

Integrating Islamic Principles in the Curriculum of Psychology

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Abstract. The discipline of psychology is a very important knowledge to guide human life in this world. Psychology is a knowledge about ourselves with all the dynamics that could happen to us. The current mainstream psychological science is dominated by the western secular atheistic perspective. Psychology defines human beings as human animals as one of the products of evolution. The evolutionary perspective on human beings leads us to accept that human beings are evolving overtime, meaning that there is no basic nature of human beings that remains the same until the end of the world. In the Quranic word this basic nature of human beings is called *fitrah*. This issue could and already mislead the muslim Ummah in understanding their self and their social life. Therefore, as a muslim we should define psychology that is based on the Islamic teaching through the Quran and Hadith.

In order to establish the discipline of psychology from the Islamic perspective, at least we have to redefine the purpose, the object of study, and the methodology. The purpose of the discipline of psychology on Islamic worldview is to maintain and grow the health of the human soul. The Islamic teaching teaches us that life in this world is a journey that eventually we will come back to Allah in the hereafter. This purpose is different from conventional psychology which is hedonistic in nature and also materialistic. All individuals living in this world will experience happiness and sadness and sometimes multiple degrees of suffering. The Quran already warns us about these multiple possibilities in life and as a human we should endure this up and down while still preserving our dignity. That is why the discipline of psychology from the Islamic perspective embraces happiness and also difficulties in life with the belief that everything has meaning for us to learn from.

The object of the study in Islamic psychology is the human soul (*nafs*) which is sometimes also called the human heart. On the other hand, conventional psychology always changes their object of study across history. Concerning the methodology, the science of Islamic psychology expands the scientific evidence not only from something that can be observed, but also from the psychodynamics of human beings and the Quranic messages. Therefore, in Islamic psychology a multimethod approach is used in all levels and all areas of the discipline. For example, in developing theories, the muslim psychologist can start from Quranic study and then combine with observation and also be supported by logical contemplation.

Keywords: curriculum, integration, islamic psychology, method, object of study, purpose

Introduction

Islamic Psychology has been developing rapidly in recent years. The Muslim ummah around the world has shown great enthusiasm for Islamic psychology. These trends are not limited to Muslim-majority countries but are also observed in Muslim-minority countries such as Russia, Australia, the United Kingdom, and even the United States (Iqbal & Skinner, 2021). In response to this growing interest, scholars in Islamic Psychology have actively engaged with the field. Routledge, part of the Taylor & Francis Group, has published a series of books on Islamic psychotherapy, Islamic counseling, and Islamic psychology in general. International conferences on Islamic psychology are being organized in multiple countries more than four times a year. This development demonstrates that Islamic psychology is gaining worldwide recognition and is emerging as a new school of thought within the discipline of psychology.

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Many universities are initiating programs on Islamic psychology. However, most of the curricula implemented by these universities combine psychological science adopted from the Western school of thought with added Islamic values. This approach creates a degree of confusion because conventional psychology and Islamic psychology have fundamentally different philosophical foundations. While they may appear similar in application, their underlying assumptions are diametrically opposed. Conventional psychology is built on the foundation of secularism and materialism, which do not acknowledge the existence of the human soul. It is largely based on the perspective of Darwinian Evolutionary Theory. According to William B. Provine, from an evolutionary standpoint, human beings simply live and die, with no inherent meaning or purpose in life, as everything occurs by coincidence (Provine, 1988). When conventional psychology discusses meaning, its perspective is limited to life in this world, without recognizing the hereafter or the transcendent connection between human beings and Allah. Even when positive psychology addresses gratitude, it is understood merely as a transactional interaction between individuals, rather than as a spiritual connection with the Divine.

As a distinct school of thought, Islamic psychology is based on the *tawhid* paradigm (Riyono, 2022). It should not deviate from Islamic teachings. *Tawhid* must serve as the fundamental philosophical foundation, viewing human beings as Allah's creature, sent down to earth to live a temporary life before returning to Allah in the hereafter (Riyono, 2022). This philosophical background is crucial, as it will determine how Islamic psychologists develop theories, conduct psychotherapy, and approach self-development and the treatment of others in various aspects of human life.

What has been developed by the science of psychology can be utilized after being reconstructed within a new paradigm. For example, the concept of motivation can be applied within the framework of Islamic psychology but must be understood as energy that should be directed toward complying with Allah's guidance (Riyono, 2012). In every psychological concept, there should be an ultimate purpose, even though we must also acknowledge that some practices may be misdirected. Therefore, the notions of right and wrong will always be embedded in any psychological theory developed within the Islamic Psychology school of thought. The same principle applies to the concept of personality. A personality theory developed through Islamic psychology should also have a clear purpose. In Quranic terms, the ideal personality is one that embodies *Akhlaq al-Karimah* (noble character).

Based on the discussions above, the primary fundamental difference between conventional psychology and Islamic psychology is that Islamic psychology has a clear purpose. The purpose of Islamic psychology is aligned with the purpose of life itself. However, some schools of thought within conventional psychology may also have implicit purposes based on the ideals of the scholars who develop them. For example, psychoanalysis, behaviorism, and humanistic psychology each have their own distinct purposes that differ from one another. This is why conventional psychology is a divergent discipline that is difficult to integrate.

Freudian psychoanalysis is based on the pleasure principle, meaning that its primary purpose is to seek pleasure in life. According to Sigmund Freud, the highest form of pleasure is sex. This is why all his theories are centered on and focused on sexuality (Freud, 1961). The measure of good and bad is also determined by whether one can achieve sexual pleasure or not.

B. F. Skinner believed that human behaviour can be controlled in a certain way to ensure that people behave properly (Skinner, 1953). The purpose of behaviorism is to establish order in society. Skinner illustrated his idea on behaviorism in his novel "*Walden Two*", where he described a utopian society that is orderly, allowing everyone to live happily and properly (Skinner, 1948). According to Skinner, when this order cannot be achieved, institutions should be in place to correct misbehavior. These

institutions include prisons, mental health hospitals, educational institutions, and others.

The idea of humanistic psychology, developed by Abraham Maslow, is based on the idealism that all human beings have the freedom of choice (Maslow, 1943). This is why the ultimate purpose of humanistic psychology is to allow individuals to actualize themselves and become whatever they desire, as long as they are happy and do not harm others. Self-actualization is the primary goal of humanistic psychology, based on the assumption that all human beings possess free will. However, humanistic psychology neglects the guidance of Allah the Almighty on how to live our lives in this world. The Quranic message states that not everything you like is good for you, and not everything you dislike is bad for you. This means that freedom of choice is not the ultimate value of life.

Interestingly, the newest shift in conventional psychology focuses on studying the brain, leading to the development of the discipline known as neuropsychology. If we carefully examine neuropsychology, we will find that it lacks a clear purpose. The only objective it might claim is simply studying the brain. Neuropsychology primarily conducts numerous experiments on different parts of the brain in an attempt to discover anything of interest. For example, Lisa Feldman Barrett studied the brain for 25 years to understand the dynamics of emotions by observing brain activity (Barrett, 2017). Why did she do that? Simply because she wanted to understand how emotions work through the observation of brain activity. Thus, there is no higher purpose in the discipline of neuropsychology.

The purpose of Islamic psychology is to educate human beings about the truth of themselves and guide them to live life in this world in a proper way (Riyono, 2022). Living life properly means following Allah's guidance on how to perceive, manage emotions, and respond to life events. The ultimate purpose is to be prepared to return to Allah in a good condition, so that we may be worthy of being accepted into heaven.

In other words, we must continuously develop and deepen our knowledge about our lives and ourselves as long as we live in this world. To understand ourselves, we should learn from the Quranic messages and the scientific findings in the discipline of psychology that have been collected so far. To understand our lives, besides referring to the discipline of psychology, we should also learn from the social sciences, which provide a broader perspective on existence in this world. Of course, we should always refer to the Quranic message first to gain a fundamental understanding of the principles of life.

The Object of Study

The second issue of a discipline concerns its object of study. The term “psychology” consists of two components, which is “*psyche*” and “*logos*”. “*Logos*” means knowledge or the study of, while “*psyche*” refers to the soul, mind, and personality (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). Therefore, psychology is the study of human soul, mind, and personality as a whole. However, throughout the development of conventional psychology, the object of study has shifted over time. During the era of Freudian psychology, the “*psyche*” was defined as the unconscious mind with all its mysterious dynamics. In the era of behaviorism, psychology's focus shifted to observable behavior, leading to the discipline being referred to as the science of human behavior. With the rise of humanistic psychology, the object of study moved toward human needs, whereas in cognitive psychology, the focus shifted to intelligence. In the most recent development of neuroscience, the object of study has once again shifted—this time to the human brain and nervous system.

Conventional psychology has undergone changes regarding its object of study, leading to shifts in the definition of psychology over time. These changes in the object of study explain why conventional psychology is losing its sense of purpose, as the purpose defines the object of study. On the other hand, if one begins with curiosity about the object of study while neglecting its purpose, it may ultimately result in a lack of direction. This tendency is evident in neuropsychology. However, a small number of neuroscientists and neuropsychologists have pioneered experiments demonstrating that the brain is controlled by the soul, for example, John Eccles (1994) argued that the soul controls the brain, in his book “*How the Self Controls Its Brain*”.

In Islamic psychology, since the early Islamic civilization, it has been clear that psychology has been developed within the framework of *ilmu nafs*. The definition of “*psyche*” closely resembles the meaning of *nafs*, which is mentioned in the Quran 298 times across 270 verses. From the early classical scholars of Islam to the present day, the object of study has remained consistent. The *nafs* as the object of study aligns with the purpose of Islamic Psychology, which extends to life in the hereafter. Another way to perceive the object of study in Islamic psychology is through the focus on the heart (*qalb*). By definition, *nafs* refers to the individual, the self, or an individual's identity, while the heart is considered the core of the individual, as mentioned in a hadith by Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon Him. The Quran states that the heart is the one that listens, sees, thinks, understands, or rejects guidance. In this sense, the heart (*qalb*) also represents the human mind in conventional psychology.

In Islamic psychology, the study of personality is also focused on the heart. Personality is not only about behavioral tendencies, but also involves morality. Therefore, there is a good personality and not-so-good personality. The Islamic term that represents personality is *akhlak*. *Akhlak* is dynamic, meaning it can be upgraded or degraded. Consequently, Islamic psychology should also study how to upgrade *akhlak*, or in other words, how to improve an individual's personality.

Methods

The third fundamental issue in scientific inquiry is the methodology. Methodology involves the philosophical foundation, research design, and method of analysis. There are two dominant philosophical foundations in scientific inquiry, the first is positivism and the second one is the phenomenological approach. Positivism is usually deductive in nature, meaning it starts with general theories or hypotheses and tests them through empirical observation, while the phenomenological approach is typically inductive, meaning it derives theories from lived experiences and subjective interpretations. Both approaches primarily collect data from observable phenomena.

Scientific inquiry from an Islamic perspective is the process of understanding Allah's messages through the signs Allah has spread throughout the universe, within the human soul, and in the Quran (Surah Fussilat 41:53). Conventional scientific disciplines primarily rely on observing the universe. In psychology, some schools of thought focus on observable behavior and brain activity, while others explore the dynamics of the human soul, including thoughts, emotions, motivation, and needs. Islamic psychology, however, takes a more holistic approach to scientific inquiry by integrating both observable realities and the spiritual dimensions of human existence.

The Maqasid methodology, introduced by Jasser Auda (2021), is a scientific approach that should be applied to Islamic psychology to ensure coherence with its fundamental purpose. In Maqasid methodology, all sources of data are examined to understand the dynamics of human beings and their life events. Generally, the Maqasid methodology consists of five key steps, as follows:

1. Defining the purpose of study
2. Engaging in cyclical reflection of the Quran and Hadith
3. Analyzing information using a specific framework
4. Critically evaluating existing literature on the relevant topic
5. Constructing theories based on the findings

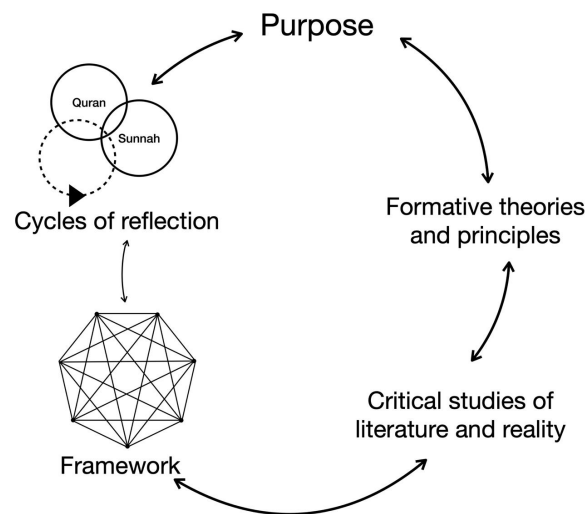


Figure 1. *Five steps of Maqasid Methodology*

Source: Auda (2021)

Theory of Human Basic Potential

To illustrate the outcomes of research in Islamic Psychology, the following are two fundamental theories. These theories are about the theory of human basic potential (Riyono, 2023) and the anchor personality theory (Riyono et al., 2012).

The theory about human basic potential was developed to address the question of the universal characteristics shared by all human beings. These universal characteristics are referred to as *fitrah* in the Quran, specifically Surah Ar-Rum 30:30, which states that Allah created human beings based on *fitrah* and that there is no changes in this *fitrah*. From this verse, we can conclude that all human beings share certain fundamental characteristics. This does not mean that individual differences are neglected, rather, there is a common denominator in human characteristics. While every individual is unique, they also share fundamental characteristics, which we refer to as human basic potential. The uniqueness of each person arises from variations in the development of this basic potential.

As mentioned earlier, the object of study in Islamic Psychology is the human soul or human heart. Therefore, basic potential does not refer to physical attributes, such as skin color, body height, hair type, or eye color. Instead, it pertains to the faculties of the human heart, which are not directly observable.

To identify this basic potential, a study was conducted focusing on the process of creation, particularly the creation of the first human, Prophet Adam. This creation process is described in Surah Al-Baqarah 2:30-39 and further supported by Surah Al-Hijr 15:26, which discusses the creation of the human body. After the body's formation, Allah gave Prophet Adam life, activating his soul (*nafs*). Once the *nafs* became alive and functional, Allah taught Prophet Adam the names of all things. Following this, Adam was introduced to the angels and the devils. The angels obeyed Allah's command to prostrate before Prophet Adam, while the devils refused, claiming superiority over humans. As a result, Allah declared the devils to be among the arrogant and the deniers.

The description of Prophet Adam's creation also applies to the creation of all human beings, as mentioned in Surah Al-Mu'minun 23:12-14. If we translate this process of creation into psychological terms, we can construct a theory of human basic potential as follows. First, the creation of the human body, which then becomes alive and able to communicate, signifies the development of sensory perception. Second, Allah's teaching of the names of things represents the emergence of abstract thinking, which forms the foundation of intelligence. Finally, the introduction to the angels and the devils marks the activation of morality, which is the ability to distinguish between good and bad.

As the human population grew and civilization emerged in various regions across the world, morality became localized within different cultures. This aligns with the argument of humanistic psychology, which asserts that morality is not absolute, but rather dependent on cultural context. However, from the Islamic psychology perspective, absolute morality never disappears because Allah is ever-present. Therefore, morality can be understood in two layers, culturally relative morality which varies across societies, and absolute morality, which remains constant and should not be compromised by the cultural differences.

In conclusion, the basic human potential, which is the faculty of the human soul, consists of four layers. The most superficial layer is the sensing capability, which allows individuals to perceive their surroundings and the present moment. The second layer is the reasoning capability, which involves abstract thinking, purpose, reasoning, and meaning of human experiences or ideas. The third layer is empathy, which enables individuals to respect others and appreciate their unique characteristics. The deepest human basic potential is conscience, which encompasses a profound understanding of the truth,

awareness of Allah's presence, and comprehension of the reality of life after death. Empathy enables individuals to adapt to cultural differences, but it must not transgress the boundaries of absolute morality, which is represented by the conscience. While all human beings are endowed with these four basic potentials, the extent to which they develop them varies based on individual effort. This variation in development explains the differences among individuals.

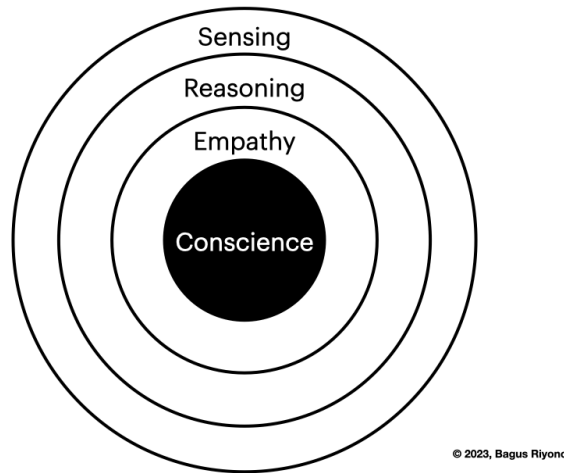


Figure 2. *Layers of Human Soul*

Source: Riyono (2023)

Anchor Personality Theory

The second theory that represents the Islamic Psychology perspectives is the Anchor Personality Theory (Riyono et al., 2012). As mentioned earlier, personality in the Islamic perspective is not fixed, but rather something that can be developed throughout a person's life. The development of human personality is a highly dynamic process, fluctuating based on life experiences that influence these changes. The ultimate purpose of personality theory in the Islamic perspective is to explain the *akhlak*. This aligns with a hadith narrated by Imam Malik, in which Rasulullah, peace be upon Him, has said that my main duty is to perfect the *akhlak* of the *ummah*.

The Anchor Personality Theory constructs personality based on the anchors that the individual chooses. An anchor is something a person relies on, holds onto, or prioritizes in life's various events. Imam Al-Ghazali, in his book "*Thya' 'Ulum al-Din*" stated that all human beings will worship something. If they refuse to worship Allah, they will inevitably worship something else (Al-Ghazali, n.d.). This statement also inspired the Anchor Personality Theory, as an anchor can be understood as something a person metaphorically "worships" or deeply values.

Another reference that inspired this theory is the statement of Ibn al-Haytam who said that only through knowledge (*'ilm*), we can draw closer to Allah. This implies that worshipping Allah requires deep understanding of the signs He has revealed in the universe, within our own souls, and in the Quranic verses. Since we cannot have direct contact with Allah while living in this finite world, seeking knowledge becomes a means of strengthening our connection with Him.

Among the many possible anchors that individuals may prioritize, there are four general categories. The first category concerns with others, including parents, spouses, friends, and supervisors. The second category consists of aspects related to the self, such as self-confidence, self-esteem, and self-efficacy. The third category pertains to material possessions, such as money, wealth, or objects believed to hold special significance, like amulets. The fourth category is virtues, including, knowledge, and higher meanings that lead individuals closer to Allah.

A healthy personality is the one that prioritizes virtues over other anchors. However, human beings have a natural tendency to swing between anchors due to environmental influences and life experiences. The swinging of these four anchors reflects the swinging of the heart. This is why, in order to maintain stability, individuals must continuously reorient their anchors toward virtues, regardless of life's circumstances. Those who can manage their hearts so that they remain consistently oriented toward virtues are considered mentally healthy.

The virtues-oriented anchor has been studied in predicting various positive and negative psychological states. It has been found significantly predict well-being (Akhtar & Firmanto, 2020), leadership (Hardanti & Riyono, 2022), meaning (Ayuningtyas & Riyono, 2023), flourishing (Istiqomah & Riyono, 2024), adversity quotient (Putri & Riyono, 2024), resilience (Mahvur & Riyono, 2024), career adaptability (Damariatna & Riyono, 2024), organizational citizenship behavior (Syabina & Riyono, 2024), work-engagement (Apsari & Riyono, 2025), and many other positive outcomes. Additionally, the virtues-oriented anchor negatively predicts experience, such as quarter-life crisis (Itsaini & Riyono, 2024), turnover intention (Afiani & Riyono, 2024), and burnout (Aini & Riyono, 2025).

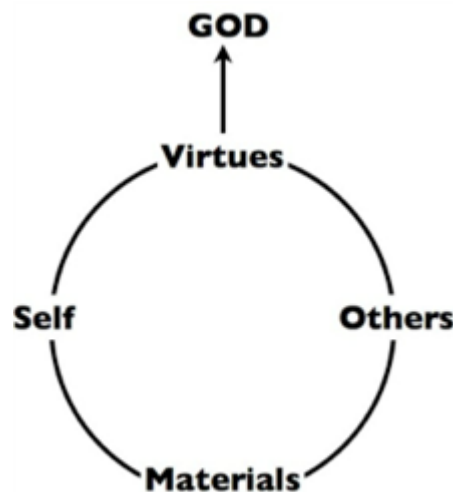


Figure 3. *Anchor Personality Theory*

Source: Riyono et al., 2012

Conclusion

This article has shown that psychology from an Islamic perspective is already emerging as a distinct field. It also argues that there are fundamental differences between conventional psychology and Islamic psychology that cannot be compromised. These differences involve three fundamental issues, i.e. purpose, object of study, and methodology. The most significant distinction is that, in Islamic psychology, the presence of Allah is never overlooked. The second crucial difference is that Islamic psychology is

oriented toward eternal life in the hereafter, whereas conventional psychology focuses solely on life in this finite world.

However, to some extent, findings from conventional psychology can be selectively integrated to enrich the body of knowledge of psychology through the Islamic paradigm. Likewise, theories developed within the Islamic psychology paradigm can also provide valuable explanations for various issues explored in conventional psychology.

Islamic psychology stands as an independent school of thought in the study of human beings. It has a more comprehensive and multidimensional approach in understanding and explaining human life and its dynamic. The continued development of Islamic psychology is expected to contribute significantly to the field of psychology and guide humanity toward a better and more noble state.

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