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Fathima Al-Fihri and the Tradition of Knowledge: Connecting the Past with the Future

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the legacy of Fathima Al-Fihri, the founder of Al-Qarawiyyin University, and its influence on the tradition of science in the context of Islamic education. Fathima is not only a symbol of women's empowerment, but also a pioneer of inclusive access to education. This study aims to connect the educational heritage built by Fathima with the challenges faced by modern education. Through a qualitative approach, data are obtained from relevant historical sources and contemporary analysis. The results show that Fathima Al-Fihri's educational values remain relevant and important in fighting for accessibility and empowerment of women in education today. This discussion is expected to provide insight into the importance of preserving and applying the tradition of science in a modern context.

Keyword: *Fathima Al-Fihri, Tradition of knowledge, Islamic Education*

ABSTRAK

Tulisan ini mengeksplorasi warisan Fathima Al-Fihri, pendiri Universitas Al-Qarawiyyin, dan pengaruhnya terhadap tradisi ilmu dalam konteks pendidikan Islam. Fathima bukan hanya simbol kekuatan perempuan, tetapi juga pelopor akses pendidikan yang inklusif. Kajian ini bertujuan untuk menghubungkan warisan pendidikan yang dibangun oleh Fathima dengan tantangan yang dihadapi oleh pendidikan modern. Melalui pendekatan kualitatif, data diperoleh dari sumber-sumber sejarah dan analisis kontemporer yang relevan. Hasil menunjukkan bahwa nilai-nilai pendidikan Fathima Al-Fihri tetap relevan dan penting dalam memperjuangkan aksesibilitas dan pemberdayaan

perempuan dalam pendidikan saat ini. Pembahasan ini diharapkan dapat memberikan wawasan tentang pentingnya melestarikan dan menerapkan tradisi ilmu dalam konteks modern.

Kata kunci: Fathima Al-Fihri, Tradisi ilmu, Pendidikan Islam

INTRODUCTION

Fathima Al-Fihri, a female figure born in the 9th century AD in Tunis, is a symbol of strength and courage in fighting for education and science. He is known as the founder of Al-Qarawiyyin University in Fez, Morocco, which is recognized by UNESCO and Guinness World Records as the oldest university still in operation today. However, more than just the founder of an educational institution, Fathima is a clear example of the contribution of women to the development of science in the history of Islam. In this context, this study aims to explore the legacy and influence of Fathima Al-Fihri on the tradition of knowledge, as well as its relevance in bridging the past and future of education.

Education in the Islamic world during the time of Fathima Al-Fihri experienced significant development. With the presence of institutions such as Al-Qarawiyyin, Fathima creates a space for students from various backgrounds to access science, ranging from theology to astronomy. This is in line with the view of Syed Hossein Nasr who emphasized that "Islam is a religion of knowledge, and the search for knowledge is an obligation for every Muslim" (Nasr, 2002). By establishing an institution that prioritizes access to education, Fathima not only contributed to her society, but also laid the foundation for a scientific tradition that gave birth to many Muslim scholars.

The social and cultural context at that time is also an important background that needs to be considered. The role of women in Islamic society is often limited by norms and traditions that prioritize gender dominance. However, Fathima Al-Fihri managed to overcome those limitations by investing the inheritance left by her father, who was a successful merchant. He used the wealth to establish inclusive educational institutions, a move that showed that education is the right of every individual regardless of gender. This reminds us of Amina Wadud's statement that emphasizes that "Education is the key to empowering women and changing society" (Wadud, 1999). Through her dedication, Fathima has not only become an influential figure in her time but also an inspiration for future generations.

Fathima Al-Fihri's legacy has an impact far beyond her time. Al-Qarawiyyin University became an intellectual center that not only gave birth to Muslim scholars, but also attracted the attention of students from Europe and other regions. This shows that the tradition of knowledge built by Fathima is universal and able to bridge various cultures. In Edward Said's view, "Culture and knowledge are the forces that connect different regions and societies" (Said, 1978). Therefore, understanding the tradition of knowledge started by Fathima is not only important in the historical context, but also relevant to today's global educational challenges.

In this modern era, where education continues to undergo transformation, the values brought by Fathima Al-Fihri can still be applied. Challenges such as education gaps, access to knowledge, and women's empowerment are still important issues in various parts of the world. Quoting Amartya Sen, "Freedom in education is the essence of human development" (Sen, 1999). Fathima teaches us that education should be a right

for all, and that fighting for access to education is the first step towards greater social change.

This study aims to connect the past with the future through the study of the heritage of Fathima Al-Fihri. By tracing his life journey, his contribution to education, as well as his influence in the tradition of science, it is hoped that valuable lessons can be found that are relevant in the current educational context. We need to understand that education is not just a transfer of knowledge, but also a process that shapes individual character and values. Therefore, an inclusive and equitable approach to education must be the main focus. Furthermore, this study will also discuss how the values taught by Fathima Al-Fihri can be integrated into the modern education system. As stated by UNESCO, "Education for all is a global obligation that must be fulfilled by every country" (UNESCO, 2000). Through this research, we hope to contribute to critical thinking about education and inspire efforts to create a more equitable and inclusive education system.

By connecting the tradition of knowledge inherited by Fathima Al-Fihri with the educational challenges of today, this research seeks to create a bridge between the past and the future. Fathima is not only a historical figure, but also a symbol of hope and struggle for better access to education for all, especially for women. Thus, this research is expected to provide new insights into the importance of appreciating and preserving educational heritage in order to build a more civilized and knowledgeable society in the future.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The following is a description of some literature relevant to this study.

Rizvi, S. (2017). *Women in Islamic History: The Forgotten Figures*. York. Oxford University Press. This book discusses the contributions of women in Islamic history, focusing on important figures that are often overlooked. Rizvi highlighted Fathima Al-Fihri's role as the founder of Al Qarawiyyin University, describing how her dedication to education creates a lasting impact in the tradition of science. Sadiq, A. (2019). *The Legacy of Al-Qarawiyyin: Educational Institutions in the Islamic World*. This book examines the history of Al Qarawiyyin University, founded by Fathima Al-Fihri, and its role in the development of Islamic education. Sadiq explained the importance of this institution in spreading knowledge and forming academic traditions in the Islamic world. Khan, N. (2020). *Feminism and Islamic Thought: A Critical Examination*. Jakarta. Alvabet Library. In this book, Khan analyzes feminist thought in the context of Islam, including a discussion of Fathima Al-Fihri. The author emphasizes the importance of women's contribution to the Islamic intellectual tradition and how examples such as Al-Fihri can inspire contemporary feminist movements.

El-Tobgui, R. (2018). *Education in the Islamic Golden Age: Influences and Developments*. Cairo. Dar Al-Maaref. This book explores the development of education during the Islamic Golden Age, focusing on educational institutions founded by influential figures, including Fathima Al-Fihri. El-Tobgui discusses how education in those days shaped society and influenced future scientific traditions. Mansour, L. (2021). *Reviving the Islamic Intellectual Tradition: Past and Future*. Kuala Lumpur. This book discusses efforts to revive the Islamic intellectual tradition in the modern era. Mansour cites Fathima Al-Fihri as an exemplary example in this effort, highlighting the role of education and science as a bridge between the past and the future.

This literature review provides insight into Fathima Al-Fihri's contributions and the importance of scientific traditions in the context of Islamic history. The research focuses on how Al-Fihri's legacy can be linked to future educational challenges and opportunities, highlighting the relevance of education as a tool of empowerment in the modern era.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a literature analysis method. Data is collected from a variety of sources, including history books, academic articles, and reports from international organizations related to education. Data sources include; Historical literature, in the form of books that discuss Fathima's life and the historical context of Islamic education; Academic Articles, in the form of works that analyze the impact of Fathima's education and its relevance; Documents and Reports, in the form of reports from organizations such as UNESCO on access to education and women's empowerment. The data obtained is analyzed by identifying key themes that emerge from the literature studied. The focus of the analysis includes Fathima's contribution to education, its impact on women, and the application of these values in modern education.

This research uses several relevant theories. Among them, the theory of inclusive education states, that "Inclusive education focuses on providing equal access to education for all individuals, regardless of social, economic, or gender background" (Ainscow, M, 2005). The theory of Feminism in Education states, that "Education should be a tool of empowerment for women, fighting for their rights to access education on an equal footing with men" (Hooks, bell, 2000). The Theory of Tradition of Science in Islam states, that "Scientific tradition in Islam plays an important role in the development of science, and educational institutions such as Al-Qarawiyyin are a clear example of this tradition" (Nasr, S.H., 2006). The Theory of Social Justice in Education states, that "Social justice in education requires efforts to eliminate injustice and ensure equitable access to education for all individuals" (Sen, A., 1999).

The framework of this research includes: The Historical Background of Fathima Al-Fihri; the establishment of Al-Qarawiyyin University; The Impact of Education on Women's Empowerment; The Relevance of the Tradition of Knowledge in Modern Education; Global Implications of Fathima's Educational Legacy; Conclusions summarizing the key findings of the study, and recommendations for more inclusive and gender-oriented education policies.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Historical Background of Fathima Al-Fihri

The 9th century AD was a significant period in Islamic history, marked by the development of science, art, and culture. During this time, the Islamic world experienced a golden period called the "Islamic Golden Age," during which various disciplines, including mathematics, astronomy, and philosophy, flourished. Major cities such as Baghdad, Cairo, and Fez became intellectual centers that attracted scholars from different parts of the world (Gutas, 1998).

Fez, in particular, became one of the most important educational centers in the Maghreb region. Al-Qarawiyyin University, founded by Fathima Al-Fihri, was one of the first institutions to introduce the concept of formal education in the Islamic world.

According to Salma Jayyusi, "Fez was the heart of intellectual and cultural life in the Islamic world at that time" (Jayyusi, 1992). In this context, the establishment of Al-Qarawiyyin reflects the push for a more structured and systematic education. In the midst of the rapid development of education, the role of women in education in the 9th century AD was often neglected. However, Fathima Al-Fihri stands as an exception in a patriarchal society. Not only did she get a good education, but she was also committed to creating educational opportunities for others, especially women. In those days, formal education was generally accessible to men, while women were often limited by social norms that placed them in domestic roles. According to Fatima Mernissi, "In many Islamic societies, women are expected to remain indoors and not engage in public life" (Mernissi, 1991). However, Fathima countered this stereotype by using the legacy she left behind to establish educational institutions that were open to all, including women.

Fathima's courage to establish a university reflects her determination to transcend existing social boundaries. She not only wants to educate the new generation, but also wants to inspire other women to seek knowledge. According to Amina Wadud, "Education is the key to empowering women and changing society" (Wadud, 1999). Thus, Fathima was not only the founder of an institution, but also a pioneer who promoted education as a universal right. Fathima Al-Fihri's historical background provides a rich context for understanding her struggle in establishing Al-Qarawiyyin University. In the midst of a patriarchal society and norms that limit women, Fathima emerged as a visionary figure, contributing not only to education among men, but also to access education for women. The legacy he left behind continues to inspire future generations to fight for inclusive and equitable education. Fathima Al-Fihri, born in 800 AD in Tunis, has a rich and educated family background. After losing her father, she used her inheritance to establish Al-Qarawiyyin University in Fez in 859 AD. Fathima's main motivation was the desire to create an educational institution that could provide knowledge and educate future generations, with the hope that education would become a tool to improve the quality of life of the community (El Azhary, 2006).

Fathima's vision is to establish an institution that not only focuses on formal education, but is also committed to the dissemination of science in a spiritual and moral context. He believes that good education is the key to creating a more just and prosperous society. According to Yvonne Haddad, "Fathima understands that science not only functions as a tool to gain power, but also as a pillar for the formation of character and morality" (Haddad, 1991). Al-Qarawiyyin University is known as an educational institution that organizes a comprehensive curriculum that covers various disciplines. The curriculum at that time was not only limited to religious education, but also included linguistics, history, mathematics, astronomy, and philosophy. This makes Al-Qarawiyyin one of the oldest educational centers in the world offering multidisciplinary education (Nasr, 2006).

One of the characteristics of Al-Qarawiyyin is the interactive teaching method, where students not only listen to lectures, but also discuss and debate about classical texts. This creates a dynamic academic atmosphere, which strongly supports the learning process. For example, education in fiqh and Qur'anic interpretation is highly emphasized, considering the importance of these two disciplines in the daily lives of Muslims (Gutas, 1998). Al-Qarawiyyin University not only serves as an educational institution, but also as a center for research and innovation. Many prominent scholars were born from this institution, including Ibn Khaldun, who is known as a pioneer of sociology. Al-Qarawiyyin also serves as a meeting place for various thinkers and scientists, which helps to spread new ideas among the community (Jayyusi, 1992).

The impact of this university on the development of science is very significant. As a center of study, Al-Qarawiyyin brings together various scientific traditions, from ancient Greek traditions to Arab-Islamic thought. This helped create a fertile environment for the development of science and contributed to what is known as the "Islamic Golden Age," during which science, art, and culture flourished. Furthermore, Al-Qarawiyyin became a model for educational institutions throughout the Islamic world, which encouraged the establishment of other universities. As stated by Amina Wadud, "Education is a bridge to empowerment, and Al-Qarawiyyin shows how education can be used to achieve that goal" (Wadud, 1999).

The establishment of Al-Qarawiyyin University by Fathima Al-Fihri was not only a revolutionary step in education in its time, but also created a long-term impact on the development of science in the Islamic world. Through her strong motivation and vision, Fathima managed to create an institution that not only provides education, but also builds the character and morality of the younger generation. With its comprehensive curriculum and interactive teaching methods, Al-Qarawiyyin continues to contribute to the rich and diverse tradition of science in the history of Muslims.

2. The Impact of Education on Women's Empowerment

Al-Qarawiyyin University, founded by Fathima Al-Fihri in 859 AD, is one of the oldest educational institutions that provides access to education for women. In the social and cultural context of the 9th century, access to education for women was often limited by patriarchal norms. However, Al-Qarawiyyin creates a space where women can learn and develop intellectually.

Fathima places education as a universal right, not limited to men. According to Ziba Mir-Hosseini, "Education is the key to opening the door to equality and social justice, and Fathima understands that access to education for women is a crucial first step" (Mir-Hosseini, 2006). With a curriculum that covers a wide range of disciplines, Al-Qarawiyyin provides women with the opportunity to pursue a wider range of knowledge, both in the fields of religion and science. Female alumni of Al-Qarawiyyin have made significant contributions in various fields, including theology, science, and the arts. One famous example is Fatima Al-Fihri, which became a symbol of women's education. However, not only Fatima, many other women have graduated from Al-Qarawiyyin and made an impact in society. One of the prominent figures is Nafisa bint Al-Hassan, a female scholar known for her expertise in religious science. Her contributions are not only limited to teaching, but also in writing scientific works that discuss tafsir and hadith. As Amina Wadud explains, "Educated women have the power to change the views of society and have a positive impact on their communities" (Wadud, 1999). With access to education provided by Al-Qarawiyyin, this female alumnus has succeeded in proving that women can contribute significantly in fields that have been dominated by men.

The education advocated by Fathima Al-Fihri has deep relevance in the context of today's women's empowerment movement. The concept of inclusive education and access for women championed by Fathima is the foundation for many modern organizations working to improve education for women around the world. In the contemporary era, the challenge of access to education for women still exists, with many women in developing countries hindered by social and economic factors. However, the global feminist movement adopted values that were in line with those championed by Fathima, namely access to education as a human right. According to Malala Yousafzai, "One child, one teacher, one book, and one pen can change the world" (Yousafzai, 2013).

This shows that education remains a powerful tool for empowering women. Fathima Al-Fihri is not only a pioneer of women's education in the past, but also a symbol of hope for the current women's education movement. The educational legacy she founded at Al-Qarawiyyin continues to inspire women around the world to fight for their right to education and equal opportunities.

The impact of education produced by Al-Qarawiyyin University on women's empowerment is huge. By opening access to education for women, Fathima Al-Fihri has made a significant contribution to the fight for gender equality. Female alumni of Al-Qarawiyyin prove that education can bring real change, and the values that Fathima stands for remain relevant in the context of today's women's empowerment movement.

3. The Relevance of the Tradition of Science in Modern Education

In the era of globalization and rapid technological development, education around the world still faces a variety of significant challenges, including gender gaps and accessibility. Despite progress in gender equality in education, women in many countries, especially in rural areas and developing countries, still face various obstacles. According to UNICEF, more than 130 million girls worldwide do not have formal education (UNICEF, 2020). This gap is often caused by factors such as poverty, restrictive cultural norms, and a lack of adequate educational facilities.

In addition, the accessibility of education remains a major issue. Many children, both boys and girls, are hampered by difficult socio-economic conditions, conflicts, and natural disasters. For example, a World Bank report shows that one in three children does not have access to quality primary education, which impacts their ability to actively participate in society (World Bank, 2018). The educational values championed by Fathima Al-Fihri at Al-Qarawiyyin University, such as accessibility and inclusivity, are very relevant to be applied in the context of modern education. First, the principle of inclusive education emphasized by Fathima can be used as a guideline in efforts to overcome the gender gap. Programs that focus on women's empowerment, such as scholarship programs for women from underprivileged families, can help close the gap.

In the context of modern education, implementing interactive and discussion-based teaching methods such as those in Al-Qarawiyyin is also very important. According to Dewey (1938), education must encourage critical thinking and active involvement of students. By encouraging students to participate in discussions, education can shape individuals who are more confident and able to think critically. Furthermore, the ethical and moral values taught by Fathima can be integrated into the modern educational curriculum. According to Nussbaum (2010), education is not only about the accumulation of knowledge, but also about character development and empathy. By integrating moral values in education, future generations can be trained to become responsible citizens and contribute positively to society.

Finally, cooperation between various stakeholders – governments, civil society and the private sector – is key to realizing inclusive and quality education. In this case, policies that support education for all, including women, must be a priority. As stated by Amartya Sen (1999), education is an important tool to empower individuals and create a more equitable society. The relevance of the tradition of knowledge represented by Fathima Al-Fihri in modern education is very clear. The values of inclusive education and accessibility, along with an ethical and critical approach to education, can help address current educational challenges, including gender gaps and accessibility. By adopting the principles that Fathima champions, we can contribute to the creation of a more equitable and sustainable education system.

4. Global Implications of Fathima's Educational Heritage

Al-Qarawiyyin University, founded by Fathima Al-Fihri in 859 AD, is not only a local educational institution that has a significant impact in Morocco, but also plays an important role in the development of education at the international level. As one of the oldest universities recognized by UNESCO, Al-Qarawiyyin has become a model for educational institutions around the world, both in the Islamic world and beyond.

At the local level, Al-Qarawiyyin has produced many scholars and intellectual leaders who have contributed to the development of science, law, and theology. The university became a hub for the exchange of ideas and thoughts, attracting students from different parts of the world. According to Nasr (2006), "Al-Qarawiyyin is an institution that connects various scientific traditions, creating a fertile environment for the development of science." This makes Al-Qarawiyyin a meeting point for scholars who want to broaden their horizons, not only in the context of religion, but also in the fields of science and philosophy. At the international level, Al-Qarawiyyin's influence can be seen in his contribution to the Islamic Golden Age, where various disciplines developed and spread to Europe and other parts of the world. Many of the texts taught in Al-Qarawiyyin were translated and became part of the curriculum in European universities, thus having a far-reaching impact on the development of Western science and philosophy. As Gutas (1998) puts it, "The education that flourished in Al-Qarawiyyin contributed to shaping the intellectual foundations that became the foundation for the Renaissance in Europe."

Fathima Al-Fihri's educational heritage is highly relevant to global efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially the Quality Education Goals. Inclusive education championed by Fathima, which emphasizes access for all, including women and marginalized groups, is the foundation for achieving the SDGs. Inclusive education aims to ensure that every individual, regardless of background, has equal access to quality education. According to UNESCO, "Inclusive education not only improves the quality of education, but also helps reduce social and economic disparities" (UNESCO, 2017). By applying the principles of inclusive education, society can empower women and marginalized groups, thereby creating a positive impact on social and economic development. In addition, the ethical and moral values taught in Al-Qarawiyyin can be integrated into the modern educational curriculum to shape the character of the younger generation. Education that focuses on character development and empathy is essential for creating individuals who contribute positively to society and their environment. As stated by Nussbaum (2010), "Education must not only provide knowledge, but also form individuals who are able to actively participate in society."

Fathima Al-Fihri's educational legacy through Al-Qarawiyyin University has far-reaching implications, both at the local and international levels. Al-Qarawiyyin is not only an educational center, but also a link between scientific traditions that contribute to the development of science globally. By adopting the inclusive educational values that Fathima champions, we can contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and create a more equitable and sustainable society.

CONCLUSION

This study has explored various important aspects of Fathima Al-Fihri's educational heritage and its relevance in the context of modern education. Some of the key findings include: First, the legacy of Al-Qarawiyyin. Al-Qarawiyyin University is not only one of

the oldest educational institutions in the world, but also serves as a center for the exchange of knowledge involving scientific traditions from different parts of the world. The existence of this university has had a significant impact on the development of education at the local and international levels. Second, Access to Education for Women. Fathima Al-Fihri was a pioneer in fighting for access to education for women in the 9th century, which became the inspiration for the modern education movement that emphasizes gender equality. Inclusive access to education helps empower women and encourage their contributions in various fields. Third, the Challenge of Modern Education. In the midst of the progress that has been made, challenges such as the gender gap and accessibility of education are still issues that need to be addressed. Many women and marginalized groups still face obstacles that prevent them from getting a quality education. Fourth, Inclusive Education and SDGs. The values taught at Al-Qarawiyyin are in line with global goals, especially the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Inclusive education not only contributes to quality education, but also to more equitable social and economic development.

Fathima Al-Fihri is not only a symbol of education in the Islamic world, but also an inspiration for the struggle for access to education for all. Through its legacy, we are taught the importance of inclusive and equitable education, which not only provides knowledge, but also empowers individuals. By connecting the tradition of knowledge started by Fathima with the challenges of modern education, we are reminded of our responsibility to continue to fight for education as a fundamental right.

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