

Islamic Work Ethics and Job Performance among Muslim Foreign Workers in Malaysia: Evidence from a Survey Study

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the influence of Islamic elements, including Islamic work ethics, religious belief, and Islamic leadership justice, on job performance among Muslim foreign workers in Malaysia. Drawing on Self-Determination Theory, the study employs a quantitative cross-sectional design and an online survey, using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) for analysis. Convenience sampling was used to select respondents from various nationalities. The findings indicate that Islamic work ethics, religious belief, and Islamic leadership justice are associated with job performance. It is suggested that future research include additional variables.

Keywords: Job Performance, Islamic Work Ethics, Religious Belief, Islamic Leadership Justice, Self-Determination Theory

1. INTRODUCTION

Malaysia is one of the countries that rely heavily on foreign workers in sectors such as industry, a reliance that is critical for local employees (World Bank Group, 2020). Foreign workers contribute significantly to Malaysia's economic growth, particularly in labour-intensive industries with limited local participation. Recent discussions in Malaysia indicate that foreign workers remain essential for filling "3D jobs" (dirty, dangerous, and difficult), especially in the construction, manufacturing, and agriculture sectors. As of 30 September 2024, Malaysia has approximately 2.47 million active foreign workers across key sectors, with the majority employed in manufacturing, construction, and services (Rahimy Rahim et al., 2024). The highest number of foreign workers is employed in the manufacturing sector, totaling 771,327 individuals, followed by construction (698,407), services (448,572), plantation (266,600), agriculture (183,086), foreign domestic helpers (102,037), and mining and quarrying (752) (See Figure 1).

Industrial Sector	Number of Foreign Workers
Manufacturing	771,327
Construction	698,407
Services	448,572
Plantation	266,600
Agriculture	183,086
Foreign Domestic Helpers	102,037
Mining and Quarrying	752
Total	2,470,781

Figure 1. Key Foreign Worker Statistics.
Source: Rahimy Rahim et al. (2024).

Among these workers, a substantial proportion are Muslim migrants from neighbouring countries and other Muslim-majority nations, including Indonesia, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and

Myanmar. As these workers contribute significantly to Malaysia's workforce, understanding the factors influencing their job performance has become an important concern for employers, policymakers, and researchers. Job performance is widely recognised as a critical determinant of organisational effectiveness and productivity (Saks & Gruman, 2014). Employees who demonstrate commitment, discipline, cooperation, and responsibility contribute positively to organisational goals and service quality. However, the performance of foreign workers is often affected by various social, cultural, psychological, and organisational factors, such as language barriers, working conditions, adaptation challenges, and ethical orientations. For Muslim foreign workers, religious values and ethical principles may play an important role in shaping workplace attitudes and behaviours.

Therefore, this study aims to investigate the relationship between Islamic work ethics, Islamic leadership, religious belief, and job performance among Muslim foreign workers in Malaysia using a survey-based approach. Specifically, the study seeks to examine the extent to which adherence to Islamic ethical principles influences employees' workplace performance and behaviour. By exploring this relationship, the study aims to provide empirical evidence to enhance understanding of ethical values in multicultural and migrant workforce settings, and to contribute to improved organisational practices and labour management strategies in Malaysia.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Self-Determination Theory

Self-Determination Theory (SDT), developed by Edward L. Deci and Richard M. Ryan (Deci & Ryan, 1985), posits that human motivation is driven by the satisfaction of three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2001). Autonomy is the desire for control over one's life; competence is the drive to master tasks and influence outcomes; and relatedness is the desire to connect with others and share meaningful experiences (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2001). In the organisational context, fulfilling these needs enhances intrinsic motivation and improves job performance among Muslim foreign workers in Malaysia (See Figure 2).

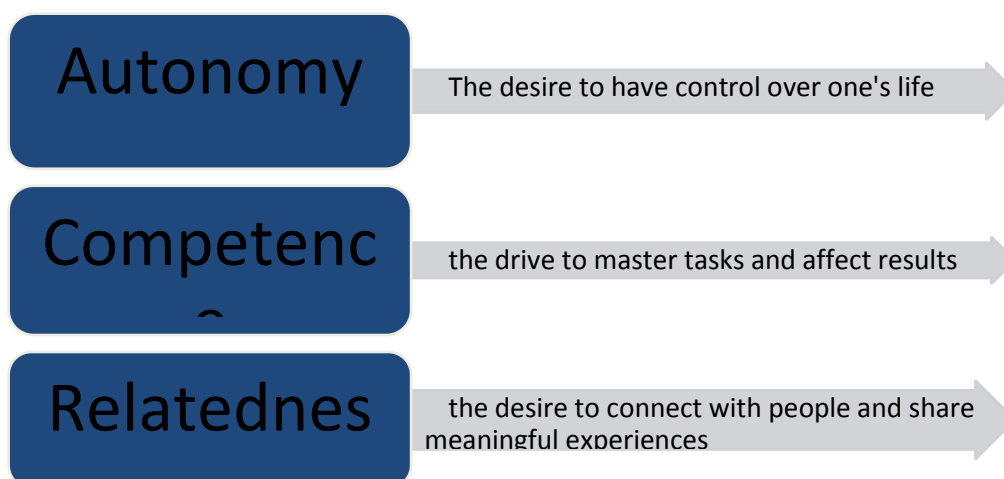


Figure 2: Self-Determination Theory.

Source: Deci & Ryan (1985, 2000); Ryan & Deci (2001)

In this study, Islamic work ethics, religious belief, and Islamic leadership justice are proposed as key antecedents that foster the satisfaction of these psychological needs among Muslim foreign workers in Malaysia. Islamic work ethics promotes internalised values and a sense of

responsibility, enhancing autonomy and competence. Religious belief provides individuals with meaning and purpose, strengthening intrinsic motivation and relatedness. Islamic leadership justice ensures fairness and respect, supporting employees' sense of relatedness and psychological safety. These factors contribute to higher levels of intrinsic motivation and psychological need satisfaction, ultimately leading to improved job performance (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2001).

2.2 Job Performance

Job performance can be defined as the effectiveness with which an individual fulfils their job responsibilities, measured through various performance criteria, which may be objective (e.g. production rates) or subjective (e.g. supervisory ratings) (Motowidlo et al., 1997). It includes the evaluation techniques and standards used to assess these responsibilities, as well as issues related to rating accuracy and the development of performance models (Borman & Motowidlo, 1997). Job performance is a central concept in organisational behaviour and human resource management, as it reflects the extent to which employees accomplish tasks and contribute to organisational goals. For Muslim foreign workers in Malaysia, job performance is increasingly important due to Malaysia's reliance on migrant labour in sectors such as manufacturing, construction, services, and plantations (Rahimy Rahim et al., 2024). Studies have highlighted that foreign workers make significant contributions to national productivity and economic sustainability, especially in labour-intensive industries.

Job performance has become an important issue among foreign workers in Malaysia due to the increasing reliance on migrant labour in sectors such as manufacturing, construction, plantations, and services (Rahimy Rahim et al., 2024). Foreign workers are often exposed to difficult working conditions, challenges in cultural adaptation, language barriers, and workplace discrimination, which may affect their productivity and organisational commitment (Maria Mohd Salleh et al., 2021). Despite these challenges, Muslim foreign workers with strong religious values and ethical orientations may demonstrate higher levels of discipline, honesty, and responsibility at work. Previous studies indicate that ethical and spiritual values significantly influence employee performance. Islamic-oriented values encourage employees to work sincerely (*ikhlas*), responsibly (*amanah*), and diligently, as work is considered an act of worship (*ibadah*). Employees who internalise these values tend to show greater organisational commitment and higher performance (Suhendra et al., 2025).

2.3 Islamic Work Ethics

Islamic work ethics originate from the Al-Quran and Hadith, addressing aspects such as individual behaviour, creativity, accountability, and collaboration in the workplace. Islamic work ethics set standards for workplace conduct, including effort, responsibility, devotion, social interactions, creativity, and collaboration (Aflah et al., 2021). This concept is based on the teachings and actions of Prophet Muhammad, who rejected unethical behaviour in both personal and professional contexts (Qasim et al., 2022). Studying the role of Islamic ethics can improve job performance. Work ethic encompasses a person's entire character at work, demonstrating that it is not limited to those in offices or high positions, but can be practised by anyone in any profession. Islamic work ethics are an important component of individual character, as they emphasise performing work to the best of one's ability as a responsibility to God (Allah SWT) (Pratama et al., 2023). Numerous scholars have examined the relationship between Islamic work ethics and workers' attitudes, commitment, satisfaction, and performance in organisational work in the literature (Aflah et al., 2021; Al-Douri et al., 2020).

A study on the association between Islamic work ethics and job performance was conducted at a Syariah bank in Indonesia (Amaliasita & Astuti, 2023). It focuses on Islamic labour ethics, which regard work as a virtue. The study also emphasises creativity as a source of happiness and life

satisfaction. Hard work is considered a virtue, and those who work hard are more likely to succeed in life, while a lack of hard work is seen as a recipe for disaster. The role of Islamic work ethics deserves special attention because it influences job satisfaction, employee commitment, and organisational effectiveness (Nasution & Rafiki, 2020). Another study in Kuwait proposed a model of how Islamic work ethics might impact employees' reactions to change, particularly their commitment to change and engagement in undesirable workplace behaviour (organisational deviance) (Al-Shamali et al., 2021). The findings reveal that Islamic work ethics influence employees' commitment to change in various ways, depending on factors such as attitudes and job performance.

From the discussion above, the hypothesis is as follows:

H₁: Islamic work ethics are related to job performance.

2.4 Religious Belief

A Muslim employee who views their work as a religious responsibility is more likely to be intrinsically motivated. Instilling Islamic workplace rectitude can foster long-term work ideals that lead to joy and fulfilment in their careers (Sulphrey, 2023). Employees should demonstrate good behaviour and attitudes as taught in Islamic teachings (Kuhn et al., 2025). The Quran emphasises the importance of good conduct among workers. Participating in religious services, pilgrimage, fasting, and prayers, as well as trusting in God and feeling connected to a higher entity, can significantly impact one's sense of meaning in life (Pastwa-Wojciechowska et al., 2021). Spirituality encompasses a connection with God and nature, as well as the pursuit of quality and purpose in life (Chirico et al., 2023). Religious belief guides employees on how to perform their jobs effectively. Each individual's sense of religiosity is different, yet all humans possess it (Sari Dewi et al., 2020).

Few studies examine the relationship between religiosity and job performance. Research conducted in 2023 by Muthuswamy & Umarani (2023) indicates that religious belief, Islamic leadership justice, Islamic work ethics, and organisational culture significantly influence employee engagement, which in turn affects the job performance of SME workers in Europe. Additionally, a study on religious belief and communication quality in Indonesia confirmed a relationship with employee performance (Zahid, 2017). However, research among workers in the Nigerian construction sector suggests that religiosity is not a determinant of job performance in this context (Ayodele & Kolawole, 2025). These findings indicate that worker effectiveness in the construction sector is more closely associated with factors such as individual competencies and professional practices than with religious identity.

The hypothesis is as follows:

H₂: Religious belief is related to job performance.

2.5 Islamic Leadership Justice

Islamic leadership justice extends beyond effective management; it requires leading with accountability to Allah, rooted in ethics, fairness, and compassion (Qasim et al., 2022). In the Islamic context, leadership involves guiding an organisation towards shared goals and establishing a framework that promotes satisfaction and prosperity for all, known as *Alfalah* (Siddique et al., 2023). Leaders act as role models for their subordinates and often oversee all aspects of operations and business (Javed et al., 2020). Leadership is essential in crisis management, particularly when addressing the complexities and challenges of global crises

such as pandemics (Chiwisa, 2024). Islamic leadership shares features with modern leadership styles, including servant, ethical, and spiritual leadership (Zaim et al., 2022). Ethical leaders build positive relationships with employees by providing care and fair treatment (Qasim et al., 2020). Employees who receive care and fair treatment are more likely to work diligently and support their colleagues.

Recent research on Islamic organisational values indicates that justice-oriented leadership contributes positively to employee performance (Ratnaningrum et al., 2024). Islamic leadership that promotes integrity, trustworthiness, and fairness may therefore enhance both task performance and organisational citizenship behaviour among Muslim foreign workers. In the Malaysian context, where many foreign workers are employed in labour-intensive sectors, Islamic leadership justice may play a significant role in ensuring ethical labour management and improving workplace harmony (Suradi et al., 2025). Leaders who practise justice according to Islamic teachings are likely to create supportive environments that encourage employees to work more productively and responsibly.

As a result of the discussion, the hypothesis is as follows:

H₃: Islamic leadership justice is related to job performance.

Based on the literature review, the relevant conceptual framework is shown in Figure 3.

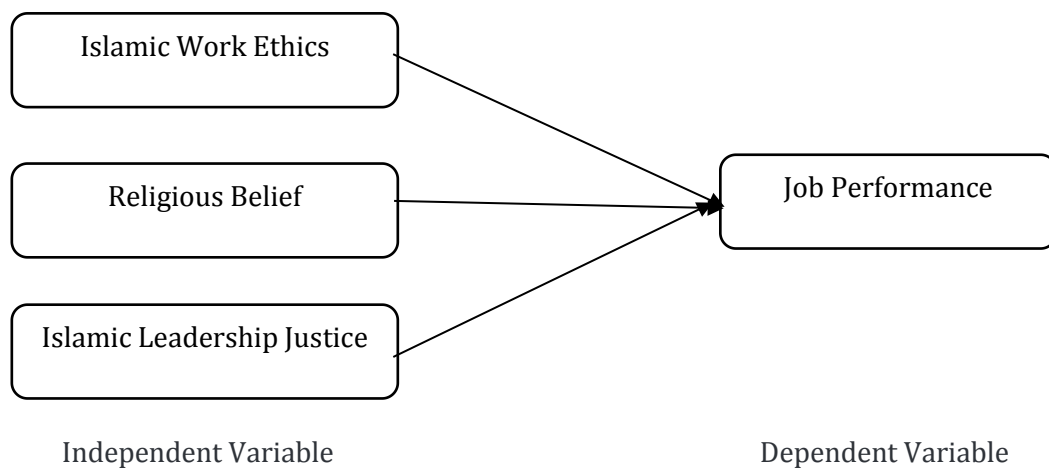


Figure 3. The Conceptual Framework.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study employs a descriptive-correlational research design to examine the relationships among Islamic work ethics, religious belief, and Islamic leadership justice and job performance among foreign workers in Malaysia. The research adopts quantitative methods with a cross-sectional time frame. The population consists of Muslim foreign workers currently employed in various sectors in Malaysia. The study used convenience sampling, selecting participants based on their willingness to participate and accessibility to the researchers. Data were collected through an online survey using Google Forms. The questionnaire link was distributed to

respondents via various online platforms, including WhatsApp, Telegram, and email. The data collected were analysed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software.

3.2 Questionnaire

The survey for this study is divided into five main sections. Section A covers the demographic background of respondents. Section B assesses job performance, the study's dependent variable. Sections C, D, and E assess the independent variables: Islamic work ethics, religious beliefs, and Islamic leadership justice. All measurements use a Likert scale from 1 to 5, where 1 indicates strongly disagree and 5 indicates strongly agree.

4. FINDINGS

4.1 Descriptive Analysis

Table 1 presents the demographic background of the respondents. A total of 171 responses were collected. Of these, 49.7% were male and 50.3% were female. The largest age group was 20 to 29 years (33.3%). Most respondents were married (63.7%). Many were from Pakistan (49.7%). The majority had worked in Malaysia for 1 to 5 years (32.2%).

Table 1 Descriptive Analysis of the Demographic Profile

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	85	49.7
	Female	86	50.3
Age	19 years old and below	6	3.5
	20 – 29 years old	57	33.3
	30 – 39 years old	54	31.6
	40 – 49 years old	51	29.8
	50 – 59 years old	3	1.8
Marital Status	Single	60	35.1
	Married	109	63.7
	Widow/Widower	2	1.2
Nationality	China	1	0.6
	Bangladesh	80	46.8
	Mali	1	0.6
	Pakistan	85	49.7
	Thailand	1	0.6
Years of Working in Malaysia	Yemen	3	1.8
	Less than 1 year	5	2.9
	1-5 years	55	32.2
	6-10 years	48	28.1
	11-15 years	49	28.7
	16-20 years	7	4.1
	20 years and above	7	4.1

Table 2 presents the descriptive analysis for the study's primary variables: Islamic work ethics, religious belief, Islamic leadership justice, and job performance. The mean scores for all variables are relatively high, ranging from 3.80 to 3.93, indicating that respondents held favourable attitudes towards each construct. Religious belief had the highest mean of 3.93 with a standard deviation of 0.83, reflecting strong religious commitment among individuals. The lowest mean was for Islamic leadership justice (mean = 3.80, standard deviation = 0.89), which still indicated generally positive attitudes but with a slightly wider range of responses. All variables had scores ranging from 1 to 5, with no out-of-range or extreme values.

Table 2 Descriptive Analysis of the Study Variables

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Islamic Work Ethics	3.89	0.82	1.80	5.00
Religious Belief	3.93	0.83	1.75	5.00
Islamic Leadership Justice	3.80	0.89	1.40	5.00
Job Performance	3.89	0.81	1.50	5.00

4.2 Inferential Analysis

Table 3 presents the Pearson correlation coefficients for the independent variables (Islamic work ethics, religious belief, and Islamic leadership justice) and the dependent variable (job performance). All relationships are highly significant ($p < .001$). This indicates that higher levels of Islamic work ethics, religious belief, and leadership justice are each associated with higher levels of job performance. The strongest association is between Islamic work ethics and job performance ($r = .811$), followed by religious belief ($r = .810$), and Islamic leadership justice ($r = .772$).

Table 3 Correlation

Variable	r	p-value (2-tailed)	Significance
Islamic Work Ethics	0.811	.000	Significant ($p < .001$)
Religious Belief	0.810	.000	Significant ($p < .001$)
Islamic Leadership Justice	0.772	.000	Significant ($p < .001$)

Table 4 presents the results of the regression analysis. The standardised beta coefficient (β) shows how each independent variable predicts job success. Religious belief was the strongest predictor ($\beta = 0.405$, $p < .001$), showing that individuals with strong religious values perform better in their employment responsibilities. Islamic work ethics ($\beta = 0.299$, $p < .001$) also had a substantial positive effect on job performance. Islamic leadership justice also had a positive effect on job performance ($\beta = 0.225$, $p = .002$), suggesting that perceptions of fairness and justice in leadership are crucial for improving employee performance.

Table 4 Regression Analysis

Predictor Variables	β	Beta	t	Sig. (p-value)	Significance
(Constant)	0.396	-	2.436	.016	Significant
Islamic Work Ethics	0.296	0.299	3.632	.000	Significant
Religious Belief	0.400	0.405	6.083	.000	Significant
Islamic Leadership Justice	0.205	0.225	3.096	.002	Significant

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

5.1 Conclusion

The first hypothesis (H₁) demonstrates a significant relationship between Islamic work ethics and job performance ($r = .811$, $p < .001$). This suggests that individuals who closely follow Islamic work norms are more likely to excel in their careers. It indicates that Islamic work ethics have a substantial impact on the job performance of Muslim foreign workers. Based on these findings, organisations should promote Islamic ethical principles in the workplace to improve employee engagement, discipline, and overall performance. The positive correlation may result from Islamic work principles encouraging accountability, trustworthiness, honesty, and the pursuit of excellence, all of which are directly linked to high job performance. Foreign Muslim workers in Malaysia may be motivated to demonstrate these qualities to maintain a good reputation, retain their jobs, and gain spiritual rewards, especially in a country where Islam plays an important cultural role.

The second hypothesis (H₂) revealed a substantial and significant correlation between religious belief and job performance ($r = .810$, $p < .001$). This finding may also be interpreted in terms of God-consciousness, where fear of God and the promise of divine recompense motivate individuals to perform their jobs well, avoid unethical behaviour, and strive to meet expectations. Religious beliefs also provide emotional resilience and coping skills when dealing with work-related stress or cultural adjustment, which can indirectly improve performance. The third hypothesis (H₃) revealed a substantial and strong positive relationship between Islamic leadership justice and job performance ($r = .772$, $p < .001$). This indicates that when employees perceive their employer as fair, just, and committed to Islamic concepts of justice, they are more likely to perform well in their roles. It is therefore recommended that leadership development programmes include elements that promote transparency, fairness, and ethical leadership based on Islamic principles.

5.2 Recommendation

Based on the findings of the current study, several suggestions for future research are proposed. First, it is recommended that longitudinal studies be conducted. Extending the study period would allow for a longitudinal research design, enabling researchers to examine changes in job performance over time and gain a deeper understanding of the evolving influence of Islamic ethics and leadership practices. Second, the target demographic should be broadened to include a more diverse group of individuals. Future studies could include Malaysian Muslim workers or compare them with foreign Muslim workers. Finally, it is suggested to identify other characteristics or variables that may affect foreign Muslim employees, such as organisational culture, well-being, and personality traits. Including these factors would provide a more comprehensive framework for measuring job performance among Muslim foreign workers.

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