The Effect of Self-compassion on the Anxiety Level of Students During the Final Project Period

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ABSTRACT: This qualitative study investigates the relationship between anxiety and self-compassion among undergraduate and graduate students working on capstone projects in Indonesian higher education. In semi-structured interviews, fifteen participants discussed their experiences, offering subtle insights on coping tactics, outside pressures, and methods for developing self-compassion during the final project phase. Thematic analysis sheds light on the critical function that self-compassion plays as a buffer against anxiety, emphasizing the value of self-kindness, acknowledging our common humanity, and practicing mindfulness in building emotional resilience. The results highlight how crucial it is to support students' academic success and well-being in higher education settings by destigmatizing mental health issues and encouraging the cultivation of self-compassion.

Keywords: Self-Compassion, Anxiety, Final Project, Higher Education, Indonesia

INTRODUCTION

In the context of higher education, finishing final projects represents an important academic benchmark, but it often comes with elevated anxiety, particularly in settings where academic performance is highly prized. Scholarly investigations have explored the relationship between emotional well-being and academic difficulties (Lopez et al., 2023; McGrath & Coles, 2013; Rustam & Putri, 2023). Numerous factors have been investigated, including educators' experiences with students' mental health difficulties, social support, resilience, project scaffolding, and stress management techniques (Hashim et al., 2021; McKendrick-Calder & Choate, 2024). Research emphasizes how important it is to divide final projects into small, digestible pieces in order to lower stress levels and improve the wellbeing of students. It is essential to recognize and manage environmental pressures, workload, and stress factors to help students successfully complete the rigorous final year projects in higher education.

Higher education is highly prized in Indonesia, which can contribute to academic pressure and anxiety, especially around important academic milestones like final projects. Research indicates that anxiety is a problem for Indonesian students in a number of areas relating to their academic career (Alam et al., 2023; Andriani et al., 2023; Ro'ufiyati & Mahbub, 2023). Learning environments, self-confidence, faith in language learning experiences, emotional intelligence, and fear of technical difficulties during online learning are some of the factors that contribute to this anxiety (Harsono & Suprapti, 2024; Paklang, 2022; Suhendro & Agustina, 2022). Furthermore, students' anxiety levels have increased as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic-related shift to distant learning; emotional intelligence is crucial for coping with academic worry. The main goals of efforts to treat anxiety in students should be to improve emotional intelligence, foster a supportive learning environment, and offer assistance in efficiently managing academic stress. Therefore, it is crucial to comprehend the subtleties of anxiety in relation to completing final projects in order to develop efficient treatments and support systems that will lessen student discomfort and improve their academic experience.

(Neff, 2011) characterized self-compassion as a combination of self-kindness, mindfulness, and shared humanity that promotes resilience in difficult circumstances (Krejcová et al., 2023). Studies show that self-compassion is important for relationships, mental health, and coping strategies, among other areas of well-being (Demetriou et al., 2023; Lathren, 2023; Riristuningsia et al., 2017). Research has indicated that elevated levels of self-compassion are linked to enhanced psychological resilience, less anxiety, and more adaptive reactions in the face of adversities such as the COVID-19 pandemic (Alfonsson et al., 2023; Judijanto et al., 2024). Moreover, research has connected self-compassion to improved communication, empathy, conflict resolution, and relationship satisfaction, underscoring its importance in both personal and professional contexts. The Self-Compassion Scale - Short Form (SCS-SF) has been found to be a reliable tool for measuring levels of self-compassion in both clinical and non-clinical samples based on psychometric examination. Though there has been much research on the connection between self-compassion and psychological health, little is known about how precisely self-compassion interacts with anxiety when it comes to final projects, especially in the setting of Indonesian higher education.

In light of this, the purpose of this qualitative study is to investigate how self-compassion affects the anxiety levels of Indonesian higher education students working on their final projects. Through examining the complex relationship between anxiety and self-compassion, this study aims to provide insight into how students deal with the emotional aspects of academic difficulties. This research seeks to uncover the variables that influence the relationship between anxiety and self-compassion through a comprehensive examination of students' lived experiences. The findings may provide guidance for customized treatments that promote students' achievement and well-being.

Self-Compassion and Psychological Well-being

By lowering levels of stress, anxiety, and depression, self-compassion—which includes self-kindness, shared humanity, and mindfulness—plays a critical role in improving psychological well-being (Coutts et al., 2023; Han & Kim, 2023; Henderson et al., 2023). Research has demonstrated that self-compassion-focused therapies have significantly reduced depressive symptoms, anxiety, and stress in both the short and long term (Kirby et al., 2023). Furthermore, it has been determined

that self-concept clarity has a mediating role in the association between self-compassion and measures of mental health, including life satisfaction, perceived stress, and depressive symptomatology (Demetriou et al., 2023). Applying compassion-based skills has been shown to be a successful method for reducing stress, enhancing mental health, and fostering emotional resilience—particularly when dealing with the pressures of the modern workplace. Compassion in education can help Social Emotional Learning (SEL) by improving staff and student wellbeing and creating a healthy classroom atmosphere.

Anxiety in Higher Education

Higher education students' anxiety is a serious issue that affects both their general well-being and academic performance. Academic stress and performance anxiety are influenced by a number of factors, including test anxiety, dread of results, lack of preparation, and past failures (Ali et al., 2023; Miya et al., 2023). Resilience is essential for lowering anxiety, particularly when combined with supportive institutions and a good college experience (Woo et al., 2023). Furthermore, it has been shown that motor activity may be a mitigating factor for stress-related illnesses in students enrolled in higher education; yet, participation in such activities may be impeded by stressors such as armed conflicts and lifestyle changes brought on by societal digitalization (Бишевець & Бишевець, 2023). Resilience and performance in higher education can be fostered in students by comprehending these underlying mechanisms and putting techniques like welcoming testing environments into practice (Imran et al., 2023).

Self-Compassion and Academic Performance

Students who practice self-compassion are better able to withstand the detrimental effects of academic stress (Farisandy et al., 2023; Karakasidou et al., 2023; Nam & Park, 2020; Wang et al., 2023; YANG, 2023). High levels of self-compassion, according to research, promote emotional resilience, adaptive coping mechanisms, and intrinsic motivation to learn. These traits help people overcome obstacles without giving in to self-loathing or rumination. Furthermore, self-compassionate people have higher levels of self-efficacy and are more likely to ask for assistance when they are having difficulties in their academic endeavors. This improves their academic achievement as well as their emotional health. For students, developing self-compassion is crucial since it increases academic performance and perseverance while also fostering emotional resilience.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study is based on the transactional model of stress and coping proposed by (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) and the self-compassion model of (Neff, 2011). Neff's model offers a whole framework for comprehending the behavioral, affective, and cognitive aspects of self-compassion, clarifying its function as a protective buffer against the damaging impacts of stress and misfortune. On the other hand, the transactional model developed by Lazarus and Folkman provides insights into the dynamic interaction between personal assessment processes and coping strategies in the face of stress. This study aims to investigate the complex relationship between self-compassion, anxiety, and coping methods among students completing final projects in higher education in Indonesia by combining several theoretical perspectives.
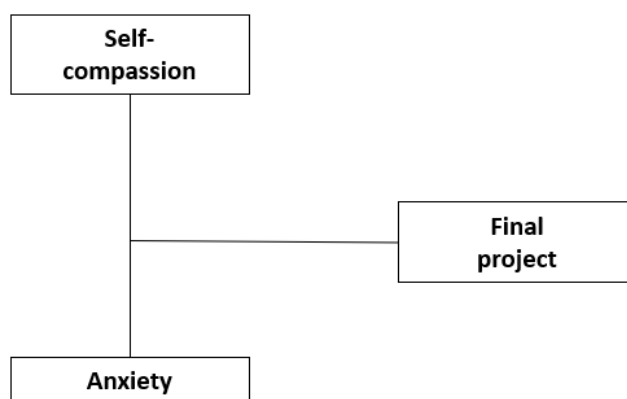
Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

METHOD

Research Design

In order to examine the association between anxiety levels and self-compassion among students completing final projects in Indonesian higher education, this qualitative study uses an exploratory research methodology. In the context of academic obstacles, qualitative approaches are well-suited to capture the complex feelings, perceptions, and meanings associated with anxiety and self-compassion (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This study intends to clarify the significance of self-compassion in influencing students' experiences of anxiety during final project completion and to reveal the intricacies of students' emotional landscapes through in-depth interviews with participants.

Participants

For this study, fifteen undergraduate and graduate students who are enrolled in Indonesian higher education institutions will be chosen. To guarantee variety in terms of gender, academic discipline, and project stage, purposeful sampling will be used. The selection of participants will be contingent upon their readiness to divulge their experiences with anxiety and self-compassion during the culminating project phase.

Data Collection

Depending on participant preferences and practical constraints, semi-structured interviews will be done in person or over video conferencing platforms to collect data. In addition to guaranteeing consistency throughout interviews, the semi-structured interview method permits participants' experiences to be explored in-depth and with flexibility (Smith, 2015). The research objectives and literature evaluation will be the basis for developing the interview guide, which will cover subjects such students' experiences with self-compassion, anxiety origins, coping mechanisms, and perceived connections between anxiety and self-compassion.

Data Analysis

The interview transcripts will be methodically arranged and analyzed for this study's data analysis using NVivo, a qualitative data analysis program. The technique includes a few crucial elements that are based on the thematic analysis framework developed by (Braun & Clarke, 2006). First, in order to gain a thorough grasp of the data, transcripts will be familiarized with many readings. After then, preliminary coding will be used to find recurrent themes, patterns, and ideas in the transcripts. Based on conceptual similarities and differences, these codes will thereafter be arranged into overarching themes and sub-themes. To guarantee coherence and consistency, the research team will examine and modify the thematic framework iteratively through conversations. Lastly, to clarify the implications of the findings, the theme framework will be interpreted in light of the study questions and theoretical framework. Through the use of NVivo, this methodology seeks to improve the transparency and rigor of the analysis, enabling a methodical investigation of the qualitative data obtained from participant narratives. In terms of ethical issues, the appropriate institutional review board will be consulted before any data is collected. All participants will be asked to provide informed consent that details the goal of the study, their voluntary involvement, confidentiality policies, and their ability to withdraw at any time. Throughout the course of the study, precautions will be taken to protect participant data's confidentiality and anonymity. Resources and support services will also be made available to participants in order to help them deal with any emotional distress that may develop during or following the interview process.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Fifteen undergraduate and graduate students spanning a range of final project completion phases in Indonesian higher education, representing a variety of academic disciplines, took part in the study. An even representation of male and female participants in the sample ensured a fair view of the experiences with anxiety and self-compassion during the final project phase.

Themes Identified

Theme 1: Self-Compassion as a Coping Mechanism

Participants repeatedly underlined the need of self-compassion as a basic coping strategy for handling the difficulties and unknowns that come with working on a final project. In interviews, students talked about how mindfulness, self-kindness, and acknowledging their common humanity helped them control their anxiety and stay balanced during their final assignment. A number of individuals conveyed personal experiences that demonstrated the critical function of self-compassion in managing academic pressures. One participant described, for example, how self-compassionate self-talk helped them combat feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt when they were having academic difficulties. "When I faced challenges or setbacks in my project, I would remind myself to be kind and compassionate toward myself," they said. Even under trying conditions, I was able to endure and keep a positive attitude because of my self-compassionate thinking."

Participants also emphasized the significance of acknowledging their shared humanity and difficulties with others. Students felt a sense of connection and solidarity with their peers by understanding that feelings of fear and self-doubt were common experiences, which helped lessen feelings of inadequacy and loneliness. As one participant put it, "I felt less alone in my journey knowing that other students were going through similar struggles." It served as a helpful reminder that I'm not alone in experiencing obstacles and that mistakes are OK." Moreover, staying attentive has been shown to be an effective method for developing self-compassion and controlling worry. Participants talked about how mindfulness techniques, such deep breathing and meditation, helped them develop a non-judgmental awareness of their thoughts and feelings. This allowed them to respond to academic challenges with more clarity and composure. One participant said, "By practicing mindfulness, I was able to avoid being carried away by worrying thoughts about the future and instead remain grounded and in the present moment." It gave me the serenity and perspective I needed to tackle my project job."

Theme 2: Impact of External Pressures

Throughout the final project process, study participants repeatedly noted the substantial influence of outside forces on their anxiety levels. Students' main sources of stress and anxiety have been identified as academic expectations, impending deadlines, and the feeling that they must do academically well.

Many participants said that a major factor contributing to their anxiety was the pressure to satisfy high academic standards and expectations. Students' anxiety over failing their classes and the repercussions of not living up to standards caused stress and self-doubt to spike. "The constant pressure to perform well and meet deadlines took a toll on my mental health," said one participant. I frequently caught myself doubting my skills and wondering that I wouldn't live up to expectations."

Participants also emphasized how external competition and comparisons exacerbated their anxiety levels. Feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt were exacerbated by the propensity to compare oneself to peers and classmates and the anxiety of falling behind or not measuring up. One participant put it like way: "I felt like I was falling behind when I saw other students succeed academically or making progress on their assignments. It increased my anxiousness and caused me to doubt my own skills."

Students' anxiety levels were further exacerbated by the pressure to juggle their academic requirements with other commitments, including work, family duties, and social events. Students felt overburdened and overextended as they juggled handling several obligations and expectations. One participant said, "It was very stressful to try to balance my project work with other responsibilities, like work and family commitments." I frequently thought that I was trying to keep up with everything and stretching myself too thin."

Theme 3: Strategies for Cultivating Self-Compassion

Study participants discussed the many approaches they used to develop self-compassion and reduce anxiety while working on the final assignment. These tactics included taking care of oneself,

reaching out for social support, and changing the way one talks to oneself in order to promote resilience and self-compassion.

A key component of the participants' development of self-compassion was found to be self-care. Exercise, relaxation techniques, and hobbies are examples of activities that students can partake in to maintain their physical, emotional, and mental well-being and provide them a much-needed break from the pressures of their final assignments. As one participant put it, "I found that taking breaks and doing things I enjoy helped me decompress and cope with stress." I was able to approach my project work with fresh enthusiasm and determination as a result. In addition, getting social support from family, friends, and mentors has been shown to be a crucial tactic for developing resilience and self-compassion. Students felt more supported and validated in their challenges when they shared their stories, asked for guidance, and received encouragement from others. One participant said, "I felt less alone in my journey when I talked to my peers and mentors about the challenges I was facing with my project." Their inspiration and assistance gave me reassurance that I can overcome challenges and accomplish my objectives."

The significance of redefining negative self-talk and embracing a more sympathetic and positive inner conversation was also stressed by the participants. Students who practiced self-acceptance, self-challenged their negative views about themselves, and acknowledged their accomplishments were able to develop a more loving and caring connection with themselves. One member thought, "I tried to focus on my strengths and accomplishments instead of dwelling on my mistakes or perceived shortcomings." It assisted me in cultivating a more understanding and upbeat mindset about myself, despite obstacles."

Theme 4: Interplay Between Self-Compassion and Anxiety

The study's participants discussed the intricate interactions between anxiety and self-compassion, emphasizing how the former acts as a buffer against the latter's detrimental impacts on wellbeing and academic achievement. The results of the study highlighted the significance of self-compassion in reducing anxiety and promoting emotional resilience among students working on final projects.

Throughout the course of the final project, participants who expressed higher levels of self-compassion also showed greater emotional resilience and adaptive coping methods for managing anxiety. Through practicing self-compassion, acknowledging their common humanity, and practicing mindfulness, students were better able to handle the difficulties and unknowns associated with the final project process.

One participant said, "I felt less overcome by anxiety when I approached my work with kindness and understanding and practiced self-compassion." It made it easier for me to stay focused on the subject at hand and overcome obstacles."

Participants also emphasized how practicing self-compassion helped them develop a more sympathetic and objective viewpoint on their academic difficulties. Through rephrasing self-critical ideas and embracing a more empathetic internal dialogue, students managed to offset emotions of uncertainty and insufficiency, consequently diminishing anxiety levels. "Practicing self-compassion helped me develop a more compassionate and nurturing relationship with myself, which in turn reduced my anxiety levels," said a participant, reflecting on the

relationship between self-compassion and anxiety. It gave me the courage and fortitude to tackle my project work with more assurance."

The study's conclusions offer insightful information about the intricate connection between anxiety, self-compassion, and the final project process for higher education students in Indonesia. The consequences of these findings, theoretical contributions, practical repercussions, and directions for further research will all be covered in the debate.

Theoretical Contributions

By emphasizing the function of self-compassion as a coping strategy for handling anxiety during the final project phase, this study adds to the body of current literature. The results clarify how self-kindness, awareness of one's common humanity, and mindfulness help students deal with scholastic difficulties with more resilience and emotional well-being, building on Neff's (2003) model of self-compassion. Through highlighting the significance of self-compassion in reducing anxiety, the research broadens our theoretical comprehension of coping strategies within the context of further education.

The study supports earlier studies by emphasizing how important self-compassion is in lowering anxiety among college students (Gerber et al., 2023; Han & Kim, 2023). It adds to our theoretical knowledge of coping strategies in higher education by highlighting the way that enhanced emotional regulation brought about by self-compassion might lower anxiety levels (Mirzaei Neyestani et al., 2023). Furthermore, the research highlights the importance of self-compassion as a defensive mechanism that facilitates the management of diverse attentional stressors, hence promoting a more comprehensive approach in contrast to alternative defense mechanisms (YANG, 2023). Moreover, studies show that interventions that focus on improving subjective happiness and self-compassion can successfully reduce stress, anxiety, and depression among college students, underscoring the significance of coping skill development for this susceptible group (Costa et al., 2022).

Practical Implications

The results hold practical significance for higher education institutions in Indonesia, particularly for educators, policymakers, and student support services providers. Acknowledging the ubiquitous influence of outside factors on students' anxiety levels, educational institutions can execute initiatives designed to alleviate academic stress, cultivate a nurturing learning atmosphere, and encourage the development of self-compassion. Self-compassion training programs can be included into academic curricula and student support services to provide students with the tools and resources they need to overcome academic obstacles more easily and resiliently.

The study also emphasizes how critical it is to de-stigmatize mental health conditions and encourage candid conversations about anxiety and self-compassion in educational contexts. Higher education institutions may foster a culture of compassion and wellbeing by offering resources and support services to students dealing with mental health issues.

Limitations and Future Research

It is imperative to recognize the constraints of current investigation and prospects for subsequent research. The study's qualitative design restricts how broadly the results may be applied to

situations outside of Indonesian higher education. In order to triangulate results and offer a more thorough knowledge of the connection between self-compassion, anxiety, and academic outcomes, future research may use a mixed-methods approach.

Furthermore, longitudinal research could investigate the long-term impacts of self-compassion therapies on the academic performance and general well-being of students. To improve student mental health in higher education settings, we should investigate individual variances in self-compassion levels and the efficacy of interventions designed specifically for particular student demographics.

CONCLUSION

In summary, this study offers insightful information about the connection between anxiety, self-compassion, and the final project process for higher education students in Indonesia. The results highlight the value of self-compassion as a coping strategy for anxiety management and fostering emotional fortitude in the face of scholastic difficulties. Students can experience more ease and compassion when navigating the challenges of the final project process by cultivating self-kindness, acknowledging their shared humanity, and practicing mindfulness. The findings have practical consequences for educators, legislators, and student support agencies. They highlight the significance of cultivating self-compassion and creating a helpful learning environment. Subsequent studies ought to investigate the efficaciousness of self-compassion interventions and customize assistance programs to cater to the heterogeneous requirements of postsecondary learners. Overall, encouraging holistic student development and academic achievement in Indonesian higher education requires an understanding of the significance of self-compassion in assisting students' mental health.

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