

ISLAMIC-BASED SPIRITUAL CAPABILITY AS A CORE INDIVIDUAL COMPETENCY FOR ENHANCING SOCIAL FUNCTIONING: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND IMPLICATIONS

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Abstract: Social functioning is widely regarded as the central objective of social work practice, encompassing the ability of individuals, families, and communities to fulfill their social roles effectively within changing and complex environments. This article proposes a new theoretical construct called Islamic Spiritual Capability, which is presented as a foundational individual competency that provides an internal basis for achieving structured and sustainable social functioning. Through an integrative synthesis of Islamic behavioral theory, the concept of social functioning, and the capability approach, this study develops four dimensions of spiritual capability that can be operationalized within social work practice. These dimensions are further articulated into individual

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competency units that may serve as tools for assessment, professional training, and social intervention. Consequently, Islamic spiritual capability is positioned not only as an indicator of well-being but also as a learnable, measurable, and improvable core competency within a value-based and meaning-oriented framework for social development.

Keywords: Social functioning; Social work; Spiritual capability.

Introduction

Development is essentially a long-term process of cultivating human potential and excellence (Midgley, 2020). Social work plays a significant role in achieving this long-term objective (Adi, 2015). Social work is understood as an expertise, skillset, and profession in humanitarian assistance that is grounded in a body of values, a body of knowledge, and a body of skills acquired through formal education and professional practice experience (Octilia, 2013). In the context of Islamic Social Welfare, social functioning is not measured merely by the fulfillment of needs or the stability of social roles, but by spiritual depth, value maturity, and the capacity to act as an agent of goodness and public benefit (Ghafur, 2011). Functional social workers in Indonesia often face challenges in understanding the complexity of clients' social functioning because many approaches remain partial and technical. Reflective and holistic competencies are therefore needed so that social interventions can generate comprehensive and lasting impacts (Octilia, 2013).

The growing application of strength-based approaches and perspectives has produced many new and productive assumptions. This development has encouraged greater efforts to recognize human strengths and advantages as essential assets for achieving well-being

(Poulin, 2005). Efforts to continuously understand the human being, which serve as a gateway to delivering the best humanitarian services, have also persisted (Nashori, 2010). Consequently, scholars have increasingly explored religious, spiritual, and Islamic perspectives. A number of studies conclude that incorporating spirituality into social services is becoming increasingly important. Social services for older adults in nursing homes, for example, have shown significant effects on their psychosocial conditions, indicating that social interventions should comprehensively consider both psychological and spiritual aspects (Gea, Raharjo, and Kamil Basar, 2023). Another study highlights that financial management practices among PKH beneficiary households require value-based guidance and spiritual capability so that well-being can be achieved sustainably (Fasiha and Alwi, 2023). Thus, Islamic approaches in social work practice deserve serious attention (Notowidagdo, 2016). The integration of Islamic scholarship is also necessary to develop a holistic understanding of human beings as the primary subjects of social work practice (Taufiq, 2006).

However, integrative understanding that involves religious knowledge does not develop instantly. It requires conceptual formulations that can explain in depth what actually drives human behavior (Muslih, 2023) and the internal mechanisms individuals use to construct and shape themselves as whole persons. Alongside contemporary developments, Islamic social work has continued to evolve into a more professional field and is increasingly recognized within national welfare systems (Schimd and Sheikhzadegan, 2022). Islamic social work does not conflict with universal social work values such as social justice, human dignity, and service. Instead, it has the potential to strengthen modern social work ethics and practice (Abdulaziz Albrithen, 2023).

Within the discipline of social welfare, the terminology of social functioning is a key concept (Poulin, 2005). Social functioning has been a foundational concept in social work practice since the early development of the profession. In the classic NASW (1958) definition (Wibhawa, Raharjo, and Santoso, 2019), social work aims to facilitate change in the reciprocal relationship between clients and their environments, placing social functioning at the center of social intervention. As theories and practices have advanced, social functioning is now understood as the ability of individuals, families, and communities to carry out social roles effectively within dynamic environmental contexts (Kodaruddin, Sulastri, and Wibowo, 2020).

Social functioning is a central concept for understanding the uniqueness of social work. It refers to the capabilities of individuals, families, or communities to perform social roles within their surroundings (Raharjo, 2017). Social welfare is generally defined as a condition of well-being, meaning a state in which essential life needs are fulfilled, especially basic needs such as food, clothing, housing, education, and healthcare (Suharto, 2017). However, there remains a lack of studies that explore how individuals should move toward achieving optimal social functioning and what internal forces drive this process.

This article proposes a conceptual framework referred to as spiritual capability. The term capability is inspired by Amartya Sen's capability approach, which focuses on the ability to achieve what one values most (Sunaryo and Hasan, 2024). Spirituality is one of the four major dimensions within the person-in-environment framework, consisting of biological, psychological, social, and spiritual dimensions (Fahrudin, 2018). The term capability itself refers to a set of competencies (Sen, 2025). Competence is defined as a set of abilities required to perform specific activities, built on knowledge, skills, and attitudes (Moeheriono, 2012).

The literature study is a research method carried out by reviewing, examining, and analyzing various written sources relevant to the topic or issue being investigated. This method does not involve direct field data collection but focuses on understanding and synthesizing existing knowledge. The study was conducted by examining a range of works on competence, capability, Islamic social work, and spiritualism from various credible sources.

Discussion

This article presents the theoretical construction and practical implications of spiritual capability for social workers as a guide in supporting the development of individuals and families toward achieving social functioning, which is the primary goal of social work practice (Wibhawa, Raharjo, and Santoso, 2019). Furthermore, this framework opens opportunities for the development of more transformative and spiritually centered assessments and policies.

Social work is defined as a method of social institution designed to assist individuals in preventing or resolving their social problems to restore and enhance their social functioning (Fahrudin, 2014). The Ministry of Social Affairs explains that social work involves assisting problem-solving, empowerment, and efforts to promote social change in the interaction between people and their environment at the levels of individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities to improve their well-being (Pekei, 2019). Social work in the modern world has become an important social institution (Jinchao, 1995 in Fahrudin, 2018). This development aligns with the increasing complexity of social dynamics and the accelerating pace of lifestyle changes (Kasali, 2018). As a result, efforts to ensure that individuals and communities remain on the right path become even more important.

The study of social welfare in its broad sense encompasses various human actions aimed at achieving improved living conditions for individuals, groups, and communities (Notowidagdo, 2016). The social work process is a critical component of social work practice (Raharjo, 2014), with its ultimate goal being the development of social functioning. Social functioning in social work practice is defined as the ability of individuals, families, groups, and communities to meet basic needs, perform social roles, and face life challenges in meaningful ways (Wibhawa, Raharjo, and Santoso, 2019). In the context of Islamic scholarship, however, social functioning is not merely mechanical or administrative. It is rooted in the spiritual depth of the individual as a servant and vicegerent of God (Noorkamilah, 2017).

Social functioning, identified as the primary goal of social work practice (Poulin, 2005), represents a dimension of health and well-being that reflects how individuals interact with their social environment, how the social environment responds to them, how they fulfill their social roles, and how they engage with social institutions (McDowell and Newell, 1966; Froland et al., 1979 in Levin, 2000). As social beings, humans need social intelligence or the ability to build social interactions and carry out social roles effectively. In the Islamic perspective, social intelligence is not limited to interactions with fellow human beings (*habluminannas*), but also encompasses a strong relationship with the Creator in pursuit of His pleasure (Hamid, M., and Mahfuz, 2023).

Allah *Subhanahu wa ta'ala* has provided human beings with all the essential elements needed for survival (Najati, 2010). Therefore, it is appropriate for humans to strive to develop all aspects of their innate potential (Santosa, 2022). This theoretical exploration is built upon Islamic understanding for two main reasons. First, the majority of Indonesia's population is Muslim, totaling 87.08

percent according to the Ministry of Home Affairs, making Islamic values a strong basis for argumentation and motivation in developing social services. Second, Islamic teachings have increasingly been grounded as the fifth school of psychology (Nashori, 2010), making them a more operational tool for analyzing human behavior.

This article is also a continuation of previous research that explored the urgency of objectifying Islamic values in social work themes (Noorkamilah, 2017). This implies the need for alternative sources of knowledge to understand human nature beyond empirical science alone (Hakim, 2016), such as Islamic psychology which examines the human being from a spiritual perspective.

Islam is defined as submission to Allah through obedience to Him, distancing oneself from polytheism, and worshipping Him according to what He has prescribed throughout time (al-Fauzan, 2016). Islam is a religion of fitrah that does not contradict sound human reason (Jawas, 2021). Thus, examining human beings from the Islamic perspective enriches our understanding of humanity itself.

Islam teaches that society holds a vital and inseparable position alongside the individual. To maintain the continuity and harmony of social life, Islam introduces the concept of individual responsibility toward society (*takafulul ijtimai*) (Sarbin, 2021), which is closely related to social functioning and how individuals operate effectively within their social environments. This approach draws upon Islamic psychology, particularly the concept of the *ruh* (Rothman, 2025), which explains that the elements shaping human cognition and behavior consist of four major components: the *ruh*, the *aql*, the *qalb*, and the *nafs*. These four components are translated into the main dimensions of spiritual capability, which is positioned as a set of competencies that can be learned, enhanced, and measured (Andina, 2018).

Spiritual capability is therefore conceptualized as a set of competencies. Competence itself is defined as a fundamental characteristic of a person that indicates patterns of thinking, behaving, and acting, as well as the ability to maintain these patterns over a certain period of time (Moeheriono, 2012). Based on this, spiritual capability is formulated as a multidimensional set of competencies that enables individuals to harmonize the dimensions of ruh, aql, qalb, and nafs within the framework of servitude to Allah.

Table 1. Qur'anic Verses that are relevant to the Dimension of Spirituality Capability

Dimension	Description	Relevant Qur'an Verses	Operational Significance
Life orientation to Divine pleasure	Making Allah's pleasure the main goal in all aspects of life	QS. Al-Bayyinah: 8 – <i>"Allah is pleased with them and they are pleased with Him..."</i> At-Taubah: 59 – <i>"If they were pleased with what Allah and His Messenger have given..."</i>	Aligning intentions, actions, and decisions with Divine values
Use of common sense for meaningful decisions	Using reason as a tool of tafakkur, tadabbur, and ijthad	Al-Fajr: 27-28 – <i>"O calm soul, return to your Lord..."</i> QS. An-Nisa: 82 – <i>"Do they not pay attention to the Qur'an?"</i>	Reason as an instrument to understand reality, weigh benefits, and choose the path that is pleasing
Purification of	Cleanse the	QS. Ash-Shams:	Tazkiyatun

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the heart as a vessel of guidance	heart from so it is of spiritual diseases that it is worthy receiving guidance	9-10 — " <i>Blessed is the one who purifies the soul, and how much is the loss of the one who defiles it.</i> " Al-Hadiid: 16 — " <i>Has not the time come for the believers to submit their hearts...</i> "	nafs as a continuous process to open up space for the light of guidance.
Lust control as a positive motivation	Regulating lust urges as a source of positive energy	QS. Al-Baqarah: 164 — " <i>... signs (of Allah's power) for the wise.</i> "	Transformation from <i>nafs ammarah</i> to <i>nafs mutmainnah</i> through spiritual practice and awareness

Sen emphasized that the ability (Sen, 2025) *Capability* human beings for social function can be developed through education, policies, and a supportive environment.

Various social work efforts to encourage individuals and families to achieve their social functioning certainly require new studies and research. A comprehensive understanding of human social functioning is very useful in developing intervention plans and implementing services to clients. (Fahrudin, 2025)

Table 2. Relationships of Spiritual Capabilities and Social Functioning Dimensions

Social Functioning Dimension (Suharto, 2017)	Dimension of Spiritual Capabilities (Spiritual, Mind, Heart and Lust)	Discussion
Meet/respond	"Indeed, the act depends on his	Building the

to their basic needs (income, education and health)	<p><i>intentions."</i> (Hadith of Bukhari Muslim) in (Al-Bugha & Mistu, 2014)</p> <p>Aql Dimensions "Studying knowledge is mandatory for every Muslim, male and female, (Abdat, 2023)</p> <p>Aql Dimensions From Abu Hurairah he said. I have heard the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) say:<i>Indeed, knowledge is only by studying....."</i> (Narrated by Imam Al Khatib Al Baghdadi) (Abdat, 2023)</p>	<p>intention that his personal growth, the effort to get a job so that he does not depend on others is solely to seek pleasure from Allah Subhanahu wa ta'ala. Fully understand that work is dependent on intention.</p> <p>The spiritual capabilities that individuals possess should encourage them to do their best for self-reliance and their families.</p> <p>Through the journey of seeking knowledge, individuals will know what is right and wrong, as well as what is good and true. So this will guide his life to live the right life, so that it has the potential to build the best social functioning.</p> <p>Clear Mind and Mind will encourage individuals to build independence to fulfill</p>
Carry out social roles in accordance with	<p><i>"Whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day, let him say good or be silent. Whoever</i></p>	<p>The optimization of good intellect and thinking will</p>

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their status and duties	<p><i>believes in Allah and the Last Day, let him respect his neighbor. And whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day, let him glorify his guests"</i> (Hadith Bukhari-Muslim)</p> <p><i>"Indeed, Allah loves those who do good(Al Baqarah: 195) in (al-Khalaq, 2016)</i></p>	<p>encourage individuals to behave well towards their neighbors and social environment. This means that individuals will grow into individuals who are able to perform social roles based on their status and duties.</p> <p>Also, the individual's awareness of the love of Allah SWT for those who do good, should encourage individuals to behave well towards others.</p>
Dealing with shocks and pressures	<p><i>"It is amazing the affairs of a believer. Indeed, all his affairs are good for him, and this does not happen to a believer. When he gets joy, he is grateful and that is his good deed. And when he gets distressed, he is patient and that is good for him (HR. Muslim (no.2999)) in (Jawas, 2018)</i></p> <p><i>"Verily, your Lord makes sustenance available to whom He wills and limits (to whom He wills); Indeed, He is All-Knowing, All-Seeing of His servants." (QS. Al-Israa:30) in (Jawas, 2018)</i></p> <p><i>For truly, with every difficulty there is ease; indeed, with every difficulty there is ease. So, when you are free (from the pressure of one job), continue</i></p>	<p>Understanding sustenance will make individuals less sad when tested with shortcomings and less happy when tested with sufficiency. So this appreciation will support the third dimension of its social functioning.</p> <p>Furthermore, the understanding that along with difficulties there is ease, should bring individuals to a new dimension of appreciation of the meaning of life's struggle, which can bring them to a better</p>

(to) another job (Q.S Al- level of social
 Insyirah (94):5-7) functioning

This set of competencies of spiritual capabilities actually also accommodates a power-based perspective, which assumes that every human being has power within him, including spiritual power and nature (Poulin, 2005) (Hanief, Sawaliyah, & Mahwiyah, 2023)

Spiritual capabilities provide an operational framework of skills, dispositions, and awareness that enable individuals to live lives with sincerity, resilience, and meaning-orientation. This framework can be a training guide, an assessment of the condition of service recipients, as well as a vision of a series of social service programs. The biopsychosocial-spiritual approach offers a more comprehensive and integrated perspective on human beings, especially for the helping profession (Fahrudin, 2025)

So here are some recommendations for practice guidance for working with individuals or groups; (1) Guiding the client towards the fulfillment of his social functioning, can be started by strengthening the client's spirituality, his belief in his religious teachings and also his appreciation of the purpose and purpose of creation, (2) The client is guided to be able to harmonize *his spiritual movements, aql, qalb and nafs*, to present a holistic balance and avoid cognitive resonance.

Conclusion

This paper emphasizes that spiritual capability is not merely an additional component within social work practice but a foundational element that enables individuals, families, and communities to achieve complete and meaningful social functioning grounded in their belief systems. Within this perspective, social functioning is understood not only as the administrative ability to carry

out social roles but also as an expression of the harmony between the spirit, reason, heart, and nafs within the broader framework of servitude to Allah.

Modern social work recognizes the critical role of institutions in addressing the complexities of human life. However, approaches that focus solely on technical and structural dimensions are insufficient to meet the spiritual needs of human beings as fitrah-based creations. For this reason, a spiritual approach rooted in Islamic values and spiritual theory offers a deeper, more holistic, and transformative pathway.

By integrating Rothman's framework of *ruh*, *'aql*, *qalb*, and *nafs*, along with the capability and human nature perspectives, spiritual capability can be conceptualized as a multidimensional competency comprising four interrelated dimensions: orientation of life toward Divine pleasure, the use of reason for meaningful decision-making, purification of the heart as a receptacle of guidance, and the regulation of nafs as a source of positive motivation. These dimensions serve as the inner foundation that strengthens an individual's capacity to function socially in ways that are adaptive to changing environments while remaining spiritually resilient.

Given its comprehensive nature, spiritual capability should be considered a new framework for assessment, policy formulation, and professional training in social work. Such an approach offers the potential to make social work practices in Indonesia more transformative, spiritually centered, and aligned with the cultural and religious character of the majority population.

Ultimately, spiritual capability moves beyond the domain of knowledge and skills. It penetrates the depth of spiritual character, shapes a person's self-conception as a devoted servant of Allah, and instills a sincere motivation to benefit others. This is the essence of the model developed in this study. Furthermore, the concept can serve as a

foundational structure for training, empowerment programs, counseling, and other self-development initiatives aimed at strengthening the potential of beneficiary groups. In doing so, individuals are supported in optimizing their belief-based *fitrah* potential, leading to the attainment of social functioning as the central objective of social work practice.

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