

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background Problem

Malaysia has engaged with international human rights regimes. Soon after its independence in 1957, Malaysia became a member of the United Nations, driving it to embrace the concept of human rights. Malaysia then ratified several treaties, the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in 1995, which became the foundation of the Malaysian Child Act enacted in 2001 (The UN Human Rights Office, n.d.) . Malaysia's commitment to human rights also extends to labor rights. Recently, in 2022, Malaysia became the 58th country to ratify the Protocol of 2014 to the Forced Labour Convention of 1930. This action is a testament to how Malaysia condemns the practice of forced labor, including human trafficking (International Labour Organization, 2022). These commitments illustrate that on paper, Malaysia appears to be an active state in enforcing the international human rights regime.

However, the persistence of child and labor rights violations in Malaysia complicates this trajectory of norm diffusion. Despite treaty ratification, domestic legal incorporation, and visible institutional commitments, Malaysia continues to face challenges in enforcing human rights protections at the domestic level. This makes the Malaysian case analytically significant not only as an example of an implementation gap, but also as a case that raises theoretical questions about the assumption that international norm adoption naturally progresses toward internalization. Within this context, the case of Global Ikhwan Services and Business Holdings (GISBH) is

especially important because it reveals how child and labor rights violations can coexist within a single religious-economic organization despite the presence of formal legal and normative commitments.

In September 2024, Malaysian police launched “Op Global”, a targeted operation against 20 welfare homes that are related to GISBH. According to CNA (2024), these homes were not independent institutions but as part of GISBH’s wider business network. During this investigation, police rescued 625 children aged between one and 17, who had been abused, some sexually (Camoens, 2024). Further police investigations revealed that many of the children placed in those welfare homes were actually the children of GISBH members, yet they were passed as orphans to receive donations and exploit public religious sentiment (CNA, 2024). These acts committed by GISBH violate not only domestic child protection laws but also Malaysia’s international commitments under the CRC, specifically Article 19, where the state is responsible for delivering all measures to protect all children from abuse, neglect, maltreatment, sexual abuse, and any other forms of physical and mental violence.

After Op Global, old cases and reports of GISBH regarding exploitation began to resurface, with many coming from former workers’ reports of unpaid wages. Inspector-General of Police Razarudin Husain stated that complaints of unpaid wages, dating back to 2013, involve victims who are teenagers aged 14-20 (Bernama, 2024a). Unpaid wages violate Section 19(1) of Malaysia’s Employment Act 1955 concerning timely wage payment. Beyond violating domestic laws, the failure to give fair pay to employees also undermines the fundamental rights as written in Article 23(3) of the UDHR. Still within the labor context, GISBH also violates Section 90B of the

Employment Act 1955 regarding forced labor. This statement is supported as the police received reports from former employees about unlawful business practices by GISBH from 2013 to 2024 (Hakim, 2024). These violations are especially alarming, given that reports have occurred over a decade, directly contravene Malaysia's commitment to ILO, and reveal that GISBH's labor violations are not incidental.

The GISBH case is also significant because of the organization's religious-organizational character. GISBH did not operate only as a conventional business entity, but also as a religious-economic community with internal hierarchies, social authority, and organizational practices that were partly shielded from ordinary regulatory visibility. This religious and organizational opacity made the case more complex than a simple failure of law enforcement. It shows how international human rights norms may be formally accepted by the state, but still fail to penetrate social and organizational spaces where competing normative frameworks shape behavior and authority.

Therefore, the GISBH case provides a critical empirical context for examining Malaysia's domestic internalization of international human rights norms. More importantly, it functions as a 'least likely case' for the Norm Life Cycle (NLC) model. Malaysia possesses many conditions under which norm diffusion should theoretically succeed: formal treaty ratification, domestic legislation, public scrutiny, media attention, and state enforcement actions. Yet, the persistence of violations and the reactive nature of enforcement suggest that norm diffusion does not necessarily move in a linear direction from acknowledgement to cascade and finally to internalization.

Instead, the GISBH case reveals that norm internalization may stall even when prior indicators of norm acceptance appear to be present.

1.2. Research Question

Based on the background problem presented, this research questions “what does Malaysia's enforcement in the GISBH case reveal about the limitations of the norm life cycle model's assumption of linear norm progression?”

1.3. Research Objectives

1.3.1. General Objectives

This research aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the Global Ikhwan Services and Business Holdings (GISBH), outlining its organizational development, operational sectors, and the context surrounding reports of welfare and labor related violations happening inside its management.

1.3.2. Specific Objectives

To thoroughly address the research question, this research will first examines the enforcement actions undertaken by Malaysian authorities against GISBH. Then, this research analyzes why the GISBH case represents a least likely case of linear norm internalization by examining how Malaysia’s formal commitments, domestic legal frameworks, public pressure, and enforcement responses were present, yet remained insufficient to produce routinized and consistent internalization of child and labor rights norms.

1.4. Research Significance

1.4.1. Academic Significance

This research contributes to the study of human rights, norm diffusion, and implementation gaps. Academically, this research offers a critical perspective on the NLC model by analyzing GISBH as a least likely case for linear norm internalization. In this case, the conditions that should theoretically support norm progression were largely present, yet full internalization remained incomplete. Therefore, this research contributes to discussions on the limitations of the NLC model by demonstrating that norm diffusion does not always move linearly from acknowledgement to cascade and internalization. Instead, the GISBH case shows that norm internalization may stall due to reactive enforcement culture, organizational opacity, and competing religious-legal normative contexts.

1.4.2. Practical Significance

The findings of this research provide valuable insights for policymakers and regulatory bodies to strengthen the domestic implementation of international human rights norms. By examining factors that hinder the internalization of child and labor rights, it offers evidence-based considerations for designing more consistent human rights enforcement mechanisms, advancing state efforts toward sustained norm internalization.

1.5. Theoretical Framework

1.5.1. Literature Review

Within the development of International Relations discourse, human rights are widely conceptualized as both legal matters based on moral claims and also components of international normative regimes that structure state behavior. Existing literature has emphasized the internalization of human rights, reflecting a broader transformation of global governance, where shared norms increasingly shape expectations of appropriate state conduct.

Anaya Muñoz et al. (2021), in *Human Rights in International Relations and Foreign Policy*, states human rights as an integral component of contemporary international relations, as it is hard to imagine the modern world and politics without organizations aimed to globally promote human rights. Muñoz argues that the recognition of international human rights began from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 which consists of human rights principles, rules & norms, and decision-making processes. The existence of a set of regimes developed by different international organizations created the concept of international human rights regimes. Montero, through Muñoz's book, also argues that states still have the dominant role in the continuation of international human rights regimes. The main functions of state in this context include decision-making, promoting, supervising, and protecting the regimes' values. However, to some degree, human rights principles are often understood to have tension with national interest, specifically in

regard to state sovereignty. However, this book argues that human rights can only be realized under a sovereign authority (state) that fulfills the human rights of its citizens. Overall, through this book, Muñoz concludes that international human rights function as a central normative framework in contemporary international relations, and nurtured through sovereign states that are willing and able to protect the rights of its inhabitants.

Beyond that book, Anaya Muñoz's (2017) article, *INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS REGIMES*, further argues the importance of international human rights regimes in global politics and its institutionality. Similar to the book, Muñoz views international human rights regimes as rooted from the principles of dignity, equal rights for all humans, as well as the idea that humans are inalienable in nature. The regimes and its organizations establish a wide range of concrete rights that states need to fulfill for its citizens. For example, The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) consists of laws that protect life & dignity, freedom, equality, and justice. Then, ultimately, the role of international human rights instruments is to structure procedures to promote the regimes' values to other international actors, both state and non-state actors. Finally, this article closes with an analysis of international human rights regimes' institutionality level by using the Donnelly's matrix. This matrix explains that international human rights regimes vary in their levels of institutionalization, with most regimes emphasizing norm declaration, promotion, and monitoring rather than enforcement. This structural limitation explains why the realization of human rights remains heavily dependent

on domestic implementation and state enforcement, despite the existence of extensive international standards.

Additionally, Global Citizenship Commission (GCC) (2016), through *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights in the 21st Century: A Living Document in a Changing World*, extends the discussion on human rights beyond their foundational normative structure by emphasizing the evolving nature of the UDHR in response to contemporary global challenges. According to their analysis, following the adoption of UDHR, human rights have evolved in identifying rights in several sectors, including the rights of women, children, disabled people, prisoners, and more. However, behind its development, GCC also highlights lack of enforcement and political will as the primary obstacles of human rights implementation. Lastly, Brown also mentions recommendations to overcome such obstacles, which includes enhancing international organization's presence, limiting the UN Security Council veto in the case of mass atrocities, and harnessing more technological measures in implementing human rights.

Beyond the international human rights analysis, this study also utilizes the analysis on Malaysia's human rights enforcement and realities. Farid S. Shuaib's (2019) work, *Embracing International Human Rights Law: The Malaysian Experience Navigating the Dual Quality of International Law*, provides a historical approach to understanding Malaysia's commitments to international human rights standards. Following its formal entry into the United Nations, Malaysia has ratified several foundational human rights treaties, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in 1995 and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with

Disabilities (CRPD) in 2010. These commitments trickled down to the domestic level with the establishment of the Child Act of 2001.

While international human rights regimes have established comprehensive normative frameworks that define states' obligations to respect, protect, and fulfill human rights, the existence of these regimes does not automatically guarantee effective protection in practice. Elaborated treaty ratification and institutional development have not eliminated persistent violations, indicating a disjunction between formal commitment and actual implementation. As a result, the concept of the implementation gap emerges as a critical analytical lens for understanding why states that formally endorse international human rights norms continue to exhibit inconsistent or inadequate compliance.

An example of an implementation gap in human rights treaties is explained through Cole's (2015) work, *Mind the Gap: State Capacity and the Implementation of Human Rights Treaties*. In this article, Cole argued that noncompliance does not always occur from a state's immoral intention, but rather from the issue of state capacity and the bureaucratic capacity of each state. Thus, Cole believes that the ratification of human rights treaties does not automatically mean adequate human rights practice. Building on this capacity-centered perspective of implementation gap, the Commonwealth Secretariat's (2023) report, *Bridging the Human Rights Implementation Gap*, provides an institutional explanation for persistent implementation failures by analyzing states progress. The report identifies the factors that drive the implementation gap: weak coordination between institutions, limited follow-up mechanisms, and states' focus on reporting instead of

implementing. While many states actively engage with international human rights mechanisms through periodic reporting, fewer have established permanent, well-resourced structures to translate recommendations into concrete laws, policies, and enforcement practices.

In addition to literature on international human rights and its implementation gap, the study of norms in International Relations emphasizes that norms are not static rules whose adoption automatically leads to compliance. Instead, norms are socially constructed standards of appropriate behavior whose influence depends on how they are promoted, diffused, and embedded within domestic institutions. To explain this process, Finnemore and Sikkink introduce the norm life cycle (NLC) model, which conceptualizes norm diffusion as a dynamic process consisting of three stages: norm emergence, norm cascade, and norm internalization. This framework has since been widely adopted and refined in the literature to assess how international norms operate in practice.

A comprehensive definition and application of NLC is provided by Richter (2018), in the *The Norm Life Cycle of UN Reform: “Delivering as One and UN System-Wide Coherence”*. In this article, Richter analyzes how Finnemore and Sikkink (1998) approach to explain norm emergence and widespread is characterized as issue-based. By tracing norm’s reform process from norm emergence to norm cascade, Richter argues that norm entrepreneurs interact to promote changes within the organizational system, specifically on UN reform as this article’s case study. However, this article’s most significant contribution is its critique to the internalization stage. Despite formal acceptance and widespread

implementation, even on a global scale, Richter finds that internalization was not achieved, as the reform remains voluntary and lacking institutional consolidation. In response to this limitation, Richter proposes the addition of a stabilization stage, arguing that norms may be implemented and diffused without becoming fully taken for granted. This insight challenges linear interpretations of the NLC and highlights the importance of institutional capacity and political consensus in sustaining norm internalization.

While classical interpretations of NLC assume that norms always progress towards stable internalization, Frantz & Pigozzi (2018), through their work *MODELING NORM DYNAMICS IN MULTI-AGENT SYSTEMS*, adds an argument that norm diffusion is neither linear nor irreversible. Their analysis suggests that norms may stagnate, weaken, or even disappear depending on contextual and institutional conditions. Internalization, in this view, can be partial or shallow, resulting in formal acceptance without consistent behavioral change. This dynamic understanding of norms provides an important corrective to linear models and helps explain why states may selectively comply with international norms despite formal commitments.

Beyond the analysis of norm progression from emergence to internalization, it is also crucial to understand the important role of norm entrepreneurs in the early stage of norm diffusion. This discussion is elaborated by Khomsani & Soetjipto's (2022) study on civil organizations (KontraS and Imparsial) as human rights campaigners. Their analysis argues that norms do not emerge organically but are actively constructed through advocacy, framing, and public engagement. However,

this study also highlights a limitation: even if a norm promotion is successful, it does not always translate to policy change or effective enforcement. This situation brings norm progression back to its common critique, where state actions determine whether norms advance beyond emergence and cascade toward internalization.

Additionally, Romaniuk & Grice (2018), through their study *Norms, Norm Violations, and IR Theory*, provide a perspective of how norm violations should be perceived in the analysis of NLC. They argue that norm violations should not automatically be understood as evidence of norm rejection or failure. Instead, violations may indicate contested norms, competing normative frameworks, or incomplete internalization. By situating norm violations within broader theoretical debates, their analysis cautions against equating persistent norm violations with the absence of norms. This approach allows researchers to interpret violations as indicators of unstable or partial internalization rather than norm abandonment.

Finally, beyond the NLC model, Acharya's (2004) work, *How Ideas Spread: Whose Norms Matter? Norm Localization and Institutional Change in Asian Regionalism*, offers an alternative perspective on how international norms travel and take root in different contexts. Through a study of transnational norm diffusion within the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), Acharya argues that local actors are not passive recipients of international norms but active agents who reconstruct foreign norms to build congruence with preexisting local beliefs, identities, and institutional practices, a process he calls localization. This stands in contrast to the NLC model's assumption that norms progress linearly from emergence to internalization, as localization suggests that norm diffusion is instead

shaped by the agency of local actors who selectively borrow, reframe, and adapt external norms rather than adopting them wholesale. Acharya further contends that the success of norm diffusion depends less on the persuasive efforts of transnational norm entrepreneurs and more on whether the external norm can be made congruent with the local normative order without displacing it. In this sense, Acharya's framework challenges the NLC's top-down, linear conception of norm diffusion by demonstrating that local normative environments actively condition how, and to what extent, international norms are internalized in practice.

While existing literature has examined Malaysia's formal commitment to international human rights standards, the persistence of implementation gaps, and the broader challenges of domestic human rights enforcement, limited attention has been given to the GISBH case as a theoretically significant site for analyzing the limits of norm internalization. Existing studies on the NLC model often explain how norms emerge, cascade, and become internalized, yet they do not always sufficiently account for cases where formal commitment, domestic legislation, public scrutiny, and enforcement responses are already present but internalization remains incomplete. By situating the GISBH case within the NLC model, this research does not merely trace Malaysia's progression between norm cascade and internalization, but also interrogates the model's assumption of linear norm progression. Therefore, this research shifts the focus from the mere existence of human rights commitments and institutional weaknesses toward the conditions under which norm internalization stalls in complex domestic settings, particularly in cases shaped by reactive

enforcement culture, organizational opacity, and competing religious-legal normative contexts.

1.5.2. Norm Life Cycle Model by Finnemore and Sikkink (1998)

The emergence of the GISBH human rights violations and the trajectory of Malaysia's response to the case reveal that enforcing child and labor rights is not a static commitment but a dynamic process that evolves through norm adoption, reinforcement, and internalization stages. This progression mirrors the stages of the norm life cycle (NLC) model founded by Finnemore and Sikkink. The model was established to answer questions regarding norms, such as where norms come from, how norms change, and what roles they have in political changes (Richter, 2018). Traditionally, Finnemore and Sikkink's model is applied to the international spread of norms among states. However, this research adapts the model to examine the domestic enforcement trajectory of internationally recognized child and labor rights within Malaysia, while also interrogating the model's explanatory limits in a case where linear norm progression should theoretically be expected. This research's adaptation is justified on the basis that although child rights, labor rights, and even human rights in general have reached the internalization stage globally, individual states may still be in different stages of adoption and enforcement. Building on this premise, the following section outlines the three stages of the NLC model, adapted to the Malaysian domestic context.

According to Frantz and Pigozzi (2018), stage one of the model is called norm emergence, characterized by persuasion, meaning this stage includes norm entrepreneurs and thinkers of norms to persuade and convince states to agree on and implement new norms. Finnemore and Sikkink mentioned Henry Dunant as one of the most prominent norm entrepreneurs, as he played a role in forming a norm where doctors and wounded soldiers are noncombatants in time of war. However, in international relations, norm entrepreneurs relate more to the people within the organizational platform, such as NGOs. The task of norm entrepreneurs is complicated, as they need to propose a new norm that sometimes could compete against embedded social contexts and cultures. In Malaysia, norm emergence is reflected in the ratification of the CRC and ILO conventions, followed by incorporating such standards into Malaysia's domestic laws, such as the Child Act 2001 and the Employment Act 1995.

Norm emergence is followed by norm cascade. Originally, this stage is marked by a rapidly increasing number of states adopting the newly introduced norms. Most of the time, this spread happens as states feel pressure to conform, often to gain a good image among other states and be seen as a responsible member of the global community. Adapted to this research, the GISBH case catalyzes the cascade of human rights implementation in Malaysia. Allegations reported by former employees of GISBH, "Op Global" operation findings, media exposure, and resurfacing human rights violations have prompted intensified government action and formal investigation. Therefore, measures by Malaysia indicate their attempt to demonstrate compliance with its international obligations.

The model's last stage is called norm internalization. This stage is achieved once compliance is routineized and no longer contested. In this research context, internalization would mean when child and labor rights protections are proactively enforced in the state without reliance on cases to trigger actions. While current developments of the case, such as the opening of 111 investigation papers as of August 2025, suggest movement towards stronger human rights enforcement, full internalization has yet to be achieved. The sustainability of reforms and institutional practices will determine whether Malaysia completes this stage. Figure 1.1 visually represents the stages of the NLC model as developed by Finnemore and Sikkink (1998) as follows:

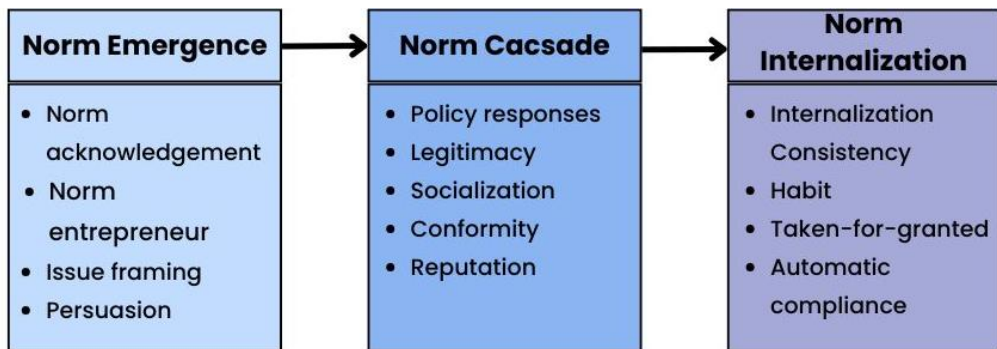


Figure 1. 1. Norm Life Cycle (NLC) model by Finnemore and Sikkink (1998)

Source: Created by author from Finnemore and Sikkink (1998)

As visualized in Figure 1.1, the NLC model progresses through three sequential stages: norm emergence, norm cascade, and norm internalization. In the first stage, norm entrepreneurs utilize organizational or advocacy platforms to frame issues and persuade relevant actors of the necessity of new standards. Once a critical

mass of acceptance is reached, the process enters the cascade stage, where socialization, legitimacy concerns, and reputational pressures encourage broader conformity among states. The final stage, internalization, is characterized by the institutionalization of norms within domestic systems, where compliance becomes habitual and acquires a taken-for-granted quality. This staged progression provides the analytical lens through which the development and implementation of child and labor rights norms in Malaysia are examined in this study.

To operationalize the NLC model within the context of this research, the conceptual relationship between issue emergence, state response, and the degree of norm internalization is illustrated in Figure 1.2. This framework adapts the original stages of the NLC model into observable analytical indicators, namely norm acknowledgement, policy responses, and internalization consistency, while also incorporating contextual factors that influence how issues enter the state's agenda.

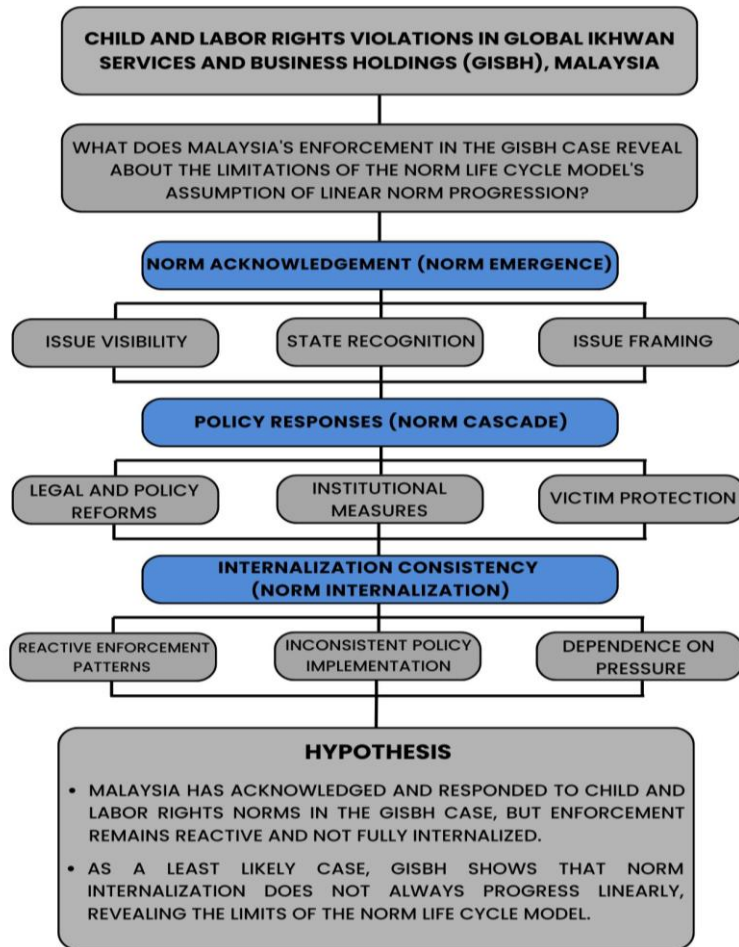


Figure 1. 2. Conceptual Framework

Source: Created by author, 2026

According to Figure 1.2, this research applies three core indicators adapted from the NLC model to examine Malaysia’s handling of the GISBH case. The first indicator concerns norm acknowledgement, focusing on the process of actors’ role in elevating child and labor rights violations into matters requiring state intervention. The second indicator addresses policy responses, assessing policies are interpreted, implemented, and enacted by relevant actors within Malaysia’s domestic legal framework, rather than merely adopted as fixed directives. The third indicator examines internalization consistency, which evaluates the scope and consistency of

governmental responses following the exposure of violations, also comparing Malaysia's enforcement on the GISBH case to Finnemore and Sikkink's ideal situation of norm internalization (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998). The detailed analysis of each indicator is further elaborated in the sections below.

1.6. Concept Operationalization

1.6.1. Conceptual Definition

1.6.1.1. Norm Acknowledgement

In the NLC model, a significant indicator is the acknowledgement of international norms, which usually derive from a situation where such norms are violated (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998). The definition of norm acknowledgement itself mainly revolves around the question why states oblige international norms and its values, including international human rights norms. According to Gennarini (2019), obligations derived from international law, such as from international treaties, are positioned to be legally binding to states, even without the process of agreement in negotiation or writing. D'Amato (as cited in Sellers, 1998) also refers to international law as to serve the interests of peace and prosperity through maintaining a system of states. Therefore, norm acknowledgement includes state efforts to comply with accepted norms to fulfill their legal and moral obligation. However, the fulfillment of these obligations also depends on consent given by the states. Consent in this context is reflected in *opinion juris sive necessitatis*, a principle where states believe that one international law exists and must be followed, therefore it could ultimately become

a customary international law (Pickering, 2014). In conclusion, norm acknowledgement in the context of NLC refers to how states acknowledge and express compliance to the values of international law(s).

1.6.1.2. Policy Responses

The second stage of NLC, known as the norm cascade stage, is characterized by how the government translates international norm values into enforcement actions (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998). Policy response itself refers to the process through which policies are interpreted, implemented, and enacted by relevant actors, rather than merely adopted as fixed directives. As Ward et al. (2015) argue, policy is not a static output but a dynamic process that involves negotiation, adaptation, and interaction between actors and contexts. Consequently, policy response may manifest in forms of compliance, modification, or even contestation, depending on how actors engage with the underlying policy discourse. The importance of analyzing policy is also supported by Nudzor (as cited in Ward et al., 2015) and his model of theoretical eclecticism, where it views policy not only as a solution or a process, but also as an exercise of power, in which language is used to construct and legitimize certain actions and interpretations of social issues.

1.6.1.3. Internalization Consistency

Internalization consistency is the primary analytical concept in this research because it captures the point at which the limitations of linear norm progression become most visible norm internalization. At this stage, compliance

becomes habitual and is consistently reproduced through institutional practices. Furthermore, internalization is reinforced through processes of socialization, whereby international norms are incorporated into domestic structures and influence state behavior in a predictable and stable manner (Checkel, 2005). Therefore, internalization consistency captures not only the presence of norms within formal frameworks, but also the degree to which they are applied uniformly and continuously, indicating that such norms have become normalized within governance practices.

1.6.2. Operational Definition

1.6.2.1. Norm Acknowledgement

Norm acknowledgment refers to the extent to which the state recognizes an issue as requiring formal attention and intervention. This indicator is used to assess whether the government identifies child and labor rights violations as matters of public concern. It is measured through initial state actions such as the initiation of investigations, legal proceedings, public statements, and the involvement of relevant authorities. In this research, norm acknowledgement is also assessed by examining whether state recognition emerged through routine monitoring or was triggered by crisis visibility, whistleblowing, media coverage, and public pressure. Within this research, norm acknowledgement is therefore not examined as a standalone indicator of the norm emergence stage, but as the first dimension through which Malaysia's progression toward internalization is assessed: specifically, whether the state's capacity to recognize child and labor

rights violations reflects proactive, routinized awareness or remains dependent on crisis conditions to be activated.

1.6.2.2. Policy Responses

Policy responses refer to the extent to which the state translates recognized norms into concrete actions through legal enforcement and institutional mechanisms. This indicator is used to assess how the government implements child and labor rights norms within its governance framework. It is measured through the application of relevant laws, enforcement actions, inter-agency coordination, and the development or use of regulatory instruments addressing identified violations. In this research, policy responses are also evaluated by distinguishing between crisis-driven compliance and routinized institutional response. This distinction is important because visible enforcement after the exposure of violations does not necessarily indicate that norms have been fully internalized. Within this research, policy responses are therefore not examined as a standalone indicator of the norm cascade stage, but as the second dimension through which Malaysia's progression toward internalization is assessed: specifically, whether state enforcement of child and labor rights reflects the consistent, preventive institutional behavior associated with internalization, or whether it remains reactive and contingent on external pressure.

1.6.2.3. Internalization Consistency

Internalization consistency refers to the extent to which norms are applied in a stable, routine, and sustained manner across different contexts. This indicator

is used to assess whether child and labor rights norms have been fully embedded within state practices. It is measured through the consistency of enforcement, the presence of preventive mechanisms, and the degree to which implementation occurs independently of external pressure or specific cases. As the primary analytical indicator of this research, internalization consistency is used to examine why norm internalization remains incomplete despite Malaysia's formal commitments, domestic legal frameworks, and enforcement responses. Particular attention is given to reactive enforcement patterns, complaint-driven labor enforcement, organizational opacity, and competing religious-legal normative contexts as factors that may prevent child and labor rights norms from becoming routinized governance practices. Within the NLC framework, this corresponds to the stage of norm internalization, where norms are taken-for-granted and are consistently reflected in governance practices.

1.7. Research Argument

Rather than solely framing the GISBH case as a failure of human rights enforcement, this research argues that the case reflects Malaysia's evolving position within the norm life cycle (NLC) of child and labor rights protection. The exposure of GISBH's violations, driven by whistleblowers, media coverage, and public pressure, has elevated the issue into the state's agenda, resulting in clear norm acknowledgement by Malaysian authorities. This recognition is subsequently translated into policy responses, including large-scale enforcement operations, institutional coordination, and victim rehabilitation measures, demonstrating characteristics of the norm cascade stage.

However, the consistency of these efforts remains limited. Enforcement continues to be largely reactive and dependent on issue visibility, indicating that human rights norms have not yet been fully institutionalized as routine governance practices. Therefore, this research argues that while Malaysia has demonstrated significant progress in recognizing and implementing international human rights norms, the process of internalization remains incomplete. As such, Malaysia is positioned in a transitional phase between the late norm cascade stage and the early stage of norm internalization within the NLC framework.

Theoretically, this transitional position is significant because the GISBH case represents a least likely case for linear norm internalization. Malaysia had already demonstrated several conditions that should support norm progression, including formal treaty commitments, domestic legal frameworks, public scrutiny, and visible enforcement responses. Yet, these conditions were insufficient to produce full internalization. The GISBH case therefore shows that norm diffusion can stall at the internalization stage even when prior indicators of norm acceptance appear favorable.

This finding reveals the explanatory limits of the NLC model's assumption of linear progression. While the model is useful for identifying Malaysia's position between cascade and internalization, it does not fully explain why routinized compliance remains blocked in contexts shaped by reactive enforcement culture, religious-organizational opacity, complaint-driven labor enforcement, and competing religious-legal normative frameworks. Thus, this research uses the GISBH case not only to assess Malaysia's stage of norm internalization, but also to demonstrate how

complex domestic contexts can disrupt the expected movement from norm acknowledgement to internalization.

1.8. Research Method

1.8.1. Research Type

In exploring Malaysia's commitment to international human rights standards, this research will utilize a descriptive qualitative approach. This approach allows for the creation of a systematic and coherent general description of the relationship between each phenomenon in this research (Furidha, 2023), in this context, Malaysia's commitment to international human rights standards, the GISBH case, and the stages according to the NLC model. An in-depth analysis using descriptive qualitative methods provides insights into Malaysia's trajectory within the NLC, particularly regarding norm acknowledgement, policy responses, and internalization consistency. Additionally, this method will also seek Malaysia's enforcement of human rights, to assess whether such measures indicate progress toward the norm internalization stage, where norm enforcement becomes more sustainable and guaranteed. Additionally, this qualitative research will be rich in answering how, what, and why questions regarding the topic (Creswell et al. in Bazen et al., 2021), while also giving an understanding of a social problem (Creswell in Furidha, 2023).

1.8.2. Research Site

This research focuses on Malaysia as the primary site, with the GISBH case serving as the central lens through which the state's human rights enforcement is examined. However, the research itself will be conducted in Semarang, Indonesia.

1.8.3. Research Subject

This research focuses on three main subjects. First, it examines Malaysia's human rights enforcement, particularly in relation to child and labor rights. Second, it analyzes the human rights violations associated with GISBH, drawing on reports and investigation findings to understand the nature and scope of these abuses. Third, the study evaluates Malaysia's position within the NLC framework, using three analytical indicators, norm acknowledgement, policy responses, and internalization consistency. These interconnected indicators are used to assess the extent of Malaysia's norm internalization.

1.8.4. Data Type

The data used in this research is qualitative in nature, consisting primarily of written texts and narratives that portray individuals, actions, and events within social contexts. This study utilizes both primary and secondary data sources. The primary data is obtained through an interview with Mr. Colin Mianqing Xie, who provides contextual insights into Malaysia's human rights enforcement and the handling of the GISBH case. Meanwhile, the secondary data consists of legal documents, international human rights instruments, government statements, mass media reports, and academic journals. As this research adopts a literature review and interview approach, the data is descriptive rather than numerical, allowing for an in-depth

analysis of the processes and dynamics underlying norm development and implementation.

1.8.5. Data Sources

The data sources in this research consist of both primary and secondary data. The primary data is obtained directly through an interview with Mr. Colin Mianqing Xie, providing contextual insights into Malaysia's human rights enforcement practices and the handling of the GISBH case. Meanwhile, the secondary data is derived from various documents and literature, including international human rights instruments ratified by Malaysia, such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and relevant International Labour Organization (ILO) conventions, domestic legal frameworks such as the Child Act 2001 and the Employment Act 1955, as well as academic sources including books and journal articles from Finnemore & Sikkink which serve to support and enrich the analysis of norm internalization.

1.8.6. Data Collection Techniques

Cresswell (2018) states that there are at least four main strategies used in collecting data for qualitative research, including qualitative observation, qualitative interviews, qualitative documents, and qualitative audio-visual material. With the research requiring in-depth document analysis, therefore, this research employs qualitative interviews and qualitative documents as its primary data collection technique, focusing on both primary and secondary data sources. Another perspective also views that in qualitative research, data can be collected in the form of secondary data, meaning data that are published (Wahyuni in Dewi, 2021).

1.8.7. Data Analysis and Interpretation

In this research, data analysis is conducted using a qualitative approach combining library research and congruence analysis. Library research is employed to systematically collect and examine data from literature, legal documents, academic journals, and official reports related to the GISBH case and Malaysia's human rights framework. Furthermore, congruence analysis is applied to assess the alignment between empirical findings and the theoretical expectations of the NLC framework.

The analysis is guided by three analytical indicators, norm acknowledgement, policy responses, and internalization consistency, which are used to compare Malaysia's observed practices with the characteristics of each stage in the model. Through this approach, the research evaluates the extent to which Malaysia's response reflects progression within the NLC model, while also analyzing the limitations of linear norm diffusion concept.

1.8.8. Data Quality (Goodness Criteria)

This research ensures data quality by adhering to established qualitative goodness criteria, particularly credibility, authenticity, and contextual validity. Credibility is maintained through the use of reliable and triangulated sources, including legal documents, official reports, media coverage, and peer-reviewed academic literature. Authenticity is ensured by presenting data interpretations as faithfully as possible to the original context, particularly in capturing the socio-

cultural dimensions surrounding GISBH and its localized understanding of human rights.

Furthermore, consistent with a critical analytical perspective, this research situates the analysis within broader historical, cultural, social, and political contexts. By incorporating these dimensions, the study ensures that interpretations are not detached from the realities shaping Malaysia's human rights landscape, thereby strengthening the validity and depth of the analysis.