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### FACTOR INFLUENCING THE MARKETABILITY OF GRADUATE: A CASE STUDY IN ISLAMIC SCIENCE UNIVERSITY MALAYSIA (USIM)

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#### ABSTRACT

*Today, graduate marketability is deteriorating. Some graduates from universities in the public sector can still not enter the employment market. This study was thus carried out on the elements which affect the marketability of graduates in Malaysia at the public university. Three hundred eighty graduate students from a public university were the participants in the research. The quantitative approach was applied in this study, descriptive analysis and inferential analysis. The data gathered from the questionnaire are the medium for blasting over the Google Form platform. This study analysed data using Statistical Package of Social Science (SPSS) Version 26. The analysis utilised included the descriptive analysis and Pearson correlation. The results have shown that the marketability of graduates has a tangible link to their personality and skills. Meanwhile, numerous regression analyses demonstrate that public university graduates' personalities, skills, and academics impact marketability. This research indicates that three key characteristics, personality, skills and academics, affect the marketability of graduate students. To prepare for job marketing, the graduate must be aware of the three variables highlighted in this research.*

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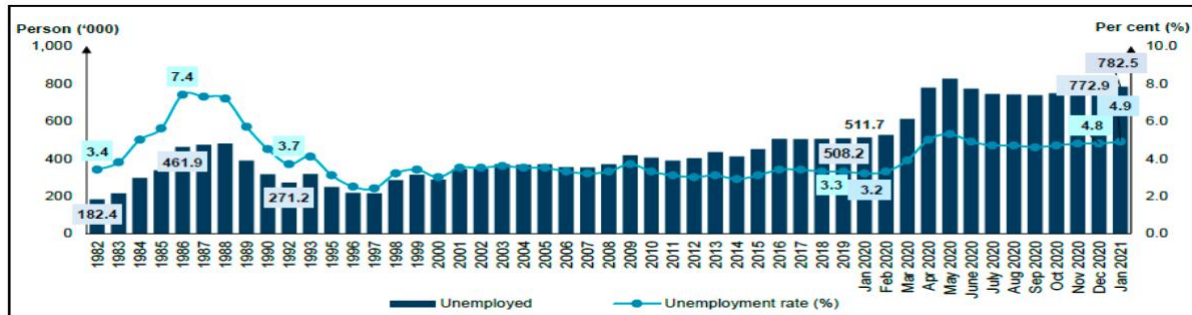
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#### Introduction

The higher education sector is divided between Malaysia's public and private sectors. Universities in the public sector are government-regulated universities that provide different kinds of courses and degrees of study. Universities in the private sector provide various methods depending on the universities themselves. However, these colleges can distinguish many things. The issue of graduate employment in the country has recently become a significant concern. The increasing number of students in public and private higher education institutions also puts pressure on the market competition for jobs (Harun et al.2017; Tan et al.2017; Yusof & Jamaluddin, 2017).

Today, universities are responsible for developing and distributing knowledge and preparing graduates' careers. The employability of graduates is a worldwide problem, not just the issue of Malaysian universities (Ahmad et al. 2018). Most countries worldwide are experiencing severe difficulties with graduate unemployment in today's competitive, technological, and economically demanding circumstances (Longe, 2017). In Malaysia, there has not been a complete resolution of unemployment caused by exceeding many graduates, and many parties, including the Government, regard this as a severe disorder (Ab Halim et al. 2019). The high unemployment rate among university graduates worldwide is due to a lack of work

opportunities and a scarcity of individuals with the skills that companies need (Emeh et al.2012; Pitan, 2016; Judd et al.2015). The study focuses on the marketability of graduates from a public university in Malaysia. This is because several students from universities in the public sector have yet to enter the labour market. According to the 2018 Graduates Tracer study statistics from the Ministry of Education of Malaysia, around 20,7% of public university students are still unemployed. As we can see, the marketability of graduates is deteriorating nowadays, and this problem has led the graduate to a high jobless rate. Furthermore, this study is also being carried out due to the worrying national unemployment rate, as shown in Figure 1.



**Fig. 1:** Unemployed persons and unemployment rate, 1982 - 2019 and January 2020 - January 2021  
(Source: Department of Statistic Malaysia, 2021)

According to Fig. 1, Malaysia's unemployment rate from 1982 to 2021 shows a significant increase in the unemployment rate in Malaysia. In January 2021, there was a rate of unemployment rise of 0.1 points to 4.9% compared to the previous month, which shows a 1.3% increase in unemployment, or 9.7 thousand more people to 782.5 thousand people (December 2020: 772.9 thousand persons). Year by year, unemployment rose by 270.9 thousand compared to 511.7 thousand in January 2020. Similarly, from 3.2 per cent, the unemployment rate increased by 1.7 percentage points. This proves that the problem of unemployment is a severe concern that must be solved.

Daud et al. (2012) researched the gap between essential elements (knowledge, skills, talents, and personality) that graduates of higher education institutions should possess and their actual performance while working in the industry. The findings revealed that graduate performance did not fulfil employers' expectations of the graduates' characteristics. During the career phase, their personality critically influences their marketability. Every company that hires someone must ensure that the personality is a top priority over any other element. Some aspects of personality are always necessary by an organisation, such as look, communication style, etc. In addition to the personality component, skills are also crucial in determining graduate marketability. For postgraduate students, fundamental skills, such as communication, listening and writing, are highly vital as they are essential for advanced careers (Majid et al. 2012). In addition, substantial academic achievement may also be one of the elements leading to a high degree of student marketability in colleges.

On the other hand, today's graduates tend to overlook the value of having a good personality. According to Suleman (2018), personality may also be viewed as an organism in a person's psychological system and physical makeup. It has an impact on how they interact with their surroundings. Furthermore, graduate students lack all types of fundamental and advanced abilities. According to Azmi et al. (2018), most university students currently lack some essential skills, such as soft skills, problem-solving and communication skills (Hanapi & Nordin, 2014), as well as some hard skills, such as technological competence, difficulty in applying knowledge, and English communication skills (Hanapi & Nordin, 2014; Lim et al. 2016). Employer desires graduate workers who can push organisations to compete effectively in the market (Hamid et al.2013). The capacity of graduates to communicate vocally and in writing in English is an essential qualification, followed by their ability to think critically.

Since today's business community is infinite and endless, managers look for highly qualified employees such as communication, coordination, issue resolution, project and company management, strategy and organisation, self-management and lifetime learning (Ismail, 2012). Next, poor academic performance contributes to graduate students' low marketability. The students appear to be unconcerned about their academic achievement during their studies. Academic achievement has long been

acknowledged as a vital product of any educational institution (Omolo et al.2020). Academic performance is critical for young people's social development (Regier, 2011). Students who succeed in school are better prepared to move to adulthood and achieve professional and financial success.

As the results of the preceding difficulties are summarisable, graduate students' unemployment will be high because their marketability in the workplace is relatively poor. As the previous difficulties' results summarise, postgraduate students' unemployment will be high because their marketability in the workplace is rather poor. It would also be difficult for them to find a suitable career if they are unaware of the above elements because they are the root of their work. Moreover, the challenges today are incredibly high for a decent job. This research is, therefore, timely and essential. Table 1 provides the marketability of graduate students from both the public and private sectors.

**Table 1:** Statistic of the Employment Status in 2019

Categories s of HEIc	Employment Status										Total	
	Employed		Further Study		Upgrading Skills		Waiting for Work Placement		Unemployed			
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Public University	76274	62.8	21521	17.7	2323	1.9	6455	5.3	14849	12.2	121422	100

(Source: Department of Statistic Malaysia, 2019)

As shown in Table 1, the statistic from the Graduate Tracer Study of the Higher Education Statistic 2019: The Ministry of Education Malaysia, from the public-sector universities, about 76,274 graduates had been employed, equal to 62.8%. Approximately 21,521 (17.7%) graduates are furthering their studies, 2,323 (1.9%) graduates are upgrading their skills, and about 6,455 (5.3%) graduates are waiting for work placement. Alarmingly, about 14,849 (12.2%) graduates are still unemployed, raising significant concerns.

This study aimed to examine the factors influencing the marketability of university graduates. The contribution of this study can add more knowledge to the field studied and help university shareholders focus on the preparation of students at the university.

## Literature Review

Marketability is described as a person's ability to obtain or keep a job (Musa & Soo, 2016). This is when their skills will become more valuable. A marketing graduate is adaptable, inventive, skilled at solving issues and making decisions, consistently demonstrates a high level of quality and is devoted to their job. According to Noor and Mansor (2018), graduates' marketability is determined not just by the degree they earned but also by their soft skills. The marketability of graduates is particularly important since it reflects the university's investment in human resources. However, even if graduates are well prepared in their field of speciality, the rising number of jobless undergraduates is thought to be due to a lack of soft skills. Students can increase their marketability at the university level in various ways, including learning new technologies, becoming more engaged in extracurricular activities, holding conferences or lectures, etc. Students can increase their marketability at the university level in various ways, including continuing to study developing technologies, becoming more engaged in extracurricular activities, holding conferences or lectures, etc.

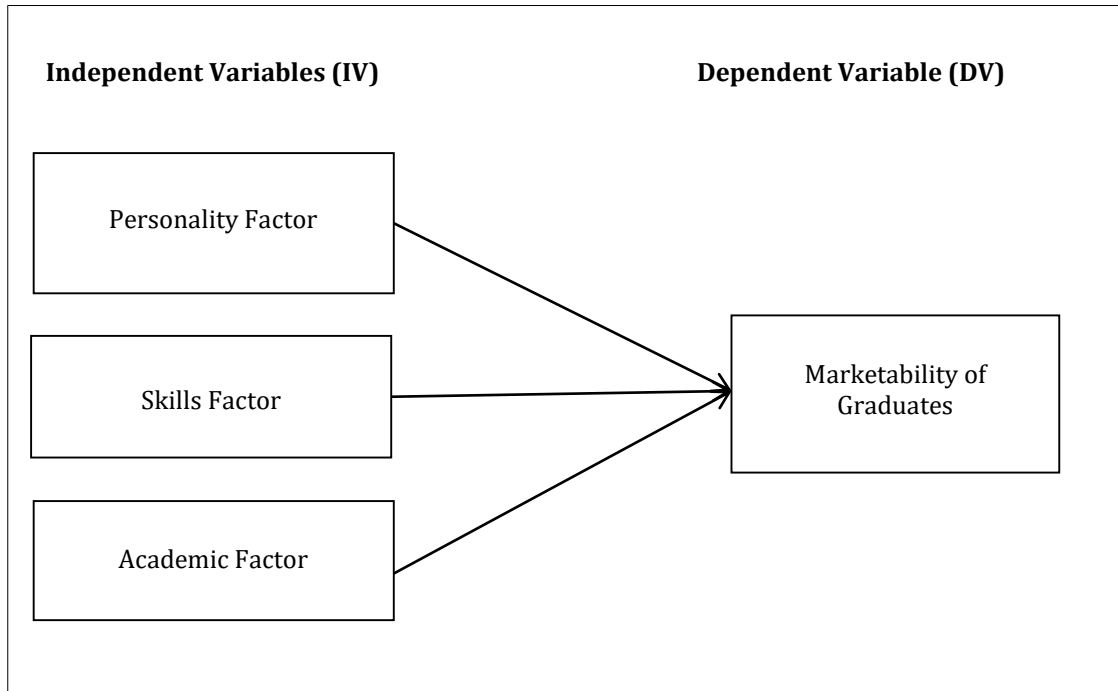
A personality characteristic describes a person's behaviour, ideas, and emotions of consistent patterns (Parks-Leduc et al.2015). According to Uher (2017), personality could be defined as a person's traits and behaviour, including how they think, feel and drive. Meanwhile, according to Nuckcheddy (2018), personality refers to a person's distinct qualities that make them recognised and identifiable. It serves as the foundation for individual differences among organisation members. Another way to describe the development of a person is the functional meaning and the range of unique affective, emotional, and motivational mechanisms that may lead to the development of personality variations (Nuckcheddy, 2018). As a result, individuals may have the same physical look but differ in their characteristics (Barrick et al.2013).

According to Abdel-Wahab et al. (2005), the concept of talents has expanded to encompass the ability to perform specific deceitful tasks, including linguistic skills such as reading, writing, speaking, and listening. The capabilities involving numbers include computation, measurement, graphing, and tables. Manipulative agility, coordination and problem-solving when critical thinking abilities are also required. On the other hand, skill is crucial for a student to get a decent career. Furthermore, companies increasingly like to see a mix of abilities in their employees who have been chosen to fill a particular job. In addition, an adequate degree of soft skills is regarded as desirable to advance in a career for disciplined-based competence and abilities (Majid et al. 2012). According to the Department of Statistics, most graduates overlook crucial knowledge and professional skills while applying for jobs (Columnist, 2013). They also lack fundamental abilities like communication, language competence, and general knowledge (Ismail, 2011). Empirical studies have demonstrated the lack of employability among graduates, such as failure to communicate well, lack of skills in group work, lacking creative thinking and critical thought, poor decision making, lack of interpersonal skills and insufficient problem-solving skills (Dhakal et al. 2018; Hajazi, 2016; Tanius, 2018; Yusof & Jamaluddin, 2017). These abilities are essential marketing qualities perceived from the employer's point of view.

Academics refer to disciplines that apply to work in schools, colleges, and universities, especially those involving study and reasoning rather than practical or technical abilities. Academics is one of the essential elements that graduates must possess to ensure their marketability after steadily completing their studies (Shaharuddin Ahmad et al. 2014). Mushtaq and Khan (2012) divide the elements impacting students' performance into two categories: internal classroom factors such as teacher performance, proficiency in English, how the teacher teaches in the class, and others. Meanwhile, external classroom issues such as financial troubles, social problems, family problems, extracurricular activities, and others are considered the impact. Furthermore, Robert and Sampson (2011) discovered that a staff member's qualification is crucial to student achievement. As a result, it is reasonable to assume that academics will play a significant part in a post-future graduate's marketability if they can maintain their academic performance. Suleman's (2018) study, for example, establishes the connection between marketability and personality amongst students by comparing graduates from two leading public universities in Malaysia. This further supports Ma'dan et al. (2020) claim that graduates' competitive attitudes, such as emotional control, innovation, and enthusiasm to be the best, are essential to better future graduates' marketability. Fu and Rebecca's (2016) study explores the relationship between a subordinate upbeat personality and a quantitative measure of career achievement. The study showed the positive link between proactive character and career achievement and the indirect relationship between proactive individuality and professional success when reduced power distance orientation. The attitude of a graduate is essential in terms of collaboration, and the graduate can affect the team's work. Characteristics of an individual graduate are particularly crucial for developing their cooperation and communication skills (Ali et al. 2017). Wahab (2014) iterated that communication skills are critical in evaluating graduates' marketability. Prospective candidates with good employability skills will more than likely meet the expectations of employers (Ab Rahman et al. 2019). He also added that each employee in any business must have specific employable skills for their organisations or companies to function better. Graduates' employability talents are essential variables when a company employs new employees. Students, therefore, need to do enough to train themselves to be successful in the workplace (Yau, 2019).

Moreover, research by Dorte and Jolanda (2016), on the other hand, showed that academic performance significantly influences students to be ready for future job field transfer. In other words, academic achievement is essential to predict successful professional routes (Suvedi et al. 2016).

Hence, all these factors form the basis of this framework (Fig. 2) in determining factors that influence graduate marketability.



**Fig. 2: Conceptual Framework**

Therefore, this study will test the following hypothesis:

- H1: There is a significant relationship between the personality and the marketability of the graduates.
- H2: There is a significant relationship between skills and marketability of graduates.
- H3: There is a significant relationship between graduates' academic and marketability.

## Research Methodology

This study was done among students from the Islamic Science University Malaysia (USIM), a public university in Malaysia. The overall population of the university was roughly 11,560 students, with nine colleges (Islamic Science University Malaysia, 2020). The sample or number of responders is around 375. Due to the Covid-19 issue, the responders will deliver the questionnaire through Google Form. This cross-sectional study has used a Simple Random Sampling method. According to Creswell (2012), this sampling method is cost-effective and makes it easy to get feedback from respondents.

In this study, a questionnaire is the main instrument. The first part was the respondents' profiles covering gender, age, race, student year and faculty: the second part was the marketability of graduates, followed by personality, skills, and academics. Table 2 is a list of measurements adapted from previously published scales.

**Table 2: Respondent's Demographic Profile**

Instrument	Sources	Cronbach's alpha
Marketability of Graduate	Chang Peng Kee et al. (2012)	0.743
Personality	Fu Yang, Rabecca Chau (2016)	0.8
Skills	Ilhaamie et. al (2018)	0.8
Academic	Shaharuddin Ahmad et. al (2014)	0.9

## Findings

This study collects about 380 graduate students from the Islamic Science University Malaysia (USIM). The respondents were analysed according to their gender, age group and faculty. Respondents' demographic profile is depicted in Table 3:

**Table 3: Respondent's Demographic Profile**

Characteristics	Frequencies	Percentage
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	204	53.7
Female	176	46.3
Total	380	100.0
<b>Age</b>		
<21 years old	82	21.6
22-23 years old	151	39.7
24 years old and above	147	38.7
Total	380	100.0
<b>Race</b>		
Malay	380	100.0
Chinese	-	-
Indian	-	-
Total	380	100.0
<b>Faculty</b>		
<i>Quranic &amp; Sunnah Studies</i>	57	15
<i>Leadership &amp; Management</i>	26	6.8
<i>Syariah &amp; Law</i>	71	18.7
<i>Economics &amp; Muamalat</i>	45	11.8
<i>Science &amp; Technology</i>	56	14.7
<i>Medicine &amp; Health Science</i>	27	7.1
<i>Major Language Studies</i>	12	3.2
<i>Dentistry</i>	53	13.9
<i>Engineering &amp; Built Environment</i>	33	8.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>380</b>	<b>100.0</b>

The best linear relationship between personality and the marketability of graduate was observed, as seen in Table 4 ( $r = 0.659$ ,  $p = .000$ , alpha modified = 0.05). The moderate positive correlation coefficient of 0.659 shows that the graduate marketability ranking improves as the personality score increases. This observation strongly confirms the research hypothesis,  $H_1$ , and there is a significant relationship between personality and graduate marketability. As seen in Table 4, the best linear relationship between skills and graduate marketability was observed ( $r = 0.315$ ,  $p = .0001$ , alpha modified = 0.05). The low positive correlation coefficient of 0.315 shows that the marketability ranking of graduates improves as the score for skills increases. This observation strongly confirms the research hypothesis,  $H_2$ , that there is a significant relationship between skills and graduate marketability. As shown in Table 3, there is no relationship was found between academic and the marketability of graduate ( $r = .091$ ,  $p = .076$ ,  $\alpha$  adjusted = 0.05). The negligible positive correlation coefficient of 0.091 indicates that as the academic score increases, so does the rating for graduate marketability. This finding engages the research hypothesis,  $H_3$ , that there is a significant relationship between academic and graduate marketability.

**Table 4: The Finding of the Relationship between Personality, Skills, Academic and Marketability of Graduate**

	Marketability of Graduate		
	Magnitude of relationship	Coefficient (r)	P-value
Personality	Moderate	0.659	0.0001
Skills	Weak	0.315	0.0001
Academic	Negligible	0.091	0.0760

The study found that each component, particularly personality, had a significant positive relationship with graduate marketability. This conclusion was supported by a previous study by Fu and Rebecca (2015), which found that personality directly influenced graduate marketability. The findings validated the hypothesis, H<sub>1</sub>, that there is a significant link between personality and graduate marketability and Suleman's (2018) argument that the relationship between marketability and personality is substantial and very strong among graduates. This demonstrates that a graduate's personality has a significant role in determining their marketability after graduation. Before beginning their future profession, graduates should ensure they have prepared their personalities. This result also shows that most organisations nowadays are selecting their employees by evaluating their personality, whereby an employee's personality can be one of the factors of the improvement in an organisation.

Meanwhile, the second independent variable, skills, positively correlates with graduate marketability. In the previous study, Yau (2019) found that skills directly and substantially influence graduate marketability. Consequently, the findings confirmed hypothesis H<sub>2</sub>, a significant relationship between graduate skills and marketability. This demonstrates that talents are a considerable element in evaluating a graduate's marketability. Because today's technology evolves rapidly, an organisation's skills have become increasingly crucial. In addition, this study revealed that academic is not now highly likely to influence marketability. Graduates with solid academics are not competent at other elements, particularly their personality, and cannot regulate certain situations. This study has so fulfilled all the objectives set out in this research. This survey is vital for understanding how graduate from public universities view their marketability through personality, skills, and academics.

## Conclusions

Universities worldwide are taking many steps to guarantee that graduate employability is a priority. More significantly, in today's climate, graduate employability is one of the significant performance metrics for a university (Ahmad et al.2018). The findings showed the strength of the individual, talent, and intellect to the theoretical consequences of graduate marketability. The study's outcomes verified briefly that students' personalities, skills, and academic characteristics explain the variation. This study allowed the university to discover and practice the critical aspect of marketability for graduate students and participate in positive group cohesion to attain a high degree of personality, skills, and academic achievement.

In conclusion, the outcomes of this study may be applied to improve the marketability of public university graduates. As the world changes, universities must ensure that the graduate they produce is market-ready. This responsibility, however, does not fall solely on higher education institutions. Students, universities, employers, and the government are responsible. Students must assume responsibility for ensuring they are prepared with the necessary abilities. These abilities can be honed through courses or extracurricular activities such as volunteering, professional organisations, or competitive sports. Employers must also participate in exchanging ideas about changing job market requirements. Employers must also assist the graduate in transferring and adjusting to their organisation.

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