

Human Nature as the Ontological Foundation of Islamic Education: Insights from Al-Farabi's Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the nature of human beings from the perspective of Al-Farabi's philosophy and its relevance to the development of contemporary Islamic educational philosophy. The research focuses on the concept of human beings as rational creatures (al-hayawan al-nathiq), the relationship between intellect and soul, human perfection (al-kamal), and the educational objective of attaining ultimate happiness (al-sa'adah). This study employs a qualitative approach through library research using a philosophical-conceptual analysis framework. The data sources consist of Al-Farabi's primary works, including Ara' Ahl al-Madinah al-Fadilah, Tahsil al-Sa'adah, and Risalah fi al-'Aql, as well as relevant secondary literature. Data analysis was conducted through qualitative content analysis and philosophical hermeneutics to interpret and reconstruct Al-Farabi's conception of human nature. The findings demonstrate that Al-Farabi views human beings as multidimensional entities possessing intellectual, moral, spiritual, and social potentials that require harmonious development through education. Human perfection is not determined solely by rational capacity but also by the integration of intellect, soul, and moral virtues in the pursuit of al-sa'adah. Furthermore, Al-Farabi's philosophical conception of humanity remains relevant to contemporary educational paradigms, including humanistic education, human flourishing, character education, and holistic education, particularly in addressing the challenges of educational dehumanization, digital technological transformation, and artificial intelligence. Therefore, Al-Farabi's philosophy of humanity contributes significantly to the development of Islamic education oriented toward the formation of knowledgeable, virtuous, spiritually aware, and socially responsible human beings.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The discourse on the nature of the human being constitutes the fundamental cornerstone of every philosophy of education (Alfi Syahrin & Adiba Maulidiyah, 2023). The way an educational

system conceptualizes human nature determines its educational aims, curricular orientation, pedagogical strategies, and the overall paradigm for learner development. Within the framework of Islamic education, the human being is not merely understood as a biological entity (*al-bashar*), but rather as an integrated spiritual, intellectual, moral, and social being entrusted with the dual vocation of serving as both a servant of God (*'abd Allah*) and His vicegerent on earth (*khalifat Allah fi al-ard*).

Consequently, the ultimate objective of Islamic education is the holistic cultivation of all human potentials to attain human perfection (*al-insan al-kamil*). However, contemporary educational developments increasingly privilege cognitive achievement and technical competencies over the cultivation of metaphysical, ethical, and spiritual dimensions of human existence (Nurdin et al., 2025). As a result, education has gradually been reduced to a process of knowledge transmission and economic skill acquisition, while its more profound humanistic purposes have become progressively marginalized. This tendency has become even more pronounced in the era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution and Society 5.0, where education is shaped by the dominance of instrumental rationality, digital transformation, artificial intelligence, and the pervasive logic of global capitalism.

Numerous indicators demonstrate that advances in science and technology have not necessarily been accompanied by corresponding improvements in moral integrity. Ethical crises, educational dehumanization, growing individualism, declining social empathy, intolerance, and the erosion of moral character have emerged as persistent challenges confronting educational institutions worldwide, including those operating within Islamic educational contexts (Maulidiyah, 2025). These developments reveal a widening gap between intellectual advancement and moral-spiritual maturity, thereby underscoring the urgent need to reconstruct an educational paradigm that restores the human being as the central focus of holistic development.

In this regard, the philosophy of Islamic education offers an alternative paradigm by conceiving the human being as an integrated unity of body, soul, intellect, and spirit. Among classical Muslim philosophers, Al-Farabi developed one of the most systematic philosophical constructions of human nature (Maulidiyah, 2023). Through his synthesis of Greek philosophical traditions and Islamic intellectual heritage, Al-Farabi formulated a comprehensive conception of humanity grounded in the hierarchy of existence, the theory of the soul, the functions of the intellect, and the pursuit of ultimate happiness (*al-sa'adah*) as the highest end of human life.

From Al-Farabi's perspective, education is not merely the transmission of knowledge but a transformative process of perfecting the soul through the actualization of intellectual and moral capacities, enabling individuals to attain genuine happiness while simultaneously contributing to the realization of the virtuous society (*al-madinah al-fadilah*). This conception demonstrates that education encompasses inseparable ontological, epistemological, and axiological dimensions (Maulidiyah et al., 2022). Although Al-Farabi's intellectual legacy has received considerable scholarly attention within Islamic philosophy, existing studies have predominantly concentrated on his political philosophy, the concept of the virtuous state, logic, metaphysics, or the theory of emanation.

Investigations specifically addressing Al-Farabi's conception of human nature generally remain descriptive and philosophical in orientation, without comprehensively integrating his anthropological framework into the paradigm of contemporary Islamic education. Likewise, previous research has tended to examine concepts such as intellect, soul, or happiness in isolation, without constructing a coherent conceptual relationship between Al-Farabi's philosophical anthropology and the aims, processes, and educational orientation of Islamic education (Maulidiyah et al., 2025).

Moreover, discussions concerning the nature of the human being in Islamic educational philosophy have been more extensively informed by the works of Al-Ghazali, Ibn Sina, Ibn Khaldun, and Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, resulting in the relative underrepresentation of Al-Farabi's contribution to the development of an anthropological foundation for Islamic education. These research gaps indicate the necessity of a study that not only explicates Al-Farabi's conception of human nature but also reconstructs its implications for the philosophy of Islamic education (Asman et al., 2025).

Such a reconstruction is particularly significant because contemporary educational paradigms require a robust philosophical foundation capable of integrating intellectual, spiritual, moral, and social development within a coherent holistic framework. Accordingly, Al-Farabi's thought should not be regarded merely as a historical intellectual legacy but rather as a living conceptual resource capable of addressing the educational challenges of the twenty-first century, characterized by crises of meaning, educational dehumanization, and value disorientation (Nasir et al., 2023). This study offers a novel perspective by examining Al-Farabi's conception of human nature as the ontological foundation of Islamic education.

Unlike previous studies that primarily emphasize Al-Farabi's general philosophy or political theory, this research develops an integrative synthesis of philosophical anthropology, the theory of the soul, the epistemology of intellect, and the objectives of Islamic education to construct a more comprehensive conceptual framework for the formation of the ideal human being. Such an approach is expected to enrich the discourse on the philosophy of Islamic education while providing a theoretical foundation for developing an educational paradigm that is simultaneously humanistic, transcendental, and oriented toward nurturing individuals who possess intellectual excellence, moral integrity, and the capacity to fulfill their responsibility as God's vicegerents on earth (Rafliyanto, 2025). Based on these considerations, this study aims to critically analyze the nature of the human being from the perspective of Al-Farabi's philosophy and to examine its relevance for the construction of the philosophy of Islamic education.

2. METHODS

This study employed a qualitative research approach using a library research design grounded in philosophical conceptual inquiry to reconstruct Al-Farabi's conception of human nature and examine its relevance to the philosophy of Islamic education. The primary data consisted of Al-Farabi's authoritative works, including *Ara' Ahl al-Madinah al-Fadilah*, *Tahsil al-Sa'adah*, *Risalah fi al-'Aql*, and *Kitab al-Siyasah al-Madaniyyah*. These primary sources were complemented by secondary materials comprising peer reviewed journal articles, scholarly books, and recent studies on Islamic philosophy, philosophical anthropology, and Islamic education. Data were collected through systematic document analysis by identifying, selecting, classifying, and organizing relevant literature according to its academic credibility, authenticity, and conceptual relevance. The data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis integrated with a philosophical hermeneutic approach to identify, interpret, and reconstruct Al-Farabi's key concepts concerning human nature, the soul, intellect, happiness (*al-sa'adah*), and the aims of education. The analytical process involved data reduction, thematic categorization, philosophical interpretation, and conceptual synthesis, resulting in a comprehensive theoretical framework of Al-Farabi's educational anthropology. To ensure the trustworthiness and conceptual rigor of the findings, source triangulation was employed by comparing Al-Farabi's original texts with interpretations by both classical and contemporary scholars (Zahira Jannataini et al., 2025). This strategy enhanced the conceptual validity of the study and strengthened its contribution to the development of an integrative, humanistic, and

transcendental paradigm of Islamic educational philosophy capable of addressing the challenges of contemporary education.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. The Concept of Human Nature in Al-Farabi's Philosophical Perspective

Al-Farabi conceptualizes the human being as a multidimensional entity composed of the body (al-jism) and the soul (al-nafs), which exist in an inseparable and complementary relationship (Aflisia et al., 2021). Human essence, according to Al-Farabi, does not reside in biological existence alone but in the soul's capacity to actualize its intellectual potential toward perfection. Unlike materialistic perspectives that reduce human existence to physical and empirical dimensions, Al-Farabi identifies reason (al-'aql) as the defining characteristic that distinguishes human beings from all other creatures.

This rational faculty enables individuals to transcend instinctive behavior and attain higher levels of intellectual, moral, and spiritual realization. Within Al-Farabi's philosophical anthropology, the soul develops through a hierarchical progression consisting of the vegetative, sensitive, imaginative, and rational faculties, with the rational faculty representing the highest stage of human perfection. Each level contributes to the comprehensive development of the individual, yet genuine human excellence can only be achieved when the rational faculty governs and harmonizes the lower faculties.

Consequently, intellectual development cannot be separated from ethical cultivation, as reason functions most effectively when guided by moral virtues and divine revelation. Human perfection (al-kamal) therefore emerges through the balanced integration of rational inquiry, ethical discipline, and spiritual refinement. This conception implies that every human being possesses innate capacities that can be progressively cultivated through education. Accordingly, education is understood not merely as a process of knowledge transmission but as a transformative endeavor aimed at actualizing the intellectual, moral, and spiritual potentials embedded within human nature. From this perspective, educational success is determined by the extent to which individuals achieve holistic self-perfection rather than simply acquiring cognitive competencies or technical expertise.

3.2. The Role of Intellect and Soul as the Foundation of Islamic Education

Al-Farabi's educational philosophy places the intellect (al-'aql) and the soul (al-nafs) at the center of the educational process, viewing education fundamentally as the perfection of the soul through the cultivation of rational capacities. The intellect functions as the principal instrument for acquiring knowledge and attaining truth, whereas the soul constitutes the locus of moral formation, ethical consciousness, and personal character (Nasri et al., 2024). Consequently, the educational process must nurture both intellectual excellence and moral integrity, ensuring that knowledge contributes to the comprehensive development of the human person rather than serving merely instrumental or utilitarian purposes.

Al-Farabi further explains that intellectual development proceeds through successive stages, beginning with the potential intellect (al-'aql bi al-quwwah), progressing to the actual intellect (al-'aql bi al-fi'l), and culminating in the acquired intellect (al-'aql al-mustafad). This developmental trajectory reflects a dynamic process whereby human cognitive capacities gradually attain perfection through learning, contemplation, and sustained intellectual engagement. However, the realization of these stages cannot be achieved through intellectual instruction alone.

Rather, it requires an educational environment that integrates rigorous intellectual training, ethical habituation, and continuous spiritual cultivation. From this standpoint, Islamic

education cannot be evaluated solely by academic achievement or measurable cognitive outcomes. Its ultimate effectiveness lies in its ability to produce individuals who integrate knowledge, virtue, wisdom, and spiritual awareness into their personal and social lives. Al-Farabi's framework therefore advances a holistic educational paradigm in which intellectual excellence and moral character are mutually reinforcing dimensions of authentic human development.

3.3. The Ultimate Objective of Islamic Education in Al-Farabi's Philosophy: Attaining Al-Sa'adah

For Al-Farabi, the ultimate purpose of education is the attainment of al-sa'adah (true happiness), understood as the highest state of intellectual, moral, and spiritual perfection. Happiness is not equated with material prosperity, sensory pleasure, or worldly success; rather, it represents the complete realization of the human soul through knowledge, virtue, and proximity to God (Arfan et al., 2024). This conception reflects a teleological understanding of education in which all educational activities are directed toward the fulfillment of humanity's highest existential purpose.

Accordingly, education must facilitate the balanced development of all human capacities, enabling individuals to fulfill their dual responsibility as servants of God ('abd Allah) and His vicegerents on earth (khalifat Allah fi al-ard). Such an educational orientation transcends the narrow objective of preparing individuals for economic productivity or professional competence. Instead, it emphasizes the cultivation of ethical responsibility, spiritual maturity, and social commitment as integral dimensions of human flourishing.

Furthermore, Al-Farabi maintains that the realization of al-sa'adah possesses both individual and collective significance. Individuals who attain intellectual and moral excellence are expected to contribute actively to the establishment of the virtuous society (al-madinah al-fadilah), founded upon justice, wisdom, cooperation, and the common good. Consequently, education serves not only as a means of individual self-perfection but also as a transformative instrument for realizing a morally ordered and socially harmonious civilization.

3.4. Reconstructing Human Nature within Contemporary Islamic Education

The analysis of Al-Farabi's philosophical thought demonstrates that his conception of human nature remains highly relevant to addressing the contemporary challenges confronting Islamic education (Sabarudin et al., 2024). Current educational paradigms are increasingly dominated by technical competencies, measurable learning outcomes, and market-oriented objectives, often at the expense of moral, spiritual, and humanistic development. Such tendencies have contributed to the dehumanization of education, where learners are frequently perceived as economic resources rather than holistic human beings endowed with intellectual, ethical, and spiritual dimensions.

Al-Farabi's philosophical anthropology offers an alternative educational paradigm by advocating the integrated development of intellect, soul, moral character, and social responsibility. Within this framework, human beings are understood as multidimensional entities whose biological, intellectual, ethical, spiritual, and social capacities must be cultivated harmoniously (Tatang Sholahuddin Ma'ruf & Iskandar Mirza, 2025). This holistic perspective provides a robust ontological foundation for reconstructing Islamic educational philosophy capable of responding to contemporary educational challenges without abandoning its transcendental orientation. The findings of this study therefore suggest that Al-Farabi's philosophy should not be regarded merely as a historical intellectual legacy but as a living conceptual framework with enduring relevance for twenty-first-century education.

His educational vision reinforces the necessity of developing learners who possess intellectual excellence, moral integrity, spiritual awareness, social responsibility, and the capacity to engage constructively with scientific and technological advancement while remaining firmly grounded in divine and humanitarian values. Accordingly, Al-Farabi's philosophical anthropology offers a comprehensive theoretical foundation for the development of a humanistic, integrative, and value-oriented paradigm of Islamic education capable of addressing the complex demands of contemporary civilization.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal that Al-Farabi's philosophical conception of humanity is fundamentally grounded in the view that human beings possess an inherent potential to attain perfection (*al-kamal*). Human perfection, according to Al-Farabi, is not determined solely by intellectual capacity but emerges from the harmonious integration of intellect, soul, morality, and spiritual orientation (Memon et al., 2024). Al-Farabi positions human beings as rational creatures (*al-hayawan al-nathiq*) who possess the ability to comprehend reality and direct their existence based on knowledge of truth. Humans are not passive entities shaped entirely by external circumstances; rather, they are active subjects capable of self-development through educational processes.

This perspective demonstrates that Al-Farabi's educational philosophy possesses a strong anthropological foundation, placing human beings at the center of developing their entire spectrum of intellectual, ethical, and spiritual capacities. This conception corresponds with the modern humanistic educational paradigm developed by Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers, which emphasizes that education should facilitate the process of self-actualization through the development of intellectual, emotional, and moral potentials (Edelbay, 2023; Rachman, 2021). However, Al-Farabi's perspective extends beyond modern humanism by introducing a stronger transcendental dimension through the pursuit of ultimate happiness (*al-sa'adah*) and spiritual proximity to God.

While humanistic education primarily emphasizes individual growth and personal fulfillment, Al-Farabi situates human development within a broader metaphysical framework in which intellectual excellence must be integrated with moral virtue and divine orientation. The study further demonstrates that Al-Farabi's philosophical anthropology is closely related to the concept of the civilized human being (*insan adabi*) developed by Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas. Al-Attas argues that the primary objective of Islamic education is to cultivate individuals who recognize their proper position within the order of reality, possess authentic knowledge, and are capable of placing everything according to its appropriate proportion (*adl*).

This perspective aligns with Al-Farabi's argument that the perfected human being is one who harmonizes intellectual capabilities with moral virtues. Knowledge without wisdom and ethical character cannot lead individuals toward genuine perfection. Therefore, education cannot be separated from the cultivation of moral excellence (*fadhilah*) and ethical disposition. These findings provide a critical reflection on contemporary educational paradigms that frequently separate academic intelligence from character formation. In the context of twenty-first-century education, educational institutions should not mere

ly produce technically competent individuals but should cultivate responsible human beings capable of applying knowledge ethically and constructively. Education, therefore, must transcend instrumental objectives and return to its fundamental mission of developing individuals who possess intellectual capability, moral responsibility, and social awareness. Furthermore, the concept of human nature in Al-Farabi's philosophy demonstrates significant relevance to Howard Gardner's

theory of multiple intelligences. Gardner argues that human beings possess diverse forms of intelligence, including logical, interpersonal, intrapersonal, linguistic, and other capacities. This perspective corresponds with Al-Farabi's understanding of the diverse faculties of the human soul, which develop progressively toward higher levels of rationality.

Both perspectives challenge reductionist views of intelligence by emphasizing that human potential encompasses multiple dimensions requiring comprehensive educational development. From this perspective, education should recognize learners as multidimensional individuals whose intellectual, social, emotional, moral, and spiritual potentials require balanced cultivation. The integration of various human capacities reflects the principles of holistic education, which views learners as complete human beings possessing physical, psychological, social, intellectual, and spiritual dimensions.

Thus, Al-Farabi's philosophical anthropology contributes significantly to the development of an Islamic educational paradigm that aims not only to produce intellectually capable individuals but also morally responsible and spiritually mature human beings. The findings also indicate that the concepts of intellect (*al-'aql*) and soul (*al-nafs*) constitute fundamental elements within Al-Farabi's philosophy of humanity. The intellect represents the primary distinguishing characteristic of human beings and serves as the essential instrument through which individuals achieve existential perfection. Al-Farabi conceptualizes intellectual development through three progressive stages: the potential intellect (*al-'aql bi al-quwwah*), the actual intellect (*al-'aql bi al-fi'l*), and the acquired intellect (*al-'aql al-mustafad*).

These stages illustrate that human intellectual capacities are not static but must be cultivated through continuous educational engagement. Within the context of contemporary Islamic education, Al-Farabi's concept of intellect provides a critique of educational systems that prioritize information acquisition while neglecting critical thinking, reflection, and meaningful understanding. For Al-Farabi, intellect is not merely a mechanism for obtaining empirical knowledge but a higher faculty capable of recognizing truth, discerning values, and guiding human beings toward virtuous living.

This perspective demonstrates compatibility with Thomas Lickona's theory of character education, which emphasizes the integration of moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action as essential components of ethical development. In addition to intellect, the concept of the soul (*al-nafs*) occupies a central position because human perfection requires the harmonious development of various faculties, including biological, emotional, imaginative, and rational dimensions. This understanding corresponds with the principles of holistic education, which emphasizes the development of the whole person rather than isolated cognitive achievement.

Therefore, the integration of intellect and soul in Al-Farabi's philosophy provides a conceptual foundation for Islamic education that seeks to produce individuals who are not only knowledgeable but also possess moral depth, emotional maturity, and spiritual awareness. The study further reveals that the ultimate objective of education in Al-Farabi's perspective is closely associated with the attainment of *al-sa'adah* (true happiness) as the highest realization of human perfection. Unlike modern educational perspectives that often evaluate success through economic productivity, professional achievement, or measurable competencies, Al-Farabi understands happiness as a state in which human beings actualize their intellectual potential, cultivate moral virtues, and establish a relationship with the highest reality.

In *Tahsil al-Sa'adah*, Al-Farabi explains that happiness is attained through the integration of knowledge and virtuous action. This conception resonates with Martha Nussbaum's notion of human flourishing, which emphasizes the development of human capabilities necessary for living a dignified life, including intellectual freedom, social empathy, and active participation in communal life. Nevertheless, Al-Farabi's framework extends beyond the capabilities approach by

embedding human flourishing within a metaphysical and spiritual orientation. Education, therefore, is not merely a process of knowledge transmission but a transformative endeavor for character formation and civilization building through the integration of knowledge and ethical action.

The findings also demonstrate that Al-Farabi's conception of human nature provides significant relevance for addressing educational transformations in the era of Society 5.0 and the rapid advancement of Artificial Intelligence (AI). Digital technologies have expanded access to information and enhanced educational possibilities; however, they also raise fundamental questions regarding the distinctive role of human beings within educational processes. Al-Farabi's philosophical anthropology offers the insight that humans cannot be reduced to intellectual performance or technological adaptability alone but must be understood as beings possessing intellectual, ethical, spiritual, and social dimensions.

Accordingly, future educational paradigms should adopt a human-centered approach in which technology functions as a supportive instrument rather than a replacement for human essence. The reconstruction of Al-Farabi's thought emphasizes the necessity of integrating intellectual intelligence, moral responsibility, and spiritual consciousness in developing Islamic education that remains adaptive to contemporary transformations (Didikin & Shumilova, 2025; Mürsepp et al., 2024). Furthermore, the concept of *al-madinah al-fadilah* illustrates that the ideal human being is one who utilizes knowledge for the advancement of collective welfare and the establishment of a virtuous society.

Therefore, Al-Farabi's philosophy of human nature remains highly relevant as a contemporary paradigm for Islamic education that is humanistic, transformative, and capable of bridging classical Islamic intellectual traditions with modern educational challenges and global civilizational developments (Sajjadi, 2026). His philosophical framework provides a comprehensive foundation for reimagining education as a process of cultivating individuals who are intellectually competent, morally virtuous, spiritually grounded, and socially responsible.

4. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the nature of the human being in Al-Farabi's philosophical perspective represents an anthropological conception that views humanity as a rational, spiritual, and moral entity endowed with the potential to attain perfection (*al-kamal*) through the cultivation of intellect, soul, and virtue (*fadhilah*). Within the framework of Islamic education, Al-Farabi's thought emphasizes that education should not be limited to the enhancement of intellectual capacities but must also aim at developing individuals who achieve a harmonious integration of knowledge, ethical character, spirituality, and social responsibility. Al-Farabi's concepts of intellect (*al-'aql*) and soul (*al-nafs*) illustrate that education is fundamentally a process of actualizing the totality of human potential, while the concept of *al-sa'adah* demonstrates that the ultimate purpose of education lies in attaining genuine happiness through intellectual perfection and moral excellence. These findings reveal a strong conceptual connection between Al-Farabi's philosophical anthropology and contemporary educational paradigms, including humanistic education, human flourishing, character education, and holistic education, all of which recognize human beings as the central focus of educational development. In the context of the challenges posed by Society 5.0 and the rapid advancement of artificial intelligence, Al-Farabi's philosophy of humanity provides a significant conceptual framework emphasizing that education must remain oriented toward the formation of the whole person. Education should not merely produce technically competent individuals but should cultivate wise, civilized, ethically responsible, and spiritually grounded human beings capable of utilizing knowledge for the benefit of humanity. Therefore, the

reconstruction of Al-Farabi's philosophical thought contributes significantly to the advancement of contemporary Islamic educational philosophy by offering an integrative, humanistic, and transcendental framework. His conception of human nature provides a philosophical foundation for developing an educational paradigm that seeks to build a civilization characterized not only by intellectual advancement but also by moral consciousness, spiritual depth, and responsible engagement with social realities.

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