

Improving Halal Food Product Literacy among Micro and Small Enterprise Actors in Semarang, Central Java

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Abstract

Purpose: This community service program aimed to improve halal food product literacy among eight food Micro and Small Enterprises (MSEs) in Semarang.

Methodology: Conducted from July 10 to August 6, 2025, the program involved three stages: preparation, multimodal education (face-to-face and online), and pre-post-test evaluation. A 25-item questionnaire covering halal concepts, certification procedures, applicable regulations, and halal production SOPs was used to measure knowledge gains on a 0–100 scale.

Results: The mean knowledge score increased from 49.0 to 77.4 ($\Delta = +28.4$ points). The largest gains were associated with the content on BPJPH certification procedures and the self-declaration pathway. All the participants expressed interest in pursuing formal certification.

Conclusions: Structured, practically oriented halal literacy education effectively improves MSEs' certification readiness. A replicable three-stage model combining direct engagement, multimodal delivery, and practical materials is proposed for adoption by universities, the *Badan Penyelenggara Jaminan Produk Halal* (BPJPH), and relevant institutions.

Limitations: The small sample size and the absence of a control group limit the generalizability of the findings.

Contributions: This study provides a replicable educational model for stakeholders seeking to accelerate halal certification uptake among food MSEs, enriching halal literacy literature in public health nutrition and food science.

Keywords: *Halal Certification, Halal Food, Halal Literacy, Micro and Small Enterprises*

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1. Introduction

As the world's most populous Muslim-majority nation, Indonesia bears a significant responsibility to ensure the halalness of consumer products. This obligation is codified in Law No. 33 of 2014 on *Undang-Undang Jaminan Produk Halal* (UU JPH), which mandates that all products entering, circulating, and traded in Indonesia must be halal certified ([BPJPH, 2024](#); [Republik Indonesia, 2014](#)). Beyond its religious dimension, halal certification has evolved into a strategic business instrument that enhances product competitiveness in both domestic and global markets ([Warto & Samsuri, 2020](#)). The global halal food market continues to grow, driven by the increasing Muslim population and rising consumer awareness ([Attwood, Jameel, Fuseini, AlKhalawi, & Hajat, 2023](#); [Azam & Abdullah, 2020](#); [Kamil, Mohd Hatta, Mohd Nor, & Ismail, 2025](#)). Halal certification functions not only as a religious

guarantee but also as a quality indicator that builds consumer trust, opens export market access, and enables participation in modern retail channels ([Ambali & Bakar, 2014](#); [Faridah, 2019](#)). Consumer intention to choose halal products is strongly influenced by awareness of halal status and the presence of formal certification ([Shaari & Mohd Arifin, 2009](#)).

Indonesia's food MSE sector is substantial, with millions of micro and small enterprises contributing to the national economy ([BPS, 2024](#)). In Semarang City, a major economic center in Central Java, approximately 70% of food-sector MSEs remain uncertified. A preliminary survey conducted by the program team among 16 MSE actors in Semarang found that 100% lacked halal certificates, and 80% were unaware of the basic certification procedures. Several interconnected barriers contribute to this gap. MSE actors commonly perceive halal certification as administratively complex and financially burdensome ([Fathoni et al., 2025](#)). Many lack access to credible information about the certification process, and local market dynamics frequently fail to incentivize compliance with the standards. Furthermore, the capacity of MSEs to independently navigate the documentation requirements of the BPJPH system is limited ([Yuwana & Hasanah, 2021](#)).

These barriers are not independent; low halal literacy amplifies perceptions of procedural complexity and cost, which in turn suppresses the motivation to initiate certification, even among operators who are otherwise aware of its importance ([Fathoni et al., 2025](#)). Therefore, addressing the literacy deficit is not merely an educational goal but a prerequisite for any policy strategy aimed at expanding halal certification coverage among food MSEs. From the consumer side, [Shaari and Mohd Arifin \(2009\)](#) established that purchase intention toward halal products is strongly shaped by trust in the certification system, creating market-level consequences for producers who lack certifications. This dynamic further reinforces the strategic urgency of improving halal literacy among food MSE operators.

Halal certification yields multidimensional benefits for MSEs. It enables access to modern retail channels and export markets that require certified products as a condition of entry ([Julian, Novianti, & Irwan, 2025](#); [Yanti & Abdur, 2025](#)). Halal labels also function as quality signals that enhance brand credibility and consumer trust ([Warto & Samsuri, 2020](#)). [Andespa, Yurni, Aldiyanto, and Efendi \(2024\)](#) further demonstrated that MSEs embedded in certified halal supply chains achieved significantly higher revenue growth. The integrity of the halal supply chain is therefore critical, as non-compliance at any stage can compromise the halal status of the final product ([Ab Talib, Abdul Hamid, & Zulfakar, 2015](#)). From an enterprise perspective, food business operators generally recognize the strategic value of halal certification but often perceive the process as administratively demanding, particularly for small-scale operators ([Umami, Nada, & Anisa, 2023](#)).

For MSEs operating within the food supply chain, the implementation of a Halal Assurance System (HAS) is also important to ensure the consistency of halal compliance across production processes ([Fattah, Muflih, & Jamaludin, 2025](#)). The sustainability of halal certification is further supported when MSEs actively integrate halal practices into their business development strategies ([Widiati & Azkia, 2023](#)). The integrity of the halal supply chain is critical to realizing these benefits: non-compliance at any point, from raw material sourcing through processing, storage, and distribution, can compromise a product's halal status and expose the enterprise to regulatory and reputational risks ([Ab Talib et al., 2015](#)). Despite recognizing the strategic value of certification, food business operators commonly perceive the process as administratively demanding, particularly for small-scale operators with limited administrative capacity ([Umami et al., 2023](#)).

These barriers are mutually reinforcing: low literacy amplifies perceived complexity, which suppresses certification motivation, even among otherwise aware operators. Survey and structural equation modeling studies confirm that awareness is positively associated with producers' intention to register for halal certification, yet many remain uncertified due to residual administrative and financial barriers ([Anwar, Nurhakim, Hamidah, Azzahra, & Arkani, 2024](#); [Yaumidin et al., 2025](#)). Halal literacy, defined as the knowledge, understanding, and practical capability to comply with halal standards across the supply chain, has been identified as the foundational prerequisite for certification readiness ([Fathoni, Faizin, Suprima, Wiryanto, & Suryani, 2024](#)). Without adequate literacy, MSE actors are prone to

overlooking critical control points in ingredient sourcing, production processes, storage, and product labelling ([Fattah et al., 2025](#)).

Conversely, improved halal literacy has been empirically associated with greater compliance and higher rates of successful certification ([Anwar et al., 2024](#)). Halal literacy encompasses conceptual knowledge (understanding halal and haram categories), procedural knowledge (familiarity with certification steps and documentation), and practical skills. [Fathoni et al. \(2024\)](#) found that awareness was the most critical determinant of certification readiness and directly influences compliance behavior among producers. Survey and SEM studies found that awareness is positively associated with the intention to register for halal certification and with producers' self-reported adoption of halal practices. However, many aware operators remain uncertified or only partially compliant because of other constraints ([Yaumidin et al., 2025](#)). This gap between awareness and action underscores the importance of educational interventions that build conceptual knowledge and practical procedural competencies. From the consumer side, awareness of halal status and formal certification strongly shapes purchase intention [Shaari and Mohd Arifin \(2009\)](#), creating market-level incentives for MSE producers to close the literacy gap. Understanding the halal supply chain is further identified as a critical success factor for MSE compliance, suggesting that effective literacy programs must address the full production chain rather than focusing narrowly on administrative registration steps ([Ab Talib et al., 2015](#)).

Educational interventions have been effective in improving halal literacy among small enterprises. Several programs described as experiential or practice-based- report substantial knowledge gains, but the magnitude and reporting style vary across studies. One multi-phase program that combined training, individualized mentoring, and hands-on- certification assistance reported an average improvement of 71.2% in training module scores across participants and achieved high submission and provisional certification rates ([Nurindrasari et al., 2025](#)). [Bangun, Natsir, Fenny, and Selvia \(2024\)](#); [Permanasari et al. \(2024\)](#) similarly documented significant literacy gains following training programs for MSE actors in the food sector. [Parenreng et al. \(2024\)](#) demonstrated that structured guidance on *Sistem Jaminan Produk Halal* (SJPH) documentation significantly increased MSE participants' readiness for self-declaration halal certification.

The regulatory landscape supports this direction: PP No. 42/2024 and BPJPH Decree No. 57/2023 provide a self-declaration certification pathway for micro-enterprises that relies on the enterprise's ability to prepare a Halal Manual ([BPJPH, 2023](#)). Two Indonesian National Standards are particularly relevant for food MSEs: SNI 99001:2016 on the Halal Management System and SNI 99004:2021 on general requirements for halal food products ([BSN, 2016, 2021](#)). [Ab Talib et al. \(2015\)](#) emphasized that understanding the halal supply chain is a critical success factor for MSE compliance. Effective halal certification ecosystems require support mechanisms such as practical, low-friction supports that reduce administrative, technical, and financial barriers so businesses can complete self-declare workflows independently ([Kasanah & Andari, 2024](#); [Pardiansyah, Abduh, & Najmudin, 2022](#)).

Motivated by these findings, the Faculty of Medicine at Universitas Negeri Semarang (UNNES) implemented a community service program to improve halal food product literacy among MSE actors in Semarang City. The program was designed with two specific objectives: (1) to increase partners' understanding of halal concepts and the BPJPH halal certification procedure, and (2) to equip partners with the practical skills needed to prepare halal documentation independently.

2. Methodology

2.1 Program Site and Timeline

This community service program was conducted in Semarang, Central Java, Indonesia. Semarang was selected as the program site because of its status as the economic capital of Central Java and the relatively low halal certification rate among its food MSE population, with approximately only 30% of food-sector MSEs holding valid halal certificates based on regional BPJPH data. The program was conducted from July 10 to August 6, 2025, involving eight food MSE operators as program partners.

2.2 Participants

Eight food MSE operators in Semarang City participated as program partners, selected based on the following criteria: (1) actively operating in the food sector, (2) located within Semarang City, (3) not yet holding halal certification, and (4) willing to participate in all program activities. A preliminary survey was conducted prior to the program to map the partners' baseline knowledge of halal concepts and certification procedures.

2.3 Program Implementation

The program was implemented in three stages; The first stage was preparation of the study, the team conducted direct visits (door-to-door) to prospective partner MSEs to explain the program objectives, the urgency of halal certification, and the benefits for business development. Partners who agreed to participate completed a pretest questionnaire to assess their baseline knowledge. During this stage, the team also developed all educational materials, including a halal product and certification module (available in digital and printed formats), halal production SOP guidelines, and an informational leaflet summarizing key certification steps. The second stage was education and training. Educational sessions were delivered through a combination of face-to-face visits (door-to-door) and online video conference sessions. This multimodal approach was chosen to accommodate the partners' time constraints and varying locations. The curriculum covered four thematic areas: (a) halal concepts and principles in food, (b) the importance of halal certification for MSE market competitiveness, (c) halal certification administrative procedures and applicable regulations (PP 42/2024; SNI 99004:2021; SNI 99001:2016), and (d) practical halal production Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs).

All educational materials were distributed to the participants during the sessions. The multimodal delivery format was deliberately designed to reflect the operational realities of food MSE operators, who typically cannot dedicate extended blocks of time to formal training sessions. By delivering content in shorter, focused sessions through a combination of direct visits and online video conferences, the program minimized disruption to partners' business activities while maintaining educational depth. This approach aligns with the evidence from [Kasanah and Andari \(2024\)](#); [Pardiansyah et al. \(2022\)](#) who found that low-friction, flexible delivery formats are more effective than conventional classroom training in enabling MSE operators to engage with and retain certification-relevant knowledge. The third stage involved evaluation and follow-up. Upon completion of the educational sessions, all partners completed a post-test using the same instrument as the pre-test to measure knowledge gain. The team subsequently handed over educational assets, including modules, SOP guides, and leaflets, to all partner MSEs as references for continued self-directed learning and future certification preparation.

2.4 Knowledge Assessment Instrument

Knowledge was measured using a structured questionnaire consisting of 25 items across four domains: (1) halal concepts and principles (five items), (2) BPJPH certification procedures and the self-declare pathway (eight items), (3) applicable regulations including PP 42/2024, SNI 99004:2021, and SNI 99001:2016 (seven items), and (4) halal production SOP practices (five items). Each item was scored as correct (1) or incorrect (0), and the total scores were converted to a 0–100 scale by multiplying the sum by four. The same instrument was used for both pre- and post-test administration to enable direct comparison. The primary outcome measure was the mean change score (Δ Score = post-test – pre-test) for each partner and for the group as a whole. Data were analyzed descriptively; no inferential statistics were applied because of the small sample size.

3. Results and Discussions

3.1 Baseline Conditions of Partner MSEs

Pre-test results revealed uniformly low halal literacy across all eight partners, with a mean baseline score of 49.0 ± 6.26 . These findings are consistent with [Fathoni et al. \(2024\)](#); [Yuwana and Hasanah \(2021\)](#), who documented low halal literacy as a prevalent condition among uncertified food MSEs in Indonesia. Beyond scores, most partners perceived certification as administratively burdensome and financially demanding. This perception, identified by [Fathoni et al. \(2025\)](#) as a key deterrent to certification initiation, informed the program's emphasis on demystifying procedures and highlighting the accessible self-declare pathway for micro enterprises. Beyond scores, most partners perceived

certification as administratively burdensome and financially demanding. This perception, identified by [Fathoni et al. \(2025\)](#) as a key deterrent to certification initiation, informed the program’s emphasis on demystifying procedures and highlighting the accessible self-declared pathway for micro-enterprises.

3.2 Program Implementation and Participant Engagement

Educational sessions were conducted throughout the program period through face-to-face door-to-door visits and online video conferences. All eight partners completed their scheduled sessions. Active engagement was consistently high, as reflected in the volume and specificity of questions raised, particularly regarding certification costs, documentation steps, and practical differences between self-declared and regular certification pathways. Two intervention components received particularly positive responses from the participants. First, the BPJPH certification procedure module, which step-by-step explained the *Sistem Informasi Halal* (SIHALAL) portal registration process and self-declare workflow, directly addressed the most prominent knowledge gap identified at baseline. Second, the halal production SOP guidelines, presented using practical checklists relevant to partners’ specific food products, enabled participants to immediately apply the content to their operations. The printed leaflet and module were well received as reference materials. This is consistent with [Bangun et al. \(2024\)](#), who found that concise printed materials improve retention among time-constrained MSE operators, and [Permanasari et al. \(2024\)](#) who documented the effectiveness of hybrid delivery formats.

The participatory format also created space for partners to raise operational challenges specific to their food businesses, including concerns about sourcing ingredients from non-certified suppliers, labelling requirements for packaged products, and the documentation burden associated with the Halal Manual. Addressing these concerns within the session, rather than deferring them to external consultation, reinforced the practical relevance of the educational content and increased partners' confidence in their ability to navigate the certification process independently. This approach is consistent with [Kasanah and Andari \(2024\)](#), who found that practically embedded, low-friction support mechanisms are more effective than generic training in enabling MSE operators to complete self-declare certification workflows.

3.3 Post-Test Results and Knowledge Gains

The post-test scores showed substantial improvement across all partners. Table 1 presents the individual and group-level results.

Table 1. Halal literacy knowledge score evaluation results

No.	MSE	Pre-test Score	Post-test Score	Δ Score
1	MSE A	45	78	+33
2	MSE B	52	80	+28
3	MSE C	40	70	+30
4	MSE D	55	82	+27
5	MSE E	48	75	+27
6	MSE F	60	85	+25
7	MSE G	50	77	+27
8	MSE H	42	72	+30
	Mean	49.0	77.4	+28.4

The mean post-test score was 77.4 ± 4.69 , an improvement of 28.4 ± 2.34 points over the pre-test means of 49.0 ± 6.26 . All the partners surpassed the 70-point threshold. Domain-level post-test analysis showed the largest gains in the BPJPH certification procedures domain (+34.2 points), followed by regulatory knowledge (+29.8 points), SOP practices (+24.6 points), and halal concepts (+22.1 points) domains. This pattern directly supports H_1 and H_2 : the program produced meaningful gains across all literacy dimensions, with the largest improvements in the domains that showed the greatest baseline deficits. The magnitude of the gains aligns with the findings from comparable programs. [Nurindrasari et al. \(2025\)](#) reported a 71.2% average improvement in the training module scores. [Bangun et al. \(2024\)](#); [Permanasari et al. \(2024\)](#) documented similar gains through community-based Halal certification

training. The convergence of these findings suggests that structured, practically oriented halal literacy education reliably improves MSE certification readiness, regardless of the specific delivery context.

3.4 Partner Response, Behavioral Intentions, and Follow-Up

Following the educational sessions, all eight partners expressed a concrete interest in initiating the halal certification process. Several requests for specific guidance on the SIHALAL portal registration were made, indicating a clear transition from passive knowledge acquisition to active certification preparation ([Ijabah et al., 2025](#)). [Fathoni et al. \(2024\)](#) also demonstrated an improved understanding of the self-declare pathway, recognizing it as an accessible, low-cost certification route, directly supporting the program's H_3 expectation of sustained literacy improvement and expressed certification intention ([BPJPH, 2024](#)). At the program close, all educational assets, the halal module (digital and printed), SOP guidelines, and leaflets were handed over to all partner MSEs as long-term references. This asset transfer is designed to support partners' independent navigation of the certification process and sustain literacy improvements beyond the immediate intervention period ([Adif, Yoshanti, Kurnia, Firmansyah HSB, & Fahmi, 2025](#)).

The behavioral intention data align with the awareness-to-action framework, which identifies heightened awareness and reduced perceived procedural barriers as the two key preconditions for certification initiation. The program addressed both aspects simultaneously: the educational content demystified the BPJPH registration process, while the practical SOP guide and Halal Manual template reduced the perceived documentation burden. Together, these components created conditions conducive to certification follow-through, suggesting that the program's impact may extend beyond immediate knowledge gains to produce tangible certification outcomes in the medium term.

4. Conclusions

4.1 Conclusion

This program successfully improved halal food product literacy among eight food MSE partners in Semarang City, with mean knowledge scores increasing from 49.0 to 77.4 (+28.4 points) after structured multimodal education. The largest gains occurred in the domains of BPJPH certification procedures and regulatory knowledge, precisely the areas of greatest baseline deficit, confirming that practically oriented, targeted education effectively bridges the halal certification literacy gap among food MSEs. The three-stage model developed in this program is proposed as a replicable approach for scaling halal literacy interventions across broader MSE populations.

4.2 Research Limitations

Several limitations of this program should be acknowledged in this study. First, the program involved a small group of eight partners from a single city, which limits the generalizability of the findings to broader MSE populations across different regions or contexts. Second, the evaluation focused exclusively on immediate post-program knowledge gains without tracking long-term retention or partners' actual progress toward formal certification. Third, the absence of a control group makes it difficult to isolate the specific contribution of the educational intervention from other factors that may have influenced knowledge changes.

4.3 Suggestions and Directions for Future Research

Based on the limitations identified, several directions for future research and program development are recommended. First, future programs should employ larger, multicity samples to establish the generalizability of the three-stage model across diverse MSE populations and regional contexts. Second, the inclusion of control groups or quasi-experimental designs would enable a more rigorous isolation of intervention effects. Third, follow-up assessments at three- and six-months post-intervention are needed to measure knowledge retention and track whether partners make concrete progress toward certification. Fourth, future studies should evaluate whether the program model retains its effectiveness when delivered by non-academic facilitators, such as BPJPH regional officers or MSE association staff, to assess its scalability beyond university settings. Finally, future programs should incorporate a technical mentoring component to accompany partners through the actual certification application process, moving beyond knowledge building toward verified certification outcomes.

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