

# The Effectiveness of MyREF HijrahPreneur Skills Program in Enhancing Economic Sustainability among *Hijrah* Community

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**Abstract.** The *hijrah* community group is a vulnerable group that deserves comprehensive guidance and support in numerous forms. This effort is necessary to prevent members of this group from reverting back to their previous circumstances. By recognizing this need, the Malaysian Research and Education Foundation (MyREF) stepped in to assist the *hijrah* community in enhancing their entrepreneurial and leadership skills, with a particular focus on ten selected participants. This study employed the action research method with the incorporation of observation and open-ended questionnaire methods in order to achieve its two primary objectives. The objectives are to identify the skills development program for the *hijrah* community and analyze the program's effectiveness by examining certain aspects. To recapitulate, through the employment of the content analysis method, this study demonstrates the skills development program which includes MyREF Advanced Digital Entrepreneur Program (MyREF ADEP), MyREF Business Management Program (MyREF BMP) and MyREF Halal Training Program (MyREF HTP) has given a positive impact through indicators of income, new knowledge and skills, systematic marketing strategies, product ideas and innovations that ultimately form economic sustainability for the *hijrah* community.

**Keywords:** *Hijrah* Community, Economy, LGBT, Drug Abusers

## 1 Introduction

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) issues and substance abuse are pressing social challenges that have gained constant debate and attention due to their complex nature. The LGBT phenomenon not only raises moral and religious questions but also challenges established societal norms and cultural values. In addition, drug abusers often engage in criminal activities to support addiction and result in legal issues. Due to uncommon behaviours, many individuals find it challenging to accept the presence of this community in a broader, more diverse society. Delving into these social issues, it becomes evident that some individuals within this community wish to embrace their true selves, leading to migration or a return to their authentic identities

and individuality. However, the *hijrah* community exhibits heightened concern regarding migration decisions, primarily stemming from financial and career instability. Consequently, there is an increased likelihood that individuals within this community may revert back to their former way of life.

Various programs, often driven by da'wah initiatives, have been initiated to address these issues. While some programs have successfully aided individuals on their journey toward change, others have faced obstacles that hinder their effectiveness. In order to sustain a lasting transformation and changes, addressing the economic and vocational aspects of their lives is crucial. Additionally, these groups often possess untapped potential, and nurturing their hidden talents can lead to sustainable livelihoods. Recognizing and empowering these talents contributes to long-term success. Furthermore, many existing intervention models are characterized by a "touch and go" approach, leaving program sustainability uncertain once individuals are on their own. Ensuring ongoing support and mentorship is vital to maintaining progress and preventing relapse. These challenges underscore the need for comprehensive, holistic approaches considering immediate issues and the broader socioeconomic factors impacting these individuals' lives. Addressing financial stability, nurturing talents, and providing long-term support can enhance the effectiveness of da'wah efforts and other intervention programs in helping individuals overcome these complex social problems.

In Islam, it is essential to extend support to the *hijrah* community, as they fall under the category of *asnaf al-riqab*, making them eligible to receive zakat. This inclusion is justified by the challenges they face due to a non-conventional lifestyle, as acknowledged by the Selangor Islamic Religious Council in 2022. Traditionally, *al-riqab* referred to liberating enslaved people from the *jahiliyah* slavery and war prisoner systems. However, as presented by Nur Anisah Nordin and Wan Mohd Khairul Firdaus Wan Khairuldin (2018), contemporary interpretations recognize that modern slavery extends beyond physical bondage to include mental and socio-economic aspects. This expanded view highlights the need to support marginalized groups such as the *hijrah* community to free them from the constraints of social stigma and faith-related challenges.

Assisting this community is an expression of compassion and a means to enhance their economic well-being, shielding them from the grips of poverty. This endeavour aligns with the broader objective of zakat, which is to elevate the financial standing of Muslims. Hence, it is incumbent upon the Islamic community to address the unique needs of the *hijrah* community and guide them towards a more inclusive and supportive environment.

Realizing this issue, MyREF has introduced a comprehensive initiative that focuses on fostering economic development among the *hijrah* community, specifically targeting individuals who have transitioned from LGBT and drug abuse backgrounds. This initiative is called the MyREF HijrahPreneur Skills Program (MyREF HSP). This program serves as an extension of the preceding training initiative, known as MyREF Digital Entrepreneur (MyREF DEP), albeit with a more intensive and comprehensive framework of its own. In essence, this program comprises three distinct sub-programs designed to facilitate sustainable income generation within the *hijrah* community.

These sub-programs are MyREF Advanced Digital Entrepreneur Program (My-ADEP), MyREF Business Management Program (MyREF BMP) and MyREF Halal Training Program (MyREF HTP).

## 2 Methodology

This paper represents an action research that fits with the studies of social issues within the *hijrah* community. Simultaneously, it delves into investigating this group through the evaluation of skills development programs. To achieve the research aims, two primary data collection methods were employed. These methods include observation and open-ended questionnaire methods specifically designed for ten participants. Subsequently, during the data analysis phase, the content analysis method using the thematic method was assessed to analyze the effectiveness of the skills development program based on several aspects in the input of the program implemented.

## 3 Discussion and Analysis

The achievements and impacts of the MyREF Digital Entrepreneur Program (MyREF DEP) have provided the impetus for the expansion of the MyREF HSP program. MyREF DEP has yielded notable improvements in the businesses of its participants. As a result, MyREF has initiated the provision in offering a more comprehensive skill training program for a selected group of ten participants from the *hijrah* community. This specialized training will be conducted in collaboration with subject matter experts (SMEs) from MyREF who possess the requisite expertise to align with the goals, deliverables and outcomes envisioned by the MyREF HSP.

**Table 1.** Objectives, Output and Outcome of MyREF HSP

Objectives	Output	Outcome
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To provide knowledge on entrepreneurship, business and halal management to the participants;</li> <li>• To train the participants with the skills needed for a successful entrepreneur;</li> <li>• To prepare participants to become mentors and guide their mentees effectively;</li> <li>• To open up space and opportunities for each participant to expand their business.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participants who are knowledgeable and skilled in managing their own business;</li> <li>• Participants who are capable of being leaders and able to train their mentees to succeed in business.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Entrepreneurs who are proficient in digital marketing, business management and halal management;</li> <li>• Entrepreneurs who have the skills to train other entrepreneurs to succeed in business together.</li> </ul>

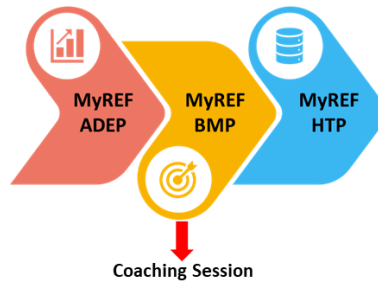
The selection of ten participants for the MyREF HSP is based on their outstanding performance in improving their businesses after participating in the MyREF DEP. MyREF recognizes the potential for these ten individuals to further elevate their entrepreneurial endeavors. Consequently, MyREF HSP is introduced through "train-the-trainer" and "mentor-mentee" to ensure the most significant possible impact on the participants.

For the "train-the-trainer" method, the program trainer imparts skill training directly to the ten selected participants. Conversely, in the "mentor-mentee" approach, ten participants who undertake the responsibility of mentors will be offering direction and training to two mentees each, whom they personally select. The subsequent detailed flowchart illustrates the implementation of both the "train-the-trainer" and "mentor-mentee" methods within the MyREF HSP program.



**Fig. 1.** Flow Chart of MyREF HSP

During the "mentor-mentee" phase, each participant is responsible to identify two mentees from the *hijrah* community. Subsequently, they were actively involved in the three sub programs and coaching sessions.



**Fig. 2.** Implementation of MyREF ADEP, MyREF BMP and MyREF HTP

The coaching sessions are conducted following the completion of the three programs. In the skill training program designed for the *hijrah* community, the primary emphasis is placed on providing continuous guidance. This emphasis is particularly crucial for this vulnerable group, as they require consistent moral support and ongoing direction.

Thus far, all ten participants who enrolled in MyREF HSP have effectively implemented the "mentor-mentee" approach. Consequently, they have assisted their

peers within the *hijrah* community in enhancing their understanding of business management and strengthening their economic stability. The businesses of all ten participants are as follows:

**Table 2.** Participant's Business Types

No.	Participants	Business Type
1	P1	Perfume
2	P2	Bomboloni Doughnut, Burger Omak, Banana Chips and <i>Sambal Tumis</i> (sauteed chili)
3	P3	Crochet Cap
4	P4	Bread and Cake Based Products
5	P5	India Curry Puff
6	P6	Food and Beverages, Bakery and Wedding Planner Service
7	P7	Garlic Medicated Oil ( <i>Minyak angin bawang putih</i> )
8	P8	Frozen Curry Puff
9	P9	Frozen Curry Puff and Frozen Sugarcane Juice
10	P10	Dried Lemon and Detox Tea

These ten participants are actively participating in three concurrent sub-programs: the MyREF Advanced Digital Entrepreneur Program (MyREF ADEP), the MyREF Business Management Program (MyREF BMP), and the MyREF Halal Training Program (MyREF HTP).

### 3.1 MyREF HSP Sub Program

#### MyREF Digital Entrepreneurship Program (MyREF ADEP)

The MyREF Advanced Digital Entrepreneur Program (MyREF ADEP) represents the evolution of MyREF's prior training endeavor, known as the MyREF Digital Entrepreneur Program (MyREF DEP). MyREF DEP provided participants with a foundational understanding of digital marketing techniques for promoting their products online.

In contrast, MyREF ADEP offers participants a more precise and comprehensive training in online marketing, with an emphasis on its applicability during the COVID-19 pandemic. This program equips participants with the skills to market their products without the need for physical customer interactions. Instead, customers can explore and purchase their products online. Some key components covered in MyREF ADEP's syllabus include:



**Fig. 3.** Syllabus of MyREF ADEP

During the course and mentoring sessions, both mentors and mentees will undergo assessments in the form of tests to gauge their comprehension and proficiency in the sub-programs they are engaged in. These assessments are reviewed and assessed by the program secretariat and trainer. In the context of MyREF ADEP, the assessments are centred around strategies and methods for boosting the sales of participants' products and services. The assignments encompass tasks such as creating regular posts on platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Google Business Profile, WhatsApp Broadcast, developing content management, devising a comprehensive content planner for one month, establishing brand identity, crafting brand boards, building brand awareness, maintaining a customer database, organizing sales campaigns using the *Canva* application, and creating short videos for each product.

### **MyREF Business Management Program (MyREF BMP)**

The MyREF Business Management Program (MyREF BMP) is designed to provide all ten participants with insights into business management. Certified trainers and academic faculty from the University of Malaya have collaborated with MyREF under a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to deliver this program. MyREF's inclusion of academic staff in MyREF BMP serves as an initiative to obtain recognition for the program from the university, thereby enhancing its value for participants. Some critical components of MyREF BMP's syllabus include:



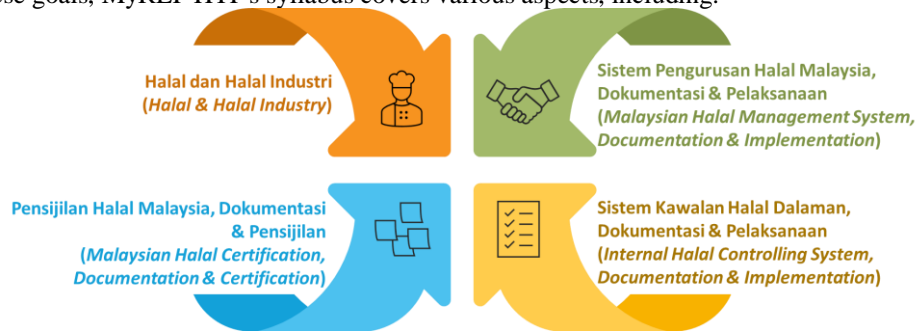
**Fig. 4.** Syllabus MyREF BMP

In MyREF BMP, the assessment evaluates participants' ability to manage their financial accounts, expenses, and product innovation. Participants are allocated to various tasks including the maintenance of their business cash books using Microsoft Excel, the completion of an innovation summary form, the procurement of copyright for their products, and the formulation of SMART objectives for each of their business ventures.

### MyREF Halal Training Program (MyREF HTP)

The MyREF Halal Training Program (MyREF HTP) is a specialized program tailored for participants engaged in the food and beverage (F&B) sector. Five participants operating F&B-based businesses with growth potential will be chosen to participate in MyREF HTP. Their involvement is pivotal to equip them with knowledge about Malaysia's halal system and industry, which they can subsequently apply to enhance their businesses.

MyREF envisions that this program will propel the growth of these initially small-scale businesses, enabling them to expand and potentially establish additional branches and franchises. Simultaneously, participants can assist their peers in the *hijrah* community in pursuing businesses that contribute to economic growth. To realize these goals, MyREF HTP's syllabus covers various aspects, including:



**Fig. 5.** Syllabus MyREF HTP

In MyREF HTP, the assessment serves as preparation for participants before they apply for halal certification. Tasks include FOSIM registration, documenting the raw materials used for product processing, capturing images of Food Preparation Premises, creating processing area photographs, developing processing flow charts for products and premises, and preparing a plan for premises (from A to Z) with a one-way route and labeled areas (e.g., packaging area, cooking area, etc.).

### 3.2 Participants Progress

The progress of MyREF HSP participants undergoes continuous monitoring to ensure their alignment with the program's objectives and desired outcomes. As an integral part of the program, participants are required to submit monthly reports with details of their business revenue throughout the first six months of the program. The consolidated income data for the ten mentors in MyREF HSP is presented in Table 3 and Figure 6 below.

**Table 3.** Monthly Income of MyREF HSP Mentors

Mentor (P)	Month 1	Month 2	Month 3	Month 4	Month 5	Month 6
P1	RM800	RM800	RM800	RM500	RM500	RM500
P2	RM2,500	RM2,200	RM1,000	RM700	RM500	RM700
P3	RM300	RM270	RM200	RM280	RM290	RM260
P4	RM2,500	RM7,000	RM0	RM0	RM0	RM0
P5	RM2,000	RM2,000	RM2,000	RM2,000	RM2,000	RM2,000
P6	RM2,500	RM2,300	RM1,500	RM2,700	RM3,000	RM3,200
P7	RM680	RM920	RM1,200	RM1,000	RM1,350	RM3,345
P8	RM5,000	RM4,850	RM10,000	RM25,300	RM4,980	RM3,560
P9	RM1,000	RM2,500	RM3,000	RM1,600	RM1,800	RM2,800
P10	RM529	RM1,617	RM759	RM100	RM400	RM529

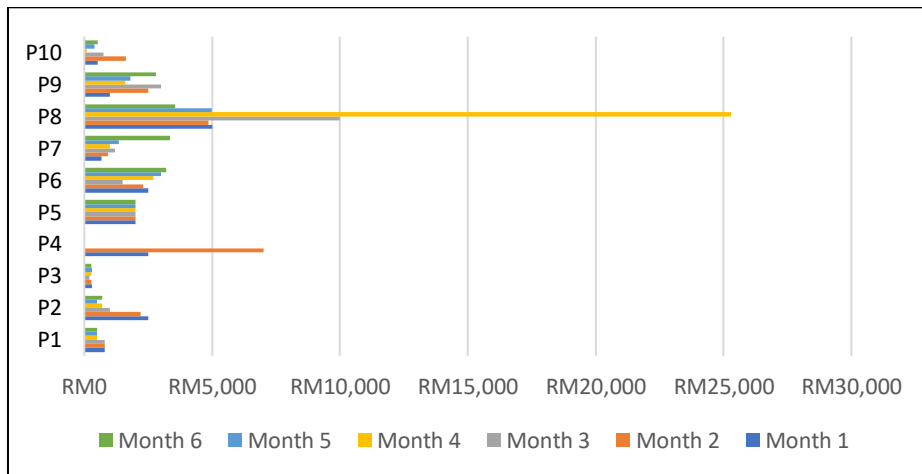
**Fig. 6.** Overview of Income Progress of MyREF HSP Mentors

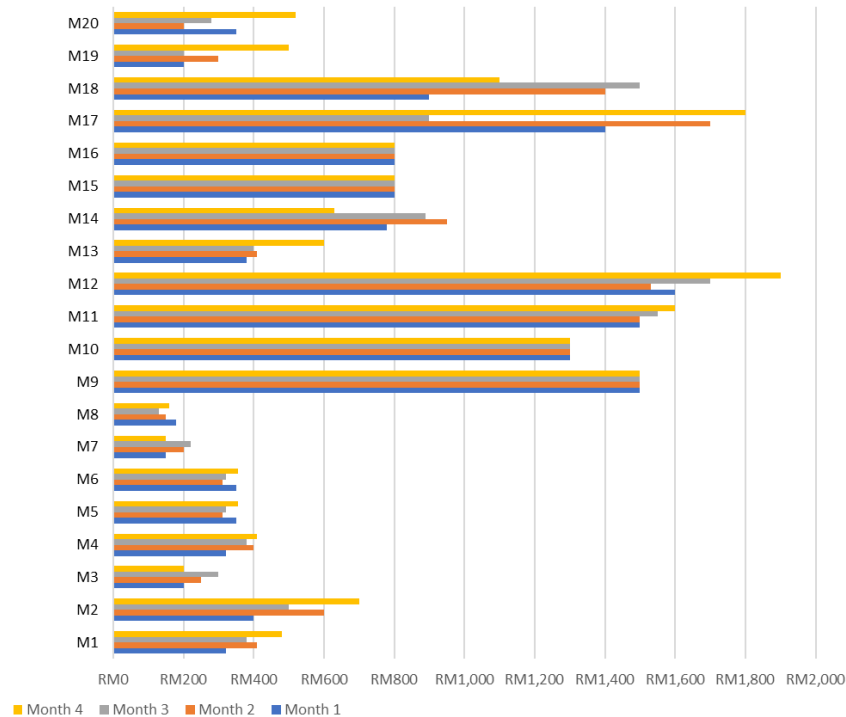
Table 3 and Figure 6 analysis reveals that most MyREF HSP participants consistently generate monthly income. However, one participant, P4, faced a challenge as he did not generate income from the third to the sixth month. His business, which had initially yielded an income of RM7,000, had to be temporarily halted due to his health condition, specifically Myasthenia gravis, an autoimmune disease that also affected his mental well-being. Additionally, he experienced stress due to the extended care he provided for his bedridden brother in the hospital. Nonetheless, P4 displayed an unwavering commitment to attending training and mentor-mentee activities. With the support of MyREF and his friends within the *hijrah* community, he is gradually recovering and has successfully achieved an average monthly income of RM600 by selling bread, pastries, and cakes.



Following two months of mentor monitoring, MyREF gathered feedback from the mentees regarding their progress. The collective income data for all 20 mentees is presented in Table 4 and Figure 7 below.

**Table 4.** Monthly Income of MyREF HSP Mentees

Mentor (P)	Mentee (M)	Month 1	Month 2	Month 3	Month 4
P1	M1	RM320	RM410	RM380	RM480
	M2	RM400	RM600	RM500	RM700
P2	M3	RM200	RM250	RM300	RM200
	M4	RM320	RM400	RM380	RM410
P3	M5	RM350	RM311	RM320	RM355
	M6	RM350	RM311	RM320	RM355
P4	M7	RM150	RM200	RM220	RM150
	M8	RM180	RM150	RM130	RM160
P5	M9	RM1,500	RM1,500	RM1,500	RM1,500
	M10	RM1,300	RM1,300	RM1,300	RM1,300
P6	M11	RM1,500	RM1,500	RM1,550	RM1,600
	M12	RM1,600	RM1,530	RM1,700	RM1,900
P7	M13	RM380	RM410	RM400	RM600
	M14	RM780	RM950	RM890	RM630
P8	M15	RM800	RM800	RM800	RM800
	M16	RM800	RM800	RM800	RM800
P9	M17	RM1,400	RM1,700	RM900	RM1,800
	M18	RM900	RM1,400	RM1,500	RM1,100
P10	M19	RM200	RM300	RM200	RM500
	M20	RM350	RM200	RM280	RM520



**Fig. 7.** Overview of Income Progress of MyREF HSP Mentees

### 3.3 Participants Constraints

Throughout the program's implementation, participants were closely monitored for any challenges they encountered in attending training sessions, receiving guidance, and completing assignments. The survey conducted among the participants revealed several constraints:

➤ **Technical and Equipment Problems:**

- Many participants lacked the necessary gadgets for attending online training, completing assignments, and conducting business transactions.
- Participants often used a single mobile phone for both personal and business purposes, leading to difficulties in distinguishing customers and contacts.
- Limited mobile phone functionality hindered participants from creating marketing materials like posters and leaflets.
- Assignments requiring Microsoft Word and Excel posed difficulties for participants relying solely on mobile phones. Some mentees had to borrow laptops from mentors to complete these tasks.

- In addition to equipment constraints, participants faced challenges due to limited and slow internet connections, primarily relying on mobile data. This limitation resulted in difficulties staying in class for extended periods due to data exhaustion or phone battery depletion.
- **Lack of Knowledge and Skills in Equipment Use:**
  - Many mentees lacked experience in using Microsoft Excel to manage their cash flow, initially struggling with related assignments. However, ongoing guidance from mentors helped them overcome this constraint.
  - Creating compelling digital marketing materials, such as posters, proved challenging for most mentees, particularly when using applications like Canva. Support from mentors and access to Canva's templates ultimately resolved this issue.
- **Idea Management:**
  - While participants had numerous ideas for promoting their products and services, they lacked a systematic strategy. To address this, the trainer provided guidelines to help participants organize their ideas effectively.
- **Business-Related Information Management:**
  - Participants in MyREF HTP encountered difficulties in remembering the processes for preparing their food products. This was particularly important as they needed to document every step and ingredient for halal certification. The trainer provided guidance on record-keeping and emphasized the significance of documenting each ingredient and process in their business operations.

### 3.4 MyREF HSP Input

The implementation of MyREF HSP has provided valuable insights and skills to both mentors and mentees, including:

- **New Knowledge and Skills:**
  - Graphics and Design
    - Participants successfully created marketing materials like posters using the Canva Application.
  - Accounts and Business Records
    - Improved accuracy in tracking business finances, leading to more organized business records.
    - Enhanced proficiency in Microsoft Excel for financial recording.
    - Gained a better understanding of business systems and improved decision-making regarding profit and loss.
  - Marketing:
    - Learned from past business mistakes and acquired effective marketing techniques.

- **More Systematic Marketing Strategy:**
  - Improved Customer Order Management
    - Enhanced organization of customer product orders.
  - Effective Customer Tracking
    - Easier tracking of previous customers, especially for soliciting feedback on product purchases and usage.
  - Time Management
    - Better time management for sales promotions and customer engagement on social media.
  - Efficient Information Dissemination
    - Improved ability to quickly convey information to a broader customer base.
- **Idea and Product Innovation:**
  - Systematic Idea Planning
    - Participants developed a more structured and systematic approach to generating ideas.
  - Building Personal Identity
    - Acquired skills for establishing a unique identity.
  - Cost Sensitivity and Product Innovation
    - Became more cost-conscious and innovative with their products.
  - Intellectual Property Awareness
    - Gained an understanding of the importance of intellectual property rights, including trademarks and copyrights.
  - Adaptation to Customer Needs
    - Became more adaptable in responding to customer demands and changing market conditions.

## 4 Conclusion

To recapitulate, the MyREF HSP has significantly empowered the *hijrah* community by delivering specialized digital marketing skills' training initiative. This program's primary objective of enhancing the *hijrah* community's economic welfare and living conditions has been accomplished with great success. Feedbacks from participants and on-site observations reveal that aside from acquiring digital marketing's expertise, individuals have also benefited from valuable support and motivation from both trainers and their fellow community members, amplifying their entrepreneurial pursuits.

Furthermore, it is vital to highlight the significance of coaching and monitoring through a mentor-mentee approach conducted for six (6) months following the skills training. This method demonstrates that the program is not merely a "touch and go" event but is dedicated to supporting participants until they achieve lasting income sustainability. Additionally, leadership skills are also emphasized during the mentor-

mentee sessions, which eventually contributes to the lasting support network and a strong presence in the economic sector of the *hijrah* community.

It is also with mentioning that MyREF can assess participants' performance through an assessment strategy, contributing to the program's success. This is evident as selected *hijrah* community members have achieved notable improvements in various areas, including enhanced business management, diversified digital marketing strategies, and increased sales profitability. These outcomes highlight participants' ability to establish better livelihoods through structured business practices following their migration.

In order to optimize the program's efficacy, future training initiatives should consider distributing electronic devices such as smartphones, tablets, and other marketing tools. This proactive measure aims to tackle technical and equipment-related obstacles, as well as the lack of knowledge and skills in utilizing such devices.

## 5 Acknowledgements

This research study is conducted by the Research and Development Unit of the Malaysian Research and Education Foundation (MyREF), which focuses on the entrepreneurship training program MyREF HSP. It is worth noting that the successful implementation of this program has been made possible through the generous contributions of funds by ETIQA Takaful.

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