

Middle-Aged Mothers as Teachers to Kindergarten Learners

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Mothers are often regarded as the light of the home, serving as primary caregivers who nurture, guide, and support their children's development. In early childhood, particularly during the kindergarten years, middle-aged mothers play a crucial role as their children's first teachers, shaping foundational skills, behaviors, and values. This role carries deep cultural and personal significance, as mothering is widely recognized as a meaningful and socially valued responsibility across societies (Kruger, 2003). However, it is also highly demanding, requiring patience, emotional sensitivity, and a strong understanding of children's developmental needs. These demands become more pronounced during the preschool years, when children may display impulsive or aggressive behaviors that require consistent guidance and effective behavioral management. At the same time, middle-aged mothers may face additional social, psychological, and biological challenges, including those associated with the menopausal transition (Thomas et al., 2018), which can influence their capacity to respond to these demands.

In this context, middle-aged mothers with kindergarten-aged children often encounter difficulties that affect both their well-being and their

effectiveness as primary educators at home. Increased physical and emotional stress is common as they attempt to balance parenting responsibilities with work and other obligations. This dual burden can lead to fatigue and burnout, which may, in turn, affect the quality of their engagement in their children's early learning experiences (Ali & Rahman, 2023). Similarly, middle-aged mothers frequently experience physical and psychological exhaustion, limiting their ability to manage multiple roles effectively and consistently support their children's developmental needs (Tornu et al., 2023).

In the District of Batan in the Philippines, many middle-aged mothers remain actively involved in supporting their children's early education, particularly during the kindergarten stage. Despite their commitment, they often struggle to balance household responsibilities with their role as facilitators of learning at home. These challenges highlight the complexities of their dual role as caregivers and educators and underscore the importance of understanding their lived experiences to better support their well-being and their children's early development.

Mothers as First Teachers: The Complex Realities of Middle-Aged Parenting in Early Education

The journey of middle-aged mothers with kindergarten learners is complex and multifaceted, shaped by the demands of parenting alongside personal and professional responsibilities. These mothers often assume dual roles as both caregivers and educators, requiring them to address not only their children's academic needs but also their emotional development (Bornstein et al., 2016). This dual responsibility involves significant emotional labor, as mothers strive to create a nurturing environment that supports both learning and well-being.

Their experiences are further influenced by societal expectations and the pressure to ensure their children's academic success. Xiaolin et al. (2025) highlighted that many mothers experience anxiety related to their children's school performance, recognizing the importance of early education in shaping future outcomes. This pressure is intensified by competitive educational environments, where comparisons with peers are common. Balancing these expectations with personal and professional responsibilities often leads to stress and feelings of being overwhelmed.

Support systems play a crucial role in shaping these experiences. Xu and Zhang (2025) found that mothers with strong support networks, such as family, friends, and community resources, tend to experience lower stress levels and greater satisfaction in their parenting roles. These networks provide both practical assistance and emotional reassurance. In contrast, limited support can lead to feelings of isolation and inadequacy, negatively affecting both maternal well-being and the ability to support children effectively.

Mothers' involvement in their children's education is influenced by their own educational backgrounds. Grolnick (2015) observed that mothers with positive educational experiences are more likely to engage actively in their children's schooling, offering guidance and motivation. Conversely, those with limited or negative experiences may feel less confident in supporting academic tasks, which can affect children's early learning outcomes.

Middle-aged mothers also face various emotional and societal challenges. The transition of children into formal schooling introduces new demands, requiring mothers to manage their own concerns while helping their children adjust to new environments (Morawska et al., 2026). At the same time, broader societal changes, such as the rise of dual-income households and the evolving involvement of fathers, are reshaping parenting roles. Nomaguchi

et al. (2017) noted that increased paternal participation can help ease the burden on mothers, fostering a more balanced and collaborative approach to supporting children's early education.

Balancing Care and Career: The Realities of Middle-Aged Motherhood

According to Thomas et al. (2018), challenges refer to experiences that demand significant physical or mental effort and test an individual's strength, skills, and abilities. For middle-aged women, a common challenge lies in managing multiple responsibilities arising from their diverse roles, as teachers to their children, daughters to aging parents, wives, mothers, and employees. These overlapping roles often create competing demands that require careful balance and resilience.

The challenges associated with middle-aged motherhood are substantial and should not be overlooked. Health-related concerns, such as fatigue and the physical demands of parenting later in life, can affect a mother's ability to actively engage in her child's education. Nomaguchi et al. (2017) noted that older mothers may struggle with these physical demands, which can limit their participation in school-related activities. At the same time, balancing career responsibilities with parenting further intensifies stress and reduces the time available for direct involvement in children's learning.

Sievert et al. (2018) emphasized that middle-aged mothers are more likely to experience stress and fatigue due to the combined demands of work, home responsibilities, and, in some cases, caregiving for elderly parents. These pressures can influence both their well-being and the level of support they provide to their children, particularly during the critical kindergarten years when parental involvement is essential.

The challenge of balancing career and parenting responsibilities shapes how middle-aged mothers interact with and prepare their children for school. Ravindranath et al. (2021) explained that although older mothers may have more resources, they often face time constraints due to demanding careers. This can limit direct engagement with their children's educational activities. Nevertheless, many middle-aged mothers demonstrate adaptability by prioritizing quality time and seeking external support, such as tutors or enrichment programs, to ensure their children's development and readiness for school.

Cultural Expectations and Maternal Coping: The Influence of Social Norms on Middle-Aged Mothers

Social support networks play a crucial role in the coping strategies of middle-aged mothers with kindergarten learners. McLeish and Redshaw (2017) found that mothers who actively build and maintain strong connections with family, friends, or parenting groups experience higher levels of well-being and lower levels of stress. These networks provide practical guidance, emotional reassurance, and a sense of belonging, all of which are essential as mothers navigate the demands of early childhood education. Moreover, sharing experiences and strategies within these groups empowers mothers, enhancing their confidence and competence in their parenting roles.

Cultural expectations and societal norms also significantly shape how middle-aged mothers cope with their responsibilities. Venard et al. (2024) argued that in societies where mothers are expected to be the primary caregivers, these expectations can intensify stress and pressure. Such norms often encourage perfectionism and self-sacrifice, which may further burden mothers. However, in cultures that promote shared parenting responsibilities,

mothers tend to report lower stress levels and greater satisfaction, highlighting the importance of more balanced caregiving roles.

The involvement of fathers and extended family members can greatly ease the pressures faced by middle-aged mothers. Nomaguchi et al. (2017) emphasized that active paternal involvement in children's early education leads to reduced maternal stress and more balanced family dynamics. Similarly, support from grandparents and other extended family members provides additional assistance in caregiving responsibilities. This collaborative approach not only supports mothers but also contributes to the overall well-being and development of the child during these formative years.

Motherhood, Well-Being, and Teaching Through the Lens of Good Enough Mother Theory

The Good Enough Mother Theory (Winnicott, 2013) emphasizes that a child does not require a perfect mother but rather one who is sufficiently responsive to support healthy development. Winnicott explained that a "good enough" mother initially meets the infant's needs in a way that fosters a sense of security, and gradually allows the child to develop independence. A mother who is overly intrusive may hinder the child's autonomy, while one who is too distant may create anxiety. In both cases, imbalance can affect the child's self-concept and ability to form meaningful relationships later in life. Schiewe-Kopyra (2023) further highlighted that effective mothering does not require perfection but consistent care, protection, and emotional presence. A devoted mother who prioritizes her child's needs while remaining attentive to her own well-being can be considered "good enough." This perspective recognizes that mothering is shaped by everyday realities, including physical changes, emotional demands, and life transitions.

This theory frames the experiences of middle-aged mothers with kindergarten learners within the context of balance, between caregiving and fostering independence, and between personal well-being and parental responsibilities. Factors such as physical fatigue, social expectations, and limited support systems may influence a mother’s ability to provide “good enough” care.

RESEARCH FOCUS: The Stories of Middle-Aged Mothers with Kindergarten Learners

This study explored the narratives of middle-aged mothers with kindergarten learners, particularly in a time marked by increasing demands for practicality, flexibility, and resilience. It identified the experiences, challenges, and coping mechanisms of middle-aged mothers with kindergarten learners in the District of Batan in the Philippines.

The study employed a qualitative narrative inquiry design as it focuses on personal stories and allows participants to share their experiences, emotions, and perspectives through open-ended interviews, providing deeper insights into their parenting roles and realities. Eight participants were purposively selected from the District of Batan based on specific criteria, including age (40–60 years old), having a kindergarten child, diverse socio-economic backgrounds, and willingness to participate. Data were collected using a researcher-developed, open-ended interview guide that underwent expert validation. Necessary permissions were secured prior to data collection, and interviews were conducted in agreed locations, with responses recorded and documented for analysis.

Data were analyzed using Colaizzi’s method, which involved identifying significant statements, formulating meanings, clustering themes, and developing a comprehensive description of the phenomenon. To ensure

rigor, the study applied credibility, transferability, and confirmability through participant validation and expert review. Ethical considerations were strictly followed, including voluntary participation, informed consent, confidentiality, and the use of pseudonyms, with all data securely handled and disposed of after the study.

The study identified four key themes based on the participants' responses. First, middle-aged mothers highlighted the challenge of balancing multiple roles and responsibilities. They serve as primary caregivers, wives, employees, and home teachers, often feeling overwhelmed by the expectations placed upon them. Their responsibilities extend beyond household duties, as they must also support their children's academic development while fulfilling work obligations and maintaining family relationships. This constant juggling of roles requires effective time management and strong emotional resilience.

Another significant theme is the shift in identity experienced by these mothers as they navigate motherhood later in life. Despite physical limitations and age-related challenges, they continue to adapt to evolving responsibilities. They play a vital role in their children's education by providing academic support, fostering motivation, and nurturing a love for learning. However, their experiences are also shaped by socio-economic conditions and family dynamics. Many contribute financially to their households, making it necessary to balance employment and parenting. Limited financial resources often force them to prioritize essential needs, adding complexity to their daily lives.

In terms of challenges, the study revealed several recurring issues, including children's illness, difficulties in disciplining children, societal discrimination, financial stress, and physical and emotional exhaustion. Mothers expressed stress when their children became ill, as this led to additional expenses and missed workdays. They also found disciplining

children challenging, requiring patience and consistency in shaping behavior and encouraging school attendance. Some participants experienced societal judgment due to their age, making them feel out of place in certain social or school contexts. Financial constraints further intensified their struggles, as they had to carefully allocate limited resources for household and educational needs. These challenges often resulted in fatigue and emotional strain due to overlapping responsibilities.

To cope with these challenges, participants employed several strategies. Establishing routines and prioritizing tasks helped them manage their responsibilities more effectively, allowing them to balance work, household duties, and their children's education. Self-care practices also played a crucial role in maintaining their physical and mental well-being, enabling them to remain resilient in the face of challenges. Furthermore, support from family and the community provided emotional, practical, and sometimes financial assistance, helping to ease their burdens.

Conclusion

The experiences of middle-aged mothers with kindergarten learners reflect the complexity of balancing multiple roles, adapting to shifts in identity, supporting their children's development, and managing socio-economic and family-related demands. They navigate shifting identities while responding to the developmental needs of their children and the demands of their personal and professional lives. These intersecting responsibilities underscore the multifaceted nature of motherhood during this stage, where balancing time, energy, and emotional resources becomes a constant challenge.

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