

THE BARRIERS OF SMEs MALAY EMPLOYERS ON HALAL CERTIFICATION APPLICATION AT KEDAH DARUL AMAN

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Abstract: *Based on corporate status and industry, statistics from 2010 to 2022 on requests for halal certification in Kedah reveal a low amount of requests. In comparison to the real number of Malay small and medium industry enterprises in Kedah, only 219 Malay employers have applied. 408 of the 629 applications come from non-Bumiputras, and the remaining 529 are from Malay company owners. A comparatively modest number of firms with Malay ownership have applied for halal certification. This essay seeks to comprehend the steps and processes involved in applying for halal certification, the significance of a halal certificate for the sector, and the obstacles Malay employers in the SMEs industry have when seeking for a halal certificate. Thus, it is crucial to recognise the significance of halal certification for this industry and examine the obstacles that Malay employers face when applying for halal certificates in the Bumiputera sector. With the use of the qualitative research approach, this study highlights the depth of the data. Interviews were conducted with ten Kedah-based industrial company managers. The respondents in this study were chosen through the use of purposeful sampling. In-depth interviews gave researchers the chance to gather detailed information about the thoughts and actions of these businessmen, particularly with regard to halal certification. Five obstacles are getting in the way of them obtaining Malaysian Halal Certification, according to the interviewees. The difficulties were listed as being time limits, lack of guidance and directions, cost, ignorance of the halal standard, stringent procedures, and severe procedures. Because such initiatives are in line with JAKIM's objective to ensure enforcement and compliance with standards halal in this country, JAKIM should implement effective information and awareness campaigns, especially for Malay entrepreneurs.*

Keywords: *Halal, Halal Certification, SMEs, Industry*

Introduction

Halal meals and products are becoming more and more well-known as a substitute standard for assuring the quality, safety, and hygienic standards of the food and beverages we frequently eat. As a result, halal products are generally accepted by both Muslim and non-Muslim consumers (Azam & Afshan, 2016). Halal meals and beverages are a symbol of cleanliness, quality, and safety for a non-Muslim customer even if they are a sign that the products have satisfied with the criteria of Shariah law for Muslim consumers (Raufu & Naqiyuddin, 2012). Yusaini et al. (2016) contend that it is likely that Halal encourages a healthy lifestyle, especially in light of the *tayyib*, which convey the idea of cleanliness and food safety. As a result, the rise of the Halal industry in Malaysia is beneficial for the nation's economy. Halal must be successfully implemented by rules, regulations, administration, guidelines, and law, especially for Muslim society.

Due to the long-term stability of the business, applying for halal certification is not an issue for industry participants from big corporations. Due to the robust financial components and the potential to further develop Malaysia's halal sector, assistance from the government and the authorities involved in these industry players is also highly encouraging. Yet, the majority of industry players, particularly small and medium-sized firms, are still inactive in the halal business sector due to a number of factors that pose significant barriers to certification. (Abdul et al, 2013).

The total number of halal applications from small and medium-sized businesses totals 627, according to statistics from 2010 to 2022 on the confirmation of Malaysian halal certification applications by year based on company status and type of industry in Kedah (MyeHALAL,2022). Just 219 of these applications—408 of which came from non-Bumiputera business owners—were submitted by Bumiputera entrepreneurs. Businesses that aren't Bumiputera have embraced and used the halal concept because they view it as a valuable commercial opportunity. The proportion of non-Bumiputera applications is currently rising. Yet, it appears that the number of applications from Bumiputera businesses is comparatively low and steady. That demonstrates the motivations and limitations Malay employers have for accepting halal norms (MyE-Halal, 2022).

Determining the stages and procedures for applying for halal certification, understanding the significance of a halal certificate for the industry, and identifying the obstacles Malay employers of SMEs industry have when applying for a halal certificate are the goals of this paper.

Literature Review

Halal from an Islamic perspective

The term "halal" refers to a wide range of foods, goods, and services. Understanding the concept of halal is a command from Allah SWT and a crucial aspect of Islam. There is evidence that suggests a Muslim must eat halal based on the Quranic phrase Surah Al-Maida (Chapter 5, Verse 88):

Meaning: "And eat of what Allah has provided for you which is lawful and good. And fear Allah, in whom you are believers."

Throughout the aforementioned Quranic and Hadith writings, the consumption of halal is emphasised, demonstrating that halal concepts must be used in or consumed in daily life for the benefit of consumers. It is crucial to comprehend what halal refers to Al-Qardhawi (2010) defined Halal as whatever required to be free of the association or tie of haram and the principles of Shariah. Halal is described in Malaysian Standard Guidelines 1500 as behaviours that are acceptable by Shariah law (2019). Halal is something connected to human beings in acts and behaviour by engaging in a permissible action that does not contravene Shariah law and can net them several benefits, according to both definitions.

Halal is necessary from the initial process (raw materials) to the last process (consumer), as specified in the halal guideline, claims Halal Development Corporation (2010). For instance, a halal critical point must be examined before receiving ingredients or raw materials to ensure the quality and integrity of a halal food product. Halal activities are difficult to control since they must be observed without compromising their status throughout the entire process, from raw materials to customer consumption.

Halal Industry and SME

Deuraseh, Wahab, and Sulaima (2021) claim that the establishment of the halal manufacturing sector accelerated the nation's economic development in the area. The government's initiative to offer halal certification to businesses who want it has resulted in this economic boom. As a result of halal standards' developments, they have now been accepted at the regional level and are helping to expand their nation's halal industry by serving as a global industry reference. Furthermore, according to Abdul, Hashim, Johari, and Ismail (2009), the Halal business has experienced rapid growth and development over the years, spurred on by an increase in consumer and product maker awareness of Halal products. Given the emphasis placed on food marketing globally, companies in the food industry must be aware of the needs of Muslim consumers if they hope to tap into the 24 percent Muslim population of the world.

In Malaysia, the growth of the halal market has created attractive prospects for SMEs to engage in this desirable area. One of the main drivers of Malaysia's economic expansion has been the emergence of SMEs, which have since developed into a platform for the development of the halal industry. Azmi (2017) noted in his earlier research that SMEs must develop their managerial and entrepreneurial skills if they are to contribute to the stability and growth of the economy. SME's will grow their Halal businesses in the Halal environment, especially in Malaysia.

Clearing up any questions about the ingredients utilised right now is essential. A verification method is necessary due to the influx of items with unidentified sources, including those derived from chemicals, plants, animals, etc. For instance, do the animal ingredients utilised adhere to the Shariah's rules for slaughter or the opposite? Gelatin, fat, enzymes, glycerin, and other components are also sources of ingredients that are vulnerable to aspects of doubt. There is no doubt that the demand for halal certification is considerable due to the industry's widespread usage of products derived from animal sources such as gelatin, glycerin, collagen, lecithin, animal fat, pancreatin, pepsin, plasma proteins, emulsifiers, rennin, and others (Suhaimi & Yaacob, 2011). When customers start to have doubts about a product made by a company, there will be controversy surrounding the halal certification of that product. Users quickly become popular on social media, and soon the company they worked for becomes the object of boycott campaigns. The supplier company in some instances, according to the findings of JAIPk, lacks a halal certificate, and the meat it supplies is not labelled in accordance with the regulations

established to make sure that the types of meat sold can be distinguished (Tanzizi, N. H. 2017, January 31. Berita Harian). Because of this, the Malaysian product market may not be able to expand further and wider even outside, our country may not succeed in becoming a halal hub centre, and it may not be cited as an example by other countries.

A strict Halal Assurance System known as Halal certification was created to protect Muslim customers. The halal certification looks at every stage of production, not only the raw materials or components of the product. The "Toyyiban," or applied wholesomeness notion, is famed for this. This is acknowledged as the Halal certification strength, where sanitation and safety are also vital components of this certification. These key attributes are found to be key selling points to all client segments, not only Muslims (Aziz & Vui, 2013). 2013 (Aziz & Vui). Therefore, using a Halal logo as a sole marketing tactic to draw clients is unworkable. A emblem or logo for Halal Malaysia was consequently created for that reason. Almost all Halal product packaging in Malaysia now bears this symbol, and it is also prominently displayed in a number of restaurants. The JAKIM-certified Halal emblem serves as a further indication that the goods or businesses bear this label and adhere to Shariah law.

The literature constantly debates whether the Halal designation can draw in and affect consumer decisions (Golnaz et al., 2012). Together, these studies demonstrate that customers, particularly Muslims, are concerned about the Halal issue and that the Halal insignia has become a crucial marketing tool for Halal products. The public still views the Halal Malaysia logo, which stands for JAKIM's Halal certification, as illustrated in Figure 1.

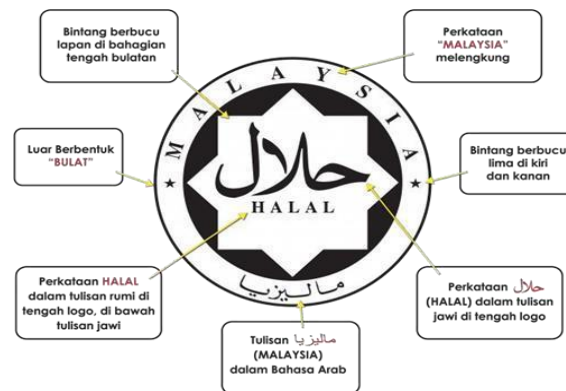



Figure 1: Malaysian Halal Logo

Research Methodology

Data for this research was acquired through interviews using a qualitative methodology. For this objective, interviews with Malay employers in the SME sector were conducted.

The use of qualitative method techniques has a number of benefits. To begin with, a qualitative method is one in which the ideas, thoughts, feelings, and experiences of participants based on the difficulties they face on a daily basis are detailed in great depth. As a result of being able to gain a greater understanding of how others perceive things, the method's output offers precise and in-depth information. Because face-to-face interviewing techniques are used for data collection, researchers and participants can gather data that is both subjective and in-depth (Rahman, 2017). Table 1 shows the overview of the research design.

Table 1: Overview of Research Design



	LITERATURE REVIEW	QUALITATIVE METHOD
Collection Data	Document Analysis	Indepth-Interview
Objective	Objective 1	Objective 2
Implementation	Formulating previousresearch	Explored the barrier of Malay employers from the SMEs industry in halal certificate application using a semi-structured interview
Analysis Method	Content analysis	Thematic analysis

The interviewer, the respondents, and a set of interview questions that have been approved by the experts and adhere to research ethics are all used in this study to get the data needed for the research. Three sections made up the protocol interview: The questions in Section A concern the names, ages, occupations, names of the firms, and positions held by the informants inside those firms. The informants' perspectives on numerous subjects are elicited in Part B. Part B's questions focus on the benefits of halal certification for businesses and how to apply for one using MPPHM 2020. Questions about the limitations Malay SME employers have while requesting halal certificates are found in Section C.

Based on the comments from industry experts who served as respondents, this in-depth interview helped uncover and analyse this research. The locations of the interviews are shown in Table 2 and include offices, dining establishments, cafes, and factories in Kedah.

Table 2: List of Informant

No	Name	Position Informants
1)	A	Assistant Manager (OEM)
2)	B	Owner and Manager Restaurant
3)	C	Halal Executive (Slaughterhouse)
4)	D	Manager (Premise Food)
5)	E	Internship (Food and Beverage Product)
6)	F	Manager (Premise Food and FoodProduct)
7)	G	Owner and Manager Restaurant (PremiseFood)
8)	I	QC Inspector (Food Product)
9)	J	Halal Executive (Kitchen Hotel)
10)	K	Halal Executive (Slaughterhouse)

The duration of the interview varied from 15 to 30 minutes, depending on the respondents' availability. Interviews were digitally recorded in order to effectively utilise time and assist the researcher concentrate on the conversation between business people.

Secondary data is also the use of pre-exist data by a researcher or investigator that can be applied internationally. the data acquired for their benefit and objectives. Because the secondary data are already available from earlier studies, they can reduce the time needed for data gathering. It makes use of secondary information gathered from both public and private sources. Data from research universities, colleges, and academics were acquired through publications linked to the published conclusions of this study. A document like MPPHM 2020 should be used in addition to books, journals, articles, conference proceedings papers, and electronic (online) sources.

Findings

Based on the qualitative approach and the secondary data applied, the following findings are deliberated to achieve the objectives outlined.

Figure 2 shows the halal certification procedure that involves six stages of processing. This serves to meet objective one of this research. Firstly, application, payment of certification fee, audit, validation panel meeting, a halal certificate issued, and lastly halal monitoring or enforcement.

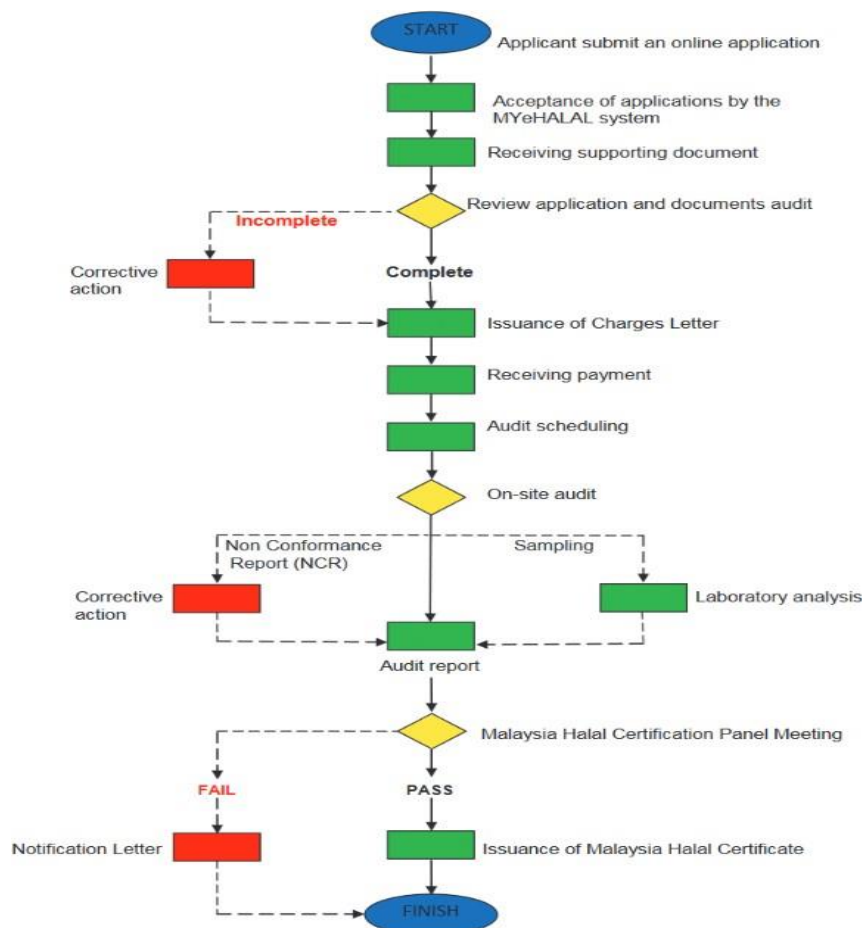


Figure 2: Malaysian Halal Certificate Procedure

In governing halal management in Malaysia, legislation has been created through the Trade Description (Food Marking) Act 1972 (APD 1972). (APD 1972). At the level of government administration, this Act has been revised to designate JAKIM, State Islamic Religious Department (Jain), and State Islamic Religious Council (MAIN) as Malaysia's sole halal

certification organization. Therefore, the JAKIM/JAIN/MAIN halal rules and standards apply to the halal certification process. The Malaysia Halal Certification Procedure Manual (MPPHM 2020) is the most recent general guideline for explaining the conditions and specifications of certification to business owners and the general public.

The Malaysian halal certification procedure document covers the preparation, processing, storage, packaging, handling, and transportation of Muslims' food, drink, and consumer goods in addition to acting as a guide for authorities determining if a product is halal. Any company owner, domestic or foreign, who wishes to submit an application for a halal certificate must abide by the essential standards set forth by JAKIM/JAIN/MAIN.

The main objective of this study was to identify the types of barriers face by Malay business owners in SME sector encounter while trying to achieve halal certification. Respondents' answers were transcribed, and response patterns were collected. Of all the answers, most of the respondents either admit to needing or not needing halal certification, on the average state that certain obstacles cause difficulty in obtaining halal certification. That's what it means most respondents face several obstacles in obtaining halal certification regardless of whether they intend to apply for halal certification or have already obtained a halal certificate. The responses can be collected as external factor and internal factors. According to the results of the interviews, there are five (5) challenges that Malay businessowners face while trying to certify their products as halal. The five (5) barriers are we can classify according to the external factor and internal factors as follows: Internal Factors are (1) cost, (2) Ignorance of Halal Standards, (3) time constraint, and for the external factoris (1) lack of help and guidance and (2) strict procedures.

Costs

The cost needed to assure the complete execution is one of the obstacles facedby food industry operators in Malaysia who are interested in implementing the Halalconcept and applying for certification. One of the factors contributing to the decrease in the number of businesses requesting Halal certification is the rise in manufacturing and running costs. The cost to establish a Halal Certified firm is believed to increase by up to 10% compared to the typical normal manufacturing cost. Particularly for those entering particular enterprises for the first time, the additional cost burden is great. The cost of compliance must be considered when determining how much should be paid for the certification process andconsulting work. The responses are reflected in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Barriers to Halal Certificate Application (Cost)

No	Barrier (Cost)	Respondent
1.	<i>"Finding a halal executive was challenging. In addition, starting early in a small company may have a small salary."</i>	C
2.	<i>"We lack staff so to find staff we need to offer a higher salary with the current situation. It's like a salary ofRM1200, people demand whether like it or not."</i>	D
3.	<i>"The first is financial. As we know this business sometimes has okay days and not okay days, and we also had the restrictions of the PKP last two years."</i>	F

Three (3) responders, as seen in Table 3 above, have capital, or cost, constraints. Every task we perform for something requires payment, as is common knowledge, and filing for a halal certificate is no different. this is due to the fact that we need workers in order to apply for a

halal certificate, so we must pay a fair wage in order to attract people. Recently, Malaysia set a minimum wage of RM1500, which makes it challenging for the company to acquire employees because, according to respondent D, a wage of RM1200 is already considered low for individuals residing outside of Malaysia. Due to this and the fact that the company initially operated in a small industry, as responded to by respondent C, it is difficult for the sector to find employees. Conversely, respondent F stated that he faces financial difficulties due to the fact that, as is typical in business, sometimes sales are strong and other times they are not, especially in the wake of the MCO that hit us two years ago. Lack of funds is one of the main reasons why it is difficult for small business owners to meet the requirements of halal certification standards because many Malay entrepreneurs must self-finance and it is challenging for them to get bank funding (Man & Harun, 2016; Yusuf et al., 2016; Kazimoto, 2014; Hassan & Hamdan, 2013).

Time Constraint

Last but not least, the barrier for Malay employers or entrepreneurs in the SME industry is the halal certificate application. Time constraints can come from many aspects. Table 4 below shows the responses.

Table 4: Barriers in Halal Certificate Application (Time Constraint)

No	Barrier (Time Constraint)	Respondent
1.	<i>“The second constraint is from the authorities; when we sent the documents to the authorities, we have not been able to be sure of the exact time frame for getting this halal certificate. We will usually probably be able in 3,6 to 1 year to get a halal certificate for our company.”</i>	A
2.	<i>“For me, it may be time constraints. If it's from a financial point of view, there might not be a problem because it's such an important thing. Just fine. It's just a time constraint because I'm the one who manages. I'm the one who cooks. It's all I do, and no one can expect to help me do it.</i>	D
3.	<i>“So, for the three of us to apply for halal took quite a long time.”</i>	E

The department's difficulty is the little time available. Regarding the time frame for the halal party to provide the halal certificate, respondent A cited table 4 and claimed that they lacked the necessary temporal certainty. This is so that respondent A, who runs the OEM sector, can inform clients with precise time estimates. Additionally, respondents D and E stated that they had a lack of staff to manage halal matters, while respondent H stated that they had a lack of time because when they wanted to reapply for a halal certificate, all of the previous data and information were not saved. As a result, it took time to obtain data, a halal certificate, and a description of the product from the supplier, among other things. Respondent, I also mentioned that they were pressed for time because they had to wait for the supplier's certificate application, and at the same time that they were waiting, other items had expired as a result of the lengthy delay in receiving the supplier's halal certificate in applying for the halal certificate. Finally, respondent J stated that his organisation is time-constrained because every new employee must complete a slaughter course and receive certification, thus they must schedule time to send their staff to training sessions and courses while maintaining normal production. This restriction will lessen the effectiveness of halal implementation in this state and therefore, to some extent, affect how Malay enterprises and employers apply for halal certificates.

Ignorance of Halal Standard

Malaysia has one of the most trustworthy and organised halal certification processes. It includes a detailed list of requirements that a company must meet to get its products certified as halal. This condition was not understood by all candidates, as seen by their responses in Table 5 below.

Table 5: Barrier in Halal Certificate Application (Ignorance of Halal Standard)

No	Barrier (Ignorance of Halal Standard)	Respondent
1.	<i>"Another, I only register online after I don't know how to do—many documents."</i>	B
2.	<i>"At the same time, the boss also tried to apply and was indeed rejected because there were many missing documents, not complete, and the background for halal management is lacking because the experience of this chicken is zero. This is because, this company wants to build a slaughterhouse, but doesn't know how to apply for the halal certificate."</i>	C

Some of the respondents claimed that they were not aware of what was required to become certified as halal. The responses in Table 5 above demonstrate the misunderstandings brought on by the entrepreneurs' assumptions. One (1) respondent, respondent B, acknowledged that using the online application form was necessary but said they were unaware of the procedures to follow. It's possible that they never sought advice from any pertinent regulatory bodies, which could be the cause of this. Another factor contributing to the difficulty of halal applications is the lack of consultation offered to entrepreneurs to assist them in applying for the certification, comprehending the significance of the Malaysian Halal Certification, and understanding the processes and requirements for halal certification (Soraji, Awang & Mohd Yusoff, 2017; Ahmad, Fazullah, Borham, Hashim, & Abd. Razak, 2011; Bernama, 2018)

Lack of Help and Guidance

Business owners must receive guidance and support in order to understand the halal certification procedure. If this is not done, it increases the difficulties that eventually demotivate Malay business owners from seeking halal certification. The findings demonstrated that a lack of assistance and guidance was one of the challenges Malay businesses faced while requesting halal certificates.

Table 6: Barrier in Halal Certificate Application (Lack of Help and Guidance)

No	Barrier (Lack of help and guidance)	Respondent
1.	<i>"People sometimes say it's difficult because we need to register everything we need to do. So, to avoid that, when he wants to meet with the consultant who wants to know, the consultant needs to tell him everything about the ingredients, for example, putting sugar for many brands even if it is not used."</i>	G
2.	<i>"So, for the three of us to apply for halal took quite a long time, and the documentation process, because we are still new to using halal, so it takes time to collect data."</i>	E

One of the reasons why business owners are ignorant that their products are halal is a lack of information and advisory services from pertinent organisations (Muhammad et al., 2019;

Bernama, 2018). As shown in Table 6, the respondents made a point of noting this. They need support and guidance before submitting because the requirements for halal certification are so complicated. The respondents argued that they require a consultant to walk them through each step of the process so they don't run into any difficulties before another difficulty—time constraints—becomes apparent.

Strict Protocol/Procedures

Also, one of the factors that prevent Malay business owners or employers from obtaining for a halal certificate is the rigid procedures. As seen in their comments in table 7 below, applicants are less interested in applying because of the numerous procedures or stages they must do in order to obtain a halal certificate.

Table 7: Barrier in Halal Certificate Application (Strict Procedure)

No	Barrier (Strict Procedure)	Respondent
1.	<i>“My business in Langkawi, my limitation is that raw materials such as chicken are always cut off. For a moment, another supplier came in, and another supplier came in. The company we applied to came in a lot, and we exchanged because we are in the island area, so it became one of our constraints regarding raw materials. When we get a new supplier, we want to update our new halal certificate.”</i>	F
2.	<i>“For me, the procedure itself is a bit complicated; the ingredients used must have a halal certificate before the whole thing has the halal certification. So, suppose the component needs to have a halal certificate. In that case, we have to wait for the supplier to have a halal certificate first because some of the products that are used are not all have halal certification,”</i>	I

The general halal requirements and specifications mentioned in the JAKIM halal standards and manuals must be followed by all candidates. Some of the respondents in Table 7 above acknowledged the value of halal but were still unable to submit an application for a halal certificate due to the stringent standards. F and G, two respondents, believe that this process is extremely difficult because every tool a corporation uses needs to be updated on a regular basis. This becomes a problem since the supply might be interrupted and the source may change, making it difficult to keep the system updated. I explained that the respondent's company had to wait for its supplier to obtain a halal certificate before their application process would be allowed to the following level, making this method highly stringent. As a result, this is one of the respondents' complaints over the stringent regulations that limit the business. They learned that the application process for halal certification was too challenging.

JAKIM/JAIS is required to boost the efficiency of its Halal Auditors by providing them with clear instructions or checklists to refer to when they are reviewing application materials. Executives in the halal sector contended that JAKIM only provided a cursory explanation of how the Halal Assurance System was put into place. An illustration of the lack of direction is the lack of a sufficient checklist to confirm the important history of raw materials. This problem affects both Halal Executives and Halal Auditors because there are no clear rules about what ingredients are acceptable in the ingredients list. Halal Executives and Auditors will be in the dark about what is allowed as a result. Halal Auditors will find it very beneficial if JAKIM can

provide a list of approved materials, methods, and processes because clear guidelines and instructions from management can increase employees' productivity. Most of the respondents who were Halal Executives cited this issue. Among the grievances:

“So, to avoid that, when he wants to meet with the consultant who wants to know, the consultant needs to tell him everything about the ingredients, for example, putting sugar for many brands even if it is not used.”
(Respondent G)

Conclusion

This study may assist Malay employers or business owners in gaining halal certification through the development of reasonable and well-informed solutions. Also, this can be used as a guide for professionals and decision-makers to adopt halal certification in the Malaysian sector, allowing halal goods to enter and compete on the international market. It is hoped that by drawing attention to these difficulties, additional study would be done to address the problems brought up in this article and offer Malaysian business owners useful guidance on how to submit an application for halal certification. This study's findings on barriers are accompanied with recommendations for how to remove them. This is due to the fact that the researcher also conducted interviews with the respondents and sought their advice on how to solve this issue. One of them is to offer assistance, encouragement, and support in order to clarify the process so as to improve the proportion of Malay entrepreneurs in Kedah who apply for halal certificates.

JAKIM/JAIS is required to boost the efficiency of its Halal Auditors by providing them with clear instructions or checklists to refer to when they are reviewing application materials. Executives in the halal sector contended that JAKIM only provided a cursory explanation of how the Halal Assurance System was put into place. An illustration of the lack of direction is the lack of a sufficient checklist to confirm the important history of raw materials. This problem affects both Halal Executives and Halal Auditors because there are no clear rules about what ingredients are acceptable in the ingredients list. Halal Executives and Auditors will be in the dark about what is allowed as a result. Halal Auditors will find it very beneficial if JAKIM can provide a list of approved materials, methods, and processes because clear guidelines and instructions from management can increase employees' productivity. One last suggestion is for future researchers who wish to study a related subject to switch to the quantitative approach in order to determine whether the data ultimately leads to the same demands and solutions. As these initiatives are in line with JAKIM's objective to ensure enforcement and compliance with standards halal in this country, it is also advised that JAKIM build effective education and awareness campaigns, particularly for Malay business owners.

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