Muis Halal Hub: Its Role and Contribution to the Islamic Community in Sabah

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ABSTRACT

The Sabah Islamic Religious Council (MUIS) Halal Hub serves as a one-stop centre that supports halal traders and entrepreneurs, particularly in relation to halal certification and industry development. This study examines the roles and perceived contributions of the MUIS Halal Hub to the development of the Muslim community in Sabah. It adopts an institution-focused qualitative case study design. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with two key informants who hold operational roles in the MUIS Halal Hub and through an analysis of relevant institutional and scholarly documents. The data were analysed thematically. From the institutional perspective represented in the interviews, the findings identify four interrelated roles: managing certification documentation and records, supporting halal industry development, conducting halal audits, and coordinating monitoring and enforcement activities. These functions may support local entrepreneurs by improving their understanding of halal requirements, strengthening compliance, and facilitating access to wider markets. The findings also highlight operational constraints, including limited human resources, Sabah's extensive geographical coverage, continuing non-compliance among some certificate holders, and the MUIS Halal Hub's dependence on other agencies for enforcement. The study concludes that the MUIS Halal Hub has the potential to contribute to entrepreneurship, employment, and consumer confidence; however, evidence from entrepreneurs, consumers, policymakers, and quantitative socioeconomic indicators is required before broader impacts can be established.

Keywords: MUIS Halal Hub, halal governance, halal certification, community development, Sabah

ABSTRACT

Majlis Ugama Islam Sabah (MUIS) Halal Hub berfungsi sebagai pusat sehenti yang menyokong peniaga dan usahawan halal, khususnya dalam urusan pensijilan halal dan pembangunan industri. Kajian ini meneliti peranan dan sumbangan yang dilihat daripada MUIS Halal Hub terhadap pembangunan masyarakat Islam di Sabah. Kajian menggunakan reka bentuk kajian kes kualitatif yang berfokuskan institusi. Data dikumpulkan melalui temu bual separa berstruktur dengan dua orang informan utama yang memegang peranan operasi di MUIS Halal Hub serta melalui analisis dokumen institusi dan penulisan ilmiah yang berkaitan. Data dianalisis secara tematik. Berdasarkan perspektif institusi yang diwakili dalam temu bual, dapatan mengenal pasti empat peranan yang saling berkaitan, iaitu mengurus dokumentasi dan rekod pensijilan, menyokong pembangunan industri halal, menjalankan audit halal, serta menyelaras aktiviti pemantauan dan penguatkuasaan. Fungsi-fungsi ini berpotensi membantu usahawan tempatan dengan meningkatkan pemahaman tentang keperluan halal, memperkukuh pematuhan dan memudahkan akses kepada pasaran yang lebih luas. Kajian turut mengenal pasti kekangan operasi, termasuk sumber manusia yang terhad, keluasan geografi Sabah, ketidakpatuhan berterusan dalam kalangan sesetengah pemegang sijil dan kebergantungan MUIS Halal Hub kepada agensi lain dalam urusan penguatkuasaan. Kajian menyimpulkan bahawa MUIS Halal Hub berpotensi menyumbang kepada keusahawanan, peluang pekerjaan dan keyakinan pengguna. Walau bagaimanapun, bukti daripada usahawan, pengguna dan pembuat dasar serta petunjuk sosioekonomi kuantitatif diperlukan sebelum kesan yang lebih luas dapat dipastikan.

Kata kunci: MUIS Halal Hub, tadbir urus halal, pensijilan halal, pembangunan masyarakat, Sabah

INTRODUCTION

Malaysia's halal industry has developed through the interaction of certification authorities, industry-development agencies, businesses, and consumers. Halal certification applies across food premises and a growing range of products and services, making credible governance important to both consumer confidence and market access. Malaysia has also pursued international halal trade through institutional cooperation, including engagement with Japan (Elias, 2024). Within this national system, the Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM), State Islamic Religious Councils, and State Islamic Religious Departments perform related certification and governance functions (Md Nawi et al., 2021). These arrangements provide the broader context for examining how a state-level institution contributes to halal development in Sabah.

In Sabah, responsibility for halal administration developed through state religious institutions before the MUIS Halal Hub (MHH) was formally established. Its establishment was approved in 2020, and MHH officially commenced operations in 2021 to coordinate halal certification, industry development, policy implementation, and public awareness in the state (Majlis Ugama Islam Sabah, 2021). Sabah's large geographical area, dispersed business community, and developing halal ecosystem make the institutional role of MHH particularly significant. In 2024, 168 Sabah entrepreneurs who were ready to apply for Malaysian halal certification participated in the Halal Awareness Workshop for Sabah Madani Entrepreneurs, reflecting continuing demand for certification support and capacity development (Sabah State Legislative Assembly, 2024). The need for a local halal-testing laboratory to help shorten the certification process was also raised in the Sabah State Legislative Assembly in 2025, indicating that supporting infrastructure remains an operational concern (Sabah State Legislative Assembly, 2025). Despite MHH's expanding responsibilities, empirical evidence on how its certification, auditing, monitoring, and industry-development functions contribute to the Muslim community in Sabah remains limited, as existing studies have largely focused on Malaysia's national halal system rather than state-level implementation. Against this background, the present study asks: What roles does MHH perform, what contributions do its officers perceive these roles to make to the Muslim community in Sabah, and what operational constraints affect their implementation?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Documentation and Records

Reliable documentation and record management are central to halal certification. Applicants must maintain current, traceable, and accessible records in accordance with the Malaysian Halal Certification Procedure Manual (MPPHM), including supporting documents that can be retrieved during assessment and monitoring (Department of Islamic Development Malaysia, 2020). These requirements allow certification authorities to verify ingredients, processes, personnel, suppliers, and corrective actions across the certification cycle.

Digital systems can reduce administrative friction when they are accessible and supported by consistent internal procedures. The MYeHALAL system, for example, facilitates applications and document verification, while effective internal record systems help both applicants and auditors retrieve evidence efficiently. Fikri et al. (2021) argue that a user-friendly certification process can improve industry participation; however, technology alone does not resolve incomplete records, limited applicant capability, or inconsistent filing practices.

Documentation is therefore both a technical requirement and a governance mechanism. Inadequate records can delay certification and weaken audit trails, whereas systematic documentation can improve transparency and accountability (Hazban & Nasohah, 2023). For state-level institutions such as MHH, the challenge is to combine digital tools, clear allocation of responsibilities, applicant guidance, and follow-up procedures rather than treating documentation as an isolated administrative task.

Halal Development

Malaysia has progressively developed its halal governance and industry-support infrastructure. The establishment of JAKIM's Halal Hub Division and the Malaysian Halal Council strengthened national coordination, certification administration, and industry planning (Hassan et al., 2023). Legal recognition of JAKIM and state religious authorities as halal-certification bodies has also supported the international visibility of Malaysia's halal standards (Md Nawi et al., 2021).

Industry development nevertheless depends on more than regulation. Small and medium-sized enterprises may face limited awareness, compliance costs, complex documentation, and delays in the certification process. Training, advisory support, simplified procedures, and cooperation among public agencies and business organisations can help address these barriers (Fikri et al., 2021; Hassan et al., 2023).

At the state level, these challenges create a dual responsibility for MHH: safeguarding the integrity of halal certification while enabling local businesses to participate in the halal economy. This balance is important because overly burdensome procedures may discourage participation, whereas weak oversight may undermine consumer trust. Institutional performance should therefore be assessed in terms of both regulatory integrity and the practical accessibility of support for entrepreneurs.

Halal Audit

Halal auditing provides systematic assurance that products, services, and production processes comply with certification requirements. Audits may examine documentation, raw materials, processing, equipment, packaging, storage, transportation, sanitation, and internal halal controls. Effective auditing can strengthen product integrity and consumer confidence, but its reliability depends on competent auditors, consistent standards, sufficient resources, and complete evidence (Abdul Aziz & Che Hussin, 2024; Harun et al., 2023).

Audit systems commonly include internal, customer-related, and independent assessments. In the Malaysian certification context, document review, on-site inspection, monitoring, corrective action, and follow-up are closely connected. The involvement of trained Shariah and technical personnel is intended to ensure that both religious and operational requirements are assessed (Mohamad & Othman, n.d.; Department of Islamic Development Malaysia, 2020).

Persistent challenges include differences among halal standards, incomplete documentation, limited digital tools, audit costs, and shortages of qualified personnel (Abdallah et al., 2021; Akbar et al., 2023; Abdul Aziz & Che Hussin, 2024). These constraints may be more pronounced in geographically large jurisdictions. Consequently, audit frequency alone is not a sufficient measure of effectiveness; audit quality, corrective-action closure, continuing compliance, and the capacity to reach dispersed certificate holders must also be considered.

Monitoring and Enforcement

Monitoring determines whether halal certificate holders continue to comply after certification. Malaysian procedures provide for periodic, follow-up, complaint-based, and enforcement-related inspections (Department of Islamic Development Malaysia, 2014; Daud et al., 2017). These activities protect consumers and certification integrity by identifying non-compliance that may emerge after an initial audit.

A key governance issue is the division of authority among institutions. MHH monitors halal-certified premises and supplies technical information, while statutory enforcement may require cooperation with the ministry responsible for domestic trade and other authorised agencies. This interdependence can provide checks and balances, but it may also slow action when mandates, procedures, or operational resources are not closely coordinated.

The literature therefore suggests that effective halal governance requires clear institutional mandates, timely information sharing, coordinated enforcement, and accessible complaint mechanisms. It also requires attention to the perspective of regulated businesses and consumers, whose experiences may differ from institutional accounts. This gap informs the interpretation of the present institution-focused case study.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted an institution-focused qualitative case study design to examine the roles, perceived contributions, and operational challenges of the MUIS Halal Hub (MHH). Two key informants were purposively selected based on their direct operational responsibilities and experience in the core institutional functions under investigation. P1 was an Assistant Audit Officer in the Certification Unit with 11 years of experience, while P2 was an Assistant Officer in Monitoring and Enforcement with three years of experience.

Data collection was conducted in July 2024 at the Mabul Room, Sabah International Convention Centre (SICC). The interviews were conducted in Malay and lasted nearly two and a half hours in total. Semi-structured questions were used to obtain detailed accounts of work procedures, institutional initiatives, compliance issues, perceived contributions to the Muslim community, and implementation constraints. With the participants' verbal consent, the interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim in Malay. Relevant excerpts were subsequently translated into English and checked against the original transcripts to preserve their intended meaning.

Formal ethics committee approval was not obtained for this institution-focused interview study. Before the interviews, both participants were informed of the study's purpose, the voluntary nature of their participation, the recording procedure, and the intended academic use of the data. Verbal informed consent was obtained from both participants. To protect confidentiality, the participants were identified as P1 and P2, while personally identifiable information was excluded from the transcripts and reporting.

The documentary analysis focused on five core policy and regulatory documents published between 2011 and 2021: the Trade Descriptions (Certification and Marking of Halal) Order 2011, MS 1500:2019, the Manual Procedure for Malaysia Halal Certification (Domestic) 2020, the Malaysian Halal Management System 2020, and the MHH Establishment Policy 2021. These documents were purposively selected because they directly addressed halal certification, institutional governance, auditing, documentation, monitoring, enforcement, or MHH's official mandate. Relevant scholarly studies were additionally reviewed to contextualise the institutional and regulatory evidence.

The interview transcripts were initially coded by the first author using a combined deductive and inductive approach. The initial coding categories were informed by MHH's officially defined institutional functions, while the codes were subsequently refined based on recurring patterns in the interview data. The codes were organised into four final themes: documentation and records, halal development, halal auditing, and monitoring and enforcement. The codes and themes were subsequently reviewed by the co-authors, and differences in interpretation were resolved through discussion and consensus.

Credibility was strengthened through triangulation between the interview findings and official documentary evidence. Coding notes, theme-development records, and relevant supporting excerpts were maintained as an audit trail to enhance analytical transparency. Documentary evidence was used to clarify institutional arrangements and support the critical interpretation of the interview findings. Nevertheless, because both participants were MHH officers, the findings represent an institutional perspective and are not intended to capture the experiences of all halal-industry stakeholders. The findings also reflect the institutional arrangements

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and participants' experiences at the time of data collection in July 2024 and may not capture subsequent changes in MHH's policies, personnel, or operational practices.

Table 1. Profile of the Key Informants

No	Position	Code	Experience
1.	Assistant Audit Officer (Certification Unit)	P1	11 Years
2.	Assistant Officer (Monitoring & Enforcement)	P2	3 Years

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis identified four interrelated institutional roles through which the MUIS Halal Hub (MHH) may contribute to community development in Sabah: documentation and records management, halal industry development, halal auditing, and monitoring and enforcement. Across these themes, 11 illustrative interview quotations are presented: two relating to documentation and records, two to halal development, three to halal auditing, and four to monitoring and enforcement. These figures refer only to quotations reproduced in the manuscript and do not represent the relative importance or frequency of each theme.

The interview evidence was triangulated with relevant policy and regulatory documents. The reported constraints are interpreted as implementation considerations arising from Sabah's geographical context, MHH's evolving institutional arrangements, and the division of responsibilities among relevant agencies. They should not be interpreted as evidence of institutional failure. Rather, they identify areas in which MHH's existing initiatives may be further supported and strengthened.

Table 2. Evidence Map of MHH's Institutional Roles and Reported Contributions

Theme	Interview Evidence	Documentary Evidence	Reported Contribution	Implementation Consideration and Evidence Boundary
Documentation and records	P1; two quotations concerning audit responsibilities and digital storage	MHH Establishment Policy 2021; MPPHM 2020	Supports traceability, coordination and retrieval of certification evidence	Further performance data are required to assess processing efficiency and user accessibility
Halal development	P1; two quotations concerning KPMDI, SHIK and certification support	MHH Establishment Policy 2021; official records of halal-awareness initiatives	Supports entrepreneur awareness, capability and access to certification pathways	Longer-term data are required to assess certification progression and business outcomes
Halal auditing	P1; three quotations concerning audit allocation, non-conformities and corrective procedures	MHH Establishment Policy 2021; MPPHM 2020; MS 1500:2019	Strengthens certification integrity and corrective compliance	Sabah's geographical coverage requires continuing attention to resource planning, scheduling and follow-up

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Monitoring and enforcement	P1 and P2; four quotations concerning monitoring, inter-agency responsibilities, suspensions and corrective responses	MHH Establishment Policy 2021; MPPHM 2020; Trade Descriptions Act 2011	Supports continuous compliance, consumer protection and case escalation	Implementation depends on sustained coordination and information sharing among relevant agencies

Documentation and Records

The informants described documentation and records management as a foundation of the certification and audit process. MHH divides audit responsibilities into documentation, Shariah and technical components, allowing documentary assessment and physical inspection to be undertaken concurrently. According to P1:

"In Sabah, our audit responsibilities are divided into documentation, Shariah, and technical components. After the opening meeting and company presentation, the team is divided so that the documentation can be reviewed while the Shariah and technical auditors conduct the physical inspection. This arrangement is intended to save time."

This division of responsibilities may support a more systematic assessment by allowing claims made in certification applications to be compared with documentary and physical evidence. It also reflects the multidisciplinary nature of halal auditing, in which compliance must be assessed from administrative, technical and Shariah perspectives. MHH also maintains duplicate digital copies of certification and audit records. These records may assist officers in retrieving previous evidence during renewal applications and following up on non-conformity reports. P1 explained:

"*We keep a duplicate in digital storage. When a company applies for renewal, we can review the relevant drive and refer any non-conformity report to the responsible party. We are continuing to improve this process*."

The use of digital storage indicates an ongoing effort to strengthen record accessibility and continuity. It may facilitate the retrieval of earlier audit findings and support follow-up during renewal applications. Nevertheless, this study focuses on qualitative insights; quantitative indicators, such as the number of digitized files, incomplete applications, and the closure rate of non-conformity reports, were beyond its scope and may be examined in future research. The findings should therefore be interpreted as evidence of an institutional record-management practice rather than proof that digitalisation has already produced measurable efficiency gains.

The value of digital records also depends on consistent file management, information security, data quality and timely updating. From an Islamic-governance perspective, transparent and traceable records may support accountability and consumer protection by enabling halal claims to be verified. Their contribution to community development is indirect but important because dependable documentation supports credible certification and may strengthen confidence in locally produced goods and services.

Halal Development

The findings indicate that MHH combines its regulatory role with initiatives intended to develop the halal capabilities of local entrepreneurs. The informants identified training, awareness, certification guidance and institutional collaboration as important elements of this developmental role.

One initiative highlighted by P1 was the *Kursus Pengendalian Makanan Dalam Islam* (KPMDI), which introduces entrepreneurs, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises, to Islamic food-handling principles and halal-certification requirements:

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"*One of our initiatives is the Islamic food-handling course, which we refer to as KPMDI. It introduces the industry, particularly SMEs, to the benefits of applying halal requirements to their products*."

KPMDI may help reduce knowledge barriers by translating certification requirements into practical guidance. This form of support is particularly relevant for micro and small enterprises that may have limited internal halal expertise. However, the present study did not obtain programme-level data on the number of sessions, participants, districts covered or participants who subsequently progressed to application or certification. KPMDI should therefore be understood as a capacity-building initiative whose longer-term outcomes require further evaluation. P1 also discussed the *Sijil Halal Industri Kotej* (SHIK), which provides a pathway for cottage-industry entrepreneurs who may not possess suitable production facilities:

"SHIK provides an alternative pathway for small producers without suitable production facilities. The initiative was introduced nationally by JAKIM and has been implemented in Sabah."

By addressing infrastructure-related barriers, SHIK may facilitate the participation of smaller producers in the formal halal system. This has the potential to strengthen consumer assurance and create pathways towards wider market participation. Official Sabah records show that 168 entrepreneurs who were ready to apply for halal certification participated in the Halal Awareness Workshop for Sabah Madani Entrepreneurs in 2024, including micro and cottage-industry entrepreneurs interested in SHIK (Sabah State Legislative Assembly, 2024). This figure demonstrates demand for certification support, although it should not be interpreted as a direct performance indicator for KPMDI or SHIK.

MHH has also collaborated with Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia and Universiti Malaysia Sabah in areas such as education, research and the development of shared guidance. These partnerships may provide technical expertise, strengthen local research capacity and connect institutional practice with academic knowledge. Their longer-term value, however, depends on the translation of research and training outputs into practical services that respond to industry needs.

At the time of data collection, the informants did not report any formal international partnership specifically led by MHH. This does not necessarily indicate an absence of institutional engagement; rather, no such partnership was identified within the scope of the interviews. Future partnerships may be considered according to specific purposes, including standards benchmarking, auditor training, research and development, or access to regional halal markets. Overall, the findings suggest that MHH supports halal development through a combination of regulatory guidance and capacity-building initiatives. These activities may help entrepreneurs understand halal requirements and participate in the halal economy. Nevertheless, potential outcomes such as employment creation, certification success and improved business competitiveness were not independently measured in this study.

Halal Auditing

Halal auditing constitutes a central component of MHH's institutional responsibilities. The informants explained that audits cover documentation, internal halal-control systems, raw materials, processing activities, equipment, packaging, storage, transportation, personnel, sanitation and waste management. This broad scope allows compliance to be assessed across the production chain rather than at a single stage. The informants reported that the monitoring function involved eight personnel at the time of data collection. Officers were allocated across different geographical areas to enable audit activities to be undertaken concurrently. P1 explained:

"One officer is assigned to audits around Kota Kinabalu, including Tuaran and Papar, while I cover areas outside Kota Kinabalu. This allows us to conduct audits concurrently with the personnel available."

This arrangement demonstrates institutional adaptation to Sabah's extensive geographical area. The allocation of available personnel requires careful planning to balance audit coverage, travelling time, inspection depth, corrective follow-up and staff workload. The figure of eight personnel reflects the situation reported during the July 2024 interviews and should not be interpreted as the current staffing level without further institutional

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confirmation.

The informants also described periodic, follow-up, complaint-based and enforcement-related inspections. Periodic inspections assess continuing compliance, follow-up inspections verify corrective action, complaint-based inspections respond to public information, and enforcement-related inspections involve cooperation with agencies possessing the relevant authority. Together, these mechanisms provide several channels for maintaining post-certification assurance. Recurring non-conformities reported by the informants included incomplete pest-control records, inadequate cleanliness and the use of raw materials that had not been declared in the certification system. P1 distinguished between technical and Shariah-related non-conformities:

"Minor non-conformities are usually technical, such as incomplete pest-control records or cleanliness that does not meet MPPHM requirements. Major non-conformities generally involve Shariah requirements, including raw materials that have not been declared in the system."

These findings show that non-compliance may arise from both administrative weaknesses and substantive breaches of halal requirements. Training and guidance may assist businesses in addressing documentation and knowledge gaps, while repeated or serious non-compliance requires appropriate corrective and escalation mechanisms. Evidence from certificate holders would nevertheless be required to explain why particular forms of non-compliance persist.

The informants further reported that the response period associated with identified non-conformities had been reduced from 14 days to five working days. P1 perceived this procedural change as contributing to faster corrective responses:

"The revised procedure has helped to speed up the application process, and it is one of the measures we have implemented."

Because the study did not obtain the relevant circular or procedural document, the five-working-day period is reported as an institutional account provided by the informants. Further confirmation is required to determine whether it refers specifically to responding to an NCR, completing corrective action or submitting evidence of correction. A shorter response period may facilitate timely follow-up, although its effectiveness should ultimately be assessed through response rates, the quality of corrective action, repeated non-conformity and the administrative experience of smaller businesses. The findings demonstrate that MHH is required to balance its developmental and advisory responsibilities with its auditing and compliance-assurance functions. Clear procedures, appropriate resource planning and systematic case tracking may further support this balance without weakening either entrepreneur assistance or certification integrity.

Monitoring and Enforcement

The informants emphasised the distinction between MHH's monitoring responsibilities and the statutory enforcement powers held by the ministry responsible for domestic trade. MHH may inspect halal-certified premises, document non-conformity and recommend further action, while certain formal enforcement measures require the involvement of an authorised agency. P1 explained:

"MHH does not hold the same enforcement authority as the domestic-trade ministry. Obtaining formal enforcement authority is challenging, so cases that require such action must involve the authorised agency."

This division of authority requires effective coordination between MHH and agencies possessing the relevant statutory powers. The arrangement may support procedural accountability by ensuring that formal enforcement is undertaken within the appropriate legal mandate. Its effectiveness depends on clear referral procedures, timely information exchange, coordinated operations and feedback on the outcome of referred cases.

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P2 reported an increase in monitoring activity:

"MHH conducted 89 monitoring visits in 2023, compared with 32 in the preceding reporting period. Each year, we aim to monitor approximately 50% of halal certificate holders and prioritise certificates that are nearing expiry."

The increase from 32 to 89 visits indicates expanded institutional activity. However, the precise period represented by the earlier figure of 32 was not independently verified. The figures are therefore presented as officer-reported data. A fuller assessment would require the total number of certificate holders, the proportion monitored, district and sectoral coverage, non-conformities detected, corrective actions completed and recurrence rates. Prioritising certificates nearing expiry may support administrative planning and renewal management. This may be complemented by risk-based monitoring so that premises presenting higher compliance risks receive appropriate attention irrespective of certificate-expiry dates. The informants further reported recurring issues involving pest-control records, sanitation requirements and undeclared raw materials:

"Common problems include incomplete pest-control records, failure to meet sanitation requirements, and the use of raw materials that have not been declared in the system."

These issues demonstrate the importance of continuous compliance after certification has been awarded. According to the informants, some premises were more attentive to compliance when an audit was anticipated. This suggests that monitoring works most effectively when supported by internal halal-control systems, continuing education and a sustained organisational compliance culture. P1 reported that nine certificates had been suspended during the relevant reporting year. Businesses were provided with an opportunity to explain and correct the identified non-conformity:

"When a certificate is suspended, MHH asks the business to explain how the non-conformity will be corrected. The business is given five working days to respond. If it does not respond satisfactorily, we recommend that the panel withdraw the certificate."

The use of suspension, corrective responses and panel recommendations demonstrates that structured escalation mechanisms are available. The nine suspensions indicate regulatory activity but should not be interpreted as an effectiveness rate without information on the total number of certificate holders, reasons for suspension, corrective outcomes or subsequent withdrawals.

MHH's monitoring role covers businesses of different sizes and sectors. Consistent halal standards remain necessary, while proportional guidance may help micro and small enterprises develop the systems required for sustained compliance. Continued cooperation with authorised agencies, education for certificate holders and secure case-management systems may further strengthen accountability and coordinated implementation.

Collectively, the findings show that MHH performs both regulatory and developmental functions. Documentation and audit activities support the credibility of certification, while training, certification assistance and institutional partnerships may expand entrepreneur participation. Monitoring and inter-agency enforcement arrangements provide mechanisms for maintaining compliance after certification. The findings should nevertheless be understood as an institutional account based on two MHH officers and selected documentary evidence. They demonstrate activities, procedures and perceived contributions but do not independently measure changes in household welfare, employment, firm performance or consumer confidence. Future research involving entrepreneurs, certificate holders, consumers and partner agencies would provide a more comprehensive assessment of MHH's wider contribution. Within these boundaries, MHH's activities reflect an important state-level effort to coordinate halal governance and industry development across Sabah. The implementation considerations identified in this study primarily highlight the need for continued institutional support, outcome monitoring, inter-agency coordination and context-sensitive planning in a geographically extensive state.

Limitations And Directions for Future Research

This study has several limitations. First, the empirical evidence is based on two purposively selected MHH officers. Their operational experience provides detailed institution-level insights; however, the focused and relatively homogeneous sample means that the findings are context-specific and may not represent the full range of perspectives surrounding halal governance in Sabah. Second, the study does not include halal-certified entrepreneurs, applicants, industry practitioners, consumers, policymakers, or representatives of partner agencies. It therefore cannot establish whether these stakeholders experience MHH's developmental and regulatory functions in the same way as the interviewed officers. Third, the study focuses on qualitative insights; quantitative indicators relating to employment, business performance, certification success, market access, consumer confidence, digitised records, incomplete applications, and the closure of non-conformity reports were beyond its scope. Documentary evidence was used to contextualise and triangulate the interview findings but does not substitute for independent stakeholder perspectives or outcome-based evidence.

Despite these limitations, the study provides an initial institution-level account of halal governance in Sabah, documents MHH's regulatory and developmental roles, and identifies implementation considerations that may inform broader multi-stakeholder research and continuing institutional development.

Future research should employ maximum variation sampling involving different stakeholder groups and districts across Sabah. A mixed-methods design could combine interviews and focus groups with surveys, administrative certification records, audit and monitoring outcomes, business performance indicators, and measures of consumer confidence. Longitudinal research could also examine whether training, certification assistance and corrective-action mechanisms produce sustained improvements over time.

Comparative studies across Malaysian states may further explain how institutional mandates, staffing arrangements, geographical conditions and inter agency coordination shape halal-governance implementation. Research on international collaboration should assess not only the number of partnerships established but also their contribution to standards alignment, auditor competency, entrepreneur capability, export readiness and benefits to local communities.

CONCLUSION

This study identifies four interrelated roles of the MUIS Halal Hub: managing documentation and records, supporting halal industry development, conducting halal audits, and coordinating monitoring and enforcement. Through these functions, MHH contributes to ongoing efforts to strengthen certification integrity, enhance entrepreneur awareness, facilitate participation in halal markets, and reinforce consumer confidence. The findings also highlight several implementation considerations, including human-resource capacity, Sabah's extensive geographical coverage, recurring non-conformities, and the need for continued cooperation with agencies possessing formal enforcement authority. These considerations reflect the complex institutional environment in which MHH performs both regulatory and developmental responsibilities.

Based on the perspectives of two MHH officers, this study provides an initial institution-level account of how a state halal institution balances certification assurance with industry development. A more comprehensive assessment could incorporate the perspectives of businesses, consumers, policymakers and partner agencies, together with measurable indicators of certification performance, employment, market access and consumer confidence.

Within the scope of the present evidence, MHH plays an important and evolving role in strengthening halal governance and supporting the development of a credible, inclusive and contextually responsive halal ecosystem in Sabah.

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