



## **ASSESSING GRADUATE MARKETABILITY: A CASE STUDY OF THE QURANIC AND MULTIMEDIA INTEGRATED PROGRAM**

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
<p><b>Article history:</b> Received: 22 Sept 2023 Revised: 4 Oct 2022 Accepted: 15 Oct 2023 Published: 1 Nov 2023</p>	<p>To understand the demands of the modern labor market, this study focuses on the marketability of graduates from programs that mix multimedia with Quranic studies. These programs combine multimedia as a minor with Quranic studies as a major. Nonetheless, concerns remain over the program's applicability in light of the quickly changing technology landscape and the graduates' capacity to use their education to their advantage in the workplace. This study examines the employment situation of USIM graduates in multimedia Quranic studies for the academic years 2017, 2018, and 2019. Evaluate graduates' opinions regarding the program's suitability in fulfilling the labor market demands and any barriers they see to improving their marketability. The study uses a quantitative research design to gather information from 330 former students who obtained a Bachelor of Quranic Studies with a Multimedia degree. The results show that 77.2% of graduates have jobs, which suggests that marketability skills are on the rise. With only 5.6% of graduates still unemployed, graduates have a great understanding of the demands of the labor market and a proactive approach to enhancing their abilities. The biggest impediment to developing marketable skills is financial, with 90% of graduates stating this as a reason for not enrolling in outside training or courses. To sum up, graduates of the Quranic Studies with Multimedia curriculum are in demand for employment and have a market worth to the businesses. Notwithstanding the difficulties from restricted resources and information exposure, the graduates desire to improve their abilities, underscoring the significance of a well-rounded education that integrates <i>naqli</i> and <i>aqli</i> knowledge. These results provide insight into the success of this integration and the graduates' preparedness for the demands of the contemporary labor market.</p>
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## INTRODUCTION

The university's role, both as an academic institution fostering knowledge deepening and as a center for professional training, is crucial; higher education not only nurtures students' mental and spiritual growth but also sharpens their skills to meet the demands of a professional, technically oriented job market, thereby contributing to the development of technical skills among young individuals and fostering the country's economic growth (Masduki et al., 2022). This underscores the pivotal importance of education in general and higher education, specifically in equipping students with skills and attitudes aligned with job market requirements. Graduate employability hinges on various factors, with the quality of education and training received from higher education institutions playing a crucial role; however, academic success alone doesn't guarantee employment, as employers often consider additional factors, including students' attitudes toward future work, their life perspectives, proficiency in essential skills like ICT and language, creative and critical thinking abilities, self-discipline, general knowledge, exposure to training, career guidance, and other elements. To provide specific insights, this paper delves into the employment status of graduates who have earned a bachelor's degree in a program that integrates Quranic studies with multimedia in the industry. It aims to assess the alignment of the Quranic Studies with the Multimedia program's curriculum with current job market needs and explore the preparations students need for a successful transition into the workforce. As an example of this integrated program, Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia (USIM) is renowned as one of the local universities offering programs that integrate "naqli" and "aqli" knowledge. "Naqli" represents knowledge derived from the Quran and the Sunnah, while "aqli" represents conventional knowledge. For instance, the Quranic Studies with Multimedia program combines Quranic studies as a major with multimedia as a minor, aligning with contemporary industrial requirements.

A recent report has shed light on the Malaysian Ministry of Higher Education's decision to discontinue 38 academic programs offered by 19 universities due to their dwindling relevance to current and future job market demands. This decision arose from the programs no longer offering job opportunities for graduates aligned with current industry demands. This is mainly due to limited student interest in these programs and inadequate promotional efforts by the universities. It further emphasizes the impact of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, known as Industrial Revolution 4.0, which amalgamates traditional manufacturing processes with advanced technology, particularly the Internet of Things (IoT), to enhance automation, communication, and data management. IoT involves a network of interconnected physical devices that collect and share data online, with applications ranging from using a smartphone to operating a smart TV to more advanced uses. In response to this, the paper raises questions about the currency and alignment of the program's syllabus with the latest technological developments in the industry and the student's ability to apply their acquired knowledge and skills in the workplace effectively. Each year, the higher education system releases thousands of graduates into the job market, prompting this paper to address essential questions and establish research objectives. These objectives encompass assessing the employment status of graduates holding bachelor's degrees in Quranic Studies with the multimedia-integrated program in the years 2017, 2018, and 2019, gauging graduates' perceptions of the alignment of the Quranic Studies with the multimedia program with job market requirements and exploring graduates' views on the obstacles hindering the enhancement of their marketability.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Marketability is a concept that is challenging to measure and define. It evolves in response to changes in employment patterns and human resource models. Marketability, a relatively new concept a decade ago, has become a key aspect of labor market policies in the United Kingdom (UK) and various European states (McQuaid & Lindsay, 2005). Marketability has become a focal point in labor market policies concerning graduate employability. Graduates have traditionally held prestigious positions in economics and policy, regarded as social elites with access to high wages and the potential to pursue knowledge-based careers (Yusof et al., 2013). Graduate marketability is not solely a result of specific academic disciplines or professional

learning; it also hinges on graduates' ability to demonstrate broad skills such as communication, problem-solving, interpersonal skills, initiative, and efficiency. Additionally, marketability encompasses personal attributes like loyalty, commitment, honesty, timeliness, and integrity. Therefore, it involves proactive actions, self-management attitudes, and career management behaviors among individuals to secure their desired careers (Clarke, 2008). The marketability of graduates is closely tied to employers' preference for graduates with soft skills, alongside academic qualifications and competencies, making graduate marketability vary based on the course of study, CGPA, soft skills, and personal attributes.

Unemployment among graduates is often caused by a lack of advantages in terms of marketability and employability (Singam, 2017). Studies have revealed a mismatch between graduate quality and labor market demands, particularly regarding graduates' skills and knowledge. This could affect economic growth and the transition to a knowledge-based economy. In response, Malaysian universities have long maintained a tradition of tracking graduates. The government has adopted the Graduates Tracer Study System (SKPG), which the Malaysian Ministry of Education runs (Nor Zamira & Siti Farah, 2019). The importance of this study in reassessing graduates' educational experiences, determining how prepared they are for the labor market, evaluating the success of courses, determining the level of soft skill acquisition, and obtaining graduates' opinions on infrastructure and amenities. These reports are vital for universities to address program weaknesses, update curricula to align with industry requirements and enhance facilities and student activities to upgrade soft skills and attitudes. Compared to other IPTAs, public higher education institutions like Universiti Malaysia Pahang (UMP) had the highest graduate employability rate (GE) rate in 2018, at 96.2%. USIM's GE was 72.1%.

Compared to 2018, USIM's GE increased by 11.46% in 2019. A notable increase in GE was seen at USIM's Faculty of Quranic and Sunnah Studies (FPQS), which went from 72.8% in 2018 to 92.06% in 2019. The Quranic Studies with Multimedia program, particularly, had the greatest GE, coming in at 96.09%. Quranic Studies is essential for a comprehensive understanding of Islam, covering various knowledge areas such as theology, law, history, and science. However, the traditional focus on Islamic law and theology has limited graduates' ability to engage with contemporary science and technology. To address this gap, the Quranic Studies with Multimedia program combines Quranic studies, including Qiraat and Tarannum, with the application of science and technology. This unique approach helps students appreciate and apply Quranic knowledge in academic and professional contexts. The program's dynamic curriculum aims to bridge the gap between Islamic teachings and modern technology, preparing graduates for a broader range of careers and entrepreneurship. The program's objectives include producing professional and ethical graduates skilled in Quranic studies and multimedia, providing added-value skills, ensuring competitiveness in the job market, and advancing Islamic studies through advanced approaches and ICT for societal well-being and harmony.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study used a quantitative research design as its methodology. The participants in this study were USIM graduates, specifically those who earned a bachelor's degree in multimedia-based Quranic studies. Eight hundred ninety-four people graduated overall between 2009 and 2019. The researcher's sample size was restricted to 330 graduates who received diplomas in 2017, 2018, and 2019. All respondents pledge to submit a complete set of information. Purposive sampling was used to choose the study's sample pool. One hundred seventy-five graduates who received their Bachelor of Quranic Studies with Multimedia degrees between 2009 and 2019 were used as the sample group by the researcher for this study. This study's research tool was a questionnaire randomly delivered to each respondent. There are two primary sections to this questionnaire. Demographics make up Part 1. Part 2 discusses graduates' perceptions of the study program's suitability for meeting job market criteria and the factors limiting marketable talent development. Likert scale was included in this questionnaire as a research tool. The employed Likert scale has three levels of agreement, ranging from scale 1 to scale 3. This Likert Scale was selected for this study because it was simple to use. The Likert scale has numerous benefits, including being simple to use, having questions that are simple to respond to, and producing data of a high caliber (Mumu et al., 2022).

This study investigated the constraints faced by the Quranic Studies with Multimedia program graduates in acquiring employment status data through a survey methodology. The selection of the survey approach was driven by its practicality, cost-effectiveness, and capacity to accumulate a substantial volume of data swiftly. This facilitated a systematic quantification and analysis of the questionnaire results. The survey was divided into two parts: Section A encompassed demographic information such as gender, age, Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA), year of graduation, and job status, while Section B and Section C addressed graduates' perceptions of the program's adequacy in meeting job market requirements and identified constraints affecting marketability skills. Section B comprised five questionnaire items assessing factors such as specialization, program depth, study duration, learning and work dynamics differences, and soft skills exposure. Section C was divided into four key constraints: time, cost and program-related issues, information, and attitude. Respondents were required to rate their responses on a Three-point Likert-type scale (1 = Agree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Unsure). The data analysis was conducted using statistical software, specifically SPSS, to determine the frequency and percentage of responses for each data point, facilitating the expression of relative response frequencies in the survey.

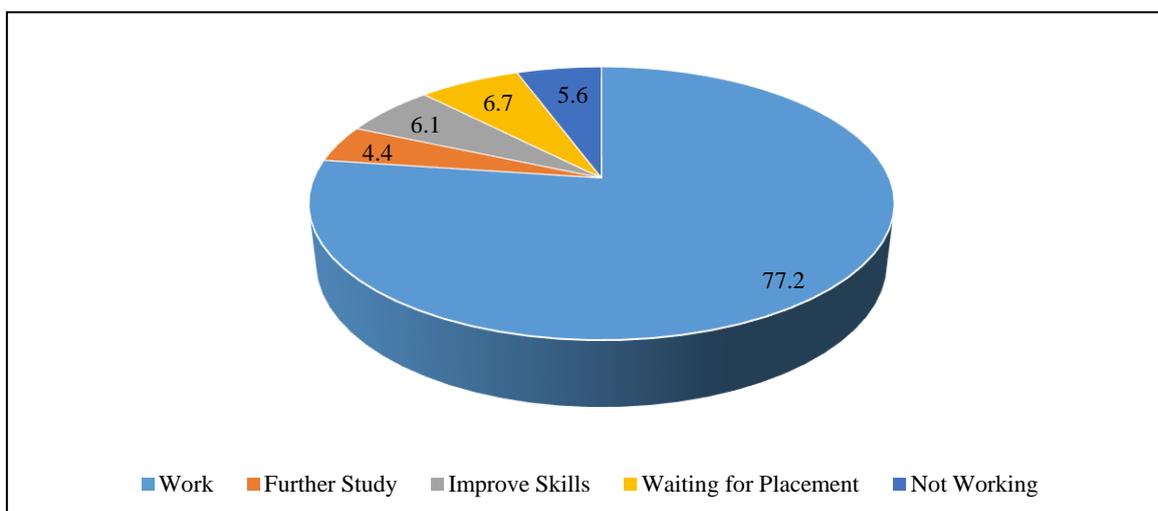
### RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The total number of graduates involved in this study was 180 individuals. Most of these graduates were female, comprising 60% of the total, while the remaining 40% were male. The study's graduates' age distribution encompassed three categories: 19-22 years, 23-26 years, and 27 years and above. Almost all participants fell within the 23-26 age group, accounting for 99.4% of the sample, representing 179 graduates. Only one participant was 27, and no individuals aged 19-22.

Academic achievement data were gathered based on Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA) and spanned from below 2.00 to 4.00. Notably, 30 graduates had a CGPA ranging from 3.50 to 4.00, constituting 16.7% of the total. The majority, 71.1%, held CGPAs between 3.00 and 3.49, totaling 128 graduates. A smaller portion, 10.6%, had CGPAs ranging from 2.50 to 2.99, encompassing 19 graduates, while only 1.7% had CGPAs between 2.00 and 2.49, consisting of 3 graduates. This study exclusively focused on graduates who completed their studies in 2017, 2018, and 2019. The largest proportion of participants graduated in 2019, accounting for 49.4% (89 graduates), followed by graduates from 2018, representing 33.9% (61 graduates), and graduates from 2017, making up 16.7% (30 graduates).

The total number and corresponding percentages of graduates, based on their job status, are presented in Figure 1. The highest percentage, 77.2%, pertained to the 139 graduates who had secured employment. Following this group, 6.7% (12 graduates) were awaiting job placement, while 6.1% (11 individuals) opted to enhance their skills. An additional 4.4% (8 graduates) pursued higher education, and 5.6% (10 individuals) remained unemployed.

Figure 1: Percentage of Graduates by Job Status



## Graduates' Program Perception and Factors Limiting Marketability Skills Enhancement

The study emphasizes the pivotal role of the curriculum in shaping students' career paths. Some graduates express concerns about the adequacy of their chosen study programs in preparing them for the competitive job market. In contrast, others find their fields of study adequately aligned with contemporary job market demands. Consequently, a perception study was conducted to investigate graduates' views on the sufficiency of their study programs in meeting job market requirements. It comprised five question items addressing program specialization, program depth, study duration, work-study dynamics differences, and soft skills exposure. Analysis of the data (Table 1) reveals that most graduates (68.3%) agree that their field of study is narrowly focused, while 23.3% disagree and 8.3% are unsure. In conclusion, the study indicates that many graduates perceive their fields of study as narrowly specialized, necessitating self-driven exploration into related fields for a broader skill set.

The percentage of graduates agreeing that their field of study is fundamentally basic is notably high at 86.7%, in stark contrast to the mere 8.9% who disagree, while 4.4% remained uncertain. This unequivocally suggests that most graduates perceive their program's curriculum as fundamentally basic. A comprehensive breakdown of this perception is presented in Table 1. Regarding the perception of a short study period, only 7.8% of respondents concurred, whereas 86.1% disagreed, with the remaining 6.1% expressing uncertainty. Consequently, the prevailing consensus among graduates is that their university study duration is adequately comprehensive, notwithstanding the provision of a four-year, eight-semester program.

Additionally, 96.1% of graduates found the worlds of work and learning to be significantly distinct, with a mere 1.1% expressing disagreement, while 2.8% remained uncertain. This consensus aligns with the fact that most graduates who have already entered the workforce acknowledge the disparity between the work environment and the university setting. Furthermore, the perception of a lack of exposure to soft skills at the university was widely shared by 57.2% of graduates, contrasting with the 22.2% who disagreed, while 20.6% remained uncertain. Therefore, based on these responses, it can be concluded that the exposure to soft skills during their university education was insufficient.

Table 1: Perceptions Regarding Field of Study, Program Basic, Study Period, Job Match, and Required Skills

Responses	Agree		Disagree		Unsure	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Field of study	123	68.3	42	23.3	15	8.3
Program basic	156	86.7	16	8.9	8	4.4
Study period	14	7.8	155	86.1	11	6.1
Job match	173	96.1	2	1.1	5	2.8
Required skills	103	57.2	40	22.2	37	20.6

The development of graduate marketability is not confined to the curriculum of the study program but, more importantly, the university's efforts to offer specialized programs, courses or training that expose students to the soft skills required by employers and the job market. Proactive students certainly have the initiative to obtain career information from many sources to equip themselves before entering the job market after graduation. While some students know the marketability scenario and have initiatives to improve that in the graduate job market, their efforts also face some constraints. Therefore, the researcher divided these factors into four main factors: time, cost and program, information, and attitude. To get more validation, a perceptual study was conducted on graduates to get their responses and views on this issue. Time as a major factor of constraints to graduates increasing their marketability skills was divided into three items of a questionnaire which is busy with assignments and classes, there is always an overlap between courses or skills training with lecture time and the burden of course requirements for graduation. Table 2 details each item's frequency and percent of graduates' perception.

Table 2: Perceptions Regarding Assignment Relevance, Program Basic, Study Period, Job Match, and Required Skills

Responses	Agree		Disagree		Unsure	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Assignment relevance	68	37.8	94	52.2	18	10.0
Program basic	162	90.0	12	6.7	6	3.3
Study period	122	67.8	44	24.4	14	7.8
Job match	136	75.6	31	17.2	13	7.2
Required skills	28	15.6	142	78.9	10	5.6

Based on Table 2, most graduates disagreed with three time-related factors hindering the enhancement of their marketability skills. A significant 52.2% disagreed that they are too busy with assignments and classes, 53.3% disagreed with the notion that there is always an overlap between course or skills training and lecture time, and 48.3% disagreed that course requirements for graduation are burdensome. The second factor identified as a barrier to students' skill improvement is cost and program related. This factor consists of four questions: difficulty in self-funding external courses or skills training, scarcity of job skills training programs organized by the university, lack of interest in most university-offered training, and limited opportunities to attend university-organized training. Table 2 shows that 90% of graduates found it challenging to attend external courses or training, and 51.7% disagreed with the statement about the scarcity of job skills training programs at the university. In terms of interest, 56.7% disagreed with the notion that most university-offered training wasn't interesting to them, compared to 22.2% in agreement and 21.1% unsure.

The final aspect related to the program factor revealed that 50.6% disagreed with the idea that there were no or limited opportunities to attend university-organized training. In comparison, 38.9% agreed and 10.6% were unsure. The third hindrance is the lack of information, divided into four question items: insufficient information about organized skills training or courses, limited availability of training opportunities information, lack of reference sources to determine the suitability of skills training or courses with their study programs, and difficulty in finding appropriate training information. Detailed perceptions of graduates for each item are presented in Table 2. Lastly, the fourth factor involves students' attitudes. It is divided into three questionnaire items: disinterest in engaging in activities or courses outside their field of study, reluctance to participate in training or courses in different groups, and the belief that employment skills training is unnecessary as their program of study is sufficient for job acquisition. According to Table 2, 78.9% of graduates disagreed with the notion of disinterest in activities outside their field of study, 72.2% disagreed with reluctance to join training in different groups, and 89.4% disagreed with the belief that employment skills training is unnecessary. However, a small percentage (7.2%) agreed, and 3.3% were unsure.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Based on the research findings, 77.2% of the graduates are currently employed, with 6.7% awaiting job placement, 6.1% choosing to enhance their skills, 4.4% opting for further study, and 5.6% experiencing unemployment. This data suggests a positive trend in the enhancement of marketability skills among graduates in the Bachelor of Quranic Studies with Multimedia program, with graduates showing a high level of awareness about the job market and their willingness to acquire new skills in preparation for employment, resulting in a low unemployment rate. Furthermore, the graduates expressed a positive view of their study program, acknowledging its basic nature and focusing on specific areas of study while recognizing the need for additional soft skills development. The extended study duration provided by the university allows them to explore further knowledge and skills through their efforts. Graduates actively learn both inside and outside the classroom, preparing themselves for the transition into the job market. The majority also agreed that the nature of work and learning differs significantly, highlighting the importance of early preparation for employment. Financial constraints are identified as a significant factor hindering students' skill enhancement, with 90% of respondents finding it difficult to self-fund external training or courses.

Additionally, limited access to information and references on skill programs from the university poses challenges in acquiring knowledge and enhancing marketability skills. However, time is not perceived as a significant barrier to skill improvement. Attitude factors also do not appear to be a major obstacle, as the majority of graduates express interest in activities and courses beyond their field of study, are willing to engage in diverse training opportunities, and disagree with the idea that employment skills training is unnecessary.

In conclusion, this study has garnered strong support and cooperation from Bachelor of Quranic Studies with Multimedia graduates. The insights provided by graduates about their program of study and the barriers they face can influence the program's direction and benefit prospective students. This study yields data on job status, feedback on the study program, and insights into factors affecting skill development. The study serves multiple purposes. Firstly, it provides program leaders with data on graduates in the field of Quranic Studies with Multimedia, including their job status and perceptions of the study program. Additionally, it identifies factors hindering students' ability to enhance their marketability skills during their university studies. Secondly, the study benefits current students by offering career-related assurance after graduation. Students gain insights into career prospects related to their field of study, including the types of jobs available and the necessary skills and knowledge required by the job market. It aids students in understanding how their field of study aligns with job market demands. To address the identified issues, the researcher suggests the program leader consider implementing a specialized program focusing on career assurance in creative multimedia, aligning with current job market needs. The program can be initiated during the first year of study, allowing students to plan their careers from the beginning of their academic journey and acquire relevant skills and knowledge. Furthermore, students are encouraged to actively seek out opportunities for skill enhancement, not only within the university but also through external training that relates to their field of study and is affordable. This study offers several recommendations for addressing the identified challenges, including program leadership, academic curriculum, and student attitudes.

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