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Islamic Graduate Employability Framework (IGEF): Developing a Competency-Based Graduate Outcome Model for Religious Educational Institutions in the Era of Artificial Intelligence and the Global Knowledge Economy

Dr. Hafiz Khubaib ur Rehman Awan, PhD

Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Global Institute of Curriculum Consultancy (GICC), Pakistan

General Secretary, Wifaq ul Jamiaat al Arabia Pakistan (WJAP), Pakistan.

dr.khubaiburehman@gmail.com

Prof. Dr. Naseer Ahmed Akhtar

Head of Department (HoD), Department of Islamic Studies, University of Lahore, Pakistan.

hod@ais.uol.edu.pk

Dr. Muhammad Tariq Ramzan

Associate Professor, Chairman, Department of Arts & Humanities, Superior University, Pakistan.

Abstract

In the rapidly evolving landscape of the twenty-first century, characterized by the paradigm shifts of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and the global knowledge economy, traditional religious educational institutions (Madaris and Islamic universities) face unprecedented challenges regarding graduate employability and societal relevance. This study develops and proposes a novel international educational model: the Islamic Graduate Employability Framework (IGEF). Adopting a qualitative conceptual research methodology, the study integrates classical Islamic Educational Philosophy and the foundational principles of Maqasid al-Shariah (Objectives of Islamic Law) with contemporary educational paradigms, including Human Capital Theory, Competency Theory, and Outcome-Based Education (OBE). The resulting framework identifies twelve interconnected competency domains: Islamic Epistemology & Knowledge, Ethical Leadership & Governance, Communication Excellence, Critical Thinking, AI Literacy & Human-AI Collaboration, Digital Competence, Research & Knowledge Creation, Social Entrepreneurship, Community Engagement, Global Citizenship, Emotional & Spiritual Intelligence, and Lifelong Learning. To operationalize the framework, we construct an analytical Graduate Competency Matrix, an empirical Graduate Employability Index (GEI), and an Institutional Implementation Scorecard. This study provides a vital strategic roadmap for curriculum designers, higher education commissions, religious educational boards, and accreditation bodies globally, demonstrating that the synthesis of classical Islamic values and advanced technological competencies is not only conceptually viable but essential for modern institutional resilience and societal development.

Keywords: Graduate Employability, Islamic Higher Education, Maqasid al-Shariah, Artificial Intelligence, Competency-Based Education, Human Capital Theory, Global Knowledge Economy, Educational Governance, Madaris Reform, Curriculum Design.

1. Introduction

The global higher education landscape is undergoing a profound structural transformation driven by the rapid maturation of generative Artificial Intelligence (AI), quantum computing, and the realities of a highly competitive, digitalized knowledge economy (World Economic Forum [WEF], 2023; UNESCO, 2021). These disruptions are fundamentally redefining the nature of labor, demanding that academic institutions look beyond conventional disciplinary boundaries to foster

complex cognitive, digital, and ethical capacities in their graduates. For religious educational institutions, particularly traditional Islamic universities and Madaris across the Muslim world, this modern shift presents both a structural crisis and an unprecedented opportunity. Historically, these institutions have served as guardians of moral philosophy, spiritual instruction, and classical scholarship. However, a significant gap has emerged between their traditional academic outputs and the complex demands of the contemporary global workforce (Awan, 2026; UNESCO, 2023). In response to this disparity, this paper introduces the **Islamic Graduate Employability Framework (IGEF)**, a comprehensive, competency-based outcome model designed specifically for religious educational institutions. The IGEF does not advocate for the secularization or dilution of traditional theological curricula. Rather, it proposes a structured, theoretically rigorous integration of classical Islamic educational philosophy with advanced technological literacy, ethical leadership, social entrepreneurship, and global citizenship. By grounding graduate employability in the holistic ethos of *Maqasid al-Shariah* (the preservation of faith, life, intellect, lineage, and wealth) and Human Capital Theory, this study establishes a robust scholarly paradigm. It ensures that modern Islamic graduates can effectively navigate, lead, and contribute to both local communities and the global digital economy.

2. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Islamic educational boards and religious universities globally have historically operated within distinct pedagogical structures. Traditional institutions, such as those governed by national frameworks and independent boards like the Wifaq ul Jamiaat al Arabia Pakistan (WJAP), provide rigorous instruction in classical Arabic, hermeneutics, jurisprudence, and theology. While these institutions excel at preserving cultural and intellectual heritage, modern socio-economic shifts require graduates to engage with complex contemporary challenges, including digital transformation, economic volatility, and cross-cultural communication. Over the past decade, international bodies like the OECD and the World Bank have championed "Twenty-First Century Skills," urging higher education systems to adopt Outcome-Based Education (OBE) to align educational inputs with labor market outcomes. This framework addresses this need within Islamic higher education, providing a clear path to bridge historical tradition with contemporary professional competencies.

3. PROBLEM STATEMENT

A significant structural mismatch exists between the pedagogical outputs of religious educational institutions and the demands of the modern global knowledge economy. Graduates of traditional Madaris and Islamic higher education systems often enter the job market with deep theological knowledge but limited practical competencies in key areas, such as artificial intelligence, data analytics, social entrepreneurship, and modern research methodologies. This gap limits their career prospects, reduces their capability to influence contemporary public policy, and hinders their potential to lead community-focused developmental initiatives. Consequently, these institutions risk becoming isolated from broader economic and technological advancements, leaving their graduates underrepresented in modern professional sectors.

4. RESEARCH GAP

While extensive literature exists on modern graduate employability frameworks (such as the Dearing Report, the USEM model, and various OECD learning frameworks), these models are designed for secular, westernized educational systems and fail to address the specific spiritual, ethical, and cultural objectives of religious higher education. Conversely, current literature on Islamic curriculum reform remains largely conceptual or polemical, offering few actionable, empirically measurable competency frameworks. There is a clear scholarly gap for an integrated,

multi-dimensional framework that synthesizes classical Islamic educational goals with modern technological and professional competencies.

5. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study is guided by three primary research questions:

- a) How can traditional Islamic educational philosophy and the principles of *Maqasid al-Shariah* be theoretically integrated with modern, competency-based graduate outcome models to enhance employability?
- b) What are the core competency domains and measurable performance indicators required to prepare Islamic higher education graduates for the era of artificial intelligence and the global knowledge economy?
- c) How can an empirical index and institutional scorecard be developed to systematically measure and evaluate graduate employability outcomes in religious institutions?

6. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The primary objectives of this study are:

- a) To synthesize classical Islamic philosophy with contemporary educational theories (Human Capital Theory, OBE, and Constructivism) into a cohesive theoretical framework.
- b) To construct the **Islamic Graduate Employability Framework (IGEF)**, specifying twelve core competency domains alongside clear, measurable behavioral indicators and designated performance weights.
- c) To develop an actionable implementation roadmap and institutional scorecard to guide religious educational boards, universities, and quality assurance agencies in curriculum reform.

7. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study offers a valuable resource for higher education administrators, policy makers, curriculum designers, and accreditation bodies throughout the Muslim world and international education sectors. By proposing a clear, structured framework, the research supports the modernization of religious curricula without compromising their theological foundations. For academic institutions, it provides an actionable pathway to design and evaluate outcome-based programs. For governments and global employers, it offers a standardized matrix to recognize and utilize the distinct ethical and professional capabilities of Islamic university graduates.

8. COMPREHENSIVE LITERATURE REVIEW

Scholarly discourse surrounding graduate employability has evolved from simple human capital models to complex, multidimensional frameworks. Early models, such as York and Knight's (2006) USEM model, highlighted four key dimensions: Understanding, Skills, Efficacy beliefs, and Metacognition. Similarly, Tomlinson's (2017) Graduate Capital Model emphasized five distinct forms of graduate capital: human, social, cultural, identity, and psychological. These models demonstrate that technical knowledge alone is insufficient; graduates must also possess the psychological resilience, social networks, and self-efficacy required to navigate shifting professional environments.

With the rapid expansion of the digital economy, researchers have increasingly emphasized the critical role of technological and digital literacies. The World Economic Forum's *Future of Jobs Report* consistently highlights active learning, analytical thinking, technological design, and systems analysis as vital skills for the contemporary workforce. Concurrently, the rise of artificial intelligence has sparked a renewed focus on uniquely human traits—such as emotional intelligence, ethical leadership, and critical thinking—often referred to as "soft" or non-cognitive

skills. These traits are essential because they represent the capabilities least likely to be automated by machine learning algorithms (Susskind & Susskind, 2020).

Within Islamic education research, scholarly contributions have historically focused on curriculum preservation and pedagogical values. Foundational thinkers emphasize the concept of *Tarbiyah* (holistic development), *Ta'dib* (ethical cultivation), and *Ta'lim* (knowledge transfer). However, modern scholars argue that preserving this intellectual heritage should not lead to isolation from contemporary scientific and technological advancements. Integrating digital tools, entrepreneurship, and global communication skills into religious curricula is increasingly recognized as a vital step toward ensuring graduates can address contemporary challenges

Table 1: Comparative Analysis of International Employability Models

MODEL / FRAMEWORK	CORE FOCUS AREAS	UNRESOLVED GAPS	IGEF INTEGRATION & CONTRIBUTION
USEM Model (York & Knight, 2006)	Subject understanding, metacognition, personal efficacy, and generic skills.	Omit spiritual, religious, and socio-ethical values; lacks focus on AI-era digital demands.	Integrates metacognitive reflection with spiritual values; self-assessment (Tazkiyah) and ethical agency.
Graduate Capital Model (Tomlinson, 2017)	Five capitals: human, social, psychological, identity.	Does not address religious and institutional contexts or specific ethical-legal frameworks (Shariah).	Adapts "psychological" and "social" capital into Spiritual Capital and Shariah-compliant social responsibility.
OECD Learning Compass 2030	Agency, transformative competencies (creating new value, reconciling dilemmas, taking responsibility).	Lacks a foundational metaphysical anchor to guide agency.	Provides a transcendental ethical anchor through Maqasid al-Shariah and classical Islamic values.
IGEF (Proposed)	12 domains merging Islamic philosophy, AI literacy, entrepreneurship, and global citizenship.	Addresses previous gaps.	Integrates classical Islamic theology with advanced digital literacy and modern economic frameworks.

9. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical foundation of the Islamic Graduate Employability Framework (IGEF) is built on a careful synthesis of classical Islamic concepts and contemporary educational theories:

- **Human Capital Theory (Schultz, 1961; Becker, 1964):** Posits that education and training increase an individual's cognitive and technical capabilities, directly boosting productivity and economic output. The IGEF expands this concept to include "Spiritual Human Capital," recognizing ethical integrity and spiritual resilience as key drivers of professional productivity.

- **Maqasid al-Shariah (Objectives of Islamic Law):** Originally formulated by classical scholars like Al-Ghazali and Ash-Shatibi, this principle identifies five essential human needs: the preservation of faith (*Din*), life (*Nafs*), intellect (*Aql*), lineage (*Nasl*), and wealth (*Mal*). The IGEF aligns these objectives with modern educational goals, as shown in the mathematical representations below.
- **Outcome-Based Education (OBE) & Competency Theory:** Focuses on structuring curriculum and assessment around clearly defined, observable, and measurable outcomes. This methodology ensures that every academic activity directly contributes to developing specific graduate competencies.
- **Constructivism & Lifelong Learning:** Positions the learner as an active creator of knowledge, reflecting the Islamic principle of continuous self-improvement and seeking knowledge "from the cradle to the grave."

To represent the integration of *Maqasid al-Shariah* into the evaluation of Graduate Competency, we introduce a formal mathematical relationship. Let $C_{\{tot\}}$ be the Total Graduate Competency Score, defined as:

$$C_{\{tot\}} = \sum_{i=1}^n w_i \cdot c_i$$

Where w_i represents the normalized weight assigned to the i -th competency domain ($\sum w_i = 1.0$), and c_i represents the score obtained in that specific domain. This score is moderated by the Maqasid Preservation Index (Φ_M), expressed as:

$$\Phi_M = \rho \cdot D + \eta \cdot N + \gamma \cdot A + \delta \cdot S + \theta \cdot M$$

Where D (*Din*), N (*Nafs*), A (*Aql*), S (*Nasl*), and M (*Mal*) are assessed values between 0 and 1, with coefficients representing the relative developmental emphasis of the institution. The final Adjusted Employability Index (AEI) is given by:

$$AEI = C_{\{tot\}} \cdot \Phi_M$$

10. THE ORIGINAL CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: IGEF

The Islamic Graduate Employability Framework (IGEF) is built around twelve core competency domains. Each domain includes specific behavioral indicators and carries a defined weight within the overall assessment model:

Table 2: IGEF Core Competency Domains and Performance Indicators

ID	COMPETENCY DOMAIN	WEIGHT (%)	MEASURABLE INDICATORS	PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT METHOD
C1	Islamic Knowledge & Epistemology	10%	Understanding classical texts; integrating religious principles with modern humanities.	Written essays, capstone projects.
C2	Ethical Leadership & Shariah Governance	10%	Applying Shariah principles to leadership; demonstrating transparent governance.	Peer reviews, situational judgment tests.
C3	Communication Excellence	10%	Academic writing; clear, persuasive presentations.	Oral defenses, written reports, public speaking.
C4	Critical Thinking & Problem Solving	10%	Formulating research questions; resolving complex modern ethical issues.	Case study analysis, viva examinations.
C5	AI Literacy & Human-AI Collaboration	10%	Using AI tools responsibly; understanding the ethical implications of automation.	Technical projects, AI ethics case studies.

C6	Digital & Data Competence	8%	Analyzing quantitative datasets; Practical lab tests, managing basic digital software assignments. collaboration tools.
C7	Research Knowledge Creation	8%	Publishing peer-reviewed articles; Thesis defense, executing rigorous research published papers. designs.
C8	Social Entrepreneurship & Economic Resilience	8%	Drafting sustainable, Shariah-Business plan compliant business plans; competitions, project launching social ventures. pilots.
C9	Community Engagement & Public Service	7%	Designing local welfare projects; Community service logs, volunteering with non-profit field evaluations. organizations.
C10	Global Citizenship & Inter-civilizational Dialogue	7%	Participating in interfaith Global seminar conferences; demonstrating presentations, reflective cross-cultural empathy. portfolios.
C11	Emotional Spiritual Intelligence (Tazkiyah)	6%	Practicing self-regulation, Self-assessment mindfulness, and constructive surveys, mentor self-reflection. feedback.
C12	Lifelong Learning & Metacognitive Adaptability	6%	Pursuing professional Personal development certifications; documenting plans (PDP). independent learning goals.

11. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative conceptual research design to develop a robust educational framework. The methodology consists of three main phases:

- Phase 1: Document Analysis (Extensive Review):** Analyzing classical Islamic texts on pedagogy alongside contemporary higher education policy documents from UNESCO, the OECD, the World Bank, and various national higher education commissions.
- Phase 2: Framework Development (Synthesis):** Integrating key elements from Phase 1 to construct the twelve competency domains of the IGEF, using Maqasid al-Shariah as the underlying conceptual structure.
- Phase 3: Validation and Refinement:** Gathering expert feedback through a Delphi study with twenty participants, including Islamic education scholars, university vice-chancellors, and global quality assurance experts, to ensure content validity.

12. GRADUATE EMPLOYABILITY ASSESSMENT MODEL

To transition the IGEF from a conceptual framework to a practical institutional tool, we present a five-level employability rubrics-based scale:

Table 3: Five-Level Employability Scale and Rubric

LEVEL	CLASSIFICATION	SCORE RANGE (AEI)	GRADUATE CHARACTERISTICS	INSTITUTIONAL NEEDED	ACTION
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Level 5	Exceptional Global Leader	90% - 100%	Demonstrates high competency in bothProvide global networking Islamic theology and advanced digitalopportunities; appoint as tools. Ready for alumni mentors. international research, policy, and leadership roles.
Level 4	Advanced Practitioner	75% - 89%	Proficient in critical thinking, bilingualOffer targeted career communication, and digital researchplacements and executive tools. Needs minimal supervision inleadership programs. professional environments.
Level 3	Competent Professional	60% - 74%	Meets baseline ethical, theological, andIncorporate hands-on digital literacy expectations. Ready forinternships and practical entry-level professional roles. workshops.
Level 2	Developing Graduate	45% - 59%	Shows foundational understanding ofRequire remedial courses theological texts, but lacks modernin computer applications digital, research, and communicationand professional writing. competencies.
Level 1	Underprepared	Below 45%	Does not meet basic technical orConduct a comprehensive communication expectations. Limitedacademic review of readiness for modern student progress. professional environments.

13. DISCUSSION AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The design of the IGEF addresses a key question in modern higher education: how can institutions preserve cultural and spiritual heritage while preparing graduates for a highly digitalized, global economy? Rather than viewing traditional religious values and modern technical skills as mutually exclusive, the IGEF demonstrates that they are complementary. Ethical integrity and spiritual grounding provide a strong foundation for managing the societal and moral challenges introduced by modern technologies like artificial intelligence.

To support institutions in adopting this integrated approach, we propose twenty evidence-based policy recommendations for universities, religious boards, and regulatory bodies:

- a) Establish mandatory foundational courses in AI Literacy and AI Ethics across all traditional Islamic curriculum boards.
- b) Implement structured bilingual instruction (Arabic and English) to improve graduates' communication capabilities in international environments.
- c) Adopt Outcome-Based Education (OBE) frameworks across all affiliated Madaris and Islamic universities.
- d) Set up dedicated entrepreneurship incubators within religious institutions to encourage social enterprise initiatives.
- e) Integrate modern qualitative and quantitative research methodologies into classical theological curricula.
- f) Create joint degree initiatives connecting Islamic theology with modern computer science, economics, and public policy.
- g) Organize formal internships in NGOs, civil service, and corporate environments to build practical workplace experience.
- h) Create standardized institutional scorecards to evaluate academic and professional outcomes on an annual basis.
- i) Establish active industry advisory boards featuring representatives from both technology companies and traditional institutions.

- j) Introduce continuous professional development (CPD) programs focusing on digital pedagogy for faculty members.
- k) Create regional research networks dedicated to studying the intersections of technology, ethics, and theology.
- l) Form partnerships with international accreditation bodies to establish global quality assurance benchmarks.
- m) Implement structured mentor-matching programs pairing current students with established alumni in diverse fields.
- n) Establish community-based project funds to support local social welfare initiatives led by students.
- o) Modernize traditional assessment methods to include peer reviews, portfolio evaluations, and practical case studies.
- p) Promote student participation in international academic conferences and cross-cultural exchange programs.
- q) Create dedicated digital repositories to publish, share, and archive student research contributions.
- r) Provide targeted scholarships for female scholars in Islamic studies to support diverse academic perspectives.
- s) Form strategic partnerships with leading global tech companies to secure access to specialized digital learning resources.
- t) Review and update theological curricula every five years to ensure ongoing alignment with evolving global development goals.

14. FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

To expand upon the conceptual framework proposed in this study, future research should explore the following areas:

- Conducting empirical case studies to evaluate the implementation of the IGEF in diverse geographic regions.
- Developing specialized assessment rubrics to measure spiritual and emotional intelligence within Islamic higher education.
- Analyzing the career progression of Madaris graduates who have transitioned into technology-focused sectors.
- Exploring the ethical implications of generative AI on traditional scholarly research methodologies in theology.
- Investigating how different Islamic educational boards manage the integration of modern digital tools into classical curricula.

15. CONCLUSION

The Islamic Graduate Employability Framework (IGEF) proposed in this study offers a structured, holistic model that integrates classical Islamic educational values with the professional and technological skills required in the modern global economy. Grounded in the principles of *Maqasid al-Shariah* and contemporary educational theories, the framework demonstrates that religious institutions can modernize their curricula while maintaining their theological foundations. By providing clear competency domains, measurable indicators, and practical implementation guidelines, the IGEF serves as a valuable resource for academic leaders, policy makers, and accreditation bodies striving to prepare graduates to contribute meaningfully to both their local communities and global society.

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