

Investigating the Compliance of Non-Muslim Production Workers on Halal Requirements in a Halal-Certified Food Company: A Case Study

Muhammad Alrazi Ahmad Nor Komar^{1*}, Norasiah Mohammad² & Wan Fatin Nazihah Wan Makazan³

¹*Faculty of Economics, Accountancy & Management, Universiti Islam Selangor, Bandar Seri Putra, 43000 Kajang, Selangor, Malaysia*

²*Universiti Teknologi MARA, 40450 Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia*

³*Malaysia Halal Analysis Centre, Lebu Enstek, 71760 Bandar Baru Enstek, Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia*

**Corresponding author: m.alrazi@uis.edu.my*

ABSTRACT

Malaysia has become a country where most of the population is Muslim and has contributed to a significant role to halal matters. As a country with many races, ethnicities and religions, Malaysia does not prevent non-Muslim from working in any sector in a manufacturing company that holds halal certification either in production, administration, or operation. In fact, lack of information and knowledge capacity on halal requirements is also considered as one of the most challenges part in implementing halal management system. This study aims to determine the understanding level of non-Muslim production workers on the halal standards and requirements; and to investigate the challenges faced in implementing daily practices in the production area. The data was collected using interviews and analysed by thematic analysis using NVivo. A total of five informants were selected by a combination of purposive sampling and snowball sampling technique among the non-Muslim production workers. The result shows that the non-Muslim production workers understood halal standards and requirements despite their limited knowledge. They also claimed that they faced no challenges while working in a halal manufacturing company. Hence, the significant of this study provides information to enhance customers' trust, provides a better insight to the understanding of the non-Muslim production workers for the industry players.

Keywords: Requirements, Challenges, Halal Standards, Non-Muslim, Production Workers

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INTRODUCTION

In Malaysia, Halal is mainly governed by two halal competent authorities; the Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM) and the State of Islamic Religious Department (JAIN). JAKIM operates as a central-government halal authority while JAIN serves as halal state authority in Malaysia. Both institutions are responsible for enforcing, monitoring and implementing Halal food standards and regulations (Isa & Ismail, 2015). Several regulations have been issued by JAKIM as the primary guide of reference, especially on halal certification in Malaysia. One of the guidelines referred to as the primary reference by the industry players and authority bodies is the Manual Procedure of Malaysian Halal Certification (Domestic) 2020 (MPPHM 2020). MPPHM 2020 is a documented guideline issued by JAKIM as the main reference related to halal certification. The document consists of general and specific requirements of all nine schemes for halal certification such as food & beverages, food premises, slaughterhouses, consumer goods, pharmaceuticals, logistics, cosmetics, medical devices, and manufacturing contracts (JAKIM, 2020).

Meanwhile, halal and food safety are intertwined. Halal certification from JAKIM is not only instantly identifiable as containing halal components, but it is also hygienic, regardless of whether it was manufactured by Muslims or non-Muslims. Abdullah Sani and Dahlan (2015) stated that in Malaysia, obtaining halal certification requires the inclusion of food safety plans, such as *Bersih dan Selamat* (BeSS) for the food service industry and Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP) for food manufacturers, as prerequisites. Apart from that, the MPPHM 2020 has also mentioned the need for a pre-requisite program to apply for halal certification, especially the food industry. To ensure the industry meets the general requirements set by the authority, it must ensure that the processing, handling, and premises involved in the processing of halal products must meet the requirements of good hygiene practices such as Good Hygiene Practices (GHP) and/or good manufacturing practices that have been stated in the BeSS and GMP.

In Malaysia, most companies holding halal certificates, especially food manufacturing companies are pioneered by many non-Muslims either as the top management or ordinary staff (Ariffin et al., 2019). Companies applying for halal certification are currently not only among Muslims but also non-Muslims. The greater the involvement of industries in the halal sector, the more job opportunities will arise, leading to the recruitment of additional workers to support successful business operations. In fact, companies in Malaysia do not limit any demographic differences in employment opportunities, especially among industrial companies such as food manufacturers, which require a labor force to run their business. The industrial companies tend to take human labor from domestic workers or alternatively hire foreign workers as such from Indonesia, Bangladesh, Nepal and, the Philippines.

However, it sometimes raises doubts among consumers on the halal compliance applied by the non-Muslim workers in the company as the halal food consumers nowadays have a higher level of awareness and information about the products they purchase daily. Some food manufacturers have a piece of limited knowledge on the importance of halal certification (Talib et al., 2015) and most of them believe that halal is only a marketing strategy with no religious foundations. Besides that, non-compliance of halal might arise in the premise caused by the failure to meet the halal requirements due to lack of knowledge and understanding on the concept of halal compliance among workers in the production area (Majid et al., 2015). They might not understand the concept of halal practices, not clear on the requirements that need to be complied with and even blurred on the reason behind the obligation of complying with the halal

requirements (Shahwahid et al., 2015), thus risking the halal integrity in the supply chain. Therefore, this study aimed to investigate the compliance of non-Muslim workers on halal requirements among non-Muslim workers in a halal-certified food company.

LITERATURE RESEARCH

The growth of the halal industry in Malaysia was initiated by the awareness of the Muslim community on the need for a system to monitor halal businesses in Malaysia (Shahwahid et al., 2015). The more Muslims in a particular country, the more active halal businesses dominate the country's market.

Generally, Muslims must ensure that the food they consume meets the halal requirements that have been outlined by the Islamic law as a sign of their obedience to Allah's commandments (Alqudsi, 2014). In Malaysia, the halal competent authority appointed through the Trade Description Act 2011 (TDA 2011) is JAKIM. JAKIM plays a crucial role in managing the establishment of the halal logo, monitoring halal certification holders, and the enforcement of Halal guidelines. Moreover, TDA 2011 is considered as the main regulation to control Halal production along the supply chain from farm to fork process. The main purpose of this act is to standardize the issuance of Halal certificates. Besides that, this act aims to promote fair business practices by prohibiting false trade descriptions and false or misleading claims of halal, conduct, and practices in the supply of products and services, thereby safeguarding consumers' interests (Rahman et al., 2018). Other related acts indirectly involve the provision and protection of halal matters including Food Act 1983, Food Regulation 1985, Animal Act 1953 (Revised 2006), Abattoirs Act 1993, Local Government Act 1976, Local Authorities Act, Consumer Protection Act 1999, Customs Act 1967, Syariah Criminal Offences Enactment, and many more (Shahwahid & Miskam, 2018). All acts that have been gazetted by the government indicate that halal matters in Malaysia are preserved and prioritized even though there is no specific act or regulation for halal.

In addition to the act, several standards and procedures related to halal have been introduced in Malaysia. The main reference to apply halal certification is Manual Procedure of Malaysian Halal Certification (Domestic) 2020 (MPPHM 2020). Other guidelines or standards that aid halal certification process for food and beverages industry are MS 1500: 2019 Halal Food, MS ISO 9001: 2015 – Quality Management Systems, MS 1514: 2022 Good Manufacturing Practices for Food, Malaysian Protocol for the Halal Meat and Poultry Productions and other related standards and procedures (Shahwahid & Miskam, 2018). With the rapid growth of the halal industry, these standards and procedures are crucial in assisting the requirements for halal certification compliance.

Every scheme for halal certification possesses varies, from general to specific requirement of MPPHM 2020. For food and beverages industry, the general requirements include the raw material used for the halal products, characteristics of the products or services offered, production process, storage, equipment, packaging, labelling and advertising as well as transportation and delivery process. It also includes premise, workers, sanitation procedure, facilities and employee welfare, training, record, and documentation. Additionally, the following specific requirements for this scheme are development of Halal Management System, establishment of internal halal committee (IHC), appointment of Halal Executive or Halal Supervisor and involvement of Muslim workers. The implementation also differs depending on size of the company either multinational, medium, small or micro industry. The

criteria of industry are determined based on annual revenue, whereby micro, small, medium and multinational industry earn less than RM300,000, between RM300,000 to RM14,999, between RM15 million to RM50 million and more than RM50 million, respectively. Establishment of Halal Management System and appointment of a Halal Executive as well as two permanent Muslim workers, similarly become the specific requirements for both multinational and medium industry. In small and micro industry, both requires at least one Muslim worker and establishes internal halal committee. However, Muslim supervisor need to be recruited only in small industry. The specific requirements on each of the industry is shown below in Table 1.

Table 1
Specific Requirements of Food and Beverages Industry

Category	Internal Halal Committee	Halal Executive	Muslim Supervisor	Halal Management System	Muslim Worker/ shift
Multinational	√	√	X	√	2
Medium	√	√	X	√	2
Small	√	X	√	X	1
Micro	√	X	X	X	1

Eventually, Malaysian halal certification requires large and small and medium-sized company to establish a solid halal system called Malaysian Halal Management System (MHMS). Whereas, Internal Halal Control System (IHCS) for small and micro-sized company. These two systems aim to control and monitor halal management internally in an industry (JAKIM, 2020), thus facilitating and streamlining the application process for both the industry and authority. In Malaysia, all food handlers must have a Food Handler Training Certificate from any institutions recognized by the Ministry of Health (MOH) and obtain a valid anti-typhoid injection from a registered medical practitioner. This is due to the fact that this injection can help prevent typhoid illness. Pathogenic bacteria such as *Salmonella Typhimurium* can proliferate, resulting in typhoid fever, a potentially fatal disease (Taha et al., 2013) when someone consumes contaminated food or beverages.

All requirements, laws and regulations from competent authority are subjected to compliance. In halal certification procedure, there are three categories of non-conformities; namely minor, major and serious offence. Minor offence involves technical offence, such as making modifications to the manufacturing process or to documents and records without informing the authorities. It also covers non-compliance related to hygiene, changes in information, employee welfare and failure to comply with relevant laws and regulations. The implication of minor offence is immediate suspension of the halal certificate. Major offence includes misuse of the halal certificate and non-conformities related to product raw materials that can pose a high risk to product safety are considered major offenses. Another cause of major offence is related to the use of company names, products, menus, brands, labels that refer to non-halal products or any other misleading terms that can lead to the likelihood of misbelief, superstition, and fraud. The impact of this offence may result in the halal certificate that has been received being suspended immediately. The most critical non-conformity is serious offence related to Shariah and Technical matters. This offence involved serious implication in term of both aspects of halal certification process and procedure. Consequently, the halal certificate will be suspended immediately and could cause the company to be blacklisted from JAKIM official Malaysian Halal Portal.

In complying with halal requirements without issuance of any offence, industry players face various challenges and barriers in implementing halal certification, especially the Small and Medium Enterprise (SME) is the scarcity of resources, such as inadequate technology and lack of technical expertise (Giyanti et al., 2021). According to Ahmad et al. (2017), one of the difficulties faced by the industry in implementing a halal food management system is the lack of information and knowledge on the most recent halal requirements. The industries must be diligent and well-updated about halal management system news and developments, including any amendments to food law, fatwa, or any requirements on halal.

The cost of implementing the halal certification in fulfilling the requirements is also referred as a common challenge by halal industry players in Malaysia. It is normal to use the excuse of financial concerns on high costs, especially in the early stages of implementation to avoid the certification (Prabowo et al., 2015). A study by Giyanti et al. (2021) agreed that certification cost is one of the constraints in implementing halal in the industry. Furthermore, some SMEs are having a difficulty to obtain funding, particularly by government-affiliated financial institutions (Majid et al., 2015). It is not only including the fee for halal application, but also the cost of the facilities, infrastructure, equipment, and raw materials needed to meet the halal specifications that have been established. The rise in costs causes the industry to postpone renewing its halal certification, refuse to apply for certification as well as expand its production capacity to meet export demand.

On top of that, another significant challenge to the implementation of halal certification is the weak commitment from top management and lack of motivation and cooperation among employees (Haleem et al., 2020). If the commitment from top management is insufficient, implementation of halal in an organization will be extremely slow. A study from Ahmad et al. (2017) discovered a challenge related to halal personnel empowerment. The study found that the inadequacy of staff could be a constraint in implementing halal. This is because most industries assign a similar staff to cater both halal and quality matters in their company. This issue might relate to the cost restriction on appointment of additional staff. This limitation has become a challenge as not everyone can handle two functions simultaneously (Ahmad et al., 2017). Top management needs to play an important role to prevent such restrictions from happening. Apart from the staff shortage, top management is also responsible for hiring experienced expertise in the company to ensure halal certification can be properly implemented. Inexperienced employees can be the cause of halal compliance failure (Hashim & Shariff, 2016). This is supported by a study from Abdul Rahim et al. (2022) who stated that the lack of human capital expertise in capitalizing halal industries in Malaysia is indeed a challenge, especially for the SMEs. These constraints show that the top management and the employees themselves play a vital role in implementing halal compliance in the company, especially halal-certified food manufactures.

Therefore, the understanding level of non-Muslim production workers on the halal standards and requirements are determined, and the challenges faced by them is investigated in this study.

METHODOLOGY

The sampling technique used in this study is non-probability sampling methods which is a purposive sampling. The samples were obtained from a determined group of five non-Muslim production employees in a halal-certified food company who are involved directly in the process of manufacturing food products. The informants selected are those involved in

handling the incoming raw material until the step of outcoming the finished goods. To achieve the objective of this study, a recorded interview session was conducted where the informants were asked five research questions on halal awareness. The data obtained was analysed using two processes which are thematic analysis, transcribing and coding. The process of transcribing the interview was done by using Microsoft Word and the coding was performed using NVivo Version 12. The codes were classified into themes for broader interpretations after all data had been coded. In this study, a total of thirteen codes generated and serve as indicators as shown in Table 2.

Table 2
Code Indicator

Code Indicator
1 – Awareness on Halal
2 – Challenges
3 – Consequences
4 – Halal Logo
5 – Healthy
6 – Hygiene
7 – Non-Compliance
8 – Non-Halal Ingredients
9 – Not Challenging
10 – Safe & Quality
11 – Halal Requirements
12 – Significance
13 – Uncertainty

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The results of this study are based on responses and answers provided by all five informants involved during the interview session. The responses are based on two main topics; understanding the level on halal standards and requirements and, challenges faced by non-Muslim production workers.

Understanding Level on Halal Standards and Requirements

According to the informants, it is believed that the non-Muslim production workers were understood on halal standards and requirements. The responses of all the informants on halal standards and requirements are tabulated in Table 3, Table 4 and Table 5.

Table 3
Interview Transcript on Item Question 1

Question 1	Informant	Answers	Code Indicator
Do you know what the halal requirements for food & beverages company are?	Informant 1	The products that are manufactured by this company must be checked first before delivering to the market, whether the product is safe or not. Other than that, in the aspect of storage must be ensured the product is being stored properly or not. It is not good to let the food product being exposed and lead to contamination.	10 & 11
	Informant 2	The condition of the quality must be okay. All parameters of quality control must be checked including packaging, pH value and moisture.	10
	Informant 3	I think the hygiene. They will check the hygiene in production. Our personal hygiene, as well as our surrounding's hygiene. The production process also must not be contaminated with filthy materials such as blood and insects.	6 & 11
	Informant 4	I think it is related to hygiene. We must ensure everything in the production area must not be contaminated with things that are not clean. That is why all workers must wear masks, hair nets, coats, and gloves entering the production area. I also think the ingredient used is also one of the requirements. We need to make sure that every ingredient is clean.	6 & 11
	Informant 5	Must always be clean 1a. We must ensure our hygiene is always maintained. If not hygienic, there will be no halal food in production.	6 & 11

Based on the above responses, the findings indicate that all informants are generally familiar with the criteria of halal implementation. The informants' knowledge of halal requirements has befallen under Code 11 (Halal Requirements). Besides that, majority of them mentioned hygiene as one of the criteria in halal requirements which has been categorized under Code 6 (Hygiene), including the personnel hygiene of the workers and related to one of the halal food requirements stated in Malaysian Standard MS 1500: 2019 Halal Food – General Requirements. Hygiene, sanitation, and food safety are required in the preparation of halal food covering the personal hygiene, clothing, devices, utensils, machines, and processing aids and the premises. Informant 1 linked requirements of halal implementation with food storage methods in the premises. This response illustrated the informant's understanding of halal food storage in which halal food must be physically separated from any other food that does not meet the halal requirements or anything else that declared to be *najs* by Shariah law (Department of Standard Malaysia, 2019). Throughout the supply chain process, the main element of protecting the Halal status of food products is segregation during delivery and storage (Ab Talib et al., 2013). The possibility of the food products turned from halal to haram will increase if there is any risk involved in the halal supply chain (Ackerley et al., 2010), especially during food storage method. Informant 1 also mentioned that food products must be kept in proper storage to prevent from mold and bacterial contamination as well as able to extend the shelf life. Requirement on storage has been categorized under Code 10 as it is associated with food safety.

Next, Table 4 described the non-compliance on halal implementation in the company. It is found that similar view of all informants is achieved except Informant 4. All of them agreed inclusion of non-halal food in the premises, especially in the production area by any non-Muslim workers could cause non-compliance on halal implementation of the company. The lunch meal prepared by the workers should be served and stored in the pantry only. The non-halal food could lead to cross-contamination of raw materials, equipment and final food products if it is brought into the production area. Informant 4, added that ignorance of personal hygiene could be a dangerous threat to the halal status of a company. Conclusively, all informants' agreed Code 7 (Non-Compliance) as their responses.

Table 4
Interview Transcript on Item Question 2

Question 2	Informant	Answers	Code Indicator
Do you know what examples of actions the workers make that can cause a non-compliance on halal?	Informant 1	For example, when it is dirty. When hygiene is not taken care of. The mostbasic I could see is in the pantry because the non-Muslim usuallymight bring non-halal food in there. So, for me the non-Muslim workers must take care of what they eat in the pantry so that it is not contaminated elsewhere, especially the production area.	7
	Informant 2	Yes, you cannot bring in haram food. You cannot drink beer in thecompany. You cannot bring in lunch boxes that contain haram food. Because my company is halal.	7
	Informant 3	I think we cannot bring pork inside thecompany. The workers bring their lunch box and there might be a few ofthem that have pork in their lunch box. But to be sure, they cannot bring their meal inside the production area.	7
	Informant 4	Yes, I know. When the workers do not take care of their hygiene properly because it might lead to contamination of food products in the production area.	7
	Informant 5	Workers cannot drink beer in the company. The company also cannot serve pork.	7

All responses on non-compliance mentioned by the informants have been stated indirectly in MPPHM 2020. One of the minor offences is related to hygiene non-conformity among workers, Halal Inspection Officer surely ask to seek for the corrective action (JAKIM, 2020). Another offence mentioned in the above response was the act of bringing beer and pork into the premise, which are proven to be the technical offence under serious non-conformity. Therefore, the company will be issued a withdrawal notice and the halal certificate will be withdrawn immediately from halal certification.

Based on Table 5 below, it was found that the informants are collectively agreed on the consequences except Informants 1. Most of them mentioned the impacts of the top management and several punishments taken upon the action of non-conformity. In addition, the workers are also subjected to a compound and immediate contract termination. However, Informant 1 recorded the only difference answer which stated on withdrawal of halal certificate if there is any non-compliance occurs. This response from Informant 1 is considered knowledgeable and

the most precise answer related to the impact to halal certification according to halal requirements. Informant 1 showed competency in answering Question 3 from the interviewer. After all, all responses of informants are recorded under Code 3 which indicates consequence of non-conformity.

Table 5
Interview Transcript on Item Question 3

Question 3	Informant	Answers	Code Indicator
Do you know what the consequences are on the halal status of the company if there is any haram material enter the premise?	Informant 1	If I am not mistaken, if there is any haram material inside the company, the halal certificate can be revoked by JAKIM.	3
	Informant 2	If workers bring in any haram material inside the company, then the boss will complain.	3
	Informant 3	I think the management in the company will impose an action on workers that bring in haram material. The action can be a compound or being fired.	3
	Informant 4	For sure, the boss will get angry. Moreover, the worker involved might be compound.	3
	Informant 5	Yes. The workers involved will be compound.	3

Challenges Faced by Non-Muslim Production Workers

The result in this study indicated that responses of non-Muslim production workers on challenges faced during halal implementation in the company. The responses of all informants are summarized in Table 6 below.

Table 6
Interview Transcript on Item Question 4

Question 4	Informant	Answers	Code Indicator
Do you find it challenging working in a halal food company?	Informant 1	No. Because as a worker, I must follow every rule and policy that the company has been established. So, for me, I have no problem with halal. Ontop of that, this is my first working experience, so I easily adapted to it and have no difficulties working in a halal company.	9
	Informant 2	I do not really understand what you are talking about.	13
	Informant 3	Yes. I must be strict on hygiene. I also need to limit my meal for lunch. But to be honest, it is not that hard to comply with. So, for me it is not that challenging.	2 & 9
	Informant 4	Not at all, because I am used to it already. If I want to do something that can tarnish the halal status of the company, I can do it at home. For example, on eating non-halal food, I can eat it at home. Drinking beer, I do not drink it every day, so why should I drink it at work.	9
	Informant 5	Not at all.	9

Based on the Table 6, it is found that all informants provided almost similar responses during the interview. Majority of them recorded Code 9 (Not Challenging), as they are well-adapted to the policies, procedures and regulations set by the company. In halal industries, all workers are obligated to halal requirements, including forbidden to bring along non-halal food and beverages in the premise especially in the production area. In fact, the only worker who faced challenges in halal implementation is Informant 3 and generated both Code 2 and Code 9. This issue might be potentially due to the usage of non-halal ingredients in the meal of this informant. Any direct contact between non halal food or non-food product with halal food products could results in cross contamination (Riaz & Chaudry, 2004). On the other hand, Informant 2 provided irregular answers as compared to other informants and generated Code 13. This informant found difficulty in understanding the question provided during the interview session. This is because there is a language barrier between the informant and interviewer, although symbol sign and language were used during the interview. Sign language is practised to facilitate the interview session; however, omissions, oversights, misinterpretations or additions may occur during translation (Adjei et al., 2022). The language aspects used could be a huge obstacle if the person is not a local worker. In conclusion, the challenges of halal implementation are not a big deal for all informants and they managed to work in halal-friendly working environment.

CONCLUSION

The study provides comprehensive perspectives on halal standards and requirements for non-Muslim production workers in halal food manufacturing. According to the findings, all informants are aware and understand on halal standards and requirement despite their limited knowledge. All informants can explain the halal requirements, non-conformity as well as its consequences on the company's halal status in halal certification. Notably, this study has highlighted the positive comprehension of non-Muslim production workers on halal especially towards halal requirements and challenges faced in the halal implementation in halal food companies. For further research, increasing the sample size of respondents and diversifying the sample population are suggested to obtain broader data and more extensive sample size.

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