

UNDERSTANDING HUMAN CAPITAL IN THE CONTEXT OF EDUCATION: ISLAMIC DIMENSIONAL ANALYSIS

 Hureen Wasifa Siddiqui*

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Open University, Hyderabad, India

Abstract. Intellect meets investment - Human capital shapes the future with each learned moment. This paper, foremostly, focuses on the conventional or the Western concept of Economics and human capital. It then attempts to comprehend the Islamic notion of Economics and human capital. Secondly, the significance and development of human capital is explored under the Islamic umbrella. Thirdly, this paper identifies and strives to comprehend the dimensions of human capital - *Education, Morality, Spirituality, Industriousness, Science & Technology and Creativity* from the Islamic perspective. Lastly, educational implications, in the light of the identified Islamic dimensions of human capital, are laid down for the educational community, especially teachers, so that they can ponder and integrate them in their teaching, supporting holistic development of students and enhancing human capital.

Keywords: *Conventional economics, dimensions of human capital, human capital, Islamic economics, teachers.*

***Corresponding Author:** Hureen Wasifa, Siddiqui, Department of Education, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Open University, Hyderabad, India, e-mail: hureenwasifasiddiqui@gmail.com

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1. Introduction

Conventional view of Economics

Economics, the Queen of Social Sciences, widely deals with household management (Puehringer, 2016). It addresses the problem of unlimited wants and the limited resources. It is a broad discipline that undertakes numerous concepts, such as microeconomics, macroeconomics, cost and benefit analysis, income & its types, demand and supply, investment & rate of returns, revenue & expenditure, quality of life, marketing, etc. One such concept it deals with is capital. Capital is one of the four components of the factors of production, which are required to manufacture goods and offer services; the other three being land, labour and entrepreneurship. Capital is an economic term for money, wealth, or asset that can be invested by an individual or a group of people into a business to derive profit. The capital is, however, predominantly divided into *physical capital* and *human capital*. Physical capital, on one hand, is something that is generally associated with material or tangible objects, such as building, equipment, gadgets, etc. which are used to produce goods and render services. Human capital, on the other hand, compared to physical capital, is something innate,

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non-tangible entity of man, such as qualification, dexterity, experience, etc., which impacts the process of production of goods and services. Human capital is defined as

“The improvement in labour created by education and knowledge that is embodied in the workforce” (Krugman & Wells, 2015).

Adam Smith (1723-1790), an eminent Scottish Economist of the 18th century, also known as the Father of Capitalism, speaks about human capital in one of his books *The Wealth of Nations* (Ead & Eid, 2014). This book, although did not specifically uses the term human capital has yet, provided a scope for the study of human capital by quoting

“The acquired and useful abilities of all the inhabitants or members of the society” (Schultz, 1961), which forms a prerequisite source of the economy of a nation and its development.

He further asserts that

“When any expensive machine is erected, the extraordinary work to be performed by it before it is worn out, it must be expected, will replace the capital laid out upon it, with at least the ordinary profits. A man educated at the expense of much labour and time to any of those employments which require extraordinary dexterity and skill, may be compared to one of those expensive machines” (Smith, 1910; Renshaw, 1960).

Considering this conventional connotation of human capital, some of the essential questions that need to be addressed are: Does the concept of human capital merely material in nature? Is man merely a profit making machine - has come into this life to only enjoy material benefits? Do the dimensions of human capital have a spiritual relevance in Islam?

Islamic view of Economics

Economics, in Islam, deals with economic knowledge, activity or processes as per Shariah rule. Islamic economics can be defined as

“The knowledge and application of injunctions and rules of the Shariah that prevent injustice in the acquisition and disposal of material resources in order to provide satisfaction to human beings and enable them to perform their obligations to Allah and the society” (Zaman, 1984).

The sources of the Islamic economics are the *Noble Qur’an, Sunnah, Ijma (Consensus), Ijtihad (Independent reasoning)* etc. (Celik & Akbulut, 2020; Boutayeba *et al.*, 2014). Some of the economic themes, which are dealt with under the Islamic economics are: the economic stability of an individual, society & state; distribution of wealth, economic rights & opportunities etc. Islamic economics majorly strives for the promotion of

“Human brotherhood, socio-economic justice and the well-being of all through an integrated role of moral values, market mechanism, families, society and ‘good governance” (Chapra, 2008).

This promotion is however, not possible without the realisation of the Islamic concept of human capital where man is considered a masterpiece of human creator Allah (swt) (Al-Qur’an, 2:30); an entity, who is biological in nature but metaphysical in origin and chemical in composition yet spiritual in essence. Man is a possessor of unfathomed potential and an embodiment of innate abilities. Man is one of those miraculous creations of Allah (swt) who, when observed, is as delicate as a petal of a rose but, when reflected, is as strong as a rock, courageously facing the highest tides of life. These tides can encounter him in any form, for instance, sometimes, it may take a

tinge of a want & some other times it may acquire the colour of a need; or on certain occasions it may take a shape of a development and on certain other occasions it may obtain a frame of enhancement. Whatever might be the case, man is and oftentimes urges to evolve both naturally as well as economically through conscious efforts. This evolution can take place due to numerous reasons that can be demarcated into different categories based on certain disciplines. Economics, which rightfully deals with human capital, is one of the disciplines where man desires to grow in terms of money, strives to change his social position, improve his standard of living, excel in his economic realms of life, etc. However, when these facets are pondered upon in the light of Islam, one realises its superficiality.

With the assistance of Islam, man develops a deeper sense of existence by getting acquainted with a perspective that he is not merely a money making machine whose only mission is to constantly manufacture profit in terms of wealth, capital, assets, etc. He rather realises the essential reason behind his creation, which is the vicegerency (*Khilafat*) of Allah (swt) as revealed in the noble Quran (Al-Quran, 2:30; 38:26). It is for this very reason man is bestowed with the significant abilities that no other creation is blessed with (Al-Qur'an, 55:4; 67:23). These human abilities, which are sometimes manifest and other times latent, are termed as human potential, a synonym to human capital (Berkes, 2021). The essential objective of human potential is to discover the God of mankind - Allah (swt) and to unleash the purpose of human existence. The purpose of human existence as perceived in Islam is to worship Allah (swt) alone and to obey Him (swt) alone (Al-Quran, 4:36 & 59).

The human capital, when viewed from the lens of the Islamic economic system, keeps man and his potential at a focal point without undermining his **dignity as a human being**. It does not merely make him an asset or a tool, accumulating wealth while deviating him from his actual purpose of vicegerency.

Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406), one of the eminent Muslim economist of the 14th century, the inventor of Social Sciences and the Inspirational Father of Economics, centrally dealt with the concept of human capital in his well acclaimed book *Al-Muqaddimah* (Prolegomenon) (Ead & Eid, 2014). This book also, as *The Wealth of Nations*, did not technically use the term human capital but has provided insights in understanding the concept of humans and their development from the Islamic perspective. According to Ibn Khaldun, Allah granted man with enormous potential to meet his material needs without compromising his spiritual requirements in order to excel in this life and the next (Abdullah, 2014). However, these abilities need to be nourished, time-to-time, under the guidance of Islam so that they will rightly be available, when required, in the most apt & efficient form. In this way, the Islamic human capital attempts to make man realise his full potential as a centre of creation and his role as Allah's (swt) vicegerent. It fosters man to strike a balance between this life and the life hereafter while addressing various problems of society, including the inconsistent flow of capital that impacts the healthy development of human development (Mujahidin, 2018).

2. Significance of the study

This section looks into the significance of human capital, reflecting the importance of human capital in Islam. It also addresses why the development of human capital is required. Al-Faruqi, a Muslim scholar, states the development of human capital is

essential not because it is noble or productive in nature, rather because it has an essential purpose in human life. He further adds the existence of human beings was predetermined and is not a result of an accident or random occurrence in the universe (Hashi & Bashiir, 2009). The creation of human beings was predetermined by Allah (swt). Man has been created with a purpose and responsibility, the responsibility of vicegerency (Al- Qur'an, 2:30). In order to attain the purpose of human creation and exercise vicegerency, the development of human capital is essential. The development of human capital in Islam helps man flourish at material as well as spiritual level. Within this context, (Fauzi, 2017) states that human capital is a developmental agent, which is linked with the development of man. This development should however, take place as per the framework of Islam. The Islamic development of human capital acts as a compass that provides a direction to the individuals, nation and world at large to move towards economic progress without compromising the dignity of human beings. It strives to prepare humans both at material as well as spiritual level by integrating a sense of morality & dignity, enhancing their quality as humans. The Islamic perspective provides a wider vision of human capital by relating it with the actual purpose of human creation, upholding the ultimate success of humanity. Besides this, the noble Quran recounts the story of Prophet Moses (pbuh) where Prophet Moses (pbuh) calls out to Allah to enhance his (pbuh) speech & ease his (pbuh) task of vicegerency for him (pbuh), underscoring the development of human capital (Al-Qur'an, 20:25-28).

However, the present century is believed to be the most challenging of all in terms of *"hunger, poverty, climate change, population, pollution, floods, droughts, heatwaves, food security, etc"*. The world is said to experience a crisis in a way it has never experienced before. Whether it be financial, health, educational, social, political, or environmental; it has left devastating effects on humanity. One such significant crisis faced by humanity today is science & technology as it is undermining morality. Therefore, it is essential to grasp human capital and its components within the light of Islam.

3. Dimensions of Human Capital

Mankind is the creation of Allah (swt) and descendants of Adam (pbuh), the father of mankind (Al- Qur'an, 2:30). They have been blessed with distinguishing qualities of hearing, speech, insight, consciousness, etc. which, in the terms of economics, are the sources of human capital (Al- Qur'an, 2:31; 7: 179; 16:78; 55:4). The noble Quran speaks about the innate capital granted to humankind in different chapters. However, this capital needs to be realised and utilised according to Islam. The means through which it can be realised and utilised are *Education, Morality, Spirituality, Industriousness, Science & Technology and Creativity* (Al-Quran, 96:1; 91:7-8; 17:85; 90:4; 16:90; 75:4), which are identified as the key dimensions of human capital in the present paper. There are, however, various other dimensions of human capital but the aforementioned are prominently discussed in this article.

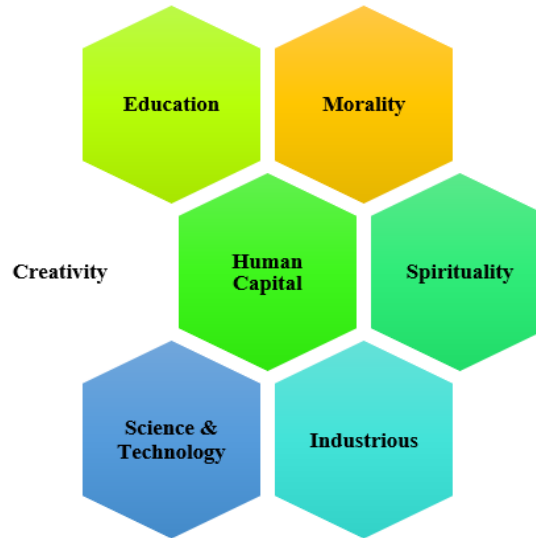


Figure 1. Depicts the identified Islamic dimensions of human capital

Education

Education plays a significant role in Islam. One of the essential ingredients of education is knowledge, without which, the meaning and accomplishment of education is incomplete. Education is not merely literacy but it is something beyond the concept of literacy and non-literacy. Knowledge is that essential component of education based on which Adam (pbuh) was held above the entire creation. His (pbuh) status was elevated from the most perfect creation – *Angels* as well. The notion of education can be traced back to the foremost chapter of the noble Quran that commands human beings “*أَفْرَأَ بِأَسْمِ رَبِّكَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ*” - meaning “*to read in the name of your Lord who created*” (Al-Qur’an, 96:1). It is incumbent to acquire knowledge in the name of Allah (swt) as He (swt) is the fountainhead of knowledge. Acquiring knowledge in the name of Allah (swt) is also necessary as it acquaints man with the essential purpose of education, self-realisation and self-development, highlighting human capital (Al-Quran, 96:1; 39:9; 59:19; 91:9; 87:14). This provides the basis to seek knowledge through Allah (swt). Allah (swt) has made the acquisition of knowledge man’s inherent quality. Whether man is conscious about its acquisition or not, he is continuously receiving information from the internal as well as external world, which keeps him evolving. However, he, as a source of human capital, is not just desired to accumulate information rather, is encouraged to organise, manage and utilise the knowledge that will not only contribute to his progress as an individual but also to a society as a group, economy as a system and world as a community.

Morality

Morality is another significant element of the Islamic human capital. In general terms, morality is associated with a sense of right and wrong. It is also related to a good character (Akhlāq) (Al-Qur’an, 91:7-8; 16:90). Morality is, however, predominantly linked with the concept of God consciousness, which is known as “*Taqwa*” in Islam (Al-Qur’an, 3:102). It is the concept of God consciousness that makes man achieve the noblest character. The concept of God consciousness provides man with a sense of judgement day, a day of accountability, where he will be accountable for all his actions, to Allah (swt). The remembrance of this day helps him to live a balanced life. Within

this context, the development of human capital does not merely rely upon imparting knowledge and exploiting human potential, rather, it depends upon the parameters on which the knowledge should be acquired and the potential should be utilised, for example whether the knowledge and human potential is used for the welfare of humanity or for the destruction of it. It is the concept of morality that adds the quality ingredient in the development of human capital as it deals with goodness, ethics, character, values, underscoring the seed of morality, the consciousness of Allah (swt), which assist humanity to flourish at all levels. Human capital is shallow without morality but when it is affixed to morality, it uplifts humanity, replacing mere tolerance with mutual tolerance, accelerating human progress. This is how morality annexes value to the notion of human capital under Islam.

Spirituality

Spirit (*Rooh*) is the most authentic component of the noble Quran. It is a non-physical, animating force present in human beings. It is delicate yet the strongest entity, giving life to the human body. There are various chapters of the noble Quran (Al-Qur'an, 17:85; 91:7), which deal with the concept of spirit. In Islam, spirit is taken as a command of Allah. Allah says in the noble Quran that "*He blew the spirit into Adam (pbuh) when He completed creating him (pbuh)*" (Al-Qur'an, 38:71). Allah also says in another verse of the noble Quran that "*when the people forget Allah (swt), Allah (swt) will make them forget their own self*" (Al-Qur'an, 59:19), indicating the essential purpose of spirit, which is worshipping and obeying Allah (swt) alone in a way prescribed by Allah (swt) and demonstrated by Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) (Al-Qur'an, 3:102). The spirit present in human beings makes them a distinct creation of Allah (swt) (Al-Qur'an 38:72; 95:4; 17:70). However, spirituality is the process through which the consciousness of Allah (Taqwa) and the extraordinary strength and status of spirit is realised and lived. When Islamic spirituality grasps man, it takes man to the level of vicegerency. Islamic spirituality fundamentally purifies the heart (Sahih al-Bukhari, 52), fosters acts of worship (Ibadah) (Al-Qur'an, 95:6), cultivates good character (Aqlaq), etc. (Al-Qur'an, 31:17-19), facilitating man towards vicegerency. The vicegerent lives according to the will of Allah (swt). He makes the will of Allah (swt) his will, in turn, Allah (swt) makes the will of His (swt) vicegerent His (swt) will as demonstrated by Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) (Al-Qur'an, 2:144). Vicegerent, accordingly, strives to utilise the resources effectively, maximising prosperity and minimising destruction in aspects, relating to environment, society, economy etc. The presence of Islamic spirituality brings developments to human civilisations and the absence of it leads to human decay hence, leading to the deterioration of human capital. Islamic spirituality is a special character of the Islamic human capital, which needs to be understood, enhanced and utilised.

Industriousness

According to the noble Quran, man is created in hardships (Al-Qur'an, 90:4). Life, in Islam, is considered to be a test. Allah says in the noble Quran that "*He did not create life and death but to test man and observe who is best in deeds*" (Al-Qur'an, 67:2). This concept of life and death illustrates that man is destined to persevere in this life, by consciously remembering the life hereafter, as the life hereafter is the ultimate abode for human beings. Islam does not support the concept of self-negation; it rather supports the idea of self-realisation and active participation in the course of life (Al-

Qur'an, 3:200). Islam highlights quality (Ihsan) and excellence (Itqan) (Bukhari, 4777), which can be attained with Sabar. The term sabar holds a wide meaning in Islam, which is often translated as patience in English. Sabr, in brief, can be described as making constant efforts to achieve something while entirely relying upon Allah (swt) (Al-Qur'an, 3:200). The concept of sabar is overwhelmed with the quality of hope contrary to hopelessness, which is discouraged in Islam as hope is an impetus that pushes man towards action and success whereas hopelessness demotivates and stagnates him, leading to unrealistic and non utilisation of human capital. In Islam, being hopeless is being unfaithful to Allah (swt) (Al-Qur'an, 12:87). One of the attributes of Allah (swt) is Al-Hakim, which means "*The All Wise*". Islam perceives wisdom as the basis of creation. Understanding wisdom requires a lot of human ponderance. Wisdom is miraculous in nature. It often reflects the other way around, for example instead of perceiving challenges as problems, wisdom comprehends them as a fresh opening towards life and learning, which means - more the challenges, the more humans will explore themselves, leading to expansion of human capital.

Science & Technology

The productivity of a nation broadly depends upon science & technology. The synchronisation between science & technology and Islam is significant for human development. The advancement without assistance of its creator - Allah (swt) is paralysed. Islam is a flambeau that guides science & technology without compromising humanity. It nurtures human development while using science & technology in the right direction. Today, the world is experiencing enormous scientific developments. These advancements provide man with a dimension of enhancing human capital by upgrading man's skills. The needs of man changes as per the changes in time and science & technology is the need of the hour. The essential role of science & technology has great implications on human capital. However, if the notion of science & technology is perceived independently, without the guidance of Islam, then the developments arising from it will have detrimental effects on the human psyche. Although it may provide certain benefits to mankind but may inflict lasting impairment. Islam encourages scientific explorations in the light of the noble Qur'an. For instance, the noble Quran speaks about the scientific concepts, such as embryonic development (Al- Qur'an, 22:5), heaven & earth, night & day, celestial bodies (Al- Qur'an, 7:54), rain & vegetation (Al- Qur'an, 6:99) etc. Besides this, the goblet of scientific discoveries brimmed during the Islamic rule. From Math to Medicine, Muslims historically flourished in scientific discoveries (Bakar, 2016). Science and technology, accompanied by God consciousness, brings holistic welfare.

Creativity

Creativity is also an important entity of human capital. The essence of creativity is derived from Allah (swt) Himself. Allah (swt) is the best of creators and like all things, creativity ultimately belongs to Him (swt) alone as Allah (swt) is the only creator and anything/anyone other than Him (swt) is creation (Al-Qur'an, 23:14; 2:117). The noble Quran states that "*Allah has created everything and designed it in a perfect measure*" (Al-Quran 25:2). The concept of individual difference also falls under the shade of His creative aspect. Whether it be the DNA or fingerprints of human beings or the animal prints or any other creature, His (swt) creativity is manifested in all realms (Al-Qur'an, 75:4). Likewise, humans are blessed with creativity too. For instance, Allah (swt) says

that “*He taught Adam (pbuh) the names of all things*”, reflecting the potential for human innovation (Al-Qur’an, 2:31). The Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) also encourages the usage of human talents. It states those humans as the best humans who strive to help others (Sahih al-Bukhari, 2518) as helping others requires human efforts, embracing creative thinking whether convergent or divergent thinking. Not only this, Islamic civilisation demonstrates creativity from art and calligraphy to groundbreaking inventions. Therefore, creative expression becomes an essential component of human capital. Creativity not only helps man in the upgradation of his skills & abilities but also facilitates the progress of society. Creativity assists man in broadening his intellectual horizon and safeguarding him from the blind imitation of the prevailing trends. Creativity gives birth to innovation, helping man in addressing the challenges in new ways. It makes man independent & self-reliant, essentially contributing to human capital.

4. Conclusion

Considering the Islamic economics, it can be said that the connotation of human capital is not merely material in nature but is spiritual in essence. It also communicates that man is more than a profit making machine. He is the centre of creation, holding a significant task of vicegerency. Besides this, Islamic dimensional analysis of human capital also concludes that, with the assistance of the Islamic perspective, human capital can be optimised. The understanding of these dimensions also open contemporary avenues for the realisation & development of human potential. The dimensional analysis further makes it evident that the constructive development of human capital leads to healthy advancement of nation & world at large. By blowing an Islamic spirit, man transforms human capital from a conventional, mechanical concept to a non-conventional, spiritual notion.

5. Educational Implications

Painting human capital with Islamic hue, the following are the drawn out implications for the educational community, fundamentally teachers

i) Mastery of content and multidisciplinary approach

Teachers should strive to attain mastery of content. They should endeavour to connect the content knowledge across different disciplines eventually, connecting it with Allah (swt), to the best of their ability, which will assist students in understanding the content better and applying it at a broader level.

ii) Character building

Teachers, when transacting the content, should focus on the character building of students while imbuing a sense of morality in students, which is possible with the integration of Islamic principles in the teaching-learning process.

iii) Self-awakening

Teachers should attempt to awaken the spirit of students by making them realise the significance and purpose of self. Teachers should provide effective teaching-learning experiences that will facilitate students in awakening themselves, leading them towards the essential aim of humankind - *Vicegerency*.

iv) Self-affirmation

Teachers should strive to make students active participants by applying non-conventional teaching practices that will help students to regulate their skills.

v) Creativity of students

Teachers should acknowledge individual differences among students and provide them with appropriate opportunities, which will not only make students realise their creativity but also enhance it at a broader spectrum.

These implications provide multiple avenues for teachers and other educational stakeholders. For instance, it helps teachers in making students realise their extraordinary potential additionally guiding teachers towards moulding their students according to their potential. This also helps students in acquiring self-realisation rather than self-negation; remaining human rather than inhuman, being selfless instead of selfish, etc., facilitating them towards the achievement of vicegerency - *the ultimate purpose of mankind* and thriving not only in the economic sphere but also in different realms of life.

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