

Knowledge and Practice for Implementing Internal Halal Assurance System among Halal Executives

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Abstract

Food premises that have secured the Halal Certification should comply with the requirements of the Internal Halal Assurance System (IHAS) in their premises. Internal Halal Assurance System (IHAS) is a system that ensures the integrity of halal food at the processing stage, thereby ensuring the production of halal and quality food. Although there is an increase in the number of food premises receive the Halal certificate by the Malaysian Islamic bodies, the continuous implementation of the IHAS at the respective food premises is still questionable. To ensure a sustainable practice of complying with the Halal certification system, this study aimed to investigate the knowledge and skills of the implementing the IHAS among the executives at the respective food premises. This study adopted a qualitative research approach using interview technique on 39 executives at the halal food premises throughout the State of Malacca. It was found that the halal executives implemented the IHAS mainly based on their knowledge in Islam as they lack of knowledge on the requirements of IHAS. Therefore, it is suggested that they should be given continuous training so that a sustainable implementation of IHAS at the food premises can be achieved. This can contribute to the good practice of delivering quality and safe food at the food premises.

Keywords: food premise, Internal Halal Assurance System, knowledge, good practices

1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

Malaysia has been recognised as the hub of halal certification for food production, and this practice has been adopted by Muslim and non-Muslims countries all over the world (Bernama, 2014). Malaysia is also the only country that produces Islamic halal certification on halal food products (Mohamad Khan, 2011). Food premises are eligible to apply for the Halal Certification Malaysia (Malaysian Islamic Development Department, 2011). According to the Ministry of Health (MOH) Malaysia, food premises are defined as the premises used for or in connection with the preparation, preservation, packaging, storage, transportation, distribution or the selling of any food or re-labelling, re-processing or improvement of any food (Ministry of Health, 2009). In Malacca, food premises are the second highest category after food products that receive the halal certification from the Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM) (Note 1) (Melaka Islamic Religious Department, 2014). In this case, considering the rapid growth of the food preparation industry and the growing importance of this industry, it is questionable whether or not the authorities could tackle the problem of safety and quality of food provided by the food premises. It is crucial for the authorities to have control over this situation since without proper control, it may lead to poor quality of food prepared at the food premises.

Food service sector is the final thread in the entire food chain before the food product reaches its consumers. In this case, it is very important to avoid the risk of *haram* or *syubhah* so that halal foods are served particularly to the Muslim (Rahman, Rahman, & Saleh, 2011). Therefore, food premises should provide a clean and safe food to their customers. Govindasamy & Mazuki (2011) asserted that the level of food hygiene and safety should be evaluated at the food premises in order to avoid delivering poor quality food that may result in food poisoning to consumers. Additionally, it was found that the negligence of food preparation and presentation of food is the main source of contaminated food which causes food poisoning (Abdul Rahman & Md Yusoff, 2010).

There are several ways that the owner of food premises can adopt to ensure the production and provision of *halal* and quality food. One of the ways is to seek for accreditation from various agencies responsible for food preparation services, such as the Malaysian Halal Certification, Safe Food Certification Industry Responsibility (MeSTI), Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP), Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP). In this regard, Halal Certification Malaysia has gained recognition among food producers in Malaysia. According to the Director General of JAKIM, 3,469 applications for halal certification have been approved in 2012 compared to 1,678 applications in 2011 (Bernama, 2013). One of the possible reasons for the increase is that food products that display the halal certification and halal logo has a competitive advantage over other products since they have become the choice of preference among customers (Ahmad & Wahid, 2007). Bruil (2010) highlighted that besides the halal products being processed in accordance with the principles of Islam, halal certification also indicates the production of quality product since the product has undergone specific process to avoid cross contamination and errors during processing.

In this case, JAKIM and the State Department of Islamic Religion (JAIM) (Note 2) are committed to ensure that the food premises that have received the Malaysian Halal Certification comply with the requirements of the halal certification. A study conducted by Azhar (2013) found that JAKIM's staff have the responsibility to monitor and control the food premises that have received the Halal Certification. It is also suggested that JAKIM should conduct continuous monitoring to ensure continuous compliance of the Halal Certification (Azhar, 2013). Furthermore, efforts to ensure the quality of halal food are not limited to JAKIM only. It should also be carried out within the organisation of the food premise (in-house) and during the stage of processing. At present, JAKIM has imposed that it is compulsory for all new applications in the category of multinationals to implement Halal Assurance System (Halal Assurance Management System) before applying for halal certification (Department of Islamic Development Malaysia, 2013). However, this regulation yet to be imposed for applications in the category of halal food premises. In this case, food premises need to start preparing for the implementation of IHAS so that they are ready once this regulation is implemented.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

This paper presents a study that investigated the knowledge and the practices of halal executives working at the food premises on the implementation of IHAS so that they are able to comply to the Internal Halal Assurance System (IHAS). In this regard, this study addresses two research questions which are stated as follows:

- 1) What are the knowledge and understanding of the halal executives with respect to the implementation of IHAS at the food premises?
- 2) How do they implement the IHAS at the food premises?

Based on these research questions, the implementation of IHAS is investigated based on the knowledge and attitude of halal executive related to IHAS as well as their common practice related to the compliance to IHAS.

2. Method

This study adopted a qualitative research approach. This section presents the research design, sampling procedures, data collection procedures and data analysis of this study.

2.1 Research Design

This study aimed to investigate the level of knowledge and practice of executive halal food premises in implementing IHAS at the food premises in Melaka. This study adopts a qualitative approach because the researchers aim to understand the phenomenon of the knowledge and practice of implementing IHAS among the executives in the food premises they serve (Wiersma, 2005). Considering that the implementation of IHAS is a new practice introduced in an organisation, the research design was developed based on the adaptation of the Technology Acceptance Model developed by Fred Davis (1989) which was further developed by Venkatesh (2003). In this regard, the implementation of IHAS is considered as a new technology introduced in a particular setting and the knowledge and attitude of implementing IHAS is crucial to ensure the sustainable production of quality, safe and halal food served at the food premises. The research design is shown in Figure 1. It is also important to highlight that the research design is mainly used as general guideline to investigate the how knowledge and practice contribute to the implementation of IHAS at the respective food premise. The knowledge, understanding and practice of the halal executives are expected to result in the sustainable implementation of IHAS at the food premises. As shown in Figure 1, the implementation of the IHAS is investigated based on four practices, which are the halal critical points, cleanliness and hygiene of the food premise, documentation related to halal practices and the internal halal committee members. These aspects are based on the guidelines stipulated in the Malaysian Halal certification.

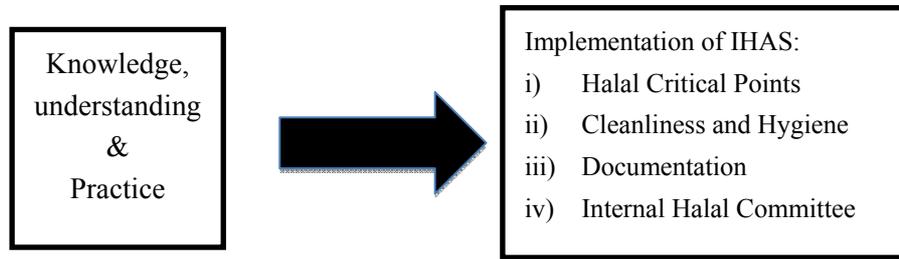


Figure 1. The research design

2.2 Sampling Procedures

The samples were formulated by identifying the population of food premises in the state of Melaka. This study is a study that involves the entire food premises in Malacca who has obtained Halal Certification Malaysia for application during the years 2013 to 2014. The respondents are comprised of executives who are still serving halal food premises during the period of validity of the certificate Halal certification. The list of Halal certificate holders was collected from JAIM. Based on the information there were 60 food premises that have been identified for the collection of data. All the executives at the food premises were contacted and they were invited to participate in the survey. However, only 39 executives agreed to participate in the study. The interviews have been carried out with 39 halal executives who have direct responsibility in the implementation of IHAS at their respective food premise.

2.3 Data Collection Procedures

To investigate the ways in which the knowledge, understanding and practice of the halal executive in the implementation of the IHAS at the food premise, the researcher adopted interview technique as the main tool to collect the data. In this case, 12 semi-structured interview questions were designed based on the two dependent variables and the five constructs of the independent variables. Additionally, observations were also conducted at the food premises, particularly to seek evidences on the practice of hygiene at the food premises. Figure 2 shows the process of data collection, which consists of five stages. The five stages were designing the interview questions, validating the interview questions, identifying the samples, contacting the respondents, and conducting the interviews.

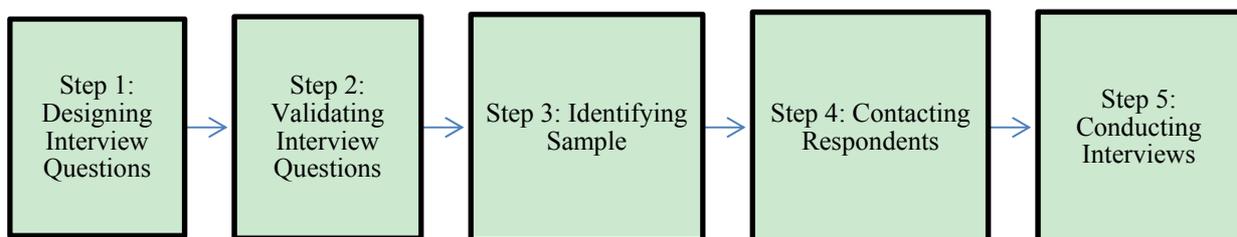


Figure 2. Data collection procedures

The first and second steps of the data collection involved the process of designing and validating the interview questions. The interview questions were designed based on the analysis of documents related to the certification of Halal Malaysia, such as the MS 1500-2009 (Halal Food – Production, Preparation, Handling and Storing – General Guideline (2nd revision), Food Act 1983 (Act 281), Guidelines For Halal Assurance Management System Of Malaysia Halal Certification, Regulations of Food 1985 dan Regulations of Food Hygiene and Safety by the Ministry of Health Malaysia (MOH) 2009, Decisions of the Fatwa Committee of the National Council for Islamic Religious Affairs or *fatwa* proclaimed by the State. A total of 12 semi-structured questions that have been designed based on the information in the literature review and the review of documents related to the study (Cavana, RY, Delahaye, 2001). The interview questions mapped to the respective factors investigated in this study is shown in Table 1. The questions were also given to the three experts from JAKIN to validate the interview questions. The questions were then revised based on the feedback from the experts.

Table 1. Mapping between the categories and Interview Questions

<i>Categories</i>	<i>Interview Questions</i>
Knowledge	1. What is your understanding of the IHAS?
	2. Why do you think that it is important to comply to IHAS?
	3. In your opinion, what factors contribute to the good practice to comply to IHAS?
Practices	4. You use slaughtered animal-based raw material. How did you ensure that the raw material and ingredients used at your premise are halal?
	5. You use raw material based on eggs. How did you ensure that the cleanliness of the eggs you purchase?
	6. You use raw material/critical processed raw material (fat, oil, gelatine, preservatives). How did you ensure that they come from a halal source?
	7. How did you ensure that your premise is always clean?
	8. How did you avoid your premise from being infested by pests?
	9. What actions did you take to prevent the occurrence of contamination related to physical, chemical and biology at your food processing space?
	10. You practice cleanliness as stipulated in the <i>Good Hygiene Practices</i> . State your common practice of cleanliness at your food premise.
	11. You make documentation in your Halal file. What and how do you keep in the file?
	12. Who is the Chair of the Committee and the committee members of IHAS at your premise?

The third and fourth steps of the research involved the process of identifying the sample and contacting the selected respondents. The procedures of determining the respondents are described in Section 2.2.

Stage five is the stage where data were collected using interview technique. This method allows the researcher to interact with the subject of the study (Wiersma, 2005). Prior to the interview session, respondents were asked for a permission to conduct interview with them. Once approved, a meeting with the executive was scheduled. The interview session runs about 30 to 45 minutes. During the interview, the researcher asked questions and the respondents answered the questions one by one. At the same time the researchers made notes and recorded the interview. The researcher also asked the respondents to repeat their answer in cases when the responses were not clear to the researcher. This practice can avoid any misunderstanding during the interview process. After the interview session, the researcher also conducted an observation of the food premises, and additional information was also recorded in the researcher's log book.

2.4 Data Analysis

After the interview data have been transcribed, the data were coded into categories drawn from the literature as well as the interview questions. Subsequently, relevant themes were determined. The themes that have emerged from the 12 interview questions are summarised in Table 2. These themes are considered as findings for this research and they are explained in the next section.

3. Findings

Based on Table 2, findings of the research is categorised into two main categories which are the knowledge and practice. Further, the practice is categorised into four categories: critical halal points, cleanliness and hygiene, documentation and internal halal committee. This section will be organised based on the topics of category as depicted in Table 2.

Table 2. Mapping the Emerging Themes based on the Research Questions

<i>Topic</i>	<i>Themes</i>
Knowledge	General knowledge of Islam
Attitudes	Importance of compliance to IHAS for gaining competitive advantage

<i>Topic</i>	<i>Themes</i>
Practice – Critical Halal Points	Valid halal raw material; Muslim suppliers or from suppliers with halal logo; Conduct audit on suppliers;
Cleanliness and Hygiene	Follow planned cleaning schedule; Create and impose policy for cleanliness; Appointment of the committee for cleanliness Premises free from pests; Adopt internal monitoring or hire external pesticide agents Ensure space for food separated from potential hazardous products Provide training for workers
Practice – Documentation	Established specific files as required by IHAS
Practice – Internal Halal Committee	Availability of the head of committee and members of committee

3.1 Knowledge and Attitude of IHAS

Based on Table 2, the study found that not all of the executives know precisely about IHAS and only a few of them have sufficient knowledge and skills on IHAS. Most of them were not able to give accurate response with respect to the objectives and meaning of IHAS. In this case, they seem to implement IHAS based on their own general knowledge and understanding with lack of specific knowledge on the actual practice of the IHAS. The implementation of IHAS was mainly to ensure the use of the raw materials that have been certified halal by JAKIM, JAIM and other certification bodies accredited by them.

All of the respondents agreed the importance of implementing IHAS. All of them justified that the main purpose for getting the halal certificate was to get customers' trust on their food product. Customers tend to have the understanding that the halal logo represents hygiene and safe food. Hence, it is important for food premises to implement IHAS as it signifies the production of high quality food resulting from the quality control of the raw materials and ingredients used in the preparation of the food as stipulated in the halal certificate. Hence, the implementation of IHAS is perceived as one of the ways for the food premises to gain competitive advantage in comparison to other food premises without the halal logo.

3.2 Practice of IHAS

3.2.1 Critical Halal Points

The first category of the practice of IHAS is the practice related to the critical halal points. This practice is directly related to the processing and producing of the food product in accordance to the IHAS. In this regard, the critical halal points are identified as the compliance with IHAS for source of raw material, particularly the use of slaughtered animal-based material, eggs and process raw materials such as fat, oil, gelatine and preservatives.

The knowledge and attitude on the implementation of IHAS also reflect their practices that comply with the IHAS. Each respondent was able to describe their practice on the four halal points as stipulated in the IHAS. Among the critical parts that they highlighted are the monitoring practice at the entry of raw materials and ingredients. They also said that they gave adequate training to their subordinates to ensure that they follow the IHAS. With respect to the halal critical points, the halal executives admitted that they have their ways to control the use of the raw materials at their food premises. Among the ways they adopt to control the use of the raw materials are to ensure that every used raw material and ingredients has the halal logo. The halal logo is not specific to the one issued by JAKIM, but it may also be any halal logo issued by authorities other than Malaysia. They also have the understanding that the use of raw material and ingredients that have the halal logo comply to the requirements of the IHAS. With regard to the use of raw material based on human, they also made sure that the animals are slaughtered. Some of the halal executives also highlighted that they eye-witnessed the process of slaughtering themselves to ensure that the Islamic way of slaughtering is enforced on the raw materials that they ordered. For the use of eggs at the premise, they confidently said that their workers washed the eggs prior to cooking. In addition to compliance with the IHAS, this practice is a common practice in Islam. Further, they are more convinced that the raw materials and ingredients are halal if the suppliers are from Muslim.

3.2.2 Cleanliness and Hygiene

With respect to cleanliness, hygiene and pest control, there were various initiatives of cleanliness practice being adopted at the food premises. Among them were the enforcement of scheduled cleaning practice. Among the important issue in this case is the effectiveness and the enforcement of the cleaning schedule. The halal executive had problems to ensure that the workers follow the cleaning schedule and they lack of mechanism to make sure all their workers follow the cleaning schedule. The crucial issue regarding the enforcement of the cleaning schedule is whether the workers really follow the schedule. Additionally, another approach taken by the halal executive to ensure the practice of cleanliness during the food processing for the production of safe and hygiene food. This practice is achieved by setting a Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) for controlling the movement of workers during the food processing procedure. There are some halal executives at the food premises who have provided training for their workers. The training provides the workers with some understanding on the importance of cleanliness, especially at the food processing areas. There were also instances where the food premises initiate a cleanliness policy to be imposed to all workers at the premise. The policy emphasises that cleanliness is essential during food processing. Another initiative taken by the halal executives are setting up a committee that monitors on the cleanliness at the food premises. With regards the pest control, the halal executives admitted that they monitor the pest control by hiring external pest control companies or they do it on their own. It is important to note the most of the halal executives admitted that they take their own actions to control the pest.

The issue of hygiene and safe food is also related to the actions taken to prevent multiple pollution on the food prepared. Among the potential pollutions are the exposed of the food to chemical products, such as cleanser solutions, insects pesticides and many others which are stored in the food premises. Most of the halal executives claimed that they separated the hazardous products from the area where they prepared the food. They also claimed that they sent their workers for training on handling hazardous products at their premise to reduce the risk of exposing hazardous product to the food. With respect to the practice of cleanliness, majority of the halal executives ensure that their workers wear proper attire when handling food. Specifically, workers are enforced to wear apron, hat cover, and gloves. The workers are expected to make sure that their finger nails are clean and short when handling food at the premise. All these practices are the requirements which have been enforced by the Ministry of Health Malaysia (MOH) and has been briefed during the trainings on handling food organised by the MOH.

3.2.3 Documentation

The third practice of IHAS is documentation. One of the requirements to comply with the IHAS is to have sufficient documents so that the practice of compliance with the IHAS can be traced. The halal executives need to create a special file with the relevant documents as evidence that they comply to the IHAS. All of the halal executives were aware of the requirement and placed all the relevant documents required by JAKIM and JAIM in the file. Among the documents they compile are the company's profile, list of raw materials and ingredients used at the premise which have been registered with JAKIM or JAIM, letters and reports issued by JAKIM and JAIM during their visit at the premise. There are also some documents related to initiatives for improvements such as documents on the latest news and reports from JAKIM and JAIM about the raw materials and ingredients in the mass media and websites from JAIM and JAKIM. These documents were kept for the precautionary actions regarding the raw materials they used at their premises.

3.2.4 Internal Halal Committee

Finally, the last practise is the establishment of the internal halal committee members. This research reported that most of the premises did not establish a formal and special committee to oversee the implementation of IHAS. The committee members were appointed informally as long as they have some knowledge in Islam. Hence, the committee members have general Islamic knowledge and practice, and they are not specifically selected based on their knowledge of the IHAS. Further, there were also instances whereby the responsibilities of ensuring the compliance of IHAS were borne by one person at the food premise. The person in charge may not have the sufficient knowledge on the implementation of IHAS, except for having the background knowledge and practice in Islam, either acquired through formal education or informal (based on experience).

4. Discussion

The findings stated in the previous section indicate that the halal executive did implement the IHAS at their food premises. However, the implementation of IHAS was not done systematically, and it did not comply closely to the requirements of the IHAS. There was also cases where no specific committee was formed to ensure the implementation of IHAS that is fully complied to its requirements. The halal executives were found to

implement the IHAS based on their basic knowledge and skills on the IHAS, their general knowledge in Islam and their knowledge and experience in managing food premises. In this regard, it can be implied that the halal executives implement the IHAS based on their spiritual knowledge in Islam that is closely related to the rules of *syarak* and their technical knowledge related to the field of food technology and good practices in handling food at the food premises provided by the authorities. Based on their prior knowledge and experience, they implement the IHAS using their own creativity and understanding with less reference to the requirements of IHAS. In this case, the types of knowledge, skills and understanding that become the basis of their implementation of IHAS are presented in Table 3. Based on Table 3, the knowledge and skills that influence the implementation of IHAS at food premises as shown in Figure 1 can be adapted by differentiating the knowledge into three categories, namely, the spiritual knowledge (Knowledge in Islam), technical knowledge (knowledge in food technology) and knowledge in managing food premises.

Table 3. Mapping the types of Knowledge to Relevant Evidence

<i>Types of knowledge</i>	<i>Evidences</i>
Spiritual Knowledge (Knowledge in Islam)	Rules from the perspectives of syariah, halal and haram in Islam, <i>syubahah</i> and unhygienic.
Technical Knowledge	Knowledge related to food technology, cross contamination, harmful bacteria on food, proper way for food storage, correct way for cleaning and the use of chemical.
Understanding	The purpose of implementation, the consistent way of implementation, continuous training program, ethics and job responsibility, experience in the related accreditation process.
Skills in Managing Food Premise	Managing business, managing food premise, skills in the sections of the food premise, storage system, active halal committee members.

4.1 Spiritual Knowledge

With respect to spiritual knowledge, namely the knowledge in Islam, the halal executives need to have the knowledge on the rules and regulations that are stipulated by the relevant legislation (*syarak*) including issues related to *halal*, *syubahah*, *haram*, *najis* and others. This conclusion was derived from the interview questions no. 2, no. 3, no. 4, no 5, and no. 6. The answer for this questions required the respondents to have knowledge related to the rules of *syarak*, *halal*, *syubahah* and *haram*. Specifically issues related to the use of raw materials and critical ingredients such as the use of material based on slaughtered animal require the halal executives to make decisions based on their knowledge in Islam. In this case, most of the halal executives were concerned with the practice consistent with the Islamic law. Some of the operators of the food premises audited their suppliers to ensure that the source of the raw materials is halal.

4.2 Technical Knowledge

The technical knowledge relate to the halal executives' knowledge on food technology. This knowledge includes issues related to cross contamination, the danger of bacteria to food, the right techniques for food storage based on the correct temperature, techniques of cleaning and the control use of chemical products. This knowledge was evident based on the response to questions no 1, 2, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 and 12. Although the responsibility related to food technology is not directly inclusive in the job responsibility of the halal executives, they need to have some knowledge on food technology as it helps them to make decisions regarding the use and handling of raw materials and critical ingredients. In this case, it can be seen that both the spiritual and technical knowledge are complementary to each other, and it is crucial for the halal executives to have both knowledge when making decision to produce quality food.

4.3 Understanding of IHAS

Understanding of the IHAS is also crucial for the effective implementation of IHAS. Data from the interviews indicate that the halal executives can only understand the IHAS when they have the spiritual and technical

knowledge. Specifically, the halal executives need to understand the purpose of implementing the IHAS and they need to be ethical and responsible to the task given to them. Besides the understanding is also related to their past experience working in food premises. Sufficient training can also contribute to the understanding of IHAS.

4.4 Skills in Managing Food Premises

With respect to the skills in managing food premises, halal executives who have the skills in managing food premise will be able to implement the IHAS. With the relevant skills, they can facilitate an effective and efficient implementation of IHAS. Among the skills that are evidence from the interviews are skills on managing business, managing food premises in general and specific sections of the food premise, managing a particular storage system. With this skills, they can become the source of reference and active halal committee members.

4.5 Relationship between Knowledge and Skills of IHAS

The relationship between the types of knowledge and skills for the implementation of IHAS is presented in Figure 3. Based on this figure the spiritual knowledge, technical knowledge and understanding are interrelated to each other and they are categorised as the knowledge needed to implement the IHAS. In this case, the halal executives require both the spiritual and technical knowledge to make decisions regarding the implementation of IHAS. Additionally, their understanding of the IHAS contribute to the sustainable implementation of IHAS. Besides the knowledge, the skills in managing the food premise also contribute to the sustainable implementation of IHAS. The knowledge together with the understanding of the importance or the value of implementing IHAS and the skills in managing food premise, the sustainbale implementation of IHAS can contribute to the competitive advantage and production of quality, safe and hygiene food product at the food premises.

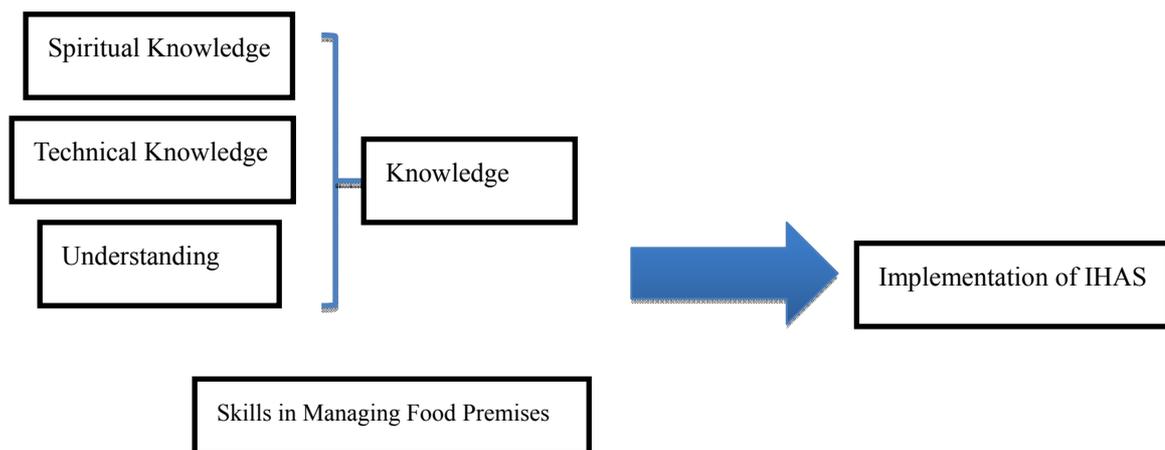


Figure 3. Interrelationship of the factors related to Implementation of IHAS

5. Conclusion

The study found that all of the food premises involved in this study have received the halal certification from JAKIM in the state of Malacca and they did implement the IHAS at their food premises. The food premises have taken the innitiatives to ensure that they complied to almost all of the requirements stipulated in the documents related to the halal certification, such as the MS 1500-2009 (Halal Food – Production, Preparation, Handling and Storage – General Guidelines (2nd revision), Food Act 1983 (Act 281), Guidelines For Halal Assurance Management System Of Malaysia Halal Certification, Rules and Regulations of Food 1985 dan Guidelines for Cleanliness and Food Safety by the Ministry of Health (MOH) Malaysia 2009, the decision of the Committee of the National Council of Fatwa of the Islamic Religion Affairs or the fatwa gazzetted by the State. However, the the implementation of the IHAS was not specifically based on thier understanding of the system, but mainy based on their general and background knowledge and understanding of Islam, technical knowledge on food technology and past experience and knowledge on managing food premises. Therefore, a compilation of the good practices of handling food based on the IHAS is required so that it can be made as a standard operating procedure (SOP) to be implemented at the food premises. This initiative does not only facilitate the efficiency of implementing the IHAS, but it also helps to ensure the sustainable practice of producing quality, safe and hygiene food at the food premises.

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Notes

Note 1. JAKIM is a commonly used acronym of the Department of Islamic Development Malaysia in Malay language.

Note 2. JAIM is a commonly used acronym of the State Department of Islamic Religion in Malay language.

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