

Awareness of the Role of “Religious People” in Environmental Conservation from the Perspective of Islamic Studies Students

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How to cite this paper: Rahman, N. A., & Jalil, M. H. (2021). Awareness of the Role of “Religious People” in Environmental Conservation from the Perspective of Islamic Studies Students. *Creative Education*, 12, 1755-1772.

<https://doi.org/10.4236/ce.2021.128133>

Received: June 22, 2021

Accepted: July 30, 2021

Published: August 2, 2021

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Abstract

Protecting and conserving the environment is the responsibility of every individual including religious people in the Islamic context. Religious people play an important role in environmental conservation because they have the ability to cultivate public awareness on environmental conservation by linking the field of environmental conservation with religious knowledge. However, studies that focus on the role of religious people in helping the efforts of environmental conservation are still lacking. Therefore, this study explored the awareness of the role of religious people in environmental conservation from the perspective of students enrolled in the Islamic studies program. This study is a qualitative study where data were obtained from the reflective assignments of second year Islamic studies students who were following the Global Ecology and Sustainable Development course. Data were analyzed thematically using the ATLAS.ti version 7 software. Based on the findings, there are eight main roles played by religious people from the students' perspectives. The eight themes, sequentially arranged from the highest to the lowest, are providing environmental awareness to the public, adopting a sustainable lifestyle, becoming a role model, conducting environmental campaigns, working together with NGOs or the authorities, enhancing Islamic values in relation to the environment in oneself, becoming an environmental volunteer and contributing financially to environmental conservation. The role of religious people that was proposed by the students is in line with the Islamic values related to environmental conservation, namely *ta'awun*, *mahabbah*, *ihsan* and *qana'ah*. These values need to be lived and translated into behavior by religious persons so that they are followed and made a role model by the public in contributing toward environmental sustainability efforts.

Keywords

Role of Religious People, Environmental Conservation, Islamic Values, Environmental Behavior

1. Introduction

The Qur'an has concluded that the damage that happens to the environment is caused by human actions in committing misdeeds against the environment (Ibrahim, 2010; Rahman, 2016; Mikdar, 2010). There are many teachings about the environment in the Qur'an. It is estimated that there are 750 verses which refer to various aspects of the environment and the relationship between humans and the environment (Mănoiu et al., 2016). Among the values of environmental conservation taught in the Qur'an are 1) *qana'ah* which means being moderate and being grateful to Allah; 2) *mahabbah* which means love and appreciation of the environment; 3) *ihsan* which means choice wisely, staying away from actions that damage the environment, being responsible for the actions; and 4) *ta'awun* which means teaching the family about environmental conservation, reducing the use of natural resources, reducing wastes and engaging in environmental conservation campaigns (Yaacob et al., 2017; Rahman et al., 2020). In addition, there are four main principles in Islam that control the role of humans in environmental conservation, namely the principle of *tawhid* (the Oneness of Allah), *khalifah* (caliph), *mizan* (balance) and *fitrah* (nature) (Mangunjaya, 2010). Islamic values which are related to environmental conservation need to be translated into environmental conservation behavior. However, this responsible behavior toward environmental conservation is increasingly getting eroded because of the lack of appreciation of Islamic values related to environmental management that are based on the Qur'an and *as-Sunnah* (Rahman, 2017; Ibrahim, 2010; Mikdar, 2010).

Environmental problems are not just ecological problems but also related to theology (Djainudin & Sirait, 2016). In this regard, environmental management that involves Islamic-based environmental conservation is increasingly gaining attention both nationally and internationally (Aung, 2016). This is in line with the nature of Islam as a comprehensive religion (Rahman, 2016; McKay et al., 2013). Islam prioritizes measures of prevention, preservation and conservation before environmental destruction occurs. Thus, faith, morality, and ethics in conducting behavior in the society are important in environmental conservation efforts. A person's faith and worldview guide their actions toward the environment and this in turn leads to a sense of volunteerism in protecting the environment (Aung, 2016). Hence, the role of religious people is important to help in increasing awareness of environmental conservation to society.

In Malaysia, Islam is the religion that the majority of the people follow at 63.3% compared to Buddhism (19.8%), Christianity (9.2%), Hinduism (6.5%),

other religions (1.7%) and no religion or unknown religion (0.5%) (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2021). All religions emphasize good practices toward the environment. Religious people in Malaysia have a huge influence in conveying reminders and awareness of *aqidah* and the development of morals of the society. In addition, religious people such as the Muftis also play an important role in issuing a nonbinding opinion (*fatwa*) related to the environment (Torabi & Noori, 2019) such as laws in eating or selling endangered animals (Mangunjaya & Paharawati, 2019). Muftis are able to bring positive changes in the aspect of environmental care through *fatwas* and attract the attention of others to protect the environment (Torabi & Noori, 2019). Accordingly, in line with the roles of religious people in the society, the approach used to address environmental issues is different from the roles played by educators, activists, and scientists. The awareness of the roles of religious people needs to be explored in order to strengthen the cooperation from religious people in environmental conservation.

Extant studies on behavior toward environmental care have focused more on students and the general public (Karpudewan, 2019; Shamuganathan, 2015; Wu & Otsuka, 2020) without taking into consideration the impact of their roles or their occupation in the society. Identifying how individuals show their behavior toward the environment based on their roles in society will provide a more comprehensive understanding. In predicting behavior, several theories or models have made the elements of beliefs and values as the basis in shaping behavior toward environmental care. Among these are the VBN theory (values-beliefs-norms) by Stern (2000) and the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 2005) where the basis focuses on an individual's beliefs in predicting the desire toward environmental behavior. Values, beliefs and norms are closely related to religion and culture that also play an important role in influencing behavior toward environmental care (Fang et al., 2017; Aung, 2016). However, research lack focuses on the influence of culturally or religiously related values in shaping behavior toward environmental care (Fang et al., 2017).

In addition, there is a lack of research that explores the views of religious people at the local community level in increasing Islamic values such as *ta'awun*, *mahabbah*, *ihsan* and *qana'ah* and awareness on solving environmental issues (Torabi & Noori, 2019; Mangunjaya, 2010). As religious people have an important role in the preservation and conservation of the environment in the context of Islam, it is thus necessary for this study to be conducted in an attempt to explore the extent to which religious people have awareness of carrying out their duties in environmental conservation based on the perspective of Islamic studies students. This is because Islamic studies students who were involved in this study are students pursuing their studies at the bachelor's degree level on a part time basis. Most of them are working in sectors involving Islam, for example as Imams, Islamic education teachers, preachers as well as public and private employees involved in jobs related to the Islamic sector. Therefore, they play a crucial role to enhance the environmental awareness through Islamic approach. It is expected that through this study, awareness of religious people in terms of un-

derstanding and implementation of their roles in environmental conservation efforts can be better understood, and appropriate interventions can be planned well. This study can also provide understanding to the public of the roles of religious people in environmental conservation efforts based on their abilities in the context of a Muslim country.

2. Literature Review

2.1. The Role of Education in Addressing Environmental Problems

Environmental conservation is the responsibility of every human in fitting with humans' role as a servant and a caliph (Djainudin & Sirait, 2016). As the caliph or vicegerent of Allah, humans need to uphold the trust in managing the environment in the best possible way. However, humans often exploit the environment excessively, beyond the limits and limitations for their own self-interest. To address environmental problems, focus need not only be given to infrastructure improvements, but attention also needs to be given to increasing ethical behavior towards environmental care through environmental education (Tiwi & Samsilah, 2014). Education is the key thrust in developing awareness of the role of every individual in addressing environmental issues. Environmental education is also seen as the best medium and effort in instilling responsibility and knowledge about the concept of sustainable development to address environmental crises (Rahman, 2017).

2.2. The Quran and the Hadith That Related to Environment

Among the knowledge that humans need to master in conserving the environment is environmental sustainability, equilibrium of nature or ecological knowledge as well as interpretation of the Qur'an and hadith related to proof or evidence (*dalil*) of environmental destruction and ways of conserving the environment (Iksan et al., 2015). Appreciation of interpretation of the Qur'an that is related to the environment or pondering over the meaning of the verses of the Qur'an and contemplating them (*taddabur*) needs to be reflected through observation of the environment. Through *taddabur* of the Qur'an, a person can feel the greatness of God and take heed of the lessons from God's reminders contained in the Qur'an; additionally, pondering upon the Qur'an also creates the feeling of gratitude (Iksan et al., 2015). The importance of appreciating the Qur'an and hadith is also emphasized by Sharina et al. (2017); they remarked when science that is performed and studied is based on humans' responsibility as a caliph as well as guided by the Qur'an and the hadith, it is capable of producing humans who are spirited, strong-willed and propelled to do good deeds and always striving to be close to Allah SWT.

2.3. The Role of Islam Authorities in Preservation and Conservation of Environment

In the context of understanding and application of environmental care, the De-

partment of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM) has carried out promotions on caring and conservation of the environment through the Islamic Hadhari Approach. One of the principles emphasized in the Islamic Hadhari Approach is environmental conservation (Sani, 2010). The infusion and application of the ninth Islamic Hadhari principle does not only happen at JAKIM but is also taking place at all levels of ministries and government departments throughout Malaysia (Surip et al., 2016). The religious authorities in Malaysia also emphasize that the responsibility of preserving the environment is shouldered by all Muslims, from the government level up to the level of the consumer society (Mustafar et al., 2020), and the responsibility not only applies in this world, but is also questioned in the hereafter in the afterlife as stated in the formal ruling or *fatwa* on environmental pollution (JAKIM, 2016). Additionally, the development of multidisciplinary knowledge related to environmental conservation is expanded through research activities. In the month of May 2007, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia established the Institute of Islam Hadhari as a multidisciplinary research institute that integrates knowledge, including integration of knowledge in the environmental field with Islam which is the main focus of research at the institute (Bakar et al., 2017).

The monitoring mechanism for understanding and practice of caring for the environment is carried out through the Malaysian Shariah Index developed by JAKIM, under the responsibility of Malaysian Shariah Index Governance Committee. The index is a comprehensive measurement mechanism of governance practices in Malaysia based on *Maqasid Syariah*. The measurement and evaluation are implemented in eight main sectors, namely Islamic law, political, economic, education, health, cultural, infrastructure, and the environment and the social sector. Environmental care and conservation are assessed under the infrastructure and environment sector which examines the procedure in the provision of infrastructure and landscape, environmental sustainability, disaster management procedure as well as programs to intensify and strengthen environmental awareness. The planning, governance, and physical development activities of the country are monitored, evaluated and rated by the Malaysian Shariah Index each year (Malaysian Shariah Index Unit, 2015). The monitoring is conducted so that the environment is not damaged, and the development activities are carried out in line with *Maqasid Syariah* that preserves religion, life, intellect, lineage, and property (al-Raysuni, 2010).

2.4. Environmental Values Orientation

Emari, Vazifehdoust and Nikoomaram (2017) developed the Islam and Islamic Environmental Consciousness (IEC) instrument. The item was developed based on verses of the Qur'an and interviews with teachers in Islamic seminars. In the instrument, only attitudinal and behavioral factors were given focus despite aspects of value beliefs and norms also being important in creating environmental awareness. Based on Schwartz (2012) and Stern (2000), there are three values that underlie environmental care behavior, namely egoistic, altruistic and bios-

pheric values. Egoistic is the value that places personal needs and interests first, while altruistic is the value that places social needs first such as the people who are close to the individual including family, friends, neighbors and the local community. Biospheric values on the other hand are the values that prioritize or give importance to the environment in every action taken. There is another environmental value related to religion namely spiritual (Chowdhury, 2018; Crowe, 2013) and Islamic values related to environmental conservation such as *ta'awun*, *mahabbah*, *ihsan* and *qana'ah*. However, religious values related to environmental conservation is still poorly studied.

Religion plays a role in influencing values, motivation, behavior, and policy changes in supporting environmental conservation (Ghazali et al., 2018; Mcleod & Palmer, 2015). A study by Hancock (2019) found that the integration of religious values such as the concepts of *tawhid*, *caliph*, and *mizan* with science increases the involvement of Muslims as environmental activists. Therefore, this study could help to identify the awareness underpinned by the dominant values held by religious people in showing good behavior toward the environment through their roles.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Context of Study

The study aimed to explore the awareness of the role of religious people in environmental conservation based on the perspectives of Islamic studies students. This study is a qualitative study and data were obtained from the students' reflection through the assignment for the Global Ecology and Sustainable Development (LMCR 2332) course at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.

3.2. Participants

Purposive sampling was used in this study to ensure that the study participants are capable of providing information to answer the research questions. Participants are youths who are pursuing their studies on a part time basis at the bachelor's degree level at the Faculty of Islamic Studies, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia. Among the participants' field of study include da'wah and leadership, Arabic language study, Qur'an and Sunnah studies and *Usuluddin*. A total of 43 students were involved in this study, comprising 20 female and 23 male students.

3.3. Data Analysis Procedure

The study's data were obtained from the reflection assignment submitted by the students of which the question was: What is your role as a religious person in addressing environmental issues? The length of the reflective writing was between 300 to 600 words. Review of the reflections was carried out by identifying the themes related to the role as a religious person in addressing environmental issues. To help in the organization of the themes and sub-themes, the ATLAS.ti software version 7 was used.

4. Findings

The thematic analysis revealed that there are eight roles played by religious people based on the Islamic studies students' perspectives. The eight themes according to sequence are providing environmental awareness to the community, adopting a sustainable lifestyle, becoming a role model, conducting campaigns, working together with NGOs or the authorities, enhancing Islamic values in oneself that are related to the environment, becoming an environmental volunteer, and contributing financially to environmental conservation. **Table 1** shows the frequency of each theme mentioned by the study participants.

4.1. Providing Environmental Awareness to the Community

In fitting with the role as a religious person who always preaches to the community, most of the study participants mentioned providing awareness to the community about the environment. Words of Allah in surah Az-zariyat, verse 55 which means "And remind, for indeed, the reminder benefits the believers". Hence, conveying awareness and reminders to the community about the environment is in line with what is demanded by Allah. Based on the finding, religious people convey awareness to the community through sermons (khutbah), writings, and messages through the mass media or print media. Preaching in giving awareness to the community to care for the environment is a *ta'awun* (cooperation) value that is teaching others to conserve the environment, reduce the use of natural resources, reduce waste material, and to involve oneself in environmental conservation campaigns (Yaacob et al., 2017). Another value instilled and applied by religious people is the *mahabbah* value which means love and appreciation of the environment. Providing awareness to the community in environmental care is in accord with the hadith narrated by Muslim which states that the duty of preventing evil should be performed either through the power and ability that we have or the ability to provide reprimands and advice.

Table 1. Frequency of themes mentioned by the participants.

No	Themes	Number of Statements by the Participants
1	Providing environmental awareness to the community	42
2	Adopting a sustainable lifestyle	21
3	Becoming a role model to the community	14
4	Conducting environmental campaigns	13
5	Working together with NGOs or the authorities	12
6	Enhancing Islamic values in oneself that are related to the environment	3
7	Becoming an environmental volunteer	2
8	Contributing financially to environmental conservation	2

“...I deliver talks in mosques or anywhere to develop awareness and true understanding of the environment.” (7L)

“...delivering messages about environmental sustainability because each person has the right to live in a safe, healthy and beautiful environment.” (12P)

“Religious people can also play a role by explaining to the public about government policies and plans on the environment.” (13L)

“...the role of religious people in providing understanding and educating the attitude of humans to love, cherish and appreciate the environment of Allah’s creation that has been entrusted upon us.” (16P)

“...providing internal motivation as well as understanding in a more holistic framework to the community in relation to environmental care through the mediums of information dissemination that they obtained.” (36L)

“...giving advice to love our environment.” (40L)

The method used by the study participants in providing awareness to the community is by linking it to the relevant verses in the Qur’an, hadith as well as applying Islamic values related to environmental conservation. Among the Islamic values related to the environment is the concept of *tawhid* which is to remind humans to adhere to the words of Allah that are contained in the Qur’an and Hadith as well as perform duties as caliphs in taking care of the environment.

“I need to explain to the community about the importance of caring for the environment in the religious context.” (2P)

“...as a religious person, I need to urge the people to hold on to the words of Allah that humans are created to prosper the earth and not to do damage like what is happening today.” (9L)

“...give awareness to Muslims about the connection between Islam and the environment as well as the demands advised in Islam.” (10P)

“...providing awareness, importance as well as teachings on the significance of the environment based on the words of Allah in the Qur’an and the encouragement of the Prophet SAW through his hadiths.” (20L)

“I should also be aggressive, in integrating the understanding of religious texts with facts presented in the field of discussion by various parties.” (23L)

“...provide spiritual education about environmental cleanliness in Islam.” (30P)

“...religious people who always talk based on true arguments and accurate evidence in guiding the life of this ummah based on the Qur’an and sunnah in preserving the environment.” (33L)

“...give awareness to the community about environmental issues and it is also important that we provide evidence from the Qur’an and Hadith to call upon especially the Muslims to realize that among the paths of taqwa to Allah is by taking care of cleanliness and Allah always loves people who are clean physically and spiritually.” (39L)

“...developing the community’s awareness on the love for the environment from the physical and spiritual aspect through understanding of nature in Is-

lam.” (41L)

The values of environmental conservation taught in Islam are also related to the five values of environmental care in Japan which are *Kaizen*, *Wa*, *Kami*, *Mottainai* and *Ikigai*. *Kaizen* means continuous improvement, *Wa* means harmony, *Kami* means believing that there is God watching what is being done, *Mottainai* means no waste and *Ikigai* means being aware of the purpose of existence (Ujang, 2019). The environmental values in Japan are in line with Islamic values taught, namely the concepts of *tawhid*, *wasatiyah* (moderation) and the role as a caliph.

There are also other participants who provided awareness to the community by relating it to the knowledge of *usul fiqh* where caring for the environment is important for the benefit and interest of the community. Caring for the environment is also similar to taking care of religion, life, lineage, intellect, and property (Yang, 2018). This shows that environmental care is greatly emphasized in Islam.

“...conveying the three forms of human rights in Islam in general which are divided into three forms, namely rights of al dharuriyyat (human basic needs/ necessities), rights of al hajiyyat (human interests/ ordinary needs), and rights of al tahsiniyyat (human comfort/additional needs). To realize the claim of the rights of al dharuriyyat, there are 5 forms of preservation that have been prescribed by Islam that are excluded as al dharuriyyat al khams, namely the preservation of religion (hifz al din), preservation of life (hifz al nafs), preservation of the mind (hifz al aql), preservation of property (hifz al mal) and the preservation of lineage (hifz al nasl) which are actually very closely related in dealing with environmental issues.” (26P)

There are various channels used in conveying awareness to the community. Among these include using the social media or the mass media as well as through Friday sermons. The development of technology has made the delivery of awareness about the environment by religious people varied and more comprehensive. Environmental awareness conveyed through Friday sermons is also a good platform in educating the community about caring for the environment. For this reason, religious people should be educated by environmentalists to help them in composing the scripts for the sermons (Torabi & Noori, 2019). This indicates that there is a need for collaboration between religious people and environmental activists or experts.

“Exposure through the mass media can also be used to disseminate all information about the environment.” (1P)

“As a religious person, I will use social media such as YouTube, Facebook, Twitter and many others to provide an approach to the community in disseminating the importance of caring for the environment.” (28P)

“...I can use the medium of Friday sermons to make the community aware of the importance of keeping the environment clean and collect contributions to realize environmental programs.” (43L)

There were also participants who used the approach of educating people closest to them such as family members and friends as well as students because some of the participants worked as teachers at religious schools. This is the role as a *murrabi* who is always educating. In enhancing responsible behavior, support from educators or education institutions plays an important role especially in the school environment. This is because school is a place to acquire all kinds of knowledge and various norms that need to be adhered as well as ethics that can be the foundation or basis for humans in achieving well-being (Hidayat, 2015). This is even more crucial when environmental issues have become increasingly serious as the values of humanity which are segregated from the education system have resulted in environmental destruction (Lewis, 2007). Thus, among the roles of educators are to encourage students to take care of the environment through environmental programs organized, familiarizing students with cleaning activities so that it becomes part of their practice or culture, ensuring that all students are involved in any activities related to environmental conservation and establishing rules for monitoring development of students' behavior (Fua et al., 2018).

"...as an educator ... giving knowledge to children about the beauty of nature that needs to be protected. This is because education given since childhood is more effective since children who are still very young are pure from all bad things." (38P)

"I always advice and remind myself, my family, friends, and students to always care about environmental cleanliness."(4P)

4.2. Adopting a Sustainable Lifestyle in Life

The study participants also played their role in environmental conservation by adopting and practicing a sustainable lifestyle in life such as taking care of cleanliness. It shows that the participant being responsible for the actions (known as *ihsan* in Islamic values). The most basic cleanliness for them is to maintain cleanliness inside as well as outside of the home as well as at places of worship. In Islam, cleanliness indicates faith as in the Hadith which states "Cleanliness is half of faith" (Hadith narrated by Muslim).

"...we need to play an important role by caring about and giving attention to cleanliness in and outside of our home first." (1P)

"...ensuring that our house of worship is always clean and tidy because it shows how the religion emphasizes cleanliness." (37P)

In addition, they also implement basic things in solid waste management such as disposing of waste, separating wastes for recycling as well as reducing the use of plastic. These actions are in line with the values of moderation taught in Islam where moderation and not being excessive in producing wastes, which can have an impact on the well-being of humankind, is promoted in Islamic teachings. Solid waste that is not managed well will attract pests such as rats, cockroaches and mosquitoes to breed in the area and this in turn will spread diseases to hu-

mans because these pests act as the vectors of viruses that can disrupt human health; additionally, these pests can also visually impair the scenery of the surroundings.

“...role as a religious person who is responsible, should always maintain the cleanliness of the environment, for example like throwing rubbish into the dust-bin.” (6P)

“...the method of separating rubbish for recycling, avoiding open burning around the house, and managing solid waste properly.” (22L)

“...we must also manage the environment as best as possible such as reducing the use of plastic and avoiding waste because Islam also prohibits wastage.” (3P)

“...we should use something based on our need such as reducing the use of plastic or replacing it with paper to lessen the problem of waste disposal.” (32P)

Planting trees is also part of the sustainable lifestyle that the participants adopt. In addition, they also adopt the practice of vehicle sharing as well as saving electricity by reducing its consumption. Protecting the flora and fauna is also a part of their effort in environmental conservation. From Anas RA, he said: The Prophet SAW said, *“There is none amongst the Muslims who plants a tree or sows seeds, and then a bird, or a person or an animal eats from it, but is regarded as a charitable gift for him”*. If the community understands and appreciates the hadith, then the community will be motivated to plant trees and simultaneously contribute to environmental conservation actions. Trees play a very important role in supplying oxygen for respiration, preventing soil erosion because of their ability to absorb water as well as being a habitat and shelter for some animals. Trees are also capable of reducing the greenhouse effect as a result of climate change that is happening globally.

“...contributing a little to the environment, for example like planting trees, this is because trees help to increase oxygen on earth and absorb carbon dioxide.” (6P)

“I will plant like fruit trees in the around the housing area” (12P)

“Begin by practicing our daily living based on characteristics of environmentally friendly living such as recycling, planting trees, sharing vehicles, and saving on electricity consumption. The air conditioner needs to be set at the right temperature so that it is not too cold.” (14P)

“...caring for the environment such as protecting the flora and fauna, throwing rubbish at the right place, picking up rubbish and many others.” (40L)

4.3. Becoming a Role Model to the Community

As religious persons, these people are emulated by others in the community. Therefore, they need to show good morals through good behavior toward the environment so that they can be an exemplary person for others in caring for the environment. In Islam, among the most effective *da'wah* or preaching is *“Dakwah Bil Ha”* which is *da'wah* through one's character or behavior that is done by the Prophet SAW himself as the best example for Muslims to emulate. Thus,

participating in programs or organizing programs related to the environment themselves can to a certain extent help address environmental issues. There are several methods that have been examined previously by the researcher, that is the role as a role model can be demonstrated by conducting cleaning activities together or communally (*gotong-royong*); creating a green environment; instilling awareness of the importance of environmental management through daily activities, through teaching or education, through role modeling or through example, and the application of Islamic values (Efendi, 2017; Fua et al., 2018).

“I also have a role to be a ‘role model’ or an exemplary person for the community by caring about the environment myself.” (2P)

“...giving a good example in dealing with environmental issues in order to safeguard the sustainability of the world’s future for the children of the future generation.” (4P)

“...become a ‘role model’ by showing good moral values to the community.” (5P)

“I must lead first in caring for the environment.” (8L)

“...showing the value of cleanliness and the correct ethics in caring for the environment. This is because religious persons will be an example to the people.” (12P)

“...religious people should show good behavior especially in the aspect of cleanliness irrespective of wherever they are because their behavior will be an example among the community.” (13L)

“...showing character and attitude fitting with religious understanding so that religious people will not be a slander against the religion they preach.” (16P)

“...showing the best moral character so that they can be emulated by the community because the duty of a religious person is a duty that becomes a social point of view.” (22L)

4.4. Conducting Environmental Campaigns

One of the roles of religious people according to the views of the study participants is to conduct campaigns related to the environment. Campaign activities are varied such as putting up posters and planting trees. The purpose of the campaigns is to raise interest and awareness in the community on environmental conservation. Campaigns are also one of the methods of persuading the community to participate in caring for the environment.

“‘Love the Environment’ campaign by putting up posters related to the environment will attract the attention of the public to give their full attention in addressing environmental issues.” (5P)

“...conducting campaigns on the environment. For example, such as tree planting campaigns in the area where we live. Through this way, we will be able to cultivate the spirit of love for our nature among the local community especially among the adolescents and children because they are the ones carving the future of our country.” (25L)

“Community programs in practice can also raise interest and awareness to the surrounding community, for example planting fruit trees in the area surrounding the surau (communal prayer places) and providing moral support to the community that is just beginning to get involved in nature conservation.” (35L)

4.5. Working Together with the NGOs or the Authorities

Based on the views of the study participants, they work together with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) or the authorities in conserving the environment by making complaints or organizing campaigns to raise awareness and as an amalgamation of efforts in conserving the environment including cooperation with environmental experts. Collaboration between religious groups and stakeholders in the environmental field has a more effective impact on the practice of environmental care in daily life.

“...as a religious person, Islam encourages its believers to mutually help each other such as helping the authorities in preventing environmental crimes that are happening around us by reporting the crimes that occur to the relevant parties.” (3P)

“...conducting campaigns in collaboration with Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) in relation to the environment.” (5P)

“...working together with those who have awareness in caring for the environment to become more responsible in caring for the environment.” (8L)

“...religious people need to work together and unite with ecological experts in addressing environmental issues according to their expertise in the respective fields.” (16P)

“...together with the non-governmental organizations to give contributions to activists who provide awareness in caring for the environment.” (17L)

“...religious people also need to unite in voicing reports to the authorities if there is illegal logging of timber in the forest that is being carried out without a valid license.” (19P)

“...act as an Environmental Partner by being the eyes and ears of the government in helping to channel information and complaints to the authorities.” (24 L)

“...establishing a medium of information channel on the environment with the cooperation of experts in the field.” (29L)

4.6. Enhancing Islamic Value in Oneself in Relation to the Environment

The study participants are of the view that they need to instill Islamic values in themselves first before providing awareness to others. Among the Islamic values that need to be appreciated are being grateful (*qana'ah*) and always reflecting about the environmental issues that occur. They also need to strengthen their faith and increase their knowledge about the environment. Being grateful to Allah for all the bounty of nature that gives benefit to humankind needs to be translated into action by caring for the environment as best as possible.

“My role as a religious person in dealing with environmental issues is to instill Islamic values in myself.” (2P)

“The role as a religious person who practices Islamic teachings, we must always be grateful and reflect on ourselves so that environmental issues that contribute to the destruction of the environment will no longer occur.” (6P)

In addition, the environment is a bounty of Allah to His creatures as *ayatullah* or signs of the greatness of Allah SWT, as a book of knowledge that is always ready to be studied and as a gift from Allah SWT to His creatures to be benefited (Djainudin & Sirait, 2016; Ibrahim, 2010). This is in line with the views of study participant 3P as described below.

“The role as a religious person in dealing with environmental issues is to cultivate and strengthen our faith. This is because a strong faith can help a person educate themselves to always care for and respect God’s creation. Islam also commands us to always do good to fellow beings. Apart from that, making nature as a source of knowledge and for strengthening one’s faith. By appreciating the creation of nature, it will engender feelings of love for the environment and the person will be more appreciative of His creation. It also helps to avoid oneself from doing harm to the environment.” (3P)

4.7. Becoming an Environmental Volunteer

Religious people can also contribute to the efforts of environmental conservation through environmental volunteering activities. Based on extant studies, the benefits gained as a result of engaging in environmental volunteering activities include creating a sense of well-being in oneself (Seligman, 2011; Butler & Kern, 2016). Thus, environmental volunteering activities are not only good for the environment, but they also benefit the volunteers themselves as stated in the verse of the Qur’an, *“And cooperate in righteousness and piety, but do not cooperate in sin and aggression. And fear Allah; indeed, Allah is severe in penalty”* (Surah al-Maidah 5:2). Additionally, the Prophet SAW also emphasized on the aspect of helping each other through his hadith, *“The best among you are those who bring greatest benefits to many other”* (narration of Ibn Hibban). Therefore, the actions of religious people who participate in environmental volunteering activities is in line with Islamic values, namely helping each other in conserving the environment.

“We can also join volunteering organizations in environmental associations such as in Malaysia, namely the Environmental Protection Society Malaysia (MASA) and Environmental Management and Research Association of Malaysia (ENSEARCH)... Our involvement in these associations is really important by becoming a volunteer in the activities that they organize.” (P1)

“...becoming a volunteer in environmental clean-up activities.” (15P)

4.8. Contributing Financially for Environmental Conservation

The study participants also contributed financially to environmental conservation efforts. Among the examples of contribution of one of the study participants

is by making salary deductions to an environmental organization that he has implemented since the past five (5) years. This is one of the efforts that needs to be carried out by religious people in helping environmental conservation, namely through almsgiving. In Islam, almsgiving for environmental conservation will be rewarded for as long as it brings benefit to humans and other living creatures.

“Contributions in monetary form can also be given to ensure activities of saving the environment are successful.” (P1)

“Among the ways and methods to increase this feeling of love is to make salary deductions even though not much but continuously to this organization to help them financially. This is what I have been doing for the past 5 years.” (17L)

5. Conclusion

Overall, there are eight roles as a religious person performed by the students of Islamic studies in environmental conservation efforts, namely providing environmental awareness to the community, adopting a sustainable lifestyle, becoming a role model, conducting campaigns, working together with NGOs or the authorities, enhancing Islamic values related to the environment in themselves, becoming environmental volunteers, contributing financially and cooperating with the stakeholders in environmental conservation efforts. These findings indicate that there are various approaches that can be adopted by religious people to be equally involved in environmental conservation efforts. The advantage of religious people in giving awareness to the community differs slightly from that of other parties as religious people have the ability to integrate *naqli* knowledge (revealed knowledge) based on the Qur'an and the hadiths in giving awareness to the community about environmental conservation efforts. For this reason, religious people too need to equip themselves with environmental knowledge and relate the environmental field with the values contained in the Qur'an and Hadith.

There may be constraints for religious people in executing the trust of providing awareness to the community in the mutual effort of conserving the environment. These constraints can be addressed by working together with associations or agencies related to the environment. It is hoped that the knowledge of religious people in understanding the verses of the Qur'an and the hadith can be translated into exemplary behavior so that they can be a good example to the community and simultaneously become a role model to the community.

It is suggested that future research should be extended to other methods of data collection such as conducting survey research using questionnaires and interviews of religious people as well as observations of the role of religious institutions in environmental conservation efforts. Findings from studies that examine the perception of religious people on their role in caring for the environment can provide information on intervention planning in optimizing the role of religious people in environmental conservation efforts.

Funding

This study was funded by research grant RH-2020-001, Chair of Syekh Abdullah Fahim Grant, Institute of Islam Hadhari, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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