

Religion and Pro-Environmental Behavior Among Boarding Students and Public Schools

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Abstract

Environmental issues are increasingly urgent, highlighting the need for pro-environmental behavior, especially among students. This study aims to examine the role of religion and differences in pro-environmental behavior between Islamic boarding school students and public school students. A quantitative approach with comparative techniques was used. The measuring instrument was the Pro-Environmental Behavior Scale by Larson et al. (2015). The sample consisted of 221 students selected from a population of 643 using probability sampling with a cluster sampling technique. The results showed a significant difference in pro-environmental behavior ($t = 6.689$, $p = 0.000$), with Islamic boarding school students scoring higher (Mean = 112.5; SD = 13.6) than public school students (Mean = 101.6; SD = 9.7). These findings suggest that the religious-based educational environment contributes to shaping students' environmental awareness. A clean and religious educational setting plays an important role in fostering greater concern for the environment among students.

Keywords: Pro-Environmental Behavior, public students, Islamic boarding schools

Abstrak

Masalah lingkungan semakin hari semakin meningkat, sehingga mendorong pentingnya perilaku pro-lingkungan, terutama di kalangan pelajar. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk melihat peran agama serta perbedaan perilaku pro-lingkungan antara siswa pesantren dan siswa sekolah umum. Pendekatan yang digunakan adalah kuantitatif dengan teknik komparatif. Alat ukur menggunakan skala perilaku pro-lingkungan dari Larson et al. (2015). Sampel penelitian berjumlah 221 siswa dari total populasi 643 orang, dipilih melalui teknik probability sampling dengan cluster sampling. Hasil analisis menunjukkan adanya perbedaan signifikan dalam perilaku pro-lingkungan antara kedua kelompok ($t = 6,689$; $p = 0,000$), dengan rata-rata lebih tinggi pada siswa pesantren ($M = 112,5$; $SD = 13,6$) dibanding siswa sekolah umum ($M = 101,6$; $SD = 9,7$). Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa lingkungan pendidikan berbasis agama memiliki pengaruh dalam membentuk kepedulian terhadap lingkungan. Pendidikan religius dan lingkungan yang bersih mendorong siswa untuk berperilaku lebih pro-lingkungan.

Kata kunci : Perilaku Pro-Lingkungan, Siswa Umum, Siswa Pesantren, Sistem Pendidikan, Agama

Humans cannot be separated from their dependence on nature. The interaction between humans and the environment is deeply interconnected, yet in modern times, this relationship has led to increasing environmental problems on a global scale. These problems primarily stem from excessive exploitation of nature to meet human needs, often without considering the long-term negative impacts. In the 21st century, the human–environment relationship has become a critical global issue. Human greed and the unwise use of modern, non-environmentally friendly technologies have significantly contributed to environmental degradation.

Franz Magnis-Suseno (in Jaelani & Marliani, 2016) argues that one root cause of environmental destruction is a technocratic mindset, which originates from the Greek words *tekne* (skill) and *kratein* (to rule). This mindset views nature solely as a resource to be mastered and exploited. Such a perspective creates a dichotomy between humans and their environment, treating nature as separate from human life. This leads to apathy and irresponsible behavior toward the environment.

Environmental damage is also caused by the behavior of individuals and groups. Simple actions such as littering, deforestation, or improper waste disposal, when done collectively, can cause large-scale environmental harm. At the state level, environmental degradation often results from government policies lacking environmental foresight or commitment. For example, deforestation for economic purposes can lead to severe consequences not only for ecosystems but also for the people who depend on them.

One solution to environmental problems is the promotion of pro-environmental behavior—actions taken with the awareness of minimizing negative impacts on nature. Ajeng et al. (2018) highlight that such behavior stems from individuals' awareness of environmental sustainability. According to Kollmuss & Agyeman (2002), pro-environmental behavior includes conserving resources, reducing waste, saving energy, and using non-toxic materials. Erita (2020) adds that environmental concern is central to sustaining nature's function—caring is the key to ensuring that the environment continues to thrive.

Several values reflect humans' responsibility toward the environment, including respecting nature's intrinsic value, developing a strong sense of responsibility toward one's local surroundings, preserving the biosphere, and avoiding pollution and resource depletion.

Ajeng et al. (2018) emphasize that everyone, including students, must be involved in addressing environmental problems. According to Law No. 20 of 2003 (Indonesia), students are members of society striving to improve their quality of life through education. In school, subjects such as Biology provide students with basic knowledge about environmental issues. This knowledge is important because awareness and behavior are strongly linked; students with sufficient environmental understanding are more likely to act in environmentally responsible ways.

However, as noted by Silvi et al. (2020), knowledge alone does not guarantee environmentally conscious behavior. Despite receiving guidance, many students still display carelessness—such as littering—indicating a lack of environmental concern among school communities. Therefore, beyond knowledge, daily habits and value reinforcement through education are necessary.

Education and religion are two key factors influencing pro-environmental behavior (Gifford & Nilsson, 2014). Schools can foster environmental responsibility through structured activities, such as weekly cleaning duties, avoiding vandalism, maintaining classroom cleanliness, turning off unused electronic devices, and proper waste disposal. These habits represent students' concern and responsibility toward their environment. Without sufficient knowledge or values, individuals are unlikely to behave pro-environmentally.

Moreover, religion plays a significant role in shaping environmental ethics. From an Islamic perspective, as Yusuf Qardhawi (in Safrilsyah, 2014) explains, protecting the environment is a religious obligation for Muslims. Religious education settings like Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) often integrate such teachings into daily life, fostering deeper environmental awareness.

Based on the theories and previous research, this study proposes a hypothesis that there are differences in pro-environmental behavior between public school students and Islamic boarding school students, with the assumption that students in Islamic boarding schools exhibit higher levels of pro-environmental behavior. This is likely due to the influence of religious teachings and value-based education, which emphasize cleanliness, responsibility, and stewardship of the earth as part of faith-based living

Method

The approach used in this research is to use a quantitative approach using comparative techniques, namely to differentiate pro-environmental behavior in Islamic boarding school students and general education students. The population used in this research was teenagers from Lab School Unsyiah High School, totaling 111 students and Santri 'Aliyah Dayah Modern Darul Ulum, totaling 110 students.

This research uses the measuring instrument used in this research in the form of a psychological scale, namely using pro-environmental behavior variables. Answers on this scale are expressed in four categories, namely, Strongly Agree (SS), Agree (S), Disagree (TS), and Strongly Disagree (STS). The pro-environmental behavior scale was prepared using a Likert scale based on aspects proposed by Larson et al., (2015) which consists of four aspects, namely social environmentalism, namely community behavior or actions that are based on ideas or understanding to participate in overcoming environmental issues. , secondly, land stewardship, namely behavior or actions in an effort to improve land quality, directly related to improving the local landscape, including support for the existence of wildlife and environmental conservation measures, cleaning up public land areas by cleaning up rubbish, which makes the quality of public land better, then a lifestyle that supports conservation. Behavior or actions that aim to support conservation efforts, such as recycling, saving water and energy, minimizing waste generation and using eco-friendly goods. Fourth, citizenship that cares about the environment, behavior or actions that aim to participate in the policy-making process related to the environment, such as electing officials who are pro-environmental sustainability so that they participate in maintaining a good environmental sustainability. The total number of items on this scale is 34 statements. This scale passed a content validity test conducted through expert judgment. The research data analysis technique uses a t-test, where previously a prerequisite test is carried out. The prerequisite tests carried out in this research are the normality test and linearity test.

Results

This research was conducted on 221 students and santri. The sample demographic data obtained from this research is based on school education, namely 111 public school students (50.2%) and 110 Islamic boarding school students (49.8%). The description of the research data is as follows.

Table 1
Description of Pro-Environmental Behavior Scale Research Data

Variabel	Hypothetical Data				Empirical Data			
Scale	Xmax	Xmin	Mean	SD	Xmax	Xmin	Mean	SD
Pro-Environment	136	34	85	17	136	46	107,08	13,02

Based on the results of statistical testing of research data in table 4.6 above, hypothetical descriptive analysis shows that the minimum answer is 34, the maximum is 136, the average value is 85, and the standard deviation is 17. Meanwhile, the empirical data shows that the minimum value is 46, the maximum value is 136, the value the mean is 107.08, and the standard deviation value is 13.02. The description of the research data was used as a limitation in categorizing the research sample which consisted of three categories, namely low, medium and high using the ordinal categorization method.

Table 2
Description of research data on pro-environmental behavior among students

Variabel	Hypothetical Data				Empirical Data			
Behavior	Xmax	Xmin	Mean	SD	Xmax	Xmin	Mean	SD
Pro-Environment	136	34	85	17	136	46	113	14

The results of the categorization of Pro-Environmental Behavior in santri above show that there are 15 santri in the low category (13.6%), 80 in the medium category (72.8%), and 15 in the high category (13.6%).).

Table 3
Description of research data on pro-environmental behavior among students

Variabel	Hypothetical Data				Empirical Data			
Behavior	Xmax	Xmin	Mean	SD	Xmax	Xmin	Mean	SD
Pro-Environment	136	34	85	17	136	81	102	10

The results of the categorization of Pro-Environmental Behavior in public school students above show that there are 14 students in the low category (12.6%), 76 people in the medium category (68.4%) and 21 people in the high category (19%) .

The results of the t-test to see the differences show that the value of $t = 6.689$, $p = 0.000$ where the value of pro-environmental behavior in Islamic boarding school students (Mean = 112.5; SD = 13.6) and in public school students (Mean = 101.6 ; SD = 9.7). The results of this research

show that there are differences in pro-environmental behavior between Islamic boarding school students and public school students based on the education system, where the pro-environmental behavior of Islamic boarding school students is higher than that of public school students.

Discussion

Religion has long been recognized as a powerful influence on human behavior, values, and ethics. In the context of environmental preservation, religion—particularly Islam—can offer strong moral and spiritual foundations that motivate individuals and communities to care for the natural world. Islam emphasizes harmony between humans and nature and views the environment as a sacred trust (*amanah*) from Allah SWT. This worldview implies that damaging the environment is not just a social or scientific concern but also a spiritual and moral transgression.

The Islamic concept of *maqashid al-shari'ah*—the higher objectives of Islamic law—includes the preservation of religion, life, intellect, lineage, and property. These five essentials are deeply interconnected with the environment. For instance, the protection of life and health cannot be achieved if the air, water, and food sources are polluted. The safeguarding of intellect is threatened by toxins and environmental degradation that impact mental and physical well-being. Therefore, protecting the environment becomes a necessary prerequisite for achieving these objectives. In the principles of *Ushul Fiqh*, the rule “*ma la yatimmu al-wajib illa bihi fahuwa wajib*” (what is required to fulfill an obligation becomes obligatory itself) emphasizes that environmental stewardship is not optional—it is an obligation derived from core Islamic duties (Safrilsyah, 2014).

The research findings support this religious framework by highlighting current student behaviors related to environmental concern. Among the general student population, 14% demonstrated low levels of pro-environmental behavior, 67% were in the moderate category, and 19% were in the high category. These figures suggest that the majority of students exhibit moderate awareness and actions in relation to environmental care.

When we compare students from Islamic boarding schools (*santri*) to those from public schools, notable differences emerge. Among the *santri*, 13.6% displayed low pro-environmental behavior, 72.8% moderate, and 13.6% high. Among public school students,

12.6% were in the low category, 68.4% moderate, and 19% high. Though both groups mostly fall in the medium range, santri tend to have more structured experiences and routines that reinforce environmental values.

One of the key factors contributing to this difference is the educational environment and disciplinary culture within Islamic boarding schools. In these institutions, regular *gotong royong* (mutual cooperation) activities are a common practice. These weekly communal cleaning efforts are not only intended to maintain hygiene but also function as practical environmental education. Additionally, the implementation of a "cleanliness court" system by school authorities—including teachers (*ustadz*) and student leaders (OSIS)—ensures accountability. Students who neglect cleanliness may face consequences such as fines, cleaning duties, or public reminders, thereby reinforcing a culture of environmental responsibility. This practice encourages habit formation, peer accountability, and internalization of environmental values among students.

In contrast, public school students often lack these practical and community-based environmental learning experiences. According to Ilmi et al. (2019), classroom-based environmental education in public schools tends to focus on theoretical or textbook-based content, which often emphasizes memorization of terms and definitions rather than fostering real-world application or behavioral change. This kind of instruction, while academically valuable, does little to instill a sense of personal or collective responsibility for the environment.

Islamic boarding schools, however, go a step further by integrating environmental values within the religious and spiritual framework. Students are consistently reminded that they are *khalifah* (stewards) of the Earth—entrusted by God to protect and nurture the planet. Environmental teachings are not merely academic subjects, but part of a holistic approach to religious life. The students live in close-knit communities where environmental behavior is part of the daily routine, guided by discipline, values, and mutual respect.

Moreover, environmental education in Islamic boarding schools does not stand alone; it is interwoven with moral, ethical, and religious teachings that influence students on a deeper level. When students clean their dormitories or engage in community gardening, they do so not just out of obligation, but also with the understanding that these acts have spiritual merit.

This kind of education addresses the heart, mind, and behavior simultaneously—something that purely secular education systems often lack.

Erita (2020) emphasizes that Islam offers a comprehensive and compassionate perspective on environmental stewardship. As a religion of *rahmatan lil 'alamin* (a mercy to all creation), Islam encourages humans to live in balance with nature, to refrain from excessive consumption (*israf*), and to avoid corruption on the earth (*fasad fil-ardh*). The environment is viewed as a creation of Allah SWT, and any harm done to it is seen as an affront to the Creator. This theological framework inspires a deep emotional and spiritual connection to nature, further encouraging pro-environmental behavior.

It is important to note that education and knowledge are among the most powerful predictors of pro-environmental behavior. Gifford and Nilsson (2014) argue that it is difficult for individuals to engage in deliberate environmental action if they lack a basic understanding of environmental challenges and solutions. Knowledge serves as a foundation for awareness, and awareness can then be translated into action—provided the learning environment supports and encourages it. Education must go beyond rote learning and aim to build critical thinking, empathy, and active engagement with real environmental issues.

In summary, the findings of the research clearly suggest that the type and quality of education—especially when integrated with religious values and practical application—play a crucial role in shaping students' environmental attitudes and behaviors. Islamic boarding schools, by virtue of their holistic approach combining faith, discipline, community living, and environmental education, appear to be more effective in cultivating environmentally responsible individuals. The integration of religious doctrine, structured environmental practices, and consistent behavioral reinforcement leads to a deeper internalization of environmental ethics. In contrast, students in public schools may benefit from enhanced curriculum reform that includes not only environmental knowledge but also meaningful, participatory experiences that encourage long-term behavioral change.

Thus, religion and education together can act as powerful agents in promoting sustainable environmental practices. As the global environmental crisis continues to deepen, the role of faith-based education in fostering pro-environmental behavior becomes not just relevant, but essential for building a more sustainable and ethically conscious society.

Conclusion

Based on the data analysis from the previous discussion, there is a clear and significant difference in pro-environmental behavior between students from Islamic boarding schools and those from public schools. Students from Islamic boarding schools demonstrate a higher level of environmental care. This difference suggests that the pro-environmental behavior of Islamic boarding school students is greater than that of public school students. This environmentally conscious behavior is fostered because education in Islamic boarding schools includes teaching Quranic verses about the importance of protecting the environment. Among the verses often discussed in these schools are QS Al-Araf verse 56: "And do not cause damage on the face of the earth after (Allah) has repaired it," QS Al-Rum verse 41: "There has been visible damage on land and in the sea caused by the actions of human hands, so that Allah will let them taste part of the consequences of their actions, so that they may return to the right path," and QS Al-Baqarah verse 205: "And when he turns away, he walks on the earth to cause damage to it, destroys crops and livestock, and Allah does not like destruction."

Their thorough study and understanding of the Quran is one of the key factors influencing their behavior in protecting the environment. A person cannot consciously care for the environment or deliberately engage in pro-environmental behavior without knowledge of environmental issues or a positive attitude toward their surroundings. Therefore, a supportive and religious educational environment plays an important role in encouraging students to care more about the environment.

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