

HUMANISTIC KNOWLEDGE AND SUSTAINABLE SOCIOECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT: AN ISLAMIC ETHICAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE NEXUS BETWEEN HUMANITIES AND LIVELIHOODS IN NIGERIA

Mohiyat Adenium ATOBATELE. Ph.D

Abstract

The emergence of the new humanities as a paradigm shift in humanistic scholarship has generated renewed interest in their role in addressing contemporary socioeconomic challenges. This paper examines the intersection between humanistic knowledge and livelihoods from an Islamic perspective, emphasising its relevance for sustainable development. While global development discourse prioritises science and technology, sustainable progress requires a balance between material advancement and ethical, cultural, and intellectual foundations. Drawing on the Human Capabilities Approach and Islamic Ethical Theory, this study develops an integrated framework that positions humanistic knowledge as central to ethical leadership, social cohesion, and livelihood enhancement. Using a qualitative, conceptual methodology supported by textual and case-based analysis, the study demonstrates that Islamic intellectual traditions historically integrated ethics, education, and economic life through institutions such as waqf and madrasah systems. The findings reveal that the marginalisation of the humanities contributes to moral decline, weak institutions, and unsustainable development outcomes, particularly in Nigeria. The study concludes that reintegrating humanistic knowledge into education and policy frameworks can foster ethical governance, resilient communities, and inclusive development. It recommends educational reforms, interdisciplinary programmes, and policy engagement with faith-based institutions.

Keywords: Humanistic knowledge, socioeconomic development, Islamic ethics, livelihoods, capabilities approach, interdisciplinary education

Introduction

In recent decades, the intersection between the humanities and socioeconomic development has gathered increased scholarly attention. While science and technology dominate contemporary development discourse, the humanities fields concerned with language, literature, religion, ethics, history, and philosophy. The humanities offer crucial insights into the human condition, social values, and cultural practices that underpin sustainable development. Since time immemorial, the vast field of the humanities has played a vital role in deepening the understanding of individuals, societies, and their diverse cultures. It preserves the remarkable achievements of the past, enhances our comprehension of the present world, and equips us with the intellectual tools to envision the future. In doing so, it fosters social cohesion and supports the advancement of other fields of knowledge.

Historically, the Humanities flourished within institutions of higher learning, with disciplines such as language, philosophy, literature, arts, history, religion, and rhetoric. They were regarded as the pinnacle of scholarship, attracting and shaping some of the world's greatest minds (Ramesh, 2023). However, today's world is increasingly shaped by the far-reaching influence of globalisation, driven by a new, technologically integrated global order. This transformation is reshaping everyday social life and, in turn, significantly impacting the field of the humanities. Despite remarkable scientific and technological advancements that have effectively turned the world into a global village, the humanities are gradually losing their prominence and identity as the foundation of values and moral norms. Its public and political relevance is waning, as the all-encompassing nature of the global social order continues to erode cultural and social diversity (Yanitsky, 2017). In our rapidly evolving, science- and technology-driven world, the relevance of the Humanities is more critical than ever. They offer a

necessary balance and perspective in contextualising scientific knowledge. Moreover, the Humanities enhance our global outlook and foster creative and critical thinking skills, broadening our intellectual foundation. They also equip us to articulate and communicate scientific and technological ideas clearly and effectively (Yanitsky, 2017).

However, the long-standing prestige and relevance of the humanities has been increasingly undermined and met with disregard. In recent years, the field has faced a precarious position within the higher education and research landscapes of the United Kingdom, the United States and especially across Africa (Rosario, 2019). There is growing evidence of how universities have treated humanities disciplines with a lack of seriousness and respect (Oyeweso, 2010). Subjects such as languages, cultures, literature, philosophy, religion, and history are perceived by some universities as irrelevant discipline. This trend appears to be driven by efforts to elevate the status of other disciplines, particularly in science and technology. This at the expense of the Humanities, which are frequently perceived as less critical to national development priorities.

Meanwhile, within the Islamic intellectual tradition, the humanities have historically played a foundational role in shaping moral, spiritual, and socio-economic life. Classical Islamic scholarship integrated the study of ethics (*akhlāq*), jurisprudence (*fiqh*), theology (*kalām*), and literature (*adāb*) as vital components of communal well-being and governance. However, from an Islamic standpoint, knowledge (*ʿilm*) is not limited to technical sciences but encompasses a comprehensive understanding of human existence, ethics, and society (Al-Attas, 1980). The contemporary neglect of the humanities in favour of technical and professional disciplines poses a serious concern for sustainable development in contemporary societies (Nasr, 1996). This paper examines the pivotal role of humanistic disciplines, including philosophy, ethics, literature, religious studies, and history, in promoting societal development.

However, Islamic tradition offers a more holistic vision of prosperity (*falāh*) that emphasises material well-being, ethical conduct, social harmony, and spiritual fulfillment (Chapra, 2008). Accordingly, humanistic education is not an optional luxury but an indispensable foundation for balanced progress in both individual and collective life. The paper proceeds by examining the historical significance of humanistic knowledge in Islamic civilisation, the critical role the humanities play in modern socioeconomic development, challenges confronting contemporary societies, and strategies for integrating humanistic disciplines into sustainable development policies.

Statement of the Problem

Contemporary development paradigms in many African contexts prioritise economic growth and technological advancement while neglecting ethical, cultural, and human-centred dimensions of development (Sen, 1999; Nussbaum, 2011). This has contributed to persistent challenges such as unemployment, corruption, moral decline, and weak institutional structures (Oyeweso, 2010; Rosario, 2019). This marginalisation from Islamic perspective, contradicts an epistemology that integrates material progress with ethical responsibility and conceives knowledge (*ʿilm*) as purposive and humanistic, aimed at holistic well-being (*falāh*) (Al-Attas, 1980; Chapra, 2008). Existing development theories, particularly the Human Capabilities Approach, emphasise human well-being but often lack integration with religious and ethical frameworks, especially in Muslim societies. Furthermore, there is limited scholarly work that systematically integrates Islamic humanistic knowledge with modern development theories. This gap is particularly evident in Nigeria, where faith-based values significantly influence social and economic life. This study addresses this gap by proposing an integrated framework that combines humanistic knowledge and Islamic ethics that can foster socioeconomic development.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on an integrated theoretical framework that draws from the Human Capabilities Approach and Islamic Ethical Theory. Together, these frameworks provide a holistic lens for understanding development as both an expansion of human potential and a moral–ethical process oriented toward justice, dignity, and collective well-being of people.

The Human Capabilities Approach: The Human Capabilities Approach, developed principally by Amartya Sen and further expanded by Martha Nussbaum, reconceptualises development beyond income, growth and material accumulation. Development is defined as the expansion of people's substantive freedoms—the real opportunities individuals have to be and to do what they value (Sen, 1999). These capabilities include, but are not limited to, education, meaningful work, participation in civic life, ethical reasoning, and social affiliation. Central to this approach is the distinction between “resources and capabilities”. While resources such as education or income are important, what ultimately matters, is how individuals can convert them into valued ways of living.

Nussbaum (2011) further systematises this framework by identifying core human capabilities, including practical reason, affiliation, moral imagination, and control over one's environment—dimensions closely aligned with the aims of humanistic education. In the context of this study, the Human Capabilities Approach provides a normative foundation for arguing that the humanities are not merely complementary to development but are essential in cultivating critical thinking, ethical judgement, social responsibility, and civic engagement. These capabilities directly influence livelihood quality, leadership effectiveness, and social cohesion, thereby linking humanistic knowledge to socioeconomic outcomes.

Islamic Ethical Theory: Islamic Ethical Theory complements and deepens the capabilities framework by grounding human development within a moral ontology derived from the Qur'ān, Sunnah, and classical Islamic scholarship. Islamic ethics is rooted in the concepts of *tawhīd* (unity of God), *khilāfah* (human stewardship), ‘*adl* (justice), *amānah* (trust), and *falāh* (success). Human beings are viewed as moral agents responsible for nurturing both material resources and ethical values in society (Chapra, 2008). Classical scholars such as Al-Ghazālī, Al-Farābī, and Ibn Khaldūn emphasised that knowledge without ethics leads to social corruption (*fasād*), while ethics without knowledge results in stagnation. Al-Ghazālī's integration of spiritual, moral, and social education underscores the role of humanistic disciplines in refining character (*tahdhīb al-akhlāq*) and sustaining social order (Al-Ghazālī). Ibn Khaldūn's theory of *aṣabiyyah* highlights how moral cohesion and intellectual culture underpin economic productivity and civilisational endurance (Ibn Khaldūn, 1967).

From this perspective, humanistic knowledge—ethics, history, philosophy, religious studies, and literature—is indispensable for shaping individuals capable of ethical leadership, social responsibility, and productive livelihoods. Islamic Ethical Theory thus reframes development as a value-laden process aimed at achieving justice, dignity, and collective prosperity rather than mere economic efficiency. Therefore, by integrating the Human Capabilities Approach with Islamic Ethical Theory, this study advances a framework in which development is understood as the cultivation of ethically grounded capabilities through humanistic knowledge. The new humanities, when informed by Islamic ethics, serve as instruments for expanding human freedoms while ensuring moral accountability, thereby linking education, livelihoods, and sustainable socioeconomic development in a coherent and culturally resonant manner.

Convergence and Complementarity of the Human Capabilities Approach and Islamic Ethical Theory: While Human Capabilities Approach and Islamic Ethical Theory emerge from distinct intellectual traditions, they converge significantly in their understanding of development as a multidimensional and value-laden process. The Human Capabilities Approach emphasises the expansion of human freedom and opportunities (Sen, 1999; Nussbaum, 2011), whereas, Islamic Ethical Theory grounds these freedoms within a moral and spiritual framework oriented toward justice (*‘adl*), human responsibility (*khilāfah*), and ultimate well-being (*falāh*). The complementarity between the two frameworks lies in their shared concern for human dignity, social justice, and holistic well-being. However, Islamic Ethical Theory extends the capabilities framework by embedding moral accountability and divine purpose into human development. While Sen's model remains largely secular and choice-based, Islamic ethics introduces normative constraints that ensure that human freedoms are exercised within ethical boundaries.

Comparative Integration of Frameworks

Dimension	Human capabilities Approach	Islamic Ethical Theory	Integrated Insight
Core Focus	Expansion of freedoms	Moral responsibility and divine purpose	Ethical capability expansion
Human Agency	Individual choice and freedom	Accountable stewardship (<i>khilāfah</i>)	Responsible agency
Development Goal	Well-being and quality of life	<i>Falāh</i> (holistic success)	Balanced material and spiritual development
Ethics	Implicit/secondary	Central and foundational	Ethics-driven development
Social Justice	Equity and inclusion	Justice (<i>‘adl</i>) and social Welfare	Normative and social justice

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, conceptual, and interpretive research design aimed at examining the relationship between humanistic knowledge and socioeconomic development within an Islamic ethical framework. The research is primarily theoretical, focusing on the synthesis and critical evaluation of existing literature rather than empirical data collection. The study employs **conceptual analysis** to interrogate key constructs such as human capabilities, *falāh* (holistic well-being), ethical agency, and human dignity. Foundational texts by Sen (1999), Nussbaum (2011), Al-Attas (1980), and Chapra (2008) were purposively selected due to their significant contributions to development theory and Islamic epistemology. Selection criteria included relevance to human development, ethical reasoning, and applicability to contemporary socioeconomic challenges.

In addition, the study utilises **documentary and textual analysis**, drawing from primary Islamic sources such as the Qur’ān and Hadīth, as well as classical works by Al-Ghazālī and Ibn Khaldūn. These sources were selected to provide normative and historical grounding for the role of humanistic knowledge in societal development. To enhance contextual relevance, the study incorporates **case-based illustrations from Nigeria**, including Islamic educational institutions, faith-based organisations, and community development initiatives. These cases were selected based on their demonstrable integration of ethical values, education, and livelihood practices. While not statistically generalisable, they serve as analytical examples that illustrate how theoretical principles operate in real-world contexts (Yin, 2018).

Data analysis follows a **thematic approach**, focusing on four core themes: ethical formation, capability expansion, livelihood sustainability, and social cohesion. These themes were derived inductively from the literature and aligned with the study's integrated theoretical framework. This study is interpretive in nature and

acknowledges certain limitations. First, its reliance on secondary data limits empirical generalisation. Second, the focus on Islamic perspectives may not fully capture pluralistic contexts. However, the study provides valuable theoretical insights and lays the groundwork for future empirical investigations.

Humanistic Knowledge in Islamic Thought

Humanistic knowledge occupies a central position in Islamic intellectual history. Classical scholars such as Al-Farābī (d. 950) and Al-Ghazālī (d.111) emphasised the integration of religious science and rational philosophy. Al-Farābī, known as the "Second Teacher" after Aristotle, provides a profound philosophical foundation for humanistic inquiry. His framework focuses on seeking of knowledge and human excellence through critical thinking, rational inquiry, and intellectual growth. He also emphasises developing moral character and working together towards the common good. (Siddiqui, Memon & Mugberi, 2024). Al-Farabi's notion of the "virtuous city" (*al-Madīnah al-fadīlah*) further underscore the need for ethical leadership grounded in philosophical understanding and communal values. This philosophical vision resonates with the new humanities, which emphasises interdisciplinarity, addressing global challenges through collective action and prioritising dignity, justice and compassion.

Al-Farābī's ideas remain pertinent today, offering insights into prioritising intellectual virtue over ambition or gain, cultivating critical thinking, empathy and civic engagement, and fostering shared values and community trust. The Qur'ān itself encourages reflection (*tafakkur*), reasoning (*ta'aqqul*), and seeking knowledge (*'ilm*) in various domains of human experience (Sardar, 2006). For instance, in Suratul-'Alaq, *ayāh* 1-5, Allāh commands Prophet Muhammad (ṢAW) to "read" and "learn," underscoring the connection between knowledge and divine revelation. This intellectual tradition underlines the idea that humanistic knowledge,

which involves philosophy, history, religion, ethics, and literature, is critical for understanding both the natural and metaphysical worlds.

Islamic civilisation, from the Golden Age of Baghdad to the intellectual centres in Andalusia and Cairo, has been a cradle for the development of humanistic knowledge. Scholars like Al-Ghazālī (d. 111) and Ibn Khaldūn (d. 1406) were not only theologians but also pioneers in Sociology, Philosophy, and Psychology, laying the foundation for multidisciplinary approaches to understanding humanity. Al-Ghazālī, in his book, *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din*, emphasises the inseparability of spiritual and ethical education from societal well-being, while Ibn Khaldūn in *Muqaddimah* provides a sociological framework for understanding the rise and fall of civilisations based on moral and cultural capital. They argued that knowledge and wisdom were integral to the prosperity of societies, influencing both an individual's character and the broader social and political structure (Said, 2003). The classical Islamic approach to knowledge embraced a synthesis between reason (*'aql*) and revelation (*wahy*), a distinctive characteristic of the Islamic intellectual tradition. Humanistic disciplines were seen as essential in cultivating the virtues necessary for a just and prosperous society. The *'Ilm al-Mi'yar* (science of standards), for example, is a framework for integrating knowledge and ethics, where humanistic knowledge serves to enhance both personal and collective well-being.

Roles of Humanities in Socioeconomic Development

Humanistic disciplines are vital for sustainable development by focusing on human well-being beyond economic metrics, as emphasised by Amartya Sen. Sen's capability approach defines development as the expansion of people's capabilities and real freedoms to lead lives they value, encompassing social justice and human potential. By cultivating critical thinking, empathy, and social responsibility, humanistic fields equip individuals with the values

and skills essential for creating a more just and sustainable world, rather than accumulating wealth (Thomas, 2016). In this regard, the humanities, including literature, religion, ethics, and history, serve as vehicles for cultivating empathy, critical thinking, and ethical leadership, all of which are essential for addressing the multifaceted challenges of contemporary development.

Islamic teachings also emphasises the need for a balanced approach to material and spiritual development. The Qur'ān and Hadīth are replete with teachings on the importance of justice, charity, and social welfare, which are integral to a just economic system (Chapra, 2008). This balance focuses on both attaining divine satisfaction and recognising the needs of all living beings, fostering a just and prosperous life in this world and success in the hereafter. The Islamic vision of development, rooted in the principles of *Maqāsid al-Sharī'ah* (objectives of Islamic law), focuses on promoting human dignity, social justice, and economic equity. This vision aligns with the broader goals of sustainable development, where the economic and material needs of individuals are met while ensuring that ethical principles and social values guide decision-making processes (Kamali, 2008). Similarly, the majority of Muslim academics are of the opinion that in Islam, the basic goal of development is to create an environment that enables people to enjoy spiritual, moral and socio-economic well-being in this world and success in the Hereafter. They refer to this conception of well-being as *falāh* (prosperity). The implication of this is that such an environment can only be created in societies that work to remove sources of human deprivation in multiple dimensions. This is contrary to the prevailing view of development focused on economic growth alone (Khan, 1995).

Additionally, in the Muslim world, historical examples such as the *waqf* (endowment) system, which funded education, hospitals, and social welfare programmes demonstrate how humanistic knowledge was historically integrated into economic and social systems to foster public welfare. (Alam et al., 2018). In other words, waqf

(endowment) system is a prime example of integrating humanistic values into economic and social structures. It established non-profit institutions that funded public goods like schools, hospitals, and social welfare programmes, thereby fostering community well-being. By dedicating assets as acts of assisting less privileged, *waqf* serves as form of relief and sustainability of essential services, supporting societal development and the common good beyond the self-interest of private individuals or state power (Muhammad et al., 2020).

In addition, Madrasah systems do integrate religious and secular education to provide a holistic upbringing, fostering spiritual, moral, and intellectual development necessary for social and economic growth (Sri Maryati et al., 2023). By integrating modern knowledge and life skills with traditional Islamic teachings, madrasahs equip students to navigate a complex world while adhering to Islamic ethics, thus promoting well-rounded individuals prepared to contribute positively to their communities and society at large. Madrasah also focus on the **spiritual and moral development of students through character formation by educating students in Islamic values such as honesty, justice and mutual respect, which are foundational to personal integrity** (Umar & Adamu, 2024). Similarly, madrasah emphasises intellectual and practical skills by providing students with essential scientific, technical and academic competencies, ensuring they are prepared for global challenges (Mohd Zuraini et al., 2025). Their core principle, therefore, is to harmonise spiritual nurturing with intellectual growth, bridging the gap between traditional Islamic teachings and modern educational practices.

Similarly, Madrasah, Islamic organisation and Zakat and Sadaqah Foundation also contribute to character building and citizenship. They built individuals to be of strong character, with the integrity and competencies to make positive social changes and engage constructively with contemporary societal issues (Sri Maryati et al.,

2023). Through integrating secular subjects and modern skills, these Islamic bodies contribute to the economic readiness of humanity by ensuring their alumni possess the relevant competencies for the workforce, allowing them to contribute to economic development and global competitiveness. Below are some of the cases of these bodies' activities in Nigeria:

Faith-Based Peacebuilding Initiatives: Islamic organisations in Nigeria, such as the Federation of Muslim Women Association of Nigeria (FOMWAN), among others, have played key roles in women's empowerment for long-term stability. FOMWAN engages in skills acquisition training, promotes micro-enterprise support, cooperative societies and financial literacy. They also empower widows and vulnerable women, believing that if women become economically stable, households and communities will be more resilient. These initiatives demonstrate how ethical teachings can foster social cohesion and stability.

Zakat and Waqf-Based Welfare Systems: Local Zakat and Saqadah Foundations, which has its headquarter at Tafawa Balewa Square, Lagos State, Nigeria, with branches in other states, provide financial assistance, education support, and small business funding. These interventions reduce poverty and promote inclusive development.

Islamic Schools and Vocational Integration: Many Islamic schools in Southwestern Nigeria integrate Qur'anic education with skills-oriented activities, entrepreneurship exposure, and livelihood-relevant training. This model enhances employability while reinforcing ethical values, aligning with both capability expansion and moral development.

Islamic Ethical Framework for Livelihoods

Livelihoods, in Islamic thought, are not seen as separate from ethical considerations. The Qur'an and Hadith stress that the pursuit of wealth should be conducted within the bounds of ethical conduct, honesty, and social responsibility. Prophet Muhammad (AW) stated

that "the best of you are those who are most beneficial to others" (Al-Tabarānī, 2008), a principle that links personal prosperity to communal well-being.

Humanistic knowledge provides the ethical framework that guides individuals in balancing their material pursuits with their moral obligations. In a society that often prioritises profit over people, the Islamic ethical approach to livelihoods emphasises justice (*'adl*), fairness, and social welfare. The concept of *'barakah'* (blessing) in wealth is another important idea in Islam, which suggests that wealth should be used for the benefit of society and should contribute to the greater good (Ansari, 1989). Humanistic knowledge places human values, dignity and rational thought at the centre of its ethical framework, aiming to resolve problems through reason and scientific understanding. It strives to improve society by promoting human rights, social responsibility and fostering a more inclusive and equitable world.

Meanwhile, Islamic ethics principles, such as the prohibition of *riba* (usury) and the encouragement of *zakah* and *sadaqah* (compulsory and voluntary alms-giving), serve as important mechanisms for regulating wealth and ensuring that economic activities benefit society as a whole. The incorporation of humanistic knowledge into economic life enables individuals and institutions to conduct their financial activities in line with Islamic values, thereby promoting ethical and socially responsible wealth creation. (Al-Qaradawi, 2000).

In addition, the Qur'an explicitly links knowledge, ethics, and human responsibility in the daily affairs, thus:

Indeed, Allāh commands justice (*'adl*), excellence, and giving to relatives. And He forbids immorality, and injustice, and oppression. He advises you, so that you may take heed (Qur'an 16:90).

This *āyah* (verse) establishes justice as a foundational principle of social organisation. Similarly, Allāh warns against taking another people's property by force or deception:

And do not consume one another's wealth by unjust means, nor offer it as bribes to the officials in order to consume part of other people's wealth illicitly, while you know (Qur'ān 2:188).

The above *āyah* underscores ethical economic conduct, as Allāh ties economic behaviour to morality. Hence, wealth should circulate through honest work, trade, gifts, and charity, not through exploitation. Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) also stated: “*The best of people are those who are most beneficial to others*” (Al-Tabarānī, 2008). This hadith ties personal excellence to social impact; it pushes people from self-focus to community-focus. In other words, the best person is one whose presence makes life easier, safer, or better for others, even in small ways. These sources collectively demonstrate that knowledge must be ethically guided to produce meaningful societal outcomes.

Integrating Humanistic Knowledge into Development Policies

To achieve meaningful socioeconomic development, policymakers should recognise that development is not merely about economic growth but also includes cultural, ethical, and spiritual dimensions (Nasr, 1996). Educational reforms should integrate the humanities alongside science and technology disciplines to produce well-rounded leaders who are capable of addressing both the material and moral challenges of modern life. This holistic approach to education will not only foster economic prosperity but also contribute to the development of ethical, compassionate, and socially responsible citizens.

Contemporary Muslim scholars such as Ismail Al-Faruqi and Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas have sought to revive the Islamic

humanistic tradition through the Islamisation of knowledge, a process that involves reintegrating Islamic values and ethical principles into all fields of study, including the humanities. By incorporating Islamic ethics into educational curricula, policymakers can help cultivate a generation of leaders who are both skilled in their professions and grounded in Islamic moral teachings. They argue that the splitting of religious and secular knowledge systems has weakened the moral and intellectual integrity of societies. Al-Faruqi (1982) advocated for a unified curriculum that integrates ethical and spiritual values into all fields of learning, thereby aligning education with the *maqāsid al-sharī'ah* (objectives of Islamic law), which aim at the preservation of faith, life, intellect, progeny, and wealth.

In practice, this means promoting interdisciplinary studies that examines Islamic philosophy, ethics, history, and social sciences with technical fields like engineering, economics, and medicine. Such an approach will ensure that the next generation of leaders is not only capable of solving practical problems but also equipped to make decisions that contribute to the well-being of members of society.

Challenges in Humanistic Knowledge in Contemporary Societies

Despite the historical emphasis on humanistic knowledge, contemporary societies face significant challenges in integrating STEM and Humanistic disciplines into their development agendas. The rapid rise of technical education and the dominance of neoliberal economic policies have led to marginalisation of the humanities. This trend is particularly concerning because it overlooks the role of ethics, social responsibility, religion and cultural values in promoting sustainable development (UNESCO, 2020).

Today, one of the key challenges facing our contemporary societies is the prevalence of materialism and individualism, which often leads to social fragmentation and inequality. The neglect of humanistic education in favour of purely technical or vocational training can result in the development of professionals who are

skilled in their respective fields but lack the ethical grounding to contribute meaningfully to society (Bakare & Adeowu, 2024).

Furthermore, the rise of secularism and globalisation has contributed to the erosion of traditional Islamic values that emphasised the integration of knowledge, ethics, and economic life. In many countries, including Nigeria, there is a growing disconnect between academic institutions and the broader societal needs. Universities, for example, often focus on producing graduates with technical skills that are ill-equipped to address the ethical and social challenges facing their communities (Atobatele et al., 2024). To overcome these challenges, societies should recognise the value of humanistic knowledge in shaping both personal character and societal structures. This can be achieved by revitalising Islamic educational systems, integrating humanistic disciplines into sustainable development policies, and fostering a culture of intellectual inquiry that combines faith with reason.

Findings of the Study

The study reveals the following key findings:

Ethical Capabilities Development: Humanistic knowledge enhances moral reasoning and social responsibility. Humanities play a crucial role in developing moral reasoning, empathy, and civic responsibility, which are essential for sustainable livelihoods.

Integration of Islamic ethics strengthens development frameworks: Islamic Ethical Theory provides a moral foundation that complements and deepens the Human Capabilities Approach.

Historical Islamic Institutions Demonstrate Practical Application: Systems such as *waqf* and *madrasah* historically integrated ethics with economic and social development.

Marginalisation of the Humanities Undermines Development: The neglect of humanistic education contributes to corruption, weak leadership, and social fragmentation.

Interdisciplinary Education Improves Socioeconomic Outcomes: Combining humanities with technical disciplines enhances employability, innovation, and ethical leadership.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study align with Sen (1999) and Nussbaum (2011), who argue that development extends beyond economic growth to include human capabilities. However, this study advances their work by demonstrating that Islamic Ethical Theory provides a moral framework necessary for sustaining these capabilities.

The findings also support Chapra's (2008) assertion that development must integrate ethical and spiritual dimensions. Unlike secular frameworks, this study shows that Islamic humanistic traditions offer practical mechanisms, such as *waqf* and faith-based education, for achieving sustainable development.

Furthermore, the study reinforces arguments by Oyeweso (2010) and UNESCO (2020) regarding the consequences of neglecting the humanities. However, it extends these arguments by situating them within an Islamic epistemological framework, thereby providing culturally relevant solutions. The Nigerian context illustrates that development challenges are not merely economic but also ethical. This underscores the importance of integrating humanistic knowledge into education and policy to address systemic issues such as corruption and social inequality.

While secular development models emphasise economic growth and institutional efficiency, they often neglect moral formation. In contrast, the Islamic framework integrates ethical accountability, thereby addressing the root causes of corruption and social inequality in Nigeria. This demonstrates that ethical deficits, not merely economic limitations, constitute a major barrier to development.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that humanistic knowledge, when grounded in Islamic ethical principles, is essential for achieving sustainable socioeconomic development. By integrating the Human

Capabilities Approach with Islamic Ethical Theory, the paper provides a holistic framework that redefines development as both a material and moral process. The findings reveal that the marginalisation of the humanities contributes to ethical deficiencies that undermine economic progress, while their integration fosters responsible leadership, social cohesion, and sustainable livelihoods. This highlights the need to rethink dominant development paradigms that prioritise technical advancement at the expense of human values.

The study contributes to existing scholarship by bridging the gap between secular development theories and faith-based ethical frameworks. It also demonstrates the practical relevance of Islamic humanistic institutions in addressing contemporary challenges. Ultimately, the paper calls for a paradigm shift in which humanistic knowledge is repositioned as a central pillar of development, capable of fostering ethical governance, inclusive growth, and resilient societies.

Limitations and Future Research

This study is limited by its conceptual nature and reliance on secondary sources. Future research should adopt empirical methodologies to measure the impact of humanistic education on employment outcomes, ethical behaviour, and governance in Nigeria. Comparative studies across religious and cultural contexts would also provide broader insights into the role of ethics in development.

Recommendations

Educational Policy Reform: The Nigerian Ministry of Education should mandate the inclusion of ethics and humanities courses in all tertiary STEM programmes through curriculum reform policies within a 3-to-5-year implementation framework.

Interdisciplinary Curriculum Development: The Nigerian Ministry of Education should encourage universities to design programmes combining Islamic studies, entrepreneurship, and technology to enhance employability and ethical business practices.

Revitalisation of Islamic Institutions: The Nigerian government should strengthen traditional systems such as *waqf* to support education, healthcare, and poverty alleviation.

Ethical Leadership Training: The Islamic Institutions in Nigeria should implement training programmes focused on ethical decision-making rooted in Islamic principles.

Policy Engagement with Faith-Based Organisations: Governments should collaborate with Islamic organisations in development planning, particularly in social welfare and peacebuilding.

References

- Al-Attas, S. M. N. (1980). *The concept of education in Islam*. Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilisation.
- Al-Farabi. (1985). *The virtuous city* (R. Walzer, Trans.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Al-Faruqi, I. R. (1982). *Islamization of knowledge: General principles and work plan*. Herndon, Virginia: International Institute of Islamic Thought.

- Al-Ghazâlî. (1978). *I yâ ulûm al-dîn* (Revival of Religious Sciences). Lahore: Sind Sagar Academy.
- Al-Qaradawi, Y. (2000). *The lawful and the prohibited in Islam*. American Trust Publications.
- Al-Tabarânî. (2008). *Al-Mu jam al-Awsat* (Vol. 6, Hadîth No. 5787; N. Al-Khattab, Trans.). Darussalam.
- Alam, M. M., Shahriar, S. M., Said, J., & Elahi, M. M. (2018). Waqf as a tool for rendering social welfare services in the social entrepreneurship context. *Global Journal Al-Thaqafah* (Special Issue), 87–98. <http://www.gjat.my/gjat2018si/SI2018-06.pdf>
- Ansari, A. (1989). Islamic ethics: Concept and prospect. *The American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences*, 6(1), 81–91. DOI <https://doi.org/10.35632/ajis.v6i1.2834>
- Atobatele, M. A., Zubair, S. S., & Odeniyi, I. K. (2024). Islamic ethics as paradigm for social harmony in Nigeria. *RUMFA Journal of Arts*, 3(1), 196–206.
- Bakare, M. I., & Adeowu, A. W. (2024). Challenges of 21st-century education: The youth and social studies curriculum in Nigeria. *Journal of African Social Studies*, 5 (1), 54 – 62. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/388844017>
- Bowen, G. A. (2009). Document analysis as a qualitative research method. *Qualitative Research Journal*, 9(2), 27–40. <https://doi.org/10.3316/ORJ0902027>
- Chapra, M. U. (2008). *The Islamic vision of development in the light of maqâ id al-sharî ah*. International Institute of Islamic Thought.
- Gerring, J. (2001). *Social science methodology: A criterial framework*. Cambridge University Press.
- Ibn Khaldûn. (1967). *The Muqaddimah: An introduction to history* (F. Rosenthal, Trans.). Princeton University Press.
- Kamali, M. H. (2008). *Principles of Islamic jurisprudence*. Cambridge, UK: Islamic Texts Society.

- Khan, M. A. M. (1995). The philosophical foundations of Islamic political economy. *The American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences*, 13 (3), 389–400. <https://doi.org/10.35632/ajis.v13i3.2300>
- Mohd Zuraini, N. S., Embong, R., Mohamad Yusoff, Z. J., Omar, M. C., & Subaidi. (2025). Holistic management of Islamic education in the 21st century. *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science*, 9 (7), 5813 – 5824. <https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2025.907000468>
- Nasr, S. H. (1996). *Religion and the order of nature*. Oxford University Press.
- Nussbaum, M. C. (2011). *Creating capabilities: The human development approach*. Harvard University Press.
- Oyeweso, S. (2010). The challenges of humanities education in Nigeria. In *Proceedings of the ICERI2010 Conference* (pp. 6603). Madrid, Spain. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/287294546>
- Ramesh, S. (2023). The illuminating significance of humanities in an evolving world. *Journal of Humanities Music and Dance*, 4(41), 1-6. DOI:10.55529/jhmd.41.1.6
- Rosario, C. C. (2019). The place of the humanities in today's knowledge society. *Palgrave Communications*, 5, Article 38.
- Said, E. (2003). *Humanism and Islam: A global perspective*. HarperCollins.
- Sardar, Z. (2006). *Islamic futures: The shape of ideas to come*. Mansell Publishing.
- Sen, A. (1999). *Development as freedom*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Siddiqui, A., Memon, K. S. & Mugberi, N. A. (2024). Political theories and Islamic ideas of Al-Farabi for the state and government: A critical analysis. *Journal of Law, Social and Management Sciences*, 3(1), 89–94. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/382822662>

- Sri Maryati, L., Lestari, L., & Samiha, Y. T. (2023). Madrasah as an institution of Islamic education and social change. *Jurnal Konseling Pendidikan Islam*, 4 (2), 317–326. <https://doi.org/10.32806/jkpi.v4i2.11>
- Sutriwala, S., Kushwaha, J., & Majagaonkar, S. (2023). Contribution of humanities and social sciences to a transforming life and society. *Journal of Emerging Technology and Innovative Research*, 10(6), 238–241. www.jetir.org
- Thomas, L. J. (2016). Amartya Sen's capabilities approach. *Journal of Communication*, 66 (5), 789–810. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcom.12252>
- Umar, A. M., & Adamu, T. I. (2024). Islamic education and its value. *Bulletin of Islamic Research*, 2 (4), 725–744. <https://doi.org/10.69526/bir.v2i4.165>
- UNESCO. (2020). *Humanistic futures of learning*. UNESCO.
- Yanitsky, O. N. (2017). Current globalisation: A challenge for the humanities. *Advances in Social Sciences Research Journal*, 4(12), 131-140. DOI:10.14738/assrj.412.3370
- Yin, R. K. (2018). *Case study research and applications* (6th ed.). Sage.