



Deconstructing The Pedagogical Praxis of Christian Educators: A Hermeneutical Analysis of Matthew's Gospel

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ABSTRACT

Contemporary Christian religious education necessitates a theoretically robust understanding of pedagogical roles grounded in theological frameworks. While previous research has explored teachers' responsibilities from educational perspectives, systematic analyses of biblical texts as foundational pedagogical sources remain underdeveloped. This study examines the multidimensional roles of Christian religious educators through a hermeneutical analysis of Matthew's Gospel, identifying pedagogical paradigms that can inform contemporary educational praxis. Employing a qualitative hermeneutical approach, this research systematically analyzed the Gospel of Matthew using critical exegetical methods and thematic content analysis. The investigation incorporated intertextual analysis, historical-critical interpretation, and phenomenological reduction to identify pedagogical frameworks embedded within the Matthean narrative. The analysis revealed four distinct yet interconnected pedagogical dimensions within Matthew's Gospel: (1) Teachers as transformative agents implementing instructional, kerygmatic, and restorative functions within communal contexts; (2) Teachers as dialogical facilitators demonstrating attentive listening, critical engagement, patience, and impartiality; (3) Teachers as ethical mentors providing counsel, cultivating responsibility, and modeling virtuous conduct; and (4) Teachers as spiritual catalysts inspiring vocational consciousness and sustaining theological resilience. These findings suggest that effective Christian religious education requires an integrated pedagogical approach that transcends mere knowledge transmission to encompass transformative, facilitative, mentoring, and catalytic functions. This research contributes to educational theology by providing a biblically-grounded theoretical framework for contemporary Christian pedagogical practice.

Keywords: : Pedagogical theology; Christian religious education; Matthean hermeneutics; transformative education; educational praxis; theological instruction; biblical pedagogy

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INTRODUCTION

The conceptualization of pedagogical roles within Christian religious education represents a critical intersection between educational theory and theological praxis. Contemporary educational contexts demand that

Christian educators not only convey doctrinal content but also facilitate holistic spiritual formation within increasingly diverse and complex learning environments (Cooling, 2018; Smith, 2021). This pedagogical challenge necessitates a theoretically robust understanding of educator roles grounded in substantive theological frameworks that can inform contemporary practice. Christian religious educators operate within a distinctive educational paradigm that seeks to integrate academic instruction with spiritual formation and ethical development (Estep et al., 2016). Nainggolan (2010) conceptualizes this multifaceted role as encompassing guidance, reformation, exemplification, innovation, counsel, creation, authority, inspiration, narration, and evaluation. This complexity generates a fundamental pedagogical tension: Christian religious education must simultaneously address cognitive, affective, and formational dimensions while maintaining theological integrity and educational effectiveness (Crosby, 2020).

The pedagogical challenge is further complicated by competing educational philosophies and theological orientations. As Ermindyawati (2019) observes, Christian religious education extends beyond knowledge transmission to encompass spiritual formation and faith transmission. This multidimensional educational mission requires theoretical frameworks that can adequately conceptualize the distinctive roles of Christian educators within contemporary educational contexts. However, existing research predominantly approaches this question from educational rather than theological perspectives, resulting in theoretical frameworks that lack substantive theological grounding.

While previous studies have examined Christian religious educators' roles from various perspectives, systematic analyses of biblical texts as foundational sources for pedagogical theory remain underdeveloped. Ermindyawati's (2019) research identifies Christian religious education teachers as faith interpreters, shepherds, guides, leaders, and evangelists. Similarly, Putnarubun et al. (n.d.) characterize these educators as motivators, leaders, and evangelists. These contributions provide valuable insights but typically apply predetermined educational frameworks to theological contexts rather than deriving pedagogical theory from theological sources.

This research addresses this theoretical gap by conducting a systematic hermeneutical analysis of Matthew's Gospel to identify embedded pedagogical paradigms that can inform contemporary educational praxis. The Gospel of Matthew provides a particularly appropriate text for this analysis given its extensive depiction of Jesus as teacher, its catechetical structure, and its prominence in early Christian education (Carter, 2017; Wright, 2015). By grounding pedagogical theory in careful biblical exegesis, this research develops a distinctively theological framework for conceptualizing Christian religious educators' roles.

This study employs a hermeneutical approach informed by Gadamer's (2013) philosophical hermeneutics, which recognizes the productive role of historical distance in interpretation, and Ricoeur's (1976) theory of textual interpretation, which emphasizes the world-disclosing capacity of texts. This theoretical framework enables the analysis to move beyond simplistic proof-texting to engage the complex pedagogical implications of Matthew's narrative.

The investigation is further informed by critical religious pedagogy (Miedema, 2017), which recognizes education as inherently value-laden and potentially transformative, and by emerging work in theological education that emphasizes formation rather than mere information (Smith, 2018). These theoretical perspectives provide analytical lenses through which to examine Matthew's Gospel as a potential source for contemporary pedagogical theory.

This research aims to develop a theologically grounded theoretical framework for conceptualizing Christian religious educators' roles through systematic analysis of Matthew's Gospel. Specifically, the study addresses the following research questions:

What pedagogical roles and functions are depicted or implied within Matthew's Gospel?
How do these biblically-derived roles compare with contemporary educational frameworks? What implications do these findings have for contemporary Christian religious education?

By addressing these questions, this research contributes to educational theology by providing a biblically-grounded theoretical framework for contemporary Christian pedagogical practice. This contribution is significant because it bridges the gap between theological sources and educational theory, potentially enriching both fields through interdisciplinary dialogue.

This study employs a qualitative hermeneutical approach to analyze the Gospel of Matthew. The methodological process involves systematic textual analysis using critical exegetical methods, thematic content analysis, and phenomenological reduction to identify pedagogical frameworks embedded within the Matthean narrative. This approach enables the research to move beyond superficial readings to engage the text's pedagogical implications in their full complexity.

The following sections present the research methodology in greater detail, followed by findings, discussion, and conclusions. The analysis reveals four distinct yet interconnected pedagogical dimensions within Matthew's Gospel, providing a theoretically robust framework for conceptualizing Christian religious educators' roles in contemporary contexts.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research employs a qualitative hermeneutical approach centered on textual analysis of the Gospel of Matthew. The methodological framework integrates biblical hermeneutics with pedagogical theory to deconstruct educational praxis within Christian contexts. The study is situated within the interpretive paradigm, recognizing that meanings are socially constructed and historically situated (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Research Design

A systematic hermeneutical analysis forms the core methodological framework, applying Gadamer's (2004) philosophical hermeneutics which emphasizes the fusion of horizons between text and interpreter. This approach acknowledges that understanding emerges from the dialectical relationship between the historical context of Matthew's Gospel and contemporary educational contexts (Porter & Robinson, 2011). The research design incorporates three interconnected phases:

1. Textual analysis: Close reading and exegesis of Matthew's Gospel with particular attention to pedagogical encounters, teaching metaphors, and educational principles embedded within the narrative.
2. Hermeneutical reflection: Critical interpretation of the identified pedagogical elements through both historical-grammatical and reader-response hermeneutical lenses.
3. Pedagogical application: Synthesis of findings into a coherent theoretical framework for contemporary Christian educational praxis.

Data Collection

Primary data are drawn from Matthew's Gospel, supplemented by secondary sources including:

- Scholarly commentaries on Matthew's Gospel with emphasis on educational dimensions
- Peer-reviewed literature on Christian pedagogy and biblical hermeneutics
- Theoretical works on critical pedagogy and educational philosophy

The literature corpus was systematically compiled using academic databases (ATLA Religion Database, ERIC, JSTOR) employing search terms including "Matthew's Gospel AND pedagogy," "Christian education AND biblical foundations," and "hermeneutics AND educational praxis." Selection criteria prioritized scholarly contributions published within the past fifteen years, while including seminal works that have significantly shaped the discourse on biblical pedagogy.

Data Analysis

The analytical framework employs a multi-layered hermeneutical approach informed by Ricoeur's (1976) critical hermeneutics and van Manen's (2016) phenomenological analysis. This process involves:

1. Structural analysis: Identifying pedagogical motifs, teaching episodes, and educational principles within Matthew's Gospel.

2. Contextual interpretation: Situating these elements within their first-century cultural-historical context to understand their original significance.

3. Critical reflection: Examining the implications of these pedagogical elements for contemporary educational theory and practice through a process of "distanciation" and "appropriation" (Ricoeur, 1976).

4. Theoretical integration: Synthesizing findings into a coherent conceptual framework that can inform contemporary Christian educational praxis.

The analytical process employs constant comparative methods (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to identify emergent themes and patterns across the textual corpus.

Trustworthiness and Methodological Limitations To ensure methodological rigor, the study employs several strategies:

- Triangulation of interpretations through engagement with diverse scholarly perspectives
- Reflexivity through explicit acknowledgment of the researcher's theological positioning
- Thick description of textual evidence supporting interpretive claims
- Peer debriefing with scholars in biblical studies and Christian education

The study acknowledges its methodological limitations, including the inherent subjectivity of hermeneutical analysis and the cultural distance between first-century Palestine and contemporary educational contexts. These limitations are addressed through transparent interpretive processes and engagement with diverse scholarly perspectives.

This methodological approach aims not merely to extract pedagogical principles from Matthew's Gospel but to facilitate a transformative dialogue between biblical text and contemporary educational praxis that can enrich and deepen the professional identity and practice of Christian educators.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Digital Conceptual Framework of Christian Religious Education

Christian religious education represents an intentional educational paradigm characterized by, predicated upon, and directed toward Christian theological foundations (Sidjabat, 2000). The conceptual parameters of Christian education encompass a multi-dimensional pedagogical framework. Pazmino (2000) offers a comprehensive definition:

"Christian education constitutes a deliberate, systematic endeavor supported through spiritual and anthropological initiatives to transmit knowledge, values, attitudes, skills, and behaviors congruent with Christian faith, thereby facilitating change, renewal, and reformation, enabling learners to align their existence with divine intentionality."

This definition transcends simplistic interpretations of religious instruction, positioning Christian education as a transformative praxis designed to facilitate holistic spiritual formation. Kristanto (2010) further conceptualizes Christian religious education as instruction centered on Christological principles, designed to guide individuals toward epistemological and experiential growth aligned with divine precepts, ultimately equipping them for spiritual maturity and behavioral transformation.

The teleological dimensions of Christian religious education extend beyond rudimentary religious knowledge transmission. Posumah-Santoso (2006) argues that classroom-based religious instruction necessitates supplementary nurturing activities to achieve its formative objectives. Nainggolan (2008) delineates specific theological objectives of Christian education, including facilitating metanoia (repentance), catalyzing spiritual development, encouraging discipleship, enabling spiritual formation, and equipping for evangelistic engagement. This conceptualization positions Christian education within a transformative pedagogical framework that transcends informational objectives to embrace formational imperatives.

The Ontological Status of Christian Religious Education Teachers

The Christian religious educator occupies a distinctive ontological position characterized by specific professional competencies, ethical imperatives, and theological orientations. Belandina (2005) conceptualizes the Christian educator as an agent who executes instructional and formative responsibilities within the religious education domain, drawing upon advanced competencies and character attributes, consistently referencing Jesus as the archetypal pedagogical exemplar.

Homrighausen (1985) frames the Christian educator's ontological status through a theological lens, positioning them as stewards entrusted with eternal verities, responsible for facilitating encounters between learners and divine realities. This conceptualization affirms the intrinsic value of learners within divine economy, emphasizing the sacred trust inherent in the educational vocation. The Christian educator thus functions as a mediator who facilitates Christological knowledge and emulation, embodying Jesus's pedagogical praxis.

Nainggolan (2008) and Purba (2019) further explicate this role, emphasizing the Christian educator's responsibility to facilitate practical application of theoretical knowledge and to develop specialized expertise across multiple educational domains. This professional responsibility finds biblical precedent in Proverbs 22:6, which mandates formative guidance aligned with individual developmental trajectories, promising long-term behavioral stability.

Hermeneutical Analysis of Educators' Roles in Matthew's Gospel

Pedagogical Function as Divine Commission (Matthew 4:23)

The Matthean narrative presents a tripartite pedagogical framework exemplified in Jesus's ministry: didactic engagement, theological proclamation, and holistic transformation. In Matthew 4:23, the evangelist employs διδάσκων (didaskon) an active present participle in the nominative masculine singular form signifying continuous, deliberate instructional activity with Jesus as the grammatical subject. The instructional context is situated within

synagogues (συναγωγαῖς/sunagogais) a dative feminine plural noun indicating locative specificity for formal religious instruction.

The synagogue, etymologically derived from the Greek συν (syn, "together") and ἀγωγή (agoge, "leading"), constituted the primary institutional structure for Jewish religious education, analogous to contemporary educational institutions (Santoso, 2020). The Hebrew equivalent eda ("congregation") further emphasizes the communal dimension of religious instruction. This hermeneutical analysis reveals Jesus's intentional engagement with established educational structures as the primary context for his pedagogical praxis.

Theological Proclamation

The proclamation of the βασιλεία (basileia, "kingdom") represents a central pedagogical objective in Matthew's Gospel. Nurwindayani (2021) conceptualizes the kingdom of God as divine governance predicated upon monotheistic theological foundations and divine self-disclosure. Widjaja (2018) identifies messianic leadership as essential to this kingdom, while Guthrie (1996) clarifies that βασιλεία emphasizes divine governmental activity rather than territorial dominion.

Matthew's kingdom proclamation (κηρύσσων/kerusson present active participle nominative masculine singular) signifies continuous, intentional proclamation of salvific reality. This proclamation invites participation through obedience to Jesus and volitional commitment (Matthew 13:44-46), recognizing Jesus as the embodiment of divine governance (Gunanakan, n.d.). This hermeneutical framework establishes proclamation of theological truth as a fundamental component of effective religious pedagogy.

Transformative Intervention

Beyond didactic instruction and theological proclamation, Jesus's pedagogical praxis includes transformative intervention, addressing pathologies (νόσον/noson) and deficiencies (μαλακίαν/malakian). This therapeutic dimension extends metaphorically to contemporary educational contexts, where educators confront behavioral pathologies through transformative intervention. Effective Christian education transcends mere information transmission to facilitate behavioral transformation, addressing negative behavioral patterns through exemplary instruction and meaningful intervention.

Educator as Facilitative Agent (Matthew 8:10; 17:17; 22:21)

Sanjaya (2008) conceptualizes the educator's facilitative function as providing services that optimize learners' educational processes, necessitating diversified resources and media beyond the instructor as sole knowledge source. Naibaho (2018) extends this role to include relational development with both students and parents, emphasizing effective communication that engages student interest.

Active Listening and Non-Dominative Engagement (Matthew 8:10)

The Matthean narrative demonstrates Jesus's facilitative approach through attentive listening before pedagogical intervention. In Matthew 8:10, the author employs ἀκούσας (akousas) an aorist active participle in the nominative masculine singular form indicating completed auditory reception prior to subsequent response. This grammatical construction positions active listening as prerequisite to meaningful pedagogical engagement.

The contextual analysis reveals Jesus's encounter with a centurion concerned about his παῖς (pais, "child/servant"), demonstrating empathic attunement to the officer's request. Jesus's responsive listening models

facilitative pedagogy that prioritizes learner expression over instructor domination, creating space for active learner participation.

Appropriately Calibrated Confrontation (Matthew 17:17)

Effective facilitation occasionally necessitates appropriate confrontation to address deficient performance. In Matthew 17:17, following the disciples' inability to facilitate healing, Jesus employs ἀνέξομαι (anexomai) a future middle indicative verb in the first person singular to express ongoing endurance of disciples' inadequate faith. This grammatical construction indicates continuous accommodative patience despite legitimate disappointment.

Jesus's confrontation maintains relational integrity while addressing performance deficiencies, modeling pedagogical patience defined by the National Education Department (2015) as steadfastness amid challenges and by Yusuf (2010) as integrated management of emotional and behavioral responses. Effective Christian educators demonstrate patience with learners' cognitive limitations, attitudinal resistance, and behavioral challenges without resorting to resigned despair or unproductive anger.

Impartial Engagement and Non-Critical Response (Matthew 22:21)

The Matthean account of Jesus's engagement with Pharisaical interlocutors (Matthew 22:15-22) demonstrates impartial facilitation amid dialectical complexity. Jesus employs ἀπόδοτε (apodote)—an aorist active imperative verb in the second person plural commanding balanced obligation fulfillment in both secular and sacred domains. This grammatical construction indicates authoritative direction without demonstrating partisan alignment or critical dismissal.

Jesus's response models pedagogical impartiality that addresses controversial questions without compromising intellectual integrity or demonstrating inappropriate favoritism. Contemporary Christian educators must similarly facilitate diverse perspectives while maintaining neutrality, employing appropriate methodologies to resolve conflictual discourse without compromising ethical or theological integrity.

Educator as Developmental Guide (Matthew 10:5; 7-8; 12)

The guiding function of educators involves directive leadership akin to adult guidance of developing children (Fatkhurohman, n.d.). Lebar (2006) conceptualizes the Christian educator as a developmental guide who facilitates comprehensive learner development across developmental stages. The Matthean narrative presents specific strategies for effective developmental guidance:

Advisory Direction (Matthew 10:5)

In Matthew 10:5, Jesus provides directive counsel through παραγγείλας (paraggeilas) an aorist active participle in the nominative masculine singular form indicating authoritative instruction preceding commissioning activity. This grammatical construction establishes instructional guidance as prerequisite to practical implementation.

Christian educators provide similar advisory direction, demonstrating exemplary behavioral integrity that reinforces verbal instruction. Napitupulu (2020) emphasizes that effective advisory guidance combines indirect verbal instruction with exemplary behavioral demonstration, as behavioral modeling proves more efficacious than verbal instruction alone.

Responsibility Cultivation (Matthew 10:7-8)

Jesus's directive to disciples includes both *πορευόμενοι* (*poreuomenoi*) a present middle participle in the nominative masculine plural form and *κηρύσσετε* (*kerussete*) a present active imperative verb in the second person plural. This grammatical construction indicates continuous missionary movement accompanied by ongoing proclamatory activity, establishing developmental responsibility beyond initial advisory guidance.

Tafonao (2018) identifies multiple strategies for responsibility cultivation, including conceptual explanation, task assignment, redemptive correction, trust extension, collaborative engagement, self-esteem development, and exemplary modeling. Contemporary Christian educators similarly facilitate responsibility development through graduated assignment of increasingly complex responsibilities, building self-efficacy through structured developmental challenges.

Behavioral Decorum Development (Matthew 10:12)

Jesus cultivates appropriate social behavior through the imperative *ἀπάσασθε* (*aspasasthe*) an aorist middle imperative verb in the second person plural commanding appropriate greeting practices during home visitation. This grammatical construction mandates culturally appropriate social engagement as an essential component of ministerial behavior.

Contemporary Christian educators similarly facilitate appropriate behavioral decorum development, teaching respectful engagement with authority figures, appropriate greeting practices, and verbal courtesy as essential components of holistic development. These behavioral competencies extend beyond cognitive instruction to encompass social and relational dimensions of learner development.

Educator as Motivational Catalyst (Matthew 5:13; 6:25)

Motivation constitutes an internal drive either conscious or unconscious that precipitates specific behaviors (Manizar, n.d.). Djamarah (2005) identifies the motivational function as essential to educational interaction, representing the essence of the teaching profession through personalization and socialization processes. The Matthean narrative presents specific motivational strategies employed by Jesus:

Significance Motivation (Matthew 5:13)

In Matthew 5:13, Jesus employs *ἐστε* (*este*) a present active indicative verb in the second person plural to establish disciples' ontological identity as *ἅλας* (*halas*, "salt"), a nominative neuter singular noun functioning as subject complement. This grammatical construction establishes existential identity rather than aspirational becoming, motivating disciples toward influential significance.

Nixon (1999) explicates salt's preservative function, indicating that disciples' wisdom and lifestyle should exert societal influence despite difficult circumstances (Matthew 5:10-11). Contemporary Christian educators similarly motivate learners toward meaningful societal impact, emphasizing their potential contribution to community flourishing through exemplary character and productive engagement.

Theological Trust Motivation (Matthew 6:25)

Jesus addresses anxiety through *μὴ μεριμνᾶτε* (*me merimnate*) combining the negative particle with a present active imperative verb in the second person plural commanding continuous refusal of anxious preoccupation. This grammatical construction establishes ongoing trust as the appropriate response to potential anxiety.

Stamps (2006) identifies anxiety as evidence of insufficient faith in divine provision, while Beck (2001) correlates anxiety liberation with divine blessing through theological focus. Rungkat (2010) identifies kingdom prioritization (Matthew 6:33) as the singular motivational focus that alleviates anxiety.

Contemporary Christian educators similarly motivate learners toward theological trust amid challenging circumstances, addressing cognitive division (Moore, 2011) and faith disruption (Sosipater, 2010) that accompanies anxiety. This motivation addresses economic insecurity, academic challenges, familial difficulties, and minority status experiences that potentially generate anxiety among Christian students, directing attention toward divine provision despite challenging circumstances.

Pedagogical Implications for Contemporary Christian Education

This hermeneutical analysis of Matthean pedagogical praxis yields significant implications for contemporary Christian education. The multifaceted role of the Christian educator encompassing instructional expertise, facilitative engagement, developmental guidance, and motivational catalysis presents a comprehensive framework for effective religious education.

The Matthean paradigm presents Jesus as the archetypal educator who demonstrates balanced integration of these roles through contextualized application. Contemporary Christian educators must similarly adapt their pedagogical approach to specific contextual requirements, employing appropriate methodologies based on learner needs and educational objectives.

The transformative dimension of Christian education extends beyond cognitive information transmission to encompass behavioral formation, characterological development, theological understanding, and relational competence. This comprehensive approach addresses the whole person, facilitating holistic development aligned with divine intentions.

Furthermore, the Matthean emphasis on exemplary demonstration alongside verbal instruction highlights the importance of pedagogical integrity, where the educator's life reinforces instructional content. Contemporary Christian educators must similarly demonstrate congruence between pedagogical content and personal conduct, recognizing their role as living exemplars of the principles they communicate.

CONCLUSION

This research has illuminated the multifaceted role of Christian religious education teachers in implementing biblical instruction based on the Gospel of Matthew. Several essential aspects emerge regarding how these educators should fulfill their responsibilities. First, in their role as task executors (Matthew 4:23), Christian educators must effectively transmit knowledge and Christian values not only to students in academic settings but also to congregations within church communities. Their teaching should center on conveying the gospel of salvation, while also addressing personal weaknesses and undesirable behaviors with the ultimate goal of facilitating meaningful behavioral transformation.

Second, as facilitators, teachers must develop strong listening skills rather than dominating conversations (Matthew 8:10), which helps prevent misinterpretations and ensures accurate information exchange. They should maintain appropriate firmness with students (Matthew 17:17)—not through harshness but through patient guidance and correction. Additionally, they must demonstrate impartiality and refrain from undue criticism (Matthew 22:21), treating all students fairly regardless of differences in perspective.

Third, in their mentoring capacity, Christian educators should provide constructive advice (Matthew 10:5), guiding students away from inappropriate actions through exemplary conduct and thoughtful communication. They must instill a sense of responsibility (Matthew 10:7-8) by assigning meaningful tasks and expressing trust in their students. Furthermore, they should cultivate politeness and respect (Matthew 10:12) as essential qualities in their students' interactions with teachers and others.

Fourth, as motivators, Christian religious education teachers should inspire students to become blessings with meaningful impact (Matthew 5:13), encouraging them to function as "salt and light" in the world through positive actions and words. They must also motivate students to maintain steadfast faith (Matthew 6:25), emphasizing trust in God's provision and care regardless of challenging circumstances.

Through this comprehensive approach to Christian religious education, teachers can effectively embody biblical principles while guiding students toward spiritual growth and ethical development in accordance with scriptural teachings.

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