



Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development

**THE MEDIATING ROLE OF RESILIENCE BETWEEN SELF-
COMPASSION AND ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT AMONG
UNIVERSITY STUDENTS UPON ONLINE LEARNING**

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**THE MEDIATING ROLE OF RESILIENCE BETWEEN SELF-COMPASSION AND
ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS UPON ONLINE
LEARNING**

NURDAYANA WONG FANG KIM

This project is submitted
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for a
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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to investigate the relationship between resilience, self-compassion, and academic engagement among university students in Malaysia. It also investigated gender role and its association with resilience and self-compassion. Research data was collected using an online survey. There were 312 undergraduate students from public and private universities who participated in this quantitative study. The descriptive and inferential statistics were obtained by conducting data analysis using the statistical software, IBM SPSS Statistics 26. The descriptive analysis obtained information on participants' age, gender, university, faculty, course of study, year of study and latest grade-point Average (GPA), while the inferential analysis conducted Pearson correlation test, Multiple Regression Test and Independent Samples T-test. The analyses revealed that resilience had a significant positive correlation with self-compassion and academic engagement among undergraduate students. The results also showed that self-compassion was a significant predictor mediator between undergraduate students' resilience and academic engagement. However, the study showed that there was no significant difference in self-compassion and resilience between female and male undergraduate students. This study highlighted the significance of psychological positive constructs, i.e., resilience and self-compassion on enhancing students' academic performance and readiness to encounter and adapt to daily life obstacles.

Keywords: Resilience, Self-compassion, Academic Engagement, Undergraduate, Gender

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji hubungan antara daya tahan, belas kasihan sendiri dan penglibatan akademik dalam kalangan para pelajar universiti di Malaysia. Selain itu, kajian ini turut mengkaji perbezaan jantina dan peranannya terhadap tahap daya tahan dan belas kasihan sendiri para pelajar. Data kuantitatif dikumpulkan secara dalam talian. Jumlah responden adalah seramai 312 pelajar ijazah sarjana muda dari institusi pengajian tinggi awam (IPTA) dan institusi pengajian tinggi swasta (IPTS). Data soal selidik yang dikumpulkan kemudiannya dianalisis secara deskriptif dan inferensi menggunakan perisian statistik, *IBM SPSS Statistics 26*. Analisis deskriptif mengambil kira jantina, umur, jenis institusi pengajian tinggi, fakulti, kursus pembelajaran, tahun pengajian, dan Purata Nilai Gred (PNG) terkini manakala analisis inferensi melibatkan Ujian korelasi Pearson, Ujian *t* dan Ujian regresi berganda. Dapatan kajian telah menunjukkan terdapat hubungan positif yang signifikan antara daya tahan, belas kasihan sendiri, dan penglibatan akademik pelajar universiti. Selain itu, kajian ini juga mendapati bahawa belas kasihan sendiri merupakan variabel mediator yang signifikan terhadap hubungan antara daya tahan dan belas kasihan sendiri. Namun, tiada perbezaan yang signifikan dalam peranan jantina terhadap belas kasihan sendiri dan daya tahan dalam kalangan pelajar ijazah sarjana muda. Kesimpulannya, kajian ini menekankan kepentingan konstruk psikologi yang positif, iaitu, daya tahan dan belas kasihan sendiri dalam meningkatkan prestasi pembelajaran pelajar dan tahap kesediaan pelajar untuk menyesuaikan diri dalam mendepani cabaran-cabaran kehidupan.

Kata kunci: Daya tahan, Belas kasihan sendiri, Penglibatan akademik, Ijazah sarjana muda, Jantina

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

This chapter briefly explains the main idea and overview of this study. It addresses the background of the study, problem statement, research objectives, questions and hypotheses, conceptual framework, significance of study, and definition of terms.

1.0 Introduction

Since March 2019, the pandemic coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak has affected many people around the globe, and it has been disastrous and traumatising. The World Health Organization (WHO) declared that governments and public health institutions must limit physical interactions and set stay-at-home guidelines globally to prevent the spread of the novel coronavirus. Due to this, face-to-face interactions have been limited. COVID-19 has been attacking us physically, mentally, socially, and emotionally. Everyone reacts differently to this unforeseen circumstance. It is undeniable that there are some who could accept and see this event from a positive perspective, but there are some who are still in denial and finding the strength to cope with it. Besides adults and elderly, adolescents and young adults are also impacted by this unprecedented disaster. Students who do not have a well-versed coping strategy to adapt to the sudden change of learning methods (from conventional face-to-face classroom learning to online learning) will cause them to experience several emotional disturbances which may affect their study productivity.

1.1 Background of Study

Since the COVID-19 outbreak, the functioning of the academic institutions has changed including universities in Malaysia. Students must attend class via online platforms from their home. Although the learning method has been conducted for about 3 years since the pandemic, adolescents and young adults who are in the transition to independent, adult life are still

struggling to adapt to the novel teaching method. This statement is supported by a study conducted by Babicka-Wirkus et al. (2021) which confirmed that university students tend to have maladaptive coping strategies in the times of stress especially during the pandemic. Unhealthy coping strategies will not be beneficial for the students in a long-term and it may impact their physical and mental health including their academic achievements.

Besides the high probability of developing technostress, students are prone to have a shorter attention span during online classes. According to a peer review, students have lower attentiveness for class with duration more than half an hour compared to class segments below 30 minutes (Smith & Schreder, 2021). A long period of class may not only reduce students' attentiveness, but also increase fatigue and stress among them. Moreover, students who are only listening to the lecture throughout the class without any interaction make them feel less productive which further leads to boredom. According to a more recent study regarding attentiveness, Balan et al. (2021) found that boredom has a positive correlation with students' attention difficulties. Students might only be present "physically" via the online platform but not with their mind and emotion to pay full attention to the lecture being delivered. Students are easily distracted especially those who are in higher institutions as they have the freedom to check on their devices whenever they want including during the lecture. With that said, online learning has made it much easier for students to reach for their devices and divert their attention from the learning material being presented to them to other online applications such as the Internet or social medias with the intention to eliminate the boredom and tension they feel during online class.

Without attentiveness, the learning process is not effective. Therefore, it is best to avoid the students from feeling bored by giving them the opportunity to give feedbacks throughout the learning session and decrease the duration of the online lecture being conducted. By doing

these, students' engagement in their study and class can be maintained which will result in better academic performance and achievement.

Despite the stressful situation of the COVID-19 pandemic, students are aware that being attentive and participative during the online class is important as it will affect their academic results (GPA). However, insufficient internet data has been a major issue that hinder the effectiveness of the online learning among students in Malaysia. Hence, failure to effectively attend the online class may lead to mental and emotional disturbances for students especially those who do not know how to cope with adversities. In Malaysia, Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) has taken an action to help university students to cope with stress associated with their academic demands. Since 2020, MOHE has run about 160 stress management programmes and activities via online by involving a total of 150 mental health professionals to monitor students' mental health at the public universities in Malaysia ("150 counsellors, psychologists monitoring", 2021). In attempt to provide a more conducive and effective virtual learning experience, institutions of higher learning (IPT) have allowed educators to implement flexible class schedules and introduce various learning methods according to the suitability of the learning course as suggested by the MOHE, IPT and Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA) ("MOHE conducting study", 2021). The initiative was implemented with the aim to reduce students' academic stress level. Due to the increased stress level among university students, the government acknowledged that insufficient internet data is one of the major contributors to the pressure faced by the students. Without enough internet data and quota, students may have trouble attending the class activities and assignments, including assessments that are fully conducted online within a time limit. Therefore, the government has taken the responsibility to overcome this issue by providing students-friendly internet data plans with affordable price yet better connectivity (Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission, 2021).

1.2 Problem Statement

Although the government has provided psychosocial support and affordable internet packages, the learning effectiveness is still questionable as students are still under stress trying to cope with online learning. It is reported that university students in Malaysia are experiencing higher stress levels due to the online learning methods, financial issues, and the uncertainties in their academic performance, which will determine their future career (Sundarasan et al., 2020). Most students may keep silent instead of getting help from counsellors, psychologists, or other psychosocial support services due to the stigma of help-seeking regarding mental health among Malaysians. Hanafiah and Van (2015) reported that health workers such as nurses were prone to labelling patients as "crazy" and disregarding them just because they assumed that the patients were acting out and helpless. Moreover, people will usually go to general hospitals before being referred to mental health professionals, which will make the students more hesitant to seek emotional advice. There are four main perpetrators of stigmatising mental health issues, which are: (1) family, (2) friends, (3) employers, and (4) health-related alliances (Hanafiah & Van, 2015). Since most university students are staying at home during online learning, family members are the closest group of people that they could ask for help. However, they tend to resist bringing the family member to mental health professionals as mental illness is usually associated with the idea of "losing face" among Asian families (Ibrahim et al., 2019). Besides, the internet data offered by the government together with the telecommunication companies is insufficient to solve the internet problems in this country, especially for students who live in rural areas that have poor internet access. A local news reported that a female student, Veveonah, who is from Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS), had to risk her safety by climbing a tree at night to get a better internet signal for her examination preparation. She further explained that internet access is not readily available in her hometown (Ming Teoh, 2020).

Other than internet connectivity issues, other environmental factors that are out of students' control, such as additional house chores and confined study space, would also lead to an emotional burden for students which may affect their academic result. Lei, Cui and Zhou (2018) conducted a meta-analysis of 69 independent studies to determine the relationship between academic engagement and academic achievement among students. The meta-analysis shows that there was a strong positive correlation between students' engagement and academic achievement. This indicates that students' academic result is associated with their level of emotional and cognitive engagement in the class. According to Babicka-Wirkus et al. (2021), students who do not have a healthy coping strategy are more vulnerable to higher stress and burnout during online learning, which may negatively affect their physical and mental health, such as depression. Salmerla-Aro et al. (2009, as cited in Aida, 2020) found that individuals who experience burnout have a higher tendency to show depressive symptoms. Furthermore, Aida (2020) confirmed that self-compassion has a negative association with depression. During the epidemic COVID-19 in Malaysia, it was discovered that female undergraduate students are better prepared and satisfied with online learning than male undergraduate students (Chung et al., 2020). Nailah Najwa Zainoodin et al. (2021) found that there is a high positive correlation of gratitude with resilience and academic performance among university students.

Thus, academic burnout and stress can be prevented if students build personal inner strengths within them to overcome uncontrollable barriers such as poor internet connectivity that will hinder them from experiencing an effective learning process. It is undeniable that students are easily distracted when studying online at home, therefore it takes a lot of mental and emotional courage to prepare themselves to be more self-disciplined in order to actively participate in online lectures. Hence, this study aimed to understand the relationship between resilience, self-compassion, and academic engagement among university students in Malaysia upon online learning.

1.3 Research Objectives

1.3.1 General Objective

This study attempts to identify the relationship between resilience, self-compassion and academic engagement among university students during online learning in Malaysia.

1.3.2 Specific Objectives

The specific objectives of this study are:

1. To determine the relationship between resilience, self-compassion, and academic engagement among university students during online learning.
 - a) To determine the relationship between self-compassion and academic engagement among university students during online learning.
 - b) To determine the relationship between self-compassion and resilience among university students during online learning.
 - c) To determine the relationship between resilience and academic engagement among university students during online learning.
2. To determine the mediator role of resilience between self-compassion and academic engagement among university students during online learning.
3. To determine the significant gender difference on self-compassion and resilience among university students during online learning.

1.4 Research Questions

The research questions of this study are:

1. Is there any relationship between resilience, self-compassion and academic engagement among university students during online learning?

- a) Is there any relationship between self-compassion and academic engagement among university students during online learning?
 - b) Is there any relationship between self-compassion and resilience among university students during online learning?
 - c) Is there any relationship between resilience and academic engagement among university students during online learning?
2. Is resilience a significant predictor mediator between self-compassion and academic engagement among university students during online learning?
 3. Is there a significant difference in self-compassion and resilience between female and male university students during online learning?

1.5 Research Hypotheses

The research hypotheses of this study are:

1. There is a significant relationship between resilience, self-compassion, and students' engagement among university students during online learning.
 - a) There is a significant relationship between self-compassion and academic engagement among university students during online learning.
 - b) There is a significant relationship between self-compassion and resilience among university students during online learning.
 - c) There is a significant relationship between resilience and academic engagement among university students during online learning.
2. Resilience is a significant predictor mediator between self-compassion and academic engagement among university students during online learning.

3. There is a significant difference in self-compassion and resilience between female and male university students during online learning.

1.6 Conceptual Framework

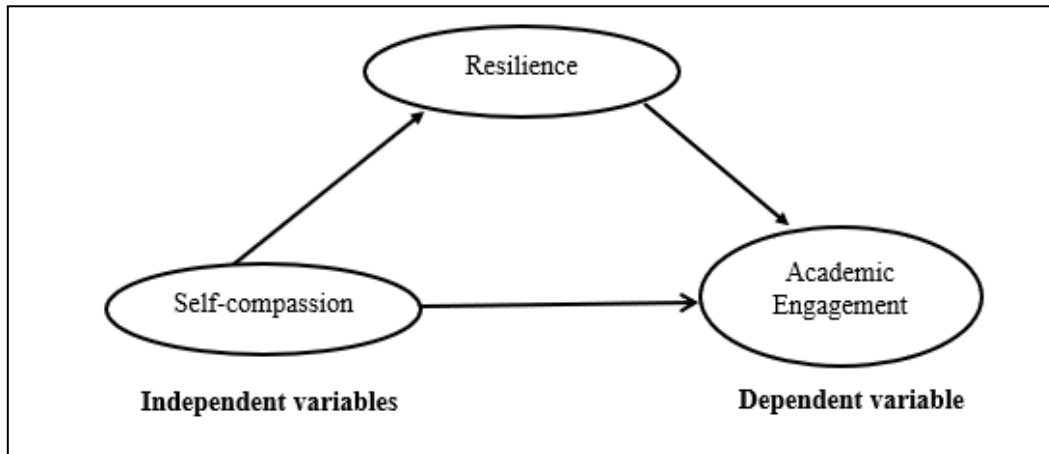


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework of the Study

Figure 1 is the conceptual framework that explains the relationship between the variables and the research hypotheses that this study aimed to predict. It aims to understand how self-compassion and academic engagement are related, and how resilience mediates the relationship between self-compassion and academic engagement.

1.7 Significance of Study

This study provides a better understanding of the importance of fostering personal, positive psychological constructs among students at higher institutions in Malaysia. Although many studies on positive traits and their relationship with academic performance in educational settings have been conducted, there is little evidence that resilience and self-compassion could help university students to cope with the adversities of online learning during the pandemic. The findings of this study may guide higher institutions to improve students' well-being by incorporating healthy coping strategies for handling academic burdens and environmental stress. Hence, this study wishes to help the students in finding and building their inner strength to overcome various setbacks from the new norm of online learning.

1.8 Definition of Terms

1.8.1 Self-compassion

Conceptual Definition:

Self-compassion can be defined as having 3 interrelated components (Neff, 2012). The first one is self-kindness, such as showing an attitude of tenderness, gentleness, and acceptance towards oneself when handling setbacks. Secondly, a sense of common humanity. Acknowledging that everyone shares similar experiences (positive and negative) will give us a feeling of togetherness. The last component is being mindful and calm when experiencing suffering and adversity (Zhang et al., 2021). Several studies have shown that students who are more self-compassionate are less likely to experience negative emotions, self-criticising thoughts, and fear of failure when facing setbacks in their academic careers. In addition, they are more likely to adopt a healthier emotion-focused coping strategy over an avoidance-oriented strategy to manage the stress if they are self-compassionate towards themselves (Neff et al., 2005). Moreover, students who are higher in self-compassion show higher behavioural and mental engagement in learning due to their greater intrinsic motivation to achieve their mastery goals (Neff et al., 2005). In short, self-compassion is a positive psychological construct that can allow students to be more adaptive and proactive despite the inevitable adversity that they may encounter during online learning.

Operational Definition:

A Self-Compassion Scale-Short Form (SCS-SF) by Raes et al. (2011) was administered to measure students' self-compassion. It is a shortened version of the 26-item Self-Compassion Scale (SCS), consisting of only 12 items with a 5-point Likert scale: 1 = strongly disagree (almost never), 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree (almost always). The higher the score, the higher the level of self-compassionate of the individual.