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Obtaining Halal Food for International Muslim Students in Muslim-Minority Countries

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ABSTRACT

The experiences of international Muslim students studying abroad are characterized by a careful balancing act between their academic endeavors and the maintenance of their cultural and religious identities in a world turning increasingly interconnected. When it comes to the many parts of daily life, eating habits are one that stands out as being closely associated with religious commitment. The availability of halal food, which complies with Islamic dietary regulations, becomes an important concern for Muslim students studying abroad. This research aims to identify how international Muslim students obtaining halal food in Muslim-minority countries. The method applied in this research is narrative literature review. The research findings identified that several international Muslim students studying abroad still have to fight for their rights to be provided by halal meals options within their schools, while another universities in another continents had recognize the dietary needs of their Muslim students and strive to provide halal food options on campus.

Keywords: *Halal Food, International Muslim Students, Muslim-Minority Countries*

INTRODUCTION

The experiences of international Muslim students studying abroad are characterized by a careful balancing act between their academic endeavors and the maintenance of their cultural and religious identities in a world turning increasingly interconnected. When it comes to the many parts of daily life, eating habits are one that stands out as being closely associated with religious commitment. The availability of halal food, which complies with Islamic dietary regulations, becomes an important concern for Muslim students studying abroad. The importance of eating halal cuisine goes far beyond taste buds; it involves cultural identity, religious commitment, and overall health (Jusmaliani & Nasution, 2021).

Halal is a key and primary requirement for Muslims in their daily lives. The word halal itself is an Arabic term which denotes anything that is allowed or lawful. This term applies to all conducts, not only the act of consumption. As a concept, halal has already developed into a major industry these days, expanding beyond food to include various aspects of Muslim daily life including medicine and cosmetics (Morlin-Yron, 2016). In terms of food, halal refers to a category of food or beverage that Muslims may consume according to Islamic law. Halal food must comply with tight sanitation and hygiene standards, making it acknowledged for its cleanliness as well as high quality (Triansyah, 2023). Examples of Halal food include a wide range of products such as common foods, confections, desserts, snacks, bread, breakfast cereals, cakes, candies, doughnuts, cookies, pastries, chewing gum, and so on (Hamid et al., 2022; Sulaiman et al., 2023). Halal food is not only consumed by Muslims but is also sought after by non-Muslims due to its high quality from the perspectives of safety and hygiene (Riaz & Riaz, 2024).

The exact opposite of halal is *haram*, a term in Arabic that implies forbidden or unlawful. It specifically refers to things that are forbidden or prohibited according to Islamic teachings. The concept of haram has both a negative connotation, representing everything that is bad, evil, or sinful. Food that is forbidden or unlawful by Islamic law is referred to as haram food, according to Islamic law. It includes items such as pork and its by-products, alcohol and products made with it, blood and its by-products, dead animals and their products, and animals slaughtered while reciting a name other than God (Riaz & Riaz, 2024). Haram food can also include halal food that has been contaminated or mixed with any haram ingredients. The consumption of haram food is believed to have negative impacts on human health and society in general (Musdja, 2018). It is considered a violation of Islamic teachings and is believed to be associated with certain diseases and disorders. The distinction between halal (permissible) and haram (forbidden) foods is based on the teachings of the Quran and Hadith (Milhan, 2022).

The concept of halal food has gained global recognition, and many Muslim-minority countries are exporting halal foods to foreign countries (Mostafa, 2022). The halal food industry often faces challenges such as low awareness, uncertainties regarding ingredients, and misleading information on product packaging (Secinaro & Calandra, 2021). This circumstance has become a challenge for international Muslim student as well, considering they have to be careful in choosing everyday food to consume daily while staying abroad.

Numerous research concerning the procurement of halal food in Muslim-minority areas had been conducted in the past. Takdir & Hamida (2023) conducted a research on the potential for halal cuisine development and the availability of halal cuisine in Tana Toraja, as one of areas in Indonesia where Muslims are not the dominant demographic. Their research findings suggested that Toraja, as a Muslim-minority area, has little access to halal cuisine. Additionally, through involvement of stakeholders, the research revealed a considerable opportunity and potential for the development of halal cuisine. As a result, the government and tourism management must prioritize the supply of halal cuisine in Tana Toraja. Furthermore, Samad et al. (2022) also conducted a similar research on the phenomenon of halal cuisine in the Muslim minority region in Manado, North Sulawesi. Despite Manado's reputation as a Muslim-minority area, their research indicates that Muslim business owners there are still in an advantageous position of selling their halal food products. Lastly, Nawawi et al., (2019) They conduct a research which seeks to examine the development of the halal industry in Thailand. According to the findings of their research, Thailand has a significant market share in the worldwide halal market due to its thriving tourism sector, which supports the nation's halal branding, uniformed halal definitions and standards, and efficient support for small and medium-sized enterprises or SMEs.

According to the findings of the mentioned prior research above, none of these research has specifically discussed the struggles and ways of international Muslim students obtaining halal food while staying abroad. Conforming to the context of the situation as detailed above, therefore, the objective of this research is to identify how international Muslim students obtaining halal food in Muslim-minority countries.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The method applied in this research is narrative literature review. A narrative literature review is a type of research method that involves analyzing and summarizing existing literature on a specific topic (Snyder, 2019). It aims to identify key themes, theories, and findings from multiple sources to inform theory, practice, and research in a particular field. The review process typically involves conducting a systematic search of relevant publications, analyzing the

content of the selected articles, and synthesizing the information to draw meaningful conclusions (Xiao & Watson, 2019). Unlike systematic reviews that follow a structured and rigorous process with predefined criteria, a narrative review provides a more qualitative and interpretive overview of the literature (Masse et al., 2023). In addition, the primary data from this research was taken from several sources, such as articles, theses, online news articles, books, and so on.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Halal refers to the food and products that are permissible or lawful according to Islamic law. It is a certification that ensures the product is prepared in accordance with the guidelines mentioned in the Quran, the ultimate source of guidance for all aspects of a Muslim's life. Halal certification is not limited to food items but also applies to lifestyle offerings such as fashion, travel, medicines, and hospitality services (Dhaundiyal & Anand, 2023). In the realm of fashion, for instance, halal-certified clothing lines adhere to modesty standards and utilize materials that are ethically sourced and free from prohibited substances according to Islamic principles. Similarly, in the travel industry, halal-certified accommodations and tour packages cater to the unique requirements of Muslim travelers, offering amenities and services that align with their cultural and religious sensibilities. Additionally, in the realm of healthcare, halal-certified medicines and pharmaceutical products are manufactured in compliance with Islamic guidelines, ensuring that they are free from any ingredients or processes that may compromise their halal status. Likewise, hospitality services such as halal-certified restaurants and hotels prioritize halal practices in their operations, providing reassurance to Muslim customers regarding the integrity and suitability of their offerings. By expanding the scope of halal certification to encompass these diverse lifestyle offerings, businesses and industries demonstrate a commitment to inclusivity, diversity, and respect for the values and preferences of Muslim consumers worldwide.

Halal foods are free from any components that are prohibited in Islam and are processed using utensils and equipment that have been cleansed according to Islamic law (Riaz & Riaz, 2024). Moreover, the production and processing of halal foods entail rigorous measures to guarantee the purity and sanctity of the final product, with utensils and equipment subjected to thorough cleansing procedures in accordance with Islamic jurisprudence. This purification process, guided by the principles of *taharah* (ritual purity), involves meticulous cleansing and sanitization to rid the utensils and equipment of any impurities or contaminants that may compromise the halal status of the food (Nazihah & Arifin, 2020). By meticulously adhering to these purification rituals, manufacturers and producers uphold the integrity of halal foods, affirming their commitment to

honoring Islamic dietary laws and ensuring the sanctity and wholesomeness of the final food product.

The term halal also encompasses the concept of *dhabiha*, which means that the animal that was going to be consumed has been slaughtered according to Islamic methods (Nor & Hassan, 2022). This intricate process, deeply rooted in religious tradition and ethical considerations, entails a humane and ritualistic method of slaughter aimed at minimizing the animal's suffering and ensuring its swift and merciful demise. Through the practice of *dhabiha*, adherents of Islam uphold the sanctity of life and demonstrate reverence for the intrinsic value of all living beings, adhering to a set of guidelines that dictate the proper procedure for slaughter (Mukherjee, 2014). This includes invoking the name of Allah prior to the act, using a sharp instrument to swiftly sever the major blood vessels in the neck, and ensuring that the animal is treated with respect and compassion throughout the entire process (Nor & Hassan, 2022). By adhering to these stringent standards, the practice of *dhabiha* not only fulfills the requirements of halal but also embodies a profound commitment to ethical stewardship and compassion towards all creatures entrusted to our care.

Halal products have gained popularity among both Muslim and non-Muslim consumers as they are seen as a mark of the safety, hygiene, and reliability of a food (Norwahidayah et al., 2020). This burgeoning popularity stems from a recognition of halal certification as not merely an indicator of adherence to Islamic dietary laws but also as a testament to the meticulous quality control measures and stringent standards upheld throughout the production process. As discerning consumers increasingly prioritize health, ethical sourcing, and transparency in their food choices, the halal label emerges as a beacon of trust, assuring consumers—Muslim and non-Muslim alike—of the utmost integrity and wholesomeness of the products they select. Moreover, the growing demand for halal products reflects a broader societal shift towards embracing diversity and inclusivity, with consumers embracing halal offerings as a symbol of cultural appreciation and cross-cultural harmony (Halal, 2023). In essence, the rising prominence of halal products underscores their universal appeal and resonates with consumers' desire for products that not only satisfy their dietary needs but also embody values of integrity, authenticity, and respect for diversity.

The certification of halal products is necessary for Muslim consumers to ensure that the products they use align with their cultural and religious beliefs (Rohman & Windarsih, 2020). This certification serves as a beacon of trust and authenticity in a market inundated with diverse offerings, allowing Muslim consumers to navigate the plethora of choices with confidence, knowing that the products they select are meticulously scrutinized and compliant with the rigorous standards prescribed by Islamic dietary laws. Beyond mere compliance, halal certification serves as a tangible embodiment of respect for the sacred traditions and dietary restrictions observed by Muslim communities worldwide, fostering a

sense of connection and reverence for their religion. In essence, the certification of halal products transcends mere logistical necessity; it represents a profound commitment to honoring the religious convictions and cultural identities of Muslim consumers, affirming their right to access products that resonate harmoniously with their deeply held beliefs and values.

Common misconceptions about halal food include the belief that it is only a religious concept and not related to health concerns at all (Wahab, 2019). While halal indeed originates from Islamic dietary guidelines, it encompasses broader principles that extend beyond religious observance to encompass various health and ethical considerations. Non-Muslims often perceive halal as a religious concept rather than a health-related concern (Askomi et al., 2018). Another misconception is that halal food is only suitable for Muslims, when in fact it is also suitable for non-Muslims (Adekunle & Filson, 2020). Despite its origins in Islamic dietary laws, halal food transcends religious boundaries and holds broader appeal due to its adherence to rigorous quality standards, ethical sourcing practices, and emphasis on cleanliness and animal welfare. Contrary to popular belief, halal-certified products offer a diverse array of culinary options that cater to the preferences and dietary requirements of a multicultural society, making them equally suitable and accessible to non-Muslim consumers seeking high-quality, wholesome choices of food. This misconception overlooks the universal appeal of halal food, which resonates with individuals seeking nutritious, ethically sourced, and culturally diverse culinary experiences, regardless of their religious beliefs or cultural backgrounds.

Additionally, there are misconceptions about the practices and requirements of halal slaughter, with some incorrect practices being thought to be required (Jalil et al., 2018). These misunderstandings may stem from a lack of familiarity with the nuanced guidelines outlined in Islamic jurisprudence regarding the permissible methods of animal slaughter. As a result, misconceptions may arise regarding specific techniques or rituals that are mistakenly believed to be mandatory components of halal slaughter. These misconceptions can obscure the true essence of halal slaughter, which prioritizes compassion, humanity, and adherence to strict ethical standards in the treatment of animals. By clarifying the authentic requirements of halal slaughter and dispelling misconceptions surrounding it, a deeper understanding can be fostered regarding the principles of compassion and ethical treatment that underpin halal dietary practices. Furthermore, these misconceptions can lead to a lack of trust in the market and challenges in ensuring the authenticity and traceability of halal food (Krishnan et al., 2017). Such skepticism arises from uncertainties surrounding the authenticity and traceability of halal food products, as misconceptions blur the lines between genuine halal-certified items and those that fall short of meeting the stringent requirements outlined by Islamic dietary laws. Consequently, this climate of doubt presents formidable challenges for regulatory bodies, food producers, and vendors tasked

with upholding the integrity of halal food supply chains. By addressing and rectifying these misconceptions, stakeholders can work collaboratively to reinforce consumer confidence, enhance transparency in labeling and certification processes, and ensure the seamless traceability of halal products from farm to fork. In doing so, the market can cultivate a climate of trust, integrity, and accountability that safeguards the interests of both Muslim and non-Muslim consumers seeking authentic halal food options.

When it comes to halal cuisine, especially for international Muslim students who find themselves abroad for their studies, the significance and allure of it cannot be overstated. The comforting familiarity of halal food not only provides a taste of home but also serves as a cultural anchor in an unfamiliar environment. In navigating the challenges of adapting to a new country, where culinary norms may differ vastly from what they're accustomed to, halal cuisine stands out as a reliable source of sustenance and connection to one's faith and identity. Whether it's exploring halal restaurants, carefully scrutinizing food labels, or even learning to cook traditional dishes themselves, these students go to great lengths to ensure that their dietary needs are met without compromising their beliefs. In doing so, they not only nourish their bodies but also nurture a sense of belonging and community, forging bonds with fellow Muslims and non-Muslims alike over shared meals and cultural exchanges. Thus, while their academic pursuits may take them far from home, the flavors of halal cuisine serve as a constant reminder of who they are and where they come from, anchoring them in a world that is at once diverse and interconnected.

However, obtaining halal food in countries where Muslims are in the minority may present a significant challenge for many international Muslim students. In such conditions, the availability of halal options may be limited, and navigating the intricacies of local food practices becomes a daily struggle. Unlike in predominantly Muslim countries where halal food is the norm and easily accessible, these students often find themselves in environments where their dietary requirements are not widely understood or accommodated.

Finding halal food options on campus has proven to be a constant struggle. A sense of acceptance within the academic community is sought for by international students from a variety of cultural and religious backgrounds. Leading the charge in promoting the availability of halal meals is the Muslim Student Association (MSA) at the University of Southern Mississippi (USM). The president of the USM Muslim Student Association, Shiza Shahid, stated that the association often works with Eagle Dining, the campus dining options, to arrange on-campus gatherings with Halal cuisine during the semester. Shahid further underlined that including Halal food into the fresh menu is relatively straightforward on campus. Similar thoughts were expressed by MSA Vice-President Saba Shahid, who asserted that while they have attempted to assist certain students by inviting them over, it has not been enough (Lama, 2023).

Meanwhile, the University of North Carolina dining halls have catered to the dietary requirements of Muslim students by providing halal-certified meals since 2022. However, some students are reluctant to consume these options due to worries regarding the authenticity of halal food. Students' concerns have been aroused by the labeling of some food products as halal, including vegetables, noodles, and even pork sausages, even though Carolina Dining Services (CDS) offers an online menu enabling them to customize their meals. Due to the uncertainty surrounding the source of halal meat and possible cross-contamination concerns, some students have ceased going to the dining halls altogether. The UNC alumni Dalal Azzam and CDS collaborated together to provide halal choices on campus; nevertheless, there are still some questions concerning where the halal protein comes from. In spite of these challenges, students such as Mariam Matin have taken initiatives with organizations such as Halal Heels to promote the availability of halal food on campus and raise awareness of the importance of adhering to Islamic dietary laws. Some Muslim students prefer to prepare their own meals or eat at nearby halal eating places in order to maintain adherence to their dietary needs and support the principles of kindness and cleanliness in their food choices, even while UNC strives to further clarify its halal offerings (Khan, 2024).

In addition, the Illinois legislature recently passed a bill that requires state-funded institutions, such schools, to serve halal and kosher food upon request in order to accommodate the dietary requirements of the Jewish and Muslim communities. The Muslim Civic Coalition and other groups are leading this historic initiative, which responds to the growing demand for inclusive meal options in public spaces. The goal of the measure is to reduce food insecurity among minority groups, especially Muslims who frequently suffer financially. It is expected to take effect in July 2024, pending the governor's signature. While Illinois is leading the way, other states have seen the emergence of comparable programs that emphasize the significance of religious inclusivity in food access. Students at Chicago's Sullivan High School effectively advocated for halal food, highlighting the importance of these adjustments in creating a welcoming and fair learning environment. Students like Ridwan Rashid benefit from having access to halal options because they can focus more and have a better overall educational experience. This is evident in his transition to Loyola University, where there are plenty of different halal options (Terrell, 2023).

Recently, the Sharpe Refectory at Brown University established a new halal eating station, alongside kosher and allergen-aware kitchens, striving to address the dietary needs of diverse student populations. In the past, students who had dietary requirements had few options and frequently came across improperly labeled or unsuitable food. In order to guarantee proper certification and halal food preparation, the institution has improved its halal program and partnered with Halal Monitoring Services. Despite these improvements, a few students

voice concerns regarding the halal station's dimensions and visibility in comparison to the kosher kitchen. The intention of the changes is to raise awareness of the challenges faced by Muslim students on campus. Facilities-related issues, such as the Muslim Students' Center's lack of basic amenities such as bathroom, also draw attention to persistent worries about inclusivity and the demands of Muslim students on campus (Nelson, 2023).

The search for halal food in such countries may involve extensive research, meticulous label reading, and frequent inquiries at restaurants and grocery stores. Additionally, cultural and language barriers may further complicate the process, requiring students to rely on creative solutions and community networks to meet their dietary needs. Moreover, the absence of halal certification standards in some regions adds another layer of complexity, as students must rely on their own judgment and sometimes ambiguous labeling to determine the halal status of any food products that they encounter. This heightened vigilance is not just a matter of personal preference but is deeply rooted in religious beliefs and obligations. Furthermore, the lack of halal options can impact not only the physical well-being but also the emotional and psychological health of international Muslim students. Feeling marginalized or excluded from mainstream food culture can contribute to a sense of alienation and homesickness, exacerbating the challenges of adjusting to life in a new country.

Many universities around the world recognize the dietary needs of their Muslim students and strive to provide halal food options on campus. One example is the University of Toronto in Canada. They have dedicated halal food stations in several of their dining halls and cafeterias, ensuring that Muslim students have access to culturally appropriate and religiously permissible meals (Toronto, 2024). At the University of Toronto, administrators have proactively addressed the dietary preferences and religious considerations of their diverse student body by establishing dedicated halal food stations across various dining halls and cafeterias on campus. These specialized food stations are strategically positioned to ensure convenient access for Muslim students, providing them with a range of culturally appropriate and religiously permissible meal choices. Moreover, the university has implemented rigorous protocols to ensure the authenticity and compliance of its halal offerings, collaborating closely with reputable halal-certified suppliers and adhering to strict standards of preparation and handling. This commitment to quality and integrity underscores the university's dedication to meeting the dietary needs and respecting the religious beliefs of its Muslim students. Beyond merely providing halal food options, the University of Toronto fosters an inclusive and welcoming environment where students of all backgrounds feel valued and represented. By recognizing the significance of halal cuisine in the lives of Muslim students and actively incorporating it into the campus dining experience, the university demonstrates its commitment to diversity, equity, and cultural sensitivity.

Similarly, the University of Manchester in the United Kingdom also offers halal food options across its campus dining facilities (Manchester, 2024). They have worked closely with their Muslim student population to ensure that their dietary needs are met, including providing halal meat options and labeling halal-certified foods for easy identification. Through close consultation and engagement with Muslim student organizations and community leaders, the University of Manchester has demonstrated a steadfast dedication to understanding and addressing the specific dietary needs and cultural considerations of its Muslim students. This collaborative approach has resulted in the establishment of dedicated halal food stations and the integration of halal options into the menus of campus eateries, ensuring that Muslim students have access to a diverse array of halal-certified food choices. Furthermore, the university has implemented clear and prominent labeling systems to facilitate the identification of halal-certified foods, thereby enhancing transparency and enabling Muslim students to make informed choices about their dietary selections. By prioritizing accessibility and clarity in its halal food offerings, the University of Manchester reinforces its commitment to fostering an inclusive and supportive campus environment where all students feel valued and respected.

Shizuoka University Hamamatsu Campus, for another instance, serves as one of the best Muslim-friendly institutions in a Muslim-minority countries. Located in Shizuoka, Japan, the Hamamatsu cafeterias serve a wide range of meals and embrace a multicultural campus environment for all of their students (Television, 2015). The campus management strives to provide a space for all students to enjoy their meals together regardless of their nationalities, cultures, and religions. One of the newly added menus includes halal food, which will definitely become a convenience for their international Muslim students. Cited from their website, Shizuoka University Hamamatsu Campus is willing to make any efforts until they make the campus a home for all of their international students (Program, 2024).

These universities, among numerous others worldwide, demonstrate a profound understanding of the significance of catering to the diverse dietary requirements of their student population, particularly those tied to religious observance. Recognizing the intrinsic value of inclusivity and cultural sensitivity, these institutions have proactively undertaken measures to guarantee the accessibility and availability of halal food options within their campus dining facilities. Through collaborative efforts with student organizations, community leaders, and culinary experts, these universities have established dedicated halal food stations, integrated halal options into their menus, and implemented transparent labeling systems to facilitate informed decision-making for Muslim students. By prioritizing the dietary preferences and religious beliefs of their diverse student body, these universities exemplify a commitment to fostering an

environment of respect, understanding, and acceptance, where all individuals feel valued and supported in their pursuit of higher education.

Many international Muslim students demonstrate resilience and resourcefulness in their quest for halal food. They may form support networks with fellow international Muslim students, share tips and recommendations, and even advocate for increased halal options on campus or in their communities. In navigating the complexities of obtaining halal food in Muslim-minority countries, international Muslim students showcase not only their commitment to their faith but also their adaptability and perseverance in the face of adversity. Their experiences underscore the importance of fostering inclusive environments that respect and accommodate diverse dietary needs and cultural practices.

Maintaining a halal eating habits outside of their school or university campus can be very difficult for international Muslim students studying overseas. It takes resourcefulness and careful planning to follow Islamic dietary requirements while navigating unfamiliar culinary environments. These students frequently find themselves in countries with a lack of halal food options or where access suitable meals may be hampered by cultural differences. In spite of these challenges, Muslim overseas students use a variety of strategies to ensure they can get halal food outside of their schools. These students demonstrate perseverance as well as adaptation in maintaining their religious dietary standards while pursuing their education abroad, from exploring local restaurants to cooking at home and embracing community support.

CONCLUSION

Finding halal food options on campus has proven to be a universal constant struggle, especially for international Muslim students. A sense of acceptance within the academic community is sought for by international students from a variety of cultural and religious backgrounds. Several international Muslim students throughout the world still have to fight for their rights to be provided by halal meals options within their schools, while another universities such as University of Toronto, University of Manchester, and Shizuoka University Hamamatsu Campus, had recognize the dietary needs of their Muslim students and strive to provide halal food options on campus. Maintaining a halal eating habits outside of their school or university campus can be very difficult for international Muslim students studying overseas. These students frequently find themselves in countries with a lack of halal food options or where access suitable meals may be hampered by cultural differences. In spite of these challenges, Muslim overseas students use a variety of strategies to get halal food outside of their schools. These students demonstrate perseverance and adaptation in maintaining their religious dietary standards while pursuing their education abroad, from exploring local restaurants to cooking at home.

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