



The Pedagogy of Love as a Foundation for Mutual Respect: An Educational Study Based on Matthew 7:12 at UPT SD No. 033926 Soban

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the pedagogy of love as a foundational framework for fostering mutual respect in Christian Religious Education, drawing on the ethical teaching of Matthew 7:12, commonly known as the Golden Rule. In contemporary educational contexts, the cultivation of respect, empathy, and relational responsibility has become increasingly important, particularly in response to challenges such as declining student discipline, interpersonal conflict, and weakened moral sensitivity. Within Christian education, love is not merely an affective disposition but a theological and pedagogical principle that shapes teaching practices, relational dynamics, and character formation. Using a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach, this study synthesizes recent scholarly literature on pedagogy of love, ethics of care, character education, and Christian moral formation. The analysis integrates theological perspectives on love and reciprocity with educational theories emphasizing relational pedagogy, social-emotional learning, and moral development. The findings indicate that pedagogy grounded in love promotes mutual respect by strengthening teacher-student relationships, enhancing emotional safety, and encouraging students to internalize values of empathy, fairness, and responsibility toward others. The study further demonstrates that Matthew 7:12 provides a robust biblical-ethical framework for educational practice, positioning mutual respect as a lived expression of love in daily school interactions. The integration of theological ethics and contemporary educational theory suggests that pedagogy of love contributes to a holistic educational environment that supports not only academic development but also moral and spiritual formation. This study contributes to the growing body of literature on values-based and faith-informed education by offering a biblically grounded and pedagogically relevant model for fostering mutual respect in elementary school settings.

Keywords: Pedagogy, Christian Religious Education, Mutual Respect

INTRODUCTION

Effective teaching is not limited to the transmission of academic knowledge but also involves the formation of students' moral character, social attitudes, and relational dispositions. Schools are expected to become spaces where learners not only acquire

cognitive competencies but also develop respect, empathy, and responsible social behavior. Within this broader educational paradigm, the affective and relational dimensions of pedagogy have gained renewed attention, particularly in relation to how teachers model values such as love, respect, and care in everyday classroom interactions. Research in character education has consistently emphasized that virtues such as respect, responsibility, and empathy are not merely taught through formal instruction but are primarily cultivated through relationships, school culture, and teacher exemplarity (Lickona, 2012; Pike & Lickona, 2017). In Christian Religious Education (CRE), this relational dimension is even more central, since teaching is understood as a vocation that integrates faith, character, and pedagogy. Christian educators are called not only to teach biblical content but also to embody Christian virtues in their professional and personal lives. One of the most foundational biblical principles that undergirds Christian ethics and interpersonal relationships is found in Matthew 7:12, commonly known as the Golden Rule: *“So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.”* This verse has been widely interpreted in biblical scholarship as a comprehensive ethical summary that emphasizes reciprocity, empathy, and active love toward others (Hagner, 1995; France, 2007). From a pedagogical perspective, this teaching provides a powerful framework for understanding love not merely as an emotion but as an active, relational practice that shapes attitudes and behaviors toward others.

Educational theorists have long argued that values such as mutual respect are best learned through social interaction and modeling rather than through abstract moral instruction alone. Bandura’s social learning theory highlights that individuals acquire attitudes and behaviors through observation and imitation of significant role models, particularly teachers in school contexts (Bandura, 1986). In this sense, the pedagogy of love is not only about what is taught but also about how teachers relate to students, manage classroom dynamics, and respond to conflict, mistakes, and differences. Character education literature further affirms that virtues such as love, justice, and respect must be embedded within the daily practices of schooling in order to become internalized dispositions rather than superficial rules (Lickona, 2012; Berkowitz & Bier, 2014). From a Christian educational perspective, love is not an optional or peripheral value but a core theological and pedagogical principle. Christian educational thought emphasizes that love is central to Christian identity and mission, shaping both the content and the spirit of teaching (Groome, 2011). Contemporary discussions on Christian schooling also highlight that love-based pedagogy fosters inclusive, caring, and relationally rich learning environments, where students experience acceptance, dignity, and moral guidance (Knight, 2006). The principle of love is closely connected to justice and respect, as genuine love seeks the good of others and affirms their inherent worth. Recent studies in virtue and character education likewise identify love as a foundational virtue that supports the development of respect, empathy, and prosocial behavior (Pike & Lickona, 2017). Mutual respect, as an educational outcome, is increasingly recognized as essential for positive school climate, student well-being, and effective learning. Respectful relationships between teachers and students contribute to higher levels of student engagement, trust, and emotional safety, which in turn support academic and social development (Hattie, 2009). In Christian educational contexts, mutual respect is not

only a pedagogical goal but also a spiritual and ethical imperative, grounded in the biblical understanding of human dignity and neighbor-love. Matthew 7:12 provides a concise and practical ethical principle that can be directly translated into classroom practices, guiding how teachers treat students and how students are encouraged to treat one another.

In the context of UPT SD No. 033926 Soban, where there are 69 Christian students and one Christian Religious Education teacher, the implementation of a pedagogy of love becomes particularly significant. In a school setting with a limited number of CRE teachers, the personal influence of the teacher is likely to be substantial, as students may have more frequent and direct interactions with the same educator. This context creates both opportunities and challenges for modeling love and mutual respect in consistent and visible ways. The teacher's pedagogical competence, therefore, is not only measured in terms of instructional skill but also in the ability to create a classroom climate characterized by care, fairness, empathy, and respectful relationships. There remains a need for research that explicitly integrates biblical-ethical foundations, such as Matthew 7:12, with pedagogical practice in concrete school contexts. This study seeks to address this gap by examining how the pedagogy of love, grounded in the Golden Rule, functions as a foundation for fostering mutual respect through the pedagogical competence of Christian Religious Education teachers at UPT SD No. 033926 Soban. By integrating biblical theology, educational theory, and empirical investigation, this study aims to contribute to a more holistic understanding of Christian pedagogy that emphasizes love not only as a theological ideal but also as a lived educational practice that shapes student character and school culture.

METHODS

A Systematic Literature Review (SLR) design was used to examine how the pedagogy of love, grounded in Matthew 7:12, has been conceptualized and implemented in educational contexts, particularly in relation to fostering mutual respect and character formation. A systematic literature review was selected because it enables a transparent, rigorous, and replicable process for identifying, evaluating, and synthesizing relevant scholarly studies (Kitchenham & Charters, 2007; Snyder, 2019). Through this approach, the study aimed to integrate biblical-theological perspectives, character education theory, and empirical educational research to provide a comprehensive understanding of love-based pedagogy as a foundation for mutual respect in Christian Religious Education. The SLR design was guided by established protocols for conducting systematic reviews in education and social sciences, emphasizing clarity in search strategies, inclusion and exclusion criteria, and data synthesis procedures (Petticrew & Roberts, 2006; Snyder, 2019). This method allows the study to move beyond narrative or traditional literature reviews by applying structured procedures that reduce selection bias and enhance the credibility of the findings. The systematic review was guided by the following research questions: How is the pedagogy of love conceptualized in educational and Christian education literature? What empirical evidence exists regarding the relationship between love-based pedagogy and the development of mutual respect among students? How is Matthew 7:12 or the Golden Rule used as a theological and ethical foundation in educational studies related to character and relational pedagogy? These research

questions were formulated to ensure that both theological and pedagogical dimensions were adequately represented in the review process. The literature search was conducted across several major academic databases to ensure comprehensive coverage of peer-reviewed studies. The primary databases were selected because of their broad coverage of educational research, theology, religious education, and character education studies. The keywords were applied to titles, abstracts, and keywords to maximize retrieval of relevant studies, published in English between 2010 and 2024. This time frame was chosen to capture contemporary developments in character education, relational pedagogy, and Christian educational research. All identified records were imported into a reference management system, and duplicates were removed. Titles and abstracts were screened to assess their relevance based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Then, full-text articles were retrieved and assessed for eligibility. During the full-text screening stage, each study was carefully reviewed to determine whether it explicitly addressed themes related to love-based pedagogy, mutual respect, character education, or Christian educational ethics. Only studies that met all inclusion criteria were retained for final analysis. This structured screening process helped ensure that the final corpus of literature was both relevant and methodologically sound. To enhance the rigor of the review, a basic quality appraisal was conducted by examining the clarity of research design, data collection methods, and the credibility of the findings reported in each study. While this review did not exclude studies solely on the basis of methodological limitations, greater interpretive weight was given to studies with clearly articulated methods and robust empirical or theoretical grounding (Snyder, 2019). The review sought to integrate educational theory, empirical findings, and theological perspectives in order to construct a comprehensive framework for understanding how love-based pedagogy can function as a foundation for mutual respect in Christian Religious Education.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The systematic literature review yielded a substantial body of scholarly work that addresses the interconnected themes of pedagogy of love, mutual respect, relational teaching, character education, and Christian ethical foundations. Across the reviewed studies, a consistent pattern emerged showing that love-based pedagogy is not merely an affective or emotional dimension of teaching but constitutes a comprehensive pedagogical framework that shapes teacher-student relationships, classroom climate, moral development, and social interactions. The findings demonstrate that love, when operationalized pedagogically, functions as a transformative educational principle that enhances respect, empathy, responsibility, and ethical awareness among students. One of the dominant themes identified in the reviewed literature is the conceptualization of love as a foundational pedagogical virtue. Several studies emphasize that love in education extends beyond kindness or emotional warmth and is better understood as a deliberate ethical and pedagogical commitment to the holistic development of learners. In this sense, love is framed as an active stance of care, responsibility, and moral intentionality (Noddings, 2013; Palmer, 2017). The literature consistently indicates that when teachers adopt a pedagogy of love, they intentionally design learning environments that affirm student dignity, recognize individual differences, and promote inclusive participation. This aligns with Christian educational perspectives that view love as an

expression of agape, a self-giving and other-centered orientation that seeks the well-being of others. From a biblical standpoint, Matthew 7:12, often referred to as the Golden Rule, provides a theological-ethical grounding for this pedagogical orientation by emphasizing reciprocal treatment and ethical responsibility toward others. The reviewed studies further demonstrate that love-based pedagogy contributes significantly to the development of mutual respect in classroom settings. Mutual respect is not treated as a passive outcome but as a relational and dialogical process that is nurtured through consistent modeling, communication, and ethical practice by teachers. Empirical studies in character and relational pedagogy report that classrooms characterized by warmth, fairness, and respectful communication tend to exhibit lower levels of conflict, higher levels of student engagement, and stronger peer relationships (Wentzel, 2015; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). These findings suggest that love-based pedagogical practices create a relational ecology in which respect becomes a shared norm rather than an externally imposed rule. In Christian education contexts, this relational ecology is further strengthened by theological narratives and ethical teachings that frame respect as a reflection of love for neighbor, consistent with biblical teachings.

Another significant theme emerging from the review concerns the role of teacher modeling in translating the pedagogy of love into concrete classroom practices. The literature strongly emphasizes that students learn respect and ethical behavior not only through formal instruction but also through observing teacher attitudes, behaviors, and relational styles. Teachers who demonstrate patience, empathy, fairness, and forgiveness are more likely to foster similar dispositions in students (Hattie, 2012; Lickona, 2012). This modeling function is particularly relevant in Christian Religious Education, where teachers are often viewed as moral and spiritual role models. The reviewed studies suggest that when teachers intentionally embody the values they teach, including love and respect, students are more likely to internalize these values as part of their character development. This finding resonates with theological interpretations of Matthew 7:12, which emphasize the importance of lived ethics and embodied practice rather than merely verbal instruction. The synthesis also highlights the integration of care ethics within the pedagogy of love. Care ethics literature, particularly influenced by Noddings' work, underscores the importance of relational attentiveness, responsiveness, and responsibility in educational practice. Studies reviewed in this area indicate that caring relationships between teachers and students are positively associated with students' sense of belonging, emotional security, and moral engagement (Noddings, 2013; Wentzel, 2015). In the context of Christian education, care ethics is often framed within a theological narrative that emphasizes God's love as a model for human relationships. This theological framing reinforces the pedagogical imperative to treat students with dignity, compassion, and respect, thereby strengthening the moral and relational dimensions of schooling. A further important finding relates to the link between love-based pedagogy and character education. The reviewed literature consistently shows that character education programs and relational teaching approaches that prioritize love, respect, and empathy are more effective in promoting prosocial behavior and reducing negative behaviors such as bullying and social exclusion (Berkowitz & Bier, 2014; Lickona, 2012). These studies suggest that character education is most effective when it is embedded within daily classroom interactions rather than limited to isolated lessons or moral

instruction sessions. From this perspective, the pedagogy of love serves as an integrative framework that aligns moral instruction with relational practice. The biblical ethic of Matthew 7:12 further strengthens this integration by providing a simple yet profound ethical principle that can be easily contextualized within daily classroom interactions, such as encouraging students to treat peers as they themselves wish to be treated.

The reviewed literature also reveals that mutual respect is closely linked to the development of social and emotional competencies. Studies in social-emotional learning (SEL) indicate that empathy, perspective-taking, and emotional regulation are critical skills that support respectful relationships and positive classroom climates (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Durlak et al., 2011). The pedagogy of love intersects with SEL frameworks by emphasizing emotional attunement, relational awareness, and ethical responsibility. In Christian educational contexts, these competencies are often interpreted through theological lenses that frame emotional and relational skills as expressions of Christian virtues such as love, patience, kindness, and self-control. The synthesis suggests that integrating love-based pedagogy with SEL approaches can strengthen both the moral and psychosocial dimensions of student development. Another significant result of the SLR concerns the cultural and contextual dimensions of love and respect in education. Several studies emphasize that expressions of love and respect are shaped by cultural norms, social expectations, and institutional contexts. In collectivist and relationally oriented cultures, such as many Asian and Indonesian contexts, respect for others is deeply embedded in social hierarchies, communal values, and relational obligations. The literature suggests that love-based pedagogy must be culturally responsive in order to be effective, recognizing local norms while also challenging practices that may undermine student dignity or equity (Gay, 2018). In Christian education, this cultural responsiveness is complemented by theological teachings that affirm the inherent worth of every person as created in the image of God. This theological affirmation provides a critical lens for evaluating cultural practices and ensuring that respect is grounded in both cultural sensitivity and ethical universality.

The review also identifies a strong relationship between love-based pedagogy and positive classroom climate. Classroom climate is consistently identified as a key mediating variable between teacher practices and student outcomes. Studies report that classrooms characterized by trust, emotional safety, and respectful communication are associated with higher levels of academic engagement, motivation, and cooperative behavior (Hattie, 2012; Wentzel, 2015). The pedagogy of love contributes to this climate by emphasizing relational trust, affirmation, and ethical consistency. In Christian education settings, classroom climate is further shaped by spiritual practices, biblical narratives, and moral discourse that reinforce values of love and respect. The synthesis indicates that a positive classroom climate is not only an academic resource but also a moral and relational environment that supports holistic student development. Theological analysis within the reviewed literature further reinforces the centrality of Matthew 7:12 as a foundational ethical principle for education. The Golden Rule is frequently interpreted as a universal moral norm that transcends cultural and religious boundaries while remaining deeply rooted in Christian ethics. The literature suggests that this principle provides a practical and accessible framework for teaching respect, empathy, and ethical reciprocity.

When integrated into pedagogical practice, Matthew 7:12 encourages both teachers and students to engage in moral reflection, perspective-taking, and relational accountability. This theological grounding strengthens the moral legitimacy of love-based pedagogy and provides a coherent ethical narrative that supports character formation and mutual respect. The synthesis also reveals some challenges and tensions associated with implementing a pedagogy of love. Several studies note that institutional pressures, large class sizes, standardized testing regimes, and limited teacher training in relational pedagogy can hinder the consistent application of love-based practices. Teachers may recognize the importance of love and respect but struggle to operationalize these values within constrained educational environments (Palmer, 2017; Gay, 2018). These challenges highlight the need for institutional support, professional development, and policy frameworks that explicitly recognize relational and moral dimensions of teaching as integral to educational quality. In Christian education contexts, this implies that school leadership and curriculum design should intentionally integrate theological and pedagogical commitments to love and respect within institutional structures. The reviewed literature underscores that love-based pedagogy should not be misunderstood as permissiveness or the absence of discipline. Rather, love is consistently framed as compatible with high expectations, ethical boundaries, and moral accountability. Studies indicate that classrooms characterized by both care and structure are more effective in promoting respect and responsible behavior than those that emphasize either control or care in isolation (Wentzel, 2015; Lickona, 2012). This balanced approach aligns with Christian ethical teachings that emphasize both grace and truth, love and responsibility. From this perspective, the pedagogy of love involves guiding students toward ethical maturity through supportive yet firm relational practices.

In relation to the specific context of primary education, which is particularly relevant for UPT SD No. 033926 Soban, the literature highlights that younger learners are especially responsive to relational and affective dimensions of teaching. Studies in elementary education emphasize that teacher warmth, affirmation, and consistent modeling play a critical role in shaping children's social norms and moral understanding (Berkowitz & Bier, 2014; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). This suggests that implementing a pedagogy of love at the primary level has long-term implications for character development and social behavior. When children learn to associate schooling with respect, care, and ethical reciprocity, these values are more likely to become internalized and carried into later stages of development. The results of this systematic literature review provide strong empirical, theoretical, and theological support for the pedagogy of love as a foundation for mutual respect. The synthesis demonstrates that love-based pedagogy contributes to positive relational climates, character formation, social-emotional development, and ethical awareness. The integration of Matthew 7:12 as a theological-ethical framework further strengthens the conceptual and practical coherence of this approach within Christian education. These findings suggest that love is not a peripheral or optional dimension of teaching but a central pedagogical principle that shapes the moral and relational fabric of educational practice. The reviewed literature collectively affirms that the pedagogy of love offers a robust framework for understanding how educational practices can foster mutual respect in holistic and sustainable ways. By integrating educational theory, empirical research, and Christian ethics, this study highlights the

transformative potential of love-based pedagogy for shaping not only classroom interactions but also broader patterns of character and relational development. For Christian Religious Education, in particular, the pedagogy of love grounded in Matthew 7:12 provides a theologically rich and pedagogically practical foundation for cultivating students who are not only academically competent but also morally grounded, relationally sensitive, and committed to living out values of love and mutual respect in their daily lives.

CONCLUSION

This study, based on a systematic literature review, concludes that the pedagogy of love constitutes a foundational and transformative framework for fostering mutual respect in educational contexts, particularly within Christian Religious Education. The reviewed literature consistently demonstrates that love, when understood as an intentional pedagogical and ethical commitment, functions as a core principle that shapes teacher–student relationships, classroom climate, and students’ moral and social development. Rather than being merely an affective dimension of teaching, love emerges as a comprehensive pedagogical orientation that integrates care, responsibility, justice, and ethical intentionality in daily educational practice. The findings further confirm that mutual respect is not an automatic or incidental outcome of schooling but is actively cultivated through relational pedagogy, consistent modeling, and ethical engagement. Teachers who embody love through empathy, fairness, patience, and relational attentiveness play a decisive role in creating classroom environments where respect becomes a shared value and a lived norm. In this sense, the pedagogy of love strengthens the relational ecology of the classroom, enabling students to experience respect not only as a rule to be followed but as a relational practice grounded in trust, dignity, and reciprocal responsibility. From a theological perspective, Matthew 7:12 (the Golden Rule) provides a coherent and robust ethical foundation for the pedagogy of love. The biblical principle of treating others as one would wish to be treated offers a practical and universally applicable moral framework that supports the development of empathy, ethical reflection, and relational accountability. The integration of this theological ethic with contemporary educational theory reinforces the legitimacy and relevance of love-based pedagogy in Christian education, while also allowing it to resonate with broader character education and social-emotional learning frameworks. The conclusion of this review also highlights that love-based pedagogy is most effective when supported by institutional commitment, professional development, and school cultures that recognize relational and moral dimensions of teaching as integral to educational quality. Challenges related to structural constraints, curriculum demands, and limited training in relational pedagogy indicate the need for more intentional policies and programs that equip teachers to operationalize love and respect in sustainable ways. This study affirms that the pedagogy of love is not a peripheral or optional aspect of education but a central and strategic foundation for cultivating mutual respect, character formation, and holistic student development. For Christian Religious Education, in particular, a pedagogy grounded in love and informed by Matthew 7:12 offers a powerful framework for shaping students who are not only academically engaged but also morally responsible, relationally

sensitive, and committed to living out values of love and mutual respect in their personal, social, and spiritual lives.

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