

## **Halal Hospitality Education in Malaysia: A PRISMA-Based Systematic Review on Its Role, Challenges, and Future Development**

**Nur Iman Hashim <sup>1\*</sup> & Nadzirah Mohd Fauzi <sup>2</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>*Faculty of Hospitality and Tourism Management, UCSI University, Taman Connaught, 56000 Cheras, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia*

<sup>2</sup>*Faculty of Economics, Accountancy and Management, Universiti Islam Selangor. Bandar Seri Putra, 43000 Kajang, Selangor, Malaysia*

\*Corresponding author: [Nur-Iman@ucsiuniversity.edu.my](mailto:Nur-Iman@ucsiuniversity.edu.my)

### **ABSTRACT**

Despite Malaysia's ambition to position itself as a global halal tourism hub, its halal hospitality education system remains fragmented, unstandardised, and insufficiently aligned with industry needs. Without a systematic development of halal hospitality education, Malaysia risks losing its leadership position in the halal tourism industry. This study presents a systematic review of research on halal hospitality education in Malaysia, aiming to map current developments, identify challenges, and highlight future directions to enhance national competitiveness. Following the PRISMA 2020 protocol, studies published from 2010 to 2025 were systematically retrieved from Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, and ResearchGate using predefined keywords and Boolean operators. After rigorous screening, quality appraisal, and thematic synthesis, 37 studies were included, revealing seven key themes: authentic halal experience, workforce training and competency, halal certification standards, cultural sensitivity, institutional collaboration, innovation and digital transformation, and SME empowerment. The findings indicate that, despite notable advancements, substantial inconsistencies persist across institutions, and coordination among academia, industry, and policymakers remains limited. Strengthening Malaysia's leadership in global halal tourism therefore requires comprehensive curriculum reform, structured training frameworks, and enhanced multi-stakeholder collaboration. Accordingly, this study advocates the establishment of a national halal education framework, underpinned by strategic support from JAKIM, the Ministry of Higher Education, and industry partners, to ensure workforce readiness, maintain educational quality, and promote sustainable growth in the halal tourism sector.

**Keywords:** Halal Education; Halal Hospitality; Systematic Literature Review; Workforce Development

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Halal tourism is one of the fastest-growing sectors in the global travel industry, driven by the increasing demand for services and products that align with Islamic values (Pratama, 2023). Malaysia has strategically positioned itself as a global halal hub for both products and services, leveraging its cultural diversity to attract Muslim tourists worldwide (Ahmad et al., 2024). This burgeoning sector presents significant opportunities for Malaysia, but it also brings challenges in ensuring the delivery of authentic and comprehensive halal experiences. As the nation aims to solidify its reputation as a premier halal tourism destination, there is a pressing need to address the development and advancement of halal hospitality education (Wahizan Saidin et al., 2025).

The global halal market is estimated to exceed USD 2.3 trillion, with halal tourism becoming a crucial component of this growth (Azam et al., 2019). Malaysia, with its large Muslim population and strong commitment to halal standards, is well-positioned to lead in this industry (Aslan, 2023). However, to fully leverage this potential, it is essential to develop a robust educational framework capable of producing skilled professionals who can uphold the integrity of halal hospitality. The lack of in-depth halal training in Malaysia's hospitality workforce poses a significant risk to the authenticity and credibility of its halal offerings (Mohsin et al., 2016). Without this essential education, the delivery of truly halal experiences may be compromised, leading to a superficial implementation of halal standards (Handayani et al., 2023).

Considering these challenges, this paper seeks to explore the necessity of advancing halal hospitality education in Malaysia. The objective of this study is to critically evaluate the current state of halal hospitality education and identify specific, actionable strategies for its improvement. The goal is to ensure that Malaysia's hospitality sector is equipped to meet the evolving demands of Muslim tourists and maintain its position as a leader in halal tourism within the global market. The research aims to address this gap by proposing educational reforms that are realistic, measurable, and timely to develop a workforce capable of delivering high-quality halal hospitality experiences.

Ultimately, advancing halal hospitality education is crucial not only to meet the religious and cultural needs of Muslim tourists but also to enhance Malaysia's reputation as a credible and comprehensive halal hub (Daud et al., 2023). Hence, this study will contribute to existing knowledge by offering insights into how Malaysia can bridge the current educational gap and strengthen its standing in the global halal tourism market.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study employed a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach (Petticrew & Roberts, 2006), guided by the PRISMA 2020 framework for reporting systematic reviews (Page et al., 2021). The review aimed to systematically identify, evaluate, and synthesize existing research on halal hospitality education in Malaysia, ensuring transparency, replicability, and methodological rigor throughout the process. The review protocol was developed in accordance with PRISMA and registered internally prior to data collection, providing a structured framework for the search strategy, inclusion criteria, and synthesis procedures.

## Research Question

The central research question guiding this review is: *"What is the significance of Halal Hospitality Education in shaping Malaysia's halal tourism and hospitality sector?"*. This question seeks to uncover how structured educational initiatives contribute to the professionalisation, competitiveness, and sustainability of the halal hospitality ecosystem.

To structure this inquiry, the PICO framework was utilized, focusing on four key aspects. The *population* considered in this study includes stakeholders in the halal hospitality industry, such as educators, students, and professionals. The *intervention* examines the implementation of halal education and training programs, while the *comparison* highlights differences between institutions that offer formal halal hospitality education and those that do not. Lastly, the *outcome* assesses the impact of halal education on industry standards, workforce competency, and consumer trust.

## Search Strategy and Selection Process

A systematic literature review (SLR) was conducted following the PRISMA 2020 guidelines (Page et al., 2021) and established SLR principles (Petticrew & Roberts, 2006) to identify, evaluate, and synthesise research on halal hospitality education in Malaysia. A comprehensive search was performed between January and March 2025 across four major academic databases: Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, and ResearchGate. Boolean operators and truncations were applied to refine the search, using key terms such as *"halal hospitality," "Muslim-friendly hospitality," "education," "training," "curriculum,"* and *"Malaysia."*

All retrieved records were screened systematically. After removing duplicates using Zotero, titles and abstracts were initially assessed for relevance, followed by full-text evaluation against predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria. Studies were included if they were peer-reviewed, published in English from 2010 to 2025, and focused on halal hospitality, tourism, or education within Malaysia or comparable Muslim-majority contexts. Both empirical and conceptual studies were considered, while non-peer-reviewed works, editorials, unrelated studies, and inaccessible articles were excluded.

This structured, multi-stage process ensured methodological rigor, transparency, and replicability. The inclusion and exclusion criteria applied at each stage are summarised in Table 1.

**Table 1**  
*Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria for Study Selection*

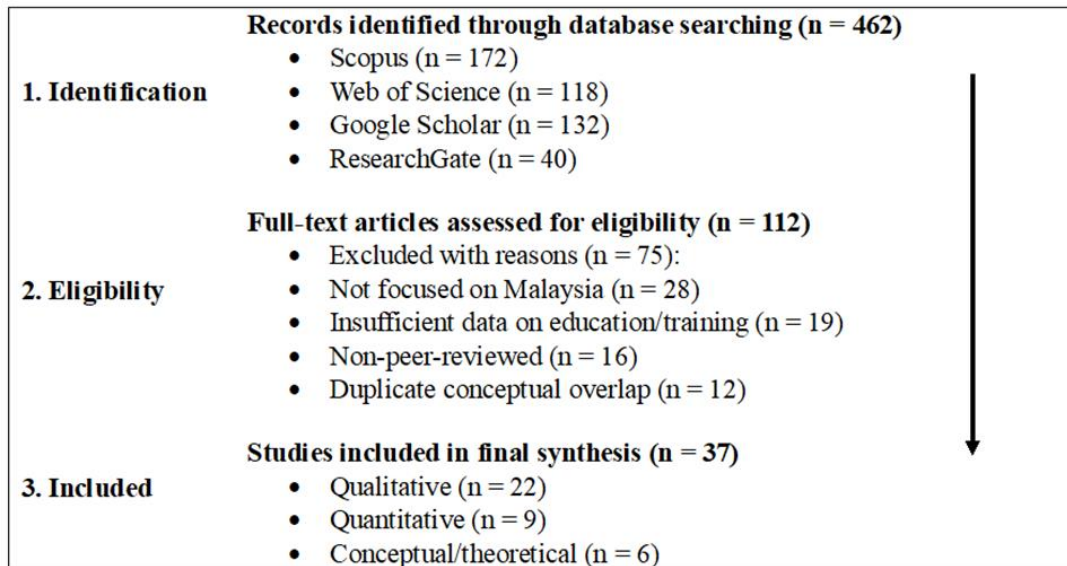
Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Focus on halal hospitality, tourism, or halal education	Articles unrelated to hospitality or education
Empirical or conceptual studies	Non-academic or non-peer-reviewed sources
Conducted in Malaysia or comparable Muslim-majority countries	Studies published in languages other than English
Published from 2010 to 2025	Duplicated, incomplete, or inaccessible articles

The inclusion and exclusion criteria were consistently applied during the screening and eligibility stages. Titles and abstracts were first screened, and full texts were retrieved for articles that met the screening threshold. Duplicate records, inaccessible papers, and those not meeting the criteria were removed before quality appraisal and final synthesis.

Following this process, 37 studies were retained for inclusion in the final review. These studies encompassed qualitative (22), quantitative (9), and conceptual/theoretical (6) research designs, forming a comprehensive and methodologically robust foundation for thematic synthesis and interpretation. The full PRISMA 2020 flow diagram summarising the identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion stages is presented in Figure 1.

**Figure 1**

*PRISMA 2020 Flow Diagram*



*Source: Adoption from Page et al. (2021)*

## Quality Assessment

A rigorous quality assessment was conducted on all selected studies to ensure methodological soundness, validity, and transparency. The appraisal process followed established systematic review standards, employing the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) checklist for qualitative studies (Backman et al., 2017) and the Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI) critical appraisal tools for quantitative and mixed-method studies (Porrirt et al., 2014). Each study was evaluated based on criteria such as research design, clarity of data presentation, analytical rigour, and ethical reporting. Only studies achieving a minimum quality threshold of 70% were included in the final synthesis.

To ensure reliability and consistency, the appraisal adhered to the SLR guidelines of Tranfield et al. (2003) and Kitchenham and Charters (2007), integrating best practices from Gough et al. (2017). A structured set of evaluation questions was used to determine methodological and conceptual robustness, adapted from these established frameworks:

1. Does the study have clearly defined objectives and research questions? (Tranfield et al., 2003; Gough et al., 2017)
2. Is the research design appropriate for addressing the stated objectives? (Kitchenham & Charters, 2007)
3. Are data collection and analysis methods clearly described and justified? (JBI, 2020; CASP, 2018)
4. Are the findings supported by adequate evidence and logical reasoning? (Gough et al., 2017)
5. Does the study provide meaningful implications for theory, policy, or practice? (Tranfield et al., 2003; Gough et al., 2017)

Studies meeting at least four of these five criteria were retained. This multi-layered appraisal ensured that only methodologically rigorous and ethically sound works contributed to the thematic synthesis, thereby strengthening the overall validity, transparency, and credibility of the review findings.

### **Data Extraction**

A standardized data-extraction form, pilot-tested and validated against prior systematic reviews as per suggestion made by Buchter et al. (2020) was employed to systematically gather essential information from each selected study. The extracted data encompassed the study’s focus, methodological approach, data sources, key findings, and reported implications or research gaps. This structured and replicable process facilitated the systematic categorization of thematic patterns, the identification of emerging trends, and the recognition of unresolved issues within the existing body of literature (Buchter et al., 2021).

**Table 2**  
*Data Extraction Matrix of Included Studies*

Author(s) / Year	Study Focus	Methodology	Data Source	Key Findings	Implications / Gaps
Adinugraha et al. (2023)	Development of halal tourism strategies in Malaysia	Conceptual review	Secondary literature	Emphasised the need for halal education and workforce alignment	Lacked empirical data on educational implementation
Noraizan & Syuhaida (2019)	Halal awareness education through Islamic curriculum	Qualitative	Content analysis of Islamic Education syllabus	Curriculum introduces halal values but lacks hospitality context	Suggests for integration of halal vocational content
Ibrahim et al. (2022)	Collaboration for employability in halal studies	Case study	University–industry collaboration	Partnership enhances graduate readiness	Limited scalability across institutions
Isa et al. (2018)	Muslim tourist perceived value in halal tourism	Quantitative	312 Muslim tourists in Malaysia	Halal hospitality education affects service perception	Need to train staff in soft skills and ethics
Daud et al. (2023)	Halal certification practice in Malaysia’s meat industry	Mixed method	Industry audit and interviews	Certification builds consumer trust but is complex	Suggest simplified certification training for SMEs
Handayani et al. (2023)	Halal education development in Southeast Asia	Bibliometric	Scopus database	Rapid rise in halal education research 2015–2022	Few studies link education to workforce outcomes
Battour (2018)	Muslim travel behaviour and halal tourism	Conceptual	Literature-based	Certification and training increase loyalty	Calls for structured halal hospitality curriculum

Sabri et al. (2022)	Muslim-friendly accommodation criteria	Qualitative	Malaysian hoteliers	Halal training improves service consistency	Recommends government-academia curriculum synergy
Koc et al. (2025)	Trust and religiosity in halal consumption	Quantitative	400 Muslim consumers	Education indirectly increases halal awareness	No analysis of education provider's role
Rasul (2019)	Global trends and challenges in halal tourism	Systematic review	74 international studies	Lack of skilled workforce in halal hospitality	Advocates for professional halal training modules

## Synthesis of Results

The extracted data were systematically analysed using a thematic synthesis approach, which enabled the identification of key patterns, relationships, and conceptual linkages across the reviewed studies. Consistent with the analytical process outlined by Thomas and Harden (2008) and further supported by Braun and Clarke (2006), the synthesis was conducted through three iterative stages. First, all extracted data were coded line by line to identify recurring ideas and relevant concepts associated with halal hospitality education. Second, these initial codes were grouped into broader descriptive themes, such as workforce training and competency, halal certification standards, cultural sensitivity, institutional collaboration, and digital innovation. Third, analytical themes were developed to interpret how halal hospitality education influences workforce development, industry standards, and consumer trust in halal-certified establishments.

This structured synthesis also incorporated a comparative analysis of educational frameworks adopted by different institutions, enabling the review to highlight both shared practices and contextual variations across Malaysia's higher education landscape. Following best practices in thematic analysis (Nowell et al., 2017), the coding and interpretation process was conducted systematically to ensure credibility, transparency, and reproducibility. By contrasting and integrating findings across studies, the thematic synthesis provided a comprehensive, evidence-based understanding of the evolving role of halal hospitality education in strengthening Malaysia's global position in halal tourism. This systematic approach ensured that all insights were grounded in collective empirical and conceptual evidence rather than anecdotal or narrative impressions.

## Contribution of the Study

By adhering to the PRISMA 2020 protocol, this systematic review offers a transparent, replicable, and evidence-based overview of the current state of Halal Hospitality Education in Malaysia. The synthesis advances scholarly understanding by identifying key themes, conceptual relationships, and critical knowledge gaps that shape the intersection between education, certification, and workforce development in the halal hospitality sector.

From an academic perspective, this review contributes to theory-building by consolidating fragmented insights into a coherent framework for analysing halal education within tourism and hospitality. It highlights emerging research frontiers such as competency-based learning, curriculum standardisation, and digital innovation in halal training delivery. From a policy perspective, the study underscores the need for standardised, industry-aligned halal education frameworks to strengthen workforce readiness and institutional accountability, complementing

national initiatives such as the Halal Industry Master Plan (HIMP 2030). From an industry standpoint, the findings reaffirm the role of halal education in enhancing service quality, operational compliance, and consumer confidence, ultimately contributing to Malaysia's reputation as a global halal tourism leader.

Overall, by systematically addressing existing gaps and proposing evidence-driven future research directions, this review makes a significant contribution to the evolving discourse on halal tourism and hospitality education, supporting its sustainable development and international competitiveness.

## **FINDINGS AND THEMATIC SYNTHESIS**

Following the PRISMA 2020 selection process (Figure 1), a total of 37 studies published from 2010 to 2025 were included in the final synthesis. These studies adopted diverse methodological approaches, including qualitative (22), quantitative (9), and conceptual or theoretical (6) designs, providing a multidimensional perspective on the evolution of halal hospitality and education in Malaysia. After coding and synthesizing the extracted data, seven major themes were identified, reflecting recurring patterns, conceptual linkages, and key issues across the literature. Thematic synthesis (Thomas & Harden, 2008; Braun & Clarke, 2006) enabled the systematic categorization of these themes, capturing the major dimensions, challenges, and opportunities shaping the sector. Each theme represents an intersection of theory, policy, and practice, contributing to the ongoing development of Malaysia's halal tourism ecosystem.

### **Building an Authentic Halal Experience**

An authentic halal experience extends well beyond the procedural requirements of certification and touches every aspect of a guest's journey that reflects Islamic principles and ethical awareness (Ahmad et al., 2024; Flamboyant et al., 2017). Research has shown that authenticity depends on a holistic interplay of factors such as food preparation, accommodation design, staff behaviour, and destination culture (Zafar et al., 2024; Azam et al., 2019; Isa et al., 2018). These dimensions collectively influence the way Muslim travellers perceive trust and satisfaction during their stays. Despite the growing interest in halal hospitality, fewer than one quarter of the reviewed studies examined empirically how education and training prepare professionals to deliver a seamless halal experience. This absence indicates a continuing disconnect between the academic curriculum and the operational realities of service delivery.

Curricula that blend Islamic studies with hospitality management could cultivate a generation of practitioners capable of translating spiritual values into operational excellence. Integrating courses on Islamic ethics, consumer psychology, and cultural aesthetics into hospitality programmes would strengthen the ability of graduates to create emotionally resonant and spiritually authentic experiences (Che Omar & Islam, 2019). Furthermore, continuous professional education within the industry could ensure that employees maintain a dynamic understanding of halal requirements as traveller expectations evolve. Future research should explore how such educational interventions influence consumer perceptions of authenticity and strengthen loyalty and brand attachment in halal-friendly destinations (Adinugraha et al., 2023; Battour, 2018).

### **Workforce Training and Competency Development**

The long-term competitiveness of Malaysia's halal hospitality industry depends heavily on a skilled, knowledgeable, and ethically grounded workforce (Noraizan & Syuhaida, 2019). The

literature repeatedly shows that existing training systems are fragmented and often limited to the technicalities of certification or food handling (Deuraseh & Heradhyaksa, 2020). Although some educational institutions have introduced modules on halal standards, relatively few embed topics such as ethical reasoning, cultural empathy, and customer relationship management (Handayani et al., 2023). This gap constrains the industry's capacity to produce professionals who can balance operational precision with Islamic principles of service.

Several scholars, including Battour (2018) and Adinugraha et al. (2023), argue for a comprehensive competency-based learning framework that encourages lifelong learning and reflective practice. Such frameworks could integrate Islamic economics, sustainability, and cross-cultural communication to ensure that training reflects both local contexts and international hospitality trends. In practice, this means that universities and training providers should collaborate closely with halal certification bodies and industry partners to align competency outcomes with market needs. The implementation of mentorship schemes, industry attachments, and micro-credential modules focusing on ethics and customer engagement would further enhance the adaptability of graduates. A future research agenda might assess how integrated training models influence workforce retention, service quality, and consumer confidence in halal-certified establishments.

### **Halal Certification and Educational Integration**

Halal certification is the foundation of credibility in halal hospitality because it assures travellers that products and services comply with religious and ethical standards (Isa et al., 2018). Nevertheless, certification procedures are frequently described as complex, inconsistent, and difficult for smaller enterprises to navigate (Mohd Nor & Hassan, 2022; Norafni, 2017). Research by Hashim and Mohd Fauzi (2022) and Noraizan and Syuhaida (2019) reveals that many of these problems originate from inadequate education and limited professional understanding of certification systems. Integrating certification literacy into hospitality curricula would help bridge this gap by ensuring that students and practitioners comprehend the practical requirements of audits, documentation, and international compliance.

Education can therefore serve as the conduit linking technical compliance with ethical consciousness. Courses that introduce learners to the policy logic, administrative procedures, and theological foundations of halal certification would promote both efficiency and spiritual integrity in service delivery. Beyond Malaysia, the issue of global harmonisation of halal standards is growing increasingly significant (Lutfika et al., 2022). As Malaysia continues to position itself as a leader in halal tourism, understanding how international recognition of certification influences consumer perceptions and destination competitiveness is crucial (Razalli, 2019; Samori et al., 2016). Education and professional development play a pivotal role in preparing practitioners to interpret and implement such evolving global frameworks. This will ensure that Malaysian hospitality providers maintain credibility and consistency across diverse international markets.

### **Fostering Cultural Sensitivity and Inclusive Practice**

Cultural sensitivity is central to the delivery of memorable and respectful halal hospitality experiences. Multiple studies affirm that an appreciation of the norms, expectations, and devotional practices of Muslim travellers is essential for meeting service quality standards (Ahmad et al., 2024; Aslan, 2023). Yet, empirical evidence remains scarce regarding how cultural training translates into improved performance outcomes within hospitality settings (Chantarungsri et al., 2024). This shortage of data highlights an important research gap

concerning the mechanisms through which cultural awareness influences behaviour and service consistency among hospitality employees.

To respond to the diversity of the global Muslim market, education and training programmes must reflect the cultural plurality of Muslim travellers from regions such as the Middle East, South Asia, and Southeast Asia (Zafar et al., 2024; Meirezaldi, 2019). Incorporating experiential learning models that expose students to intercultural scenarios and reflective practices can deepen empathy and adaptability. For instance, simulated service encounters, international student exchanges, and joint industry projects could provide valuable experiential exposure. Furthermore, embedding Islamic ethics and cross-cultural communication within professional certification programmes could institutionalise cultural competence as a measurable learning outcome (Savic & Dariescu, 2020). Such initiatives would enable hospitality professionals to deliver services that are not only operationally efficient but also emotionally engaging and inclusive, thereby enhancing the overall reputation of Malaysia as a preferred halal destination (Ibrahim et al., 2022).

### **Institutional Collaboration and Curriculum Alignment**

Collaboration among academia, industry, and government agencies is widely recognised as a cornerstone for advancing halal hospitality education (Samori et al., 2016; Ibrahim et al., 2022). Yet, despite ongoing dialogue between these stakeholders, many collaborative efforts remain fragmented, short-term, and dependent on individual institutional initiatives rather than systematic policy direction (Deuraseh & Heradhyaksa, 2020). Studies reveal that while partnership-based projects can enhance curriculum relevance and graduate employability, they often lack continuity due to inconsistent governance mechanisms and limited resource allocation. This situation limits the scalability of good practices and prevents the creation of a standardised, national framework for halal education.

To strengthen collaboration, universities should align academic offerings with current industry practices through curriculum mapping and stakeholder consultation (Jackson & Michelson, 2015). Establishing joint advisory panels comprising representatives from JAKIM, the Ministry of Tourism, and hospitality operators could ensure that learning outcomes reflect the competencies required by employers and regulators. Moreover, partnerships can facilitate internship opportunities, research collaborations, and industry certification pathways that integrate learning with real-world practice (Ferns et al., 2024). By embedding such partnerships within a national strategy, Malaysia can ensure alignment between the education sector and key policy initiatives, including the Halal Industry Master Plan (HIMP 2030). Future research should investigate how government incentives, policy interventions, and accreditation systems can encourage long-term collaboration and foster a culture of knowledge sharing among universities and industry players. Such insights would be instrumental in developing a sustainable educational ecosystem that continuously supports innovation, competitiveness, and workforce readiness in halal hospitality.

### **Innovation and Digital Transformation**

Technological innovation has become an essential catalyst for modernising halal hospitality education and industry practice. Digital tools, including halal-friendly mobile applications, online certification management systems, and AI-powered customer engagement platforms, are increasingly recognised as mechanisms to improve efficiency, transparency, and service quality (Sabri et al., 2022; Aslan, 2023; Rafiki et al., 2023). Despite these developments, fewer than ten of the reviewed studies examined the structured integration of such technologies into educational or vocational contexts. This limited attention suggests that the academic sector has

yet to fully embrace digital transformation as a learning tool for enhancing understanding of halal operations and compliance.

Incorporating technological literacy into hospitality education could significantly enhance the employability and adaptability of graduates. Virtual simulations, augmented reality exercises, and e-learning platforms could be utilised to familiarise learners with certification procedures, supply chain monitoring, and halal product verification. For example, simulation-based modules can allow learners to experience realistic scenarios involving halal audits or customer interactions, thereby improving their decision-making and problem-solving skills. At the same time, digital innovations must be designed in accordance with Islamic ethical principles, ensuring that technology enhances rather than replaces the human element of hospitality. Furthermore, exploring the sustainability and ethical implications of digital transformation within halal contexts would provide valuable insights into how technology can uphold principles of integrity, equity, and transparency while driving Malaysia's competitiveness in the global halal tourism industry.

### **Empowering SMEs and Community-Based Enterprises**

Small and medium enterprises (SMEs) represent the backbone of Malaysia's halal tourism ecosystem, contributing diversity, authenticity, and local character to the industry (Saima et al., 2024; Bahara et al., 2024). However, their potential remains underrealised due to financial, administrative, and educational challenges that hinder their ability to obtain and maintain halal certification (Noraizan & Syuhaida, 2019; Daud et al., 2023). Studies by Karim et al. (2022) and Razalli (2019) have shown that these challenges often result in SMEs being excluded from major tourism networks, limiting their competitiveness and capacity for growth. In this context, education and training are critical levers for empowerment.

Developing targeted training programmes tailored to SME operators can build their understanding of halal compliance, financial management, and digital marketing. For instance, short courses on halal literacy or modular training in marketing strategy and business ethics could enhance their confidence and operational sustainability. Collaboration between universities, local authorities, and industry associations can also create mentorship schemes linking SMEs with larger tourism providers, facilitating knowledge transfer and business networking. Furthermore, integrating SME-focused entrepreneurship modules into hospitality programmes can cultivate an entrepreneurial mindset among graduates, encouraging them to contribute to community-based halal ventures. When SMEs are equipped with the right knowledge and institutional support, they can play a transformative role in creating inclusive growth and authentic experiences that reflect Malaysia's cultural identity and Islamic values (Hasayotin et al., 2024; Zafar et al., 2024).

### **Research and Development for Sustainable Growth**

Research and development (R&D) are fundamental to the continuous improvement and sustainability of halal hospitality practices (Islam and Ashton, 2024; Adinugraha et al., 2023). However, the literature reveals that R&D remains an underexplored dimension within both the educational and industrial spheres (Chantarungsri et al., 2024). Few institutions have established dedicated R&D units focusing on halal innovation, consumer behaviour, and sustainable business models. The absence of such structures restricts the ability of Malaysia's halal tourism sector to anticipate emerging trends and respond proactively to global shifts in consumer demand and technology.

To address this gap, universities and tourism agencies should prioritise the integration of R&D into their operational strategies. Establishing collaborative research centres that bridge academia and industry could drive innovation in areas such as halal food technology, sustainable operations, and service quality enhancement. International collaborations would also expand Malaysia's research capacity, enabling benchmarking with global leaders in digitalisation, wellness tourism, and sustainable development (Ahmad et al., 2024; Pratama, 2023). Embedding R&D-oriented courses in higher education could nurture analytical and creative competencies among students, preparing them to engage critically with complex industry challenges. Moreover, encouraging applied research that connects theoretical understanding with policy implementation would ensure that academic findings translate into tangible improvements within the halal tourism ecosystem. Ultimately, sustained investment in R&D will not only enhance Malaysia's competitiveness but also reinforce its reputation as a global pioneer in halal hospitality and education.

### **Summary of Findings**

The synthesis of 37 studies provides a holistic view of Malaysia's achievements and remaining challenges in developing halal hospitality education. The findings reveal that while substantial progress has been made in establishing halal-focused programmes and practices, fragmentation and uneven implementation persist. The themes collectively underscore that authentic halal experiences, workforce competency, certification literacy, cultural sensitivity, innovation, and SME empowerment are interdependent drivers of sustainable industry growth. Education emerges as the central mechanism that connects these dimensions by translating policy aspirations into professional practice and consumer trust.

Strengthening educational frameworks, institutional collaboration, and research capacity is therefore essential for sustaining Malaysia's leadership in the global halal tourism arena. Integrating certification knowledge, cultural awareness, ethical literacy, and experiential learning into curricula will help cultivate a more competent and values-driven workforce. At the same time, leveraging innovation, particularly digital transformation and SME participation, can broaden economic inclusivity and support industry resilience.

Overall, the synthesis highlights that robust and well-integrated educational strategies are critical for enhancing industry professionalism, reinforcing operational compliance, and elevating consumer trust. By strengthening the alignment between education, policy, and industry practice, Malaysia is well-positioned to consolidate and expand its competitive advantage in the global halal tourism and hospitality landscape.

### **DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS**

The present systematic review was conducted using a PRISMA-guided protocol to provide an evidence-based synthesis of research on halal hospitality education in Malaysia. The review addresses a critical gap in existing literature while halal tourism is widely promoted as a key driver of Malaysia's economic and cultural identity, there has been insufficient consolidation of academic evidence linking halal education, certification, and workforce competency. If such a systematic synthesis were not undertaken, the sector would continue to rely on fragmented knowledge, making it difficult for policymakers and educators to design effective frameworks for sustaining Malaysia's position as a global halal tourism leader.

In addressing the central research question regarding the significance of halal hospitality education, the review establishes that education functions as the backbone of Malaysia's halal

tourism sector. It influences multiple dimensions such as workforce capability, service authenticity, consumer confidence, certification adherence, and institutional alignment. These interconnected roles illustrate how halal hospitality education directly shapes the industry's development and sustainability, providing clear empirical and conceptual justification for its national importance.

The findings demonstrate that halal hospitality education must advance beyond a narrow focus on certification and procedural compliance toward a more comprehensive, consumer-centric, and value-driven framework (Bhanu et al., 2023). The growing emphasis on the authentic halal experience underscores the need for hospitality providers and educators to embed Islamic values holistically across all service dimensions, including product offerings, staff conduct, customer engagement, and post-service relations (Isa et al., 2018). This integrative approach would not only enhance operational credibility but also strengthen the emotional and spiritual resonance of the guest experience for Muslim travellers. Despite conceptual recognition of authenticity, empirical understanding of how consumer perceptions shape trust, satisfaction, and loyalty remain limited. Future research should therefore explore the psychological and behavioural dimensions of halal hospitality, particularly how perceived authenticity influences consumer attachment and brand equity (Leung et al., 2023).

Another significant implication concerns the human capital development within halal hospitality. The synthesis reveals that workforce training remains predominantly technical, with limited attention to ethical education, intercultural sensitivity, and service excellence (Deuraseh & Heradhyaksa, 2020). This reflects a mismatch between current training provisions and the broader professional competencies demanded by the evolving industry. Developing integrated and competency-based educational frameworks that include interpersonal communication, Islamic ethics, and cultural awareness would enhance workforce readiness and professionalism ((Ferns et al., 2024). Bridging this gap is essential for maintaining Malaysia's global competitiveness in halal tourism and ensuring that service delivery embodies both operational and spiritual excellence (Battour, 2018).

The review also reaffirms that halal certification, while central to consumer trust, continues to pose administrative and structural barriers for many small and medium enterprises (SMEs). High certification costs, procedural complexity, and regulatory ambiguity hinder SME participation (Noraizan & Syuhaida, 2019). This issue has educational implications, as current curricula often overlook the operational realities faced by SMEs in obtaining and maintaining halal compliance. Hence, future research and training initiatives should focus on designing simplified, transparent, and context-sensitive certification modules that enhance SME engagement and capacity (Hashim & Mohd Fauzi, 2022). Streamlined certification processes would not only improve inclusivity but also elevate Malaysia's credibility as a halal tourism hub.

Cultural sensitivity also emerged as a crucial determinant of service quality and guest satisfaction. Empirical studies highlight that culturally competent staff significantly enhance Muslim travellers' sense of belonging and comfort (Koc et al., 2025). However, limited research has examined how cultural awareness training directly influences measurable service outcomes. Future studies should therefore develop evaluation frameworks capable of quantifying the impact of such training on performance and customer experience (Chantarungsri et al., 2024). Embedding cultural competence as a compulsory component in hospitality curricula and professional development programmes will be vital for producing a workforce that reflects Malaysia's multicultural and Islamic hospitality ethos.

Collectively, these findings reinforce that education is the integrative axis connecting halal certification, workforce competency, and consumer trust. Halal hospitality education must

evolve into a transformative system that not only imparts technical knowledge but also cultivates ethical responsibility, cultural empathy, and innovation readiness. Strengthening interdisciplinary collaboration among policymakers, educators, and industry stakeholders will ensure alignment between curriculum design and national halal tourism objectives. Ultimately, a strategic educational transformation that integrates certification literacy, cultural intelligence, and research-driven innovation will be instrumental in sustaining Malaysia's leadership and global competitiveness in halal tourism.

## **CONCLUSION**

This systematic review provides a comprehensive synthesis of existing literature on halal hospitality education in Malaysia, grounded in the PRISMA 2020 framework. By synthesising evidence across 37 studies, this review confirms that halal hospitality education plays a crucial and multi-dimensional role in shaping Malaysia's halal tourism and hospitality sector. It strengthens professional competency, improves service authenticity, enhances certification compliance, and supports innovation, ultimately reinforcing Malaysia's global leadership in halal tourism. These findings provide a direct and comprehensive answer to the research question and emphasise the need for a coordinated national approach to halal hospitality education.

Overall, the findings confirm that education and training serve as the cornerstone of Malaysia's halal hospitality ecosystem. Despite the increasing number of institutions offering halal-related programmes, most remain fragmented and lack strong alignment with industry requirements and national policy objectives. The literature consistently indicates that effective halal hospitality education must move beyond a narrow focus on technical certification to incorporate broader dimensions such as cultural sensitivity, ethical awareness, and digital transformation.

From a theoretical perspective, this review contributes by providing a structured, evidence-based understanding of how halal education supports workforce competency, enhances industry credibility, and builds consumer trust. From a practical standpoint, the synthesis underscores the urgent need for a coordinated national halal education framework that brings together higher education institutions, JAKIM, and tourism industry stakeholders. Such collaboration would ensure curriculum consistency, improve graduate employability, and support Malaysia's broader policy agenda as articulated in the Halal Industry Master Plan (HIMP 2030).

As the hospitality sector continues to embrace technology and innovation, halal education must also evolve in tandem. The integration of digital learning tools, including virtual reality simulations, halal certification management systems, and AI-assisted training platforms, can enhance the authenticity, accessibility, and engagement of halal learning experiences. Incorporating such innovations would not only modernise Malaysia's education ecosystem but also equip graduates with the technological agility required in a rapidly transforming service industry.

Future research should focus on empirically assessing the effectiveness of halal hospitality curricula and training programmes, conducting cross-country comparative studies to benchmark educational frameworks, and undertaking longitudinal research to evaluate how halal education influences workforce performance, customer satisfaction, and destination competitiveness over time. By addressing these critical areas, scholars and policymakers can ensure that Malaysia's halal hospitality education continues to evolve in line with global best practices and emerging industry expectations. Strengthening educational quality, institutional

collaboration, and technological innovation will be essential to sustaining Malaysia's leadership in halal-friendly tourism and hospitality.

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