

ENHANCING COLLABORATION FOR FUTURE *HALAL* STUDIES GRADUATE EMPLOYABILITY

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(Received: 19th Nov. 2020, Accepted: 24th Jan. 2022, Published on-line: 31st Jan. 2022)

ABSTRACT: The halal industry development requires a competent *halal* industry human capital. However, very few establishments create employment opportunities for *halal* studies graduates. There are currently no guidelines or frameworks for *halal* education to suit the job markets. In response to this scenario, this paper will examine the support system of the Malaysian higher learning institution that offers halal studies programmes to develop a more comprehensive *halal* education ecosystem framework. Additionally, the study examined whether Malaysia's current legal system has resulted in increased job opportunities for *halal* studies graduates. On 12th April 2021, the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA) in collaboration with *Halal* Development Corporation Berhad (HDC) and the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) has, developed the new academic programme standard for *halal* studies. Is this standard necessary to alter the current *halal* studies curriculum to make it more relevant to the *halal* industry? Thus, it is necessary to thoroughly study and discuss the vibrant guidelines and framework to enhance the quality and competency of *halal* studies graduates for the future job markets in Malaysia, which serves as a hub for competent *halal* expert providers that capable of meeting the *halal* industry ecosystem's human capital needs.

KEYWORDS: *Halal industry; Halal studies; Higher learning institution; Halal studies curriculum; Industrial job market*

1. INTRODUCTION

Halal industry sustainability and human resources development are critical aspects of *halal* industry development. Although no organization's proclamation reports that the *halal* industry requires human capital to thrive, human capital is critical. A country is uniquely vulnerable due to a scarcity of human capital assets in the *halal* sector. Developing world-class *halal* industry human capital assets is not easy, even for Malaysia. At the moment, Malaysia and the rest of the world are concerned about the high unemployment rate among graduates. This is especially pertinent considering the global pandemic caused by COVID-19. According to the Department

of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM), the unemployment rate in June 2021 climbed to 4.8% from 4.5% in May 2021 after four consecutive months of decreases. The number of unemployed persons escalated by 40.6 thousand people to 768.7 thousand people. COVID-19 has a more significant impact on the economic situation of graduates than on the general population. Jobs for graduates of the *halal* industry are filled by a fraction of a specialist. This demonstrates the true nature of the unemployment problem, which is not caused by a shortage of graduates in the *halal* industry, but by various other variables, such as the jobs opening provided by the industry. In 2019, Malaysia’s unemployment rate was 3.3% (as shown in Figure 1). This means that three out of every hundred workers are unemployed, while the remaining seven are employed. Compared to other countries throughout the world, this rate is comparable to Germany. Although the rate is low compared to other industrialized nations, there will always be concerns about the quality of employment among those who are employed and the social safety nets available to those who are unemployed (Ali Khan, 2020). This paper aims to identify a collaboration framework to curb unemployment among *halal* studies graduates by examining the *halal* education ecosystem.

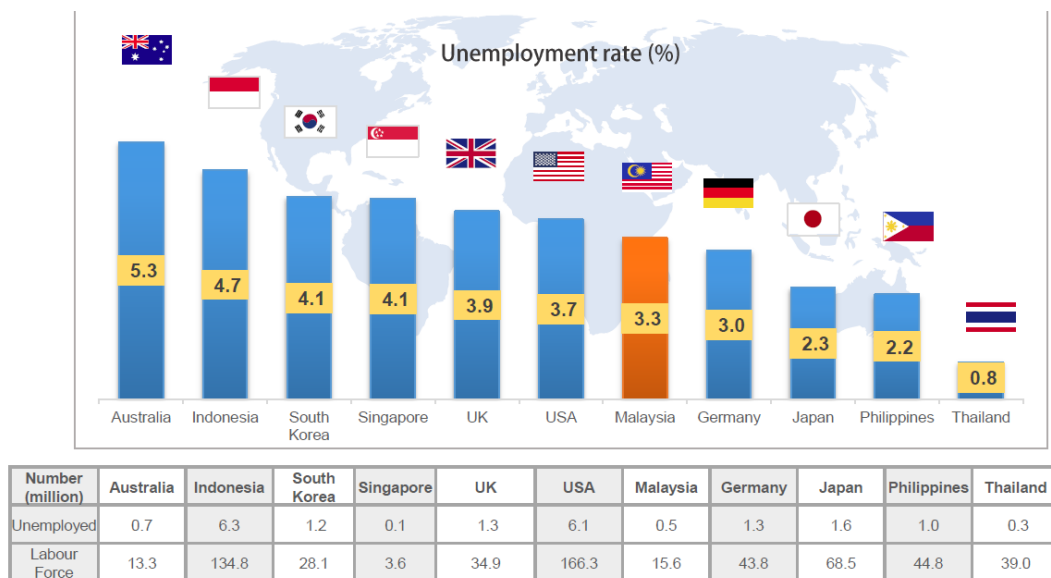


Fig 1: Malaysia labour force survey 2019.

Due to the tremendous growth of the *halal* industry, local and international sectors have rushed to invest in this rapid developing *halal* sector of the national economy. After the investment and subsequent developments, new businesses and job opportunities were created. This effort highlights future students' awareness of the *halal* industry. The lack of *halal* industry jobs offers part of a broader social bias in Malaysia that affects the mind of the students when choosing the field of *halal* industry studies. How can the advantage of the *halal* studies programme be safeguarded? The most significant factors influencing students’ selection of *halal* industry studies are: Malaysian *halal* industry development have recently influenced the *halal* studies program, but how many job openings in the *halal* industry do new graduates have *halal* industry? How much do the government agencies contribute to helping the graduates of *halal* studies to find jobs after the COVID-19 pandemic?

To develop the *halal* industry, government policies must be in place. How could the quality of *halal* studies graduates be improved in a constantly changing and developing world? Students should not focus solely on gaining single expertise before graduation. Some advantages can be gained by students whom both have mastered on-the-job and soft-skills skills. For example, as in transferable skills, essential skills, core skills, generic skills, personal

skills, employability skills, capability skills, personal skills, how do all these skills benefit the marketability and employability of the halal studies graduate? The purpose of this paper is to discuss the potential collaboration between all *halal* education stakeholders in establishing a platform for a comprehensive and competitive qualified *halal* industry human resource pool in the global *halal* industry. In discussing this issue, the authors refer to the occupational structure in the *halal* industry by the Department of Skills Development, Ministry of Human Resources Malaysia, *Halal* Industry Master Plan (HIMP) 2030 by *Halal* Development Corporation (HDC), and *Halal* Studies Program Standard by Malaysian Qualification Agency (MQA), journal articles, and other relevant documents.

2. HALAL EDUCATION IN MALAYSIA

2.1 *Halal* Awareness and Training in Malaysia

Islamic matters were prevalent in the mainstream media and academic world 10-15 years ago, especially in Malaysia. Islamic studies in business, banking, administration, education, and so on are offered in many academic programmes in education. However, people have shown a growing interest in *halal* when *halal* matters have recently been the centre of attention; as of default, *halal* covers a multifaceted spectrum encompassing various sectors, especially for the Muslim community.

Multiple government link entities in Malaysia run education programmes on *halal* at various levels. For example, the *Halal* Development Corporations (HDC) are MITI-run agencies created to promote and help set up the *halal* industry in Malaysia. Educational programmes address both the industry and the public. “Enjoy Programmes!” are tailored for elementary to secondary school students. *Halal* certification and training are provided at their headquarters in Kuala Lumpur. HDC offers the first-ever *halal* executive training program in conjunction with other educational institutions.

In addition, the Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM) is setting up compulsory courses and training for all *halal* executives training and *halal* audit training for industries. Due to this, all *halal* executive candidates were encouraged to attend and become part of the competent *Halal* Professional Council community in the *halal* industry.

2.2 *Halal* Education in Malaysia's Mainstream Education System

The new Primary School Curriculum Standard (PSS-BC) places little emphasis on *halal* subjects if any at all. If there is any element, it is done indirectly and at a level that requires no further explanation or discussion. For instance, the Islamic education syllabus in the Malaysian school system focuses exclusively on developing and strengthening the faith and *Qur'an* literacy. *Halal* matters are not taught explicitly and are only discussed briefly in a context related to *akhlaq* (manners). An interview with a school teacher of Islamic education with over 15 years of experience teaching primary school revealed a new dimension in mainstream *halal* education where *halal* education in primary school is almost non-existent. *Halal* food is briefly discussed concerning manners, highlighting the importance of a Muslim choosing *halal* food. Moreover, this is accomplished without elucidating what *halal* food is. Surprisingly, this is only thought to standard five primary students, (Jais, 2014).

At the secondary level, a review of the Islamic education syllabus shows that one aspect of *halal* food is being taught during form four which covers the topic of slaughtering. The syllabus was divided into three distinct stages of learning. This is the only subject that directly addresses the *halal* topic throughout the five-year secondary school system by the Ministry of Education of Malaysia MOE (2008). As previously stated, *halal* is only taught at a selected

juncture in the curriculum. There are significant gaps between *halal* education at the secondary and tertiary levels. The gaps between students who continue their educations at the tertiary level are also quite significant, with some students reporting gaps of up to four years between their last known for education in *halal* matters. This is their final formal education in *halal* vocations for those who do not intend to continue their academic studies in *halal*. These gaps, over time, will erode the student's motivation and desire to pursue *halal* industry education in the future.

The need for *halal* food will continue to grow, regardless of the economy. For Malaysia to become a central *halal* hub globally, a dynamic *halal* education environment must be created, including developing human resources. A comprehensive *halal* education will prepare the *halal* studies graduates with the ever-changing needs of economic dynamism. Career opportunities exist in the *halal* industry, but only competent potential can seize them.

3. HALAL STUDIES AND CAREER PROSPECT

3.1 Halal Education Providers as Halal Industry Players

The *halal* education programme is a higher education programme offered by the university through the diploma, bachelor's degree, and post-graduate programmes. *Halal* education is defined as scientific knowledge, with multi-disciplinary programmes based on the *halal* concept and framework. *Halal* studies is not yet a body of knowledge in *halal* education, but there is a distinct demand for a *halal* curriculum that will facilitate the establishment of the *halal* industry education field in the future. *Halal* studies are becoming a significant topic in the business world due to the *halal* industry development, (Ahmad, 2014).

The *halal* studies have been given special attention. As a result, this niche market will be kept on the right side. The sustainable *halal* industry will be thriving if the available body of knowledge on *halal* studies is given a push. *Halal* studies are only being studied extensively at the tertiary level, where students can specialize in their preferred fields. Some universities have established a dedicated *halal* research centre and programmes to offer *halal* studies programmes, such as the International Institute for *Halal* Research and Training (INHART) at International Islamic University of Malaysia (IIUM), *Halal* Products Research Institute (HPRI) at Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) and Akademi *Halal* at Kolej Profesional Baitulmal Kuala Lumpur (KPBKL). To keep up with the growing *halal* awareness, the *halal* industry and the *halal* business players need a qualify *halal* personnel and resources who have robust knowledge in *halal* matters. Hence, higher learning institutions play an essential role in maintaining a high-quality workforce in the *halal* industry.

3.2 Halal Studies Trend of Demands and Requirements

There is an ongoing need for a qualified workforce that meets market demands in the *halal* profession, but the supply ran out. HDC acknowledges the problem and even brings in *halal*-competent personnel and skills from overseas, (Khan, 2011). Many academic institutions, the government, and the private sector offer only industry-specific training. To stay competitive, it is a requirement that we produce semi-skilled and skilled workers. According to the *Halal* Industry Master Plan 2030, the *halal* industry of today is stable and robust. Opportunities for economic growth and greater public awareness of *halal* products are increasing worldwide. *Halal* values are starting to be more widely accepted among international organisations. A comprehensive *halal* ecosystem that includes the quality of *halal* education, Malaysia has established itself as the international reference in the development of *halal* standards and business processes by supporting the growth of *halal* experts while also connecting the local

and international business to the global and local *halal* market. The *Halal* Industry Master Plan 2030 (HIMP 2030) was developed to catalyse Malaysia strength towards the development of the *halal* ecosystem holistically.

The theme “Prominent, Visible and Globalized *Halal* Malaysia” showcased Malaysia’s goal to achieve socio-economic development through leading the global industry. The global *halal* market will increase to over \$5 trillion by 2030, with domestic growth estimated at over \$113 billion. Malaysia stands to benefit significantly from a comprehensive *halal* ecosystem. Qualified *halal* industry workers should exist because of the demand for *halal* food. This demand is further compounded by the growing scale of *halal* markets domestically and globally. According to Grand View Research, the global *halal* market will be \$739.59 billion by 2025. Apart from that, the Malaysians have realised the necessity of goods and services when catering to their religious needs as awareness of *halal* and haram continues to grow, although it is not being taught formally in the Malaysian school system. People have access to information, so they are more aware of the *halal*-related issues that almost often become social media-focused. Besides that, new government policies have greatly affected the country's business environment as *halal* industry employees demand has doubled over the last year. As a result of the Trade Description Act 2011, companies that have used private or self-proclaimed *halal* food prior to 2011 must employ a workforce with industry expertise, (Khan, 2011). The *Halal* Industry Masterplan 2030 looks at the *halal* industry trends and a projection of both global and local market growth for a *halal* focus sector. This master plan aligned Malaysia’s *halal* industry to its economic growth potential while demonstrating opportunities to maximize its socio-economic potential. Thus, efforts to improve governance and all stakeholders' collaboration are required.

3.3 Career Prospect for *Halal* Studies Graduate in the Industry in The Long Run

Applicants for *halal* executive positions must have adequate training and knowledge of *halal* principles and applications. Hence, training, as well as formal education for the *halal* industry, are required. The supply side of the workforce has been overburdened by the demand for a *halal* executive. Using ‘*halal*’ and ‘*halal* executive’ in Malaysia's job-hunting portal yielded many jobs in January 2020. A standard internet search engine, www.google.com and a specific job-hunting portal search engine has advertised over 100 results for *halal* related career opportunities, indicating a high demand for jobs related to *halal*. Although the number of Trade Description Act 2011 (TDA)-related jobs is unknown, it is safe to assume that the number has been increasing since the inception of TDA 2011.

One of the major impediments to the growth of Malaysia's *halal* industries is a shortage of workforce and skilled workers, (Khan, 2011). The government has acknowledged this issue and is planning to address it appropriately. Before this, *Halal* Development Corporation (HDC) has resorted to temporary measures such as bringing in outside experts. The demand for and supply of labour is frequently associated with the state of the economy. In the aftermath of a recession and a slowdown in the economy, the *halal* industry, such as the food industry, is one of the last industries to be affected, (Jais, 2014). Due to the strict definition of the *halal* executive in the Malaysian Standards (MS) 1500: 2019, it is not easy to find a qualified *halal* executive, according to Khan (2011), because there is so much untapped potential in the *halal* industry as the market and job opportunities are moving in lockstep.

The share of the *halal* market in Malaysia will continue to grow in tandem with the country's overall trade growth. There are numerous initiatives underway to assist Malaysia in becoming a global *halal* hub, and as a result, there is an increased demand for *halal* industry experts. Graduates should investigate job opportunities both domestically and internationally when pursuing a career. The *halal* standards and practices followed by the Malaysian *halal*

industry are highly regarded worldwide, and they serve as models for other countries' *halal* standards. This would provide opportunities for Malaysian's *halal* studies graduates who have received their qualifications and training in the *halal* industry to work in other countries, (Evans & Evans, 2012).

Since the *halal* industry has expanded beyond the food sector, opportunities for *halal* studies graduates are plentiful. It has been discovered that graduates of *halal* studies may attempt to secure employment and a career in various positions, most notably as government, *halal* auditors, *halal* consultants, universities researchers, educationists and academicians, (Deuraseh & Heradhyaksa, 2020).

4. THE HALAL INDUSTRY ECOSYSTEM: A COLLABORATION BETWEEN GOVERNMENTS, INDUSTRY AND HALAL EDUCATION PROVIDERS

Currently, a knowledge-based economy is the litmus test for any prosperous nation's development. At the same time, this type of economy results from the interaction between industry and *halal* education. The economy and industry-*halal* education nexus directly impact graduate employability, as the demand for professionalism and expertise from human resources is higher than ever, (Aithal, 2018). Higher education institutions must establish a robust link with industry to foster employability and a knowledge-based economy to remain competitive in the global business environment. *Halal* education and industry are two separate spheres entirely. However, graduates are groomed first, and their industries are built on their success. Graduates are the building blocks of *halal* education and industry as practitioners. Therefore, their journey from a higher education institution to a company should use methods to ensure that industry expectations are met without compromising academic goals, (Bartunek & Rynes, 2014). In developed and developing countries, shortages of qualified human resources are commonly seen.

Conversely, the graduates also suffer when their expertise does not meet the job requirement for the industries. Unemployment or underemployment has resulted from this dilemma, (Aithal, 2018). Economic development in developing countries such as Malaysia is directly related to the country's unemployment rate, (Zulkifli et al., 2016). The degree of unemployment among graduates varies but is given significant attention regarding employability and advancing the knowledge-based economy worldwide, (Aithal, 2018).

Besides, Ramakrishnan & Yasin (2010) stated that 'Knowledge Management' is imperative in resolving undergraduates' unemployment and the industries' human resource shortage. More knowledge should be funnelled to industry and *halal* education to connect graduates with un- or underemployment. To design a graduate curriculum, industries should supply input to higher education institutions. Students acquire matching skills to meet the need for state-of-the-art industry expertise. Sustainable human resources and employability are developed with an extensive knowledge cycle. Collaboration among all stakeholders in the *halal* education ecosystem was identified as critical to ensuring relevant and authentic learning experiences for students of *halal* studies, culminating in work-ready graduates. People involved in this *halal* education ecosystem emphasised the importance of collaborations based on trust, autonomy balance, clarity of roles and responsibilities, consultative nature, shared vision, and agreed-upon goals. Universities are expected to prepare students for work environments that are volatile, complex, and ambiguous in the industry.

5. THE WAY FORWARD FOR *HALAL* EDUCATION AND INDUSTRY

Despite rigorous strategic planning to integrate industry and *halal* education to achieve the desired level of graduate employability in Malaysia, the results have been disappointing. When implemented in its entirety, it is quite effective. However, through the survey given in Bank Negara Annual Report, 2017, we see that the partnership between higher learning institutions and industry does not exist to the extent that it should be. This collaboration is therefore largely missing from graduate employability development. If there is a proper check-in place on monitoring the link between industry and *halal* education, this relationship can be sustained to make the framework of graduate employability development more effective. Thus, as a result, graduate unemployment will go down in the country. Ensuring collaborative outcomes is a priority in designing the *halal* education ecosystem. Higher education institutions can benefit the job search for graduates of the *halal* studies course and meet the *halal* industry requirements. For industry readiness, it will provide better career development for graduates in *halal* studies.

The primary role of the intermediary and monitoring body is to verify that the content of *halal* industry studies has been approved by industry and *halal* education. It will also evaluate the industry's involvement in creating internship and training programmes to better equip graduates for employment in the industry. The body serves as a medium of communication between industry and higher education institutions in coding and decoding the exchangeable content of consideration. Essentially, a monitoring and intermediary body could help reduce the lacunae in implementing the graduate employability framework. Since that is the case, it is expected that the desired results of higher graduate employability will be accomplished.

6. CONCLUSION

Investigating a *halal* education program at a Malaysian university is essential to fostering *halal* studies graduates' employability in the current *halal* industry market. The relevancy of the *halal* study courses offered by the higher learning institution is under question due to rising unemployment among the fresh graduates in Malaysia even as the country's economy grows. Hence, the collaboration from all the stakeholders in the *halal* education ecosystem are essentials to act as the medium of communication between industry and higher education institutions for decoding the exchangeable content in an understandable requirement and needs from both parties. By introducing a monitoring and intermediary body, it will be possible to eradicate the lacunae in implementing the *halal* studies graduate employability framework.

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