The Role of Teacher Interpersonal Behavior in Enhancing Student Well-being : The Mediating Effect of Self-esteem

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Abstract. This study examines the role of teacher interpersonal behavior in enhancing student well-being, with self-esteem as a mediating factor. Conducted with 395 elementary school students in Yogyakarta, the research utilized the Student Well-Being Scale, Self-Esteem Scale, and Teacher Interpersonal Behavior Scale. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was used to analyze the relationships among variables. Results showed that teacher interpersonal behavior significantly and directly influenced student well-being ($\beta = 0.558$, $p < 0.001$) and indirectly affected it through self-esteem ($\beta = 0.484$, $p < 0.001$). These findings highlight the critical role of positive teacher-student interactions in fostering self-esteem, which in turn enhances overall well-being. The study underscores the need for teacher training programs to develop interpersonal skills that promote both self-esteem and well-being. By addressing this dynamic, the research contributes to educational psychology literature and offers actionable strategies for improving the quality of student-teacher relationships in schools.

Keywords: teacher interpersonal behavior, student well-being, self esteem, mediation.

1 Introduction

Student well-being is a critical issue in education, as it is fundamentally linked to the social, emotional, and academic development of students. High student well-being significantly enhances academic performance and is essential for reducing the risk of mental health issues, such as anxiety and depression [1]. Low student well-being in schools is associated with a number of risks that will impact their development. Low student well-being in schools poses significant risks that can hinder student development. Poor student well-being is linked to behaviors such as smoking, high levels of burnout, limited participation in school activities, and reduced academic performance [2]. Given that schools are key microsystems that directly influence children, they hold a crucial responsibility to foster student well-being. This can be achieved by encouraging positive social interactions among all members of the school community.

Student well-being is a multifaceted issue that extends beyond the direct influence of teachers' behavior. In explaining the definition of well-being, there are two perspectives, namely eudaimonic and hedonistic, which have different emphases. The hedonic perspective explains that well-being is a tendency to obtain pleasure, both mentally and physically[3]. The hedonic model which is widely used to explain well-being consists of three aspects, namely life satisfaction, the presence of dominant positive emotions and the absence/lack of negative emotions[4]. On the other hand, the eudaimonic perspective emphasizes that well-being is not only about happiness, but psychological well-being will be achieved when a person realizes his or her potential and can function optimally [3].

Based on these two approaches, a number of definitions of student well-being are described.. Long [5] explains student well-being using a hedonistic perspective in four model factors, namely: a) positive emotions, b) negative emotions, c) fears related to negative emotions, and d) school satisfaction. Student well-being in school as a subjective evaluation of students about how they emotionally experience their lives, especially in the school context[6]. Hascher [7]specifically focuses the definition of student well-being in school not only on the balance between positive and negative affect but also on the cognitive aspects of well-being. Student well-being is an emotional experience characterized by predominantly positive feelings and thoughts about school, people in school and the school context itself compared to negative feelings and thoughts about school life. Student well-being is also associated with the affective experiences that students feel towards their school environment, as well as personal, interpersonal and contextual factors[8].

Determinants of student well-being in school can be divided into internal and external factors. Internal factors include self-esteem [9], gratitude[10] , and academic performance. External factors include family support[11], peer support [9], school climate, and teacher interpersonal behavior [12]. In the school, teachers have a role to support student learning. Research shows that teaching conducted by teachers can predict student well-being [10]. Specific teacher behaviour and pedagogical approach include need-supportive teachers and positive teacher-student relationship [13]. The interpersonal behavior of teachers plays a crucial role in shaping a school environment that nurtures student well-being. Teachers who demonstrate positive interpersonal behaviors—such as offering emotional support, paying focused attention, and acknowledging students' potential—help establish a supportive and secure learning atmosphere [14]. Such behaviors contribute to a constructive classroom environment and have a significant impact on student well-being. Studies indicate that when teachers are supportive, students experience increased confidence and a greater sense of comfort at school, which are essential for their psychological well-being [15].

One critical factor that contributes to this well-being is students' self-esteem, which refers to their perception of their value and competence[16]. Students with high self-esteem possess a greater capacity to tackle challenges, maintain a positive outlook, and exhibit enhanced mental resilience. Research indicates that positive interpersonal behaviors from teachers can elevate students' self-esteem, creating an indirect impact on their overall well-being [14].Yet, the role of self-esteem as a mediator between teacher interpersonal behavior and student well-being remains largely underexplored.

Despite many studies highlighting the connection between teachers' interpersonal conduct and student well-being, as well as the significant influence of self-esteem, there is a notable lack of research specifically examining self-esteem's mediating role in this dynamic. Most existing

studies focus solely on the direct effects of teacher behavior, neglecting the internal psychological factors like self-esteem that could offer a deeper understanding of how educator interactions affect student well-being. This study aims to address the critical research gap regarding self-esteem's mediation in the relationship between teacher behavior and student well-being.

By investigating the mediating role of self-esteem in the relationship between teacher interpersonal behavior and student well-being, this study provides evidence-based insights that can guide the development of teacher training programs and educational policies. Such interventions are essential to align educational system with global best practices, ensuring that the holistic needs of students are met.

2.Method

2.1 Population and Sampling

Participants. Participants in this study included 395 students from grades 3 to 5 attending public elementary schools in Yogyakarta, selected using the multistage cluster sampling method.

Table 1. Description of participants

Description	Frequency	Percentage
Age (years)		
9	42	10.6
10	169	42.8
11	159	40.3
12	17	4.3
13	6	1.5
14	2	3.5
Sex		
Boys	218	55.2
Girls	177	44.8
Total	**395**	**100**

Instruments. To gather data, three specific scales were utilized: the Student Well-Being Scale, the Self-Esteem Scale, and the Teacher Interpersonal Behavior Scale.The Student Well-Being Scale, developed by Aulia [17], encompasses five dimensions: Engagement, Satisfaction, Relationships, Positive Emotions, and Negative Emotions, comprising a total of 30 items. This scale demonstrated a high alpha reliability coefficient of 0.907. The Teacher Interpersonal Behavior Scale was based on Leary's (1957) definition of positive teacher interpersonal behavior. It consists of four dimensions: Leadership, Helping/Friendly, Understanding, and Giving Responsibility/Freedom to Students, totalling 20 items, with an impressive alpha reliability coefficient of 0.924. Lastly, the Self-Esteem Scale was designed by Hirmaningsih and Minauli[18] and draws from Coopersmith's [19] concept of self-esteem. This scale features four aspects: General Self-Esteem, Social Environment, Family Environment, and School, including a total of 25 items, and it has an alpha reliability coefficient of 0.880.

Procedure. Prior to data collection, the researcher obtained ethical clearance approval from the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Psychology, Universitas Gadjah Mada (UGM). This approval ensured that the research complied with ethical standards, including obtaining informed consent from participants and their guardians. The data collection was conducted directly with students using a paper-and-pencil. Students were assembled in their respective classrooms, where they were provided with clear instructions on how to complete the scale. The researcher, accompanied by trained assistants, supervised the data collection process to ensure clarity and to address any questions from the participants. Participation was entirely voluntary, and students were assured of the confidentiality of their responses.

Data analysis was conducted using mediation analysis within a Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) framework, facilitated by the JASP program. This approach allowed for a comprehensive examination of the relationships between teacher interpersonal behavior, self-esteem, and student well-being, providing valuable insights into how these variables interact within an educational context.

3. Result and Discussion
3.1 Result
Based on mediation analysis using SEM, the following result found :

Table. 2 Mediation Analysis

Pathway	Estimate	Std.Error	z-value	p-value	95% Confidence Interval
Direct Effect Teacher Interpersonal Behavior→ Student Well-being	0.558	0.069	8.138	<0.001	0.423-0.692
Indirect Effect Teacher Interpersonal Behavior→Self Esteem→Student Well-being	0.484	0.053	9.222	<0.001	0.381-0.587
Total Effect Teacher Interpersonal Behavior→ Student Well-being	1.042	0.062	16.873	<0.001	0.921-1.163

Table 2 illustrates the relationship between teacher interpersonal behavior and student well-being, highlighting self-ssteem as a mediating factor. The results indicate a significant direct effect of teacher interpersonal behavior on student well-being, with an estimate of 0.558 (p < 0.001). Additionally, the indirect effect through self-esteem is also significant, with an estimate of 0.484 (p < 0.001). This leads to a total effect of 1.042, suggesting that enhancements in teacher interpersonal behavior are positively correlated with increased student well-being. These findings underscore the importance of fostering positive teacher-student interactions to promote a supportive learning environment.

3.2 Discussion

The mediation analysis results indicate that teacher interpersonal behavior has a significant effect on student well-being, both directly and through the mediation of self-esteem.

Teacher interpersonal behavior directly influences student well-being with a coefficient of 0.558 (p < 0.001; CI: 0.423-0.692). This suggests that positive teacher interpersonal behavior, such as effective communication, emotional support, and friendly interactions, enhances student well-being. These findings are consistent with previous studies, which found that positive teacher behavior creates a safe, supportive, and motivating learning environment for students to grow emotionally and academically [20]; [21].

The Self-Determination Theory [22] also explains this relationship. The proposition put forward by SDT is that certain psychological and social nutrients, when met within an individual and cultural context, will facilitate growth, integrity, and well-being. One of the basic needs described by this theory is the need for relatedness, which is the need to be connected and supported by significant others in one's life. In the school context, teachers and peers are significant parties to meet the need for relatedness for students. When students feel emotionally supported by their teachers, their basic need for relatedness is fulfilled, which contributes to their well-being in school. Teachers who provide verbal support, recognition, and positive feedback help students develop a positive self-evaluation. The findings of this study are in line with previous research that teacher factors play an important role in student well-being [7], [23].

Results show that self-esteem mediates the relationship between teacher interpersonal behavior and student well-being, with a coefficient of 0.484 (p < 0.001; CI: 0.381-0.587). This means that positive teacher behavior can enhance students' self-esteem, which in turn contributes to improved well-being. Previous research highlighted that self-esteem is a key component of psychological well-being [24], [25], [26]. Students who have positive interpersonal relationships with teachers will make the students evaluate themselves more positively. This positive self-evaluation will then make students feel dominant positive emotions in school-related activities, be able to establish good relationships and achieve good achievements in academics and non-academically. High self-esteem allows students to have a positive perception of themselves, enabling them to better cope with academic and social pressures [27].

The total effect of teacher interpersonal behavior on student well-being is 1.042 (p < 0.001; CI: 0.921-1.163). This indicates that the overall influence of teacher Interpersonal behavior is substantial and significant. The combination of direct and indirect effects reinforces the crucial role of teachers in influencing student well-being through positive interpersonal approaches.

Theoretically, these findings align with the principles of positive psychology, which emphasize the importance of fostering positive relationships in educational settings to improve student well-being [28]. Teachers are not merely conveyors of academic material but also key figures in shaping students' social and emotional environments. Practically, this highlights the need for teacher training programs to develop interpersonal skills that support student well-being. Interventions such as empathic communication training and social-emotional learning approaches can enhance the quality of teacher-student interactions and foster a more supportive school climate.

4. Conclusion

This study highlights the critical role of teacher interpersonal behavior in enhancing student well-being, with self-esteem serving as a key mediator. By fostering positive teacher-student

interactions, schools can create supportive environments that not only enhance students' academic performance but also contribute to their overall mental health. Educational institutions should prioritize professional development for teachers, equipping them with the interpersonal skills needed to nurture student self-esteem. The study sample may have been limited to elementary school students, which reduces the generalizability of the result. Comparative studies accros different educational systems, region and cultural settings are necessary to understand the universality of these findings. Future research should explore additional mediators and contextual factors to provide a more comprehensive understanding of this dynamic.

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