

A STUDY ON MALAYSIAN STUDENTS' READINESS TO LEARN ISLAMIC ETIQUETTE AND MORALITY

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Introduction

Islamic Etiquette and Morality or *Adab* and *Akhlak Islam* is a new component which is being introduced in the pre-university curriculum in Malaysia. It was first started in 2003 with a plan to be completed in 2005. This study is carried out to observe the appropriateness of the students' readiness to learn it since the component is still new. This is important in order to ensure its effective teaching and learning. 294 Islamic Education teachers were involved in this study. According to this study, there is a difference between the teachers' thinking and the Malaysian Ministry of Education directives in the distribution of the Islamic Etiquette and Morality learning sub-areas for different pre-university levels. This difference is further examined and analysed in this paper since it has far-reaching consequences for the teachers' teaching and the Malaysian students' learning.

The readiness of students to learn is an important factor in the teaching and learning processes. According to Atan Long (1983) and Omar As-Syaibani (1991), it is one of the learning principles that a teacher must consider to ensure effective teaching. Traditionally, a teacher will just deliver the content of a curriculum prepared by a planner at the *institutional* level. The teacher at the *instructional* level must adapt the curriculum to the students' level of learning readiness, known as the *personal* level. Therefore, it is appropriate that a teacher is involved in the planning of a curriculum so that the gap between the institutional and instructional curricula will be smaller. According to McNeil (1996), besides the *societal* and *institutional* levels there is an *instructional* level. What is done and carried out by the teacher is known as the instructional level. The foundation or basis which is used by the teacher is what has been decided by the authority. The real instructional curriculum which is implemented in the classroom is normally different and not exactly the same as the planned curriculum at the institutional level. In any case, the importance of a curriculum for achieving the aims and objectives of an education system cannot be overstated:

The triumph of an Islamic Education is due to the curriculum being used as a tool to educate the young generation effectively and to help them to develop all the skills and talents and to prepare them to be responsible for themselves, their families, their community and their race. (Al-Syaibani, p. 476)

Despite the different definitions of curriculum for this study, it is referred to as the learning activity in the classroom and other formal situations which are planned by the school. There is a view about the formation of a curriculum for a classroom. According to Sowell, the formation of a curriculum (in this case at the Malaysian Ministry of Education level) is not necessarily carried out totally at the school level; it may be developed at the governmental level. The purpose of this paper is to investigate the readiness of the students to learn Islamic Etiquette and Morality (IEM), a subject introduced by the Malaysian Ministry of Education (MME).

IEM is one of the components in Islamic Education. The other two components are Recitation of the Qur'ān (*Tilāwat al-Qur'ān*) and Islamic Law (*'Ulūm Sharī'ah*). Islamic Education is one of the compulsory subjects for Muslim students whereas Moral Education is for non-Muslim students in the Malaysian education system. Islamic Education is introduced at both the primary and secondary levels. The students at the primary level (from 7 to 12 years old) and those at the secondary level (from 13 to 17 years old) are required to study Islamic Education and sit the examination.

The IEM component consists of six main learning areas which are: Etiquette in Daily Life, Etiquette in Social Life, Etiquette in Worship of Allah, Etiquette Towards Parents, Etiquette in Pursuing Knowledge and Etiquette towards Allah and *Rasūlullāh*. Under each of these main learning areas there are altogether 47 learning sub-areas.

The Students' Readiness to Learn

A child has different stages of learning. The learning readiness refers to the ability of a student who is ready to face and learn something in a certain period of time (Ahmad Mohd Salleh, 1997). Lee Shok Mee (1997:43) argues that learning readiness means the inner condition of a child who is ready and has the ability to gain new learning experiences. In addition, Lovell (in Hillier, 2002) stresses that according to the earlier teaching regulations, a teacher must lead a student from the prior level to his intended level. The concept of learning alertness stresses the development of the student's intellectual ability to optimize his learning. A child or a student must not be forced to do any work which is not within their intellectual ability. On the other hand, delaying the presentation of a certain task to the child will have a negative effect on them. Certain sayings (*ḥadīth*) of Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.) encourage the teaching to be imparted in stages. For example, "We as the Messenger of God are instructed to deliver the messages of God according to the peoples' level of understanding".

In conclusion, levels of cognition and actual experiences are two important factors which influence the students' readiness to learn. According to the literature survey discussed here, a student's cognitive development increases as he gets older even though there might be a difference between his mental and chronological ages. Therefore, the curriculum planners and teachers must consider the maturity level and mental difference among students when planning the learning program.

Teachers' Perception of Instructional Curriculum

Regarding the student's readiness to learn IEM, this study has looked into the

teachers' perception of the appropriateness of IEM distributions according to levels of learning. One of the reasons that the teachers have become the subject of study in this article is that the decision-makers of what is supposed to be taught to students have different views and expectations. Even though some teachers accept it without questioning the syllabus, some express their concerns about what should be taught in the classroom. Moreover, teachers have valuable knowledge and expertise to contribute to the curriculum development process.

From what has been stated above, it is clear that the teacher's perception about the IEM component has to be given attention in order to minimise the discrepancy between the institutional and instructional curricula, as well as reducing the gap between the instructional curriculum and the student's personal ability. Without the teachers' involvement, curriculum writers normally fail to produce a suitable curriculum because they are not familiar with the actual educational levels of the students. The teachers have a close contact with classroom situations, so they are aware of students' needs. Hence, they can make a unique contribution towards the development of a successful curriculum. According to Sjogern, Poskiparta, Limatainen and Kettunen (2003), only the teachers who are involved in the development of a curriculum can adopt it. A curriculum which is legislated without the involvement of their interest is considered to be an important document by many teachers, but in practice they do not prove to be very useful.

The Objective of the Study

The objective of this study is to observe the appropriateness of the learning sub-areas of the IEM. In more specific terms, it is to identify the appropriateness of the distribution of the IEM learning sub-areas based on the students' readiness to learn at each form (form one to form five) according to the teacher's perception.

The Importance of the Study

Based on the above objective, the importance of the study is that it can explain the appropriateness of the IEM learning sub-areas which has been assigned to each form and hence can trace the student's readiness to learn. Therefore, it has the potential to increase the effectiveness of teaching character through IEM in the classroom. The results of this study can also be used as a guide to strengthen the Islamic Education Curriculum, and especially the IEM component.

The Methodology of Study

This study has used the descriptive method in order to get quantitative data about the teachers' views on the appropriateness of the IEM component distribution. For this, opinions were sought from the teachers of the schools in the districts of Hulu Langat and Petaling in Selangor. This investigation was intended to find whether a certain component of the IEM syllabus was appropriate to the students' readiness to learn.

The cluster random sampling technique was used in order to get the sample of teachers. After getting the Hulu Langat and Petaling districts randomly, the researcher then looked at the list of all the secondary schools in both the districts. The sample of teachers was randomly drawn only from the daily secondary schools.

294 Islamic Education teachers responded to the questionnaire distributed by the researcher herself. Hague, *et al.* (1993) suggests that a sample which exceeds 30 and less than 500 is suitable in many studies. Since this study is a survey, Cochran's formula was used to determine the minimum size of the sample.

The data collected through the questionnaire were analyzed by applying the statistical method to obtain the required information. The descriptive analysis statistic was used to describe and summarize the quantitative data. The data obtained has been processed by using the Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) program.

Table 1: Frequencies and percentages of learning sub-areas of IEM based on teachers' perception

Learning Sub-areas of IEM	Form 1		Form 2		Form 3		Form 4		Form 5	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Etiquette of male and female nature	109	37.2	113	38.6	61	20.8	9	3.1	1	0.3
Etiquette with friends	156	53.6	95	32.7	34	12.03	6	1.72	0	0
Etiquette in facing disaster and pleasure	56	19.11	103	35.15	90	30.72	35	11.95	9	3.07
Etiquette with neighbours	46	15.75	90	30.82	89	30.48	48	16.44	19	6.51
Etiquette towards self and dignity	91	31.38	94	32.41	67	23.10	23	7.93	15	5.17
Etiquette of thinking	17	5.80	31	10.58	77	26.28	113	38.57	55	18.77
Etiquette in self-grooming	22	7.51	58	19.8	86	29.35	93	31.74	34	11.60
Etiquette towards the ill	10	3.41	30	10.24	104	35.49	94	32.08	55	18.77
Etiquette in travelling	3	1.7	44	15.1	78	26.7	89	30.5	78	26.7
Etiquette towards country	5	1.71	8	2.74	18	6.16	97	33.22	164	56.16
Etiquette towards leader	13	4.47	9	3.09	21	7.22	78	26.80	170	58.42
Etiquette of war	6	2.08	4	1.0	16	5.54	82	28.37	181	62.63
Etiquette towards Muslims and non-Muslims	41	14.04	68	23.29	94	32.19	65	22.26	24	8.22
Etiquette towards guests	38	13.01	90	30.82	89	30.48	57	19.52	18	6.16
Etiquette in working	6	2.05	19	6.51	33	11.30	83	28.42	151	51.71
Etiquette in speaking	28	9.56	31	10.58	70	28.89	112	38.23	52	17.75
Etiquette in <i>amar makruf dan nahi mungkar</i>	40	13.94	32	11.15	56	19.51	105	36.59	54	18.82
Etiquette at the recreational area	37	12.67	95	32.53	70	23.97	64	21.92	26	8.90
Etiquette of using the public amenities	70	23.81	90	30.61	73	24.83	51	17.35	10	3.40
Etiquette in visiting the dead	13	4.44	23	7.85	152	51.88	7	24.91	32	10.32
Etiquette in preserving the environment	44	15.17	74	25.52	80	25.59	73	25.17	19	6.55
Etiquette in accepting gifts and alms	28	9.66	79	27.24	90	31.03	66	22.76	27	9.31
Etiquette in business	13	4.0	19	6.55	52	17.93	133	45.86	73	25.17
Etiquette in reciting the Qur'an	230	79.31	33	11.38	15	5.17	8	2.76	4	1.38
Etiquette in the mosque	151	51.54	69	23.55	44	15.02	20	6.83	9	3.07
Etiquette towards the Qur'an	220	75.86	47	16.21	16	5.52	5	1.72	2	0.69
Etiquette during prayers	163	56.21	89	30.69	32	11.03	6	2.07	0	0
Etiquette in worship of Allah	112	38.62	106	36.55	56	19.31	12	4.14	4	1.38
Etiquette towards parents	201	68.64	56	19.18	24	8.22	6	2.05	5	1.71
Etiquette towards family	126	43.3	96	32.99	41	14.09	16	5.50	12	4.12
Etiquette in devotion to parents	140	48.78	56	19.51	52	18.12	24	8.36	15	5.23
Etiquette in preserving school's property	109	37.59	102	35.17	46	15.86	31	10.69	2	0.69
Etiquette towards teacher	153	53.13	82	28.47	31	10.76	18	6.25	4	1.39
Etiquette in pursuing knowledge	82	28.37	89	30.80	56	19.38	56	19.38	6	2.08
Etiquette of public speaking	10	3.45	15	5.17	78	26.90	106	36.55	81	27.93
Etiquette in <i>zikrullah</i>	49	16.90	70	24.14	81	27.93	63	21.72	27	9.31
Etiquette towards <i>Rasulullah</i>	63	21.65	84	28.87	86	29.55	44	15.12	14	4.81

Result and Discussion

From the teachers' responses the frequency and the percentage of the distribution of the learning sub-areas of IEM according to form were obtained. Table 1 shows the frequency and the percentage of each learning sub-areas of IEM according to various forms based on the teachers' perception.

Based on the highest frequency and percentage as shown in Table 1, the distribution of learning sub-areas according to the various forms can be obtained. For example, for Etiquette of Male and Female Nature, it is seen that Form 2 has the highest frequency (113) and highest percentage (38.6). Similarly, for Etiquette of War Form 5 has the highest frequency (181) and highest percentage (62.63). The results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Distribution of IEM learning sub-areas in different forms based on teachers' perception

Learning Areas	Learning Sub-areas of IEM	Forms
Etiquette in Daily Life	Etiquette of male and female nature	2
	Etiquette with friends	1
	Etiquette in facing disaster and pleasure	2
	Etiquette with neighbours	2
	Etiquette towards self and dignity	2
	Etiquette of thinking	4
	Etiquette in self-grooming	4
	Etiquette towards the ill	3
	Etiquette in travelling	4
	Etiquette towards country	5
	Etiquette towards leader	5
	Etiquette of war	5
Etiquette in Social Life	Etiquette towards Muslims and non-Muslims	3
	Etiquette towards guests	2
	Etiquette in working	5
	Etiquette in speaking	4
	Etiquette in <i>amar makruf dan nahi mungkar</i>	4
	Etiquette at the recreational area	2
	Etiquette of using the public amenities	2
	Etiquette in visiting the death	3
	Etiquette in preserving the environment	3
	Etiquette in accepting gifts and alms	3
	Etiquette in business	4
Etiquette in Worship of Allah	Etiquette in reciting the Qur'ān	1
	Etiquette in the mosque	1
	Etiquette towards the Qur'ān	1
	Etiquette during prayers	1
	Etiquette in worship of Allah	1
Etiquette towards Parents	Etiquette towards parents	1
	Etiquette towards family	1
	Etiquette in devotion to parents	1
Etiquette in Pursuing Knowledge	Etiquette in preserving school's property	1
	Etiquette towards teacher	1
	Etiquette in pursuing knowledge	2
	Etiquette of public speaking	4
Etiquette towards Allah and <i>Rasūlullah</i>	Etiquette in <i>zikrullah</i>	3
	Etiquette towards <i>Rasūlullah</i>	3

Based on the findings of the teacher's questionnaire, the comparison regarding the distribution of the learning sub-areas of IEM between the Malaysian Ministry of Education and teachers is shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Distribution of IEM learning sub-areas to different forms according to the Ministry of Education Malaysia (MEM) and teachers

Learning Areas	Learning Sub-areas	Forms	
		MEM	Teachers
Etiquette in Daily Life	Etiquette of male and female nature	1	2
	Etiquette with friends	1	1
	Etiquette in facing disaster and pleasure	2	2
	Etiquette with neighbours	2	2
	Etiquette towards self and dignity	2	2
	Etiquette of thinking	4	4
	Etiquette in self-grooming	4	4
	Etiquette towards the ill	4	3
	Etiquette in travelling	5	4
	Etiquette towards country	5	5
	Etiquette towards leader	5	5
	Etiquette of war	5	5
Etiquette in Social Life	Etiquette towards Muslims and non-Muslims	2	3
	Etiquette towards guests	3	2
	Etiquette in working	3	5
	Etiquette in speaking	3	4
	Etiquette in <i>amar makruf dan nahi mungkar</i>	4	4
	Etiquette at the recreational area	4	2
	Etiquette of using the public amenities	4	2
	Etiquette in visiting the death	4	3
	Etiquette in preserving the environment	5	3
	Etiquette in accepting gifts and alms	5	3
	Etiquette in business	5	4
Etiquette in Worship of Allah	Etiquette in reciting the Qur'ān	1	1
	Etiquette in the mosque	2	1
	Etiquette towards the Qur'ān	2	1
	Etiquette during prayers	2	1
	Etiquette in Worship of Allah	2	1
Etiquette towards Parents	Etiquette towards parents	1	1
	Etiquette towards family	1	1
	Etiquette in devotion to parents	3	1
Etiquette in Pursuing Knowledge	Etiquette in preserving school's property	1	1
	Etiquette towards teacher	1	1
	Etiquette in pursuing knowledge	1	2
	Etiquette of public speaking	3	4
Etiquette towards Allah and <i>Rasūlullāh</i>	Etiquette in <i>zikrullāh</i>	4	3
	Etiquette towards <i>Rasūlullāh</i>	4	3

From Table 3, it is seen that only in 15 (40.5%) cases out of 37, learning sub-areas are distributed in the same manner by the Ministry of Education as by the teachers.

Table 4 shows the sub-areas where there are agreements between the teachers and the Ministry of Education.

Table 4: IEM learning sub-areas assigned to forms as agreed by the teachers

Forms	Learning Sub-areas of IEM
1	Etiquette with friends Etiquette towards the Qur'ān Etiquette towards parents Etiquette towards family Etiquette in preserving school's property Etiquette towards teacher
2	Etiquette in facing disaster and pleasure Etiquette with neighbours Etiquette towards self and dignity
4	Etiquette of thinking Etiquette in self-grooming Etiquette in <i>amar makruf dan nahi mungkar</i>
5	Etiquette towards country Etiquette towards leader Etiquette of war

Therefore, there are 22 (59.5%) learning sub-areas over which there are disagreements between the Malaysian Ministry of Education and the teachers as shown in Table 5.

There are some pertinent issues related to the above disagreements. First, there is one sub-area of the IEM which has been fixed by the Ministry of Education to be taught at the lower secondary level (form 3) but the teachers feel that it should be taught at the upper secondary level (form 4). This is the Etiquette in Public Speaking. If the teachers' judgement were to be given more weight than that of the Malaysian Ministry of Education, the students who will sit the Lower Secondary Examination or PMR will not be ready to learn that component and the teachers will have difficulties to make them comprehend. Hence, the students will have difficulties answering the questions on the sub-area of Etiquette in Public Speaking during the Lower Secondary Examination, if the sub-area is still considered part of the syllabus for Form 3 as stipulated by the ministry.

There are two learning sub-areas of the IEM which have been categorised by the Malaysian Ministry of Education as ones to be taught at the lower secondary level (Form 3). These are the Etiquette in Working and Etiquette in Public Speaking sub-areas. But the teachers feel that both learning sub-areas of learning are only suitable for the upper secondary level. A solution is needed for the best way to distribute both learning sub-areas.

Secondly, the disagreement between the teachers and the Malaysian Ministry of Education over the distribution of learning sub-areas needs to be considered. For

example, the teachers believe that the Etiquette in Behaving at the Recreational Area is suitable to be taught to Form 2 students, yet the Ministry feels it is suitable to be taught at Form 4. Other learning sub-areas are the Etiquette of Using the Public Amenities, Preserving the Environment and the Etiquette of Accepting Presents and Alms.

Table 5: Distribution of different learning sub-areas between the Ministry of Education Malaysia and teachers

Learning Sub-areas of IEM	MEM	Teachers
Etiquette of male and female nature	Form 1	Form 2
Etiquette towards the ill	Form 4	Form 3
Etiquette in pursuing knowledge	Form 1	Form 2
Etiquette towards Muslims and non-Muslims	Form 2	Form 3
Etiquette towards guests	Form 3	Form 2
Etiquette towards the Qur'ān	Form 2	Form 1
Etiquette in the mosque	Form 2	Form 1
Etiquette during prayers	Form 2	Form 1
Etiquette in worship of Allah	Form 2	Form 1
Etiquette in devotion to parents	Form 3	Form 1
Etiquette in working	Form 3	Form 5
Etiquette in speaking	Form 3	Form 4
Etiquette of public speaking	Form 3	Form 4
Etiquette at the recreational area	Form 4	Form 2
Etiquette in visiting the death	Form 4	Form 3
Etiquette of using the public amenities	Form 4	Form 2
Etiquette in <i>zikrullāh</i>	Form 4	Form 3
Etiquette towards <i>Rasūlullāh</i>	Form 4	Form 3
Etiquette preserving the environment	Form 5	Form 3
Etiquette in accepting gifts and alms	Form 5	Form 3
Etiquette in travelling	Form 5	Form 4
Etiquette in business	Form 5	Form 4

The difference of these two forms can be seen in Table 5. Two other learning sub-areas which the teachers and students find suitable for the lower secondary level but the Ministry considers them suitable for the upper secondary level are the Etiquette in *Zikrullāh* and the Etiquette towards *Rasūlullāh*. But the difference involves only one form (refer to table 5). If these learning sub-areas are still taught at the secondary level, there is a possibility the students might get bored because they feel they are too easy for them.

Conclusion

This study found that there are differences in the distributions of the sub-areas of learning according to forms between the Malaysian Ministry of Education, teachers and students. But the teachers' and students' perception are closer. As far the scope of the sub-areas of learning of IEM, the findings of this study show that it is still not enough and needs to be added to.

Hence, based on this study, it is found that the IEM component is not very well established, and the *akhlak* values need to be stated explicitly in the Islamic

Education Curriculum. Also, teachers should be more involved in developing a curriculum to ensure that it is more meaningful and in line with students' level of learning readiness.

Suggestion

The following suggestions can be made. Firstly, for a better curriculum, the gap between societal curriculum and institutional levels and that between instructional curriculum and personal levels will have to be reduced so that the teaching of IEM will be more meaningful and effective for the students.

Secondly, the teachers' view is very important in determining the appropriateness of the subject content since they are the ones who are closer to the students and they know them better. Therefore, the level of teachers' involvement in the process of planning a curriculum should be increased.

In sum, a follow-up study on the readiness of the students to learn the IME component based on the students' perception is strongly recommended in order to determine the difference between the teachers and students. Undoubtedly, such a study will further strengthen the syllabus and the teaching of the component.

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