

## THE DYNAMICS OF ETHNIC ARAB THOUGHT ON WOMEN'S EDUCATION IN MALANG INDONESIA

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### Abstrak

Idealnya, pendidikan harus dapat diakses oleh semua orang, baik laki-laki maupun perempuan, tanpa diskriminasi terhadap salah satu kelompok. Namun, pada kenyataannya, ketimpangan pendidikan tetap ada, terutama di antara perempuan etnis Arab. Artikel ini bertujuan untuk menggali lebih dalam perspektif komunitas etnis Arab mengenai pendidikan perempuan dan untuk mengeksplorasi tanggapan perempuan muda terhadap pandangan ini. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dan metode studi kasus, dengan observasi dan wawancara mendalam digunakan untuk pengumpulan data. Temuan ini mengungkapkan bahwa pembatasan dan pembatasan pendidikan bagi perempuan etnis Arab berakar pada interpretasi teks normatif dan norma-norma budaya yang mengikat. Tanggapan dari perempuan etnis Arab terhadap pembatasan ini berkisar dari penerimaan hingga perlawanan halus, dan bahkan oposisi aktif. Implikasi penelitian ini adalah Memahami bagaimana pemikiran etnis Arab memengaruhi pola pendidikan perempuan di Malang dapat membantu dalam merancang program pendidikan yang lebih inklusif dan sesuai dengan nilai budaya. Memberikan wawasan mengenai bagaimana nilai-nilai tradisional dan modern berinteraksi dalam komunitas Arab di Malang, serta dampaknya terhadap kesempatan pendidikan bagi perempuan. Dapat menjadi dasar bagi institusi pendidikan untuk menyusun kurikulum yang memperhitungkan aspek budaya, sehingga pendidikan perempuan dapat diterima lebih luas di kalangan komunitas etnis Arab. Mendorong kebijakan pendidikan yang lebih progresif dan berbasis kesetaraan gender dengan tetap menghormati nilai budaya yang dianut oleh komunitas Arab.

**Kata Kunci:** Arab Ethnic Thought, Women's Education

### Abstract

Ideally, education should be accessible to everyone, both men and women, without discrimination against any group. However, in reality, educational inequality persists, especially among ethnic Arab women. This article aims to delve deeper into the perspective of the ethnic Arab community regarding women's education and to explore young women's responses to this view. This study uses a qualitative approach and case study method, with in-depth observation and interviews used for data collection. These findings reveal that educational restrictions and restrictions for ethnic Arab women are rooted in the interpretation of normative texts and binding cultural norms. Responses from ethnic Arab women to these restrictions ranged from acceptance to subtle resistance, and even active opposition. The implication of this research is that understanding how Arab ethnic thinking affects women's educational patterns in Malang can help in designing educational programs that are more inclusive and in accordance with cultural values. Provide insight into how traditional and modern values interact in the Arab community in Malang, as well as their impact on educational opportunities for women. It can be the basis for educational institutions to develop a curriculum that takes into account cultural aspects, so that women's education can be more widely accepted among ethnic Arab communities. Encourage more progressive and gender-equality-based education policies while respecting the cultural values embraced by the Arab community.

**Keywords:** Arab Ethnic Thought, Women's Education

## **Introduction**

Women's education in Indonesia, especially within the Arab community, has become a topic of increasing attention [1]. Research shows that despite progress in access to education for women, there are still significant challenges to overcome. For example, cultural and religious factors often influence families' decisions to support girls' education. In Malang city, the Arab community has unique traditions and values that may influence their views on education.

Ethnic Arab thinking on women's education has undergone a complex development, influenced by various social, cultural and religious factors prevailing in their environment. Over time, Arab women's roles in society and their views on education have evolved, reflecting broad social changes and efforts to achieve gender equality in education. In many Arab societies, women used to be confronted with social norms that limited their access to formal education, especially higher education. This was driven by traditional perceptions that emphasized women's roles in the domestic sphere over roles in the public or professional sectors [2].

So far, studies on Arab Ethnicity have looked at the interaction, marriage, nationalism and parenting of Arab Ethnic communities that blend with other Ethnicities, such as Javanese, Madurese, Chinese and Pakistani [3]. Another research on Arab Ethnicity highlights that they have assimilated into the local community as well as their role in the spread of Islam and trade in the archipelago [4]. Similar to Yahya's research is Muchtar's research. This research highlights how these communities face the pressure of cultural assimilation while maintaining their distinct ethnic traditions [5]. The communication pattern of Ethnic Arabs with local communities is of particular concern in the study which concludes that between Ethnic Arabs and local communities has been integrated in a trade [6]. Meanwhile, in the context of education, research on Arab Ethnicity highlights aspects of Nationalism towards Indonesia initiated by the Al-Irsyad educational institution [7]. Another study related to Arab Ethnic education only focuses on the parenting of Islamic religious education in the family [8]. The tendency of studies on Arab Ethnicity above is still to study the interaction of Arab Ethnicity with local communities, endogamous marriages, nationalism, and parenting. In the author's position, there is an empty space that has not been studied by other researchers. That is about Ethnic Arab thinking about women's education.

This research complements the shortcomings of existing studies by looking at how Arab Ethnic views on women's education in discourse and practice have implications for girls' responses in responding to these views. Theological and cultural issues are directly related to a view on education. Therefore, it is a crucial issue to know the Arab Ethnic views on women's education and how girls respond to these views. Specifically, this paper answers the Arab Ethnic thinking about

women's education in the form of educational discourse and practice. An in-depth understanding of the urgency of education provides an educational model and lesson learned for the response of Arab Ethnic women to education.

This research is based on an argument that the inequality of education for women is not only caused by the uncertainty of the interpretation of normative propositions, but also due to local culture that brings bad implications for women's education. The interpretation of normative propositions accepted by the Arab Ethnicity becomes the basis for the problems of women's education. The lack of education for women causes women to be left behind in various sectors. At the same time, patriarchal culture also contributes to the inequality of education for women which is always massively produced. Thus, educational inequality for women is based on normative arguments and patriarchal culture.

The position of women in this social structure then develops into the realm of education. Basically, men and women have the same rights in the field of education. This is based on Islamic teachings (hadith) which obliges men and women without exception to study [9], [10], [11]. As what became a separate highlight for Al-Qabisi. He said that there is no difference between men and women in utilizing education (especially Islamic education. Education is the right of all people without any exceptions. Muslims will advance, if they master the field of education as an instrument and vehicle for quality self-development. For him, social ties and social justice will be possible to realize only through education[12]. This gender justice effort has an important role in the creation of solutions to all forms of discrimination problems that occur between men and women both in the public and domestic spheres, including in the field of education [13].

In addition, the relevant concepts or theories used in this study are concepts that explain the causes of gender injustice and its impact in the social life of society and in the daily lives of women. Included in this case is the impact on women's education. According to Nassarudin Umar, the differences between men and women until now still leave very complicated problems, both in terms of the substance of events (theological) and the role played by women in society (sociological). Men and women in terms of body anatomy (biology) do have very sharp differences. However, this difference causes effects that are sometimes detrimental to women. The consequences of these differences then triggered various debates that have so far been difficult to resolve [14]; [15]. Because this biological difference (sex) has given birth to a certain set of socio-cultural concepts among the community [16].

Theologically, for Riffat Hasan, discrimination and all forms of gender injustice that befall women solely arise from a misunderstanding of Islamic teachings (Al-Quran Hadith). According to

Rifat, the understanding of the creation of men and women is created equal by God [17]; [18]. Meanwhile, from a sociological aspect, the cause of the view that women are differentiated from men (gender differences) is caused by several things, including: 1) the existence of a social construction of society that illustrates that men are strong and assertive creatures while women are meek creatures. 2) reinforcement through legislation that sometimes differentiates or sometimes discriminates against the position of women. 3) the existence of social groups and even educational processes that sometimes sort and select the position of men and women [19]; [20].

### **Research Methods**

The Arab Ethnic community in Malang city who received low education from their parents is the unit of analysis of this research. The educational backwardness of Arab Ethnic women is the basis for women to face life problems. Higher education is the cause of women's welfare. Educational backwardness has become the basis for social and economic downturn. They reject various forms of improving the quality of women. By studying Arab ethnic women who experience educational backwardness, a model for solving education for women can be built.

In this study, researchers will use a qualitative approach. While the type of research is multi-site. The parameters of this research will refer to the parameters offered by Bogdan and Biklen. This is based on the argument that this research is natural. Researchers will not treat and engineer the data or research sources. This is because this research emphasizes the integrity of the data. For this reason, this researcher will understand the data contextually. On the other hand, the researcher will be positioned as a data collection instrument (human instrument). The researcher's position aims to capture the special cases that exist in the characters, ethnic leaders and girls of the Arab and Madurese ethnicities. In addition, this research analysis uses inductive. Of course, researchers still need theory as a foothold in analysis. The researcher will depart from the theory and examine the reality data that has been found. Furthermore, the researcher will present the data descriptively. The researcher will describe the data encountered in the field. Researchers will limit themselves based on the research focus. The researcher will validate the data by triangulating the data.

For data collection techniques, researchers will use three techniques which include in-depth interviews, participatory observation and documentation. The informants that the researcher will interview are women of Arab ethnicity who represent the social structure of society in Malang City and Madurese ethnic women who represent the social structure of society in rural areas, namely in Malang Regency. In addition to the researcher himself as a research instrument, the researcher will also compile data collection instruments which include interview guidelines, observation guidelines and documentation guidelines.

While the data analysis that will be used in this research is Milles, Hubberman and Saldana's interactive data analysis which includes the process of data collection, data condensation process, data display and conclusion drawing. To ensure data validity, researchers will use method triangulation and source triangulation techniques. The procedures of this research are: Researchers conducted a preliminary study (preliminary observation) to the research location. Researchers determined informants, namely several women of Arab ethnicity in Malang City. Researchers compiled research instruments in the form of interview guidelines, observation guidelines and documentation guidelines. Researchers contacted informants for approval to carry out interviews, observations and documentation. Researchers collected data by means of in-depth interviews, participatory observation and documentation. Researchers analyzed the data that researchers had collected. Researchers checked the validity of the data, and researchers concluded the results of the research and compiled a research report.

## **Discussion**

Women's education is very important to Arabs. Women can pursue the highest level of education possible. Even if necessary, women can pursue education up to the level of S3 education. The quality of women can also be seen from the knowledge they gain. The higher the level of education women take, the higher the quality of knowledge they get. In Habib Sholeh's family, for example, one of his female family members has completed her undergraduate education. In fact, she is currently pursuing a s2 education at Maulana Malik Ibrahim Islamic University Malang [21]. The above facts emphasize that education for Arab Ethnic girls is a necessity that must be undertaken up to higher education.

Women who pursue education must be balanced between formal and non-formal education. This balance is in the form of religious and non-religious education. There are three basic things that are used as a basis by Ethnic Arabs related to religious and non-religious education, namely provisions for life in society, provisions for living a religious life, and provisions for educating children. In terms of educating children at home, Arabs are fully aware that the first educator of a child in the family is the mother. Ethnic Arab women who pursue education without balancing religious and non-religious education tend to be immoral. Some Arab women who do not have a balanced education are seen as less social. Children whose mothers do not have a balanced education tend to lack a good education from the family. The balance of education between religious and non-religious education is the fulcrum for ethnic Arabs towards a better person.

In an effort to balance the above education, at least the Arabs have established the Ibtida'iyah madrasah in 1960, the Tsanawiyah madrasah in 1990, and the Aliyah madrasah in 1990. However,

the forerunner of this madrasah is said to have been established in 1930 by Habib Sholeh bin Muhammad Mauladdawila. This madrasa was registered in the Dutch East Indies as an Ibtidai'yah madrasah that aimed to combine religious and general studies. The establishment of this madrasah was based on strengthening comprehensive Islamic education. During the colonial era, the form of education was only in the form of folk schools (SR) whose subject content was limited to general education. In this position, Habib Sholeh bin Muhammad Mauladdawila was inspired to establish an education that balances religion and non-religion. Thus, the awareness of ethnic Arabs on the balance of education between religion and non-religion has long emerged. Although gradually formal educational institutions are gradually processed.

Initially, education for Arab ethnic women was limited. Women within the Arab ethnic community did not receive adequate education. However, women's education has gradually undergone significant development. Najma acknowledges that she only received a basic level of education [22]. She was unable to pursue higher and adequate education, as her family prohibited her from continuing her studies. Even leaving the house for minor outings was a cause of concern for her family, let alone pursuing higher education. Najma further reveals that her education was limited to primary school, where she attended a girls-only school. Educational restrictions for Arab ethnic women forced them to accept their situation without resistance.

The restrictions on education for Arab ethnic girls are rooted in religious views that limit women's mobility. Within Islam, there is a belief that women should be accompanied by a mahram (male guardian) when they leave the house. This view is partially upheld by the Arab ethnic community. As a result, the prohibition against women going out without a mahram extends to all matters conducted outside the home, including pursuing an education. This religious perspective, which mandates a mahram's accompaniment for women leaving the house, serves as a theological foundation for the Arab ethnic community

As a solution to the above issue, women can pursue higher levels of education by providing Arab ethnic girls with the opportunity to study in female-only educational institutions [23]. For instance, Mufida continued her education up to Madrasah Aliyah, where male and female students were segregated. However, she did not pursue higher education, as there are no gender-segregated universities in Malang. Both public universities and Islamic religious universities integrate male and female students. Thus, Arab ethnic girls are given limited educational opportunities, restricted by both the level of education and the homogeneity of the educational environment.

These educational limitations for Arab ethnic girls receive varied responses from the girls themselves, ranging from acceptance, gentle resistance, to outright rejection. These three types of



responses are natural, as some Arab ethnic girls have received a better education, while others remain limited to primary school. Girls who accept their parents' decisions tend to be passive, having been ingrained with the belief that obedience to parents is a duty. In contrast, those who gently resist attempt to negotiate with their family members. As for those who reject more actively, they advocate to their parents for the importance of education. Najma, for example, has taken this approach while working as a Qur'an teacher. These varied responses demonstrate the dynamic evolution of education for Arab ethnic girls [22].

The dynamism in education within the Arab ethnic community reflects a reality where some Arab ethnic women aspire to educational equality with men. Mufida strongly supports the pursuit of higher education for Arab ethnic women [23]. This desire for educational equality is driven not only by the progress of modern times but also by self-empowerment and preparation for educating their own children. The advancement of society demands progress from all, including women. With quality education, women can defend themselves from longstanding negative stereotypes and also become effective educators for their children. Thus, societal progress calls for the advancement of women's education, demanding the development of high-quality educational opportunities for women.

Women, including Arab ethnic women, possess great potential. This potential can be realized through education. Najma emphasizes that the potential of Arab ethnic women remains underdeveloped due to discriminatory gender-based educational practices. Such discrimination can hinder women's potential. Many Arab ethnic women with exceptional abilities have had their potential stifled by these educational disparities. Consequently, skills that could have placed them on equal footing with men—such as academic capabilities, social relations, and public office—remain untapped, leaving them confined to the role of housewife. The potential of Arab ethnic girls remains underdeveloped, and they are expected to settle for domestic roles.

This study shows that education for Arab ethnic women has experienced dynamic shifts over time, from the theological basis for restrictions on women receiving proper education, gender-segregated schooling, to the resistance from Arab ethnic women. Theological grounds remain central to issues surrounding women's education within the Arab ethnic community. Additionally, restrictions are often reinforced by parents' excessive concerns for their daughters' safety. Female resistance has emerged against limitations on pursuing higher education, with some women actively challenging restricted educational opportunities. The dynamics in Arab ethnic women's education have led to gradual improvements regarding access to education.

Restrictions on education for Arab ethnic women reflect the community's understanding of the urgency of education. The significant role of education in human development appears to be sidelined in favor of theological interpretations, which are often multi-faceted. Parental concerns within the Arab community over girls' safety further contribute to limitations on their access to higher, quality education. Although Arab ethnic families have gradually allowed their daughters to pursue higher education, gender segregation remains prevalent, underscoring the dominance of theological values. Thus, theological dominance and excessive concerns over girls' safety play key roles in the restrictions on girls' education.

The theological dominance limiting women's access to education is often linked to religious interpretations that emphasize traditional female roles as wives or mothers, overlooking the importance of formal education. In certain contexts, religious institutions or communities resist women's participation in theological education and leadership positions, due to either strong patriarchal values or literal interpretations of sacred texts. This is evident, for instance, in church communities in South Africa, where women face obstacles to leadership roles in religious educational institutions, traditionally viewed as male-dominated domains [24]. However, studies suggest that theological education can be adapted to foster inclusivity by introducing more egalitarian gender perspectives through critical hermeneutics and social identity theory, which allow women to challenge prevailing structures within religious institutions [25].

Theoretically, the implications of theological dominance on the education of Arab ethnic women can be grouped as follows: first, restrictions on educational access; second, reinforcement of gender stereotypes; third, loss of economic and social potential; and fourth, barriers to theological education itself. Educational Access Restrictions reflect how conservative theological doctrines in some religions limit women's roles in public spaces, including educational access. For instance, in conservative Islamic contexts in Afghanistan, women are often barred from higher education, even in religious studies [26]. Gender Stereotype Reinforcement occurs as theological dominance reinforces the role of women as primary homemakers, perpetuating gender norms that position women as subordinate to men, limiting their educational and career prospects. Loss of Economic and Social Potential arises from these restrictions, leading to reduced contributions by women to economic and societal sectors. UNESCO reports that countries with gender-based educational restrictions exhibit slower development rates, as half of the population cannot contribute fully to educational or professional fields (Aelshire, 2018). Finally, Barriers to Theological Education are evident in educational institutions across various countries, where women are often only allowed limited participation. Studies of seminaries in the United States reveal that women still face barriers



to leadership or teaching roles in theological institutions, dominated by patriarchal curricula and structures.

A study by LSE examined the barriers faced by Muslim women from Salafi communities, particularly regarding higher education. Although some Salafi religious leaders discourage women from attending college due to concerns about "gender mixing," many women in these communities defy such views and successfully pursue higher education. This study suggests that financial constraints, such as the high cost of tuition and limited access to low-interest loans, pose more significant barriers than theological pressures, though theological perspectives remain influential in conservative communities [27]. Research by Pew Research Center indicates that while theology is often linked to lower educational levels for Muslim women, economic factors play a more significant role. In economically developed Muslim countries, women increasingly gain educational access. In contrast, poorer countries like Mali show significant educational disparities, with Muslim women averaging only 1.4 years of schooling, indicating that economic factors are more decisive than culture or law in women's educational attainment [28]. A study published by the International Journal of Educational Development explores how religious regulations and practices in Pakistan frequently limit women's access to formal education. The study found that strict religious gender norms restrict women to primary or secondary education, though there is a shift in public attitudes allowing more women to pursue higher education under conditions of gender segregation or religious safety [29]. Research in the Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs highlights the challenges faced by Afghan women, especially with the rise of regimes enforcing strict interpretations of Sharia law. Female education is severely restricted by direct prohibitions from groups like the Taliban, who claim a rigid religious interpretation. However, the study also notes that many women seek alternative education, such as informal classes at home, as a form of resistance against the theological restrictions imposed by the local government [30].

In promoting women's education, especially for Arab ethnic women, key figures in the Arab ethnic community are encouraged to emphasize the urgency of women's education and reconsider theological doctrines that restrict women from pursuing advanced education. One-dimensional interpretations of religious texts tend to place women in a disadvantaged position compared to men. Approaches to religious texts that might potentially discriminate against women should incorporate interpretive methods, such as sociological and anthropological perspectives. Re-evaluating the theological basis for Arab ethnic women's educational opportunities is seen as an urgent necessity.

## Conclusion

The educational barriers faced by Arab ethnic women in Malang are not solely due to parental concerns over mixed-gender education but are also influenced by theological factors. These barriers arise from interpretations of sacred religious texts within the Arab ethnic community. A lack of alternative interpretive perspectives has led to limited educational opportunities for Arab ethnic women. Thus, the educational underdevelopment of Arab ethnic women is not due to an inability to pursue education, but rather to a one-dimensional doctrinal approach to religious texts.

This study provides a perspective on women's education, particularly for Arab ethnic women, highlighting how theological views serve as the basis for educational barriers. The knowledge of alternative interpretations among central figures in the community is still deemed insufficient to address women's educational needs. This paper emphasizes that educational restrictions for Arab ethnic women stem not only from parental concerns but also from the dominant, and often misinterpreted, theological doctrines.

This study is limited by its data sources, which are confined to Malang. Formulating lessons from this perspective requires broader research with a larger, more in-depth pool of informants to establish a foundation for decisions on advanced education for Arab ethnic women. Research on issues related to gender equality in education for women remains ongoing to improve women's quality of life. Further studies with broader samples and diverse sources of information could provide a deeper understanding and contribute to better educational frameworks.

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