Competency and recognition of the halal supervisor in Brunei Darussalam

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Abstract

Inefficient and inadequate qualification assessment for the requirements of halal supervisors has attracted more attention in the halal industry field, which led to the withdrawal of the halal certificate following the discovery that the restaurant violated halal certification requirements. Furthermore, there is a lack of research discussing the halal supervisor's credibility procedure in Brunei Darussalam. This research aims to identify the efficiency and adequacy of the current qualification assessment for the requirements for halal supervisors by Shari'ah principles and laws in Brunei. This research adopted a qualitative method, using a semi-structured interview and library research method. The finding reveals that a halal supervisor is qualified by passing a written and oral test prepared by the Halal Food Control Division (HFCD), with supplementary talks or briefings given. However, no specific halal training is offered to halal supervisors. This finding indicated the need to improve the qualification system. It can aid in suggesting the necessary ecosystem for the credibility of the competency and recognition of the qualification of a halal food supervisor. This study can benefit future research and industrial players and improve the qualification procedure for halal supervisor.

1. Introduction

The Brunei Vision 2035 and the Ninth and Tenth National Development Plans plan to grow and diversify the economy through strategic halal projects. Given the vast potential of the halal business, the government's focus on the halal industry is essentially to achieve a dynamic and sustainable economy (Mohamed Syazwan, 2020). Brunei Darussalam is positioning itself as a halal hub, and the Brunei Halal Certification is the most authentic and stringent halal product certification (Khalid et al., 2018). To ensure that halal integrity is maintained and monitored by experts. The Brunei Halal Certification play an essential role in maintaining the integrity of its halal-certified product as it is internationally renowned for its credibility. Business owners who wish to apply for a halal certificate or halal permit must apply through the HFCD, which has the authority to handle the certification procedure, and then through the Brunei Islamic Religious Council (BIRC) at the Ministry of Religious Affairs of Brunei (MORA) (Raffi, 2019).

Following the commencement of the Halal Certificate and Halal Label (Amendment) Order, 2017, it is now compulsory for all businesses that produce, supply, and serve food and beverages in Brunei to obtain a halal certificate and permit (Mohammad Rozaiman, 2022). The business must apply the halal certification process to ensure that processing and handling at food premises are by the halal standard. It also ensures that the premise of the business complies with halal legal standards and requirements. It indicates that the food service industry can embrace this unique concept by using a halal logo, labelling it, and correctly displaying the halal certification. The halal certificate and permit symbolise assurance and guarantee for consumers on a product's halal authenticity (Norkhairiah Hashim et al., 2022; Syed Marzuki, 2016). Thus, potential consumers can be assured of the halal integrity of the product since they have the right to expect the food they eat to be safe and suitable for consumption. This will boost consumer confidence and trust.

According to regulations in Chapter 4 (1) of the Halal Certificate and Halal Label Order (2005), the business owner must have at least two halal supervisors who are acknowledged by the Brunei Islamic Religious Council (BIRC). This supervisor is essential and responsible for the product’s halal status and all food processing at the premises (Norkhairiah Hashim et al., 2022). A halal food supervisor is an essential position in the company to ensure the integrity of halal certification. This is because they are responsible for ensuring that the food premise aligns with the halal standard and requirements of halal certification (Jabatan Hal Ehwal Shari’ah 2008).

However, issues have been raised concerning their credibility in terms of compliance with the law, such as the withdrawal of the halal certificate because of a violation of the certification requirement (Azlan, 2021a). Recently, in September 2023, one of the eatery’s halal certificates and halal food supervisor certificates in a restaurant in Gadong’s commercial area were cancelled after a 25-litre barrel of pork fat (refined fat), 35 solid packets of duck blood and 58 other types of doubtful food items that were found and used as cooking ingredients (Azlan, 2023b). This happened because of the lack of knowledge,
understanding, and adequate practice on halalan toyyiban. As a result, the halal certification has been revoked from some premises. Conducting ethical duties as a halal food supervisor is very important and should be practised by all halal food supervisors. Hence, this study aims to explore the expanded potential of halal supervisors, particularly in the halalan toyyiban aspect and to provide practical implications in improving the effectiveness of halal management systems, especially in the assessment procedures to become a qualified halal supervisor.

2. Materials and methods

This study adopted a qualitative method where a semi-structured interview was conducted with two food officers from HFCD as primary data and government reports as secondary data. In this study, purposive or judgmental sampling was chosen, where the researcher organised and analysed the data manually from the interview results according to sub-categories to help interpret results. The secondary data collection method is from legal documents such as official reports such as halal standards guidelines and acts related to halal supervisors, which have been extensively utilised to gather relevant information for this research.

3. Results and discussion

3.1 Halal certification

Brunei Halal Accreditation covers the source of the ingredients, and only manufacturers that meet the halal standard and have high quality and safety would be awarded the Brunei Halal Certification. To enforce the implementation of halal certification, the Brunei Government created a committee consisting of officers from BIRC, HFCD, Ministry of Health (MOH), (MORA), State Judiciary Department, Agriculture Department, and Islamic Judicial (Nor Surilawana Sulaiman, et al., 2023). The halal certification aims to provide consumers with assurances of the authenticity of the halal product in terms of production, materials, and processing. Enduring the process to get the halal certification can also strengthen the status of halal foods as well as services in Brunei are following the halal standard as stated by the officer:

“Halal certifications include the halalan toyyiban, so they must ensure the restaurant is always clean despite ensuring the food they serve is halal.”

As mentioned, the business owner must have at least two halal food supervisors whom BIRC acknowledges. Halal food supervisors must be on duty at the place of business where they applied. They cannot be assigned to any other branches except with permission from BIRC. There should always be one stationed on the premises. The officer said:

“Each business premises requires two halal food supervisors, who will account for each premises. They are not allowed to work at various branches; however, the applicant could write a letter to BIRC requesting permission for the halal food supervisor to be allowed to work in rotation.”

3.2 Roles and responsibilities of halal food supervisors

According to the halal supervisor's guideline book, the person who can apply as a halal food supervisor is a Muslim from Mazhab Shafei’. Other Mazhabs such as Hanafi, Maliki or Hamali are also considered with the condition that they must understand the shariah law, especially from Mazhab Shafei’. In addition, according to the guidelines of a halal food supervisor, the duties of a halal food supervisor are stated below (Jabatan Hal Ehwal Shari’ah, 2008):

a. The halal food supervisor must be on duty at the place of business, which is applied only. They cannot be assigned to other branches except with the permission of the BIRC, and one of them must always be present at the place of business.

b. The halal food supervisor controls halal food products at the business location.

c. The halal food supervisor is responsible for controlling matters related to preparing and handling cooked ingredients, including tools and appliances used in the business’s place of business.

d. The halal food supervisor is responsible for ensuring that the business place only prepares, sells, or serves halal products.

e. The halal food supervisor is responsible for ensuring only halal food or drink that should be brought inside the place of business, including those carried by its employees.

f. The halal food supervisor is responsible for ensuring that only halal ingredients are used in the place of business.

g. The halal food supervisor is responsible for informing BIRC of any changes in food ingredients.

h. The halal food supervisor is responsible for ensuring that all equipment and utensils used in the place of business are pure and permitted by Hukm Syara’.

i. It is the responsibility of the halal food supervisor to clean any area, place, vehicle, goods or equipment used in preparation, storage, and transportation that is ever in contact with or near faeces according to the procedures set out in the Standard Brunei Darussalam PBD 24:2007.

It is the responsibility of the halal food supervisor to ensure the requirements of Brunei Darussalam standards PBD 24:2007 on Halal Food and Guideline for Halal Certification (BCG Halal 1) must be fulfilled. They must carry out their tasks to protect Muslims' interests and ensure that the premise’s products and utensils are safe, clean, pure, and in compliance with protocols established by HFCD (Jabatan Hal Ehwal Shari’ah, 2008). Besides, the role of the halal supervisor is essential and encourages all committee members to acquire extensive knowledge and undergo halal training. As Fischer (2016) states, halal training plays an important role because it increase awareness, understanding and knowledge of standards and standardisation in halal practises.

3.3 The assessment of halal food supervisors

The HFCD officer said that in order to become qualified halal supervisors, they must pass the written and oral tests that the HFCD prescribes:

“The assessment will take place 5 days after the application has been received and processed by the examiners; the question
includes their knowledge of filth, how to perform ablution and practical religious components will also be tested, and the technical questions will cover hygiene, such as general cleanliness, utensils.”

Hence, the tests are divided into two categories: oral and written tests. Ultimately, all halal supervisors must pass their oral and written tests with a passing mark of 50% or above:

“The passing mark is 50%, and there are two types of tests: written and oral. However, there are no assessment levels. As long as the candidate obtains the 50%, it is considered a pass.”

A halal food supervisor must have halal expertise in Shari‘ah and technical areas. Halalan toyyiban is knowledge of certainty, and there are several verses in the Qur’an that mention halal and haram, and Sunnah discusses the merits or wisdom of eating halal foods. Aside from that, they should comprehend the technical aspects of handling halal matters, such as managing halal documents in which they must clearly explain the halal products they used and submit them to BIRC. If there are any changes in food products, they must notify BIRC. The supervisors are encouraged to participate in the Halal Supervision Strengthening Program Session conducted by HFCD, and during this session, the halal supervisors were briefed and guided:

“We will explain the duties and responsibilities of a halal food supervisor. We also conduct case studies so participants can imagine what they would do if a certain situation occurred, such as food contamination.”

The benefits of attending this program are that it enhances the understanding of halal food supervisors regarding their roles and responsibilities. To encourage them to practice halalan toyyiban principles of halal food in their daily tasks and practice good attitudes and values as Muslims. More importantly, this program ensures halal food supervisors can make wise choices in the use of ingredients and ensure there are no contaminations or mixing of non-halal materials with halal. However, the application for a halal certificate can be rejected by BIRC if the conditions for the appointment of a supervisor are not complied with, other than health and hygiene factors, and employees found to be unwell are not allowed to work in restaurants. See Figure 1.

Figure 1 summarises the roles and responsibilities of halal food supervisors in restaurants from the preliminary research interview with HFCD. In addition, the principle of trust and honesty is an important business transaction and should be practised by halal food supervisors; it is enacted between two parties: the one who trusts the consumer and the one who is trusted, the halal supervisor and the applicant. The consumer is not sure about the status of the halal food product in the restaurant and consequently seeks assurance by asking the halal supervisor. The latter ensures the consumer that the food served is halal, and the consumer trusts the halal food supervisor in turn. The relationship between them will be analysed from the perspective of the consumer. In running any company or business, these two morals are crucial because the company or business could have problems without them. Consequently, the halal food supervisors must ensure they serve halal and tayyib food, do not bring prohibited food, and maintain the restaurant’s cleanliness.

In addition, the halal food supervisor has to prove that they are knowledgeable about halal regulations and procedures in terms of food preparation. Thus, the most crucial factor influencing human behaviour and actions is the value of knowledge and thought. Halal science is a subset of Islamic science philosophy when classifying Islamic science. This is because halal products cover various social activities in Islam. They include, among other things, mualamat, family, economics, religion, morals, attire, entertainment, and so forth (Saadan Man, 2014).

Consequently, halal food supervisors must be well-versed in Islamic dietary principles, including what constitutes permitted and prohibited food, and it is necessary to have a background in food science and nutrition, along with specialised training or certification in halal standards and regulations. They must know halal regulations, product handling, packaging, and labelling. Furthermore, they must be trustworthy and professional in doing their work to maintain the credibility and trustworthiness of halal food supervisors.

4. Recommendation

Halal supervisors in Brunei Darussalam must be credible, knowledgeable, and proficient in their field to achieve the qualities and level of competency they need. Therefore, in this section, several steps can be taken to improve the competency of the halal food supervisors, and their roles must be competent enough to ensure consistency in their adherence to the halal standards and requirements.

![Figure 1: The role and responsibilities of halal food supervisors in restaurants.](19)
Qualified candidates should be chosen for positions; this practice dates back to early Islamic management. As a result, only those who are genuinely capable are permitted to assume leadership roles. This was crucial in accepting accountability (Ab Aziz Yusof, 2019). In particular, the authority must ensure that the employees’ qualifications match the tasks that must be completed. This guarantees that every supervisor of halal food can give their all to the establishment and has an official record of achievement given upon successfully finishing a training programme, passing an exam, and possessing the required skills. For instance, halal food supervisors should deeply understand Shariah’s knowledge and technical knowledge, such as food safety management systems.

Implement continuous and specialised halal training and education by conducting comprehensive training programmes for halal food supervisors. Training programmes should cover various topics, such as Islamic dietary regulations and food safety measures. An organisation such as the private sector can establish a culture of continuous learning and professional development that can enable the halal food supervisors to manage complex problems, adapt to new requirements, and adhere to halal standards and compliance. The halal food supervisor should be fully committed to continuous learning. According to Riaz and Chaudry (2003), continuous training is essential, ensuring that supervisors remain current on changing industry norms.

Strengthen assessment procedures for halal food supervisors, including theoretical and practical, to ensure a thorough evaluation of their qualification and capabilities. Furthermore, it emphasises transparency and accountability in the qualification system for halal supervisors. For instance, clear evaluation criteria for assessing the qualifications of halal supervisors should be established, outlining the specific knowledge and skills required for their role. Implementing standardised assessments, such as written and oral tests with defined passing marks, ensures consistency and fairness in evaluating the competency of halal food supervisors.

5. Conclusion

The professional efficiency of these assessments is also an important asset that determines the success of operational performances. In order to become halal food supervisors, it is essential to have an assessment that covers both theoretical and practical aspects. Halal food supervisors must have specialised knowledge, especially in the Syariah and technical aspects. Therefore, they can practice in restaurants and improve their competency performances by having that valuable knowledge. In addition, regular monitoring and oversight by regulatory bodies, such as the HFCD and BBRC, help ensure that halal food supervisors fulfill their duties effectively, promoting transparency and accountability in the qualification system. To conclude, this research can make a real contribution to marketers and policymakers in improving their service, which can be gained from successful and effective performances to make competent halal supervisors.

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