

Maternal roles in children's character formation: Religious education, developmental strategies, and role modeling in Islam

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Abstract:

The strong emphasis on mothers in children's character education may raise questions about gendered divisions of parenting responsibilities and the extent of paternal involvement. This study aims to analyze the role of mothers in children's character education from an Islamic perspective. A qualitative library research approach was employed using thematic content analysis. Data from 35 scholarly sources published between 2014 and 2023 were analyzed through source triangulation, expert validation, and peer review. The findings reveal three interconnected dimensions of maternal roles. First, mothers function as the *madrasah al-ula* (first school) by introducing faith, habituating worship, and cultivating moral values from early childhood. Second, mothers employ family-based strategies for character formation, including giving meaningful names, praying for children, stimulating intellectual development, fostering independence, establishing healthy communication, and using the environment as a learning resource. Third, mothers implement Islamic character education through consistent role modeling in everyday life, reinforced by religious values concerning the dignity of motherhood and filial respect for parents. The study concludes that mothers emerge as key actors in Islamic character education through religious instruction, contextual parenting strategies, and everyday role modeling. These findings contribute to Islamic education scholarship by highlighting how maternal education integrates faith, worship, moral development, and character formation within family life, while also raising the need to consider more balanced parental involvement in contemporary family education.

Keywords:

Maternal Roles; Character Formation; Islamic Education; Role Modeling.



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INTRODUCTION

Although the mother is the first figure a child knows, many in society view her merely as a 'childbearer' without recognizing her depth in character formation. In fact, the early home environment, especially the mother's voice and role modeling, forms the primary foundation for children's language, perception, and morality (Nurlina, 2019; Pener-Tessler et al., 2022; Valavi et al., 2022). The mother contributes significantly because the child's attitudes and mindset are shaped by her upbringing. Her exemplary behavior is key, as children learn through imitating their closest figure (Hadi, 2029; Apriyanti, 2021; He et al., 2022). Islam affirms that positive character depends on the mother's moral guidance. She must exemplify Islamic teachings from an early age, because good morals cannot grow without a concrete example from the first educator (Kunto & Mandemakers, 2019; Paul et al., 2022). Thus, the mother is the primary school who must avoid negative attitudes, serve as a positive role model, and through supervision and education build the child's good character.

Previous studies have extensively examined the mother's role in child education. First, the family environment is central to character formation, with the mother as the first and most influential moral educator (Deffaa et al., 2020; Sugiarti et al., 2022; Abroto et al., 2022). Second, the mother instills religious education and life-guidance values, including an understanding of the worldly and afterlife purposes of worship (Rianawati, 2014; Ardi & Aulia, 2020; Mahanani et al., 2022; Giang & Huynh, 2022). Third, the mother, as the primary educator, determines the quality of the next generation; however, a gap remains because parents prioritize worldly matters over moral education (Masyithah & Lestari, 2022; Muji, 2021; Susanti, 2022). Thus, previous studies have not comprehensively integrated the mother's role as the first school, parenting strategies, and role modeling into a single Islamic character education framework. The novelty of this study lies in the holistic integration of these three dimensions for sustainable character formation.

This study aims to conduct an in-depth analysis of mothers' role in children's character education from an Islamic perspective. The research questions are as follows: (1) What is the mother's role as the first school in instilling faith (aqidah), teaching worship (ibadah), and shaping children's morals from an early age? (2) What are the family education strategies implemented by mothers, such as giving good names, making prayers (doa), developing intelligence, training independence, fostering healthy communication, and utilizing the environment as a means for children's developmental learning? (3) How does the mother's role modeling in daily life, reinforced by religious values concerning the nobility of motherhood and the importance of filial piety to parents, contribute to a happy life? The contribution of this study is to enrich Islamic education theory by presenting an operational model of the 'first school' that integrates parenting strategies, role modeling, and theological justification. In practical terms, this research provides guidance for mothers, educators, and policymakers on shaping a strong, balanced, and sustainable generation with Islamic character.

This study departs from the argument that, from an Islamic perspective, mothers' role in children's character education is fundamental, multidimensional, and irreplaceable. Academically, the findings confirm three main pillars: first, the mother, as the first school, is responsible for instilling faith, worship, and morals from an early age, forming the child's religious foundation. Second, the mother's holistic strategies include giving a good name, developing intelligence, fostering independence, maintaining healthy communication, utilizing the environment, and orienting toward worldly and afterlife happiness, thereby comprehensively shaping the child's character. Third, the mother's role modeling of moral behavior, worship practices, habituation to Islamic values, positive thinking, and the creation

of a harmonious environment is the most effective mechanism for internalization because children learn through imitation. Thus, this study reinforces Islamic education theory by demonstrating that a child's character development is not measured by economic status but by the consistency and sincerity of the mother's daily role modeling.

METHOD

Research Approach

This study employs a qualitative research design using a library research approach (Thelwall & Nevill, 2021). The library research method is selected to examine various literature sources as primary data to address the research questions (Snyder, 2019). A qualitative approach is used to gain an in-depth, complex, and contextual understanding of mothers' roles in child character education. The phenomena analyzed include maternal behaviors, educational strategies, and role modeling within an Islamic perspective. This design enables the researcher to explore the implicit meanings in Islamic textual sources without statistical generalization, instead generating a comprehensive and holistic understanding of the issue.

Data Collection

Data were collected by identifying and reviewing relevant primary and secondary literature (Rodrigues et al., 2016; Jha et al., 2022). The data sources included Islamic studies books, accredited national journals, scholarly articles, conference proceedings, and credible online documents. The search strategy employed keywords such as "mother's role in character education," "first school (madrasah al-ula)," "maternal role modeling in Islam," and "Islamic parenting strategies." Data were retrieved from databases including Google Scholar, Scopus, and DOAJ, covering publications from 2014 to 2023. The inclusion criteria comprised literature discussing the roles of mothers, child education, and Islamic values. This process resulted in 35 selected sources that were further analyzed in depth.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis as developed by Krippendorff (2018). The analysis procedures were conducted as follows. First, all literature was read repeatedly to gain a comprehensive understanding of the context. Second, relevant meaning units related to mothers' roles, educational strategies, and role modeling were identified. Third, the findings were categorized into three main themes in accordance with the research questions. Fourth, interpretation and synthesis across themes were conducted to generate integrated insights. The validity of the analysis was ensured through re-checking procedures and peer discussion among researchers to minimize interpretative bias (Bramer et al., 2017). The results of the analysis are presented in the form of findings tables, descriptive explanations, implications, and references.

Data Validity

Data validity in this library-based study was ensured through source triangulation and a layered literature review (Moon, 2019). Source triangulation involved comparing and cross-checking information from at least three independent literature sources for each major finding to identify consistencies, differences, and patterns across the evidence. The researcher also applied a member-checking technique by consulting experts in Islamic education to assess whether the interpretations accurately reflected the Islamic context and remained consistent with relevant principles and values. Credibility was further strengthened by prioritizing peer-reviewed publications indexed in Scopus, accredited national journals, authoritative Islamic sources, and relevant regulatory documents. In addition, complete and traceable references

were provided for each substantive claim, enabling readers to verify the evidentiary basis and strengthening the transparency, consistency, and credibility of the analytical process.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Mothers' role in educating children from an Islamic perspective

The reviewed literature indicates that mothers occupy a central position in children's early religious and character education. Five interrelated dimensions of maternal educational roles were identified: worship education, faith formation, moral education, the family as the first educational environment, and responsibility for children's education. These dimensions demonstrate that maternal education extends beyond direct instruction to include habituation, daily interaction, and the creation of a supportive family environment.

Table 1

Findings on Mothers' Role in Educating Children from an Islamic Perspective

No.	Finding	Description of Finding	Implication	Reference
1	Worship Education	Mothers introduce worship, particularly prayer, through early habituation.	Builds religious discipline and spiritual connection with Allah SWT.	Nurlina (2019)
2	Instilling Aqidah (Faith)	Mothers introduce <i>tawhid</i> and basic Islamic beliefs as foundations of religious life.	Strengthens children's faith and resistance to values that conflict with Islamic teachings.	Kusmawati & Surachman (2021)
3	Moral Education	Mothers instill moral values and good behavior through daily interaction.	Develops ethical behavior, politeness, and self-control.	Junaidi et al. (2021)
4	First Educational Environment	The family provides children's first environment for learning faith, morals, social interaction, and life skills.	Strengthens the family as a foundation for character formation.	Wati & Sundawa (2018)
5	Responsibility for Child Education	Mothers remain important educators despite professional or other activities outside the home.	Highlights maternal involvement in children's character formation.	Munirah (2014)

Source: compiled by the researcher (2023).

Table 1 indicates that maternal educational roles encompass religious, moral, and environmental dimensions. First, mothers introduce children to religious practices, particularly prayer, through early habituation, thereby fostering religious discipline and spiritual attachment. Second, mothers contribute to faith formation by introducing *tawhid* and basic principles of Islamic belief. Third, moral education is fostered by reinforcing ethical behavior, politeness, and self-control in everyday interactions.

Beyond direct religious and moral instruction, the reviewed literature identifies the family as the child's first educational environment. Within this environment, children acquire not only religious and moral values but also social behaviors and everyday life skills. Mothers, therefore, function as important educational agents through continuous interaction and behavioral example. The literature also indicates that maternal educational responsibilities persist alongside mothers' professional or other activities, highlighting the continuing significance of the family in children's early character and religious development.

Taken together, the findings suggest that maternal education in the Islamic context operates through three interconnected processes: religious instruction, value habituation, and everyday role modeling. Religious instruction provides children with foundational

knowledge of worship and faith; habituation transforms these values into repeated practices; and role modeling enables children to observe and internalize Islamic values through everyday family interactions. Thus, the mother's educational role is not limited to transmitting religious knowledge but also involves creating conditions through which religious and moral values become embedded in children's daily behavior.

Strategies used by mothers in children's character formation

The reviewed literature identifies six strategies through which mothers contribute to children's character formation: assigning meaningful names, stimulating intellectual development, fostering independence, establishing healthy communication, utilizing the environment as a learning medium, and guiding children toward well-being in both this world and the hereafter. These strategies indicate that maternal character education extends beyond religious instruction to encompass cognitive, emotional, social, psychological, and spiritual development.

Table 2

Findings on Mothers' Strategies for Children's Character Formation

No.	Finding	Description of Finding	Implication	Reference
1	Giving a Good Name	A meaningful name is given as a prayer and expectation for positive character development.	Supports identity and positive self-concept.	Fauzi'ah (2017)
2	Development of Intelligence	Mothers stimulate children's thinking abilities and intelligence to prepare them for life challenges.	Enhances cognitive development and problem-solving skills.	Lee & Kim (2022)
3	Instilling Independence	Mothers foster independence from an early age to develop responsibility and resilience.	Builds self-reliance, accountability, and resilience.	Nasution (2019)
4	Healthy Communication	Affectionate and positive communication supports children's character development.	Strengthens emotional bonding and socio-emotional development.	Zhu et al. (2022)
5	Learning Through Environment	Nature and life experiences are used as learning resources to develop awareness and social responsibility.	Promotes experiential learning and social awareness.	Aryani & Wilyanita (2022)
6	Education for Happiness in the World and Hereafter	Mothers guide children in gratitude, patience, and religious values for worldly and spiritual well-being.	Develops spiritual resilience and balanced life orientation.	Yani (2017)

Source: compiled by the researcher (2023).

Table 2 demonstrates that maternal strategies for character formation operate across interconnected developmental domains. Giving a meaningful name contributes to children's identity and self-concept, while intellectual stimulation supports cognitive development and problem-solving abilities. The cultivation of independence further strengthens responsibility and self-reliance. Meanwhile, healthy communication contributes to emotional bonding and socio-emotional development, and learning through the environment enables children to develop awareness of social responsibilities through everyday experiences.

The findings further indicate that Islamic character formation incorporates a spiritual dimension oriented toward both worldly and hereafter well-being. Mothers encourage gratitude, patience, and religious commitment as values that guide children's attitudes and behavior. Taken together, the six strategies can be synthesized into four interconnected dimensions of maternal character education: identity and cognitive development; autonomy and responsibility; emotional and social development; and spiritual development. This

synthesis suggests that maternal character formation in the Islamic context is holistic, integrating children's intellectual, psychological, social, and spiritual capacities rather than treating religious education as a separate domain.

Mothers' role modeling in Islamic character education

The reviewed literature identifies maternal role modeling as an important mechanism through which Islamic character values are transmitted and habituated within the family. Five dimensions were identified: moral and behavioral role modeling, modeling of worship practices, habituation of Islamic values, development of a positive mindset, and the creation of a harmonious family environment. These findings indicate that Islamic character education occurs not only through verbal instruction but also through children's continuous observation of maternal behavior in everyday life.

Table 3

Findings on Mothers' Role Modeling in Islamic Character Education

No.	Finding	Description of Finding	Implication	Reference
1	Moral and Behavioral Role Modeling	Mothers model good moral behavior in daily life, which children tend to imitate.	Strengthens children's ethical and moral development.	Najwah (2021)
2	Role Modeling in Worship Practices	Mothers model religious duties and avoidance of prohibited practices.	Builds religious discipline and Islamic worship habits.	Deffaa et al. (2020)
3	Habituation of Islamic Values	Mothers reinforce Islamic values through greetings (<i>salam</i>), <i>basmalah</i> , and respect for parents.	Develops consistent Islamic habits and moral behavior.	Junaidi et al. (2021)
4	Development of a Positive Mindset	Mothers cultivate optimism, responsibility, and positive attitudes.	Supports emotional resilience and constructive thinking.	Nurlina (2019)
5	Building a Harmonious Family Environment	Mothers contribute to a religious and harmonious family environment through role modeling.	Supports emotional stability and children's moral development.	Suherman (2022)

Source: compiled by the researcher (2023).

Table 3 indicates that maternal role modeling operates through both religious practices and everyday interpersonal behavior. Moral and behavioral modeling provides children with observable examples of ethical conduct, while modeling worship practices familiarizes children with religious obligations and appropriate Islamic practices. These processes are reinforced through simple, repeated habits, including greeting others with *salam*, reciting *basmalah*, and showing respect to parents and other family members.

The findings also show that maternal role modeling extends beyond observable religious and moral practices to children's emotional and psychological development. Mothers foster the development of optimism, responsibility, and positive attitudes, while a harmonious family environment provides a supportive context for their internalization. Thus, role modeling is a continuous process in which children observe, imitate, and gradually internalize Islamic values through everyday family interactions.

Taken together, the findings can be synthesized into three interconnected mechanisms of Islamic character formation: behavioral modeling, value habituation, and supportive family interaction. Behavioral modeling provides concrete examples of moral and religious conduct; value habituation transforms these examples into repeated everyday practices; and a harmonious family environment reinforces their emotional and social internalization. This

suggests that maternal role modeling constitutes an important pathway for the development of children's moral, emotional, and religious character within Islamic family education.

Discussion

This study identified three main dimensions of mothers' roles in shaping children's character from an Islamic perspective. First, mothers function as the *madrrasah al-ula* (first school) by introducing faith, habituating worship, and cultivating moral values from an early age as foundations of Islamic character. Second, mothers contribute to children's character formation through family-based educational strategies, including giving meaningful names, stimulating intellectual development, fostering independence, establishing healthy communication, utilizing the environment as a learning resource, and guiding children toward worldly and spiritual well-being. Third, mothers implement Islamic character education through consistent role modeling in everyday life, including moral conduct, worship practices, Islamic habituation, positive attitudes, and the creation of a harmonious family environment. Taken together, these findings indicate that mothers emerge as key agents in children's Islamic character education through religious instruction, contextual parenting strategies, and everyday role modeling. The integration of these dimensions supports the development of children's religious, moral, emotional, social, and psychological capacities within family life.

The central role of mothers as first educators is highly relevant to current social conditions, in which character crises among younger generations, including brawls, bullying, and moral degradation, are associated with negative influences on social media (Junaidi et al., 2021). In the digital era, parents, particularly mothers, face challenges as children are increasingly exposed to uncontrolled digital content (Mangeli et al., 2018; Targari et al., 2020). Economic demands may also reduce mothers' time and capacity for consistent guidance and role modeling at home (Fan & Potočník, 2021). "Gadget parenting" may further weaken emotional bonding and the transmission of religious values. Therefore, reaffirming mothers as *madrrasah al-ula* (first school) is important for strengthening family-based character education, while complementing fathers, schools, and other social environments. Character education is thus a shared process in which maternal role modeling provides an important foundation. Khadijah's example, successfully managing her business while educating her children, illustrates how maternal involvement can integrate professional and family responsibilities (Witro et al., 2020).

This study is consistent with the literature on paternal parenting and co-parenting quality (Kara & Sümer, 2022), recognizing both parents' contributions while highlighting maternal involvement in early child development. The theory of imitation in preschool children (Wang & Meltzoff, 2020) explains that young children learn through imitation and pedagogical cues from primary caregivers. Their first social environment, the family, strongly influences attitudes and behavior (Sholihah & Nurhayati, 2022). Mothers' distinctive experiences of pregnancy, breastfeeding, and intensive early caregiving may contribute to their significant involvement during early childhood (Kara & Sümer, 2022; Okorn et al., 2022), without making character education exclusively maternal, as paternal participation and co-parenting remain important. Role modeling (*uswah hasanah*) is an important mechanism through which children observe, imitate, and internalize Islamic values in daily family interactions (Frosch et al., 2019; Wang & Meltzoff, 2020; Najwah, 2021). Education in faith (*aqidah*) and worship (*ibadah*) further develops habitual religious practices through repeated daily rituals embedded in children's character.

This study further highlights the particular significance of mothers' roles in early character education while recognizing that children's development is also shaped by fathers,

schools, peers, and broader social environments. The findings suggest that effective maternal character education is determined not only by employment status or material resources but also by the consistency of everyday interactions, guidance, and role modeling (Grey et al., 2022). Building children's character is not an instant process but a long-term form of education that requires patience, gentleness, and adaptive strategies (Sugiarti et al., 2022). Mothers who recognize the importance of their educational role may be encouraged to continually develop their knowledge and parenting practices because children learn from the behaviors they observe in their immediate environment. Another important finding is that children's well-being is not limited to material fulfillment or the satisfaction of immediate desires but also involves guidance toward worldly and spiritual well-being through strong faith (*aqidah*) and independence (Aryani & Wilyanita, 2022). From an Islamic perspective, child education can therefore be understood as a significant moral and religious responsibility within family life.

This study draws on Nurlina (2019), which emphasizes the importance of introducing prayer in early childhood as a foundation for children's spiritual communication. However, the present study extends this perspective by identifying additional concrete strategies, including using nature as a learning environment and fostering children's independence, which are less emphasized in studies that focus primarily on ritual worship. Compared with Wati and Sundawa (2018), who highlight the family as a learning environment in general, this study specifically highlights mothers as key actors in family-based character education, connecting their educational practices to Islamic values and everyday role modeling. Similarly, previous research, such as Ahen et al. (2021), emphasizes the theoretical inculcation of *tawhid* (monotheism), whereas the present study integrates micro-level behavioral role modeling, such as practicing the use of the right hand, as an everyday method of character formation. Thus, this study extends previous research by presenting a more operational account of maternal character education that integrates religious instruction, contextual parenting strategies, and everyday role modeling within Islamic family education.

Based on these findings, several recommendations are proposed. First, mothers can allocate gadget-free quality time, model religious practices such as congregational prayer and joint supplication, and foster children's independence through age-appropriate household responsibilities. Second, fathers and families should actively participate in parenting and character education so that Islamic character formation is not exclusively associated with maternal responsibility. Third, educational institutions and *majelis taklim* (Islamic study groups) can organize family-based Islamic parenting programs focusing on character formation and parenting management in the digital era. Fourth, policymakers can integrate family character-education and parenting programs into *posyandu* (integrated health posts), early childhood education, and family learning centers. Fifth, communities can revive *silaturahmi* (maintaining kinship ties) and cooperation as natural learning environments. These recommendations strengthen family-based Islamic character education through complementary involvement of mothers, fathers, institutions, and communities.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that mothers are not merely figures of affection but key agents in Islamic character education through three interconnected dimensions: instilling faith, implementing family-based parenting strategies, and providing consistent role modeling. The findings indicate that maternal role modeling is particularly important because young children learn through observation and imitation. Character formation strategies extend beyond ritual worship to include giving meaningful names, developing independence, fostering positive communication, and utilizing the environment as a learning resource. The findings also

highlight the religious dimension of maternal education, in which respect and devotion to mothers are associated with Islamic teachings concerning family relationships and spiritual well-being. Consequently, maternal involvement in children's character development is closely tied to the consistency of religious instruction, everyday habituation, and role modeling, rather than determined solely by socioeconomic status.

This study contributes to Islamic education theory by demonstrating that the family constitutes a fundamental environment for character formation, with mothers functioning as key agents who integrate faith, worship, and moral values into children's everyday educational experiences. The findings also extend role-modeling perspectives by emphasizing daily practices and habituation as mechanisms for value internalization rather than relying solely on the verbal transmission of knowledge. In practical terms, the findings suggest that effective family-based Islamic character education requires concrete strategies, including habituation of worship, positive communication, independence training, and the use of the surrounding environment as a learning resource. The study further underscores the importance of active maternal involvement in accompanying children in the digital era while recognizing that character education is a shared responsibility involving mothers, fathers, educational institutions, and communities.

This study has several limitations. Its predominantly conceptual and literature-based approach limits its ability to capture variations in maternal parenting practices across different socioeconomic and family contexts. Furthermore, the study does not examine, in depth, differences in maternal roles by educational level, employment status, or contemporary family structures, including single-parent families and families with digital work patterns. Future research should employ empirical qualitative or quantitative approaches to examine how specific maternal parenting strategies influence children's character development across different contexts. Comparative and cross-cultural studies are also needed to investigate the relevance and variation of maternal role modeling in diverse cultural settings and within the increasingly complex dynamics of digital society.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

Siti Robi'ah: Conceptualization; Data Curation; Formal Analysis; Investigation; Methodology; Project Administration; Writing Original Draft. **Nur Hidayat:** Conceptualization; Formal Analysis; Validation; Visualization; Writing Review & Editing.

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