

# Challenges in the Employability of Halal Studies Graduates in Malaysia

Muhammad Irhamudin Ibrahim<sup>1\*</sup>, Mohamad Aizat Jamaludin<sup>2</sup>, Betania Kartika<sup>3</sup>, Yumi Zuhani Has-Yun Hashim<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1 2 3 4</sup> International Institute for Halal Research and Training (INHART), International Islamic University of Malaysia (IIUM), Malaysia.

\*:irham.ibrahim@hfce.eu

## ABSTRACT

The expansion of the halal business in Malaysia has resulted in a rising need for individuals who possess specialised qualifications in halal studies. Nevertheless, despite the growing market, these graduates encounter substantial obstacles in terms of their employability. This study examines the elements that influence the employability of halal studies graduates in Malaysia. It focuses on the important concerns connected to the relevance of the curriculum, recognition from the industry, inadequacies in infrastructure, and the competence of instructors. The study utilises a qualitative research methodology, incorporating data from both primary and secondary sources, to offer a thorough examination of the halal education ecosystem. The results suggest that the absence of a uniform curriculum, inadequate infrastructure, and limited involvement of the sector impede the successful training of graduates for the halal employment market. Moreover, the discrepancy between academic education and the requirement of halal industry sector worsens the difficulties in finding employment. The paper suggests fostering stronger collaboration between educational institutions and industry stakeholders, implementing curriculum reforms, and establishing accreditation standards as measures to enhance the employability of halal studies graduates and promote the sustainable expansion of the halal industry in Malaysia.

**Keywords:** *Halal studies graduates, Employability, Curriculum relevance, Industry recognition, Halal industry ecosystem.*

## 1. Introduction

Academic qualifications are crucial for securing employment and facilitating financial progress, particularly for the younger generation from the middle class and below. Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are vital for developing and maintaining the employability qualities of graduates in specialized fields like halal studies. Higher Learning Institutions have transitioned from knowledge acquisition centres to hubs for progress and economic advancement through technical innovation, talent cultivation, and skilled workforce training (Dearden et al., 2002). The transformation process in HEIs, guided by institutional theory, focuses on enhancing the competency levels of halal studies graduates through elements such as structure, norms, development, and student achievement. These elements align with feedback from informants, emphasizing the importance of halal education students, educational institutions in the halal industry, infrastructure, industry lecturers, additional skills gained through education, employment acquisition, and feedback mechanisms (Dearden et al., 2002).

Research indicates that academic qualifications yield higher returns than vocational qualifications, with gender differences existing. Effective strategies identified in the literature include embedding employability into institutional initiatives, reinforcing employability through curricula and extracurricular activities, and promoting students' personal development and critical thinking (Dearden et al., 2002; Abelha et al., 2020;

Dickson & Smith, 2011). Higher Education (HE) qualifications in the UK are highly valued for ensuring individual economic success.

Employers often prefer professional accounting qualifications over academic ones, emphasizing the importance of practical competencies and communication skills for a successful transition to the labour market (Naseem, 2019; Perera et al., 2021; Monteiro et al., 2016). Higher Learning Institutions play a crucial role in preparing students for effective practice in their chosen occupations upon graduation, meeting the expectations of various stakeholders (Billett, 2015).

Ultimately, academic credentials obtained from HEIs have a crucial role in determining graduates' job prospects and achievements, especially in specialised areas such as halal studies. The halal business is undergoing substantial expansion, and there is a rising need for graduates who not only have theoretical knowledge but also possess practical skills that align with the industry's requirements. Thus, the hypothesis suggests that fostering greater collaboration between educational institutions and industry stakeholders, implementing curriculum reforms, and establishing accreditation standards, can improve graduates' employability in halal studies and facilitate the sustainable growth of the halal industry in Malaysia.

The goal of promoting enhanced collaboration between educational institutions and industrial stakeholders is to establish a mutually beneficial and harmonious partnership. By involving experts from the halal industry in the process of designing and implementing the halal studies curriculum, educational institutions may guarantee that the skills and abilities being taught are directly applicable to the present requirements of the halal market. This relationship can also provide internships and practical training possibilities for halal studies students, augmenting their employability upon graduation. The establishment of a framework for evaluating halal studies programs is crucial in order to synchronise educational achievements with industry requirements, guaranteeing that graduates are adequately equipped to fulfil the demands of the halal ecosystem (Ibrahim, 2022).

One important goal is to implement curricular revisions to improve the relevance and quality of halal studies programs. As the halal industry progresses, the educational systems that underpin it must also advance. The curriculum revisions should prioritise the incorporation of practical skills, industry expertise, and environmental concepts within the halal studies curriculum. This approach aligns with the conclusions of Chang and Lien (2020), who stress the significance of integrating sustainability into university courses to establish a more adaptable educational setting. By adopting this approach, HEIs may cultivate graduates who possess not only a deep understanding of halal practices but also the necessary skills and expertise to actively contribute to the long-term growth and sustainability of the sector.

Developing accreditation criteria is crucial to guarantee the excellence and uniformity of halal studies programs across various institutions. Accreditation acts as a standard for measuring education quality, giving students, employers, and industry stakeholders confidence that graduates have the requisite skills and knowledge. According to Raffi (2022), the factors influencing employment and employability in the halal sector are strongly connected to the calibre of education graduates obtain. HEIs can strengthen their programs'

credibility and boost their graduates' employability by implementing strong accrediting requirements.

Overall, the hypothesis that increasing collaboration between educational institutions and industry stakeholders, implementing curriculum reforms, and establishing accreditation standards will improve the job prospects of halal studies graduates is backed by the increasing need for qualified professionals in the halal industry. By synchronising educational methodologies with the demands of the industry and guaranteeing the excellence of educational initiatives, Malaysia has the potential to establish itself as a frontrunner in the halal market. This will contribute to the promotion of sustainable expansion and advancement in this crucial sector. The evolving role of HEIs in fostering talent, innovation, and economic growth underscores the significance of academic qualifications in today's competitive job market (Dearden et al., 2002).

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Halal Studies**

Halal education is a growing field of study driven by the global expansion of the halal industry. Hasan Ahmad (2011) emphasized the importance of a comprehensive understanding of the halal industry, highlighting the transition from traditional knowledge to modern practices such as smart food for future sustainability (Jamaludin & Ramli, 2022). The complexity of the industry has led to the development of a specialized body of knowledge known as Halal education, which is effectively delivered in higher education institutions (Soon & Wallace, 2017). In Malaysia, the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA) has established Programme Standards for Halal Studies in partnership with the Halal Development Corporation (HDC) and the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE).

Halal studies in higher education are divided into applied science, management, and law, encompassing sectors such as food, beverages, cosmetics, logistics, tourism, and Islamic financial products. These programs are structured across various qualification levels in the Malaysian Qualifications Framework (MQF) to cultivate individuals with a comprehensive set of competencies for the halal industry (Hew et al., 2020). Malaysia's dedication to becoming a global halal hub underscores the significance of nurturing human capital through education and research at different academic levels in the halal industry. Halal studies aim to merge theoretical and practical skills, technology, and wisdom to achieve Maqasid Syariah, contributing to the promotion of a responsible citizenry in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (Ishak et al., 2019).

The academic literature provides insights into different facets of halal education and the halal industry. Research has delved into consumer behaviours in purchasing halal products, the implementation of halal traceability systems, and the importance of strategic orientation for gaining a competitive edge in halal micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs). Additionally, studies have explored the reasons for engaging in halal food standard implementation, obstacles to implementing halal logistics, and the role of Islamic banks in advancing halal tourism (Jaswir et al., 2023).

The establishment of Halal education programs in higher education institutions plays a pivotal role in preparing individuals for the evolving halal industry. The amalgamation of theoretical knowledge, practical skills, and ethical principles in halal studies contributes to the expansion and sustainability of the halal sector, aligning with global standards and industry requirements (Soon & Wallace, 2017).

## 2.2 Halal Education Ecosystem in Malaysia

In the context of halal education, particularly in Malaysia, there are notable gaps and limitations within the current educational framework. The Malaysian halal certification system, while established, faces various challenges that hinder its effectiveness and comprehensiveness. For instance, the study highlights the complexity of the halal food control system in Malaysia, emphasizing the need for robust legislation, management control, and educational initiatives to enhance the understanding and implementation of halal standards (Ahmad et al., 2018). The primary and secondary school curricula lack substantial coverage of halal topics, with only brief mentions of halal food in manners-related subjects. The focus is primarily on Islamic education and Quran literacy, without explicit teaching on halal content (Soon & Wallace, 2017). This deficiency continues into secondary education, where halal topics are only addressed in Form 4, specifically in the context of slaughtering (Oemar, 2023). The disparities in halal education become more pronounced as students' progress to higher education levels. There are substantial gaps between the last formal education on halal in secondary school and tertiary education, which can span up to four years for some students (Ahmed et al., 2019). This lack of continuous exposure to halal education may diminish students' interest in pursuing halal studies at higher learning institutions, especially when compared to more mainstream fields like medicine, science, or engineering (Fauzi et al., 2023).

However, there is a more comprehensive exposure to halal education at the tertiary level, with specialized programs and research centres dedicated to halal studies. Institutions like the Halal Product Research Institute (HPRI), Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) and International Institute for Halal Research and Training (INHART), International Islamic University of Malaysia (IIUM) offer postgraduate courses in halal science and management, research opportunities, and consultation services in halal product manufacturing (Sayogo, 2018).

To address the shortcomings in halal education, it is crucial for educational institutions to enhance their curricula and provide more in-depth coverage of halal topics at all levels of education. This includes integrating halal content into various subjects beyond just Islamic education, offering specialized courses in halal studies, and establishing research centres focused on halal research and innovation. By strengthening halal education from primary school through tertiary education, individuals can develop a deeper understanding of halal principles, contributing to the growth and sustainability of the halal industry.

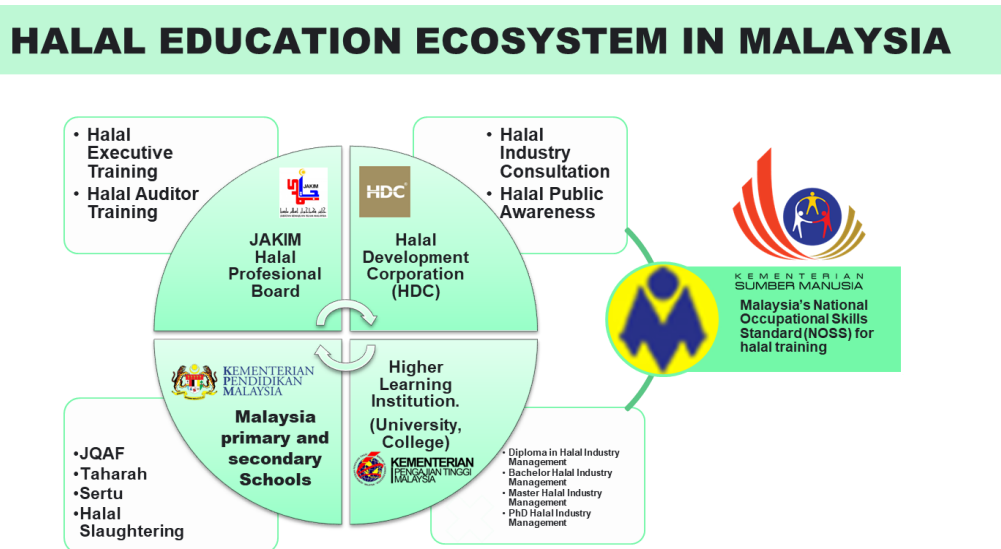


Figure 1 The current landscape of the Malaysian Halal Education Ecosystem from Five Sectors

The evolving landscape of the halal industry and the increasing global demand for halal products and services, higher education institutions offering halal education must undergo significant reforms to enhance graduates' employability. Kechot and Abdullah (2006) and Hajazi (2016) emphasized the necessity of higher education institution (HEI) reforms to improve education quality, program relevance, and effective administration, which are crucial for national development. The alignment of halal industry curricula with industry requirements is paramount to ensure that students are adequately prepared to meet contemporary challenges (Soltanian et al., 2016).

The current halal education ecosystem in Malaysia encompasses various sectors, including Islamic Education in the Integrated Secondary School Curriculum (KBSM), halal academic programs at higher education institutions, training programs by Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia (JAKIM), Malaysia's National Occupational Skills Standard (NOSS) for halal training, and public training by the Halal Development Corporation (HDC) under the Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI). Each sector serves different purposes and participants, highlighting the country's complexity and diversity of halal education development (Zailani et al., 2017).

Reforms in halal education must involve close collaboration with industry professionals to ensure that curricula remain relevant and up to date. This realignment is essential to bridge the gap between academic knowledge and industry requirements, ultimately enhancing graduates' employability in the halal sector. The involvement of multiple ministries in administering halal education institutions underscores the interdisciplinary nature of halal education and the need for a coordinated approach to address the challenges and opportunities in the field (Ngah et al., 2017).

The transformation of halal education in higher education institutions is imperative to meet the demands of the growing halal industry. By aligning curricula with industry needs, fostering collaborations with industry stakeholders, and streamlining administrative

processes across ministries, higher education institutions can play a pivotal role in preparing graduates for successful careers in the dynamic and expanding halal sector.

### 2.3 Halal Industry Growth and Demand for Halal Studies Graduates

The global halal industry is indeed experiencing significant growth, driven by the increasing demand for halal products and services worldwide. This growth is largely attributed to the rising awareness and acceptance of halal standards among Muslim consumers and non-Muslim consumers who appreciate the quality and ethical considerations associated with halal products. notes that the halal industry has gained substantial global attention, expanding beyond traditional markets and catering to a diverse consumer base, including Muslims and non-Muslims (Aulia, 2023). This surge in demand is attributed to the rising awareness among Muslims regarding the consumption of products that adhere to Islamic dietary requirements (Antara et al., 2023). The halal industry, estimated to be worth around USD 2.3 trillion annually (Nainatul et al., 2023), is one of the fastest-growing markets globally (Azam & Abdullah, 2020). Despite challenges such as the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the global halal market is projected to reach USD 6.0 trillion by 2024 (Rahim, 2023).

Higher education institutions play a crucial role in supporting the growth of the halal industry by offering halal education programs that align with industry needs. Halal education reform is essential to enhance graduates' employability and ensure they are prepared to meet the industry's evolving demands. Collaborations with industry professionals are vital to keep curricula current and relevant, enabling students to address contemporary challenges in the halal sector. The development of the halal industry is not limited to Muslim-majority countries, as evidenced by the emergence of the halal food industry in non-Muslim countries like Thailand (Nawawi et al., 2019).

This expansion presents opportunities for halal MSMEs to strengthen their presence in local and global markets, contributing to the overall reinforcement of the halal industry. The growth of the halal industry is significantly driven by the increasing Muslim population globally. This demographic factor plays a crucial role in expanding the demand for halal products and services. According to the halal food industry is experiencing new opportunities for economic growth and development, particularly in regions with both Muslim majority and minority populations (Destriyansah, 2023).

The demand for halal certification and quality assurance (Karimah & Darwanto, 2021) and the development of halal tourism (Rusyiana, 2022). By focusing on innovation, collaboration, and aligning education with industry requirements, stakeholders can further propel the halal industry's expansion and contribute to economic growth and community welfare. The expansion of the halal industry has resulted in a growing demand for professionals with expertise in halal studies. The global halal market is rapidly expanding, necessitating skilled individuals who can navigate the industry's complexities and contribute to its advancement (Prabowo et al., 2015). The increasing awareness of halal products and services consumption has propelled the growth of the halal industry, positioning it as one of the largest consumer markets worldwide (Rahim, 2023).

In Malaysia, where the halal sector significantly influences the economy, there is a rising need for graduates with halal studies qualifications. The country has established itself as a Global Halal Hub, underscoring the significance of halal education and expertise in fostering economic progress (Nasir et al., 2021). Malaysia's Third Industrial Master Plan (2006-2020) has delineated strategies to harness the potential of the halal industry to bolster the nation's economic development (Nasir et al., 2021). Indonesia is also witnessing growth in the halal industry, presenting challenges and opportunities (Destriyansah, 2023). The country has emerged as a key player in the halal industry, underscoring the necessity for proficient professionals to support its expansion (Mubarak & Imam, 2020). Vocational education plays a pivotal role in equipping graduates with the essential skills and competencies to thrive in the halal industry (Pratama, 2023).

The establishment of halal studies programs and the enhancement of the halal education landscape are crucial to meet the escalating demand for competent professionals in the halal industry. By aligning curricula with industry requisites, fostering partnerships with industry stakeholders, and emphasizing the importance of halal education, higher education institutions can prepare graduates to excel in the dynamic and burgeoning field of halal studies.

### **3. Materials and Methods**

Qualitative research has been chosen for this study to provide a comprehensive understanding of the halal education ecosystem in Malaysia, focusing on aspects such as the halal curriculum, syllabuses, and the preparation of halal studies graduates for the job market. The study will utilize both primary and secondary sources. The primary phase will involve data collection and library-based research, including an analysis of the Malaysian Qualification Accreditation in Halal Studies Standard. Secondary data from administrative regulations, statistics, and relevant reports from the Ministry of Higher Education of Malaysia and the JAKIM will also be incorporated. The workflow of data collection and data analysis is shown in Figure 2.

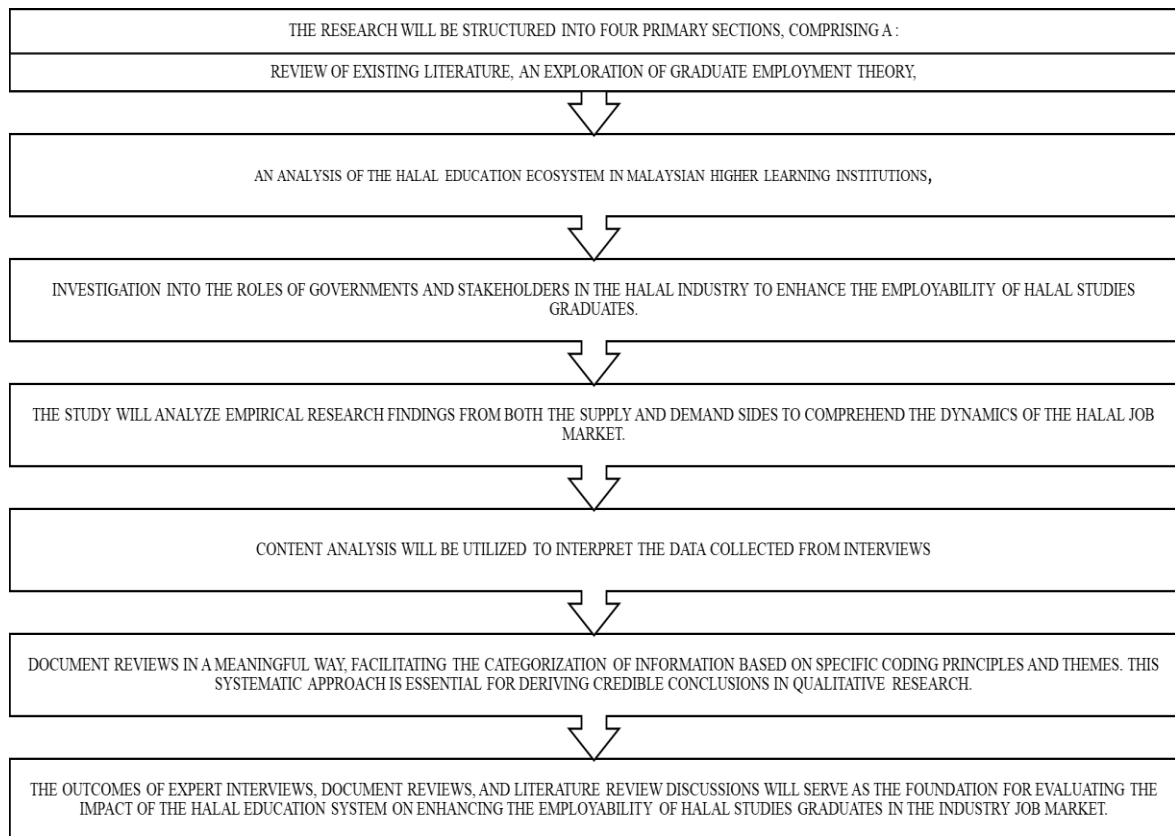


Figure 2. The Workflow of Data Collection and Data Analysis

## 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1 Redundancy in Current Halal Education Curriculum

The redundant content in the existing halal education curriculum in Malaysia can be described to multiple interconnected issues, mostly arising from a deficiency in centralised governance and communication among diverse stakeholders. This lack of coherence results in disparities in halal industry educational standards and goals across various sectors, which can give rise to inefficiencies and deficiencies in the curriculum. Zulfakar (2018) examines the impact of the lack of a cohesive regulatory framework on the interpretation of halal standards. This can create complexities in the educational field and potentially contribute to a deficiency in skills among graduates (Zulfakar et al., 2018). The misalignment not only hampers the standard of education but also reduces the employability of graduates, as they may lack the precise skills demanded by the halal industry (Ahmad et al., 2018).

In order to reduce these duplications, it is crucial to improve the coordination between different government ministries and promote regular discussions between academic institutions and industrial participants. Collaboration of this nature can facilitate the alignment of halal education standards and curriculum, so ensuring their uniformity and applicability to the requirements of the business. The authors (Ahmad et al., 2018) argue that it is crucial to prioritise the alignment of halal industry educational programs with market demands. They propose that a halal industry curriculum that is simplified and emphasises practical skills and specialisation will greatly enhance the job prospects of graduates in the halal industry. Moreover, the implementation of targeted training programs, as



recommended by Ibrahim (2022), can enhance students' preparedness for the labour market, thereby guaranteeing a greater yield on their educational investment.

Furthermore, the existence of duplications in the halal industry curriculum may cause employers to become uncertain about the credentials of graduates, potentially leading to a sense of diminished educational excellence. The repetitive nature of certain instructional content exacerbates this problem, leading students to allocate time and resources towards learning material that does not contribute to the improvement of their skill set (Royal et al., 2014). The implementation of a thorough curriculum mapping method, as proposed by Royal et al. (2014), is essential in order to identify and remove unnecessary content, thus enhancing the overall standard of halal industry education.

Different ministries and stakeholders must collaborate to effectively address the redundancies in the halal education curriculum in Malaysia. To boost the employability of graduates and contribute more effectively to the halal industry business, halal education institutes can streamline their curriculum to comply with industry requirements and place greater emphasis on practical skills. This method not only provides advantages to students but also enhances the broader halal ecosystem in Malaysia, guaranteeing that it fulfils the changing requirements of the global market.

#### **4. 2 The Insufficiency of Infrastructure and Facilities in Halal Education Institutions**

The inadequacy of infrastructure and facilities in halal education institutions pose a significant challenge that directly affects the quality of education and training provided in these establishments. Despite the increasing demand for halal education, institutions face notable obstacles related to infrastructure funding, resource scarcity, and insufficient facilities (Pratikto et al., 2021). These challenges not only impede the effective implementation of educational programs, including halal studies but also restrict the opportunities available to graduates in this field (Ibrahim, 2022). Furthermore, the absence of proper infrastructure development in higher institutions, as evidenced in Nigerian universities, exacerbates the situation (Ebekozi et al., 2022). In the realm of halal education, specialized facilities such as dedicated classrooms, laboratories, and research centres are paramount to offer students a comprehensive learning experience (Ibrahim, 2022).

Nevertheless, the prevailing constraints in infrastructure, encompassing inadequate government funding and lack of equipment, impede institutions' capacity to deliver quality education in halal studies (Obaju et al., 2022). Additionally, the dearth of employment prospects for halal studies graduates underscores the broader repercussions of insufficient infrastructure on the overall ecosystem of halal education (Ibrahim, 2022).

Addressing these challenges demands a multifaceted strategy, including heightened investment in infrastructure development, collaboration with private entities for financial backing and governmental initiatives to advance halal education and training programs (Ebekozi et al., 2023; Ebekozi et al., 2022;). Through bolstering infrastructure, creating employment opportunities, and enhancing educational programs, institutions can better cater to the escalating demand for halal education and contribute to nurturing skilled professionals

in this domain. It is worth mentioning that rectifying the insufficiency of infrastructure and facilities in halal education institutions is pivotal to ensuring the quality and pertinence of education in this specialized field.

#### **4. 3 Competency and Credentials Issues Among Halal Education Lecturers and Trainers**

Competency and credentials issues among halal education lecturers and trainers are crucial in ensuring the quality of education and training provided in this specialized field. Several studies highlighted the significance of factors such as certification, training, education, and awareness in the halal industry. Certification processes, like those conducted by JAKIM, involve various criteria that are essential for ensuring the quality and authenticity of halal products (Khoo et al., 2019). Training and education play a vital role in enhancing Halal literacy among educators and students. Integrating halal education into the curriculum, providing training for teachers and students, and promoting collaboration are effective methods to increase awareness and knowledge of halal practices (Mardlotillah et al., 2022). Additionally, studies emphasize the importance of halal training, education, and personnel empowerment in food inspection management to ensure compliance with halal standards (Almahrooqi et al., 2022).

Furthermore, the development of frameworks for evaluating halal studies programs is crucial for producing competent graduates who can meet the industry's human capital needs (Ibrahim, 2022). Vocational education is identified as a key player in training qualified human resources to support the growth of the halal tourism sector (Pratama, 2023). Moreover, the role of Islamic higher education in providing skills and services to the halal industry is highlighted as an opportunity to meet the industry's demands (Riofita & Iqbal, 2022).

To address the concerns regarding the qualifications and experience of halal industry lecturers, instructors, and trainers, it is crucial for halal educational institutions to prioritize the establishment of robust faculty teams. The proficiency and qualifications of these academic staff members play a pivotal role in ensuring that students receive a superior level of education in halal practices, equipping them with the necessary skills for success in the halal industry (Nawawi et al., 2019). The Program Standards for Halal Studies in Higher Education underscore the importance of the competence and qualifications of academic staff to deliver high-quality programs and produce marketable graduates.

Higher Education Providers (HEPs) are mandated to ensure that their academic personnel possess accredited academic credentials and receive ongoing professional development to enhance their pedagogical skills and knowledge (Katuk et al., 2020). One of the prevailing concerns is the deficiency in industry experience among halal industry lecturers, instructors, and trainers. While academic qualifications are essential, practical experience in the halal industry is equally crucial to provide students with a comprehensive understanding of halal practices. Lack of practical experience can hinder educators from imparting real-world perspectives and pragmatic solutions to students (Annabi & Ibidapo-Obe, 2017). To address this issue, establishing partnerships between halal educational institutions and industrial organizations can offer industrial attachments or short-term positions for academic staff to gain firsthand experience as halal executives. This exposure

can enhance their knowledge and provide valuable insights for their teaching endeavours. Implementing policies that mandate halal education academic staff to acquire halal executive certification and experience can further enhance their teaching capabilities (Hidayat et al., 2021).

Furthermore, the lack of uniformity in prescribed qualifications for halal industry lecturers, instructors, and trainers poses a challenge. Establishing certification and accreditation standards can ensure that educators have the necessary knowledge and competencies to deliver halal industry courses effectively. These processes may include training programs, evaluations, and opportunities for professional growth to maintain high educational standards (Saeed Muhammad et al., 2020). In addition to certification and accreditation, ongoing professional development opportunities are essential for halal industry lecturers and instructors to stay updated with industry advancements. Workshops, seminars, and courses on halal certification, compliance, and management can enhance their pedagogical skills and knowledge, providing students with a more comprehensive education (Jaswir et al., 2023). Guest lectures and seminars by practising halal executives can offer valuable insights into the practical aspects of the industry. Integrating case studies into the curriculum can enhance problem-solving skills and provide students with a deeper understanding of halal certification and compliance (Al-Mahmood, 2023).

Peer reviews, evaluations, and a Code of Ethics for educators can provide feedback and uphold ethical standards in teaching. These measures aim to enhance students' readiness for employment in the halal industry and contribute to its growth and advancement (Wisudanto et al., 2023). Addressing the qualifications and experience of halal industry lecturers, instructors, and trainers requires a collaborative effort between educational institutions, industry partners, and regulatory bodies. By establishing certification and accreditation standards, providing ongoing professional development opportunities, and fostering industry partnerships, halal education can be enhanced to equip students with the necessary skills for success in the halal industry.

#### **4. 4 Recognition Issues of the Halal Study Graduates Qualification**

Recognition of qualifications obtained by graduates of halal studies programs is essential for their career progression and mobility, particularly within the global halal industry. The establishment of formal degrees in halal supply chain and logistics at various academic levels can help fulfil the demand for skilled professionals in this sector (Talib et al., 2015).

Graduates of Halal studies programs have diverse career opportunities in fields such as education, health, agriculture, trade, and finance, showcasing the array of paths available within the halal industry (Deuraseh & Heradhyaksa, 2020). The complexities associated with the recognition of foreign qualifications and the standardisation of certification processes for halal education are intricate and closely connected to the wider dynamics of the halal business. An important problem arises from the lack of uniformity in halal standards among different countries, making it difficult to establish international recognition of qualifications and certifications. Although there are many Halal Certification Bodies (HCBs) worldwide, their adoption of different standards has resulted in confusion and a lack of

consistency in halal certification procedures. (Lutfika et al., 2022; Akbar, 2023; Muhammad et al., 2020).

Initiatives aimed at improving the Halal industry involve tackling issues like high certification costs through partnerships between governments and industry associations (Huda et al., 2020). Furthermore, integrating Halal requirements across the supply chain, as demonstrated in the regulation of Halal cosmetic products, is crucial for upholding the authenticity of Halal goods (Othman et al., 2022). Implementing self-declaration Halal based on Islamic Sharia law can cultivate trust and legal assurance among consumers (Azizah, 2022). The acknowledgement of qualifications acquired by graduates of Halal studies programs is crucial for their effective integration into the workforce, particularly within the Halal industry. Standardizing certification processes, addressing financial barriers, and ensuring Halal compliance throughout the supply chain are pivotal elements in advancing the Halal industry and supporting the professional growth of Halal studies graduates.

The lack of recognition for qualifications obtained by graduates of Halal studies programs in the Malaysian halal education ecosystem poses a significant challenge within the halal industry job market. Graduates investing substantial time and effort in their education face obstacles when their qualifications are not acknowledged by potential employers or regulatory bodies. This lack of recognition can stem from various factors, including the absence of a standardized curriculum, disparities in educational quality, and limited employer understanding of the value of qualifications in halal studies (Sobari Nurdin, 2017). To address these issues, the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA) has introduced Program Standards for Halal Studies in Higher Education, which serve as a benchmark for designing and implementing halal study programs at Malaysian higher education institutions.

These standards aim to ensure that graduates possess the necessary knowledge, skills, and competencies aligned with the Malaysian Qualifications Framework (MQF) to pursue diverse career opportunities within the halal industry (McGuinness, 2006). The Program Standards emphasize a comprehensive approach that integrates theoretical and practical competencies, technological advancements, and wisdom to achieve the goals of Maqasid Syariah through education in halal disciplines. Graduates of programs adhering to these standards are expected to have a solid grounding in halal industry principles and values, enabling them to contribute effectively to the industry's growth and development (Talib et al., 2015). However, challenges remain, such as ensuring consistent implementation of the standards across all program providers and addressing potential discrepancies in curriculum design and delivery. Establishing a standardized approach to curriculum creation and incorporating quality assurance measures are essential steps to maintain program quality and relevance in line with industry requirements (Ahmad et al., 2015).

Furthermore, enhancing global recognition for graduates of halal studies programs requires promoting the Program Standards internationally and establishing partnerships with global organizations. Graduates are anticipated to possess the necessary skills and knowledge to pursue diverse career opportunities within the halal industry, but industry acceptance may vary based on program provider prestige and curriculum quality (Marmaya et al., 2019). To enhance recognition and employability, educational institutions should collaborate with industry professionals, regulatory bodies, and other stakeholders to develop

comprehensive curricula aligned with industry demands. Accreditation by reputable organizations, industry awareness campaigns, and the involvement of industry advisory boards can further enhance the credibility and acceptance of halal studies qualifications (Ibrahim, 2022).

Engagement in research and development activities aligned with industry needs is crucial for graduates to contribute meaningfully to the halal industry. By staying abreast of industry requirements and fostering innovation, graduates can emerge as leaders and innovators in the halal business sector, shaping its future and making valuable contributions to society (Nawawi et al., 2019).

#### **4. 5 Employer Assumption, Preference, and Unclear Career Development**

The growth of the halal industry has led to an increased need to understand the career prospects and preferences of graduates in this field. Graduates play a fundamental role in both halal education and industry (Ibrahim, 2022). In Indonesia, the halal industry spans various sectors such as food and beverage, tourism, fashion, media, pharmaceuticals, and renewable energy (Rangkuty, 2021). In Brunei Darussalam, there is a specific focus on exploring job opportunities for Halal Science Graduates, particularly within the education sector (Deuraseh et al., 2022). Vocational education is crucial for nurturing the halal industry in Indonesia (Pratama, 2023).

Research suggests that halal studies graduates often choose corporate positions over teaching or research careers due to perceived growth opportunities (Bhattacharya, 2015). The influence of the halal lifestyle on career choices, especially among women in Indonesia, has significantly contributed to the expansion of the halal industry (Salsabila & Ihsan, 2023). The importance of the halal food industry extends beyond Islamic countries to include secular nations and Muslim minorities (Bahrudin, 2024). Regarding career development, graduates often struggle to identify clear career paths within organizations (Arnold & Davey, 1994). Employability and career uncertainty are common among graduates, underscoring the need for improved career support and guidance (Hasby et al., P. L. (2023). Earlier career training and personalized career development support during studies are crucial for enhancing graduates' employability and career paths (Lee et al., 2013; Ojala et al., 2021). Additionally, the role of social background in influencing graduate employability is a significant factor to consider (Okay–Somerville & Scholarios, 2015).

The halal industry provides diverse career opportunities for graduates, but tailored career development support is necessary to enhance their employability and clarify career paths within the industry. To address the challenges faced by halal studies graduates in the job market, it is crucial to bridge the gap between employer expectations and the actual skills possessed by these graduates.

Employers may misinterpret halal studies programs as primarily focusing on Islamic studies rather than technical and scientific fields like food science, engineering, or chemistry. This misunderstanding can lead to a preference for graduates from technical and scientific domains over those with a background in halal studies, affecting the employability of halal studies graduates (Bashir 2019).

One effective strategy to tackle this issue is for educational institutions offering halal studies programs to establish strong connections and collaborations with employers in the halal industry. By organizing workshops, seminars, and networking activities, employers can gain a better understanding of the curriculum and training provided by halal studies programs, highlighting the technical and scientific acumen of graduates (Hamilton et al., 2003).

Furthermore, integrating industry-oriented elements such as internships, industry placements, or capstone projects into the curriculum can provide hands-on experience to halal education students, showcasing their technical and scientific proficiencies in practical settings. This practical exposure not only enhances graduates' employability but also aligns employer expectations with the competencies of recent graduates (Fusarelli, 2004).

In terms of career advancement for halal studies graduates, the requirement for certification as a JAKIM Halal Executive may limit their professional prospects. Policy reforms are essential to address this constraint and create a more inclusive job market for halal studies graduates. Expanding certification programs tailored to various sectors within the industry, such as halal food technology or cosmetics production, can enhance graduates' specialization and employability (Swanson & Stevenson, 2002).

Moreover, implementing mutual acceptance of Halal Executive certifications among countries with significant halal markets can boost international mobility and employment opportunities for halal studies graduates. By broadening the eligibility criteria for halal certification to include relevant qualifications in areas like food safety or supply chain management, graduates can leverage their diverse skill sets for a wider range of career prospects within the halal industry (Tieman & Ghazali, 2013).

## 5. Conclusion

Based on the studies carried out, it can be inferred that it is crucial to have coordinated efforts among ministries and organisations participating in halal education in order to eliminate duplications and ensure that the curriculum is in line with industry demands. In addition, institutions may enhance the educational experience for students studying halal studies and support the growth and long-term viability of the halal business through investments in infrastructure, efficient allocation of resources, and promoting collaboration among stakeholders.

Higher education institutions must provide official roles for lecturers, instructors, and trainers in the halal business to guarantee the excellence of halal education. Examining the credentials and expertise of lecturers, instructors, and trainers in the halal industry necessitates a cooperative endeavour involving educational institutions, industry collaborators, and regulatory authorities.

Furthermore, rectifying the issue of insufficient acknowledgement for graduate qualifications in halal studies necessitates a collective endeavour involving educational institutions, employers, regulatory organisations, and industry players. By conforming to Program Standards, conducting research, and cultivating industry collaborations, graduates can improve their chances of finding employment and make valuable contributions to the development and progress of the halal business. To enhance the employability and career

advancement opportunities for individuals in the field of halal studies, it is crucial to highlight the distinct skills and knowledge possessed by halal studies graduates, advocate for policy reforms to address certification limitations, and foster collaboration between educational institutions and businesses.

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