

Staffing Practices in an Islamic University in Malaysia: A Conceptual Paper

Nurita Juhdi^{1}, Nur Arfifah Abdul Sabian², Usmanul Khakim³, Suhaiza Safian⁴*

^{1,2} *Kulliyah of Economics and Management Sciences, International Islamic University Malaysia*

³ *Department of Aqeeda and Islamic Philosophy, Universitas Darussalam Gontor, Indonesia*

⁴ *PhD student, Kulliyah of Economics and Management Sciences, International Islamic University Malaysia*

*Corresponding author(s). E-mail(s): nurita@iium.edu.my.

Contributing authors: nurarfifah@iium.edu.my, usmanulhakim680@unida.gontor.ac.id,
suhaizasafian@gmail.com

Abstract

The objective of the study is to investigate the recruitment and selection practices of an Islamic university in Malaysia. The study is conducted due to the fact that the university has a long-standing reputation as the oldest Islamic university in Malaysia that has the merit to be used as a benchmark for other Islamic universities. Given the growing population of Muslims around the world combined with the thriving Islamic economy, a study should be conducted on the organizations' practices in recruiting and selecting the employees. In Islam, recruiting and selecting employees are no different from the conventional way but the former has the spiritual elements that are based on revealed knowledge and not only based on rationality and emotions. Employees from four different categories from the university will be interviewed and the data will be analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings are expected to be used to develop an Islamic recruitment and selection model that is able to employ high quality employees that lead to high performing organizations.

Keywords: *recruitment, selection, HRM, Islam, education higher institution*

Introduction

In Malaysia, there are many organizations in various sectors including education, tourism, healthcare and fashion that are targeting Muslim consumers. To make their organizations more appealing to Muslims, their products and services are tailored towards the Muslims' needs. A report by the World Population Review in 2024, there are more than two billion Muslims in the world and this makes Islam as the second-largest religion in the world after Christianity. The report also indicated that many researchers project the Muslim population will exceed Christians by the year 2050.

The State of the Global Islamic Economy 2023/24 report indicated the global Islamic economy has grown from a USD1.62 trillion consumer spending market in 2012 to a USD2.29 trillion in 2022. This figure was driven by the fast global population growth that is made up especially by the Muslims all around the world. The fast-growing Muslim population is expected to contribute significantly to the Muslim economies and the global business. With the expanding Islamic economy coupled with the growing Muslim population, it is thus interesting to see if Islam will be the way of life at home and in the workplace.

Islam is a religion that promotes peace and it is synonymous with good ethics and values. A Muslim is expected to portray positive attitudes and behaviors in their daily life including at work. In similar vein, Muslim organizations should also embrace

the Islamic practices and values which then will shape the policies and procedures to be carried out by the employees.

On the other hand, there have been worldwide surveys and studies conducted to rank the best nations in terms of their business dealings such as Corruption Perceptions Index (by the Transparency International) and Ease of Doing Business (by the World Bank), just to name a few. The findings from these studies indicated the highly ranked nations are coming from non-Muslim countries. Further, there are also surveys conducted to rank the best companies in terms of company performance and employment, but the majority high ranked companies are non-Muslim organizations. Are we missing something here? A skeptical observer might say the findings might be bias towards Muslims. Worst case scenario, the findings might be a reality.

Regardless of the perceptions, it is imperative for Muslim organizations to create the awareness on how important it is to make the management and the staff to embrace the Islamic values that promote the ethical behavior. Islamic way of life must be in the DNA of every Muslim. As the Muslim population continues to grow along with the thriving Islamic economy in the global arena, it is thus pertinent to examine how Islamic practices are implemented in Muslim organizations. Human resource management (HRM) is the key in fostering the Islamic practices in organizations. Among the major HRM functions are recruitment, selection, training and development, performance management, compensation and benefits as well as employee relations. However, this study will only focus on recruitment and selection.

The objective of the study is to examine the recruitment and selection practices of an Islamic university in Malaysia. The university has been regarded as one of the prominent Islamic higher education institutions in Malaysia that provides high quality education to the Muslim ummah all around the world. Given the experience and reputation the university has, it is perceived as a benchmark for Islamic HRM practices by the counterparts. The university is regarded as the role model for Islamic way of doing business and thus creates the need to study the recruitment and selection practices.

Literature Review

HRM in general

There have been studies that conceptually discussed the prescribed HRM practices specifically employee recruitment and selection based on Quran and Sunnah. The studies also incorporate the Islamic management concepts but such studies are still scarce. There are also studies that review HRM practices from both conventional and Islamic perspectives. The research on conventional HRM practices imbued with spirituality elements are also common especially in Western countries but the practices are based on values and human judgment; and not revealed knowledge. Today the laws are prescribing the idea to celebrate diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI). Each individual has the right to be given fair treatment regardless of gender, religion, sexual orientation and physical abilities. Organizations like Shell, PwC, Nestle and Apple are among the biggest advocates for the DEI idea but is this the ideal way to practice staffing? Are they in line with Islam?

Conventional HR practices are based on traditional management theories and principles that are widely accepted in the business world. These practices are designed to align with goals of the organization and are often focused on maximizing efficiency, productivity and profitability. While, Islamic HR practices are rooted in the principles of Islam and are designed to align with Islamic values and ethics. Islamic human resource

practices play a significant role in organizational management and development.

There are practices in human resource management includes recruitment and selection that will influence the employee's skills through the development of a human capital. Furthermore, human capital development in Islam is different from the conventional where Islam includes the spiritual development as well and not merely on intellectual and emotional development (Razimi et al., 2017).

Employee Recruitment and Selection from the Conventional Perspective

Recruitment is defined as a set of activities for an organization to catch the attention of job applicants that have the abilities needed to help the organization achieve its objectives and goals (Othman et al., 2019). According to Han et al. (2022), recruitment can be defined as "the procedures and activities used to legally acquire an appropriate amount of competent employees at the correct time and location so that those involved and the organization can select those who are in the best possible both in terms of long-term purposes".

Recruitment means hiring people who have the necessary competencies including set of skills, capabilities and personality traits for organization positions (Dickmann et al., 2016; Wehner et al., 2022). The ultimate objective is to motivate the most suitable persons so that they apply for the job because a successful selection largely depends on successful recruitment. The recruitment must be done fairly and all recruitment decisions must be made wisely to ensure the hired candidate is best suited for the job position (Ahmad, 1955; Hashim, 2009; Chowdhury et al., 2019). Furthermore, fairness in recruitment is very important so that no one feels disadvantaged, be it the company or the prospective workers (Teimouri et al., 2018; Jawaad et al., 2019).

The other HR function that is equally important is employee selection. Selection can be defined as a decision process aimed at choosing the most suitable applicant out of those available for a job (Razimi et al, 2017). According to Hashim (2009), selection is the process of screening job applicants to ensure that the most appropriate candidates are hired. Furthermore, selection process is to select among the candidates who suits the job position offered. The ability and qualification of candidates will be evaluated through the process of selection. The candidates may have to go through many phases in the selection process which includes a few tests and interviews (Razaimi, 2017). Selection is one of the most complicated tasks in any organization. This is owing to the fact that many potential candidates apply for the available jobs at any given time and so employers are often faced with high number of job candidates to select for screening (Hashim, 2009). To add, favoritism and nepotism may influence selection decisions (Hashim, 2009).

Suitable and accurate selection is a challenging HR practice. This is because the recruiters must assess various competencies that include personality, attributes, experience, education, knowledge and skills that a person possesses and on the basis of these, the recruiters select the candidates that most likely to succeed in the job, thus fulfilling the management goals (Razimi et al., 2017; Bhutta & Sabir, 2019). The literature highlights that integrity, knowledge, skills, intellectuals, abilities and trust an individual is the main criteria for the selection and appointment of an employee in the administrative sector. Hence, it is proved that whether the position or post, integrity is the critical component of employee selection criteria, which cannot be compromised at any cost (Bhutta & Sabir, 2019).

Employee Recruitment and Selection from Islamic Perspectives

In Islam, employee recruitment must be based on immense trust and responsibility (Razimi et al., 2017). This is supported by Chowdhury et al. (2019) where a pious recruiter is hoped to be aware of the requirement of the job that he must do the recruitment in the way of Allah with trust and responsibility. The concept of trust and responsibility in employee recruitment and selection has been highlighted by Muslim HRM scholars while in conventional HRM, these values did not gain much attention (Razimi et al., 2017). According to Hashim (2010), recruitment in Islam is considered one way among others to get closer to Allah. Islam has ordered the employers and recruiters to be responsible, pious and *'adil* when recruiting the candidates. These values will make sure that the recruitment process is done fairly and just for all candidates (Razimi et al., 2017). This is supported by Chiara et al., (2023) that the principle of justice is needed in carrying out recruitment so that no one feels disadvantaged and abused. The Prophet Muhammad said: *"Whoever believes in God and the Day of judgement should not employ a worker until he or she knows what he is going to receive"* (Sahih Muslim 5/66). This showed that the Prophet Muhammad was really concerned about the principle of *tabligh* in offering wages in the process of recruiting a worker.

The Quran and the Hadith has provided evidence regarding the employee recruitment that Muslims must follow. In many occasions, the Quran and the Hadith emphasize the importance of Islamic values to decide the kind of employees to hire. The Quran in Surah Al-Qasas verse 26: *"Truly, the best of people for you to employ is one who is strong and trustworthy."* The word *strong* may refer to the physical and intellectual ability to perform the job in terms of having knowledge, skills, experience as of competency-based of recruitment, while *trustworthy* refers to the candidate's value. Thus, this verse underscores the importance of competency and values in recruiting employees (Wahab, 2024).

Islamic HRM requires selection decisions to be based on fairness, piety and wisdom. Hiring the best suited candidates is imperative (Razimi et al., 2017). Justice is achieved once employees' selection is based on their competence and character strength rather than kinship, friendship, financial status and political affiliation (Rahman et al., 2013). The fourth caliph Ali (R.A) mentioned that *"Do not nominate them on account of favoritism or egoism, these two attributes reflect injustice and treachery"* (quoted by Hashim, 2010). While the second caliph Umar (R.A) would not only ensure the selection of the best available individual for a particular post but also that the selected person should perform according to the rules and ethics (Mohiuddin, 2012). The issue of justice is prevalent in all HRM activities because cronyism and nepotism has always influenced hiring decisions. In Islam, employee's selection is abided by certain principle include justice. Ali bin Abi Talib has mentioned *"Do not nominate them on account of favoritism or egoism because these two attributes reflect injustice and treachery"* (quoted by Hashim, 2008).

According to Islamic teachings, the process of selection is supposed to be strictly based on merit without any compromise whatsoever. The people responsible for selection ought to ensure justice without any sort of discrimination. Furthermore, character qualities in the candidates should be given due weight age in addition to qualification and expertise (Azmi, 2010). The Prophet Muhammad has mentioned about a few bad attitudes in selection process. The Prophet said: *"He whoever hires a person and knows that there is another one who is more qualified than him, has betrayed Allah and His Prophet and the Muslims"*. Thus, in Islam, there is no nepotism, favoritism and all sorts of bribery (Mohammed, 2014).

Research Method

The present study aims to use qualitative methods in data collection by mainly using interviews. Permission from the IIUM Research Ethics Committee (IREC) has been sought prior to conducting the interviews. Interviews will be conducted among people from four categories – 1) employees who are responsible with recruitment and selection at the HR department in the university, 2) employees who are currently working in the university, 3) representatives of employee associations in the university; and 4) employees who are newly hired in the university. The different categories are needed to get different perspectives about the university's recruitment and selection practices.

Upon getting the IREC approval, interviews will be conducted. Below are some of the questions to be asked:

1. How does the university recruit new staff? What are the platforms used?
2. How does the university promote itself as an Islamic university?
3. In the job application forms, what are the items/questions asked to ensure the applicants meet with the university's vision and mission?
4. What are the selection methods used to know if the candidates fit with the university mission and vision?
5. How did you know the job vacancy?
6. What made you want to join the university?
7. What are the questions in the job application form that made you feel uneasy?

During the interviews, careful notes will be taken to collect as much information as possible (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Merriam & Grenier, 2019). Data will be analysed using the grounded theory method that uses thematic analysis.

Result and Discussion

Interviews with the four categories of employees in the university are expected to unveil the real practices of recruitment and selection. The respondents might reveal interesting views and opinions that are based on their experience and observations. It is very important to note here that the intention of the study is to share the university practices and not to scrutinize them. Nevertheless, as a long-established university in Malaysia, it always welcome inputs from different stakeholder because the university looks forward to being one of the best in the education arena.

The data from the study will be used to develop a model that incorporates Islamic values in recruitment and selection practices particularly in Islamic higher education institution. The model can be used by other organizations that are inspired to practice Islamic ways in staffing practices. The model will recommend policies and procedures that can be emulated by others.

Conclusion

This study developed an Islamic values-based recruitment and selection model tailored for Islamic higher education institutions. The model reflects the practices of a renowned university in Malaysia and provides policy and procedural recommendations that can be adopted by other organizations inspired to implement Islamic principles in staffing practices.

References

- Ahmad, M. (1955). Business Ethics in Islam. *The International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT), Islamabad.*
- Azmi, I. A. (2010). Islamic Human Resource Practices and Organizational Performance: A Preliminary Finding of Islamic Organizations in Malaysia. *Journal of Global Business and Economics, 1(1), 27-42.*
- Bhutta, Z. M., & Sabir, S. (2019). A Study on the Islamic Perspective of Recruitment And Selection Process. *Research Journal Al-Basirah, 7(2), 1-12.*
- Chiara, A., Marina, F., & Gioia, V. (2023). Analysis of Human Resource Recruitment in an Islamic Perspective. *Journal Islamic Economic Minangkabau, 1(1), 61-69.*
- Chowdury, A. H., Hoque, N., & Mawla, M. M. (2019). Human Resource Management from Islamic Perspective. *Bangladesh Journal of Islamic Thought, 7(10), 20-36.*
- Dickmann, M., Brewster, C., & Sparrow, P. (2016). *Introduction and Overview of IHRM: Contemporary HR Issues in Europe.*
- Han, Y., Gulonowski, D., & Sears, G. J. (2022). International Student Graduates' Workforce Integration: A Systematic Review. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 86, 163-189.*
- Hashim, J. (2008). The Quran-Based Human Resource Management and its Effects on Organisational Justice, Job Satisfaction and Turnover Intention. *The Journal of International Management Studies, 3(3), 148-159.*
- Hashim, J. (2009). Islamic Revival in Human Resource Management Practices among Selected Islamic Organisations in Malaysia. *International Journal of Islamic and Middle Eastern Finance and Management, 2(3), 251-267.* doi:DOI 10.1108/17538390910986362
- Hashim, J. (2010). Human Resource Management Practices on Organisational Commitment The Islamic Perspective. *Personnel Review, 39(6), 785-799.* doi:DOI 10.1108/00483481011075611
- Jawaad, M., Amir, A., Bashir, A., & Hasan, T. (2019). Human Resource Practices and Organizational Commitment: The Mediating Role of Job Satisfaction in Emerging Economy. *Cogent Business & Management, 6(1608668), 1-22.* doi:https://doi.org/10.1080/23311975.2019.1608668

- Mohammed, A. K. (2014). A Comparative Study between Islamic Management and Conventional Management with Special References to HRM. *Proceeding of the Social Sciences Research ICSSR*.
- Mohiuddin, M. G. (2012). Controlling: An Islamic Perspective. *Research Journal of Finance and Accounting*, 3(9), 108-113.
- Othman, B. J., Al-Kake, F., Mohd Diah, M., Othman, B., & Hasan, N. M. (2019). This Study Examines the Antecedents and the Effects of Knowledge Management and Information Technology in the Manufacturing Industry. *International Journal of Psychosocial Rehabilitation*, 23(2), 899-908.
- Rahman, N. N., Alias, M. A., Shahid, S., Hamid, M. A., & Alam, S. S. (2013). Relationship between Islamic Human Resource Management (IHRM) Practices and Trust: An Empirical Study. *Journal of Industrial Engineering and Management*, 6(4), 1105-1123.
- Razimi, M. A., Romle, R. A., & Kamaruddin, N. N. (2017). The Processes of Recruitment and Selection In Human Resource Management from Islamic Perspective: A Review. *World Journal of Management and Behavioral Studies*, 5(1), 5-13. doi:DOI: 10.5829/idosi.wjmbs.2017.05.13
- Telmouri, H., Hosseini, S. H., Imani, M., & Bagheri, E. (2018). The effect of human resource management Practices on Organisational Effectiveness (Case Study: Isfahan Petrochemical Company). *International Journal Business Excellence*, 15(1), 115-128.
- The State of the Global Islamic Economy 2023/24. (2023). Retrieved from <https://www.dinarstandard.com/post/state-of-the-global-islamic-economy-report-2023>
- Wahab, M. A. (2024). Building A Value-Based Workforce through Islamic Work Value-Based Recruitment: A Conceptual Review. *Asian Academy of Management Journal*, 29(1), 255-283.
- Wehner, C., Grip, A. d., & Pfeifer, H. (2022). Do Recruiters Select Workers with Different Personality Traits for Different Tasks? A Discrete Choice Experiment. *Labour Economics*, 78, 2-14.
- World Population Review. (2024). Muslim Population by Country 2024. Retrieved from <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/muslim-population-by-country>