

## Waqf Model: Al-Azhar University Forever

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### Abstract

Al-Azhar University is a prestigious Islamic educational institution located in Cairo Egypt. It is considered one of the oldest universities in the world and is renowned for its focus on Islamic studies. The waqf model of funding, which relies on donations from the community supports Al-Azhar University to maintain its independence and promote high-quality education in Islamic sciences, Arabic language, and other disciplines. However, the Al-Azhar waqf model has faced challenges in recent times, particularly with the decline in traditional sources of funding. In this paper, the author aims to highlight the success of Al-Azhar University as a waqf model for education and promoting the role of waqf in financing education to be a sustainable model for educational institutions, especially in the Islamic world. To further describe the objective, the author used qualitative research methods to analyze the available literature on Al-Azhar University's waqf model and analyze the data using content analysis techniques. The findings of this study revealed that while the waqf model has been instrumental in supporting Al-Azhar University throughout its history, it is facing increasing challenges in the modern era. However, it remains a viable and important source of funding for the university and remains as a prominent waqf model forever.

**Keyword:** Al-Azhar University, Waqf Model, Education, Prospect and Challenges

### Background of the study

Al-Azhar University, located in Cairo, Egypt, is one of the oldest and most prestigious Islamic educational institutions in the world. It was established in 975 and has been providing free education to people from all over the world, from elementary school to university level (Al-Azhar - Islamic Studies - Oxford Bibliographies, n.d). According to Abdullah, Al-Azhar University received full financial support from waqf, which played a significant role in financing the institution (Saad et al., 2019). The source of waqf funds for Al-Azhar University can be traced back to the early years of its establishment.

During this time, wealthy individuals and rulers donated properties, land, buildings, and funds to be used as endowments for the university. These endowments, known as waqf, were specifically allocated for the maintenance and development of the university and its various educational programs. According to Rahman et al (2020), the waqf model has allowed Al-Azhar University to sustain itself financially and provide education to students without charging fees. By relying on waqf, Al-Azhar University has been able to fulfil its mission of providing education to students from diverse backgrounds without financial barriers (Arshad et al., 2019). Al-Azhar also provided scholarship opportunities to students, especially those from low-income families, further promoting accessibility to education for both Egyptian and international students. For example, in 2020 about 30% of the enrolled students at Al-Azhar University were on scholarships supported by waqf funds (Arshad et al., 2019).

The waqf model has not only allowed Al-Azhar University to provide free education, but it has also enabled the institution to expand its reach and impact beyond Egypt. It is recorded that Al-Azhar University has established Azharite institutes abroad, allowing students from different countries to benefit from its educational programs. These institutes serve as an extension of the university, providing education in Islamic studies and Arabic language to students who may not have access to such facilities in their own countries (Musa et al., 2021).

In this paper, the author aims to highlight the success of Al-Azhar University as a waqf model for education. Besides promoting the role of waqf in financing education to be a sustainable model for educational institutions, especially in the Islamic world.

### **Historical Background of Al-Azhar University**

The history of Al-Azhar University dates to its establishment in 975. Al-Azhar means to glorify the Caliphate, projecting its power and authority to its rivals, mainly the Caliphs in Baghdad (modern-day Iraq) (Dodge, 1961). It was founded as a center for Islamic education and scholarship, and it quickly gained recognition as one of the most prestigious universities in the Islamic world. Jawhar al-Siqilli, the Fatimid vizier, founded Al-Azhar University to create a center for religious and academic learning (Musa et al., 2021). For the first time Jami' al-Azhar was built to serve as an "assembly mosque" for the masses.

It was formed during the Fatimid Caliphate (909–1171), a Shia-leaning government, in 972. The Fatimid Caliphate upheld the Shiite Ismailiyya school of thought. Interestingly, even though the rulers were Shias, Egypt was (and still is) a Sunni-majority country. When the Fatimids conquered Egypt, they did not oppress the Sunnis, and they were allowed to practice their beliefs freely (Dodge, 1961). Under the Fatimids, Jews, and Copts were also allowed to practice their faith without any oppression (Tignor, 2010).

Afterward, the management of al-Azhar as a nazir waqf was taken over by the Egyptian Government. This means for nearly 900 years Al-Azhar was able to stand firm with waqf which it managed itself, then in the last 100 years it began to be taken over by the Government. This situation had become a challenge for Al-Azhar and the Government of Egypt so that the needs of Al-Azhar from year to year could be met by the Government of Egypt sourced from the State Budget (Abdullah, 2020).

Al-Azhar has lost some of its financial independence over the years as government funding has become more prevalent. It is started when President Jamal Abdel Nasser nationalized the waqf properties in the 1960s, resulting in the government taking control of their management and revenue. Since that day, the government has gradually increased its financial support to Al-Azhar University, reducing its reliance on waqf resources. The

responsibility of Shaikh Al-Azhar also decreases, and the government has taken on a larger role in funding and managing the university (Don, 2017).

Despite the decrease in financial independence, Al-Azhar University continues to benefit from waqf resources and donations from individuals and organizations. As one of the oldest and most prestigious educational institutions in the Islamic world, Al-Azhar University stands as an exemplary model of the effective use of waqf to support higher education. The establishment of Al-Azhar University was a significant milestone in the history of Islamic education.

### **Understanding Waqf: Definition and Importance**

The word waqf is derived from Arabic root waqafa means "to stop" or "to hold back". Literally waqf means "holding back" or "dedicated". In the context of Islamic law, waqf refers to the permanent dedication of property or assets to benefit a specific purpose deemed beneficial to society. In early days of Islam, waqf was primarily used for religious purposes such as mosques and madrasas. But nowadays its benefit extends to various areas, including education, healthcare, and social welfare. Al-Azhar University in Cairo is a prime example of how waqf funds have been utilized for the advancement and sustenance of education (Saad et al., 2017). Whereas waqf for education means allocating specific properties or assets to support educational institutions and programs. In the context of Al-Azhar, the waqf system has allowed the university to receive the resources and financial support necessary for its operation, enabling it to provide quality education to local and international students from diverse backgrounds (Don et al., 2022; Salarzehi et al., 2010).

In the West, there are also endowment funds for education purposes which function similarly to waqf in providing sustainable financial support for educational institutions. Through the endowment fund, Oxford University has been able to maintain its academic excellence and provide scholarships for students in need. Cambridge University also provided an endowment fund to ensure the continuous growth and development of the institution. It is recorded that Oxford and Cambridge University have collected more than \$3 billion each through their endowment funds. Their source of funds received from billionaires like Bill Gates and Warren Buffett, as well as alumni donations, corporate sponsorships, and investments (Mahamood et al., 2018).

Therefore, the use of waqf or endowment funds for education has proven to be a successful model in not only sustaining educational institutions but also maintaining their academic excellence and providing opportunities for students from all backgrounds (Haseeb, 2018). The waqf fund for education is important to the sustainability and growth of educational institutions, as it provides a stable and continuous source of funding. It has become a second budget to government entities, allowing for more flexibility in financing educational programs and infrastructure development. In the case of Al-Azhar University, the utilization of waqf funds has played a crucial role in supporting its educational programs and infrastructure development, allowing the university to expand its capacity and improve the quality of education provided to students.

### **Al-Azhar University: A Model of Waqf for Education**

Al-Azhar University serves as a successful model of the waqf system in education (Arshad et al., 2019). By receiving full financial support from Waqf, Al-Azhar University has been able to provide free education to students from all over the world.

The waqf model adopted by Al-Azhar University ensures that education is accessible and sustainable for all, regardless of their financial capabilities. The waqf model implemented by Al-Azhar University showcases the importance of investing in education and utilizing waqf resources to support educational centers. By allocating a major part of its financial sources to educational centers, Al-Azhar University demonstrates the effectiveness of the waqf system in providing free and quality education to students. Furthermore, the waqf model implemented by Al-Azhar University has allowed for the maintenance and management of facilities, ensuring that the institution can continue forever.

The source of waqf for Al-Azhar University comes from various sources, including donations from individuals, businesses, and organizations. Such as charitable endowments, land and property investments, and financial contributions from the community. Al-Azhar Islamic University in Egypt also is a successful model of a university in the world that is based on the benefits of investment, and it has been allocated major parts of its financial sources to educational centers through the waqf system. Studies have shown that the waqf model implemented by Al-Azhar University has played a significant role in sustaining and expanding its educational programs. It includes scholarships and grants for students, funding for research and academic initiatives, and the maintenance of campus facilities. The waqf model implemented by Al-Azhar University has allowed for the provision of free and quality education to students from all over the world, regardless of their financial capabilities.

Through its waqf model, Al-Azhar University has made significant contributions to education by providing free and accessible education to students from all over the world. The university's allocation of major financial resources to educational centers through the waqf system enables them to offer scholarships, fund research, and academic initiatives, and maintain campus facilities (Kharomah et al., 2023).

This commitment to education has not only benefited individual students but has also had a broader impact on society by equipping individuals with the knowledge and skills needed to contribute to the development and progress of their communities.

By receiving financial support through waqf, Al-Azhar University has been able to allocate a major part of its financial resources to educational centers. This has ensured that the university can provide quality education to its students and maintain a high standard of academic excellence. The waqf model adopted by Al-Azhar University has allowed for the management and maintenance of facilities, making education more accessible and sustainable in the long run (Salarzahi et al., 2010).

Al-Azhar University also promotes the concept of waqf by encouraging its students and supporters to contribute to the university's waqf fund (Kharomah et al., 2023). It is also to encourage Muslims to engage in acts of waqf as a means of supporting the institution and ensuring the continuous provision of quality education.

According to Kasdi (2018), the use of Al-Azhar's productive waqf fund for education consists of supporting educational cost in al-Azhar, providing the welfare to teachers, lecturers and other education personnel, financing the construction and maintenance of educational facilities such as school buildings and lecture buildings, libraries, and research laboratories, construction of supporting facilities, and improving the quality of human resources by conducting training of teachers, lecturers and other education personnel.

This embodiment of the waqf model in Al-Azhar University showcases the capacity of Islamic faith and belief, where Muslims, with the aim of divine satisfaction, allocate a portion of their wealth to support educational initiatives (Salarzahi et al., 2010). This practice reflects

the commitment of Muslims to fulfill their religious obligations and contribute to the welfare of their communities.

The students also have a crucial role in the development of Islamic da'wah based on manhaj (method) Al-Azhar to support the local community. After completing their studies, many of them return to serve as preachers, teachers, and lecturers in school, madrasa, higher education institutions or serve as private and government servants. The students of Al-Azhar also serve as ambassadors to defend the true Islamic faith of ahli sunnah wal jamaah and counter misconceptions and stereotypes about Islam. According to Abdullah (2020) the main concern of the establishment of Al-Azhar University is the effort to prepare the next generation of educated and noble Muslims through education (Abdullah, 2020).

### **The Future of Waqf for Education: Prospects and Challenges**

The success of the waqf model implemented by Al-Azhar University serves as a testament to the potential of waqf in funding and sustaining educational institutions (Arshad et al., 2019). It provides a sustainable and community-driven approach to financing education, ensuring that resources are allocated towards the betterment of society. Although, the management of al-Azhar waqf was taken over by the Egyptian government its assets are still growing and productive. This means for nearly 900 years Al-Azhar was able to stand firm with waqf which it managed itself, then only in the last 100 years it began to be taken over by the Government (Abdullah, 2020).

The success of Al-Azhar University's waqf model highlights the need for similar initiatives in other educational institutions to address the challenges of accessibility, affordability, and quality of education. By leveraging the waqf model, other universities and educational institutions can tap into a new source of funding that is rooted in religious principles and community support, while also promoting social welfare and the fulfillment of religious obligations (Salarzehi et al., 2010). Additionally, the waqf model has allowed Al-Azhar University to focus on its core mission of providing education without being solely reliant on government funding or tuition fees (Arshad et al., 2019).

### **Conclusion: Lessons from Al-Azhar University's as a Waqf Model**

The waqf model implemented by Al-Azhar University serves as a valuable lesson for the future of education. It demonstrates the potential of waqf in financing and sustaining educational institutions, particularly in providing accessible and quality education to students from diverse backgrounds (Saad et al., 2019). By allocating significant financial resources to educational centers through the waqf system, Al-Azhar University has been able to offer scholarships, support research and academic initiatives, and maintain campus facilities. Management of waqf by Al-Azhar is considered as one of the most successful waqf management in the world (Abdullah, 2020).

In today's rapidly changing world, the significance of accurate weather forecasts cannot be overstated. The waqf model implemented by Al-Azhar University not only benefits the individual students but also has a broader impact on society (Arshad et al., 2019). It promotes community development, social welfare, and the fulfillment of religious obligations. Furthermore, the success of Al-Azhar University's waqf model highlights the need for similar initiatives in other educational institutions to address the challenges of accessibility, affordability, and quality of education.

Implementing waqf models in other universities and educational institutions can help ensure that resources are allocated towards the betterment of society and the provision of



quality education for all. The establishment of waqf institutions in other universities and educational institutions, like the model exemplified by Al-Azhar University, can revolutionize the way education is funded and create a more sustainable and inclusive educational system.

In conclusion, the waqf model employed by Al-Azhar University in Egypt serves as a successful example for financing and sustaining educational institutions. By adopting this model, other universities and educational institutions can tap into a new source of funding that is rooted in religious principles and community support, while also fulfilling their social responsibility to provide accessible and quality education. Implementing waqf models in other universities and educational institutions can help ensure that resources are allocated towards the betterment of society and the provision of quality education for all, regardless of financial capabilities. Implementing waqf models in other universities and educational institutions can help ensure that resources are allocated towards the betterment of society and the provision of quality education for all individuals, regardless of their financial capabilities or backgrounds.

The utilization of waqf funds for the continued sustainability of Al-Azhar University has proven to be a testament to the success and longevity of this model of financing in education (Rahman et al., 2020). Through waqf, not only has the university been able to maintain its facilities and services, but it has also been able to expand its educational offerings and maintain its high standards of academic excellence for centuries.

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