



Equality and Human Dignity in Islamic Education: Responding to the Stigma of Disability

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Abstract

Stigma and discriminatory treatment of people with disabilities still frequently occur in educational settings, ranging from negative labeling, exclusion from learning activities, to low expectations of their abilities, thus hindering their access to and participation in the educational process. This phenomenon demonstrates the gap between the principle of human equality and the reality of discriminatory educational practices. This study aims to examine the concept of equality and human dignity from an Islamic educational perspective as a basis for responding to this stigma. The research used a qualitative approach with a library research method, examining primary and secondary sources related to the concept of humanity in Islamic education. The results of the study indicate that the concepts of *karamah al-insan* (human nobility), *khalifah* (human position as a trustee), and *taqwa* (parameters of nobility before God) can be synthesized into an ethical framework that affirms that physical or psychological differences do not make someone inferior, because human status is determined solely by piety, not physical condition or social background. This framework serves as a basis for Islamic education to eliminate stigma and build inclusive educational practices. This study concludes that Islamic education needs to reaffirm the principles of equality and human dignity as an ethical foundation for building an inclusive society for groups with disabilities.

INTRODUCTION

Humans are the most perfect creatures among all of Allah SWT's creations, endowed with reason and thought as a privilege that distinguishes them from other creatures. The Qur'an uses various terms to describe humans, such as *al-basyar*, *al-insan*, *an-nas*, and *khalifah*, each of which represents the biological, intellectual, social, moral, and spiritual dimensions of humans as a whole (Natali et al., 2025)(Nurhaliza et al., 2025).

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This diversity of terms emphasizes that understanding human nature cannot be separated from understanding its duties, goals, and functions in life, which are fundamentally different from those of other creatures (Ahmed, 2018). Education and humans are two inseparable entities, as both the subject and object of education are humans themselves. Humans are viewed as constantly changing and transformable beings, thus requiring an educational process (Alkeraida, 2026) to optimize their physical and spiritual potential (Bagheri & Khosravi, 2006).

Previous studies have shown that understanding the terminology of human in the Qur'an has direct relevance and implications (Farabi, 2022) for the educational process, as Islamic education is fundamentally oriented not only toward cognitive development, but also toward the affective and spiritual aspects of students (H. Irawan, 2022). This aligns with the mandate of Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System, which affirms that education is a conscious and planned effort to develop students' potential so that they possess spiritual and religious strength, self-control, personality, intelligence, noble character, and skills that are beneficial to themselves, society, the nation, and the state.

From an Islamic perspective, physical and psychological differences between individuals should not become barriers or divide human relations. Allah SWT created humans differently based on physical characteristics (Gillani & Khan, 2025), ethnicity, language, country, and gender solely as a means of getting to know one another (Hamzah, 2020). A person's true glory in the sight of Allah is determined by their piety, not by these outward attributes (Ahmed, 2018).

Thus, the concept of discrimination fundamentally contradicts the principles of *musawah* (equality) and *'adl* (justice), which are the foundations of Islamic teachings. This is also emphasized in studies on disability issues in Islamic education, which emphasize the importance of a rights-based approach to ensure equal opportunity, accessibility, and respect for human dignity for persons with disabilities (Iskandar et al., 2025).

However, the reality on the ground demonstrates a worrying gap between these ideal principles (Lubis et al., 2023) and everyday educational practices. Unfair attitudes from educators and educational institutions persist, including discriminatory treatment of certain students, particularly those with disabilities, among students, and even bullying by teachers against students and between students. This phenomenon indicates that the essence of education as a process of human development (*takrim*) has not been fully understood (Ma'zumi et al., 2019) and internalized in educational practices on the ground.

To date, previous research has tended to examine the concept of humanity and Islamic education in a normative-textual manner, focusing solely on analysis of Qur'anic terminology (H. Irawan, 2022) (Natali et al., 2025) (Nurhaliza et al., 2025), or to discuss the issue of disability and social inclusion from a regulatory and human rights perspective without explicitly integrating it with the concept of human dignity in Islamic education (Natali et al., 2025).

These studies generally focus on one of two areas: terminological-conceptual or socio-regulatory, resulting in the lack of an analytical framework that connects the concepts of Islamic education, human nature, and human dignity (*takrim*) in an integrated manner (Noaparast, 2012) as a basis for addressing the problematic stigma and unfair treatment that persist in educational practices, particularly for persons with disabilities. The novelty of this research lies in its attempt to integrate these three concepts into a single conceptual analytical framework that explicitly bridges theological Normative issues of equality and inclusion in Islamic educational practices have not been a primary focus of previous research (Rabbani & Kudhori, 2023).

Based on this description, this study aims to examine the concept of Islamic education, the concept of humanity from an Islamic perspective, and the concept of human dignity as a unified analytical framework. This aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how Islamic education views and treats humans as noble and equal beings before Allah SWT. It also serves as a reflective foundation for eliminating stigma and discriminatory treatment of vulnerable groups, particularly people with disabilities, in educational practices.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative approach with a library research design, a study that explores and analyzes written texts to gain conceptual understanding without field data (Hamzah, 2020) (Zed, 2008). This approach was chosen because the research objective was interpretative-conceptual, namely to examine the nature of humankind and its dignity from the perspective of Islamic education based on authoritative written sources. Primary data consisted of Quranic verses analyzed using a thematic tafsir approach, referring to the mu'tabar (religious) tafsir (interpretation of the Quran) (Al-Mishbah, Ibn Kathir, Al-Munir), as well as authentic/hasan hadith from Kutub al-Sittah, verified through takhrij books when sourced outside of that.

Secondary data consisted of journal articles, books, and previous research related to Islamic education, the concept of humanity, and equality/disability in Islam. Secondary data searches were conducted systematically through Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, Moraref, and Garuda, using keyword combinations such as "human dignity" AND "Islamic education," "human nature" AND Islam, and "disability" AND "Islamic perspective," limited to publications from 2015–2025, excluding authoritative classics. Data selection followed four stages: identification, screening (title/abstract), eligibility (full text), and inclusion based on the criteria of theme relevance, academic credibility (indexed/accredited journals), currency, and full text accessibility, to maintain the representativeness of the literature and avoid cherry-picking of predetermined arguments.

The researcher acted as the primary instrument (human instrument) collecting and recording data on a data extraction sheet containing the author, year, theme, and citation points, to support traceability and replicability. The data were analyzed descriptively and analytically using three techniques: deductive analysis (from general to specific), inductive analysis (from specific to generalization), and comparative analysis (comparing different perspectives to gain a coherent understanding), conducted iteratively during and after data collection (Hamzah, 2021).

Data validity was ensured through Lincoln & Guba's (1985) four trustworthiness criteria: credibility (repeated reading and expert consultation), transferability (detailed description of the context), dependability (systematic documentation of the analysis process), and confirmability (source triangulation between verses, hadith, tafsir, and contemporary academic literature to minimize interpretive bias) (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

This study did not involve human subjects and therefore did not require ethical clearance. However, academic integrity was maintained in citing sources. Limitations include the interpretive-conceptual nature of the findings without empirical field verification, the potential influence of the researcher's perspective on the interpretation of religious texts, and the limited scope of the literature, which was limited to fully accessible Indonesian, Arabic, and English-language sources.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Education is the primary foundation in the process of developing a complete human being, as well as a strategic instrument for the sustainability and progress of a nation. In the Islamic context, the concept of education cannot be understood in a single sense, but rather is summarized in three key, complementary terms: *tarbiyah* (nurturing and upbringing), *ta'lim* (teaching), and *ta'dib* (character development). These three terms reflect Islamic education as a holistic process encompassing the simultaneous intellectual, moral, and spiritual development of human beings (Rohman & Mighwar, 2024) (Rokim & Triana, 2021).

Among these three terms, the concept of *ta'dib*, developed by Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, has received widespread attention in international academic discourse. Al-Attas argues that the term *ta'dib* more accurately represents the essence of Islamic education than *tarbiyah* or *ta'lim*, because *ta'dib* inherently encompasses the dimension of *adab* (adab) that integrates knowledge, action, and virtue (Ahmed, 2018).

This view makes education not merely the transmission of knowledge (Widayanti & Siswati, 2009) but rather a process of instilling recognition and acknowledgment (*ma'rifah*) of the correct position of all things within the order of creation, including humanity's own position before God (Noaparast, 2012). This idea has been criticized and developed by a number of contemporary thinkers who emphasize the importance of reformulating Islamic educational theory so that it is not merely a copy of a secular educational system labeled Islamic, but rather stems from an authentic Islamic epistemology and worldview (Bagheri & Khosravi, 2006).

In line with this view, Islamic education can be operationally interpreted as all efforts to nurture and develop human nature and all its human resources, toward the formation of a holistic personality in accordance with Islamic norms. The scope of Islamic education encompasses four main areas of relationships: the relationship between humans and Allah SWT, with each other, with themselves, and with other creatures and their environment. These four domains culminate in one ultimate goal: the realization of humankind's function as *khalifatullah fi al-ardh* (carrier of Allah's trust on earth), obedient servant (*'abd*), and a creature who is *rahmatan lil-'alamin* (blessing for the universe).

Muslim education experts generally agree that Islamic educational theory and practice must be grounded in a clear conception of human nature, as without such clarity, the direction of education will lose its philosophical foundation. The concept of human creation and its existential function in the universe must be fully accommodated in the formulation of Islamic educational theory, whether through a revelatory (Qur'anic), empirical-scientific, or rational-philosophical approach. The latter two serve as a medium for reasoning about God's textual and contextual messages (Zainuddin, 2020).

The Qur'an uses at least three terms to refer to humans, *al-basyar*, *al-insan*, and *al-nas*, in addition to the term *bani Adam*, each of which has a different emphasis on meaning even though it refers to the same entity (R. Irawan & Sari, 2025). The word *al-basyar* is mentioned 36 times in 26 surahs, etymologically referring to the skin or surface of the human body, which indicates the biological dimension of humans as creatures who have natural needs and limitations such as eating, drinking, and a sense of security. This term is used universally by the Qur'an, including to emphasize the humanity of the prophets and messengers (Q.S. Al-Kahf: 110), while distinguishing them from humans in general through the provision of revelation.

The word "*al-insan*," derived from "*al-uns*," appears 73 times in 43 suras and refers to the totality of humanity as a physical-spiritual unity. This term emphasizes the uniqueness and perfection of humans as beings with the potential to assume the

title of caliph, yet they are also susceptible to weakness, haste, and anxiety, as emphasized in various verses that compare them to Satan's temptations.

The word "al-nas," appearing 240 times in 53 suras, refers to humans as collective social beings, regardless of their religious status, thus having a more general meaning than "al-insan." Meanwhile, the term "bani Adam," mentioned seven times in three suras, emphasizes humanity's descent from the Prophet Adam (peace be upon him) and also conveys normative messages about culture, vigilance against temptation, and the responsibility to utilize the universe for worship.

This diversity of terminology demonstrates that the Quran views humans multidimensionally biologically, psychologically, socially, and spiritually a view that has direct implications for the formulation of the goals and methods of Islamic education, which must address all these dimensions in a balanced manner, not just the cognitive aspect.

Ontologically, human creation can be traced through two stages: a distant origin (the creation of Adam from dust) and a nearby origin (the creation of Adam's descendants through a gradual biological process from the nuthfah to the breathing of the soul), as described in Q.S. As-Sajdah: 7–9. This process confirms that humans are composed of two basic elements: material (body) and immaterial (spirit), whose optimal functioning is the primary goal of the educational process.

The purpose and function of human creation are broadly classified into two primary roles. First, the role of khalifah (vicegerent) (Q.S. Al-Baqarah: 30), which is interpreted as carrying out God's mandate to prosper the earth while also leading oneself and other creatures responsibly. In contemporary academic discourse, the concept of the caliphate is no longer understood narrowly as power over nature, but rather as a stewardship mandate that demands human moral and ecological accountability for all of creation (Khalid, 2020)

Second, the role as 'abd (servant of Allah), as emphasized in Q.S. Adz-Dzariyat: 56, which requires all human activities to be oriented towards devotion and seeking His pleasure. These two functions of caliph and 'abd are not two separate entities, but rather one unit that supports each other: the status of human caliphate only has authentic meaning if it is carried out within the framework of self-servation to Allah, and its achievement is realized through the formation of character (akhlaq) that is sustainable throughout life (Gillani & Khan, 2025)

Islam places human dignity (karamah al-insan) as an ontological principle inherent in every human being since their creation, inherent and universal regardless of race, social class, or religious background (Ali, 2022). This principle is a divine gift that is not earned through effort, but rather given from the beginning of creation. Therefore, any violation of a person's dignity is essentially a violation of the divine mandate—a view that differs significantly from the secular framework that tends to interpret human dignity as a mere social construct

Life is a gift that is entirely within the will of Allah (Q.S. Al-Hijr: 23), so no one has the right to eliminate it without a justifiable reason according to sharia. The principle of qisas (Q.S. Al-Baqarah: 179) is implemented not as a form of violence, but as a mechanism for collective protection of the right to life of every individual, as emphasized in Q.S. Al-Ma'idah: 32 that killing one person without a valid reason is equivalent to killing the entire human race.

Human rights. This protection extends to the obligation to maintain personal health, prohibition against self-harm, and special protection for vulnerable groups such as women, mothers, children, and socio-economically marginalized groups.

Islam emphasizes that human life has no value without freedom, therefore the right to freedom is a fundamental human right in Islamic teachings. The practice of abolishing slavery during the time of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), as reflected in the liberation and social elevation of Bilal ibn Rabah, sets a historical

precedent for how Islam encourages vertical social mobility for previously marginalized groups. The same principle applies to the empowerment of the poor, the weak (dhu'afa'), and women, who, according to the Quran, have equal status with men in carrying out humanitarian duties, despite unavoidable physical differences.

The above principles are directly relevant to contemporary issues related to stigma and discriminatory treatment of persons with disabilities. In line with the principles of *musawah* (equality) and *'adl* (justice) which are the foundation of Islamic teachings, contemporary studies on inclusive education emphasize that physical differences, including disabilities, cannot be used as a basis for degrading a person's dignity, because true nobility is solely determined by piety, not by a person's physical or social condition. Thus, the concept of *karamah al-insan* becomes a relevant ethical framework for correcting discriminatory practices that still occur in the world of education today, while also becoming a foundation for the realization of Islamic education that is truly inclusive and humanizes humans as ideally.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Islamic education, the concept of humanity, and human dignity constitute an epistemological unity: Islamic education views humans as multidimensional beings who must be educated toward the perfect human being. This process is only meaningful if it is grounded in the recognition of the inherent dignity (*karamah al-insan*) inherent in every human being from their creation, regardless of their physical or social condition.

Thus, human dignity is not an additional implication of Islamic education, but rather an ontological requirement that frames the entire process. Stigma and discrimination against vulnerable groups, including people with disabilities, constitute a deviation from fundamental theological principles, not simply a matter of social ethics. This study's contribution lies in its conceptual framework that integrates the study of human terminology, Islamic educational theory, and the discourse of equality/disability, which have tended to be studied separately, into a single argument that *karamah al-insan* serves as a connecting principle and measure of the success of Islamic education.

The implication is that this principle of equality needs to be internalized into the curriculum, teacher training, and school culture. Since this research is of a literary and conceptual-normative nature, further empirical research in inclusive education units is recommended to test the relevance of this framework to the reality of its implementation, particularly the treatment of students with disabilities.

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