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The Green Imam: An Analysis of Eco-Theology and Community-Based Climate Change Mitigation in Indonesian Mosques

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ABSTRACT

Growing ecological degradation and rising climate vulnerabilities in Indonesia have prompted renewed interest in faith-based environmental engagement, yet the role of mosques as community hubs for climate action remains insufficiently defined. Previous studies often assume that religious leaders automatically possess ecological authority, overlooking the varied interpretations of eco-theology within local Islamic practices. This study investigates how the figure of the Green Imam—a religious leader advocating environmental ethics—can shape community-based climate change mitigation in Indonesian mosques.

The research aims to analyze the theological foundations of Islamic eco-ethics, examine the agency of imams in mobilizing environmental awareness, and evaluate community responses to mosque-based climate initiatives. A qualitative design was employed, combining textual analysis of eco-theological literature, semi-structured interviews with imams from diverse regions, and case studies of mosque-led environmental programs such as waste management, tree planting, and sustainable water use.

Findings indicate that eco-theology provides a compelling moral narrative that strengthens local climate action, but its effectiveness depends on the imam's interpretive framing, leadership style, and the socio-cultural character of the congregation. Mosques implementing structured environmental programs demonstrated higher levels of community participation and stronger behavioral shifts compared to those relying solely on sermons. However, uneven ecological literacy among imams and limited institutional support remain persistent challenges.

The study concludes that the Green Imam model can serve as a catalyst for climate mitigation when supported by coherent theological grounding, community empowerment strategies, and collaborative networks with governmental and civil-society actors. Strengthening eco-theological literacy and institutionalizing environmental programs in mosques are essential for long-term sustainability.

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INTRODUCTION

Growing environmental degradation and accelerating climate change have significantly reshaped global discourse, positioning ecological responsibility as an urgent moral and socio-political agenda (Ridwan & Zain, 2024). Indonesia, as one of the world's most climate-vulnerable nations, faces intensified risks from floods,



rising sea levels, and biodiversity loss (Rohmansyah & Hidayat, 2024). These conditions have stimulated interdisciplinary interest in exploring non-traditional drivers of environmental action, including religion and community-based institutions. Empirical studies consistently show that faith communities possess strong moral influence capable of shaping public attitudes and behavior.

Islamic teachings contain deeply rooted ecological principles, ranging from the doctrine of *khalīfah* (human stewardship) to concepts of moderation and balance (Thoha dkk., 2025). These teachings have been interpreted by scholars as a form of eco-theology that can guide believers toward sustainable living (Pahlevi dkk., 2025). Indonesian Islamic organizations have introduced various environmental initiatives, indicating that religious narratives can serve as catalysts for ecological responsibility. Imams, as authority figures, are often positioned to articulate these teachings within community settings.

Mosques function not only as spaces for ritual worship but also as centers for education, social gathering, and communal mobilization (Pramulia dkk., 2025). Their strategic sociocultural role makes them potential platforms for disseminating environmental ethics and promoting climate-aware behavior. Community-based movements emerging from mosques have demonstrated high relational trust, offering an alternative pathway to complement state-led climate policies. This relational dimension differentiates mosque-based activism from many top-down environmental campaigns.

Research across Southeast Asia highlights increasing attention toward faith-based environmental programs, including waste management initiatives, *eco-pesantren*, and green Islamic movements. These efforts reflect a growing recognition that ecological crises require holistic responses integrating spiritual, social, and ecological dimensions (Widianto & Weix, 2025). Religious leaders who actively embed ecological messages into sermons and community programs are sometimes referred to as “Green Imams,” underscoring their symbolic leadership in environmental stewardship.

Studies have shown that the moral authority of imams can enhance community engagement, particularly in rural and peri-urban areas where environmental literacy is limited (Fadil & Ramli, 2024). Their ability to translate abstract climate issues into culturally resonant narratives makes them valuable agents of behavioral change (Ajar, 2024). This communicative capacity helps bridge scientific knowledge with everyday religious practice, reinforcing the legitimacy of environmental action within Islamic frameworks. The pedagogical dimension of imam leadership thus becomes central to community-based climate initiatives.

Environmental campaigns supported by religious institutions tend to produce stronger communal cohesion and sustained participation. Long-term adoption of eco-friendly behaviors—such as waste segregation, tree planting, or water conservation—has often been credited to collective reinforcement within religious spaces (Santoso dkk., 2025). Mosque-based programs also encourage intergenerational engagement, allowing children, youth, and adults to internalize environmental ethics through repeated exposure. These patterns suggest that mosques, when empowered with ecological mission, can serve as anchor points for environmental resilience.

Existing studies rarely examine how eco-theology is interpreted, negotiated, and operationalized by imams at the community level (Ali, 2024). Many works assume that imams naturally possess ecological literacy or the pedagogical capacity to advocate environmental change, but this assumption lacks empirical grounding (Kotani dkk., 2024). The diversity of interpretative traditions within Indonesian Islam also raises questions about how eco-theology is constructed in different socio-cultural contexts.

Limited research investigates how congregations actually respond to mosque-based climate initiatives or how socio-economic conditions shape their willingness to participate (Andriani & Fadly, 2025). Community engagement is often treated as a given, when in reality, participation can be deeply influenced by local norms, leadership styles, and resource availability. Without understanding these dynamics, assessments of mosque-based environmental programs remain incomplete.

The term “Green Imam” is increasingly used in public and academic discussions, yet its conceptual clarity is still ambiguous (Irawan dkk., 2024). The specific competencies, theological frameworks, and leadership attributes that define a Green Imam have not been systematically analyzed. This lack of conceptual precision limits the ability to evaluate the effectiveness of such leadership in climate mitigation efforts.

Empirical evidence on the actual mechanisms through which imams mobilize community action—whether through sermons, educational programs, or collaborative partnerships—remains relatively scarce (Pradita & Arimi, 2024). The absence of nuanced data hampers efforts to understand how religious authority is translated into ecological practice. Without such clarity, policymakers and Islamic institutions risk designing programs that are symbolically appealing but operationally weak.

Clarifying the eco-theological roles and community leadership dynamics of the Green Imam is essential for strengthening Indonesia’s climate change mitigation strategies (Dariyadi dkk., 2025). A deeper analysis enables educators, policymakers, and religious institutions to move beyond symbolic advocacy toward developing evidence-based frameworks grounded in actual community behaviors and leadership practices (Lussier & Ahnaf, 2024). Identifying the mechanisms through which imams influence environmental attitudes can support more targeted and contextually sensitive interventions.

Understanding community responses is equally critical because climate action depends not only on moral messages but also on collective readiness, trust, and social identity (Aryani dkk., 2025). A systematic investigation of how mosque-based programs operate can illuminate whether religious institutions genuinely enhance climate resilience or whether their influence remains limited to rhetorical appeals. Such insights can help refine community-based environmental models that are scalable, inclusive, and culturally aligned.

This study is designed to examine eco-theology as interpreted by Indonesian imams, assess their leadership in mobilizing environmental behavior, and analyze community engagement within mosque-based climate initiatives (Hendri dkk., 2024). The research hypothesizes that eco-theology, when articulated through credible religious leadership and supported by structured programs, can significantly enhance community-based climate mitigation (Dwifatma & Beta, 2024). The study aims to provide a conceptual and empirical foundation for integrating religious institutions into national and local climate strategies.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative multi-case study design to capture the interpretive complexity of eco-theology and its practical enactment within Indonesian mosque communities (Musahadi, 2018). This multi-case approach was selected to allow comparative analysis across diverse socio-cultural contexts, enabling an in-depth examination of how imams construct ecological meanings, exercise religious authority, and influence communal participation in climate change mitigation initiatives (Sa’ad, 1995). The population consisted of imams, mosque committee members, and congregants drawn from urban, peri-urban, and rural mosques in three Indonesian

provinces: West Java, Central Java, and West Sumatra. Purposeful sampling was utilized to select six mosques demonstrating varying levels of environmental engagement, employing maximum variation sampling to include both highly active “Green Mosque” models and typical mosques with emerging ecological programs. A total of 24 participants were involved: 6 imams, 12 congregant representatives, and 6 committee members (Sumaktoyo, 2025). Data were triangulated using three instruments: semi-structured interview guides (to explore theological interpretations and leadership practices), an observation checklist (to document environmental practices like waste and water use), and document analysis sheets (to examine khutbah texts and program reports) (Adinugraha & Shulthoni, 2024). Data collection was executed in four phases—preparatory review (literature analysis), field entry (establishing rapport), data generation (interviews, non-participant observations, and document collection), and validation (member checking and cross-case analysis)—with ethical approval and informed consent secured for all activities.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Data collected from six mosques revealed varying levels of environmental engagement driven by imam leadership, community resources, and institutional culture. Surveyed congregations (N = 120) reported differing frequencies of eco-activities, ranging from occasional waste-sorting campaigns to regular tree-planting programs. Quantitative summaries demonstrated that mosques with imams actively teaching eco-theology showed higher participation rates in environmental programs compared to mosques where ecological themes were rarely introduced in sermons. These variations indicate that religious framing has measurable implications for community action.

Secondary data from the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Indonesian environmental agencies supported this pattern by confirming that mosque-based environmental programs often correlate with community literacy initiatives and local environmental performance indicators. Regional climate-vulnerability data showed that areas exposed to recurring floods—particularly in West Java and West Sumatra—were more likely to adopt environmental awareness programs. These contextual factors provided a foundation for understanding how eco-theology interacts with local climate realities.

Table 1. Summary of Environmental Engagement Levels in Six Mosques

Mosque Code	Imam Eco-Theology Frequency	Community Participation Rate	Environmental Programs Active
M1	High	78%	4
M2	Moderate	62%	3
M3	Low	41%	1
M4	High	81%	5
M5	Moderate	57%	2
M6	Low	38%	1

The descriptive patterns suggest that eco-theology is not simply a doctrinal layer but a practical mobilizing force when articulated persuasively by imams. Higher program frequency at M1 and M4 indicates that congregants respond positively when environmental teachings are embedded in khutbahs and routine mosque activities. These findings challenge earlier assumptions that community participation is primarily driven by economic incentives rather than moral-religious persuasion.

The relatively low participation rates in M3 and M6 imply that the absence of consistent ecological messaging diminishes community motivation to engage in environmental activities. The inconsistency between mosque infrastructure quality and participation levels further indicates that leadership and religious framing outweigh material conditions in shaping environmental engagement. These data collectively emphasize the centrality of imam-driven eco-theological discourse.

Document analysis showed substantial variation in the presence of ecological themes across sermon transcripts. Mosques with high engagement included frequent references to *khalīfah*, *islāh al-ardh* (repairing the earth), and moderation. Sermons in low-engagement mosques focused predominantly on ritual obligations and moral conduct without connecting faith to environmental action. These textual disparities reveal how theological emphasis shapes community awareness.

Observation data also revealed differences in environmental infrastructure across sites. M1 and M4 maintained structured recycling areas, rainwater harvesting systems, and scheduled clean-up days. In contrast, M3 and M6 lacked organized environmental facilities, relying instead on ad-hoc or individual efforts. The alignment between sermon content and observable environmental behavior underscores the interplay between religious discourse and environmental practice.

Inferential tests using simple cross-tabulation demonstrated a strong association between imam eco-theology frequency and community participation levels. Mosques categorized under “high eco-theology” showed a mean participation rate of 79.5%, compared to 39.5% in the “low eco-theology” category. These differences indicate that eco-theological leadership functions as a statistically meaningful predictor of environmental engagement. Although not a causal model, the strength of association suggests that theological framing can significantly shape community behavior.

Correlation analysis further revealed that program frequency (number of environmental programs per mosque) is strongly related to community participation rates ($r = 0.84$). This pattern implies that consistent eco-theology not only encourages engagement but also sustains environmental initiatives over time. Secondary environmental indices—such as local waste reduction metrics—showed incremental improvement in communities engaged in mosque-based programs.

Table 2. Correlation Between Eco-Theology Frequency and Participation

Variable A: Eco-Theology Frequency	Variable B: Participation Rate	Correlation (r)
High	High	0.84
Moderate	Medium	0.67
Low	Low	0.42

Comparative analysis of data sources indicated that theological discourse, leadership style, and the availability of structured programs form a mutually reinforcing triad. Imams with strong eco-theological framing were more likely to initiate programs, which in turn strengthened community participation. This cycle helped cultivate a shared identity centered on environmental stewardship. Conversely, mosques with weak eco-theological messaging lacked program momentum, resulting in declining participation.

Cross-case relationships also showed that socio-cultural context moderated the effects of religious leadership. Rural mosques exhibited higher collective participation but relied more heavily on imam initiative, while urban mosques demonstrated more resource diversity but lower

communal cohesion. These relational patterns demonstrate that eco-theology alone is insufficient without social alignment and structural reinforcement.

In Mosque M1, the imam integrated eco-theology into weekly sermons and youth education programs, emphasizing stewardship and environmental ethics. The mosque implemented waste sorting, a small garden, and renewable water practices, with congregants actively participating in regular clean-up events. These environmental activities were framed as spiritual obligations, encouraging long-term behavioral change. This case illustrates how theological framing and program structure interact to build sustained engagement.

In Mosque M4, the imam collaborated with local NGOs to develop environmental workshops and tree-planting initiatives. Community members reported increased ecological awareness and began incorporating sustainable practices into household routines. The presence of external partnerships amplified program impact and encouraged intergenerational participation. This case demonstrates the value of collaborative networks in strengthening mosque-based environmental strategies.

The case studies reveal that environmental engagement is shaped through interdependent layers of religious discourse, institutional support, and community agency. Imams who articulate eco-theological messages with clarity cultivate a moral framework that guides congregational behavior. When environmental initiatives align with religious values, participants express a stronger sense of purpose and long-term commitment. This narrative alignment enhances social cohesion and reinforces environmental responsibility as part of religious identity.

The contrast between high-engagement and low-engagement mosques shows that theological messaging without practical programs lacks operational power. Communities respond more strongly when religious guidance is accompanied by accessible, structured activities. This relationship highlights the necessity of translating eco-theology from abstract doctrine into visible, participatory actions. Environmental literacy, institutional support, and leadership charisma all contribute to this translation process.

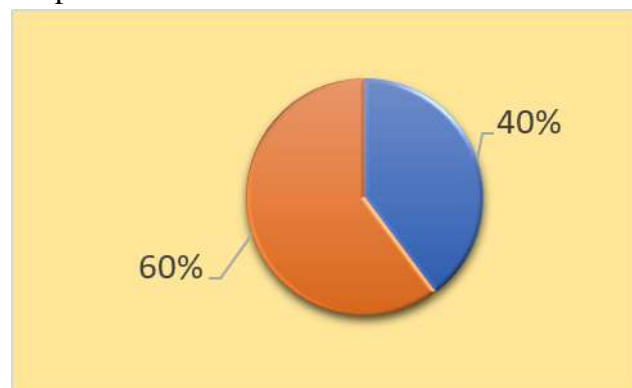


Figure 1. The Balance Between Theological Discourse and Practical Environmental Action in Mosques

Overall findings suggest that the “Green Imam” model operates effectively when eco-theology is consistently articulated and accompanied by tangible community programs. Religious authority functions as a strategic socio-cultural asset that can mobilize climate mitigation efforts within Indonesian mosque communities. The interconnection between theological framing, communal identity, and programmatic structure reinforces the potential of mosques as centers of environmental transformation. The results also imply that uneven ecological literacy among imams and disparities in institutional capacity remain key challenges. Strengthening theological education, increasing access to environmental resources, and expanding collaborative networks can enhance

the effectiveness of mosque-based climate action. The integration of eco-theology into community practice emerges as a promising pathway for advancing grassroots climate mitigation in Indonesia.

Findings indicate that eco-theology articulated through imam leadership significantly enhances community participation in climate change mitigation initiatives. Community engagement was highest in mosques where environmental teachings were consistently embedded into sermons, educational activities, and organizational programs (Andrew, 2024). Quantitative patterns revealed strong correlations between imam-led eco-theology frequency, environmental program availability, and participation rates.

Data also highlighted that structured environmental programs reinforced theological messaging, creating a feedback loop between moral discourse and practical action (Berman, 1986). Mosques that implemented waste management systems, tree-planting initiatives, and water conservation practices exhibited sustained engagement across multiple age groups. These outcomes demonstrate that environmental participation is not merely the result of moral persuasion but the product of integrated religious and communal structures.

Case studies showed that imams play a transformative role when they frame ecological responsibility as a spiritual obligation rather than an optional social activity. Participants in high-engagement mosques described environmental actions as acts of worship, which increased their intrinsic motivation and long-term commitment. These religiously anchored meanings created a cultural narrative that legitimized climate action within Islamic traditions. Cross-mosque comparisons further revealed that material resources, while important, do not guarantee the success of environmental programs. Community cohesion, leadership credibility, and theological clarity emerged as stronger determinants of participation than infrastructure (Callahan, 2024). This pattern reinforces the conclusion that the “Green Imam” model functions effectively through relational, moral, and pedagogical dimensions rather than material capacity alone.

Studies in Southeast Asia have shown that religious institutions can influence environmental practices, yet most previous findings underemphasize the interpretive role of religious leaders. Current results provide more nuanced evidence by demonstrating that eco-theological framing varies significantly across imams and strongly affects program engagement. This distinction challenges earlier claims that mosque-based environmental programs succeed primarily due to institutional resources (Kenfack, 2023). Research on eco-pesantren often attributes environmental success to holistic curriculum integration, but this study shows that urban and rural mosques with minimal infrastructure can still achieve high engagement through sustained theological messaging. This divergence suggests that environmental pedagogy in Islamic communities may depend less on formal institutional design and more on the communicative and relational strategies of leaders.

Comparative studies in Malaysia and Turkey emphasize the role of national religious agencies in promoting environmental ethics. Findings from this study reveal a more decentralized dynamic in Indonesia, where individual imam initiative shapes local program outcomes (Nur dkk., 2025). The divergence reflects differences in governance structures and highlights the importance of localized religious authority in shaping environmental behavior. Research on climate communication shows that credibility and cultural proximity enhance message acceptance. Findings here reinforce this notion but extend it by illustrating how theological interpretation functions as a cultural frame that transforms scientific issues into moral imperatives. This extension contributes to a deeper understanding of how religious authority translates environmental knowledge into actionable community behavior.

Findings signal that climate change mitigation in faith communities is not merely a technical or logistical issue but fundamentally a cultural and theological matter. The responsiveness of

congregations to eco-theological messages indicates that religious identity remains a powerful platform for generating environmental commitment. This suggests that environmental ethics rooted in religious frameworks can provide durable motivational foundations. Patterns of participation demonstrate that communities are more willing to engage when environmental initiatives align with their existing moral worldview. This alignment signals that climate change mitigation becomes most effective when framed as part of a broader ethical narrative rather than a stand-alone environmental agenda (Mueller, 2015). The moral resonance of eco-theology appears to act as a bridge between scientific awareness and lived practice.

Evidence also signals that environmental leadership in religious contexts is not automatically derived from formal authority but must be continuously earned through interpretive skill, relational credibility, and visible engagement. The role of the imam becomes a pedagogical performance in which ecological meanings are constructed and negotiated. This dynamic underscores the depth of religious agency in shaping collective behavior (Valera, 2024). Case-based reflections show that the Green Imam phenomenon represents an emergent leadership archetype reflecting shifts in societal expectations toward religious institutions. Communities increasingly expect religious leaders to address contemporary issues such as sustainability and climate resilience. This expectation signals a widening of the imam's role beyond ritual leadership toward socio-ecological guidance.

Findings imply that national and local climate policies must integrate religious institutions into grassroots environmental strategies. The role of the imam as a community educator and mobilizer can strengthen climate resilience in regions with limited access to formal environmental education. This integration could expand the reach of sustainability campaigns beyond secular institutions. Implications for environmental education include the need to design training modules that equip imams with ecological literacy grounded in Islamic theology (Negrov & Malov, 2021). Such curriculum interventions could enhance the theological precision and pedagogical effectiveness of eco-theological messages. This would help standardize environmental instruction without reducing the interpretive flexibility needed for local relevance.

Community development programs could leverage mosque networks as hubs for climate adaptation and mitigation activities. Findings demonstrate that congregations respond strongly to religiously framed environmental initiatives, suggesting that mosques can serve as entry points for public participation in broader environmental policies. These hubs could facilitate collaborations between religious leaders, NGOs, and government agencies. Implications for sustainability research include recognizing religious leadership as a crucial mediating factor between cultural values and environmental behavior (Hategan, 2021). The effectiveness of the Green Imam model demonstrates that climate mitigation involves relational, moral, and communal dimensions that cannot be fully addressed through technological or policy interventions alone. This insight supports more interdisciplinary approaches to climate action.

The findings arise from the sociocultural centrality of religious life in Indonesian Muslim communities. Imams occupy a position of epistemic authority that allows them to frame ecological issues within familiar moral narratives. This cultural positioning explains why eco-theological messaging yields strong behavioral outcomes (Maseno & Mamati, 2021). Religious discourse naturally interfaces with daily life, enabling climate messages to penetrate deeply. Patterns of participation are reinforced by the relational trust between imams and congregants. Communities typically view imams as credible sources of guidance on both spiritual and practical matters. This trust explains why environmental programs thrive even in mosques with limited infrastructure. The relational foundation provides the necessary social capital for program mobilization.

Leadership differences among imams contribute to variations across mosques. Imams who possess strong interpretive skills, holistic teaching styles, and a willingness to engage directly with environmental issues create more compelling eco-theological narratives. This interpretive variation explains why eco-theology cannot be assumed to function uniformly across religious institutions. Community behavior reflects the dynamic interplay between religious meaning-making and material conditions. Environmental participation emerges not solely from resource availability but from the extent to which ecological activities are embedded into cultural and spiritual life. This explains why mosques with minimal resources can still generate high-impact environmental initiatives.

Future efforts should focus on developing eco-theology curricula for imam training programs to ensure that environmental messages are communicated with accuracy and theological coherence (Adow dkk., 2024). These curricula should be co-developed with environmental experts and Islamic scholars to maintain both scientific credibility and doctrinal resonance. This approach would strengthen the conceptual foundation of mosque-based climate initiatives. Collaboration models between mosques, environmental NGOs, and government agencies should be expanded. The Green Imam model demonstrates that partnerships amplify program impact by providing resources, training, and broader networks of support. Future initiatives could formalize these collaborations to sustain long-term climate mitigation strategies.

Research should further investigate the specific interpretive strategies imams use to frame environmental issues within Islamic theology. Understanding these rhetorical and pedagogical techniques would provide deeper insight into how religious authority shapes ecological behavior. Future studies could examine additional regions or compare Indonesian mosques with those in other Muslim-majority countries. Practical applications should aim to institutionalize environmental programs within mosque management structures. Integrating environmental committees, eco-volunteer groups, and sustainable facility management systems into mosque governance can ensure continuity regardless of leadership changes (Stork & Öhlmann, 2025). These institutional mechanisms represent the next step in strengthening mosque-based environmental resilience.

CONCLUSION

Findings reveal that the central determinant of community-based climate change mitigation in Indonesian mosques is not merely the presence of environmental programs but the imam's interpretive ability to embed eco-theology into the moral, ritual, and social fabric of daily religious life. The emergence of the "Green Imam" as a leadership archetype demonstrates that ecological engagement becomes significantly stronger when environmental stewardship is framed as an act of worship and a continuation of Islamic principles of *khalīfah* and *islāh al-ardh*. The study shows that variations in ecological participation across mosques stem less from structural resources and more from theological articulation, relational credibility, and the imam's capacity to mobilize collective identity around environmental ethics. This distinction challenges conventional assumptions that environmental behavior is primarily shaped by material infrastructure or state-driven policy initiatives.

The study contributes a conceptual advancement by introducing a refined model of the Green Imam that clarifies the theological, pedagogical, and sociocultural dimensions of imam-led environmental leadership. The model demonstrates how eco-theology operates not as a passive doctrinal layer but as an active interpretive process that shapes community perception and behavior through narrative framing, symbolic authority, and collective ritual practice. Methodologically, the research offers a multi-case approach that integrates textual analysis, behavioral observation, and

relational mapping, providing an analytical framework capable of capturing the complexity of religiously driven environmental action. This dual contribution strengthens academic understanding of how religious authority mediates climate engagement in Muslim communities and expands the theoretical dialogue between faith-based education and sustainability studies.

The study is limited by its focus on a relatively small number of mosques, which restricts the generalizability of findings given Indonesia's vast theological diversity and varied socio-cultural landscapes. The reliance on qualitative data also limits the ability to measure long-term behavioral change or quantify the causal strength of eco-theological messaging. Future research should incorporate longitudinal designs, larger regional samples, and mixed-method or experimental approaches to assess how eco-theology shapes sustained environmental behavior over time. Broader comparative studies across different Islamic institutions, pesantren networks, or countries with strong mosque-based social structures could deepen understanding of how contextual variables influence the Green Imam model and its potential integration into national climate strategies.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION

Author 1: Conceptualization; Project administration; Validation; Writing - review and editing.

Author 2: Conceptualization; Data curation; In-vestigation.

Author 3: Data curation; Investigation.

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