



Psychology of Human Development from an Islamic Perspective

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Abstract

This study examines human development from an Islamic perspective by employing a qualitative literature review approach to synthesize classical and contemporary scholarly discussions. Human development is understood not merely as a biological or psychological process, but as a holistic and purposeful progression encompassing physical, cognitive, emotional, and spiritual dimensions. In contrast to dominant Western developmental theories that often prioritize empirical and value-neutral explanations, Islamic thought conceptualizes development as a morally oriented journey guided by divine purpose and ethical responsibility. Data were collected from peer-reviewed journals, academic books, and authoritative Islamic scholarship relevant to psychology, human development, and religious studies. The selected literature was analysed using qualitative content analysis to identify recurring themes, conceptual frameworks, and interpretative differences among scholars. The findings indicate that Islamic perspectives emphasize the integration of bodily growth, intellectual maturity, and spiritual consciousness, with development evaluated not solely by age but by readiness, moral accountability, and social responsibility. Human development is framed as a continuous process directed toward the formation of ethically grounded individuals capable of fulfilling their roles within society. This study further reveals that Islamic developmental thought highlights normative objectives such as moral discipline, self-awareness, and stewardship, which are often underexplored in conventional psychological models. By articulating these dimensions, the study contributes to the enrichment of developmental psychology through a value-based and holistic framework. The findings offer theoretical insights that may inform future research, as well as practical implications for education, counselling, and human development programs that seek to integrate psychological growth with ethical and spiritual values.

Introduction

Human development is a lifelong process characterized by continuous and systematic changes that occur across multiple dimensions, including physical, emotional, cognitive, social, and spiritual aspects. These dimensions do not develop independently; rather, they interact dynamically to shape human behavior, personality, and identity throughout the lifespan. In psychology, human development is commonly understood as a gradual progression from conception to old age, involving both biological maturation and experiential learning. However, this perspective often emphasizes empirical and observable aspects of development, sometimes overlooking deeper metaphysical and spiritual dimensions that are fundamental to human existence (Achoui, 1998). For this reason, understanding human development requires a more holistic approach that integrates not only psychological and biological explanations but also philosophical and spiritual insights.

From an Islamic perspective, human beings are viewed as holistic entities composed of interrelated physical, psychological, and spiritual elements (Azoma & Ninin, 2022; Arif, 2024). Islam does not perceive development merely as biological growth or cognitive advancement, but as a meaningful process oriented toward moral responsibility and spiritual fulfillment. Human development is thus inseparable from purpose, values, and ethical accountability. This perspective challenges reductionist approaches in modern psychology by asserting that human behavior and development cannot be fully understood without acknowledging the spiritual dimension that guides intention, morality, and self-awareness (Putri, 2023). Consequently, Islamic psychology offers an integrative framework in which development is understood as both a natural process and a divinely guided journey toward human perfection.

Islamic teachings provide a rich conceptualization of human nature through various terminologies that reflect different dimensions of humanity (Redhatul & Jamilus, 2023). Concepts such as *bani Adam*, *basyar*, and *insan* illustrate that humans are not only biological beings but also moral and spiritual agents. These terms emphasize human dignity, consciousness, and responsibility as creatures entrusted with a special role in the world. Scholars argue that this conceptual diversity reflects Islam's comprehensive view of humanity, where physical form, intellect, emotion, and spirituality are unified rather than separated (Ghofur, 2018; Asrowi, 2023). Within this framework, human development is understood as a process that nurtures all aspects of the self, not merely intellectual competence or physical maturity.

In developmental psychology, development is generally defined as a progressive change in abilities and functions resulting from maturation and experience (Shehu, 1998). Garcia et al. describe development as a predictable and orderly process in which individuals acquire increasingly complex skills over time. Similarly, Almizan (2010) views development as a continuous process that begins at conception and ends with death, encompassing growth, decline, and adaptation. While these definitions provide valuable insight into the mechanisms of development, they tend to focus primarily on observable changes and measurable outcomes. Islamic perspectives complement these views by emphasizing inner development, particularly the cultivation of moral awareness, self-discipline, and spiritual consciousness as integral components of human growth.

One of the distinctive features of the Islamic view of human development is its emphasis on readiness, responsibility, and independence rather than age alone (Zahid & Kassim, 2023; Hashim, 2025; Mahfuzi & Solehudin, 2025). Development is not evaluated solely by chronological markers, but by an individual's ability to act responsibly, make ethical decisions, and manage personal and social obligations (Maidugu & Isah, 2024 Salamuddin et al., 2025). This perspective highlights that maturity involves psychological stability, intellectual discernment, and moral judgment (Nurhidin, E. (2023; Nafi'Hasbi et al., 2023; Batula et al., 2025). In social contexts, such as responsibility for oneself or others, Islam emphasizes the importance of assessing an individual's competence and readiness rather than relying exclusively on biological maturity. This approach underscores the idea that development is a process that unfolds through both internal growth and external experience (Jannataini et al., 2025).

Furthermore, Islamic thought positions human development within a broader moral and social framework (Tirta, 2024; Ibrahim, et al., 2024; Ali, et al., 2024). Humans are viewed as moral agents whose development is closely linked to social responsibility, justice, and ethical conduct (Ahmad et al., 2023; Shaukat, et al., 2024; Thalgi, 2024). Development, therefore, is not an individualistic pursuit but a socially embedded process that contributes to communal well-being (Sachedina, 2022; Hossain, 2023; Das et al., 2024; Lestari & Arumi, 2024). This

perspective aligns with the Islamic view of humans as *khalifah* (stewards), entrusted with maintaining balance and justice in society. Achieving maturity in this sense involves not only personal success but also the ability to contribute positively to others and uphold ethical principles in social interactions.

Understanding human development from an Islamic perspective is particularly relevant in contemporary contexts marked by moral uncertainty, identity crises, and rapid social change. Modern developmental challenges often involve conflicts between material progress and moral direction, highlighting the need for frameworks that integrate psychological growth with ethical and spiritual guidance. Islamic perspectives on development offer valuable insights into how individuals can achieve balance between worldly responsibilities and spiritual well-being. By emphasizing purpose, responsibility, and holistic growth, Islamic developmental psychology provides a comprehensive model for understanding human potential across the lifespan.

In light of these considerations, studying human development from an Islamic perspective contributes not only to academic discourse but also to practical applications in education, psychology, and social development. It offers an alternative paradigm that enriches conventional developmental theories by integrating spiritual meaning and moral orientation. Such an approach enables a deeper understanding of how humans can achieve personal fulfillment, social harmony, and overall well-being. Therefore, an Islamic perspective on human development is essential for constructing a more comprehensive and meaningful understanding of human growth and potential throughout life.

Methods

Research Design and Approach

This study employed a literature review design with a descriptive-analytical approach to examine human development from an Islamic perspective. A literature review was selected as the most appropriate method because the study does not aim to generate primary empirical data, but rather to synthesize, interpret, and critically evaluate existing scholarly works related to Islamic psychology, human development, and religious epistemology. Qualitative descriptive analysis allows the researcher to explore concepts, meanings, and theoretical constructions embedded within texts, making it suitable for studies that seek depth of understanding rather than statistical generalization (Mirza et al., 2022). Through this approach, the study systematically reconstructs conceptual patterns and scholarly arguments regarding human development within Islamic thought.

Data Sources and Literature Selection

The data for this study were derived exclusively from secondary sources, consisting of peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, and authoritative scholarly publications relevant to human development and Islamic psychology. The literature was obtained from reputable academic databases and publishers to ensure credibility and scholarly rigor. The selection of sources focused on works that explicitly discuss human development stages, psychological growth, moral and spiritual dimensions, and Islamic philosophical foundations. To maintain relevance and depth, the study prioritized sources that present theoretical explanations, interpretative analyses, and comparative discussions rather than purely descriptive or non-academic materials. This selective process enabled the researcher to build a focused and coherent body of literature addressing the research theme (Purnomo, 2023).

Data Collection Procedure

The data collection process followed a systematic and structured procedure. Initially, relevant keywords such as *human development*, *Islamic psychology*, *Islamic perspective on development*, and *moral and spiritual growth* were identified to guide the search process. Selected texts were then carefully read, reviewed, and documented. Each source was examined to identify its core arguments, conceptual frameworks, methodological orientation, and key findings related to human development. Important passages were summarized and categorized according to thematic relevance. This process ensured that the collected data were not only comprehensive but also directly aligned with the objectives of the study. The collected literature was subsequently organized to facilitate deeper analysis and synthesis (Gillani & Khan, 2025).

Analytical Framework and Data Analysis

Data analysis in this study was conducted using qualitative content analysis, focusing on interpreting meanings, concepts, and theoretical positions within the selected literature. The analysis did not merely summarize existing studies but sought to identify recurring themes, conceptual similarities, and critical differences among scholars. Following this approach, Islamic sources such as classical and contemporary scholarly interpretations were analyzed to understand how human development is conceptualized within Islamic thought. The analysis emphasized the integration of physical, psychological, and spiritual dimensions of development, as well as the moral objectives underlying human growth. This interpretative process allowed the researcher to construct a coherent narrative that reflects the complexity and multidimensional nature of human development from an Islamic perspective (Huda & Soleh, 2023).

Stages of the Literature Review Process

The literature review process in this study followed four systematic stages adapted from Mirshad's framework as elaborated by Sari & Asmendri (2020). First, an inventory stage was conducted to identify and compile scholarly works relevant to the research topic. Second, the integration stage involved synthesizing ideas, concepts, and findings from different sources to form thematic groupings. Third, a critical analysis stage was carried out to evaluate the strengths, limitations, and theoretical contributions of each source. Finally, the reflective and contributive stage focused on positioning the current study within existing academic discourse by highlighting conceptual gaps, theoretical implications, and areas requiring further scholarly attention. Through these stages, the study not only reviewed existing literature but also contributed analytically to the ongoing discussion on Islamic perspectives of human development.

Results and Discussion

Rather than reporting empirical findings, this section integrates key themes, theoretical patterns, and interpretative differences identified across classical and contemporary sources. The discussion highlights how Islamic perspectives frame human development as a holistic process that unites physical growth, psychological maturation, and spiritual consciousness, while also emphasizing moral responsibility and social accountability. By systematically organizing and analysing these themes, this section aims to demonstrate how Islamic developmental concepts both complement and extend existing psychological theories, while also addressing gaps and limitations within prior scholarship.

Human Development in Islamic Thought: Thematic and Critical Synthesis

Rather than treating Islamic texts as merely descriptive or doctrinal sources, the reviewed literature demonstrates that Islamic thought offers a systematic and conceptually rich framework for understanding human development (Abdalla, 2025). Qur'anic verses, prophetic traditions, and classical scholarly interpretations collectively construct a developmental paradigm rooted in divine intentionality and moral purpose. Unlike Western developmental psychology, which is largely anthropocentric and empirically grounded, Islamic developmental thought is theocentric, positioning human growth as part of a divinely ordained process (*sunnatullah*). This ontological foundation frames development not as a neutral biological progression, but as a meaningful trajectory directed toward ethical responsibility and spiritual fulfillment.

A critical synthesis of the literature reveals that Islamic scholars broadly agree on the dual structure of human development, consisting of prenatal and postnatal phases, yet diverge significantly in their interpretative emphases (Adiyono et al., 2024). Qur'anic descriptions of embryological stages (e.g., *nuthfah*, *'alaqah*, *mudghah*) are consistently cited across studies; however, classical exegetes such as Ibn Kathir emphasize their sequential physical realism, while scholars like Al-Ghazali and contemporary Islamic psychologists interpret these stages as symbolic of moral and spiritual preparation. This divergence illustrates that Islamic developmental discourse is not monolithic but pluralistic, shaped by theological, philosophical, and epistemological orientations that influence how human growth is conceptualized and explained.

The postnatal stages of development further highlight both convergence and debate within Islamic scholarship (Zayd, 2025). While most sources recognize childhood, adolescence, and adulthood as distinct phases, disagreement arises regarding the criteria used to define these stages. Juristic traditions focus on *bulūgh* and legal accountability, whereas philosophical scholars prioritize intellectual maturity (*'aql*) and ethical discernment. Fakhruddin al-Razi's physiological-humoral framework contrasts sharply with Al-Ghazali's spiritually oriented model, revealing competing assumptions about whether development should be evaluated primarily through biological balance or moral-spiritual refinement. Existing studies often present these perspectives separately, resulting in fragmented discussions rather than an integrated developmental model.

Importantly, the literature consistently underscores that the ultimate aim of human development in Islamic psychology is normative rather than descriptive. Development is oriented toward becoming a morally responsible servant and steward (*'abd* and *khalīfah*) of God, not merely an autonomous individual. However, a critical gap emerges in prior studies, as many fail to examine how this teleological orientation can be operationalized in contemporary psychological or educational contexts. By synthesizing ontological foundations, stage-based models, and moral objectives, this study advances the literature by clarifying that Islamic human development is best understood as an integrated process linking divine origin, multidimensional growth, and ethical-spiritual purpose.

Ontological Foundations: Divine Origin and Moral Purpose

Across Islamic intellectual traditions, human development is fundamentally grounded in a theocentric ontology, where existence, growth, and purpose are inseparable from divine will. Qur'anic accounts of human creation such as the sequential formation described in Q.S. Al-Mu'minun (23:12–14) and the infusion of the soul in Q.S. Al-Hijr (15:29) and Q.S. Shad (38:72) establish that human development is not an autonomous biological phenomenon but a divinely initiated and sustained process. This ontological position contrasts sharply with

Western developmental psychology, which largely explains human growth through naturalistic mechanisms such as heredity, cognition, and environmental interaction. In Islamic thought, biological processes are acknowledged, yet they are subordinated to divine intentionality (*irādah ilāhiyyah*), indicating that development unfolds within a sacred moral order rather than a value-neutral system.

A key ontological distinction emerging from the literature is the Islamic integration of material and immaterial dimensions of the human being (Khan, 2025; Ikhwan, 2025). While Western paradigms often reduce development to observable physical and psychological changes, Islamic sources conceptualize humans as composites of body (*jasad*), intellect (*'aql*), and spirit (*rūh*). Classical scholars such as Al-Ghazali emphasize that the presence of the *rūh* transforms biological life into moral agency, thereby redefining development as a process of ethical and spiritual actualization. This position challenges reductionist models of psychology by asserting that essential aspects of human growth such as conscience, moral awareness, and transcendental orientation cannot be fully explained through empirical observation alone. Consequently, Islamic developmental ontology expands the scope of psychology beyond empirical confines, positioning revelation as a legitimate epistemic source (Arroisi et al., 2022).

Within this theocentric framework, the concepts of *taqdir* (divine decree) and *sunnatullah* (divinely ordained natural laws) play a central role in shaping human development. Islamic sources converge on the idea that while humans possess agency and responsibility, their developmental trajectories operate within divinely established parameters. This view introduces a nuanced balance between determinism and free will: human effort (*ikhtiyār*) is meaningful, yet it unfolds within a preordained cosmic order. In contrast, Western developmental theories often debate nature versus nurture without reference to transcendent governance. The Islamic position reframes this debate by integrating heredity and environment as instruments of divine law rather than independent causal forces, thus offering a more holistic explanatory model.

Despite broad agreement on these ontological foundations, the literature reveals interpretative variation regarding their psychological implications. Some scholars adopt a primarily theological reading, emphasizing submission to divine will, while others argue for an applied developmental interpretation that links divine purpose to educational and psychological practice. However, many existing studies stop at doctrinal affirmation and do not critically explore how this ontological stance reshapes core psychological concepts such as autonomy, motivation, and maturity. This gap underscores the need for a more analytically integrated Islamic developmental psychology one that not only asserts divine origin but systematically examines how moral purpose functions as the organizing principle of human growth across the lifespan.

Stages of Development: Convergence and Divergence Among Scholars

The literature consistently agrees that human development in Islamic thought unfolds through prenatal and postnatal phases, yet this agreement is largely structural rather than conceptual (Hashim, 2025). Most studies acknowledge this division as self-evident, drawing directly from Qur'anic narratives of creation, but they often fail to interrogate what distinguishes these phases in psychological terms. As a result, the prenatal stage is frequently treated as a preparatory biological period, while the postnatal stage is assumed to be the primary arena of psychological development. This implicit hierarchy reflects an uncritical borrowing of Western developmental assumptions, where meaningful psychological processes are presumed to begin only after birth.

In contrast, a closer reading of Islamic sources reveals that prenatal development is framed as a morally and spiritually formative stage, not merely a biological one. The Qur'anic concept of *nafkh al-rūh* (the infusion of the soul) signifies a decisive ontological transition, transforming the fetus from a biological organism into a moral subject endowed with potential consciousness and responsibility (binti et al., 2024). Classical scholars differ in interpreting the timing and nature of this event, yet they converge on its significance as the foundation of human moral agency. Despite this, much of the contemporary literature mentions *nafkh al-rūh* only as doctrinal evidence, without exploring how this concept reshapes understandings of early human development, moral predispositions, or the origins of ethical awareness.

An even more neglected dimension of prenatal development is the notion of the primordial covenant (*mīthāq*), as articulated in Q.S. Al-A'raf 7:172. This concept implies that recognition of divine authority and moral truth precedes social learning, language acquisition, and environmental influence. From a developmental psychology perspective, this challenges empiricist views that moral cognition emerges solely through postnatal socialization. Instead, Islamic thought introduces the idea of an innate moral orientation (*fiṭrah*) that exists prior to experiential learning. However, existing studies rarely treat the *mīthāq* as a developmental construct, leaving its implications for theories of moral development, identity formation, and conscience largely unexplored.

The limited analytical engagement with these prenatal concepts has broader consequences for how postnatal development is understood. When the prenatal phase is reduced to biological description, postnatal stages such as childhood and adolescence are analyzed in isolation from their ontological foundations. This results in fragmented models where legal accountability (*taḳlīf*), cognitive maturity (*'aql*), and spiritual awareness are discussed separately rather than as continuations of an already initiated developmental process. A more integrated reading of Islamic sources suggests that postnatal development represents the actualization of moral and spiritual potentials embedded during the prenatal stage. Recognizing this continuity allows Islamic developmental psychology to move beyond descriptive staging and toward a coherent framework that links divine origin, innate moral orientation, and lifelong psychological growth.

Normative Aim of Development: From Growth to Moral Flourishing

A defining feature of Islamic developmental thought is its teleological orientation, in which human growth is intrinsically directed toward moral and spiritual ends rather than merely descriptive life stages (Ghaseminaei et al., 2022). Unlike Western developmental psychology, which often treats development as a value-neutral process measured by cognitive, emotional, or behavioral milestones, Islamic sources frame development as an evaluative journey toward fulfilling divine responsibility (*taḳlīf*). From this perspective, development is meaningful only insofar as it culminates in ethical awareness, accountability, and submission to divine guidance. This teleological framing redefines psychological maturity not as autonomy or self-actualization alone, but as the capacity to act in accordance with moral and spiritual principles.

Within this framework, each developmental stage carries a distinct moral function. Childhood is understood as a period of moral receptivity, where the individual possesses an uncorrupted disposition (*fiṭrah*) and heightened openness to ethical formation. Adolescence represents a critical transitional phase marked by the onset of accountability, where individuals become legally and morally responsible for their actions before God. Adulthood, in turn, is conceptualized as the stage of ethical stewardship (*khilāfah*), in which intellectual maturity, moral judgment, and social responsibility converge. Classical scholars such as Al-Ghazali emphasize that true adulthood is not defined solely by age or biological maturity, but by the

internalization of ethical discipline and spiritual awareness, reinforcing the normative nature of development in Islamic psychology.

Despite the conceptual coherence of this moral trajectory, the reviewed literature reveals a tendency to assert normative ideals without critically operationalizing them. Many studies reiterate concepts such as *akhlāq*, *taklīf*, and *khilāfah* as theological goals, yet they rarely examine how these ideals translate into observable psychological processes, behavioral indicators, or educational practices. As a result, Islamic developmental psychology often remains prescriptive rather than analytical, limiting its engagement with contemporary psychological discourse. This gap is particularly evident in discussions of adolescence, where moral accountability is emphasized but insufficiently linked to identity formation, emotional regulation, or decision-making processes studied in modern psychology.

This lack of applied analysis has significant implications for addressing contemporary developmental challenges, including identity crises, moral disengagement, and the effects of secularization (Ruiz et al., 2025). Without a clear articulation of how Islamic developmental goals function in real-life psychological contexts, the normative richness of Islamic thought risks remaining abstract and disconnected from lived experience. By foregrounding moral flourishing as the ultimate aim of development, this study highlights the need for an integrated framework that bridges classical Islamic concepts with contemporary psychological and educational models. Such an approach not only strengthens the academic relevance of Islamic developmental psychology but also positions it as a viable framework for responding to modern ethical and existential challenges across the lifespan.

Conclusion

This study concludes that human development from an Islamic perspective is a holistic and integrative process encompassing physical, psychological, and spiritual dimensions that unfold throughout the human lifespan. Unlike reductionist developmental models that emphasize biological maturation or cognitive achievement alone, the Islamic perspective positions human development as a meaningful journey oriented toward moral responsibility, ethical awareness, and spiritual fulfilment. Through a qualitative literature review, this study demonstrates that Islamic thought conceptualizes development not merely in terms of age or physical growth, but in relation to readiness, accountability, and the actualization of human potential as a moral and social being. By synthesizing classical and contemporary scholarly interpretations, the study highlights that the ultimate aim of human development in Islam is the formation of a balanced individual capable of personal integrity and social responsibility. These findings contribute to a deeper theoretical understanding of Islamic developmental psychology and offer a valuable framework for future research and practical applications in education, psychology, and social development.

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