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Bridging informal halal industry experience and formal accreditation: The implementation of accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL) in Islamic studies within Malaysian higher education institutions

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Abstract

The swift growth of the halal industry has generated a need for experts possessing both formal academic credentials and practical experience. Malaysia has established the Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) as a system to acknowledge non-formal and informal learning for academic credit and access. This article examines the implementation of APEL in Islamic Studies programs, particularly in halal industry management and *Shari'ah*-based fields, across Malaysian higher education institutions. This study employs qualitative methods, including policy analysis, document review, and expert interviews, to examine how APEL integrates field experience in halal auditing, certification, logistics, and compliance into its formal curriculum frameworks. It evaluates the difficulties in harmonising experiential learning with *Maqasid al-Shari'ah, Usul al-Fiqh,* and institutional certification criteria. The findings suggest that although APEL serves as an essential link between industry and academia, its execution must consider epistemological integrity, assessment systems, and curricular alignment. Recommendations are proposed to improve governance, *Shari'ah* compliance, and strategic implementation of APEL to future-proof Islamic higher education within the global halal economy.

1. Introduction

The informal halal industry has evolved considerably over the years, particularly in Malaysia, where it is integral to the nation's economic and cultural identity. Nevertheless, a disparity persists in integrating the experiential knowledge acquired in the informal sector with the formal educational structure offered by higher education institutions. The Assessment of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) is a feasible remedy to this shortcoming, especially in Islamic Studies. This introduction explores the convergence of informal knowledge in the halal industry and formal accreditation systems, highlighting how APEL can improve educational outcomes in Malaysian higher education. The informal halal industry is defined by the varied experiences and practices of individuals involved in halal-related activities, comprising food manufacturing and financial services. Such experiences are frequently not recognized within the educational framework, thereby preventing people from obtaining formal qualifications despite possessing relevant knowledge and skills.

Mokhtar *et al.* (2023) argue that the APEL process is crucial for recognising prior experiential learning, particularly for graduates of conventional Islamic institutions, such as *Pondok* schools in Malaysia. This acknowledgement strengthens the Malaysian Qualifications Agency's (MQA) initiatives to incorporate diverse educational courses within the formal accreditation framework.

In recent years, discourse on halal education has intensified, emphasising the integration of Islamic jurisprudence and pertinent industry requirements into academic curricula. Siregar *et al.* (2024), in their review titled 'The Prospects of a Halal Food Safety Academic Programme in Malaysian Higher Education: A Review', emphasise the importance of integrating elements of Islamic law to equip students with knowledge of halal food safety, relevant regulatory frameworks, and practical experience through internships or field visits. With the expansion of the halal industry, Malaysian higher education institutions must acknowledge prior learning and revise their curricula to incorporate both traditional Islamic teachings and current market requirements.

The use of APEL can enrich the field of Islamic Studies by fostering a thorough understanding of Islamic ideals in relation to contemporary halal industry activities. Studies demonstrate that this methodology can foster new solutions to critical difficulties encountered by the sector, such as adherence to international standards and customer awareness (Putri *et al.*, 2024). Interdisciplinary approaches are crucial for this integration, promoting collaboration with industry experts to align educational content with practical applications, thereby ensuring graduates are informed and equipped to meet the requirements of the halal economy (Siswahyuningsih & Adzhar, 2025). However, existing studies broadly discuss APEL at a conceptual level and offer limited guidance on

operationalising it within Islamic Studies programmes to meet halal industry competency needs in Malaysia. This study addresses that gap by synthesising the literature and proposing a more precise framing of APEL's role in aligning Islamic Studies curriculum with industry expectations.

Consequently, the integration of APEL in Islamic Studies at Malaysian higher education institutions is poised to advantage both students and the wider community. This study contributes by linking APEL to a *Shari'ah*-grounded epistemological lens, in which experiential learning is evaluated against Islamic principles of knowledge, values, and accountability. This framing clarifies how APEL can be operationalised in Islamic Studies while maintaining *Shari'ah* coherence and meeting halal industry competency needs. By prioritising experiential knowledge and aligning curricula with industry demands, educational institutions can cultivate graduates adept at navigating and leading in the rapidly evolving halal sector. This alignment will improve graduates' employability and foster Malaysia's growth and recognition as a global leader in the halal sector.

2. Literature review

2.1 Theoretical foundations of APEL in Islamic epistemology

The theoretical foundations of the Assessment of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) in Islamic epistemology are essential for integrating informal knowledge into formal higher education systems, particularly in Islamic Studies. APEL serves as a framework for validating and recognizing informal and non-traditional learning experiences, aligning educational outcomes with the overarching goals of Islamic epistemology.

Islamic epistemology focuses on the sources and types of knowledge, highlighting the unity of knowledge, the significance of intention (*niyyah*), and the ethical aspects of learning. The implementation of APEL aligns with these principles by recognising and valuing learners' prior experiences, whether in community engagement, traditional scholarship, or professional contexts within the accredited educational framework.

Incorporating Islamic values into educational practices is crucial for curricula to embody both academic rigour and the spiritual and ethical dimensions intrinsic to Islamic teachings (Rafsanjani *et al.*, 2025). The alignment holds particular significance in Islamic Studies, where careful navigation of the dichotomy between secular and religious knowledge is essential. The role of APEL in Islamic epistemology underscores the necessity of a comprehensive, integrative approach to knowledge. Islamic higher education must evolve to address modern challenges while adhering to core Islamic principles (Hasanah & SZ, 2023). APEL enables adaptation by providing a framework for recognizing diverse forms of knowledge arising outside conventional academic environments, thereby enhancing the educational landscape.

Additionally, APEL serves as a response to the globalised educational landscape, allowing institutions to recognise and integrate various epistemological viewpoints. The engagement with diverse knowledge forms is essential for promoting critical thinking and innovation in students, as emphasised by the advocacy for interdisciplinary collaboration in academia (Rafsanjani *et al.*, 2025; Hasanah & SZ, 2023). The

epistemological foundations of APEL align with the Islamic tradition of knowledge acquisition from diverse sources, promoting a combination of traditional educational methods with experiential and community-oriented learning.

The emphasis on the spiritual and ethical aspects of knowledge sharing, as noted by Rahman *et al.*, corresponds with APEL practices aimed at fostering supportive learning environments (Rahman *et al.*, 2020). Academic institutions can enhance graduates' preparedness for positive societal contributions by promoting a culture of inclusivity and recognition. This is especially pertinent in Malaysia, where the halal industry is experiencing rapid expansion and necessitates a workforce equipped with both technical skills and an understanding of ethical considerations rooted in Islamic principles.

The theoretical foundations of APEL in Islamic epistemology emphasise the significance of acknowledging various forms of knowledge while maintaining an educational framework rooted in ethical and spiritual values. This approach validates experiential learning and enhances the academic framework of Islamic Studies, preparing learners to address the complexities of modern society while upholding Islamic principles.

2.2 Review of APEL implementation in Malaysia

The implementation of the Assessment of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) in Malaysia signifies a notable effort to recognise and formalise experiential knowledge acquired in many contexts, especially in Islamic Studies. APEL connects informal learning experiences with formal education, promoting a more inclusive educational environment. The evaluation of APEL's implementation in Malaysia reveals several key elements, including the recognition of prior experience from conventional Islamic educational institutions, the incorporation of other knowledge systems, and compliance with national educational policies. The importance of APEL resides in its capacity to acknowledge experiences gained from *Pondok* schools and other informal Islamic educational environments. Mokhtar *et al.* claim that the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA) recognises these types of knowledge as significant and worthy of formal acknowledgement within academic structures (Mokhtar *et al.*, 2023).

This is especially pertinent as numerous graduates from these institutions possess practical expertise that may not have been formally recognised in higher education settings. By incorporating APEL, educational institutions can establish avenues for students to obtain credits for their experiential learning, thereby improving their academic and career opportunities. Furthermore, APEL corresponds with Malaysia's overarching educational objectives, including those delineated in the Malaysian Education Blueprint 2015-2025, which seeks to cultivate well-rounded graduates equipped with relevant skills and capabilities for the global marketplace. The incorporation of APEL facilitates the recognition of varied learning experiences, promoting lifelong learning and competency-based education (Mokhtar *et al.*, 2023). This connection is crucial for Islamic higher education to maintain relevance in a rapidly changing educational environment shaped by globalisation and technological progress.

Furthermore, the introduction of APEL signifies a transition towards a holistic educational approach that incorporates interdisciplinary techniques. The interaction between experiential knowledge and formal education systems

promotes the examination of diverse educational philosophies, especially those grounded in Islamic traditions, which support a holistic and comprehensive view of knowledge. While Nasir *et al.* examine the development of Islamic education curricula, their emphasis does not explicitly address APEL and its incorporation into traditional educational methodologies in the Malaysian context (Nasir *et al.*, 2021). This underscores the need for further investigation into the specific effects of APEL on Islamic Studies.

The implementation and utilisation of APEL in Malaysia had been substantial throughout the shift to online learning, expedited by the COVID-19 epidemic. The difficulties educators and students faced in adjusting to remote learning environments highlighted the need to acknowledge diverse learning modalities. Nonetheless, although Rahman *et al.* emphasise the incorporation of e-learning within the APEL framework, there is a shortage of specific studies about its implementation during the pandemic in relation to Islamic educational principles (Mokhtar *et al.*, 2023). This adaptability demonstrates APEL's flexibility in meeting modern educational requirements while adhering to Islamic educational principles.

The application of APEL in Malaysian higher education, especially in Islamic Studies, marks a significant advancement in the recognition and validation of experiential learning. By integrating casual learning experiences with official academic accreditation, APEL aligns with national educational goals and updates the curriculum in accordance with worldwide trends. The program promotes educational opportunities for students from Islamic educational backgrounds and enriches Malaysia's overall educational landscape.

2.3 Role of experiential knowledge in halal governance

Experiential knowledge plays a significant role in halal governance, shaping rules and practices that ensure compliance with Islamic principles and support the development of the halal industry. The importance is emphasised in Malaysia, a country striving to position itself as a global halal centre. The incorporation of experiential knowledge into halal governance can be examined through multiple perspectives, including the concepts of *Maqasid al-Shari'ah*, legal enforcement, and stakeholder involvement. The concepts of *Maqasid al-Shari'ah*, which emphasise the most important aims of Islamic law, offer a fundamental paradigm for halal governance. Zain and Zakaria argue that successful halal governance must conform to these principles to tackle sustainability and ethical considerations within the halal ecosystem (Zain & Zakaria, 2022).

Understanding the contextual uses of experience knowledge—drawn from many stakeholders across the halal supply chain—facilitates the development of governance frameworks aligned with the community's ideals. Consequently, experiential learning from industry practitioners strengthens the theoretical foundations of halal governance, fostering methods that address both economic and ethical considerations. Implementing halal regulations is essential to ensuring compliance within the halal industry. Nazim and Yusof emphasise the need to understand food operators' awareness of halal compliance and the consequences of non-compliance (Nazim & Yusof, 2023). By integrating experiential insights from these operators, regulatory authorities can deepen their understanding of the practical challenges of complying with halal standards. This feedback loop not only enhances

enforcement techniques but also helps develop more effective education and training programs for all stakeholders.

Furthermore, the role of competent authorities, such as the Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM), is crucial to the governance of halal certification processes. According to Othman *et al.*, these authorities oversee halal matters, and their effectiveness can be enhanced by integrating feedback from both enterprises and customers (Othman *et al.*, 2025). By prioritising practical experience within the halal governance framework, JAKIM may better align its policies with the demands and realities of the halal industry, thereby fostering a more conducive environment for halal businesses. The dynamics of stakeholder participation are crucial in this environment. From grassroots producers to huge enterprises, each stakeholder contributes distinct experiential knowledge that can enhance halal governance. Kamil and Hatta highlight that the interplay between government rules and industry practices may significantly influence the performance of the halal food sector (Kamil & Hatta, 2025). This collaborative method facilitates the integration of insights gained from previous implementations and encountered problems, thereby informing future halal governance initiatives to enhance their efficiency and practicality.

Ultimately, the comparative framework of halal certification across nations highlights the need to learn from diverse practices and rules. While Muhammad *et al.* were not explicitly cited in this job, the research agrees that Malaysian halal governance can be improved by examining experiential insights from international peers and concurrently exporting effective frameworks. This adaptive learning can help create a resilient halal ecosystem that is both competitive and compliant. Experiential knowledge is crucial in shaping and enhancing halal governance in Malaysia. The governance system can be improved by integrating practical perspectives from diverse stakeholders, adhering to the *Maqasid al-Shari'ah* guidelines, and actively engaging halal authorities. This comprehensive strategy not only fosters the expansion of the halal business but also reinforces Malaysia's status as a global halal market leader.

2.4 Global trends in recognising prior learning (RPL/APEL)

The successful implementation of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) or Assessment of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) throughout different nations illustrates varied methodologies for incorporating informal and non-formal experiences into higher education frameworks. Countries such as the UK, Australia, and South Africa have developed RPL frameworks that enable the recognition of professional experience through academic credentials.

This enables students to utilise their industrial expertise and competencies to obtain official qualifications that are advantageous in fields such as halal governance and Islamic studies. By juxtaposing these methods with Malaysia's APEL project and pertinent guidelines from UNESCO and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development OECD, we can elucidate Malaysia's distinctive standing in the domain of Islamic higher education.

In the UK, RPL is systematically organised under the framework set by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA). The QAA offers guidelines that highlight a flexible methodology for acknowledging various learning

modalities, urging institutions to evaluate experiential learning, including apprenticeships and vocational training, together with academic credentials. Research demonstrates that UK colleges employ multifaceted assessment techniques, encompassing portfolios, interviews, and reflective essays, to cater to diverse learning styles and experiences.

Australia is a prominent leader in RPL adoption, distinguished by national policies that support the recognition of prior learning across its education system. Research by Jamil *et al.* (2020) indicates that RPL is achieved through examinations customised to the learners' needs and prior experiences in their specific domains. Thus, this methodology corresponds with Malaysia's APEL, which likewise seeks to acknowledge students' previous experiences. Malaysia's efforts prioritise integrating Islamic ideas into education, whereas Australia emphasises vocational training and skill development across diverse sectors.

South Africa's Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) methodology is particularly significant. The country's National Qualifications Framework (NQF) facilitates the incorporation of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) to enhance inclusion and accessibility to higher education for marginalised groups. The South African system promotes educational institutions to implement assessment methodologies that acknowledge the experiential learning of adult learners in informal contexts, including agricultural practices and technical skills (Eschmann *et al.*, 2025). This inclusive strategy serves as a significant example for Malaysia, particularly because it aims to involve a diverse demographic with varying educational levels in its halal economy.

In contrast, Malaysia's APEL effort has progressed in line with directives from organisations such as UNESCO and the OECD. The Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA) has established the APEL framework, which prioritises the evaluation of knowledge acquired through several informal paths, such as professional experience and community service (Yende, 2023). This framework exemplifies a dedication to closing the gap between APEL and formal qualifications in Islamic Higher Education Institutions. Malaysia encounters difficulties in effectively implementing its APEL system, notably regarding the need for a standardised evaluation method, the availability of experienced evaluators, and the alignment of experiential learning with academic courses (Ghasemy, 2022).

The ASEAN region offers insights into RPL practices. Countries like Thailand and Indonesia are integrating RPL into their educational systems, advancing lifelong learning as a component of their national human resource development goals. This regional emphasis on RPL amplifies Malaysia's capacity to cooperate and acquire knowledge from its neighbours, promoting a unified strategy for lifelong learning among ASEAN member states (Kawata & Salman, 2020).

Malaysia's distinctive position in Islamic Higher Education offers an opportunity to integrate traditional Islamic knowledge with modern practices through APEL. This generates opportunities for customised qualification pathways in areas such as *fiqh al-ṭahārah* (jurisprudence on purity) or halal governance that align with the requirements of the local halal industry while conforming to Islamic ethical standards (Rizki *et al.*, 2023). Malaysia's focus on halal requirements introduces a complication absent in the RPL schemes of other nations, necessitating meticulous adherence to regulatory requirements alongside educational frameworks.

In conclusion, whereas the RPL frameworks of the UK, Australia, and South Africa offer significant examples for acknowledging informal learning, Malaysia's APEL program represents a distinctly Islamic perspective on higher education. By contextualising current RPL practices with global and regional benchmarks, Malaysia could identify areas for enhancement and innovation, hence reinforcing the significance of experiential knowledge in Islamic higher education and the halal business.

2.5 APEL's role in democratising Islamic higher education

The Assessment of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) plays an important role in democratizing access to Islamic higher education, particularly for diverse groups such as *asnaf* eligible for *zakat, mualaf* (new Muslims), mosque-based educators, independent preachers, and halal entrepreneurs. These individuals often possess substantial practical experience and strong knowledge in fields like Islamic jurisprudence and halal operations, yet they may lack conventional academic credentials. APEL serves as a bridge, enabling these individuals to acquire formal qualifications, thereby fostering a more inclusive and balanced educational environment aligned with the principles of *wasatiyyah* (moderation) in Islamic education.

APEL can significantly uplift marginalized groups by acknowledging their experiential knowledge as legitimate learning. Experiences gathered from preaching, community leadership, or halal industry operations can be formally evaluated and credited toward academic qualifications. Research suggests that recognition frameworks, such as APEL, enhance access to education for non-traditional students and support social inclusion (Maurer *et al.*, 2022). By doing so, educational institutions can empower individuals who may otherwise be excluded from pursuing higher education because of a lack of formal qualifications, thereby promoting an equitable educational landscape. The experiences of *asnaf* and *mualaf* are particularly critical in this context. These groups often engage deeply with community needs and Islamic teachings through practical applications of knowledge. The flexible APEL process can help translate their community involvement and operational expertise into academic credits toward Islamic studies programs, enabling them to further their knowledge and expertise, which is essential for effective community leadership and advocacy (Mokhtar *et al.*, 2023).

Additionally, APEL equips mosque-based educators and independent preachers who may lack formal pedagogical training with opportunities to formalize their teaching credentials. With proper assessment and acknowledgment of their teaching experience, they can fulfil the educational standards required to work in formal educational environments. Frameworks described by Roy and Marsafawy highlight how RPL can connect community expertise with formal learning environments, facilitating a circular interaction between educational institutions and the broader society (Roy & Marsafawy, 2021).

Furthermore, halal entrepreneurs possess valuable operational insights from their engagements in the halal industry. By granting these individuals academic recognition for their experiences, APEL creates a pathway to enhance their qualifications and enrich the discussion on halal governance. This enables educators in Islamic studies to draw practical insights from industry experience to develop curricula that

address real-world challenges in halal compliance and ethics. Compared with other countries' practices, Malaysia's APEL bears similarities to Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) frameworks observed in contexts such as the UK and Australia. However, Malaysia's unique positioning within Islamic contexts allows for a more culturally specific application of these principles. While frameworks in more secular contexts prioritize vocational education and skill recognition broadly, Malaysia can integrate its rich Islamic heritage into the evaluation process of experiential knowledge (Alves *et al.*, 2020).

Moreover, Malaysian higher education institutions are encouraged to establish partnerships with local community organizations, mosques, and halal industry stakeholders to share resources, knowledge, and expertise aligned with the APEL initiative (Rich *et al.*, 2020). Such collaborations could facilitate a deeper understanding of potential students' lived experiences and build an interconnected framework of support, resonating with the *wasatiyyah* concept that promotes balance, inclusivity, and justice in educational practices.

In conclusion, APEL serves as a transformative mechanism that democratizes access to Islamic higher education for *asnaf, mualaf*, mosque-based educators, independent preachers, and halal entrepreneurs. It validates the extensive informal learning accumulated by these groups and provides a structured pathway toward formal educational recognition. By promoting inclusive frameworks, APEL not only enriches the educational landscape but also aligns with the core fundamentals of *wasatiyyah*, seeking to offer balanced and comprehensive Islamic education.

3. Methodology

This study utilises a qualitative research methodology, defined by policy analysis, document review, and expert interviews, to examine the integration of field experience in halal auditing, certification, logistics, and compliance into formal curriculum frameworks by the Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL). The expert interviews generated experiential evidence from purposively selected practitioners who were directly involved as APEL coordinators and assessors at the Malaysian Public University. The emphasis is on assessing the difficulties of aligning experiential learning with the goals of *Maqasid al-Shari'ah*, *Usul al-Fiqh*, and the accreditation standards set by educational institutions.

3.1 Research design

The qualitative technique is employed due to its efficacy in examining the intricacies and complexities of institutional procedures related to APEL and experiences within the halal industry. This methodology facilitates a comprehensive study of how various stakeholders perceive and implement APEL regulations within Islamic Studies programs, particularly in the halal industry. The research begins with a thorough review of the official documents, regulations, and recommendations promulgated by the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA). The essential components of APEL are APEL-A (Access), APEL-C (Credit Award), and APEL-Q (Qualification Award), which are rigorously analysed to ascertain their role in incorporating informal experiences within the halal environment into formal education (Ariffin *et al.*, 2023).
The study drew on three interlocking evidentiary strands: policy analysis, systematic document review, and semi-structured expert interviews. First, a policy corpus comprising

MQA Guidelines to Good Practices for APEL C, APEL A, and APEL M, the Programme Standards for Halal Studies, the APEL Learners Handbook, and related national quality assurance documents. It also included key works on Islamic higher education and halal governance. This policy strand provided authoritative criteria for credit limits, course learning outcomes, and assessment instruments. It also provided quality assurance requirements against which institutional practices could be evaluated.

Second, a document review was conducted on the Malaysia APEL centre policies. This included internal APEL committee minutes, workshop reports, proposed APEL Centre structures, APEL C checklists, and SOPs from Malaysian Islamic higher education institutions and benchmarking universities. These documents provided empirical evidence on how national policies and the Halal Studies Programme Standards are being operationalised, adapted, and contested at the institutional level. Examples include the separation of roles between advisor and assessor, *Shari'ah*-compliance screening of portfolios, the use of digital APEL portals, and internal moderation and appeal mechanisms.

Third semi-structured interviews were conducted with 16 APEL experts selected through purposive sampling during the APEL Workshop. The interviews captured diverse perspectives on APEL implementation in Islamic Studies and halal-related programmes. The sample included APEL coordinators, advisors, assessors, and moderators in the *Shari'ah* and Halal Studies program.

All materials, including policies, institutional documents, and interview transcripts, were imported into a qualitative analysis framework and subjected to iterative coding. Data analysis combined directed content analysis with a priori codes derived from *Maqasid al-Shari'ah* and Islamic legal epistemology, including *fiqh usul al fiqh*, *qawaid fiqhiyyah*, and MQA APEL and Halal Studies program standards. It also used inductive thematic coding to capture emergent categories related to governance assessment practice, *Shari'ah* screening, and institutional readiness. Triangulation across the three evidence streams, policy texts, institutional documents, and expert narratives, was used to corroborate findings and to identify convergences and tensions between formal frameworks and lived implementation.

In combination with policy papers, the curricular frameworks of selected Islamic Studies programs at public and private Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are analysed. This evaluation assesses the alignment of the current curriculum with APEL requirements, highlighting any deficiencies or constraints in recognising prior field expertise in halal auditing and logistics. These factors are essential for cultivating a more sophisticated comprehension of the recognition of experiential knowledge within academic contexts (Ariffin *et al.*, 2023).

3.2 Epistemological framework

The study adopts an interpretivist epistemological framework, acknowledging that incorporating Islamic experiential learning into formal academic certification systems reflects diverse values and viewpoints associated with individual and cultural identities. This viewpoint recognises that the difficulties encountered in certifying informal Islamic knowledge and halal operational experience necessitate a contextually aware understanding rather than a purely positivist assessment. It is essential to evaluate the impact of personal beliefs and
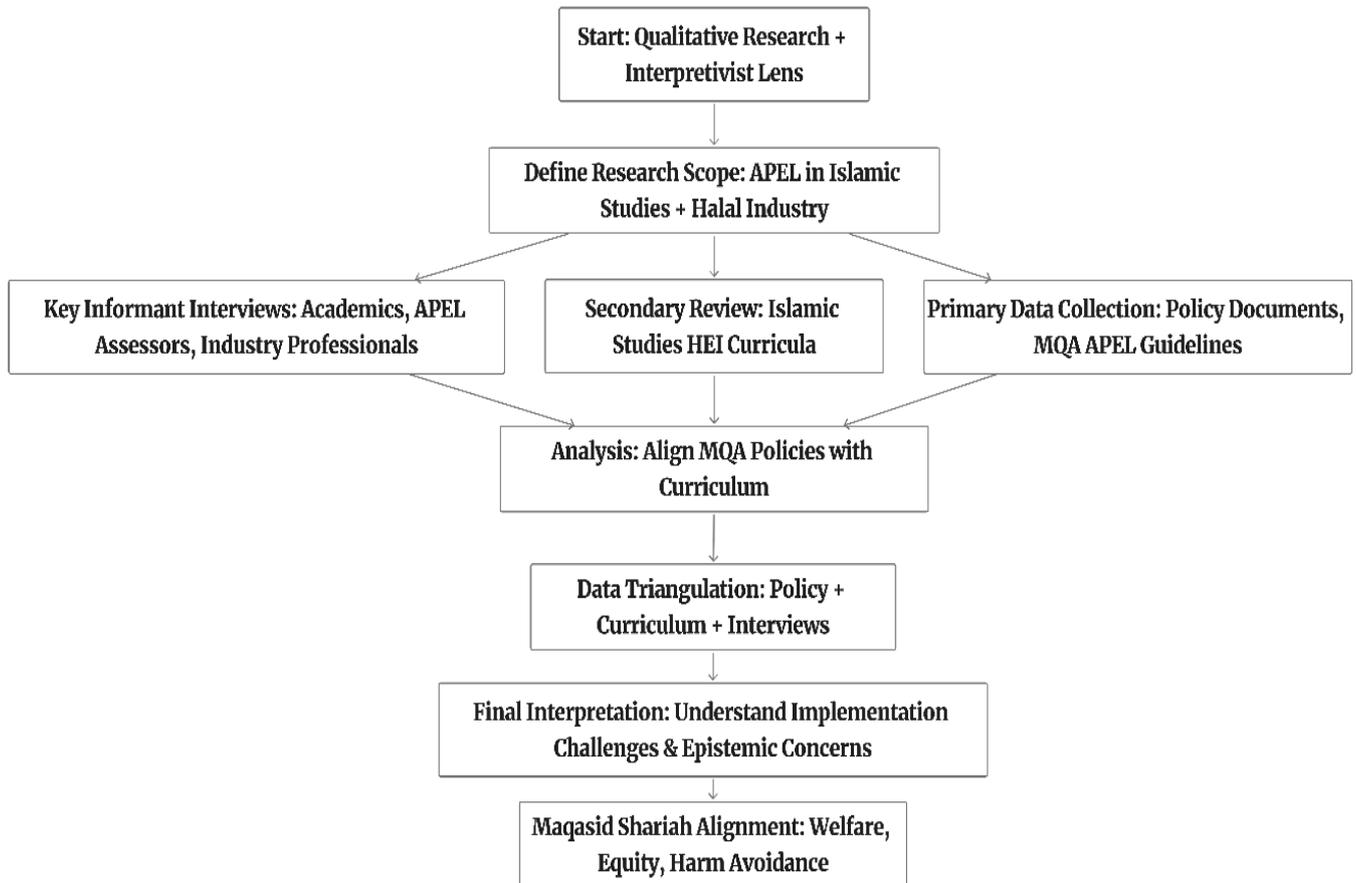
Figure 1: Process flowchart of the research methodology on APEL implementation in Islamic studies and halal industry contexts.

institutional mandates on the acknowledgement of earlier experiential learning, especially in the Islamic educational framework (Hasan & Latif, 2024).

3.3 Evaluation of *Maqasid al-Shari'ah* alignment

The integration of experiential learning within APEL frameworks must correspond with the fundamental aims of *Maqasid al-Shari'ah*, which seek to enhance welfare, avert damage, and uphold equity. This alignment poses difficulties, especially concerning the relationship between operational methods in halal certification and auditing and fundamental Islamic values (Hasan & Latif, 2024; Dahlal, 2021).

Figure 1 illustrates the sequential methodological framework employed in the research. It initiates with the implementation of a qualitative research methodology informed by an interpretivist perspective.

4. Results and discussion

4.1 Mapping halal industry experience to Islamic academic outcomes

In Malaysian higher education, the Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning for Credit Award (APEL-C) provides a formal framework to translate pertinent professional experience, especially in the halal sector, into academic credit. This acknowledgement is given only when experience claims are meticulously aligned with course learning outcomes (CLOs) and assessed through reliable means, such as portfolios or challenge examinations. The assessment should focus on the documented learning outcomes rather than the experience itself. To obtain credit, learners must demonstrate a minimum of 50% proficiency for each Course Learning Outcome (CLO). Upon approval, the credit is recorded as CT(APEL) on the academic transcript. It holds no grade point value and contributes to graduation credits within the 30% threshold established by national policy. This restriction guarantees the preservation of the core curriculum while simultaneously facilitating experiential learning.

In halal auditing, experts conduct internal and external audits, verify compliance, and mitigate risks. These responsibilities align closely with the Programme Standards for Halal Studies, particularly regarding halal regulation, governance, assurance systems, and auditing procedures. Auditors may incorporate documentation such as audit checklists, corrective action reports, and standard operating procedures into their portfolio. These materials substantiate claims about CLOs related to knowledge, practical skills, ethical behaviour, and leadership within halal contexts. The exhibited learning must correspond with designated CLOs and satisfy the minimum performance standard. A challenge test may be used further to evaluate the candidate's understanding of halal regulations when deemed necessary. Credit is awarded solely upon the fulfilment of specified outcomes, with results officially documented without impacting the learner's GPA.

Table 1: Sequential qualitative methodology for exploring APEL(C) in Islamic and halal education pathways

Criteria	Key Policy & Assessment Principles (APEL Framework)	Curriculum Match (MQA Halal Studies Standards)
I. Foundational Principles & Quality Assurance		
Policy Mandate	APEL(C) awards academic credit for informal/non-formal prior experiential learning, provided evidence is rigorously mapped to Course Learning Outcomes (CLOs).	The philosophical requirements include compliance with *Shari'ah* and adherence to the principles of *Maqasid al-Shari'ah* in all curriculum design and assessment.
Credit Limit & Notation	The maximum credit transfer is capped at 30% of the program's total graduating credits. Example 36 credits for a 120-credit bachelor's program. Awards are recorded as CT(APEL) on the transcript, count toward graduation, but do not affect GPA/CGPA calculations.	Credit recognition is constrained by the minimum required graduating credits for the respective MQF level; for example, 60 for Certificate, 120 for Bachelor's, and 40 for master's by Coursework.
Assessment Standard	Assessment must confirm demonstrable and evidence-based learning, not merely claimed experience. Candidates must achieve at least 50% on each CLO to pass.	Assessment instruments must align with the academic level and the 11 MQF Learning Outcomes clusters specified in the Halal Studies Programme Standards: Cognitive, Practical, Professionalism & Ethics, and Leadership.
II. Application of APEL(C) to Industry Roles (Use Cases)		
1. Halal Auditors	Competence is assessed through detailed Portfolio submission and/or Challenge Tests, often involving complex case studies to ensure validity and practical relevance.	Practice maps directly to the Halal Regulatory and Governance, covering Halal Standards, Halal Assurance Management System (HAS), and Halal Auditing, as detailed in the curriculum tables and industrial training checklists.
2. Halal Trainers	Claims typically focus on soft skills, such as presentation, communication, and curriculum development, which require demonstration via work samples and possibly skills demonstration/observation assessments.	Experience aligns with Communication Skills, Interpersonal Skills, and specialized Discipline Core components related to Halal Products and Services or Halal Systems, depending on the training focus.
3. *Shari'ah* Advisors	Evidence must undergo *Shari'ah* compliance screening by qualified panels to prohibit the recognition of learning derived from non-permissible industries or activities such as *riba,* gambling, and alcohol.	Expertise is mapped to the mandatory Halal Common Core Courses, such as Islamic Theology, *Usul Fiqh, Qawaid Fiqhiyyah,* and *Fiqh al-Istihlak,* ensuring foundational *Shari'ah* compliance for problem-solving and ethical practice.
III. Assessment & Documentation Requirements		
Assessment Instruments	Primary instruments include the Challenge Test, either a written or an oral evaluation, and Portfolio or Evidence Collection, which are organized materials that verify acquired skills.	The instruments must confirm learning equivalence to the CLOs of specific, accredited courses within the Halal Studies program.
Required Documentation	Applicants must submit a Self-Assessment Form (SAF), a curriculum vitae of up to 3 pages, a 500-word reflective report on experiential learning related to the course, and verifiable evidence such as certifications, work samples, and supporting letters.	Portfolio evidence must explicitly map the acquired learning statements to the targeted course CLOs, such as demonstrating 'Editing in Word' skills via past job experience, using institutionally provided templates and rubrics.
Review & Endorsement	All assessment results require review and endorsement by the relevant Academic Committee, Examination Committee, or the University Senate before credit is officially posted.	Assessment panels must include at least one industry representative and one *Shari'ah* or ethics advisor to safeguard academic and Islamic integrity throughout the evaluation process.
Cost Recovery Note	The APEL implementation is framed as an "opportunity provider" for lifelong learners. However, financial planning is essential, as operational expenses must be covered through a cost-recovery model involving transparent, non-refundable fees for registration, application per credit hour, portfolio submission, and challenge tests, which are approved by the Finance Division and the Senate.	

Halal trainers possess expertise in providing structured education on halal-related subjects, including supply chain management, slaughtering protocols, and product certification, enabling them to fulfil CLOs in communication, interpersonal relations, leadership, and lifelong learning. These competences are integrated into the Malaysian Qualifications Framework (MQF) for Halal Studies programs. Trainers may use training syllabi, learner evaluations, and reflective reports in their portfolios to demonstrate alignment with academic objectives. If additional evaluation is required, a challenge test may be conducted to assess specific knowledge. Credit is granted solely upon fulfilling evaluation requirements and is subject to moderation. It is included under the 30% APEL(C) limit and is officially acknowledged in the learner's academic record.

Shari'ah advisers, who offer specialised counsel in halal governance and Islamic finance, frequently engage with fatwas, *Shari'ah* review papers, and legal advice memoranda. These outputs are strongly associated with fundamental elements of the Halal Studies curriculum, specifically in Islamic jurisprudence, *usul al-fiqh*, consumer ethics, and *Maqasid al-Shari'ah*. Their proof must have both theoretical depth and practical relevance, and it should be explicitly aligned with the course CLOs. A portfolio must adhere to the criteria of authenticity, relevance, and sufficiency, and may be supplemented by a challenge test to validate jurisprudential comprehension. The credit award process includes ethical screening to ensure compliance with *Shari'ah* norms. Approved credits are documented as CT(APEL) without grade transfer and must adhere to the 30% maximum permitted by institutional requirements.

Aligning the curriculum with experiential learning necessitates a meticulous comparison between the Course Learning Outcomes (CLOs) and the candidate's evidence. The Halal Studies Programme Standards offer comprehensive frameworks and industrial training criteria that assist assessors in making uniform evaluations. APEL(C) commences by determining the Course Learning Outcomes (CLOs) of a designated course and correlating evidence from industrial practices to pertinent areas, including halal systems, legislation, or governance. Instruments such as assessment rubrics, challenge examinations, and advisory checklists are used to standardise the process and ensure reliability. No partial credit will be awarded, and assessments must rely on complete course equivalence. All awarded credits require internal moderation and formal endorsement before they are included in academic records.

To uphold quality and institutional integrity, the adoption of APEL(C) necessitates a distinct separation of roles between advisors and assessors. Evidence must be corroborated, evaluations must be equitable, and decision-making must be recorded. These processes undergo internal and external audits. Islamic universities implement supplementary ethical reviews to verify adherence to *Shari'ah* norms during the recognition process. The curriculum maintains its Islamic identity while providing access to specialists with practical experience. This system allows practitioners to obtain educational degrees without having to redo previously acquired material, ensuring that credentials reflect both practical proficiency and intellectual rigour. The overall framework safeguards academic standards while providing flexibility and acknowledgement to professionals in halal-related domains.

4.2 Islamic legal epistemology in APEL evaluation

Incorporating Islamic legal epistemology into the Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) process requires that assessments be grounded in fundamental Islamic jurisprudence. This encompasses the implementation of *fiqh, uṣūl al-fiqh*, and *qawāʿid fiqhiyyah*, while also reflecting the ethical principles of *amanah* (trust), *'adl* (justice), and *ikhlas* (sincerity). These frameworks provide a comprehensive, ethically principled foundation for acknowledging experiential learning in Islamic academic programs, particularly in Halal studies.

The Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA) Programme Standards for Halal Studies include the incorporation of "Halal Common Core Courses" at all qualification levels under the Malaysian Qualifications Framework (MQF). These include modules such as *Usul al-Fiqh, Qawaid Fiqhiyyah*, Islamic Theology (Aqidah), and *Fiqh al-Istihlak* (Islamic Law of Consumerism). These disciplines are not solely academic; they also ground the curriculum within the broader objectives of Islamic law. The program highlights essential elements of Islamic legal reasoning, including the sources of *Shari'ah*, legal decisions of *ḥukm taklifi* and *waḍ'ī*, and the five universal legal maxims that provide epistemic standards for assessing permissibility, harm, and public interest. These principles guarantee that APEL assessments are purposefully aligned with *Maqasid al-Shari'ah*, namely the safeguarding of religion, life, lineage, intellect, and property.

In operational terms, APEL(C) mandates assessors to verify that experiential learning aligns with the specified Course Learning Outcomes (CLOs) of recognised subjects. This includes not only gathering experience but also exhibiting cognitive and skill-based proficiency in accordance with MQF level descriptions. Assessments are grounded in evidence, with rubrics requiring a minimum of 50% achievement of each Course Learning Outcome (CLO) to ensure epistemic adequacy and validity. Portfolios must present clear correlations between prior learning and CLOs, substantiated by tangible documentation, including audit reports or training materials. In intellectually complex domains such as *Usul al-Fiqh* and *Qawaid*, evaluative assessments may be essential for gauging doctrinal understanding and legal reasoning.

The method highlights the integrity of knowledge (*'ilm*) and the transmission chain of knowledge (*sanad*). This is accomplished via explicit operational processes, including third-party attestations, authenticity declarations, and identity verification. Advisors and assessors must be distinct individuals to guarantee impartiality. Subject-matter specialists function as evaluators, assessing evidence for validity, dependability, sufficiency, and currency, reflecting traditional Islamic criteria for knowledge verification. The incorporation of moderation procedures and final approval by the Senate resembles an institutional degree, validating that assessments have been examined and officially sanctioned prior to the conferral of credit. The CT(APEL) credits do not affect GPA/CGPA and are subject to the MQF's 30% cap on experiential learning credits.

The parameters of *Shari'ah* are crucial in evaluating legitimacy. Knowledge acquired from prohibited sectors such as gambling, alcohol, or interest-based finance is completely invalidated. This guarantees that APEL examinations are both academically rigorous and *Shari'ah*-compliant. Portfolios and assessments must demonstrate ethical integrity and adhere to the ideals

inherent in the Programme Standards. *Shari'ah* or ethics consultants are expected to serve on examination panels to ensure doctrinal accuracy and moral suitability, in line with the consultation tradition in Islamic jurisprudence.

The APEL(C) process might encompass several responsibilities within the halal ecosystem. Halal auditors may provide audit plans, Halal Assurance System HAS paperwork, and compliance reports to meet CLOs about standards, assurance systems, and risk management. Halal trainers may present teaching portfolios and assessments to fulfil CLOs in communication and professional development. *Shari'ah* consultants may provide fatwa documents, governance reports, and legal opinions as evidence to satisfy CLOs in Islamic jurisprudence and ethics. Each case demands substantial evidence and, when appropriate, further oral or written corroborations to verify knowledge and applicability. The incorporation of APEL(C) within the institution's quality assurance framework guarantees traceability, transparency, and consistency. All records, including application data, success rates, learner feedback, and progression outcomes, must be preserved and subject to audit. Credits obtained via APEL(C) are officially documented, although they are limited and meticulously regulated to maintain the integrity of the academic credential.

In conclusion, integrating Islamic legal epistemology into APEL necessitates a comprehensive alignment of prior learning with *a fiqh-based curriculum, assurance of procedural integrity grounded in ethical principles and morals, and a* rigorous commitment to *Shari'ah* compliance. APEL(C) serves as a legitimate platform for recognizing expertise through evidence-based evaluations and systematic quality control, while upholding Islamic academic and ethical norms.

4.3 Curriculum integration and quality assurance in APEL pathways

Aligning APEL portfolios with established curriculum and course learning outcomes (CLOs) necessitates that institutions recognise prior experiential learning as equivalent solely when it clearly fulfils course-level outcomes via validated instruments, rather than relying on tenure or job titles, in accordance with the MQA Guidelines to Good Practices (GGP) for APEL(C). In APEL(C), assessors are required to evaluate the learner's experiential learning in relation to the designated course CLOs through a Challenge Test and/or a structured Portfolio, which must align in scope and cognitive demand with the course's credit value and level. This process is supported by Test Specification Tables (TST) and rubrics to guarantee comprehensive coverage, validity, and equity. To ensure academic integrity, the Guidelines to Good Practices mandate evidence-based choices reflecting a minimum attainment of 50% for each CLO, formal approval by the Academic Board or Senate, and transcript documentation as CT(APEL) that contributes to graduation credits without impacting Cumulative Grade Point Average CGPA or GPA.

Higher Learning Institutions must incorporate APEL(C) processes into their quality assurance frameworks, encompassing monitoring success rates, learner and staff experiences, and the growth of APEL learners, thereby ensuring transparency and auditability for external quality assurance evaluations. Curriculum integration in Islamic Studies is notably complicated, as it revolves around traditional knowledge frameworks and *Shari'ah* perspectives. The Halal Studies Programme Standards (PS) serve as a definitive reference for aligning sector portfolios with Body of Knowledge (BoK) components and Course Learning Outcomes (CLO) clusters throughout each Malaysian Qualifications Framework (MQF) level. The Programme Standards specifically integrate Islamic Theology (*Aqidah*), *Usul al-Fiqh, Qawaid Fiqhiyyah,* Islamic Law of Consumerism (*Fiqh al-Istihlak*), and Halal Regulatory and Governance as "Halal Common Core Courses," ensuring that experiential learning in halal sectors is epistemically established rather than merely procedural.

Programme-level learning outcomes require the integration of knowledge, cognitive skills, practical abilities, communication, interpersonal skills, digital and numeracy competencies, leadership, autonomy, personal and entrepreneurial skills, and professionalism and ethics. This framework establishes specific Course Learning Outcomes (CLO) for APEL mapping and assessment in Islamic Studies institutions that utilise conventional *sanad*-oriented and madrasah-style methodologies. In the context of International Islamic University Malaysia IIUM, *Shari'ah* compliance is regarded as a governance and ethical necessity where evidence from prohibited industries is disregarded, panels incorporate *Shari'ah* and ethics advisors, and recognition processes embody *amanah, 'adl,* and *ikhlas* in both submission and judgement, harmonising APEL with Islamic evaluative traditions.

The standardisation of assessment rubrics and instruments is a persistent challenge in cross-disciplinary APEL implementations, alleviated by the Guidelines to Good Practices mandate for role differentiation, where an Advisor cannot become the Assessor, the publication of rubrics, moderator validation, and explicit instrument design, including a Table of Test Specification (TST) for Challenge Tests. The implementation of the Table of Test Specifications ensures content validity and suitability. At the same time, portfolio rubrics facilitate the assessment of the acceptability, sufficiency, authenticity, and currency of evidence, thereby resolving issues related to the diversity of industry items and the need for consistent evaluations among assessors.

To maintain academic integrity, each APEL(C) outcome must receive approval from the Academic Senate, be recorded as CT(APEL), excluded from the GPA, and, when relevant, accompanied by the Malaysian Qualification Statement (MQS) as an ancillary document. Credit awards are limited by the national ceiling, typically set at a maximum of 30% of the total graduating credits, preserving curricular coherence and ensuring that APEL enhances rather than substitutes for the academic core, a crucial safeguard particularly relevant in programs with significant core *Shari'ah* components.

Institutional readiness includes policy, organisation, staffing, digital systems, and the pilot proof required by the Malaysian Qualifications Agency for approval, with inadequacies in these areas frequently undermining consistency in quality assurance. The Guidelines to Good Practices mandate that higher education providers create a specialised APEL(C) centre or unit with detailed job descriptions, adequate infrastructure and IT systems, trained assessors and moderators, learner handbooks, and documented procedures, followed by two pilot cases, which are the Challenge Test and Portfolio, to demonstrate practice before approval. Quality assurance in APEL processes must be systematic and iterative, encompassing the monitoring of volumes, pass rates, learner and staff engagement, progression results, and the efficacy of collaborative arrangements, with documentation accessible for external evaluation.

In Islamic Studies, a *Shari'ah* compliance layer complements standard quality assurance, necessitating the inclusion of *Shari'ah* advisors on panels and forbidding the acknowledgement of learning from non-compliant sectors. This enhances alignment with the objectives of the Halal Studies program and addresses concerns that portfolio content may diverge from Islamic legal principles. Appeals mechanisms must be transparent and require the appointment of a separate assessor. Institutions should document decisions, rationales, and audit logs within their APEL portals to ensure traceability, which upholds both academic due process and the *sanad*-like chain of responsibility esteemed in Islamic epistemic traditions.

Ultimately, aligning APEL portfolios with curriculum and CLOs in Islamic Studies requires intentional curriculum mapping and instrument design that adhere to both MQF outcomes and the Halal Studies PS knowledge framework, with institutional quality assurance guaranteeing the consistent enforcement of role separation, moderation, endorsement, transcript notation, and the 30% cap. By incorporating *Shari'ah* compliance measures, utilising standardised rubrics and Table of Test Specification, and developing necessary organisational and digital capabilities, institutions can connect informal halal industry education with formal accreditation while preserving academic integrity and the unique Islamic identity of their programs.

4.4 Institutional and regulatory challenges

Challenges in implementing Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning for Credit Award within Islamic Studies derive primarily from a structural misalignment between industry certification frameworks, such as those linked to national halal authorities, and the academic prerequisites of curriculum coherence, course learning outcomes, and evidence-based assessment as stipulated by the Malaysian Qualifications Agency's Guidelines to Good Practices for APEL for Credit Award and the Programme Standards for Halal Studies.

The Halal Studies Programme Standards incorporate Halal Common Core Courses and a comprehensive body of knowledge in Halal Regulatory and Governance, including essential topics on accreditation, certification bodies, and state religious authorities. This requires that assessors convert practice-oriented recognition results into measurable achievement of course learning outcomes across knowledge, cognitive, practical, communication, leadership, and professionalism domains at the appropriate Malaysian Qualifications Framework level, rather than merely accepting certification status as a substitute for learning.

This requirement often exposes discrepancies between certification checklists and the advanced reasoning, legal principles, and ethical integration demanded in educational programs. The APEL for Credit Award framework mandates that recognition is conferred solely when the student demonstrates competence for each specified course learning outcome via validated instruments, with results documented as CT(APEL) on the transcript and omitted from grade point calculations. This limitation hinders any effort to equate industry certificates or audit roles with course equivalence, necessitating a meticulous alignment of halal practice documentation to course learning outcomes and level The obligations of quality assurance raise the alignment burden, as higher education institutions are required to establish a specialised APEL centre with clearly defined roles, adequate infrastructure and information systems, ongoing staff training, and two pilot cases demonstrating the quality of instrument design and adjudication prior to approval.

Additionally, they must incorporate continuous monitoring of volumes, pass rates, learner and staff experiences, and progression into existing quality systems subject to external scrutiny. Training for assessors, the standardisation of rubrics, and the utilisation of defensible instruments are fundamental to academic professionalism, as the guidelines demand a clear distinction between the roles of advisor and assessor, explicit expertise of assessors, and the implementation of challenge tests and portfolios derived from test specification tables and published rubrics. This ensures that validity, reliability, sufficiency, authenticity, and currency are consistently evaluated across cases, irrespective of diverse industry evidence.

The minimum performance criteria require students to attain at least fifty percent of each course learning outcome to earn credit. This standard cannot be met solely through work experience or certification; it requires specific challenge assessments to evaluate conceptual and judicial comprehension, as well as portfolios that integrate documentary evidence, third-party endorsements, and reflective assessments. Islamic Studies institutions that maintain traditional *sanad*-oriented pedagogies face an additional challenge of reconciliation, as the *Shari'ah* compliance parameters in APEL prohibit the recognition of learning from forbidden sectors and require the inclusion of *Shari'ah* or ethics advisors on panels. These stipulations must be integrated into portfolio screening practices and the qualifications and training of assessors and moderators to uphold the Programme Standards.

Institutional readiness encompasses not merely policy but also process improvement and digital facilitation, as evidenced by university committee resolutions that emphasise a cohesive standard operating procedure, benchmarking, and a fully functional digital portal to guarantee audit trails, role-based permissions, cost transparency, and prompt case management, thereby aligning with national approval timelines and ensuring uniform mapping and adjudication across faculty.

4.5 Policy, governance, and institutional barriers to APEL uptake in Islamic studies

Obstacle to the implementation of the Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning for Credit Award (APEL.C) in Islamic Studies arises from a combination of policy limitations, institutional governance challenges, and theological sensitivities. Numerous Islamic academic institutions exhibit reluctance to embrace APEL.C owing to profound cultural and religious adherence to *sanad*-based teaching and a prudent strategy to preserve the integrity of the information imparted. Despite Malaysia's established national framework for APEL, there persists hesitance to embrace non-traditional entry routes and to acknowledge experiential learning in the absence of explicit institutional endorsement and centralised direction.

Officials within institutions recognise that existing regulations are excessively restrictive and stress the need for consistent, top-down frameworks to ensure uniform implementation. Academics frequently lack sufficient knowledge of assessment instruments such as challenge exams, course learning outcome (CLO) mapping, and digital documentation procedures, resulting in inconsistent adoption and awareness. Islamic

Domain 1: Misalignment between industry and academic standards

- Industry halal certificates & audit roles do not automatically translate to course learning outcomes (CLOs) at MQF level.
- Certification checklists emphasise procedural compliance, academic courses require higher-order legal reasoning & ethical reflection.
- APEL-C credit only via valid instruments per CLO; industry status is not a proxy for learning, creating an "equivalence gap".

Domain 2: Quality-assurance and capacity constraints

- MQA prerequisites: dedicated APEL unit, clear roles, two pilot cases (Challenge Test & Portfolio), and QA system integration.
- Institutions struggle with standardisation of rubrics, TST development, moderation, and evidence validity/reliability.
- Academics lack familiarity with CLO mapping, challenge tests, and digital workflows, leading to uneven implementation.

Domain 3: Shariah-compliance and epistemic concerns

- Shariah compliance requires excluding experiential learning from forbidden sectors (riba, gambling, alcohol).
- Sanad-oriented pedagogies cautious about equating fragmented experiential evidence with formally transmitted knowledge.
- Portfolio screening must simultaneously satisfy MQA standards and Islamic legal-ethical criteria, increasing complexity.

Domain 4: Governance, cultural and digital-infrastructure challenges

- Institutional regulations perceived as restrictive; call for clear top-down frameworks and central APEL unit.
- Resource constraints (time, budget, IT support) and faculty variation undermine consistent QA.
- Need for functional APEL digital portal (workflow, audit trails, permissions) remains a work-in-progress.

Figure 2: Barriers to APEL-C Implementation in Islamic Studies. This figure summarises the multi-level barriers constraining the implementation of Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning for Credit Award (APEL-C) in Islamic Studies programmes, particularly within halal-related curricula. Barriers are organised into four interlocking domains: (i) misalignment between industry certification frameworks and academic requirements; (ii) quality-assurance and capacity constraints; (iii) Shari'ah-compliance and epistemic concerns; and (iv) governance, cultural, and digital-infrastructure challenges.

programs, including those aligned with the Halal Studies Programme Standards, incorporate Islamic jurisprudence and ethics into their educational programs.

These requirements mandate that any acknowledgement of experiential learning conforms to both academic rigour and *Shari'ah* norms. This indicates that industry certification alone is inadequate; it must be corroborated by proof demonstrating both proficiency and knowledge of Islamic law. Institutions have begun to contextualise national APEL guidelines by integrating *Shari'ah*-specific components, including the exclusion of evidence from impermissible sectors such as gambling or *riba*-based finance, the appointment of *Shari'ah* advisors to APEL panels, the establishment of modest, gender-appropriate assessment environments, and the avoidance of assessment schedules during prayer times. These modifications demonstrate an endeavour to safeguard doctrinal principles while adhering to external academic quality requirements.

The procedural structure for APEL.A, including the Learner's Handbook, enhances transparency and integrity by delineating the separation of advisor and assessor roles, appeal processes, and documentation standards. When utilised alongside APEL.C procedures such as reflective writing, organised portfolios, challenge examinations, and Senate approvals, they offer Islamic institutions a definitive framework for incorporating APEL while maintaining religious integrity and academic credibility. Notwithstanding this, Islamic institutions continue to encounter difficulties in implementation, including resource limitations, varying practices within faculties, and insufficient digital infrastructure. Committees have emphasised the necessity for digital platforms, explicit standard operating procedures, standardised rubrics, and qualified evaluators to enhance decision-making and mitigate indecision.

In summary, the successful execution of APEL.C in Islamic Studies necessitates a synthesis of religious verification, academic diligence, and operational preparedness. By diligently following MQA governance structures and integrating *Shari'ah* principles into the process, institutions can maintain the integrity of information dissemination and ensure acknowledgement of experience. Through adequate training, standardised tools, and internal quality systems, previous expertise in the halal industry can be assessed and recognised in a manner that embodies both religious authenticity and academic distinction.

5. Recommendations

The Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) in Islamic Studies, especially in the management of the Halal Industry, requires significant changes to how institutions are run and how classes operate to protect both religious sincerity and educational integrity. A primary suggestion is that quality assurance and policy standardisation should be made official across all institutions that carry out the proposal. According to the Malaysian Qualifications Agency's (MQA) Guidelines on Good Practices, higher education providers that offer the APEL for Credit Award (APEL-C) must establish separate APEL units with clearly defined roles. This is to ensure a clear separation between the advisor who helps the applicant and the assessor who reviews the evidence.

Creating consistent Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and robust digital portals is necessary to manage applications, ensure fees are transparent, move case files, and enable systematic audit trails and compliance monitoring across different faculties. This will help reduce problems caused by uneven uptake and process variation within institutions.

A *Shari'ah* compliance layer must be built into the assessment method to protect the unique identity and integrity of Halal Studies educational institutions. This important safety measure means that any knowledge or experience gained from illegal areas or activities, like gaming, drinking, or interest-based finance, must not be recognised. This is because *Shari'ah* criteria are used to decide if the experience is legitimate. Furthermore, the people whose job it is to judge experiential claims, especially in roles such as *Shari'ah* advisors, should ensure they include qualified *Shari'ah* consultants. This will ensure that the process is fair and in line with *Maqasid al-Shari'ah* principles for avoiding harm and promoting welfare in the halal ecosystem.

Lastly, significant research should be conducted to improve the assessment literacy and methodological competence of academic staff who oversee the assessment of past experiential learning. Professional development must occur regularly at institutions and should focus on how to use outcome-based assessment tools, such as standardised rubrics and the organised Table of Test Specification (TST) required for Challenge Tests.

It is important to take this initiative because just showing that you have experience or an industry certification is not enough. Credit should be given only when the applicant demonstrates that they meet the Course Learning Outcome (CLO) requirements for at least 50% proficiency through objective, evidence-based methods. This way, academic credentials will demonstrate complete cognitive and practical mastery, rather than just proving you have a job title or experience. This focus on strict alignment ensures that the Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning connects work experience and formal education in a way that maintains the high standards of academic credentials.

6. Conclusion

The study demonstrates that Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) provides an effective means of incorporating the substantial informal knowledge gained in Malaysia's growing halal industry into the formal curriculum of Islamic Studies programs, thereby addressing the enduring gap between industry practice and academic qualifications. By anchoring the APEL framework in Islamic epistemology, which emphasises the integration of knowledge, the purpose of learning, and ethical considerations, the process harmonises experiential acknowledgement with the fundamental objectives of *Maqasid al-Shari'ah*, thereby ensuring that conferred credits promote welfare, equity, and the prevention of harm.

The study also identifies various systemic barriers, including the necessity for explicit governance frameworks, stringent quality-assurance protocols, and comprehensive *Shari'ah*-compliance evaluations that eliminate experiences associated with prohibited sectors such as gambling, alcohol, or interest-based finance. Effective implementation requires institutions to create specialised APEL units with clearly delineated roles, distinct advisory and assessment tasks, and comprehensive digital platforms that ensure transparent fee structures, audit trails, and uniform documentation. The evaluation of prior learning must be outcome-oriented, utilising standardised rubrics, challenge assessments, and portfolio evidence that demonstrate at least 50% proficiency for each Course Learning Outcome, ensuring that credit awards reflect both cognitive and practical expertise rather than solely job titles.

The paper advocates for ongoing professional development for academic personnel, the establishment of explicit standard operating procedures, and the incorporation of qualified *Shari'ah* or ethics advisors on assessment panels, all of which are crucial for maintaining academic integrity, adhering to Islamic legal principles, and facilitating the halal sector's contribution to Malaysia's goal of becoming a global halal hub. Looking ahead, a strengthened and well-governed APEL pathway can also support Malaysia's halal industry workforce development by accelerating the recognition and upskilling of experienced practitioners, narrowing competency gaps across halal assurance functions, and expanding industry-ready talent pipelines aligned with national halal standards and market needs.

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