

# Graduate Employability and User Satisfaction in Higher Education

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doi: 10.17977/um065.v6.i4.2026.7

## Article history

Submitted: 14 February 2026

Revised: 30 March 2026

Accepted: 31 March 2026

Published: 9 April 2026

## Keywords

Graduates

Graduate employability

User satisfaction with graduates

## Abstract

The existence and absorption of graduates into the workforce is an important indicator of a university's success in achieving its goals. The quality and competency of graduates serve as key measures of employer satisfaction. This study aims to examine the average waiting period for employment among graduates of the Faculty of Ushuluddin, Adab, and Da'wah at an Islamic university in Indonesia, as well as the level of employer satisfaction. This research employed a survey method using both open- and closed-ended questionnaires, with data analyzed descriptively. The findings show that out of 288 graduates surveyed, 53% (152 individuals) were employed, while 46.9% (135 individuals) were unemployed. Regarding waiting time, 35.4% (102 graduates) obtained employment within six months, 13.2% (38 graduates) within 6–18 months, and 4.5% (13 graduates) after more than 18 months. In terms of employer satisfaction, graduates received positive evaluations across key indicators, including attitudes, skills, competencies, and self-development. Employers particularly valued graduates' positive attitudes and strong work ethic, indicating that graduates generally possess attributes required in the workplace. However, to further enhance employability and reduce waiting time, it is recommended that the university strengthen practical training, technical skills, and language proficiency. A balanced integration of theoretical knowledge and practical experience is also essential. These efforts are expected to produce well-rounded graduates who are better prepared to meet the demands of the modern workforce.

## 1. Introduction

A Graduate employability refers to the combination of skills, knowledge, and attributes that enable graduates to secure meaningful employment and perform effectively in the workforce. It includes both hard skills (technical competencies) and soft skills (interpersonal skills such as communication, teamwork, and adaptability), which are increasingly valued by employers. According to Yorke (2006), employability is not solely dependent on academic performance but also on the ability to adapt to the dynamic labor market. Research by Andrews and Higson (2008) and the World Economic Forum (2020) highlights the importance of combining business knowledge with soft skills, such as communication and problem-solving, to enhance employability. Additionally, Jackson (2016) suggests that pre-professional identity and understanding of workplace expectations play a significant role in graduates' employability, while aligning curricula with industry needs is crucial for bridging the gap between education and the labor market.

User satisfaction refers to the degree to which employers are pleased with the qualifications, competencies, and behaviors of graduates. According to Robbins (2003), employers highly value interpersonal skills, including communication, teamwork, and adaptability, which are essential for organizational success. Research by Robles (2012) identifies soft skills like integrity, responsibility, and work ethic as key factors influencing job performance and satisfaction. Furthermore, Schomburg (2003) emphasizes the importance of practical work experience, such as internships and fieldwork, in enhancing employer satisfaction. Employers also prioritize graduates' technical and professional skills, particularly in fields such as technology and healthcare, where specific technical competencies are crucial. Thus, a combination of both soft and hard skills is essential for ensuring high levels of user satisfaction and meeting the demands of the modern workforce. Faculty of Ushuluddin, Adab and Da'wah of the studied institution, which offers bachelor's degree programs, has set graduate competency standards referring to the National Higher Education Standards and the Minimum Qualification Framework. These standards aim to ensure that the education at Faculty of Ushuluddin, Adab and Da'wah of the studied institution produces high-quality human resources. One indicator of the mastery of these competencies will undoubtedly be seen in the competitive ability and performance exhibited in the workforce.

Nearly every student who recently received a bachelor's degree from a higher education institution undergoes a period known as frictional unemployment. The same happens at the Faculty of Ushuluddin, Adab, and Da'wah of the studied institution. Frictional unemployment, also known as the waiting period or the time required to get the first job, is influenced by many factors such as information gaps (Kiri & Atti, 2021), a lack of job opportunities, a mismatch between the field of work and educational background, and sometimes, limited competencies held by the graduates. Official data from the Central Statistics Agency for February 2021 reported that the number of unemployed graduates reached nearly one million people (Pusparisa, 2021).

Currently, the Faculty of Ushuluddin, Adab, and Da'wah of the studied institution offers eight study programs, namely the Islamic Communication and Broadcasting Program, Islamic Counseling Program, Arabic Language and Literature Program, Da'wah Management Program, History of Islamic Civilization Program, Sociology of Religion Program, Islamic Community Development Program, and Islamic Journalism Program. One of these programs, the Da'wah Management Program, reported an average waiting period for employment of more than 18 months. Of these, 34% of graduates found jobs within six months, 19% found jobs within 6-18 months, and 47% had to wait more than 18 months. Additionally, the majority of graduates who had found employment reported a low level of alignment between their job field and their educational background. The average study period for Da'wah Management students is relatively long, at 4 years and 5 months, with a total of around 60 alumni and an average of 40 active students per year since the da'wah management program's establishment eight years ago.

Another condition observed in the da'wah management program, as one of the programs within Faculty of Ushuluddin, Adab, and Da'wah of the studied institution, is the relatively high Cumulative Grade Point Average of its graduates, with an average graduation GPA of 3.7. Additionally, surveys of user satisfaction with da'wah management alumni show that over 50% of respondents were very satisfied. This is an interesting finding because, despite the long study period and waiting period for employment, user satisfaction remains high. Another interesting point is that, despite the high GPA achieved by graduates, they still experience a relatively long waiting period for employment.

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the employability of graduates from the Faculty of Ushuluddin, Adab, and Da'wah of the studied institution, focusing on employment absorption rates, waiting times for employment, and the alignment between graduates' educational backgrounds and their job fields. Additionally, the study aims to assess employer satisfaction with graduates' competencies, skills, and attitudes, identifying areas for improvement in both hard and soft skills. Furthermore, the research seeks to provide recommendations for curriculum development and institutional policies that will better align education with the demands of the labor market. However, a gap in this study exists in its limited exploration of the external factors influencing employment outcomes, such as economic conditions and market demands, as well as the lack of in-depth qualitative analysis on the reasons behind job mismatches. This gap indicates the need for further research to better understand how curriculum changes can address these external challenges and improve employability outcomes.

Therefore, the researcher is interested in analyzing the entire programs within Faculty of Ushuluddin, Adab, and Da'wah of the studied institution related to study period, waiting time, alignment of job fields, user satisfaction, and the relationships between these four factors. The results of this study are expected to serve as an evaluation material for policy-making and curriculum development at the Faculty of Ushuluddin, Adab, and Da'wah of the studied institution.

## 2. Method

This research utilizes a mixed method, which involves numerical data and statistical analysis. Quantitative research is a process of discovering knowledge where the data is in the form of numbers that serve as tools for analyzing information about what we want to know (Kasiram, 2010:172). The rules in quantitative research essentially include the determination of the subject selection, where the information or data is obtained from, the techniques used in data collection, procedures for collecting data, and how treatments will be conducted.

In this study, a descriptive quantitative approach is used. The research focuses on indicators such as the study period, waiting time for work, and identifying whether there is a relationship between the students' study period and their waiting period after graduation. Additionally, job field alignment is also derived through quantitative data collection. Descriptive, as defined in the Indonesian dictionary, means to describe something as it is. According to Sugiyono (2008), descriptive research is conducted to understand the value of independent variables, whether one or more (independent), without comparing or relating them to other variables.

In this study, the researcher was directly involved in field research to gather concrete data related to the study. Data collection is the most strategic step in research because the main goal of any research is to gather data. A questionnaire is used as a research instrument to collect data on the study period, waiting time, and job

field alignment of alumni and also validity testing using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation and reliability testing using Cronbach's Alpha. The measurement scale used for the questionnaire is the Likert scale.

The Likert scale is used to measure the attitudes, opinions, and perceptions of individuals or groups on specific indicators. This scale includes both positive and negative questions. The positive questions are scored 4, 3, 2, 1 scale includes the following response options: strongly agree, agree, neutral, and disagree.

The documentation technique is used to collect and analyze documents, both written, images, and electronic. The documentation used in this study includes images and evidence of conversations during interviews conducted through various media channels. The researcher collects documents and other supporting materials during fieldwork, such as data on population, survey results, and other relevant documents.

### 3. Results and Discussion

The target respondents were alumni from 2014 to 2021 of Faculty of Ushuluddin, Adab, and Da'wah at one of Islamic University in Indonesia. These alumni were selected as the most appropriate respondents for the 2022 Tracer Study, as their graduation period is within the maximum of seven years and the minimum of one year after graduation. A total of 578 alumni graduating between 2014 and 2021, are recorded.

Table 1 shows that the 2022 Tracer Study conducted over more than a month, starting from August 23, 2021, and ending on September 1, 2022, achieved a respondent participation rate of 49.8% (288 respondents out of 578 total alumni). Based on individual study programs, the programs with the highest response rates were the Arabic Language and Literature Program, Sociology of Religion Program, and Islamic Journalism Program, all achieving 100% respondent participation. Meanwhile, the programs with the lowest response rates were Da'wah Management, Islamic Counseling, and History of Islamic Civilization, where the response rates were below 50%. From a total of 288 alumni who completed the tracer study, 152 were recorded as employed (see Table 2).

**Table 1. Tracer Study 2022 Respondents' Profile**

No	Program Study	Number of Graduates	Tracked Graduates	Percentage
1	Islamic Communication & Broadcasting	163	91	56%
2	Islamic Counseling	213	88	41%
3	History of Islamic Civilization	79	39	49%
4	Da'wah Management	92	39	42%
5	Arabic Language and Literature	9	9	100%
6	Islamic Community Development	13	10	76%
7	Sociology of Religion	1	1	100%
8	Islamic Journalism	8	8	100%
<b>Total</b>		578	288	49.8%

**Table 2. Tracer Study 2022 Respondents' Employment**

No	Program Study	Number of Graduates	Tracked Graduates	Employed
1	Islamic Communication & Broadcasting	163	91	49
2	Islamic Counseling	213	88	53
3	History of Islamic Civilization	79	39	14
4	Da'wah Management	92	39	22
5	Arabic Language and Literature	9	9	2
6	Islamic Community Development	13	10	6
7	Sociology of Religion	1	1	1
8	Islamic Journalism	8	8	5
<b>Total</b>		578	288	152

#### 3.1. Results

##### 3.1.1. Average Waiting Time for Graduates

Upon graduation, alumni are expected to enter the workforce and apply the knowledge they gained during their studies. Based on the survey, it was found that from the total 288 graduates who were tracked and filled out the survey, 152 had secured their first job, including those who ventured into entrepreneurship.

The 2022 Tracer Study provides not only information about the job search process from the alumni's perspective but also the time it took them to secure their first job. Generally, alumni found employment after graduation.

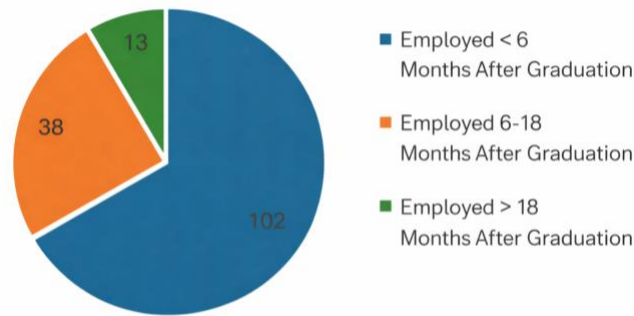


Figure 1. Graduate Waiting Time Diagram

To determine the general waiting time for employment among alumni, it was noted that those who secured a job six months before graduation were counted as having zero waiting time, meaning they had no waiting period. This was reflected in the total of 22 alumni who had already secured their first job before graduation, thus falling into the "0 months" category and under six months waiting time. Based on the information above, it was found that out of the total of 288 graduates tracked and surveyed, 53% (152 individuals) found employment, while 46.9% (135 individuals) remained unemployed.

Among the 152 (53%) graduates who had secured a job, it was found that 13 people (4.5%) had worked for more than 18 months, 38 people (13.2%) had worked within the 6-18 months period, and the majority, approximately 102 people (35.4%), secured employment within six months of graduation.

### 3.1.2. User Satisfaction with Graduates

The absorption of graduates into the workforce is undoubtedly related to the competencies and professionalism they possess. To determine the level of satisfaction of users (employers, organizations, and other institutions employing the graduates), a user satisfaction survey was conducted. The survey included various indicators such as attitude, behavior, skills and competencies, communication, and teamwork exhibited by the graduates.

The research instrument used to measure user satisfaction with graduates was a questionnaire, which included both closed-ended and open-ended questions. The closed-ended questionnaire used a Likert scale, with response options of "very good", "good", "fair" and "poor."

Table 3. User Satisfaction Statements for Graduates

No	Questionnaire Statement	Percentage (%)
1	Honesty and Responsibility	100%
2	Ability to Perform and Complete Tasks	97%
3	Obeying Workplace Rules	97%
4	Applying Skills to Complete Tasks	89%
5	Passive English Language Proficiency	67%
6	Active English Language Proficiency	52%
7.	Computer Operating Skills	92%
8.	Internet Utilization	89%
9.	Good Communication with Supervisors	97%
10.	Good Communication with Co-workers	100%

The first indicator is the graduates' honesty and responsibility, which were assessed by the users. According to the survey, all respondents provided positive assessments regarding the honesty and responsibility of graduates in carrying out their tasks. This is evident from the fact that 53% rated it as "very good" and 47% rated it as "good", with no negative feedback regarding these qualities.

The next indicator concerns the graduates' ability to perform and complete tasks thoroughly in their jobs. Survey results show that users rated this ability as "very good" (47%) and "good" (50%), with only 3% rating it

as "fair". The ability to obey workplace rules received a similar assessment, with 50% of users rating it as "very good" and 47% as "good". This suggests that the majority of graduates are seen as complying with workplace rules, although 3% of users indicated that some graduates were not fully compliant, particularly in terms of work discipline.

Completing tasks given by superiors is another important aspect for workers. However, applying the skills learned in performing these tasks is just as crucial. Survey results show that 36% of users rated graduates' ability to apply their skills as "very good", and 53% rated it as "good". However, 11% of users rated it as "fair" suggesting that a small portion of graduates either lacked skills or did not apply them adequately in their work. Competency and proficiency in foreign languages, particularly English, are essential in the workforce. Survey results revealed that 6% of users rated the passive English skills of the graduates as "very good" while 61% rated it as "good". However, 25% rated it as "fair" and 8% rated it as "poor".

Regarding active English proficiency, the rating was even lower compared to passive English skills. This means that many employers felt that graduates' active English skills were inadequate. In the survey, 5% of users rated active English proficiency as "very good" 47% as "good" 31% as "fair" and 17% as "poor". Besides English language skills, the ability to operate computers is another critical competency. Most workplaces require the use of digital technology. Survey results show that 31% of users rated graduates' computer skills as "very good," while 61% rated them as "good". However, 8% rated it as "fair". Graduates' ability to utilize the internet was rated positively by employers. According to the survey, 53% rated it as "very good" and 36% rated it as "good" while 11% rated it as "fair".

Good communication is also an essential professional skill. Effective communication with both superiors and co-workers is crucial in shaping a healthy workplace environment. Based on the table, 55% of users rated graduates' communication with supervisors as "very good," 42% as "good", and 3% as "fair". Communication with co-workers was rated slightly better, with 50% rated as "very good" and 50% as "good". Teamwork is another essential skill, and it was positively rated by the users. The survey results indicated that 44% rated graduates' teamwork ability as "very good" and 56% as "good," with no responses indicating "fair" or "poor".

The willingness to continue learning new things, which supports personal development in the workplace, is also important. Survey results show that 47% of users rated this quality as "very good," and 50% rated it as "good," with only 3% rating it as "fair". Openness to receiving criticism and suggestions is another essential quality for workers. According to the survey, 44% of users rated graduates' openness to feedback as "very good", 53% as "good" and 3% as "fair".

Lastly, the willingness to improve and develop oneself was considered an important factor for satisfaction. The more eager graduates are to improve, the better their work performance and job completion will be. This is closely tied to higher user satisfaction.

### 3.1.3. Satisfaction and Dissatisfaction

To assess user satisfaction beyond what was captured in the closed-ended questionnaire, respondents were asked to provide their views on the factors influencing their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the performance of employees who are graduates of the institution. The results showed that most users expressed more indicators of satisfaction than dissatisfaction.

The satisfaction felt by users is influenced by several factors, including employees who work with discipline, whether regarding time management or the accuracy of task completion, honesty, diligence, and responsibility. These four indicators were the most frequently mentioned, and they are fundamental qualities that employees, in this case, graduates, must possess in order to achieve maximum satisfaction from their employers. In addition to these four main indicators, other factors contributing to user satisfaction (employers) include loyalty, productivity, dedication, attitude, consistency, and agility in work demonstrated by their employees.

The ability to work in teams is also considered a significant factor in task completion, which in turn impacts employer satisfaction. Additionally, good communication and politeness are highly valued by employers, whether with co-workers or superiors. The minimum expectation from employers, which should be possessed by employees, is to work according to their respective job descriptions. For those whose roles are customer service-oriented, employers expect them to provide excellent service, both inside and outside the office. The more employees can complete the tasks given to them, the greater the satisfaction of the users.

Being open to learning new things and new experiences also provides high satisfaction to employers. This means that employees are expected to be versatile, able to perform tasks outside their regular skills and job responsibilities. Employers hope that new discoveries made while performing their duties can serve as learning experiences that contribute to personal development.

Aside from satisfaction, users also expressed the dissatisfaction they felt. Some issues cited include delays and absences when entrusted with important tasks for any reason, failure to meet deadlines, lack of initiative in carrying out assigned tasks, and only waiting for orders. Health issues were also mentioned as significant obstacles to completing tasks. Some tasks that were supposed to be completed within the set deadlines were not finished on time due to health conditions. Although employees may have good attitudes, frequent sick leave disrupts the completion of tasks that need to be done.

For jobs that require excellent customer service, such as working as a customer service representative, teller, or front office staff, employers expect employees to provide friendly, polite, and responsive service. The survey revealed that some employees were diligent in performing their front office duties but were not friendly in their customer service, which affected the overall satisfaction of customers.

A suggestion from users is that graduates should be equipped with more work experience during their studies, not limited to just the internship period, which typically lasts about one month. By gaining more practical experience during their studies, graduates will be better prepared for the workforce and avoid unprofessional behaviors when performing their duties.

### 3.1.4. Materials That Should Be Taught

The statements regarding the materials that should be taught to students during their time in university and are considered essential for preparing them for the workforce were answered variably by the users of the graduates. However, three key materials were frequently mentioned in their responses: computer applications (information technology), English, and work ethics. These three areas are considered extremely important and are essential skills that should be possessed by graduates. They are fundamental skills that greatly support task completion in the current era.

Other materials mentioned by several users include administrative science, service communication, organizational management, news writing, graphic design, and advertising. These materials are considered crucial and important to learn. Users also demand that graduates maintain a balance between theoretical and practical abilities, meaning that they should not only be able to understand theory but also apply the knowledge they have acquired. In addition to mastering the material, networking skills are equally important as they greatly facilitate job progression. Another important skill considered by users is entrepreneurship. Since not all graduates will be absorbed by the workforce, they are expected to be more creative and take the initiative to create their own job opportunities.

In addition to general academic subjects, users believe that graduates should also be equipped with spiritual competencies, such as sincerity in work, honesty, discipline, good manners, social skills, respecting others, and the ability to think critically and analytically.

### 3.1.5. Suggestions and Input to Improve Graduate Competence

Users provided several suggestions and input aimed at improving and developing the quality graduates of the studied institution. These suggestions are expected to improve and maximize the preparation of graduates in facing the professional workforce.

The most frequent suggestion from users is that the campus should support and increase the intensity and frequency of students engaging in practical work experience, such as field work practice or supporting internship activities according to the expertise of each program. This will certainly be beneficial in applying the theories that students have learned. This activity also helps students avoid "culture shock" when they finish their studies and transition into the workforce.

Important materials needed to support the workforce were also highlighted by users. Strengthening practical materials such as public speaking communication practices, operating computer devices (both software and hardware), and other digital tools and applications were considered essential. Additionally, students should be encouraged to enhance and deepen their soft skills while in university. The campus should facilitate the development of these skills, helping students maximize and sharpen their talents and abilities by offering workshops or trainings that could provide them with additional skills that will later serve as a selling point in the eyes of employers or industry professionals.

Strengthening program-specific courses is also a suggestion from users, focusing on improving the competence within each program's field of study. Another suggestion is to create business opportunities that can serve as a learning laboratory for graduates of the studied institution. By optimizing the existing faculty laboratories, they could become spaces where students can practice applying their theoretical knowledge in real-world scenarios. For example, training students to write scripts or create videos related to the activities of Islamic preachers and publishing them on social media platforms such as YouTube. Such practical activities

would allow students to interact with important figures and build their networking, which would positively impact their career development.

Users also suggested incorporating public speaking training into the curriculum, as it will be invaluable for students when they enter the workforce. They will no longer feel awkward when asked to speak in public. Moreover, students should be trained in time management to help them become more disciplined and respect the time available to them.

It is also essential to instill values such as politeness in communication and conduct. The integration of knowledge, skills, and ethics should be emphasized in every student. Graduates should also be expected to be more reliable in terms of religious understanding, such as in the Quran and Hadith. This is especially significant since they come from an Islamic higher education institution that places a high value on a strong understanding of religious knowledge compared to general universities.

### 3.1.6. Unique Characteristics and Strengths of the Alumni

To identify the unique characteristics and traits of graduates of the studied institution, the researcher also asked the users about the specific traits possessed by the alumni, and the responses found were varied. However, upon analysis, it was evident that the uniqueness they shared was centered around one common factor: good attitude. The attitude possessed by these graduates was considered a significant advantage in the eyes of employers. This includes traits such as friendliness, discipline, politeness in communication and actions, diligence, responsiveness, honesty, religious knowledge (alim), adaptability, a cheerful demeanor, and being easy to collaborate with. These behaviors and attitudes were the most frequently mentioned by the users (based on the survey conducted). Therefore, it can be concluded that the primary characteristic of graduates of the studied institution lies in their highly positive attitude (behavior and conduct), which is considered a valuable asset in the workplace.

While there were other varying responses, it was still widely acknowledged that graduates of the studied institution possess positive qualities in the eyes of the employers. These include their ability to apply communication techniques (such as lobbying, public speaking, acting as MCs, moderators, etc.), their proficiency in information technology, and their reliable journalistic skills.

In addition to these general competencies, users also regarded one of the key characteristics of graduates of the studied institution graduates as their fluency in reading the Quran. Their ability to read the Quran well and correctly was seen as an important skill that could be relied upon when needed for activities in their respective workplaces.

## 3.2. Discussion

This study investigates the absorption rate and user satisfaction regarding the graduates of the studied institution, focusing on the waiting period before employment and the alignment of graduate skills with job market needs. The findings present several key insights into the dynamics of graduate employment and the perceptions of employers, contributing to the ongoing discourse on improving higher education curricula to better prepare students for the workforce.

### 3.2.1. Graduate Employment Waiting Period

The results indicate that 53% of graduates of the studied institution who participated in the survey had found employment, while the remaining 47% were still seeking work. Notably, the dominant waiting period for employment was under six months (35.4%), while 13.2% of graduates waited between six to 18 months, and only 4.5% had a waiting period exceeding 18 months. This finding aligns with the broader phenomenon of "frictional unemployment," which is the time it takes for individuals to transition from education to their first job, as discussed by Kiri and Atti (2021). The relatively short average waiting period is indicative of the demand for graduates in certain fields, although it is also important to note the significant portion of graduates who faced longer waiting times, which could be attributed to the mismatch between the graduates' qualifications and the available job opportunities (Pusparisa, 2021).

This study's findings also highlight the importance of factors such as academic performance (with an average GPA of 3.7) and the field of study. As identified by Supriyati (2018), even high-performing graduates from certain fields like Management of Da'wah report extended waiting periods for employment, suggesting that the job market may not always align with graduates' qualifications. The disparity between academic success and employment outcomes further underscores the need for greater integration between academic training and practical work experience (Rasyid, 2000).

### 3.2.2. Employer Satisfaction and Graduate Competencies

In terms of employer satisfaction, the survey reveals that graduates of the studied institution were highly rated in key competencies such as honesty, responsibility, communication, teamwork, and willingness to learn. These qualities were particularly appreciated by employers, with 100% of respondents rating graduates positively on honesty and responsibility. Similarly, communication skills, both with supervisors and coworkers, were deemed essential for workplace success, supporting Robbins (2003), who emphasizes the importance of interpersonal skills in organizational behavior.

However, the survey also highlights areas for improvement, especially in language proficiency. While the passive use of English was rated positively by a majority of employers (61%), active proficiency in English remained a concern, with a notable portion of employers (17%) rating it as inadequate. This reinforces findings by Rofaida et al. (2019), who argue that language skills, particularly English, are crucial for graduates to thrive in the globalized job market. This suggests a critical need for universities to intensify their focus on language education, especially in disciplines where international communication plays a pivotal role.

Additionally, technical competencies such as computer literacy and the use of digital tools were highlighted as areas where graduates performed well, with 92% of employers rating computer operation skills as satisfactory. This aligns with the literature that emphasizes the importance of digital skills in today's labor market (Mahsun, 2005).

### 3.2.3. Recommendations for Curriculum Improvement

Based on the feedback from employers, several recommendations for curriculum enhancements emerge. Firstly, it is clear that practical experience, such as internships and fieldwork, is crucial for preparing graduates for the realities of the workplace. Employers recommended increasing the frequency and duration of internships, as well as incorporating more practical, hands-on learning experiences during students' academic journeys. This would address concerns about the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application, which is often cited as a major challenge in graduate employment (Gunawan, 2015).

Moreover, employers also suggested a stronger emphasis on soft skills, including leadership, problem-solving, and time management. As emphasized in prior research, these skills are increasingly valued in the workplace, and their inclusion in academic programs would further enhance graduate employability (Septianti & Pamuji, 2018).

While the findings of this study indicate that graduates are generally well-prepared for the workforce, there is room for improvement, particularly in aligning academic programs with job market needs. By addressing gaps in language proficiency, offering more practical work experiences, and enhancing soft skills training, educational institutions can significantly improve the employability of their graduates.

### 3.2.4. Skill Mismatch

The findings of this study indicate the presence of a skill mismatch phenomenon, reflected in the misalignment between graduates' educational backgrounds and their fields of employment, as well as the relatively prolonged waiting time experienced by some graduates and the low level of job-field alignment in certain programs. This phenomenon is consistent with international literature, which identifies skill mismatch as a key factor influencing low levels of graduate employability, particularly in developing countries characterized by rapidly evolving labor market dynamics. According to Michael Yorke (2006), employability is not solely determined by mastery of disciplinary knowledge, but also by graduates' ability to adapt their competencies to the changing demands of the labor market.

Within the context of this study, although graduates of the studied institution demonstrate strong academic achievement (with an average GPA of 3.7), this does not automatically translate into faster employment outcomes. This indicates a gap between academic achievement and labor market relevance. A study by David J. Finch et al. (2013) emphasizes that graduate success in securing employment is more strongly influenced by a combination of hard skills and soft skills, rather than academic performance alone. Therefore, the findings of this study reinforce the argument that higher education institutions need to shift their orientation from knowledge transmission toward the development of applied and market-relevant competencies.

### 3.2.5. Employability Skill

Furthermore, the results reveal that the employability skills of graduates of the studied institution are relatively strong in terms of soft skills, including honesty, responsibility, communication, and teamwork, which received highly positive evaluations from employers. These findings are consistent with the work of Mark M. Robles (2012), who identifies soft skills such as integrity, communication, and teamwork as essential competencies in the modern workplace. In addition, the World Economic Forum (2020) highlights that

competencies such as communication, collaboration, adaptability, and problem-solving are critical in responding to the transformation of the digital economy.

However, this study also identifies weaknesses in certain hard skills, particularly in active English proficiency and specific technical competencies. This suggests that while graduates possess solid foundational employability skills, they still require further enhancement in technical and global competencies to remain competitive in broader labor markets. This finding aligns with the graduate employability model proposed by Lorraine Dacre Pool and Peter Sewell (2007), which emphasizes the integration of skills, knowledge, understanding, and personal attributes in shaping work-ready graduates.

### 3.2.6. Tracer Study Findings

From a tracer study perspective, the findings provide strong empirical insights into the transition of graduates from higher education to the workforce, particularly in terms of waiting time, employment absorption, and user satisfaction. Referring to the framework proposed by Harald Schomburg (2003), tracer studies serve as a strategic evaluation tool to assess the relevance of higher education to labor market needs. In this study, an employment rate of 53% and the dominance of a waiting period of less than six months indicate that a portion of graduates has been able to adapt to labor market demands. However, the relatively high proportion of unemployed graduates suggests the need for more systematic institutional interventions, particularly in strengthening the alignment between curriculum and industry requirements.

Overall, the findings suggest that the employability of graduates of the studied institution can be categorized as moderately competitive, with strong advantages in character and soft skills, but still facing challenges in terms of competency alignment and technical skill development. Therefore, strengthening Outcome-Based Education-oriented curricula, enhancing experiential learning, and integrating industry needs into the learning process are crucial strategies for improving graduate competitiveness in a sustainable and globally relevant manner.

### 3.3. Implications

Based on the research findings and discussion presented, several key implications can be drawn regarding educational policy, curriculum development, and the relationship between higher education institutions and industry.

**Implications for Curriculum Development.** The research indicates a mismatch between the educational background of graduates and the jobs they secure, despite their high GPA. This highlights the importance of revising curricula to better align with the demands of the job market. Therefore, the graduates of the studied institution should assess and improve its curriculum by incorporating industry-relevant content, with a stronger emphasis on developing both soft skills (e.g., communication, teamwork, and work ethics) and hard skills (e.g., English proficiency and technological expertise). Integrating these competencies into the curriculum will provide graduates with a competitive edge in the labor market.

**Increased Industry Involvement in Education.** The involvement of industry in education, such as through internships, hands-on training, or collaborative research, can address the mismatch between graduates' skills and the needs of the labor market. The study shows that a significant portion of graduates faced extended waiting periods for employment, with some waiting more than 18 months. To remedy this, universities must strengthen partnerships with various sectors and offer more opportunities for students to gain practical experience. This would help bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and real-world applications, as supported by Gunawan (2015), who emphasized the importance of practical experience in higher education.

**Emphasis on Foreign Language and Technology Skills.** The study revealed that many graduates have limited proficiency in English, both passive and active. This highlights the urgent need to enhance foreign language proficiency, particularly in English, which is a requirement in many job sectors. Higher education institutions should invest more in language education through intensive courses or integrated curricula. Additionally, proficiency in technology, including the ability to operate hardware and software, has become increasingly essential. Thus, universities should include more content related to technology and digital tools in their academic programs to ensure graduates are prepared for modern work environments.

**Focus on Practical Skills Training.** Based on feedback from employers, there is a clear need for more training in practical skills, such as public speaking, time management, and other job-related competencies. Strengthening practical training outside of formal classroom settings through workshops, seminars, and additional courses will help students develop these skills. This would reduce the gap between theory taught in universities and the practical skills needed to succeed in the workforce, as highlighted by Susanto and Lestari (2018). This approach will equip students with the necessary tools to excel in their careers from day one.

**Evaluation of the Higher Education System to Address Frictional Unemployment.** The finding that many graduates experience long periods of frictional unemployment suggest the need for evaluation and improvement of the higher education system. While external factors, such as job market competition and limited job opportunities, play a role, the prolonged unemployment period also indicates a need for universities to better align curricula with the dynamic job market. Universities should focus on improving industry collaboration, increasing internship opportunities, and training students in skills that are directly applicable to their future careers. This would help reduce the unemployment gap for recent graduates.

**Development of Professional Attitudes and Character.** One interesting finding from this study is the high value employers place on graduates' attitudes, such as honesty, responsibility, and work ethics. This demonstrates that, in addition to technical skills, personal qualities are highly regarded in the workplace. Universities should integrate character and professional ethics development into their curriculum and campus activities. Training in positive attitudes, such as discipline, openness to criticism, and teamwork, should be prioritized as part of the holistic education that prepares students for the professional world.

**Strengthening Networking Opportunities for Graduates.** The feedback from employers about graduates' lack of initiative and delayed responses to tasks points to the importance of enhancing networking opportunities between students, alumni, and industry. Higher education institutions can support this by providing platforms for students to engage with industries, such as job fairs, seminars, or mentoring programs with alumni. This would allow students to build relationships with industry professionals and increase their chances of securing jobs shortly after graduation, while also offering a smoother transition into the workforce.

### 3.4. Limitations

Although this study records that many graduates are employed in fields unrelated to their area of study, there is no further analysis regarding the factors contributing to this mismatch, such as limitations in technical skills, lack of practical experience, or market demand not aligning with the curriculum taught. This reduces the deeper understanding of the causes behind this mismatch.

## 4. Conclusion

Based on the results and discussion, this study concludes that while 53% of graduates of the studied institution graduates have secured employment, a significant portion (46.9%) is still seeking work, with most facing waiting periods of under six months. The findings suggest a mismatch between graduates' qualifications and the job market needs. User satisfaction surveys indicate that employers highly value graduates' attitudes, including honesty, responsibility, and adaptability, with attitude being the primary distinguishing feature of graduates of the studied institution. Despite strong competencies in areas such as communication and information technology, the study highlights a need for further development in active English proficiency and technical skills. Additionally, employers emphasize the importance of practical work experience and soft skills like time management, public speaking, and entrepreneurship. Spiritual and ethical competencies, such as sincerity and critical thinking, were also identified as vital attributes. The study recommends that studied institution enhance practical training, technical skills, and language proficiency, while balancing theoretical knowledge with real-world application, to better prepare graduates for the demands of the modern workforce.

## Author Contributions

Andi Dian Fitriana: Conceived the study, designed the research methodology, and coordinated the overall research process. Responsible for data collection, analysis, and interpretation. Drafted the introduction, methodology, and conclusion sections of the paper. Emilia Mustary: Assisted in designing the research framework, contributed to data analysis, and reviewed the literature. Responsible for drafting the results and discussion sections and reviewing the manuscript for consistency and clarity. Abd Halim K: Provided critical revisions to the manuscript, especially the discussion and conclusion sections. Offered expert insights into the interpretation of results and ensured the accuracy of the data. Assisted with the final revision of the manuscript.

## Funding

No funding support was received.

## Declaration of Conflicting Interests

No potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/ or publication of this article.

## Data Availability

The datasets generated during and/ or analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

## Declaration on AI Use

The authors declare that no artificial intelligence (AI) or AI-assisted tools were used in the preparation of this manuscript.

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