

# Proceedings



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Islamic and Arabic Language Education Excellence  
in Southeast Asia”*

6<sup>th</sup> – 7<sup>th</sup> April 2013  
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**3<sup>rd</sup> INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE  
ON ISLAMIC EDUCATION 2013  
( I C I E D 2 0 1 3 )**

**An Analysis of Ibn Sahnun's Concept of Education and Its Relevance  
to the Current Educational System: With Special Reference  
To *Adab Al-Mu'allimin***

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**ABSTRACT**

Studies on the ideas of previous muslim scholars can give some insights for the contemporary educational practices. Ibn Sahnun was among the pioneer in the field of Islamic education. This study aims to analyse and interpret the ideas of Ibn Sahnun in relation to education, and the relevance of his ideas to the current educational system. Also, to determine whether his ideas could be implemented in contemporary educational system. The study employed content analysis methodology using his work in the field of education namely *Adab al-Mu'allimin* (Rules of Conduct for Teachers). It was found that the ideas of Ibn Sahnun's on Islamic education could be divided into three major categories. Teaching al-Quran is the compulsory subject that must be offered by educational institution. Ibn Sahnun has gave particular concerns on the lower primary education. The researchers suggested teachers professional ethics must be seriously observed by teachers as well as teaching al-Quran must be a major concern by modern education system.

**Keywords:** Ibn Sahnun, lower primary education, Islamic Education, pedagogy and teaching al-Qur'an.

**INTRODUCTION**

Islamic Education is very important for Muslim in order to achieve success in this worldly life and in the hereafter. In order to achieve this success, Allah S.W.T. stresses in the Quran the importance of knowledge. Allah says to the effect: "Read and your Lord is Most Honorable, who taught (to write) with the pen, who taught man what he knew not." (Qur'an, 96: 3-5). These verses revealed the significance of seeking knowledge among Muslims. The following verse indicates the importance of seeking knowledge, wherein Allah S.W.T. tells the Prophet S.A.W. to ask Him for an increase in knowledge; "Oh Allah, You increase me in Knowledge." (Qur'an, 20: 114). Muslim educationists discussed seriously issues pertaining to seeking knowledge and education in Islam (Khan, 1986 & Alavi, 1988). According to Khan (1986), Islamic Education has a broader meaning and it does not confine to merely reading books but also includes upbringing learners to be a good Muslim in this world and hereafter. Khan (1986) asserted that curriculum in school, especially in elementary education must begin with proclaiming faith (*shahadah*). Ibn Sahnun was among the pioneer in the field of Islamic education. His book in education 'The Rules of Conduct for Teachers' (*Adab al-Mu'allimin*) is a proof of his concern in the field of education.

**PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

Ibn Sahnun's ideas of education in his work, *Adab al-Mu'allimin* represent the high point that inspired Muslim scholars in Islamic education as the most important reference. The purpose of the study is to examine and analyze Ibn Sahnun's major ideas and practices on education, particularly pertaining to teaching and learning. In addition, this study also intended to analyze and compare the implication of Ibn Sahnun's ideas in modern educational situation especially in the Malaysian Educational system.



## METHODOLOGY AND THE TEXT OF STUDY

This study employs content analysis method. Content analysis means a systematic analysis of the content rather than the structure of a communication, such as written work, speech, or film, including the study of thematic and symbolic elements to determine the objective or meaning of the communication (Dictionary of the English Language, 2009).

For the text of study, all informations for the study is collected from the archetype book *Adab al-Mu'allimin* written by Ibn Sahnun. This book is written in Arabic and has been translated into Indonesian language. For the purpose of analysis, Ibn Sahnun text on the Rules of Conduct for Teacher (*Adab al-Mu'allimin*) will be analysed. The text was commented and attached by Hijazi (1995) in his work as an Appendix and will be the subject of the study.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Ibn Sahnun in Brief

The real name of Ibn Sahnun is Abu Abdillah Muhammad ibn Abi Sa'id Sahnun ibn Sa'id ibn Habib ibn Hassan al-Tanukhi. He was a *qadhi*, *mufti* and *faqih* from Qairawan, north central Tunisia. Ibn Sahnun was born 202 *Hijriah* and lived most of his life in Qairawan. During his time, Qairawan is one of the cities in Islam becoming flourishing economic, administrative, cultural and intellectual center of the Western lands (Hijazi, 1995 & Gamal Zakaria, 2002).

Ibn Sahnun or Muhammad received his early education from his father. His father gave a really serious consideration on his son's intellectual and comprehensive growth as he was incredibly sharp and intelligent. Therefore, his father sent him to *al-kuttab* to learn the Quran and writing. Besides his father, he also learned from great African scholars such as Musa Bin Muawiyah Al-Samadihi (225H) and Abd Aziz binYahya Al-Madani (240 H) (Hijazi, 1995 & Gamal Zakaria, 2002). According to Muftah (1992), Ibn Sahnun is well known for his credibility of knowledge and people at that time always ask for his great opinions, advises and problem solution. Eventually he wrote the book on education namely *Adab al-Mu'allimin* which is the first book in Islamic education, ethics and teacher's professionalism. He represented a unique style of teaching that respected the learner's ability to work, cooperate and progress. Gunther (2006) added that Ibn Sahnun ideas are in providing the specific instructions that elementary school teacher needs. These instructions are in terms of providing curriculum and examination, about teacher's rules and work, teaching organization and supervision of school students (Adang, 2009).

During Ibn Sahnun's life, teaching the Quran is a widespread culture among children in Northern Africa and has a great concern among parents. The learning of the Quran takes place and developed gradually with exercises in reading and writing from the Quran. It also added by Mark Ginsburg (2006) regarding the conception of the Islamic culture and, particularly, the "tradition" of Quranic schooling as emphasizing memorization and rote learning. For Alavi (1988), he mentioned that the teacher should be accountability towards their career and students' affairs. He also concerned on corporal punishment that must be restricted to the maximum of three strokes of cane but not on face or head.

Gamal Zakaria (2002) pointed out that the main discussions in Ibn Sahnun's writing are on teacher's role, character, and personality of teachers. Teachers must behave and possess good moral values in order to teach and be a good model to their students. Therefore he suggested a teacher must well prepared in their teaching process to be able to face challenges before going to the real teaching field.

### Quranic Class and Islamic Education in the Malaysian Educational System

To what extent Ibn Sahnun's ideas could be implemented in the current educational institution and curriculum in Malaysia? By referring to Malaysia historical view on education, early education in Malaysia began at house of religious teachers, leading towards the establishment of *pondok* institution (traditional religious system). The teaching of the Quran was the main curriculum in the nineteenth century. Then the establishment of *madrrasah* (religious school) took place in the early twentieth century (Rosnani Hashim, 2004). Teaching the Quran has developed steadily and has been underlying



within Islamic Education and became the compulsory subject at schools in the Malaysian educational system. To date, the Ministry of Education implements the Integrated Curriculum whereby Islamic Education becomes the compulsory subject for Muslim students. Furthermore, the main subdivision in Islamic Education is to teach students to master in Quranic recitation and comprehension, which is in line with the Philosophy of Islamic Education. Exemplifying that, j-Qaf (Jawi, Quranic and Fard 'Ain Programme) and Kelas Aliran Agama (Religious Stream Class) implemented at the mainstream secondary schools, which are established to improve the mastery of students in Quranic recitation and comprehension. (refer [www.bpi.gov.my](http://www.bpi.gov.my))

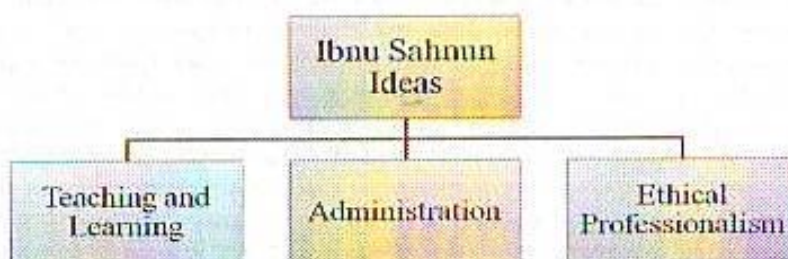
Besides, in the secondary level, the national educational system comprises of public and religious secondary schools and the latter is managed by Division of Islamic Education (*Bahagian Pendidikan Islam*) and emphasized the religious studies in broader line. Furthering of that, the students from government religious secondary school (SMKA), they have an opportunity to learn the Quran and Sunnah Studies and Islamic Jurisprudence subjects. We can conclude that the government is really concerned on religious studies among students. (see [www.bpi.gov.my](http://www.bpi.gov.my))

In relation to Ibn Sahnun's ideas on education, it could be understood that Ibn Sahnun possess deep knowledge in Islamic education and research has qualified him to contribute and promote solutions to educational issues that still face the concern and attention of people from walks of life (Rosnani Hashim, 2004; Hijazi, 1995; Muftah, 1992). Therefore the researchers tend to examine and analyze Ibn Sahnun's ideas and the implication towards the current Malaysian educational system.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

After the analysis of the book was done, the researchers found that Ibn Sahnun's ideas on education could be categorized into three major categories. First category is about teaching and learning. Second, about educational administration and the third category is about teachers' ethics and professionalism. To illustrate the categories could be referred to Diagram 1 below:

Diagram 1: Categories of Ibn Sahnun's Ideas on Islamic education



### **Ibn Sahnun's Approach in Teaching and Learning**

It is found that Ibn Sahnun supports his ideas on Islamic education with the Quran and Sunnah. This approach is in line with his expertise in Islamic jurisprudence and Sunnah Prophetic. This approach also considered as a widespread culture for the Northern Africa scholars during that time. In addition, his work is considered as a compilation of his conversation or dialogue with his father Sahnun. This is because his father was a great *qadhi* and jurist during his time as well as involve in teaching and learning (See Muhammed Azb, 1992).

### **Teaching and Learning**

First and foremost, Ibn Sahnun's major ideas under the category of teaching and learning could be summarized under Qur'anic learning, just and fair, student's treatment, the rule of disposition of books, accomplishment of a course for educational process.



Ibn Sahnun emphasizes on the importance of teaching and learning of the Quran. Due to this reason, Ibn Sahnun supported his idea with the tradition from the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). The Prophet said:

*"The most important among all of you is the one who learns the Quran and teach it."*  
(Ibn Sahnun, 1995, 121)

During the process of teaching and learning, teachers have to face various types of students' behavior. Therefore, just and fair treatment is needed in these circumstances. For Ibn Sahnun, his ideas was taken from the tradition of the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) narrated by Muhammad ibn 'Abdul Karim al-Barqy. By the authority of Anas ibn Malik, the Prophet said:

*"Educators (mu'addib) anywhere that handles (education) three small children of this people, and he did not teach them the same, the poor with the rich among them, and the rich with the poor among them, later on the Day of Resurrection he will be dragged with the traitors."* (Ibn Sahnun, 1995, p.123)

Apart from of that, Ibn Sahnun also emphasizes on the ethics towards knowledge and the rule of disposition books and notes. This shows that Ibn Sahnun holds knowledge at the highest regard. He said:

*"Due to Muhammad ibn 'Abdurrahman told me: from' Abdullah ibn Sa'ed: from Zaid ibn Rabi ': from Basyar ibn Hakim: from Sa'eed ibn Harun: Anas bin Malik said, "If a little boy to remove posts: 'tanzilun min rabbil 'alamin', from board their records using their feet, then teacher it had thrown all his Islam behind his back, then he does not matter above (condition) what kind of day he will see God."* (p.123)

Furthermore, according to Ibn Sahnun, teacher should complete courses in the process of educating student. He also describes in term of payment after accomplishment clearly. He said that there is no limited time as long as the Qur'anic subject has been completed. As stated in his book:

*"For in addition to the Qur'an, are not required to complete it as a whole; not even a half, a third or a quarter, except if they are voluntary (willed). "Muhammad said: I was present when Sahnun set (payment) for finish (lesson) a person, and it is tailored to his ability, whether he belongs wealthy or poor."* (p.125)

### Administration

The second category comprises of matters pertaining to school holidays, teachers' payment or fee, book loan and celebration of teacher's day. Based on the book, he explains that, students deserve to have holiday during the Muslim Festival (*Eid al-Fitr*) from one to three days. While (*Eid Al-Adha*) from three to five days. Ibn Sahnun seeks clarification from his father Sahnun about holiday:

*"I asked him, "In your opinion, how long the student center (on vacation) on Holy Days? "Answered," For 'Eid Al-Fitr, one day, but does not matter for give permission for three days. For 'Eid-Adhha three days, but not a problem for give permission for up to five days."* (p. 126)

Furthermore, Ibn Sahnun is also concerned about a teacher's needs. Teacher should be given the appropriate remuneration for their effort in teaching. Ibn Sahnun noted that,

*"If the contract between parents and teacher in particular year, it must for parents to give the payment either they live or not. Only wage imposed here fixed suit with condition respective child, reason they there is that adequate and some disadvantaged. There is child that own really finance to learn, and some do not own subsidy to (given) to the teacher."* (p.131)

In addition, under the administrative category, Ibn Sahnun also gave concern on book loan. He said that selling and buying a books (also the Quran) are allowed. However, if someone unable to buy, he has a choice to borrow it. This statement has been recorded in his book. He narrates from his father:

*"Sahnun said: I asked Ibn al-Qasim, "Do you think Al-Mushhaf Qur'an was legitimate for rent, with the goal to read?" Answered," No problem, because Malik said: 'No*



*matter for sell it.' Ibn Wahb narrated from Ibn Luhai'ah, and Yahya ibn Ayyub narrated from 'Umarah bin' Arafah: Rabi'a: "It is allowed to sell Mushhaf (the Quran). Which traded is just ink, paper and services." (p.133)*

In relation to the celebration of teacher's day, Ibn Sahnun emphasizes that teachers should not ask for gifts from their students during teacher's day. The reason for this is because teachers have their own salary and income.

*"...He said, "It is not allowed for a teacher to overload students with something - other than wages - such as gifts, and others. He also may not ask from them. If he was rewarded because of his request, so it is haram. If students give something to their teacher because of their willingness, this is permissible..." (p.126)*

In addition, Ibn Sahnun also gives the ideas regarding the rules of punishing the students. In today's context, the administration of Malaysian educational system is more systematic in providing the rules and regulation. Ibn Sahnun describes about the sanction to the students not more than three times and the purpose of punishment must to educate and give a lesson to the children. He said.

*"It is only because he (ie, teachers, children) hit his students when he's angry, and not for their benefit. However, it does not matter to hit them for their own good. Do not impose sanctions - namely, punch - more than three times, unless her father allowed more than that, when the child hurt others: Teachers should not penalize them for playing around and done in vain, but should not be sanctioned more than ten times. For (teaching) read the Qur'an, then do not give sanctions more than three times." (p.124)*

### **Teachers' Ethics and Professionalism**

The third category of Ibn Sahnun ideas on education consist of ethics and responsibilities of teachers. According to Ibn Sahnun, teachers should have a great personality, responsibility and must be trustworthy (*amanah*) in teaching. He provides clear guidelines to be a good teacher and *amanah* in teaching. He said:

*"Be a teacher who is always sincere and totally devote the attention to students. He should not attend the solat jenazah, except in cases where (the body) was among those who should get attention from him..." (p.127)*

Teachers must upgrade themselves too by conducting research or write a book for the benefits of themselves and the students. He said

*"I asked my father about teacher who writes book in fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence). He said: If the teachers has free time, he is allowed to write book in fiqh for himself and for the benefit of the peoples." (p. 127)*

### **IMPLICATION OF IBN SAHNUN'S IDEAS IN CURRENT MODERN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM**

The previous discussion about Ibn Sahnun's categories on education showed that his focus more on the teaching of noble Al-Quran for the lower primary level, which is the average of the child is six to nine years old. The teaching of the Quran is seems to be the very significance one to the lower primary child in education.

Ibn Sahnun ideas are quite similar in Malaysia educational system especially in lower primary school. Muslim Scholars like Ibn Sahnun, Al-Farabi, Al-Qabisi write the guideline for the teacher and classroom management. These guidelines need to be practiced among the teachers in the classroom in order to establish a conducive and good environment during teaching and learning process. The conclusion on the implication of Ibn Sahnun's ideas on Islamic Education system in current Malaysia education system could be referred to a following discussion.



**Table 1: The Implication of Ibn Sahnun's Ideas on Teaching and Learning to the Current Educational System in Malaysia.**

Category	Ideas of Ibn Sahnun	Current situation	Comment
1. Teaching and Learning. Ibn Sahnun had divided his ideas into ten subtopic. However, the researchers found that Qur'anic learning, student's treatment, the rule of disposition books, accomplishment of a course for educating process included in the teaching and learning process.	1. The importance of teaching and learning Al-Quran.	The establishment of SAMR (Secondary Islamic Religious School), SRA (Primary Religious School), SMKA (National Religious Secondary School), j-QAF programme and other religious school which is concern about <i>Qur'anic</i> teaching. (refer to <a href="http://www.moe.gov.my">www.moe.gov.my</a> )	Quran should be the fundamental education to the child to nurture the sense of loving the Qyran and good personality among them from the lower level of education. (ref; Islamic Education Philosophy)
	2. Method of teaching- In the teaching and learning process, Ibn Sahnun gives many guidelines about how to interact with students.	The basic fundamental to fulfill this requirement proven by the establishment of institutional for trainee teacher. (Teacher Training College) <a href="http://www.moe.gov.my">www.moe.gov.my</a>	The view of Muslim scholar should be revisited to integrate between past and modern understanding on pedagogical aspects.
	3. The rules of disposition books and notes.	In today's context, we have responsible party which responsible to manage the book loan, in terms of textbook in school. <a href="http://www.moe.gov.my">www.moe.gov.my</a>	The government is helpful in giving the facilities for increasing the quality of education among the students. So they have their own way in creating and dispose the materials regarding the books.

Table 2 explains the implementation of Ibn Sahnun's ideas on teaching and learning in current Malaysia education system. There are similarities especially on the importance of teaching the Quran. Teaching the Quran is an essential and fundamental issue and must begin from preschool then primary. In current education system, the Ministry of Education and private educational institution concern on this matter. Issue on pedagogical aspects also among the concern of Ibn Sahnun as practiced in current education system. The establishment of Teacher Training Colleges by the Ministry of Education, and faculty and department of Education in University level are as a proof.

**Table 2: The Implication of Ibn Sahnun's Ideas on Administration to the Current Educational System in Malaysia**

Category	Ideas of Ibn Sahnun	Current situation	Comment
2. Administration. In context of administration comprises of school holidays, remuneration, book loan and celebration of teacher's day and punishment should be included in this division because	1. School holiday ; According to Ibn Sahnun, during <i>Eid fitri</i> , they can extent the holiday from one day until three days. During <i>Eidil Adha</i> , the period from three to five days	The ministry of education is organized the academic school calendar standardize for all schools in Malaysia 2 semesters. 1 <sup>st</sup> semester (Jan-May) 2 <sup>nd</sup> semester (June-Nov). Usually <i>Eid</i> feast, (1 week). <a href="http://www.moe.gov.my">www.moe.gov.my</a>	The standardized holiday in Malaysia, in order to prepare for the importance examination and to plan the academic calendar.



the researchers found that there are the engagement from other parties such as Educational State Division and Ministry of Education.	2. Remuneration - Salary: No limited time.	Have schedule which is standardize. Ref: <a href="http://www.moe.gov.my">www.moe.gov.my</a>	More organized system should be established because of the time changing.
	3. Book loan - Ibn Sahnun pointed that not a matter for selling and buying a book.	In today's context, we have the responsible party which responsible to manage the book loan and in particular the management of textbook in schools. (reference: <a href="http://www.moe.gov.my">www.moe.gov.my</a> )	The Malaysian educational system implementing the same idea with Ibn Sahnun.
	4. Teachers Day: -It's prohibited if teacher force their students to buy present because teacher already have their own salary.	The celebration of Teacher's Day should be held concurrent at the same date, 16 <sup>th</sup> May every year. (ref: <a href="http://www.moe.gov.my/upload/galeri_awam//2012/1336538306.pdf">http://www.moe.gov.my/upload/galeri_awam//2012/1336538306.pdf</a> )	Teacher's Day just to appreciate teachers and to celebrate with students nothing is wrong, but teacher must not force their student to give present to them.
	5. Punishment -Not more than three times in the suitable place and certain part of body.	Have procedure and guideline by Ministry of Education Malaysia to conduct punishment among student and disciplinary cases. <a href="http://www.moe.gov.my">www.moe.gov.my</a>	Punishment is needed in order to shape the character of the child.

Ibn Sahnun concerns on good administrative practices in education field (Table 2). He discusses issues about school calendar and holiday, teacher's salary or payment, celebration of teacher's day and rules for pupils punishment. By referring to the current practice in Malaysia, the Ministry of Education provided a clear guidelines and regulation pertaining to these matters.

**Table 3: The Implications of Ibn Sahnun's Ideas on Teachers' Ethics and Professionalism to Current Educational System in Malaysia**

Category	Ideas of Ibn Sahnun	Current situation	Comment
3. Ethical Professionalism. This is the important part in building the student's personality according to man's purpose in life. This contains the roles and responsibilities of teacher.	1. Teacher ethics, roles and responsibilities of teacher. Modesty, patience, fair treatment to students.	Establish the guideline of the teacher's ethics by the school organization. (Ref, Standard Guru Malaysia) <a href="http://www.moe.gov.my/sgm/">http://www.moe.gov.my/sgm/</a>	Teacher is the best role model for students. Teacher must show the best conduct ( <i>akhlak</i> ) to their students. They imitate the actions of their teacher.

Table 3 shows that the idea of Ibn Sahnun is still relevant in the current education system. In Malaysia, the Ministry of Education produced the guideline for the practice among teachers known as Malaysian Teacher Standard (*Standard Guru Malaysia*).



## CONCLUSIONS

Ibn Sahnun was a great thinker in education which produce guidelines about the practice of Islamic education. The ideas of Ibn Sahnun focus on the importance of teaching the Quran, educational administration and the role of teacher or teacher professionalism which are important in dissemination the knowledge in Islam. The implementation of some curriculum and policies in Malaysia educational system are similar to the ideas of Ibn Sahnun. Current educational system should study the past muslim scholars on education for the integration of knowledge beside learning theories from Western scholars.

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