

Research Article

# The Urgency of Education in Supporting the Country's Economic Development Through the Human Capital Theory Approach

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**Abstract:** This article raises the academic issue of the low contribution of education quality to economic development in several developing countries, including Indonesia. This problem arises due to limited investment in developing quality human resources. Education plays a strategic role in shaping the intellectual capacity, skills, and productivity of the workforce, which are the foundation of sustainable economic growth. The purpose of this study is to analyze the urgency of education in supporting economic development through the perspective of Human Capital Theory, which emphasizes the importance of investing in people as a primary development asset. This study uses a desk study method by reviewing various academic literature, previous research results, and reports from international institutions regarding the relationship between education and economic growth. The results show that education plays a crucial role in driving economic and social development through the development of competent human resources. Based on human capital theory, investment in education can improve individual capabilities and societal welfare. Developed countries such as Finland, Japan, and Singapore have successfully demonstrated that large budget allocations to the education sector can sustainably increase economic productivity. However, developing countries and Muslim countries still face obstacles such as unequal access, limited facilities, and low teaching quality. Meanwhile, education in Muslim countries needs to be strengthened through curriculum reform and improved teaching quality to produce a skilled and globally competitive generation.

**Keywords:** Development; Economic; Education; Human Capital Theory; Productivity

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## 1. Introduction

The 1945 Constitution marked the birth of the ideals of national education as a path to enlightening the nation's life. Comprehensively, this aspirational goal is outlined in Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning the national education system, Article 3, which states that "national education functions to develop capabilities and shape the character and civilization of a dignified nation in order to enlighten the nation's life, aiming to develop the potential of students to become people who believe in and fear God Almighty, have noble morals, are healthy, capable, knowledgeable, creative, independent, and become democratic and responsible citizens " (Rachmayan & ZSudarwati, 2021) .Education plays a crucial role in the lives of individuals and citizens (Begum et al., 2024) . As a basic human right, education serves

as the foundation for character building, knowledge development, and skill enhancement (Nikkola et al., 2024) .

Furthermore, education also serves as a catalyst for social and economic development. In the era of globalization, where intense competition is a problem in many fields, quality education is a primary key to creating competent, innovative, and adaptive human resources.

The importance of education extends beyond the individual. At the societal level, education has a wide-ranging impact, from poverty reduction and increased well-being to social stability (Sanz et al., 2017) . By providing equitable access to education, a country can address social disparities and increase economic mobility. Education also helps eradicate hunger, thus fostering social harmony (Bertoni et al., 2025) . Education is a sustainable investment that offers long-term benefits to individuals and society as a whole. Education is a profitable investment because it not only enhances individual skills and knowledge but also promotes social stability, economic progress, and sustainable development (Affandi et al., 2025) .

Education plays a crucial role in overcoming poverty, with various economists, such as Amartya Sen and Jeffrey Sachs, focusing on this study. According to Sen, this problem is related to restrictions on individual freedom. Political systems that limit freedom result in many people being unable to voice their suffering and lacking the opportunity to develop their potential, a phenomenon known as *capability deprivation*. This limitation on the capacity to develop is considered a barrier to human capability , which is the primary capital for development. Countries such as India and China place great emphasis on the importance of developing human capabilities. Jeffrey Sachs, in his book, *The End of Poverty* , states that the solution to reducing poverty is through the development of *human capital* , particularly in the education and health sectors (Ustama, 2009) .

The challenge in educational development today is improving the quality of educational services to meet the needs of the 21st century. This era is characterized by the dominance of digital information, where various forms of education can be easily accessed through technological devices, such as written courses and video explanations available on various online platforms. This situation encourages teachers to continuously innovate in classroom learning methods. Universities need to pay special attention to preparing graduates with superior skills, both in terms of knowledge and practical expertise.

The knowledge gained during college must align with true values. This means that skills development is a crucial element in supporting universities in creating competent human resources as the primary drivers of a nation's economic development (Munthe, 2020) . Education has long been considered a key pillar of economic development (Droubi et al., 2023) . Human capital theory, for example, views education not only as a means of transferring knowledge but also as a strategic investment to increase individual productivity and well-being. Education, skills, and health are tools for enhancing individual capabilities, which in turn can impact the productivity of society as a whole.

The role of education in economic development is inextricably linked to the fact that the quality of human resources determines a country's competitiveness amidst globalization. Developed, developing, and Muslim-majority countries have different approaches to prioritizing education as human capital. Developed countries tend to have more structured education systems, broad access, and significant investment in research and development,

resulting in an innovative and competitive workforce. Conversely, developing countries often face challenges such as limited access, low-quality education, and regional disparities.

Meanwhile, Muslim countries face a dilemma between maintaining traditional values and promoting educational modernization to support economic development. The impact of education on economic development is very concrete, both in the short and long term. In developed countries, education contributes to increased productivity and innovation, which drive sustainable economic growth. Education plays a crucial role in a country's development, particularly in supporting economic growth. Quality education lays the foundation for developing competent, innovative, and globally competitive human resources.

Education also shapes character and skills that support economic development. Quality higher education produces academically superior, creative, and innovative graduates. The educational environment fosters critical thinking and adaptability to change, helping individuals face global challenges. A country's economic competitiveness depends on the quality of its human resources, with education being a key element in preparing individuals to face the complexities of the global economy. The focus on sustainable development and technological and industrial advancements makes quality education a key driver of sustainable economic growth and improved public welfare (Kardina & Magriasti, 2023) .

Issue of economic growth is aimed at increasing the value of goods and services produced. This growth can only occur if natural capital (natural resources) and human capital (human resources) are adequate in both quantity and quality. Classical theories of economic growth focus more on the interactions that drive economic growth, but education is the primary source of a country's economic progress. Various studies show that Western countries do not consider human capital as a driver of economic growth; rather, human capital growth, based on education, is the primary foundation of economic progress in developed countries.

The reality that justifies these findings ultimately led to the birth of a new framework for thinking in economic development theory, namely the knowledge-based economy. This paradigm shift further emphasizes the importance of human resources as a crucial and strategic aspect of development (Dariah, 2004) . Human capital theory is linguistically composed of two terms: humans and capital. Capital refers to the factors of production used to create goods or services without being used up during the production process. According to this definition, humans in the concept of human capital are seen as a form of capital, similar to using machines or technology. Humans play a vital role in various economic activities, including production, consumption, and transactions.

As this theory has evolved, human capital can be defined through three main concepts. First, human capital is viewed as an individual aspect, namely the inherent abilities of humans, such as knowledge and skills. Human capital encompasses the knowledge, competencies, attitudes, health, and character possessed by individuals. Second, human capital is acquired through educational activities, such as school, courses, or training, which are the result of a specific accumulation process. Third, human capital is viewed from a production-oriented perspective, where it is the primary source of economic productivity. Humans invest in education, training, and skills development to increase their productivity.

Human capital theory is considered a combination of education, experience, training, skills, norms, health, energy, and initiative that contribute to human productivity. There are two ways to acquire human capital. First, through the quantitative use of labor, where

increasing the number of workers is believed to increase productivity. Second, through investment in education and training to emphasize the quality of the workforce rather than its quantity. Based on this, the research aims to analyze: first, human capital theory- based education ; second; the portrait of education in developed countries on economic growth; third, the impact of education in developing countries on economic growth; fourth, the role of education in muslim countries on economic growth.

## 2. Research Methods

This research uses a literature review method with a narrative study approach. This approach was chosen because it can provide an in-depth understanding of the relationship between the quality of human resources formed through education and national economic growth. The data used consists of primary and secondary data. The secondary data used are from scientific literature, government reports, journals, and official publications related to education, labor, and economics. The data collection technique is carried out through source triangulation to obtain a theoretical basis and empirical facts. Data analysis is carried out using the content analysis method, namely examining the contents of various sources to find patterns of relationships between improving the quality of education and economic growth. The results of the analysis are presented in the form of a systematic description that explains how education plays a role as an investment in human capital in strengthening the competitiveness and productivity of a country's economy.

## 3. Results and Discussion

### Human Capital Theory-Based Education

Education plays a crucial role in driving economic growth and sustainable development. Through education, a country can increase its capacity to absorb modern information and technology, while simultaneously developing its potential. Education is seen as a key component in supporting a country's economic growth. As an investment in human resources, education is an effort to improve the quality of individuals. Investment in human capital is carried out through providing additional education, both formal and informal, with the aim of enhancing individual abilities and income opportunities after completion of education. Education not only contributes to individual progress, but is also a key factor in the progress of a nation.

Quality economic growth depends on human resources. Educated individuals are able to quickly adapt to new technologies and information. Human *capital theory* was first introduced in 1961 by Theodore W. Schultz. This concept integrates the analysis of investments in education and health into human capital theory. The term human capital is often used by economists to refer to aspects of education, health, and other factors that can increase productivity and economic development. Productivity growth is a key factor determining a country's ability to improve living standards through the production of goods and services. Labor and capital are the two main factors of production. Human resources play a central role in production and support overall development (Hutami & Riani, 2022) .



**Figure 1.** Growth rate of Indonesian labor productivity (2016-2020)

*Source: BPS*

The figure above shows that the development of labor productivity growth in Indonesia is reflected in GDP growth per worker. Over the past five years, labor productivity growth has fluctuated. In 2016, the growth rate reached 1.85 percent. In 2017, the figure rose to 2.8 percent, then declined to 0.79 percent in 2018. Productivity rebounded to 3 percent in 2019 thanks to vocational training programs. However, in 2020, productivity experienced a drastic decline, reaching -1.84 percent. This decline was caused by disruptions to the employment sector due to the Covid-19 pandemic, such as reduced working hours experienced by workers.

The concept of human capital has evolved in various countries, but truly took shape as a theory in the Western world in the 1960s. Human capital theory has made significant contributions to economics and culture, and is based on Western economic growth theory and the study of human behavior. The determinants of economic development in Western countries have shifted from physical resources to human capital, with the focus on human behavior becoming a primary concern from both theoretical and practical perspectives, particularly since the rise of the human relations school. The concept and theory of human capital have been widely developed in Western countries, producing research that has had a significant impact on social, economic, and corporate development.

In response to these changes, human capital theory provides a solid theoretical foundation, supporting socioeconomic restructuring and the emergence of corporations through effective human capital investment and development mechanisms. This approach aims to encourage corporate growth, social evolution, and overall economic improvement (Burhanudin, 2021). Traditional classical economics views human labor as purely physical strength, requiring little knowledge or skill. This concept assumes that labor capabilities are homogeneous and do not undergo significant change. Its emergence marked the beginning of the development of the concept of humans as a form of capital, which has existed since ancient times.

The idea of the importance of human resources as capital has a long history. William Petty already used the concept of human capital to compare military losses and war equipment. Adam Smith developed the idea that investment in human capital and worker skills significantly impacted individual income and wage structures. Worker skills began to be viewed as a crucial resource for driving economic growth and societal well-being. *Human capital* refers

to the abilities, knowledge, skills, and qualifications possessed by individuals as a key factor in economic and social development.

The relationship between human capital and education lies in the fact that education plays a significant role in increasing the value of people as capital, as well as their economic output and productivity. Humans are considered capital because they generate income and output throughout their lives. This concept is similar to investments such as factories or companies, which provide returns over time. More narrowly, capital applied to humans refers to factors that increase their value and capabilities, such as computer skills training, formal education, and other informal training. Capital also includes government spending on hospitals and the development of healthcare systems, which can increase human productivity much like manufacturing plants increase the production of goods (Hasan et al., 2023).

### **Portrait of Education in Developed Countries on Economic Growth**

Educational facilities in Indonesia are unevenly distributed, with many remote areas lacking school facilities and equipment. The distribution of teaching staff is also uneven, with most teachers working in cities, while underdeveloped regions lack qualified teachers. The curriculum remains overly theoretical, with minimal practical skills development. Many schools lack practical work or teach the necessary soft and hard skills. This leaves graduates lacking the practical skills to face the world of work. Finland, for example, boasts a world-class education system, unique features such as free education, no uniforms or national exams, and a relaxed learning environment.

This success is driven by a focus on teacher quality, with only select individuals becoming teachers. Education is highly valued, and from an early age, Finns are taught to love reading, making books their primary source of knowledge (Kurniawan et al., 2024). Other developed countries in East Asia and the Pacific, such as Japan, China, South Korea, and Singapore, focus large budget allocations on basic education, building a solid foundation for their education systems. According to a World Bank report on March 15, 2018, Singapore, for example, allocated a third of its national budget to education in 1952. However, the share of the education budget declined as state revenues increased thanks to a qualified workforce. South Korea allocated 14.3% of its budget to education in 1963, rising to 20.4% in 2000, then dropping to 12.8% in 2013. Japan allocated 14.5% in 1955, remaining there for three decades, then dropping to 8.13%-9.3% in 2009-2013 (Tari, 2016).

The report emphasizes that improving the quality of education is crucial to supporting sustainable economic growth. Furthermore, the report notes that the East Asia and Pacific region has demonstrated remarkable economic growth since 1960. From 1960 to 2015, the region's economy grew more than twice the global average, reaching 7.2% compared to the world's 3.5%. Even excluding China's growth, the region still recorded growth 2% higher than the global average during that period. The World Bank recommends that countries seeking to strengthen human resources focus on basic education. Historically, wealthy countries have allocated more budgets to primary education. Meanwhile, Indonesia allocates 20% of its national budget to education, but a larger portion is allocated to secondary education.

Developed countries prioritize curriculum development that emphasizes 21st-century skills, supported by superior teacher quality, effective use of technology, and a student-centric learning approach with parental and community involvement. Indonesia still faces several challenges, such as a curriculum that does not fully support the development of skills

according to the needs of the modern era, teacher quality that needs to be improved, and suboptimal use of technology and support from parents and the community. Improving the quality of education in Indonesia requires planned and sustainable steps through education policies that adopt best practices from developed countries, while still considering the unique cultural, social, and economic context of Indonesia (Ratnawati et al., 2024).

### **The Impact of Education in Developing Countries on Economic Growth**

The quality of education in developing countries still lags far behind that of developed countries. Education in developing countries often appears disorganized, with many people lacking an understanding of its importance. The majority of the population in developing countries tends to place little emphasis on education, even though it is an indicator of development and a determinant of a country's progress. Education policies in developing countries are generally a legacy of colonial policies. This is because, at the beginning of their independence, developing countries were unable to formulate education policies that met the needs of their people. Achieving political independence did not automatically translate into independence in other areas, particularly in the education sector. (Majid, 2023).

Developing countries have low living standards, limited industrial sectors, lower-middle HDI, and low per capita income. The education system in these countries faces various challenges, such as low education quality, varying school standards across regions, limited facilities and resources in remote areas, and uneven teacher quality. Some teachers still do not meet the required educational standards. There are two main approaches to addressing this problem. Systemic solutions involve changing the social systems closely related to education, including the underlying economic system. Currently, the education system in Indonesia operates within a capitalist economic framework that tends to reduce the state's role in education funding (Dillah et al., 2023).

Education is crucial for both developed and developing countries. Developed countries use education to improve the quality of life of their citizens. Developing countries implement education to catch up and reach parity with developed countries. Education systems are influenced by political, economic, ideological, social, religious, and cultural factors. Developed and developing countries face different educational challenges. Developing countries often face more complex problems, such as limited access, low quality, inadequate facilities, gender disparities, limited financial resources, inadequate teacher training, and a lack of teaching materials and technology (Yulianti et al., 2023).

### **The Role of Education in Muslim Countries on Economic Growth**

Education plays a crucial role in a nation's progress. As a key pillar of civilizational development, education provides people with access to knowledge, skills, and technology. These three aspects are key factors in determining a nation's competitiveness in the era of the ASEAN free economy. Through education, the younger generation is prepared to achieve these three elements. Therefore, national education is designed as a system implemented by the state to realize the nation's independence and future (Haryanto, 2015).

Education in Muslim countries is characterized by diverse characteristics, influenced by culture, traditions, and religious values. Educational systems often integrate religious knowledge with general knowledge to develop individuals with noble character and broad knowledge. Several Muslim countries excel in modern education, providing leading universities and academic innovation. Challenges include ensuring equitable access to

education, especially in remote areas, and developing curricula relevant to global needs. Educational reform efforts continue to improve the quality and competitiveness of the younger generation on the international stage.

The quality of human resources in Indonesia is still low compared to other countries, with the state of education being concerning, both in terms of facilities and infrastructure. Some people have not fully enjoyed the right to a decent education, as stipulated in Article 31 Paragraph 1 of the 1945 Constitution, which states that "Every citizen has the right to education." This article affirms the right of all Indonesian people to access a decent education, which is beneficial for individuals and the progress of the nation in the future. The education system in Indonesia faces various problems that have an impact on the low quality of education.

These problems include weak educational management, disparities in the provision of facilities and infrastructure between urban and rural areas, minimal government support, and low evaluation standards in the learning process (Safitri et al., 2022). Unlike Iran, primary and secondary education is administered and funded by the Ministry of Education. Provincial and sub-district governments manage local education, while the Ministry of Education oversees national exams, standards, teacher training, curriculum, learning materials, and school funding. The Higher Council for Education sets policy, and private schools are supervised by the Ministry of Education and receive a portion of government funding (Ihsan, 2015).

UNESCO at its 40th General Conference adopted a new framework, the ESD for 2030. This framework aims to reorient education so that by 2030 students can have the knowledge and skills needed to achieve the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. This goal must then look at the various challenges in creating a learning environment that can transform the K-12 system. Ironically, in Muslim countries including Egypt, facing increasingly turbulent political conditions, where each change of ministers brings new policies. Other problems faced include overly busy school schedules, minimal understanding of sustainability, and a lack of teacher readiness to lead sustainability efforts that require training (El-Aasar et al., 2024).

#### **4. Conclusion**

Education plays a crucial role in economic and social development, in both developed and developing countries, as well as Muslim countries. Through education, a country can develop competent human resources, which in turn can support economic growth and improve the quality of life of its citizens. Human capital theory explains that investment in education, both formal and informal, can enhance individual capabilities and open greater opportunities for improved well-being. Developed countries such as Finland, Japan, and Singapore have demonstrated how significant budget allocations for education can strengthen education systems and sustainably increase economic productivity.

However, challenges remain in developing and Muslim countries, which often face unequal access to education, a lack of facilities and quality teaching, and the need for comprehensive educational reform. Muslim countries consider education a pillar for developing a skilled and morally upright young generation. Complex challenges include political issues that hinder education policies. The curricula of many Muslim countries lack relevance to global needs. Education needs to focus on improving the quality of teaching and

empowering students to compete internationally, in accordance with the UNESCO 2030 framework.

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