

Research Article:

Fostering Halal Awareness in The National Pre-School Standard Curriculum in Malaysia: A Preliminary Study

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ABSTRACT

Fostering halal awareness from an early age is crucial in Muslim society. However, the current education system primarily focuses on Islamic consumerism at higher education levels, resulting in a gap in knowledge and actions related to halal and haram. This article explores the application of the halal curriculum in the pre-school syllabus, addressing the need for comprehensive education on halal practices. The study adopts a qualitative approach, utilising observation, interviews and document analysis to understand the current implementation of the halal curriculum within the National Pre-school Standard Curriculum. The research findings indicate that the halal curriculum is incorporated within the pre-school curriculum, primarily focusing on teaching eating and drinking manners, as well as promoting healthy and nutritious eating habits. However, the curriculum lacks an in-depth exploration of halal and haram beyond the basic understanding of distinguishing permissible and forbidden foods. To enhance the halal curriculum in pre-school education, several improvements are suggested; explaining the aspects of *tayyib* in halal food, introducing halal food as real food, introducing Malaysia's halal logo, diversifying learning activities and projects together, and collaborating with parents and the community. By incorporating these elements into the pre-school curriculum, children can develop a strong foundation in halal and *tayyib* principles, enabling them to make informed choices about their food and develop a lifelong appreciation for halal practices.

Keywords: *tayyib*, food, education, halal practice, healthy

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INTRODUCTION

The global market for halal food exports is projected to reach USD3 trillion (RM13.3 trillion) by 2027, up from USD2 trillion in 2021. This growth is driven by the expanding of global Muslim market, which represents 24% of the world's population, totalling 1.9 billion people in 2022. Key segments of halal food products include meat, poultry, and processed seafood, as well as processed fruits and vegetables, dairy products, cereal and grains, oil and fats, and confectionery (Malaysian Investment Development Authority (MIDA), 2024). The Asia Pacific region leads in market demand for halal products, followed by the Middle East, Africa, Europe, North America and Latin America. Malaysia stands out as the first country to establish a government agency dedicated to regulating halal matters and certification in the global halal market. Consequently, Malaysia continues to earn global trust and acceptance for its locally produced halal food products (MIDA, 2024).

Halal food refers to food that conforms to Islamic law and does not contain any non-halal ingredients (Al-Khadari, 1987). The handling and equipment used in its preparation are clean, pure, and fully halal. Halal food emphasises not only purity but also aspects of hygiene, health, and safety for consumers. It is food that can bring benefits to those who consume it. Allah SWT encourages Muslims to choose halal and clean food in their lives and express gratitude for the blessings given. Allah says in Surah al-Baqarah; verse 168: "O men! Eat the lawful and good things out of what is in the earth, and do not follow the footsteps of the shaitan; surely he is your open enemy."

Allah commands all mankind to consume what is lawful and wholesome from the earth and to not follow the footsteps of the devil, as indeed, Satan is an open enemy to humanity (Yusuf al-Qaradawi, 2018). In Arabic, *tayyib* means wholesome and suitable for consumption. It is a fundamental requirement of halal food that it must be *tayyib*; otherwise, it cannot be considered halal and would be deemed haram. The concept of *tayyib* encompasses elements of purity, goodness, nutrition, hygiene, safety, high quality, and wholesomeness (Mohd Dasuqkhi & Mohd Hapiz, 2022).

Due to rapid technological advancements and changes in food production methods, halal food faces an increasing risk of contamination from non-halal sources, often escaping detection. Various forms of halal food pollution have emerged in the market, spanning methods of slaughter, sourcing of raw materials and ingredients, processing, packaging, hygiene standards, food safety protocols, storage practices and environmental factors. Consequently, the prevalence of non-halal food has surged compared to halal alternatives (Nor Asiah Yaakub, 2020). In response, public agencies are diligently augmenting the knowledge and awareness of entrepreneurs and consumers regarding the principles of *halalan tayyiban*. This effort is pivotal in fostering halal accountability and integrity within the business landscape. Ultimately, consumers benefit by gaining confidence in products certified halal by the Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (Noraizan & Syuhaida, 2019).

Given the gravity of this situation, consumers must enhance their understanding of halal standards and quality products, encompassing aspects such as sourcing, processing, packaging, storage, handling, manufacturing and transportation. The dissemination of halal knowledge and education is paramount across all educational tiers, spanning public agencies, universities, secondary and primary schools and even preschools. Such educational endeavours dovetail with Malaysia's aspirations to emerge as a global hub for halal products (Amini & Mohd Daud, 2017). Numerous initiatives have been undertaken to nurture halal awareness, including halal exhibition programmes, mass media campaigns, community engagements and educational initiatives at various academic levels. Government bodies like the Department of Islamic Development Malaysia and the Halal Development Centre (HDC) actively distribute informational leaflets on halal certification to both the public and interested entrepreneurs. These materials cover a range of topics including *halalan tayyiban*, the halal logo, halal integrity, handling within the halal industry, industry-specific halal products and halal industrial training (Mohd Zhaffar & Wan Abdullah (2021).

Prior studies indicate that several Malaysian institutions of higher learning offer halal education programmes at diploma, bachelor's and master's levels. Such programmes serve as a breeding ground for qualified personnel poised to lead the nation's burgeoning halal industry. Universities also contribute to halal education through research endeavours and awareness campaigns (Noraizan & Syuhaida, 2019). However, the integration of halal education within school curricula, especially at the preschool level, remains limited. While basic concepts of halal are imparted in Islamic Education classes at the primary level, the coverage is often inadequate and lacks comprehensiveness. (Noraizan & Syuhaida, 2019).

In the secondary school curriculum, the inclusion of halal education is slightly more extensive. The Islamic Education subject encompasses two categories related to halal education (Bartkowski et al., 2008). The first category explicitly addresses halal education, while the second indirectly covers halal and haram topics (Mohd Zhaffar & Wan Abdullah, 2021). However, the study on halal education at the preschool level is rarely discussed. Therefore, this article will investigate the extent to which halal education is integrated into the preschool curriculum, especially in public schools (government). It is important to increase awareness of adequate halal food among children, especially in the preschool environment.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Halal consumer education is very important because it gives consumers the necessary knowledge and understanding as a guide to protect themselves when making purchasing decisions. With knowledge and awareness about the product, users can make wiser and empowering decisions. This is important because it helps consumers avoid the risk of

unsafe purchases, as well as ensure that they get halal and quality products that meet their needs and desires. In Indonesia, halal curriculum education is a topic taught in the Islamic Religious Education curriculum at all levels of education, from primary school to higher education. According to Wahyudin et al. (2018), students choose healthy and delicious foods, avoiding illegal food sources knowing they are harmful to health. However, they are less concerned about halal labelling when buying products at local supermarkets.

According to Wardhani et al. (2018), halal curriculum education should also be applied among preschool students because they are less exposed to halal and good food according to Islamic law. Teaching children about halal concepts early in their development is crucial, especially during the transition from elementary school to adolescence. However, the representation of the halal lifestyle concept in Islamic Religious Education textbooks remains insufficient (Handayani et al., 2023). Maya Lestari et al. (2024), teachers face significant challenges in explaining the concept of halal to preschool students. This is due to their young age, as they are not yet able to comprehend complicated religious and health concepts. Therefore, explanations about halal and haram need to be conveyed in a manner that is easily understandable to them (Mukhsen, 2022).

The development of halal curriculum education in Malaysia has progressed rapidly alongside the establishment of government agencies and the halal industry. Various halal programmes, modules and curricula have been developed within the general education sector, primarily aiming to raise awareness about the importance of choosing halal products. According to Mohammad Aizat and Mohd Anuar (2012), halal education programmes in Malaysia can be categorised into four main components. Firstly, government-initiated programmes, such as those by the Malaysian Islamic Development Department (JAKIM) and the State Islamic Religious Departments (JAIN), play a crucial role. Additionally, Government-Linked Companies (GLCs), including the Halal Industry Development Corporation (HDC), the National Institute of Entrepreneurship (INSKEN), the Malaysian Institute of Islamic Understanding (IKIM) and the Penang International Halal Hub (PIHH), contribute to these efforts.

Secondly, state educational institutions, such as the Halal Products Research Institute (IPPH) at Universiti Putra Malaysia, the Centre for Halal Excellence, the International Islamic University and the Institute of Halal Research and Management (IHRAM) at Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia, actively participate in halal education. This component also involves various polytechnics, colleges, and other educational institutions. Thirdly, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and associations, such as the Malaysian Islamic Consumers Association (PPIM) and the Penang Consumer Association (CAP), as well as group training centres like the Melaka Industrial Skill Development Center (MISDC), the Penang Skill Development Center (PSDC) and the Pahang Skill Development Corporation (PSDC), offer halal education programmes. Finally, individuals and training companies, such as al-Hamra Management and Consultancy Services, Innovative Management Consultancy (IMC) Sdn. Bhd., Olive Global Sdn.

Bhd., Halal Global Sdn. Bhd. and others, contribute to halal education through their programmes. Through these diverse initiatives, awareness of the importance of halal products is heightened among Malaysians, bolstering the halal industry and positioning Malaysia as a leader in this field.

According to Jais (2014), halal curriculum education receives minimal attention within the Primary School Standard Curriculum (KSSR). The concept of halal is indirectly addressed in the KSSR, often as a peripheral topic primarily stressing the importance of selecting halal food without delving into its true significance. Notably, this foundational knowledge is introduced only to Primary 5 students. At the secondary level, a topic related to halal is introduced to Form 4 students within the context of animal slaughter, and further segmented into subtopics for detailed understanding. This illustrates that direct emphasis on the concept of halal is limited to a single topic throughout the five years of secondary education.

The findings of Noraizan and Syuhaida's study (2019) align with Mohd Zhaffar and Wan Abdullah's (2021) explanation that there is limited knowledge about halal education among students in schools. Although elements of halal education are incorporated into Islamic Education subjects, they are often not presented under specific and comprehensive headings. Typically, these topics are included within Hadith, Jawi and Adab lessons, with a narrow scope.

Mohd Zhaffar and Wan Abdullah (2021) and Pauzi et al. (2022) further elaborate that the halal curriculum is extensively covered in the KSSM Islamic Education subject. It is categorised into two sections: the first section emphasizes the halal curriculum explicitly, while the second section addresses halal and haram implicitly, covering various areas such as Akidah, Worship, Marriage, Muamalat, Crime and Morals. Previous studies indicate that several institutions of higher learning in Malaysia provide halal education programmes at various academic levels, including diplomas, bachelor's degrees and master's degrees. These programmes contribute to the development of skilled professionals capable of leading Malaysia's halal industry. Universities play a crucial role in advancing halal education through research and awareness-raising initiatives (Noraizan & Syuhaida, 2019).

Gunardi (2020) highlights the significant role of IPPH UPM in disseminating education and training to enhance Malaysia's halal industry. This effort aims to raise awareness among individuals interested in participating directly in the halal sector by enrolling in IPPH UPM programmes. Participation in these programmes enables them to grasp fundamental and practical concepts aligned with Sharia principles. Moreover, the JAKIM Halal Hub Division and HDC also contribute significantly by providing education and training to enhance human resource skills in the halal industry. Their efforts focus on expanding knowledge, enhancing performance and improving the quality of halal products, including aspects like marketing, creativity and product

packaging. The education and training initiatives aimed at developing Malaysia's halal industry are expected to enhance human resource skills for the effective development and management of halal products and services (Zakaria et al., 2022). This contributes to the advancement of halal education, a crucial factor in halal awareness (Jannah & Al-Banna, 2021).

However, existing halal education programs tend to cater to specific target groups and are primarily available at the primary, secondary and tertiary education levels, both in public and private institutions. Surprisingly, there is a lack of literature discussing halal education at the preschool level. Therefore, this study seeks to evaluate the dissemination of halal curriculum education programmes among preschool students and examine their implementation through the subjects and syllabi provided.

AIMS AND RESEARCH METHODS

This study aims to explore the application of the halal curriculum in the preschool syllabus. It is a qualitative study where data is collected through library studies as well as field studies. The literature review is obtained through documentation methods, which involve examining previous and contemporary books related to the study's title and using authoritative documents. These data sources include printed materials such as working papers, research reports, books, etc., as well as official websites. The search results are then grouped to form the themes of the study findings. In addition, this study also utilises the National Preschool Standard Curriculum (NPSC) published in 2017. Researchers commenced by scrutinising the documents for each topic specifically related to the halal field. Subsequently, the study proceeded by delving into general topics associated with the halal field for deeper analysis. This ensures that crucial aspects of halal are comprehensively integrated into the preschool curriculum.

Furthermore, field studies are conducted through interview and observation methods. The interview method is chosen by the researcher to acquire verbal information, perspectives, and insights from the respondents through direct interaction. In this approach, researchers have identified several knowledgeable informants to interview based on their expertise and experience in relevant fields, particularly in preschool education. The aim of conducting these interviews is to gather more in-depth and first-hand information directly from the primary sources, as well as to observe the actual implementation of the curriculum.

Field studies were conducted at a public school situated in Sungai Buloh, Selangor. This location was selected for the study due to its high population density and sizable student. The school consists of 6 teachers, 5 teaching assistants and 145 students. The students are divided into 6 classes, each comprising 25 pupils. All students are 6 years old and belong to the Muslim faith. Face-to-face interviews were conducted to gather information directly from the respondents. The interviews took place on 12 April 2023

with teachers at the school who have experience in preschool education. Four respondents were selected, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Interviewed respondents

No.	Respondents	Label
1	Preschool teacher – General 1	G1
2	Preschool teacher – General 2	G2
3	Preschool teacher – General 3	G3
4	Preschool teacher – Islamic Education	G4

The structured interviews were conducted formally and carefully planned, following a predetermined list of questions to be answered by the respondents. However, in some cases, semi-structured interviews were also conducted when the respondents did not understand the meaning of the question or when the researcher required further clarification on specific issues. The interview questions were confirmed by academic experts in the field of education and halal. Researchers recorded interviews and took written notes. The recorded results have been transcribed for further analysis.

For data analysis, researchers utilised Qualitative Data Analysis (QDA). Researchers analysed the data using the thematic analysis method. This data, transcribed manually by the researchers themselves, aided in understanding and identifying themes present during the transcription process. Subsequently, the identified themes were grouped according to the subjects of study in tabular form. To ensure the reliability of the data, researchers reconnected with respondents to validate the results obtained and allow for any potential improvements. The findings from the interviews were interpreted and consolidated into a study report, wherein researchers outlined the main themes, respondents' perspectives, and suggestions for enhancing the integration of halal concepts in preschool education. Through this interview method, researchers could gain insights and a deeper understanding of various stakeholders related to the study topic.

Considering the significance of integrating the halal concept into preschool education, observation methods (Hasyim, 2016) are employed to monitor and evaluate its implementation in preschools. Researchers conducted direct observations in preschool settings to observe how the halal concept was integrated into daily activities, including nutrition, hygiene, and other relevant learning activities. These observations enable researchers to gain a comprehensive understanding of the application of the halal concept in preschools and identify any areas requiring improvement or correction. The findings from this observation method are then utilised to enhance and refine the implementation of the halal concept in preschool education.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Allah says in al-Quran, “And eat of what Allah has provided for you [which is lawful and good. And fear Allah, in whom you are believers.” (surah Al-Maidah: 88). The concept of halal is a religious command that requires a person to consume food permitted by Allah. While *tayyiban* means good, that is, the food should be good to eat and obtained from a legitimate source (Man & Yahaya, 2014). Food from halal and good products is emphasised in the life of a Muslim because it can increase the light and faith in the heart of a person. It can also increase the fervour and devotion in worship to Allah.

The production process of halal food begins at the agricultural or farming stage and continues until it reaches the dining table of individuals who adhere to halal dietary practices. It emphasises the importance of maintaining the purity and lawfulness of food throughout the supply chain, including production, processing, preparation, and serving. This concept underscores the entire food production process to be conducted following halal principles and regulations, from start to finish, to ensure that the food consumed is halal and pure according to Islamic teachings. Recognising this, it is important to provide early emphasis on halal awareness education among children. Various activities can be organised to raise awareness among them about what is permissible and forbidden concerning halal practices.

Awareness of halal principles can be instilled starting from the early educational years of children, typically between the ages of four to six. The objective is to cultivate a comprehensive understanding and appreciation of halal practices across various dimensions of development, including physical, emotional, spiritual, intellectual and social aspects. This is achieved through the provision of a secure and enriching learning environment, coupled with engaging, imaginative and purposeful learning activities. Referring to the learning standards outlined in the NPSC, the preschool curriculum is based on six pillars: (i) communication strand; (ii) spirituality, attitude and values strand; (iii) humanity strand; (iv) personal competence strand; (v) physical development and aesthetics strand; and (vi) science and technology strand. The explanation for each pillar are as follows (Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia, 2017):

1. Communication strand: The communication strand emphasises verbal and non-verbal communication in interaction. This strand comprises Bahasa Melayu and English Language which must be learnt by all preschool pupils. For pupils in national-type schools, it is compulsory for them to learn Chinese or Tamil Language.
2. Spirituality, attitudes and values strand: The spirituality, attitudes and values strand give priority to the appreciation of religious practices, beliefs, attitudes and values. This strand contains two disciplines namely Islamic Education and

Moral Education. Islamic Education will be learnt by Muslim pupils while Moral Education will be learnt by non-Muslim pupils.

3. Humanity strand: The humanity strand emphasises on the acquisition of knowledge and practises of the local community and the environment, the country and the world as well as instilling patriotism and unity.
4. Personal competence strand: The personal competence strand emphasises the development of socio-emotional, interaction skills and social skills amongst pupils. The development of leadership and personality is fostered through curricular and extra-curricular activities.
5. Physical development and aesthetics strand: The physical development and aesthetics strand emphasises physical development and health for personal well-being and nurturing of imagination, creativity, talents, and appreciation of arts among pupils. This strand comprises Physical Development and Healthcare as well as Creativity and Aesthetics.
6. Science and technology strand: The science and technology strand emphasises scientific knowledge, skills and attitudes as well as mathematical knowledge and skills. This strand comprises of Early Science and Early Mathematics.

These pillars serve as the main domains that support and complement each other, and they are integrated with critical, creative, and innovative thinking. The purpose of this integration is to foster the development of human capital among students, nurturing their appreciation for good values rooted in religion, knowledge, expertise, critical thinking, creativity and innovation.

The findings indicate that the halal curriculum education has been implemented indirectly, lacking a systematic approach within the early education syllabus or through a dedicated subject. Nonetheless, it has been integrated into the spirituality, attitudes, and values strand, with a notable focus on fostering an appreciation for religious practices, beliefs, attitudes and values. This strand encompasses the discipline of Islamic Education, which is tailored for Muslim students and guided by teachers equipped with the knowledge to engage effectively with Muslim students.

Based on the aforementioned findings, it aligns to enable students to embody and apply these manners and morals in their daily lives (Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia, 2017). By incorporating the dedicated subject of the halal curriculum within one of the six pillars mentioned earlier, preschool education aims to establish a robust foundation of Islamic principles and ethical conduct in students. This includes fostering their character development and moral growth through heightened awareness of halal practices.

Table 2. Application of manners in life

Standard content	Standards of learning	Activities
PI 5.1 Applying manners in life	4+	
	PI 5.1.1 Adopt basmallah and hamdalah in every good deed.	Not specified
	PI 5.1.2 Shows the mannners of eating and drinking	Not specified
	5+	
	PI 5.1.6 Distinguish halal and illegal food and beverages	Not specified
	PI 5.1.7 Declaring sunnah food	Not specified

Notes: PI = Pendidikan Islam; 4+ = 4 years; 5+ = 5 years (Source: National Preschool Standard Curriculum, 2017)

According to Table 2, the preschool curriculum includes standards for teaching life manners, particularly focusing on morality (G4). Two key aspects are highlighted for preschoolers: manners of eating and drinking, and the concept of halal and haram food.

In terms of eating and drinking etiquette in Islam, several practices are underscored, such as reciting the *basmallah* (in the name of Allah) before eating, using the right hand, and taking food from in front; refraining from eating and drinking while standing; eating with three fingers and avoiding licking fingers and plates; being mindful while drinking from a container; abstaining from blowing into drinking water; avoiding overeating; and expressing gratitude to Allah after finishing eating and drinking. Learning these etiquettes enables preschoolers to incorporate them into their daily routines. These manners are derived from the *Sunnah* (teachings) of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and have been scientifically proven to have positive effects on human health (Sohrah, 2016; Al-Sibagh, 2010).

The second aspect involves introducing preschoolers to the differentiation between permissible (halal) and prohibited (haram) foods. Allah SWT has provided guidelines concerning halal and haram foods, and it is incumbent upon individuals to select foods that are *halalan tayyiban* (pure and lawful) for the betterment of their spiritual and physical well-being. This significance is emphasised in Surah al-Baqarah, verse 168. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) also emphasised the importance of consuming halal food, cautioning against the consumption of haram substances (Hadith Riwayat Ahmad) (Mohd Nor & Hassan, 2022; Ripin et al., 2017).

The aspiration is that through exposure to these concepts, students will comprehend that halal food must be clean and safe for consumption. Conversely, haram food encompasses

any part of pigs, animals not slaughtered properly, carrion, wild animals, alcohol, flowing blood, and poisonous food or plants, as detailed in Surah al-Maidah, verse 3. Consequently, such haram food is deemed non-halal for Muslims (Al-Teinaz et al., 2020). This serves as a foundation for instilling the importance of early education on religious principles, particularly those of Islam, in children. Essentially, Islam advocates for simple habits that can be instilled from a young age to aid in children's understanding of religious rules.

The objective is for students to understand the critical importance of halal food being clean and safe for consumption through exposure to these concepts. Conversely, haram food includes any part of pigs, animals not slaughtered properly, carrion, wild animals, alcohol, flowing blood and poisonous food or plants, as outlined in Surah al-Maidah, verse 3. Consequently, such haram food is considered non-halal for Muslims (Al-Teinaz et al., 2020). According to a study by Wardani et al. (2018), this lays the groundwork for instilling the significance of imparting religious knowledge, particularly related to Islam, from an early age. Essentially, Islam underscores the importance of instilling simple habits early on to facilitate children's comprehension of religious principles.

In the view of the researcher, it is important for students to understand that the food they consume will affect their behaviour and physical health. By practicing halal and healthy eating habits, will support brain development to be more focused, strengthen bones and muscles to stay active and boost the immune system. This is because, at present, children are often exposed to high-sugar and high-salt diets due to unhealthy eating habits such as fast food, sugary drinks, ice cream and unhealthy snacks. At the preschool level, it is also important for students to be exposed to the selection of halal and healthy foods, especially Halal-certified products by Malaysia. Halal-certified products are guaranteed to be halal, healthy and safe. With this awareness, they can distinguish between halal and healthy foods from unhealthy ones early in their development. This will stimulate them to think critically and provide new insights into their knowledge.

The findings also indicate that Islamic Education classes at the school are conducted by teachers following the standard curriculum (G1). Each class spans two hours per week, with one hour dedicated to oral instruction and another hour for activities utilising exercise books to gauge students' comprehension. These exercise books contain materials assessing students' ability to differentiate between edible and inedible foods and beverages, as well as to recognise the Malaysian halal logo (G4). However, there are no special projects conducted exclusively for these topics, aside from the activities outlined in the exercise books. Teachers rely on the NPSC to structure their teaching methods, highlighting the absence of specific textbooks or resources tailored for preschool educators (G3).

The primary finding is that the halal curriculum is not given significant emphasis at the preschool level. Instead, the focus is mainly on teaching children manners related

to eating and drinking (G4). While the curriculum does include some exposure to the concepts of halal and haram foods, it is basic. Students are introduced to these concepts as part of the NPSC, but the depth of understanding may be limited. Despite the basic exposure, there are challenges in providing comprehensive halal education at the preschool level. One major challenge is the limited teaching time allocated to this topic. Additionally, the broad range of other subjects that children need to learn adds to the difficulty of dedicating sufficient attention to halal education.

Table 3 shows the health standards and safe nutrition for students.

Table 3. Healthy and safe nutrition

Content standards	Learning standards	Activities
FK 6.1: Adopt healthy and safe eating	4+	
	FK 6.1.1: Identifying safe food and beverages	Pupils look at food pyramid charts and watch healthy food.
	FK 6.1.2: Telling about the importance of healthy eating	Students tell interest based on pictures of food.
	5+	
	FK 6.1.3: Students can also declare nutritious and non-nutritious foods	-Students choose nutritious and non-nutritious foods -Students adjust nutritious and non-nutritious foods.
	FK 6.1.4 Adopt a balanced diet	Students talk about the food pyramid.

Notes: FK = Fizikal Kesihatan; 4+ = 4 years; 5+ = 5 years (Source: National Preschool Standard Curriculum, 2017)

Based on Table 3, the halal curriculum is additionally incorporated into the domain of healthy and safe eating within the NPSC. This curriculum underscores the significance of healthcare, physical growth, and nutrition during early childhood education. It stresses the importance of instilling awareness regarding health, safety and nutrition from a young age, to be applied and adopted in daily routines. Teachers introduce healthcare practices during school sessions, while parents play a pivotal role in maintaining these practices in the child's everyday life.

Good nutrition is emphasised as a fundamental element, as children necessitate a well-rounded array of vitamins and minerals for comprehensive development, spanning physical, emotional, spiritual, intellectual, and social facets. The NPSC strives to imbue

students with a healthy lifestyle ethos through balanced nutrition and personal hygiene practices. Additionally, students are taught self-care and the significance of safety awareness (Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia, 2017). Teachers employ various initiatives to enlighten students about nutritious and non-nutritious foods, as well as those that are beneficial for health. These initiatives encompass sandwich projects, food pyramids, food plates and introducing vegetable-centric meals to students (G1).

Teacher assistants are instrumental in ensuring that students receive meals that are both halal and nutritious. The school goes to great lengths to offer a selection of halal food options, including popular dishes like nasi lemak, fried rice, fried noodles and sandwiches. To uphold stringent food safety standards, teacher assistants undergo specialised food safety training overseen by local regulatory authorities (G2). Moreover, stringent hygiene practices are observed in both the food preparation areas and dining spaces, with meticulous attention given to cleanliness. During food preparation, teacher assistants prioritise hygiene measures to prevent any potential contamination and minimise the risk of diseases such as food poisoning, as highlighted by Saad and Ramli (2018) in their study. They are also vigilant in promptly addressing any spills on the floor to prevent the accumulation of waste and impurities, thereby reducing the risk of germ transmission (G3). Integrating halal education with healthy eating habits can be beneficial. This approach encourages children to make informed choices about food choices while adhering to religious principles.

The NPSC is designed with the overarching goal of nurturing a well-rounded development in children, focusing specifically on the pivotal aspects of nutrition, hygiene and food safety. By actively involving teachers, teacher assistants, and parents, the NPSC ensures that these fundamental practices are not only taught but also put into action. This collective effort creates an environment that prioritizes the holistic well-being and health of children, fostering their growth and development in a supportive and nurturing setting.

Based on interviews and observations, it was noted that the NPSC syllabus has remained unchanged since 2017. Therefore, regular reviews are essential to ensure optimal teaching and learning quality and to adapt to the current needs of religious education among students. This will guarantee the relevance and effectiveness of the syllabus taught at the school level. Furthermore, in the preschool setting, there is a shortage of trainers or teachers with expertise in Islamic studies. Qualified instructors specialised in religious studies are unavailable. Consequently, teaching is not conducted comprehensively and effectively for students.

Moreover, due to limited teaching time, teachers may struggle to cover the extensive syllabus adequately. This may result in insufficient emphasis on crucial topics, such as the halal curriculum. Based on the researcher's observations, schools must ensure the

availability of adequate teaching materials, including exercise books, to support teachers in their instructional tasks and students in their learning journey. Insufficient teaching materials can adversely affect students' comprehension and performance in Islamic Education subjects, including the halal curriculum.

While the article acknowledges the importance of early halal education, the current approach in preschool curriculum seems to have limitations that hinder its effectiveness in fostering a deeper understanding of halal principles. First, the focus on simply identifying permissible (halal) and forbidden (haram) foods creates a limited understanding of halal. It overlooks the broader ethical framework that governs halal practices. This could lead children to view halal solely as a dietary restriction rather than a holistic approach to daily life. Second, it seems that the curriculum appears to lack exploration of the underlying reasons for halal and haram distinctions. Understanding the Quranic verses and prophetic teachings that inform these principles fosters respect and a deeper appreciation for halal practices. Without this context, children may simply view these rules as arbitrary restrictions.

Third, it may seem that some ethical dimensions are disconnected in the curriculum. Halal principles are not merely about food choices; they encompass ethical sourcing, fair treatment of animals and environmental responsibility. By neglecting these aspects, the curriculum misses the opportunity to connect halal practices with broader ethical values. This could lead to a disconnect between religious teachings and practical application. Although it may seem they student at young age might not really understand ethics, however we should not underestimate their capacity to absorb and internalise ethical principles when presented in an age-appropriate way. While young children may not grasp the full complexities of ethical concepts, they are highly receptive to learning about fairness, kindness, and taking care of the environment. By introducing these ideas alongside halal principles, the curriculum can begin to build a strong foundation for ethical decision-making throughout their lives. Fourth, the current curriculum scope is limited to food. Focusing solely on food-related halal principles overlooks other aspects of daily life encompassed by halal guidelines. This could include ethical behaviour in business dealings, environmental awareness, and social interactions. A comprehensive curriculum would introduce children to the broader application of halal principles in their daily lives.

RECOMMENDATION

However, there is an opportunity for enhancing the development of the halal curriculum at the preschool level. Addressing the limitations above is crucial for creating a more effective halal curriculum. By incorporating a diverse range of learning methods, exploring the ethical and religious rationale behind halal principles, and expanding the

scope beyond food, preschool educators can equip children with a strong foundation for lifelong appreciation and informed decision-making based on halal and *tayyib* principles. Therefore, proposed improvements to the curriculum include:

Exploring the Concept of Tayyib in Halal Food

The concept of halal is intricately linked with the idea of *tayyib*, as both play a crucial role in determining the suitability of food in Islam. While the NSPC provides explanations on halal and haram food, it is equally important to educate students about the concept of *tayyib*. In Islamic dietary law, it is not sufficient for food to be merely halal; it must also be wholesome and fit for consumption (*tayyib*). This entails that food should be produced under hygienic conditions, devoid of contamination, and harmful substances. *Tayyib* extends beyond the realm of food quality; it encompasses the positive impacts that food consumption has on individuals, promoting a healthy body and mind. This aspect is pivotal for individuals to become devout and righteous servants of Allah SWT, as it nurtures virtuous thinking and enables them to fulfill their roles as custodians of the Earth (Man & Yahaya, 2014). To deepen children's comprehension and awareness of halal and haram food, the curriculum should incorporate more detailed and comprehensive content. This may involve providing elaborate information about the sources of halal food and the methods of food preparation. The objective is to enrich children's understanding of the significance of consuming halal food for both their physical and spiritual well-being.

Introducing Halal Food as Real Food

In Malaysia, many children suffer from malnutrition due to their reliance on carbohydrate, protein, and fat-heavy diets. This inclination towards calorie-dense foods, particularly fried options high in fat, salt and sugar, is largely influenced by public preferences. Additionally, parental habits of purchasing fast food further exacerbate this issue, inadvertently fostering picky eating behaviours in children. Regrettably, vegetable-based meals are uncommon at home and are rarely served to children (Ku Akmal Afifi, 2021). Nonetheless, it is crucial to acquaint children with nutritious, real foods from a young age, including during their preschool years (Ku Marudzi et al., 2021). Real foods encompass a diverse array of options, ranging from animal products like beef, poultry, seafood, eggs and dairy to plant-based alternatives such as whole grains, vegetables, fruits, legumes, nuts and seeds. These foods offer a comprehensive nutritional profile, comprising essential nutrients like protein, fibre and water, which promote satiety and overall health. Advocating for the consumption of real food helps steer children away from developing dependencies on unhealthy products that may jeopardise their future health. Moreover, a diet rich in real food facilitates holistic development, nurturing physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being (Wahyu, 2018). Therefore, introducing halal food as real food not only addresses immediate health concerns but also lays the foundation for lifelong habits conducive to overall well-being.

Introducing Malaysia's Halal Logo

Introducing the Malaysian halal logo can significantly enhance the understanding of halal products among preschool students. This distinctive logo serves as a clear marker on food items and consumer goods that have received certification from Malaysia's halal authority. By familiarising themselves with this logo, students not only become more informed about the halal options available in local stores but also develop the skills to confidently select suitable products. The halal logo is a legally registered trademark under the Trademark Act 1976, administered by the Religious Authority. Its design features an eight-pointed star enclosed within a circle. Within the star, the Arabic word "halal" is prominently displayed, followed by its Romanised (Rumi) counterpart "HALAL." Surrounding the star, the circular border of the logo includes the word "Malaysia" in Romanised script, accompanied by its Arabic equivalent "maliziya." Additionally, two small five-pointed stars serve to separate the Romanised and Arabic sections of the logo. Through instruction from teachers, students gain confidence in recognising products bearing Malaysia's halal certification as genuinely halal, of superior quality, and safe for consumption (Buang & Mahmod, 2012). This knowledge empowers them to make informed choices when purchasing goods, contributing to their overall well-being and adherence to Islamic dietary principles.

Diversifying Learning Activities and Projects Together

In early childhood education, effective teaching and learning often involve engaging children in specific activities or projects. For example, involving children in the food preparation process, such as making sandwiches, taking them along on grocery shopping trips to select fruits and bread, consistently promoting the consumption of nutritious vegetables, and facilitating shared meal experiences. Integrating these activities and projects into early childhood education becomes essential for optimising children's learning and development. Through hands-on activities like these, children can develop their attitudes, knowledge and psychomotor skills, allowing them to explore various food items, types, and preparation methods in relation to the concepts of halal and *tayyib* (Zulfajri et al., 2021; Wahyu, 2018). By immersing children in practical experiences, they can actively apply the principles of halal and healthy eating in their daily lives. These hands-on encounters provide children with a deeper understanding of the significance of adhering to halal practices and equip them with the skills needed to make informed decisions about halal and nutritious food choices. This approach empowers children to prioritise their well-being by making conscious choices about their food consumption.

Collaboration with Parents and the Community

Furthermore, fostering collaboration between parents and the community can significantly enhance awareness of halal education. This collaboration can take the form of workshops, seminars, and community engagement programmes aimed at equipping parents with the knowledge and resources necessary to support and implement halal practices at home. Partnering with local halal certification bodies and religious institutions can further enrich understanding and ensure the effective implementation of halal standards. The involvement of parents in these initiatives holds particular importance as it cultivates a shared understanding between parents and children regarding the principles of halal and *tayyib* (Kassim & Jalal, 2023). Introducing the fundamentals of halal nutrition to children at a young age is paramount, as these efforts yield positive effects on their physical growth and their surroundings. Beyond promoting healthy development and physical fitness, it instills discipline in food choices and contributes to the formation of virtuous character traits.

CONCLUSION

In Islam, consuming halal food is not just a requirement, it also signifies the nurturing of an individual with a character that is pure, fresh, and strong. Muslims believe that halal food and drinks exert positive effects on both the physical and spiritual aspects of a person, leading to the development of future generations with positive mindsets and attitudes.

Based on research, the halal curriculum is currently being taught to preschoolers in subjects such as Islamic education and healthcare, since 2017. In the aspect of Islamic education, manners during eating and drinking are emphasised. Among the manners emphasised during eating and drinking include sitting while eating, starting with the recitation of Bismillah and ending with Alhamdulillah, maintaining a seated posture while eating, washing hands before and after eating, as well as avoiding food wastage. Each of these actions carries its wisdom in shaping children's personalities and morals from a young age, helping them understand the importance of gratitude and cleanliness in all their actions.

The pedagogical implications of halal education programs are multifaceted and crucial for effective teaching and learning about halal concepts. First, contextualised learning, which relates halal concepts to real-life scenarios and contexts relevant to students' experiences, can make learning more meaningful and relatable. Teachers can use examples from daily life, food consumption practices, and ethical considerations to illustrate the significance of halal principles. In addition, introducing healthy eating habits is crucial to motivating

children to opt for nutritious foods that foster physical and mental growth. Both aspects are vital for lifelong well-being. This includes offering balanced and nutritious food choices such as fruits, vegetables, grains and high-quality proteins to preschoolers. Moreover, educating them about the significance of consuming foods rich in diverse nutrients for promoting healthy bone development, optimal brain function and sustained energy levels throughout the day is essential. Consequently, they not only comprehend the importance of nutritious food but also incorporate it into their daily routines.

Secondly, introducing Islamic cultural sensitivity and inclusivity is crucial. Recognising and respecting cultural diversity and religious beliefs in the classroom is essential in halal education. While the introduction of halal food is important in shaping the attitudes, knowledge, and psychomotor skills of preschoolers, it is also necessary to emphasise the aspect of *tayyib* (wholesome) nutrition. This is because halal and *tayyib* form the main foundation of the halal curriculum at the preschool level. Furthermore, it is crucial to introduce the basic rulings of halal and haram by referring to the main sources of Islam, namely the Quran and Sunnah, and educate children to adhere to these sources. Thirdly, interactive learning approaches are essential. Therefore, teachers are advised to meticulously plan different teaching methods and daily activities aimed at fostering children's interest and understanding of halal concepts. This could involve incorporating halal-related topics into various subjects, organising interactive discussions or arranging hands-on activities related to food choices and consumption. Interactive sessions encourage active participation, critical thinking, and knowledge application.

Also, parental involvement and communication are paramount. Collaboration with parents is highlighted as crucial in reinforcing halal awareness. Parents are recognised as primary role models for children, influencing their attitudes and behaviours toward food. By involving parents in halal and haram projects or activities, educators can extend the learning environment beyond the classroom, ensuring consistency in messaging and reinforcing values at home. Hence, it is essential to foster halal awareness globally at the preschool level, as it establishes the groundwork for comprehending and valuing the principles of halal food. This awareness not only instills an understanding of the importance of pure and religiously authentic nutrition but also fosters the growth of future generations with a profound appreciation of the beneficial effects of halal nutrition on their physical and spiritual well-being. By integrating these pedagogical implications, halal education programmes can establish engaging, inclusive, and efficient learning settings that enable students to comprehend, value and implement halal principles in their lives.

In conclusion, introducing halal concepts at a young age can foster a deeper understanding of Islamic values and practices. Early exposure can shape lifelong habits and decision-making related to food and other aspects of daily life. However, while we acknowledge the importance of early halal education, the current approach in preschool curriculum seems

to have limitations that hinder its effectiveness in fostering a deeper understanding of halal principles.

The limitation of this study may potentially be biased or limited in scope because it only focuses one preschool as the sample for this study. The discussion coverage is narrow and not extensive. This study may not encompass the various implementation methods practiced in different preschools across Malaysia. Based on the limitations of this study, the study finds that a comprehensive study needs to be conducted to examine the extent to which the implementation of halal education is practiced in preschools nationwide, including public and private schools. The aim is to explore the similarities, differences, weaknesses and strengths to produce the best educational methods in teaching and learning activities to ensure the sustainability of a halal-literate generation in the future.

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