

## Character Building for Religious Moderation Through the Issue of Climate Change in Vocational Higher Education Context

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**Abstract:** Climate change is becoming an increasingly urgent and global threat in the scale of its impact. Students, as future agents of change, have a key role in responding to and overcoming the challenges of climate change. Therefore, a deeper understanding of the issue of climate change is expected to contribute to shaping the religious moderation character of students. The purpose of this research was to identify the relationship between understanding the issue of climate change and the formation of religious moderation character in the Indonesian vocational higher education context. This study employed a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods, targeting a population of Electrical Engineering students comprising eight classes and approximately 234 individuals who were enrolled in religion courses. The sample of respondents was chosen purposively, including students from various religious backgrounds. The research instruments used were observation, interviews, and questionnaires administered to respondents. The results showed that there is a significant relationship between students' understanding of climate change issues and the formation of religious moderation character. The higher the students' understanding of climate change, the higher their level of religious moderation.

**Keywords:** Climate Change, Character, Religious Moderation, vocational higher education, religious backgrounds

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### INTRODUCTION

Climate change is currently one of the biggest challenges facing humanity. Its impacts are felt globally, affecting not only a local scale but also ecosystems, natural resources, and human lives around the world. The environmental imbalance that occurs is largely triggered by excessive human interference with nature (Ismail, 2012).

One tangible evidence of this impact is natural disasters, such as landslides caused by massive tree cutting without adequate reforestation efforts. These irresponsible human actions have significantly worsened environmental degradation (Abidin, 2018).

The environmental crisis we are experiencing today is not only a physical problem but is also related to the ethical aspects of humans. This damage occurs due to a lack of awareness of the importance of protecting nature as a gift given by Allah SWT. This lack of concern stems from insufficient knowledge and practice of ethical values in everyday life, both among the general public, businesspeople, practitioners, and policymakers (Habibie, 2021).

The Quran teaches the importance of universal unity, which we know as ecosystems. Ecosystems are mutually beneficial interactions between living and non-living things in creating a natural balance. This interaction can take the form of symbiotic mutualism, where both parties benefit from each other, or symbiotic commensalism, where one party benefits without harming the other (Fachruddin, 2021). This concept emphasizes the importance of

human awareness of the reciprocal relationship between themselves and nature, in accordance with religious teachings.

Climate change has become an increasingly urgent global threat, demanding concrete action from all parties. In facing this challenge, students as future leaders have an important role to play in responding to and overcoming this problem. With a deeper understanding of climate change, students are expected not only to be more aware of the importance of environmental conservation but also to be able to develop a strong religious moderation character. This understanding will motivate them to act ethically and responsibly towards the environment and fellow humans (Mangunjaya, 2021; M. Hanafi, 2013).

Several previous studies have linked religious values with ecological responsibility and climate change awareness, though few have addressed the context of vocational higher education. McNeeley and Lazrus (2014) examined how religious and cultural beliefs influence the perception of climate change risks and adaptation strategies, concluding that spiritual values such as stewardship and moral duty guide communities in responding to environmental challenges. While their study provides valuable insights into the role of religious ethics in shaping attitudes toward environmental issues, it is limited to rural community contexts and does not explore how these values can be integrated into educational settings. Similarly, Özkaynak and Çolak (2023) proposed an “eco-religious approach” showing that strong religiosity correlates with a smaller ecological footprint, suggesting that faith-based ethics can mobilize sustainable behaviors. However, this study remains broad and does not address the pedagogical or character-building aspects of climate education, especially in vocational higher education.

Based on the background written previously, this research fills the gap by focusing on how climate change issues can be utilized to shape the character of religious moderation among vocational students. Unlike previous studies that focus on community adaptation or macro-level ecological impacts, this study combines religious values, climate change awareness, and educational approaches to foster responsible ecological behavior. This research aims to identify the relationship between understanding the issue of climate change and the formation of religious moderation character in the Indonesian vocational higher education context. It provides a unique contribution by examining the direct integration of religious moderation principles into climate change education, creating a framework for building ethical and environmentally conscious future professionals.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The research employed a combination of quantitative and descriptive qualitative methods. Descriptive research aims to depict phenomena as they currently exist or occurred in the past. This study primarily described the phenomena based on statistical data processing, while also incorporating qualitative data obtained from interviews, documentation, and observations (Sugiyono, 2012).

A multidisciplinary approach was used, consisting of a pedagogical perspective that views humans (students) as God’s creatures undergoing spiritual and physical development who require guidance through education. The theological approach considered Islamic teachings from the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet as sources of inspiration and motivation for Islamic education (Arifin, 2000).

The population consisted of students at Ujung Pandang State Polytechnic enrolled in the Religious Education course, totaling 234 participants for quantitative data collection. For qualitative data, purposive sampling selected students from diverse religious backgrounds to ensure varied and representative data. Data collection involved four main instruments: observation, interviews, questionnaires, and documentation. Observation was conducted on campus using notebooks, checklists, and cameras to record student behaviors and interactions related to climate change and religious moderation. Interviews with students of different faiths provided deeper insights into how their religious beliefs influenced their views on climate change. Structured questionnaires were distributed and collected to obtain quantitative responses. Documentation gathered supporting materials such as books, regulations, photos, activity reports, and institutional data relevant to the study.

Quantitative data from questionnaires were processed through editing, where each returned questionnaire was thoroughly checked and compiled into frequency tables to analyze percentage distributions and correlations between variables. The data were then interpreted to derive meaningful conclusions. Qualitative data from interviews, observations, and documentation were analyzed through stages including detailed field notes, sorting, and classifying information according to themes. This was followed by synthesizing the data into a comprehensive narrative explaining the relationship between students' awareness of climate change and the development of their religious moderation character.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This research was conducted on 234 students who took Religious Education courses in the even semester of the 2023/2024 academic year. Several things were revealed in this study, as follows:

**Religious Distribution of Respondents and its Implications for Understanding Social Issues:** The majority of respondents in this study were Muslim (70.5%), followed by Hindu (12%) and Protestant Christian (6.4%).

This distribution illustrates the religious diversity of the study area. The predominance of Muslim respondents may influence the general perspective on social issues, including climate change. Given that religion is often the moral basis for decision-making, a faith-based approach, especially Islam, can be an effective strategy to increase community awareness and involvement in environmental conservation efforts.

in this study—predominantly Muslim (70.5%), followed by Hindu (12%) and Protestant Christian (6.4%)—highlights the diverse religious landscape of the area. This distribution suggests that the predominant Islamic worldview may significantly influence how social issues, particularly climate change, are perceived. Research has shown that religion often serves as a moral foundation for decision-making (Bowers et al., 2013), suggesting that faith-based approaches, especially rooted in Islamic teachings about stewardship (khalifah), can effectively mobilize community awareness and participation in environmental conservation efforts.

**Community Understanding of Climate Change:** Most respondents (60.7%) reported having a good understanding of climate change, while only 15.8% felt they had a very good understanding. This shows that while there is awareness of the issue, deep understanding is still lacking. This percentage of good understanding indicates progress in disseminating information related to climate change. However, this result also indicates the need for further

efforts to deepen people's understanding so that they can take concrete actions based on their knowledge. A more systematic and comprehensive education program is needed to promote deeper understanding.

Previous research emphasizes the importance of comprehensive education programs in promoting sustainable practices (Hakan et al., 2018). This study's results suggest a need for more systematic education initiatives to ensure individuals can translate their understanding into concrete actions. Such programs should be tailored to address the nuances of climate change and its local impacts, thereby equipping the community with the tools necessary for effective engagement.

**Information Sources Used:** Most respondents (88%) obtained information from social media, indicating the important role of social media in disseminating information on climate change. However, the high reliance on social media also needs to be balanced with verification of the information received, given that social media is often a source of inaccurate or even misleading information. The role of formal education and traditional mass media needs to be strengthened to ensure more valid and reliable information can reach the public.

(88% of respondents) underscores its role in disseminating information about climate change. However, this finding also aligns with concerns highlighted in previous studies regarding the prevalence of misinformation in digital platforms (Tuck et al., 2020). The necessity for verifying information is critical, as inaccurate information can hinder public engagement. Strengthening the role of formal education and traditional media is essential to provide valid and reliable data, ensuring that the community can access accurate information.

**Frequency of Discussion on Climate Change Issues in the Campus Environment:** Most students stated that they often discuss climate change issues (55.1%). This shows a fairly high interest among students in environmental issues. However, there are still some who rarely or never discuss it, which may be due to the lack of access or opportunity to discuss this topic in an academic setting. Therefore, it is important to provide more discussion spaces and forums that can facilitate the exchange of ideas and views on climate change.

55.1% of students often engage in discussions indicates a strong interest in environmental issues among students. However, the presence of students who rarely or never discuss these topics suggests barriers to accessing academic discourse. This observation aligns with calls for creating more inclusive spaces for discussion, allowing for the exchange of ideas and fostering a culture of environmental engagement (Dempsey et al., 2021)

**Perceptions of Responsibility Based on Religious Teachings:** The majority of respondents (41%) feel very responsible for protecting the environment based on their religious teachings. This suggests that religious values can be a strong motivation in encouraging environmentally friendly behavior. However, there were also respondents who felt their responsibility was only adequate or lacking. This indicates the need to strengthen religious teachings that emphasize the importance of environmental conservation. Religious leaders and religious institutions can play a more active role in conveying the importance of protecting the environment (Misrawi, 2007).

41% of respondents feel very responsible for environmental protection, highlight the potential for religious values to motivate pro-environmental behavior. Previous research indicates that religious teachings can serve as a powerful impetus for environmental stewardship (Hakan et al., 2018). Nevertheless, the presence of respondents who feel only

moderately responsible underscores the need for religious leaders and institutions to reinforce the significance of environmental conservation within their teachings, further promoting a sense of communal responsibility.

**Practice of Environmentally Friendly Behavior:** While most respondents have reduced their plastic use (66.7%) and saved energy (85.5%), only a few have recycled waste and used environmentally friendly transportation (21.4%). This indicates a gap between awareness and action. Factors such as inadequate facilities, low awareness of the benefits of recycling, and the habit of using private transportation may be the main obstacles. To address this, a more intensive campaign on the importance of recycling and the use of environmentally friendly public transportation is needed (Nur et al., 2015).

**The Role of Religious Values in Addressing Climate Change:** Most respondents (87.6%) believe that religious values are important in addressing climate change. This shows that there is great potential to utilize religious teachings in environmental campaigns. Collaboration with religious organizations to spread messages about the importance of protecting the environment can strengthen climate change mitigation efforts. A faith-based approach can not only strengthen individual awareness, but also mobilize communities to actively participate in environmental conservation (Huda, 2021).

87.6% agreement indicates a significant opportunity to leverage faith-based messages in environmental campaigns. Previous studies suggest that collaboration with religious organizations can enhance climate change mitigation efforts by aligning environmental initiatives with moral imperatives inherent in various religious teachings (Bowers et al., 2013).

**The Role of Religious Moderation in Addressing Climate Change:** 74.8% of respondents agreed that religious moderation has an important role in addressing climate change. Religious moderation that emphasizes tolerance and awareness of diversity can encourage positive attitudes towards the environment (Rizal & Setiawan, 2022). Therefore, this approach can be an effective strategy in environmental campaigns, especially in multicultural and multi-religious societies (Berry, 2020; Huda, 2021).

**Interfaith Collaboration on Climate Change:** The majority of respondents (75.3%) agreed that interfaith collaboration can strengthen efforts to address climate change. This shows that interfaith cooperation has the potential to create synergy in environmental conservation actions (Rahman, 2019). This collaboration can build unity and solidarity in dealing with global issues such as climate change, and reduce the potential for conflict between groups with different beliefs (Sari et al., 2023).

Finally, the strong agreement (75.3%) regarding the potential of interfaith collaboration to strengthen climate change efforts highlights the value of unity in addressing global issues. Previous research supports the idea that interfaith cooperation can create synergy in environmental conservation actions, fostering solidarity and reducing conflict among diverse belief systems (Dempsey et al., 2021). Such collaboration not only promotes a unified response to climate change but also enhances community resilience in facing environmental challenges (Prabowo, 2020).

## CONCLUSION

The findings of this research underscore the intricate relationship between religious beliefs, community awareness, and environmental action, highlighting the significant role that

religion and religious values play in shaping attitudes and behaviors toward the environment. Recognizing the potential of faith-based approaches, alongside the importance of formal education and social media campaigns, is essential for stakeholders to develop more effective strategies for promoting sustainable practices and addressing the pressing challenge of climate change. A multidimensional approach that combines these elements is needed to enhance public understanding and participation in environmental conservation efforts. Furthermore, collaboration between academics, religious leaders, and policymakers is crucial for designing programs that effectively increase public awareness and foster action on climate change across diverse communities. Future research should continue exploring these dynamics to better inform policy and educational initiatives aimed at promoting environmental stewardship.

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