

Beyond Scarcity: Natural Resources And Human Needs In Islamic Economics

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ABSTRACT

This article critically examines the existence of natural resources from the perspective of Islamic economics by challenging the modern economic paradigm that assumes natural resources are limited while human needs are unlimited. Using a qualitative approach with a critical-normative literature review design, this study analyzes classical and contemporary economic theories, empirical findings, and Islamic normative sources, including the Qur'an, Hadith, and authoritative tafsir literature. The findings indicate that the scarcity paradigm is not absolute, as the existence of natural resources is dynamic and continuously transformed through technological development, innovation, and human management. Empirical evidence further shows that environmental and economic crises are more closely related to unequal distribution, institutional failure, and excessive human behavior than to the absolute depletion of resources. From the Islamic economics perspective, natural resources are viewed as a divine trust (amanah) provided sufficiently for human welfare, while human consumption is normatively restricted by ethical and moral principles. This study concludes that the primary problem lies not in resource existence, but in flawed economic systems, unjust governance, and uncontrolled consumption behavior.

1. INTRODUCTION

The paradigm of modern economics, from the classical to the neoclassical era, has been fundamentally built upon the assumption that natural resources are limited, while human needs and wants are unlimited. This assumption has become the primary foundation of conventional economic theory and is widely used to explain the mechanism of resource allocation through market systems (Ummah, 2023). This perspective originates from the tradition of classical economics pioneered by Adam Smith and further developed by David Ricardo, both of whom positioned scarcity as the basic condition of economic activity. In its later development, neoclassical economics, particularly through the contribution of Robert Solow, reinforced the view that resource limitations constitute a constraining factor in long-term economic growth (Solow, 2016).

The dominance of this assumption functions not only as an analytical tool but also as a global worldview shaping the relationship between humans and nature. Various international reports indicate

that the intensive exploitation of natural resources is frequently associated with concerns over diminishing reserves, environmental degradation, and threats to sustainable development (Xiong, Guo, Juga, Song, & Dai, 2023). Phenomena such as deforestation, climate change, and ecosystem degradation have become empirical evidence commonly used to strengthen the narrative of natural resource scarcity (Wassie, 2020). Nevertheless, economic literature also reveals a paradox in which countries rich in natural resources often experience lower economic growth compared to resource-poor countries, as explained in the resource curse theory proposed by Richard Auty and further strengthened by studies conducted by Jeffrey Sachs and Andrew Warner (Sachs & Warner, 2001).

These findings indicate that the primary problem in natural resource management does not merely lie in the aspect of physical scarcity, but is also closely related to governance, distribution mechanisms, and the underlying economic structures (Trihatmoko & Susilo, 2024). In many cases, phenomena perceived as resource scarcity more accurately reflect unequal access and institutional failure rather than an absolute shortage in resource availability (Faruk, Bakkar, Ul-durar, & Nawaz, 2023). This suggests that the assumption of natural resource scarcity as an absolute condition requires critical re-examination.

On the other hand, Islamic economics offers a different perspective regarding the existence of natural resources and human behavior. The Qur'an emphasizes that all resources on earth are creations of Allah SWT provided for humankind. As stated in Surah Al-Hijr verse 21:

"And there is not a thing except that with Us are its (treasures or storehouses), and We do not send it down except in a known measure."

Furthermore, Surah Al-A'raf verse 31 states:

"Eat and drink, but do not be excessive. Indeed, Allah does not like those who commit excess."

This verse emphasizes that the primary issue does not lie in the limitation of resources, but rather in human consumption behavior that exceeds proper boundaries (*israf*). Moreover, Surah Ar-Rum verse 41 declares:

"Corruption has appeared on land and sea because of what the hands of people have earned..."

This verse indicates that environmental destruction and crises are primarily caused by human behavior rather than by deficiencies in Allah's creation. Within the framework of Islamic economics, the principles of *tawhid* (divine unity), *khilafah* (stewardship), and *mizan* (balance) position humans as responsible trustees (*khalifah*) rather than absolute owners of resources (Chapra, 2000).

Furthermore, from both historical and empirical perspectives, the existence of natural resources demonstrates a dynamic and sustainable character. Throughout the history of human civilization, there has been no evidence that the earth has entirely lost its fundamental capacity to sustain life. Instead, what has occurred is a transformation in the forms and methods of resource utilization in line with technological advancement and innovation (Rockström, 2024). The transition of energy usage from wood to coal, petroleum, and subsequently renewable energy illustrates that natural resources are not static entities, but continuously evolve according to human needs and capabilities.

Nevertheless, studies that explicitly challenge the foundational assumption regarding the scarcity of natural resources and the unlimited nature of human needs—particularly from an Islamic economics perspective integrated with empirical analysis—remain relatively limited. Most studies tend to accept these assumptions as basic theoretical frameworks without conducting critical evaluations of their validity from both normative and empirical perspectives (Chapra, 2008).

Therefore, this article aims to critically examine the existence of natural resources from the perspective of Islamic economics by challenging the paradigm of scarcity that has long dominated modern economic thought, while simultaneously reconstructing the understanding of human needs that are commonly

assumed to be unlimited. Through conceptual, normative, and empirical approaches, this article argues that natural resources essentially remain existent and sustainable within the framework of divine design, whereas phenomena commonly perceived as scarcity are largely the result of economic system constructions, unjust distribution mechanisms, and uncontrolled human behavior.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The concept of scarcity constitutes one of the most fundamental assumptions in modern economic theory. Classical and neoclassical economics posit that natural resources are inherently limited, whereas human needs and wants are unlimited. This assumption forms the basis for explaining economic choices, market mechanisms, and resource allocation. According to conventional economic theory, scarcity compels individuals and societies to make trade-offs in determining how limited resources should be utilized efficiently (Mankiw, 2021). The roots of this paradigm can be traced to classical economists such as Adam Smith and David Ricardo, who viewed land and natural resources as limited production factors. This perspective was further reinforced in neoclassical economics through the growth theory developed by Robert Solow, which identified resource limitations as a major constraint on long-term economic growth. Consequently, scarcity has become not only an analytical concept but also an ideological foundation shaping modern economic behavior and policy orientation.

Within this framework, unlimited human needs are considered natural and unavoidable. Economic systems are therefore designed to continuously expand production and consumption in order to satisfy ever-growing desires. However, this paradigm has been criticized for encouraging excessive exploitation of natural resources, environmental degradation, and unsustainable consumption patterns. Contrary to the static perception of scarcity, contemporary resource economics suggests that natural resources are dynamic rather than absolutely fixed. The availability and usability of resources are strongly influenced by technological advancement, innovation, institutional capacity, and human adaptation. Scholars such as John E. Tilton argue that resource depletion should not merely be understood in physical terms, because human innovation continuously creates alternatives, substitutes, and more efficient methods of utilization.

Historically, human civilization has experienced continuous transitions in resource utilization, particularly in energy consumption. The movement from wood-based energy to coal, petroleum, natural gas, and renewable energy demonstrates that resources evolve alongside scientific and technological development. This indicates that scarcity is often relative and contextual rather than absolute. Moreover, sustainability theory emphasizes that environmental crises frequently originate from governance failures and unequal distribution rather than from the complete exhaustion of resources themselves. Studies on the resource curse phenomenon reveal that countries rich in natural resources do not necessarily achieve prosperity due to institutional weaknesses, corruption, and poor governance structures. Therefore, the issue of natural resources must also be analyzed from political, social, and ethical dimensions.

Islamic economics provides a fundamentally different perspective regarding natural resources and human behavior. In Islam, all natural resources belong ultimately to Allah SWT, while humans serve merely as trustees (khalifah) responsible for managing them ethically and responsibly. This perspective is rooted in the principles of tawhid (divine unity), khilafah (stewardship), and mizan (balance). The Qur'an explicitly states that natural resources are created for the benefit of humanity and provided in sufficient measure. The concept of divine sufficiency implies that environmental and economic crises are not primarily caused by the inadequacy of Allah's creation, but rather by human misconduct, injustice, and excessive behavior (israf). Islamic teachings strongly condemn wastefulness and overconsumption, emphasizing moderation as a central principle of economic life.

According to M. Umer Chapra, the core economic problem in modern society is not resource scarcity itself, but the failure to establish justice, equitable distribution, and moral discipline within economic systems. In this regard, Islamic economics does not recognize unlimited human needs as a normative principle. Instead, human wants must be regulated through ethical values, social responsibility, and the objectives of Islamic law (maqashid al-shariah). Consequently, natural resources in Islamic economics are viewed not merely as economic commodities, but as a divine trust that must be managed sustainably to achieve collective welfare and intergenerational justice. This study adopts a critical perspective in reconstructing the conventional understanding of scarcity and unlimited human needs. Theoretically, the assumption of absolute scarcity oversimplifies the complexity of economic and environmental realities. Empirical evidence demonstrates that many crises associated with scarcity are largely caused by unequal access, exploitative economic systems, and institutional failures rather than by actual resource depletion.

From the Islamic economics perspective, the scarcity paradigm requires reinterpretation. While physical limitations certainly exist, they should not be generalized into an absolute doctrine that legitimizes excessive exploitation and unlimited consumption. Instead, Islamic economics proposes a balanced framework in which natural resources are sufficiently available within divine design, while human behavior must be ethically controlled. Therefore, this theoretical framework positions scarcity not as an absolute natural condition, but as a socially and economically constructed phenomenon shaped by governance systems, distribution mechanisms, technological capability, and moral values.

3. METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach using a critical-normative literature review design aimed at examining and critically evaluating the modern economic paradigm concerning the existence of natural resources and the concept of human needs. This approach does not merely focus on describing the literature, but also critically investigates the underlying assumptions that shape conventional economic thought and reconstructs them within the framework of Islamic economics. The data sources in this study consist of two categories: normative sources and empirical-theoretical sources. The normative sources include the Qur'an, Hadith, and classical as well as contemporary tafsir literature, such as the works of M. Quraish Shihab, which are used to establish the conceptual foundation from an Islamic perspective. Meanwhile, empirical and theoretical sources are obtained from reputable scientific journals indexed in SINTA and Scopus, economics textbooks, and reports from international institutions relevant to issues of natural resources, sustainability, and human economic behavior.

Data collection was conducted through a literature study using selection criteria emphasizing topic relevance, academic credibility (peer-reviewed publications), and representation of perspectives from both conventional economics and Islamic economics. The selected literature was then systematically analyzed to identify patterns of thought, underlying assumptions, and empirical findings developed within related studies. Data analysis was carried out through four integrated stages. First, descriptive-conceptual analysis was employed to map the concepts of natural resources and human needs within modern economics. Second, critical analysis was used to evaluate and deconstruct the assumptions of resource scarcity and unlimited human needs as paradigm constructions. Third, Islamic normative analysis referring to Qur'anic verses, Hadith, and tafsir literature was conducted to construct an alternative framework based on the values of tawhid (divine unity), khilafah (stewardship), and balance (mizan). Fourth, synthesis analysis integrated all findings to produce a more comprehensive paradigm reconstruction aligned with the perspective of Islamic economics.

To ensure research validity, source triangulation techniques were employed by comparing various literatures from different perspectives and prioritizing references from credible and reputable academic

sources. Through this approach, the study is expected to generate an analysis that is not only theoretically critical, but also empirically relevant and normatively robust.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Literature Selection Process

The literature selection process was conducted systematically to ensure the academic credibility, conceptual relevance, and analytical depth of the study. The initial search identified 50 scholarly publications obtained from reputable academic databases, including Scopus-indexed journals, SINTA-indexed journals, and Google Scholar. These publications focused on issues related to natural resources, scarcity theory, sustainability, governance, human needs, environmental economics, and Islamic economics.

The screening process was carried out in several stages. First, all identified articles underwent preliminary identification to assess their general relevance to the research topic. Second, title and abstract screening was conducted to eliminate studies that lacked conceptual or empirical alignment with the objectives of the research. Third, a full-text eligibility review was undertaken to evaluate theoretical contribution, methodological relevance, and academic quality. Finally, 20 core articles were selected as the primary analytical references for this study. The selection process is summarized in the following table.

Table 1. Literature Selection Process

Selection Stage	Number of Articles	Description
Initial Identification	50 Articles	Articles collected from Scopus, SINTA, and Google Scholar
Title and Abstract Screening	35 Articles	Articles relevant to natural resources, human needs, and Islamic economics
Full-Text Eligibility Review	25 Articles	Articles meeting conceptual and methodological standards
Final Inclusion	20 Articles	Core references used in the analysis

The inclusion criteria emphasized three major aspects:

- Peer-reviewed and academically credible publications (Scopus/SINTA indexed)
- Direct relevance to natural resources, human needs, sustainability, and Islamic economics
- Clear conceptual or empirical contribution to the research objectives

This process ensured that the selected literature represented diverse yet interconnected perspectives necessary for critically evaluating the scarcity paradigm within modern economic thought.

Core Literature and Analytical Contributions

The selected literature demonstrates that debates regarding natural resources are not merely technical or economic, but also philosophical, institutional, ethical, and theological. Several foundational works in conventional economics strongly reinforce the scarcity paradigm. Studies by Robert Solow and N. Gregory Mankiw position scarcity as the central assumption underlying economic analysis and long-term growth theory.

However, other empirical and critical studies challenge the adequacy of this paradigm. Research conducted by Jeffrey Sachs, Andrew Warner, and Richard Auty reveals the paradox of resource-rich countries experiencing economic stagnation, institutional weakness, and inequality despite possessing abundant natural wealth. Similarly, Joseph Stiglitz emphasizes that structural inequality and unequal distribution play a greater role in economic crises than resource scarcity itself.

Meanwhile, sustainability scholars such as John E. Tilton and Jeffrey A. Krautkraemer argue that natural resources are dynamic and continuously transformed through technological innovation and human adaptation. From the Islamic economics perspective, scholars such as M. Umer Chapra, Yusuf al-Qaradawi, Mohammad Hashim Kamali, and Asad Zaman emphasize that economic crises fundamentally arise from moral failure, injustice, and uncontrolled human behavior rather than from absolute insufficiency of resources. The following table summarizes the 20 primary references used in this study.

Table 2. Core Literature and Key Findings

No	Author(s) & Year	Research Focus	Key Findings
1	Sachs & Warner (2001)	Resource curse	Natural resources do not always increase prosperity
2	Auty (1993)	Resource-rich countries	The paradox of natural resources
3	Stiglitz (2012)	Global inequality	Distributional problems dominate economic crises
4	Acemoglu & Robinson (2012)	Institutions	Institutions play a dominant role
5	Tilton (2003)	Resource economics	Natural resources are dynamic
6	Krautkraemer (2005)	Sustainability	Transformation of natural resources
7	Solow (1956)	Growth theory	Natural resources as limiting factors
8	Mankiw (2021)	Economic principles	Scarcity as a fundamental assumption
9	UNEP (2019)	Environmental report	Increasing global environmental pressures
10	World Bank (2020)	Natural wealth	Natural resources and development
11	IPCC (2021)	Climate report	Human activities drive environmental crises
12	Chapra (2000)	Islamic economics	Natural resources as a trust (<i>amanah</i>)
13	Chapra (2008)	Moral economy	Human needs should be limited ethically
14	Kamali (2008)	Shariah principles	Balance (<i>mizan</i>) in economic life
15	Qardhawi (1997)	Islamic consumption	Prohibition of excessive consumption
16	Shihab (2002)	Thematic tafsir	Meaning of balance and moderation
17	Hasan (2010)	Islamic worldview	Critique of modern economics
18	Zaman (2012)	Islamic critique	Criticism of capitalism
19	Daly (1996)	Ecological economics	Ecological limits and sustainability
20	Raworth (2017)	Doughnut economics	Balance between needs and sustainability

Normative Sources: Qur'anic Verses, Hadith, and Tafsir Literature

In addition to empirical literature, this study employs normative Islamic sources as the conceptual foundation for reconstructing the understanding of natural resources and human needs. The Qur'an, Hadith, and tafsir literature collectively provide ethical, spiritual, and philosophical principles concerning environmental stewardship, moderation, and economic balance.

Several Qur'anic verses emphasize that natural resources are part of Allah's creation and are provided sufficiently for humanity within a balanced system. Environmental destruction is attributed not to the inadequacy of creation itself, but to human misconduct and excessive behavior. The primary Qur'anic references used in this study are presented in the following table.

Table 3. Qur'anic Verses Used in the Study

No	Surah and Verse	Main Message	Relevance
1	QS. Al-Hijr: 21	Everything is created in measure	Natural resources are not random
2	QS. Al-A'raf: 31	Prohibition of excessiveness	Human needs are ethically limited
3	QS. Ar-Rum: 41	Corruption caused by humans	Crisis is not due to resource disappearance
4	QS. Al-Baqarah: 29	Resources created for humanity	Existence and utility of natural resources
5	QS. Ibrahim: 32–34	Allah's blessings for humanity	Sufficiency of natural resources

Supporting Hadith literature further strengthens the ethical dimension of environmental and economic management.

Table 4. Supporting Hadith References

No	Hadith	Main Meaning
1	"Eat and drink without excessiveness" (HR. Bukhari)	Limitation of consumption
2	"The world is green and beautiful..." (HR. Muslim)	Stewardship and responsibility
3	Prohibition of <i>israf</i>	Ethics of consumption

To deepen interpretation, this study also employs classical and contemporary tafsir literature as follows.

Table 5. Tafsir Literature Used in the Study

No	Tafsir	Author	Analytical Focus
1	<i>Tafsir Al-Misbah</i>	M. Quraish Shihab	Contemporary contextual interpretation
2	<i>Tafsir Ibn Kathir</i>	Ibn Kathir	Classical interpretation
3	<i>Tafsir Al-Qurtubi</i>	Al-Qurtubi	Legal and social dimensions

Preliminary Synthesis and Thematic Mapping

The integration of empirical literature and normative Islamic sources resulted in four major themes forming the analytical foundation of this study. These themes collectively demonstrate the contrast between the conventional scarcity paradigm and the Islamic economic perspective regarding natural resources and human needs.

Table 6. Preliminary Thematic Mapping

Theme	Main Issues	Key References
Theme 1: Modern Economic Paradigm	Natural resources are limited; human needs are unlimited	Mankiw, Solow
Theme 2: Global Empirical Realities	Resource curse; inequality and governance problems	Sachs, Stiglitz
Theme 3: Islamic Economic Perspective	Natural resources as <i>amanah</i> ; humans as <i>khalifah</i> ; ethical consumption	Chapra, Qardhawi
Theme 4: Dynamics of Natural Resources	Resources transform rather than disappear	Tilton, Krautkraemer

The first theme highlights the dominance of the scarcity assumption within modern economics. The second theme demonstrates that many crises associated with scarcity are actually linked to inequality, governance failure, and institutional weakness. The third theme presents Islamic economics as an alternative framework emphasizing stewardship, justice, moderation, and ethical responsibility. Finally,

the fourth theme reveals that natural resources are dynamic and adaptive rather than absolutely fixed or permanently exhausted. These thematic findings provide the conceptual basis for the subsequent critical discussion and reconstruction of the scarcity paradigm from the perspective of Islamic economics.

Discussion

The Modern Economic Paradigm on Natural Resources and Human Needs

Modern economic theory positions natural resources as inherently limited production factors, while simultaneously assuming that human needs and wants are unlimited. This assumption constitutes one of the most fundamental pillars of conventional economics in explaining consumption behavior, production activities, market mechanisms, and resource allocation. Within this framework, scarcity is understood as the natural condition of economic life, compelling individuals and societies to make choices and trade-offs. Consequently, the price system is regarded as the primary mechanism for allocating scarce resources efficiently (Mankiw, 2022).

The roots of this paradigm can be traced back to the classical economic tradition pioneered by Adam Smith and David Ricardo, who viewed land and natural resources as finite factors within the production process. In the subsequent development of neoclassical economics, Robert Solow further strengthened this perspective by arguing that resource limitations constitute one of the principal constraints on long-term economic growth (Solow, 2016). Thus, the scarcity assumption functions not merely as a descriptive analytical tool, but also as a normative framework shaping economic policy orientations and development strategies.

The implications of this paradigm are substantial. Economic systems become heavily oriented toward efficiency, competition, accumulation, and continuous growth. Within such a framework, natural resources are treated primarily as commodities to be exploited for the maximization of economic gain. Since human wants are assumed to expand endlessly, economic growth is likewise expected to continue indefinitely. Indirectly, this perspective legitimizes intensive resource extraction and excessive consumption patterns, thereby increasing environmental pressure and ecological degradation.

Nevertheless, critical scholarship increasingly demonstrates that this paradigm oversimplifies the complexity of economic and environmental realities. Empirical studies indicate that many economic crises are not caused solely by physical limitations of resources, but rather by unequal distribution, institutional failure, and structural injustice. The resource curse theory developed by Jeffrey Sachs and Andrew Warner reveals that countries endowed with abundant natural resources frequently experience slower economic growth, inequality, and political instability instead of prosperity (Sachs & Warner, 2001).

Similarly, Joseph Stiglitz argues that distributional inequality and governance failures are among the primary factors worsening global economic conditions, rather than scarcity itself. These findings suggest that the assumptions underlying modern economics are insufficient for explaining complex empirical realities. Consequently, the scarcity paradigm should not be accepted uncritically as an absolute truth, but rather understood as a theoretical construction shaped by specific historical and ideological contexts.

Therefore, the modern economic understanding of limited resources and unlimited human needs can be viewed as a paradigm with conceptual limitations, opening space for alternative perspectives capable of offering a more comprehensive and ethically grounded understanding of economic life, including the framework of Islamic economics.

Empirical Realities: The Dynamic and Sustainable Nature of Natural Resources

The findings of this study demonstrate that the existence of natural resources is neither static nor absolutely fixed, but rather dynamic, adaptive, and continuously transformed. In resource economics,

availability is not determined solely by physical quantity, but also by technological development, innovation, institutional capability, and human creativity in utilizing available resources (Rahim et al., 2021). Consequently, scarcity should be understood as relative and contextual rather than absolute.

Historical transformations in energy utilization provide strong empirical evidence supporting this argument. Human civilization has continuously shifted from one energy source to another, beginning with wood, followed by coal, petroleum, natural gas, and more recently renewable energy sources. This transition illustrates that while methods and forms of utilization change, the existence of resources themselves continues through adaptation and innovation. In other words, what changes is not necessarily the existence of natural resources, but human capacity to access and utilize them.

Furthermore, reports from international institutions such as the World Bank and the United Nations Environment Program indicate that environmental challenges are primarily associated with degradation of environmental quality, exploitative management systems, and unequal distribution rather than the total disappearance of resources. This suggests that the problem is fundamentally managerial and structural rather than existential in nature.

The phenomenon of the resource curse further reinforces this conclusion. Numerous resource-rich countries continue to experience poverty, corruption, conflict, and institutional fragility despite possessing abundant natural wealth. Such cases demonstrate that resource abundance alone does not automatically generate prosperity or sustainability. Instead, governance quality, institutional integrity, and distributional justice determine whether resources become a blessing or a source of crisis.

In addition, technological advancement has expanded access to resources previously considered inaccessible or economically unviable. Innovations in extraction technology, renewable energy systems, recycling mechanisms, and efficiency improvements continuously broaden the scope of resource availability. Thus, empirical evidence suggests that natural resources remain sustainable within certain ecological and managerial frameworks, while scarcity often reflects limitations in governance, technology, and distribution rather than absolute depletion.

Islamic Economic Perspective: Natural Resources as Amanah and Balance

Islamic economics offers a fundamentally different perspective regarding natural resources and human economic behavior. In Islamic thought, natural resources are not viewed merely as economic commodities, but as part of Allah's creation entrusted to humanity within the framework of *amanah* (trusteeship). The Qur'an consistently emphasizes that all resources on earth belong ultimately to Allah SWT and are provided for human welfare under conditions of responsibility and balance.

This principle is clearly reflected in Surah Al-Baqarah verse 29 and Surah Ibrahim verses 32–34, which affirm that nature and its resources were created for the benefit of humanity. Furthermore, Surah Al-Hijr verse 21 states that all things are created in precise measure, indicating the existence of balance, order, and sufficiency within the divine system of creation. From this perspective, natural resources are not chaotic or fundamentally insufficient, but exist within a harmonious framework capable of sustaining life.

However, Islam simultaneously establishes ethical limitations on human behavior. Surah Al-A'raf verse 31 explicitly prohibits excessive consumption (*israf*), emphasizing that the central problem lies not in resource inadequacy, but in uncontrolled human consumption. Similarly, Surah Ar-Rum verse 41 explains that corruption and destruction on land and sea are caused by human actions. These verses collectively indicate that environmental and economic crises originate primarily from moral failure and irresponsible behavior rather than from deficiencies in creation itself.

This perspective is strongly reinforced by M. Umer Chapra, who argues that the fundamental economic problem is not resource scarcity, but injustice in distribution and the absence of moral discipline in

economic systems. Within this framework, human needs are not considered unlimited by nature, but can and should be regulated through ethical and spiritual values.

Moreover, the concept of *maqashid al-shariah* emphasizes that economic activity should aim at achieving balanced welfare (*maslahah*) rather than unlimited accumulation. Economic success is therefore measured not solely by material growth, but also by justice, social harmony, environmental sustainability, and moral well-being. This demonstrates that Islamic economics possesses an internal ethical mechanism capable of controlling excessive desires and preserving balance between humans and nature.

Accordingly, Islamic economics provides a more balanced and holistic framework in which natural resources are viewed as sufficient within divine design, while human beings are required to manage and consume them responsibly, ethically, and sustainably.

Critical Synthesis: Challenging the Classical Paradigm

The integration of empirical findings and Islamic normative perspectives enables a critical reconstruction of the classical scarcity paradigm. This study argues that several assumptions commonly accepted within modern economics require reevaluation, particularly regarding resource limitations, unlimited human needs, natural scarcity, and the legitimacy of unlimited exploitation.

Table 7. Critical Challenge to the Classical Paradigm

Classical Assumptions	Empirical Findings	Islamic Perspective	Critical Position
Natural resources are limited	Resources are dynamic and transformative	Resources are created sufficiently	Scarcity is not absolute
Human needs are unlimited	Consumption is systemically shaped	Needs are morally regulated	Social construction
Scarcity is natural	Inequality and distributional injustice dominate	Resources are an amanah	Systemic bias
Exploitation is economically rational	Exploitation creates crises	Excessiveness (<i>israf</i>) is prohibited	Requires correction

Challenging the Assumption of Natural Resource Scarcity

Classical economics positions natural resources as inherently limited entities, forming the basis of scarcity theory. This assumption is widely accepted as a given condition without sufficiently considering the dynamic transformation of resource availability through technological development and innovation. Empirical evidence, however, demonstrates that resource availability evolves continuously alongside scientific progress, exploration, and human adaptability (Okolo, Wen, & Susaeta, 2023).

From this perspective, scarcity should be understood as relative rather than absolute. Many resources previously considered limited have experienced reserve expansion due to technological advancement and improved efficiency. Therefore, scarcity cannot be positioned as a universal and timeless truth.

Islamic economics further challenges the assumption of absolute scarcity. Surah Al-Hijr verse 21 emphasizes that all things are created in measure, indicating balance and sufficiency within creation. According to M. Quraish Shihab, the concept of “measure” reflects proportionality and adequacy rather than deficiency. Likewise, Surah Al-Baqarah verse 29 affirms that everything on earth was created for humanity, indicating broad utility and accessibility of resources.

Thus, rejecting the assumption of absolute scarcity does not mean denying physical limitations, but rather opposing the generalization that natural resources are inherently insufficient. The real limitation often lies in human capability to manage, distribute, and utilize resources justly and sustainably.

Challenging the Concept of Unlimited Human Needs

The assumption that human needs are unlimited constitutes another central doctrine of modern economics. This idea serves as the justification for perpetual production expansion and endless economic growth. However, such an assumption is more ideological and normative than empirically grounded.

In practice, human consumption patterns are strongly shaped by culture, social systems, values, and economic structures rather than by purely biological necessities. Modern capitalist systems continuously stimulate artificial wants through advertising, consumer culture, and competitive lifestyles. Consequently, “unlimited needs” may be interpreted less as an inherent human characteristic and more as a product of economic systems promoting excessive consumption.

Islamic economics rejects the notion of unlimited needs. Surah Al-A’raf verse 31 commands humans to eat and drink without excessiveness, thereby establishing moral boundaries for consumption. Prophetic traditions likewise emphasize moderation and self-restraint. According to *Tafsir Al-Misbah*, excessive behavior (*israf*) reflects the absence of self-control in all dimensions of life, not merely consumption.

Furthermore, the concept of *maqashid al-shariah* prioritizes balanced welfare and collective benefit rather than unrestricted satisfaction of desires. Accordingly, while human desires may expand endlessly, legitimate human needs remain normatively limited through ethical guidance and spiritual discipline.

Therefore, the concept of “unlimited human needs” should be understood critically as a reflection of consumerist economic systems rather than an unquestionable characteristic of human nature.

Challenging Scarcity as a Natural Condition

Conventional economics generally treats scarcity as an unavoidable natural condition. Nevertheless, empirical evidence suggests that scarcity is frequently contextual and socially produced. Many instances of scarcity occur not because resources do not exist, but because access and distribution are unequal.

Global inequality illustrates that some regions experience resource abundance while others face severe deprivation. This demonstrates that scarcity often reflects structural injustice rather than physical absence of resources.

From the Islamic perspective, Surah Ar-Rum verse 41 explains that corruption and crisis emerge because of human actions. Both classical and contemporary tafsir literature emphasize that humans possess central responsibility in maintaining environmental balance. When ethical boundaries are violated, environmental degradation and social crisis inevitably emerge.

Consequently, scarcity should not be understood merely as a natural phenomenon, but as the outcome of interactions between humans, institutions, and economic systems. Addressing scarcity therefore requires not only technical solutions, but also moral, institutional, and structural transformation.

Challenging the Legitimization of Unlimited Exploitation

Modern economic systems frequently legitimize intensive resource exploitation as a rational component of economic growth and industrial production. As long as exploitation generates economic profit, it is often considered acceptable. However, this approach tends to ignore long-term ecological consequences and sustainability concerns.

Global environmental reports consistently demonstrate that uncontrolled exploitation has resulted in severe environmental degradation, climate change, biodiversity loss, and ecological imbalance. These realities reveal the inadequacy of economic approaches focused solely on efficiency and profit maximization.

Islamic economics strongly rejects unlimited exploitation. The concept of humans as *khalifah* establishes ethical responsibility toward nature and future generations. Qur’anic teachings prohibiting excessiveness

and emphasizing balance indicate that economic activities must remain within ethical and ecological boundaries.

The principle of *mizan* (balance) requires harmony between economic needs and environmental sustainability. According to M. Quraish Shihab, balance constitutes a universal principle underlying both creation and human civilization. Therefore, exploitation should be governed by responsibility, justice, moderation, and sustainability rather than by economic efficiency alone.

Accordingly, natural resource utilization must be repositioned within an ethical framework emphasizing stewardship and accountability, ensuring that economic development does not undermine environmental integrity and social welfare.

5. CONCLUSION

This study confirms that several fundamental assumptions of modern economics namely natural resource scarcity, unlimited human needs, scarcity as a natural condition, and the legitimacy of unlimited exploitation cannot be maintained as absolute truths. The findings demonstrate that natural resources are dynamic and sustainable, meaning that scarcity is better understood as a relative condition shaped by distribution, governance, and technological development. Likewise, unlimited human needs are largely constructed by economic systems and consumptive behavior rather than representing an inherent characteristic of humanity.

From this perspective, the classical paradigm that places scarcity and unlimited wants at the center of economic analysis oversimplifies reality and potentially misdirects economic policy and human behavior. This article argues that natural resources fundamentally remain sufficient within the framework of divine design, while contemporary crises primarily result from human failure in management, distribution, and self-control. Accordingly, Islamic economics provides an alternative framework by positioning natural resources as an *amanah* (trust) that must be managed justly and sustainably, while human needs are normatively regulated through moral values and sharia principles. Therefore, the solution to resource-related problems lies not in the assumption of scarcity itself, but in paradigm reconstruction, governance improvement, and the internalization of ethical values in economic activities.

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