

Exploring Halal Certification Literacy Measurement for Micro Small Enterprises (MSEs)

Muhammad Anwar Fathoni^{1*}, Faizi¹, Suprima¹ Fadhli Suko Wiryanto²
Suryani¹

¹Universitas Pembangunan Nasional Veteran Jakarta, Indonesia

²Universitas Islam Negeri Sultan Maulana Hasanuddin Banten, Indonesia

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Abstract

Purpose – The study aims to explore the development of a Halal Certification Literacy Index (HCI) as a novel approach to address challenges faced by Micro and Small Enterprises (MSEs) in obtaining halal certification in Indonesia.

Methodology – Employing a qualitative methodology, this research utilizes a comprehensive literature review to construct a conceptual framework for measuring halal certification literacy. The study investigates the current landscape of halal certification, focusing on regulatory frameworks, certification procedures, and the role of government bodies.

Findings – The research identifies key challenges such as lack of awareness, financial constraints, and bureaucratic complexities hindering MSEs in obtaining halal certification. The proposed HCI assesses components like knowledge and awareness, procedural readiness, financial capability, human resource competency, and technological adoption.

Keywords: Halal certification; halal industry; halal literacy; Micro small enterprises (MSEs)

*Corresponding author: mfathoni@upnvj.ac.id

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the halal industry has experienced significant growth globally, with Indonesia positioning itself as a key player in this sector (Juliana et al., 2024a; Alitakrim et al., 2022). As the country with the largest Muslim population worldwide, Indonesia has been actively promoting halal certification for various products and services (Juliana et al., 2024b). The implementation of Law No. 33 of 2014 on Halal Product Assurance has made halal certification mandatory for products circulating in Indonesia by October 17, 2024 (Akhmad Rifqi Zain et al., 2024). This legislative move has created a pressing need for businesses, especially Micro and Small Enterprises (MSEs), to obtain halal certification for their products (Mahri et al., 2024).

The importance of halal certification in Indonesia is underscored by recent data from the Halal Product Assurance Organizing Agency (BPJPH). There were 1,018,614 halal-certified products in Indonesia, with a significant increase in halal certification applications following the implementation of the Halal Product Assurance Law (Indah, 2022). However, despite this progress, there remains a considerable gap in halal certification, particularly among MSEs, which form the backbone of Indonesia's economy (Mahri et al., 2024; Alfarizi, 2023).

The concept of a Halal Certification Index (HCI) emerges as a potential solution to address the challenges faced by businesses, especially MSEs, in obtaining halal certification. This index aims to measure and improve halal certification literacy among stakeholders, including business owners, consumers, and regulatory bodies. The HCI could serve as a comprehensive tool to assess knowledge, readiness, and implementation of halal certification processes.

Recent studies have highlighted the need for standardized approaches to halal certification across the ASEAN region, including Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand (Akhmad Rifqi Zain et al., 2024). These countries have different regulations and requirements for implementing halal assurance standards, which can create confusion and hinder trade. The proposed HCI could potentially address these disparities by providing a unified framework for measuring halal certification literacy.

Furthermore, the introduction of self-declaration mechanisms for halal certification, as mandated by Law No. 11 of 2020, presents both opportunities and challenges (Jamaluddin et al., 2022). While this approach aims to accelerate halal certification for MSEs, the current low rate of certification among these businesses highlights the need for improved literacy and understanding of halal certification processes.

This article proposes the development of a Halal Certification Index as a means to measure and enhance halal certification literacy. By focusing on key components such as knowledge and awareness, procedural readiness, financial capability, human resource competency, and technological adoption, the HCI aims to provide a comprehensive assessment of halal certification readiness. This index could serve as a valuable tool for policymakers, businesses, and consumers in navigating the complex landscape of halal certification in Indonesia and potentially beyond.

As Indonesia strives to strengthen its position in the global halal market, the proposed Halal Certification Index offers a novel approach to addressing the challenges in halal certification, particularly for MSEs (Mahri et al., 2024). By improving halal certification literacy, this initiative has the potential to contribute significantly to the growth and competitiveness of Indonesia's halal industry while ensuring compliance with regulatory requirements and meeting consumer demands for halal-certified products.

Given the challenges faced by MSEs in navigating the complex and often costly halal certification process, this study seeks to address the following research question: *How can a Halal*

Certification Literacy Index (HCI) be developed to effectively measure and enhance halal certification literacy among MSEs in Indonesia?

The importance of halal certification in Indonesia is underscored by recent data from the Halal Product Assurance Organizing Agency (BPJPH), which shows a significant increase in halal certification applications following the implementation of the Halal Product Assurance Law. Despite this progress, there remains a considerable gap in halal certification among MSEs, which form the backbone of Indonesia's economy.

Previous research has largely focused on the procedural and regulatory aspects of halal certification, highlighting challenges such as lack of awareness, financial constraints, and bureaucratic hurdles. While some studies have explored consumer perspectives and the role of digital platforms in promoting halal certification, there has been a noticeable gap in the systematic measurement of halal certification literacy. This research introduces the Halal Certification Literacy Index (HCI) as a novel approach, filling this gap by providing a structured and comprehensive tool to assess and enhance literacy in this critical area.

The HCI is designed to evaluate multiple dimensions of literacy, including knowledge, awareness, procedural readiness, financial capability, human resource competency, and technological adoption. This index not only builds upon the findings of earlier studies but also offers a practical solution that could be replicated or adapted in other regions, thus contributing to the broader discourse on halal certification and MSEs development.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative research methodology with a literature review approach to develop a conceptual framework for measuring halal certification literacy through a proposed Halal Certification Index. The research design follows a qualitative paradigm, utilizing an exploratory and descriptive approach. This design is appropriate for developing new conceptual frameworks and indices based on existing literature and theories.

Data collected through a comprehensive literature review of peer-reviewed journal articles, books, conference proceedings, and other relevant publications related to halal certification, food literacy, and index development. This qualitative methodology, centered on a rigorous literature review, provides a solid foundation for developing a conceptual Halal Certification Index. It allows for a comprehensive exploration of existing knowledge while facilitating the creation of new theoretical constructs in the field of halal certification literacy.

To ensure a comprehensive understanding, the selection criteria for articles included:

- a. **Relevance:** Articles focused on halal certification processes, literacy, challenges faced by MSEs, and innovations in halal industry practices.
- b. **Timeliness:** Preference was given to recent publications (last 10 years) to capture current trends and developments.
- c. **Source Credibility:** Peer-reviewed journals and publications from reputable academic and professional bodies were prioritized.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1. Halal Product in Indonesia

Halal products are those that conform to Islamic dietary laws and ethical guidelines (Juliana et al., 2024c). These laws prohibit the consumption of certain items, such as pork and alcohol, and require specific methods of slaughtering animals (Pratiwi & Purwanto, 2024). The concept of halal extends beyond the ingredients to include the entire production process, ensuring no cross-contamination with non-halal substances (Juliana et al., 2024a; Monoarfa et al., 2023; Puspitaningrum et al., 2021). Moreover, halal products must also adhere to ethical considerations, such as humane treatment of animals and maintaining high standards of hygiene and safety throughout the supply chain (Ali, 2016; Alzeer et al., 2018).

Indonesia has a comprehensive regulatory framework governing halal products, reflecting its commitment to maintaining high halal standards. The Indonesian Council of Ulama (Majelis Ulama Indonesia, MUI) is the primary authority responsible for halal certification. MUI sets the standards and guidelines for halal products and conducts audits and inspections to ensure compliance. The Halal Product Assurance Organizing Agency (Badan Penyelenggara Jaminan Produk Halal, BPJPH) was established under Law No. 33/2014 on Halal Product Assurance. This law mandates halal certification for a wide range of products, including food, beverages, pharmaceuticals, cosmetics, and other consumer goods. BPJPH oversees the implementation of halal certification, ensuring that all products entering, circulating, and being traded in Indonesia are halal-certified (Aziz et al., 2019).

The concept of halal is deeply ingrained in Indonesian culture and religious practices. For Indonesian Muslims, consuming halal products is not just a dietary preference but a religious obligation that reflects their adherence to Islamic dietary laws and ethical guidelines. Halal certification serves as a mark of trust and assurance for consumers, indicating that the product meets stringent religious and quality standards. This trust enhances brand loyalty and influences purchasing decisions. Moreover, halal consumption is a part of social identity for Indonesian Muslims, reinforcing their cultural and religious values (Nissa, 2024; Santoso et al., 2021).

On the other side, the halal industry in Indonesia significantly contributes to the national economy, with substantial implications for various sectors. The large Muslim population drives strong demand for halal products, creating vast market opportunities for businesses. This demand extends beyond food and beverages to include pharmaceuticals, cosmetics, and personal care products (Fathoni & Syahputri, 2020). Indonesia's halal certification is recognized globally, enhancing the export potential of Indonesian halal products. Compliance with international halal standards facilitates market entry and acceptance in other Muslim-majority countries. The halal industry supports the growth of local businesses, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), by providing them with a competitive edge in both domestic and international markets (Anggarkasih & Resma, 2022; Fahira & Yasin, 2022).

While the halal product market in Indonesia presents numerous opportunities, it also faces certain challenges. The halal certification process can be complex and costly, particularly for SMEs. Navigating regulatory requirements and ensuring compliance can be burdensome. Additionally, differences in halal standards and certification processes across countries can create barriers to international trade. There is also a need to increase consumer awareness about the significance of halal certification and the benefits of consuming halal products (Adiba & Amir, 2023; Anggraeni & Zaerofi, 2024; Saima et al., 2024).

Despite these challenges, the growing global demand for halal products presents significant opportunities for market expansion and diversification. There is potential for innovation in product development, particularly in the areas of halal pharmaceuticals, cosmetics, and personal care products. Indonesia can position itself as a global leader in the halal industry by leveraging its regulatory framework, expertise, and market potential.

3.2. Halal Certification Procedure

The halal certification process in Indonesia involves several key stages, beginning with the application and culminating in the issuance of the halal certificate. Each step is designed to ensure that the products meet the stringent halal standards set forth by Islamic law and regulatory authorities (Juliana et al., 2024b).

The foundation of halal certification in Indonesia is established by Law No. 33 of 2014 on Halal Product Assurance. This law mandates that all products entering, circulating, and being traded within Indonesia must be certified halal. The implementation of this law is regulated through Government Regulation No. 39 of 2021, which outlines the detailed processes and requirements for obtaining halal certification (Mohammad, 2021).

Halal certification in Indonesia is governed by the Indonesian Ulema Council (Majelis Ulama Indonesia or MUI) and the Halal Product Assurance Agency (Badan Penyelenggara Jaminan Produk Halal or BPJPH). Established under the Ministry of Religious Affairs, BPJPH plays a pivotal role in managing the certification process, ensuring that products meet Islamic dietary laws.

The certification process begins with the registration of the product or business entity with BPJPH. Applicants must provide detailed information about the product, including ingredients, production methods, and the supply chain. This initial step is crucial as it sets the foundation for subsequent evaluations and inspections.

Once the registration is complete, a thorough audit and inspection process follows. This involves a comprehensive assessment of the production facilities, storage areas, and transportation methods to ensure compliance with halal standards. The audit is conducted by a team of certified auditors who examine the entire production process, from raw material sourcing to the final product. These auditors are trained to identify any potential contamination or non-compliance with halal requirements (Simbolon & Hidayat, 2021).

A critical component of the halal certification process is the evaluation of ingredients. Each ingredient used in the product must be verified as halal, meaning it must be permissible under Islamic law and free from any haram (forbidden) substances. This includes ensuring that no alcohol, pork, or its derivatives are present at any stage of production. Suppliers of raw materials must also provide halal certificates for their products, creating a chain of assurance from source to final product.

Laboratory testing is another vital aspect of the certification process. Samples of the product are subjected to rigorous testing to detect any traces of non-halal substances. These tests are conducted in accredited laboratories that adhere to international standards. The results of these tests are then reviewed by BPJPH and MUI to ensure that the product complies with halal guidelines.

After successfully passing the audit and laboratory tests, the product is submitted to MUI for the issuance of a fatwa (religious ruling). The fatwa is a formal declaration that the product is halal and can be consumed by Muslims. This declaration is based on the findings of the audits, ingredient evaluations, and laboratory tests. Once the fatwa is issued, BPJPH grants the halal certificate,

which is valid for a specific period. Businesses must regularly renew their certification to maintain compliance. This involves periodic re-audits and continuous monitoring to ensure ongoing adherence to halal standards (Fitri & Jumiono, 2021).

Recent updates to the halal certification process in Indonesia have introduced more stringent regulations and enhanced oversight mechanisms. The government has implemented digital systems to streamline the application and monitoring processes, reducing administrative burdens and improving transparency. These digital platforms allow businesses to track the status of their applications and ensure timely compliance with regulatory requirements.

Additionally, Indonesia has strengthened its collaboration with international halal certification bodies to harmonize standards and facilitate global trade. This includes mutual recognition agreements that enable Indonesian halal-certified products to be accepted in other countries and vice versa. Such collaborations are vital in promoting the global competitiveness of Indonesian halal products and expanding their market reach.

3.3. Halal Certification in Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand

Malaysia is often regarded as a global leader in halal certification, with its well-established regulatory framework managed by JAKIM (Department of Islamic Development Malaysia). Research shows that Malaysia's comprehensive and streamlined halal certification process has become a benchmark for many countries. The integration of halal standards across various sectors, from food and beverages to cosmetics and pharmaceuticals, illustrates the nation's commitment to maintaining high halal standards. The procedure begins with businesses submitting detailed applications outlining their product information, ingredients, and production processes. JAKIM then conducts audits and inspections to verify compliance with stringent halal standards. Upon successful completion, a Halal Certification Panel reviews the findings and issues the halal certificate. Regular renewals and ongoing compliance monitoring are integral to maintaining certification standards (Hasan & Latif, 2024; Sofiana et al., 2021; YILDIRIM, 2019).

Thailand, through Central Islamic Council of Thailand CICOT, has established itself as a key player in the halal food export market. Despite being a predominantly Buddhist country, Thailand has capitalized on the growing demand for halal products, particularly from Muslim-majority nations in the Middle East and ASEAN. The country's focus on high-quality standards and export orientation has bolstered its reputation as a reliable halal product supplier. Thailand has made significant strides in halal certification, largely to support its robust food export sector. Managed by the Central Islamic Council of Thailand (CICOT), the process involves the submission of applications, rigorous inspections, and compliance checks. Once products meet the halal standards, CICOT issues the certification. Continuous monitoring ensures that certified products maintain their halal integrity (Konety et al., 2019; Mohd Nawawi et al., 2020; Wannasupchue et al., 2023).

Singapore's MUIS (Islamic Religious Council of Singapore) manages halal certification with a strong emphasis on technological integration and stringent food safety standards. Singapore's halal certification is recognized internationally, which aids local businesses in accessing global markets. The city-state's approach focuses on ensuring both religious compliance and adherence to international food safety norms. The process includes a pre-application assessment, submission of detailed documentation, and thorough audits. MUIS auditors ensure all production processes comply with halal standards before issuing the certificate. Periodic surveillance audits and timely renewals are critical components of Singapore's certification procedure (Mehmood et al., 2024; Rahman et al., 2020).

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Halal certification literacy refers to the knowledge and understanding of halal certification processes and standards among consumers, producers, and regulators. This literacy is essential for several reasons, such as consumer trust and confidence, market access and competitiveness, and regulatory compliance. Consumers need to trust that products labeled as halal genuinely meet the required standards. Producers also must understand and comply with halal certification to access and compete in the Muslim consumer market. In the other side, regulators must ensure that certification processes are transparent and reliable to maintain market integrity.

Halal certification serves as a guarantee for Muslim consumers that the products they consume are permissible under Islamic law. It is not only a religious requirement but also a marker of quality and safety. The certification process involves rigorous checks and compliance with specific standards, which can enhance consumer trust and expand market reach for businesses (Adiba & Amir, 2023). Despite its importance, the adoption of halal certification among MSMEs faces several challenges, such as (Astuti et al., 2023b; Saima et al., 2024):

- a. Lack of Awareness and Understanding. Many MSMEs lack adequate knowledge about the halal certification process and its benefits. This gap in understanding can lead to reluctance in pursuing certification.
- b. Cost and Bureaucracy. The certification process can be costly and bureaucratically cumbersome, deterring small businesses from seeking certification. The complexity of the process and the associated costs are significant barriers.
- c. Perception and Trust Issues. There is often a lack of trust in the certification bodies and skepticism about the necessity of certification, especially among businesses that already consider their products to be halal by default.

Several approaches have been employed to measure halal certification literacy. Mila Adila and Dewi Rahmi used quantitative surveys and utilized likert scale questionnaires to assess various aspects of halal literacy. For instance, a study in Bandung, Indonesia, employed a descriptive quantitative method using a Likert scale to measure halal literacy among culinary MSMEs (Mila Adila & Dewi Rahmi, 2024). Some studies also have developed comprehensive scales that measure multiple dimensions of halal literacy, including knowledge, awareness, and behavioral intentions (Khasanah et al., 2023; Nusran, M; Gunawan, M; Razak, 2018). Observing actual behaviors related to halal certification adoption can provide insights into literacy levels. This approach often involves analyzing the factors influencing MSMEs' decisions to pursue halal certification. Several researchers also used qualitative assessments with in-depth interviews and focus groups. It can provide rich, contextual data on halal literacy levels and the challenges faced by MSMEs in understanding and implementing halal certification (Amrin et al., 2022; Nur Anisa, 2023).

The concept of a Halal Certification Literacy Index as a tool for measuring halal certification literacy is a novel approach in the field of halal studies. While there is no direct research on this specific concept, a comprehensive review of recent literature reveals several key themes and developments in halal certification that are relevant to the proposed index.

a. Halal Certification Procedures and Challenges

Recent studies have highlighted the complexities and challenges in the halal certification process, particularly for Micro and Small Enterprises (MSEs) in Indonesia. A study by (Astuti et al., 2023a; Simbolon & Hidayat, 2021) outlined the five-step procedure for halal certification in

Indonesia, which includes application, document verification, product inspection and testing, halal status determination, and certificate issuance. The study also identified several issues with mandatory halal certification, including lengthy processes, potential conflicts of interest, and the need for improved accountability and transparency.

b. The Role of Government and Regulatory Bodies

The implementation of Law No. 33 of 2014 on Halal Product Assurance has significantly impacted the halal certification landscape in Indonesia. Research by (Khairuddin & Zaki, 2021) examined the readiness of the Halal Product Assurance Organizing Agency (BPJPH) in implementing this law. The study highlighted the shift in authority from LPPOM MUI to BPJPH and discussed the implications of this transition. This change in regulatory framework is crucial to consider when developing a Halal Certification Index.

c. Self-Declaration Mechanism for MSEs

A notable development in halal certification is the introduction of the self-declaration mechanism for MSEs. A 2023 study by (Jamaluddin et al., 2022; Pujilestari & Rahmawati, 2023) explored the concept of "self-declare" halal certification for micro and small businesses. This approach aims to address the financial barriers faced by MSEs in obtaining halal certification. The study reported a 43.33% increase in understanding of halal certification and self-declaration processes among participants following an educational intervention.

d. Triple Helix Model for Halal Industry Development

Research by (Hariani et al., 2024) proposed the application of the Triple Helix model for developing Indonesia's halal food industry. This model emphasizes the collaboration between government, academia, and business sectors. The study identified various challenges faced by halal food MSEs, including issues related to capital, human resources, product innovation, technology, and certification. This holistic approach to industry development could inform the structure of a Halal Certification Index.

e. Consumer Perspectives and Purchase Decisions

A 2023 study by (Fahira & Yasin, 2022; Fuadi et al., 2022; Muhnidin & Br. Pinem, 2024; Parvin Hosseini et al., 2019) examined the influence of promotion and halal certification on consumer purchasing decisions. Interestingly, the research found that while promotion had a significant positive impact on purchase decisions, halal certification did not show a significant influence. This finding underscores the need for increased consumer education and awareness about halal certification, which could be addressed through a Halal Certification Index.

f. Digital Platforms and Halal Certification

The role of digital platforms in facilitating halal certification for MSEs has been explored in recent literature. A study by (Dwi Hidayatul Firdaus & Teguh Setyobudi, 2022) investigated the potential roles of digital food delivery platforms in accelerating halal certification for MSMEs. While the study found that these platforms do not currently require halal certification for partnering businesses, it suggested potential roles for these platforms in promoting and facilitating halal certification.

g. Educational Initiatives and Awareness Programs

Several studies have focused on educational initiatives to improve understanding of halal certification. For instance, a study by (Annisa et al., 2023) reported on an educational program for MSEs about the Halal Assurance System and the process of obtaining halal certification. Similarly, research by (Muthiadin et al., 2024) described efforts to prepare university canteens for halal certification, emphasizing the importance of education and awareness in the halal certification process.

While the specific concept of a Halal Certification Index for measuring halal certification literacy is not directly addressed in recent literature, the reviewed studies provide valuable insights into the current state of halal certification in Indonesia, particularly for MSEs. The challenges, regulatory changes, educational initiatives, and technological developments highlighted in these studies can inform the development of a comprehensive Halal Certification Index. Such an index could potentially address the gaps in knowledge, awareness, and implementation of halal certification processes, ultimately contributing to the growth and improvement of the halal industry in Indonesia.

5. CONCLUSION

The study proposes a novel HCI framework, designed to evaluate and improve literacy across key dimensions such as knowledge, procedural readiness, financial capability, human resource competency, and technological adoption. By providing a structured approach to understanding and enhancing halal certification processes, the HCI aims to bridge significant gaps faced by MSEs. By measuring and enhancing halal certification literacy among stakeholders, including business owners, consumers, and regulatory bodies, the HCI aims to bridge knowledge gaps and improve readiness for halal certification. This comprehensive tool assesses various components, such as knowledge and awareness, procedural readiness, financial capability, human resource competency, and technological adoption, providing a holistic view of the certification landscape.

As Indonesia continues to strengthen its position in the global halal market, the development and implementation of the Halal Certification Literacy Index will be crucial. This innovative approach has the potential to significantly contribute to the growth and competitiveness of Indonesia's halal industry, ensuring regulatory compliance, meeting consumer demands, and supporting the sustainable development of MSEs.

The findings offer valuable practical applications. The HCI can serve as a diagnostic tool for policymakers and regulatory bodies to identify literacy gaps and design targeted interventions. It empowers businesses by providing a clear roadmap for achieving halal certification, ultimately enhancing their market competitiveness. For consumers, improved halal literacy among producers ensures better compliance with religious and quality standards, fostering greater trust in halal products.

The social implications are profound, particularly in a predominantly Muslim society like Indonesia. By promoting halal certification literacy, this research supports broader efforts to uphold Islamic dietary laws, thereby strengthening religious adherence. Enhanced literacy can also lead to increased economic participation and empowerment of MSEs, fostering social inclusivity and economic equity.

Despite its contributions, this research has certain limitations. The reliance on qualitative methods and literature review may limit the generalizability of the findings. The conceptual framework of the HCI, while innovative, requires empirical validation through field studies and pilot testing. Additionally, the study focuses predominantly on the Indonesian context, which may limit its applicability to other regions with different socio-economic and regulatory environments.

Future research should aim to empirically test the HCI framework, refine its components based on practical application, and explore its adaptability in other ASEAN countries or global contexts. Such efforts could further validate and enhance the robustness of the proposed index, contributing to the global discourse on halal certification.

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