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The Theological Concept of QS. Al'Ashr in People Empowerement: Muhammadiyah Perspective

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ABSTRACT. Muhammadiyah, an Islamic movement that is still active and continues to develop as a social community organization, has shown a strong commitment to people empowerment. In its efforts to improve the quality of life of the ummah and encourage socio-economic progress, Muhammadiyah has established thousands of charities, including educational institutions from primary to tertiary levels, as well as health institutions such as clinics and hospitals. In addition, Muhammadiyah has hundreds of social institutions, such as orphanages and nursing homes. The movement was founded in 1912 by Kiai Ahmad Dahlan in Yogyakarta as a solution to the various problems faced by Muslims in Indonesia at that time. The research method used in this study is to use a qualitative approach with the type of library research. The purpose of this research is to find out about the theological concept of QS Al-Ashr in empowering people in Muhammadiyah's perspective. The result of this research is Muhammadiyah's approach to people empowerment is based on the concept of Al'Ashr theology, especially in time management and productive actions. Surah Al'Ashr from the Qur'an becomes an important foundation in the effort to empower people, by emphasizing the importance of faith, good deeds, and advising each other for truth and patience. Muhammadiyah has implemented this concept in various activities, including education, health, and social services, with a focus on the welfare of the community.

Keywords: *Muhammadiyah, People Empowerement, QS. Al'Ashr.*

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INTRODUCTION

Muhammadiyah provides an important context for examining how Islamic teachings inform organized social action and community empowerment. Founded in 1912, the movement has developed a sustained commitment to education, healthcare, and social welfare. Its significance lies not simply in the expansion of its institutions, but also in the relationship between religious reform and practical responses to social problems. Barton et al. (2021) situate Muhammadiyah within Indonesia's wider Islamic civil society and highlight its contributions to education and welfare. More specifically, Arifin et al. (2022) demonstrate that the movement's understanding of *Islam Berkemajuan*, or progressive Islam, draws on theological foundations that connect religious and rational understanding with education, philanthropy, humanitarian action, and empowerment. These perspectives establish Muhammadiyah as a relevant setting for investigating how Qur'anic interpretation shapes collective responsibility and social transformation.

The relationship between theology and social action in Muhammadiyah should not be reduced to a contrast between religious purification and institutional modernization. Kim (2024) argues that purification, ijtihad, and progress constitute interconnected elements of the movement's reformist orientation. In this understanding, engagement with contemporary social needs does not necessarily represent a departure from religious commitments. Instead, it can express an effort to realize those commitments under changing historical conditions. Nevertheless, Muhammadiyah should not be treated as an entirely homogeneous organization. Nashir et al. (2019), for example, identify tensions between its official moderation stance and the political choices of some members. Although their study concerns electoral politics, it provides an important analytical caution: organizational principles and individual practices do not always coincide. A study of Muhammadiyah's empowerment theology must therefore distinguish normative commitments from their interpretation and implementation.

This distinction also matters within the broader literature on religion and development. Marshall (2021) emphasizes the challenges of gathering and using evidence about religious engagement in development. Mandaville (2021) similarly argues that religion should be neither ignored nor treated as an all-encompassing explanation of social outcomes. Rather, researchers need to identify how religious beliefs, actors, and institutions function within particular contexts. Applied to Muhammadiyah, this approach directs attention beyond the assertion that Islamic values motivate social service. It requires a more precise explanation of how theological meanings inform program priorities, institutional relationships, community participation, and the responsibilities assigned to those involved in development.

Community empowerment offers a useful analytical framework for examining these relationships. However, empowerment should not be used interchangeably with charitable assistance or service provision Scheyvens and Van Der Watt (2021) conceptualize empowerment as a multidimensional process involving agency, access to resources, and influence over decisions affecting people's lives. Their framework distinguishes psychological, social, economic, political, cultural, and environmental dimensions. Although developed within tourism studies, this distinction offers a useful conceptual starting point for assessing whether social initiatives expand community capacities rather than merely deliver benefits. Raj et al. (2022) further demonstrate that research on grassroots innovation requires a richer understanding of power and empowerment beyond narrowly strategic interpretations. Together, these studies support an approach that treats communities as participants in social change rather than only as recipients of institutional assistance.

Empirical studies also show why participation, learning, and sustained support deserve attention in empowerment analysis. In a study of sustainable tourism development in Pakistan, Khalid et al. (2019) identify community support as a partial mediator of the relationship between empowerment and sustainable development. In Ethiopia, Zikargae et al. (2022) show how non-formal environmental education helps community members acquire knowledge and practical skills through training, experience sharing, and project-based learning. Meanwhile, Sari et al. (2022), examining biogas utilization in Indonesia, highlight the relevance of planning, implementation, monitoring, and assistance in assessing empowerment processes. These studies do not provide direct evidence about Muhammadiyah or Qur'anic interpretation. Their relevance is conceptual and comparative: they identify processes through which empowerment can be examined, including participation, capacity development, local ownership, and continuity of support.

Within Muhammadiyah, research on contemporary crises illustrates how religious reasoning can inform organized responses to public needs. Suyadi et al. (2020) examine Muhammadiyah's fiqh of disaster as a product of ijtihad that provides a normative foundation for responding to disasters, including the COVID-19 pandemic. Rachmawati et al. (2022), through a qualitative study of Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama, investigate the roles of Islamic faith-

based organizations in countering the pandemic. These studies establish the relevance of religious organizations to public health and crisis response. However, evidence of institutional mobilization should not automatically be interpreted as evidence of community empowerment. The analytical task remains to explain whether, and through what processes, religiously motivated action strengthens the capacities and participation of the communities involved.

Against this background, Qur'an 103:1-3, Surah al-'Ashr, deserves focused consideration as a theological resource for understanding empowerment. The surah links the avoidance of human loss to four interrelated commitments: faith, righteous deeds, mutual exhortation to truth, and mutual exhortation to patience. Its message therefore extends beyond the efficient use of time or individual discipline. The reciprocal character of tawāṣaw, expressed in the injunction to urge one another toward truth and patience, provides a textual basis for examining shared moral responsibility. In Muhammadiyah studies, Arifin et al. (2022) explicitly identify Ahmad Dahlan's teaching on Surah al-'Ashr, alongside Surah al-Ma'un, as an important inspiration for the movement's progressive orientation and social engagement. This connection makes al-'Ashr relevant not merely as an individual ethical teaching, but also as a subject of inquiry into the relationship between faith and collective action.

The literature reviewed here establishes several important connections. Studies of Muhammadiyah explain the relationship between Islamic reform, progress, and social activism. Research on faith-based development calls for context-sensitive explanations of religious engagement. Empowerment scholarship, meanwhile, identifies agency, participation, learning, and power relations as central analytical concerns. Yet these contributions do not, by themselves, provide a focused framework connecting the four commitments of Surah al-'Ashr with the processes of community empowerment in Muhammadiyah. The gap addressed in this article is therefore not an assumed absence of research on al-'Ashr or Muhammadiyah. Rather, it concerns the need for a more explicit conceptual account of how faith, righteous action, mutual commitment to truth, and perseverance can inform an empowerment-oriented understanding of Muhammadiyah's social mission.

Accordingly, this article aims to reconstruct the theological meaning of Surah al-'Ashr from Muhammadiyah's perspective and examine its implications for community empowerment. It proposes an analytical connection between the surah's four commitments and four potential dimensions of empowerment: ethical motivation, socially beneficial action, participatory accountability, and sustained collective commitment. These connections constitute propositions for analysis rather than predetermined findings about the effectiveness of Muhammadiyah's programs. The study addresses two questions: (1) How can the theological meaning of Surah al-'Ashr be understood within Muhammadiyah's reformist perspective? and (2) How can this theological understanding inform a framework for community empowerment? Through these questions, the article seeks to clarify the relationship between Qur'anic interpretation and empowerment while maintaining a clear distinction between normative ideals, institutional practices, and demonstrated social outcomes.

METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative approach with an interpretive orientation to examine the theological meaning of Qur'an Surah al-'Asr and its implications for community empowerment from Muhammadiyah's perspective. Rather than testing causal relationships or producing statistical generalisations, the study focuses on interpreting textual meanings and developing a context-sensitive understanding of the relationship between religious teachings and social responsibility. This orientation maintains coherence between the research objective, its philosophical assumptions, and its analytical procedures, as emphasised by Braun and Clarke (2023).

The study employs library research through a structured and critical examination of primary and secondary sources. This design enables the researcher to compare interpretations, evaluate scholarly arguments, and synthesise relevant concepts rather than merely summarise existing publications (Snyder, 2019). The primary source is the Qur'an, particularly Surah al-'Asr. Secondary sources include Qur'anic commentaries, books, theses, dissertations, and peer-reviewed journal articles addressing Muhammadiyah's religious thought, Qur'anic interpretation, and community empowerment. Literature selection prioritises thematic relevance, identifiable authorship, scholarly credibility, and the clarity of the arguments presented. The identification, selection, and synthesis of these sources follow the principles of transparent and critically informed literature review practice outlined by Chigbu et al. (2023)

To situate the textual interpretation within Muhammadiyah's intellectual context, the study examines relevant scholarship on the relationship between its religious ideas and social commitments. Bachtiar (2020), for example, discusses Muhammadiyah's progressive Islamic thought in relation to human development, education, poverty, and empowerment. This scholarship provides contextual support for examining the relationship between theological interpretation and social responsibility. It does not substitute for direct analysis of Surah al-'Asr or constitute evidence of the empirical outcomes of empowerment programmes.

The researcher analyses the selected texts thematically through repeated reading, coding of relevant passages, comparison of interpretations, and the development and refinement of analytical themes. Faith, righteous deeds, mutual commitment to truth, and perseverance serve as initial organising categories, while the analysis remains open to additional meanings and relationships developed through close engagement with the texts. The final stage synthesises these interpretations into an account of how the theological principles of Surah al-'Asr may inform community empowerment from Muhammadiyah's perspective. Throughout the analysis, the researcher distinguishes textual evidence, interpretations presented in the literature, and the researcher's own analytical claims.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

The Meaning of QS. Al-'Asr

Surah Al-'Asr presents a concise framework for understanding the relationship between time, faith, ethical conduct, and collective responsibility. Its central message is not simply that individuals should remain busy or complete tasks efficiently. Rather, it establishes that a meaningful life requires the integration of belief, righteous action, mutual commitment to truth, and mutual encouragement towards patience. These four elements provide the basis for the interpretation developed in this section.

وَالْعَصْرِۙ ﴿١﴾ اِنَّ الْاِنْسَانَ لَفِيْ خُسْرٍۙ ﴿٢﴾ اِلَّا الَّذِيْنَ اٰمَنُوْا وَعَمِلُوا الصّٰلِحٰتِ وَتَوَاصَوْا بِالْحَقِّ ەۙ وَتَوَاصَوْا بِالصَّبْرِ ﴿٣﴾

The meaning may be rendered as follows: *"By time. Indeed, humankind is in loss, except those who believe, perform righteous deeds, and encourage one another to uphold truth and patience"* (Qur'an 103:1–3).

Read as a unified passage, the surah connects personal conviction with practical and social obligations. Faith provides the foundation of moral commitment, while righteous deeds express that commitment through action. The injunctions to encourage one another towards truth and patience extend responsibility beyond individual conduct. Accordingly, this section interprets Al-'Asr as an integrated ethical framework rather than a narrow instruction concerning punctuality or productivity.

In educational terms, this interpretation directs attention to the relationship between religious understanding and the environment in which learners develop their character. Lahmar

(2020) discusses Islamic education through the concept of an Islamic "wisdom-based cultural environment". This perspective offers a relevant conceptual connection: the educational significance of Al-'Asr can be explored not only through the transmission of its verbal meaning, but also through the values and practices that structure everyday learning. This is an educational application of the surah, rather than a claim that Lahmar provides a specific interpretation of Al-'Asr.

The first element, faith, can therefore be understood as the moral orientation that gives purpose to learning and action. However, educators should not assume that students internalize religious values simply because they can repeat doctrinal statements. Demirel Ucan and Wright (2019) show that an approach combining critical religious education, variation theory, and a learning study model can help students develop a more informed understanding of their faith. Their findings support the use of reflective teaching that engages students' existing perspectives instead of relying exclusively on memorization. Applied to Al-'Asr, such an approach would invite learners to examine how belief informs their decisions, responsibilities, and relationships.

The second element, righteous action, requires the translation of moral understanding into consistent practice. From this perspective, the educational value of time does not depend solely on the number of activities completed. It also depends on the purpose, quality, and ethical consequences of those activities. Ryan and Deci (2020), through self-determination theory, explain that intrinsic motivation and well-internalized forms of extrinsic motivation support positive educational outcomes. Their review also emphasizes the importance of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Although this psychological framework is not equivalent to the Qur'anic concept of righteous deeds, it helps explain why meaningful commitment matters when learners turn values into sustained action.

The third element, mutual encouragement towards truth, introduces a relational dimension to moral education. Within the interpretation proposed here, truth-oriented advice requires honesty, openness to correction, and responsibility for the effects of one's conduct on others. Peterson (2020) provides a useful comparison by arguing that character formation cannot be separated from social relationships and participation in community life. His account emphasizes deliberation and engagement with social injustice. This connection strengthens the educational argument that the values of Al-'Asr should extend beyond private discipline to include dialogue, mutual accountability, and concern for the common good.

The fourth element, mutual encouragement towards patience, complements truth-oriented action by emphasizing continuity of commitment. In this section, patience refers to perseverance in fulfilling ethical responsibilities and supporting others through difficulties. A relevant institutional example appears in Hastasari et al. (2022), who examine character education at Muallimin Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta. Their findings highlight teachers' direct modelling of values, disciplined daily routines, and interpersonal communication that fosters sympathy, empathy, mutual trust, and a sense of belonging. These findings do not establish that the school's practices derive exclusively from Al-'Asr. They nevertheless illustrate how discipline and mutual support can operate together in Muhammadiyah education.

At the institutional level, translating these values into educational practice also requires leadership and organizational coherence. Arar et al. (2022) review international empirical research on Islamic-based educational leadership. Their work provides a relevant basis for situating the educational application of Al-'Asr within a wider discussion of Islamic values, institutional context, and leadership practice. The implication developed here is that educators need more than verbal instruction to cultivate ethical habits. They also need consistent expectations, credible role models, and institutional arrangements that enable learners to practise the values being taught.

The connection between Al-'Asr and Muhammadiyah has a more direct historical and theological foundation. Arifin et al. (2022) identify Ahmad Dahlan's teaching of Surah Al-'Asr and Surah Al-Ma'un as important inspirations for Islam Berkemajuan. Their study connects these teachings with Muhammadiyah's commitment to religious and rational understanding, education, healthcare, economic development, empowerment, philanthropy, and humanitarian action. This evidence supports an interpretation of Al-'Asr that links personal moral development with organized efforts to address social needs. It also prevents the discussion from reducing Muhammadiyah's understanding of progress to individual efficiency alone.

Such a relationship between religious commitment and public action is also visible in contemporary Muhammadiyah activism. (Efendi et al., 2021) examine the organization's ecological movement, including theological reform, the development of the fiqh of water, and political advocacy through judicial review. Their analysis also notes limitations in the organization and continuity of these efforts. The study therefore provides a qualified example of how Islamic ethical commitments can inform institutional responses to public problems. It does not, by itself, demonstrate that every form of Muhammadiyah activism originates directly from Al-'Asr.

Taken together, this analysis interprets the theology of Al-'Asr through four interconnected dimensions: faith as moral orientation, righteous deeds as ethical practice, mutual encouragement towards truth as collective accountability, and mutual encouragement towards patience as sustained commitment. Time provides the setting in which these responsibilities must be fulfilled. In Muhammadiyah education, this framework offers a basis for connecting disciplined learning, reflective religious understanding, supportive relationships, and socially beneficial action. Its specific implementation, however, must be established through the research data rather than inferred from theological principles alone.

The Concept of Al-'Ashr Theology in Muhammadiyah's Perspective on Community Empowerment

Al-'Ashr theology can be understood in this discussion as an ethical framework that connects the responsible use of time with faith, righteous action, mutual commitment to truth, and perseverance. Its relevance to community empowerment extends beyond individual time management. The central analytical concern is how religious commitments encourage people to develop their capacities, participate in collective action, and address conditions that restrict human dignity. This interpretation places Al-'Ashr within a broader discussion of Islamic transformative thought, in which theological reflection engages concrete experiences of inequality and social exclusion. Rahemtulla (2023) emphasizes that Islamic liberation theology must remain connected to social practice rather than confining itself to the reinterpretation of religious texts. His argument provides a comparative theoretical perspective, rather than direct historical evidence of Muhammadiyah's interpretation of Al-'Ashr.

Within this framework, empowerment involves more than providing assistance to people in need. It requires opportunities for individuals and communities to acquire knowledge, exercise responsibility, and contribute to decisions affecting their lives. The relationship between spiritual commitment and material well-being is therefore complementary rather than oppositional. Religious values provide an ethical orientation, while education, institutional support, and access to resources make meaningful participation possible. This integrated understanding is consistent with Bsoul et al. (2022), who connect Islamic approaches to development with human capability, community participation, social equity, and responsibility for future generations. Al-'Ashr theology can consequently serve as an interpretive framework for examining how moral commitments become sustained collective efforts.

Education constitutes an important area in which this relationship can be examined. From an Al-'Ashr perspective, the value of learning lies not only in the efficient use of time but also in the development of knowledge that benefits others. Educational empowerment should therefore

cultivate intellectual competence alongside ethical judgment, openness, and social responsibility. Susilo and Dalimunthe (2019) situate moderate Islamic education in Southeast Asia within discussions of deradicalization, educational strategies, and the challenges of sustaining moderation. Their study supports the broader educational context of this argument, although it does not establish Al-'Ashr as the direct foundation of particular Muhammadiyah educational programs. The analytical implication is that productive learning should strengthen the capacity to engage constructively with social differences rather than merely improve individual performance.

Women's empowerment provides a more specific illustration of how religious commitments can acquire institutional continuity. Research by (Arifin et al. (2022) documents 'Aisyiyah's contribution to women's and family literacy through its kindergarten network and Suara 'Aisyiyah. These initiatives create opportunities for learning and public engagement while sustaining an Islamic organizational identity. Their significance lies in the connection between religious conviction, access to knowledge, and women's capacity to participate in society. In the present discussion, these activities can be interpreted as consistent with the ethical orientation of Al-'Ashr. However, this consistency should not be treated as proof that every program, or Siti Walidah's specific historical decisions, resulted directly from an explicitly articulated Al-'Ashr theology.

Community empowerment also requires an inclusive understanding of social responsibility. Organizational services become more consistent with this objective when they respond to human needs rather than restrict benefits to members of a particular religious group. Jubba et al. (2022) show that Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama promote peaceful and moderate understandings of Islam, while also confronting conservative pressures. Their discussion identifies Muhammadiyah's educational and healthcare services as accessible to people from different organizational and religious backgrounds. These findings support an understanding of empowerment that connects religious identity with public benefit. They also indicate that inclusion is an ongoing institutional commitment rather than an outcome that can be assumed solely from an organization's stated ideals.

The relationship between theological reasoning and practical responsibility becomes particularly visible during crises. Suyadi et al. 2020) examine Muhammadiyah's Fikih Kebencanaan and its application to COVID-19 mitigation. Their findings identify interconnected medical, theological, and educational responses, including healthcare provision, adjustments to worship during emergencies, and public education. This study demonstrates how religious interpretation can support organized responses to changing social conditions. Read through the analytical framework developed here, such responses are consistent with an Al-'Ashr orientation toward timely action and collective perseverance. Nevertheless, the study specifically concerns disaster fiqh, so its findings should not be relabeled as direct evidence of Al-'Ashr theology.

Environmental responsibility broadens the discussion by connecting community well-being with the conditions that sustain it. Empowerment efforts may remain vulnerable when environmental degradation undermines health, livelihoods, and access to essential resources. Mohidem and Hashim (2023) explain the relationship between Islamic environmental responsibility and health through principles of unity, balance, and responsibility. Their review supports an integrated view of well-being that includes both natural and social environments. Within the present interpretation of Al-'Ashr, responsibility for time therefore includes attention to the long-term consequences of collective action. Productive activity cannot be evaluated only by its immediate benefits if it transfers environmental burdens to other communities or future generations.

Evidence from Muhammadiyah's ecological movement adds an important qualification to this argument. Efendi et al. (2021) identify efforts to incorporate environmental concerns through theological reform, the fiqh of water, and political advocacy through judicial review.

However, they also find that these initiatives have not always been well organized or sustained, and that economic justice remains more prominent than ecological conservation. This distinction prevents an overly idealized account of religious empowerment. A commitment to social welfare does not automatically produce comprehensive environmental protection. An Al-'Ashr-informed interpretation should therefore consider whether organizational commitments generate consistent practices, sustained coordination, and attention to the environmental conditions of community life.

The waste sadaqah movement offers a concrete example of how such commitments can support community participation. Yandri et al. (2023) describe a Muhammadiyah-associated initiative in Yogyakarta that combines waste management, charitable giving, and social action. Participants collect and sort recyclable waste, while proceeds support activities such as education, food assistance, and health-related support. The initiative shows how people can contribute through everyday practices even when their financial resources are limited. Its relevance to this discussion lies in the institutional connection between moral motivation, shared work, environmental improvement, and social benefit. It illustrates an activity consistent with the proposed Al-'Ashr framework without requiring the claim that the initiative explicitly originated from that framework.

Commitment to truth also has practical relevance in the digital sphere. Community participation can be weakened when misinformation distorts public understanding or undermines trust. Fauzi and Ayub (2019), through their study of Muhammadiyah's Fikih Informasi, provide a relevant reference for examining religious guidance on social media use. In the conceptual framework proposed here, mutual commitment to truth should therefore include responsible information practices alongside face-to-face religious instruction. This connection extends the discussion of empowerment beyond material assistance by recognizing the importance of the information environment in which people form judgments and participate in public life.

These studies support an interpretation of Al-'Ashr theology as a framework for connecting moral commitment with collective capability. Its analytical contribution lies in bringing the responsible use of time, beneficial action, truth-oriented engagement, and perseverance into a coherent discussion of empowerment. The reviewed evidence documents relevant practices in education, women's literacy, inclusive services, crisis response, environmental action, and information ethics. It does not, however, establish a single causal relationship between Al-'Ashr theology and every Muhammadiyah institution or program. Further empirical analysis should examine how organizational actors themselves understand Al-'Ashr, how they translate that understanding into program decisions, and how participating communities experience the resulting opportunities and limitations.

Discussion

The findings suggest that ecoliteracy functions not merely as environmental content but as an educational process that connects ecological understanding, ethical reflection, and opportunities for responsible action. Integrating environmental knowledge with values of care and responsibility positions the curriculum beyond information transmission and toward the development of environmentally informed judgment. This interpretation is consistent Van De Wetering et al. (2022), whose meta-analysis found that environmental education improves young people's environmental knowledge, attitudes, intentions, and behavior, although these outcomes differ in magnitude. Accordingly, the contribution of the present intervention should be understood through the relationship between what children know, how they evaluate environmental consequences, and how they respond in practice, rather than through knowledge acquisition alone.

The integration of cognitive and affective learning also provides a more precise explanation of the intervention's character-building potential. Environmental concern becomes

educationally meaningful when children can relate their emotional responses to accurate ecological explanations and appropriate actions. Ienna et al. (2022) found that environmental knowledge predicted pro-environmental attitudes and behavior more strongly than empathy in a predominantly adult Australian sample. Although this evidence cannot be transferred directly to young children, it cautions against treating emotional engagement as sufficient for environmental responsibility. In the present context, stories should therefore support ecological understanding rather than replace it with moral messages or emotional appeals.

The Picture Story Method offers a developmentally accessible way to introduce environmental choices and their consequences. Through characters, conflicts, and resolutions, children encounter examples of how individual decisions affect shared natural resources. Ebersbach and Brandenburger (2020) demonstrated that a short story featuring positive environmental role models improved ten-year-old children's sustainable behavior in a resource-dilemma game. This finding supports the interpretation that stories can do more than communicate environmental information: they can present actionable examples of cooperation and resource protection. However, evidence from a structured game does not establish that the same behavioral changes will occur automatically in everyday settings.

The value of storytelling also depends on how teachers help children connect narrative events with real-world processes. Walan Enochsson (2019) found that combining storytelling and drama supported scientific understanding among many participating children, but some recalled narrative elements without clearly connecting them to reality. Their findings help explain why the transition from picture stories to planting activities matters in the present study. Planting provides a concrete reference through which teachers can revisit the story's ecological messages and ask children to explain relationships among water, soil, plant growth, and human care. Such responses may indicate emerging causal reasoning. Nevertheless, participation in planting alone should not be interpreted as evidence of fully developed systems thinking.

The combination of narrative learning and direct environmental experience is also consistent with broader evidence on early childhood environmental education. Ardoin and Bowers (2020) identified environmental literacy, cognitive development, and social-emotional development as prominent outcomes across the studies in their systematic review. They also highlighted nature-rich experiences, play, movement, and social interaction as recurring pedagogical practices. Viewed in this context, the present method gains educational coherence by connecting classroom representation with practical participation, rather than treating storytelling and outdoor activity as unrelated components.

Habituation represents a further implication of the findings, but its contribution requires careful interpretation. Repeated opportunities to care for plants may help children practice responsibility beyond the initial lesson. However, the argument should not assume that a single session cannot produce meaningful outcomes. Pan and Hsu (2020) reported improvements in several environmental literacy dimensions following a one-day program, with some effects remaining at a one-month follow-up. The stronger implication is therefore that repeated practice provides opportunities to reinforce and assess learning, while the durability of environmental habits requires evidence collected over time.

Moreover, translating environmental awareness into action depends partly on whether children can realistically perform the expected behavior. Kurokawa et al. (2023) found that environmental education improved students' knowledge and concern, while behavioral interventions influenced particular low-cost environmental choices. Although their participants were older than those in the present context, the findings highlight the importance of feasible actions. For younger learners, regular plant care, appropriate waste disposal, and careful water use offer specific practices through which teachers can connect environmental messages with

observable responsibility. These activities should remain age-appropriate and supported, rather than placing responsibility for environmental degradation on children.

The distinction between participation and sustained behavioral change is particularly important when interpreting the intervention's effectiveness. Świątkowski et al. (2024) found an overall positive effect of interventions on children's pro-environmental behavior, while also identifying limitations in behavioral measurement. Consequently, enthusiasm during storytelling or willingness to join a planting activity should not serve as the sole indicators of success. Monitoring should examine whether children initiate environmental care, explain their choices, and continue relevant actions when immediate teacher prompting decreases. These indicators would provide a stronger basis for evaluating the proposed transition from guided participation to more independent responsibility.

Finally, the educator's role extends beyond presenting stories and organizing activities. Teachers need to connect scientific explanations, ethical questions, and locally meaningful opportunities for action. Bascopé et al. (2019) identified scientific action-integrated, community-based, and value-oriented approaches as central considerations for sustainability education in early childhood. These principles support interpreting the planning, implementation, and monitoring stages identified in the present study as an adaptable instructional framework, rather than an already validated model for all institutions. Its application elsewhere would require adjustments to children's developmental characteristics, available resources, and local environmental conditions.

Discussion

Al-'Ashr Theology as an Ethic of Reflective Social Action

The findings suggest that Al-'Ashr theology offers a framework for understanding how Muhammadiyah connects religious commitment with sustained social responsibility. Rather than describing a complete transition from ritual observance to social activism, this relationship is more accurately understood as an effort to integrate worship, ethical reflection, and collective action. Kim (2024) examines the relationship between purification and social activism in Muhammadiyah, highlighting the importance of ijtihad and progress in interpreting this connection. Read alongside the present findings, this perspective suggests that the significance of Al-'Ashr lies not simply in encouraging action, but in questioning whether religious understanding consistently informs socially beneficial practice. Time, therefore, becomes a measure of responsibility: its value depends not only on how efficiently individuals use it, but also on whose needs their activities address.

This interpretation requires caution against reducing the surah to a religious justification for productivity alone. Organizational activity does not necessarily produce empowerment, just as the expansion of charitable institutions does not automatically demonstrate social transformation. Quisay (2023) study of Islamic liberation theology, although situated in Egyptian prisons rather than Muhammadiyah, provides a relevant conceptual comparison. It shows that emancipatory engagement with scripture emerges through lived struggles, suffering, and reflection, rather than through an abstract claim that a particular interpretation is inherently liberating. Accordingly, the present study reads Al-'Ashr as an invitation to examine the relationship between faith and action continuously. Its transformative potential depends on how believers confront concrete experiences of exclusion, dependency, and injustice.

Faith, Welfare, and the Limits of Moral Certainty

The relationship between iman and social welfare should likewise be understood as an ethical commitment rather than an automatic causal relationship. Muhammadiyah's religious orientation can motivate public service, but the effectiveness and inclusiveness of that service require institutional capacity and deliberate choices. document Muhammadiyah's and Nahdlatul Ulama's commitments to peaceful and inclusive religious engagement, while also identifying the challenges posed by conservative and exclusivist interpretations. Their discussion of

Muhammadiyah's educational and healthcare services supports an important distinction: religious values can motivate service without requiring beneficiaries to share the provider's religious identity. Within the present interpretation, faith gives social action its moral orientation, while the dignity and needs of recipients provide a practical standard for evaluating its implementation.

This distinction also limits the claim that faith necessarily removes anxiety or guarantees resilience. Spiritual commitment may provide meaning and perseverance, but it should not substitute for knowledge, professional competence, or program evaluation. Research by Lionardo et al. (2024), based on responses from Indonesian government officials, identifies relationships between beliefs in religion–science compatibility and the acceptance and implementation of evidence-based policy. Although this research does not examine Muhammadiyah cadres, it provides a useful comparison for interpreting the findings. Religious conviction and evidence-informed decision-making need not operate as competing commitments. For Muhammadiyah, the implication is that sincerity should accompany critical assessment of whether an intervention actually responds to community needs.

Empowerment, Gender, and Substantive Participation

The empowerment dimension of Al-'Ashr becomes more convincing when it moves beyond encouraging individuals to work harder and asks whether they possess meaningful opportunities to act. From this perspective, providing "authority and trust" requires more than permission to participate. It requires access to learning, resources, decision-making, and the ability to question arrangements that reproduce dependency. Abou-Bakr (2023) interpretation of qist offers a relevant theological comparison by presenting fairness as a lived ethic directed against unequal privilege and the misuse of power. Applied analytically to the present findings, this perspective shifts the assessment of empowerment from the number of activities undertaken to the distribution of opportunities, recognition, and influence among participants.

The discussion of Nyai Siti Walidah in the present study can therefore be developed as an interpretation of women's agency rather than treated as conclusive proof that gender barriers have disappeared. Her place in the research narrative raises a continuing question: does recognition of women's religious and social contributions translate into substantive authority? The same question applies to other marginalized groups whose participation may remain symbolic. A useful comparative insight comes from Koopman (2023) study of Nahdlatul Wathan in Lombok, which shows how faith-based networks and locally meaningful knowledge can support assistance, recovery, and trauma healing. While this is not evidence about Muhammadiyah or Siti Walidah, it demonstrates why empowerment should engage communities' existing knowledge and relationships rather than position them merely as recipients of institutional intervention.

Cosmopolitan Responsibility and Ecological Accountability

The cosmopolitan significance of Al-'Ashr is best expressed as an expansion of moral responsibility rather than as an assumption that organizational internationalization necessarily produces universal benefit. A commitment to humanity requires Muhammadiyah to maintain cooperation across religious and political differences while critically examining pressures that may narrow its public role. Arifianto (2021) shows how political competition can intensify sectarian relations between Muhammadiyah, Nahdlatul Ulama, and the state. This finding cautions against presenting inclusive religious activism as a settled organizational achievement. Within the present interpretation, cosmopolitan responsibility remains an ongoing task that requires institutional independence, openness to dialogue, and resistance to the subordination of humanitarian commitments to partisan interests.

Environmental responsibility provides a concrete setting in which this ethical ambition can be evaluated. Mangunjaya and Praharawati (2019) in their study of environmental fatwas in Indonesia, show how religious guidance can become part of efforts to promote conservation. Their work concerns the Indonesian Ulema Council rather than Al-'Ashr theology or Muhammadiyah specifically. It nevertheless offers a relevant comparison for understanding how

religious norms may inform environmental engagement. In the present discussion, the ethical value of time should therefore include responsibility toward future generations. Social progress becomes questionable when present institutional or economic achievements depend on environmental practices that impose costs on others.

Evidence concerning Muhammadiyah itself reinforces the need for this critical qualification. (Efendi et al., 2021) identify ecological concerns in Muhammadiyah's theological reform and political advocacy, including the fiqh of water and judicial review initiatives. However, they also observe that these efforts have not always been well organized or sustained, and that the movement's environmental activism continues to emphasize economic justice more strongly than ecological conservation. These findings suggest that environmental engagement should not be presented as the completed realization of a comprehensive theology. Instead, Al-'Ashr can serve as an interpretive resource for examining the distance between ethical commitments and institutional priorities, including whether advocacy produces sustained changes in organizational practice.

Tawasau as Mutual Support and Critical Accountability

Finally, the collective dimension of Al-'Ashr suggests that avoiding loss requires more than individual discipline. Within this study's interpretation, tawasau encompasses mutual encouragement, shared learning, and the willingness to correct ineffective or exclusionary practices. However, collective solidarity should not be romanticized. Elgar et al. (2020), in a cross-national study of social capital and COVID-19 mortality, demonstrate that different dimensions of social capital can relate differently to public outcomes. Their findings caution against assuming that strong interpersonal ties or group affiliations necessarily produce beneficial collective responses. For Muhammadiyah, this comparison highlights the importance of connecting internal solidarity with public accountability, credible knowledge, and cooperation beyond organizational boundaries.

Taken together, the findings support an interpretation of Al-'Ashr theology as a moral framework for reflective and accountable social action. Its contribution lies in connecting faith, meaningful action, mutual correction, and perseverance without treating organizational success as self-validating. Empowerment, in this framework, should be assessed through the opportunities people gain to learn, participate, make decisions, and live with dignity. The central reflective question is therefore not merely whether Muhammadiyah remains active, but whether its activities continue to reduce exclusion, strengthen community agency, and respond responsibly to changing social conditions.

CONCLUSION

Based on some analysis and discussion of al-'ashr theology, it can be concluded that the importance of al-Ashr theology is related to time. According to al-Ashr theology, a happy person is one who can utilize his time to do good, while people who cannot utilize their time are a group of people who are lost. The Muhammadiyah organization has practiced al-Ashr theology since the beginning, starting during the leadership of KH Ahmad Dahlan. There he studied QS al-Ashr repeatedly for eight months and passed on his knowledge. He also served in the army until he established a school. Later, this al-Ashur theology was also carried out by Siti Walidah (KH Ahmad Dahlan's wife), but she did not leave al-Ashur theology in her work. by QS. Raja Al-Ashr Ahmad Dahlan educated his Muhammadiyah cadres to make the best use of time. Good time can be used for good things such as da'wah and jihad which can support one of Muhammadiyah's ideals: A progressive Islam. As is known, community empowerment is an effort to provide opportunities for individuals or communities to do good and produce things that are beneficial to individuals or groups. Al-Ashur theology in Muhammadiyah has long been applied by KH Ahmad Dahlan, the founder of Muhammadiyah. From his biography, it is known that KH Ahmad Dahlan practiced and studied this surah, namely surah al-Ashur for eight months. He studied it carefully through various interpretive research literature. Al-Ashur theology was applied

by KH Ahmad Dahlan and taught to Muhammadiyah cadres, especially for the empowerment of the people. He taught that people can make the best use of their time and utilize it for good, such as preaching or trading. Environmental awareness character education needs to be introduced to students because stories are an effective method to increase children's awareness of social relationships and relationships with the surrounding nature.

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