



The Relevance of *Al-Umm Madrasatul Ula* for Career Mothers in the 21st Century

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Abstract

The rapid development of the times has caused many shifts in parenting styles, especially for a woman as a mother. The increasing demands of the current era force women in hard position in reconciling work and family. The situation impacted child-rearing behavior and the overall quality of family life. This study aimed to determine the relevance of al-umm madrasatul ula in the case of career mothers and analyze their role in forming the religious character of children aged eight to nine years old. This study employed a quantitative survey method using a semantic differential scale by Osgood questionnaire distributed to 33 career mothers of students at SD Islam Surya Buana Malang, with data was analyzed through descriptive statistics. The results showed that 88 percent of mothers still doing their obligations as al-umm madrasatul ula depend on al-Maghribi' s and al-Ghazali' s perspectives even though they played dual roles as housewives and working mothers.

Keywords: *Holistic Education; Instructional Communication; Spiritual Strengthening*

A. Introduction

Generational growth has led to shifts in the social order, particularly within the small sphere of the family. The modern era places dual demands on the role of parents, especially women. In previous generations, such as the Baby Boomers and Generation Y, it was common to find women staying home as housewives. However, in the millennial generation, it is now very common to find career mothers. The increasing demands of the current era force women to play dual roles as homemakers and working mothers. The condition significantly impacts child-rearing behaviour and the overall quality of family life (Moreira et al., 2019). At the end, woman has a very hard position in reconciling work and family role to achieve stability and balance (Dizaho et al., 2016; McIntosh et al., 2012).

To meet their children's cognitive and emotional needs, working parents choose schools or educational institutions offering comprehensive programs, including character-building activities such as religious practices and other talent development initiatives. Islamic religious school, commonly known as madrasa or pesantren, but now it becomes wider where private school also used Islamic religious school term, for example SDI (Sekolah Dasar Islam) for primary school. These schools have been instrumental in preserving and promoting Islamic knowledge, values, and traditions for centuries. Islamic religious schools serve as essential institutions for religious education and spiritual development, providing a unique and comprehensive approach. In the global era, these schools have gained prominence as alternative education institutions characterized by interconnectedness and cultural (Hussin et al., 2024).

The increase in the choice of integrated Islamic schools is significant, according to observations of the Indonesian Teachers Association (IGI), which is based on the experiences of the increasingly busy parents in the upper middle class (Liyanti, 2017). Contrary to the past, the attention of mothers is still very effective in forming children's religious attitudes. Parents, especially the mother as *al-umm madrasatul ula* at home, undertook duties by monitoring children's intellectual and spiritual development (Mahsun et al., 2023, p. 124; Rohmat & Widiyanto, 2020, p. 10), providing advice, and instilling the habit of turning off the television at home from Maghrib to Isha (Putri, 2016). This phenomenon raises questions about the role of a mother as "*al-umm madrasatul ula*" in the 21st century, especially if child-rearing is increasingly entrusted to religious-based full-day schools.

Al-umm madrasatul ula is undoubtedly a special title for mothers. Etymologically, al-umm means "mother" and madrasatul ula means "first school" or "main school" (Wartika, 2022). Meanwhile, in terms of terminology, al-umm madrasatul ula signifies the mother being the first/main school for her children until the child matures and achieves success in their formal education (Abdul, 2020; Cardozo & Srimulyani, 2021; Nurhayati & Syahrizal, 2015). The nation's next generation, who possess excellent morals, depends on the care of their parents. It can be done by parents positioning themselves as role models for their children's religious attitude, such as carrying out acts of worship, reminding children when they make mistakes, instilling good morals, and providing social education (Mulasi, 2021; Nuthpaturahman, 2022; Selawati & Wahyuni, 2022; Taufikurrohman, 2022). Given the fact that mothers are primary caregivers and have the greatest impact on children's physical and psychological aspects, mothers will also transfer good personality traits to their children (Alimohammadi et al., 2017; Pasulle et al., 2024).

In general, the competencies required by mothers for them to be worthy of being called madrasatul ula is outlined by the book known as *Ayyuhal Walad*, authored by the medieval Muslim scholar Imam al-Ghazali and *Begini Seharusnya Mendidik Anak* by al-Maghribi bin as-Said al-Maghribi. These books encourage mothers to have a high level of faith and piety, extensive knowledge and sufficient experience to be a role model for children (Savira et al., 2020), educate gently, encourage children to worship and have a soul close to the mosque (Yusuf, 2006), teach the Qur'an, always pray and be a sincere person, tell Islamic stories and listen to children's stories, provide motivation and sanctions, build good communication and give fair affection, also encourage children to choose a good environment (Al-Ghazali, 2018; Al-Maghribi, 2004; Desmita, 2011; Muhyidin, 2004; Trimuliana et al., 2020). For this reason, the role of parents is vital in developing children to become good Muslims who practice Islamic religious values according to the guidance of the Qur'an and the Sunnah.

Only a few studies have examined the relevance of the concept of al-umm madrasatul ula for its impact on career mothers in the twenty-first century. Previous research has discussed the role of mothers as madrasatul ula (first school) in children's moral education (a case study of career women in Central Java, Indonesia) (Hidayah & Maharani, 2023); working wives, resolving dysfunctional household harmony: a study on structural-functional theory and Islamic law perspective (Anggraeni & Mubarak, 2023); female management

between motherhood and career (Apostu, 2017); parenting patterns of al-umm madrasatul ula in forming the character of kiai's children (Selawati & Wahyuni, 2022); and HR management for women teachers at SDIT Insantama Serang from an Islamic perspective (Eviyanti & Qurtubi, 2023). The results of previous research show similarities in the themes discussed, those related to al-umm madrasatul ula. However, there has been no specific discussion regarding the relevance of the concept of al-umm madrasatul ula for career mothers in internalizing good morals in the 21st century.

The present research contributes a different perspective from previous research, which generally focuses on and discusses mothers' relevance, urgency, and role as madrasatul ula. There have been limited studies concerned with measuring the relevance of the role. Therefore, this study aims to determine whether the concept of "al-umm madrasatul ula" is still relevant if a mother spends part of her time working outside the home while her children's religious education is entrusted to the school.

B. Methods

This study employed a quantitative approach to reach respondents, collect data, and utilize a questionnaire instrument of numerically graded items. SD Islam Surya Buana emphasizes child-friendly character education in its activities. The school is one of the private institutions that integrates Islamic values into its curriculum and is known for several flagship programs. These school programs are considered beneficial in supporting children's learning, especially since working mothers often lack sufficient time to accompany their children in the learning process personally. This study examined whether the concept of al-umm madrasatul ula, which positions the mother as the primary educator in shaping a child's religious attitude, remains relevant for career mothers who delegate nearly all aspects of their children's character development and education to the school.

The research was conducted over one month, from October 8, 2023, to November 11, 2023. The researcher carried out using purposive sampling. In this method, purposive sampling is preferred to obtain an accurate subset of the population (Azzahrah et al., 2022). The population in this study consisted of 35 working mothers with various professions, including lecturers, teachers, nurses, private employees, and others. Based on the Slovin formula calculation, a minimum sample size of 33 respondents was determined. The measurement scale used in this study employed semantic differential by Osgood, where one indicated "very

relevant," "quite relevant," "less relevant," and "very irrelevant." The questionnaire was chosen because it is considered capable for representing the role of working mothers in shaping students' religious character, such as teaching monotheism, inviting children to pray, and educating children to have good behaviour. The questionnaire was distributed online via Microsoft Forms, and the link was shared with the relevant WhatsApp group. The survey instruments were enclosed, and the indicators of al-umm madrasatul ula were adapted from al-Ghazali's and al-Maghribi's thoughts.

Data analysis in this study was conducted using a descriptive statistical approach based on the questionnaire results. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize, organize, and present the collected data meaningfully without attempting to draw conclusions beyond the data itself or to generalize the findings to a broader population (Sugiyono, 2021). In this study, descriptive statistics were presented narratively and included three main parts: the demographic conditions of the respondents, a description of the mother's role due to indicators of al-umm madrasatul ula, and alternative solutions based on the survey findings.

C. Result and Discussion

In the twenty-first century, many women still adhere to the patriarchal model, where all the domestic needs of the family are in the hands of women. Women have a dominant position in caring for and educating children. Therefore, it is natural that a mother is called al-umm madrasatul ula. In the past, women had much time to care for children, take them to school, teach them the Qur'an and Islamic values, and even accompany them to pray five times a day at home. Thus, a mother is quite a dominant factor in shaping a child's religious character. Mothers must be able to influence their child's educational development from the womb until the child is an adult and successful in their educational attainment (Aini, 2020).

The central figure in a child's education is a mother. Apart from physical and emotional closeness since the womb, the mother has a gentle character and a noble position. Each child has the right to receive proper care and tarbiya. The word "umm" is mentioned 28 times in the Qur'an, and it possesses the meaning of 'mother' (in the real sense). In several tafsir books, mufasssiruun explain the role of mothers in children's education, namely from al-Baqarah [2]: 233; Luqman [31]: 14; al-Ahqaaf [46]:15; Thaahaa [20]: 38 & 40; al Qashash [28]: 7, 10, 13; al-Mu'minuun [23]: 50; al-Maa'idah [5]: 17, 116; Maryam[19]: 28, an Nisaa' [4]: 23

and also other related hadiths (Susanti, 2022). The mother is addressed first in every verse of the Holy Quran that demands obedience to parents. It was also mentioned in hadith when a person questioned the Prophet who should be given greater respect than others. The prophet repeated "mother" three times. The hadith makes it very evident that a mother has a threefold greater chance than a father of educating a child (Baibosunov et al., 2021; Ritonga et al., 2021).

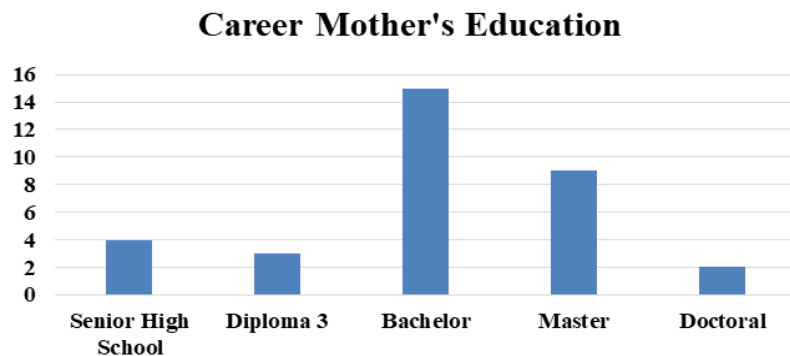


Figure 1. Career mother's education at SDI Surya Buana Malang

Figure 1 shows the educational background of a career mother. Overall, it can be seen that higher education is the major formal education taken by mothers. Moreover, the highest portion of career mothers holds a bachelor's degree more than 45%, followed by a master's degree which is about 27% in educational levels. On the other hand, the doctoral degree had the lowest number of academic qualifications and remained less common, nearly 6%, followed by a diploma, around 9%. Another interesting point is the trend toward tertiary education among career mothers, and educational attainment likely reflects its balance with career advancement nowadays.

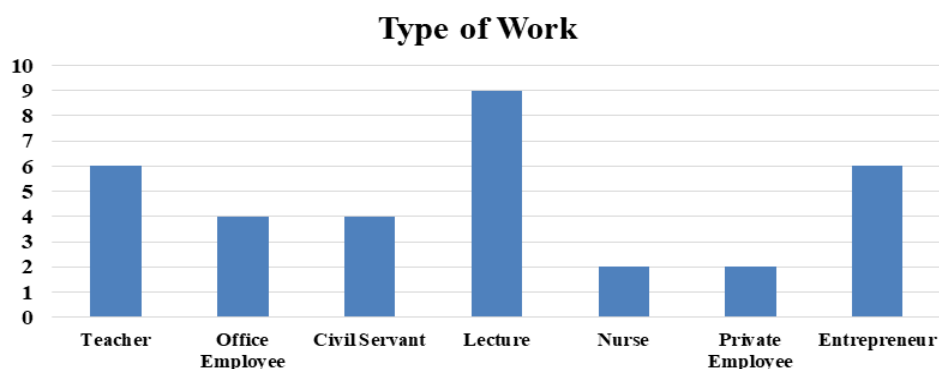


Figure 2. Type of mother's job in SDI Surya Buana Malang

Presented in picture 2 is the data about career types among mothers at SDI Surya Buana Malang. In general, it can be seen that teaching in educational institutions is the most prominent profession, listed first and likely representing the largest group. Therefore, the highest profession was a lecturer with around 45% of 33 respondents, followed by teacher and entrepreneur with similar portions about 18% on both. Meanwhile, nurses and private employees have the least number of jobs, with 6% for each.

The role of women has shifted nowadays. Especially in this modern era, it is rare to find women who do not work or only care for children at home. The difficult contemporary conditions show that there is no other choice but to look for a school integrated with Islam with superior programs so that the child continues to receive guidance, direction, and habituation in the context of worshiping Allah SWT. For example, Surya Buana Islamic Elementary School has a vision of "Preparing future Islamic leaders." This vision shows that the school prioritizes Islamic education and the Qur'an and Sunnah guides to creating a qur'ani generation who will be able to become great leaders in the future through participating in rituals like Duha, Dhuhr, and Asr prayers in congregation, reading Asma'ul Husna every morning, tahsin, tashih and tahfidz Qur'an, charity and almsgiving, and other Islamic activities.

Researchers surveyed to find out how many mothers have jobs outside the home. The data in this study were obtained from questionnaires from career mothers who had children eight to nine years old. The questionnaire questions were taken from the *madrasatul ula* criteria in *Ayyuhal al-Walad* and *Begini Seharusnya Mendidik Anak* books. The researchers then divided the criteria into 10 questions with four different answer options. The questionnaires received 33 responses, and the answers were as follows:

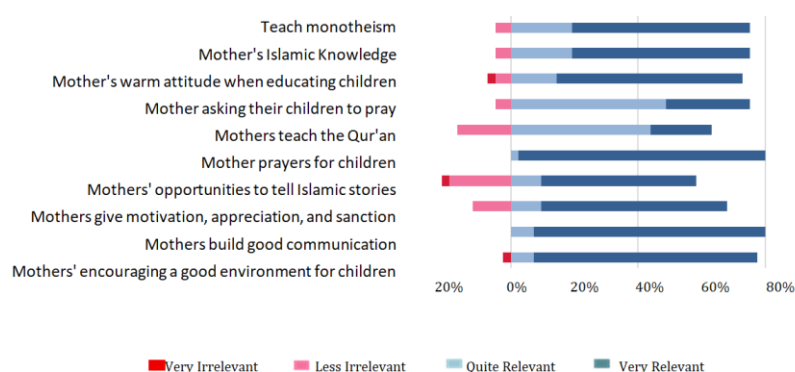


Figure 3. Measuring Mother's roles as Madrasatul Ula

Figure 3 illustrates that a career mother still does her role as al-umm madrasatul ula to instilling morals in her children. Overall, what stands out from the bar chart is that every indicator of the al-umm madrasatul ula has been confirmed to be approved by respondents. On the whole, the "very relevant" answer was the most chosen by the respondents, followed by the "relevant" answer. However, "very irrelevant" was the least chosen option by career mothers compared to the other answers.

To begin with, almost a thirty-three of career mothers chose the "very relevant" answer on "mother's intensity in praying for the good of her child", followed by the indicator "build good communication with her child" about 91%, respectively. Whereas, in option "relevant", the highest answer was in "mother's obligation to persuade her child to do five prayers times" at 61%, while "have an understanding of religious knowledge" and "teaching hijaiyah and Qur'an to her child" had a similar portion which was 55%.

Moving to the indicators with the highest "less relevant" responses was "spare time to do Islamic storytelling and listen to her child's story" reached 24%, followed by "teach hijaiyah and Qur'an" and "provide good roles, give motivation and sanction" reached 21% and 15% consecutively. In addition, a substantial number of "very irrelevant" responses were an indicator of "have an understanding of religious knowledge", "mother's frequency to give her child warm attitude and affection", "spare time to do Islamic storytelling and listen to her child story", and "encourage children to choose the good environment and have good behavior to others" was about 3%.

1. Instilling Aqidah

Education in faith and belief are delivered by mothers as al-umm madrasatul ula through the instilling of divine values and religious knowledge. This implementation can be seen from the role of mothers in cultivating monotheism, transferring an understanding religious knowledge, praying for their children's goodness, reading Islamic stories, and teaching the wisdom contained therein. Al-Maghribi (2004) agrees that as the first educator, mothers are obligated to teach tauhid. The Prophet said, "Welcome your child when he is born with the words La Ilaha Illallah and teach him when he is about to die with La Ilaha Illallah." A mother must instil piety so that faith becomes the child's primary concern (Ruli, 2020, p. 145; Yulisti et al., 2021). The opposite condition may occur in children

who rarely or never receive religious education, making it difficult for them to believe in the pillars of faith, obey Allah's commands, and avoid His prohibitions.

Mothers, as educators, must learn a lot about the nature and meaning of education from both the Qur'an and Sunnah. Therefore, mothers with higher education and religious education backgrounds have proven to be diligent in teaching Islam to their children. Therefore, a mother must have a solid understanding of religion and acquire all the valuable knowledge and appropriate educational methods (Choiriyah & Al-Atsary, 2010; Nur, 2021). Through a strong understanding of knowledge, a mother can answer her children's questions during their formative years and avoid misleading them.

Additionally, a mother plays a role in introducing her child to Islamic stories that contain wisdom (Akhyar & Zalnur, 2024, p. 134). Stories are among the most effective educational tools because they can substantially impact emotions. The busyness experienced by career mothers often prevents them from spending time with their children. However, the curiosity of elementary school children is very high; therefore, they often find out things they want to know (Nabilah et al., 2019). This cannot be overlooked in a mother's efforts to pray for her children's well-being. Sincere prayer will guide children to become successful and warriors on the path of Allah.

2. Teaching and Being a Role Model in Doing Worship

Religious education and practice by mothers such as al-umm madrasatul ula through habit formation include inviting children to perform the five daily prayers, building children's attachment to the mosque, and teaching the hijaiyah and the Qur'an. This teaching is more practical because it relates to the mother's example of worship. Furthermore, mothers must invite and teach their children about the pillars of Islam, the procedures for purification, and matters related to daily worship, such as the pillars, conditions, times, and things that invalidate worship. Monitoring and reminding children about worship and encouraging them to pray in congregation at the mosque is also one of the mothers' efforts that is considered as al-umm madrasatul ula (Adawiyah et al., 2024). Children should not only pray but also be accustomed to listening to Islamic preaching and lessons as their hearts will be easily influenced by goodness and will readily accept the truth.

Not only that, mothers should also introduce children to the Arabic alphabet and teach them to read the Quran. According to Imam al-Ghazali, teaching the Qur'an as the most important source of law and sharia is a necessity. One of the

factors that can measure a child's ability to recite the holy verses of the Koran can be seen from the mother's intensity in teaching the child, starting from recognizing hijaiyah letters until they can read the Qur'an fluently. Prophet s.a.w. said, "The best of you are those who study the Qur'an and teach it." Hadith Riwayah of al-Bukhari, Fath al-Bari 9/74, from Uthman ra, hadith marfu. Another history states, "The most important person among you is the one who studies the Qur'an and teaches it." Hadith History of al-Bukhari 9/74.

Most career mothers today prefer to entrust such education to religious teachers (kyai/ustad) or religious education at pesantren/dormitory/schools. Teaching children is a challenging task for a mother as it requires extra patience. A mother's capabilities and the complexity of her activities often influence the intensity of educating children. Therefore, mothers must continue teaching and monitoring their children's spiritual development. The urgency of religious education and religious practices carried out by al-umm madrasatul ula can influence children's spirituality (Bensaid, 2021), including the depth of spiritual soul, spiritual closeness, ease of mentoring, and so forth. The condition is supported by embodying fundamental spiritual principles and values with appropriate meanings that influence life goals and lifestyles. This is because learning is not only aimed at internalizing spiritual discipline and forming and preserving religious identity, but also for interaction with other religious and spiritual traditions, cultures, and education.

3. Forming Good Moral and Social Surroundings

Regarding moral and social education, which shapes character and good social relationships, mothers can give advice and sanctions, educate children to have helpful behavior, have a warm and patient attitude, and encourage children to choose a good environment. Moral and social education is mostly taught through guidance in children's daily lives (Warsah, 2018). Mothers usually teach manners to elders, such as how to behave, be honest, be respectful, and have other good morals. If children make mistakes, they should be reminded using a low intonation and a soft tone. Giving advice using a wise method can help soften the children's hearts and keep them from being hurt by their mother's speech (Ismail & Mansor, 2021). According to the book *Begini Seharusnya Mendidik Anak* by al-Maghribi bin as-Said al-Maghribi, the mother's role as madrasatul ula must also be able to build good communication and provide fair affection.

If a mother gives advice and imposes consequences, it should not be done in a state of explosive anger because children are excellent imitators. Umar r.a. advised educators to treat children well and gently when they reach seven years of age because children experience changes and developments in their bodies, intelligence, emotions, and reasoning abilities (Islamy et al., 2020; Pasulle et al., 2024). A mother must be firm, objective, gentle towards to her children, balanced, and controlled in all her actions. Mothers provide warmth in parenting, which is a fundamental process in developing spiritual intelligence (SQ). This form of interaction includes verbal discourse and behavioral examples (Sholehuddin et al., 2023) such as good communication with children, hugs, and support (Khoiriyah et al., 2021).

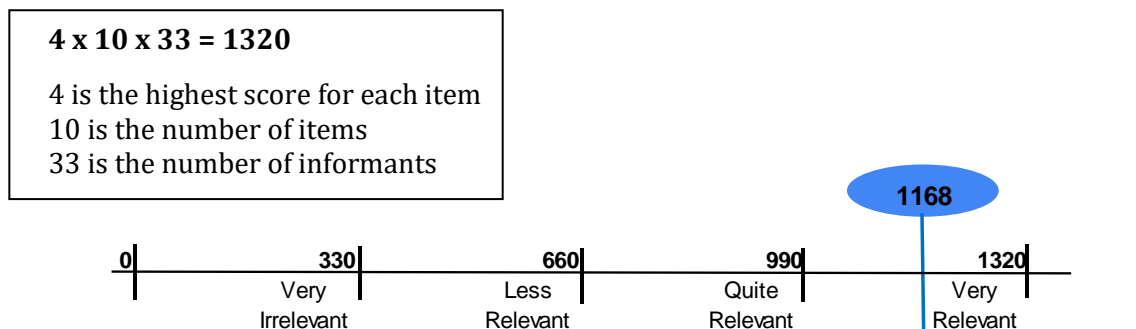
Therefore, a mother must always be patient and trustful (Hafidz et al., 2022). Mothers understand that a child's character is not formed solely by the family environment but also by the surrounding environment. Additionally, mothers must instil trust and responsibility in children so that they can understand the consequences of their actions in the future. As part of a social community, children need to be supported in interacting with their peers without discrimination but with appropriate boundaries. Twenty-first-century mothers must be more committed to educating their children so that they do not become disobedient and are resilient in facing the increasingly rapid development of the era.

Parents must continue to monitor their children's learning at school (Nabilah et al., 2019) and entrust the education of their child to someone devoted to Allah SWT, who prays diligently, who knows their God, and who teaches them the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet. Parents must also entrust their child's education to teachers with a warm attitude and fear Allah. Many schools offer interesting programs in the twenty-first century to help modern parents educate, shape their children's character, and gain adequate religious knowledge (Sumadi et al., 2021). Schools with Islamic programs are also becoming more advanced than public schools. This could be a solution for modern parents who spend more time at work than home. Apart from that, parents must direct the child to choose good friends, just like a mother chooses good food and clothes for her child. From Abu Hurairah, the Prophet said,

يُخَالِلُ مَنْ أَحَدُكُمْ فَلْيَنْظُرْ خَلِيلَهُ دِيرَ عَلَى الرَّجُلِ

"A person depends on the religion of his friends, so one of you should look at the friends he associates with." Hadith Riwayah Abu Daud, 4833; at-Tirmidhi, 2379 with shahih sanad, he said, "Hadith Hasan Narrated also by Ahmad, 2/303, 334.

The results of the research calculations from the questionnaires obtained from 33 respondents showed 1168 scores. The researcher created a questionnaire with a scale of 1 to 4, where 4 is the highest score. We can count the total criteria score if each item gets the highest score:



The total score resulting from data collection = 1168. Thus, according to the rating scale calculation in the book Metode Penelitian Pendidikan: Kuantitatif, Kualitatif, Kombinasi, R&D dan Penelitian Pendidikan (Sugiyono, 2021) al-umm madrasatul ula's label on 33 career mothers on the formation of children's religious attitudes in the 21st century can still be said to be quite relevant, namely 1168: $1320 = 88$ percent. This relatively high percentage is based on the results of a questionnaire with questions containing al-umm madrasatul ula indicators based on the book Begini Seharusnya Mendidik Anak by al-Maghribi bin Said al-Maghribi and the book Ayyuhal Walad by Imam al-Ghazali.

Mothers should not underestimate their child's education, especially education at home. Even though there is no prohibition against a career, it is necessary to realize that a woman's primary role is to be a mother, the first and main school for her children (Abdul, 2020). The role of career women as a mother and parent is taking care of children. Taking care of children is not only meeting the needs of children in terms of food, clothing, shelter, and affection but also their education. Children who enter school age need parental attention regarding their education (Tantri, 2021). Children whose education is only handed over to formal or non-formal educational institutions, whether to schools, madrasas, or Islamic boarding schools, cannot guarantee their success. This is because education in the

family, especially education from the mother, will be more secure because the mother is the first to introduce God to her child. That is why mothers are called *madrasatul ula*.

D. Conclusion

Although mothers have a dual role (as mothers and career women), they still have an important role in forming children's religious attitudes in the twenty-first-century era. Most of the career mothers still deserve to be called *al-umm madrasatul ula* because they educate children well, starting from instilling monotheism (*tauhid*), transferring understanding of religious knowledge and Islamic stories, being warm and patient, teaching them to pray five times a day, getting their children used to reading the *Qu'ran*, praying for their children's goodness, providing advice and sanction if their children make mistakes, educating their children to help, and encouraging their children to choose a suitable environment for themselves. It is proven by ten indicators in the instrument we distributed.

Our findings contribute a different perspective from previous research, which generally discusses the urgency and role of mothers as *madrasatul ula*. We are aware of the shortcomings of this research, namely that the sample obtained was small and only carried out at one site. Moreover, the method used was limited, so further research is needed to accommodate a larger sample of participants with more varied variables to obtain a more in-depth and comprehensive understanding. Researchers should determine whether other aspects or variables determine the mother's role as *madrasatul ula* remains. This study has implications for the Mother and Child Welfare Law No. 4 of 2024 that there need to be regulations for the addition of facilities such as lactation rooms, playgrounds, and special childcare rooms for mothers who have to bring their children to the office after school.

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