

## Book Review

**Title: Employability of Islamic Studies Graduates in Malaysia**

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The above-mentioned book by the authors is a notable contribution comprising a factual study of various issues facing curriculum challenges and the employability of graduates of different programs in Malaysian universities. Within this overview particular emphasis is placed on the status of the Islamic Studies Programs in respect of employability of national Malaysian graduates. Pertinent policy recommendations are made at the end. There is a good deal of research citations for elaborating on the perception of the Islamic studies programs in Malaysian universities. These universities include Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia, International Islamic University Malaysia, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, and University of Malaya. Other sources of Islamic studies in the Government institutions and colleges in Malaysia are also examined to lay down the history of evolution of Islamic studies programs in Malaysia.

The book presents a factual empirical and historical basis for the evaluation of the Islamic studies program in Malaysia to date. In the comprehensive sense of a factual study along with comparative citations on perspectives of the Islamic studies program in Malaysia and the recommendations that follow, this book is an original contribution. It ought to be referred to as a standard policy-theoretic source of reference material for policy-making and a basis for seriously charting an academic reconstruction of the Islamic studies programs in Malaysia. In this sense, the book is an important reference source for policy-makers, educationalists and students.

In coming up with its factual conclusions on the state of employability of graduates of Islamic studies programs in Malaysia the book undertakes distributional statistical presentations in important tables. The tables constructed on the basis of sample surveys point out that the prospects for Islamic studies graduates are comparable to most other general bachelor degrees. The employability picture is therefore good.

A large percentage of the total numbers of graduates interviewed are found to obtain jobs within six months of graduation. It is also noted that most of the graduates find their jobs in the teaching area in schools and colleges. Besides, their salary expectation is good with a medium income of up to RM2000 per month. These prospects tally well with the overwhelmingly high percentage of students taking Islamic studies in selected major universities in Malaysia. These are Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia, International Islamic University Malaysia, University Kebangsaan Malaysia and University of Malaya. Thus in all, the prospects for Islamic science graduates are good in Malaysia. This is an encouraging conclusion of the quantitative work that the authors have undertaken in their book. It points out some significant facts.

Islam and Islamic studies have always been the core nature of education among Muslims in Malaysia ever since her inception as an independent and modern Muslim nation with an ethnic mix. The Islamic content is now being reflected in the educational, training and modern progress of Malaysia. This fact has several futuristic implications on how human resources focused on Islamic studies can be extended to nation building.

The words of Mahayudin Haji Yahaya (see pg. 33 of the book) provide the essential basis of the importance of Islamic studies in nation building. This is to corroborate Islamic studies within the scientific, social, economic and other parts of comprehensive national objectives. This must be accomplished by means of the edicts of morality, ethics and values based on *tarbiya*, the Islamic comprehensive learning and educational process. In this way, Islamic studies can enter center stage in nation building on the basis of the *tarbiya* precept. *Tarbiya* must occupy the heart and soul of the human resource development programs and of the knowledge society that Malaysia wants to instill into her total development agenda.

Indeed, Malaysia has come a fair way in charting out such a modern future. It is necessary now that the facts on the ground relating to Islamic studies must play their central role in the modern Malaysian transformation. Consequently, the worth of the Islamic focus of studies in Malaysian universities and people, and hence respecting educational graduates, will create revolutionary leaders for the brave new Islamic world of the near morrow.



The systemic connectedness picture of Islamic learning in the modern context brings to the forefront the approach for establishing such a holistic worldview. Here the curricula of the Islamic studies programs in various universities ought to be re-modeled. The book points out the fundamental premises of sound educational practices and policies. These are pointed out to be labor-market prospects for graduates; to provide useful national service; and to devote skills, time and effort to a purposive future. The combination of such factors could establish the groundwork for development transformation. It involves both the synergies of the new Islamic mindset and the concrete *modus operandi* to translate the mind and ideas into positive actions. Such is the comprehensive model of transformation by means of moral consciousness. Indeed, the study of consciousness today has become the frontier of moral and scientific knowledge for quest in the most critical realms of thought.

The model of systemic synergy in human resource development programs involving Islamic studies should therefore, spell out a comprehensive model of interconnectedness, purpose and usefulness within the multidimensional framework of national endeavor. A comprehensive model of such educational planning and development consciousness is necessary. This obviously is not found to be emerging from the actual state of education in Malaysia as she graduates into modernity and beyond. The question is more pronounced when we apply it to the less than good expectations desired of Islamic studies programs and their graduates in nation building according to the Islamic worldview.

I refer here to Figure 2.1 of the book. The figure points out the actual status of general educational planning concept in Malaysia. Obviously, Islamic studies program will be subsumed in this framework. The figure shows that the conception of education, human resource development and development transformation according to a comprehensive consciousness model, is lacking. There are discontinuous gaps that otherwise need to be linked up according to strong learning interrelations between the educational planning and social system. Without these being established, there will not come about the necessary synergies and feedback between the various embedded sectors of nation building. Consequently, the labor-market adaptation of Islamic graduates will also be lacking.

The same figure shows that the 'Employment-Purpose' is the sole one underlying educational planning. Employability is seen to be based on the employment-centered motivation as the sole objective. Important though this

objective is in response to the need for productivity, stability and knowledge accumulation for nation building, yet employment is defined as a multi-dimensional function of values (*tarbiya*), income, and labor-market prospects. Such a comprehensive picture will not emerge from a solely market-oriented and globalization-focused pursuit of objectives. Rather the market culture, the perception on trade, commerce and development, and the response of the market order and institutions to such holism must reinforce the comprehensive picture. Consequently, the comprehensive development transformation picture should show up.

Figure 2.1 would then redefine the employability box and then chart this through the entire system of linkages and responses having no discontinuities. As it stands, there are too many such gaps in Figure 2.1. This figure though represents the prevailing understanding of the employability concept in Malaysia. Consequently, there are no strong interactive feedbacks in the Malaysian social order that can be caused and then realized continuously by education in general and Islamic studies in particular.

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The comprehensive picture of a strongly interactive model of development transformation necessitates suitable changes required in the market and institutional menus. If markets are left to themselves to bring about change, an anomie of uncharted desires and choices will corrupt. There will be contested markets and the agents here will be guided by methodological individualism. The New Economic Policy was a way to empower those who were left out of the development race within Malaysia. A better approach would be the establishment of a Positive Educational Planning for Development Consciousness.

Think of the growth of Islamic capital markets and *Muamalat* (socioeconomic affairs) by means of promoting, encouraging and realizing the Islamic transformation process. In such a milieu of change, graduates will find the appropriate jobs and governments and institutions will help in promoting the direction of development. Universities will establish superior centers of advanced thinking on the formalism of the Positive Educational Planning for Development Consciousness. Practitioners and Government will join in this framework of change. Such scholarly, practitioner and policy oriented undertaking will be based on the same model of Islamic development consciousness and transformation. Indeed, it is the model of unity of knowledge between all sectors of the socioeconomic order as she learns to accomplish the comprehensive goals.

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These are some of the policy perspectives that may be desired in the policy futures on employability of Islamic studies graduates. Indeed, then the educational institutions and the scholarly gurus along with the practitioners and decision-makers will find out ways and means of designing curriculums that are not dissociated from, but rather are integrated with the Islamic worldview. This indeed is the worldview of Tawhid, the oneness of the divine law in the systemic unity of knowledge and world-systems. The Tawhidi worldview developed and enacted by the scholarly gurus in concert with decision-makers and practitioners will convey the phenomenological meaning of modernity and beyond.

When so actualized, it is hoped that some of the gaps in employment figures (Tables 4.6, 4.8 in the book) derived from sample survey results will be improved. More educational and trade, commerce and development related jobs will open up in the midst of the expanding Islamicizing Malaysian economy. This can happen by the interaction, integration and creative evolution in polity-market learning dynamics. These are core issues of the comprehensive Positive Educational Planning for Development Consciousness referred to above.