

Islamic Tri-Intelligence Framework (Iq–Eq–Sq) For Developing the Character of Gifted and Talented Muslim Students

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ABSTRACT

This conceptual paper develops the *Islamic Tri-Intelligence Framework (IQ–EQ–SQ)* as a holistic model for strengthening the character development of Muslim gifted and talented students. Existing Western gifted education models remain predominantly cognitive-oriented and often neglect emotional and spiritual dimensions, creating a significant gap between intellectual excellence and students' psychological well-being. By synthesising contemporary psychological research and Islamic epistemology, this study explains the integrative interaction between three core domains: intellectual intelligence ('aql), emotional intelligence (nafs), and spiritual intelligence (qalb). The theoretical analysis reveals that SQ serves as the central regulating component that guides both EQ and IQ, ensuring value alignment, emotional stability, and moral integrity among gifted learners. The proposed framework offers a comprehensive foundation for curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment reforms in Islamic gifted education. It also provides avenues for future empirical research on Islamic intelligence measurement tools and education interventions grounded in spiritual–emotional–cognitive integration.

Keywords: Islamic Tri-Intelligence, Gifted and Talented Students, Character Development, Islamic Epistemology, Spiritual Intelligence, Emotional Intelligence, Intellectual Intelligence.

INTRODUCTION

Gifted and talented education has become one of the most significant discourses in today's global educational landscape, particularly as both developed and developing nations increasingly rely on high-ability human capital to drive innovation, leadership, and societal well-being. However, contemporary research reveals that gifted learners often face complex challenges, not only in terms of academic pressure but also in navigating emotional crises, identity struggles, and spiritual disorientation that directly affect their character formation (Lee & Porath, 2017). This phenomenon largely stems from the prevailing orientation of modern education systems, which continue to prioritise intellectual intelligence (IQ) as the primary indicator of excellence, despite mounting evidence that layered intelligences such as emotional intelligence (EQ) and spiritual intelligence (SQ) play a critical role in the holistic development of gifted and talented learners (Subotnik et al., 2020; King, 2019).

This article argues that an overly cognitive-centric approach to gifted education has created a profound disconnection between intellectual excellence and character formation, leading many gifted students to exhibit emotional instability, social relationship difficulties, psychological stress, and spiritual loss of direction (UNFPA, 2024). Within the Islamic intellectual tradition, intelligence is never understood in isolation. Rather, intellectual capability ('aql) is considered complete only when balanced with emotional intelligence that regulates the nafs, and spiritual intelligence that guides the qalb as the centre of moral consciousness. Accordingly, an Islamic-based approach to gifted and talented education offers an epistemological advantage in correcting the shortcomings of Western models that often conceptualise intelligence in a fragmented manner (Eissa & Khalid, 2019).

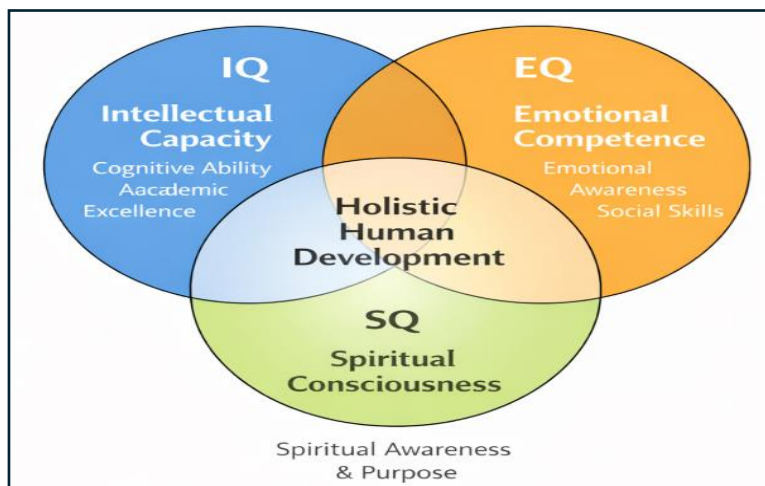
Background of the Study

In the global context, gifted and talented education continues to evolve as a critical field that demands a multidimensional approach to understanding the potential of high-ability learners. Matthews and Dai (2021) emphasise that the twenty-first century requires educational models that not only prioritise academic excellence but also cultivate social intelligence, emotional regulation, and value-based competencies. Empirical findings further indicate that gifted and talented learners are more susceptible to symptoms of anxiety, heightened perfectionism, and identity-related stress compared to their peers, largely because they are frequently perceived as “high-functioning individuals” yet receive insufficient guidance in emotional and spiritual domains (Fernández-Berrocal & Ruiz-Aranda, 2018).

Moreover, gifted schools and high-performance academic institutions often employ pedagogical approaches that are highly competitive and achievement-oriented, exposing gifted learners to excessive pressure. In Islamic school settings, an imbalance between intellectual, emotional, and spiritual dimensions not only affects academic performance but also impedes the cultivation of *adab*, integrity, and moral orientation among students (Zainal et al., 2022). Consequently, there is an urgent need to develop an Islamic educational model capable of integrating intellectual, emotional, and spiritual dimensions holistically in alignment with the concept of *insan kamil*, which represents the ultimate aim of Islamic education.

The proposed Islamic Tri-Intelligence Framework (IQ–EQ–SQ) in this conceptual article is grounded in the idea that character formation requires a balanced integration of three core domains:

1. **IQ:** Intellectual capacity that drives academic excellence.
2. **EQ:** The ability to manage emotions, demonstrate empathy, and cultivate healthy social relationships.
3. **SQ:** Spiritual awareness, moral values, and a sense of purpose.



When these three domains are integrated harmoniously, gifted and talented learners can develop into well-balanced individuals who are disciplined, emotionally stable, mature, and endowed with noble character.

Problem Statement

Although various models of gifted and talented education have been developed in the West, the majority remain predominantly cognitive-oriented and fail to cultivate gifted learners who are emotionally and spiritually balanced. This represents the most significant gap in contemporary gifted education. Research indicates that emotional imbalance is one of the key factors undermining the well-being of gifted students, while spiritual emptiness often leads to a loss of life purpose, moral instability, and identity crises (Snyder, 2019; UNFPA, 2024). In the context of Islamic education, this issue is even more critical, as the objective of education is not merely to produce intellectually excellent individuals, but to nurture morally upright and well-mannered (*beradab*) human beings.

However, to date, there is no specific Islamic theoretical framework for gifted and talented learners that systematically integrates IQ, EQ, and SQ. Most studies on Islamic education and gifted education continue to operate in separate silos, resulting in limited scholarly attempts to connect intellectual potential with emotional and spiritual development (Mohd Nasir & Ismail, 2021). This theoretical gap highlights the urgent need for a new conceptual framework grounded in Islamic epistemology.

This article contributes to addressing this gap by proposing the Islamic Tri-Intelligence Framework (IQ–EQ–SQ) as a conceptual foundation to strengthen character development among gifted and talented learners. This framework not only bridges the theoretical divide between Western gifted education models and Islamic epistemology but also provides a solid basis for developing more holistic curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment approaches.

Objectives

This conceptual article aims to develop an Islamic Tri-Intelligence Framework (IQ–EQ–SQ) for strengthening the character development of gifted and talented Muslim students. The specific objectives are:

1. **To explain** the conceptual foundations of the Islamic Tri-Intelligence Framework (IQ–EQ–SQ) based on the integration of intellectual, emotional, and spiritual intelligence.
2. **To examine** the contribution of IQ, EQ, and SQ to the character formation of gifted and talented Muslim learners.
3. **To formulate** a holistic Islamic framework that may serve as a theoretical basis for curriculum, pedagogy, and future research in gifted education

LITERATURE REVIEW

Gifted and Talented Education: Global and Islamic Perspectives

The global discourse on gifted and talented education has expanded rapidly through a range of cognitive-psychological and educational models introduced by scholars such as Renzulli, Gagné, Gardner, and Sternberg. Renzulli's model emphasises the interaction of three components above-average ability, creativity, and task commitment which collectively produce high levels of performance (Renzulli, 2016). Gagné, through the Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent (DMGT), distinguishes between “giftedness” as a natural potential and “talent” as a set of systematically developed skills influenced by training and environmental factors (Gagné, 2018). Gardner's Multiple Intelligences Theory further proposes that intelligence is multifaceted rather than singular, while Sternberg's triarchic intelligence model highlights analytical, creative, and practical dimensions (Sternberg, 2020).

However, recent scholarship critiques Western models for neglecting the spiritual, moral, and value-oriented dimensions of human development (Matthews & Dai, 2021; Subotnik et al., 2020). Gifted learners are often portrayed as high achievers academically but simultaneously struggle with emotional well-being, identity crises, and significant psychological burden. Findings by Lee and Porath (2017) indicate that gifted students exhibit higher emotional dysregulation compared to their peers. Such critiques underscore that purely cognitive approaches are reductionist and insufficient to address the holistic developmental needs of gifted learners.

Contemporary studies also demonstrate that classical Muslim scholars such as al-Ghazali and Ibn Khaldun have articulated a more holistic understanding of the characteristics of exceptional learners, encompassing intellectual, spiritual, and social dimensions. A synthesis of their thought shows that intelligence is not confined to cognitive capacity alone but includes the cultivation of *adab*, sincerity, and social awareness as foundational pillars of human excellence (Musa et al., 2025).

In the context of the Muslim world, the need for a model that integrates intellectual potential with emotional and spiritual balance is even more pronounced. Islamic education emphasises the formation of a holistic human being

(*insan kamil*) grounded in the integration of three interconnected elements: *'aql*, *nafs*, and *qalb* (Eissa & Khalid, 2019). Islamic educational research, such as the work of Zainal et al. (2022), reveals that gifted Muslim learners require pedagogical approaches that combine cognitive intelligence with moral and spiritual development. Thus, the existing literature highlights a significant gap between Western gifted education frameworks and Islamic educational perspectives, thereby justifying the development of the Islamic Tri-Intelligence Framework as a more comprehensive theoretical model.

IQ from an Islamic Perspective

In the Islamic tradition, the intellect (*'aql*) is described as the highest divine endowment that distinguishes human beings from all other creations. The Qur'an repeatedly emphasises the concepts of *ta'addul* (rational reflection) and *tafakkur* (deep contemplation) as foundational processes for the development of knowledge, wisdom, and moral discernment. Within the context of gifted and talented education, IQ is therefore not merely a measure of academic performance but a reflection of the *'aql's* capacity to comprehend reality, make ethical decisions, and formulate higher-order conceptual understanding. As such, cognitive intelligence is regarded as a trust (*amanah*) that must be guided by values (*tawjih*) and refined through moral discipline (*tahdhib al-nafs*).

Contemporary research in educational psychology indicates that IQ is strongly associated with academic achievement and intellectual creativity (Subotnik et al., 2020). However, without emotional and spiritual guidance, high intelligence can lead to intellectual arrogance, internal pressure, and social detachment (Matthews & Dai, 2021). Here, Islamic epistemology offers an important reframing: the *'aql* in Islam is not merely a cognitive tool but also a moral and spiritual instrument. Hassan and Abdullah (2022) assert that the intellect in Islam functions as a mechanism for ethical judgement, not simply as a tool for logical reasoning. Thus, IQ within the Islamic Tri-Intelligence Framework cannot stand independently; it must be harmonised with EQ and SQ to shape a balanced and holistic gifted learner.

Furthermore, the concept of *tafakkur* requires gifted learners to think reflectively and critically, rather than merely memorising information or pursuing high performance for its own sake. This Islamic perspective aligns with the findings of Mohd Nasir and Ismail (2021), which demonstrate that intellectual intelligence in Islamic education must be coupled with moral values to cultivate future leaders who are just, principled, and wise. Accordingly, IQ in Islam is not solely a mental capacity but a manifestation of responsibility and spiritual accountability.

EQ from an Islamic Perspective

Emotional intelligence (EQ) has gained increasing prominence in global literature as growing research demonstrates that the well-being of gifted and talented learners depends heavily on their ability to manage emotions, express empathy, and sustain healthy social relationships. In Islam, EQ is closely associated with the processes of *tazkiyah al-nafs* (purification of the soul) and *mujahadah* (inner discipline against negative tendencies). Al-Ghazali, in *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din*, explains that emotional balance is the foundation of virtuous character, as emotions that are not moderated by intellect and spirituality inevitably lead to undesirable behaviour.

Modern research supports this classical Islamic perspective. Fernández-Berrocal and Ruiz-Aranda (2018) found that emotional intelligence is a significant predictor of mental health, academic performance, and social functioning. Within the context of gifted education, low EQ has consistently been linked to perfectionism, academic stress, and social difficulties (UNFPA, 2024). These findings underscore the importance of integrating EQ development in Islamic gifted education, particularly through approaches that emphasise spiritual purification, regulation of the *nafs*, and the cultivation of empathy.

Furthermore, Snyder (2019) argues that EQ is intimately connected to moral values, as emotions fundamentally shape motivation, empathy, and prosocial behaviour. This aligns with the Islamic view that *akhlak* (moral character) emerges from a purified heart and a disciplined inner self. Hence, the Islamic Tri-Intelligence Framework conceptualises EQ not merely as a psychological skill but as a spiritual-emotional mechanism that plays a central role in shaping the character of Muslim gifted learners in an integrated and holistic manner.

SQ in Islamic Education

Spiritual intelligence (SQ) holds a uniquely elevated position in Islamic education because it is directly connected to the formation of the *qalb*, *ruh*, and *nafs* the core elements of human personality. In contrast to Western definitions, which typically view SQ as the ability to derive meaning or purpose in life (King, 2019), the Islamic tradition conceptualises spirituality as divine consciousness, a relationship with Allah, the internalisation of revealed values, and the ongoing process of self-purification (*tazkiyah al-nafs*). Within this framework, the *qalb* is not merely a psychological component but the moral centre that determines the ethical quality of human actions (Al-Attas, 2019). Thus, SQ in Islamic education encompasses intellectual, emotional, and spiritual dimensions simultaneously an integrative approach absent in most modern Western theories.

The centrality of the *qalb* in the Islamic SQ framework is crucial, as it serves as the foundation for the development of *akhlak*, sincerity, inner tranquillity, and moral wisdom. Wan Mohd Nor (2018) emphasises that Islamic education, which is grounded in the concept of *adab*, teaches that a corrupted heart leads to corrupted character, while a purified heart produces virtuous personality. This perspective reinforces the argument that character formation in gifted learners cannot rely solely on IQ and EQ; rather, SQ must occupy the highest position as the guiding force of values and life orientation.

The concept of *maqsad al-hayah* (purpose of life) is also a fundamental component of SQ. Islam teaches that human beings are created to worship Allah, cultivate the earth, and fulfil the divine trust (*amanah*) as *khalifah*. This perspective shapes the understanding of gifted Muslim learners by framing intelligence not as a personal possession but as a responsibility to be deployed for the benefit of the ummah (Mohd Nasir & Ismail, 2021). Recent studies further demonstrate that individuals with strong clarity of life purpose are more resilient to academic and social pressure and exhibit greater self-discipline in managing challenges (Ungar, 2018; Masten, 2016).

The relationship between SQ and exemplary character is also well-documented in international scholarship. Snyder (2019), for instance, demonstrates that SQ underpins prosocial behaviour, empathy, integrity, and moral commitment. For Muslim gifted learners, SQ serves as a protective factor against psychological risks such as perfectionism, existential anxiety, and emotional exhaustion issues commonly reported among gifted individuals (Lee & Porath, 2017). Hence, SQ is not only associated with spiritual well-being but functions as an internal regulatory system that stabilises the balance of EQ and IQ.

In addition, SQ plays a vital role in resilience. Studies by UNFPA (2024) show that adolescents with stronger spiritual grounding are better equipped to cope with social and academic stress. Masten (2016) and Ungar (2018) similarly found that spiritual orientation fosters systemic resilience by enhancing self-regulation, perseverance, and the ability to view challenges positively. This has significant implications for Muslim gifted learners who frequently face achievement pressure and identity conflicts. SQ provides emotional steadiness, identity clarity, and psychological stability, preventing them from succumbing to mental health difficulties despite their high intellectual capacity.

Overall, the literature indicates that SQ in Islamic education is not merely an intellectual or affective domain but the very essence of superior character formation. Accordingly, the Islamic Tri-Intelligence Framework positions SQ as the central component in the development of gifted learners, strengthening both IQ and EQ through authentic spiritual grounding.

Synthesis of the Tri-Intelligence Framework

The synthesis of the Islamic Tri-Intelligence Framework (IQ–EQ–SQ) demonstrates the interdependent relationship between cognitive, emotional, and spiritual domains in shaping a balanced human being. This article argues that these three dimensions cannot be viewed as separate entities, as each contributes meaningfully to the psychological well-being, ethical stability, and performance of gifted and talented learners. In modern education, intelligence is often measured predominantly through IQ, while EQ and SQ are overlooked. As a result, a significant group of gifted learners exhibit high intellectual capacity but struggle with emotional instability and

spiritual emptiness a phenomenon described by psychologists as *high ability, poor character* (Matthews & Dai, 2021; Subotnik et al., 2020).

Within the Islamic framework, IQ functions as the intellectual faculty that enables learners to understand *hikmah* (wisdom) and distinguish between right and wrong. However, without EQ to regulate emotions and SQ to guide values, IQ becomes directionless. EQ enables gifted learners to manage stress, interpret others' emotions, and cultivate healthy social relationships (Parker & Keefer, 2017; Petrides, 2020). Yet, EQ without SQ merely produces pragmatic emotional skills rather than *adab*-based character. SQ serves as the value-regulating centre that ensures intellectual reasoning and emotional expression remain aligned with the principles of *sharī'ah* and *akhlak* (Al-Attas, 2019).

Islamic educational literature (Eissa & Khalid, 2019; Zainal et al., 2022) further highlights that the *qalb* acts as the main mediator integrating these three intelligences. IQ provides analytical capacity, EQ contributes emotional stability, and SQ offers meaning and moral grounding. Only through this integration can learners develop *adab*, integrity, leadership, and moral soundness. Hence, the Islamic Tri-Intelligence Framework underscores the need for gifted education to shift from a “cognitively dominant” approach to a holistic model that harmonises all three domains.

Thus, the synthesis of the Tri-Intelligence Framework offers a significant contribution to Muslim gifted education research. It not only bridges the gap between psychological theories and Islamic epistemology but also opens pathways toward a new educational model that is value-driven, resilience-oriented, and focused on holistic human development.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology of a conceptual article differs fundamentally from that of empirical research, as it does not rely on fieldwork, surveys, experiments, or statistical testing. Instead, it is primarily concerned with theoretical examination, conceptual clarification, and the critical synthesis of existing bodies of knowledge. In this article, a conceptual and theoretical methodology is employed to develop the Islamic Tri-Intelligence Framework (IQ–EQ–SQ) as a holistic model for the character development of gifted and talented Muslim students.

This methodological orientation is grounded in a multidisciplinary review and integration of scholarship drawn from educational psychology, gifted and talented education, emotional intelligence studies, spiritual intelligence research, and Islamic epistemology. Through this approach, the article seeks to formulate a theoretically grounded framework capable of addressing an important gap in the contemporary literature on Muslim gifted education, particularly the limited integration of intellectual, emotional, and spiritual dimensions within a unified Islamic perspective (Subotnik et al., 2020; Eissa & Khalid, 2019).

Rather than generating new empirical data, this study advances knowledge by critically examining relevant theories, identifying conceptual convergences and gaps, and proposing a coherent framework that may serve as a foundation for future scholarly and educational development. In this sense, the methodology is appropriate not only for conceptual refinement, but also for theory building in an area that remains underdeveloped within both Islamic and gifted education scholarship.

Type of Study: Conceptual and Theoretical Synthesis

This article is categorised as a **Conceptual/Theoretical Synthesis**, a research design aimed at building new theories or extending existing ones through the critical integration of diverse sources. This approach is appropriate because the issue of character development among Muslim gifted learners lacks a specific theoretical framework that systematically integrates IQ, EQ, and SQ within an Islamic context.

Conceptual studies are widely used in both Western and Islamic educational scholarship, particularly when researchers aim to explore theoretical gaps not previously addressed through empirical methods (Matthews & Dai, 2021). Theoretical analysis allows for modern psychological frameworks to be compared with Islamic epistemology, which emphasises the concepts of *qalb*, *ruh*, *nafs*, and other spiritual constructs. Through this

approach, the article argues that bridging Western theories with Islamic values is essential, as conventional gifted education is overly cognitive-oriented while classical Islamic literature has not yet been systematically contextualised within modern gifted education.

This approach therefore enables the development of a new model that is not only responsive to contemporary challenges but also grounded in a strong Islamic scholarly tradition.

Analytical Approaches

(a) Thematic Analysis of Islamic Concepts

The first method employed is thematic analysis of key concepts within Islamic epistemology, including *'aql*, *qalb*, *ruh*, *nafs*, *tazkiyah*, *adab*, and *maqsad al-hayah*. This analysis was conducted with reference to contemporary literature such as Abdullah and Hassan (2020), Mohd Nasir and Ismail (2021), and Al-Attas (2019). Its purpose is to identify conceptual patterns related to intelligence, personality, and human development in Islam. This method enables systematic linkage between classical Islamic concepts and modern IQ–EQ–SQ theories.

The thematic findings indicate that *'aql* corresponds closely to IQ, *tazkiyah* and *mujahadah* relate to EQ, while *qalb* and *ruh* correspond directly to SQ. These insights form a strong theoretical foundation for integrating cognitive, emotional, and spiritual domains.

(b) Synthesis of Western and Islamic Literature

The second method involves synthesising Western and Islamic literature by conducting comparative analyses between leading Western gifted education theories (Renzulli, Gagné, Gardner, Sternberg) and Islamic literature emphasising holistic human development. This synthesis identifies points of intersection and divergence between the two knowledge traditions.

For example, Renzulli's theory places emphasis on creativity and task commitment, whereas Islam frames these qualities in terms of sincerity (*ikhlas*), trustworthiness (*amanah*), and *adab*. Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences recognises diverse cognitive strengths but does not include spiritual intelligence. Conversely, the Islamic perspective regards spirituality as the highest form of intelligence as it guides both intellect and emotion (Zainal et al., 2022). This analysis highlights the necessity of developing the Islamic Tri-Intelligence Framework to integrate the strengths of Western theories with Islamic values.

(c) Theorising and Conceptual Integration

The third method is **theorising**, a process of constructing new conceptual frameworks through integrative analysis. This method is widely employed in Q1/Q2 articles when there is a need to generate original theoretical contributions (Snyder, 2019; King, 2019).

In this article, theorising is conducted through an analysis of the interrelations between IQ, EQ, and SQ based on:

1. modern gifted and talented education theories,
2. contemporary emotional intelligence frameworks,
3. spiritual intelligence theories, and
4. Islamic epistemology (concepts of *qalb*, *ruh*, *nafs*, *'aql*, *tazkiyah*, *adab*).

This integrative process generates a new theoretical model explaining how IQ, EQ, and SQ must be harmonised to shape the character of Muslim gifted learners. The model also contributes new perspectives to global gifted education by positioning spiritual values not as supplementary components, but as foundational elements.

Rationale for the Conceptual Approach

There are three main rationales for adopting this approach:

(1) Addressing Research Gaps

Previous studies have predominantly focused on intellectual or emotional intelligence, while the spiritual dimension is often neglected due to challenges in empirical measurement (Petrides, 2020; Subotnik et al., 2020). A conceptual approach allows researchers to integrate domains that are difficult to quantify but essential for character development.

(2) Developing a Systematic Islamic Model

Islamic literature on *qalb*, *ruh*, and *nafs* is extensive but has not been systematically organised within modern gifted education frameworks. A conceptual study enables the synthesis of Islamic concepts with psychological theories to produce a more comprehensive model (Al-Attas, 2019).

(3) Creating Foundations for Future Empirical Research

The theoretical model produced can serve as a foundation for developing measurement instruments for Islamic IQ–EQ–SQ, teacher training modules, and gifted education curricula.

The Islamic Tri-Intelligence Framework (Iq–Eq–Sq)

Rationale for Developing the Framework

The global discourse on gifted and talented education reveals a significant gap between academic excellence and character development. Although gifted learners are often perceived as possessing superior intellectual abilities and higher order thinking skills, international studies indicate that they also belong to a group highly vulnerable to emotional difficulties, psychological stress, and identity crises (Subotnik et al., 2020; Lee & Porath, 2017). This phenomenon demonstrates that intellectual intelligence alone is insufficient to nurture genuinely holistic gifted individuals.

This article argues that current gifted education discourse still fails to systematically integrate the spiritual dimension, despite clear evidence that spiritual intelligence plays a major role in shaping values, life purpose, psychological resilience, and moral integrity (King, 2019; Snyder, 2019). Consequently, the construction of the Islamic Tri-Intelligence Framework (IQ–EQ–SQ) emerges as a response to two critical needs:

1. To address the gap in gifted and talented education, particularly the absence of a holistic model that integrates cognitive, emotional, and spiritual components; and
2. To fulfil the need for the formation of exemplary character (*adab*), which is the central focus of Islamic education but largely absent in modern Western models (Eissa & Khalid, 2019).

This framework thus offers a critical alternative to Western gifted education models such as those of Renzulli, Gardner, Gagné, and Sternberg, which introduce various structural models of intelligence but overlook SQ as the foundation of moral leadership and spiritual integrity.

Components of the Tri-Intelligence Framework

A. Intellectual Intelligence (IQ): ‘Aql as Gift and Trust

Within Islamic epistemology, the intellect (‘*aql*) is not merely a cognitive tool but a divine gift that entails responsibility and *adab*. IQ drives the capacity of gifted learners to comprehend abstract concepts, process complex information, and generate innovation. Research in gifted and talented education shows that gifted

learners typically possess advanced analytical thinking, metacognitive abilities, and problem-solving skills (Matthews & Dai, 2021; Gagné, 2018).

However, Islam views this intelligence as a trust (*amanah*), not an absolute privilege. The Qur'an repeatedly reminds human beings to think deeply through verses such as "*Afala ta 'qilūn*" ("Do you not use your intellect?") (Surah al-Baqarah: 44). This reveals that intellect must be guided by wisdom, values, and moral understanding.

Findings from contemporary Islamic scholarship (Mohd Nasir & Ismail, 2021) indicate that *'aql* that is not guided by spirituality can lead to arrogance, intellectual ego, and the misuse of knowledge. Therefore, the IQ component in this framework does not merely emphasise cognitive ability but underscores intellectual responsibility an essential aspect in shaping the character of Muslim gifted learners.

B. Emotional Intelligence (EQ): Tazkiyah, Empathy, and Regulation of the Nafs

EQ encompasses the ability to recognise, understand, regulate, and channel emotions in adaptive ways. In modern psychological literature, EQ has been shown to be a strong predictor of social competence, academic achievement, and the overall well-being of gifted learners (Fernández-Berrocal & Ruiz-Aranda, 2018; Parker & Keefer, 2017). However, Islam offers a deeper and more value-laden interpretation of EQ.

In Islamic epistemology, emotions are closely related to *tazkiyah al-nafs* (purification of the soul), *mujahadah* (striving against lower desires), and *sabr* (patience). Al-Ghazali views the *nafs* as both a source of strength and vulnerability; therefore, gifted learners must learn to manage impulses, stress, and anxiety through spiritual discipline and self-control.

EQ in Islam is not merely a psychological skill set but a foundational element of *akhlak*. The capacity for empathy, for instance, is intrinsically linked to the values of *rahmah* (compassion) and *ihsan* (benevolence) two ethical principles that shape healthy, low-conflict social relationships.

Without stable EQ, gifted learners are prone to perfectionism, burnout, and social instability, as shown in UNFPA's (2024) findings. Hence, the EQ component in this framework aims to foster emotional balance and moral soundness.

C. Spiritual Intelligence (SQ): Qalbun Salim, Life Purpose, and Adab

SQ is regarded as the highest component in this framework because it determines moral orientation, life purpose, and one's relationship with Allah. In Islam, spirituality is not limited to a psychological state but is a metaphysical force that connects human beings with their Creator through *iman* (faith), *taqwa* (God-consciousness), *tawakkal* (reliance on God), and *murāqabah* (constant awareness of divine presence).

The concept of *qalbun salim* (a sound heart) serves as the core of character development. It refers to a heart purified from *shirk*, blameworthy traits, and spiritual diseases. Gifted learners with high SQ tend to demonstrate integrity, self-discipline, meaning-oriented motivation, and stable intrinsic drive (Snyder, 2019; King, 2019).

SQ also enhances psychological resilience. Studies by Masten (2016) and Ungar (2018) show that strong spiritual grounding increases learners' ability to cope with academic pressure and life challenges. In the context of Muslim gifted learners, SQ becomes the primary mechanism linking intelligence with *adab*.

4.3 Interaction Between IQ–EQ–SQ: Character Formation of Muslim Gifted Learners

The Islamic Tri-Intelligence Framework illustrates that these three domains function interactively rather than in isolation:

1. IQ drives academic excellence

However, without EQ and SQ, such excellence is not accompanied by empathy, integrity, or clarity of life purpose.

2. EQ supports emotional stability and social relationships

Yet, without IQ, it does not foster critical thinking; and without SQ, it devolves into pragmatic emotional skills devoid of ethical depth.

3. SQ drives moral integrity, purposefulness, and spiritual strength

But without IQ and EQ, spirituality risks becoming ritualistic and ineffective in shaping credible and competent leadership.

International research shows that gifted students with high IQ but low EQ and SQ are more likely to experience:

- a. Identity crises,
- b. Social conflict,
- c. Burnout,
- d. Aggressive behaviour, and
- e. Loss of life direction (King, 2019; Petrides, 2020).

Accordingly, the integration of IQ–EQ–SQ is essential to produce Muslim gifted learners who are:

- a. intellectually capable,
- b. emotionally stable,
- c. spiritually strong,
- d. well-mannered, and
- e. morally upright.

This framework not only contributes to gifted education theory but also enriches global Islamic educational discourse.

Conceptual Diagram

This section elaborates the conceptual diagram that illustrates the dynamic relationship between the three core domains of intelligence Intellectual Intelligence (IQ), Emotional Intelligence (EQ), and Spiritual Intelligence (SQ) which form the foundation of the Islamic Tri-Intelligence Framework. Although the original model is represented graphically, a textual explanation is necessary for journal publication. The diagram highlights both the hierarchical structure and the synergistic relationships between these domains, as well as their collective role in shaping the character of gifted learners.

The theoretical framework positions Intellectual Intelligence (IQ) as the starting point in the flow of human development. IQ represents cognitive capacity, analytical thinking, and metacognitive ability, which are key characteristics of gifted and talented learners (Subotnik et al., 2020). From an Islamic epistemological perspective, intellect is not merely a tool for understanding information, but a divinely entrusted faculty that orients human beings towards truth and wisdom (Eissa & Khalid, 2019). Accordingly, IQ is placed at the upper section of the diagram, symbolising its role in driving academic performance and advanced problem-solving, qualities often associated with gifted learners (Matthews & Dai, 2021).

However, the diagram also makes clear that IQ does not function in isolation. It is connected to the central component of the framework, the **Islamic Tri-Intelligence Framework**, which serves as an integrative system combining all three domains of intelligence. The flow from IQ into this central structure signifies that cognitive

intelligence must be guided by a value system and inner equilibrium. Educational psychology research emphasises that IQ without emotional maturity and spiritual orientation often leads to gifted learners being at greater risk of stress and identity crises (Parker & Keefer, 2017; Petrides, 2020).

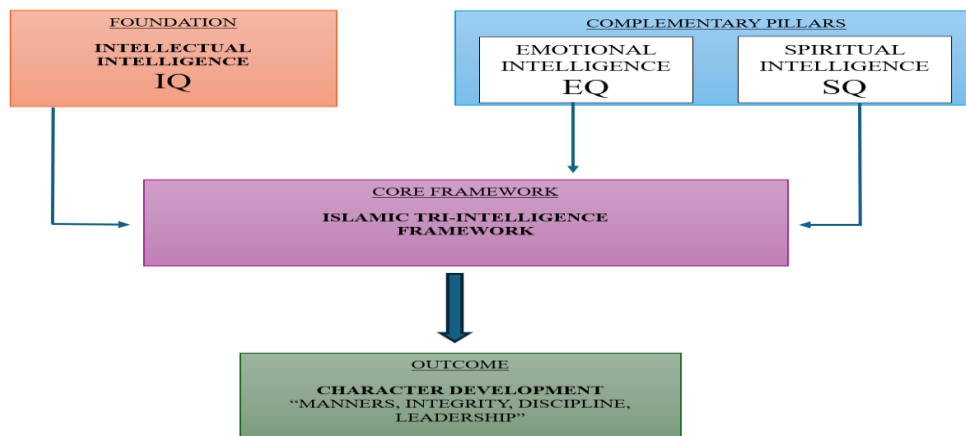
The other two domains Emotional Intelligence (EQ) and Spiritual Intelligence (SQ) are positioned laterally in the diagram, reflecting their roles as stabilising and complementary forces that support IQ. EQ encompasses empathy, emotional regulation, and psychological resilience, which are crucial for the well-being of gifted learners who are frequently exposed to high academic pressure (Fernández-Berrocal & Ruiz-Aranda, 2018). SQ, on the other hand, functions as the value-directing component, shaping life purpose, moral integrity, and the human Creator relationship (King, 2019; Snyder, 2019). In Islamic education, SQ is linked to the development of *Qalbun Salim* a purified heart oriented towards truth and goodness.

The diagram further illustrates a bidirectional relationship between EQ and SQ, indicating that spiritual strengthening has a direct influence on emotional stability, while well-regulated emotions facilitate the attainment of inner tranquillity (*Sakīnah*). This synergy forms the foundation of exemplary character emphasised in Islamic education (Zainal et al., 2022). The lateral EQ–SQ linkage signifies that both progress in tandem as complementary forces rather than competitors.

Ultimately, the integrated flow of IQ–EQ–SQ converges at the lower part of the diagram in the domain of **Character Development**, which encompasses *adab*, integrity, discipline, and leadership. The diagram underscores that the character of Muslim gifted learners is not produced through intellectual excellence alone, but through the holistic integration of cognitive, emotional, and spiritual domains. This theoretical framework thus asserts that character development is the goal of gifted and talented education from an Islamic perspective a contribution that clearly distinguishes this model from conventional Western gifted education frameworks, which are often secular and cognitively centred.

Conceptual Chart: Islamic TRI-Intelligence Framework

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK



This article argues that the Islamic Tri-Intelligence Framework (IQ–EQ–SQ) offers a distinct advantage not found in the Western gifted education models commonly used in global education systems. Models such as those of Renzulli, Gagné, Gardner, and Sternberg place substantial emphasis on cognitive intelligence, creativity, and performance potential (Subotnik et al., 2020; Gagné, 2018). Although these models have expanded the definition of intelligence, their primary focus remains on academic achievement, productive creativity, and professional social contribution. Western models, at their core, tend to evaluate potential based on performance outcomes rather than the holistic formation of the human person.

In contrast, the Islamic framework proposed in this article does not position academic excellence as the ultimate goal. Islam emphasises the formation of a balanced human being who integrates spiritual integrity, emotional

stability, and intellectual sharpness as a comprehensive reality of holistic human development (Eissa & Khalid, 2019). Thus, this model moves beyond the performance paradigm and shifts towards an *insaniyyah* paradigm, viewing the human being as a morally and spiritually accountable agent.

The component of Spiritual Intelligence (SQ) is the element that most clearly differentiates this framework from Western models. In Western literature, SQ is often regarded as a controversial construct or not widely accepted as a legitimate domain of intelligence (King, 2019). However, within Islamic epistemology, spiritual intelligence forms the foundation of *akhlaq*, integrity, and life purpose, making it impossible to separate SQ from the education of a Muslim learner. Its continuity with concepts such as *qalbun salim*, *taqwa*, and *adab* renders the framework more responsive to the lived realities of Muslim gifted learners, who require stronger mechanisms of meaning-making and moral orientation compared to their peers (Snyder, 2019).

Alignment with Islamic Educational Theory

This framework aligns closely with foundational Islamic educational theory, which views the human being as an integrated entity composed of *ruh*, *nafs*, and *'aql*. Within the concept of *Insan Kamil*, the ideal human is one who achieves spiritual, intellectual, and moral perfection in a balanced manner. This alignment demonstrates that character development for Muslim gifted learners cannot be separated from the anthropological paradigm of Islam.

The *'aql* component in this framework corresponds to the Qur'anic emphasis on the use of reason to understand the natural world, knowledge, and wisdom. Qur'anic exhortations such as *afalā ta 'qilūn* and *afalā tatafakkarūn* highlight the importance of critical thinking and rational judgement in the life of a Muslim (Hashim & Langgulong, 2015). In the context of gifted education, this indicates that high intellectual ability is a trust (*amanah*), not merely an academic advantage.

Meanwhile, the EQ component relates to the discipline of *tazkiyah al-nafs* described by al-Ghazali. According to him, the ability to regulate emotions, intentions, and behavioural responses forms the root of moral character (Wan Mohd Nor, 2018). Thus, mastering EQ is not only a psychological concern, but also a component of *tarbiyah* and self-cultivation.

The SQ component is consistent with classical Islamic teachings on *rububiyyah*, *uluhiyyah*, and spiritual consciousness as guiding forces in human behaviour. This component does not formally exist within Western models, yet it has served as the foundation of Islamic education since its earliest periods. In the context of *tarbiyah*, SQ determines clarity of life purpose, self-awareness, spiritual resilience, and the ability to derive meaning from challenges. This alignment shows that the Islamic Tri-Intelligence Framework is grounded in a strong tradition of Islamic education while simultaneously addressing contemporary psychological needs.

Relevance to Contemporary Gifted and Talented Education

Recent findings indicate that gifted learners fall within a high-risk category in terms of mental health, emotional balance, and identity conflict (Parker & Keefer, 2017; Fernández-Berrocá & Ruiz-Aranda, 2018). They often experience perfectionism, emotional vulnerability, burnout, and existential crisis that is, an early struggle to find meaning and purpose in life compared to their peers (Peters, 2021). This arises from cognitive development that outpaces emotional and spiritual maturity.

The Islamic Tri-Intelligence Framework offers a comprehensive solution to these issues. By emphasising the integration of the three domains of intelligence, the framework provides a foundation for developing gifted learners who are not only high performing but also psychologically stable and anchored in spiritual values. EQ plays a significant role in helping gifted learners manage academic stress, counter perfectionistic tendencies, and build healthy social relationships (Brackett, 2018).

SQ, in turn, provides deeper meaning-making in relation to identity formation, life purpose, and future orientation. Studies show that gifted learners with strong spiritual grounding exhibit greater resilience, better stress management, and more stable intrinsic motivation (Amram & Dryer, 2021; King, 2019). For Muslim gifted

learners, SQ helps maintain equilibrium between worldly excellence and *ukhrawi* responsibility, thereby reducing identity conflict.

This model is also highly relevant to contemporary challenges such as digital overstimulation, competitive pressure, and social isolation. Together, EQ and SQ build a moral and emotional buffer that enables gifted learners to navigate competitive environments without losing direction or moral integrity. Through the integration of concepts such as *adab*, *hikmah*, *ihsan*, and *tazkiyah*, the framework achieves a balance not attained by Western models, which are largely secular and disconnected from spiritual values.

Beyond addressing the local needs of Islamic education in Malaysia, this framework contributes meaningfully to global discussions on the limitations of traditional gifted education models that overly prioritise performance. Its theoretical contribution opens new avenues in gifted education research by incorporating values, spirituality, and holistic well-being a dimension that is increasingly gaining attention in international educational psychology.

CONCLUSION

This article asserts that the development of the Islamic Tri-Intelligence Framework (IQ–EQ–SQ) represents a significant theoretical contribution to the field of gifted and talented education, particularly within the context of Muslim learners. The study argues that the dominance of Western models often cognitively centred and performance-driven has resulted in a substantial gap between intellectual excellence and character formation. Although global gifted education systems have successfully enhanced academic achievement, they have largely failed to address the psychological vulnerabilities, emotional fragility, and existential crises commonly experienced by gifted learners. Thus, an integrative approach rooted in Islamic epistemology is not only necessary but critical for achieving holistic human development.

The Islamic Tri-Intelligence Framework demonstrates that character development cannot occur without the integration of intellect (*'aql*), emotion (*nafs*), and spirituality (*ruh*). IQ alone is insufficient to produce future leaders who are ethical and dignified; EQ alone cannot regulate behaviour without a strong moral foundation; and SQ alone cannot guide learners without the intellectual capacity to understand the responsibilities of vicegerency (*khilafah*). This article therefore proposes an integrated model that clarifies the synergistic relationship among these three domains, offering a more comprehensive conceptual structure than existing gifted education models.

The findings also emphasise that SQ is the unique component distinguishing this framework from Western models. In Islamic education, SQ is not a supplementary element but the core of *akhlak* and *adab*, which represent the ultimate purpose of education. Emerging studies show that spiritual intelligence is strongly linked to intrinsic motivation, psychological resilience, and holistic well-being especially among gifted learners who are prone to emotional pressure and loss of life direction. Hence, incorporating SQ as a primary component is not only appropriate but aligns with the Islamic anthropological understanding of human nature and purpose.

This framework also demonstrates strong coherence with Islamic educational traditions through the concepts of *Insan Kamil*, *tazkiyah al-nafs*, and the integration of *ruh-nafs-'aql*. This alignment affirms that Muslim gifted education cannot be imported directly from Western models without epistemological adaptation. Instead, the proposed model offers an approach that is both scientifically informed by modern psychological evidence and grounded in the revealed values that have sustained Islamic civilisation for centuries.

Furthermore, the framework is highly relevant to the contemporary challenges of gifted education. In an era marked by academic pressure, global competition, and identity struggles among gifted adolescents, this approach offers a comprehensive foundation for interventions targeting character development, emotional resilience, and life orientation. It also provides an alternative for Islamic schools, modern madrasahs, and higher education institutions seeking to nurture high-achieving learners who embody *adab* rather than mere performance.

Finally, this article contributes to the international literature by introducing a conceptual framework rooted in Islamic knowledge yet applicable to the global discourse on gifted education. It opens new directions for future research, including the development of Islamic Tri-Intelligence assessment instruments, spiritually grounded

educational interventions, and application of the framework in STEM education, youth leadership, and character development.

Overall, the Islamic Tri-Intelligence Framework offers a robust foundation for nurturing gifted and talented learners who are not only intellectually capable and high-performing, but also well-mannered, morally grounded, and value-driven. This framework has the potential to become a major contribution to the reform of Muslim gifted education in the 21st century.

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