Exploration of indicators of talent from the perspective of the Quran

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Abstract

Talent is a fundamental quality in humans that entails personal and social differences. However, despite its importance, relatively few empirical studies have addressed identification and assessment of talents. An adequate exploration of any topic will require extensive knowledge about it. The Holy Quran, as the very words of the Creator, who created humans with a certain structure of existence, presents the most comprehensive knowledge. Therefore, this study drew on the Quran to present indicators for talent assessment using a qualitative approach. First, among all verses of the Quran, those with words somehow related to talent were selected, leading to a semantic web, which was then used to create a list of the most relevant words. Next, lexical and conceptual analyses and Quranic usage analyses of these words, along with content analyses of the verses containing them using *tadabbur* (Quranic Contemplation) methods, marked three words (*ni'mah* – pleasant asset, *sabīl* – course, and *faẓl* – added privilege) as the main indicators for talent assessment. The findings showed that each of these indicators could be assessed in three areas, or axes, which included level of knowledge, level of yearning and level of access. Finally, the study suggests that, thanks to the comprehensive nature of the knowledge provided in the Quran, exploring the characteristics, components and dynamics of the three main words results in a far more wholistic framework for assessing human talents, which allows for more reliable and applicable results - compared to those provided by individualistic frameworks.

Keywords: Talent; Measurement indicators; Qualitative research; The Holy Quran

Introduction

Knowing talents, developing abilities and orienting them in the right time and to the right direction is a critical phase in human development. Knowing strengths and abilities is also critical for increasing one's awareness of oneself (Okhovvat, 2016a).

Talent is a general word used in almost any context. This wide usage indicates at least two points. First, the question of talent covers a wide and important range of human needs related to everyday life. Second, although the notion is widely applicable and well recognized, many ambiguities still exist about how to specifically identify and use a talent. This indicates a research gap in this pursuit of knowledge (Gallardo-Gardo *et al.*, 2013). According to Nijs *et al.* (2014), this is because no academic community has developed a theoretical foundation for defining and assessing talents. In the same line, Makel *et al*. (2015) believe that despite the increasing global recognition of the need to develop individual talents, relatively few empirical studies have addressed the question of how to identify and assess talents.

Due to their limited scope in defining the notion, traditional approaches to talent often tend to only allow for a highly bounded definition of it, to the extent that they often introduce talent as a static construct in the individual. Many institutes base their talent identification programs for the education of gifted individuals on actual abilities of their clients, and use assessment tools that focus on individual abilities (e.g. Hunsaker & Callahan, 1995). Such assessments often simply start with a rough analysis of the situations that interest the individual. Therefore, the process of identifying an individual's talents will be ambiguous as it involves making decisions about how successfully the individual functions. Assessment tools chosen or designed in this paradigm operate only within the limits of the interest that the person is being questioned about (Shavelson *et al.*, 2002).

More recent studies, however, seem to suggest that talent (or giftedness) is structurally influenced by a number of different factors. Existence of such factors is best evident when an individual performs extraordinarily (for example in terms of both "usefulness" and "novelty") in a specific context (Plucker & Barab, 2005). In the same line, Snow and Lohan (1984) believed that determining which traits of a person could be regarded as an actual talent would involve a specific examination of the individual's interests along with the environment in which the person needed to function. For them, defining the situation was part of defining a talent. Capacities of an environment would include the setting plus anything useful for performing a certain task in an environment. Here, talent is clearly related to context. As a result, identifying talents and educational interventions will not be exclusively dedicated to the "gifted individuals", as the traditional classifications would label, but they will form a system for activating potentials that applies to anyone.

Clearly, incorporating a social perspective into the different aspect of talent, as a human construct, created a significantly broader framework for the researchers and enabled them to examine the topic with a wide variety of new criteria. Moreover, the new perspective approaches talent as an evident and observable behavior, as opposed to a hidden potential structure (Plucker & Barab 2005). Acknowledging the new perspective, Dai (2020) believes that new evidence in the science of psychology do call for a reform

in how we make sense of human potentials. Such a pursuit will effectively contribute to resolving social disagreements on issues related to general and gifted education, and designing educational policies that will promote equality and activation of everyone's potentials. The prime question in talent evaluation and assessment, therefore, will not be about who is talented, but will be as to how we can match individuals to specific educational context to support realization of their potential talents (Plucker & Barab, 2005).

Yet another perspective can be introduced. An introductory knowledge of the structures and meanings of the Holy Quran will suggest that it has an extraordinary potential for dealing with any aspect of life. It can guide personal growth and make lives better and cleaner. However, a quick survey of human societies, even the Muslim population of the world, shows that the Quran is absent from how lives are led. This absence highlights the urgent need that Quran studies be applied to different aspects of human life. The present study, therefor, adopts this perspective to exploring talent, as an important basic structure of humans that requires every individual's attention to themselves.

Allah states in the Quran that any piece of land has its unique capacity and potential: "On earth there are neighboring pieces of terrain [of diverse kinds]" (*al-Ra'ad*: 4). They are, of course, connected but each has its own structure, which means that each piece of land is good for cultivating a certain type of plant or fruit that responds to a human need (Makarem Shirazi ,1995). If Allah speaks about the capacities of different pieces of land and how they serve humans, then He definitely addresses the capacities and distinctive characteristics of humans. A study of human talents from this perspective can yield many useful results, thanks to the comprehensive knowledge available in the Quran.

Today's psychology draws its norms exclusively from studies conducted in western cultures and assumes that those norms would apply to any other society anywhere in the world. Moreover, as shown above, the existing literature on talent marks two different periods. In the former, the focus was on an inherent definition of talent, which would entail developing strategies for identify gifted and extraordinary individuals. in the latter the focus is on social contexts and the role of education, which entails completely different strategies, in addition to providing a different viewpoint towards the human. The fact that each set has approached the question from a different angle and in response to a specific need has led to flaws and limitations, depending on what they ignore about the construct, in explaining the human and providing solutions for identifying human talents.

The solution to the above pitfalls will be to address talent, as an attribute assigned to a human, based on an approach adopted from the Holy Quran. In the absence of a comprehensive approach, the way the researcher, as a human, addresses the topic will basically depend on their situation, mindset and cultural factors. However, an approach from the perspective of One who has created the human and has a full perspective of the human's existence structure will make up for human limitations. Therefore, the Quran, as the very words of Allah, is the only comprehensive source for developing a framework for talent assessment through exploring the human's general and specific capacities in the Quran. This claim reinforced by a verse in the Quran that introduces the Book as the explainer of matters related to anything and the leader of humans (*al-Nahl*: 89).

Understanding the words of the Creator on how He describes His creation is therefore of critical importance. This study thereby relies on the comprehensive knowledge of the Creator over different aspects of the human, and aims to develop indicators, based on the Quran, for assessing talents.

Methods

The present qualitative study employed a content analysis methodology to arrive at indicators based on the Quran for assessing talent. A definition of content analysis would be any technique of identifying specific characteristics of massages in a systematic and objective way, to be used in scientific inference (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2011).

Historical uses of content analysis in a disciplined way can be traced back to the efforts for understanding the words of the divine scriptures, including the Torah, the Gospel and the Quran. The interpreters would engage in different analyses to uncover the layers of meaning lying in the vocabulary and concepts of these books (Saroukhani, 2014). Analyzing and discovering the meanings in a Book of Revelation is critical. Any piece of text in the Book of Revelation consists of words, or a series of lexis, which are chosen and arranged in a specific way that serves a certain "purpose", which is, in the broad sense, establishing a connection for humans with the divine world. A word, therefore, serves as a gateway to entering the realm of any text. This fact strengthens one's motivation for focusing on the words of the Holy Quran (Okhovvat, 2013).

The present study adopted a lexis-based approach to analyzing the content of the study, i.e. the text of the Holy Quran. However, miscellaneous methods would not serve this purpose. Instead, the methodology developed by Okhovvat (2011) for performing lexical studies of the Quranic texts was used. Figure 1 illustrates the process of this analysis, which consists of three phases and fifteen steps.
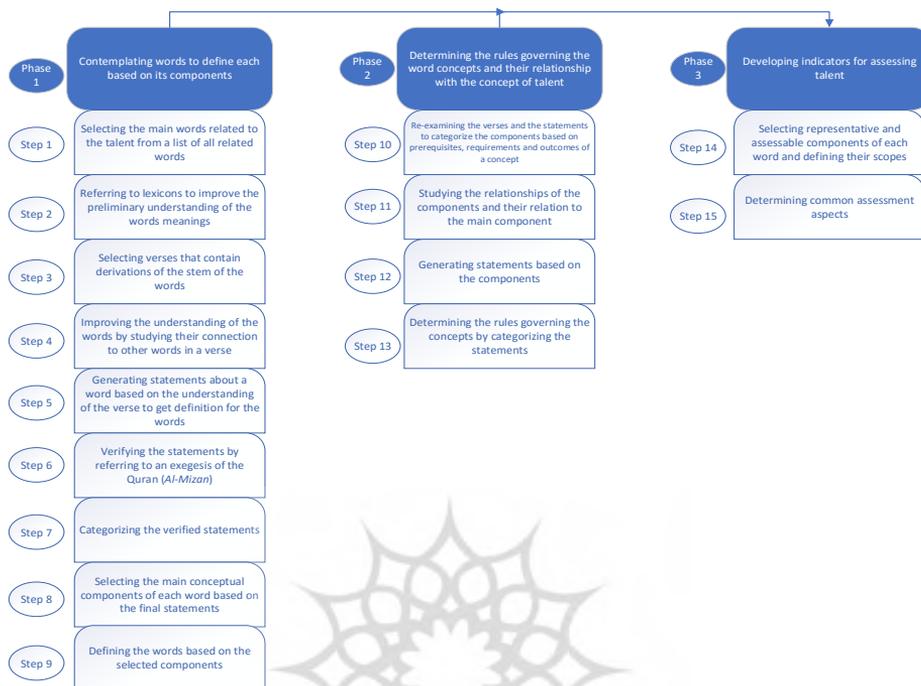
Figure 1- Phases and steps of analyzing the content to extract findings

Results

In a paper titled "Implications based on the Quran about talent"[1], the Quran was studied with the aim of offering a definition of talent, where a set of vocabulary was determined as representative of the notion, including *fi'l* (formation of action), *qadr* (capability), *wus'* (capacity), *yusr* (ease), *'usr* (difficulty), *ni'mah* (pleasant asset), *fazl* (added privilege), *sabīl* (course), *kalaf* (burden, duty), *ṭaw'* (accordant action), *waratha* (inherited), *'amal* (action), *shakl* (form), and *tawq* (enclosure, bearing). The paper then provided a definition based on the components of the set. Since the ultimate goal of any definition offered in a research context is to inform action, the present paper drew on the above set with a focus on the words related to action. To select such words, first the relationship of the set with each other needed to be explored, which is illustrated in Figure 2.
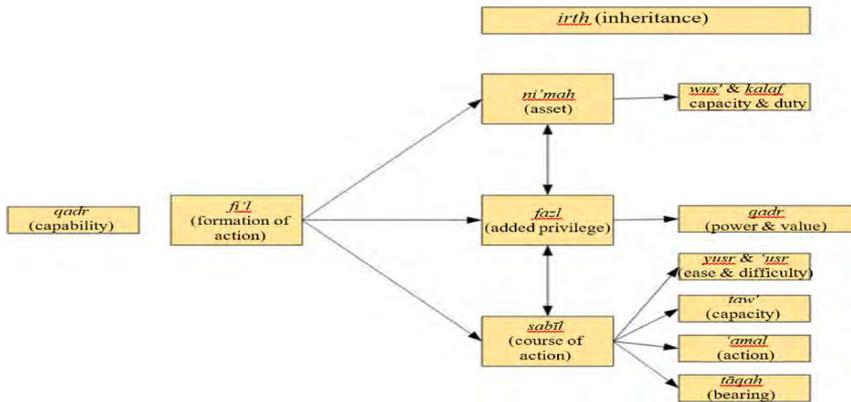

Figure 2- Relationship of the words (concepts) related to talent

As illustrated above, "capacity" and "formation of action" hold the primal meanings and foundational concepts related to the concept talent. The concepts "asset", "added privilege" and "course of action" are more general than the other concepts and classify them, as shown, and they also define the primary concept (talent). They are, therefore, the key concepts related to the research topic and they also form the foundation for the assessment design.

A lexical analysis of the key concepts yielded the following.

1. *ni'mah* (pleasant asset)

Table 1- Lexical meaning of ni'mah

Word	Definition from *Qamus a-Quran*	Definition from al-Tahqiq fi kalimat al-Quran al-Karim
ni'mah	Refers to whatever Allah has bestowed upon men; it is called *ni'mah* because it is pleasant and agreeable. Raghib says, the word is used when the blessing is given to humans, and it is not used in case of animals.	[The stem means] pleasantness of living and wellness of spirit. It is an antonym of *bu's*, which refers to any kind of pressure and deprivation.

In the Quran, 133 verses contain derivations of *ni'mah*. A process of Quranic contemplation of those verses gave the following definition:

"A *ni'mah* is an accessed asset that is agreeable to the needs of humans and prepares the setting for human development. Transformation, change or replacement of *ni'mah* will depend on how humans respond to a given one."

The main semantic components of *ni'mah* based on the above definition are illustrated in Figure 3.
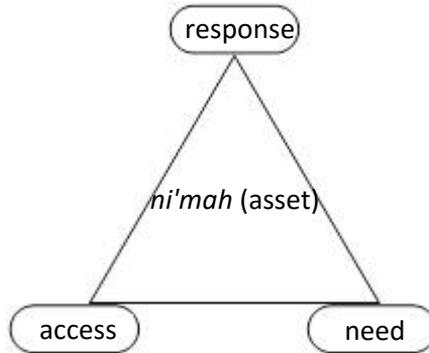
Figure 2- Semantic conponents of ni'mah

As shown, the concept *ni'mah* consists of three components. Asset refers to the benefit of various assets. Need is the prerequisite or context for accessing assets. Response refers to how one interacts with a given asset. Different kinds of responses invoke different outcomes or consequences, sometimes increasing and sometimes decreasing the access to an asset.

2. Faẓl (added privilege)

Table 2- Lexical meaning of faẓl

Word	Definition from *Qamus a-Quran*	Definition from al-Tahqiq fi kalimat al-Quran al-Karim
faẓl	*Faẓl* means increase. In the Holy Quran, it is used in two meaning: 1) superiority, and 2) endowment, gift or mercy. Both senses are instances of increase. The former can either be physical or nonphysical. The latter is an effect of Allah's *faẓl* (grace). Raghib say, any gift that was not required to be given is a *faẓl*. This means that Allah's endowments, gifts and mercy on humans are not because He has to do them, but they are out of His grace and generosity. This is why it is called *faẓl*, which means something that is added by Allah but not entitled by humans.	[The stem means] privilege or increase over a required or set amount. So, a *fazilah* is something that is more than the required limit. *Ifẓāl* means an instance of granting that is more than the known or set amount. Allah's *faẓl* means Allah grants more than the amount needed for physical or spiritual livelihood. An instance of *faẓl* is when Allah creates a thing or right after creating it (the primary *faẓl*). Or it can be the effect of a *faẓl* given after certain provisions that invite *faẓl* (the secondary *faẓl*). As understood from verse 253 in surah *al-Baqarah*, a privilege in a context will have a relationship with the person in that setting and with the obligations placed by Allah on that person. A secondary *faẓl* of Allah may be bestowed as the situation might call for or the situation or attitude of the requester allows for an added grace, which is itself added to a primary *faẓl*. This is the secondary *faẓl* that is endowed to people as an effect of their prayers and other situations.

In the Quran, 92 verses use derivations of *faẓl*. A process of Quranic ontemplation of those verses gave the following definition:

"A *faẓl* is a set of various abilities that are granted by a Bountiful and Boundless Source, are expandable, distinguish their holder and place obligations on their shoulder, can be general or exclusive and are grantable to all humans, and create some kind of advantage that will result in social and individual benefit for the person."

The semantic components of *faẓl* based on the above definition are shown in Figure 4.
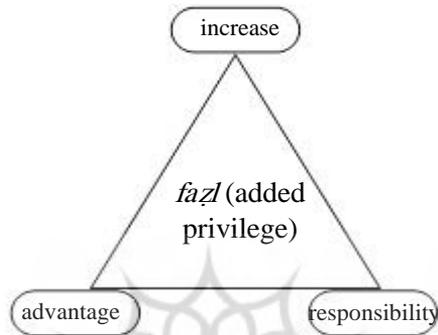
Figure 3- Semantic components of faẓl

As shown, *faẓl* has three semantic components. Thus, a *faẓl*, or added privilege, refers to qualities in addition to the *ni'mah*, or assets, as suggested by the component "increase". Moreover, an added privilege creates advantages in some situations for their holder, and thus puts added responsibilities on their shoulders.

3. Sabīl (course)

Table 3- Lexical meaning of sabīl

Word	Definition from *Qamus a-Quran*	Definition from al-Tahqiq fi kalimat al-Quran al-Karim
Sabīl	Way; whether the way of guidance, any regular way, or the way of blasphemy.	[The stem means] something that extends or stretches from a point. A *sabīl* is the natural course that delivers a person to an intended destination – whether physical or non-physical.

In the Quran, 167 verses use derivations of *sabīl*. A process of Quranic contemplation of those verses gave the following definition:

"A *sabīl*, or course, is a purposeful movement, depending on the capacity of the person, where the movement will be facilitated by receiving and obeying relevant instructions, and will take the person to a destination along the chosen direction."

The main semantic components of *sabīl* based on the above definition are shown in Figure 5.
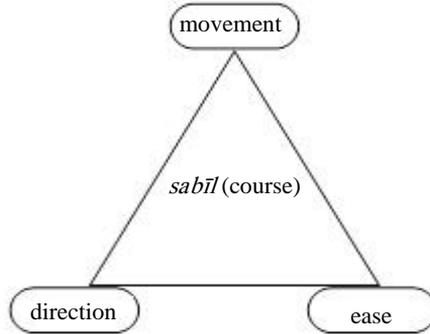
Figure 5- Semantic components of sabīl

As shown, the concept "course" has three semantic components. Movement explicates that being on a course involves some kind of motion or, here, non-physical effort. An effort can take a positive or negative direction, and the concept also implies that any effort necessarily has a direction. This is how Allah has willed it to be. Ease refers to the easy flow that one might experience in performing certain tasks and reaching the desired goal - in comparison to other tasks.

Based on the above web, a number of relevant words were selected from the respective verses, as preliminary indicators and sub-indicators of the assessment design, as explained in Table 4.

Table 4- Preliminary assessment components and indicators of the three related words to talent in the Quran

	Relevant word	Important components and their definitions and scopes
Talent	ni'mah (asset)	• **Resources and possessions:** different abilities, either qualitative or quantitative, physical or non-physical, inner or outward, … • **Response attitude:** one's way of interaction with resources and possessions. It determines whether the resources will improve to specific instances of *faẓl* or they will be lost. • **Variety:** Different individuals are granted different assets. Variety explains the diverse ways of realization of goals.
	faẓl (added privilege)	Prerequisites: Allah's Realm • **Allah's Will:** Whether a *faẓl* will be granted to a person or not depends on Allah's Will. • **Allah's Mercy:** It is the source of endowment of any kind of *faẓl* to humans. Allah shows his mercy to every person by gracing the *faẓl* that, in Allah's Knowledge, is the best for that person. Human realm:

		• **Remembrance of assets:** Reminding one's self about the assets that Allah has graced creates the context for a bigger asset, that is *faẓl*. • **Gratitude:** Gratitude (*shukr*), which practically refers to using the assets one is given in the way Allah has ordered, increases the assets and transforms them into privileges, or *faẓl*. Requirements: • **Distinctive abilities:** Different abilities with various degrees of strength are present and activated in different individuals, which makes certain tasks easier or more successful for some individuals. • **Responsibility:** Due to the different positions and abilities that humans have in life (in terms of gender, social status etc.), they need to (and are able to) take different responsibilities. Outcomes: • **Sense of satisfaction (*farah*):** Activation of different abilities and strengths creates a special kind of satisfaction. • **No sorrow and fear:** Endowment of a *faẓl* creates a permanent sense of positivity, a sense that there is always a power, that relieves the person from sorrowful thoughts about past failures or fears about the future. • **Great achievement:** Endowment of a *faẓl* leads to achieving big goals that create great sense of satisfaction. • **Guidance to the straight path:** Each person's added privileges and abilities shed light on a specific path for them that is the course towards realization of their goals.
	sabīl (course)	Prerequisites: • **Observation:** One can observe various courses and verify if a course is right or wrong. • **Determination to follow:** For taking any course, one needs to be motivated enough and determined to take that course and follow its rules with satisfaction and humbleness. • **Conformity:** Taking any course requires the ability to follow an authority, the Book and a goal that will bring satisfaction and activate a relevant potential in the person. Requirements: • **Authority (*walii*) or guide:** For any course there is an authority or guide who needs to be followed if one wishes to have support and the right direction along the path. • **The Book:** In addition to the authority, the Book is required to provide the roadmap and the right direction. • **Ease (smoothness):** Taking a course will be with its own smoothness in terms of obstacles one faces along the way – given that the choice of that course was made relevantly. • Smoothness of movement • **Forbearance and perseverance:** Obstacles might show up along any path. The only way to overcome them is with patience and due effort. Forbearance and perseverance are important requirements for taking any path. Forbearance means not being

| | | overwhelmed, frustrated and resigned, and it will gradually pay off as the shortcomings and fatigues will decrease.
• **Hope:** Striving towards a cause in hope and positiveness that the shortcomings will be made up for with patience and Allah's mercy.
Outcomes
• **Satisfaction:** The outcome of taking a course that is relevant to the person, their potentials and their goals is inner satisfaction and Allah's satisfaction. |

Based on the indicators explained in the above table, three axes were developed for assessing talents, as illustrated in Figure 6.
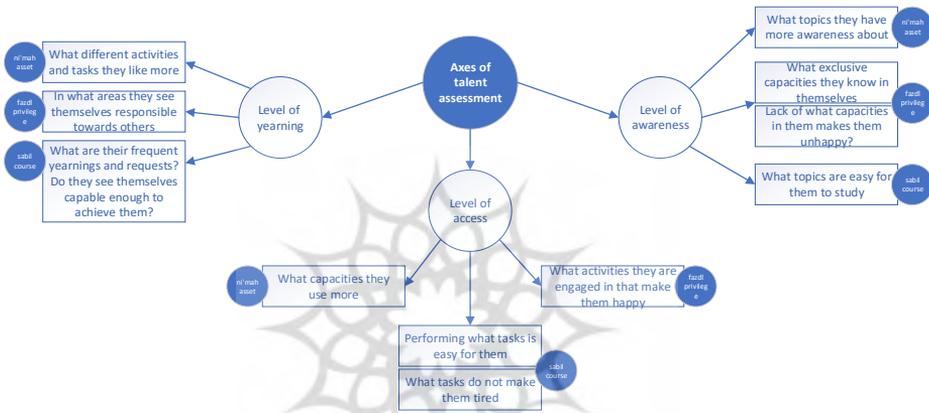
Figure 6- Axes of talent identification and assessment

As shown, the above notions were categorized into three axes: level of awareness, level of yearning, and level of access (benefit). Each axis contains questions to evaluate the individual in terms of three components: *ni'mah* (assets, blessings), *fażl* (privileges) and *sabīl* (course). The questions presented in Figure 6 are examples of the questions that can be asked.

Discussion

This section discusses the words presented above, their relationship to talent, and some conclusions that can be drawn from the findings.

A. *ni'mah* (asset)

The human, as the noblest of creatures, enjoys a special mercy blessed by Allah. For humans, whatever that exists in the universe is a *ni'mah*, or asset, given by Allah so that humans use them to nurture both their natural and non-physical development (Okhovvat, 2015). This is supported by the lexical meaning of the word *ni'mah*, which refers to anything that is agreeable to be used by the user, not disagreeable.

According to the definition of *ni'mah*, or asset, presented by this research based on Quranic contemplation, the concept has three main components: access (or benefit), need, and response. This means that the verses in which derivations of *ni'mah* occur can be categorized using these components:

1. Verses that basically use *ni'mah* in the sense of the different resources available for humans in life. These verses refer to how humans access resources.
2. Verses that introduce the different needs of humans as a basis or stimuli for recognizing various assets provided by Allah to meet the needs
3. Verses that refer to the way humans respond to an asset provided to them and whether they benefit from them or not

Further study of the above verses will provide a number of other related concepts to *ni'mah* and the rules that govern them.

- The relation of prayer (*du'ā*) to *ni'mah*: Prayer to Allah is a way for accessing or increasing assets provided by Allah.
- The relation of remembrance (*zikr*) to *ni'mah*: An asset is to be reminded and mentioned. This is the first responsibility when someone enjoys a *ni'mah*.
- The relation of gratitude (*shukr*) to *ni'mah*: In the Quran, the purpose of accessing assets or resources is to be grateful.[2] In other words, gratitude can be regarded as the optimal and relevant usage of any asset, that is, in consistence with that asset's purpose. Gratitude, along with remembrance, is an important component of any asset, or *ni'mah*.
- The relation of sign (*āyah*) to *ni'mah*: All assets blessed by Allah are clear signs that direct to the course (*sabīl*). In other words, any asset blessed by Allah is a means and basis for planning a course. Therefore, the different assets that one has require that one identify the best way to respond to them in order to be directed to the relevant courses.
- The relation of the Straight Path (*sirat*) to *ni'mah*: Gratitude for a blessing is a requirement for being guided to the Straight Path.
- The relation of course (*sabīl*) to *ni'mah*: Being on a course of real development (*rushd*) invites assets and blessings, as well as added privileges (*faẓl*).
- The relation of moods and spirit to *ni'mah*: An asset and blessing encourages a happy mood and spirit[3].
- The relation of stability and sustainability to *ni'mah*: In this world, assets are neither permanent nor static. Assets change in accordance with the person's performance. So an asset (i.e. blessing) may end for a person, increase or decrease, turn into a different asset, change, or improve to perfection.

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[2] Al-Ma'idah: 6.
[3] Explaining verse 170 in surah *al-i 'imran*, Allahmeh Tabataba'i writes, "Absence of sorrow and fear is indeed presence of a *ni'mah* and *faẓl*, and it is a gift from Allah." (Tabataba'i 1374/1995, vol. 12, p, 86).

Drawing on the above, the relation of *ni'mah* (asset, blessing) to talent can now be explored:

A capacity implies readiness to accept and use something. Human capacities, therefore, point to human needs, which can be met through identifying and addressing capacities. Allameh Tabataba'i (1995) writes in *Al-Mizan*: No human ever feels the need for a *ni'mah* (asset, resource, blessing) unless Allah fulfills it, either fully or partly. But the point is that no need will be left unattended – although some humans might have a request that they have expressed but have not found their request fulfilled".

In other words, talent as a concept implies existence of some (primary) capacities, which correspond to a number of general assets and blessing introduced in the Quran for humans in general. General assets are accessible to all humans and they can benefit from them. In other words, Allah's blessings are as wide and general as His forgiveness and mercy. Moreover, as stated in *Almizan* (Tabataba'i ,1995), "a *ni'mah*, since it is pleasant and agreeable to the development and happiness of the receiver, i.e. it guarantees the receiver's wellness and benefit, will only be a true blessing when it is used in a way that creates happiness that provides benefit. Therefore, if an asset is used towards the opposite direction, although the very asset is a *ni'mah*, but for that person it is not, and it will turn into a *niqmah* (unpleasant questioning). This means that ignoring, ingratitude and denial will never invite secondary blessings, but not only that; they deprive the person from the primary *ni'mah* they were given." Therefore, based on the definition drawn from the Quran for talent and capacity, if these potentials are used in a way other than one that leads to true happiness, then they cannot be regarded as a talent or capacity. Contemporary Psychology, however, does not recognize this point and calls a talent a talent regardless of how it is used, whether in a positive or a negative way.

Another related notion to talent is the way one responds to or deals with their capacities in different contexts. It responded correctly and positively, a capacity brings about new secondary capacities, whereas wrong response to one's potentials will ruin the primary blessings one already had. In other words, the way one responds to a *ni'mah* is important because it either creates access to new secondary assets and resources or ruins it. As already quoted from *Almizan* (Tabataba'I,1995), "ignoring, ingratitude and denial will never invite secondary blessings, but not only that; they deprive the person from the primary *ni'mah* they were given." In this light, a talent refers to the primary general assets (or potentials) that can create access to secondary assets (or activation of potentials) or ruining the primary asset, depending on the way one responds.

Based on the above discussion, the axes of talent assessment with a focus on assets (or *ni'mah*) will be as follows:

1. **Level of awareness:**
    - Evaluation of the topics and resources that the person is predominantly exposed to or deals with in life, which require more awareness of their function and importance
    - Evaluation of the person's level of awareness of and attention to the variety of assets available to them, whether inner assets or outside

- Evaluation of the person's resources, contexts and possessions that the person is happy of having

2. **Level of yearning:**
   - Evaluation of the person's yearnings, wishes and interests, which can inform one's goals and plans and serve as a motivation for using assets and resources in an optimal way, in conformity with the person's real needs

3. **Level of access (or benefit)**
   - Evaluation of the level and quality of the person's access to the various resources they have and how they use them, and how well this usage is in accordance with the real purpose of a resource
   - Evaluation of the person's beliefs about sustainability of assets (*ni'mah*) in life and the effect that these beliefs have on the person's choices and the way they use their resources

B. Faẓl (added privilege)

Faẓl is an important word in the Quran, and its derivations occur 92 times. A *faẓl* is an advantage and potential granted by Allah, and it refers to the activated potentials. Humans have a wide range of potential and capabilities, which can be activated. This is a blessing granted by Allah, which gives the power to humans to work towards what the direction that a need prompts (see *Ibrahim*: 34). On the other hand, a *faẓl* and a privilege one has makes them responsible towards others. Everyone has to use their potentials to the benefit of others, and do not hold back the capacities given to them. However, a common pitfall that harm everyone is the ungenerosity, arrogance or impiety of owners of *faẓl* (Okhovvat, 2014). Thus, a *faẓl* can be defined as an activation of capacity that causes something specific be granted over than an expected amount, which will then have certain results (Okhovvat ,2016).

According to the definition of *fazl*, or added privilege, presented by this research based on Quranic contemplation, the concept has three main components: increase, advantage and responsibility. This means that the verses in which derivations of *faẓl* occur can be categorized based on these components:

1. Verses that speak of a special, increased bestowed by Allah to humans
2. Verses that speak of advantages and distinctions of something over other things or someone over others
3. Verses that refer to the responsibilities of those who have enjoyed Allah's *faẓl* in some way and who are superior to others in certain areas

Further study of the above verses will provide a number of other related concepts to *faẓl* and the rules that govern them.

1. Factor's that invite Allah's *faẓl* (factors that create *faẓl*):

Factor's that create *fazl* are of two general types: First, those that encourage general, common *fazl,* which are those related to the growth of every human in the way of humanity, which needs to be pursued by everyone. Second, those that are specific to each person, and they are the set of specific capacities granted to a person, which is different from those of another person. As a result of this type of *fazl*, different individuals are responsible in different ways towards others and the society.

It should be pointed out that if a person puts effort into activating in themselves the general, common potentials that Allah has granted to all human, they will have automatically put efforts in activating their specific potentials, too, as Allah has promised that He will guide anyone who strives in His cause. Therefore, identifying the general common potentials in an individual and supporting their activation tends to take priority over addressing individual specific individual capacities in the person (Okhovvat, 1395).

2. Barriers towards achieving *fazl*:
    -   Oblivion
    -   Ungenerosity
    -   Jealousy
    -   Haste
    -   Obsession with the *fazl* given to other people
3. The positive role of reciting the Quran in qualifying the person for receiving *fazl*
4. The role of acting in accordance with the rules of the religion and the primal nature of humans (*fitrah*) in inviting *fazl*
5. The role of practicing to regard Allah as the primary and only real cause of anything (*al-tawhid al-robubi*) in inviting *fazl*
6. Any *fazl* has a domain of responsibility, social proactiveness and wide range of giving. Because of this social aspect, a way to identify a potential in a person is to examine the types of social activities that they are interested in.
7. *Fazl* in humans has various types, which allows for different classifications:
    -   Basic *fazl*: A *fazl* that every individual, group or community needs to activate
    -   Purpose *fazl*: A *fazl* that is the purpose of human life
    -   Context *fazl*: A *fazl* that prepare the context for reaching the purpose of life
    -   Belief *fazl*: A *fazl* that shapes one's life around *tawhid* (belief in Oneness of Allah)
    -   Moral *fazl*: A *fazl* that is related to the beautiful moralities.
    -   Lifestyle *fazl*: A *fazl* that is related to the proper lifestyle.
    -   Social *fazl*: A *fazl* that activates social capacities and brings social responsibilities
    -   Individual *fazl*: A *fazl* basically related to personal capacities, sometimes inherited or transferred by the environment, and sometimes formed by one's own efforts
    -   Trainable *fazl*: A *fazl* that is directly or indirectly teachable, as necessary

Based on the above discussion on *faẓl*, its components and the rule governing it, the relation of *faẓl* to talent can now be explained:

Based on the Quran and the hadith, a *faẓl* (privilege) is gift that is often acquirable or activatable, and every individual needs to work towards activating such privileges in them. This quality indicates that a *faẓl* is a capacity. Acquiring and using a *faẓl* in an optimal way can, therefore, be planned. This is a common quality that can relate *faẓl* to talent. More recent definitions and theories in psychology tend to put less emphasis on the inherent aspect of a talent and discuss how individuals acquire a talent and the role of training and different skills.

Another common aspect between *faẓl* and talent is the social nature ascribed to them. Distinct talents create distinctions between individuals in a group. In many cases, a distinctive talent in an individual automatically assigns them to a role in the group. Thus, some talents call for responsibility in social roles.

Another point is that some talents are owned innately, for example through inheritance, and some other are acquirable through effort or in the right context. Talents, therefore, have a wide range of types and categories. This is also the case with *faẓl*, as understood from the Quran.

Based on the above discussion, the axes of talent assessment with a focus on privileges (or *faẓl*) will be as follows:

1. Level of awareness:
   - Evaluate abilities in the individual which they think are stronger in them than in others
   - Evaluate special abilities in the individual than may have been overlooked, ignored or forgotten
   - Evaluate situations or topics in which the individual feels confident but they rarely use these abilities to benefit others
   - Evaluate topics, activities and abilities that provoke the individual's jealousy of others
   - Evaluate topics, activities and abilities in others that the individual always whishes they were his or hers
   - Evaluate topic and activities that are sometimes addressed in haste and thus result outcomes that are far from optimal
   - Evaluate the individual's frequent environments or contexts and their potentials for supporting him or her in performing activities
   - Evaluate any special belief that the individual might hold that positively distinguish the quality or other features of their activities
   - Evaluate the individual's characteristics and traits that distinguishes them
   - Evaluate the individual's aspects of lifestyle that can promote certain characteristics or abilities
2. Level of yearning

- Evaluate social responsibilities that the individual has assumed in different perioeds of their life and usually assume because of their own capabilities
- Evaluate contexts and topics in which the person is more often sought for advice, consultation or help

3. Level of access
   - Evaluate activities that the individual often enjoys

C. Sabīl (course)

Sabīl is a course taken to reach a specified destination. For one who takes a course, smoothness of movement is important. Smoothness, however, does not mean absence of any difficulties, but rather a movement that is not with unpleasantness and bitterness. The concept *sabīl* is close to the concept *sayr* (movement). Therefore, the notions people, and their objects and belongings apply to it. Based on their potentials and abilities, every individual can take a course. This why the Quran uses *sabīl* in both singular and plural. Similar to *sayr*, the direction of a *sabīl* can either be positive or negative. Therefore, the notions *sabīl* of Allah and *sabīl* of tyranny can apply to any *sabīl* (Okhovvat, 2015).

According to the definition of *sabīl*, or course, presented by this research based on Quranic contemplation, the concept has three main components: movement, direction and ease. This means that the verses in which derivations of *sabīl* occur can be categorized using these components:

1. Verses that refer to some kind of movement, motion, effort or striving
2. Verses that refer to the directions that human efforts or moves can take
3. Verses that highlight the smoothness element in the lexical meaning of *sabīl* and refer to the ease of taking certain courses

Further study of the above verses will provide a number of other related concepts to *sabīl* and the rules that govern them.

1. A *sabīl* is a course that requires the person to decide the destination and direction.
2. Taking any *sabīl* is based on choice and free will.
3. Taking any *sabīl* involves following a set of rules related to that *sabīl*. If the person fails to follow the rules of a *sabīl*, they are very likely to deviate or lose track.
4. Taking a *sabīl* involves movement and a smoothness that is brought about with continuation of movement; therefore, every *sabīl* calls for a relevant effort.
5. In knowing and understanding any *sabīl*, one might face obstacles. Passing such obstacles requires awareness and knowledge.
6. Whether the potentials of the person flourish along a *sabīl* depends on the source from which they take the relevant rules. Therefore, examining the authoritative source for individuals in taking any *sabīl*, alongside how much they follow those rules, can predict the outcomes they will have.

7.   The higher the level of the need one feels is, i.e. the more motivated they are to find a *sabīl*, the more likely they will be guided to more advanced courses.

Based on the above discussion on *sabīl*, its components and the rules governing it, the relation of *sabīl* to talent can now be explained:

By definition, *sabīl* is a course that is naturally smooth and easy to arrive at a certain destination. Therefore, one can facilitate activation of their capacities and potentials by taking the relevant *sabīl*. Smoothness does not imply that no efforts will be involved, but that certain courses accelerate or facilitate activation of certain potentials, compared to other courses. This comparable to the case of talent. Contemporary theories suggest that every individual potentially has all capabilities and capacities, but that different capacities are more readily or swiftly activated in different individuals.

The notion *sirat* (clear broad path) is related to *sabīl*. The *sirat* determines the direction a *sabīl* takes. Thus, *sirat* gives direction and *sabīl* activates talent. The *sirat* creates the connection between people and the Right. They can then take different course to use their potentials to promote the Right. In the Quran, the word *sirat* is not used in plural because only one *sirat* exists. The *sirat* introduced in the Quran is the way of obeying and serving only Him. In this light, the course that Allah is pleased with is one that involves obeying Allah's commands (communicated by an authority that He chose) or obeying the judgement of one's intellect, given that it is equipped with the right criteria. In other words, *sabīl* and movement are directly linked as *sirat* and direction are directly linked (Okhovvat, 2015).

Based on the above discussion, the axes of talent assessment with a focus on the course (or *sabīl*) will be as follows:

1.   Level of awareness:
   - Evaluation of the plans and activities that the individual feels more comfortable and eased when doing them
   - Evaluation of the barriers that the individual understands or needs to understand alongside the course to their goals
2.   Level of yearning
   - Evaluation of the individual's purposes, goals and directions in life
   - Evaluation of the quality, quantity and type of important choices that the individual has had in life and the outcomes of those choices
   - Evaluation of the quality, quantity of plans and rules that the individual has chosen towards their goals and their level of loyalty to them
   - Evaluation of the level of need the individual feels for finding more effective courses towards their goals
3.   Level of access
   - Evaluation of the individual's effort towards their goals (The things for which the individual is never tired of trying).
   - Evaluation of the quality and quantity of the individual's abiding by the rules of a chosen course towards a goal.

Conclusion

Arguably, an individual can fully activate their talents only when they identify all of the assets and resources they have (*ni'mah*), mobilize these assets on a relevant course with defined goals (*sabīl*), and move towards the goals with a careful plan for using the assets fully and properly along the course. Through this effort, the individual's capabilities will increase and they will be furnished with privileges and special talents that will optimize performing activities and responsibilities towards others, the goal of which is to realize the growth of the human society. This is supported by Allameh Tabataba'i (1995) in *Almizan*: "Using the assets (*ni'mah*) in a way that attains one's goals in the way Allah pleases is indeed the very course that realizes the true goal of creation, i.e., obedience to Allah. Using assets irrelevantly and based on desires, and disregard for the fact that assets are means and not goals, is definitely being lost and disconnected form the ultimate goal. It is also a sin, because Allah's definite unchangeable Decree has issued that the humans return to Him and be asked of what they have done."

To conclude, the main differences between the assessment structure presented in this paper, which draws on the Quran, the word of Allah, and other common methods in psychology are summarized below.

The presented structure evaluates the individual's talents from various aspects. More precisely, the individual is not evaluated in an isolated way, as if they are disconnected from environments and people. Resources available in one's environment and their groups and communities are included in the assessment. The contexts in which the individual lives, the socialization and interactions they have with other people and the quality of these interaction are important factors in shaping one's talents. According to the Quran, a talent should be defined with regard to its direction. This means that, only those capacities and abilities can be counted as talents that are used the way that Allah pleases. Trying to identify any potential or capability regardless of whether it serves the human nature and the goal of creation will not be identification of talents. Such abilities, on the contrary, do disservice to the individual by creating barriers alongside their way of growth. The current psychology, however, values just any potential and capability regardless of the direction they take. Another difference is the special focus that the Quran puts on the social nature of human talents. This focus is reflected in how talent is assessed, as well. That is, a talent is a talent only when it finds a social dimension and provokes one's sense of responsibility. In other words, in the view of the Quran, the abilities in a person that only serve one's personal needs with no benefit to others cannot be counted as talents. They, on the contrary, are barriers to the activation of more advanced potentials in the person. Lastly, in the structure drawn from the Quran, identifying obstacles to activation of potentials in an individual is part of identifying their talents, because barriers that one faces often point to special capacities and potentials. For example, for the Quran, jealousy is a barrier to activation of one's talent. However, the people or the situations that often provoke the individual's jealousy can be used to identify one's areas of strength. Thus, if the individual focuses on relevantly activating their own potentials in the areas that they are jealous of other, they will have nurtured their talents in those areas.

The Holy Quran is a limitless ocean of knowledge. Its different layers of meaning will not lend themselves to a single study. Moreover, the level of understanding that a person acquires of the Quranic texts depends on how that person is committed to purify themselves by practicing what they learn from the Quran. A stronger commitment and better practice will lead to deeper and more applicable understandings.

Due to its general nature, the framework presented in this study is applicable to any talent and any setting. A next step would be to develop detailed protocols based on a talent typology, or designed for specific contexts, such as schools and workplaces.

The framework presented by this study applies to anyone, regardless of age and stage of development. Therefore, another line of pursuit can be to develop this framework by adding specific talent assessment criteria for specific ages and stages of development. Disclosure sttements

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