



Planting Values, Reaping Harmony: Ecological Praxis and Religious Moderation in an Indonesian Eco-Pesantren

Menanam Nilai, Menuai Harmoni: Filosofi Ekologi dan Moderasi Beragama di Pesantren Ekologi Ath-Thaariq, Garut, Jawa Barat

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Abstract: *The ecological crisis and increasing social vulnerability caused by climate-related disasters indicate that environmental stewardship cannot be approached solely as a technical agenda, but must also be grounded in value-based and practice-oriented education. This article examines Pesantren Ekologi Ath-Thaariq in West Java as a case of an Indonesian eco-pesantren where ecological praxis serves as a formative medium for religious moderation. Employing a qualitative case-study design, the study draws on field observations, in-depth interviews with eight informants (caretakers, teachers, students, and non-Muslim visitors), and document analysis of the pesantren's curriculum and interfaith ecological programs. Data were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis. The findings show that religious moderation at Ath-Thaariq is not primarily transmitted through doctrinal instruction, but emerges as a habitus shaped through ecological labor, everyday ethics of sharing, and action-based interfaith engagement. Programs that frame nature as a shared home "one roof, one air, one earth", enable participants from different religious backgrounds to collaborate as co-stewards of the environment. This study contributes to discussions on religious moderation by demonstrating how ecological praxis functions as a lived ethical framework that fosters interfaith solidarity and collective responsibility in responding to ecological challenges.*

Keywords: eco-pesantren; ecological praxis; religious moderation; agroecology; interfaith dialogue



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Abstrak: Krisis ekologis dan meningkatnya kerentanan sosial akibat bencana terkait iklim menunjukkan bahwa pengelolaan lingkungan tidak dapat dipahami semata-mata sebagai agenda teknis, melainkan harus berlandaskan pada pendidikan yang berbasis nilai dan berorientasi pada praktik. Artikel ini mengkaji Pesantren Ekologi Ath-Thaariq di Jawa Barat sebagai contoh eco-pesantren di Indonesia, di mana praksis ekologis berfungsi sebagai medium pembentukan moderasi beragama. Dengan menggunakan desain studi kasus kualitatif, penelitian ini memanfaatkan observasi lapangan, wawancara mendalam dengan delapan informan (pengasuh, pendidik, santri, dan pengunjung non-Muslim), serta analisis dokumen terhadap kurikulum dan program ekologis lintas iman pesantren. Data dianalisis menggunakan analisis tematik reflektif. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa moderasi beragama di Ath-Thaariq tidak terutama ditransmisikan melalui pengajaran doktrinal, melainkan tumbuh sebagai habitus yang dibentuk melalui kerja ekologis, etika berbagi dalam kehidupan sehari-hari, serta dialog lintas iman berbasis tindakan. Program yang memaknai alam sebagai rumah bersama—”satu atap, satu udara, satu bumi”—memungkinkan partisipasi dari berbagai latar agama berkolaborasi sebagai penjaga bersama lingkungan. Studi ini berkontribusi pada kajian moderasi beragama dengan menunjukkan bagaimana praksis ekologis berfungsi sebagai kerangka etis yang hidup dalam menumbuhkan solidaritas lintas iman dan tanggung jawab kolektif menghadapi tantangan ekologis.

Kata Kunci: eco-pesantren; praksis ekologis; moderasi beragama; agroekologi; dialog lintas iman

Introduction

At the global level, the climate crisis is exhibiting increasingly widespread impacts—from increased disaster risk and food insecurity to socio-economic pressures—that demand a transformation in how humans interpret their relationship with nature. In the Indonesian context, the prevalence of hydrometeorological disasters and the scale of their impact on people’s lives emphasize that the ecological crisis is not merely a technical issue, but a civilizational one: it concerns ethics, lifestyles, and the values that shape collective human decisions. This situation becomes even more complex when the ecological crisis encounters challenges to social cohesion—polarization, prejudice, and the weakening of cross-identity meeting spaces—which can ultimately hinder community collaboration in addressing shared ecological risks. The National Disaster Management Agency (2024) reported an increasing trend in hydrometeorological disasters in recent years, while 11.3 million tons of waste in Indonesia is reportedly not properly managed (BRIN, 2024),¹ a situation that indicates both environmental vulnerability and the need for collective behavioral change.

Within this framework, religious educational institutions hold a strategic position. Islamic boarding schools, in particular, are not only spaces for the

transmission of religious knowledge, but also spaces for the formation of habits (habits, ethics, discipline) that can influence the practices of community life. It is at this point that the national policy on strengthening religious moderation becomes relevant: religious moderation is positioned as a guideline for shaping religious perspectives, attitudes, and practices that strengthen brotherhood, harmony, alignment of religious and cultural practices, and the sustainable improvement of the quality of religious life. However, a crucial question arises: how can religious moderation “get down to the ground” as a concrete, measurable social practice whose benefits are felt by interfaith communities—not just a normative slogan.

This article begins with a case study of the Ath-Thaariq Ecological Islamic Boarding School in Garut, West Java, which is known for implementing a farming and gardening curriculum as part of its education, with an orientation toward food self-sufficiency, ecosystem conservation, and ecological justice. Ath-Thaariq’s uniqueness lies in three dimensions of integration that often operate separately: (1) spirituality and religious discipline; (2) agroecological knowledge and skills; and (3) cross-identity learning, including visits and learning with non-Muslim communities, and even reports of the presence of religious leaders from other faiths who learned about ecosystem-friendly agricultural practices. Here, nature is not merely understood as an object of exploitation or a mere topic for sermons, but rather as a pedagogical space that brings together people—from different faith backgrounds—in the collaborative work of caring for life.

Theoretically, this approach aligns with contemporary research findings that religious and secular ethics can be complementary in fostering environmental curiosity, especially when translated into concrete policies, education, and social practices. Other studies have shown that religiosity can be linked to environmental concern and encourage the intensity of pro-environmental behavior, although the effects can vary across traditions, cultural contexts, and practical forms. Therefore, the primary contribution of this research is to demonstrate how “lived religiosity” through ecological work can become a practical pathway to fostering religious moderation: tolerance that is not merely discourse, but rather born from the experience of encounter, collaborative work, and ethical responsibility in a shared home.

Based on this background, this article addresses three key areas of focus: (1) how the integrated agricultural-spiritual curriculum design at Ath-Thaariq works as a value education tool; (2) how the “interfaith program” facilitates encounters between non-Muslim communities (Christians, Hindus, and Buddhists) in a learning space of farming and environmental stewardship; and (3) how the practice of planting and caring for nature serves as a medium for fostering religious

moderation, evident in manners, social relationships, and perspectives on differences.

The Ath-Thaariq Ecological Islamic Boarding School itself was established in 2008 by local environmental activists who pioneered the integration of organic farming into religious education. Located in a semi-agricultural area in Garut, the Islamic boarding school has grown as an open community that engages with the surrounding community. Its vision from the outset has emphasized food self-sufficiency and environmental conservation as part of practicing Islamic teachings. Another distinctive feature is its openness to all groups: Ath-Thaariq welcomes anyone who wishes to learn about adapting farming and environmental ethics, regardless of religious or ethnic background.

Several studies confirm that effective environmental education is typically experiential, positioning students as actors who directly experience ecological processes, not merely recipients of lectures. In this regard, Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) have an advantage because boarding school life allows for more consistent social conditioning and supervision than solely classroom-based education.²

However, the eco-*pesantren* discourse often stops at the narrative of an “environmentally friendly Islamic boarding school” without addressing its pedagogical mechanisms: how values are instilled, how conflicts are resolved, and how religious moderation is formed in daily practice. This gap is important to address because religious moderation at the policy level is often understood as a normative concept, whereas in the social sphere it requires concrete learning media.³

Based on this background, this study aims to explain three things: (1) how the integrated agricultural-spiritual curriculum at Ath-Thaariq functions as a lived curriculum; (2) how ‘interfaith programs’ facilitate encounters between Muslim and non-Muslim communities through collaborative ecological work; and (3) how the practice of planting, caring for, and producing produces a *habitus* of religious moderation that is measurable in everyday ethics. The contribution of this article is to offer a reading of religious moderation based on ecological praxis that can be replicated in the context of Islamic education.

Relevant Literature Review

This literature review positions Ath-Thaariq at the nexus of three intersecting fields of study: spiritual ecology (religion as a source of ecological ethics), practice-based pedagogy (life curriculum and habituation), and religious moderation that understands the ability to nurture differences in concrete social spaces. This

synthesis is necessary so that field findings are not read simply as an “environmental program,” but rather as a model of educational values.

Terminologically, spiritual ecology refers to how religious traditions interpret nature, organize human-nonhuman relationships, and establish moral obligations towards sustainability. Recent studies have shown that religious ethics can complement secular ethics by strengthening motivation, a sense of responsibility, and a benevolent orientation.⁴ Therefore, this research does not position religion as a barrier to environmental science, but rather as a language of values that strengthens ecological action.

1) Spiritual Ecology and Islamic Environmental Ethics

The literature of the past five years has shown that the ecological crisis is not only understood as a technical problem, but also as an ethical—and even spiritual—issue. Globally, arguments for the need for ethics (including religious ethics) to underpin the sustainability agenda are gaining strength; moral values and commitments are seen as instrumental in changing collective behavior and building a deeper “reason” for the practice of desire. Within this framework, religious and secular ethics can complement each other to form a more robust poverty strategy.

In the Islamic tradition, the foundation of environmental ethics is often formulated through concepts such as *khalifah* (management trust), *mīzān* (balance), *‘adl* (justice), and *amanah* (responsibility), which position the human-nature relationship as a moral-spiritual one, rather than an exploitative one. This formulation is often emphasized as a relevant conceptual framework for mainstreaming the tourism agenda and the SDGs through education, governance, and daily life practices. In the context of education, the integration of Islamic conservation values into teaching materials has been shown to foster a clearer categorization of conservation values—for example, responsibility, simplicity, gratitude, and the prohibition of excess—which then serve as a “bridge” between knowledge and ecological character formation.

More specifically in the Indonesian context, research on At-Tariq confirms that Islamic environmental ethics can function as a spiritual ecology—a perspective and way of life that incorporates ecological practices (farming, soil care, waste management) into inner training and moral discipline. In this model, spirituality (including its Sufi dimensions) extends beyond narratives and translates into a routine, structured, and ecological habitat passed down through Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*). Thus, spiritual ecology provides a theoretical foundation that “planting” is not merely an economic-agricultural activity, but rather a medium for internalizing values.

2) Eco-Islamic Boarding Schools as Pedagogical Practices and Integrative Curriculum

Studies on eco-Islamic boarding schools in forest conservation demonstrate that Islamic boarding schools can serve as effective community-based educational hubs due to their moral authority, extensive social networks, and the ability to transform the daily practices of students and residents. This finding is crucial for understanding At-Tariq not merely as an “environmental project,” but as an educational ecosystem that connects knowledge, values, and actions to real social spaces.

Case study research on At-Tariq in the context of environmental education emphasizes its distinctive character: ecological education at At-Tariq is grounded in an agrarian context, the struggles of grassroots farmers, and Islamic discourse that affirms ecological work. Here, the curriculum is understood not merely as a document, but as a lived curriculum: gardening practices, waste sorting, land management, and even consumption discipline—all guided by spiritual narratives and the goal of character building. This perspective aligns with research findings on Sufism and conservation at At-Tariq Islamic boarding school, which positions environmental practices as part of moral-spiritual training.

Thus, eco-boarding schools can be understood as a pedagogical practice: experiential learning that connects ecological knowledge with ethics and spirituality, while expanding the “classroom” to include land, gardens, and social relationships. This framework is relevant to this research because the document described—a curriculum integrating spiritually based plant practices—conceptually falls within the tradition of practical curricula that presupposes the integration of values and actions.

Within a pedagogical framework, an integrative curriculum does not mean adding new subjects, but rather restructuring the learning experience so that religious knowledge, simple agronomic knowledge, and cultural practices are integrated. Thus, ‘planting’ becomes a learning medium that touches the cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains simultaneously; a pattern that is often sought in character education.⁵

3) Religious Moderation and Interfaith Dialogue Based on Ecological Action

At the curriculum level, research on the development of diverse moderation criteria in higher education demonstrates that moderation can be reduced to operational learning outcomes (e.g., tolerance, cultural accommodation, non-violence, and respect), while also requiring consistent design implementation to avoid becoming a normative slogan. This finding inspires us to view “moderation”

at At-Tariq as something that emerges through program design and concrete learning experiences, not just discourse.

What is unique about the At-Tariq context is that religious moderation is built through interfaith programs that treat nature as a shared home (“one roof, one air, one earth”). Contemporary interfaith literary dialogue confirms the effectiveness of action-based dialogue—that is, dialogue that occurs through collaborative work addressing community needs—in building recognition, collaboration, and social transformation.[1] Within a public policy framework, a study mapping action-based interfaith dialogue demonstrates the dialectical relationship between dialogue and community action: dialogue strengthens collaboration, while action deepens the quality of dialogue through shared experiences and shared goals. At the practical level, other research confirms that faith-based movements can be catalysts for interfaith dialogue in conflict-prone areas through concrete and sustainable peacemaking.

In the pluralistic Indonesian context, findings on interfaith communication based on local wisdom also demonstrate that harmony can grow when interfaith communities share “social capital” and a shared identity—a finding that aligns with At-Tariq’s notion of nature as a shared space that transcends identity barriers.[2] Thus, ecology in this article is positioned not simply as an environmental issue, but also as a medium of moderation: caring for the earth becomes a meeting point that reduces identity tensions and builds interfaith solidarity.

The action-based dialogue approach also aligns with cross-contextual research findings that collaborative work on pressing issues is more effective in building trust than theological dialogue, which easily devolves into debate. In many communities, environmental issues serve as a “safe space” for initiating development because they address shared basic needs, such as air, food, and health.⁶

4) Analytical Framework Synthesis: Cultivating Values to Reap Harmony

Based on the literature above, this article uses an analytical framework that synthesizes four layers of relationships:

1. Theological-ecological values (*khalifah–amanah–mizān–‘adl*) as the normative foundation for the formation of environmental ethics.
2. The practical pedagogy of eco-pesantren as a mechanism for internalizing values through habituation and learning experiences in the field/garden/community.
3. Diverse moderation as a social competency that can be cultivated through structured program design, curriculum, and learning experiences.

4. Interfaith dialogue based on ecological action as a space for encounter that results in recognition, collaboration, and transformation of social relations.

From this synthesis, “cultivating values” is understood as the process of internalization (norms, habits, moral-spiritual disciplines) through an integrative curriculum and learning practices; while “reaping harmony” is understood as a social outcome in the form of increased interfaith trust, cooperation, and a sense of “shared home” mediated by ecological work. This framework is then broken down into research categories (e.g.: spiritual-ecological values, living curriculum practices, interfaith experiences in the garden, indicators of moderation in action, and the meaning of “one roof, one air, one earth”).

Research Methodology

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study design to deeply understand the practice of ecological education and religious moderation within the specific socio-cultural context of Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*). The case study design was chosen because it allows researchers to examine complex phenomena in a real-life context, utilizing various data sources (interviews, observations, documents), and generating a rich understanding of the processes, mechanisms, and meanings of social practices. The focus of the case study is the Ath-Thaariq Ecological Islamic Boarding School (Garut), with the unit of analysis being the practice of an integrative agricultural-spiritual curriculum and the implementation of an interfaith program that centers nature as a shared home.

The choice of a case study design is deemed appropriate because this research does not aim to test causal relationships between variables, but rather to understand the processes, meanings, and pedagogical mechanisms that shape the practice of ecologically based religious moderation within a specific setting.⁷ Case studies allow researchers to examine the interconnections between curriculum, social relations, and daily routines that are not always visible through surveys.

All interview excerpts in this article are presented as cleaned verbatim, that is, excerpts lightly edited for clarity without altering meaning. Role attributions (e.g., caregivers, teachers, students, non-Muslim guests) are maintained as interpretive context so that readers can assess the informants’ social positions and experiences when conveying their views.⁸

1. Research Location and Informants

Field data collection was conducted through participant observation (moderate participation) between November 2–5, 2025, covering daily Islamic boarding school activities (learning routines, gardening/farming practices, student-teacher interactions, and interfaith program meetings). Eight informants were selected purposively to represent a variety of positions and experiences: caregivers/program

managers, integrative curriculum teachers, students involved in agroecology practices, and interfaith program participants/partners (including non-Muslim community members who came to learn farming). This strategy was intended to capture a variety of perspectives on the same theme—spiritual values, ecological ethics, and religious moderation—from actors in different roles.

Ath-Thaariq was chosen because of its identity as an ecological Islamic boarding school that explicitly integrates agricultural practices into spiritual learning and has a regular interfaith program. The Islamic boarding school is located in the Garut region, with its hilly landscape and cultivated land, allowing planting, composting, and garden management activities to become part of the daily routine.

Informants were purposively selected to represent a variety of key experiences: one program supervisor/facilitator, two teachers who manage the curriculum, three students active in the Islamic boarding school garden, and two non-Muslim guests participating in the interfaith program. This selection allowed for a triangulation of perspectives between program designers, pedagogical implementers, education recipients, and external parties experiencing interfaith encounters.

2. Data Collection Techniques

The study relied on three primary sources. First, observation: the researcher recorded key practices and situations—for example, how the process of planting, composting, seed selection, and harvesting were positioned as exercises in discipline and responsibility; and how the etiquette of interfaith encounters was constructed through unwritten rules (how to greet, division of labor, language used, and managing differences). Observations also emphasized “pedagogical moments,” namely when instructors connect ecological practices with spiritual values and social ethics.

Second, in-depth semi-structured interviews explored (a) informants’ understanding of “planting values” and “harvesting harmony”; (b) concrete experiences of interfaith encounters in gardens/trainings; (c) how Islamic boarding schools interpret religious moderation as a practice; and (d) changes in attitudes/affections experienced after engaging in collaborative ecological work. The focus of the interviews emphasized narrative experiences (experience-near) so that religious moderation does not fall into abstract definitions but is read as a social process.

Third, document analysis: two main types of documents were analyzed: (1) curriculum documents based on the integration of spiritually based plant practices; and (2) “interfaith program” documents containing the central idea: nature as a shared home—one roof, one air, one earth. The documents were treated as both normative texts and value maps: what was emphasized, how goals were formulated,

and how practices were guided. Document analysis was also linked to the social context of Islamic boarding schools, which are known for incorporating agriculture and plantations into their curriculum and emphasizing a commitment to environmental sustainability as part of their education. To maintain data quality, interviews were conducted using open-ended questions that allowed informants to explain their practices. Narrative experiences, for example, regarding the meaning of garden work, experiences of interfaith encounters, and changes in students' attitudes before and after participating in the program. During observations, researchers recorded details of practices (schedules, task distribution, and instructional delivery) to avoid relying solely on verbal statements.

3. Data Analysis

The analysis was conducted using reflexive thematic analysis with the following stages: data familiarization, initial coding, theme development, theme review, theme definition, and writing thematic narratives. This approach was chosen because it enabled researchers to capture patterns of meaning that explain the relationship between ecological practices, the construction of spiritual values, and the formation of religious moderation, while remaining reflexive about the researcher's position and field dynamics. Trustworthiness was strengthened through (1) source triangulation (observation–interview–document); (2) a brief audit trail (records of coding decisions and theme development); and (3) a thick description in the results section to enable readers to assess transferability. Ethically, the research emphasized informant consent, anonymization as necessary, and careful description of interfaith experiences to avoid social repercussions for participants.

The coding process was iterative: researchers began with descriptive codes (e.g., 'compost,' 'garden schedule,' 'shared home language'), then developed interpretive codes that captured value relationships (e.g., 'worship as care,' 'work-based tolerance,' 'ethics of sharing as discipline'). This phase was followed by analytical memos to link field findings to the theoretical framework.⁹

The validity of the findings was maintained through source triangulation (observation, interviews, documents), triangulation of informant roles, and checking the consistency of themes with daily field notes. Researchers also conducted peer debriefings to challenge initial assumptions and clarify interpretation boundaries. Reporting principles followed the main points of the COREQ to provide readers with adequate information about the context, interview process, and analysis.¹⁰

Results and Discussion

The thematic analysis yielded four major, interconnected themes. These four themes form an argumentative flow: from the basic philosophy of “nature as a shared home,” down to institutional instruments (curriculum), then manifesting as interfaith social practices, and finally leading to the outcome of religious moderation as a replicable habitus. The results and discussion sections are structured as a thematic narrative that links descriptions of practices with conceptual interpretations. Each theme is developed from the intersection of three data sources: activity observations, informant accounts, and curriculum/program documents. In this way, the results answer not only “what is done” but also “how and why these practices shape values.” The themes below are interconnected and form a flow: starting with how Islamic boarding schools define nature as a shared home, continuing with how the curriculum cultivates values through gardening, then moving on to the practice of action-based interfaith encounters, and culminating in the formation of religious moderation as a habitus. This flow demonstrates that social harmony is not an initial assumption, but rather a learning outcome.

1. Nature as a Common Home: Grounded Interfaith Ethics

The first theme demonstrates that Ath-Thaariq positions nature not merely as a backdrop for activities, but as an “ethical language” that unites people beyond identity. In the interfaith program document, the phrase “one roof, one air, one earth” functions as a principle that mitigates competing identities: differences in faith are not negated, but placed within the horizon of shared responsibility for life. Sociologically, this aligns with the idea that religious and non-religious ethical strategies can complement each other to promote sustainability—especially when the focus is directed toward concrete, shared goals that can be worked on collectively. In the field, the “common home” is not realized through theological debate, but through collaborative work: preparing land, cultivating compost, managing water, selecting seeds, and caring for plants. This pattern is important because many tensions between identities are strengthened when relationships are built at the level of discourse; Ath-Thaariq brings them down to the level of practice, where skills, responsibility, and mutual trust become social capital. This aligns with the goal of strengthening religious moderation at the policy level, which emphasizes strengthening brotherhood, harmony, and togetherness among religious communities through moderate perspectives and practices. Interestingly, ecology also serves as a safe space (safe common ground) for interfaith encounters. In various observational moments, differences in belief are not the focus of interaction; the focus is on shared responsibility and concern for outcomes

(growing plants, healthy soil, and a sufficient harvest). Thus, social harmony is not built through uniformity, but through “equal responsibility” for the shared home. In the context of Indonesia facing ecological pressures and disasters, this model provides a strong argument that religious moderation can be maintained through ecological work that fosters real solidarity.

The principle of “nature as a shared home” is highly upheld at Ath-Thaariq. The slogan “one roof, one air, one earth” is displayed in the garden area as a reminder of the interfaith responsibility for caring for nature. As expressed by the Islamic boarding school caretaker, “God created this earth for all creatures, so when we care for the garden together, we are building a brotherhood without regard to ethnicity or religion” (Caretaker, Interview, 2025). Through this focus on shared ecological goals, religious identity becomes secondary; each participant is no longer seen as ‘people of another religion,’ but as fellow environmental activists sharing the same moral responsibility.

In observations, the Islamic boarding school welcomed interfaith guests with simple but meaningful protocols: introducing the garden space, shared work rules, and emphasizing that the garden is a learning space, not an arena for ‘testing one’s faith.’ This kind of welcome creates a sense of psychological safety that makes it easier for participants to focus on shared ecological tasks. During informal moments such as breaks and meals, conversations shift from religious identity to concrete experiences: weather, soil, seeds, and planting patterns.

Theoretically, ‘nature as a shared home’ can be read as a moral device that shifts interfaith encounters from symbolic competition to ecological solidarity. This finding aligns with studies of grassroots dialogue that emphasize collaborative work on public issues as a path to building trust.¹¹ Within this framework, the environment serves as an ethical language that is easily understood across traditions because it addresses shared basic needs.

2. Living Curriculum: Agriculture as Spiritual Practice and Character Education

The second theme emphasizes the role of the curriculum as a “values engine” that structures the students’ experiences. Ath-Thaariq does include agriculture and plantations as part of the Islamic boarding school curriculum, with an orientation toward food sovereignty, ecosystem maintenance, and fostering a commitment to preserving nature. In the integrative curriculum documents analyzed, planting practices are not positioned solely as vocational skills, but as spiritual exercises: discipline, patience, trustworthiness, and ecological honesty (not destroying the land for quick results).

In daily practice, the integration of spiritual values into farming activities is clearly visible. Every morning after the morning prayer, the students are scheduled

to tend the Islamic boarding school garden: watering the plants, feeding the livestock, or checking the compost. These activities are framed as part of spiritual practice. For example, before planting or harvesting, the students collectively recite prayers and Quranic verses about humanity's mandate as vicegerents on earth. Teachers also often use moments in the garden as a moral lesson: if a student is careless enough to damage a plant, the teacher will reprimand them, reminding them of Islamic teachings prohibiting causing damage (*fasad*) to the earth. In this way, the disciplinary warnings for farming also serve as ethical lessons. The values of patience and gratitude are instilled as they wait for the plants to grow and celebrate each harvest. Some of the harvest is consumed for the needs of the pondok, and some is sold to support the independence of the pesantren—through this process, students learn the principles of honesty and responsibility in managing the trust of the land's produce.

One teacher explained, "We instill in the students that weeding or composting is as valuable as ritual worship, because both are trusts from God that must be safeguarded" (Teacher, Interview, 2025). This statement emphasizes that every task in the garden is contextualized as a moral lesson; the discipline of farming is seen as aligned with the discipline of worship, so that caring for the earth is seen as part of a pious deed that is integral to daily worship.

Pedagogically, this integration produces two important transformations. First, students learn that worship is not only a vertical ritual, but also a horizontal work that sustains life. "Small" tasks such as weeding, caring for seeds, or composting are understood as moral exercises: delaying gratification, being patient, and being responsible. Second, the curriculum fosters ecological reasoning: understanding the interconnectedness of land, water, seeds, and humans as a single system. This is where religious education becomes ecological, not by adding an "environmental" subject, but by changing the way we view the world.

A student also shared his experience, "I used to think worship was just prayer and reciting the Quran. After regularly gardening here, I realized that caring for plants is also part of worship because we are preserving God's creation" (Santri, Interview, 2025). This quote illustrates a shift in perspective from separating "worldly" and "hereafter" activities to seeing the connection between the two through ecological work.

The strength of this model is also evident in contemporary research findings that show religiosity can correlate with environmental concern and encourage pro-environmental behavioral intentions, especially when religiosity is manifested as a moral orientation and practice, rather than a symbolic identity. In other words, Ath-Thaariq demonstrates a mechanism that bridges "values" and "behavior": the

curriculum turns values into routines; routines into habits; habits into character; and character becomes the basis for moderation in social relations.

However, this integration of agricultural and religious activities is not without challenges. At the beginning of the program, some students and parents were concerned that focusing on gardening would reduce time for religious study and formal worship. However, these concerns gradually disappeared after they realized that gardening activities were actually helping the students become more disciplined, healthier, and develop a deeper understanding of religious values in real life.

The analyzed curriculum documents show that the integration of spiritually-based planting practices is not positioned as an additional activity, but rather as a learning structure. Several learning units are designed in a cyclical manner: intention and ethics (before work), garden work procedures (during work), reflection on values (after work), and evaluation of habits (weekly). With this structure, the garden becomes an “open classroom” that forces students to confront the consequences of their actions: if they neglect watering, the plants wilt; if they waste water, the garden dries out.

The assessment system is also practical: instructors assess discipline, cooperation, and responsibility with tools and materials. This is important because values education often fails when measured solely through cognitive tests. In Ath-Thaariq, values are tested through work consistency and the ability to manage emotions when planting results do not meet expectations. Here, ecological work serves as an exercise in patience and self-control, two qualities that are also valued in the Islamic spiritual tradition.¹²

3. Action-Based Dialogue: Interfaith Programs and Joint Ecological Work

Interfaith programs at Ath-Thaariq typically take the form of workshops or short study visits, where groups of non-Muslim guests stay and study alongside students. In one observed program session, for example, a group of church youth and a Hindu community from a nearby town participated in a composting workshop on the Islamic boarding school grounds. Participants were divided into mixed teams of students and guests to collect organic materials, chop leaves, and mix them into compost. After a half-day's work, the students and guests took a break and enjoyed lunch together in the open-air pavilion. The menu featured the harvest from the garden: organic vegetables and simple side dishes cooked in the Islamic boarding school kitchen. The lunch atmosphere was warm, with people sharing stories about their daily habits and food preferences, accompanied by laughter that lightened the atmosphere. Socially, joint ecological work fosters a unique form of dialogue: one that is not always verbal, but rather one that is

action-based. The division of roles (who processes the compost, who prepares the planting medium, who tidies the beds) serves as a way to build trust. When differences of belief arise, they are not handled through theological argument, but rather through the etiquette of encounter: mutual respect for the worship space, respect for language, and prioritizing shared goals. This pattern reinforces religious moderation as a social competence, not merely cognitive knowledge. Furthermore, interfaith programs produce a “shared moral experience”: a shared sense of fatigue, a shared joy of harvest, and an awareness that good results require patience and collective work. At this point, ecology acts as a bridge, bringing together differences in an ethical project. This aligns with the policy’s stated direction of strengthening religious moderation: planned, systematic, collaborative, and sustainable—not incidental. A participant from the Christian community shared her impressions, “At first I was hesitant to come to the Islamic boarding school, but after planting and making compost together, I felt the barriers disappear; we became comrades in caring for the earth” (Christian Guest, Interview, 2025).

This experience demonstrates that through collective ecological work, social distances between groups can be significantly reduced. Academically, the findings at Ath-Thaariq reinforce previous research that found action-based interfaith interactions effectively reduce prejudice and build shared social capital.¹³ Practically, this type of interfaith initiative provides a concrete model for how religious moderation can be implemented at the grassroots level. This aligns with the spirit of national policies (e.g., Presidential Regulation 58/2023), which encourages planned and sustainable interfaith collaboration. It should be noted that the interfaith program at Ath-Thaariq also initially faced internal skepticism. Some within the Islamic boarding school were concerned that intense interaction with followers of other faiths would disrupt the students’ faith. However, in practice, these concerns proved unfounded. The students remained steadfast in their faith and even grew in confidence, demonstrating a friendly and inclusive Islamic attitude. Rather than diminishing their faith, this experience actually strengthened their understanding that Islam teaches compassion for all creatures.

During the interfaith program, collaborative work took place through a pragmatic division of tasks: who prepared the planting medium, who cut the compost, who managed the watering, and who recorded progress. This division of tasks seems simple, but it effectively reduces initial awkwardness because each participant immediately has a visible role and contribution. In situations like this, social relationships are built on the experience of mutual need. At the end of the session, there is usually a brief reflection linking work experiences to values: responsibility, simplicity, and gratitude. These findings confirm that interfaith encounters at Ath-Thaariq are not built through “assimilation,” but rather through

a cooperative ethic. Differences in identity remain, but are coordinated within a common goal: caring for the land and growing food. Therefore, the interfaith program can be read as ecological citizenship education that unites faith and social action.¹⁴

Religious Moderation as Habitus: From Values to Social Practice

The fourth theme concludes that religious moderation at Ath-Thaariq is most strongly read as habitus: it is present in small, recurring habits, not just in value statements. Conceptually, this finding overlaps with studies that see moderation as being influenced by religiosity and socio-demographic factors, but its effectiveness is highly dependent on how religiosity is constructed in social life—whether exclusive or inclusive. Ath-Thaariq demonstrates a form of practical religiosity: a religiosity that “fruits” in ecological responsibility and respect for differences.

Agroecological practices in Islamic boarding schools—as also depicted in various institutional records on farming and gardening curricula—encourage the perspective that preserving ecosystems is part of preserving human life, and therefore a moral domain that can be agreed upon across faiths. When students become accustomed to preserving habitats, avoiding land damage, and prioritizing the food sovereignty of the Islamic boarding school family, they are being trained to respect limits, avoid excess, and maintain balance. Socially, this practice parallels moderation: the ability to exercise restraint, consider, and avoid extremes in responding to differences. Various customs in Islamic boarding schools—from sharing gardening tools to taking turns watering plants—subtly train students’ moderate attitudes in their daily lives. One student admitted, “Unconsciously, through our garden habits, we learn patience and selflessness. Small things like waiting our turn to fertilize or share water actually train us to respect others more.” (Student, Interview, 2025). This statement confirms that the values of moderation (self-restraint, fairness, and empathy) develop intrinsically through the students’ ecological routines, in line with Mukhibat’s (2024) finding that habituating attitudes in daily life is more effective in shaping moderate character than simply delivering material in class.

Ultimately, religious moderation at Ath-Thaariq is not merely “teaching material,” but a “way of life” that operates through ecology. In the garden space, identities are not erased but reconfigured into a more cooperative relationship: humans are linked by a shared ecological reality—the same air, the same soil, the same risk of disaster. From here, the philosophy of “planting values, reaping harmony” finds its empirical form: values are planted through work and discipline; harmony is harvested through encounters and solidarity. The concept of habitus helps explain why moderation at Ath-Thaariq does not depend on a single lecture

or program, but rather grows from repetition and habituation. As students share tools, wait their turn, and complete garden work together daily, they learn that success is not solely the result of individual effort. This pattern prepares them for life in a pluralistic society because they are accustomed to prioritizing shared goals over group egos.

In terms of indicators, religious moderation is evident in three layers of practice: (a) language and attitudes that do not denigrate other traditions; (b) a willingness to cooperate in public affairs (environment, food, sanitation) without identity constraints; and (c) the ability to manage differences through fair social procedures, such as division of labor and deliberation. These three layers demonstrate moderation as a social competence, not merely an opinion.¹⁵

Conceptual Model: From Cultivating Values to Harvesting Harmony

Based on the findings, this article proposes a simple conceptual model. ‘Cultivating values’ refers to the process of internalizing ethics through repeated ecological work (habit formation). The main values instilled are trustworthiness, *ihsan* in work, simplicity, and responsibility to living things. These values are not taught as definitions, but as experiences: students tend plants, observe the impact of their actions, and reflect on their spiritual meaning.

‘Reaping harmony’ refers to the social outcomes of these habits. Harmony does not mean the elimination of differences, but rather the formation of cooperative relationships that enable collaborative work across identities. Interfaith programs provide a setting that accelerates this process because participants experience firsthand how ecological goals require the contributions of all parties. Within this framework, nature serves as both a pedagogical medium and a medium for social reconciliation. This model explains why Ath-Thaariq is able to link two often-separated agendas: environmental education and religious moderation. The two converge at the practical level. Therefore, replicating the model is not enough by copying gardening activities; it also requires replicating the mechanisms of reflection, habituation, and the design of safe interfaith encounters. This is where the integrative curriculum and moral leadership of the Islamic boarding school play a key role.

As an operational tool, this model can be translated into a series of process and outcome indicators. Process indicators include the intensity of habituation (frequency of garden work, disciplined schedules, and quality of value reflection), while outcome indicators include pro-environmental behavior (waste reduction, water conservation), social cohesion (cooperation, trust), and the quality of interfaith encounters (sense of security, equal roles, and sustainable collaboration).

With these indicators, the development of eco-pesantren does not stop at the label but can be monitored gradually as a values education program.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that religious moderation at the Ath-Thaariq Ecological Islamic Boarding School is cultivated primarily through ecological praxis, where ecology functions as pedagogy and agricultural labor serves as a form of spiritual discipline. Rather than being transmitted through doctrinal instruction alone, values such as responsibility, patience, trustworthiness, and mutual respect are embodied through repetitive ecological practices, thereby forming a habitus that supports moderate and inclusive social relations. In this sense, religious moderation emerges as a lived ethical disposition shaped by everyday engagement with nature.

The interfaith ecological programs further show that encounters among Muslim, Christian, Hindu, and Buddhist communities can be effectively fostered through collaborative ecological work, rather than through symbolic or purely discursive dialogue. By framing nature as a shared home “one roof, one air, one earth”, Ath-Thaariq reorients interfaith interaction from doctrinal competition toward shared responsibility for sustaining life. This shift explains how social harmony and interreligious trust can grow without undermining individual religious convictions.

At the theoretical level, this article contributes to the discourse on religious moderation by advancing the concept of moderation grounded in ecological praxis, where moderation is understood as an ethical competence formed through habit, practice, and shared experience. It also enriches studies on spiritual ecology by demonstrating how religious and secular ethics can complement one another within an educational setting: scientific knowledge provides technical guidance, while spirituality supplies moral motivation and meaning.

Practically, these findings suggest that religious and environmental agendas need not be treated as separate domains. When ecological practices are integrated into religious education, *pesantren* can function as sites for character formation, interfaith cooperation, and community resilience. Caring for the earth thus becomes not an additional theme, but a concrete pathway toward ethical maturity, social solidarity, and sustainable religious life in a pluralistic society.

Endnotes

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