their core and basic competencies emphasise respect for religious teachings, honesty, responsibility, and care for others and the environment. At SD Taman Harapan, the Islamic teacher draws on Q.S. al-Mā'idah [5]:2 and Q.S. al-Ḥujurāt [49]:13 to discuss cooperation and acceptance of diversity as sunnatullah. These teachings are applied through Friday charity, inter-class community service, and environmental projects (Erlina, direct interview, 14 December 2022). The Protestant Christian teacher uses accounts of Jesus' ministry to encourage food distribution and social service (Yafet Arnold, direct interview, 15 December 2022), while the Catholic teacher relates love and respect for creation to forgiveness, sharing, kind speech, proper waste disposal, and care for animals (Agnes Ekowati, direct interview, 15 December 2022).

The other traditions express ecological responsibility through their own theological concepts. Hindu teachers use Tri Hita Karana—the harmony among humans, God, and nature—to encourage tree planting, classroom cleanliness, and respect for the natural world (Arie Kartini, direct interview, 14 December 2022). Buddhist teachers emphasise the five precepts, particularly non-harming and simple living, as expressions of self-control and compassion for living beings (Zela Agit Permadani, direct interview, 19 December 2022). Confucian teachers draw on Zhonghe (balance) and Wuchang (five basic ethics) to connect social harmony and environmental responsibility with obedience to Tian (Heavenly God) (Lusiandani Dewi Setiawati, direct interview, 19 December 2022). Despite these theological differences, all six teachers connect religious symbols and teachings with practical actions, illustrating how local wisdom is embedded in each school's educational culture (O'Grady, 2024).

Teaching methods are adapted to the values being taught and to students' characteristics. Islamic teachers combine lectures and group discussion with collaborative projects linking worship and environmental awareness. The Protestant Christian teacher uses reflection and value-observation activities, including journals about kindness towards the environment and living creatures. Catholic teaching places greater emphasis on direct practice and personal example, while Hindu and Buddhist teachers use symbolic activities and simple meditation to nurture students' spiritual relationship with nature. The Confucian teacher, who teaches one student, adopts an individualised approach based on close teacher–student interaction (direct observation, 21–22 December 2022). Some teachers also connect religious themes with science and environmental topics, including waste recycling and forest conservation.

Ecotheological values are reinforced through informal and extracurricular activities. At SD Bina Budi Mulia, Friday Worship provides not only a setting for worship within each tradition but also opportunities for collaboration. Teachers have organised "Service for the Earth," family tree-planting, independent waste management, and interfaith visits to local places of worship and religious sites (SD Bina Budi Mulia, 2022). Field trips to city parks, botanical gardens, and beaches are used to reflect on the beauty of creation and human responsibility for the earth. Students are encouraged to observe nature and discuss the moral meanings of these experiences. Environmental mural competitions and interfaith dialogues further provide opportunities to consider the contribution of religion to environmental protection.

The observations and school documents indicate that these activities are connected with teachers' reflections and their efforts to contextualise religious teachings. Rather than simply transmitting doctrine, teachers relate it to contemporary environmental issues and students' experiences (SD Taman Harapan, 2022). Interview accounts suggest that religious teachings can inform social and ecological action when teachers communicate their practical relevance. Teachers consequently act not only as subject instructors but also as moral role models who encourage empathy and environmental responsibility. Such values are developed through repeated habits, symbolic practices, and sustained relationships, rather than through a single lesson (Lang Hearlson, 2021).

Taken together, the findings show that the six teachers integrate theological teachings, human values, and practical environmental action through approaches shaped by their respective traditions. Their practices make the classroom and wider school environment spaces for developing religious awareness and ecological responsibility. Religious diversity does not prevent cooperation; instead, distinct faith commitments can provide complementary resources for caring for the earth and other living beings.

The role of primordial identity and theological teachings in an inclusive ecological approach

The findings indicate that teachers' primordial religious identities do not necessarily hinder inclusive ecological education. Rather, these identities can provide spiritual, ethical, and pedagogical resources for fostering respect for diversity and environmental responsibility. Primordial identity, as discussed in relation to Geertz's perspective, refers to deep emotional attachments to inherited cultural and religious traditions (Zurvani & Zarei, 2024). Such attachments do not inevitably produce exclusivity or resistance to difference (Scheer, 2022). In the two schools, teachers' religious identities served as sources of moral motivation for interfaith relations and ecological concern.

Interviews and observations at SD Taman Harapan and SD Bina Budi Mulia show that teachers express their religious identities through narratives, symbols, and classroom practices. The Protestant Christian teacher explained that belief in Jesus as Saviour is compatible with teaching love across religious boundaries: “We believe in Jesus as saviour, but we also teach that Jesus' love transcends religious boundaries and does not discriminate against people” (Yafet Arnold, personal interview, 15 December 2022). The Catholic teacher similarly presents care for the earth as an expression of love for creation and the “common home.”

She uses stories about environmental figures such as St Francis of Assisi and invites students to reflect through faith journals (Agnes Ekowati, direct interview, 15 December 2022).

Teachers from non-Abrahamic traditions also draw on their religious identities to support inclusion and ecological care. The Hindu teacher uses Tri Hita Karana, together with karma and dharma, to encourage students to protect the environment, treat animals well, and respect sacred places (Arie Kartini, personal interview, 14 December 2022). The Buddhist teacher relates the five precepts and giving to compassion for nature and non-human beings (Zela Agit, personal interview, 19 December 2022). The Confucian teacher draws on Zhong (loyalty), Shu (empathy), the Lunyu, and the teachings of Tian to explain harmony with others and nature (Lusiandani, personal interview, 19 January 2023). These commitments are reflected in school-garden activities, morning meditation, and a daily moral calendar.

Teachers do not present religious texts only as abstract doctrine; they connect them with issues in students' everyday lives. The Islamic teacher relates khalifah fil ardh (human stewardship on earth) and the prohibition of fasād fī al-ardh (corruption on earth) to keeping classrooms clean, protecting the school garden, and caring for animals. Buddhist teaching connects enlightenment with simple meditation and harmony with nature. At SD Bina Budi Mulia, a Catholic module entitled “God's Creation and Our Responsibility” invites students to observe nature and consider their responsibility towards other creatures (SD Bina Budi Mulia, 2022). Ecological themes also appear in art, science, and language activities, such as drawing creation, writing poems about trees, and identifying types of waste around the school.

These religious meanings do not become homogenised through interfaith interaction. Instead, teachers maintain their particular beliefs while developing a dialogical relationship with colleagues from other traditions. They cooperate in Earth Day events, Clean Friday, and composting activities. The Confucian teacher, for example, recognises parallels between Christian teachings of love and the Confucian value of Rén (仁), while the Islamic teacher appreciates the Buddhist practice of silence and meditation as a means of cultivating spiritual awareness. Such exchanges allow shared ecological action without erasing theological differences.

Teachers also communicate their values through personal example. The Islamic teacher participates in school gotong-royong activities; the Buddhist teacher initiates green meditation in the school garden; Christian teachers coordinate social services at nursing homes and city parks; Catholic teachers participate in organic-waste management; and Hindu teachers support student environmental groups (direct observation, 25–26 January 2023). Student interview accounts suggest that teachers' everyday conduct can be more memorable than lectures or assignments. Their role modelling therefore connects religious identity with observable practices of care, inclusion, and environmental responsibility.

Primordial identity and theological teachings also shape the pedagogical methods teachers select. These include scriptural interpretation, exemplary stories, religious poetry, environmental prayers, reflection journals, and collaborative projects. Hindu teachers use mythology and sacred epics to introduce ecological values; Christian teachers encourage reflection through faith journals and group discussion; Catholic teachers draw on Pope Francis' Laudato Si' to discuss social and ecological responsibility; and Islamic teachers invite contextual interpretation of verses concerning creation, destruction, and human responsibility (direct observation, 25–26 January 2023). Teachers also exchange ideas when designing interfaith environmental projects, showing how particular religious teachings can provide a basis for dialogue and cooperation.

Overall, the cases show that primordial identity can function as an ethical and spiritual resource for inclusive ecological education. Teachers retain the distinctive teachings of their traditions while connecting them with shared concerns for humanity and environmental sustainability. Their identities thus operate not as fixed boundaries but as foundations from which dialogue, role modelling, and collective action can develop.

Table 1. Comparative Synthesis of the Six Religious Traditions

Religious tradition	Value or teaching identified	Pedagogical expression described	Evidence in the manuscript
Islam	Khalifah fil ardh; zakat; prohibition of fasād fī al-ardh; prophetic example	Friday Alms, recycling activities, reflective interpretation of kauniyah verses	Teacher account and school practice descriptions; curriculum/document references
Protestant Christianity	Love, service, and care for others	Social-ecological projects, tree planting, park clean-ups, environmental campaigns	Teacher interview and observation descriptions

Catholicism	Love of creation; responsibility for the common home; Laudato Si'	Teacher role modelling, social care, ecological reflection, use of Laudato Si'	Teacher interview and observation descriptions
Hinduism	Tri Hita Karana; Tat Twam Asi; karma and dharma	Garden maintenance, waste separation, environmental hygiene, nature-related ritual practices	Teacher interview and direct observation descriptions
Buddhism	Five precepts, non-harming, simplicity, inner balance	Narrative learning, group discussion, morning meditation, reflective journals	Teacher interview and direct observation descriptions
Confucianism	Tian, Zhonghe, Zhong, Shu, Rén, and Wu Lun	Individual dialogue, moral reflection, and teaching adapted to a one-student class	Teacher interview and direct observation descriptions

Local genius in interfaith learning for ecological awareness

The findings also show that local genius in multireligious education involves teachers' ability to adapt local cultural values, spiritual experiences, and religious teachings to their students' contexts. It refers not only to inherited traditions but also to creative, adaptive, and dialogical pedagogical practices (Gong et al., 2023; Sefein et al., 2025). At SD Taman Harapan and SD Bina Budi Mulia, religious and cultural diversity provides resources for ecological learning. Local genius therefore connects teachers' religious identities with values and actions that are meaningful within the classroom and school community (Putra et al., 2021).

This contextual creativity is visible in the distinctive practices of each tradition. The Hindu teacher integrates Tat Twam Asi ("I am thou") and Tri Hita Karana into shared garden maintenance, waste separation, and environmental-hygiene activities (direct observation, 25–26 January 2023). By relating "I am thou" to relationships with nature, students are encouraged to respect and care for other living beings (Riley, 2024). The teacher also involves students in prayer in a natural setting, offering flowers and water as expressions of gratitude to the universe.

The Confucian teacher, who taught one Confucian student, uses an individualised and relational approach. Through personal dialogue, the teacher connects Tian (Heaven), Zhonghe (balance), filial piety, mutual respect, and social responsibility with the maintenance of environmental harmony (direct observation, 25–26 January 2023). The Confucian principle of Wu Lun (the five

social relations) is also related to harmony among people and between humans and nature (Rošker, 2023). This example illustrates a context-specific response to a minority learning setting and should not be generalised to all schools.

Christian and Catholic teachers translate love and service into social and ecological practices. Christian teachers involve students in projects such as cleaning city parks, planting trees, visiting nursing homes, and preparing environmental campaigns (Chung et al., 2022). Catholic teachers emphasise everyday role modelling through greeting, forgiveness, and care for others, and use Laudato Si' as a resource for reflection on humanity's ecological responsibilities (Reilly, 2024; direct observation, 25–26 January 2023).

Buddhist teachers use contemplative and reflective learning based on narratives about Siddhartha Gautama and the five precepts (Saliya, 2025). Through stories and group discussions, students consider simple living, inner balance, and non-harming. Short morning meditation is used to foster awareness of the surrounding environment, while a meditation journal allows students to reflect on their feelings when interacting with nature (direct observation, 25–26 January 2023). These activities are consistent with a learning module that emphasises inner harmony and connectedness with the environment (Dayanidhi, 2025).

Islamic teachers adopt an integrative approach by connecting khalifah fil ardh, zakat, and the prohibition of fasād fī al-ardh with school activities (al-Qarḍāwī, 2001, pp. 57–58). Students participate in initiatives such as "Friday Alms" and waste recycling. The Prophet Muhammad's example as uswatun ḥasanah is used to encourage cleanliness, honesty, and environmental responsibility (Ūzdamīr, 2008, p. 102). Teachers also invite students to reflect on kauniyah verses, understanding natural phenomena as signs of God that should be protected and contemplated (Marpuah, 2021).

School-level flexibility further enables teachers to develop local forms of ecological learning. Friday Worship, religious celebrations, and annual programmes proposed by individual teachers provide opportunities to combine spirituality with environmental activities. With curricular flexibility and institutional support, teachers can adapt interfaith learning to local needs and organise collaborative activities in which ecological values are practised rather than discussed only as concepts (Caride et al., 2022).

Local genius is also reflected in teachers' adaptation of learning to class size, student characteristics, and social context (Kabudi et al., 2021). In classes with one or two students, teachers rely more on personal dialogue and reflection; larger classes allow discussion, group presentations, field observation, and community-service projects (Soggiu et al., 2021; Børte et al., 2023). Activities such as "Joint Reflection Day" and "Green Friday" bring students from different classes and religious backgrounds together for shared religious and environmental learning.

Teachers further shape students' moral habits through their everyday conduct. By greeting students regardless of religious background, maintaining cleanliness, and participating in social activities, they model values of diversity, virtue, and ecological responsibility (Wise et al., 2023; Gladstone & Cimpian, 2021). Student interview accounts recorded in the manuscript connect teachers' examples with students' motivation to care for the environment (direct interview, 13 December 2022).

The curriculum documents of both schools also reflect an effort to balance theological learning with social responsibility. Teaching materials and learning-outcome indicators include not only understanding of each religion but also tolerance, care, and environmental responsibility (curriculum and teaching-module documents of SD Taman Harapan and SD Bina Budi Mulia, 2022). End-of-semester projects similarly combine religious and ecological elements as part of character development.

In this article, local ecological spirituality refers to ecological awareness shaped through the interaction of religious narratives, locally meaningful cultural practices, and relationships within the school community (Sponsel, 2025; Adow et al., 2024). It differs from, while remaining related to, ecotheology and local wisdom: ecotheology provides a theological rationale for environmental care; local wisdom refers to culturally transmitted knowledge and practices; and local ecological spirituality describes how these resources are brought together in everyday educational experience. The term is used as an interpretive synthesis of the two cases, not as a separately measured student outcome. Examples include prayer gardens, caring for plants around places of worship, and cleaning shared spaces.

Taken together, the findings suggest that local genius provides a culturally grounded basis for ecological awareness in interfaith learning. Religious

education can draw on local values and inclusive spirituality while retaining the distinctive teachings of each tradition. In these cases, this approach connects faith with practical environmental responsibility and offers a contextual contribution to character education amid the wider ecological crisis.

Local genius as the epistemic basis for ecological spirituality in interfaith education

The findings speak to ecotheological scholarship arguing that environmental crises require more than technological solutions and legal regulation; they also involve ethical, spiritual, and cultural dimensions (Accetti, 2021; Abumoghli, 2023). This perspective is reflected in Pope Francis' emphasis on the relationship between environmental degradation and moral responsibility in Laudato Si' (Massaro, 2023; Wilson et al., 2023), as well as Seyyed Hossein Nasr's argument that ecological disruption is connected to the separation of humanity from nature and the loss of metaphysical values (Nasr, 1996, pp. 29, 126).

This study extends that discussion by showing how ecological values are translated into educational practices through local genius and interfaith engagement (Bujuri et al., 2023; Gede Agung et al., 2024). Teachers do not simply transmit religious doctrines; they interpret their theological resources in relation to contemporary ecological concerns. Local genius thus provides an epistemic basis for making religious teachings relevant to students' lives and for encouraging participatory, reflective, and transformative learning (Agrawal, 2025).

The traditions represented in the two schools retain distinct values: Tri Hita Karana, Tat Twam Asi, the Buddhist five precepts, Christian love, Confucian humanity, and Islamic teachings on stewardship and the environment. In educational practice, these values can nevertheless serve as bridges between religious doctrine and collective ecological action. Local knowledge is therefore more than cultural decoration: it functions as a resource for interpreting religious teachings and translating them into contextually meaningful practices.

The findings also relate to post-secular approaches to religious education, which question a strict separation between private belief and public life (Skeie, 2021; Fancourt, 2021). In these cases, religious education contributes not only to personal piety but also to public ethics concerning ecology and cultural diversity (Tauro et al., 2021). Teachers act as facilitators who connect faith, knowledge, and

social action rather than functioning solely as transmitters of doctrine (Willmore, 2023).

The synthesis of the theoretical framework and the case findings is presented as the Local Genius-Based Ecological Spirituality in Interfaith Education framework (Figure 1). It proposes that religious teachings and locally meaningful knowledge provide value resources; teachers interpret these resources through contextual and adaptive pedagogy; and school and community activities create opportunities for practice. Repeated participation may, in turn, support ecological awareness. The first three relationships are grounded in practices documented in the two schools, while the proposed developmental pathway remains a theoretical proposition requiring longitudinal and multi-site investigation.

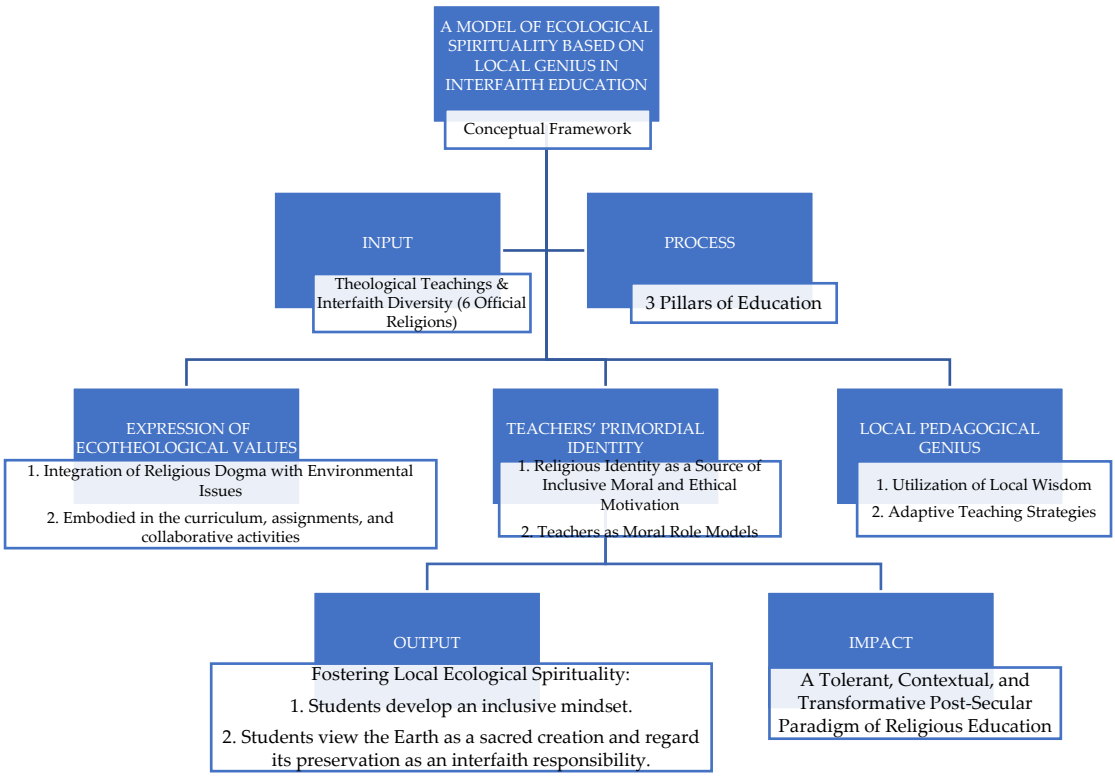


Figure 1. A Model of Ecological Spirituality Based on Local Genius in Interfaith Education

The framework is a conceptual interpretation of the two cases, not an evaluated intervention. It may inform religious education that promotes plurality and sustainability, although its transferability to other settings requires further study (Kennedy & Muzzerall, 2022). It also shifts attention beyond mastery of

religious texts towards reflection on values and their translation into action (Metcalfe & Moulin-Stożek, 2021), while offering a basis for contextual, interdisciplinary, and community-based curriculum development (Klein, 2022).

From this perspective, local genius-based interfaith education can be understood as a form of social praxis in which theology becomes an ethical and spiritual resource for collective environmental action (Pope & Nicolaides, 2021; Bullitt-Jonas, 2022). Teachers translate religious values into locally meaningful practices, making the classroom and school community spaces where ecological spirituality can be experienced (Liagkis, 2022).

The study therefore contributes a context-based conceptual framework to discussions of ecotheology and interfaith education. By positioning local genius as an epistemic foundation, it highlights how religious diversity and local knowledge can inform educational practices oriented towards ecological responsibility and social sustainability.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that interfaith education in Indonesian multireligious primary schools can foster ecological awareness through a local genius approach rooted in religious and cultural values. The findings show that teachers representing six recognised religions use their primordial identities as sources of moral and spiritual strength rather than barriers to promoting diversity, empathy, social responsibility, and environmental care. Through sacred-text narratives, symbolic practices, social projects, and everyday role modelling, teachers connect distinctive theological teachings with concrete ecological actions in schools and communities. Thus, ecological spirituality is expressed not merely through religious discourse but also through daily practices, habits, and collective responsibility.

Building on these findings, the study proposes the Local Genius-Based Ecological Spirituality model, which integrates religious teachings, local cultural practices, and contextual pedagogy in interfaith education. Theoretically, this model may inform the development of religious education and global citizenship curricula oriented towards interfaith values and environmental sustainability. Further research across broader contexts is needed to explore additional local practices and examine the model's applicability. Practically, governments and educational institutions should support pedagogical innovation among interfaith

teachers through training, mentoring, and institutional policies. Multireligious schools can serve as spaces for cross-cultural collaboration that address social and ecological challenges, positioning religious education as both a means of faith formation and a foundation for peaceful and sustainable social transformation.

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