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Teacher Professionalism in Realizing Love-Based Adaptive Pedagogy: A Nel Noddings 'Ethics of Care' Perspective

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Abstract:
Shifting learner characteristics and needs require teachers to develop instruction that is adaptive, responsive, and humanistic. Nel Noddings' 'Ethics of Care' perspective offers a foundation for understanding care as an integral part of ethical relationships in education. This study aims to analyze teacher professionalism in realizing a 'Love-Based Adaptive Pedagogy' through the lens of the Ethics of Care. Employing a library research methodology, the study examines literature concerning the Ethics of Care, teacher professionalism, adaptive pedagogy, and Love-Based Education. The findings indicate that caring serves as the ethical foundation of adaptive pedagogy, as it enables teachers to recognize and respond to learners' needs. Noddings' four caring practices, that is modeling, dialogue, practice, and confirmation, can serve as mechanisms for tailoring instructional strategies, interactions, activities, and support. The study constructs a "Love-Based Adaptive Pedagogy" model that integrates the Ethics of Care, caring, teacher professionalism, and instructional adaptation to create meaningful learning experiences. This implies that teacher professionalism encompasses not only the mastery of pedagogical, personal, social, and professional competencies but also the ability to build relationships that are responsive to learners' needs. Developing teacher professionalism is essential to strengthening the dimensions of care, communication, reflection, and responsiveness, thereby making instruction more adaptive and humane.

Keywords: **Ethics of Care Nel Noddings, Teacher Professionalism, Adaptive Pedagogy, Love-Based Education, Caring**

INTRODUCTION

Shifting learner characteristics and the changing dynamics of the educational environment require teachers not only to master subject matter and instructional methods but also to respond effectively to the diverse needs of their students (Adera, 2025; Kusumawati et al., 2025). Effective instruction increasingly demands that teachers adapt strategies, activities, materials, and forms of support in alignment with student development and needs (Danielson et al., 2024; Goyibova et al., 2025). Research on adaptive teaching indicates that teachers must continuously adjust instruction based on student responses and needs through a process of observing, interpreting, and providing appropriate pedagogical responses (Rincon-Flores et al., 2024; Vorobyeva et al., 2025).

Adaptive pedagogy involves not only the use of varied methods but also a teacher's ability to understand students as individuals with diverse backgrounds, abilities, interests, socio-emotional needs, and learning experiences (Abdurahim-Salain et al., 2026; Wang, 2026). Instructional adaptation can be achieved by adjusting learning resources, methods, activities, learning demands, and forms of assessment to meet students' needs. Adaptability is a crucial aspect of professional teaching practice, as pedagogical decisions must be grounded in information regarding student development and needs (Abu-Rasheed et al., 2023; J. J. Chen, 2023).

However, adaptive pedagogy risks becoming overly technical if learning adaptation is understood merely as an adjustment of methods and strategies (Webb & Galamba, 2026). Fundamentally, education is also a human relationship. Teachers engage with learners who require attention, recognition, acceptance, and a sense of security during the learning process (Al-Hassan et al., 2025; Zhaleh & Estaji, 2025). This is why a teacher's ability to understand and respond to learners' needs must be accompanied by a pedagogical relationship grounded in care. The 'Ethics of Care' perspective is thus relevant for enriching the understanding of adaptive pedagogy.

Nel Noddings positions caring as a crucial ethical orientation in education (Adhikari et al., 2023; M.-K. Chen & Shih, 2025). Educational relationships are built not only through the transmission of knowledge but also through a caring relationship between the "one-caring" and the 'cared-for'. Noddings emphasizes the importance of relationships founded on attentiveness, dialogue, trust, and responsiveness to the person being cared for (Assem-Erhaze, 2026; Mohajel, 2025). Caring is even positioned as a moral orientation for teaching, with practices that include modeling, dialogue, practice, and confirmation.

This perspective provides a crucial foundation for understanding 'Love-Based Education'. Love is not perceived merely as a teacher's emotional sentiment toward students, but rather as a form of care manifested through pedagogical actions. A caring teacher strives to identify students' needs, listen to their experiences, respond appropriately, respect differences, and create a learning environment that fosters student growth. Such care can serve as an ethical basis for teachers when designing instruction and determining how students are treated.

From the perspective of teacher professionalism, this approach carries broader implications. Teacher professionalism extends beyond the mastery of knowledge and teaching skills; it also encompasses the ability to build social relationships and cultivate a personality that supports the educational process. In Indonesia, teacher competence comprises pedagogical, personal, social, and professional competencies. These four competencies can serve as a foundation for developing instructional practices that are both learner-centered and responsive to students' needs.

Although research on adaptive teaching and the ethics of care has advanced, these two perspectives are often discussed in separate contexts: adaptive teaching focuses primarily on how teachers tailor instruction to students' needs, whereas the ethics of care emphasizes how caring relationships form the basis of educational action. Integrating these two perspectives is crucial for establishing the understanding that pedagogical adaptation is not merely a technical matter, but also an ethical and relational one.

This article aims to analyze the role of teacher professionalism in realizing a love-based adaptive pedagogy through the lens of Nel Noddings' 'Ethics of Care'. Specifically, the study seeks to identify principles of care relevant to adaptive pedagogical practice, analyze their connection to teacher professional competence, and formulate implications for the development of instruction that is adaptive, humanistic, and learner-centered.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach utilizing a library research method. This method was selected because the research aims to construct a conceptual analysis of teacher professionalism in realizing love-based adaptive pedagogy through the lens of Nel Noddings' 'Ethics of Care'. The research data consists of secondary data obtained from books, scholarly journal articles, proceedings, and academic documents relevant to four key areas: the 'Ethics of Care', adaptive pedagogy, teacher professionalism, and love-based education.

Data collection was conducted by searching relevant databases and academic sources using specific thematic keywords. The selected literature was evaluated based on its relevance to the research focus, source credibility, and contribution to developing the conceptual argument. Primary sources discussing Nel Noddings' ideas serve as the foundational basis for understanding the concept of 'care', while research articles and related literature are used to link this concept to adaptive pedagogy and teacher professionalism.

Data analysis was conducted using a descriptive-analytical and interpretive approach through several stages: (1) identifying and organizing literature based on research themes; (2) examining key concepts within Nel Noddings' Ethics of Care, specifically caring relationships, attentiveness, dialogue, responsiveness, and regard for students; (3) identifying the characteristics of adaptive pedagogy and dimensions of teacher professionalism; (4) synthesizing findings to uncover the interconnections between care, adaptive pedagogy, and teacher professionalism; and (5) formulating conceptual implications for the implementation of Love-Based Education in schools. The analysis was performed iteratively, comparing and interpreting various sources to achieve a coherent understanding.

The validity of the study was ensured through source triangulation, like comparing ideas and findings across different types of literature while prioritizing primary sources and credible scholarly publications. The analysis results are presented thematically to provide a conceptual understanding of how the value of care can be integrated into teacher professionalism and enacted through pedagogy that is adaptive, humanistic, and responsive to students' needs.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Caring as the Ethical Foundation of Adaptive Pedagogy

Data indicates that adaptive pedagogy cannot be understood merely as a teacher's ability to modify teaching methods, media, or activities to suit classroom conditions. Pedagogical adaptation also requires the teacher's capacity to recognize, understand, and

respond to learners' needs on a personal level (Ruiz-Rojas et al., 2023; van Geel et al., 2023). In the 'Ethics of Care', Nel Noddings posits that this process derives its ethical grounding from the relationship between the 'one-caring' and the 'cared-for', a relationship built upon attentiveness, openness, responsiveness, and engagement with the needs of the person being cared for (Adhikari et al., 2023; M.-K. Chen & Shih, 2025). In essence, while adaptive pedagogy addresses 'what' needs to be adjusted in instruction, the 'Ethics of Care' provides the basis for understanding 'why' and 'for whom' those adjustments are made.

Caring is not merely a matter of a teacher's friendliness or emotional attentiveness; rather, it is a relational orientation that shapes pedagogical decisions (Krist, 2024; Schwartz, 2023). Teachers must consider learners' experiences, abilities, circumstances, and needs before determining instructional strategies. Such understanding enables teachers to adjust methods, media, interaction patterns, support, and assessments based on the learners' actual needs, rather than relying solely on technical considerations. Instructional adaptation thus evolves from simple 'instructional adjustment' into 'relational responsiveness', the teacher's ability to respond to learners based on an understanding of their diversity (Guzelergene et al., 2025; Lapidot-Lefler, 2025).

Responsiveness also requires two-way communication. Teachers do not merely identify learners' needs through observation; they also create space for learners to share their experiences, difficulties, and needs. An open relationship fosters a sense of security and encourages learners to participate more actively in the learning process. In a diverse classroom setting, this is crucial because the varying abilities, characters, experiences, and needs of learners cannot be addressed through a single, uniform teaching approach.

The function of "caring" serves as an ethical foundation linking teacher professionalism with adaptive pedagogy. Teachers are expected not only to know effective instructional strategies but also to understand the learners to whom these strategies apply, the context of their application, and how to tailor them to meet learners' needs. An "ethics of care" perspective ensures that any instructional adaptation respects the dignity, uniqueness, and potential of the learners. Ultimately, care-based adaptive pedagogy integrates pedagogical flexibility with the teacher's ethical responsibility to respond to learner diversity.

2. Noddings' Four Caring Practices as an Adaptive Pedagogy Mechanism

A synthesis of the literature indicates that Noddings' four caring practices, are modeling, dialogue, practice, and confirmation, can be translated into adaptive pedagogical practices. Noddings identified these four elements as essential components of care-based education.

Table 1
Praktik *Caring* Noddings dalam Pedagogi Adaptif

Noddings' Principle	The Implementasi of Adaptive Pedagogy
Modeling	Teachers serve as role models by demonstrating empathy, appreciation, patience, and care.
Dialogue	Teachers open lines of communication to understand students' needs, experiences, challenges, and aspirations.
Practice	Students are given opportunities to practice caring through collaboration and social activities
Confirmation	Teachers recognize students' potential and provide reinforcement based on their individual development.

These four practices not only build the quality of the teacher-student relationship but also assist teachers in understanding student needs and determining appropriate instructional responses. Caring thus serves as a mechanism linking ethical relationships with pedagogical decisions.

Modeling is enacted through the teacher setting an example by demonstrating empathy, respect, patience, openness, and flexibility in learning situations. Such modeling creates a safe learning environment, giving students the space to ask questions, make mistakes, and grow (Effendi & Sahertian, 2023; Goyibova et al., 2025). Dialogue enables teachers to gather information about students' experiences, challenges, needs, and circumstances through two-way communication. This information serves as a basis for adjusting strategies, activities, guidance, and assessments. Dialogue functions not merely as a means of communication but also as a source of information for the process of adapting instruction (Krist, 2024).

Practice grounds caring in real-world experiences through collaborative activities, problem-solving, mutual assistance, and reflection. Through these activities, teachers can observe student development and adjust the level of support based on individual capabilities (Mikkonen et al., 2025). Students requiring more assistance can receive guidance, while more independent students can be entrusted with greater responsibility. Confirmation helps teachers recognize and reinforce students' potential and development. Reinforcement is provided not only based on final outcomes but also in recognition of the effort, perseverance, courage, and progress demonstrated by the students (Jiang, 2025). This enables teachers to provide feedback and challenges that are better aligned with individual development.

The four practices described above form a cyclical mechanism. Modeling establishes a relational climate; dialogue helps teachers understand learners' needs; practice provides space to experience and cultivate care; and confirmation reinforces learners' development. Information gathered through this process serves as a basis for teachers to make adjustments to subsequent instruction. Instructional adaptation is not applied uniformly but is instead guided by the learners' responses and development.

Adaptive pedagogy involves more than just a teacher's technical ability to select instructional methods or media. Adaptation also requires the capacity to build relationships that enable teachers to understand their students and respond appropriately to their needs (Krist, 2024). The Ethics of Care expands the definition of teacher professionalism; professionalism is demonstrated not only through mastery of subject matter, pedagogy, technology, and assessment but also through the ability to integrate these competencies with relational sensitivity. From this perspective, a professional teacher is one who can align instructional decisions with an understanding of their students' needs, experiences, and potential.

3. Reconstructing Teacher Professionalism Based on the Ethics of Care.

Nel Noddings' "Ethics of Care" perspective has implications for reconstructing the meaning of teacher professionalism. Professionalism can no longer be understood merely as the mastery of a set of technical competencies related to the planning, implementation, and evaluation of instruction; it must also be viewed as a teacher's ability to build pedagogical relationships that are responsive to the needs, experiences, and development of learners (Celik et al., 2025). Teacher competence thus acquires ethical and relational dimensions. Teachers are required not only to know what to teach and how to teach it but also to understand who is learning, the needs being faced, and the pedagogical responses best suited to the learners' conditions. Professionalism shifts from an orientation of 'competence-based professionalism' toward 'responsive professionalism', a form of professionalism that integrates technical competence with

relational sensitivity and ethical responsibility. The following outlines this reconstruction.

Table 2
Reconstructing Profesionalism based on Love

Dimensions of Profesionalism	Conventional Orientation	Reconstructing based on *Ethics of Care*	Implication for Adaptif Pedagogy
Pedagogical competence	Ability to design, implement, and evaluate instruction	Ability to understand learner diversity and respond to learning needs in a contextual manner	Adjustment of materials, strategies, activities, pacing, and assessments
Personality competence	Integrity, role-modeling, maturity, and personal stability	Presence of a teacher who is empathetic, patient, and reflective, and capable of creating a sense of safety	Creation of a learning environment that empowers learners to take risks and grow
Social competence	Communication and interaction skills	Ability to build dialogic relationships, listen actively, and understand learners' perspectives	Adaptation of learning based on information gained through interaction
Professional competence	Subject matter mastery and professional development	Ability to apply expertise contextually and ethically in accordance with learners' needs	Pedagogical decisions that are more flexible, reflective, and responsive
Professional responsiveness	Not always positioned as a distinct dimension	Ability to gauge needs, provide a response, evaluate that response, and adjust actions	Formation of a continuous cycle of learning adaptation

Table 2 illustrates that the "Ethics of Care" expands the definition of teacher professionalism from a mere mastery of competencies to a form of professionalism that is responsive to students' needs. While the four standard teacher competencies remain the foundation of professionalism, their enactment is enhanced by relational sensitivity, ethical responsibility, and the ability to tailor actions to students' specific circumstances. In this framework, responsiveness serves as the link between professional competence and adaptive pedagogy, enabling teachers not only to design and implement instruction but also to continuously assess needs, respond, evaluate, and adjust their teaching.

This reconstruction demonstrates that teacher professionalism is not static but evolves through interactions with students. Teachers must continuously gather insights from the learning process to determine whether the strategies and support provided align with their students' needs (Demartini et al., 2024). Professionalism is evidenced not only by a teacher's ability to execute instructional tasks but also by their willingness to engage in reflection and make adjustments when students' circumstances call for a different approach.

In love-based adaptive pedagogy, responsiveness emerges as a crucial aspect of teacher professionalism. Teachers are expected to integrate professional knowledge,

skills, and attitudes with genuine care for their students. This renders teacher competence more contextual, as every pedagogical decision takes into account the students' specific circumstances and developmental needs. The 'Ethics of Care' provides a foundation for a form of teacher professionalism that is not merely technically competent but also reflective, relational, adaptive, and oriented toward meeting students' needs.

4. Constructing a Love based Adaptive Pedagogy Model

This study constructs a Love-Based Adaptive Pedagogy Model that positions caring as the ethical foundation for responding to learner diversity. The model posits that instructional adaptation involves not only the selection of methods, media, strategies, or assessments but also the teacher's ability to understand the characteristics, needs, experiences, and circumstances of the learners. Instructional adaptation must be grounded in caring to ensure that pedagogical decisions remain attentive to the human dimension of the learners (Darling-Hammond et al., 2024).

Caring serves as the link between ethical values and pedagogical action. This caring is enacted through Noddings' four practices: modeling, dialogue, practice, and confirmation. Modeling involves the teacher setting an example; dialogue enables the teacher to understand learners' needs and experiences; practice provides opportunities to experience and enact caring; and confirmation helps the teacher recognize and reinforce learners' potential and development. These four practices constitute the mechanism through which the value of love is translated into instructional action.

Teacher professionalism encompasses the capacity to incorporate "caring" into instructional practice (Berbegal Vázquez et al., 2024). Pedagogical, personal, social, and professional competencies are not viewed as aspects separate from caring; rather, they are directed toward appropriately responding to learners' needs. Teachers leverage their understanding of their students to tailor strategies, materials, activities, interactions, assessments, and learning support. Caring serves as the ethical orientation guiding the application of a teacher's professional competencies.

This relationship fosters an adaptive pedagogy that prioritizes not only instructional effectiveness but also a humane and meaningful learning experience. Teachers do not merely select a method; they consider who their students are, what they need, and what form of support is appropriate. Love is understood not merely as an emotion, but as an ethical orientation manifested through attentiveness, dialogue, acceptance, appreciation, role modeling, and responsiveness to learners' needs.

The constructed model illustrates the conceptual relationships among the Ethics of Care, caring, and teacher professionalism—elements that give rise to adaptive pedagogy and meaningful learning experiences. The Ethics of Care serves as the ethical foundation, caring acts as the relational mechanism, teacher professionalism provides the capacity for action, and adaptive pedagogy constitutes the concrete form of response to learners' needs. This model broadens the definition of teacher professionalism: a professional teacher is not only capable of mastering subject matter and instructional strategies but is also able to recognize, understand, and respond to learners as individuals with unique qualities and diverse needs.

5. Implications of Love-Based Adaptive Pedagogy for the Development of Teacher Professionalism

The construct of Love-Based Adaptive Pedagogy has implications for the development of teacher professionalism. Professionalism is understood not merely through the mastery of pedagogical, personal, social, and professional competencies, but also through the ability to build relationships that are caring and responsive to learners' needs (Berbegal Vázquez et al., 2024). Teachers are expected not only to plan, implement,

and evaluate instruction but also to understand learner characteristics, establish meaningful communication, and adapt instruction to the diversity of their circumstances. The Ethics of Care expands the meaning of professionalism from a technical aspect to a relational and ethical dimension.

Love-based adaptive pedagogy requires teachers to develop the ability to recognize differences in students' abilities, characteristics, experiences, interests, and learning needs (Uzorka et al., 2024). This understanding serves as the foundation for determining appropriate strategies, activities, learning resources, interactions, and assessments. Therefore, teacher professional development should not be limited to training in instructional methods or technology; it must also strengthen skills in observation, listening, communication, and decision-making based on students' actual needs. These skills must be accompanied by reflective practice, enabling teachers to evaluate the suitability of their pedagogical actions and make continuous adjustments.

At the institutional level, teacher professional development needs to integrate relational and ethical dimensions into training, supervision, and evaluation. Professional development can encompass caring pedagogy, empathetic communication, responsive learning, professional reflection, diversity management, and the creation of safe, inclusive learning environments. Supervision should not focus solely on the completeness of instructional materials and lesson delivery; it must also consider how teachers understand their students and translate that understanding into pedagogical decisions. Accordingly, indicators of professionalism can be broadened to include the ability to listen, respond to diverse needs, foster dialogic communication, provide reinforcement, create a sense of safety, and adapt instruction.

Love-based adaptive pedagogy fosters a form of teacher professionalism that integrates competence with care. While competence remains the foundation of professionalism, its application requires sensitivity toward students as individuals with diverse needs and potential. A professional teacher not only understands the content and methods of instruction but also comprehends the nature of the learners and how to respond appropriately (Krist, 2024). The 'Ethics of Care' expands teacher professionalism into a practice that is pedagogical, reflective, relational, adaptive, and centered on the humanity of the students.

CONCLUSION

The results of this study indicate that Nel Noddings' Ethics of Care can serve as an ethical foundation for the development of a love-based adaptive pedagogy. Caring positions attention, dialogue, acceptance, and responsiveness to learners' needs as essential components of teacher professionalism. Noddings' four caring practices, are modeling, dialogue, practice, and confirmation, can be implemented as mechanisms to help teachers understand and respond to learner diversity within the learning process.

This study constructs a Love-Based Adaptive Pedagogy that links the Ethics of Care, caring, teacher professionalism, and instructional adaptation. The model asserts that a professional teacher not only masters pedagogical, personal, social, and professional competencies but is also capable of building relationships that are responsive to learners' needs. Teacher professional development needs to strengthen the dimensions of caring, reflection, communication, and responsiveness to make learning more humane, adaptive, and meaningful.

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