



Ibn Sahnun's Islamic Educational Thought and Its Relevance to Character Education

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Abstract

Classical Islamic educational thought continues to serve as an important reference for the development of Islamic educational theory and practice; however, studies examining the contemporary relevance of Ibn Sahnun's educational thought remain limited. This study aims to analyze Ibn Sahnun's Islamic educational thought as presented in *Adab al-Mu'allimin*, focusing on teacher and student ethics, educational management, parental involvement, and its relevance to character education. This study employed a qualitative method using a content analysis approach to examine *Adab al-Mu'allimin* as the primary source, supported by relevant scholarly literature. The findings reveal that Ibn Sahnun regarded ethics as the fundamental foundation of the educational process. Teachers are portrayed as moral role models who must demonstrate integrity, sincerity, and responsibility, while students are expected to cultivate respect, discipline, and diligence in the pursuit of knowledge. In addition, Ibn Sahnun proposed educational management principles encompassing curriculum, teaching methods, and collaboration between teachers and parents. These findings indicate that Ibn Sahnun's educational thought remains conceptually relevant for strengthening character education based on Islamic values and provides a valuable reference for the development of contemporary Islamic education.

INTRODUCTION

Islamic education remains a dynamic field of study that continues to evolve in response to social, cultural, and educational developments within Muslim societies (Baiza, 2013; Ibrahim et al., 2024). Amid contemporary educational innovations, classical Islamic educational thought continues to provide an important philosophical, ethical, and pedagogical foundation for the development of Islamic educational theory and practice (Alfurqan, 2020; Hendawi et al., 2024). The ideas of classical Muslim scholars not only shaped educational systems in their own historical contexts but also offer enduring principles that remain relevant to contemporary educational challenges, particularly those related to character formation, teacher professionalism, and collaboration among schools, families, and communities (Husni & Hayden, 2024; Ibrahim et al., 2024; Rahman, 2025).

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Character education has re-emerged as a major concern in educational discourse in response to growing ethical challenges within educational institutions. Numerous studies indicate that educational success should not be measured solely by academic achievement but also by the ability of educational institutions to cultivate integrity, responsibility, discipline, and social awareness among students (Kalsum et al., 2025; Mustafa et al., 2026). Consequently, strengthening the moral and ethical dimensions of education has become a central objective of educational development, including Islamic education. Within this context, the ideas of classical Muslim scholars provide valuable conceptual resources because they consistently place moral formation at the core of the educational process (Engkizar, Jaafar, Hamzah, Syafril, Febriani, et al., 2026).

Among the influential figures in classical Islamic educational thought is Ibn Sahnun, a prominent Maliki scholar who lived during the third century AH in Kairouan, North Africa. During the Aghlabid period, Kairouan emerged as one of the leading intellectual centers of the Islamic world, fostering the advancement of Islamic jurisprudence, Hadith studies, Arabic language, and education. Within this scholarly environment, Ibn Sahnun developed an educational philosophy that integrated religious values, ethical principles, and systematic educational management to nurture well-rounded Muslim individuals (Fuadi, 2024; Rianto & Ikhwan, 2024; Wiyono, 2017).

Ibn Sahnun's most significant contribution to Islamic education is embodied in *Adab al-Mu'allimin*, one of the earliest works devoted specifically to the organization and administration of Islamic education. Unlike classical jurisprudential works that addressed educational issues only incidentally, *Adab al-Mu'allimin* presents a systematic discussion of teachers' responsibilities, students' rights and obligations, parent, teacher relationships, curriculum design, instructional methods, educational supervision, and the ethical principles governing educational practice (Idawati et al., 2024; Mahanani & Sulistyorini, 2023; Rohmah & Roqib, 2024). Consequently, the work occupies an important position in the historical development of Islamic educational thought and continues to serve as a valuable reference for studies of classical Islamic pedagogy.

Despite its historical significance, research on Ibn Sahnun remains relatively limited in scope. Existing studies have primarily focused on his intellectual biography, the historical development of Islamic education, or descriptive discussions of *Adab al-Mu'allimin*. Other studies have examined teacher and student ethics but have generally treated these themes independently rather than analyzing Ibn Sahnun's educational thought as an integrated educational framework (Aryanti et al., 2022; Feuillebois-Pierunek, 2017; Rabiati & Nurjannah, 2024). Furthermore, relatively few studies have explored the contemporary relevance of Ibn Sahnun's educational ideas, particularly in relation to character education. As a result, his educational philosophy has not been comprehensively examined as a coherent system encompassing educational ethics, curriculum, instructional methods, educational management, and collaboration between schools and families (Asyibli et al., 2025; Wijaya, 2021).

At the same time, contemporary Islamic education faces increasingly complex challenges. Digital transformation, changing patterns of social interaction, and growing expectations regarding educational quality require educational institutions not only to produce academically competent graduates but also to cultivate individuals with strong moral character (Akem et al., 2025; Jannah et al., 2023). Teachers are expected to serve as ethical role models while facilitating meaningful learning experiences, whereas students are encouraged to develop discipline, responsibility, honesty, and respect for others. Within this context, classical Islamic educational thought provides an important conceptual foundation for strengthening the ethical dimension of education while remaining responsive to contemporary

educational needs (Jaafar et al., 2025; M et al., 2026; Saidi et al., 2025).

Against this background, there is a need to re-examine Ibn Sahnun's educational thought from a more comprehensive perspective. Rather than merely describing the contents of *Adab al-Mu'allimin*, this study analyzes the interrelationship among the educational components proposed by Ibn Sahnun, including teacher and student ethics, educational management, parental involvement, curriculum, and instructional methods. It further examines the conceptual relevance of these ideas to the development of character education within contemporary Islamic education.

Accordingly, this study aims to analyze Ibn Sahnun's Islamic educational thought as presented in *Adab al-Mu'allimin* through a content analysis approach and to examine its relevance to character education. The findings are expected to contribute to the scholarship on Islamic educational thought, enrich the literature on classical Islamic pedagogy, and provide a conceptual framework that may inform the development of contemporary Islamic education.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative method using a content analysis approach to examine Ibn Sahnun's Islamic educational thought as presented in *Adab al-Mu'allimin*. The primary data source was Ibn Sahnun's *Adab al-Mu'allimin*, while the secondary data consisted of relevant scholarly literature, including books, journal articles, and previous studies on classical and contemporary Islamic education (Allsop et al., 2022; Assarroudi et al., 2018; Elo et al., 2014; Engkizar et al., 2026). Data were analyzed through the processes of identifying, classifying, interpreting, and synthesizing the major themes related to teacher and student ethics, educational management, curriculum, instructional methods, and parental involvement. The findings were then critically analyzed to explain the conceptual relevance of Ibn Sahnun's educational thought to the development of character education within the context of contemporary Islamic education (Moser & Korstjens, 2017; Takona, 2024).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Historical and Intellectual Context of ibn Sahnun's Educational Thought

Ibn Sahnun's educational thought cannot be understood apart from the intellectual context of Kairouan during the third century AH, when the city flourished as one of the major centers of Islamic scholarship under the Aghlabid dynasty. During this period, Islamic intellectual traditions experienced significant development, particularly in the fields of Islamic jurisprudence, Hadith studies, and education. This dynamic scholarly environment shaped Ibn Sahnun's educational thought, which regarded education not merely as a process of knowledge transmission but also as a means of cultivating moral character and reinforcing Islamic values.

Ibn Sahnun (202–256 AH/817–870 CE), whose full name was Abu Abd Allah Muhammad ibn Sahnun, was the son of Sahnun ibn Sa'id, one of the most distinguished Maliki jurists in North Africa. The scholarly tradition within his family provided a strong intellectual foundation for the development of his ideas. In addition to his studies in Islamic jurisprudence and Hadith, Ibn Sahnun devoted particular attention to educational issues, especially those concerning teachers' responsibilities, students' character formation, and educational governance. This orientation demonstrates that Ibn Sahnun viewed education as an integrated system encompassing moral, pedagogical, and institutional dimensions (Pratama & Musthofa, 2019).

These educational ideas were systematically articulated in *Adab al-Mu'allimin*, which is widely regarded as one of the earliest works devoted specifically to Islamic education. A content analysis of this work indicates that Ibn Sahnun's discussion

extends beyond the relationship between teachers and students to include curriculum, instructional methods, educational supervision, the rights and responsibilities of teachers, and parental involvement in the educational process. The breadth of these discussions demonstrates that Ibn Sahnun conceived education as an integrated system in which multiple interconnected components work together to achieve the formation of knowledgeable and morally upright Muslims.

This historical context provides an important foundation for understanding why ethics occupies a central position in Ibn Sahnun's educational thought. The expansion of *kuttāb* as the primary institution for elementary Islamic education created a need for clear guidelines governing teachers' responsibilities, students' rights, and collaboration between families and educational institutions (Wajdi et al., 2024). Accordingly, *Adab al-Mu'allimin* represents not only a normative perspective on Islamic education but also a systematic pedagogical framework for organizing educational practice. This perspective explains the continuing conceptual relevance of Ibn Sahnun's educational thought to contemporary Islamic education, particularly in strengthening character education by positioning moral values as the foundation of the educational process.

The Fundamental Concept of Education According to Ibn Sahnun

A content analysis of *Adab al-Mu'allimin* reveals that Ibn Sahnun viewed education not merely as a process of knowledge transmission but also as a means of internalizing moral values and cultivating virtuous character. According to Ibn Sahnun, the primary objective of Islamic education is to develop individuals who possess both intellectual competence and moral excellence. This perspective reflects a holistic conception of education that integrates the intellectual, moral, and behavioral dimensions of student development. Within this framework, the Qur'an and the Sunnah serve as the principal foundations guiding the entire educational process, ensuring that learning promotes not only the acquisition of knowledge but also the formation of an Islamic moral character (Bates, 2019; Ibrahim et al., 2024b).

Furthermore, the analysis indicates that the concept of *tawhīd* constitutes the philosophical foundation of Ibn Sahnun's educational thought. All educational activities are directed toward fostering the awareness that knowledge originates from Allah and should be utilized as a means of drawing closer to Him while contributing to the well-being of society. Consequently, education is understood not merely as an instrument for achieving worldly success but as a process of developing individuals capable of integrating intellectual, spiritual, and social dimensions in a balanced manner. This perspective demonstrates the integrative orientation of Ibn Sahnun's educational philosophy, in which the pursuit of knowledge is inseparable from moral responsibility and ethical conduct.

The analysis of *Adab al-Mu'allimin* further reveals that Ibn Sahnun devoted considerable attention to curriculum design and instructional methods. The Qur'an is positioned as the core component of elementary Islamic education, complemented by the study of Arabic, Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*), and ethics as essential foundations for students' religious development. From a pedagogical perspective, Ibn Sahnun emphasized the importance of adapting instruction to students' developmental levels through gradual learning, repeated practice, and positive reinforcement. These principles demonstrate a clear concern for learners' developmental characteristics and exhibit conceptual similarities to Vygotsky's scaffolding theory, particularly in emphasizing structured guidance that corresponds to students' developmental readiness (Suardipa, 2020; Zhao, 2023). Although the two perspectives emerged from different historical contexts and philosophical foundations, both recognize the teacher's role as a facilitator who supports learning through systematic guidance.

Teacher Ethics and Roles in Ibn Sahnun's Perspective

A content analysis of *Adab al-Mu'allimin* reveals that teachers occupy a central position in the educational system formulated by Ibn Sahnun. Teachers are viewed not only as transmitters of knowledge but also as moral role models responsible for students' character formation. This finding indicates that, according to Ibn Sahnun, educational success is determined not only by the effective delivery of knowledge but also by the moral integrity and professional competence of teachers.

Furthermore, the analysis identifies several essential qualities that teachers should possess, namely sincerity, patience, justice, and responsibility. Sincerity is presented as the ethical foundation that shapes teachers' commitment to their educational responsibilities, whereas patience is understood as the ability to adapt instruction to students' diverse characteristics and learning capacities. This principle demonstrates that Ibn Sahnun recognized individual differences among learners as an important consideration in the teaching and learning process (Tambak et al., 2021).

The analysis also reveals that Ibn Sahnun emphasized the importance of treating all students fairly and without discrimination. Regarding disciplinary measures, he permitted the use of punishment as part of the educational process, provided that it was applied proportionately, served an educational purpose, and remained consistent with humanitarian principles. In addition, Ibn Sahnun's educational thought suggests that teacher professionalism encompasses intellectual, moral, and social dimensions. Teachers are expected not only to continuously develop their academic competence but also to maintain personal integrity and establish constructive relationships with parents and the wider community. These findings demonstrate that Ibn Sahnun's concept of teacher professionalism is comprehensive and remains relevant to contemporary standards of teacher professionalism.

Student Ethics and Responsibilities

The analysis of *Adab al-Mu'allimin* indicates that Ibn Sahnun regarded students as active participants who bear significant responsibility within the educational process. Educational success depends not only on teachers' competence but also on students' moral and intellectual preparedness. Within this framework, Ibn Sahnun identified sincere intention, respect for teachers, and diligence in the pursuit of knowledge as the fundamental principles that should guide every learner.

The findings further show that student ethics, according to Ibn Sahnun, encompass discipline, adherence to classroom regulations, respectful interaction with teachers, and a continuous commitment to intellectual development. These principles illustrate that learning is understood not merely as an academic activity but also as an ongoing process of character formation. Accordingly, the relationship between teachers and students is founded upon mutual respect as a prerequisite for creating a positive and productive learning environment.

From the perspective of contemporary education, these findings demonstrate a strong conceptual relevance to character education, which emphasizes the development of responsibility, discipline, respect, honesty, and lifelong learning. Although Ibn Sahnun's educational ideas emerged within a different historical and social context, they exhibit significant conceptual alignment with contemporary educational approaches that regard character formation as one of the primary goals of education. These findings suggest that Ibn Sahnun's educational thought continues to offer valuable conceptual contributions to the development of contemporary Islamic education.

The Role of Parents in Education

A content analysis of *Adab al-Mu'allimin* reveals that Ibn Sahnun regarded education as a shared responsibility involving families, teachers, and educational institutions. From his perspective, parents are responsible not only for supporting

their children's learning but also for ensuring that education takes place in an environment conducive to both character formation and intellectual development. These findings indicate that the family plays a strategic role in promoting students' educational success from the earliest stages of their development.

The analysis further demonstrates that Ibn Sahnun emphasized the importance of sustained communication and collaboration between teachers and parents. When challenges arise during the learning process, both parties are expected to work together to identify solutions that support students' development. This principle exhibits conceptual alignment with Epstein's theory of *parental involvement*, which identifies family and school partnerships as a key factor in enhancing students' academic achievement and overall development.

Educational Management in Ibn Sahnun's Perspective

The analysis of *Adab al-Mu'allimin* indicates that Ibn Sahnun formulated several fundamental principles related to educational management. His discussion encompasses the organization of learning time, the sequencing of instructional content, classroom regulations, and teachers' responsibilities in managing learning systematically. These findings suggest that, according to Ibn Sahnun, the effectiveness of education depends on a well-organized and disciplined instructional process.

Furthermore, the analysis reveals that Ibn Sahnun emphasized the principle of justice in educational practice, including equitable treatment of students and consideration of teachers' rights, particularly with regard to remuneration. This indicates that educational management extends beyond administrative concerns to include ethical principles and teacher welfare (Nisa et al., 2021). From the perspective of contemporary education, these ideas reflect the characteristics of *value-based educational management*, in which organizational effectiveness is integrated with moral and religious values.

The Relevance of Ibn Sahnun's Educational Thought to Contemporary Islamic Education

The findings demonstrate that Ibn Sahnun's educational thought possesses significant conceptual relevance to a range of issues in contemporary Islamic education, particularly those related to character education. His emphasis on teacher ethics, students' character formation, parental involvement, and educational management reflects principles that continue to be central to modern educational systems. In the Indonesian context, these values may serve as a conceptual foundation for character education initiatives that aim to develop students with strong moral values and personal integrity.

Nevertheless, applying Ibn Sahnun's educational thought within contemporary educational settings requires reinterpretation in light of developments in pedagogy, educational technology, and the characteristics of today's learners. Therefore, the relevance of his ideas lies not in their literal application but in the adaptation of their underlying educational values to support curriculum development, teacher professionalism, and character-oriented learning in contemporary Islamic education (Alkiromah & Warsah, 2023; Sikumbang, 2026).

A Comparative Analysis of ibn Sahnun's Educational Thought and Other Muslim Educational Thinkers

The comparative analysis indicates that Ibn Sahnun's educational thought exhibits both distinctive characteristics and complementary relationships with those of other prominent Muslim educational thinkers. Al-Ghazali viewed education primarily as a means of spiritual cultivation and *tazkiyat al-nafs* (purification of the soul), placing strong emphasis on moral and religious development (Madhar, 2024; Md Isa et al., 2022). By contrast, Ibn Sahnun focused more extensively on the practical dimensions of education, including teacher and student ethics, instructional

management, and the relationship between families and educational institutions.

Meanwhile, Ibn Khaldun approached education from a sociological perspective by emphasizing the influence of the social environment on individual development and advocating instructional methods that avoid excessive harshness (Luthfiyani et al., 2025; Masnila & Sassi, 2025). Compared with these two scholars, Ibn Sahnun occupies a distinctive position by integrating ethical principles, pedagogical practices, and educational management into a systematic educational framework. These findings suggest that Ibn Sahnun's contribution extends beyond articulating the moral foundations of Islamic education to formulating practical principles that remain relevant for the organization and development of educational practice.

CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis of *Adab al-Mu'allimin*, this study demonstrates that Ibn Sahnun's educational thought provides a comprehensive framework for Islamic education that places character formation at the center of the educational process by integrating moral, pedagogical, and institutional dimensions. The findings indicate that teachers are positioned as central figures whose responsibilities extend beyond the transmission of knowledge to serving as moral exemplars characterized by integrity, sincerity, justice, and professional responsibility. At the same time, students are regarded as active participants who are responsible for cultivating discipline, respect for teachers, and commitment to learning, while parents function as strategic partners who support educational success through sustained collaboration with teachers. The study also reveals that Ibn Sahnun formulated systematic principles of educational management encompassing curriculum, instructional methods, classroom governance, and the ethical organization of educational practice. Furthermore, the comparative analysis demonstrates that Ibn Sahnun's educational thought occupies a distinctive position by integrating ethics, pedagogy, and educational management into a coherent conceptual framework. Therefore, Ibn Sahnun's educational thought continues to hold substantial conceptual relevance for the development of contemporary Islamic education, particularly in strengthening character education, enhancing teacher professionalism, and fostering effective collaboration between families and educational institutions through interpretations that remain responsive to contemporary pedagogical developments and societal needs.

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