



INTEGRATING SUSTAINABILITY EDUCATION INTO ISLAMIC INDONESIAN MIDDLE SCHOOL ENGLISH CLASSROOM: PRACTICES, CHALLENGES, AND BENEFITS

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Abstract: While the global trend towards integrating sustainability into English language teaching (ELT) is undeniable, its implementation in the unique context of Islamic Indonesian middle schools remains largely unexplored. This study delves into the practices, challenges, and benefits of sustainability education in Bengkulu, where English teachers are actively aligning curriculum with Islamic values of stewardship and social responsibility. Our mixed-methods survey research reveals that creative activities and project-based learning are effective tools for fostering environmental awareness and student engagement. However, limited resources, restrictive curricula, time constraints, and varying English proficiency pose significant obstacles. Despite these challenges, the integration of sustainability into ELT enhances critical thinking, language acquisition, and moral development, aligning perfectly with the goals of Islamic education. To maximize the impact of sustainability education, we recommend increasing teacher support through resources, training, and interdisciplinary collaboration. Furthermore, ongoing research is essential to assess the long-term benefits of this approach and inform future policy decisions.

Keywords: *sustainability; English language teaching (ELT); practices; challenges; benefits*

Abstrak: Meskipun tren global dalam mengintegrasikan keberlanjutan ke dalam pengajaran bahasa Inggris (ELT) tak terbantahkan, penerapannya dalam konteks unik sekolah menengah Islam di Indonesia masih belum banyak dieksplorasi. Penelitian ini menyelidiki praktik, tantangan, dan manfaat pendidikan keberlanjutan di Bengkulu, di mana para guru bahasa Inggris secara aktif menyelaraskan kurikulum dengan nilai-nilai Islam tentang pengelolaan lingkungan (khalifah) dan tanggung jawab sosial (mas'uliyah). Penelitian dengan metode campuran kami mengungkapkan bahwa aktivitas kreatif dan pembelajaran berbasis proyek adalah alat yang efektif untuk meningkatkan kesadaran lingkungan dan keterlibatan siswa. Namun, terbatasnya sumber daya, kurikulum yang ketat, keterbatasan waktu, serta variasi kemampuan bahasa Inggris siswa menjadi hambatan yang signifikan. Terlepas dari tantangan ini, integrasi keberlanjutan dalam ELT meningkatkan kemampuan berpikir kritis, pemerolehan bahasa, dan pengembangan moral, yang selaras dengan tujuan pendidikan Islam. Untuk memaksimalkan dampak pendidikan keberlanjutan, kami merekomendasikan peningkatan dukungan bagi guru melalui penyediaan sumber daya, pelatihan, dan kolaborasi lintas disiplin. Selain



itu, penelitian berkelanjutan sangat penting untuk menilai manfaat jangka panjang dari pendekatan ini dan memberikan masukan bagi keputusan kebijakan di masa mendatang.

Kata kunci: *keberlanjutan; pengajaran bahasa Inggris (ELT); praktik; tantangan; manfaat*

INTRODUCTION

Addressing global challenges such as climate change and resource depletion requires a fundamental shift in education. As Tilbury (2011) emphasizes, education for sustainability plays a pivotal role in transforming learners' perceptions and behaviors, fostering practices that support long-term environmental stewardship. This is particularly relevant to Indonesia, a nation grappling with significant environmental crises such as deforestation and water pollution. Indonesia has one of the highest rates of deforestation globally, leading to critical biodiversity loss and contributing to elevated carbon emissions (Margono et al., 2014). Additionally, water pollution poses severe risks to public health and aquatic ecosystems across the country (Kusmana et al., 2017).

Sustainability education, which equips learners with the knowledge, skills, and values to contribute to a more sustainable future, is gaining prominence in curricula worldwide (UNESCO, 2021). This growing focus underscores the crucial role of education in developing responsible global citizens who grasp the interconnections between environmental, social, and economic issues. According to Sterling (2001), sustainability education fosters "critical and reflective thinking, systemic understanding, and a sense of responsibility towards future generations."

Within this framework, integrating sustainability into English language teaching (ELT) provides a unique opportunity for engaging middle school students in Indonesia, including those in Islamic schools. ELT, with its emphasis on communication and critical thinking, offers fertile ground for exploring diverse sustainability themes. Scholars like Cates (2002) argue that language education extends beyond linguistic competence to cultivate global citizenship and environmental awareness. By learning English through the lens of sustainability, students not only improve their language skills but also deepen their



understanding of environmental and social responsibility. As Huckle (1991) highlights, “education for sustainability should aim to equip students with the ability to think critically about environmental issues and act responsibly in their personal and professional lives.”

For Islamic Indonesian middle schools, where education is often infused with religious and ethical values, integrating sustainability into ELT can provide a multidimensional learning experience. The holistic nature of Islamic education, which emphasizes the importance of stewardship (khalifah) and balance (mizan) in the relationship between humans and the environment, aligns well with sustainability education. Embedding these themes in English language instruction not only supports language acquisition but also reinforces Islamic ethical principles about caring for the earth.

There are several compelling reasons why middle school English teachers in Indonesia, particularly within Islamic schools, should integrate sustainability themes into their classrooms. First, this age group is at a critical stage of forming values and beliefs, and many students are particularly passionate about protecting the environment. Research indicates that young adolescents are especially receptive to learning about environmental issues (Chawla & Cushing, 2007). Engaging with sustainability in the context of their English lessons can make the subject more meaningful, boosting students’ motivation and engagement. Stern (1992) points out that connecting real-world issues to language learning can enhance intrinsic motivation.

Second, sustainability issues are complex, often involving diverse perspectives and critical thinking. Exploring these themes through English encourages students to develop higher-order cognitive skills, such as analysis, synthesis, and evaluation, as outlined in Bloom’s Taxonomy (Bloom et al., 1956). Grappling with sustainability topics also allows students to practice analytical reading and persuasive writing skills, strengthening their language proficiency while addressing real-world problems.



Third, learning English enables students to access global knowledge and engage with people from different cultures. Discussing sustainability challenges in English helps foster global citizenship, an important goal in today's interconnected world. Cates (2002) argues that language education should not only teach linguistic skills but also foster a sense of responsibility and global awareness. In the context of Islamic Indonesian middle schools, this global awareness can be harmonized with Islamic values of social justice, compassion, and environmental stewardship.

Fourth, sustainability topics offer a rich vocabulary base related to environmental issues, social justice, and responsible development. When students encounter new vocabulary in meaningful, real-world contexts, their retention and understanding are significantly enhanced (Nation, 2001). Fifth, classroom discussions around sustainability encourage students to express their opinions, debate solutions, and collaborate on projects, fostering critical communication skills in both written and spoken English. Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivist theory underscores the importance of social interaction in learning, suggesting that students learn best through collaborative activities that promote communication.

Sixth, sustainability education helps students recognize the impact of their actions on the environment and encourages them to make informed decisions. Bandura's (1977) social learning theory suggests that students are more likely to adopt sustainable behaviors when they understand the consequences of their actions and see positive role models. Finally, integrating sustainability in ELT allows for interdisciplinary collaboration. English teachers can work with colleagues in science, social studies, and religious studies to create interdisciplinary projects that deepen students' understanding of complex global challenges (Beane, 1997).

Incorporating sustainability into ELT within Islamic Indonesian middle schools presents a unique opportunity to enrich students' learning experiences, enhance their language skills, and empower them to become responsible global citizens. However,



research on the integration of sustainability into ELT has primarily focused on general curriculum design and pedagogy, with limited exploration of the specific practices, challenges, and benefits experienced by middle school teachers in Indonesia's Islamic education context. This research aims to address this gap by investigating the realities of integrating sustainability education in Islamic Indonesian middle school English classrooms, highlighting the pedagogical strategies, obstacles, and potential outcomes involved.

Research Questions:

1. What teaching practices are employed by English teachers in Islamic Indonesian middle schools to integrate sustainability themes into their classrooms?
2. What challenges do English teachers in Islamic Indonesian middle schools' encounter when incorporating sustainability themes into their teaching?
3. What are the perceived benefits for teachers, students, and the environment of integrating sustainability themes into English language education in Islamic Indonesian middle schools?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Sustainability and Education

Sustainability refers to the ability to meet present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet theirs (Brundtland Commission, 1987). It encompasses three interrelated pillars: environmental, social, and economic sustainability. Environmental sustainability emphasizes the preservation of natural resources and ecosystems (Capra, 2004). Social sustainability promotes equity, justice, and well-being within and across societies (Raworth, 2017). Economic sustainability ensures long-term economic stability without the exploitation of finite resources (Daly & Cobb, 1989).

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The integration of sustainability into education has become increasingly important, as current patterns of resource consumption and environmental degradation threaten future generations (Sterling, 2001). Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), as outlined by UNESCO, equips students with the knowledge, skills, and values necessary to create a more sustainable future (UNESCO, 2017). Key learning objectives of ESD include fostering critical thinking, problem-solving, decision-making, and collaborative action. These objectives align with the development of values such as care, respect, and responsibility, empowering students to contribute actively to sustainable solutions. Schaefer and Jayaraman (2013) argue that ESD can lead to "transformative learning experiences" where students apply sustainability principles to everyday life. Orr (1992) further highlights that sustainability education must cultivate "ecological literacy" — an understanding of the interconnectedness between human systems and the natural world.

Integrating these sustainability principles into educational practices can prepare students to address complex challenges of the 21st century. For Indonesia, a country facing significant environmental challenges, embedding sustainability in the education system has become a crucial step towards securing a sustainable future.

Sustainability in English Language Teaching (ELT)

Integrating sustainability themes into English Language Teaching (ELT) offers a unique opportunity to engage students while promoting environmental and social awareness. As students often have a natural interest in topics related to environmental protection and social justice, learning English through these lenses can boost their motivation and make the subject matter more meaningful (Falk & Dierking, 2010). By exploring real-world sustainability issues in the language classroom, students develop essential critical thinking, analytical reading, and persuasive writing skills (Freeman & Freeman, 2011).



Sustainability education within ELT also enables learners to acquire global perspectives, fostering a sense of global citizenship. As Banks (2008) asserts, education that includes global perspectives promotes social responsibility and helps students understand their roles within an interconnected world. For students in Islamic Indonesian middle schools, this approach can be particularly effective, as Islamic teachings emphasize stewardship of the earth (khalifah) and justice (adl), which resonate with the broader objectives of sustainability education.

Various pedagogical approaches to integrating sustainability into ELT have been studied globally. One approach is project-based learning (PBL), where students collaborate on projects addressing real-world sustainability challenges. PBL enhances language skills while fostering teamwork and problem-solving abilities (Thomas, 2000). Similarly, content and language integrated learning (CLIL) incorporates sustainability topics into broader subjects, such as science or social studies, providing both content knowledge and language skills (Coyle, Hood, & Marsh, 2010). Authentic materials, such as news articles and documentaries related to sustainability, also offer rich opportunities for meaningful language use (Gilmore, 2007). These approaches can make ELT more dynamic, engaging, and relevant to students' lives while cultivating an environmentally conscious and socially responsible mindset.

The Indonesian Context: Environmental Education and ELT

Indonesia, known for its biodiversity and rapidly developing economy, faces numerous sustainability challenges, including deforestation, pollution, and climate change. Recognizing the urgency of addressing these issues, the Indonesian government has included environmental education in its national curriculum. However, research on how sustainability themes are integrated specifically into English language teaching in Indonesian middle schools, particularly Islamic schools, remains limited. As Tilbury (2011) asserts, "Education is a crucial tool for achieving sustainability and must be



integrated across all levels of schooling to be effective." While sustainability initiatives such as the Eco-Schools program have shown positive impacts on students' environmental attitudes and behaviors (Wals, 2012), there is a need for a deeper understanding of how ELT teachers navigate sustainability in practice.

For Islamic Indonesian middle schools, where Islamic values of environmental stewardship and social justice are central, sustainability education can be integrated naturally into the English language curriculum. The principles of caring for the environment and acting justly towards others are deeply embedded in Islamic teachings, offering a rich foundation for addressing sustainability themes. By connecting these ethical principles with sustainability topics, ELT in Islamic schools can foster both linguistic and ethical development.

However, the practical implementation of sustainability education in ELT faces challenges. Teachers may lack adequate resources or training to effectively incorporate sustainability into their lessons. Additionally, integrating sustainability into a crowded curriculum, where emphasis is often placed on preparing students for national exams, poses practical difficulties. Wals (2009) emphasizes the need for empirical studies to assess the effectiveness of sustainability education and guide improvements. Filho et al. (2018) argue that localized, context-specific studies are essential to tailoring sustainability education to meet the unique needs and challenges of different regions.

This study aims to address this gap by exploring how Islamic Indonesian middle school English teachers integrate sustainability themes, the challenges they face, and the perceived benefits for students, teachers, and the broader environment. By examining these issues within the specific cultural and educational context of Islamic schools in Indonesia, this research will contribute to a deeper understanding of how sustainability can be effectively embedded in English language teaching.



METHOD

Research Design

This study employs a mixed-methods survey research design to investigate the practices, challenges, and benefits of integrating sustainability into the English language curriculum in Indonesian Islamic middle schools. As Johnson (2019) highlights, surveys are a cost-effective and efficient means of collecting data from diverse populations. This design enables a broad exploration of the experiences of middle school English teachers in Bengkulu city, Indonesia, where Islamic values and sustainability can play an integral role in shaping education. By combining both quantitative and qualitative data, this approach aligns with previous educational research that demonstrates the efficacy of mixed-methods in capturing comprehensive insights into pedagogical practices (Smith, 2017; Brown & Jones, 2020).

Given the focus on sustainability education within an Islamic context, the survey design reflects an inquiry into how teachers balance environmental, social, and ethical considerations in their classrooms, often framed by Islamic principles of stewardship (khalifah) and social responsibility (mas'uliyah). This integrated perspective is central to understanding the unique challenges and opportunities that Indonesian Islamic schools face when embedding sustainability within their curricula.

Participants

The target population for this study consists of English language teachers working Madrasah Tsanawiyah (MTs) across Bengkulu city. Purposive sampling will be employed to select teachers with direct experience integrating sustainability into their English language lessons (Stables, 2013). This targeted sampling ensures that participants are not only actively engaged in teaching but are also knowledgeable about the intersection of sustainability and Islamic education, making their input particularly valuable to the study's aims.



A total of 37 English teachers were recruited from various schools (MTs) in Bengkulu city. This sample includes a mix of teachers from schools that explicitly integrate Islamic values, ensuring that the study captures how Islamic principles, such as care for the environment (ihsan) and justice (adl), influence the teaching of sustainability in English language lessons. By drawing from diverse school contexts, the research will highlight both common challenges and innovative practices across different educational settings (Tilbury & Wortman, 2004).

Data Collection

Data will be collected using a self-administered questionnaire tailored for this study, which will be available in both English and Bahasa Indonesia to ensure accessibility and inclusivity for all participants (UNESCO, 2017). The questionnaire is designed to explore various aspects of sustainability integration in English teaching, with a combination of 18 closed-ended and open-ended questions.

The closed-ended questions will generate quantitative data on the frequency and types of sustainability-related practices that teachers incorporate into their lessons (Leal Filho et al., 2018). These questions will allow for the systematic analysis of teaching methods and approaches related to sustainability, covering topics such as environmental conservation, social justice, and global citizenship, all of which resonate with both sustainability and Islamic values.

The open-ended questions, on the other hand, will provide qualitative insights into the specific challenges teachers face and the perceived benefits they observe. Open-ended responses offer a platform for teachers to reflect on their personal experiences, drawing attention to culturally and religiously specific considerations in the classroom. As Sterling (2001) points out, open-ended questions are essential for revealing the depth and complexity of educational experiences, especially in contexts where teachers are required to navigate both pedagogical and religious imperatives.



Data Analysis

Quantitative data from closed-ended questions will be analyzed using descriptive statistics, such as frequency distributions and percentages, to present an overview of the prevalence and distribution of sustainability practices among teachers (Stables, 2013). This analysis will provide clear insights into how often teachers integrate sustainability themes and which practices are most common across different school types and contexts.

The qualitative data from open-ended questions will undergo thematic analysis to identify key patterns and recurring themes (Tilbury & Wortman, 2004). This analysis will focus on uncovering the nuanced experiences of teachers, particularly how Islamic values inform their approaches to sustainability education, the challenges they encounter (such as lack of resources or training), and the perceived benefits for students, communities, and the environment. Themes such as environmental stewardship (khalifah), social justice (adl), and responsibility to future generations will be explored within the context of both sustainability and Islamic teachings.

By combining quantitative and qualitative data, the study aims to provide a well-rounded understanding of how sustainability is integrated into the English language classroom in Islamic middle schools in Indonesia. UNESCO (2017) underscores the importance of mixed-methods analysis, emphasizing that such an approach provides a richer and more holistic view of educational practices, helping to illuminate not only statistical trends but also the deeper cultural and pedagogical narratives that shape teaching in specific contexts.

RESULT

Demographic Profile of Participants

This section outlines the demographics of the English teachers who participated in the survey, providing insight into the professional background and characteristics of



educators involved in integrating sustainability into English language instruction in Islamic Indonesian middle schools. The majority of respondents were female, accounting for 65.5% of the participants, while 35.5% were male, reflecting a common gender distribution in the teaching profession within this context.

Regarding the grade levels taught, the majority of participants (66.7%) were responsible for teaching English to Grade 8 students. A smaller but equal portion of the teachers (16.7%) taught English in both Grade 7 and Grade 9, indicating that the survey captured a balanced representation of middle school educators across different grade levels.

The teachers' experience levels varied, highlighting a diverse range of professional expertise. A significant portion of participants (30.5%) had 4-6 years of teaching experience, while 25.5% had been teaching for 7-10 years. Another 15% were relatively new to the profession, with 1-3 years of experience, and 20% of the respondents had over a decade of teaching experience. This wide range of teaching backgrounds provides a comprehensive view of how sustainability is being integrated across varying levels of experience in the classroom, offering insights into both the challenges and benefits as perceived by teachers at different stages of their careers.

These demographic details provide context for understanding the perspectives and practices of English teachers in Islamic Indonesian middle schools as they work to incorporate sustainability themes into their lessons, contributing to the overall exploration of practices, challenges, and benefits in this study.

Practices

Table 1 below, illustrates the frequency with which teachers employ various strategies to integrate sustainability into their English lessons in Islamic Indonesian middle schools. The data highlights that the most frequently used approach involves incorporating creative activities, such as having students write stories or poems that address



environmental issues. A significant proportion of teachers (40.5%) reported using these activities either "always" or "sometimes" as part of their sustainability integration efforts.

Project-based learning, centered on sustainability topics, was another relatively common method, with 35.1% of teachers reporting they engage students in projects related to environmental and sustainability issues with similar frequency. This suggests that hands-on, student-driven learning remains a favored approach for addressing sustainability in the classroom.

On the other hand, fewer teachers (29.7%) reported using authentic materials, such as news articles, documentaries, or songs, as a means of integrating sustainability themes into their English lessons. Similarly, discussions and debates on environmental challenges and potential solutions were less prevalent, with only 22.6% of teachers indicating they incorporate these activities "always" or "sometimes."

The least common practice was cross-disciplinary integration, where sustainability themes were connected to other subjects, such as science or social studies. Only 18.9% of teachers reported using this approach regularly, indicating a lower tendency to create interdisciplinary links with sustainability.

Table 1. Frequency and types of practices used by teachers in integrating sustainability in their classrooms

No	Practice	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	Using project-based learning activities focused on sustainability issues (e.g., renewable energy, waste management).	9 (24,3%)	5 (13,5%)	13 (35,1%)	8 (21,6%)	2 (5,4%)
2	Integrating sustainability themes with other subjects like science or social studies (Content and Language Integrated Learning - CLIL).	7 (18,9%)	3 (8,1%)	11 (29,7%)	9 (24,3%)	7 (18,9%)
3	Using authentic materials related to sustainability, such as news articles, documentaries, or songs, in your English lessons.	2 (5,4%)	7 (18,9%)	14 (37,8%)	3 (8,1%)	11 (29,7%)
4	Facilitating discussions and debates on environmental challenges and solutions.	13 (35,1%)	11 (29,7%)	5 (13,5%)	5 (13,5%)	3 (8,1%)
5	Incorporating creative activities like writing stories or poems about environmental issues.	6 (16,2%)	15 (40,5%)	7 (18,9%)	6 (16,2%)	3 (8,1%)



The open-ended responses from teachers provided valuable insights into the diverse strategies they employ to incorporate sustainability themes into their English lessons. One frequently mentioned practice is the use of real-life environmental issues, specifically those relevant to local communities. By addressing sustainability challenges that students experience firsthand, teachers aim to create a more meaningful and engaged learning environment. This approach fosters a sense of responsibility among students towards their immediate surroundings, aligning well with the Islamic principle of stewardship (*khalifah*) over the Earth.

Teachers also highlighted the use of interactive methods, such as dialogues, roleplays, and discussions, to actively involve students in lessons on sustainable living. These activities are designed to promote critical thinking about environmental issues and encourage students to reflect on how Islamic values can guide sustainable lifestyles, further reinforcing the connection between faith and environmental responsibility.

Challenges

Table 2 below, outlines the key challenges reported by English teachers in integrating sustainability themes into their lessons, with a particular focus on Islamic principles. The most frequently cited challenge was a lack of access to relevant teaching materials or resources on sustainability, especially those that align with Islamic values, with 35.1% of teachers identifying this as a major barrier. This indicates a significant gap in the availability of educational resources that combine sustainability topics with Islamic teachings, such as *khalifah* (stewardship) or *mas'uliyah* (responsibility), making it difficult for educators to present these issues in a contextually meaningful way.

A second prominent challenge was feeling restricted by curriculum requirements and standardized testing, with 81% of teachers reporting this as a minor or major issue. This suggests that the rigid structure of the national curriculum limits teachers' flexibility



to incorporate sustainability topics, particularly those linked to Islamic education, which may require a more integrative and reflective pedagogical approach.

Additionally, time constraints and the pressure to cover a large volume of material emerged as significant hurdles, with 54% of respondents identifying this as a major challenge. Many teachers reported struggling to balance the breadth of the curriculum with the depth required to meaningfully engage students in sustainability discussions, particularly when also attempting to incorporate Islamic ethical perspectives.

Concerns about English language proficiency also surfaced, with 29.7% of teachers indicating difficulties in effectively discussing complex sustainability topics, particularly those intertwined with Islamic teachings. This highlights a need for targeted professional development, both in enhancing English language proficiency and in deepening teachers' understanding of sustainability through an Islamic lens.

Furthermore, difficulty in engaging students with sustainability themes due to lack of interest or prior knowledge was cited by 29.7% of teachers as a major challenge. Teachers noted that students often struggled to connect abstract sustainability concepts with their lived experiences, particularly when the discussions touched on Islamic ethical frameworks like the importance of *ihsan* (excellence) in caring for creation. This suggests a need for pedagogical strategies that not only bridge the gap between theoretical concepts and practical applications but also make sustainability relevant through Islamic values.



Table 2. Frequency and types of factors challenges faced by English teacher
when integrating sustainability themes into their English lessons

No	Challenge	Not a challenge	Minor challenge	Moderate challenge	Major challenge	Extreme challenge
1	Lack of access to relevant teaching materials or resources on sustainability, particularly those aligned with Islamic values	1 (2,7%)	3 (8,1%)	11 (29,7%)	9 (24,3%)	13 (35,1%)
2	Feeling restricted by curriculum requirements or standardized testing, leaving little room to integrate sustainability and Islamic themes	1 (2,7%)	1 (2,7%)	30 (81%)	3 (8,1%)	2 (5,4%)
3	Time constraints and pressure to cover a large amount of material, limiting the inclusion of sustainability topics	2 (5,4%)	1 (2,7%)	12 (32,4%)	20 (54%)	2 (5,4%)
4	Concerns about my own English language proficiency in discussing complex sustainability issues, especially those related to Islamic teachings	1 (2,7%)	1 (2,7%)	21 (56,7%)	3 (8,1%)	11 (29,7%)
5	Difficulty engaging students with sustainability topics due to lack of interest, prior knowledge, or their understanding of Islamic perspectives on the environment	2 (5,4%)	1 (2,7%)	13 (35,1%)	10 (27%)	11 (29,7%)

Teachers reported several challenges in their efforts to incorporate sustainability themes into English lessons. One of the key issues is the lack of student interest in sustainability topics, which can make it difficult to create engaging learning experiences. This may be further compounded by limited school facilities, such as access to digital resources or suitable materials, which restrict the range of interactive or hands-on activities that could otherwise enhance student engagement with environmental issues.

Another significant challenge is students limited English proficiency, which hinders their ability to engage with complex sustainability topics. Teachers noted that discussions around global or local environmental challenges often require a level of language skill that many students have not yet developed.

Additionally, students' difficulties in comprehending sustainability-themed texts were reported as a barrier to effective lesson integration. Teachers observed that students



often struggle with understanding these texts, which limits the depth of engagement with sustainability topics.

Benefits

According to Table 3, the frequency and types of perceived benefits when teachers integrate sustainability themes into their English lessons are significantly higher compared to when sustainability themes are not integrated. Across all five listed categories of benefits—such as job satisfaction, student engagement, and environmental awareness—teachers reported more positive outcomes when sustainability was part of the curriculum.

For each level of benefit (no benefit, minor benefit, moderate benefit, major benefit, significant benefit), integrating sustainability themes consistently resulted in a higher percentage of teachers perceiving advantages. For instance, while 8.1% of teachers indicated no improvement in their job satisfaction or sense of environmental impact when sustainability themes were not incorporated, 35.1% reported a moderate benefit in these areas when such themes were integrated.

The most substantial perceived benefit from integrating sustainability into lessons was an increase in students' awareness and understanding of environmental issues. A notable 78.3% of teachers reported at least a minor benefit in this area, with 40.5% describing the benefit as major or significant. This highlights the critical role sustainability education plays in fostering environmental consciousness among students, which resonates with Islamic values of stewardship (khalifah) over the Earth.

Additionally, teachers observed a strong positive impact on students' motivation and engagement in learning English. A significant 70.2% of teachers reported at least a minor benefit in this regard, with sustainability themes contributing to greater enthusiasm and active participation in language learning activities. This suggests that integrating real-world sustainability challenges not only enhances environmental literacy but also promotes



more meaningful language acquisition in line with Islamic educational goals of holistic development.

Table 3. Frequency and types of perceived benefits when the teachers integrating sustainability themes

No	Benefits	Not a benefit	Minor benefit	Moderate benefit	Major benefit	Significant benefit
1	Your job satisfaction and perception of contributing to environmental stewardship (khalifah).	1 (2.7%)	11 (29.7%)	13 (35.1%)	9 (24.3%)	3 (8.1%)
2	Students' motivation and engagement in English language learning through sustainability themes.	2 (5.4%)	2 (5.4%)	26 (70.2%)	4 (10.8%)	3 (8.1%)
3	Students' development of critical thinking, communication, and ethical reflection skills.	1 (2.7%)	17 (45.9%)	10 (27%)	5 (13.5%)	4 (10.8%)
4	Students' awareness and understanding of local and global environmental issues.	3 (8.1%)	29 (78.3%)	3 (8.1%)	1 (2.7%)	1 (2.7%)
5	Students' sense of environmental responsibility and encouragement to adopt environmentally conscious behaviors (maslahah).	1 (2.7%)	19 (51.3%)	11 (29.7%)	4 (10.8%)	2 (5.4%)

Teachers highlighted several key advantages of incorporating sustainability themes into their English language classrooms. One significant benefit observed was an improvement in students' ability to grasp language concepts when lessons were linked to real-world sustainability issues. By connecting language learning with tangible environmental challenges, teachers noted that students became more engaged, which led to enhanced comprehension and deeper understanding of the material. This approach not only made learning more meaningful but also resonated with students' daily experiences, fostering a more immersive educational environment.

Additionally, teachers reported that integrating sustainability themes encouraged the development of critical thinking skills. By analyzing complex environmental problems and exploring potential solutions, students were able to engage in higher-order thinking processes, applying both language skills and intellectual inquiry. This aligns with the



broader goals of Islamic education, which emphasizes reflective thinking (tafakkur) and problem-solving within a moral framework.

Another important observation from teachers was an increase in student empathy when discussing sustainability issues. Engaging with topics such as environmental stewardship and the impacts of climate change allowed students to develop a deeper sense of social responsibility and compassion for both their communities and the planet. This suggests that exploring sustainability in the classroom contributes not only to cognitive development but also to social and emotional learning (SEL), an essential aspect of Islamic education that promotes the holistic development of individuals in alignment with Islamic ethical values, such as empathy (rahmah) and care for creation.

DISCUSSION

This study explored how sustainability themes are integrated into English language classrooms for middle school students (Grades 7-9) in Islamic Indonesian schools, examining both the challenges and benefits associated with this integration. The findings aim to offer insights for teachers, curriculum developers, and policymakers interested in fostering environmental awareness and critical thinking through English language learning in alignment with Islamic educational values.

As observed by Stables (2013), "Integrating sustainability into education can foster environmental awareness and critical thinking skills among students." Consistent with this, the most frequently used approaches in the study were creative activities, such as writing stories or poems (40.5% of teachers) and project-based learning (35.1% of teachers), which prioritize student engagement and active learning. These methods align with the recommendations of Leal Filho et al. (2018), who emphasize that "Project-based learning and creative activities can enhance student engagement and understanding of complex sustainability issues." In the context of Islamic education, these practices resonate with the



concept of *tafakkur* (reflection), encouraging students to think deeply about the world and their role as stewards of the environment (*khalifah*).

Interestingly, less emphasis was placed on using authentic materials, such as news articles and documentaries (29.7%), or facilitating discussions and debates on environmental issues (22.6%). This suggests that while teachers recognize the importance of sustainability, additional support or resources are needed to fully integrate these strategies into the curriculum. As Tilbury and Wortman (2004) note, "The use of authentic materials and open discussions are crucial for providing real-world context and fostering critical thinking in students." In Islamic education, this can be particularly powerful in connecting global environmental challenges to local contexts, aligning with the ethical responsibility of *amanah* (trust) to care for creation.

One of the key strengths identified in the study was the use of locally relevant environmental issues, which teachers used to connect students with sustainability challenges that directly impact their communities. This practice fosters a sense of agency and responsibility, aligning with UNESCO (2017), which states that "Connecting learning to local environmental issues can enhance students' sense of agency and relevance of their education." In Islamic Indonesian middle schools, this localized approach may also help students internalize the concept of *maslahah* (common good), driving both personal and collective responsibility towards environmental stewardship.

Interactive methods such as dialogues, roleplays, and discussions were also highlighted as effective in encouraging critical thinking and exploring diverse perspectives on sustainability and lifestyle choices. These activities not only develop language skills but also engage students in ethical reflection, consistent with Islamic values of empathy (*rahmah*) and justice (*adl*).

An innovative strategy mentioned by teachers was the integration of recycled materials into procedural text creation, which not only promotes sustainability but also enhances students' practical writing skills. This creative use of materials reinforces the idea



that sustainability can be woven into various aspects of the curriculum. As Sterling (2001) suggests, "Creative use of recycled materials in educational activities can promote sustainability and practical skills." Such practices also resonate with the Islamic principle of *ihsan* (excellence), encouraging resourcefulness and mindful use of resources in daily life.

However, the study also identified significant challenges to the integration of sustainability themes, such as limited access to relevant teaching materials (35.1%), constraints posed by curriculum requirements or standardized testing (81%), time limitations (54%), and concerns about student English language proficiency (29.7%). Teachers also reported difficulties in engaging students with sustainability topics (29.7%), which may point to the need for differentiated instruction strategies, scaffolding techniques, and culturally relevant reading materials to address student comprehension issues. As Stables (2013) points out, "Effective differentiation and scaffolding are essential for addressing diverse student needs and promoting understanding of sustainability topics."

On the positive side, the study highlighted substantial benefits of integrating sustainability themes, including an increase in student awareness and understanding of environmental issues (78.3%) and improved motivation and engagement in English language learning (70.2%). Moreover, the integration of sustainability topics offered opportunities for students to develop critical thinking skills and foster empathy through discussions of environmental challenges. This holistic impact is aligned with the goals of Islamic education, which emphasizes the development of the whole person—intellectually, morally, and emotionally. Tilbury and Wortman (2004) emphasize that "Integrating sustainability in education can significantly enhance students' critical thinking and empathy, contributing to their overall development."

In conclusion, the findings of this study suggest that integrating sustainability themes into English language instruction in Islamic Indonesian middle schools provides a valuable opportunity to enhance both language learning and environmental literacy. To



further promote this integration, it is essential to provide teachers with the necessary resources and professional development opportunities, especially in the use of authentic materials and the facilitation of discussions on environmental issues. As Sterling (2001) recommends, "Providing targeted professional development and resources is key to successful integration of sustainability in education." Moreover, promoting cross-disciplinary collaboration among teachers across subjects such as science and social studies could enhance the comprehensive nature of sustainability education. Finally, future research should explore the long-term impact of sustainability integration on student learning outcomes, environmental behaviors, and the ongoing challenges teachers face in diverse educational contexts.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the integration of sustainability themes in English language classrooms for middle school students in Islamic Indonesian schools, highlighting both opportunities and challenges. Creative methods, such as storytelling and project-based learning, were widely used, fostering student engagement and aligning with Islamic principles of reflection and environmental stewardship. Teachers preferred addressing real-world, locally relevant environmental issues to connect students with sustainability challenges in their communities. This approach encouraged critical thinking, agency, and responsibility while resonating with Islamic values of *maslahah* (common good) and *amanah* (trust). However, limited access to authentic materials, restrictive curriculum demands, time constraints, and concerns about students' English proficiency emerged as significant barriers, emphasizing the need for enhanced teacher resources, scaffolding strategies, and culturally appropriate materials.

The study also highlighted the benefits of integrating sustainability themes, including increased student awareness of environmental issues and greater motivation for language learning. Discussions on sustainability fostered critical thinking, empathy, and



holistic development, supporting Islamic educational goals. To address challenges, systematic integration of sustainability themes into English language objectives is recommended, alongside teacher training, improved access to resources, and interdisciplinary collaboration to enrich learning experiences. Future research should examine the long-term impact of sustainability education on student outcomes, environmental behaviors, and the challenges faced in diverse educational settings.

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