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Strengthening SEHATI self-declare halal certification in South Kalimantan: Roles, constraints, and field practices of Halal Product Process Companions

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ABSTRACT
Introduction

Indonesia's halal certification regime has expanded rapidly following the Halal Product Assurance Law, positioning halal assurance as both a consumer protection instrument and a strategic requirement for micro and small enterprises. To accelerate inclusion, the Free Halal Certification Program (SEHATI) applies a self-declare pathway that depends heavily on Halal Product Process Companions to facilitate verification and validation at the grassroots level. However, implementation performance varies across regions, raising questions about how frontline facilitation shapes program outcomes in geographically dispersed provinces such as South Kalimantan.

Objectives

This study examines how Halal Product Process Companions operationalize SEHATI in South Kalimantan by analyzing their roles, constraints, and adaptive practices in assisting micro and small enterprises through the self-declare halal certification process. It also explores the structural and technical factors that contribute to implementation gaps between program targets and realized certification outcomes.

Method

This research used a qualitative field research design. Data were collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews with 37 Halal Product Process Companions selected purposively across districts and cities in South Kalimantan. Secondary data were obtained from relevant regulations, institutional reports, and prior studies. The

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analysis followed an iterative qualitative procedure involving data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing.

Results

The findings show that Halal Product Process Companions function as hybrid implementers who perform two interdependent roles: educating micro and small enterprises about halal requirements and providing technical support for verification, validation, and digital submission. Implementation is constrained by administrative complexity, unstable internet connectivity, platform limitations, and uneven institutional support. At the enterprise level, limited digital literacy, uneven halal knowledge, and weak responsiveness delay certification completion and increase facilitation workload. These conditions explain why SEHATI outcomes may fall short of targets despite simplified procedures.

Implications

The study highlights that SEHATI effectiveness depends on integrated capacity building and institutional support, including improved digital infrastructure, simplified workflows, stronger training, and structured supervision to sustain both accessibility and certification credibility.

Originality/Novelty

This research contributes field-based evidence on self-declare halal certification implementation by centering Halal Product Process Companions as frontline intermediaries whose dual roles and constraints shape the practical success of SEHATI at the provincial level.

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is widely recognized as the world's largest Muslim-majority country and has become a central actor in the global halal economy, particularly in the food and beverage sector. The State of the Global Islamic Economy 2025 report notes Indonesia's rise to third place in the Global Islamic Economy Indicator, reflecting the country's accelerating progress in developing a national halal ecosystem (DinarStandard, 2025). This trajectory is closely tied to the government's regulatory consolidation through the Halal Product Assurance Law, which requires products circulating in Indonesia—including those produced by micro and small enterprises (MSEs)—to obtain halal certification (Prawiro & Fathudin, 2023; Syafaq et al., 2024). Within this context, halal certification increasingly functions not merely as a religious compliance mechanism, but also as an institutional marker of product quality and consumer protection that can strengthen market legitimacy and competitiveness for small businesses.

Recent scholarship further demonstrates that halal certification has become strategically important for micro and small enterprises because it shapes consumer trust, influences purchase decisions, and improves perceived product reliability. Empirical studies show that halal certification is positively associated with consumer trust, especially in Muslim consumer markets where certification signals compliance and safety assurance (R. Fitri et al., 2023). Awareness-building initiatives also appear to reinforce this trust by increasing enterprise-level understanding of halal compliance and strengthening consumer confidence in certified producers (Nadia et al., 2023). At the same time, halal compliance is increasingly viewed as a baseline expectation for Muslim consumers, as it assures conformity with religious dietary standards and reinforces perceptions of product quality (Syariva et al., 2024). Beyond consumer trust, halal certification has become a pathway for micro and small enterprises to access wider domestic and global markets and to differentiate products in increasingly competitive environments (Purbasari et al., 2023; Radhitya et al., 2024; Yandrizal et al., 2025). This strategic relevance has been amplified by Indonesia's regulatory transition toward mandatory certification (Hardiyanto et al., 2023), which has positioned halal assurance as both a legal requirement and a market instrument that shapes business sustainability.

Despite these opportunities, the implementation of halal certification for micro and small enterprises remains constrained by structural and operational barriers. Studies consistently identify administrative complexity as a key deterrent, as certification procedures often require extensive documentation and procedural literacy that many enterprises cannot easily provide (F. J. Azhari et al., 2025; A. T. Fitri et al., 2025). Digital transformation has also created new demands: many micro and small enterprises lack the digital skills needed to navigate online platforms for certification registration and compliance reporting (Atmojo et al., 2024). This challenge is intensified in rural areas where access to training is limited and digital engagement remains uneven (R. Umami & Musadad, 2023). Infrastructure gaps—especially unreliable internet connectivity—further obstruct participation by preventing enterprises from accessing systems, submitting documents, and engaging with support mechanisms (Meldona & Rochayatun, 2024). Moreover, cost and time burdens remain salient: even when certification is framed as beneficial, perceived financial constraints and the time required to complete certification can discourage participation (F. J. Azhari et al., 2025; Utami et al., 2022).

To address these constraints, policy discussions increasingly emphasize the need for systemic facilitation rather than solely regulatory enforcement. Streamlining administrative requirements is frequently proposed as a foundational solution, especially through simplifying documentation demands and improving the usability of digital certification systems (F. J. Azhari et al., 2025). Strengthening digital literacy programs and expanding infrastructure access are also highlighted as necessary conditions for inclusive certification participation (Atmojo et al., 2024; Meldona & Rochayatun, 2024). Financial assistance and subsidies remain another widely recommended strategy to reduce participation barriers for resource-constrained

enterprises (Priantina et al., 2024; R. Umami & Musadad, 2023). Additionally, scholars underline the importance of consistent institutional support and inter-agency coordination to reduce confusion and improve procedural clarity across regions (Susandini et al., 2025). Community engagement and awareness campaigns are likewise framed as essential, particularly to ensure that micro and small enterprises understand the benefits, processes, and regulatory implications of halal certification (Hidayah et al., 2023). These broad recommendations suggest that successful halal certification policy requires an enabling ecosystem, not merely formal regulation.

In Indonesia, one of the most prominent facilitation mechanisms has been the Free Halal Certification Program (Sertifikasi Halal Gratis abbreviated SEHATI in Bahasa Indonesia), launched by Halal Product Assurance Organizing Body (Badan Penyelenggara Jaminan Produk Halal abbreviated BPJPH in Bahasa Indonesia) in 2021 as a strategic policy to accelerate certification uptake among micro and small enterprises through a self-declare model (Tuhuteru & Iqbal, 2024). The program was designed to make certification faster, cheaper, and more efficient, particularly for small producers who face administrative and financial constraints (Mutmainah & Romadhon, 2023; Rizkaprilisa et al., 2024). The self-declare scheme is explicitly framed as an affirmative intervention to ensure that halal certification does not become an excessive burden for micro and small enterprises (Amalia & Andni, 2023). Existing evidence suggests that SEHATI has contributed to increasing the number of halal certificates issued for micro and small enterprises (Magfiratun et al., 2025). However, policy implementation has also experienced adjustment dynamics, including the postponement of the mandatory halal certification deadline for micro and small enterprises from October 2024 to October 2026, reflecting the state's recognition that business actors need more time to adapt to technical and administrative requirements (Fattah et al., 2025; Hidayah et al., 2025). This postponement implies that facilitation capacity remains a critical determinant of whether mandatory halal assurance can be realized equitably.

Within the SEHATI framework, a core operational solution is the formal involvement of Halal Product Process Companions (Pendamping Proses Produk Halal abbreviated P3H in Bahasa Indonesia), who function as frontline actors responsible for verifying and validating micro and small enterprise submissions under the self-declare mechanism (Lestari et al., 2024). P3H are individuals trained through LP3H under BPJPH coordination and mandated to assist enterprises throughout the certification process (Hasanah & Jenita, 2023; Huda et al., 2024). Their role extends beyond technical administration: P3H also act as facilitators who explain halal–haram concepts, guide enterprises in tracing ingredients and production processes, and ensure that documents are properly submitted through the SIHALAL system (Naisabur & Putra, 2024). This expanded role becomes particularly important because many micro and small enterprises face limited access to information, low digital literacy, and weak technical understanding of the halal assurance system. Consequently, certification success in peripheral areas is strongly shaped by the intensity and quality of P3H assistance, positioning them as practical catalysts who connect small producers with a complex national system. In

operational terms, P3H also contribute to awareness-building, motivation, and the maintenance of halal integrity during the certification process, reinforcing the credibility of self-declare certification pathways.

Nevertheless, empirical accounts increasingly show that P3H operate under significant constraints that shape program effectiveness, particularly in geographically dispersed and socio-culturally diverse regions. Kalimantan Selatan represents a relevant case because its geographic conditions can limit access to certification services and intensify dependence on intermediaries. In this province, LP3H UIN Antasari recruited and trained 910 P3H across several clusters, including students, religious counselors, madrasa actors, and community members. Yet, despite BPJPH setting a quota of 7,600 free certificates for Kalimantan Selatan in 2023, realization by December 2023 was only 3,810 (accumulated since 2021), indicating a substantial gap between targets and outcomes (Wicaksono, 2024). These figures suggest that policy design alone cannot guarantee implementation success and that field-level constraints may obstruct certification acceleration. In practice, P3H frequently encounter structural challenges such as weak digital infrastructure, limited institutional support, socio-cultural barriers, and regulatory complexity, alongside technical barriers including low enterprise digital literacy, limited halal knowledge, and weak responsiveness from business actors. Such realities underscore the need to analyze SEHATI not only through normative regulatory lenses but also through the lived experiences of the frontline implementers who operationalize the policy.

Prior research has often emphasized the regulatory urgency and procedural design of halal certification, including self-declare mechanisms, while giving less attention to the empirical dynamics of facilitation at the local level. Studies have noted that SEHATI and self-declare schemes can increase accessibility, yet concerns persist about oversight adequacy and the need for sustained education among micro and small enterprises (Disemadi & Putri, 2024). Research on the Halal Product Assurance Law also highlights that institutional transitions and implementation delays remain significant, reinforcing the importance of coordination among stakeholders (Kharrazi et al., 2024; Yakub & Zein, 2022; Zainudin et al., 2024). In parallel, literature on certification systems emphasizes that intermediaries—such as facilitators, auditors, or street-level implementers—play a decisive role in bridging knowledge gaps and building trust through transparent and credible processes (Rafiuddin et al., 2024; Sadiyah & Erawati, 2024; Widiarty, 2024). Their effectiveness is shaped by training quality, inter-institutional collaboration, resource availability, and institutional legitimacy (Identiti et al., 2024; Madun et al., 2022; M. Sari et al., 2023). However, studies specifically examining P3H constraints and operational burdens at the provincial level remain limited, particularly regarding workload expansion, resource limitations, and social dynamics with enterprises (Fadhilah et al., 2024). This gap indicates a need for empirically grounded analysis that treats P3H as policy intermediaries whose performance directly shapes SEHATI outcomes.

In response to this gap, the present study investigates the roles and challenges faced by P3H in implementing SEHATI in Kalimantan Selatan, a region characterized by

geographic dispersion and socio-cultural plurality. This study aims to provide a contextual and empirical understanding of how P3H function as both educators who promote halal awareness and technical actors who ensure the accuracy of self-declare submissions through verification and validation processes. It also seeks to identify structural challenges (digital infrastructure limitations, institutional support deficits, socio-cultural barriers, regulatory complexity) and technical challenges (enterprise digital literacy constraints, limited halal knowledge, weak responsiveness) that shape facilitation effectiveness. By centering the experiences of P3H as frontline implementers, this research contributes to halal policy implementation literature that has been dominated by procedural and regulatory discussions, offering a grounded explanation of why implementation gaps persist even when facilitation mechanisms exist. Ultimately, the study justifies its novelty through an empirical exploration of P3H operational realities and provides evidence-based implications for strengthening SEHATI's sustainability and credibility at the grassroots level.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Halal Certification as a Governance Instrument in Contemporary Markets

Halal certification has increasingly been framed not only as a religious requirement but also as a modern governance instrument that strengthens consumer protection, product accountability, and market legitimacy. In Muslim-majority economies, halal certification provides an institutional guarantee that products comply with Islamic principles while simultaneously responding to growing concerns about safety and ethical consumption. From this perspective, certification serves as a trust-building mechanism that reduces information asymmetry between producers and consumers, particularly in food-related markets where risk perceptions are high. This governance function is relevant in Indonesia, where halal consumption is a dominant cultural expectation and where certification has become intertwined with broader market regulation (DinarStandard, 2025).

Recent studies conceptualize halal certification as a mechanism for consumer protection and quality assurance, particularly through systems that support transparency and traceability. Fitriani et al. (2023) argue that halal certification safeguards consumer rights by ensuring that products are safe, hygienic, and religiously permissible, thereby enabling informed consumption decisions. In addition, halal traceability systems are frequently discussed as instruments that strengthen certification credibility by linking halal assurance to supply-chain monitoring and product integrity (Sadiyah & Erawati, 2024). Traceability is also emphasized as a core dimension of food governance because it supports accountability and minimizes risks in production and distribution networks (Khan et al., 2018).

Beyond protection and quality, halal certification contributes to market legitimacy and competitiveness, particularly for small enterprises operating in increasingly regulated environments. Certification functions as a market signal that enhances acceptance in both domestic and international markets, especially where halal

compliance is associated with ethical consumption standards and standardized production practices (Abu Bakar et al., 2023). From an institutional standpoint, firms often adopt certification because of normative and regulatory pressures that shape business legitimacy (Najmi et al., 2023). Stakeholder theory further suggests that certification strengthens relationships between enterprises, regulators, and consumers by formalizing trust expectations (Fitriani et al., 2023). A Maqasid Shari'ah perspective also frames certification as contributing to welfare, innovation, and social justice within the halal economy (Ma'arif & Firdaus, 2024).

Indonesia's Regulatory Framework for Halal Product Assurance

In Indonesia, halal certification has become increasingly institutionalized through the enactment of Law No. 33 of 2014 on Halal Product Assurance, which mandates halal certification for products circulating in the national market (Indrawan et al., 2022; Mulyani & Prasetyo, 2025). The law formalizes halal assurance as a regulatory obligation rather than a voluntary market choice, requiring that all products entering, circulating, and traded in Indonesia obtain halal certification (Mariyam et al., 2022; Mujanah, 2024). This transformation reflects Indonesia's broader ambition to strengthen its halal ecosystem and increase its competitiveness in the global halal industry. In this framework, halal governance becomes a public regulatory responsibility rather than solely a religious endorsement.

A key institutional development following the law is the establishment of BPJPH as the central administrative body responsible for managing the halal certification system. BPJPH operates under the Ministry of Religious Affairs and coordinates halal certification governance, including certification administration and collaboration with related institutions (Nugroho et al., 2021; Ramadhany, 2024). This institutional shift reconfigures the previous monopoly held by MUI, although MUI and its related bodies remain significant in issuing religious fatwas and supporting certification legitimacy (M. Azhari & Ulinnuha, 2023). Collaborative arrangements with regional and local institutions are frequently identified as important for increasing inclusivity and improving implementation outcomes across diverse contexts (Zarkasyi et al., 2021).

However, the transition to mandatory certification has generated implementation challenges that disproportionately affect micro and small enterprises. A persistent issue is limited awareness among enterprises regarding certification procedures, requirements, and the available facilitation schemes (M. Azhari & Ulinnuha, 2023; Ramadhany, 2024). Compliance uncertainty also remains prominent, as many enterprises struggle to interpret standards and translate them into operational practices (Wahyuni et al., 2023). Financial barriers further constrain participation, especially for enterprises with limited capital and administrative capacity (Atsari et al., 2025). These challenges suggest that regulatory transformation alone cannot guarantee effective implementation without facilitation mechanisms that address enterprise constraints and local disparities.

SEHATI and the Self-Declare Halal Certification Model

To expand certification access, Indonesia introduced SEHATI as a strategic facilitation program aimed at accelerating halal certification for micro and small enterprises through a self-declare model (Santoso & Rachman, 2024). SEHATI was designed to ensure that halal certification does not become an excessive administrative or financial burden for enterprises that operate with limited resources (Amalia & Andni, 2023). In principle, the self-declare scheme enables eligible enterprises to certify their products more efficiently, relying on simplified procedures and assisted documentation. Empirical discussions indicate that this model has supported increased issuance of halal certificates for micro and small enterprises, reinforcing its role as an affirmative policy tool (Magfiratun et al., 2025).

Scholarly work emphasizes that self-declare certification offers advantages in speed, accessibility, and cost reduction compared with conventional certification models. Umami et al. (2023) argue that SEHATI significantly reduces the time and administrative burden associated with traditional certification processes. From an inclusion perspective, self-declare schemes also widen access for enterprises that lack experience, technical capacity, or financial readiness to pursue formal certification through more complex routes (Sadiyah & Erawati, 2024). Cost reduction is another critical advantage, as the elimination of certain fees can motivate enterprises to participate and improve overall compliance coverage (Wijoyo et al., 2023). These features make self-declare certification particularly attractive for grassroots economic development.

At the same time, self-declare certification raises concerns regarding verification gaps, credibility risks, and standard inconsistency. Hasan & Abd Latif (2024) note that simplified certification pathways may weaken oversight if accountability mechanisms are insufficient, potentially allowing false claims and undermining consumer trust. Credibility concerns become more pronounced when audits are limited or when enterprises lack the technical knowledge to ensure compliance independently (Syariva et al., 2024). In addition, inconsistent standards may emerge when self-declare practices are not supported by unified minimum requirements across enterprises (Kasanah & As Sajjad, 2022). These debates highlight the importance of designing safeguards that preserve both inclusivity and integrity within the certification system.

Safeguards and Policy Interventions for Strengthening Self-Declare Schemes

The literature increasingly argues that self-declare certification models require systematic safeguards to prevent credibility erosion and ensure reliable halal assurance. One widely recommended intervention is strengthening monitoring and auditing mechanisms to maintain accountability among enterprises using simplified certification routes. Regular supervision is viewed as essential for preventing false declarations and reinforcing consumer confidence in halal labels (Nahidloh & Qadariyah, 2021). In addition, collaborative arrangements between self-declaring enterprises and established halal institutions are proposed to enhance quality assurance and promote knowledge-sharing across the halal ecosystem (Wijoyo et al.,

2023). These safeguards suggest that self-declare models must be supported by institutional control systems rather than relying solely on enterprise declarations.

Capacity-building is also consistently emphasized as a core safeguard because many enterprises lack the knowledge required to interpret and apply halal standards correctly. Mahmud (2023) argues that educational interventions improve enterprise understanding of halal requirements and consumer expectations, reducing the risk of unintentional noncompliance. Standard-setting interventions are likewise recommended, particularly through defining minimum requirements for self-declare processes to reduce variation and maintain consistency (Pratama, 2024). These strategies align with broader perspectives that certification effectiveness depends on combining regulatory simplification with knowledge reinforcement, rather than treating simplification as an end in itself.

In addition to safeguarding credibility, evidence-based interventions are frequently proposed to improve participation and sustainability of certification programs for micro and small enterprises. Mentoring and assistance models are widely recognized as effective for guiding enterprises through certification complexities, especially when mentors provide practical support and confidence-building (Oemar et al., 2023). Digital facilitation tools can also reduce compliance burdens by streamlining submission processes and improving transparency (Rofiah et al., 2024). Simplifying documentation requirements remains essential for reducing bureaucratic barriers (Prawiro & Fathudin, 2023), while incentives and subsidies can lower financial obstacles and motivate participation (Hanifasari et al., 2024).

The Role of P3H as Frontline Implementers in Halal Certification

Within Indonesia's self-declare system, the role of P3H is central because they function as intermediaries connecting micro and small enterprises with national halal governance. P3H are individuals who have undergone official training and are registered through LP3H under BPJPH coordination, and they are mandated to assist enterprises in certification submission through the self-declare pathway (Hasanah & Jenita, 2023; Huda et al., 2024). Their work includes explaining halal concepts, guiding ingredient identification, supporting production-process mapping, and ensuring documentation completeness through SIHALAL (Naisabur & Putra, 2024). Because many enterprises face limited information access and weak digital literacy, P3H often become the decisive factor in whether certification processes can be completed effectively.

Empirical studies describe P3H as not only administrative facilitators but also as educators and quality assurance agents who help maintain halal integrity in small-scale production environments. Rachmawati et al. (2023) highlight that companions assist enterprises in interpreting halal requirements and completing certification stages, which reduces procedural confusion. Capacity-building roles are also emphasized, including training sessions and workshops that strengthen enterprise readiness and compliance understanding (Nursita et al., 2024). In addition, companions contribute to monitoring halal practices across production stages, which

can reinforce consumer trust and product integrity (Ruhana, 2021). These roles position P3H as street-level implementers whose daily decisions influence the credibility of simplified certification schemes.

The effectiveness of P3H depends heavily on competencies, accountability mechanisms, and institutional support structures. Competence in halal standards is frequently identified as a foundational requirement, enabling companions to provide accurate guidance and prevent procedural errors (Suhendro, 2023). Technical expertise related to production assessment and ingredient sourcing is also important because it ensures that enterprise practices align with certification standards (Sakti & Ramadhani, 2023). Accountability mechanisms, such as reporting systems and performance evaluation, are needed to ensure companions uphold regulatory standards and provide effective support (A. T. Fitri et al., 2025; Ibrahim et al., 2023). These factors suggest that P3H effectiveness is shaped by institutional design and resource allocation, not merely individual motivation.

Structural and Technical Barriers Affecting MSME Certification Outcomes

A large body of research documents that micro and small enterprises face multiple, overlapping barriers in obtaining halal certification, many of which directly influence the effectiveness of facilitation programs. Administrative burden remains one of the most consistently reported challenges, as enterprises often struggle with paperwork complexity and procedural requirements that exceed their organizational capacity (Abi Anwar et al., 2024). Digital literacy barriers further constrain enterprises, particularly when certification systems rely on online platforms and when business owners lack familiarity with digital tools (Yuwono et al., 2024). These constraints become more severe in rural areas where digital access and training opportunities remain limited. As a result, procedural complexity often produces low participation and delayed certification completion.

Financial and temporal constraints also remain prominent in shaping certification uptake. Studies indicate that certification costs can be prohibitive for small enterprises and can discourage engagement even when enterprises acknowledge the benefits of certification (Khasanah et al., 2024). Time burdens are similarly consequential because enterprises operating with limited labor and resources may perceive certification processes as disruptive to daily business operations. Beyond these barriers, supply-chain documentation challenges are increasingly recognized, as enterprises may struggle to verify ingredient sources and maintain systematic records needed for compliance. These limitations demonstrate that certification participation is not only shaped by willingness but also by structural capacity and resource availability.

Low awareness and limited understanding of halal certification requirements remain persistent barriers that interact with administrative and digital constraints. Timur et al. (2023) argue that many enterprises lack clarity regarding certification procedures and may not fully recognize its market significance, reducing motivation to pursue compliance. This lack of awareness can also increase resistance when enterprises perceive certification as administratively risky or financially burdensome.

Consequently, evidence-based interventions often emphasize outreach, community engagement, and simplified communication strategies to ensure that enterprises understand both the regulatory expectations and the economic value of certification (Choirunnisa et al., 2025). These findings reinforce the argument that certification policy must address behavioral and informational barriers alongside structural constraints.

Research Gap and the Significance of the Study

Although existing studies provide important insights into halal certification governance, SEHATI facilitation, and the broader challenges faced by micro and small enterprises, the empirical literature remains uneven in its treatment of frontline implementers. Many studies focus on regulatory design, institutional transitions, and procedural requirements, while fewer provide detailed field-based accounts of how certification programs operate in practice at the provincial level (Disemadi & Putri, 2024; Ramadhany, 2024). In particular, there is limited research that systematically examines the operational burdens, resource constraints, and role expansion experienced by P3H when assisting enterprises under self-declare schemes. This limitation is especially important because P3H are central to maintaining the integrity and credibility of simplified certification pathways.

This study addresses that gap by offering an empirically grounded and context-sensitive analysis of P3H roles and challenges in Kalimantan Selatan, a region shaped by geographic dispersion and socio-cultural diversity. By focusing on the lived experiences of P3H as intermediaries, the study strengthens the literature on halal policy implementation, which has often emphasized normative and procedural dimensions rather than field realities. The findings are expected to contribute academically by refining understanding of how institutional design, local context, and frontline capacity interact to shape certification outcomes. Practically, the study supports policy improvement by identifying constraints that require integrated interventions, including training design, digital infrastructure support, and structured supervision for sustainable certification acceleration.

METHOD

Research Design and Approach

This study employed a qualitative research approach using a field research design to explore in depth the roles and challenges experienced by Halal Product Process Companions (Pendamping Proses Produk Halal/P3H) in implementing the Free Halal Certification Program (SEHATI) under the self-declare scheme in South Kalimantan, Indonesia. A qualitative design was selected because it is appropriate for investigating social phenomena in a holistic and contextual manner and for capturing the subjective meanings embedded in the experiences of frontline actors. This approach enables researchers to understand not only what happens during program implementation but also how and why challenges emerge from the interaction between policy requirements, institutional arrangements, and local realities. As emphasized in qualitative inquiry, field-based engagement allows for richer interpretation of complex

social processes and institutional practices (Endres et al., 2016; Kapiszewski et al., 2022; Malsch & Salterio, 2016). Therefore, this design was considered the most suitable to illuminate the operational realities of P3H as implementers and intermediaries within Indonesia's evolving halal certification ecosystem.

Research Setting and Context

The research was conducted in South Kalimantan, a province characterized by geographic dispersion and socio-cultural diversity, conditions that shape the accessibility and effectiveness of policy implementation at the grassroots level. In this setting, the SEHATI program depends heavily on P3H as frontline facilitators who assist micro and small enterprises (MSEs) in meeting administrative and technical requirements for halal certification. The local context is important because certification processes increasingly rely on digital platforms and formal documentation systems that may not be equally accessible across districts and remote areas. The province also represents a relevant site for examining how institutional facilitation is operationalized, since local implementation involves coordination among BPJPH, LP3H, and P3H in supporting enterprises through the self-declare process. By focusing on this provincial context, the study aims to provide empirically grounded insights into how geographic and socio-cultural conditions intersect with institutional design, shaping both the opportunities and constraints faced by P3H during implementation.

Participants and Sampling Strategy

The participants in this study were P3H who had actively assisted micro and small enterprises in applying for halal certification through the SEHATI self-declare scheme. Informants were selected using purposive sampling, which involves identifying participants based on their relevance to the research objectives and their direct engagement with the phenomenon under investigation. This sampling strategy was used to ensure that the study captured experiences from P3H who were not only formally registered but also practically involved in field-level assistance and verification processes. To strengthen the richness and representativeness of perspectives, the selection also considered diversity in participants' backgrounds, including P3H from student clusters, religious counselors, madrasa teachers, and members of the general public. A total of 37 P3H were interviewed, with distribution across multiple districts and cities in South Kalimantan, allowing the study to capture variation in implementation challenges that may differ by geographic location, institutional support, and community conditions.

Data Collection Methods and Instruments

Primary data were collected through in-depth interviews using a semi-structured format, which enabled both consistency in addressing key research themes and flexibility in exploring emerging issues during the conversation. Semi-structured interviews were selected because they allow researchers to guide discussion through prepared questions while also providing space for informants to elaborate on their experiences, perceptions, and contextual interpretations. This method was appropriate

for understanding how P3H navigate the practical realities of SEHATI implementation, including administrative burdens, digital system challenges, institutional coordination, and interactions with micro and small enterprises. Interviews were conducted through both face-to-face meetings and online platforms, depending on informant availability and geographic constraints. This flexible approach allowed the researchers to maintain participation across dispersed locations and to ensure that informants could contribute without excessive logistical barriers. The interview process was designed to capture detailed narratives about roles, responsibilities, constraints, and adaptive strategies in the field.

Secondary Data and Document Review

In addition to interviews, the study utilized secondary data through document analysis to strengthen contextual understanding and support triangulation. The documents reviewed included BPJPH regulations, P3H guidelines, LP3H UIN Antasari reports, and relevant findings from prior research. Document analysis served two purposes. First, it provided an institutional and regulatory framework for interpreting P3H practices, particularly regarding formal expectations of their roles within the SEHATI self-declare mechanism. Second, it enabled comparison between policy design and field implementation, helping to identify where operational challenges reflect systemic constraints rather than individual limitations. By integrating documentary sources with interview data, the study enhanced the credibility of interpretations and ensured that conclusions were grounded in both lived experience and formal policy structure. This approach aligns with qualitative best practices in building contextual validity and strengthening evidence through multiple sources of data.

Data Analysis Procedures

The data analysis followed an iterative qualitative process involving data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing, consistent with established qualitative analytical frameworks (Miles et al., 2020). Data reduction involved selecting, focusing, and simplifying interview transcripts and documentary materials to identify information most relevant to the study's research questions. This step included organizing responses around major themes such as the dual role of P3H (educational and technical), structural constraints (infrastructure and institutional support), technical constraints (digital literacy and procedural understanding), and relational challenges with enterprises. Data display was conducted by arranging reduced data into thematic narratives that made patterns, similarities, and differences across informants more visible. Finally, conclusions were drawn inductively, meaning that interpretations were developed from recurring patterns and evidence in the data rather than imposed through predetermined assumptions. This analytic approach allowed the study to produce grounded explanations of how P3H roles and challenges shape SEHATI implementation outcomes in South Kalimantan.

Trustworthiness and Data Validation

To ensure trustworthiness, the study applied triangulation of sources and techniques by comparing interview results across informants and cross-checking them against documentary evidence. This triangulation approach strengthened credibility by reducing the risk that findings reflected isolated experiences or individual bias. For example, reports of digital infrastructure limitations or difficulties using certification platforms were examined not only as personal narratives but also in relation to documented procedures and institutional guidelines. In addition, the inclusion of informants from different clusters and districts supported a broader perspective, allowing the study to capture variation and convergence across diverse contexts. Maintaining a semi-structured interview approach also enhanced reliability by ensuring that all participants addressed core topics while still allowing contextual depth. Through these measures, the study aimed to produce a balanced and rigorous qualitative account of P3H operational realities within the SEHATI program in South Kalimantan.

RESULTS

Overview of Findings

This study reveals that the implementation of the SEHATI program in South Kalimantan relies heavily on the practical performance of Halal Product Process Companions (P3H), who serve as the primary field-based facilitators under the self-declare scheme. The findings indicate that P3H perform a dual function: they act as educators who strengthen micro and small enterprises' understanding of halal standards, and they also operate as technical implementers who guide businesses through verification and validation (verval) procedures. In practice, these roles extend beyond formal assistance into problem-solving work that helps enterprises overcome administrative and digital barriers. The results also demonstrate that SEHATI implementation outcomes are shaped by structural and technical constraints, including uneven internet connectivity, platform limitations, limited institutional coordination, and enterprise-level constraints such as low digital literacy and weak responsiveness. These combined factors influence the pace, completeness, and overall effectiveness of certification facilitation.

The Dual Role of P3H: Educational and Technical Functions

The results show that P3H are not merely administrative actors but function as frontline educators who translate policy requirements into accessible guidance for micro and small enterprises. In this role, P3H provide explanations regarding halal–haram principles, the importance of halal certification, and the practical implications of compliance for product legitimacy. They also guide enterprises in identifying ingredients, assessing production processes, and recognizing critical control points that may compromise halal status. This educational dimension is essential because many business owners have limited prior exposure to formal halal assurance systems and

often perceive certification as complicated or burdensome. Therefore, P3H assistance becomes a mechanism for building awareness and confidence, enabling enterprises to understand certification not only as a legal requirement but also as a form of consumer trust-building.

At the same time, P3H operate as technical implementers responsible for verification and validation activities required under the SEHATI self-declare pathway. In practice, this involves checking documentation, ensuring ingredient compliance, confirming production process consistency, and completing the necessary steps within the SIHALAL system. The findings indicate that technical assistance is frequently intensified by enterprises' limited administrative readiness. Many enterprises struggle to prepare documents, interpret required categories, or provide accurate production information. As a result, P3H often assume a more interventionist role, not only verifying enterprise claims but also correcting errors, guiding revisions, and ensuring that submissions meet formal requirements. This technical role is therefore both procedural and corrective, aimed at ensuring that the self-declare mechanism remains credible and administratively complete.

Importantly, the findings suggest that the educational and technical functions of P3H are interdependent rather than separate. Educational assistance enables enterprises to understand why documentation and process discipline matter, while technical guidance provides the operational steps needed to complete certification. This dual role reflects the practical reality that certification cannot be accelerated through administrative facilitation alone if enterprises do not grasp halal requirements conceptually. Conversely, awareness without procedural support is insufficient because the digital certification system requires technical inputs that many enterprises cannot independently complete. The results therefore position P3H as hybrid actors who combine informal educational outreach with formal verification responsibilities. This hybrid role becomes central to SEHATI implementation in South Kalimantan, especially in contexts where enterprises require sustained accompaniment rather than one-time instruction.

Administrative and Digital Barriers in SEHATI Implementation

A major finding is that administrative and digital barriers remain persistent constraints in SEHATI implementation, even though the program is designed to simplify certification through self-declare. P3H reported that many micro and small enterprises lack basic administrative preparedness, such as organized business documentation, clear product records, or stable communication channels. These gaps delay verification processes because P3H must repeatedly request missing information or clarify inconsistencies. Administrative barriers are also linked to digital registration prerequisites, such as National Identification Numbers (NIK), Business Identification Numbers (NIB), or appropriate business classification codes (KBLI). When these prerequisites are incomplete or mismatched, enterprises cannot proceed smoothly through the SIHALAL workflow. As a result, P3H often become responsible for resolving

issues that extend beyond halal certification itself, including helping enterprises align administrative requirements with digital platform expectations.

Digital barriers were found to be particularly influential in shaping certification outcomes. The SIHALAL system requires consistent internet access and functional platform performance, yet P3H frequently encountered unstable connectivity, limited network coverage, and platform disruptions. In several cases, P3H described difficulties in uploading documents, entering product details, or completing submission steps due to system errors and downtime. These problems were intensified in remote districts where internet infrastructure is weaker and where enterprises may not have access to reliable devices. Consequently, digital barriers contribute to delays not because enterprises are unwilling to comply, but because technical conditions prevent consistent engagement with the platform. The results indicate that digital constraints are structural rather than incidental, shaping how quickly P3H can complete verification and how many enterprises can be assisted within a given timeframe.

Another recurring issue involved platform-related data limitations, particularly regarding ingredient entries and supply-chain documentation. P3H noted that certain raw materials or ingredients were not easily available in the system database, requiring additional verification steps or alternative documentation. This complication creates uncertainty for enterprises that lack standardized supplier records and for P3H who must ensure compliance without fully integrated system support. The findings therefore highlight that self-declare certification, while administratively simplified, still depends on digital infrastructure and platform readiness. Without stable systems and accessible digital resources, P3H must compensate through additional labor and repeated troubleshooting, which reduces efficiency and contributes to uneven implementation outcomes across geographic areas.

Enterprise-Level Constraints: Literacy, Responsiveness, and Compliance Readiness

The study found that enterprise-level constraints significantly shape the effectiveness of P3H assistance. A key challenge involves limited digital literacy among micro and small enterprise owners, many of whom struggle to use online platforms, manage digital documents, or communicate consistently through digital channels. In several cases, enterprises lacked email accounts or had limited familiarity with smartphone-based documentation practices. These limitations reduce the feasibility of independent certification engagement and increase reliance on P3H for even basic procedural steps. As a result, P3H assistance frequently becomes hands-on and time intensive, requiring companions to guide enterprises through tasks that would otherwise be considered routine in digital administrative systems.

In addition to digital literacy, limited understanding of halal standards was identified as a barrier to compliance readiness. Many enterprises possess informal assumptions about halalness based on common ingredients or local practices, but lack structured knowledge about halal assurance requirements, including ingredient traceability, contamination risks, and production process control. This gap creates a

situation where enterprises may perceive certification as merely a label acquisition process rather than a structured assurance system. P3H therefore spend substantial time clarifying the meaning of halal compliance and explaining why certain documentation and procedural discipline are necessary. The findings suggest that low halal literacy is not simply a knowledge deficit but also a practical constraint that affects enterprises' ability to respond accurately during verification and validation processes.

Another major enterprise-level constraint is weak responsiveness and inconsistent engagement. P3H reported that some enterprises were slow to respond to requests for documentation or clarification, often due to competing business priorities or limited perceived urgency. In such cases, certification facilitation becomes prolonged, requiring repeated follow-ups and reminders. This issue is particularly significant because P3H workloads are often high, and delays with one enterprise reduce the time available to assist others. The results therefore indicate that enterprise responsiveness functions as an operational bottleneck, influencing the pace of SEHATI implementation and contributing to gaps between certification targets and realizations. In combination, limited literacy and responsiveness create cumulative barriers that P3H must address through continuous accompaniment rather than one-time facilitation.

Structural Constraints on P3H Performance and Workload

Beyond enterprise-level issues, the study found that P3H performance is constrained by structural factors that shape their capacity to provide consistent assistance. One of the most frequently reported constraints involves geographic distance and transportation burdens. South Kalimantan includes dispersed districts where travel requires time and personal expense, especially when companions must visit enterprises for verification activities. These logistical challenges reduce the number of enterprises that can be assisted and may discourage intensive follow-up in remote areas. In this context, SEHATI implementation depends not only on certification procedures but also on the feasibility of field mobility and the availability of supporting resources for companions.

Time constraints were also prominent, as many P3H hold additional professional roles such as students, religious counselors, or teachers. Balancing certification facilitation with other responsibilities limits the time they can allocate for repeated enterprise engagement, documentation checks, and platform troubleshooting. The findings indicate that the work of P3H often expands beyond formal expectations, requiring them to provide administrative guidance related to business licensing or digital registration processes. This expansion increases workload and complexity, positioning P3H as multi-task facilitators rather than narrowly defined halal verification actors. As a result, the practical implementation of SEHATI involves significant invisible labor that is not always reflected in formal program design.

Institutional support was also perceived as uneven, particularly in relation to incentives, supervision, and technical assistance. P3H described the need for clearer coordination mechanisms, more consistent training updates, and stronger institutional responsiveness when technical platform problems occur. In some cases, training was

viewed as insufficiently practical when delivered primarily online, limiting companions' readiness to handle real-world verification complexity. These findings suggest that P3H effectiveness depends not only on individual competence but also on institutional arrangements that provide resources, supervision, and ongoing capacity-building. Without such support, companions must rely on personal initiative to overcome barriers, which can lead to uneven performance across regions.

Implications of the Findings for SEHATI Effectiveness

Overall, the results indicate that SEHATI's effectiveness in South Kalimantan is shaped by the interaction between facilitation design and local operational realities. While the self-declare scheme reduces formal barriers and expands access, the certification process still requires administrative preparedness, digital engagement, and sustained enterprise responsiveness. In this setting, P3H function as essential intermediaries who bridge policy requirements and enterprise constraints. Their dual role as educators and technical implementers enables them to address both conceptual and procedural challenges, making them central to certification acceleration. However, their performance is limited by structural constraints such as infrastructure gaps, geographic distance, workload expansion, and uneven institutional support.

These findings help explain why certification realization may lag behind targets even when facilitation programs exist. The implementation gap is not solely a matter of enterprise reluctance or policy weakness, but reflects systemic constraints that accumulate across the certification workflow. In particular, digital infrastructure and platform reliability emerge as critical conditions for the success of self-declare certification. Similarly, the capacity of P3H to provide sustained accompaniment depends on resources, training, and institutional coordination. The results therefore suggest that strengthening SEHATI requires integrated interventions that address both enterprise readiness and companion capacity, ensuring that simplified certification pathways remain both accessible and credible in diverse local contexts.

DISCUSSION

P3H as Hybrid Implementers: Education and Technical Execution

This study demonstrates that P3H play a hybrid role in SEHATI implementation in South Kalimantan, operating simultaneously as educators and technical implementers. Beyond performing verification and validation (verval), P3H routinely translate halal standards into practical guidance for micro and small enterprises (MSEs), clarify halal–haram concepts, and support enterprises in preparing documentation and navigating SIHALAL. These dual responsibilities become necessary because many enterprises enter the self-declare scheme with limited administrative readiness and weak understanding of formal halal assurance requirements. Consequently, SEHATI implementation depends not only on regulatory design but also on how effectively P3H can provide sustained accompaniment, correct procedural errors, and build compliance capacity at the enterprise level.

This finding aligns with scholarship emphasizing that frontline facilitators in certification programs frequently serve as both capacity builders and operational executors. Ismail (2024) describes facilitators as key actors in knowledge transfer and training that enable small businesses to comply with certification requirements. Complementing this view, Giyanti et al. (2021) show that facilitators reduce bureaucratic errors by supporting documentation preparation and compliance checks. Studies also suggest that facilitator support can strengthen business confidence and increase participation rates by reducing fear and uncertainty associated with administrative complexity (Adler & Koehn, 2012; Briggs et al., 2013; Paulsen, 2004). However, this dual-role arrangement may also expand facilitator workload, particularly in settings where enterprises require repeated assistance to complete digital and administrative steps.

Theoretically, these findings reinforce the importance of analyzing SEHATI through the lens of frontline implementation, where policy outcomes depend on intermediaries who interpret and enact formal rules in everyday practice. Practically, the results imply that SEHATI effectiveness cannot be measured solely by certificate counts; it must also consider the quality and sustainability of the facilitation process that P3H provide. From a policy perspective, strengthening SEHATI requires investing in P3H capacity through continuous professional development, standardized facilitation tools, and institutional support that recognizes their dual educational–technical responsibilities. Without such support, P3H may face role overload, reducing their ability to maintain both program speed and certification credibility at scale.

Administrative Complexity and Digital-Platform Constraints as Structural Barriers

The findings indicate that administrative complexity and digital-platform constraints remain dominant obstacles in SEHATI implementation, even though the program is designed to simplify halal certification through a self-declare pathway. In practice, many enterprises struggle to meet administrative prerequisites such as aligning business classifications, preparing standardized documentation, and ensuring accurate data entry. These constraints become more severe when combined with digital limitations, including unstable internet connectivity, platform errors, and difficulties uploading required materials. As a result, P3H often must assume additional responsibilities that exceed formal certification accompaniment, including repeated troubleshooting and assisting enterprises in meeting non-halal administrative requirements. This pattern suggests that simplification policies still depend on functional digital infrastructure and administrative readiness.

Existing research supports the argument that administrative burdens and digital constraints are among the most persistent barriers in MSME certification programs. Previous studies (A. T. Fitri et al., 2025; Maulana et al., 2025; Prawiro & Fathudin, 2023; Sukayasa, 2025) emphasize that limited education and socialization of halal requirements contributes to a burdensome administrative experience for MSMEs. The literature also highlights that unclear documentation requirements and procedural

complexity can discourage participation, particularly among enterprises lacking administrative capacity (Mamduh et al., 2024; Ningrum, 2022). Digital barriers are similarly documented: inadequate technological skills prevent business owners from effectively engaging with online certification platforms, and weak internet infrastructure intensifies delays and procedural breakdowns (Rujitoningtyas et al., 2025). Studies note that documentation errors and insufficient record-keeping practices can lead to application rejection, reinforcing the need for support mechanisms that reduce administrative and digital friction (Abdul Aziz & Che Hussin, 2024; Ariska et al., 2025; Sulidar et al., 2025).

These results carry important implications for theory and policy design. Theoretically, they indicate that the success of self-declare governance depends on the interaction between regulatory simplification and infrastructural capacity, rather than simplification alone. Practically, improving SEHATI outcomes requires operational solutions, such as user-friendly guidelines, standardized checklists, and assistance mechanisms that reduce repeated errors and delays. Policy implications include investing in internet infrastructure and improving platform reliability, particularly in provinces with dispersed geography. Strengthening digital literacy training for MSMEs and offering responsive technical support channels would also improve efficiency and reduce the hidden workload transferred to P3H.

MSME Readiness: Digital Literacy, Responsiveness, and Compliance Capacity

This study finds that enterprise-level readiness substantially shapes SEHATI implementation outcomes. Many MSMEs demonstrate limited digital literacy, which restricts their ability to use SIHALAL, prepare digital documentation, and respond efficiently to verification requests. Weak responsiveness further slows facilitation, as delayed communication forces P3H to repeatedly follow up, prolonging certification timelines. Uneven compliance readiness also emerges, as enterprises vary in their understanding of halal standards and in their ability to translate those standards into consistent production practices and traceable documentation. These constraints mean that self-declare certification is not simply an administrative shortcut; it still requires baseline competencies that many MSMEs have not yet developed. Consequently, facilitation becomes a continuous accompaniment process rather than a one-time intervention.

The broader literature provides consistent support for this interpretation. Salsabila et al. (2024) report that many small business owners lack the skills required to use digital platforms for certification-related administrative tasks, limiting their ability to complete documentation and engage with electronic systems. Responsiveness issues have also been documented: Utami et al. (2022) explain that MSMEs may struggle to adapt to certification requirements, contributing to missed deadlines and reduced motivation to pursue certification. Similarly, Giyanti et al. (2021) show that limited knowledge of halal standards reduces compliance prioritization and weakens willingness to register for certification. Together, these studies reinforce that

certification uptake depends not only on program availability but also on enterprise capacity and engagement patterns.

Theoretically, these findings support the view that certification participation is shaped by capability constraints rather than purely rational cost–benefit calculations. Practically, this implies that SEHATI must be accompanied by capacity-building interventions that strengthen MSME readiness, such as targeted digital literacy programs and hands-on mentoring. Policy implications include the need for collaborative support networks involving local governments, universities, and community organizations to provide sustained assistance and training. Partnerships can help distribute facilitation burdens and increase outreach effectiveness, especially in rural areas where digital access and information dissemination remain limited. Improving readiness is therefore central to sustaining both certification completion and halal assurance integrity.

Self-Declare Certification: Efficiency Gains and Integrity Risks

The results highlight that SEHATI's self-declare mechanism creates a governance trade-off between expanding access and maintaining certification integrity. On the one hand, self-declare pathways can reduce procedural burdens for MSMEs, enabling faster certification and supporting inclusion in the formal halal assurance system. On the other hand, the findings indicate that the model places substantial responsibility on P3H to ensure credibility through verification and validation, especially when enterprises lack compliance readiness. This situation increases the importance of field-level checks, documentation discipline, and the ability of companions to detect inconsistencies. Therefore, while self-declare schemes may improve participation, their legitimacy depends on effective oversight capacity and the institutional strength of the verification process.

This tension is explicitly discussed in the literature on self-declare certification schemes. Masitah et al. (2024) argue that self-declare models enhance efficiency and inclusiveness by reducing bureaucratic hurdles and enabling small enterprises to enter certification systems more easily. However, the same study emphasizes that weak oversight can generate verification gaps, enabling misuse and increasing credibility risks, particularly when businesses falsely claim compliance (Masitah et al., 2024). The literature also highlights that inconsistent product quality and uneven standards may emerge if self-declare schemes are not supported by robust accountability mechanisms (Ariska et al., 2025; Rahmawati et al., 2025; Sholikhah et al., 2024; M. Umami et al., 2023; Wibowo & Yuliafitri, 2025). These findings mirror concerns raised in this study, where platform limitations, administrative gaps, and enterprise readiness constraints intensify reliance on P3H as credibility safeguards.

Theoretically, these findings contribute to debates on regulatory governance by demonstrating that simplified compliance mechanisms can shift burdens downward to frontline implementers and may generate new risks if oversight is insufficient. Practically, maintaining integrity requires operational safeguards such as regular audits, standardized minimum requirements, and traceability-supporting systems.

From a policy perspective, strengthening SEHATI demands clear accountability frameworks that protect consumer trust while preserving MSME accessibility. Investments in training, minimum compliance standards, and digital traceability tools may help reduce integrity risks (Masitah et al., 2024). Ultimately, self-declare schemes should be treated as institutional innovations that require continuous adjustment, not as permanent shortcuts that can function without strong verification capacity.

Institutional Capacity and Street-Level Implementation Dynamics

This study also shows that SEHATI outcomes depend on institutional capacity conditions that shape how P3H operate as frontline implementers. P3H frequently work under time constraints, geographic challenges, and expanding task demands, including assisting MSMEs with non-halal administrative issues that indirectly determine certification feasibility. The results suggest that uneven institutional support—such as limited technical assistance when platform errors occur, inconsistent coordination, and constrained resources—reduces facilitation efficiency and may contribute to the gap between certification targets and realizations. These constraints demonstrate that implementation performance is not solely determined by policy objectives but by whether frontline actors have the institutional environment necessary to translate policy into routine practice.

Policy implementation research supports this interpretation by emphasizing the role of "street-level bureaucrats" in shaping public program outcomes (Hill, 2003; May & Winter, 2009; Tummers & Bekkers, 2014). Previous studies (Ismail, 2024; Khair et al., 2023; M. D. S. Sari et al., 2025) describe how frontline implementers combine educational and technical functions to improve compliance. However, workload pressures can dilute effectiveness, particularly when implementers must manage multiple responsibilities without sufficient support. Studies in a more global context also emphasize that incentives influence motivation and performance, while training quality determines whether implementers can manage evolving certification standards (Fertig et al., 2009; Rubio-Andrada et al., 2011; Santos et al., 2020). Coordination across institutions is another critical determinant, as weak collaboration can generate miscommunication and inconsistent guidance (Gulati et al., 2012; McNamara, 2012; Syariva et al., 2024). These findings align with the present study's emphasis on institutional constraints shaping P3H performance.

Theoretically, this study reinforces implementation perspectives that view policy success as contingent on institutional capacity and frontline discretion rather than formal regulation alone. Practically, improving SEHATI requires reducing role overload through structured facilitation workflows, clear communication channels, and responsive supervision systems. Policy implications include strengthening training models, improving incentive structures, and establishing regular performance evaluations to support consistent quality in facilitation. Resource availability—such as access to reliable tools, internet support, and standardized documentation templates—should also be treated as essential program inputs rather than optional additions. By

strengthening institutional capacity, SEHATI can better balance accessibility with integrity and reduce uneven outcomes across provinces.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the implementation of the SEHATI self-declare halal certification program in South Kalimantan by focusing on the practical roles and constraints of Halal Product Process Companions (P3H). The findings show that P3H operate as hybrid implementers who combine two inseparable functions: educating micro and small enterprises (MSEs) about halal requirements and executing technical tasks such as verification, validation, and documentation support. In practice, P3H frequently extend their work into administrative problem-solving, including assisting enterprises with digital registration steps and correcting data inconsistencies that prevent applications from progressing smoothly. These realities indicate that the operational success of SEHATI depends not only on policy design, but also on sustained facilitation capacity at the field level.

The study also highlights that SEHATI implementation is shaped by persistent structural and technical barriers. Administrative complexity, platform limitations, and uneven internet infrastructure slow certification processes, especially in geographically dispersed areas. At the enterprise level, limited digital literacy, uneven halal knowledge, and weak responsiveness contribute to delays and repeated follow-ups, increasing the workload borne by P3H. These findings clarify why certification targets may not be fully achieved despite the availability of a free and simplified scheme. They also demonstrate that self-declare certification creates a governance trade-off: it improves accessibility, but its credibility relies heavily on the strength of verification and the institutional support provided to frontline companions.

This research contributes to the literature by providing empirical, field-based evidence on halal policy implementation through frontline intermediaries, a dimension that is often underexplored in regulatory and procedural studies. By documenting how P3H translate formal rules into practice while navigating resource constraints, the study strengthens understanding of certification governance in diverse local contexts. The results suggest that strengthening SEHATI requires integrated interventions—improving digital infrastructure, simplifying administrative workflows, expanding training, and enhancing institutional coordination and incentives. Future research can build on these insights by evaluating outcomes after certification and comparing implementation dynamics across provinces with different infrastructural and institutional conditions.

Limitation of the Study

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings of this study. First, the research relied on a qualitative field approach centered on interviews with P3H, meaning that the evidence primarily reflects the perspectives and experiences of companions as frontline implementers. While this focus is valuable for understanding operational realities, it may underrepresent the viewpoints of other stakeholders such as micro and small enterprise owners, BPJPH officials, LP3H administrators, or

consumers who are affected by certification outcomes. As a result, the analysis may not fully capture how enterprises interpret facilitation quality, how institutions evaluate companion performance, or how certification influences consumer trust and purchasing behavior.

Second, the study was conducted in South Kalimantan, a province with its own geographic dispersion, infrastructure characteristics, and socio-cultural conditions. These contextual features shape implementation dynamics and may limit the direct generalizability of findings to other provinces with different institutional capacity, digital connectivity, or business ecosystems. In addition, the study did not apply a longitudinal design; therefore, it cannot determine how P3H roles, enterprise readiness, or SEHATI performance evolve over time, particularly as policies, digital systems, and training programs continue to develop. These limitations suggest that the findings should be understood as context-sensitive and primarily explanatory rather than predictive or nationally representative.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future research should extend this study by incorporating multiple stakeholder perspectives to produce a more comprehensive understanding of SEHATI implementation. Studies that include micro and small enterprise owners can clarify how facilitation is experienced at the user level, which forms of assistance are most effective, and what factors motivate or discourage certification participation. In addition, research involving BPJPH and LP3H officials could provide insights into institutional coordination, training quality, supervision mechanisms, and platform governance. Mixed-method designs that integrate qualitative findings with quantitative program data—such as certification completion rates, processing time, or error frequency—would strengthen the ability to identify which barriers most strongly predict implementation delays.

Further research should also explore post-certification outcomes and comparative regional analysis. Longitudinal studies could examine whether halal certification under SEHATI produces measurable benefits for MSEs, including market expansion, consumer trust, or improved production discipline. Comparative research across provinces could test how differences in infrastructure quality, local governance capacity, and socio-economic conditions shape the effectiveness of P3H facilitation and self-declare credibility. Finally, future work could evaluate specific policy interventions, such as targeted digital literacy programs, standardized verification tools, incentive schemes for companions, or improvements to the SIHALAL platform, to determine which reforms most effectively balance accessibility with integrity in Indonesia's halal certification system.

Author Contributions

Conceptualization	Z.M., S.S., & L.S.	Resources	Z.M., S.S., & L.S.
Data curation	Z.M., S.S., & L.S.	Software	Z.M., S.S., & L.S.
Formal analysis	Z.M., S.S., & L.S.	Supervision	Z.M., S.S., & L.S.
Funding acquisition	Z.M., S.S., & L.S.	Validation	Z.M., S.S., & L.S.

Investigation	Z.M., S.S., & L.S.	Visualization	Z.M., S.S., & L.S.
Methodology	Z.M., S.S., & L.S.	Writing – original draft	Z.M., S.S., & L.S.
Project administration	Z.M., S.S., & L.S.	Writing – review & editing	Z.M., S.S., & L.S.

All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Institutional Review Board Statement

The study was approved by Program Studi Ekonomi Syariah (S1) and Program Studi Akuntansi Syariah (S1), Universitas Islam Negeri Antasari Banjarmasin, Kota Banjarmasin, Indonesia.

Informed Consent Statement

Informed consent was obtained before respondents filled out the questionnaire for this study.

Data Availability Statement

The data presented in this study are available on request from the corresponding author.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

During the preparation of this work the authors used ChatGPT, DeepL, Grammarly, and PaperPal in order to translate from Bahasa Indonesia into American English, and to improve clarity of the language and readability of the article. After using these tools, the authors reviewed and edited the content as needed and take full responsibility for the content of the published article.

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