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## Predictors of Graduate Employability: Mediating Roles of Leadership, Ethics, and Religiosity

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### Article Information

#### Keywords

Graduate Employability,  
Graduate Skills,  
Revealed Knowledge,  
Acquired Knowledge.

### Abstract

This study investigated predictors of employability among graduates of Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia (USIM). Eight graduates' competencies and values that were hypothesised as predictors of employment are Religiosity, Teamwork, Leadership, ICT, Entrepreneurship, Communication, Critical Thinking, and Ethics. Among the eight variables, Leadership, Ethics, and Religiosity were hypothesised as the mediators for this research. A structured Malay version self-administered questionnaire was distributed to all USIM alumni graduated between year 2003 until 2013 by using an Alumni Portal. The total number of population for this study is 9,840 graduates. 1146 responds were received by the researchers in the first half year of data collection. Results of the hierarchical regression analysis revealed that the eight predictors of employability explained 37 percent variance of employment status. Specifically, the analysis demonstrated Leadership, Ethics, and Religiosity completely mediated the influence of ICT, Communication, Thinking Ability, and Teamwork competencies toward graduates' employment status. In sum, this research found that value-related graduates' competencies are important for employability. This could support the focus of USIM to integrate Islamic values in the development of their curriculum and education design. Future research should focus on to increase the research participation. Furthermore, an in depth qualitative study on USIM graduates should also be conducted to further understand the issue.

### INTRODUCTION

Globalisation is a situation where there is no defined border among regions, countries and even people. It suggests the world is a borderless environment that transcends "economic, political, social and cultural development" (Wilding, 1997, p.411). It 'compresses' the world into one small community with the advancement of technology in communications or ICT (Information Communication Technology). A man in South East Asia can easily communicate with a man in South America just by one 'click' on their personal

computers. It indeed has enormous impacts on our activities in business, trade, politics, human affairs and even education.

However, for some reasons, globalisation means different things to different people. Some people see globalisation as beneficial to human life, such as globalisation could increase nation's development, thus could increase employability rate. However, some people disagree. For example, corporate-led globalisation has been criticised so much because of its consequences for the world. Zane Ma Rhea (2000, p.1) has made a clear commentary on the effects of corporate-led globalisation to human affairs.

Corporate-led globalisation, that is, accelerated deregulation of commerce and investment, is the most advanced and the most destructive aspect of globalisation...it is because, with corporate globalisation, there are winners and losers, and the decision about who wins or loses is currently made in a most undemocratic fashion. Corporate globalisation per se cannot foster improvements in democracy or respect for cultural diversity.

This might be the disadvantage of globalisation. Human activities today are mostly based on economic and corporate factors. These factors only cannot necessarily satisfy the requirements of other human needs that must be fulfilled for examples social and education development that normally require long-term investments. Education especially, is a field that should be balanced on both economic and social factors. Education should work as a field that will foster the advancements of developing countries like those in South East Asia or the African continent in a more balanced way. This cannot be achieved just by adapting the framework of industrial requirements that normally influenced by corporate-led globalisation spectrums. Education must also be fulfilled with elements of religions, beliefs, moral values, nationalism and others to make it able to produce balanced and flexible human who can work as agents of change toward goodness for the nation.

Education according to Leigh (1997, p.121) has two main functions, "first, as a means of instilling values of citizenship, a common language and a shared sense of historical and national identity to the people. Secondly, education has an important economic function to provide skills and expertise". Furthermore, Leigh (1997) also mentions about an additional function of education, which is to stimulate critical thinking in the citizen. However, according to him, this additional function is considered less important compared to the first and the second functions. Consequently from Leigh's points above, we can see that education should not be mixed directly with the functions and understanding of globalisation, especially the thinking of corporate-led globalisation in education. Globalisation in education must first be measured and analysed in order for us to receive only the positive values of it. This is because there are other qualitative values of education that cannot be achieved solely by using economic means.

Consequently, this research sees the impact of globalisation, particularly in the aspect of corporate-led globalisation, has somehow give important impacts toward the way how the country perceive quality graduates. Graduates in Malaysia are expected to be able to answer the requirements of industries and globalisation to help the country develops. Thus, issues for examples the necessity to develop university programmes that are relevance to industrial needs, as well as graduates' employability have always been voiced up by relevant parties. Based on this reason, this research aims to investigate the issue of employability among Islamic Studies graduates at Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia (USIM). This article starts its discussion by highlighting the influence of corporate-led globalisation toward education industry because USIM could be argued as one example of tertiary education institution that highlights the importance of revealed and acquired knowledge in producing balanced graduates. In other words, the university does not solely stands on the belief that the university works to supply the nation with skilled-graduates for various industries, but, the university aims to produce graduates that are balanced with values as well as skills that are useful for the nation.

#### **GRADUATE UNEMPLOYMENT ISSUE IN MALAYSIA**

Malaysia realised that the development of the physical aspects of local universities had to be balanced with improvement of the quality of education. The issue arose due to the problem of unemployed graduates in the country, which in some aspects challenged the credibility of public universities to provide the country with enough and quality human capital. One of the factors was that the graduates were claimed to have lack of communication skills as well as some other necessary skills and knowledge, such as Information and Communication Technology or ICT. Another claim was that they graduated in the courses that were not marketable.

Therefore, for Malaysia, the country absolutely needs to interpret this problem from every possible perspective. Each aspect of university activities, from the academic curricular constructions and the students' quality to the management practices, need to be analysed. For example, in 2006, the then Minister of Higher Education Malaysia, Dato' Sri Mustapa Mohamed said that, the country had a lack of competence and qualified public university academics. This has led the country to put its efforts in academics development consistently until today (Utusan Malaysia, 3 April 2006). Furthermore, in order to overcome the problem, he urged public universities to start building new relationships with major international universities. He also insisted that the government has always tried to ensure that the academics in public universities received enough opportunities to continue their education. This is to guarantee the university students would only be educated and trained by quality lecturers in public universities.

In the aspect of curricular construction, the government also admitted that some of the courses, particularly the non-professional courses, needed to be equipped with technical and soft skills knowledge. The authority saw that these non-professional courses, normally in the field of art, religious studies, social sciences, humanities and others, even though they were important for the country, had now almost lost their market value. This is because the country's market today demands graduates who possess ability in both theoretical and technical aspects. Thus, it definitely gave a problem to those who graduated in the courses that concentrate too much on theoretical aspects of education rather than on technical aspects. The problem became worse if those graduates had no ability to communicate well in other international languages, such as English, and had no professional personality, or personality that can convince the employers that they are ready to move into working environment.

In Malaysia or elsewhere, graduate skills and its relationship with employment have always been important issues for universities. Statistically, over fourteen years ago, unemployment rate in Malaysia averaged 3.26 percent from 1998 until 2015. The highest rate of unemployment was recorded in March 1999 with 4.50 percent and the lowest unemployment rate was 2.70 percent in August 2012. (Devadoss, 2012; Trading Economics, 2015). The data is supported by Department of Statistics Malaysia. The department recorded in January 2015, the unemployment rate of Malaysia rose 0.1 percent to 3.1 percent as compared to the same term in 2014. (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2015) The STAR newspaper, dated November 28, 2014 reported the unemployment issues in Malaysia is not so much worrying since the percentage is lower than 4 percent. The newspaper reported Human Resources Minister Datuk Seri Richard Riot Jaem said, the International Labour Organisation had defined an unemployment rate of below 4 percent as "full employment" or zero unemployment. This has made him consider Malaysia has zero unemployment problem. Furthermore, women participation in workforce has also increased in Malaysia. Deputy Women, Family and Community Development Minister Datin Paduka Chew Mei Fun said women participation in the labour market had increased from 46.8 percent in 2010 to 50.4 percent in 2014. The scenario seems to be slightly different with unemployment rate among graduates in Malaysia. The newspaper also reported that, there were a total of 53,282 unemployed graduates in Malaysia recorded in 2013 as compared to 51,835 in 2012. This shows a slight increase of unemployment rate among graduates from 2012 to 2013. Even though the data shows Malaysia has a very low percent of unemployment, the scenario does not necessarily reflect directly the employment rate of Malaysia university graduates. This problem should not be seen as only occurring in Malaysia since the same situation is also reported at other countries including United Kingdom and United States of America. (Charlie Ball, 2014)

There are many issues associated with the problem of unemployed graduates in Malaysia. According to a report posted by Jobstreet.com in 2011, most employers were forced to decline young graduates' application due to poor command of English, the applicants expected unrealistic remuneration during interviews, personality and attitudes problems, unclear about the suitability of the courses taken, and many more. (The Malaysian Insider, October 9, 2012) Hence, based on the issues posted, this research sees that a study on predictors of graduates' employability should be conducted. This study was conducted on graduates of the Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia (USIM) who completed their education between 2003 - 2013. USIM is considered as a sample of university in Malaysia that offers both professional and non-professional courses. Furthermore, USIM was selected based on the factor that the university has given a strong and continuous focus on the integration of revealed and acquired knowledge. This could justify the relevance of religiosity to be investigated as one of the variables in this research. Further discussions on the variables investigated will be discussed later.

In relation to this study specifically, a special focus was given to eight important predictors of employability as mentioned above. Out of the eight variables, one variable selected or religiosity was rarely investigated in previous study. The variable was selected to answer the specific niche of USIM as a university that integrates both acquired and revealed knowledge. This study could be seen as expanding previous studies focusing on employability of Islamic Studies graduates for example Mohammad, Zurina, and Nursilah (2007) who investigated the issue of employability among Islamic Studies graduates in three public universities in Malaysia

or Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), Universiti Malaya (UM), and International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM), who completing their study in year 2000. USIM was not included in the research based on the reason that USIM was established in year 2000 and the first cohort of graduates produced by the university was at year 2003. There are many reasons for this research to be conducted and one of the purposes is to face the evaluation rating Malaysian Higher Education Institutions or SETARA 2014. In addition, this study can also be used to help the university assess the quality of programmes offered by USIM and also to identify areas where the programmes could be improved. This research investigated eight predictors of graduates' employability or Religiosity, Teamwork, Leadership, ICT, Entrepreneurship, Communication, Critical Thinking, and Ethics. Among the eight variables, Leadership, Ethics, and Religiosity were hypothesised as the mediators for this research. Figure 1 depicts the overall theoretical framework of this research



Figure 1 : Research Theoretical Framework

## METHODOLOGY

### *Research Design and Sampling Procedure*

This is an ongoing research and this research was conducted by using the survey technique. Data was collected by using a self-administered questionnaire. As described above in figure 1, this research investigated Religiosity, Teamwork, Leadership, ICT, Entrepreneurship, Communication, Critical Thinking, and Ethics predictors of graduate employability or Religiosity, Teamwork, Leadership, ICT, Entrepreneurship, Communication, Critical Thinking, and Ethics. Among the eight variables, Leadership, Ethics, and Religiosity were hypothesised as the mediators for this research. Data was collected by using a survey portal developed specially for this research or the Alumni Portal USIM ([www.ealumni.usim.edu.my](http://www.ealumni.usim.edu.my)). All alumni of USIM for year of graduation 2003 to 2013 (N: 9,840) were expected to participate in this study. The graduates were gradually contacted through various means for examples by using the social media and email. Randomly selected alumni were also contacted by using telephone to promote the portal. In general, all data collected for this research was provided by the interested alumni without interference of the research members. The alumni did so by fulfilling the data by using the USIM Alumni Portal and the research members only took part to promote the portal. In sum, data collected for this research could be carefully generalised to the whole population of USIM graduates based on the fact that this research needs to increase the number of participation of graduates in this study. Data for this research was collected between June 2014 to Mei 2015.

### *The Measures*

A set of questionnaire was developed based on a number of past studies conducted in several universities. The studies are Velasco (2012), Hazrul Mohamed Ismail (2012), Bidin Yatim, Suzilah Ismail, and Mohd. Hafiz Zakaria (2011), Shaharudin Ahmad, Noraziah Ali, and Mohammad Fauzi Hamzah (2011), Guvender dan Sharan Kaur Kaur (2008), Shahrul Azmi Mohd Yusof, Lim Kong Teong, Zulkifli Abdul Nasir, Ruzinoor Che Mat, and Zulkifli Md Udin (2007), and Davison, Brondan Davison (1993). Based on the researches above, this research developed two sets of questionnaires; first is a set of questionnaire that should be filled by the graduates, and secondly questionnaires that should be filled by the employers of USIM graduates. This research reports data collected from the first set of questionnaire. The eight predictors of employability investigated was measured by using a five point likert-scale with 1- Strongly Disagree and 5- Strongly Agree. Employment status or the dependent variable for this research was measured by using a non-metric scale with 1- employed and 2- unemployed.

### *The Analysis*

Three types of analyses were conducted for this research. First is Cronbach's alpha reliability analysis. Cronbach's alpha coefficient values for all predictors found to be above 0.7 thus suggesting the scale has acceptable level of inter-item reliability. Specifically, cronbach's alpha value for Religiosity is 0.893, Teamwork is 0.880, Leadership is 0.903, ICT is 0.907, Entrepreneurship is 0.894, Communication is 0.714, Critical

Thinking is 0.858, and Ethics is 0.843. Secondly, this research analysed the hypothesised model by using two analyses or first linear regression analysis and secondly hierarchical multiple regression analysis for the testing of mediation. The dependent variable for this research was categorical with 1- employed and 2-unemployed. The score was analysed by using dummy variable method for the regression analysis.

## FINDINGS

### *Respond Rate*

This research was able to collect employment data from 191 graduates of USIM. This means that total percentage of respond rate for this research was 2 percent. Even though the respond rate was low, this research expects that data collected from the 191 respondents could be seen as valuable because the respondents filled the questionnaires without any interference. In addition, this is an ongoing research and this research expects that respond rate for this research will gradually increase in the future.

### *Demographic Background*

Distribution of the data according to the faculty is reported in Table 1.

TABLE I  
RESPOND RECEIVED FROM GRADUATES BASED ON FACULTIES

Faculty	Number of Respond	Percentage
Leadership and Management	75	39.2
Quranic and Sunnah Studies	10	5.2
Syari'ah and Law	11	5.7
Major Language Studies	10	5.2
Science and Technology	5	2.6
Economics and Mua'malat	6	3.1
Medical and Health Sciences	3	1.57
Missing	71	37.1
Total	191	100

According to table 1, graduates from seven faculties at USIM have answered the portal. The faculties are Faculty of Leadership and Management (FKP), Faculty of Qur'an and Sunnah (FPQS), Faculty of Shariah and Law (FSU), Faculty of Major Languages Study (FPBU), Faculty of Science and Technology FST), Faculty of Economics and Muamalat (FEM), and Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences (FPSK). No data was obtained from the Faculty of Dentistry (FPg) graduates. Nevertheless, due to the large number of data was obtained from Faculty of Leadership and Management (FKP) graduates, this research expects that generalisability of data for this research could not be established easily. Nevertheless, this should not decrease the value of this study since this research was exploratory and descriptive in nature and did not aim to establish a set of data that could be used to be generalised to the population of USIM graduates.

In addition to the faculties, table 2 describes the statistics of graduate employment status obtained in this research.

TABLE 2

## GRADUATES EMPLOYMENT STATUS

Description	Number of Respond	Percentage
Employed	188	98.4
Not Employed	0	0
Missing	3	1.6
Total	191	100

Based on table 2 above, this research found that 118 respondents responded to be employed, while 3 respondents didn't provide any employment status in the system. Based on the respond, this research assumes that all data collected for this research was from graduates with employment. This could enable this research to further study factors of employment as indicated in the first part of this article. In explaining further about the data, table 3 describes the employment position of the graduates, their average monthly income, the graduates' employment fields, and finally years of graduation.

TABLE 3

## EMPLOYMENT POSITION OF THE GRADUATES

	Employment Status	Number of Respond	Percentage
<i>Employment Position of the Graduates</i>	Professional / Officer	172	90.1
	Assistant Officer	4	2.1
	Clerk	5	2.6
	Self-employed	1	0.5
	Others	1	0.5
	Missing	8	4.2
	Total	191	100
	Income	Number of Respond	Percentage
<i>Average Income of the Graduates</i>	Less than RM 2,000	26	13.6
	RM 2,001 – RM 3,000	56	29.3
	RM 3,001 – RM 4,000	72	37.7
	RM 4,001 – RM 5,000	19	9.9
	More than RM 5,000	8	4.2
	Missing	10	5.2
	Total	191	100

	<b>Employment Field</b>	<b>Number of Respond</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<i>Employment Fields of the Graduates</i>	Medical services	5	2.6
	Banking	5	2.6
	Information Technology and Multimedia	2	1
	Da'wah / Islamic Social Activities	10	5.2
	Counselling	36	8.8
	Media Industry	5	2.6
	Administration / Managerial Field	13	6.8
	Science Industry	3	1.6
	Education	84	44
	Others	17	8.9
	Missing	11	5.8
	Total	191	100
	<b>Years</b>	<b>Number of Respond</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<i>Years of Graduation</i>	2004	3	1.6
	2005	3	1.6
	2006	2	1
	2007	3	1.6
	2008	6	3.1
	2009	23	12
	2010	9	4.7
	2011	13	6.8
	2012	3	1.6
	2013	4	2.1
	Missing	122	63.9
		191	100

Based on table 3 above, this research could conclude the following. First, most of the graduates responded to this research are in executive or at least junior executives level. Second, there were some variation of employment fields recorded in this research. Nonetheless, almost half of the respondents are in counselling and education field. Third, USIM has been established in 2000 and the university has produced its first graduates at 2003. Until 2015, USIM has produced thirteen cohorts of graduates. For the purpose of data collection, the system of Alumni Portal was only opened for USIM students graduated from year 2003 to 2013. Out of these eleven cohorts, this research did not receive any respond from USIM students graduated in year 2003. Based on table 3 to 6 above, this research assumes that the data collected from the respondents could be assessed to identify predictors of employability. The data is valuable since it comprises graduates from multiple field of employment, different level of incomes, and different years of graduation. This could increase the credibility of the results and findings reported in this research.

*Analysis on the Predictors of Graduate Employability: The Mediating Influence of Leadership, Ethics, and Religiosity*

As explained above, this research investigated eight predictors of graduate employability or Religiosity, Teamwork, Leadership, ICT, Entrepreneurship, Communication, Critical Thinking, and Ethics. Among the eight variables, Leadership, Ethics, and Religiosity were hypothesised as the mediators for this research. Table 7 below describes the results of linear regression analysis to investigate the influence of the eight predictors of employment toward employment. Meanwhile, table 8 describes the result of hierarchical regression analysis in investigating the mediating influence of leadership, ethics, and religiosity toward the influence of other graduates' employability predictors toward graduates' employment.

TABLE 4

RESULT OF LINEAR REGRESSION ANALYSIS ON THE INFLUENCE OF PREDICTORS OF EMPLOYABILITY TOWARD GRADUATES' EMPLOYMENT

	<b>R</b>	<b>R Square</b>	<b>Sig. F Change</b>
Dependent Variable : Employment Status	0.368	0.135	0.05
Independent Variables : Religiosity, Teamwork, Leadership, ICT, Entrepreneurship, Communication, Critical Thinking, and Ethics			

TABLE 5

RESULT OF HIERARCHICAL MULTIPLE REGRESSION ANALYSIS ON THE TESTING OF MEDIATION

	<b>R</b>	<b>R Square</b>	<b>Sig. F Change</b>
Dependent Variable : Employment Status	0.351	0.123	0.07
Step 1:  Independent Variables : Teamwork, ICT, Entrepreneurship, Communication, and Critical Thinking			

Step 2: Mediating Variables : Religiosity, Leadership, and Ethics	0.360	0.130	0.868
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Looking at the overall scenario, based on table 4 above, this research found that predictors of graduates' employability or Religiosity, Teamwork, Leadership, ICT, Entrepreneurship, Communication, Critical Thinking, and Ethics contribute 36.8 percent variance of graduates' employability (R square). This shows other predictors might also influential in determining graduates' employability. As highlighted in previous literature (e.g Noor Azina, 2011, Shaharuddin, Nooraziah, & Mohd Fauzi, 2011) there are many related variables that could be considered as predictors of graduates' employability. This research categorised the variables into two or first internal or individual factor and two external or situational factor. The similar categories were also made by other researchers in their work (e.g Morshidi, Chan, Munir, Shukran, Seri Rahayu, Ahmad Kamil, & Jasvir Kaur, 2012; Mohammad, Zurina, & Nursilah, 2007). This study focused on individual factors that predicting graduates' employability. Apart from the eight variables investigated, this research did not include other specific individual variables for example graduates' employment experience, flexibility in accepting employment offers, confidence, and so forth. Moreover, situational variables for examples current economic conditions that have significance influence over employment opportunities should also be investigated. Nonetheless, this research argues that the findings could somehow shed some light on the importance of leadership, religiosity, and ethics toward graduates' employability. As presented in table 5, this research found the three hypothesised mediating variables (leadership, religiosity, and ethics) completely mediated the influence of other predictors toward graduates' employability. This data could be used to support continuous stress given by education authority and tertiary institution on the importance of the three variables. Theoretically, even though the previous literature reported that Malaysia specifically urges universities and colleges to educate the students with more hands-on skills that are useful for the industry, this research shows that the three variables or leadership, religiosity, and ethics should not be isolated. The complete mediating influence shows that the three variables are still referred as the central variables in linking other skill-based variables or Teamwork, ICT, Entrepreneurship, Communication, and Critical Thinking with graduates' employability. The data is also useful to support the findings of Salma, Muhammad, and Amna (2014) who found that graduates' emotional intelligence and interpersonal skills as two important predictors of employability have no relationship with academic achievement of the respondents. This shows that studies on individual qualities of graduates apart from their academic achievement is necessary and should be continuously conducted. Future researches should focus on this issue further, particularly in the aspect of industry acceptance over the three variables as the most central values of graduates' quality. In sum, even though the data could be useful in the study of graduates' employability, the above data should not be used as the only source to assess the quality of USIM graduates. This is due to several reasons. First, this is an ongoing research and the results might change when data collected are more normally distributed. Secondly, the results above should be measured with other variables for example the graduates' contributions and outcomes. Finally, qualitative observations should also be conducted to help us interpret the results fairly.

## CONCLUSION

This study is important to help USIM improves the quality of their graduates. Even though responds from the graduates or alumni could be argued as limited, further researches should be conducted to obtain a higher respond from the graduates to be compared with the existing data. Nonetheless, few suggestions are made in this article to help USIM improve the quality of its graduates. First, the students should be equipped with more hands on experience to improve their personal skills for examples communication, entrepreneurship, problem solving, and leadership skills. Secondly, stress on English proficiency could be said as the most urgent action that should be taken by the university. The issue might also same with the students' Arabic proficiency. Moreover, the graduates should be promoted to industry as having high religious, social, and morale qualities. The qualities are important for industries today and further initiative to promote USIM graduates from these areas might give positive feedbacks to their employment opportunity. Finally, based on the factor that this research found leadership, ethics, and religiosity completely mediate the influence of other predictors toward employment, this research argues that the three elements should be investigated further in term of its importance

as compared to other predictors. The research is important to support the process of revealed and acquired knowledge integration as proposed by the university.

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