

## Teachers' Experiences in Building Responsive Pedagogical Interactions toward Students' Psychological Well-Being Challenges

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### ABSTRACT

The increasing psychological well-being challenges faced by students at the junior secondary education level, particularly in urban school contexts, require teachers to move beyond an exclusive focus on academic achievement and to develop responsive pedagogical interactions that address students' emotional needs. This study aims to explore teachers' experiences in building responsive pedagogical interactions toward students' psychological well-being challenges and to identify the strategies, dynamics, and constraints encountered in everyday classroom practice. A qualitative approach with an interpretative phenomenological design was employed. Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews and classroom observations involving eight public junior secondary school teachers in Jakarta, Indonesia. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify patterns of meaning and key themes emerging from teachers' lived experiences. The findings reveal that teachers develop responsive pedagogical interactions through enhanced emotional awareness, empathetic communication, instructional flexibility, and the creation of psychologically safe classroom environments.

## INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the issue of student psychological well-being has become a major concern in the global education discourse, along with the increasing prevalence of stress, anxiety, and emotional disturbances among school-age learners. Various international studies show that academic pressure, social dynamics, and changes in the learning environment contribute significantly to the decline in students' psychological well-being, especially at the junior secondary education level, which is a critical developmental transition phase (Bosacki et al., 2023). This condition challenges the traditional educational paradigm that is oriented solely on cognitive achievement, and demands a pedagogical approach that is more responsive to the emotional needs of students. Therefore, the role of teachers as a key actor in building pedagogical interactions that support students' psychological well-being is becoming increasingly strategic in the context of contemporary education (Wu & Dong, 2024).

In an urban context, including in Indonesia, the challenges of students' psychological well-being are increasingly complex due to the density of the school population, heterogeneity of social backgrounds, and high academic demands. Research shows that students in urban schools are more susceptible to experiencing emotional exhaustion and psychosocial distress that impact learning engagement and social relationships in the classroom (Lee et al., 2023). In Indonesia, the implementation of the Independent Curriculum normatively emphasizes the importance of student-centered and well-being-oriented learning, but pedagogical practices at the school level still face various structural and cultural limitations (Fitrianto, 2025). This emphasizes the urgency of empirical studies that examine how teachers actually respond to the challenges of students' psychological well-being in daily learning practices.

Theoretically, responsive pedagogy is based on humanistic and social-emotional educational approaches that emphasize the teacher-student relationship as the foundation of meaningful learning. Responsive pedagogical interaction is characterized by the teacher's sensitivity to students' emotional states, the flexibility of learning strategies, and the creation of a psychologically safe classroom climate (Garcia-Peinado, 2023). Recent studies have shown that the quality of pedagogical interaction has a positive correlation with students' psychological well-being and learning engagement, even more significant than formal curriculum factors (Wong et al., 2024). Thus, teachers' subjective experience in building responsive pedagogical interactions becomes an important source of knowledge to understand how pedagogy contributes to student well-being in the classroom.

Although research on student psychological well-being and social-emotional pedagogy has developed rapidly, most studies are still dominated by quantitative approaches that focus on measuring student outcomes. Research that explicitly explores teachers' lived experiences in building responsive pedagogical interactions is still relatively limited, especially in the context of junior secondary education (Lapidot-Lefler, 2025). In addition, many studies position teachers as policy implementers, rather than as reflective subjects who have pedagogical agency in responding to students' psychological challenges

(Mouta et al., 2025). This gap shows the need for an in-depth qualitative approach to understand pedagogical dynamics from the teacher's perspective.

In the Indonesian context, the study of students' psychological well-being generally focuses on counseling guidance services or individual student factors, while the dimension of pedagogical interaction of teachers in regular learning still receives less empirical attention. National studies show that teachers often face a dilemma between administrative demands and students' emotional needs, but these experiences are rarely raised as the main focus of research (Rachmawati & Fathurahman, 2025). In addition, the implementation of the Independent Curriculum has not been widely studied from the perspective of teachers' experiences in building pedagogical interactions that support students' well-being concretely in the classroom. This condition emphasizes the existence of research gaps that need to be filled through a study based on teacher experience in junior high school.

Based on the background and gaps of the research, this study aims to explore in depth the experience of teachers in building pedagogical interactions that are responsive to the challenges of students' psychological well-being in junior high school. In particular, this study focuses on the identification of pedagogical strategies used by teachers, the dynamics of teacher-student interactions formed, and the structural and professional barriers faced in daily learning practices. Using an interpretive phenomenological approach, this study seeks to capture the meaning of teachers' experiences contextually and reflectively (Derakhshan et al., 2026). This goal is expected to provide a comprehensive understanding of the role of responsive pedagogy in supporting students' psychological well-being.

Theoretically, this research contributes to the development of responsive pedagogical studies by enriching the understanding of the relationship between pedagogical interaction and student psychological well-being from the teacher's perspective. The findings of this study also expand the discourse of educational psychology by placing the teacher's experience as the main source of knowledge in the development of well-being-oriented pedagogical practices (Pozo-Rico et al., 2023). Practically, the results of this research are expected to be the basis for the development of teacher training that emphasizes social-emotional competence and become a reference for the formulation of school policies that are more sensitive to the psychological well-being of students. Thus, this research has strategic relevance for improving the quality of learning practices and the psychological climate of junior high schools in Indonesia.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Students' Psychological Well-Being in the Context of Secondary Education*

The psychological well-being of students has become a major focus in contemporary education research, especially at the secondary education level marked by significant changes in emotional, social, and cognitive development. Students' psychological well-being includes emotional, social, and psychological dimensions that affect their ability to function adaptively in a school environment (Shengyao et al., 2024). International studies show that junior high school students face a higher risk of academic stress, social anxiety, and decreased

motivation to learn than other levels of education (Han et al., 2024). This condition is exacerbated in the context of urban schools characterized by class density and high academic performance demands, thus demanding serious attention from the education system (Han et al., 2024).

### ***Challenges of Students' Psychological Well-Being in Urban School Environments***

The urban school environment presents its own complexities for the psychological well-being of students, ranging from competitive pressures, diversity of social backgrounds, to limited personal relationships between teachers and students. Cross-country research shows that students in urban schools are more prone to experiencing emotional exhaustion and feelings of alienation in learning (Makhmetov et al., 2026). Structural factors such as large class sizes and institutional focus on academic achievement often reduce the space for student emotional support. In the context of developing countries, including Indonesia, these challenges are further strengthened by the limited school resources and the lack of optimal integration of well-being in pedagogical practices (Savandha et al., 2024).

### ***Concepts and Principles of Responsive Pedagogy***

Responsive pedagogy develops from the tradition of humanistic education and relational pedagogy that places teacher-student interaction at the core of the learning process. This approach emphasizes the teacher's ability to recognize students' emotional signals, respond empathically, and adapt learning strategies to students' psychological needs (Aldrup et al., 2022). Empirical studies show that responsive pedagogy contributes positively to student learning engagement, emotion regulation, and psychological well-being (Sun et al., 2024). Thus, responsive pedagogy serves not only as an instructional strategy, but also as a psychological protection mechanism for students in the school environment.

### ***Pedagogical Interaction of Teachers and Their Relationship with Students' Well-Being***

Teachers' pedagogical interactions play a central role in shaping the psychological climate of the classroom that supports student well-being. Warm, supportive, and trust-based teacher-student relationships have been shown to correlate with lower stress levels and higher psychological security in students (Kidd, 2022). Recent research confirms that the quality of pedagogical interaction often determines student well-being more than structural factors such as curriculum or school facilities (Konstantinidis, 2024). Therefore, a deep understanding of how teachers build and interpret responsive pedagogical interactions is crucial in the development of well-being-oriented educational practices.

### ***Teachers' Experience in Responding to Students' Psychological Challenges***

Teachers' experiences in dealing with the challenges of students' psychological well-being are complex and multidimensional, involving professional, emotional, and institutional aspects. Qualitative studies show that

teachers often encounter a dilemma between the academic demands, administrative burden, and emotional needs of diverse students (Nwoko et al., 2024). In addition, the limitations of formal training related to students' mental health and well-being make many teachers rely on intuition and personal experience in responding to students' psychological conditions (Ricita et al., 2025). This emphasizes the importance of teacher experience-based research to understand contextually responsive pedagogical practices.

### *Phenomenological Approach in the Study of Teacher Experience*

The interpretive phenomenological approach is widely used in educational research to explore the meaning of the subjective experiences of educational actors, including teachers. This approach allows researchers to understand how teachers interpret their experiences in building pedagogical interactions and responding to students' psychological challenges (Tripon et al., 2023). Interpretive phenomenology emphasizes deep reflection on lived experiences, making it relevant to uncover emotional and pedagogical dynamics that are often unreachable by quantitative approaches. Therefore, this approach is considered appropriate to examine responsive pedagogical practices in the context of junior high schools.

### *The Context of Indonesia and the Relevance of the Independent Curriculum*

In the Indonesian context, the Independent Curriculum conceptually prioritizes student-centered learning and pays attention to psychological well-being as part of the Pancasila student profile. However, research shows that there is a gap between policy and practice, especially in the implementation of responsive pedagogy in the classroom (Williams III et al., 2023). Teachers still face limited institutional support and practical guidance to integrate students' well-being into daily learning. Therefore, empirical studies that raise the experience of teachers in junior high schools are important to bridge these gaps and strengthen the implementation of education policies oriented towards student welfare.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### *Research Type and Design*

This study uses a qualitative approach with an interpretive phenomenological design to deeply understand the teacher's experience in building pedagogical interactions that are responsive to the challenges of students' psychological well-being. This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to explore the meaning of teachers' subjective experiences formed through direct interaction with students in the context of daily learning. The research focus is directed at how teachers interpret students' emotional needs, make pedagogical decisions, and adapt learning practices in dynamic classroom situations. Relevant interpretive phenomenology is used in educational research that emphasizes the relational and reflective dimensions of teaching practice (Burns et al., 2022).

### ***Research Context and Location***

The research was carried out in public junior high schools in the DKI Jakarta area that have implemented the Independent Curriculum. The urban school context was chosen because it has the characteristics of high academic pressure, diverse student backgrounds, and complexity of social and emotional dynamics in the classroom. The implementation of the Independent Curriculum requires teachers to develop student-centered learning and pay attention to aspects of psychological well-being. Therefore, this context is considered relevant to examine the practice of pedagogical interaction that is responsive to students' emotional needs.

### ***Population and Sampling Techniques***

The research population is public junior high school teachers in DKI Jakarta who actively teach and interact directly with students. The sampling technique uses purposive sampling to select participants who have experience relevant to the focus of the research. Participant criteria include a minimum of three years of teaching experience, active involvement in regular classroom learning, as well as experience dealing with students with psychological well-being challenges such as academic stress, anxiety, or difficulty regulating emotions. This technique is used to obtain rich and in-depth data according to qualitative research objectives (Chand, 2025).

### ***Research Informant***

This study involved eight teachers from two public junior high schools in DKI Jakarta. From each school, four teachers with different subject backgrounds were selected to capture the variety of pedagogical interaction experiences in various learning situations. The selection of more than one school was made to enrich the research context and increase the transferability of the findings. The number of informants is determined based on the principle of data sufficiency, where data collection is stopped when the information obtained has been repeated and does not produce a new theme (Udayanga, 2025).

### ***Data Collection Techniques and Instruments***

Data collection was carried out through semi-structured in-depth interviews and non-participant classroom observations. Interviews were used to explore teachers' experiences, perceptions, and reflections related to the pedagogical interactions they built in facing the challenges of students' psychological well-being. Classroom observation is carried out to see firsthand the practice of teacher-student interaction in the context of real learning. The interview and observation guidelines are structured based on the concepts of responsive pedagogy and a psychologically safe classroom climate that have been widely used in educational research (Harjunmaa et al., 2023).

### ***Research Implementation Procedure***

The research procedure begins with the management of permits to the school and the submission of research information to prospective participants. After the participant's consent was obtained, the researcher conducted class

observations and interviews in stages according to the agreed schedule. All interviews are recorded and transcribed verbatim to maintain data accuracy. The identity of the participants is kept confidential through the use of codes. This procedure is carried out to ensure that research runs in accordance with the ethical principles of qualitative research and provides a sense of security for participants (Drolet et al., 2023).

### ***Data Analysis Techniques***

Data analysis is carried out using reflective thematic analysis which includes the stages of data repetition, initial coding, code grouping, and main theme development. This analysis was chosen because it was able to systematically integrate interview and observation data and capture patterns of meaning across participants. The analysis process is assisted by NVivo software to facilitate data management and theme search. The validity of the data is maintained through method triangulation, researcher reflexivity, and peer discussion to strengthen the credibility and consistency of findings (Meydan & Akkaş, 2024).

## **RESEARCH RESULT**

### ***Teachers' Emotional Awareness as the Foundation of Pedagogical Response***

The results of the study show that teachers' emotional awareness is the main foundation in building pedagogical interactions that are responsive to students' psychological well-being. Emotional awareness is interpreted as the ability of teachers to recognize changes in students' psychological conditions through facial expressions, body language, participation levels, and communication patterns during learning. Teachers realize that appropriate pedagogical responses cannot be taken if the emotional state of students is ignored from the start. In teachers' experiences, signs such as students suddenly being silent, lowered, reluctant to interact, or showing behavior changes are early signals of psychological distress that require a different approach from routine learning strategies.

This emotional awareness is reflected in the way the teacher explains the initial process of reading the classroom situation before taking pedagogical action. One teacher said that he always starts learning by observing small changes in students: *"I always start by observing first, because small changes often have big meanings. If the child is usually active and then suddenly stops and looks down, I immediately realize that there is pressure and I don't immediately reprimand"* (GA1, November 12, 2025). Another teacher emphasized the importance of reading the overall classroom atmosphere before getting into the learning material: *"I use the first five minutes to read the classroom atmosphere. If the children's faces look tense, I know that day I can't immediately enter the target material and I start with a light question first"* (GA3, November 15, 2025).

From the second school, a teacher explained that emotional awareness demands control of the teacher's personal reactions: *"I learned to change my spontaneous responses. If there is a child who suddenly denies or does not want to work, now I am not immediately angry but ask in my heart, why is this child doing this"* (GB2, November 18, 2025). Another teacher emphasized that emotional awareness

serves to prevent students' psychological pressure from becoming heavier: *"If the teacher is not sensitive, the impact can be long-lasting. Children who are depressed can be cornered and the teacher's emotional awareness is like a brake so that the classroom atmosphere does not pressure the child"* (GB4, November 21, 2025).

The results of class observation show that emotional awareness does not stop at the observation stage, but is translated into concrete pedagogical actions. Teachers appear to lower the intensity of instruction when they see students restless, change their body position to align when approaching students, and use softer tones of voice when interacting. The interview findings reinforce that teachers consciously hold off on evaluative comments at the beginning of the interaction and choose a more supportive approach. The integration of interview and observation data shows that emotional awareness is an initial mechanism that leads teachers to adaptive and non-judgmental pedagogical responses.

Thus, the teacher's emotional awareness plays a role as an important foundation that determines the quality of pedagogical responses and the direction of learning relationships throughout the learning process.

### ***Empathetic Communication as a Relational Strategy and Emotion Regulation***

The findings of the study show that empathic communication is the main strategy of teachers in responding to the challenges of students' psychological well-being. Empathic communication is understood as the ability of teachers to convey messages in calming language, provide space for students to be heard, and acknowledge students' emotional experiences without stigma. Teachers consider that communication that is blameful or too stressful actually strengthens students' anxiety and hinders learning engagement. Therefore, empathic communication is practiced not only in personal conversations, but also in the provision of instruction, reprimand, and academic feedback.

The teacher explained that empathic communication starts from the choice of words and tone of voice that are not threatening. One teacher shared a communication principle she applied in class: *"I limit the use of judgmental words. I prefer to say I see you are heavy and we try to take it slowly so that the child does not feel blamed"* (GA2, November 13, 2025). Another teacher emphasized the importance of listening as the most basic form of empathy: *"I deliberately delay giving solutions. Sometimes the child just needs to be heard and I let him tell the story first before I ask him what he needs"* (GA4, November 16, 2025).

From the second school, a teacher attributed empathic communication to validation of students' emotions: *"I often tell children that their feelings are normal and that they are not alone. After that, we will talk about the learning steps"* (GB1, November 19, 2025). Another teacher emphasized that empathy functions to open a space of relationships that allow learning to continue: *"If relationships are closed, learning does not enter. If the teacher immediately blame, the child immediately closes himself and empathy makes the child still want to attend"* (GB3, November 22, 2025).

Classroom observations show that empathic communication appears in everyday practices such as pausing before reprimanding, using language that focuses on behavior rather than personal labels, and providing feedback in a supportive tone. Teachers also often use open-ended questions to help students

express difficulties they are facing. In-depth interviews show that teachers view empathic communication as a pedagogical strategy to lower emotional tension so that students can re-engage in cognitive processes.

Thus, empathic communication becomes a relational strategy that bridges emotional support and learning continuity in a psychologically challenging classroom context.

### ***Instructional Flexibility in Response to Students' Psychological Conditions***

The results of the study show that instructional flexibility is an important strategy that teachers use to maintain a balance between academic demands and students' psychological conditions. Instructional flexibility is interpreted as the ability of teachers to adjust learning methods, the tempo of material delivery, and the form of assignments based on the emotional situation of students in the classroom. Teachers assess that a rigid learning approach has the potential to increase students' psychological stress, especially when students are in a state of stress or mental exhaustion. Therefore, teachers consciously make learning adjustments so that students can remain engaged without feeling pressured.

Teachers describe instructional flexibility as pedagogical decisions made based on direct observation of classroom conditions. One teacher said that she changed her learning priorities when she saw signs of emotional fatigue in students: *"I change priorities when children look mentally tired. If I see that they have difficulty focusing, I don't force heavy material and I break it down into small steps"* (GA1, November 14, 2025). Another teacher explained that a variety of learning methods were used to relieve class tension: *"I changed the learning format so that the atmosphere was not tense. If the child looks depressed, I change it from lectures to light discussions or group work"* (GA3, November 17, 2025).

From the second school, a teacher emphasized that flexibility does not mean lowering the standard of learning: *"I keep the target, but I set the rhythm. Not everything has to be finished that day if it makes the child more depressed"* (GB2, November 20, 2025). Another teacher emphasized that flexibility is a form of professional responsibility: *"Being flexible doesn't mean letting go. Flexibility is choosing the most appropriate way so that children continue to learn without feeling suffocated"* (GB4, November 23, 2025).

The results of classroom observations show that instructional flexibility is seen in various practices such as the provision of additional time, the provision of alternative forms of assignments, and the reduction of evaluative pressure in certain situations. Teachers are also seen inserting light activities to lower tension before returning to cognitive tasks. Interview data showed that instructional flexibility often emerged after teachers had built emotional awareness and empathic communication. The integration of interviews and observations reinforces the understanding that instructional flexibility is an adaptive strategy that teachers use to maintain the sustainability of learning.

Thus, instructional flexibility acts as a balancing mechanism that allows teachers to continue to meet learning objectives while protecting students' psychological well-being.

### ***Creation of Classroom Psychological Safety as a Prerequisite for Pedagogical Interaction***

The results show that teachers consistently strive to create psychological safety in the classroom as a key prerequisite for responsive pedagogical interaction. Psychological safety is interpreted as a condition when students feel safe to participate, express opinions, make mistakes, and express feelings without fear of being embarrassed or socially sanctioned. Teachers view that students' psychological distress is often triggered by insecure social relationships, so the management of interactions between students is an important part of pedagogical practice.

The teacher explained that the creation of psychological safety is carried out through the establishment of classroom norms and active protection of students. One teacher conveyed her approach to building classroom norms: *"I build rules that protect the dignity of children. I have always emphasized that in this class there is nothing to laugh at and nothing to be demeaned"* (GA2, November 15, 2025). Another teacher emphasized the importance of consistency in teachers' responses to classroom conflicts: *"Children should know that teachers will protect them. If there is a conflict, I do not allow it and I make sure that no child feels alone"* (GA4, November 18, 2025).

From the second school, a teacher explained her role in managing interactions between students: *"I am quick to intervene if there are comments that are dropping. I direct that their way of speaking is more respectful of friends"* (GB1, November 21, 2025). Another teacher linked psychological safety to students' courage in learning: *"If the classroom is safe, children are more courageous to answer even if they are wrong and they are not afraid of being judged"* (GB3, November 24, 2025).

Classroom observations show that teachers actively enforce respectful communication norms, rebuke mocking behavior directly, and provide reinforcement to students who dare to try. Teachers also avoid shaming students in front of the class and prefer a private approach when violations occur. In-depth interviews show that psychological safety is seen as the foundation of learning, not just an add-on. The integration of observational and interview data shows that the creation of psychological safety is a conscious and continuous practice.

Thus, the psychological safety of the classroom becomes an important condition that allows other pedagogical strategies such as empathy and instructional flexibility to function effectively.

### ***Structural Barriers in the Implementation of Responsive Pedagogy***

The results show that although teachers have a commitment to building responsive pedagogical interactions, they face a variety of structural barriers that limit the consistency of such practices. The main obstacles identified include high administrative burden, limited training related to students' psychological well-being, and lack of policy support at the school level. Teachers consider that administrative demands take up time and energy that should be used to build relationships and provide emotional assistance to students.

Teachers expressed their experiences regarding the structural barriers faced in daily practice. One teacher explained the impact of the administrative

burden on interactions with students: "*Sometimes my energy is spent on administrative matters. The time to actually accompany the child is reduced because there are many reports that must be completed*" (GA1, November 16, 2025). Another teacher highlighted the limitations of professional capacity building: "*We rarely get training that focuses on the psychological well-being of students. Even though such cases often appear in the classroom*" (GA3, November 19, 2025).

From the second school, a teacher criticized the school's policy orientation: "*The school is more demanding of academic results. Support for children's emotional processes is still minimal, so teachers often move alone*" (GB2, November 22, 2025). Another teacher emphasized the importance of systemic support for sustainable responsive practices: "*In the absence of a clear school policy, all efforts become personal and not a shared culture*" (GB4, November 25, 2025).

Classroom observations show that responsive pedagogical practices often depend on individual teacher initiatives and have not been integrated into the school system. In some situations, teachers seem to have to speed up learning due to time constraints even though students are showing emotional need. In-depth interviews show that teachers are aware of the dilemma between the demands of the system and the needs of students. The integration of interview and observation data confirms that structural barriers are a real factor that affects the quality of pedagogical interactions.

Thus, these findings confirm that the success of responsive pedagogy is determined not only by the individual competence of teachers, but also by the structural support and school policies that allow the practice to develop sustainably.

## DISCUSSION

The findings of this study confirm that teachers' emotional awareness is the main foundation in building pedagogical interactions that are responsive to students' psychological well-being. These results are in line with the framework of social-emotional theory in education that places teachers' sensitivity to students' affective conditions as a prerequisite for meaningful learning. Previous research has shown that teachers who are able to recognize and reflect on students' emotional states tend to produce more supportive and adaptive learning relationships (Li & Zhang, 2024). In the context of junior secondary education, the unstable phase of students' emotional development reinforces the urgency of the role of the teacher's emotional awareness. Thus, these findings expand the theoretical understanding that teachers' emotional competence not only impacts the classroom climate, but also shapes the quality of daily pedagogical decisions.

The results of the study also show that empathic communication functions as a relational mechanism that bridges emotional support and learning continuity. These findings support research that emphasizes that teacher empathy contributes significantly to students' psychological security and long-term learning engagement (Tong, 2025). Empathetic communication allows students to interpret mistakes as part of the learning process, not as a threat to self-esteem. This is especially important in the context of urban schools which are often characterized by academic pressure and social competition. Thus, empathic

communication is not only interpersonal, but also has systemic pedagogical implications in supporting students' psychological well-being.

The instructional flexibility found in this study reinforces the view that responsive pedagogy demands sustained contextual adaptation. These results are consistent with research findings showing that teaching flexibility is positively correlated with the regulation of students' emotions and learning motivation (Wang & Jou, 2023). Teachers in this study practice flexibility not as a compromise on academic standards, but as a professional strategy to maintain the sustainability of the learning process. These findings also challenge traditional instructional paradigms that emphasize uniformity of tempo and method. Therefore, instructional flexibility can be understood as a form of pedagogical judgment that is oriented towards the well-being and justice of learning.

The creation of classroom psychological safety that emerged as an important theme in this study is in line with supportive classroom climate theory that emphasizes the importance of a sense of security in learning. Previous studies have shown that a psychologically safe classroom environment increases students' participation, courage to express, and academic resilience (Romanovska & Novak, 2024). The findings of this study confirm that psychological safety is not a naturally occurring condition, but rather the result of deliberate and consistent pedagogical practice. Teachers play an active role in managing interaction norms, preventing social stigma, and protecting vulnerable students. The theoretical contribution of these findings lies in strengthening the position of psychological safety as a core element of responsive pedagogy, rather than simply a supporting factor.

However, this study also found structural barriers that limit the optimal implementation of responsive pedagogy. Administrative burdens, limited training related to students' psychological well-being, and lack of school policy support reflect the tension between the demands of the education system and pedagogical needs in the classroom. These findings are in line with research that reveals that structural stress often erodes teachers' reflective and relational capacities (Garrett, 2025). This condition suggests that responsive pedagogical practices cannot be fully imposed on the individual initiative of teachers. Therefore, a systemic approach is needed that aligns teachers' policies, workload, and professional development.

Although this research makes significant empirical and theoretical contributions, there are some limitations that need to be noted. The study involved a limited number of participants and focused on the context of public junior high schools in urban areas, so generalization of findings needs to be done carefully. In addition, the perspectives of students and school management have not been directly integrated in the analysis. Further research is recommended to use a multi-perspective approach and longitudinal design to capture the dynamics of responsive pedagogy more comprehensively. Thus, the findings of this study are expected to be the starting point for the development of educational policies and practices that are more oriented towards the psychological well-being of students.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

This study concludes that pedagogical interactions that are responsive to the psychological well-being of students at the junior high school level are built through teacher emotional awareness, empathic communication, instructional flexibility, and the creation of classroom psychological safety. Teachers' emotional awareness serves as a foundation that allows teachers to read students' affective needs and make adaptive pedagogical decisions, while empathic communication serves as a relational mechanism that maintains the continuity of learning in situations of academic stress. Instructional flexibility shows that pedagogical responsiveness does not conflict with academic standards, but rather represents a teacher's professional assessment oriented towards the well-being and fairness of learning. In addition, classroom psychological safety proves to be an important prerequisite for student engagement and meaningful learning, built through intentional and consistent pedagogical practice. However, the implementation of responsive pedagogy is still faced with structural obstacles that demand the support of policies and school systems that are more aligned with the needs of student welfare. Overall, the findings of this study confirm the importance of placing teachers' social-emotional competencies and institutional support as strategic elements in the development of pedagogical practices oriented towards the psychological well-being of students.

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