

Research Horizon

ISSN: 2808-0696 (p), 2807-9531 (e)

Research Horizon

Volume: 05
Issue: 06
Year: 2025
Page: 2807-2816

Citation:

Aktafian, A. (2025). Self-compassion in the adaptation skills of migrant students in Yogyakarta. *Research Horizon*, 5(6), 2807-2816.

Article History:

Received: October 7, 2025
Revised: November 9, 2025
Accepted: December 21, 2025
Online since: December 31, 2025

Self-Compassion in the Adaptation Skills of Migrant Students in Yogyakarta

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Abstract

Many students face challenges when adapting to a new environment, managing academic pressure, and navigating social changes. This study aims to understand the meaning and experience of self-compassion among migrant students. Using a qualitative approach with a case study design, this study explores how students interpret self-compassion when facing adaptation challenges, academic pressure, and changes in the social environment. Data were collected through observation, structured interviews, and documentation, then analyzed using the interactive model of Miles and Huberman. The results show that self-compassion plays a significant role in helping students overcome difficult times, improve their adjustment skills, and build emotional well-being. This study also identifies internal and external factors that influence self-compassion and describes key aspects such as self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness. Despite the growing interest in self-compassion, few studies have focused specifically on the experiences of migrant students facing adaptation and academic challenges. These findings are expected to contribute to the development of theoretical and practical understanding of the importance of self-compassion for migrant students, providing insights for educators and counselors to support students' emotional well-being and adjustment.

Keywords

Academic Pressure, Adaptation, Case Study, Emotional Well-being, Migrant Students, Self-Compassion.

1. Introduction

Law Number 12 of 2012 concerning Higher Education emphasizes the importance of equal access to education for all Indonesians. One implementation is the opening of civil service schools that provide free education, thus attracting students from various regions in Indonesia. At the Immigration Polytechnic, 295 students come from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds, of which 84%, or approximately 247 students, are migrants from outside the Greater Jakarta area. This situation places students in a new environment that demands the ability to adapt to different customs, norms, and cultures, potentially causing culture shock (Olivia et al., 2024). Culture shock is a reaction in the form of anxiety due to the loss of familiar signs in the old environment, and this condition is often exacerbated by academic demands such as a heavy workload (Maulidiyawati, 2017; Maizan et al., 2020). Therefore, adjustment is a crucial aspect of student life. Adjustment is understood as the ability to display acceptable behavior within a group and the mental and behavioral skills required to cope with environmental demands (Pritaningrum & Hendriani, 2013; Hurlock, 2014). Adjustment is influenced by internal factors such as self-concept, intelligence, and personality as well as external factors such as family, peer groups, and social norms (Prasetyoaji et al., 2024). Inability to adapt can lead to emotional impacts such as sadness, anger, feelings of worthlessness, and even depression, while good adjustment accelerates positive behavioral changes and social acceptance (Ningrum & Intansari, 2023).

On the other hand, the increasing number of children with special needs and the limited number of special needs schools have encouraged the government to develop inclusive education as a form of equalizing services (Nugroho & Mareza, 2016). Inclusive education provides opportunities for children with special needs to learn together in regular schools and is intended for children with physical, mental, or social behavioral disabilities (Efendi, 2006). In this context, Special Education students in higher education play a crucial role because they are prepared to understand the diverse needs of learners. Students themselves are defined as individuals pursuing higher education (Budianta, 2002).

Self-compassion is an important psychological aspect in supporting student well-being. According to Neff (2011), self-compassion is an attitude of kindness to oneself when facing difficulties and realistically accepting shortcomings. Self-compassion has been shown to be linked to resilience and well-being in adolescents and adults and can serve as a mediating pathway between family factors and individual well-being (Neff & McGehee, 2010). In this study, Neff's self-compassion framework is applied to special needs students, highlighting how self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness can serve as adaptive mechanisms specifically in the context of academic and social challenges faced by this population. In the context of college students, including special needs students, self-compassion can serve as an adaptive mechanism for dealing with academic pressures and the challenges of interacting with children with special needs. Despite growing research on self-compassion in general student populations, few studies have examined its role among special needs students in higher education, particularly in Indonesia. This study addresses this gap by exploring self-compassion as a mechanism for emotional regulation, adjustment, and well-being in this unique group.

Given the importance of self-compassion in supporting academic and personal development, this study aims to understand self-compassion in special needs students. Therefore, this study was conducted to further examine self-compassion for children with special needs in special needs students at Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta. The self-compassion perspective emphasizes how a person interprets their own life and how they can maximize their own potential by not neglecting others, by focusing on the factors and aspects of self-compassion. It also focuses on

how a person can increase their capacity if they have experienced a decline in self-compassion.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Self-Compassion

Self-compassion stems from the concept of compassion, which means compassion and concern for suffering (Echols & Shadily, 2000). In the context of oneself, self-compassion involves the ability to understand personal difficulties, show kindness, and not judge oneself excessively. Neff (2003) explains that individuals with high self-compassion tend to be more able to accept themselves as they are, feel comfortable in social relationships, and demonstrate greater wisdom and emotional intelligence (Neff, 2003; Neff et al., 2007). Self-compassion also improves emotional coping skills, such as clarity of feelings and the ability to manage negative emotions (Neely et al., 2009; Neff, 2003; Neff et al., 2005). Unlike self-esteem, which often relies on external validation or comparison with others, self-compassion provides a more stable foundation for psychological well-being, especially during periods of failure or stress. This internal gentleness allows individuals to maintain motivation and resilience without the fear of harsh self-criticism.

According to Halim (2015), the term compassion comes from the Latin *patiri* and the Greek *pathein*, meaning to suffer or experience. Self-compassion is defined as the ability to show compassion to oneself, to accept hardship without avoiding it, and to foster a drive to alleviate one's suffering with a kind attitude. Allen and Leary (2010) emphasize that the essence of self-compassion is showing care, trust, and affection to oneself, just as one would treat others when facing hardship. This reciprocal approach, treating oneself with the same warmth extended to loved ones, helps reduce feelings of isolation and shame commonly associated with personal struggles. Consequently, self-compassion becomes a powerful tool for emotional regulation and long-term mental health maintenance.

2.2. Antecedents of Self-Compassion

Several studies have shown that self-compassion can be influenced by gender. Women are generally considered to have higher self-compassion than men, although they are often more self-critical and dwell on their shortcomings more frequently, which can lead to twice the rate of depression and anxiety compared to men (Neff, 2011). Age is also a factor, as during the growth period, adolescents experience difficult changes from childhood to adulthood due to social and historical transitions. In the stage of adolescent identity formation, adolescence is the period of life with the lowest self-compassion (Neff, 2003; Istighfari et al., 2023). Environmental factors, particularly family, play an important role in shaping self-compassion. When parents provide care, attention, and constructive feedback, children are more likely to develop higher self-compassion.

Conversely, individuals with low self-compassion are more likely to have mothers who are less supportive of their interests, come from dysfunctional families, or exhibit anxiety (Neff & McGehee, 2010; Lathren et al., 2020). Culture is another influential factor. Comparisons between Eastern and Western cultures, particularly regarding individualism and collectivism, indicate that individuals from collectivist cultures, especially Asians, are more exposed to Buddhist teachings on self-compassion and typically exhibit greater interdependence, which predicts higher self-compassion compared to Westerners (Kitayama & Markus, 2003). Based on these explanations, it can be concluded that four main factors influence self-compassion: gender, with women tending toward higher self-criticism; age, as compassion levels increase when integrity develops; environmental factors, such as parental or social role models; and culture, where individuals in collectivist societies,

including Asian cultures, tend to display higher levels of self-criticism than those in Western countries.

2.3. Components of Self-Compassion

Neff (2012) explains that self-compassion can be understood through three interrelated components that together foster a healthy and supportive attitude toward oneself. The first component, self-kindness, refers to the capacity to respond to one's own difficulties and failures with understanding, care, and forgiveness rather than harsh self-criticism. The second component, common humanity, emphasizes the recognition that personal struggles, suffering, and imperfections are universal experiences shared by all humans, which helps to reduce feelings of isolation when facing challenges. The third component, mindfulness, involves maintaining a balanced and nonjudgmental awareness of one's thoughts and emotions, allowing individuals to acknowledge difficult experiences without becoming overwhelmed or excessively reactive.

Collectively, these three aspects form the foundation of self-compassion, promoting psychological resilience and emotional well-being (Bag et al., 2022). In contrast, the absence or imbalance of these components can manifest in specific negative tendencies: isolation occurs when individuals perceive their mistakes and shortcomings as unique to themselves, leading to feelings of alienation, while overidentification refers to becoming overly absorbed in negative emotions, reacting disproportionately to challenges rather than maintaining perspective. Thus, understanding self-compassion requires recognizing both its positive dimensions, self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness, and the potential pitfalls when these qualities are underdeveloped.

3. Methods

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study design. Qualitative research is a systematic procedure that produces descriptive data in the form of written or spoken words from observed individuals and their behaviors within a specific context, rather than numerical data, often presented as narratives, visuals, or other qualitative forms. A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a phenomenon in real-life contexts where the boundaries between phenomenon and context are unclear, requiring multiple sources of evidence for comprehensive understanding (Yin, 2009). Case studies aim to explore phenomena in depth, develop holistic understanding, and examine the context of research subjects' actions, allowing researchers to understand reality from the subjects' perspectives. This approach necessitates intensive researcher involvement, and the more specific and unique the case with clear systemic connections, the greater its contribution to scientific knowledge and public understanding. In qualitative case study research, the researcher's perspective helps determine the extent to which respondents can freely provide relevant data and experiences (Hamidi, 2013). This method allows analysis of phenomena based on the subjective experiences of individuals and groups (Rusli, 2021). In this study, the examined phenomena are aspects of self-compassion, and the subjects were migrant students in Yogyakarta, selected due to their experiences with academic, social, and emotional adaptation. The research was conducted from December 13, 2023 to January 4, 2024.

Qualitative research procedures are designed to be flexible, allowing adjustments throughout the research process to respond to the dynamics of the data encountered. According to Sugiyono (2017), the stages of qualitative research can be divided into three main parts: the description or orientation stage, the reduction stage, and the selection stage. In this study, the research process was conducted through several steps, beginning with the identification and clear formulation of the research problem, followed by the development of research questions that align with the

study's focus. Data were then collected using various predetermined techniques, processed, and interpreted based on the researcher's analysis. Subsequently, theory was developed or generated from empirical findings, and finally, a systematic research report was compiled as a form of scientific accountability.

This research focuses on self-compassion among migrant students in Yogyakarta. The subjects were selected based on their ability to provide relevant information related to the phenomenon under study. Informants in this study were categorized into two groups. First, key informants, who are individuals with in-depth knowledge of the research issue and can provide primary information. In this study, key informants were new students at Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta, expected to share insights into their experiences with self-compassion during the adaptation process as migrant students. Second, primary informants are individuals who interact directly with key informants or possess experiences relevant to the research topic. These primary informants were students who had experienced difficult times and could provide information regarding the application of self-compassion when facing adversity.

To obtain valid and accountable data, this study collected information directly in the field using observation, interviews, and documentation. Participant observation allowed the researcher to engage in the daily activities of the subjects to understand their context naturally (Sugiyono, 2017). Structured interviews were conducted using prearranged questions to gather specific information relevant to the research focus (Moleong, 2014). Documentation involved examining written materials such as books, archives, and other relevant records (Arikunto, 2006). The data consisted of primary data from observations and interviews with new students at Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta and secondary data from documents and scientific literature. The primary instrument was the researcher herself, supported by tools such as interview guidelines and recording devices.

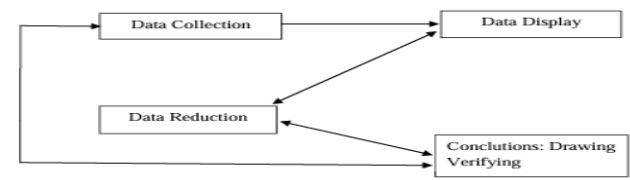


Figure 1. Interactive Model

Based on Figure 1, data analysis in this study was conducted using the Miles and Huberman interactive model, as described by Usman and Akbar (2009), which consists of three main components: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing/verification. Data reduction involves selecting, focusing, simplifying, and transforming raw data through techniques such as summarizing, coding, theme exploration, and creating analytical notes to remove irrelevant information. Data presentation organizes the information in a way that facilitates understanding patterns and relationships, often using descriptive narratives. Conclusion drawing and verification entail formulating tentative conclusions and ensuring they are valid, consistent, and reflective of the informants' perspectives rather than the researchers' assumptions.

To ensure data trustworthiness, this study employed extended observation, observation diligence, and triangulation. Extended observation involved the researcher remaining in the field until data saturation was reached, rechecking and deepening observations to confirm accuracy. Observation diligence was applied by conducting careful and continuous observations, supported by reviewing relevant references and documentation on self-compassion to ensure systematic data recording. Triangulation, particularly source triangulation, was used to verify data validity by comparing observational data with interview results and cross-checking

information among multiple interview sources (Sugiyono, 2017). These procedures ensured that the findings accurately reflected the perspectives of the informants, maintaining consistency, validity, and reliability throughout the research process.

4. Results

According to Neff (2011), self-compassion is an attitude of caring and being kind to oneself when experiencing various difficulties in life or accepting one's shortcomings. Self-compassion is the tendency to be kind to oneself and avoid the opposite, namely negative thinking or excessive self-criticism. The relationship between self-compassion and resilience has been demonstrated by Neff and McGehee (2010), who found that self-compassion is strongly associated with resilience and well-being among adolescents and adults. Furthermore, they found that self-compassion plays a significant mediating role between cognitive and family factors within an individual. Furthermore, this research suggests that self-compassion can be an alternative way to increase resilience. Self-compassion may be a pathway through which family factors impact children's well-being.

According to Budianta (2002), a college student is a student at a university. Therefore, a student can be interpreted as someone currently studying at a university. Those enrolled as students at a university are automatically referred to as students. The qualitative research used in this study is phenomenology and narrative. Phenomenology is a research strategy where researchers identify the essence of human experience regarding a particular phenomenon. Understanding human life experiences makes phenomenological philosophy a research method whose procedures require researchers to study a number of subjects to develop patterns and meaningful relationships (Nugrahani, 2014).

Observing behaviors that indicate a student must have self-compassion to maximize their potential, to achieve well-being, one must begin to develop self-compassion. This overview of self-compassion provides an alternative model of thinking about how to view oneself in order to improve well-being and personal love. Self-compassion is a new concept that seeks to foster a healthier approach to self-assessment and social comparison. The informants in this study were new students at Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta, selected to explore how self-compassion is practiced by out-of-town students and how it affects their adaptation and well-being. Observations indicated that self-compassion is reflected in the ability to cultivate kindness toward oneself when facing difficulties, helping students manage emotional and academic challenges (Repi, 2019).

The findings can be understood through several themes that reflect self-compassion practices. Students demonstrated acceptance of themselves and avoided self-blame in failure or setbacks, which aligns with Neff's (2011) conceptualization of self-compassion as self-kindness and recognition of personal limitations. Students also applied mindfulness practices, such as deep breathing and journaling, to manage negative emotions, reflecting Neff's (2011) mindfulness aspect. Viewing failures as part of the learning process demonstrates the role of self-compassion in fostering adaptive coping strategies, consistent with the idea that self-compassion mediates resilience and psychological well-being (Neff & McGehee, 2010). The social environment also influenced self-compassion, where supportive peers facilitated kindness toward oneself, reflecting the "common humanity" aspect of Neff (2011). Practicing self-compassion had positive effects on mental and physical well-being, promoting calmness, better prioritization of tasks, acceptance of physical limitations, and attention to health. These outcomes support the theoretical link between self-compassion and resilience (Neff & McGehee, 2010) and highlight its relevance in helping students adapt to academic and social challenges, in line with the phenomenological approach used in this study (Nugrahani, 2014).

From the interviews, it was found that students understood self-compassion as accepting oneself and avoiding self-blame in situations of failure or setbacks. They considered this attitude essential for coping with loneliness, academic pressure, and other challenges associated with living away from home. When encountering poor grades or failing an exam, students viewed these events as part of the learning process and employed strategies to maintain positive thinking and resilience. Students also applied mindfulness techniques, such as deep breathing and journaling, to manage negative emotions. Adjusting to independent living posed challenges, particularly in developing self-discipline and assertiveness. The social environment played a significant role in supporting self-compassion; supportive peers helped students be kinder to themselves, while competitive or unsupportive peers sometimes led to increased self-criticism.

Practicing self-compassion had a positive impact on both mental and physical well-being. Mentally, it promoted calmness and better task prioritization. Physically, it helped students accept their limitations and focus on maintaining health and agility (Repi, 2019). Looking ahead, students expressed the intention to continue practicing self-compassion to achieve a balance between working hard and self-care, highlighting the importance of giving oneself time and space to accept personal circumstances, especially when facing the challenges of being away from family. The findings indicate that self-compassion among out-of-town students manifests through understanding, emotional regulation, social support, and enhancement of well-being. These results are consistent with the theoretical framework of self-compassion and support the phenomenological approach that emphasizes understanding the lived experiences of students.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that students from other regions face significant challenges in adapting to the local culture, communication styles, and social customs. New students often experience culture shock, whereas those who have spent longer periods in the area show greater familiarity and adaptation. These findings align with prior studies suggesting that cultural and environmental adaptation is a critical aspect of adjustment for migrant students, and that insufficient adaptation can lead to emotional distress (Maulidiyawati, 2017; Olivia et al., 2024).

Separation from family members generates emotional impacts such as loneliness and homesickness. However, the presence of supportive peers and engagement in campus communities provides essential social and emotional support, mitigating stress and facilitating adjustment. This finding is consistent with the theoretical perspective that social connectedness contributes to self-compassion and resilience, as it provides a sense of common humanity (Kitayama & Markus, 2003; Neff, 2011).

Academic pressure also represents a significant challenge, particularly for new students who experience a higher intensity of anxiety due to the workload and tight schedules. Students who successfully manage academic stress exhibit higher levels of self-compassion, applying strategies that reflect the three components proposed by Neff (2011), that is self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness. Self-kindness is manifested through encouraging oneself when facing failure, recognizing that mistakes are part of the learning process. The recognition of common humanity allows students to contextualize their difficulties as shared experiences, reducing feelings of isolation. Mindfulness enables students to focus on solutions and regulate emotional responses rather than becoming overwhelmed by problems. These practices correspond with previous findings indicating that self-compassion enhances resilience and emotional well-being in adolescents and young adults (Neff & McGehee, 2010; Repi, 2019).

Despite these benefits, several challenges hinder the consistent practice of self-compassion. Personal habits such as self-indulgence and difficulties in asserting boundaries limit the effectiveness of self-compassion strategies. Moreover, a competitive or unsupportive social environment may exacerbate stress, highlighting the importance of a positive social context in fostering adaptive coping mechanisms. These findings corroborate prior research emphasizing the influence of both internal and external factors on self-compassion (Ningrum & Intansari, 2023; Prasetyoaji et al., 2024).

The study also demonstrates that self-compassion has a significant impact on students' mental and physical well-being. Mentally, students report greater calmness, improved prioritization of tasks, and more effective emotional regulation. Physically, they exhibit acceptance of personal limitations and attention to health and fitness, which supports previous studies suggesting that self-compassion promotes holistic well-being (Neff & McGehee, 2010; Repi, 2019). Students further recognize the importance of maintaining life balance, integrating self-compassion into daily routines as a strategy to manage stress while preserving mental health.

The findings indicate that self-compassion functions as a crucial mechanism for coping with the challenges of living away from home. It enables students to adapt culturally, manage emotional and academic stress, and maintain overall well-being. These results reinforce theoretical perspectives on self-compassion by Neff and McGehee (2010) and Neff (2011) and are consistent with prior studies that link self-compassion with resilience, social support, and emotional adjustment among migrant and university students by Kitayama and Markus (2003) and Olivia et al. (2024). Nevertheless, personal habits and environmental factors may constrain self-compassion practices, suggesting the need for interventions that strengthen both individual skills and supportive social structures.

6. Conclusion

International students face a variety of challenges, including cultural adaptation, academic pressure, and emotional difficulties related to separation from family. Practicing self-compassion has emerged as an effective strategy to manage these pressures, enabling students to regulate stress, maintain emotional well-being, and adapt more successfully to new environments. Self-compassion, encompassing self-kindness, recognition of common humanity, and mindfulness, supports both mental and physical health by promoting resilience, emotional regulation, and acceptance of personal limitations. Despite these benefits, students still face obstacles such as self-indulgent habits and social pressures, which can hinder consistent practice. Social support from peers and the surrounding environment plays a crucial role in facilitating the effective implementation of self-compassion as part of a balanced life. Self-compassion serves as a key mechanism for fostering adaptive functioning and well-being among students living away from home.

From a practical perspective, the findings suggest that students should be encouraged to cultivate self-compassion consciously, engage in supportive campus communities, and participate in student organizations that facilitate social adaptation. Educational institutions can strengthen the adaptation process by providing cultural introduction programs for new students and enhancing counseling services to address both academic and emotional challenges. These measures highlight the practical importance of self-compassion not only for individual well-being but also for improving overall student adjustment and resilience.

However, several limitations should be considered when interpreting these results. The study focused on a specific group of students from a single university, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, the use of self-reported data may be influenced by social desirability or subjective bias. Future

research is recommended to expand the sample across multiple institutions and employ longitudinal designs to examine the long-term effects of self-compassion practices. Intervention-based studies could also be conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of structured self-compassion programs on resilience, emotional well-being, and academic performance. Furthermore, exploring the interactions between self-compassion, social support, and environmental stressors could provide deeper conceptual understanding and practical strategies to enhance student adaptation and well-being.

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Acknowledgment

We gratefully acknowledge the contributions of individuals who supported the completion of this article.

Funding Information

This research did not receive any funding.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

Ethical Approval and Originality Statement

Ethical approval was obtained for this study. The manuscript represents original work and has not been previously published, nor is it under consideration by another journal.

Data Disclosure Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.



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