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The MIB Framework as a Catalyst for Youth Empowerment: Bridging Skills Development and Sustainable Employment

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Abstract

Despite tremendous amount of investment towards Training, Vocational and Educational Training (TVET) and skills acquisition programmes aimed at fulfilling the Brunei Vision 2035, unemployment among youth remains a persistent challenge that has been evolving in Brunei Darussalam. While technical skills mismatches are frequently cited as a primary driver of labor market friction, less attention has been paid to socio-cultural and psychological dimensions of youth readiness and transition to sustainable employment. This paper explores the potential role of Melayu Islam Beraja (MIB or Malay Islamic Monarchy) framework as a values-based catalyst for youth empowerment in connecting skill training with sustainable employment. As this paper grounded in Human Capital Theory (HCT) and Psychological Empowerment Theory (PET), this conceptual study examines selected MIB-aligned Islamic values, particularly; *Ihsan, Ikhtiar and Tawakkal*, alongside psychological empowerment and youth employment readiness. Through Qualitative Document Analysis and Conceptual Framework Synthesis of national policy documents, institutional reports and existing literature, the study identifies a multidimensional gap between skills development and sustainable employment involving translation of acquired skills into employability behaviors as well as wider labor market conditions. The findings suggests that MIB-aligned values may complement psychological empowerment and employment readiness. The study also proposes an integrated framework connecting skills development, MIB-aligned values and psychological empowerment towards sustainable youth employment and Brunei Vision 2035, while recognizing the broader employment ecosystem.

Keywords: Melayu Islam Beraja (MIB), Youth Empowerment, Skills Development, Sustainable Employment, Brunei Vision 2035, Islamic Work Ethics.

1 Introduction

As outlined under the strategic mandate of Brunei Vision 2035, the government of the Sultanate Negara Brunei Darussalam has positioned human capital development at the apex of national development. Anchored by the Brunei Vision 2035 goals; Goal 1, to produce educated, highly skilled citizens and Goal 3; to foster dynamic, sustainable economy, the Sultanate has directed substantial institutions and financial resources towards Technical, Vocational Education and Training alongside youth prorammes specialized in skills acquisition frameworks.[1] These aspirations have encouraged continued investment in education, Technical and Vocational, Education and Training (TVET), workforce development and skills-based initiatives designed to strengthen the capabilities and employability of the local workforce. Also emphasized by the Manpower Blueprint of the development of a dynamic, skilled, adaptable and future-ready workforce while recognizing the importance of balanced intellectual, spiritual, emotional and physical human capital development.[2] Within a Whole-of-Nation approach, these efforts involve a strategic collaboration among government institutions, educational and training providers, industry and other stakeholders in aligning workforce capabilities with national economic priorities.[3] Despite these efforts, youth unemployment remains a persistent challenge that has been evolving around the world, as Brunei is not an exception and unemployment trend in Brunei is shaped by its unique socio-cultural and labor market dynamic. Recent evidence indicates that youth unemployment remains high than overall unemployment, while mismatches between skills and employers' demand remain an issue that constrain the educational attainment and human capital effectiveness to translate into employment opportunities.[4] Existing discussions have associated youth employment challenges with skills mismatch, changing industry requirements and differences between employers' expectations and available employment opportunities.[5] However, employability extends beyond formal qualifications and technical competencies as employers also value non-technical capabilities such as communication,

[1] Government of Brunei Darussalam. (2018). Eleventh National Development Plan (2018-2023. Department of Economic Planning and Statistics, Ministry of Finance and Economy, p. 2.
[2] Ministry of Education & Manpower Planning and Employment Council. (2024). Manpower Blueprint for Brunei Darussalam, p. 53.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 53.
[4] International Monetary Fund (IMF). (2026). Brunei Darussalam: 2026 Article IV Consultation-Press Release; Staff Report; and Statement by the Executive Director for Brunei Darussalam. IMF Country Report No. 26/253. International Monetary Fund.
[5] Musa, S.F.P.D and Idris, D.S.R.P.H. (2020). Addressing Issues of Unemployment in Brunei: The Mismatch between Employers Expectations and Employees Aspirations. International Journal of Asian Business and Information Management, 11(2), pp. 88-101.

interpersonal skills and leadership.[6] This highlights the importance of considering not only skills development but also the psychological and behavioral dimensions of youth employment readiness. Within this context, Melayu Islam Beraja (MIB), as Brunei Darussalam's national philosophy, provides a relevant values-based perspective for further examination. MIB integrates the elements of Malay culture, Islam and the monarchical system and has been discussed in relation to national identity, education, ethical development and societal resilience. [7] This provides an opportunity to examine its potential relevance to youth empowerment and employment readiness without assuming a direct relationship with employment outcomes. Accordingly, this paper examines MIB as a potential conceptual catalyst connecting skills development, psychological empowerment as well as sustainable employment. Drawing upon Human Capital Theory (HCT), Psychological Empowerment Theory (PET), the paper examines these elements within the context of youth employment and proposes an integrated conceptual framework towards supporting sustainable youth employment and Brunei Vision 2035.

2 Research Problem

To achieve the Wawasan Brunei 2035 and fulfilling the Goal 1; to produce a highly skilled and educated citizen and Goal 3; fostering dynamic, sustainable economy, His Majesty's government has prioritized human capital development within the nation through a significant investment particularly in institutional technical trainings and education, training and workforce development.[8] Through a Whole-of Nation approach, in collaboration with the relevant institutions with educational and training providers as well as industry to strengthen workforce capabilities and align human capital development with national economic priorities.[9] However, youth unemployment remains a persistence challenge in Brunei Darussalam, with youth unemployment remaining at approximately 18% in 2025.[10] Existing discussions have frequently associated this challenge with skills mismatch, limited private-sector job opportunities and mismatches between skills and employers' requirement.[11] At the same time, existing research in Brunei has identified concerns beyond technical competencies, including lack of motivation, entrepreneurial orientation, leadership awareness and other employability skills among young jobseekers.[12] This suggests the importance of further investigating the behavioral and psychological dimensions of youth employment readiness alongside skills development. Current policy interventions are predominantly placed considerable emphasis on skills acquisition and workforce development, while MIB predominantly discussed as Brunei Darussalam's national philosophy and within the context of education, national identity, ethical development and societal resilience. [13] This presents a research gap in understanding the selected MIB-aligned Islamic Values, particularly *Ihsan*, *Ikhtiar* and *Tawakkal* may be examined alongside psychological empowerment in relation to youth empowerment to employment readiness. This study is therefore seeking to develop a conceptual framework that integrates skills development, MIB-aligned values and psychological empowerment in examining their potential contribution towards sustainable youth employment and the achievement of Brunei Vision 2035.

Research Objectives

In addressing the gap, this study is guided by four central research objectives:

1. To identify the key gaps between youth skills development and sustainable employment in Brunei Darussalam.
2. To examine how MIB values, particularly *Ihsan, Ikhtiar* and *Tawakkal* can strengthen youth empowerment and readiness.
3. To propose an MIB-based framework that supports sustainable youth employment towards Brunei Vision 2035.

[6] Hisa, A., Naqshbandi, M.M., & Mohiddin, F. (2025). Meeting the skills demand of employers in Brunei Darussalam: Where do the youth stand? In A.M. Khalid & B. Jetin (Eds.), Brunei Darussalam's economic transition in a shifting global Asia. Springer, pp. 187-190.

[7] Abdul Rahman, U.F., & Zul Raffar, I.N.A. (2026). The Role of 'Melayu Islam Beraja' (MIB) in shaping a resilient and ethical society. E-Journal of Islamic Thought & Understanding, 9(1), pp. 102-108.

[8] Government of Brunei Darussalam. (2018). Eleventh National Development Plan (2018-2023. Department of Economic Planning and Statistics, Ministry of Finance and Economy, p. 2.

[9] Ministry of Education & Manpower Planning and Employment Council. (2024). Manpower Blueprint for Brunei Darussalam, p. 53.

[10] International Monetary Fund (IMF). (2026). Brunei Darussalam: 2026 Article IV Consultation-Press Release; Staff Report; and Statement by the Executive Director for Brunei Darussalam. IMF Country Report No. 26/253. International Monetary Fund. Annex VI

[11] *Ibid.*, para 30 and Annex VI.

[12] Musa, S.F.P.D and Idris, D.S.R.P.H. (2020). Addressing Issues of Unemployment in Brunei: The Mismatch between Employers Expectations and Employees Aspirations. International Journal of Asian Business and Information Management, 11(2), pp. 88-101.

[13] Abdul Rahman, U.F., & Zul Raffar, I.N.A. (2026). The Role of 'Melayu Islam Beraja' (MIB) in shaping a resilient and ethical society. E-Journal of Islamic Thought & Understanding, 9(1), pp. 102-109.

Research Questions

This study is structured through the research questions that answer the research objectives above:

1. What are the key gaps between youth skills development and sustainable employment in Brunei Darussalam?
2. How can MIB-aligned Islamic values (*Ihsan, Ikhtiar* and *Tawakkal*) strengthen youth empowerment and employment readiness?
3. How can an MIB-based framework support sustainable youth employment in achieving Brunei Vision 2035?

3 Literature Review

In this section, the author reviews existing literature relevant to the main components of the study. The author discusses Human Capital Theory (HCT) to understand the development of human capabilities through education and training, followed by Psychological Empowerment Theory (PET) in relation to youth empowerment through Spreitzer's four cognitive dimensions. The author also discusses *Melayu Islam Beraja* (MIB) and selected MIB-aligned Islamic work values relevant to the study. Finally, the author describes Brunei Vision 2035 in relation to youth employment and national development.

3. 1 Human Capital Theory (HCT): Youth Skills Development

Human Capital Theory (HCT) is universally defined as an investment in an individual's set of skills through formal education and training to increase productivity and accumulate capital portfolios or capitalization. This theory is pioneered in the 1960s by the Theodore Schultz,[14] and then operationalized by Beckers (1964), treating this framework as human factor of production as economic engine and a catalyst to primary asset akin to physical machinery.[15] Under this methodological individualism, individuals and families act as rational economic agents who make independent decision to acquire knowledge and skills. These decisions are riven by the goal to maximize their long-term lifetime quality and overall quality of life. Following this theory, it can be understood that investing on higher education and technical trainings are treated as long-term capital investment rather than regular expenses.[16] Built upon these classical foundations, Jacob Mincer (1974) further contributes to human capital by examining a predictable, seamless pathway where an initial investment in formal education smoothly yields institutional certifications (qualifications).[17] This concept assumes that formal qualifications signal elevates productivity directly to employers, as a result in automatic and smooth market absorption as well as optimized wages distributed equally according to a worker's marginal productivity.[18]

However, a broader understanding of human capital needs to be considered as we are moving towards an era of modernization that is affecting changes in the labor market. Therefore, it is important to further understand how the knowledge and skills acquired by young people are relevant to modern employment. For instance, Mdoe et al (2024) examined youth employment by considering technical skills, digital literacy and work readiness.[19] This suggests that workforce preparation needs to be examined beyond academic qualifications by also considering practical skills that are related to industry needs. The importance of examining different types of skills must also be considered in strengthening youth competencies for labor market participation. Habiyaremya et al (2023) showed that, in addressing youth employment, particularly within emerging modern industries, technical skills for work readiness represent one dimension, while the development of non-technical competencies is another dimension that needs to be considered, suggesting that soft skills play a vital role in enhancing employability.[20] Although the socioeconomic context of South Africa differs from Brunei Darussalam, the study demonstrates the importance of developing both types of capabilities in supporting young people's participation in economic activities. Therefore, human capital development encompasses not only in academic and technical knowledge but also the ability of young people. In applying their competencies and capabilities within a changing labor market environment.

Within the context of Brunei Darussalam, this broader understanding of human capital is particularly relevant to youth workforce development. Musa (2023), through an examination of the iReady programme in Brunei, demonstrates the relevance if work-based programmes in preparing Bruneian youth for employment. The study highlights the importance of providing young graduates with exposure to the working environment and opportunities to gain practical experience beyond their educational qualifications.[21] Such programmes provide opportunities for youth to apply the knowledge and skills acquired through institutional education while gaining workplace experience, which is relevant

[14] Schultz, T.W. (1961) Investment in Human Capital. The American Economic Review, 51(1), pp. 1-3.
[15] Becker, G.S. (1962). Investment in Human Capital: A Theoretical Analysis. Journal of Political Economy, 70(5), pp. 9-11.
[16] *Ibid.*, pp. 11-13.
[17] Mincer, J. (1974). Schooling, Experience and Earnings. National Bureau of Economic Research, p. 43.
[18] *Ibid.*, pp. 83-96.

[19] Mdoe, C.N., Kanire, E., & ERICK, S.B. (2024) Determinants of Employability in the Informal Sector among the Youth in Tanzania. African Journal of Empirical Research, 5(4), p. 1638.
[20] Habiyaremya, A., Habanabakize, T. and Nwosu, C. (2023). Bridging the Labor Market Skills Gap to Tackle Youth Unemployment in South Africa. The Economic and Labor Relations Review, 33(4), pp. 797-798.
[21] Musa, S.F.P.D. (2023). Preparing the youth for the Future of Work through Apprenticeship Programme in Brueni. Higher Education, Skills and Work-Based Learning, 13 (1), pp. 114-115.

to the development of the future-ready human capital. Based on the discussion above, this study uses HCT to provide an understanding of youth skills development, particularly the role of education and trainings in facilitating workforce readiness. HCT helps in explaining how young people can be supported through investment in education and training to develop workforce capabilities. Within this study, HCT therefore provides a basis understanding of the relationship between skills development trainings and emerging industry needs in Brunei Darussalam. However, skills and productive capabilities represent only one dimension of youth empowerment. It is also important to consider how young people perceive their competence, autonomy, purpose and ability to influence through the psychological dimension of empowerment. This will eb further discussed in the following section.

3.2 Psychological Empowerment Theory (PET): Youth Empowerment

As discussed earlier, education and training play an important role in facilitating youth skills development. Psychological Empowerment Theory (PET), therefore, provide a complementary perspective to HCT by focusing on how young individuals perceive their capabilities to act, make decisions and influence their environment. While HCT emphasizes the role of education and institutional training in developing productive capabilities, PET concerns individual's perceptions of their ability to utilize these capabilities within their environment. Building on earlier work on empowerment, Spreitzer (1995) conceptualized psychological empowerment through four core dimensions: meaning, competence, self-determination and impact.[22] These dimensions are interconnected and collectively reflect an active orientation in which young individuals perceive themselves as active agents rather than passive individuals responding to their circumstances.[23] Meaning refers to the value individuals attach to their actions or purposes in relation to their belief and aspirations, while competence refer to individuals' belief in their ability to perform their actions successfully.[24] Self-determination refers to the autonomy of young individuals to make decisions regarding their education, training and career pathways, while impact concerns their belief that their actions can make a difference within their environment.[25] Incorporating these four dimensions into youth empowerment therefore provides an understanding of young people as active agents who are able to recognize and utilize their capabilities to contribute meaningfully to the workplace and wider economic development.

The importance of psychological empowerment in the context of youth development is also supported by existing studies. Within the context of a youth programme, Hong et al (2020) highlighted psychological empowerment through factors involving perceived capability and self-worth.[26] Messman et al (2022) identified the relevance of psychological empowerment to positive adjustment among adolescents that promotes positive youth developmemt.[27] while Kim and Kim (2023) found an association between psychological empowerment and career decision-making among university students.[28] Taken together, these studies indicate that youth development involves more than developing skills alone. Psychological empowerment is also relevant to strengthening young people's perceived capabilities, confidence and agency as they prepare for the workforce and participate in economic activities. This perspective is also relevant within the context of Brunei Darussalam, particularly in understanding differences between young people's employment aspirations and employers' expectations. Existing research has indicated that young graduates may prefer employment that offers better positions, high salaries and stability while employers place importance on employability skills, entrepreneurial orientation as well as leadership capabilities.[29] In addition, Hisa et al. (2024) examined youth leadership development programmes and their contribution to the perceived employability skills of young people in Brunei. The study highlights the relevance of developing capabilities beyond academic knowledge through development programmes, particularly in preparing young people to apply their skills relation to workforce readiness.[30] Although these studies do not directly examine PET, their findings highlight the importance of considering young people's perceived capabilities and preparedness alongside their educational and technical skills.[31] Based on the discussion above, PET provides a complementary perspective to HCT in understanding youth empowerment, While HCT

[22] Spreitzer, G.M. (1995). Psychological Empowerment in the Workplace: Dimensions, Measurement and Validation. Academy of Management Journal, 38(5), pp. 1443-1444.
[23] *Ibid.*, p. 1443.
[24] *Ibid.*, p. 1443-1444.
[25] *Ibid.*, p. 1443-1444.
[26] Hong, P.Y.P, Hong, R and Choi, S. (2020). Validation of the Employment Hope Scale (EHS) Among Summer Youth Employment Programe Participants. Children and Youth Services Review, 111, Article 104811.
[27] Messman, E., Scott, B., Smith Darden, J., Cortina, K., Thulin. E., Zimmerman, M. and Kernsmith, P. (2022). Psychological Empowerment as a Route Adjustment During Adolescence. Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology, 83, Article 101458..
[28] Kim, B., and Kim, J. (2023) The structural Relationship between Self-Leadership, Psychological Empowerment and Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy of College Students. Education and Learning: Global Creative Leader, 13(3), pp. 73-97.
[29] Musa, S.F.P.D and Idris, D.S.R.P.H. (2020). Addressing Issues of Unemployment in Brunei: The Mismatch between Employers Expectations and Employees Aspirations. International Journal of Asian Business and Information Management, 11(2), pp. 88-101.
[30] Hisa, A., Mohiddin, F. and Susanto, H. (2024). The Impact of Youth Leadership Program on Perceived Employability Skills: Evidence from Brunei Darussalam. Asian Academy of Management Journal, 29(2), p. 133.

[31] *Ibid.*, pp. 133-134.

focuses on the role of education an training in developing young people's skills and productive capabilities, PET focuses on how these capabilities are perceived and utilized through meaning, competence, self-determination and impact.

3.3 Melayu Islam Beraja (MIB): National Philosophy

Melayu Islam Beraja (MIB), commonly translated as Malay Islamic Monarchy, constitutes the national philosophy of Brunei Darussalam and provides a foundation for understanding the country's identity and way of life. MIB was formally proclaimed as the national philosophy upon Brunei Darussalam's independence on 1 January 1984.[32] However, the foundations of MIB are rooted in Brunei's historical development and existed long before its formal proclamation. Historically, Brunei developed as Malay society characterized by Malay language, customs and traditions with Islam providing a foundation for religious and social life under a monarchical system headed by the Sultan.[33] These historical characteristics provided the foundations of what was formally articulated as MIB in 1984, integrating the cultural, religious and monarchical elements that shape Brunei's national identity. Conceptually, MIB consists of three interrelated components: Melayu, Islam and Beraja.[34] Melayu refers to Brunei's Malay identity of which is reflected through its indigenous Malay communities, the use of Malay language and the preservation of Malay customs and cultural traditions. Islam represents the religious foundation of MIB and is based on the teachings if Ahli Sunnah Waljamaah and the Shafi'i school of jurisprudence, Within MIB, Islam serves as a guide for the way of life of Bruneian society and occupies a central position in the relationship between Melayu and Beraja.[35] Beraja, meanwhile, refers to Brunei's monarchical system of governance, in which the Sultan holds an important position within the country's political and social structure. These three components are closely interconnected and are not intended to function separately from one another.[36] Together, they integrate Brunei's cultural identity, Islamic foundation and monarchical system within a unified national philosophy.

MIB can therefore be understood not simply as a philosophy introduced at independence, but as the formal articulation of principles rooted in Brunei's historical development. It functions as a national philosophy and a guide for life in Bruneian society, while also representing the country's distinctive cultural. Religious and political identity.[37] Although scholars have proposed different theoretical arrangements for understanding the relationship among Melayu, Islam and Beraja, recent Brunei scholarship shows that these models consistently recognize the interconnected nature of the three components, with Islam occupying a central position in locally developed theories of MIB, giving that Islam is the primary role in administering the community life in the state.[38] This conceptual understanding of MIB provides the foundation for the present study to subsequently examine its relevance to Islamic Values, individual development and Brunei Darussalam's broader national objectives. Within the Islamic dimension of MIB, this study selects three Islamic values to understand individual conduct and responsibility through the ethical foundation provided by Islam. The first is *Ihsan*, which refers to an individual performing work with full responsibility to achieve quality and excellence.[39] *Ikhtiar* in this study is considered as a relation to the broader Islamic emphasis on human effort and responsible action, while *Tawakkal* means the reliance upon Allah SWT after effort has been made rather than replacing the need for human effort.[40] These selected values are examined in this study in understanding individual conduct, effort as well as responsibility, and are considered as selected MIB-aligned Islamic Values.

3.4 Brunei Vision 2035: Youth Employment

Brunei Vision 2035 *(Wawasan Brunei 2035)* represents Brunei Darussalam's long-term development vision, introduced in 2007 following a strategic planning process that began in 2004 through stakeholder consultations and assessments of previous National Development Plans.[41] It provides a long-term direction towards three national goals: an educated, highly skilled and accomplished people; a high quality of life; and a dynamic and sustainable economy.[42] Within this vision, the development of human capital through education, training and skills is important in strengthening the capabilities of the population and supporting national economic development. Youth are particularly important to this aspiration, as emphasized by His Majesty the Sultan and Yang Di-Pertuan of Brunei Darussalam in his Titah:

"*Bercakap mengenai keadaan mencabar, gologan belia adalah tonggak yang sangat diharapkan. Ke atas bahu merekalah turut dibebankan tanggungjawab mencorakkan masa depan negara. Mereka terus memberi peluang untuk*

[32] Dahlan, S.S.S. (2022). Radio dan perkembangan konsep Melayu islam Beraja di Brunei. Jurnal Pengajian Media Malaysia, 24(1), p. 51.
[33] *Ibid.*, pp. 51-53.
[34] *Ibid.*, pp.55-56.
[35] *Ibid.*, pp.55-56.
[36] *Ibid.*, pp.55-56.
[37] *Ibid.*, pp.55-56.
[38] Mohamad, R.H. & Awang Mat, M.Z. (2025). Analisis Konsep dan Teori Melayu Islam Beraja (MIB) di Negara Brunei Darussalam. AR-RA'IQ, 8(2), pp. 1-29.
[39] Kamri, N.A., Ramlan, S.F, & Ibrahim, A. (2014). Qur'anic Work Ethics. Journal of Usuluddin, 40, p. 154.
[40] Kamri, N.A., Ramlan, S.F, & Ibrahim, A. (2014). Qur'anic Work Ethics. Journal of Usuluddin, 40, pp. 154-156.
[41] Wawasan Brunei 2035 Secretariat. (n.d). Wawasan Brunei 2035 infopack, p. 3.
[42] Government of Brunei Darussalam. (2018). Eleventh National Development Plan (2018-2023). Department of Economic Planning and Statistics, Ministry of Finance and Economy, p. 2.

menjadi penggerak dan pemacu perubahan. Itulah peranan dan tanggungjawab golongan belia. Ini selaras dengan usaha memantapkan pembangunan modal insan menerusi sistem pendidikan dan latihan yang inovatif, mengukuhkan kemahiran dan kebolehpasaran anak-anak tempatan termasuk belia, sejajar dengan keperluan industri, ekonomi dan badan profesional." [43]

In this context, Goal 1 and Goal 3 are particularly relevant to youth employment, as developing skilled human capital is closely connected with preparing young people to contribute towards a dynamic and sustainable economy. Workforce readiness is therefore an important component in supporting the achievement of Brunei Vision 2035. The Manpower Blueprint for Brunei Darussalam reinforces this direction through its vision of "A Dynamic Workforce for Sustainable Socio-Economic Growth" that supported by four aspirations: Dynamic Education and Training, Future Ready People, Effective Human Capital Development and Enabling Support System and Structure. [44] These aspirations emphasize the development of knowledgeable, skilled, ethical and adaptable individuals who are prepared for changing socio-economic priorities and the future work landscape. Nevertheless, youth employment remains a concern within Brunei's changing labor market. The 2025 Labor Force Survey recorded an overall unemployment rate of 5.0% compared with a substantially higher youth unemployment that stood at 18.0%. [45] The IMF similarly identifies skills and expectations mismatches, changing industry demand and limited private sector absorption capacity among the challenges affecting employment, highlighting the continuing importance of aligning skills development with labor market needs.[46]

Employability, however, extends beyond academic qualifications and technical knowledge. Evidence form Brunei shows that employers place considerable importance on employability competencies, with listening, oral communication, learning, leadership and interpersonal skills among the highly valued skills for young people entering the labor market. The same study identifies areas such as problem solving, decision making and conflict management where employers perceive lower levels of youth competence.[47] Developing relevant skills and competencies is therefore important in preparing young people to respond to changing workplace expectations. Within the context of Brunei Vision 2035, youth employment consequently represents an important connection between the development of capable human capital and the wider aspiration of achieving a dynamic and sustainable economy.

4 Research Methodology

To examine the potential role of MIB framework in connecting skills training and youth empowerment as well as sustainable development, this study adopts Qualitative Document Analysis (QDA) and Conceptual Framework Synthesis design. Rather than relying on empirical fieldwork, this approach systematically evaluates, integrates and synthesizes national policy documents, institutional reports and as well as existing theoretical literatures in examining the relationship between skills development through HCT, psychological empowerment through PET, MIB-aligned values and youth employment in the context of Brunei Darussalam. There are three distinct analytical phases this study executes. Phase 1: Data Identification and Corpus Retrieval, in which the study gathers the data across three domains namely; 1) National Policy Framework that covering Wawasan Brunei 2035, Dasar Belia Negara and Economic Blueprint. 2) Institutional Labor Reports that are published by relevant agencies including the Manpower Planning and Employment Council and Department of Economic Planning and Statistic (DEPS). 3) Peer-reviewed existing literatures that cover Human Capital Theory (HCT), Psychological Empowerment Theory (PET), Islamic Work Ethics particularly *Ihsan*, *Ikhtiar* and *Tawakkal*) and MIB national philosophy. Phase 2: Theoretical Mapping, examining the literature and documents to identify key themes relating to youth skills development, psychological empowerment, employment readiness and labor market conditions. PET particularly the four dimensions of meaning, competence, self-determination and impact, is also examined alongside MIB-aligned Islamic Values to explore their potential complementary relationship rather than assuming a direct causal relationship. Phase 3: Conceptual Framework Synthesis which integrates the findings from the document analysis and theoretical mapping into proposed conceptual framework. The framework brings together youth skills development, MIB-aligned values and psychological empowerment in understanding youth employment readiness and its potential contribution towards sustainable employment and Brunei Vision 2035. The framework also recognizes the broader employment ecosystem, including industry demand, employment opportunities and institutional support and labor market conditions.

5 Findings and Discussions

5.1 The Gap Between Youth Skills Development and Sustainable Employment

[43] His Majesty Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah Mu'izzaddin Waddaulah. (2024). Titah Sempena Sambutan Ulang Tahun Hari Keputeraan Baginda ke-78, 15 Julai 2024.
[44] Ministry of Education & Manpower Planning and Employment Council. (2024). Manpower Blueprint for Brunei Darussalam, p. 17.
[45] Department of Economic Planning and Statistics. (2026). Labor force framework, Brunei Darussalam, 2025. Ministry of Finance and Economy, p. 3.
[46] International Monetary Fund (IMF). (2026). Brunei Darussalam: 2026 Article IV Consultation-Press Release; Staff Report; and Statement by the Executive Director for Brunei Darussalam. IMF Country Report No. 26/253. International Monetary Fund.
[47] Hisa, A., Naqshbandi, M.M., & Mohiddin, F. (2025). Meeting the skills demand of employers in Brunei Darussalam: Where do the youth stand? In A.M. Khalid & B. Jetin (Eds.), Brunei Darussalam's economic transition in a shifting global Asia. Springer., pp. 187-190.

The analysis identified a persistent gap between youth skills development and the transition to sustainable employment in Brunei Darussalam. Despite young people's attainment of educational qualifications and participation in skills development programmes, the reviewed evidence suggest that these investments do not necessarily result in a smooth transition to employment. From the perspective of HCT, investment in education and training is expected to strengthen individuals' knowledge, skills as well as productive capacity.[48] Brunei Darussalam reflects this emphasis through its continued investment in education, training and human capital development. However, the findings of this study suggest that the employment value of such investment also depends on the extend to which acquired knowledge and skills can be translated into competencies and behaviors that ae relevant to the workplace. The interpretation is supported by Hisa, Mohiddin and Susanto's study of youth leadership programmes in Brunei Darussalam. Their findings showed significant positive relationships between skills-based and attitudinal learning outcomes and perceived employability skills. More importantly, behavioral outcomes were found to mediate the relationships between knowledge, skills and attitudinal learning outcomes and perceived employability.[49] Behavioral outcomes in their study refer to the extent to which learning acquired through training is transferred and applied in work-related settings.[50] This finding suggests that the value of training cannot be understood solely through the acquisition of knowledge or technical skills. The ability of young people to translate what they have learned into observable behavior and workplace performance is also important to their employability.

This becomes particularly relevant when the findings are considered alongside employers' expectations in Brunei. Previous studies indicate that employers value not only academic qualifications and technical knowledge but also broader employability competencies. These include communication, problem-solving, decision making, interpersonal ability, leadership and time management to nurture organizational success.[51] Evidence from Brunei further suggests that young people demonstrate strengths in several areas, including oral and written communication, listening, learning and interpersonal skills, while employers identify weaker competencies in areas such as risk-taking, conflict management, problem solving as well as analytical ability and decision making.[52] Therefore, the gap should not necessarily be interpreted as an absence of skills among Bruneian youth. Rather, it also concerns whether acquired skills can be applied and adapted to the demand of the workplace. However, the transition from skills development to sustainable employment cannot be explained solely at the individual level. The analysis also indicates that employment outcomes are shaped by wider structural conditions within Brunei's labor market. Economic diversification, changing industry requirements, the availability of employment opportunities and the development of private sector influence the extent to which human capital can be absorbed and utilized productively. The IMF has similarly emphasized the need for Brunei Darussalam to align upskilling and reskilling with industry needs, address skills mismatches, strengthen private-sector dynamism and broaden employment opportunities as part of the country's economic diversification agenda.[53] These conditions indicate that strengthening youth skills alone may not sufficient if employment opportunities and labor market demand do not develop correspondingly.

Taken together, the findings suggest that the gap between youth skills development and sustainable employment in Brunei Darussalam is multidimensional. It involves nit only the acquisition of qualifications and technical competencies, but also the translation of learning into employability behavior and the capacity of the labor market to provide appropriate opportunities for young people. This extends the Human Capital Theory perspective by showing that investment in education and training remains important, but its contribution to sustainable employment depends on how effectively human capital is developed, demonstrated and utilized within the labor market. Addressing this gap therefore requires coordination between education and training providers, employers, industries and relevant government agencies. This is consistent with Brunei Darussalam's Manpower Blueprint, which calls for dynamic education and training, future-ready people, effective human capital development and an enabling support system through a Whole-of -Nation approach.[54]

5.2 MIB-aligned Islamic Values as a Catalyst for Youth Empowerment and Employment Readiness

The second analytical theme examines how youth empowerment and employment readiness may be strengthened through a values-based MIB lens. As discussed in the literature review, MIB provides a broader perspective beyond its function as Brunei Darussalam's national identity, as it also represents a value system that guides ethical conduct and social behavior. Recent MIB scholarship particularly emphasized the importance of maintaining its relevance

[48] Schul Schultz, T.W. (1961) Investment in Human Capital. The American Economic Review, 51(1), pp. 1-3; Becker, G.S. (1962). Investment in Human Capital: A Theoretical Analysis. Journal of Political Economy, 70(5), pp. 9-11.
[49] Hisa, A., Mohiddin, F. and Susanto, H. (2024). The Impact of Youth Leadership Program on Perceived Employability Skills: Evidence from Brunei Darussalam. Asian Academy of Management Journal, 29(2), pp. 149-150.
[50] *Ibid.*, pp. 137, 140, 143.
[51] *Ibid.*, pp. 136-137.
[52] Hisa, A., Naqshbandi, M.M. & Mohiddin, F. (2025). Meeting the Skills Demands of Employers in Brunei Hisa, A., Naqshbandi, M.M., & Mohiddin, F. (2025). Meeting the skills demand of employers in Brunei Darussalam: Where do the youth stand? In A.M. Khalid & B. Jetin (Eds.), Brunei Darussalam's economic transition in a shifting global Asia. Springer., pp. 189-190.
[53] International Monetary Fund (IMF). (2026). Brunei Darussalam: 2026 Article IV Consultation-Press Release; Staff Report; and Statement by the Executive Director for Brunei Darussalam. IMF Country Report No. 26/253. International Monetary Fund. Para. 30 and Annex VI.
[54] Ministry of Education & Manpower Planning and Employment Council. (2024). Manpower Blueprint for Brunei Darussalam, p. 53.

among younger generations and applying its values to contemporary realities. Abdul Rahman and Zur Raffar highlight that MIB contributes to ethical development and societal resilience, while its relevance to younger generations depends on making its values meaningful and applicable to modern challenges.[55] In the context of an increasingly changing labor market, this suggests that youth development may need to extend beyond educational and technical attainment towards the development of values and psychological empowerment. Psychological Empowerment Theory (PET) provides a useful perspective through its four cognitive dimensions of meaning, competence, self-determination and impact.[56] The present analysis therefore considers whether MIB-aligned values may complement these psychological dimensions in strengthening youth empowerment and employment readiness. Within this context, the study focuses on three selected Islamic values aligned with the Islamic dimension of MIB: *Ihsan, Ikhtiar* and *Tawakkal*. *Ihsan* can be understood in the context of work as performing responsibilities to the best of one's ability, with attention to quality, responsibility and the benefit that work provides to others. Qur'anic work ethics literature explains that an employee who embodies *Ihsan* strives to perform work carefully and to the best of his or her potential rather than completing responsibilities carelessly or half-heartedly.[57] *Ikhitiar,* as conceptualized in this study meanwhile emphasizes effort and initiatives in pursuing an intended outcome. This is consistent with Qur'anic work-ethics literature similarly places considerable importance on effort and associates it with dedication, responsibility as well as creative in achieving organizational objectives.[58] *Tawakkal* complements such effort through reliance upon Allah after appropriate effort has been undertaken. Rather than encouraging passivity, *Tawakkal* places human effort alongside spiritual reliance on Allah SWT for the eventual outcome.[59] In the context of employment, these values may therefore provide a culturally and spiritually meaningful basis for discussing quality of work, proactive effort, responsibility and perseverance when acing workplace challenges and uncertainty.

Nevertheless, the relationship between MIB-aligned values and psychological empowerment should be interpreted cautiously, as there is insufficient empirical evidence to establish direct relationships between *Ihsan, Ikhtiar* and *Tawakkal* and Spreitzer's four dimensions. These values are therefore viewed as potentially complementary to psychological empowerment rather than equivalent to specific PET dimensions.[60] MIB is consequently not presented as a direct solution to employment or a replacement for skills training, but as a values-based foundation that may strengthen youth empowerment and employment readiness through responsibility, effort, quality of work and resilience.[61]

5.3 Integrating MIB, Youth Empowerment and Sustainable Employment

The third analytical theme highlights the importance of integrating the key elements discussed in the literature review to provide a more comprehensive understanding of youth employment readiness. HCT explains the development of individual capabilities through investment in education, training as well as skills development. While PET explains psychological empowerment through four cognitive dimensions: meaning, competence, self-determination and impact.[62] MIB provides a values-based context within which this study examines the selected MIB-aligned Islamic values of *Ihsan, Ikhtiar* and *Tawakkal,* as discussed above. Employability literature further highlights the importance of behavioral outcomes in translating learning into job opportunities. In the Brunei context, behavioral outcomes have been found to mediate the relationship between learning outcomes and perceived employability skills.[63] Rather than treating these perspectives as competing explanations, this study therefore organizes them s complementary layers contributing towards youth employment readiness. As illustrated in the proposed conceptual framework, the pathway begins with Youth Skills Development, where knowledge, skills qualifications and training provide the capability inputs. MIB-aligned values may provide a values-based orientation towards effort, responsibility, quality of work and contribution. However, as establish in section 5,2 there is currently insufficient empirical evidence to establish a direct relationship between these selected MIB-aligned values and PET. The relationship is therefore conceptualized as potentially complementary rather than causal. PET subsequently explains the psychological empowerment through meaning, competence, self-determination and impact.[64] Together, skills, values and psychological empowerment may contribute towards Youth Employment Readiness, where these capabilities can be expressed practically through behaviors and competencies such as communication, initiative, problem solving, adaptability and responsibility. Evidence form Brunei similarly demonstrates the importance of transferring knowledge and skills into work-related behaviors.

[55] Abdul Rahman, U.F., & Zul Raffar, I.N.A. (2026). The Role of 'Melayu Islam Beraja' (MIB) in shaping a resilient and ethical society. E-Journal of Islamic Thought & Understanding, 9(1), pp. 102-108.
[56] Llorente-Alonso, m., Garcia-Ael, C., & Topa, G. (2024). A Meta-Analysis for Psychological Empowerment: Antecedents, Organizational Outcomes, and Moderating Variable. Current Psychology, 43, p. 1760.
[57] Kamri, N.A., Ramlan, S.F, & Ibrahim, A. (2014). Qur'anic Work Ethics. Journal of Usuluddin, 40, p. 154.
[58] *Ibid.*, p. 155-156.
[59] *Ibid.*, p. 158.
[60] Llorente-Alonso, m., Garcia-Ael, C., & Topa, G. (2024). A Meta-Analysis for Psychological Empowerment: Antecedents, Organizational Outcomes, and Moderating Variable. Current Psychology, 43, p. 1760.
[61] Abdul Rahman, U.F., & Zul Raffar, I.N.A. (2026). The Role of 'Melayu Islam Beraja' (MIB) in shaping a resilient and ethical society. E-Journal of Islamic Thought & Understanding, 9(1), pp. 104-108.
[62] Spreitzer, G.M (1995). *Psychological Empowerment in the workplace: Dimensions, measurement and validation.* Academy of Management Journal, 38(5), pp.1443-1444.
[63] Hisa, A., Mohiddin, F. and Susanto, H. (2024*). The Impact of Youth Leadership Programme on Perceived Employability Skills: Evidence from Brunei Darussalam*. Asian Academy of Management Journal. 29(2), pp. 149-150.
[64] *Ibid.*, pp. 1443-1444.

Youth employment readiness is ultimately directed towards sustainable employment and the broader objectives of Brunei Vision 2035 *(Wawasan Brunei 2035)*, which emphasize highly educated and skilled people, quality of life and a dynamic and sustainable economy.[65] However, sustainable employment does not depend solely on individual readiness, as wider factors such as industry demand, employment opportunities, institutional support and labor-market conditions also influence employment outcomes.

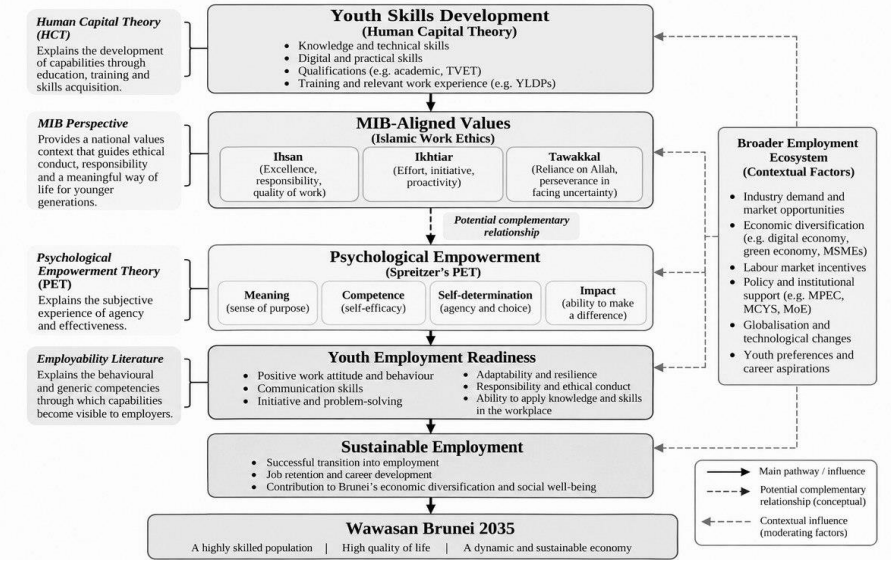

Figure 1: An Integrated Conceptual Framework for Youth Sustainable Employment in Brunei Darussalam.

6 Conclusions

In conclusion, this study provides a holistic understanding by examining the gap between youth skills development and sustainable employment in Brunei Darussalam through the integration of Human Capital Theory (HCT), Psychological Empowerment Theory (PET) and MIB-aligned Islamic values. The study highlights that investment in human capital development remains essential, particularly through institutional education and skills training. However, the transition towards sustainable employment cannot be achieved through educational attainment, qualifications and skills training alone. Young people must also be able to translate their acquired skills and knowledge into employment-related behaviors. Alongside this, psychological empowerment and wider labor market conditions also need to be considered in understanding youth employment readiness. Within this context, the study proposes MIB, particularly through its Islamic dimension and the selected values of *Ihsan*, *Ikhtiar* and *Tawakkal*, as a potential contribution towards strengthening work quality, effort, responsibility as well as perseverance among youth. The study does not establish a causal relationship between MIB and PET. Rather, MIB is considered as a complementary values-based perspective that may strengthen youth empowerment and workforce readiness. At the same time, youth employment continues to face wider challenges, including emerging industry demands, skills mismatches with employers' expectations and limited job opportunities. Therefore, supporting Bruneian youth towards sustainable employment and the achievement of Brunei Vision 2035 requires a holistic approach that considers the connection between skills development, values, psychological empowerment and the actual market needs.

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