

Issues and Challenges in Malaysian Halal Certification: Case Study of Small-Sized Poultry Slaughterhouses in Selangor

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Abstract

Purpose: This study investigates issues and challenges faced by small-sized poultry slaughterhouses in Selangor, Malaysia, in obtaining and sustaining halal certification.

Design/methodology/approach: This study examines challenges faced by small-sized poultry slaughterhouses operators and/or owners, using qualitative surveys and semi-structured interviews from four districts—Hulu Langat, Kuala Langat, Petaling, and Sepang. The interviews explored participants' understanding of halal certification, perceived challenges, and institutional experiences with certification audits.

Findings: Results indicate low halal certification penetration due to licensing complexities, financial limitations, and knowledge gaps. Many operators lack compliant facilities and certified personnel, while fragmented multi-agency regulations impose high transaction costs. Attitudinal barriers and misuse of halal logos also undermine credibility.

Research limitations/implications: The study is limited to selected districts in Selangor. Findings may not generalize nationally which may not fully capture the diversity of challenges faced by slaughterhouses in other Malaysian states or dimensions. Further longitudinal, quantitative and comparative studies are recommended.

Practical implications: Recommendations include streamlined licensing and certification process, financial support for infrastructure, professionalization of halal roles, enhancing awareness campaigns and digital compliance tools.

Originality/value: This article contributes by linking regulatory complexity with halal compliance and proposing integrated, policy-grounded solutions for halal governance.

Keywords: Halal Certification, Small-Sized Poultry Slaughterhouses, Challenges, Authorities, Halal Governance

Introduction

The global halal economy has emerged as a rapidly expanding sector, driven by increasing Muslim consumer demand for religiously compliant products and services (Alam & Sayuti, 2011; Reuters, 2022). Within this context, Malaysia is frequently cited as a pioneer in halal governance, with the Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM) establishing internationally recognized certification standards (Fischer, 2016; JAKIM, 2020). The Malaysian halal logo has become internationally recognized and trusted (Haleem et al., 2017). Through initiatives such as the Halal Industry Master Plan 2030, Malaysia aims to position itself as the leading global halal hub (MITI, 2018; HDC, 2021). Several scholars (Lever & Puig de la Bellacasa, 2010; Talib et al., 2016) note that Malaysia's certification standards are among

the most comprehensive worldwide, providing benchmarks for other countries. In Muslim-majority nations, such as Malaysia, halal certification serves as both a religious requirement and a market differentiator that enhances competitiveness in domestic and global trade.

Despite these achievements, compliance challenges persist, particularly among small-sized slaughterhouses. In Selangor, one of Malaysia's most industrially developed states, research revealed that only 11.3% of identified slaughterhouses were certified halal, despite high demand for halal poultry among the state's Muslim population (Selangor State Government, 2019). Many small slaughterhouses continue to operate without proper licensing or certification, raising concerns over food safety, religious compliance, market integrity and consumer confidence (Shafie & Othman, 2006; Soon et al., 2017). This gap not only threatens the credibility of Malaysia's halal certification framework but also undermines the nation's broader aspiration to consolidate its position as a leading global halal hub (Lever & Puig de la Bellacasa, 2010). Against this backdrop, this article examines the challenges faced by small-sized poultry slaughterhouses in obtaining and sustaining halal certification and proposes policy-grounded remedies that extend understanding of halal compliance at the SME level within Selangor.

Literature Review

Halal Certification in Malaysia

Malaysia is often cited as a global pioneer in halal governance, with its certification system managed by JAKIM. Several state-level religious departments, such as Selangor State Islamic Religious Department (JAIS), and delegated authority to certify premises under JAKIM's standards.

Although Malaysia's national halal certification framework is generally regarded as comprehensive, its effectiveness ultimately depends on grassroots compliance, particularly among small-sized slaughterhouses. An analysis of public complaints submitted to JAKIM highlights four recurring concerns: delays in processing, overly complex procedures, uncertainties in halal status verification, and high fees (Zainuddin & Syed Ismail, 2020). These grievances, received through multiple official channels such as counter submissions at the Halal Hub Division, telephone calls, emails, letters, and social media, indicate systemic inefficiencies that disproportionately burden smaller operators. Consequently, the public complaints point to a persistent gap between Malaysia's aspiration to serve as a global halal hub and the operational realities encountered by small industry players (Abdul-Talib & Abd-Razak, 2013). This tension provides a critical point of inquiry for examining the compliance challenges facing small-sized slaughterhouses in Selangor.

Poultry Farming Enactment (State of Selangor) 2007

The Poultry Farming Enactment (State of Selangor) 2007 serves as the principal legal framework governing poultry farm operations at the state level. In this enactment, "poultry" includes chickens, ducks, geese, turkeys, guinea fowls, quails, pigeons, ostriches, and emus of any gender, age, breed, or generation, as well as other bird species as specified through government gazette orders. The enactment provides detailed provisions on production, slaughtering, and distribution of poultry products under the jurisdiction of Selangor state law.

The strength of this legislation lies in its emphasis on licensing, waste management, and operational distancing requirements as preventive measures against environmental pollution and social conflict. Part IV of the enactment specifies various offences related to poultry farm

operations, including discharging farm waste into rivers, emitting offensive odors, and using prohibited substances. While Section 11 stipulates that license holders must comply with licensing conditions throughout the validity period, with violations subject to fines or license revocation at the director's discretion (Dewan Negeri Selangor, 2007).

These substantive provisions reflect a legislative commitment to mitigating the negative impacts of poultry farming on food safety and public health, while at the same time upholding *Halalan Toyyiban* principles and ethical practices. However, when compared to the Environmental Quality Act 1974 (Act 127), the Selangor enactment is more industry-specific, whereas the federal act provides a broader regulatory framework addressing environmental pollution across sectors (Undang-undang Malaysia, 1974). From this perspective, the state enactment can be regarded as complementary to federal law, though its effectiveness depends on synergy between state and federal enforcement mechanisms.

In addition, technical guidelines issued by the Ministry of Housing and Local Government (2005) stress infrastructure standards for clean, organized, and integrated slaughtering facilities. Although these guidelines do not hold the same legal authority as the enactment, they provide a practical basis that reinforces operational compliance. This highlights the importance of harmonizing technical standards with legal provisions to avoid overlaps or inconsistencies.

In synthesis, the Selangor enactment demonstrates substantive legal strength, while federal legislation offers a broader regulatory framework, and technical guidelines serve as practical support mechanisms. Nevertheless, the implementation gap underscores that regulatory success relies not only on the existence of laws but also on enforcement capacity, compliance incentives, and policy integration across state and federal levels.

Compliance Gaps in Small-Sized Poultry Slaughterhouses

Notwithstanding the coexistence of the enactment and technical guidelines, a significant proportion of small-scale slaughterhouses and poultry farms in Selangor continue to operate without licenses or valid halal certification. This situation reflects a persistent mismatch between legislative intent and field-level implementation.

Evidence suggests that compliance among small operators remains notably low. The Selangor Islamic Religious Department (JAIS, 2024) reported that only 11.3% of identified slaughterhouses were halal-certified, despite the overwhelming Muslim consumer demand for poultry products. Similar findings by Shafie and Othman (2006) underscore the lack of awareness and willingness among small businesses to pursue halal certification.

Furthermore, misuse of halal logos without proper certification has been documented (Abdul Azim Idris, 2010), undermining consumer trust and exposing weaknesses in enforcement mechanisms. Consequently, literature positions small-scale poultry slaughterhouses as both the most vulnerable point in the halal supply chain and the most critical for safeguarding consumer confidence.

Certification Processes and Institutional Challenges

Obtaining halal certification in Malaysia involves meeting requirements set by JAKIM and state religious authorities, as well as complying with regulations from local authorities (PBTs). While intended to ensure standardization, the process is often perceived as bureaucratically complex and burdensome (Mustafa, 2014). As part of the halal certification requirements,

applicants are required to provide a detailed list of raw materials, halal certificates from suppliers, standard operating procedures (SOPs), and other relevant supporting documents. Even minor errors in the preparation of these documents can result in significant delays or outright rejection of the application. This problem is further exacerbated by a lack of understanding of the technical requirements, which often renders the certification process more complicated and time-consuming (Marzita, 2018; Man & Harun, 2016).

Studies point to overlapping jurisdictions as a major barrier. Abd Rahman (2019) notes inconsistencies between federal guidelines and state-level enforcement, resulting in delays and confusion. JAIS (2024) identifies multiple procedural hurdles for small slaughterhouses, including licensing from local councils, tauliah penyembelih (slaughterman licensing), and facility requirements, all of which require significant time and resources.

Multiple authorities shape the operating landscape. Selangor Islamic Religious Council (MAIS)/JAIS regulate halal matters and issue slaughterer accreditation; PBTs license premises and enforce zoning, building codes, and signage; the Department of Veterinary Services (DVS/JPV) covers animal health and welfare; health departments oversee sanitation and food safety; environmental regulators enforce effluent and waste rules. This comprehensive framework ensures integrity but can overwhelm small operators with fragmented requirements, repetitive documentation, and inconsistent sequencing.

From an institutional perspective, the lack of effective coordination between agencies weakens implementation. Shafie and Othman (2006) argue that while JAKIM sets national standards, local enforcement agencies often lack resources and manpower to monitor small premises effectively. This misalignment highlights a governance gap in Malaysia's halal ecosystem.

Food Safety, Consumer Trust, and Market Reputation

Halal certification is closely tied to consumer trust. Soon et al. (2017) emphasize that halal integrity requires vigilance throughout the supply chain, as even minor breaches undermine consumer confidence. Shafie and Othman (2006) and Lever and Puig de la Bellacasa (2010) suggest that consumers expect halal certification to also guarantee food safety, hygiene, and ethical practices.

However, studies also highlight persistent risks. Poor hygiene, inadequate stunning, and lack of proper waste disposal in uncertified slaughterhouses compromise both halal integrity and public health (Hussein & Anas, 2018). Cases of fake halal logos (Abdul Azim Idris, 2010) further erode trust, creating reputational risks for Malaysia as a halal hub.

On an international level, Haleem et al. (2017) and Fischer (2016) argue that Malaysia's credibility as a global halal hub depends on ensuring integrity at the grassroots. The small-sized slaughterhouse sector, therefore, plays an outsized role in sustaining or damaging Malaysia's global brand.

Technological and Operational Challenges

Technology adoption in halal slaughterhouses is an emerging focus of research. Scholars such as Ghazali et al. (2022) emphasize that stunning technologies—electrical, water stunner, and pneumatic methods—must align with shariah principles. Yusof et al. (2016) highlight ongoing debates over whether certain stunning practices compromise halal integrity.

For small slaughterhouses, the costs and expertise required to implement these technologies are significant challenges (Ramli et al., 2020). Many lack modern equipment, proper segregation facilities, and trained personnel, making compliance with halal standards difficult. Wahyuni et al. (2020) and Qisthani et al. (2023) further show that risk management systems such as Halal Control Points (HCPs) are often poorly applied in small-scale operations, leading to higher vulnerability to contamination and non-compliance.

This technological gap illustrates the divide between industrial-scale slaughterhouses, which can absorb compliance costs, and small operators, who struggle to modernize. The literature suggests that targeted policy interventions, such as subsidies or centralized halal slaughtering hubs, may be required to bridge this divide.

Gaps in Literature

While numerous studies examine halal certification broadly, research specifically focusing on small-sized poultry slaughterhouses remains limited. Most literature emphasizes consumer trust (Shafie & Othman, 2006; Soon et al., 2017) or global halal governance (Fischer, 2016; Haleem et al., 2017), with fewer studies addressing grassroots operational challenges. Selangor, as Malaysia's most industrially developed state, provides a critical case. Yet empirical data on its slaughterhouses are scarce (JAIS, 2024). This gap highlights the need for research that bridges the national halal policy framework with local operational realities, particularly for small industry players who are vital in ensuring halal poultry supply.

Research Methodology

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative case study design to investigate the issues and challenges of halal certification among small-sized poultry slaughterhouses in Selangor. A case study approach is particularly appropriate for examining complex, context-dependent phenomena where regulatory, cultural, and operational dynamics intersect (Yin, 2018). By focusing on the lived experiences of operators and the perspectives of regulators, this design facilitates a holistic understanding of challenges to halal certification, complementing prior research that has highlighted systemic gaps in compliance among small and medium-sized enterprises (Mohamed, Rezai, Shamsudin, & Chiew, 2014).

Sampling and Scope

The research was conducted in four districts of Selangor—Hulu Langat, Kuala Langat, Petaling, and Sepang—which were purposively selected due to their concentration of active slaughterhouse operations and regulatory significance to the JAIS. Thus, the study sample consisted of all licensed slaughtermen and/or premise owners identified through records provided by the Selangor Islamic Religious Department (JAIS), as presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Slaughterhouse data derived from licensed halal slaughtermen and/or premise owners records in Selangor (JAIS, 2024).

District	Total
Hulu Langat	36
Kuala Langat	25
Petaling	34
Selangor	6
Grand Total	101

However, the records of licensed slaughtermen and/or premise owners were first screened to ensure that the selected premises aligned with the research objectives, particularly in relation to the challenges faced by small-sized poultry slaughterhouses. The dataset was subsequently filtered according to the following criteria:

- i. Only poultry slaughterhouses were considered.
- ii. The premises were required to be active and in current operation.

The screening process revealed that only 96 slaughterhouse premises met the above criteria. Table 2 below presents the number of slaughterhouse premises identified after the screening process.

Table 2: Slaughterhouse data derived from licensed halal slaughtermen and/or premise owners records in Selangor after screening

District	Total
Hulu Langat	36
Kuala Langat	21
Petaling	34
Sepang	5
Grand Total	96

In addition, not all premises with licensed slaughtermen hold halal certification. A slaughterman's license ensures individual compliance, but certification requires additional conditions such as PBT registration, adequate infrastructure, hygiene, and adherence to MS 1500:2019. As a result, some premises remain uncertified despite employing certified slaughtermen (JAIS, 2024; Soon, Chandia, & Regenstein, 2017).

The unit of analysis was defined at the slaughterhouse level, with particular emphasis on small-sized premises employing fewer workers and operating with limited infrastructural capacity compared to larger commercial slaughterhouses.

Data Collection

To ensure robustness, data was collected from both primary and secondary sources.

Primary Data

Field observations were conducted at selected poultry slaughterhouses to document physical infrastructure, operational processes, waste management practices, and compliance with halal procedures. Observational data provided objective insights into gaps between certification standards and actual practices.

Semi-structured interviews were carried out with slaughterhouse operators and/or owners. The interviews explored participants' understanding of halal certification, perceived challenges, and institutional experiences with certification audits. The semi-structured format allowed for probing of emerging issues while maintaining comparability across respondents.

Secondary Data

Secondary information was obtained from official JAIS halal certification databases, inspection reports, and regulatory guidelines. Additional documents from the local municipal councils and other related agencies were reviewed to contextualize regulatory requirements.

Data Analysis

The study utilized a thematic analysis framework (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to systematically identify patterns and themes across qualitative data. Three overarching themes were identified:

- i. Licensing and certification.
- ii. Infrastructural and operational.
- iii. Awareness and attitudinal limitations.

Triangulation of interview data, observation findings, and official records enhanced the credibility and validity of the analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the MAIS. All respondents provided informed consent prior to participation. Confidentiality was assured by anonymizing all data and ensuring that slaughterhouse operators could not be personally identified in published results.

Limitations

The scope of the study is geographically limited to four districts in Selangor, which may not fully capture the diversity of challenges faced by slaughterhouses in other Malaysian states. Moreover, as a qualitative study, findings are context-specific and not generalizable in a statistical sense. Nevertheless, by employing triangulation and aligning with prior scholarship, the study contributes valuable insights into systemic and operator-level challenges to halal certification in Malaysia.

Findings

The study revealed a range of interrelated issues and challenges affecting the ability of small-sized slaughterhouses in Selangor to obtain and maintain halal certification. These findings are presented thematically under three broad categories: licensing and certification issues, operational and infrastructural challenges, and awareness, compliance, and attitudinal challenges.

Licensing and Certification Issues

Field records indicated that, among the 96 licensed halal slaughtermen and/or premise owners, 63.2% did not hold halal certification, with only 36.8% certified by JAIS. The absence of PBT registration significantly affects the Malaysian halal certification process, as a local authority license is a primary prerequisite for obtaining halal certification. This figure illustrates a significant compliance gap and reflects systemic inefficiencies in the certification process.

Operators frequently expressed that the certification process was bureaucratically complex. Requirements were described as fragmented across multiple regulatory bodies, including JAIS, PBTs, the Ministry of Health, the Department of Veterinary Services, and the Malaysian Quarantine and Inspection Services (MAQIS). Such fragmented requirements, repetitive documentation, and inconsistent sequencing of approvals increased the administrative burden, leading many operators to delay or abandon certification applications.

Moreover, certification was viewed as financially burdensome, particularly for small operators with limited resources. Costs associated with upgrading facilities, implementing halal control points, and preparing required documentation were cited as prohibitive. These findings echo previous scholarship, which highlighted that the transaction costs of certification discourage

smaller players from entering or remaining in the certified halal market (Soon, Chandia, & Regenstein, 2017).

Operational and Infrastructural Challenges

The second theme relates to structural and operational deficiencies within small-sized slaughterhouses that hinder compliance with halal certification requirements.

Field observations revealed that many small-sized slaughterhouses lacked proper waste management systems, leading to hygiene lapses and environmental non-compliance. For example, some premises discharge waste into open drains or nearby waterways, raising both health and halal integrity concerns. Such poor waste management practices mirror findings by Ruslan, Ramli, and Said (2023), who noted that hygiene failures remain one of the most persistent obstacles in small slaughterhouses across Malaysia.

Another recurring issue was the shortage of trained Muslim slaughtermen. Several facilities relied on workers without proper halal slaughter accreditation, resulting in a failure to meet certification requirements (JAIS, 2024). This human capital gap is consistent with broader concerns regarding the limited supply of skilled halal workers in Malaysia (Kamarudin & Md Nor, 2021). Collectively, these constraints make day-to-day compliance fragile and vulnerable to staff turnover and demand spikes.

Finally, infrastructural limitations—such as outdated equipment, poor cold-chain facilities, and the absence of digital traceability systems—were widespread. These shortcomings not only hinder compliance with certification standards but also limit the competitiveness of small operators in the halal economy, where traceability and transparency are increasingly demanded by global markets (Tieman, 2011).

Awareness, Compliance, and Attitudinal Challenges

The third theme concerns knowledge and attitudes toward halal certification. Many operators demonstrated a limited understanding of halal certification as a comprehensive framework. Instead, certification was often perceived narrowly as fulfilling a religious obligation, while broader elements such as hygiene, product handling, safety, consumer trust and continuous Shariah compliance were undervalued (Mohamed et al., 2014). As Marzuki, Hall, and Ballantine (2012) note, halal assurance is increasingly seen as an integrated system of quality management, not merely a religious label. This finding also resonates with Mohamed, Rezai, Shamsudin, and Chiew (2014), who argued that SMEs frequently underestimate the commercial and reputational significance of halal certification.

Attitudinal resistance was also significant. Several operators reported that halal certification was too costly and offered limited commercial return, especially when their immediate consumer base did not demand certified products. This perception discourages applications, even among operators aware of the benefits of certification for broader market access (Soon et al., 2017).

The persistence of such attitudinal challenges underscores the need for targeted awareness campaigns and incentive structures. For instance, offering reduced certification fees or market access benefits for certified premises could alter perceptions and encourage compliance. Without such interventions, operators are likely to continue treating halal certification as optional rather than essential. In addition, A minority of operators misuse halal logos, reflecting

opportunism and weak enforcement. Preventing such practices requires credible monitoring, stronger incentives, and accessible capacity-building to drive lasting compliance.

This attitudinal barrier suggests that halal governance is as much a matter of education and cultural change as it is of regulatory enforcement. Initiatives such as targeted awareness campaigns, mentoring programs and certification incentives could shift perceptions and reframe halal certification as both a religious duty and a strategic business asset.

Discussion

While Malaysia's halal certification framework is internationally recognized, its implementation at the grassroots level remains problematic. The lack of harmonization between regulatory bodies, combined with insufficient support for small operators, undermines both consumer trust and Malaysia's ambition to remain a global halal hub.

The findings point to several policy implications for small-sized slaughterhouses in Selangor, particularly the need to strengthen halal certification frameworks and enforcement mechanisms. First, certification procedures should be streamlined. Establishing a single-window halal certification system — where operators can fulfil all requirements through an integrated digital platform would minimize duplication and enhance efficiency. Comparable models in other halal sectors have demonstrated promise in improving compliance (Kamarudin & Md Nor, 2021).

Second, capacity-building interventions should be prioritized for small operators. These could include subsidized training for slaughtermen and halal committee members, financial assistance for infrastructural upgrades, and technical advisory services. By lowering the cost of compliance, such interventions would reduce the financial burden that currently deters certification.

Third, policies must address awareness gaps through sustained educational outreach. Collaboration among JAIS, JAKIM, enforcement authorities, industry associations, and other relevant stakeholders would help disseminate information on the broader benefits of halal certification, ranging from enhanced consumer trust to expanded market opportunities.

Conclusion and Directions for Future Research

This study examined the issues and challenges faced by small-sized slaughterhouses in Selangor in obtaining and maintaining halal certification. Drawing on field observations, semi-structured interviews, and official records, the analysis revealed that certification gaps are primarily driven by three interrelated dimensions: bureaucratic complexity in licensing and certification, infrastructural and operational deficiencies, and limited awareness coupled with attitudinal resistance.

These findings highlight that halal certification should not be reduced to a religious compliance but must be understood as a holistic governance framework encompassing legal and policy process, food safety, socio-economic development, traceability, and public trust.

From a policy perspective, the study suggests three critical pathways for reform in Selangor and beyond:

- i. Streamlining certification processes through greater inter-agency coordination and digitalization.

- ii. Investing in capacity building for small operators, including financial assistance, infrastructural support, and training for slaughtermen and halal executive.
- iii. Enhancing awareness campaigns to reframe halal certification as both a spiritual obligation and a commercial opportunity. For example, this study recommends the development of a specialized training module for company owners, aimed at enhancing integrity and raising awareness of the legal and managerial responsibilities associated with halal compliance.

While this study provides valuable insights, several avenues for further investigation remain. First, future research could adopt a comparative perspective, examining halal certification challenges in other Selangor districts and Malaysian states, or across different halal sectors including food processing and logistics (Abu Bakar et al., 2025). Broader comparative studies across countries—for example, between Malaysia, Indonesia, and Mexico (Faiqoh & Fatwa, 2024) or within ASEAN contexts would help determine whether the challenges identified in Selangor are context-specific or reflective of wider regional and global trends.

Second, a quantitative approach could complement the current qualitative case study by statistically modelling the relationships between certification challenges, firm size, and compliance outcomes. Studies like Othman et al. (2019) demonstrate the utility of such approaches in modelling complex certification-performance linkages, which would enhance generalizability and provide robust evidence for policymaking.

Third, further research could explore the consumer dimension and examining how certification gaps in slaughterhouses affect consumer trust, purchasing decisions, and perceptions of halal integrity. As the halal economy is consumer-driven, understanding demand-side expectations is essential (Awan, Siddiquei, & Haider, 2015; Golnaz, Zainalabidin, & Mad Nasir, 2010; Rezai, Mohamed, & Shamsudin, 2012).

Finally, international comparative studies particularly between Malaysia and other leading halal hubs such as Indonesia, Brunei, or the Gulf states could provide deeper insights into best practices in halal governance. This would not only enrich the academic literature but also guide Malaysia's strategic positioning in the global halal market ((Sa'adan & Pauzi, 2017; Idris et al., 2025; Priatna et al., 2023).

In conclusion, this study has achieved its objectives, and the findings provide important perspectives on halal management while offering insights into the current realities of halal small-sized slaughterhouse operations in Selangor. It is emphasized that this research will make a significant contribution and deliver meaningful benefits to all stakeholders in the halal industry, in support of upholding Islamic values through the provision of halal food to the Muslim community and consolidate its role as a global halal leader.

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