

SMALL MEDIUM ENTERPRISES MANAGER'S MOTIVATORS IN IMPLEMENTING ISO 22000: EXPLORATIVE STUDY

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Abstract

Demands for safe and quality food are increasing locally and globally. This phenomenon leads to food industries, especially Small and Medium Food Enterprises (SMEs) to implement a safety and quality system to control and reduce the number of cases related to food hazards. ISO 22000 is the latest certification standard for Food Safety Management Systems (FSMS) that has been amended and refined from both ISO 9001 and Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP). By implementing this certificate, food industries are able to attract more potential customers to try their products. This study is done to investigate the aforementioned food small medium enterprises' perspectives towards the implementation of ISO 22000 in eight companies in Klang Valley, Malaysia. A qualitative methodology through interview was adopted to each company's manager's perspectives on the said implementation. The interview was recorded, transcribed and analyzed for themes; three major themes that influence the managers' perspective on the implementation are: (1) customers' demands, (2) overseas requirement, and (3) product quality. This study focuses on the efficacy of implementation of ISO 22000. The findings suggested that the implementation of ISO 22000 in food SMEs is needed in order to penetrate the international markets and boost consumers' confidence towards Malaysian food products.

Key Words: *ISO 22000, food safety, small medium enterprises, food quality*

Introduction

Food safety and quality is a global concern; every consumer is entitled to have a safe product to consume (Escanciano and Santos-Vijande, 2014a). The increasing number of food companies all over the world has led to the implementation of Food Safety Systems (FSS) in order to improve the quality and safety of their products. International for Standardization (ISO) 9001 and Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP). Mercan and Bucak (2013) viewed ISO 9001 and HACCP as the pioneer of regulation enforced to ensure the safety of food products.

Another food quality system, ISO 22000, was published to fill in the managerial gap in the HACCP Food Safety System. According to Kafetzopoulos and Gotzamani (2013), ISO 22000, a food safety management system (FSMS), is better than any other certification, like ISO 9001 and HACCP, since it can be applied to any organization in the food chain that includes safety management system (Food Safety Training Tools, 2014).

Escansiano and Santos-Vijande (2014b) stated that food products take in many aspects of food safety and it comes under the umbrella term of “quality”. Department of Standards Malaysia (2013) has named two types of certifications, which are ISO 22000:2005 for international standard and ISO 22000:2012 standard for national adaption. Both standards are claimed to have outlines that are on par with the FSMS’S requirement for any organization in the food chain.

ISO 22000 has specified the requirement for FSMS in which it demands the organizations in the food chain to demonstrate their ability to control food safety hazards in order to ensure the food is safe (Department of Standards Malaysia, 2013). The aforementioned requirement for FSMS as stated in ISO 22000 IS applicable to all organizations, regardless of size of the organizations, aspects of the food chain, and willingness to implement the systems (International Trade Forum, 2007). However, not all SMEs take up ISO 22000 as the standard certification to ensure food safety and quality produced.

Small and Medium Industrial Development Corporation (SMIDEC) shows that food and beverage industry is the second largest manufacturing subsector after textiles in Malaysia; that makes the said sector as one of the largest income generator in Malaysian industry. China SME is still dominant in services, trade, construction, textiles and satellite suppliers to larger firms (Lee, 2004). According to Fernando, Ng and Yusoff (2014), majority of local industries can be classified as Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs). SMEs comprise of 99.2% business in Malaysia in 2006 which contributed about 47.3% of the Gross Domestic Profit (GDP) and employed 65.3% of the nation’s workforce. Abdullah and Zain (2011) mentioned that recently, SMEs have played an active role to expand the industry by advertising their products locally and globally. This has led to the role of SMEs operating in the manufacturing sector BEING significantly recognized (Khalique, Md. Isa, Shaari & Ageel, 2011). Surak (2007) stated that SMEs are easy to adopt accreditation like Good Manufacturing Practise (GMP), HACCP, ISO 9001 or ISO 22000. In Malaysia context, foods SMEs WHICH implement quality certification are those from small and medium sector only. Micro enterprises are getting smaller sales turnover and cannot afford to implement ISO 22000 certification (Department of Standards Malaysia, 2013).

Certification of ISO 22000 demonstrates the company's commitment to food safety, apart from to ensure they are able to build trust with stakeholders, identify and manage food safety risks, reduce or eliminate product recalls and legal action and most importantly is to protect the company's brand. ISO 22000 aligns with other ISO management system standards, making it easier to integrate food safety management with quality, environmental or health and safety management (Lloyd's Register Qual, 2013).

According to Department of Standards Malaysia (2013), there are a lot of benefits in implementing ISO 22000 certificates in a company. For instance, it can help the company to penetrate domestic and international markets that comply with the legal requirement. Furthermore, the said standard certification can also safeguard the business and provide customers, suppliers and stakeholders with confidence since the company has the capability to manage food safety hazard.

However, not all food SMEs voluntarily implements ISO 22000 in their companies because there are many requirements that need to be followed such as documentation and strict guidelines (Joppen, 2005). Teixeira and Sampaio (2011) stated by following the ISO 22000 standard, the food safety management system will operate and update with safety and quality of food products. Food SMEs have more difficulties in penetrating and competing in the international market now that food safety and quality is becoming a global concern (ISO and Food, 2013).

FSMS is an essential element for a company to export food product and ensure the food is of good quality (Escanciano & Santos-Vijande, 2014b). Ames (2009) stated organizations should consider adopting ISO 22000 for three reasons which are: (1) it benefits the marketplace, (2) it benefits the organization that produces the food, and also (3) it goes well beyond regulatory requirements. In addition to that, implementation of ISO 22000 has to be made compulsory now that foreign markets, especially in European countries, have set their guidelines that ISO 22000 certification is necessary before exporting to their country.

In ISO focus (2013), ISO standard helps the company, especially food SMEs to compete with other bigger food enterprises. As supported by Zommodi (2014), ISO 22000 is a standard that is applied to food safety. Despite the aforementioned facts, most companies are reluctant to implement ISO 22000 because it incurs high cost (Yiridoe & Marett, 2004); the cost of preventing food hazards is lesser than the cost of handling food-borne illness once it occurs (Department of Standards Malaysia, 2013). Seng (2007) stated that that the benefits of implementing ISO 22000 system are worth more than the cost and documentation business.

On a positive note, the implementation of ISO 22000 is proven to reduce the cost of sales if it is adhered by the company from the beginning of the process. To date, no researcher has yet found any published empirical study that focuses solely on the implementation of ISO 22000 in food SMEs in Malaysia. Therefore, it is the purpose of this study to investigate food SMEs' managements' perspective towards ISO 22000 system in their respective companies and further identify how the system helps SMEs to get into the global market.

2. Material and methods

2.1 Research design

The study employs a non-contrived setting using an exploratory method to determine the implementation of ISO 22000 in food SME. Semi-structured questions were developed and distributed to the population that includes 133 food SMEs in Klang Valley. Eight companies agreed to participate in this interview. The researcher interviewed the person-in-charge of ISO 22000 in the each company with a reviewed protocol. The protocol was reviewed by two managers; one is a senior manager in Nelson's Franchise, Shah Alam and another lecturer in Faculty of Hotel and Tourism Management. A set of four semi-structured questions are set up by the researcher with some adaptation from Tranchard's (2008). The questions include respondent's profiles, company background, company's certification status, and interview questions.

This study was done in Selangor and Kuala Lumpur due the many small medium enterprises available in the said location. Permission was given by the ethics committee and the list of SMEs companies was acquired from SME Corporation. The face-to-face interview was conducted after appointment was made with the officers involved in the implementation of ISO 22000 in the office during working hours. The participants were asked to review and sign the consent form. The interview was recorded using Lenovo Phone Sound Recorder.

All interviews were planned and carried out in English. However, during the interview, some participant used dual languages, English and Malay language, in their responses. The data was collected in the duration of two weeks in the month of November 2014. The interview took approximately 35 to 40 minutes for each session.

2.2 Data analysis procedure

All the data was gathered by using both audio recording and handwritten information. The data from audio recorder was transcribed right after each interview session. The recorded interviews were played repeatedly to feel the impact of the stories from the actual voice of the informants. For the interviews conducted in Malay language, the data was transcribed verbatim and translated to English. The transcription typed in type pages with single spacing was reviewed by another staff committee of this study before the researcher looked for themes and sub-themes using pen-portrait analysis. Pen-portrait analysis is the manual method to find out the most repeated words without using any software (Gaztambide-Fernandez, Cairns, Kawashima, Menna, & VanderDussen, 2011). There are eight themes found from the transcription.

3. Results and discussion

3.1 Respondents profiles

Referring to Table 3.1, eight respondents from different food SMEs are involved in this research. Their identity remains confidential and the researcher has assigned each

respondent with one alphabet (A to H) as their alternate identity. The respondents are males and females with age range between 26 and 55 years old. All of them are the persons in charge of ISO 22000 system in their respective companies. All respondents have had two to 30 of working experience and are able to answer the entire query regarding ISO 22000.

All the eight food SMEs chosen for the study came from different locations in Klang Valley area and with different product backgrounds. Most respondents are from food SMEs that were established as early as 1973. All companies have other quality certification apart from ISO 22000. Table 3.1 shows the information on the year of ISO 22000 implementation and other certificates that they have for the safety and quality of their products. This information is required to measure how well

these companies have experienced the ISO 22000 implementation and other important certificates.

Table 3.1

Respondents and Company Profiles

3.2 INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Respondent	Job position	Respondents years of working in the industry	Respondents years of working in the company	Company establish since	Company Major Products	Implementing ISO since	Other certification
A	Manager	30 years	10 years	1973	Beverages, instant rice porridge	2007	Halal
B	Senior Manager	17 years	17 years	1985	Corn	2012	GMP, Halal
C	Business Development Manager	7 years	7 years	1984	Sesame oils, sauce, seasoning, paste	2011	ISO 9001, HACCP, GMP, SIRIM
D	QA and QC Executive	2 years	1 ½ years	1993	Frozen and dry products	2007	MeSTI, Halal
E	Administration Manager	2 years	2 years	1978	Bean curd skin	2011	MeSTI, GMP, Halal
F	Business Development Manager	4 years	2 years	1987	Frozen seafood and pastry	2006	Halal, HACCP
G	QC Executive	3 years	2 years	1992	Lollipops, chewy candy, toffee, hard boiled	2008	ISO 9001:2003, HACCP, Malaysian Std, Halal, National Mark (Malaysian Brand)
H	QA Executive	6 years	3 ½ years	1985	Steambun, finger foods	2009	HACCP, Halal

The interview questions were developed to investigate the food SMEs managers' perspective towards ISO22000 implementation in companies situated at Klang Valley. The questions include managers' opinion regarding the quality system certification, the importance of ISO22000 system in their respective company, the reasons for choosing ISO 22000, how ISO22000 help the companies TO GO into global market, and the challenges in implementing ISO 22000.

3.2.1 Managers' opinion regarding food industries' quality system certification

Quality system certification is crucial, especially in food industries, because it ensures the quality and safety of the food consumed by the consumers. Based on the interview, there are a few themes gathered from this question. The themes are listed in Table 3.2

3.2.1.1 Quality of food

Quality of food is the quality characteristics of food that is deemed acceptable by the consumers. Based on the answer given by all food SMEs, it was made clear that most of the respondents share similar views on the quality system certification. Below are the verbatim answers from selected respondent;

"It is a need and there is a safety measure for our food and products before being sold to consumer."

(Company E)

"In my view, all companies in food [business]. [need] to implement ISO 22000 especially SMEs industry. By having ISO certificate, it can also BOOST customer's confidence when purchasing goods in the supermarket or somewhere else. I also think that customers should be enlightened regarding the food safety issues so that they know how to choose their food. I also think that [the standard certificate] should also be applied for imported products sold in our country."

(Company G)

From all eight food SMEs, Company E, G, and H believe that the quality of food is one of the attributes for quality system certification in food industries.

3.5.1.2 System

System in food production refers to the flow or process for something to be certified as safe. In food quality system, it focuses on the process of food production. From the interview, there are three food SMEs that believe quality system certification is a well-covered system that helps their companies to be better in terms of system in the workplace. Apart from that, employees also have guidelines to follow and the quality of food can be assured.

"I think it [the system] is well- managed. Our factory in Ipoh has HACCP and ISO certified. So, as the team leader there, I find it is quite adequate. It's well covered in the area that they need to monitor."

(Company B)

“My opinion, this qualification, for the company this to quality establish their market and to expand their market, whether in this country or export their product to the outside.”

(Company D)

With 17 years of working experience, Company B shares her experience as the team leader; by having quality system certification, like HACCP and ISO, it really helps their company as a whole. Company D also has similar views as Company B.

3.5.2 The importance of ISO 22000 system in the respective companies

Different food SMEs have different importance of ISO 22000 system. Generally, ISO 22000 system is eligible for safety and quality of food. The purpose of ISO 22000 is to provide a practical approach to ensure the reduction and elimination of food safety risks as means to protect consumers. According to the interview, there are a few themes developed from this question. Product quality and control are among other themes found during the interview.

3.5.2.1 Product quality

Quality is a standard of measure the degree of excellence. In terms of product quality, it focused on the product that relate to quality. Below are the verbatim answers from selected respondents:

“As I said before, (standard certificate) helps to maintain the quality of a product and ensures continuous improvement.”

(Company C)

“The importance ISO 22000 to our company is to ensure the products’ safety and quality before reaching the market and it is also a standard procedure that is established for all tasks or department and we need to ensure that we standardize it for all departments.”

(Company G)

Company C and G share similar ideas on how important ISO 22000 system is in their company as it will affect their product quality. As mentioned by respondents from Company G and Company C, product quality should be assured before entering the market in order to control the quality.

3.5.2.2 Control

ISO 22000 system ensures adequate control at all stages of the food supply chain to prevent the introduction of food safety hazards. That is why control is important in ISO 22000 certification in order to confirm the safety and quality of food.

“It is for the quality control and very crucial especially for food hygiene.”

(Company B)

“Other than that, it is a better control of the products or raw materials since all are properly documented.”

(Company G)

According to Company B and G, control starts from the first process which is handling the raw materials. Other than that, by controlling the quality in food hygiene as mentioned by Company B, the company can certify the safety and the quality of food from the very beginning.

3.5.3 Reasons for company to implement ISO 22000 instead of other certification

ISO 22000 is a full-covered safety and quality standard certification, according to FSMSs. ISO 22000 acts as a whole while HACCP and ISO 9001 have their limited function. The themes found to answer the question are comprehensive and customer demand.

3.5.3.1 Comprehensive

Comprehensive here refers as a large scope of something. In ISO 22000 system, comprehensive means the standard certification covers a large scope of safety and quality of food or product. Below are the verbatim answers from selected respondents:

“I mean, HACCP is one thing but quality. You have to look at employees as well as your workplace and basically it (ISO22000) encompasses different, something a little bit different about it. It (ISO22000) cross references to HACCP. But quality, quality management is more about the system that you are implementing in the company itself. It is apart from the processes. Basically, it was suggested and proposed by the internal and the external auditors. So probably the ISO 22000 is something that IS quite comprehensive. It is not too complicated and one of the simplest steps”

(Company B)

“It is because ISO 22000 include HACCP and also GMP. That is why we only implement ISO22000 instead other certificate. Previously we actually have ISO 9001, but we have already upgraded to ISO 22000.”

(Company D)

Company B and D FIND that ISO 22000 is better than HACCP, GMP and ISO 9001. Both companies admit that other certification is good, but the implementation of ISO22000 systems in the company is much better.

3.5.3.2 Customer demand

The customer is always the push factor for companies or organizations to be better. That is the reason why most companies focus on their customer needs and wants. Safety and quality are some of the attributes that influence the customers before

buying their food. Most of them spend time to read and look at the ingredients as well as the printed logo before buying any product. Below are the verbatim answers from selected respondents:

“Actually, we do have other ISO 22000 certification boost customers’ confidence towards our products. ISO 22000 system can ensure the product is of high quality and safe.”

(Company G)

“It is more than about the standard. If you want to export to the global market, ISO22000 makes our company feel competent, like how the outside market demands.”

(Company H)

Company G and H said that by implementing ISO 22000, customers will be more confident and certain about the product. Amazingly, this will also boost the sales and food SME’s name too. There are SMEs that implement the ISO 22000 not because of customers’ demands, but for other reasons. Below are the verbatim answers from respondent FROM Company A:

“Honestly, back then our company implements ISO 22000 for entrepreneurs who want to get the grant from SMIDEC. During that time, any company that wants financial aid or grants, they need to apply ISO22000. But the hard thing, the complicated auditing came along. But now SMIDEC do not offer any grant anymore.”

(Company A)

With 30 years of experience in the food industry, the respondent from Company A acknowledged the importance of ISO 22000 system in the year 2006. He also thinks the company implemented ISO 22000 to grab the opportunity to get the grant from SMIDEC. He also acknowledges that the customers also feel more confident to buy his company’s products in the existence of ISO 22000 logo on the packaging.

“It was a requirement that time, so for our company, we just follow the industries”

(Company E)

“ISO 22000 was the best in 2006. It was the highest certificate during that time actually”

(Company F)

Company E and F also admit that their companies implemented ISO 22000 for the sake of requirement at that time. They need to follow because the requirement to export their products was to have the ISO 22000 certificate.

3.5.4 ISO 22000 systems could help company to go into global markets

Not all food SMEs has exported their products to overseas market. It is quite costly and this holds them back from expanding their business outside. Costly budget is not the only reason; meticulous steps and regulation need to be followed before they can

export their products, this leads them to focus more on the local market than expanding their products on the global scale. During the interview, all the respondents said that their respective companies have exported their product and it is not an issue. A few more themes are gathered from this question, which are (1) overseas' requirement and (2) recognition.

3.5.4.1 Overseas requirement

It is not easy to export local products to the outside markets. A lot of requirements need to be met. All food and food-related products exported to Europe countries must meet EU standards. They also have to comply with additional requirements set by the destination countries or markets. The particular requirements that need to be met depends on the product to export and the destination countries laws and legislations. The overseas requirement is not to prevent other countries from exporting their products, but to control the safety and quality of food. Below are the verbatim answers from selected respondents:

“First, I will go through the local market. B ministry guidelines for exporting the products. I mean the minimum criteria to export our product, as an example, HACCP: it has the requirement to export. We have to follow local market first before export to outside. In the global market, by having ISO 22000 certification, it actually gives our company warranty that our product...”

(Company D)

“It is actually for some countries...it's a requirement to have ISO 22000 before exporting our products and once again, it can convince our customers, especially our overseas customers. For another reason, by implementing ISO, it gives us a good competition in term of quality with other food companies. ISO 22000 somehow gives good advantages and also impression towards the products.”

(Company G)

“Before we export to the outside market, if we have ISO 22000, we are more advanced than the companies that do not have ISO 22000 certificates. We can easily penetrate a foreign market when we meet the entire requirement demanded by the outside market.”

(Company H)

Most of the food SMEs believes that the overseas requirement is one of the elements needed before exporting their products. Thus, by having ISO 22000 certificate, one of the requirements is fulfilled.

3.5.4.2 Recognition

Recognition or acknowledgements of the existence, validity or legality of products are some of the things pursued by these companies, in general. HACCP, GMP, ISO 9001, as well as ISO 22000 are the examples of recognition sought by the companies. By having one of the aforementioned certificates, it will give acknowledgement to the company. Among all the aforementioned certificates, ISO 22000 is the best

recognition because it is made up of both GMP and HACCP without the needs for separate accreditation. Below are the verbatim answers from selected respondents:

“Through recognition [of our product], we can obtain high confidence level from our customer.”

(Company C)

“Customers will have more trust in our products, they will feel more confident and their safety is assured.”

(Company E)

Respondents from Company C and E believe that the recognition of ISO 22000 in their respective companies will attract more customers. However, not all companies think that ISO 22000 really help them to export their products into the global market. Below are the verbatim answers from respondent in Company A:

“Not helping at all! In this industry, we have some lab test to do; it is to be able to get a Certificate of Analysis (COA). ISO 22000 is actually not enough, it's not synchronized with the global market. To do a lab test is not easy, it takes some time. Outside countries do not even bother if we have ISO 22000 or not, but follow the guidelines that are already set up, they want more than ISO 22000. For me, I do not see the point of having ISO 22000 certificate since the global market does not consider it at all.”

(Company A)

According to the respondent, having ISO 22000 certificates was not sufficient for foreign market and local SMEs need more than ISO 22000. As the manager in one of the food SMEs in Kuala Selangor, he seems upset with the different guidelines and requirements needed if they export their product to different countries. As stated before, different destination requires different rules on import and export of food products.

3.5.5 Challenges in implementing ISO 22000 in the companies

Challenges and problems will normally occur before or during the process of implementing ISO22000 in a company. In terms of challenges and problems in the ISO 22000 systems, the companies' experiences in implementing ISO 22000 are explored with great scrutiny.

3.5.5.1 Commitment

Employee's commitment is essential in order to certify the company's production is going well without any delay. In ISO 22000 system, employees' commitment is crucial in order to retain the process in food production. Without active participation from employees, ISO 22000 cannot be carried out and the companies will face more problems in the future. Below are the verbatim answers from selected respondents:

“From what I can recall, we need employees' commitment, so it is important

train employees regarding that matter.”

(Company C)

“Before ISO22000 was set up, there was some problem regarding the acceptance among the employees, but after the implementation, it was already okay and employees can follow easily.”

(Company E)

“What I see lacking now is understanding, especially from supervisory level and below...usually operator.”

(Company G)

Based on the answer above, Company G faced a problem in terms of behavior. The staffs were initially reluctant to change to the new guidelines. Some of the companies only implement ISO 22000 recently, which is why most of the employees are reluctant to change and adapt to the new system. Respondent from Company E mentioned that although their employees were reluctant to accept the new guidelines initially, eventually, they are able to abide by the rules without much difficulty. On the other hand, respondent from Company A disagrees with the question asked. Below is the verbatim answer from respondent in Company A:

“There are no issues to implement ISO22000 at all. Like I said before, we implement ISO22000 just to get the grant. We actually have a Halal certificate that should be enough for local markets. Before implementing ISO, we already expected that the company need to liaise with all kinds of auditing in the future.”

(Company A)

As the manager in medium food enterprises, respondent from Company A did not face any problem regarding ISO 22000 implementation before or during the process. For him, workers should just follow the decision made by the management and there was no issue regarding the employees' commitment at all. Since he implemented ISO 22000 just for the sake of getting the grant, whether they like it or not, ISO 22000's documentation and process need to be done.

3.5.5.2 Resources

A resource is a source or supply from which benefit is produced. Typically, resources are materials, energy, services, staffs, knowledge or others that are transformed to produce benefits. In terms of ISO 22000, resources include staffs, knowledge and services. Below are the verbatim answers from selected respondents:

“There is no problem at all. At first, we did not ask the consultant to do it for us. Based on our HACCP experience, we wrote our own manual and implemented what was necessary. If the consultant tells you what you want, then it's different from what you experience in your company and then you know what you want so you write your own.”

(Company B)

“Other than that, lack of resources such as personnel who can handle ISO 22000 systems”

(Company G)

“Overseas do not liaise with us before we implement ISO 22000. It was quite hard for us to export our product, but after implementing it, they can actually liaise with us already”

(Company F)

Services, staffs, and knowledge are examples of resources as mentioned above. Company B, F and G stated that with enough resources, they can improve in term of workers, production and the company itself. As claimed by respondent in Company G, the company lacks in personnel resources to train and assist their operational workers. Their responses show how much the resources themselves affect other things in the ISO 22000 systems.

In contrast to the previously mentioned respondents, there are two respondents who are not really sure what happened before the implementation of ISO 22000 as they only started working at the respective companies after the implementation of ISO 22000. Despite the ignorance, respondent from Company D faces no problems with the workers there. Respondent from Company H, on the other hand, mentioned that the workers still need to be reminded and assisted on what they need to do

“So far, I am not really sure [about the system] because when I started working here, ISO22000 has already been implemented...There were no complaints for now, but I am not sure of what happened before the implementation. ”

(Company D)

“I am not really sure the company already implemented [ISO22000]before I started working here But for me, from what I see, operation workers have difficulties to follow our producer, probably because most of them do not have higher education, so they do not quite understand when we only explain once, they need to always be reminded.”

(Company H)

Table 3.2

	Quality of food	System	Product Quality	Control	Comprehensive	Customer demand	Overseas requirement	Recognition
Company A			x			x	x	
Company	x	x		x	x		x	

B								
Company	x		x					x
C								
Company		x	x	x	x		x	x
D								
Company	x	x				x		
E								
Company						x	x	
F								
Company	x		x	x		x	x	x
G								
Company	x	x				x	x	
H								

Themes for Question 1-5

4. Discussion and Conclusions

From the result, the researcher is able to identify the factors that influence the managers' perspective towards ISO 22000 implementation in food SMEs. The researcher found that customers' demands, overseas requirement and product quality are the factors that influence the managers' perspective on the implementation of ISO 22000 in food SMEs. Most food SMEs implemented ISO 22000 for the benefit of their customer. Customers' demands for safe and quality food give more reasons for the companies to implement the safety and quality system such as ISO 22000.

After ISO 22000 was introduced back in 2006 in Malaysia, not all companies, especially food SMEs took the opportunities to learn and implemented ISO 22000 (Abdirahman & Sauvee, 2012). In the early 2000s, GMP alone was enough to be used as the guideline for the consumers to know that the products they purchased were safe and in a good condition. Unfortunately, GMP's guidelines are not in line with the rules and regulations set up by foreign countries for import and export. Food SMEs found that ISO 22000 is one of the guidelines required by the foreign market to penetrate and expand their market overseas. From the results, overseas requirement is one of the main factors that influence managers' perspective towards ISO 22000 implementation in their company.

In addition to that, implementation of ISO 22000 can assure the quality of the products. Before a company sells its product, the company needs to assess and evaluate the product's quality. The product needs to be certified from the very beginning of the process. As mentioned before in the findings, the quality of food is determined starting from the process of handling raw material, thus ensuring the whole production process is of good quality.

All the factors that influence the perspective of managers are parallel with the study of Escanciano and Santos-Vijande (2014a) that highlights the quality of product and customer demand as the reason for SME in Spain to implement ISO 22000. Sauvee and Abdirahman (2013) also support the claim in which they say that the quality of product and meeting customer preferences are the main factors for implementing ISO 22000 in food SMEs in France.

There are a lot of importance of ISO 22000 system in food SMEs. It was found that to ensure product quality, the company needs to have highly recognized certification like ISO 22000 as the guideline. Blanc (2006) claimed that ISO 22000 is the most used by companies in the food chain beside HACCP and ISO 9001. Additionally, Ames (2009) supported the aforementioned statement in his article by saying that the quality of food is becoming customer's concern and the needs to provide food of good quality is crucial.

Respondent from Company B repeatedly said that ISO 22000 system is a well-covered and systematic system to be implemented. With 17 years of experience as the team leader, respondent from Company B strongly believes that ISO 22000 really helps the company in guaranteeing the safety and quality of the food. According to Fargemand (2008), there are four elements of ISO 22000 which are: (1) involvement of the management team, (2) communication, (3) HACCP principle, and (4) system management. Based on his statement, system management of ISO 22000 has the most effective food safety systems with better structure. ISO 22000 is also aligned with the requirements of ISO 9001.

Other than that, Escanciano and Santos-Vijande (2014) and Sauvee and Abdirahman (2013) agreed that customers' pressure is one of the reasons for the company to implement ISO 22000. As stated from the findings, customers' demands for safe and quality food lead to food SMEs' decision to implement ISO 22000.

ISO 22000 helps food SMEs to penetrate into international market. Most respondents claimed that by following the requirement that being set up by the foreign market, they can liaise with international companies without having problems. As mentioned by Rusell (2009), after four years of launching of ISO 22000, the quality system has already been accepted by more than 300 countries which mean it is not hard to adhere to on the system to ensure safety and quality of food. That is the reason why most respondents agree that overseas requirement is a must if their companies want to expand and penetrate the global markets. To add, recognition can be gained with the existence of ISO 22000's logo printed on the packaging of the product advertised. Recognition from customer and also from the food industries help food SMEs to make their business known in the international market. Respondents from Company C, D, and G shared similar ideas in which they believe that the recognition of ISO 22000 has improved their customers' confidence towards their products. Food SMEs need to be aware that recognition as well as ISO 22000 logo can act as a marketing tool which indirectly promote safety and quality food provided via their own packaging.

Based on the research, ISO 22000 systems can help food SMEs penetrate the global markets. Other countries have set up their food safety rules and regulations before importing other food products into their countries. By following the overseas requirement to have ISO 22000 certification, food SMEs in Malaysia will be able to export their products. ISO 22000 certification is also crucial as a recognition for the customers and other food companies. Recognition from customers will be able to assist the companies to attract more customers to purchase Malaysian food products. Hence, in order to compete in and penetrate the international market, local food SMEs need to consider implementing ISO 22000 in their companies.

There is a small increment of percentage of implementation of ISO 22000 in food SMEs; this shows that the food industries, especially food SMEs, are moving towards providing safe and quality food for their consumers. Last but not least, all food SMEs should implement ISO 22000 in order to ensure the safety and quality of product. As food quality is a global concern now, it is compulsory for food SMEs to provide their consumers with safe products and the certification is a proof that they are serious about it.

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5. References

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