

**Employers' Perception Toward Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia
(USIM)
Graduates 2003-2013**

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Abstract

This study investigated the perception of employers toward USIM graduates from 2003 until 2013. Graduate skills investigated for this research are communication skills, thinking and problem solving skills, teamwork, information management and ICT, entrepreneurship and work planning, ethic and professionalism, leadership skills, and finally religious orientation in organisation. Two categories of background data collected from the graduates are the faculty at USIM which they had enrolled, and the respondents' career sector. The purpose of this study is to provide a descriptive analysis on perception of employers toward USIM graduates from 2003 until 2013. This study applied the survey technique on 350 randomly selected graduates around Malaysia. In the first phase of this research, from 120 samples, this research was able to gather information from 70 employers. Results of the descriptive analysis shows that USIM graduates were perceived to be good in religious orientation, information management and ICT, and ethic and professionalism, by the employers. Data from sector of employment shows that most of the respondents were from education sector:

Keywords: graduate skills, career sectors, employers' perception, USIM

INTRODUCTION

In Malaysia or elsewhere, graduate skills and its relationship with employment have always been important issues for universities. 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 in March of 1999 and the lowest unemployment rate was 2.70 percent in August of 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 Malaysians rose 0.1 percent that

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January 2014 to 3.1 percent. (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 four 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 directly reflect 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. (The Guardian, September 15, 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 employers' perceptions toward USIM's graduates need to be conducted to help the university find areas of improvement that need to be stressed. Specifically, this research investigated employers' perceptions toward USIM graduates under their supervision. In the development of Malaysia's increasing technology, employers aim to select workers who have work experience and high skills to reduce the need to provide trainings (Ishak Yusoff & Zainizam Zakariya 2009; Zulkifly Osman, Abu Hassan Shaari Mohd Nor Yusoff & Ishak, 2010).

The data of employers' perceptions can be used to measure the quality of human resources including university graduates. Since the first convocation of USIM in 2003, USIM has yet to carry out detailed research on the employers' perception on the quality of its graduates. 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. Previous researches found that six skills related to quality of graduates. The skills are basic skills including thinking skill, communication skill, interpersonal skill, information systems and new technology related skill, and personal attributes. (Novient Nur'arif & Othman Yeop, 2011) In this study, graduates are measured through several variables namely (i) communication skills, (ii) thinking and problem solving skills, (iii) teamwork, (iv) information management and ICT, (v) entrepreneurship and work planning, (vii) ethic and professionalism, (viii) leadership skill, and (xi) religious orientation in organisation. Figure 1 depicts the overall theoretical framework of this research.

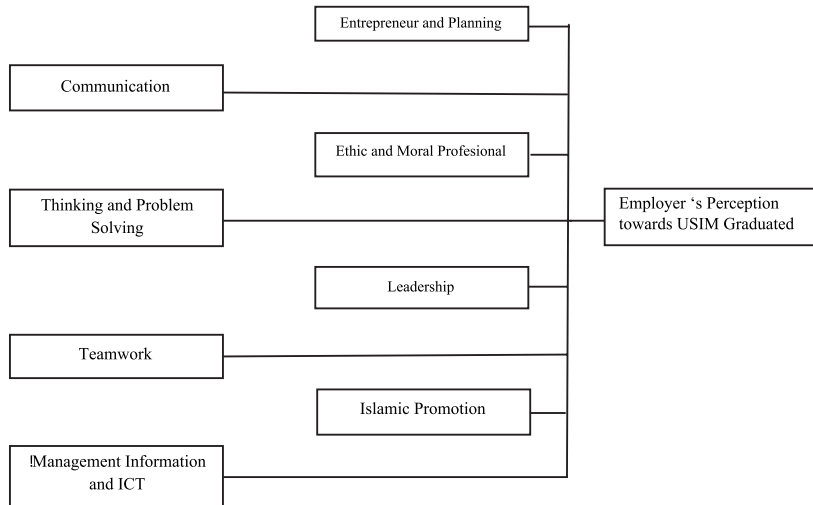


Figure 1 : Research Theoretical Framework

METHODOLOGY

Procedure of Collecting Data

Measures

This is an ongoing research and this research is conducted by using the survey technique. 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).

Sample

This research randomly selected 350 samples from the total population of 8,500 USIM graduates. The number of samples selected is based on the sample size table prepared by Krejcie and Morgan (1970). This research applied simple sampling randomizer technique to list the random numbers of the graduates. Each of graduate was contacted by using telephone to obtain the details of their employers. Upon approval of the employers, a confidential telephone interview session based on the prepared questionnaire was conducted to obtain the perceptions of the employers on USIM's graduates that work with them. Up to the date of this article was submitted, the researchers were able to conduct the telephone surveys to 70 employers. Data collected from the employers are reported next in table two, three, and four.

Pilot Study

In order to assess the reliability of the measures, a pilot study was carried out on 30 graduates from various faculties and careers covering Kuala Lumpur, Selangor and Negeri Sembilan. Cronbach Alpha (α) reliability test was used to assess the reliability of the measurement items in the questionnaire. Results are shown in Table 1. Each of these items is measured by the perception of employers using Likert scale of 1-5 (1 – Strongly Disagree and 5 – Strongly Agree).

Table 1: Cronbach Alpha (α) for each Dimension

Dimension	Cronbach Alpha Pilot Study (n-30)
Communication skills	0.934
Thinking and Problem Solving skills	0.955
Teamwork	0.939
Information Management and ICT	0.974
Entrepreneurship and Work Planning	0.967
Ethic and Professional Moral	0.948
Leadership skills	0.949
Religious Orientation in Organization.	0.991

Based on the Cronbach Alpha (α) showed, the questionnaire could be considered as reliable and suitable to be used for a larger population. Cronbach Alpha values reported are above 0.8 for each dimension and could be considered good. Therefore, no items were dropped from the questionnaire through this pilot study.

FINDINGS

Demographic Background

Distribution of the samples consisting seventy employers according to the faculties are reported in Table 2. 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), Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences (FPSK) and the Faculty of Dentistry (FPg). Nevertheless, due to the no response receive until today from employers of FPSK and FPg graduates, the data could not be used to represent the two faculties. Nevertheless, the data is sufficient to be used to explain briefly on the perceptions of employers toward USIM graduates from the other six faculties.

Table 2: Number of Respondents by Faculty

Faculty	Frequency	Percent
FKP	15	21.1
FPQS	22	31.1
FSU	18	25.4
FPBU	2	2.8
FST	6	8.5
FEM	7	9.9
FPSK	0	0
FpG	0	0
Total	70	100

In addition to the faculties, this study also looked at the career sectors of the graduates. Table 3 below list the percentage of graduates working in three main sectors or education, service, and administrative sectors. Education sector could be said as the major sector of USIM graduates from the six faculties with 82.9 percent, followed by service sector 4.3%, and administration sector 12.9%. This indicates that USIM students graduated from the six faculties are mostly work as teachers. This situation is relevant to the nature of the faculties which are based on Islamic Studies. However, the other two sectors or service and administration sectors could also be said as potential career sectors for USIM graduates. Note that this is an ongoing research. Thus, this research expects after more data collected from the employers and even the graduates, the results will be slightly different.

Table 3: Career Sectors of the Graduate

	Frequency	Percent
Education	58	82.9
Service	3	4.3
Administrative	9	12.9
Total	70	100

Looking at the overall scenario, USIM graduates were perceived to be very good in Islamic Orientation, Ethics, ICT, leadership, and teamwork. Nonetheless, the employers responded their proficiency in English should be developed. Furthermore, the graduates communication skills, entrepreneurship skills, and problem solving skills could be said as acceptable and need to be improved. 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. Table 4 below lists the mean scores of each dimension investigated based on the responds gathered from the seventy employers.

Table 4: Employers' Perception on the Graduates

	Mean of Skills								
	Communication	Problem Solving	Teamwork	ICT	Entrepreneur	Ethics and Moral Professional	Leadership	Islamic Promote	English Proficiency
FKP	3.94	3.94	4.15	4.09	3.64	4.18	4.12	4.46	3.26
FPQS	4.38	4.32	4.51	4.54	4.25	4.61	4.39	4.74	3.54
FSU	4.07	4.10	4.25	4.49	4.17	4.34	4.23	4.51	3.83
FPBU	4.50	4.54	5.00	4.78	4.25	5.00	3.83	5.00	4.00
FST	3.43	3.54	3.58	3.69	3.63	3.83	3.61	3.63	3.50
FEM	4.02	4.11	4.33	4.61	3.97	4.57	4.04	4.40	3.71
FPSK									
FpG									
Total	4.09	4.10	4.28	4.37	4.02	4.39	4.17	4.50	3.58

CONCLUSION

This study is important to help USIM improves the quality of their graduates. Even though responds from employers could be argued as significant, further researches should be conducted to clearly interpret the responds. 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. Finally, 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.

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