

# HALAL GRADUATES IN MALAYSIA: BALANCING EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT, AND INDUSTRY NEEDS

Nurzahidah binti Hj Jaapar<sup>1\*</sup>  
Nur 'Ain Najihah Binti Mohd Najib<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1,2</sup> Academy of Contemporary Islamic Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA, 40450 Shah Alam, Malaysia

\*Corresponding author: nurzah8883@uitm.edu.my

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**Abstract:** *This article examines the overproduction of halal graduates in Malaysia and its implications for building a sustainable halal workforce. Using qualitative document analysis, the study synthesises policy papers, curriculum guidelines and industry reports to (i) trace the drivers behind rising graduate output in halal studies, (ii) identify the key factors that constrain absorption into halal-sector jobs, and (iii) assess impacts on employment sustainability and workforce utilisation. Findings point to a persistent skills-jobs mismatch arising from limited industry–university collaboration, uneven policy execution, and curricula that emphasise certification knowledge over market-relevant competencies (e.g., digital, regulatory, and operational skills). The analysis highlights gaps in labour-market signalling, fragmented internship and apprenticeship pathways, and weak tracer mechanisms to monitor graduate outcomes. The paper advocates for demand-led reforms, including co-designed curricula with industry, structured work-based learning, micro-credentials, and coordinated talent planning, all of which are linked to growth areas in the halal value chain. By reframing the issue from “graduate surplus” to “alignment and deployment,” the study proposes a pragmatic pathway to bridge the gap between graduate output and job creation, thereby advancing sustainable human capital development for Malaysia’s halal economy.*

**Keywords:** *halal workforce, graduate employability, skills mismatch, curriculum–industry alignment, employment sustainability.*

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## Introduction

The halal industry in Malaysia has experienced rapid growth in recent years, becoming a key contributor to the country's economic development (Abu Bakar, 2021). This industry encompasses various sectors, including halal management, supply chain management, logistics, assurance, and auditing (Adha, 2024). As global demand for halal products and services continues to rise, Malaysia aspires to solidify its position as a leading international halal hub, supported by the implementation of various higher education programs aligned with national initiatives (Yusoff, 2020). However, this swift expansion has also brought significant challenges, particularly concerning the supply and sustainability of skilled human capital within the halal education system. Despite strong growth in the halal sector, a significant gap persists in aligning the skilled workforce, resulting in an overproduction of graduates who do not meet current industry needs.

Next, one of the critical issues is the overproduction of halal talent, where Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) continuously produce more graduates in halal-related programs than the job market can accommodate (Ibrahim, 2024). This surplus has led to an imbalance between graduate supply and industry demand, resulting in high unemployment or employment in unrelated fields. Furthermore, the misalignment between academic training and practical industry needs restricts graduates from fully utilising their expertise (Hashim, 2016).

In addition, the lack of structured career progression pathways in the halal sector exacerbates the issue. Many professionals struggle to obtain promotions or advance in their careers (Aishah, 2024). Weak talent management systems and unclear job hierarchies hinder employee development, leading to reduced motivation, low job satisfaction, and ultimately, decreased productivity and competitiveness in the halal industry (Ibrahim *et al*, 2024). Other than that, many halal officers remain in entry-level certification roles for over five years due to unclear job classification and limited upskilling opportunities.

Therefore, this study aims to examine the issue of halal talent overproduction in Malaysia by identifying the causes of the increase in halal graduates, analysing the other factors contributing to the job market imbalance, and evaluating the impact on the sustainability of career growth in the halal sector. By understanding these problems, the study aims to propose more effective talent management strategies and foster better alignment between educational institutions and industry requirements, ensuring the sustainable and competitive growth of Malaysia's halal industry.

## Literature Review

### Demanding halal talent

The increase in the number of graduates with halal talent in the halal field in Malaysia has become a significant phenomenon in recent years. This phenomenon is largely influenced by the rapid development of halal-related academic programs offered by various higher education institutions (HEIs) across the country. These programs were introduced as part of the Malaysian government's efforts to establish the nation as a global halal hub, in line with the Halal Industry Master Plan (Yusoff, 2020). However, this rapid growth occurred without a comprehensive assessment of actual labour market needs, resulting in an imbalance between the supply of graduates and the available job opportunities within the halal sector (Rahman, 2020).

One of the main causes of the oversupply of halal graduates is the lack of alignment between the academic curricula offered by HEIs and the practical requirements of the halal industry. Many halal programs are developed independently without direct collaboration with industry stakeholders, resulting in graduates who possess strong theoretical knowledge but lack the practical skills necessary for the workplace, such as halal certification procedures and the use of industry-specific software (Abu Bakar, 2021). This lack of practical exposure reduces graduates' competitiveness and makes it difficult for them to secure suitable employment in the halal sector.

Furthermore, the positive image of the halal industry as an ethical and promising career path has attracted many students to pursue studies in this field. Active promotion by government agencies and HEIs through awareness campaigns, career fairs, and educational programs has increased student enrolment in halal-related courses (Ibrahim *et al*, 2024). However, these promotions often lack realistic information about actual job opportunities, leading to expectations that do not align with market realities. This situation contributes to the growing number of graduates who struggle to find suitable employment after graduation.

The availability of financial incentives, such as scholarships, grants, and tuition subsidies, provided by both public and private sectors, also plays a significant role in increasing student enrolments in halal studies (Hashim, 2020). While these incentives facilitate access to education, they inadvertently contribute to the overproduction of halal graduates, as student intake continues to rise without consideration for the sector's capacity to absorb new workers. Therefore, financial incentives must be aligned with market planning to prevent creating imbalances in the halal talent supply (World Bank, 2023).

Lastly, the lack of an effective centralised monitoring system to regulate the supply and demand of halal talent exacerbates the oversupply problem (Ibrahim *et al*, 2024). Unlike other sectors that benefit from labour market forecasting tools, the halal industry still lacks a coordinated framework to accurately predict future workforce needs (Halal Industry Development Corporation, 2024). This lack of data and coordination makes it difficult for academic institutions and policymakers to adjust student intake targets and program offerings in response to industry trends, thereby perpetuating the cycle of graduate overproduction.

### **Talent management and strategic partnerships**

Human capital development is prioritised in the Malaysia Halal Industry Master Plan 2030 as a fundamental element for the sustainable growth and international competitiveness of the halal sector (Halal Industry Development Corporation, 2021). In response, many Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) have rapidly expanded their halal-related program offerings to capitalise on this national agenda. However, this expansion is often driven by institutional competition and financial incentives rather than thorough research and market analyses, leading to an overproduction of halal graduates without adequate consideration for the industry's absorption capacity (Zuraidah, 2022). This situation prioritises quantity over quality, ultimately undermining sustainable workforce development.

One of the primary factors contributing to this issue is the weak integration between academia and the halal industry. Most halal programs are developed independently, without direct collaboration with industry stakeholders, leading to curricula that primarily focus on theory and place less emphasis on the practical skills required in actual jobs (Musa, 2022). The lack of

structured internship opportunities and on-the-job training results in graduates being ill-prepared to meet job demands, especially in areas such as halal certification, auditing, and compliance (Ibrahim, 2024). This gap reduces graduate employability and contributes to unemployment problems within the halal sector.

Furthermore, the broad and unstandardized categorisation of "Halal Talent" poses challenges in talent management. Without clear competency frameworks and detailed career pathways, the quality and skill set of graduates are inconsistent, making it difficult for employers to find specific expertise in areas such as halal supply chain management, halal food safety, or regulatory compliance (Tukiran, 2025). This lack of clarity in role specialisation and career progression leads to inefficient workforce allocation, where graduates may find themselves in positions that do not fully utilise their potential (Voak, A., Fairman, B., & Wahyuni, H. C., 2023).

Social and cultural factors also play a significant role in sustaining the increase in halal graduates despite limited job opportunities. Many families and communities encourage students to pursue halal studies because these fields are perceived as morally commendable and aligned with Islamic values (Nur Hafizah, 2021). This societal encouragement, coupled with the availability of scholarships and financial aid specifically for halal education, drives higher student enrolment. However, these motivations often do not align with labour market realities, leading to unrealistic expectations and intense competition for limited job openings. Finally, institutional incentives further fuel the expansion of halal programs. Universities view halal studies as strategic areas to enhance their reputation and attract funding from both government bodies and the private sector (Rahim, 2022). The financial benefits derived from program expansion can overshadow the need for rigorous market evaluation and workforce planning. Without coordinated oversight to align academic offerings with industry needs, this phenomenon risks perpetuating the cycle of oversupply and underemployment within the halal talent pool (Jamil, H., Wahab, A. Y. A., Razak, A. R. A., & Al-Saari, N., 2020).

### **Job Sustainability and Workforce Utilisation**

The overproduction of halal talent in Malaysia has had a significant impact on job sustainability within the halal sector. Many graduates face issues of underemployment or jobs that do not align with their qualifications, resulting in the underutilization of their skills and low career satisfaction (Rahman, 2024). This mismatch not only affects the long-term professional development of graduates but also diminishes their motivation to continue growing within the halal field. This issue suggests that the problem of halal talent oversupply extends beyond the number of graduates; it also concerns the quality and suitability of the skills offered to the job market (Rahmat, 2024).

Increasing competition in the halal job market, particularly for entry-level positions, has led to lower starting salaries and a greater reliance on unpaid internships or short-term contracts (Rahman, 2024). These unstable employment conditions negatively affect the financial independence of young professionals and reduce their commitment to halal careers. This problem risks losing highly skilled talent to other sectors that offer clearer career paths and better job stability, thereby undermining the competitiveness of Malaysia's halal industry.

Moreover, workforce utilisation in the halal sector is inefficient due to skill mismatches and uneven geographic distribution of graduates (Ping Yong, 2023). Some regions experience

shortages of skilled halal workers, while others face a surplus of graduates. This situation forces organisations to incur additional costs for remedial training or hiring specialised personnel from outside the local graduate pool, ultimately wasting human capital and reducing sector productivity. This inefficiency negatively impacts the global competitiveness of the halal industry.

Next, the lack of accurate and up-to-date market data further complicates strategic planning, as it hinders the alignment of halal academic programs with actual industry needs (Musa, 2022). Without reliable information, policymakers and educational institutions struggle to effectively adapt curricula and set student intake targets. The persistent gap between graduate supply and industry demand perpetuates the oversupply problem, hindering sustainable human capital development in the halal sector (Ibrahim, M. I., Jamaludin, M. A., & Muflih, B. K., 2024).

Lastly, the oversupply of halal graduates also risks devaluing the academic qualifications they hold. As the market becomes flooded with halal graduates, the uniqueness and perceived value of halal degrees diminish, making it harder for graduates to stand out in the job market (Salleh, 2022). This credential inflation can impede career advancement opportunities and reduce motivation for further specialisation or lifelong learning within the halal field. Consequently, the industry risks losing highly skilled workers to other sectors offering clearer career progression and better employment prospects.

### Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research design using document analysis as the primary approach. Data were obtained from official documents and annual reports published by government agencies, including the Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM), Halal Development Corporation (HDC), Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE), and Department of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM), between 2018 and 2022. The statistics on halal certification applications issued by JAKIM (2020) show a significant increase, from 8,500 applications in 2018 to 12,000 in 2020, and further rising to 15,605 applications in 2023.

The Halal Industry Master Plan 2030, published by the Halal Development Corporation (2021), forecasts an annual increase of 7% in demand for a halal workforce until 2030, particularly in areas such as certification, auditing, and halal supply chain management. However, the report also highlights a mismatch in skills between the academic curricula offered by higher education institutions and the actual needs of the halal industry, resulting in an oversupply of graduates who lack the necessary skills. The Graduate Tracer Study by the Ministry of Higher Education (2022) further shows that only about 60% of graduates from halal-related programs secure employment within the halal sector within six months after graduation, while the remainder either work in other sectors or remain unemployed.

Furthermore, unemployment data from the Department of Statistics Malaysia (2022) indicate that the unemployment rate among halal graduates stands at 8%. This statistic indicates that the issue of halal graduate oversupply involves not only quantity but also the quality and suitability of their skills in relation to industry requirements. For example, many halal graduates possess strong theoretical knowledge, but lack of practical skills required by employers, such as hands-on experience with halal certification procedures or proficiency in industry-specific software. As a result, some graduates struggle to secure positions as halal auditors or officers because



they are unfamiliar with the latest digital tools and compliance processes used in the field.

## Results and Discussion

The issue of halal graduates in Malaysia has increasingly attracted scholarly and policy attention. While the number of higher education institutions offering halal-related programs has expanded rapidly, questions remain regarding the employability of these graduates and the alignment of their skills with market demand. The challenge lies not in the academic recognition of these programs, as most are accredited by the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA), but rather in the extent to which their curricula reflect industry-relevant competencies (Ab Talib, Hamid, & Chin, 2020). Accreditation ensures academic quality, yet it does not guarantee that graduates will secure jobs in the halal industry. Here are some of the key factors that constrain absorption into halal-sector jobs, which impact employment sustainability and workforce utilisation:

### Imbalance Between Graduate Output and Industry Demand

Precise national statistics on halal graduate output versus industry demand remain scarce, yet qualitative evidence consistently points to a structural mismatch. Ibrahim, Jamaludin, and Muflih (2024) highlight that, although the number of universities offering halal studies has increased, many graduates struggle to secure relevant employment due to the fragmented nature of their curricula and the lack of industry recognition. This problem is compounded by the absence of clear competency frameworks to align academic programs with labour market needs, despite recent efforts by MQA and the Halal Industry Development Corporation (HDC) to introduce standardised guidelines. Similarly, Ping Yong (2023) observes a significant imbalance between the number of halal graduates produced and the actual demand in the halal industry. This oversupply stems from the rapid proliferation of halal academic programs in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), most of which were introduced without comprehensive market analysis (Yusoff, 2020). These programs were largely driven by Malaysia's ambition to position itself as a global halal hub, but their expansion has far exceeded the industry's capacity to absorb new graduates.

The absence of an effective centralised monitoring and forecasting system further exacerbates the problem. Unlike other sectors that benefit from labour market intelligence and structured workforce planning, the halal sector lacks a coordinated framework to regulate graduate production in line with industry demand (HDC, 2021). Consequently, HEIs continue to produce more graduates than necessary, leaving many underemployed, while employers are inundated with applications from candidates whose skills do not fully meet operational needs. The implications of this imbalance are profound. It underscores a systemic disconnect between education providers and industry stakeholders, highlighting the urgent need for strategic planning, better coordination, and demand-led reforms. The sustainability of Malaysia's halal workforce depends on realigning graduate output with industry needs. Without such alignment, issues of unemployment, underemployment, and human capital waste will persist, ultimately undermining Malaysia's ambition to maintain global leadership in the halal economy.

## Curriculum-Industry Mismatch and Lack of Practical Exposure

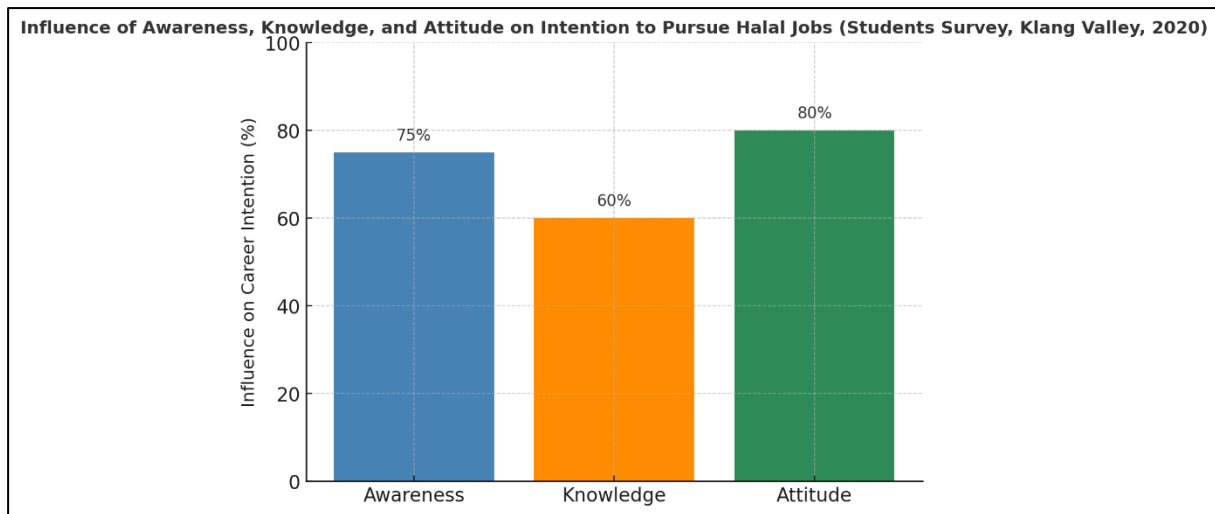
**Table 1: Indicators of halal graduates' employability issues**

Indicators	Key Findings
Halal graduates' employability issues	Struggle to secure relevant jobs due to fragmented curricula & weak industry recognition (Ibrahim et al., 2024)
Lack of career frameworks in halal talent	Absence of structured career pathways & competency frameworks (Tukiran et al., 2025)
Bachelor graduates in suitable jobs	Only ~30% of bachelor's graduates are employed in appropriate roles (HRMARS, 2024)
Graduate underemployment/over-qualification (general)	Rising graduate oversupply, underemployment, and job mismatch (Wei, 2024)

Based on the table 1 above, a persistent challenge facing halal graduates in Malaysia is the skills–jobs mismatch between the outputs of higher education and industry requirements. Numerous studies highlight that many halal programs remain certification-oriented, placing heavy emphasis on theoretical content while neglecting practical and applied competencies (Zainuddin, Hashim, & Che Omar, 2021). As a result, graduates may excel in academic knowledge of halal certification but are often underprepared for roles requiring technical, managerial, or entrepreneurial skills such as halal logistics, auditing, supply chain management, or digital marketing (Hashim, 2016; Ab Talib & Chin, 2018). This misalignment is largely driven by the weak collaboration between higher education institutions (HEIs) and industry stakeholders. Most curricula are designed independently with limited input from certification bodies or industry practitioners (Kamarudin, 2021; Ibrahim, Jamaludin, & Muflih, 2024). Internship and apprenticeship pathways are often either absent or poorly structured, providing students with little exposure to real-world halal operations (Jusang, 2020). Consequently, employers report a lack of workplace readiness among recent graduates, contributing to reduced employability and weaker confidence in academic programs (Ali, Ismail, & Sidek, 2019).

Addressing this challenge requires comprehensive reform of halal academic programs. Scholars have advocated for demand-led approaches such as the integration of competency-based modules, structured and mandatory industrial training, micro-credentials, and stronger collaboration with halal authorities like JAKIM and industry partners (Othman, Shaarani, & Baharudin, 2022; Voak, Fairman, & Wahyuni, 2023). Such reforms will not only enhance the employability of halal graduates but also ensure that human capital development in the halal sector is aligned with industry growth and global competitiveness.

## The Role of Social Perception and Institutional Promotion



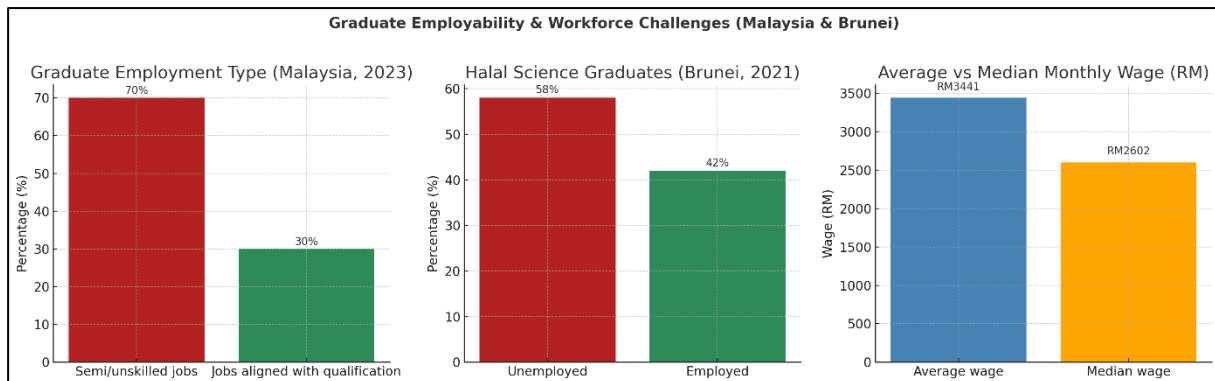
**Figure 1: Influence of awareness, knowledge, and attitude on students' intention to pursue halal jobs.**

Findings from a survey of 1,454 final-year Muslim university students in Klang Valley indicate that attitude (80%) and awareness (75%) are stronger predictors of career intention in the halal sector compared to knowledge (60%). These results highlight the role of social and cultural perceptions in shaping enrolment in halal studies, even when job market realities remain uncertain (Hashim, Kamarulzaman, Rahman, & Othman, 2020). Social factors and institutional promotion have also significantly contributed to the increasing number of students pursuing halal studies, despite the limited job market availability. The halal field is often viewed as a noble and ethical career path aligned with Islamic values, making it a top choice for many students encouraged by family and community influences (Jusang, 2020). While the motivation is sincere, pursuing education without sufficient awareness of actual job prospects can lead to a mismatch.

In addition, universities and government agencies actively promote halal studies through awareness campaigns, job fairs, and the offering of scholarships and tuition subsidies (Ibrahim, 2024). However, such promotions often lack transparency regarding market limitations, resulting in inflated expectations among students. The harsh reality upon graduation can lead to disappointment and reduced commitment to halal careers. Therefore, institutions should reassess their promotional strategies to ensure they are data-driven and realistic. Career counselling programs must provide updated information about job opportunities, and student enrolment in halal programs should reflect current industry demand. A more transparent and balanced approach can help students make informed decisions and reduce long-term consequences in the halal market.



## Impact on Career Sustainability and Work Growth Utilisation



**Figure 2: Graduate Employability and Workforce Challenges in Malaysia and Brunei.**

Grounded by figure 2, it illustrates three interrelated issues: (i) the high proportion of Malaysian graduates (70%) employed in semi-skilled or unrelated jobs, reflecting widespread underemployment (Channel News Asia, 2023); (ii) the employability challenges among halal graduates in Brunei, where 58% of Halal Science graduates remain unemployed (Deuraseh, 2021); and (iii) wage disparities in Malaysia, with an average monthly wage of RM3,441 compared to a median of RM2,602, indicating income inequality and job market imbalance (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2023). Together, these findings highlight the broader structural mismatch between graduate output and labour market absorption, with direct implications for the sustainability of halal graduates.

The problem is aggravated by fierce competition for limited halal job opportunities. With supply consistently outstripping demand, many graduates accept roles with low starting salaries, unpaid internships, or temporary contracts offering little job security (Ibrahim, 2024). Such precarious employment conditions discourage graduates from committing to halal-related careers, making the sector less attractive over time. Without stable income and clear career pathways, even highly skilled individuals are drawn to alternative sectors—such as conventional food, logistics, or international corporations—that provide better salaries and advancement prospects. This trend risks creating a talent drain, where the very individuals trained to strengthen Malaysia’s halal economy are lost to unrelated industries.

In addition, there is a pronounced geographical imbalance in workforce distribution. Some states, particularly urban centres, experience a surplus of halal graduates competing for limited jobs, while other regions struggle with shortages of qualified talent (Adha, 2024). For employers, this imbalance results in higher operational costs as they are forced to either retrain mismatched candidates or recruit from outside their regions. Over time, this geographical mismatch reduces efficiency in the halal value chain and exacerbates regional economic development inequities.

The cumulative effect of underemployment, precarious job conditions, and regional disparities is a serious threat to career sustainability. Graduates not only face limited upward mobility but also lack opportunities for reskilling, continuous professional development, and secure long-term positions. This hinders Malaysia’s broader vision of building a resilient halal workforce that can sustain its role as a global halal hub. To address these concerns, location-based

workforce planning and demand-driven education reforms are urgently required. By better aligning graduate production with regional and sectoral needs, policymakers and industry leaders can reduce talent wastage, enhance job security, and foster a career ecosystem where halal graduates can thrive sustainably over the long term.

### Conclusion

The rapid growth of Malaysia's halal industry has led to an oversupply of halal graduates, creating a persistent mismatch between the number of graduates and job market demand. Many halal-related programs in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) were introduced without adequate market analysis, leaving graduates vulnerable to unemployment or underemployment. The absence of centralised monitoring and reliable market data further hinders policymakers and institutions from aligning talent supply with industry needs. A key factor is the misalignment between curricula and industry requirements. Most halal programs focus heavily on theory, while employers demand practical skills in areas such as certification, auditing, logistics, and supply chain management. Weak university–industry collaboration and limited internship opportunities exacerbate the problem, reducing graduate employability and employer confidence. Social perceptions and institutional promotion also drive enrolment. Many families and institutions encourage halal studies for ethical or reputational reasons, but student expectations often do not reflect actual labour market realities. This has led to frustration and a decline in motivation among graduates. To address these challenges, a multi-pronged strategy is needed. This includes curriculum reform with competency-based modules, structured industrial training, and closer partnerships with industry stakeholders. Institutions must also provide accurate career guidance and adopt data-driven enrolment planning. At the policy level, a centralised labour market forecasting system is essential to realign educational incentives with workforce needs. Such measures will help Malaysia build a more agile, skilled, and sustainable halal workforce to support its ambition as a global hub for halal products.

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