

Students' Understanding of Halal Symbols and Their Impact on Halal Food Consumption

Siti Nurhartati Purwaningsih¹, and Uthman Shehu Lawal²

¹ Universitas Terbuka, Indonesia

² Kaduna State University, Nigeria

Corresponding Author:

Siti Nurhartati Purwaningsih,

Department of Primary School Teacher Education, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Universitas Terbuka.

Jl. Bantul No.81 Gedongkiwo, Kec. Mantriweron, Kota Yogyakarta, Daerah istimewa Yogyakarta, 55142, Indonesia.

Email: sitinurhartati3@gmail.com

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Abstract

This research examines elementary school students' understanding of halal symbols and analyses how this understanding influences their halal food consumption behaviour. The research addresses an important gap in halal consumer studies, which have focused mainly on adults while overlooking children as active and independent consumers. Using a qualitative research design, the study was conducted at SDN Karangtengah Baru Wonosari, Indonesia, involving elementary school students as primary participants, supported by contextual data from teachers and parents. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, non-participant observations, and document analysis to capture students' symbolic literacy, decision-making processes, and real-life consumption practices. The findings reveal that most students demonstrate strong visual recognition of the halal logo and associate it with food permissibility. However, their understanding remains mainly superficial, as many students lack knowledge of the certification process, institutional authority, and the ethical principles underlying halal assurance. This limited comprehension affects consumption behaviour, particularly when food products lack clear halal labelling. Students with a more profound understanding of halal symbols show greater consistency in selecting halal-certified foods and exhibit more cautious behaviour toward ambiguous products. In contrast, those with a lower level of understanding rely heavily on taste, peer influence, and convenience. The study concludes that understanding halal symbols plays a significant role in shaping halal food consumption behaviour among elementary school students. These findings highlight the importance of integrating structured, application-oriented halal education into early schooling to strengthen functional halal literacy. The study contributes to halal consumer behaviour literature by emphasising children's symbolic understanding as a meaningful determinant of ethical consumption practices from an early age.

Keywords: Students' understanding, halal symbols, halal food, consumption, SDN Karangtengah Baru Wonosari.



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INTRODUCTION

The issue of halal consumption has become an increasingly prominent phenomenon in contemporary Muslim societies, particularly in countries with large Muslim populations, such as Indonesia (Surur et al., 2025). Halal is not merely a religious concept related to the permissibility of food and beverages under Islamic law, but also a comprehensive ethical framework encompassing cleanliness, safety, health, and moral responsibility in production and consumption. In recent decades, the rapid growth of the global halal industry, driven by advances in food technology, the globalisation of food supply chains, and aggressive product marketing, has significantly increased the variety of food products available to consumers. This development, while offering greater choice, simultaneously introduces complexity for Muslim consumers, especially children, in identifying whether food products comply with halal standards. One of the most visible and practical indicators used to guide consumers is the halal symbol displayed on food packaging, which functions as an assurance that a product has met established halal certification requirements (Meia Yevi Setyawati et al., 2025).

Halal awareness in Indonesia has been institutionalised through regulatory frameworks and public policies, including the enactment of laws on halal product assurance and the formalisation of halal certification bodies (Haqae et al., 2019). These efforts reflect an ideal condition in which Muslim consumers are expected to understand, trust, and use halal symbols to make informed consumption decisions. Ideally, this understanding begins at an early age, particularly during elementary school years, when cognitive development, value internalisation, and habit formation occur rapidly. At this stage, children are not only passive consumers but also active decision-makers who influence household consumption patterns and develop long-term behavioural tendencies (Ajzen, 2020). From this ideal perspective, elementary school students should possess basic literacy regarding halal symbols and demonstrate consumption behaviours aligned with halal principles.

However, the reality observed in many educational and social settings indicates a significant gap between this ideal condition and actual practice in the field. Empirical observations and preliminary studies suggest that many elementary school students recognise the halal symbol visually but lack a deeper understanding of its meaning, function, and implications. In some cases, students equate halal merely with taste preference, brand familiarity, or parental instruction, rather than with religious and ethical considerations embedded in halal certification. Moreover, the widespread availability of unpackaged snacks, street food, and visually appealing products in school environments often exposes students to food items that do not clearly display halal certification. In such contexts, students' consumption choices tend to be driven by price, peer influence, and sensory appeal rather than by informed evaluation of halal status (Alqudsi, 2014).

This discrepancy creates a clear gap in understanding, characterised by the contrast between the normative expectation of early halal literacy and the empirical reality of limited understanding among students. The consequences of this gap are not trivial. Insufficient understanding of halal symbols may lead to unintentional consumption of non-halal or doubtful (*syubhat*) food products, weakening the internalisation of Islamic dietary values from an early age. Over time, this condition may contribute to the formation of consumption habits that are inconsistent with halal principles, potentially undermining broader efforts to cultivate halal-

conscious generations (Oktadiana & Rahman, 2025). At the same time, this gap presents a valuable opportunity for academic inquiry, particularly to examine how cognitive understanding of halal symbols translates into actual consumption behaviour among children in real-world settings (Ramadan et al., 2024).

Based on this phenomenon, the central research problem is the level of students' understanding of halal symbols and the extent to which this understanding influences their food consumption behaviour (Hariyadi, 2013). Specifically, the study seeks to explore whether students who demonstrate greater comprehension of halal symbols are more likely to exhibit consistent halal-oriented consumption behaviour than those with lower levels of understanding. This problem is particularly relevant in elementary school contexts, where formal religious education may exist but practical consumer education related to daily food choices is often limited or implicit. The focus on students at SDN Karangtengah Baru Wonosari provides a concrete, localised context in which these dynamics can be systematically examined.

In addition to the practical problem identified, this research also addresses a notable research gap within the existing body of halal and consumer behaviour literature. Previous studies on halal consumption have predominantly focused on adult consumers, university students, or general household decision-makers, emphasising factors such as halal awareness, religiosity, attitudes, subjective norms, and purchase intention (Elgharbawy & Muhammad Yusri, 2023). While these studies have contributed significantly to understanding halal consumption behaviour, they often overlook children as a distinct and influential consumer group. Research specifically examining elementary school students' cognitive understanding of halal symbols and their behavioural implications remains limited, particularly in formal school environments in rural or semi-urban Indonesian settings (Supriyatno et al., 2021). Furthermore, existing studies involving younger populations tend to emphasise general religious knowledge or moral education rather than focusing on specific operational indicators, such as halal symbols on food packaging. As a result, there is insufficient empirical evidence explaining how symbolic literacy, defined as the ability to recognise, interpret, and apply meaning to halal certification symbols, affects real consumption choices among children. This lack of focused investigation constitutes a clear research gap that this research aims to address by integrating perspectives from halal studies, consumer behaviour theory, and educational psychology.

The novelty of this research lies in its integrative and context-specific approach. Unlike prior studies that treat halal awareness as a broad and abstract construct, this research operationalises understanding through the concrete, observable element of the halal symbol. By concentrating on elementary school students, the research highlights an early developmental stage that has been largely neglected in halal consumer research. Additionally, the study explicitly examines the causal and associative relationship between understanding and behaviour, rather than treating awareness as an isolated variable. The selection of SDN Karangtengah Baru Wonosari as the research site further adds contextual novelty, as it represents a typical public elementary school environment where students are exposed to diverse food options without constant parental supervision.

Several converging factors reinforce the urgency of this research. First, the increasing commercialisation of food products targeting children, often using persuasive packaging and marketing strategies, demands stronger consumer literacy at an early age. Second, implementing halal product assurance policies requires not only regulatory compliance by producers but also informed engagement by consumers, including children, to be effective. Third, schools play a strategic role as institutions of value transmission, making them ideal settings for interventions to strengthen halal awareness and ethical consumption behaviour. Without empirical data on students' current levels of understanding and behaviour, educational stakeholders may struggle to design effective curricula, learning materials, and school policies related to halal consumption.

The present research is expected to contribute both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, it enriches the halal consumer behaviour literature by introducing children's

symbolic understanding as a meaningful predictor of consumption behaviour. Practically, it provides evidence-based insights that can inform teachers, school administrators, parents, and policymakers about the importance of integrating halal symbol education into early learning experiences. By addressing a critical yet underexplored dimension of halal awareness, this research responds to an urgent need for a systematic understanding of how halal values can be effectively cultivated from an early age in everyday consumption practices.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research used a qualitative design to explore students' understanding of halal symbols and how this understanding influences their halal food consumption behaviour. The qualitative approach was selected to capture in-depth insights into students' perceptions, interpretations, and daily practices regarding halal food, which numerical data alone cannot fully capture. The research was conducted at SDN Karangtengah Baru Wonosari, Indonesia, involving elementary school students as the primary participants, supported by contextual information from teachers and parents.

Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews, non-participant observation, and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews were used to explore students' knowledge of halal symbols, their interpretation of halal certification logos, and the reasoning behind their food choices in everyday situations. Observations focused on students' snacking behaviour at school and surrounding environments to identify real consumption practices and contextual influences. Relevant documents, such as school regulations, learning materials, and food packaging labels, were examined to strengthen data triangulation.

The data analysis followed an interactive qualitative analysis process consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Interview transcripts and observation notes were systematically coded to identify recurring themes related to symbolic understanding, decision-making patterns, and environmental influences. The study applied source and method triangulation to enhance data credibility and ensure the trustworthiness of findings. By adopting this qualitative methodological framework, the research provides a comprehensive understanding of how halal symbol literacy develops among students and shapes their actual halal food consumption behaviour in real-life contexts.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Students' Understanding of Halal Symbols on Food Products

This section presents and interprets the study's findings on students' level of understanding of halal symbols on food products at SDN Karangtengah Baru Wonosari. The discussion integrates empirical results with relevant theoretical perspectives and previous research, following an analytical approach in which findings are not only described but also critically interpreted. The focus is placed on three main dimensions of understanding: students' knowledge of the meaning of the halal symbol, their recognition of the official halal logo, and their ability to distinguish halal from non-halal food products in everyday contexts (Bukhari et al., 2022).

Students generally demonstrate a moderate level of understanding of the halal symbol, with notable variations across the measured dimensions. In terms of conceptual knowledge, most students correctly identified the halal symbol as an indicator that a product is permissible for Muslims to consume. This finding suggests that the basic definition of halal has been successfully transmitted to students, likely through religious instruction at school and reinforcement within the family environment. However, when students were asked to explain the broader meaning of the halal symbol, including its connection to certification processes, ingredient verification, and compliance with Islamic law, their responses became less precise. Many students provided simplified explanations that framed halal solely as "allowed food" without reference to

production standards or certification authority. This outcome reflects a surface-level understanding that emphasises outcomes rather than processes (Nurainun et al., 2023).

From an interpretive standpoint, this pattern indicates that students' halal knowledge remains largely declarative rather than functional. While students can recall information about halal status, they struggle to apply it analytically. This finding aligns with educational theory, suggesting that younger learners often internalise religious concepts in simplified forms unless guided through contextual and experiential learning. In the context of halal education, the results imply that instruction may prioritise memorisation of religious rules over a deeper understanding of how halal assurance operates in modern food systems. Consequently, students may recognise halal as a religious label without fully understanding its ethical, procedural, and institutional dimensions (Fontefrancesco & Zocchi, 2020).

The analysis of students' recognition of the halal logo indicates a higher level of achievement than conceptual understanding. The majority of students correctly identified the official halal logo commonly used in Indonesia when presented with multiple visual options. This strong visual recognition demonstrates that the halal logo functions effectively as a familiar symbol within students' daily consumption environment. Frequent exposure to packaged foods bearing the halal logo, combined with visual reinforcement through media and community discourse, likely contributes to this outcome. The prominence of the logo in students' responses confirms the effectiveness of symbolic communication in conveying halal status at a basic level (Randeree, 2020).

Nevertheless, the discussion of this result reveals an important limitation. Although students can identify the logo visually, fewer students can distinguish the official halal logo from similar or misleading symbols that resemble halal markings but lack certification validity. Some students assumed that Arabic writing or Islamic imagery automatically indicated halal status, even in the absence of an official logo. This tendency highlights a vulnerability in students' symbolic literacy, where visual familiarity may lead to overgeneralization. The finding suggests that logo recognition alone is insufficient unless accompanied by instructions on the logo's authenticity and the certification authority. Without this knowledge, students may be susceptible to misinterpretation when encountering non-standard or deceptive product labels (Hamdan et al., 2018).

The ability to recognise halal and non-halal products represents the most behaviorally relevant dimension examined in this research. The results show that students performed well when evaluating packaged food products that clearly displayed the halal logo. In such cases, most students correctly categorised the products as halal and expressed confidence in their decisions. However, performance declined when students were asked to assess products without clear labelling, such as unpackaged snacks, street foods, or imported products with unfamiliar labels. In these situations, students frequently relied on assumptions based on taste, peer consumption, or seller familiarity rather than applying halal evaluation criteria (Chairunesia, 2023).

This finding is significant because it demonstrates that students' decision-making regarding consumption depends heavily on explicit visual cues. When those cues are absent, students lack the analytical framework needed to assess halal status independently. From a behavioural perspective, this reliance on labels reflects a heuristic-based approach to decision-making, in which symbols serve as shortcuts that reduce cognitive effort. While such heuristics are practical in complex consumption environments, they also expose limitations when symbolic information is incomplete or ambiguous. The results suggest that students have not yet developed the evaluative skills required to navigate these situations, reinforcing the importance of structured halal literacy education (Muslihun, 2023).

Comparing these findings with previous studies on halal awareness reveals both consistencies and unique contributions. Prior research on adult and adolescent consumers has similarly found that recognition of the halal logo tends to be higher than a deeper understanding

of halal principles. The current study extends this pattern to the elementary school level, indicating that the gap between recognition and comprehension emerges early in the consumer socialisation process. By focusing on younger students, this research highlights the formative stage at which halal-related attitudes and behaviours begin to take shape. This contribution is particularly relevant because habits and perceptions formed during childhood often persist into adulthood.

The discussion also considers the influence of educational and environmental factors on students' understanding. Students in higher grades generally demonstrated stronger conceptual understanding and greater accuracy in product recognition tasks. This trend suggests that cognitive development and cumulative exposure to religious instruction positively affect halal literacy. However, the overall moderate level of understanding across the sample indicates that grade progression alone does not guarantee comprehensive comprehension. The findings imply that instructional quality and pedagogical approach play critical roles in shaping students' understanding of halal symbols. Passive exposure and repetitive instruction may reinforce recognition, but fall short in promoting critical thinking and application (Aswad, 2022).

The implications of these findings are multifaceted. From an educational perspective, the results highlight the need to integrate halal symbol education more explicitly into learning activities that emphasise reasoning and real-life application. Teachers may consider incorporating practical examples, product analysis exercises, and discussions about everyday food choices to help students connect abstract concepts with concrete experiences. From a policy perspective, the findings underscore the importance of clear, consistent halal labelling, particularly for products frequently consumed by children. Strengthening public awareness campaigns that target young consumers could further enhance the effectiveness of halal certification systems (Fibrianti et al., 2023).

The research relies on data from a single elementary school, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, the study captures students' understanding at a single point in time, preventing analysis of changes over time. Future research could address these limitations by employing longitudinal designs or expanding the sample to include schools from diverse socio-cultural backgrounds. Such studies would provide a more comprehensive understanding of how halal literacy develops across different contexts. Students at SDN Karangtengah Baru Wonosari possess strong visual recognition of the halal logo but exhibit limited depth in understanding its meaning and application. The findings reveal a clear gap between symbolic familiarity and functional literacy, particularly when halal status is not explicitly labelled. This research underscores the importance of early, structured, and application-oriented halal education to ensure that students are not only aware of halal symbols but also capable of using them as meaningful guides in their daily consumption behaviour. By addressing this gap, educational institutions can play a crucial role in fostering informed, ethical, and religiously consistent consumption practices from an early age.

Everyday Halal Food Consumption Behaviour of Students

Students' daily snacking patterns reveal a complex blend of preferences, accessibility, and social influence. Most students reported purchasing snacks outside school during recess and after school, with preferences shaped by taste, price, packaging, and peer influence. Packaged snacks such as chips, sweet biscuits, and flavoured drinks emerged as the most commonly consumed items, mainly due to their convenience and marketing appeal. These snacking habits reflect typical behaviour observed in elementary school contexts, where students exercise increasing independence in making small consumption decisions. However, when halal status was considered, the results revealed a discrepancy between snack popularity and students' ability to consistently choose halal options. While many students expressed a general intention to choose halal food, their actual purchasing choices often did not align with this intention, especially when halal labelling was unclear or absent (Tri Ratnasari et al., 2019).

Students are moderately selective regarding halal assurance. When products clearly display official halal certification logos, students overwhelmingly prefer those items and associate them with safety and religious correctness. This finding suggests that visible halal certification plays a crucial role as a cognitive cue in guiding consumption decisions. The reliance on halal logos aligns with consumer behaviour theory, which posits that certification marks serve as heuristics that simplify decision-making in complex environments. Students, like other consumers, use the halal symbol as a mental shortcut to evaluate permissibility without engaging in deeper inspection of ingredients or production processes. However, when products lack clear halal labelling, students' choices become inconsistent. Some still assume the food is halal based on seller reputation or because the item is familiar, while others default to taste preference or economic convenience (Sthapit et al., 2023).

Environmental influences significantly shape students' consumption behaviour. The school environment, in particular, exerts both direct and indirect pressures on food choices. Cafeteria offerings and vendors around the school largely determine what foods are available during school hours. Observations indicate that many vendors offer foods with unclear halal status, such as unpackaged snacks or foods without visible certification. Although school regulations encourage halal consumption, enforcement is inconsistent, and students frequently purchase from vendors with minimal oversight. In interviews, several students admitted that they sometimes prioritise convenience and peer acceptance over halal considerations, especially when vendors offer tastier or cheaper options. This pattern underscores the role of environmental accessibility in either reinforcing or undermining halal consumption principles (Astiwara, 2025).

The family environment also exerts a profound influence on consumption habits. Parents report instructing their children to choose halal food and emphasising the importance of halal dietary practices at home. Many parents actively check halal logos before purchase and express a desire for their children to internalise halal principles. However, students' actual behaviour demonstrates that family exhortations alone may not be sufficient to shape habitual halal consumption. Some parents acknowledged that they do not always accompany their children during afternoon snacking or may themselves purchase foods with unclear halal status due to time constraints or convenience. These discrepancies between parental intentions and children's observed behaviour mirror findings in consumer socialisation research, which suggest that parents' influence is mediated by children's autonomy, peer contexts, and everyday experiences. The interplay of parental guidance and practical constraints thus creates a nuanced environment in which halal consumption values are encouraged but not always consistently practised (Rachman & Amarullah, 2024).

The consistency of students' halal consumption behaviour emerges as a critical theme. While many students verbally affirm a commitment to eating halal food, the observational data paint a more varied picture. Consistency tends to be high when choices involve packaged foods with official certification logos or foods purchased by parents. However, consistency diminishes in informal food contexts, such as local street snacks, homemade items, or peer-to-peer sharing. In these informal settings, students are less likely to verify halal status and more likely to make choices based on sensory appeal or peer behaviour. This pattern suggests that contextual clarity and convenience of halal assurance influence the consistency of halal consumption. The presence of a recognisable symbol serves as an anchor for consistent behaviour, whereas ambiguity leads to decisions based on extraneous cues (Hassan & Osman, 2025). Examining these patterns within the broader literature on halal consumption reveals parallels with established consumer behaviour models. Previous research indicates that halal certification impacts consumers' trust, perceived safety, and purchase intention, particularly in Muslim-majority countries (Hasan, 2021). The findings from SDN Karangtengah Baru Wonosari extend this insight into a younger demographic, showing that even elementary school students internalise the significance of halal symbols, albeit to varying degrees. However, existing studies often emphasise adult consumers or university students, leaving gaps in understanding how consumption habits develop in early

childhood. The current findings help fill this gap by demonstrating that elementary-level consumption behaviour is influenced by the interplay among symbolic cues, environmental availability, and social contexts. This underscores the importance of considering developmental and situational factors when interpreting halal consumption behaviour (Abdul Khalek et al., 2023).

The discussion further suggests that the school environment represents a strategic arena for cultivating consistent halal consumption habits. Schools not only provide food options but also serve as sites where values and norms are reinforced through peer interactions, educational messaging, and institutional policies. Given that students frequently make independent food choices within and beyond school boundaries, schools can shape normative expectations about halal consumption. However, the inconsistencies observed in practice suggest the need for more structured interventions, such as halal education workshops, systematic vendor selection, and regular monitoring of food sources in the school vicinity (Suleman et al., 2021).

At the family level, the dialogue between parental guidance and children's behaviour underscores the importance of shared learning experiences. Parents who actively involve children in halal food decisions, such as reading food labels together or discussing the meaning of halal certification, may foster deeper and more consistent consumption habits. The study's findings echo broader consumer socialisation research, which posits that children learn consumption values through observation, reinforcement, and guided participation in everyday shopping practices. Integrating these insights into family routines may strengthen the alignment between intention and behaviour (Adinugraha, Shulthoni, et al., 2025).

The research has limitations that should temper the interpretation of results. The research focuses on a single school community, which may limit the generalizability to other contexts with different socio-economic or cultural dynamics. Additionally, the study relies on self-reported behaviour for some elements, which could be subject to social desirability bias, particularly given the religious nature of halal consumption. Future research could address these limitations by incorporating multi-site samples and objective measures of consumption behaviour, such as direct observation or food diary tracking. Students at SDN Karangtengah Baru Wonosari exhibit a blend of intentional halal consumption and contextual inconsistency. The study shows that while symbolic halal assurance supports positive consumption habits, environmental accessibility, social influences, and informal food contexts challenge consistent practice. These dynamics underscore the value of reinforcing halal education both in schools and within families to bridge the gap between intention and everyday behaviour. By enhancing the clarity, accessibility, and integration of halal principles into students' lived environments, educators and policymakers can support the development of informed, ethical, and consistent halal consumption habits from an early age.

Understanding Halal Symbols and Halal Food Consumption among Students

The finding indicates a significant positive relationship between students' understanding of the halal symbol and their halal food consumption behaviour. Students who demonstrated higher levels of comprehension about the meaning, purpose, and regulatory basis of the halal symbol were more likely to select and consume food products that bore official halal certification. This relationship was observed statistically through a correlational analysis, in which the degree of understanding correlated with consistent halal consumption behaviours. The findings support the hypothesis that cognitive awareness and symbolic literacy are influential determinants of consumption choices among young learners (Fitriyansyah & Adinugraha, 2025).

An initial descriptive overview of the data indicates that most students could visually identify the halal logo on food packaging. Many participants correctly pointed to the official certification mark used in Indonesia and associated it with the religious requirement for permissible consumption. However, the depth of understanding varied widely among students. While some students could articulate the broader meaning of the symbol, including its role in

signalling compliance with Islamic dietary laws, its validation by recognised authorities, and its ethical significance, others offered simplistic descriptions that equated the halal symbol solely with “good” or “safe” food. These differences in conceptual depth were meaningful in explaining variations in consumption behaviour (Adinugraha, Rahmawati, et al., 2025).

The interpretative analysis suggests that visual recognition alone does not guarantee consistent halal consumption. Instead, it is the functional understanding of what the halal symbol represents that motivates students to actively choose halal-certified products. In practical terms, students with a more sophisticated understanding displayed greater selectivity; they actively checked for the halal mark, asked questions when labels were unclear, and expressed explicit reasons for preferring certain foods over others. In contrast, students with limited understanding often defaulted to convenience, peer preference, or taste, showing less consistency in their halal choices. This pattern illustrates that symbolic meaning must be internalised beyond mere superficial familiarity to exert a meaningful influence on behaviour (Adinugraha, Sholehuddin, et al., 2025). When examining the data further, a transparent gradient emerges showing that students’ understanding increases with age and exposure to formal Islamic education. Older students and those who regularly participated in religious activities at school or in their community scored higher on measures of halal understanding. They were better able to explain not only the symbol’s appearance but also its underlying principles and implications for daily use. Correspondingly, these students displayed more consistent halal consumption behaviours, suggesting that repeated engagement with religious and ethical education strengthens both cognitive and behavioural dimensions of halal adherence (Vanany et al., 2020).

The relationship between understanding and behaviour also manifested in how students responded to ambiguous food products, that is, items without clear halal labelling, such as snacks from street vendors or unpackaged foods. Students with higher understanding tended to ask about ingredients, seek confirmation from adults, or avoid foods that might be questionable. Conversely, students with lower understanding were more likely to accept such foods based on taste, price, or familiarity, without verifying halal status. This discrepancy points to a functional application of symbolic knowledge; students who understand the halal symbol as an assurance of compliance take proactive steps to avoid uncertainty. The finding emphasises the practical value of deep understanding in real-world consumption contexts where explicit certification may not always be visible (Aufa Rizka Azzumi et al., 2023).

In discussing these results, it is important to connect them with broader theoretical frameworks. Consumer behaviour theory posits that knowledge influences attitudes, which, in turn, shape behavioural intentions and actual behaviour. In the context of halal consumption, the halal symbol acts as a pivotal informational cue. Students who interpret this cue meaningfully are more likely to form positive attitudes toward halal products and act accordingly. This research’s findings align with this theoretical perspective, underscoring the mediating role of understanding in the relationship between symbolic exposure and consumption behaviour (Maminirina Fenitra et al., 2024).

Moreover, the results contribute to the literature on consumer socialisation, which examines how individuals develop consumption competencies over time. Much of the existing research on halal consumption has focused on adults or adolescent consumers, leaving a gap in understanding how these competencies develop during childhood. The current study extends this field by showing that even at the elementary school level, cognitive understanding shapes consumption patterns. Children are not passive receivers of dietary norms; they actively interpret symbols and integrate them into decision-making processes when they possess sufficient conceptual frameworks (Iranmanesh et al., 2022).

The discussion also reveals the educational implications of these findings. The positive relationship between understanding and behaviour suggests that enhancing halal literacy in schools could be a powerful strategy for promoting consistent halal consumption. Participants who received more comprehensive instruction about what the halal symbol means were better

equipped to make informed dietary choices. This indicates that education cannot be limited to rote identification of logos; rather, it should encompass deeper explanations of halal certification processes, ethical reasoning behind halal dietary laws, and opportunities for students to practice applying this knowledge in authentic contexts. Such an approach would help bridge the gap between symbolic recognition and behavioural application (Siti Salmah & Anwar Adem Shikur, 2023).

The role of the school environment in reinforcing understanding of halal emerged as another important theme. Schools that actively integrate halal education into their curricula and daily routines, such as through classroom discussions, posters explaining halal certification, or guided analysis of food labels, foster stronger comprehension among students. Interviews with teachers and school administrators confirmed that when halal concepts were taught in interactive, contextualised ways, students demonstrated greater engagement and retention. Conversely, when halal topics were addressed only briefly or superficially, students showed limited understanding and corresponding inconsistencies in their consumption behaviour (Mukhtar et al., 2024).

Family influence also played a significant role in shaping both understanding and behaviour. Many parents explicitly taught their children about halal food and reminded them to check for halal certification. These parental practices reinforced school-based learning and contributed to students’ cognitive frameworks. However, the study found that family reinforcement alone was not sufficient without school support. In situations where parental instruction lacked depth or was not accompanied by opportunities for children to practice their understanding, students often failed to translate parental guidance into consistent behaviour. This highlights the synergistic effect of combined school and family efforts in cultivating halal literacy (Siti Maysyaroh, 2023). To further substantiate these findings, the empirical patterns observed in this research are summarised in Tables 1-3:

Table 1. Students’ Level of Understanding of the Halal Symbol

Level of Understanding of Halal Symbol	Number of Students	Percentage
High Understanding	18	24%
Moderate Understanding	39	52%
Low Understanding	18	24%

Table 1 presents the distribution of students’ levels of understanding regarding the halal symbol. The data indicate that most students demonstrate a moderate level of understanding, while a smaller proportion achieves high-level comprehension.

Table 2. Halal Food Consumption Behaviour of Students

Halal Consumption Behaviour	Number of Students	Percentage
Consistent Halal Consumption	34	45%
Occasionally Inconsistent	28	37%
Frequently Inconsistent	13	18%

Table 2 summarises students’ halal food consumption behaviour in daily life. The results show that consistent halal consumption is not yet dominant, particularly when students encounter foods without clear halal certification.

Table 3. Relationship between Understanding of Halal Symbols and Halal Consumption Behaviour

Level of Understanding	Consistent Halal Consumption	Inconsistent Consumption
High	83%	17%

Level of Understanding	Consistent Halal Consumption	Inconsistent Consumption
Moderate	49%	51%
Low	22%	78%

Table 3 illustrates the relationship between students' level of understanding of halal symbols and their consistency in halal food consumption. Higher levels of understanding are associated with greater consistency in halal consumption behaviour.

The findings also invite consideration of broader cultural and social influences. Indonesian society, with its strong Islamic identity and widespread halal norms, provides a context in which students are repeatedly exposed to halal discourse. This ambient environment likely supports baseline awareness of the halal symbol. However, ambient exposure without structured education may lead to superficial understanding, as seen in some participants. This distinction underscores the importance of deliberate educational design in transforming ambient familiarity into functional competence. It is important to acknowledge the limitations of this research. The sample was drawn from a single elementary school, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other regions or school contexts. Additionally, although the study employed both quantitative and qualitative data, the cross-sectional design limits the ability to draw causal inferences about the development of understanding over time. Future research could employ longitudinal designs to track how understanding and behaviour evolve as students progress through school grades. Comparative studies across multiple schools with diverse socio-economic backgrounds could further clarify contextual influences on halal literacy and consumption behaviour (Billah et al., 2020).

The research offers meaningful insights for researchers, educators, and policymakers. The apparent linkage between understanding and halal consumption behaviour suggests that efforts to improve halal education from an early age can have tangible effects on students' daily practices. Enhancing curriculum content, training teachers, and creating engaging learning experiences focused on halal symbolism and ethical reasoning may strengthen students' capacity to make informed consumption choices. Additionally, supporting parents with educational resources can help sustain and deepen children's understanding outside of school settings. In summary, the results and discussion reveal a robust relationship between students' understanding of the halal symbol and their halal food consumption behaviour at SDN Karangtengah Baru Wonosari. Functional comprehension of the symbol empowers students to make consistent halal choices, particularly in contexts where explicit labelling is present. The findings highlight the significance of educational interventions that go beyond symbolic recognition to foster deep, actionable understanding. Such efforts not only reinforce religious and ethical values but also foster informed, responsible consumers from an early age. Understanding halal symbols is more than academic knowledge; it is a practical competence that shapes everyday life and reflects broader cultural commitments to halal living.

CONCLUSION

This research reveals an important and somewhat unexpected finding: elementary school students demonstrate strong visual recognition of the halal symbol, yet this familiarity does not automatically translate into consistent halal food consumption behaviour. While most students at SDN Karangtengah Baru Wonosari can correctly identify the official halal logo, many rely on the symbol as a superficial cue rather than as an indicator grounded in certification processes, ingredient verification, and Islamic ethical principles. As a result, students' consumption behaviour remains inconsistent, particularly when they encounter food products without clear halal labelling, such as street snacks or unpackaged foods. This gap between symbolic

recognition and functional understanding highlights that halal awareness at an early age is often declarative rather than operational. The primary scholarly contribution of this research lies in its focus on elementary school students as active halal consumers and in its operationalisation of halal understanding through symbol literacy. By empirically demonstrating a positive relationship between students' depth of understanding of halal symbols and their actual consumption behaviour, this research extends halal consumer behaviour theory into early childhood education. It enriches existing literature by showing that symbolic comprehension is not merely a cognitive outcome but a meaningful predictor of ethical consumption practices. The findings also contribute to educational discourse by emphasising that early, application-oriented halal education can shape long-term consumption habits. The research was conducted in a single public elementary school with a limited number of respondents, which restricts the generalizability of the findings. The cross-sectional design also limits the ability to observe changes in understanding and behaviour over time. Additionally, the study relied partly on self-reported behaviour, which may be influenced by social desirability bias. Future research is therefore encouraged to involve larger and more diverse samples, adopt longitudinal or mixed-method designs, and explore the effectiveness of specific educational interventions in strengthening halal literacy and consistent halal consumption among children.

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