

ALFRED ADLER AND ERIK ERIKSON'S PERSONALITY THEORY

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ABSTRACT:

This study highlights the personality theories proposed by Alfred Adler and Erik Erikson and relates them to an Islamic perspective. This research starts from the assumption that human personality is formed through the interaction of internal and external factors. Adler emphasized the role of feelings of inferiority, the drive for excellence, social awareness, lifestyle, and individual creativity as key components in personality development. Erikson, on the other hand, formulated a theory of psychosocial development encompassing eight stages of life, each of which requires the resolution of specific psychological conflicts for healthy individual growth. The analysis reveals a common ground between the two theories, namely the view that humans are active beings who constantly strive to find meaning in life and achieve self-balance. From an Islamic perspective, Adler's and Erikson's ideas align with the concepts of fitrah (natural disposition), moral responsibility, and the purpose of life, which emphasizes a balanced relationship with God, oneself, and society.

Keywords: Adler, Erikson, Islam, Personality, Psychology, Theory

INTRODUCTION

Human personality is an essential dimension that influences how a person interacts with their environment, faces various challenges, and achieves life goals. Personality structure is formed through a combination of internal factors—such as motivation, emotional experiences, and creative potential—with external factors, including family, education, and social relationships. Understanding personality is crucial for educators, psychologists, and counselors to support optimal individual development. Alfred Adler and Erik Erikson are two influential figures in psychology who offer different but complementary perspectives on personality formation. According to Adler, every individual has a “life goal” that guides behavior in overcoming



limitations and challenges. This goal then gives rise to a “lifestyle , ” a unique pattern of thinking and acting. Furthermore, Adler emphasized the importance of social interest , namely the awareness that humans are social beings whose actions are always connected to the community. Meanwhile, Erikson emphasized psychosocial development throughout the lifespan, where each stage is marked by conflicts that must be resolved for healthy personality development, (Dyah, 2024).

The main topic of this paper is an attempt to understand the application of Western personality theory within the framework of Islamic values and teachings. In practice, there are often differences between Western psychological concepts and Islamic ethical and spiritual principles. For example, Adler's ideas about social interest are similar to the concept of Islamic brotherhood, which emphasizes brotherhood and concern for others. Meanwhile, Erikson's theory of psychosocial crisis can be used to explain an individual's spiritual development, particularly when entering the age of taklif. This theme aims to bridge Western psychological understanding with an Islamic perspective, thus integrating spiritual values into the process of personality formation. The problem raised is the lack of studies that systematically connect psychological theory with an Islamic value framework. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to analyze the theories of Alfred Adler and Erik Erikson from an Islamic perspective and examine how the social and developmental aspects of both theories can be integrated with Islamic principles. The hope is that individual personality development will not only develop psychologically but also align with religious values to achieve Allah's pleasure (al-falah).

METHOD

This study uses a literature review method by examining various scientific sources relevant to the research topic. The data sources were obtained from journal articles, books, proceedings, and other scientific publications accessed through academic platforms such as Google Scholar and Science Direct



. The selected literature was determined based on topic relevance, source credibility, and publication year in accordance with recent research developments. The collected data were then analyzed descriptively by comparing, classifying, and synthesizing findings from previous studies in order to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the topic discussed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Personality Theory According to Adler and Erikson

Alfred Adler (1870-1973)

Alfred Adler is known as one of the most influential figures in the development of psychology after Sigmund Freud. He was born in Vienna, Austria, on February 7, 1870, to a middle-class family, the second of six children. In 1898, Adler married Raissa Epstein, with whom he had five children. His childhood was marked by rickets and pneumonia, which weakened him to the point of barely being able to walk. These experiences strongly motivated Adler to pursue a career in medicine. He earned his doctorate from the University of Vienna in 1895. Initially specializing in ophthalmology, he later became a general practitioner before finally delving into psychiatry. His interest in psychology arose from his attention to the mental state of patients and the influence of the social environment on health. Through his practical experience and research, Adler increasingly focused on psychiatry, working with children and families, and eventually formulated a theory of individual psychology that emphasized the role of life goals, feelings of inferiority, and social concerns in shaping human personality.

Alfred Adler's first encounter with Sigmund Freud, a leading figure in psychoanalysis, occurred in 1902. Nine years later, he officially joined the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society. In 1907, Adler also became active in discussion groups led by Freud, and from then on began writing papers on the concept of organic inferiority, which initially aligned with Freud's thinking, (Alhabsy, 2024). Adler even served as president of the organization. However, as time



went on, fundamental differences emerged between the two regarding the source of human motivation. Adler argued that the primary drive of individuals is the will to power, namely the desire to be empowered and find meaning in life. In contrast, Freud emphasized that human behavior is more influenced by the unconscious, which stores instincts, drives, and repressed past experiences, including unrealized romantic desires or experiences.

These differing views ultimately led Adler to leave the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society and formulate a new school known as Individual Psychology, which emphasized life goals, social concerns, and the individual's ability to overcome feelings of inferiority. From 1935, Adler lived in the United States, continuing his practice as a neurologist and teaching medical psychology at Long Island College of Medicine. He died of a heart attack in Aberdeen, Scotland, on May 28, 1937, while on a lecture tour.

According to Alfred Adler, every human being naturally possesses a sense of inferiority that drives them to continually strive for self-improvement, achieving a better state, and relying on others in the process, (Muhitotun, 2025). Adler viewed humans as social beings who need each other. Within the Adlerian framework, there are four main principles: the drive to achieve superiority, a subjective perspective on experience, a unique lifestyle, and the creative power a person possesses in shaping their personality, (Risydah, 2023).

a. The drive towards superiority

According to Adler, the essence of human motivation can be simplified into one primary drive: the pursuit of success or a state of superiority. From early in life, individuals often face physical limitations that lead to feelings of inferiority. These feelings then drive a person to strive for self-improvement and achieve success. However, the struggle for personal superiority often leads individuals to become more focused on self-achievement and less concerned with social interests. Typically, this drive stems from an exaggerated sense of inferiority.

b. Subjective perception



In an effort to overcome feelings of inferiority, humans strive for excellence. However, the way they pursue this struggle is not always based on objective reality, but rather on their personal perspective on reality, their hopes, or their imagined ideal goals. In other words, the direction of achievement is more influenced by the individual's interpretation of the facts than the facts themselves.

c. Lifestyle

Every individual has goals, feels inferior, strives for superiority, and expresses these struggles through both social and non-social engagement. The unique patterns a person uses to achieve these goals are called lifestyles, which are the individual's distinctive ways of responding to the life circumstances they encounter. These lifestyles typically begin to form around the age of 4-5, influenced by heredity, environment, and how a child observes and interprets these experiences.

d. The creative power of self

Adler emphasized that humans possess creativity in determining their actions. Unlike Freud's view, which viewed individuals as passive recipients of experience, Adler viewed humans as active actors capable of initiating behavior and choosing their own course of action.

Within the Adlerian framework, there are four main concepts that form the basis of the theory: the drive for superiority, subjective perception, lifestyle, and individual creative power. These four aspects explain how a person strives to overcome feelings of inferiority and shape their personality. On the other hand, some literature formulates Adler's principles more broadly into five main elements: feelings of inferiority, striving for superiority, social interest, lifestyle, and personal creativity, (Risti, 2024). These differences in formulation arise because researchers emphasize different aspects of Adler's ideas. However, the essence remains the same: humans constantly strive to develop, overcome limitations, and build positive relationships with their environment.



In his development of Individual Psychology, Alfred Adler emphasized that each individual has a unique way of overcoming feelings of inferiority and striving for superiority, which is reflected in their lifestyle. Although Adler emphasized the uniqueness of each person, he still classified four basic lifestyle patterns formed from a combination of social interest and activity level. The first three patterns are considered forms of a mistaken lifestyle, while the fourth pattern is considered a representation of a healthy psychological condition.

a. *The ruling type* or dominant type

Individuals with this type have great energy to achieve personal goals and tend to dominate others, but show little social awareness. An example is a student organization leader who constantly demands that his ideas be accepted and struggles to accept input from others. While appearing confident, his primary motivation often stems from a fear of failure or loss of control.

b. *The getting type* or recipient type

This type is characterized by low activity levels and minimal social interest. People with this lifestyle are typically passive and dependent on others to meet their needs and solve problems. This pattern often occurs in children who are accustomed to being pampered, so they grow up believing that their environment is obligated to fulfill their desires. As a result, they prefer to be passive and simply accept help without contributing in return.

c. *The avoiding type* or avoidant type

Individuals with this type have very little activity and minimal social interest. They tend to shy away from life's challenges and problems to avoid the risk of failure. This withdrawn attitude causes them to avoid social interactions and difficult situations as a form of self-protection. However, this pattern actually hinders personal development and limits their role in the social environment.

d. *The socially useful type* or socially useful type

This type is considered ideal because it is characterized by a high level of activity and a strong social interest. Individuals with this lifestyle



are able to face life's various demands realistically and collaborate with others. Their efforts to achieve success are not solely oriented towards personal gain, but rather directed towards contributing to the common good. A strong social interest channels energy and the drive for superiority in a positive direction, resulting in constructive and beneficial actions for society.

One of Alfred Adler's most famous ideas is his theory of birth order and family roles. He believed that a child's position within the family structure has a significant influence on personality development. Adler proposed that common traits typically emerge in first-born, middle-born, and youngest children, each contributing to their individual development.

a. Firstborn child

As the firstborn, the eldest child typically carries significant responsibilities because all of their parents' attention is initially focused on them. This makes the firstborn feel like they're receiving special treatment. However, when a younger sibling is born, the parents' attention is divided, which can lead to anxiety, overdependence, or a sense of superiority, (Alhabsy, 2024). Firstborns generally develop into independent, achievement-oriented individuals who take on leadership roles within the family. For example, they often feel obligated to care for their younger siblings and help their parents, developing a more mature and responsible attitude.

b. Middle child

The middle child's position between older and younger siblings often makes them feel like they have to fight for attention. They often act as mediators in family conflicts and learn to be flexible and diplomatic. Feeling less prominent than their siblings, middle children often seek identity outside the family environment, for example through academic achievement or social interaction.

c. Youngest child



As the last child, the youngest often receives more attention because they are considered the "little one" in the family. They tend to be more independent, creative, and don't have to shoulder as much responsibility as their older siblings. Youngest children often feel protected or pampered by the entire family, making them more socially adaptable. However, in some cases, this parenting style can make them more dependent on others.

Erik Erikson (1902–1994)

Erik Erikson was a German psychologist known for his theory of eight stages of human development. He was born in Frankfurt on June 15, 1902, and died in Harwich, United States, on May 12, 1994, (Mutmainnah, 2025). Erikson was raised by his biological mother and stepfather, although he never knew for certain the identity of his biological father. During his teenage years, Erikson left home and began a wandering life. One day, he received a letter from his friend, Peter Bolos, inviting him to teach at Anna Freud's new school. During his stay in Vienna, Erikson married Joan Serson, a Canadian artist and teacher, and they had four children: three sons and one daughter. Erikson's main contribution to psychology was his idea of crises at each stage of development. He believed that these crises play a crucial role in personality formation, which can strengthen or weaken an individual, (Diana, 2021).

In 1933, Erik Erikson moved to the United States and settled in Boston, where he practiced psychoanalysis with his own modified approach. Although he lacked a medical or formal academic degree, he remained active as a researcher at Massachusetts General Hospital, Harvard Medical School, and the Harvard Psychological Clinic. Erikson then continued his academic career at the University of California, where he developed a theory of personality that was distinctive yet rooted in Freudian thought. In 1950, he published his landmark work, *Childhood and Society*. Then, in 1960, Erikson returned to Harvard and taught for the next decade as a professor of human development.

Unlike Freud, who emphasized biological aspects as the primary driver, Erik Erikson viewed personality development as the result of an interaction



between biological, social, and cultural factors. He believed that each phase of human life is characterized by psychosocial conflicts that need to be resolved so that individuals can grow healthily and develop a stable personality. Erikson believed that throughout life, humans go through stages of development from birth to old age, which he formulated in his psychosocial theory. A person's success or failure in resolving conflicts at one stage will affect the quality of development at the next stage. This division of stages is based on specific phases in human life, (Khairunnisa, 2022). Next, the author will describe Erikson's most well-known theory, namely the eight stages of psychosocial development.

a. Trust vs. Mistrust (0-1 years)

In the early stages of life, babies learn to trust others, especially primary caregivers like their mothers, through affection, attention, and the fulfillment of basic needs. When these needs are consistently met, babies feel secure and develop trust in their environment. Conversely, neglect or abuse can lead to distrust and anxiety about the world around them.

b. Autonomy vs. shame and doubt (2-3 years)

At this age, children begin to develop body control skills, such as feeding themselves, walking, or using the toilet. Proper support and freedom will foster self-confidence and independence. However, if children are overly restricted or frequently shamed, they can grow up feeling ashamed and doubtful about their abilities.

c. Initiative vs guilt (3-6 years)

Children begin to show courage in trying new things and exploring their environment. If parents support their curiosity and creativity, they will develop into confident and proactive individuals. Conversely, if a child's efforts are frequently criticized or discouraged, they will feel guilty and reluctant to act independently.

d. Perseverance vs inferiority complex (6-12 years)

During this period, children begin to hone their academic, social, and teamwork skills. Appreciation for their efforts and achievements will foster



self-confidence and productivity. However, repeated failure or negative comparisons with others can lead to feelings of inadequacy and inferiority.

e. Identity vs identity confusion (12-18/20 years)

Adolescence is marked by the search for identity, life values, and future direction. Environmental support and opportunities for exploration help form a strong identity. If this process fails, adolescents will experience role confusion, loss of direction, and a sense of not knowing who they are.

f. Intimacy vs isolation stage (20-40 years)

In early adulthood, individuals begin to develop meaningful, close relationships, whether in the form of friendships or marriage. Success is characterized by the ability to establish close, trusting relationships. Conversely, failure during this stage can lead to feelings of loneliness and a fear of commitment.

g. Generativity vs stagnation (40-60/65 years)

In this phase, individuals are encouraged to make real contributions to their families, work, and society. Those who succeed in being productive will feel their lives are meaningful and will benefit future generations. Conversely, failure to contribute can lead to feelings of worthlessness and lead to life stagnation.

h. Maturity vs despair (65 years and above)

As people enter old age, they begin to reflect on their life journey and assess whether it has been meaningful. If they are able to accept the past with peace, they will gain wisdom and inner peace. However, if their life is filled with regret and failure, they are likely to experience despair and fear of death.

Alfred Adler and Erik Erikson's Personality Theories in Islamic Perspective

From an Islamic perspective, Western personality theories such as Alfred Adler's Individual Psychology and Erik Erikson's Psychosocial Psychology do indeed show quite strong alignment in social aspects. However, both theories are often criticized for not paying enough attention to the spiritual dimension (ruh) and the orientation towards the afterlife, which in Islam are the main



foundation in understanding the nature of humans and their purpose in life, (Rusli, 2022). The main concept in Adler's thinking, namely *social interest* or social interest the natural human drive to contribute to the common welfare can be understood from an Islamic perspective as a concrete manifestation of *ukhuwah Islamiyah* (brotherhood among Muslims) and social responsibility in the realm of *mu'amalah*. Thus, Adler's ideas about the importance of social concern have a point of alignment with Islamic teachings that emphasize solidarity, cooperation, and moral responsibility towards others, (Nasution, 2024). While the concept of superiority in Western psychology emphasizes individual effort to achieve success, Islam emphasizes that this struggle must be inseparable from the spiritual dimension. Efforts to achieve success must always be accompanied by prayer and a sense of trust in God, so that the orientation of achievement is not merely worldly but also has a value of worship and is based on faith in Him, (Rusuli, 2022). in line with the word of Allah in QS. Ali Imran verse 104:

وَلْتَكُنْ مِنْكُمْ أُمَّةٌ يَدْعُونَ إِلَى الْخَيْرِ وَيَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَيَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ
الْمُفْلِحُونَ

" And let there be among you a group of people who call to virtue, enjoin what is good and forbid what is evil; they are the lucky ones. "

Erikson's framework of crisis developmental stages also holds relevance in an educational context. In adolescence, the stage of identity versus role confusion, this concept can be combined with the fundamental need to affirm oneself as a servant of God as the primary identity. In this regard, Islamic teachings serve as a fundamental guideline, helping adolescents overcome role confusion and providing clear direction in the process of identity formation, (Juwita, 2025). The initial stage of development, namely the phase of trust versus mistrust, can be understood in line with the process of instilling the value of faith as the main foundation for a child's psychosocial development.



With trust built from an early age through spiritual values, children gain a solid foundation for developing a sense of security, confidence, and positive relationships with their environment. ¹Thus, Islamic Psychology does not reject the structural framework offered by Adler or Erikson, but rather utilizes it as a basis for analysis. However, this model is then combined with the concept of soul dynamics in Islam—namely *Nafs al-Ammārah*, *Lawwāmah*, and *Muthmainnah*—so that the direction of personality development is always aimed at achieving Allah's pleasure as the primary goal. As Allah says in QS. Al Fajar verses 27-28:

يَا أَيَّتُهَا النَّفْسُ الْمُطْمَئِنَّةُ ارْجِعِي إِلَىٰ رَبِّكِ رَاضِيَةً مَّرْضِيَّةً

"O tranquil soul! Return to your Lord with a heart that is pleased and pleased with Him."

Case Study

Alfred Adler (Individual Psychology)

This case study is adapted from research at a Madrasah Aliyah (MA) in Medan City, focusing on a 16-year-old student with the initials AH who has a background as a martial arts athlete with quite good non-academic achievements. This case highlights AH's deviant behavior in the form of truancy and a decline in academic achievement after receiving a harsh reprimand from the teacher. Analysis based on Alfred Adler's Individual Psychology theory shows that this behavior is a form of compensation for an inferiority complex triggered by social shame. This condition encourages AH to divert the drive towards superiority towards rebellion, which is reflected in a lifestyle oriented towards seeking attention with a low level of social interest in the school environment. Therefore, counseling intervention is directed at reconstructing AH's lifestyle so that he is able to utilize his creative power more positively and constructively for the social benefit, (Fadilah, 2023).



Erik Erikson (Developmental Psychology)

This case study is adapted from research on adolescents facing an identity crisis due to conflict or violence within the family. For example, a 16-year-old student with the initials AN experienced the impact of divorce and emotional abuse from his parents. Analysis using the fifth stage of Erik Erikson's Psychosocial Theory (Identity vs. Role Confusion) shows that AN experienced difficulty in determining his role and direction in life, even though he was at a crucial stage in exploring his values and self-identity. This failure to build identity integration was caused by minimal support and the absence of positive role models from his primary social environment, namely his family. This condition prevented AN from achieving a sense of complete fidelity. This emphasizes that the role of the environment, especially the family, is crucial for adolescents' success in overcoming an identity crisis, where failure at this stage has the potential to lead to deviant behavior or a tendency towards social isolation, (Deborah, 2021).

CONCLUSION

1. Adler and Erikson's Personality Theories: Social Dimensions in Individual Development. Alfred Adler emphasized that personality development is rooted in an individual's efforts to overcome feelings of inferiority and achieve superiority, which is manifested through lifestyle, social interests, and creative power. Meanwhile, Erik Erikson outlined eight stages of psychosocial development influenced by interactions with the social and cultural environment, where each crisis at each stage makes an important contribution to personality formation. Both figures emphasized the role of social interaction in shaping an individual's character and identity, although Adler placed more emphasis on internal drives, while Erikson emphasized the dynamics of psychosocial crises throughout the lifespan.
2. Within an Islamic framework, Adler's and Erikson's ideas can be combined with the principles of *Islamic brotherhood* , social responsibility, and an orientation toward God's *pleasure* . Efforts to overcome deviant behavior



(munkar) and the adolescent identity crisis, as described by Erikson, can be achieved by instilling the values of faith as a guide to life. Thus, personality development in Islamic psychology emphasizes not only the social and psychological aspects, as in Western theory, but also integrates the spiritual dimension as the primary foundation for achieving true well-being and happiness.

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