

The Pedagogy of Care in Higher Education: A Phenomenological Study of Classroom Management and Student Health

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Abstract

Contemporary approaches to classroom management in higher education are predominantly framed in terms of behavioral regulation, instructional efficiency, and measurable outcomes, often overlooking the relational and experiential dimensions that shape students' well-being. This study addresses this limitation by examining the pedagogy of care as a lived phenomenon within classroom settings. The aim of the study is to explore how care is experienced by students and how it is constituted through classroom management practices in higher education. Grounded in a phenomenological framework, the study adopts an interpretive qualitative approach to investigate students' lived experiences of care, with data generated through in-depth semi-structured interviews and reflective narratives. A thematic

phenomenological analysis was employed to identify essential structures of meaning emerging from the data. The findings reveal that pedagogical care is experienced as a multidimensional phenomenon characterized by pedagogical presence, relational attunement, embodied comfort and anxiety, and the creation of safe yet vulnerable learning spaces. Care emerges not as a discrete instructional strategy but as an ontological and relational condition that shapes students' sense of belonging, engagement, and well-being. This study contributes to phenomenological scholarship by reconceptualizing classroom management as a lived and relational practice grounded in care, offering a philosophical reorientation of educational practice that emphasizes how meaningful learning is constituted through embodied and intersubjective experiences within the lifeworld of the classroom.

Keywords: Phenomenology; Pedagogy of Care; Classroom Management; Student Well-Being; Lived Experience; Higher Education

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1. Introduction

In contemporary higher education, classroom management is commonly understood as a set of structured strategies designed to regulate student behavior, maintain order, and ensure the efficient delivery of instruction (Emmer & Sabornie, 2015; Evertson & Weinstein, 2006). Within this dominant framework, teaching is frequently reduced to technical competence, and the classroom is treated as a controlled environment governed by rules, procedures, and measurable outcomes. While such approaches contribute to organizational stability, they often neglect the deeper human dimensions of teaching and learning, particularly the relational, emotional, and experiential aspects that shape students' engagement and well-being (Biesta, 2015; Noddings, 2013). As a result, classroom management is predominantly conceptualized in terms of control and compliance rather than as a meaningful interaction between persons situated within a shared educational space.

Recent developments in educational discourse have highlighted the importance of student well-being, mental health, and supportive learning environments (World Health Organization, 2020; Thorburn, 2018). However, much of the existing research approaches these concerns from psychological, behavioral, or institutional perspectives, emphasizing intervention models, policy frameworks, and measurable indicators of student outcomes (Hattie, 2009; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Although these perspectives provide valuable insights, they tend to overlook how care is actually lived and experienced within the classroom. In particular, the concept of

pedagogy of care is often treated as a set of instructional practices or ethical guidelines, rather than as an experiential and relational phenomenon grounded in the everyday realities of students and teachers. This reveals a significant gap in the literature: the absence of a phenomenological understanding of care as it is encountered, perceived, and interpreted within the lived context of higher education.

From a phenomenological standpoint, education is not merely the transmission of knowledge but a mode of being-in-the-world, wherein individuals engage with others, interpret their surroundings, and construct meaning through experience. The classroom, in this sense, is not simply a physical or institutional setting but a lived space characterized by interaction, perception, and embodiment. Drawing on the phenomenological tradition of Edmund Husserl (1970), experience is understood as the primary source of meaning, situated within the lifeworld of individuals. Furthermore, the philosophy of Martin Heidegger (1962) emphasizes care (*Sorge*) as a fundamental structure of human existence, suggesting that all forms of engagement, including teaching, are inherently grounded in relational concern. Complementing this view, Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962) highlights the role of embodiment, asserting that perception and understanding are always mediated through the lived body. Together, these perspectives provide a philosophical foundation for rethinking classroom management as an embodied and relational practice through which care is expressed and experienced.

Despite the relevance of these philosophical insights, limited research has examined how pedagogical care is constituted within the lived experience of students in higher education. In particular, there remains a lack of inquiry into how classroom management practices influence students' sense of well-being, belonging, and emotional safety from a phenomenological perspective. Addressing this gap requires an approach that moves beyond external observation and engages with the subjective dimensions of educational experience, recognizing the classroom as a dynamic field of relational and embodied interaction.

In light of these considerations, the present study seeks to explore the pedagogy of care in higher education through a phenomenological inquiry into classroom management and student well-being. Specifically, the study aims to examine how care is experienced by students within classroom settings, how it is enacted through pedagogical practices, and how it contributes to the formation of a supportive and meaningful learning environment. To guide this inquiry, the following research questions are proposed:

1. How is pedagogical care experienced by students within higher education classrooms?

2. In what ways does classroom management shape students' lived experience of well-being and health?
3. How can care be understood as an embodied and relational phenomenon in the context of teaching and learning?

2. Theoretical Framework

The present study is grounded in a phenomenological understanding of education as a lived, relational, and embodied experience. Rather than conceptualizing classroom management as a set of technical strategies or behavioral interventions, this framework situates it within a broader philosophical discourse that emphasizes meaning-making, human relationality, and the primacy of experience. By drawing on key phenomenological thinkers and the ethics of care tradition, the study reconceptualizes pedagogical practice as an expression of care that unfolds within the lived realities of students and teachers.

2.1. Phenomenology and the Lifeworld of Education

Phenomenology, as established by Edmund Husserl (1970), is fundamentally concerned with the study of experience as it is lived prior to theoretical abstraction. Central to this philosophical orientation is the concept of the *lifeworld* (*Lebenswelt*), which refers to the pre-reflective world of everyday experience in which individuals encounter meaning through perception and consciousness. The lifeworld is not an objective structure external to the individual, but a subjective and intersubjective field in which reality is constituted through lived engagement.

In the context of higher education, the classroom can be understood as a lifeworld—a space where students and teachers interact, interpret, and negotiate meaning through shared experience. Classroom management, therefore, cannot be reduced to observable behaviors or procedural techniques alone; rather, it must be understood in terms of how it is experienced by those who inhabit the classroom. This shift in perspective foregrounds the importance of students' perceptions, emotions, and interpretations, emphasizing that the quality of education is inseparable from the quality of lived experience.

2.2. Care as an Ontological Structure of Being

The concept of care acquires deeper philosophical significance in the work of Martin Heidegger (1962), who introduces *Sorge* (care) as a fundamental structure of human existence. For Heidegger, care is not merely an emotional disposition or moral obligation; rather, it is the

ontological condition that defines how individuals relate to themselves, others, and the world. Human beings are always already “being-in-the-world,” and this mode of existence is inherently characterized by concern, involvement, and relational engagement.

Applied to the educational context, this ontological understanding of care suggests that teaching is not a neutral or purely technical activity but a fundamentally relational practice grounded in concern for the other. Classroom management, from this perspective, is not simply about maintaining order but about organizing the conditions under which meaningful human interaction can occur. The teacher’s presence, attentiveness, and responsiveness are expressions of care that shape the relational atmosphere of the classroom and influence how students experience their own being within that space.

2.3. Embodiment and the Lived Body in Learning

The phenomenological emphasis on embodiment is most prominently articulated in the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962), who argues that the body is the primary site of perception and experience. Rejecting the dualistic separation of mind and body, Merleau-Ponty posits that all understanding is grounded in the lived body (*corps vécu*), through which individuals engage with the world in a direct and immediate manner. Perception is not a detached cognitive process but an embodied activity that integrates sensory, emotional, and motor dimensions.

In the classroom, this perspective highlights that learning is not solely an intellectual endeavor but an embodied experience shaped by physical presence, spatial orientation, and affective states. Students experience the classroom through feelings of comfort or discomfort, inclusion or exclusion, safety or anxiety. These embodied experiences influence not only their engagement with academic content but also their overall sense of well-being. Consequently, pedagogical care involves attending to the lived body of the student, recognizing that emotional and physical experiences are integral to the learning process.

2.4. The Ethics of Care in Pedagogical Practice

The ethical dimension of care in education is further developed in the work of Nel Noddings (2013), who emphasizes the centrality of caring relationships in teaching and learning. Noddings conceptualizes care as a relational practice that involves attentiveness, receptivity, and responsiveness to the needs of others. Within this framework, the teacher is not merely a transmitter of knowledge but a “one-caring” who engages with students as individuals deserving of recognition and support.

In educational settings, the ethics of care shifts the focus from standardized instruction to relational engagement, where the quality of interaction between teacher and student becomes central to the learning experience. Classroom management, when informed by care ethics, moves away from punitive or authoritarian models and toward practices that foster trust, respect, and mutual understanding. This approach aligns with the phenomenological emphasis on lived experience, as it prioritizes how students feel, perceive, and interpret their interactions within the classroom.

2.5. Integrative Perspective: Care as Lived Pedagogical Experience

Bringing together these philosophical perspectives, the pedagogy of care can be understood as a lived pedagogical experience that is simultaneously relational, embodied, and meaning-oriented. Phenomenology provides the methodological and conceptual tools to examine how care is experienced within the classroom, while the ethics of care offers a normative framework for understanding the importance of relational engagement in education. Together, these approaches enable a reconceptualization of classroom management as a practice that is not merely functional but deeply human.

Within this integrative framework, the classroom emerges as a dynamic space in which care is enacted through presence, interaction, and embodied experience. The teacher's role is not limited to maintaining order or delivering content but extends to cultivating an environment in which students feel seen, valued, and supported. In this sense, pedagogical care becomes central to the formation of meaningful educational experiences and the promotion of student well-being in higher education.

3. Literature Review

The discourse on classroom management, student well-being, and care in education has evolved significantly over the past decades, reflecting shifting priorities in educational theory and practice. While traditional approaches have emphasized control, discipline, and instructional efficiency, contemporary perspectives increasingly recognize the importance of relational and affective dimensions in shaping meaningful learning experiences. Despite these developments, there remains a need to critically examine how these constructs are conceptualized and, more importantly, how they are experienced within the lived reality of the classroom.

3.1. Classroom Management: From Control to Relational Practice

Early research on classroom management predominantly framed it as a system of strategies designed to regulate student behavior and maintain order within the learning environment (Evertson & Weinstein, 2006; Emmer & Sabornie, 2015). These models often emphasized teacher authority, rule enforcement, and the prevention of disruptive behavior, reflecting a behaviorist orientation that prioritized observable outcomes. While such approaches have been effective in establishing structured learning environments, they have been critiqued for their limited attention to the relational and emotional dimensions of teaching (Biesta, 2015).

More recent scholarship has begun to reconceptualize classroom management as a relational practice that involves fostering positive interactions between teachers and students. This shift acknowledges that effective classroom environments are not solely determined by control mechanisms but by the quality of relationships and the extent to which students feel supported and engaged (Pianta, Hamre, & Allen, 2012). In this context, classroom management is increasingly viewed as a dynamic process that integrates instructional, emotional, and social elements. However, while these perspectives highlight the importance of relationality, they often remain grounded in empirical and psychological frameworks, leaving unexplored the deeper experiential meanings associated with these interactions.

3.2. Student Well-Being in Higher Education

The growing emphasis on student well-being reflects broader concerns about mental health, academic stress, and the holistic development of learners in higher education. Research has shown that students' well-being is closely linked to their academic performance, engagement, and overall satisfaction with the educational experience (Hattie, 2009; World Health Organization, 2020). Studies have also highlighted the role of supportive learning environments in promoting psychological safety, resilience, and a sense of belonging among students (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009).

Despite the increasing attention to well-being, much of the literature approaches it from a psychological or health-oriented perspective, focusing on measurable indicators such as stress levels, emotional regulation, and coping mechanisms. While these approaches provide valuable insights, they tend to conceptualize well-being as an individual attribute rather than as an experience shaped by relational and environmental contexts. Consequently, there is limited understanding of how well-being is lived and experienced by students within the classroom, particularly in relation to everyday pedagogical practices.

3.3. Pedagogy of Care and Relational Teaching

The concept of care in education has been widely discussed within the framework of relational pedagogy, particularly in the work of Nel Noddings (2013), who emphasizes the importance of caring relationships in fostering meaningful learning. According to Noddings, care is not merely an ethical principle but a relational practice that involves attentiveness, responsiveness, and mutual recognition between teacher and student. This perspective has influenced a range of studies that examine how caring interactions contribute to student engagement, motivation, and emotional well-being.

Contemporary research on care in education has expanded to include concepts such as culturally responsive teaching, inclusive pedagogy, and student-centered learning, all of which emphasize the importance of recognizing students' diverse needs and experiences. These approaches highlight the role of empathy, respect, and responsiveness in creating supportive learning environments. However, similar to the broader literature on classroom management and well-being, these studies often conceptualize care in terms of observable practices or instructional strategies, rather than as a lived and embodied experience.

3.4. Emerging Debates: Beyond Instrumental and Psychological Approaches

A key debate in the literature concerns the tendency to frame educational constructs such as classroom management, well-being, and care within instrumental or psychological paradigms. While these approaches offer valuable tools for measurement and intervention, they risk reducing complex human experiences to quantifiable variables and standardized practices. Critics argue that such perspectives fail to capture the richness and depth of lived experience, particularly the ways in which individuals interpret, feel, and give meaning to their interactions within educational settings.

Emerging interdisciplinary perspectives have begun to challenge these limitations by incorporating insights from philosophy, sociology, and critical pedagogy. These approaches emphasize the importance of context, subjectivity, and relationality in understanding educational phenomena. However, despite this growing interest, the application of phenomenological frameworks to the study of classroom management and pedagogical care remains limited. There is a lack of research that explicitly examines how these constructs are experienced from the first-person perspective of students within the classroom.

3.5. Research Gap

Based on the foregoing review, it is evident that while substantial research has been conducted on classroom management, student well-being, and pedagogy of care, these areas have largely been explored through behavioral, psychological, and instructional lenses. Although recent studies have acknowledged the importance of relational and affective dimensions, there remains a significant gap in understanding how these phenomena are experienced as part of students' lived realities.

Specifically, there is a lack of phenomenological inquiry into how pedagogical care is constituted within classroom management practices and how it shapes students' embodied and relational experiences of well-being in higher education. Existing literature tends to conceptualize care as a strategy or outcome rather than as an ontological and experiential condition of teaching and learning. Addressing this gap requires an approach that foregrounds lived experience, attends to the nuances of human interaction, and interprets the classroom as a meaningful experiential space.

In response to this gap, the present study adopts a phenomenological perspective to examine the pedagogy of care as it is lived and experienced within higher education classrooms. By doing so, it seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of how care operates as a fundamental dimension of pedagogical practice and student well-being.

4. Methodology

4.1. Research Design

This research is situated within the interpretive phenomenological tradition, which emphasizes the exploration of lived experience as it is perceived and understood by individuals. Unlike descriptive approaches that aim to bracket interpretation, interpretive phenomenology acknowledges the role of the researcher in co-constructing meaning through engagement with participants' narratives. This design is appropriate for the present study, as it allows for a nuanced examination of how students experience care within classroom settings and how such experiences shape their sense of well-being.

The study focuses on the subjective and intersubjective dimensions of classroom life, recognizing that meaning emerges through interaction and interpretation. In this context, classroom management is not treated as an external variable but as an integral aspect of the lived educational experience, embedded within the relational dynamics between teacher and student.

4.2. Data Selection and Participants

Participants in the study consist of undergraduate students enrolled in higher education courses. A purposive sampling strategy was employed to select participants who have direct and sustained experience of classroom environments, ensuring that they are able to provide rich and meaningful descriptions of pedagogical interactions. The selection criteria include students who are currently enrolled in courses that involve regular face-to-face or synchronous classroom engagement, as these settings provide opportunities for observing and experiencing pedagogical care in practice.

Data were generated through in-depth, semi-structured interviews designed to elicit detailed accounts of students' experiences within the classroom. Participants were encouraged to reflect on moments in which they felt cared for or uncared for, as well as how these experiences influenced their sense of comfort, engagement, and well-being. In addition to interviews, reflective narratives were collected to further capture the nuances of lived experience, allowing participants to articulate their perceptions in a more introspective and descriptive manner.

4.3. Analytical Approach

The analysis follows a thematic phenomenological approach, focusing on the identification and interpretation of essential themes that emerge from participants' descriptions of their experiences. The process begins with a careful reading of transcripts and narratives to gain a holistic understanding of the data. This is followed by the identification of significant statements that relate to the experience of care, classroom interaction, and well-being.

These statements are then organized into meaning units, which are further clustered into thematic structures that capture recurring patterns across participants' accounts. The analysis emphasizes both description and interpretation, seeking not only to present what is experienced but also to uncover the underlying meanings that constitute these experiences. Throughout this process, attention is given to the relational and embodied aspects of experience, in line with the phenomenological framework of the study.

The goal of the analysis is not to produce generalizable findings but to reveal the essence of pedagogical care as it is lived within the classroom, highlighting how it is manifested through teacher presence, interaction, and the creation of a supportive learning environment.

4.4. Validity and Trustworthiness

To ensure the rigor and trustworthiness of the study, several strategies were employed. Credibility was enhanced through prolonged engagement with the data and the use of rich, descriptive accounts that faithfully represent participants' experiences. Member checking was conducted by allowing participants to review and validate the interpretations of their responses, ensuring that the findings accurately reflect their perspectives.

Reflexivity was also maintained throughout the research process, with the researcher continuously reflecting on their own assumptions and positionality in relation to the study. This process helps to minimize bias and supports a more transparent and authentic interpretation of the data. Additionally, peer debriefing was utilized to provide an external perspective on the analytical process, further strengthening the validity of the findings.

5. Analysis and Findings

The analysis of participants' narratives reveals that the pedagogy of care is not experienced as a discrete instructional strategy but as a pervasive quality of the classroom atmosphere, emerging through relational interactions, embodied presence, and affective engagement. Through a phenomenological interpretation of the data, four essential themes were identified: (1) care as pedagogical presence, (2) the classroom as a space of safety and vulnerability, (3) embodied experiences of comfort and anxiety, and (4) relational attunement and recognition.

5.1. Care as Pedagogical Presence

Participants consistently described care as something that is *felt* through the presence of the teacher rather than explicitly stated. This presence is characterized by attentiveness, responsiveness, and a genuine engagement with students as individuals. As one participant noted:

“You can tell when a teacher really cares. It’s not just about teaching the lesson, it’s how they look at you, how they listen. It makes you feel like you matter.”

(P3, Female, 20 years old)

This account suggests that care is experienced as a form of pedagogical presence that transcends instructional delivery. The teacher's attentiveness becomes a mode of engagement through which students perceive recognition and validation. Rather than being an abstract principle, care is encountered in subtle gestures, eye contact, tone of voice, and the willingness to listen.

From a phenomenological perspective, this reflects care as a lived relation, embodied in how the teacher *is present* with students.

5.2. The Classroom as a Space of Safety and Vulnerability

Another prominent theme is the experience of the classroom as a space where students navigate between safety and vulnerability. Participants emphasized that when care is present, the classroom becomes a space where they feel secure in expressing themselves.

“When the teacher is understanding, you don’t feel scared to speak. You feel safe to share your ideas, even if you’re not sure if they’re right.”

(P7, Male, 21 years old)

This narrative highlights the role of pedagogical care in fostering psychological safety. The experience of safety is not merely the absence of threat but the presence of trust.

Conversely, participants also described environments lacking care:

“Sometimes you just stay quiet because you feel like you’ll be judged. It’s not a safe space.”

(P2, Female, 19 years old)

The classroom is thus experienced as a relational space shaped by the presence or absence of care.

5.3. Embodied Experiences of Comfort and Anxiety

Participants’ accounts further reveal that care is deeply embodied, influencing physical and emotional states. Students described how caring environments promote comfort and relaxation, while uncaring environments evoke tension and anxiety.

“When I feel comfortable with the teacher, I’m more relaxed. I can focus better. But when the teacher is strict in a negative way, I feel tense, like I can’t breathe properly.”

(P5, Male, 22 years old)

This illustrates how care is experienced through the body, affecting not only emotions but also physiological states. Learning, therefore, is not purely cognitive but embodied.

Another participant expressed:

“You can feel it in your body when the environment is not okay, it’s like you’re always on edge.”

(P9, Female, 20 years old)

These accounts reinforce that the classroom is an embodied space where care directly influences students’ lived bodily experience.

5.4. Relational Attunement and Recognition

A final theme is relational attunement, the teacher's sensitivity to students' needs. Participants described care as being recognized and understood, even without explicit communication.

"There are times when I'm not okay, and the teacher notices it without me saying anything. That kind of understanding makes a big difference."

(P1, Female, 19 years old)

This reflects the importance of recognition as an intersubjective experience. Care is communicated through responsiveness and attentiveness to subtle cues.

Another participant shared:

"It feels different when the teacher really sees you, not just as a student but as a person."

(P6, Male, 21 years old)

This reinforces that care is relational and grounded in mutual recognition, contributing to students' sense of belonging and well-being.

5.5. Synthesis of Findings

Taken together, these themes illustrate that the pedagogy of care is experienced as a multidimensional phenomenon integrating presence, safety, embodiment, and relationality. Care is not confined to specific actions but is embedded in the overall atmosphere of the classroom.

The findings suggest that classroom management, when grounded in care, is experienced not as control but as a supportive structure that enables meaningful engagement. Through the lens of lived experience, care emerges as a fundamental dimension of teaching that shapes students' emotional, relational, and embodied well-being.

6. Discussion

6.1. Care as Lived Experience and Lifeworld Constitution

The experience of care as described by participants reflects the central phenomenological insight that meaning is constituted within the lifeworld. Drawing on the philosophy of Edmund Husserl (1970), the classroom can be understood as a lived world in which students interpret and make sense of their experiences through interaction and perception. The findings demonstrate that care is not encountered as an abstract concept but as a lived reality embedded in everyday classroom interactions.

Participants' accounts of feeling seen, heard, and acknowledged suggest that care contributes to the constitution of a meaningful educational lifeworld. In this sense, classroom management

practices are not external structures imposed upon students but are experienced as part of the fabric of their lived reality. The presence or absence of care shapes how students perceive the classroom, influencing their sense of belonging, engagement, and well-being. This interpretation aligns with phenomenological perspectives that emphasize the primacy of experience in the formation of meaning (Zahavi, 2019).

6.2. Care as Ontological Structure in Pedagogical Practice

The findings also resonate with the ontological understanding of care articulated by Martin Heidegger (1962), who conceptualizes care (*Sorge*) as a fundamental structure of human existence. The participants' descriptions of teacher presence, attentiveness, and responsiveness reflect care not as a deliberate strategy but as a mode of being that characterizes the teacher's engagement with students.

From this perspective, teaching is inherently a caring practice, insofar as it involves a relational orientation toward others. Classroom management, therefore, cannot be reduced to techniques of control but must be understood as an expression of the teacher's way of being-in-the-world. The organization of the classroom, the tone of interaction, and the responsiveness to students' needs all reflect an underlying structure of care that shapes the educational experience. This view is further supported by phenomenological analyses that position human relations as fundamentally grounded in care and concern (Gallagher & Zahavi, 2021).

6.3. Embodiment and the Lived Experience of Learning

The theme of embodied experience highlights the relevance of the philosophy of Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962), who emphasizes that perception and understanding are always mediated through the lived body. Participants' descriptions of comfort, tension, and anxiety indicate that the experience of care is not purely cognitive but is deeply rooted in bodily sensations and affective states.

This finding reinforces the notion that learning is an embodied process, shaped by the interaction between the individual and their environment. When students feel cared for, their bodies respond with ease and openness, facilitating engagement and concentration. Conversely, the absence of care manifests as bodily tension and discomfort, which can hinder participation and learning. Such experiences underscore the importance of considering embodiment in educational practice, as the quality of the learning environment is directly reflected in the lived body of the student.

6.4. Relationality and the Ethics of Care in Education

The findings further align with the ethics of care framework proposed by Nel Noddings (2013), which emphasizes the importance of relational engagement in teaching. Participants' experiences of being recognized, understood, and supported illustrate the significance of relational attunement as a key component of pedagogical care.

Within this framework, care is understood as a reciprocal and intersubjective process that involves attentiveness and responsiveness to the needs of others. The teacher's ability to perceive and respond to students' emotional and academic needs contributes to the development of trust and a sense of belonging. This relational dimension of care challenges traditional models of classroom management that prioritize authority and compliance, suggesting instead that meaningful learning emerges through authentic human connection.

6.5. Reframing Classroom Management as a Phenomenological Practice

Taken together, the findings suggest that classroom management can be reconceptualized as a phenomenological practice that integrates presence, embodiment, and relationality. Rather than focusing on control and regulation, this perspective emphasizes the importance of creating conditions that support the lived experience of care. The classroom is thus understood as an experiential space in which students and teachers co-construct meaning through interaction.

This reconceptualization challenges dominant paradigms in education that prioritize efficiency and standardization, offering instead a human-centered approach that foregrounds well-being and relational engagement. By situating classroom management within a phenomenological framework, the study highlights the need to consider not only what teachers do, but how their actions are experienced by students. In doing so, it contributes to a deeper understanding of pedagogy as a lived and meaningful practice.

7. Conclusion

This study set out to explore the pedagogy of care in higher education through a phenomenological inquiry into classroom management and student well-being. By focusing on the lived experiences of students, the research revealed that care is not merely an instructional strategy but a fundamental dimension of classroom life, manifested through pedagogical presence, relational engagement, embodied experience, and the creation of safe and supportive learning environments. The findings demonstrate that students experience care through subtle

yet meaningful interactions that shape their sense of belonging, emotional security, and overall well-being within the classroom.

From a theoretical standpoint, the study contributes to the growing discourse on phenomenology and education by reconceptualizing classroom management as a lived and relational practice. Drawing on phenomenological insights, care is understood not as a set of techniques but as an ontological condition that underlies teaching and learning. This perspective challenges dominant paradigms that frame classroom management in terms of control and regulation, offering instead a human-centered approach that foregrounds relationality, embodiment, and meaning-making. In doing so, the study bridges the gap between philosophical theory and educational practice, demonstrating how phenomenological concepts can illuminate the experiential dimensions of pedagogy.

The implications of this study extend to both pedagogical practice and institutional approaches to education. For educators, the findings highlight the importance of cultivating a caring presence in the classroom, characterized by attentiveness, responsiveness, and sensitivity to students' lived experiences. Classroom management practices should therefore move beyond rule enforcement and toward the creation of environments that support emotional and relational well-being. For institutions, the study underscores the need to prioritize care as a central component of educational policy and practice, recognizing its role in promoting student engagement, mental health, and holistic development.

Despite its contributions, the study also points to several avenues for future research. Further investigations may explore the pedagogy of care across different educational contexts, disciplines, and cultural settings to better understand how care is experienced in diverse environments. Additionally, future studies may examine the perspectives of teachers, providing a more comprehensive understanding of how care is enacted and interpreted within the classroom. There is also potential for integrating phenomenological approaches with other qualitative methodologies to deepen the analysis of educational experiences.

In conclusion, the pedagogy of care emerges as a vital and transformative dimension of higher education, shaping not only how students learn but how they experience themselves and others within the classroom. By foregrounding lived experience and relational engagement, this study offers a phenomenological reorientation of classroom management, emphasizing that education, at its core, is a deeply human practice grounded in care.

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