

## Pro-Session (Self Compassion Program) in Improving Academic Resilience of Muslim Students

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### Abstract

Muslim students need academic resilience in overcoming difficulties during the educational process. Positive emotions; self-compassion influence the academic resilience of Muslim students. Self-compassion will help Muslim students to come to terms with their conditions and themselves when experiencing problems which will facilitate the academic resilience of Muslim students. Self-compassion in improving the academic resilience of Muslim students will be provided in the form of training called PRO-SESSION (Self Compassion Program). The type of research used is quasi-experimental research. The experimental research process involved 35 research subjects who were students of UIN Sunan Ampel divided into two groups, the experimental and control groups. Based on the results of the Mann-Whitney U-test analysis, it was found that the value of sig. 0.034 ( $p < 0.05$ ) with the average value of the experimental group experiencing an increase in academic resilience scores after giving a treatment by 2.25 and the control group experiencing a decrease in academic resilience scores by 0.7. This means that there is a significant effect of PRO-SESSION in increasing the resilience of Muslim students. Thus, it can be concluded that self-compassion is effectively used to increase the resilience of Muslim students.

Keywords: academic, muslim students, resilience, self-compassion

### Introduction

Resilience is an area of research with important implications in improving the education of students who are at risk of academic failure (Waxman, Gray, & Padron, 2003). In an academic context, resilience is called academic resilience (Morales & Trotman, 2005). Academic resilience refers to a student's competence to overcome acute or chronic adversity, which is a significant attack on the educational process (Martin & Marsh, 2008). Academic resilience is the ability to survive in

difficult academic situations (Cassidy, 2015). Academically resilient individuals can effectively deal with four situations; setbacks, challenges, adversity, and pressure in an academic context (Cassidy, 2015; Hartuti & Mangunsong, 2009).

Several studies believe that academic resilience is related to the beliefs held by Muslim students (Aini, 2021; Annalakshmi & Abeer, 2011; Javanmard, 2013). The study results show that a resilient person will be able to practice his beliefs or knowledge about his religion (Annalakshmi & Abeer, 2011). In other words, someone who has high resilience will have good faith/religion. Students' religious beliefs will affect the way they behave and solve various problems they face (Aini, 2021), including the academic field (Aini, 2021; Annalakshmi & Abeer, 2011; Javanmard, 2013). Studies prove that academic resilience in Muslim students is at a moderate (Prinyaphol & Chongruksa, 2008) to very high level (Aini, 2021). According to the study, Muslim students at UIN Sunan Ampel who were threatened with dropping out had an image of being able to control their emotions and remain calm when facing problems (Mufarrohah, 2017).

Muslim students believe that Allah is the main support in releasing incompetence within many ways, because a Muslim is taught about beliefs, religious rituals and transactional rules based on the Qur'an and Sunnah. Such as belief in ease after hardship, belief in Allah's mercy on his servant and belief in successful endeavors (Mukhtar, 2021). The results of the research reveal that individuals who have high resilience are individuals who apply Islamic rituals (religious practices and ritual behaviors that show the manifestation of one's religious worldview) and about *Mu'amalat* (religiously guided behavior towards family, fellow human beings and other creation) (Annalakshmi & Abeer, 2011).

Various recordings of research results show that a Muslim has resilience in facing challenges related to prejudice and discrimination (Barkdull et al., 2011), toughness to face negative public attitudes (Calfano et al., 2016), and resilience to face racial pressures (Hargreaves, 2016). In addition, it was found that some Muslim students who received scholarships in Sydney had difficulty adapting to their new life (Dunn et al., 2015). Therefore, this study reveals the resilience of Muslim students in an academic context, in the form of adaptability in facing demands, challenges and completing academic tasks.

Academic resilience is important for first-year students, identifying student abilities, providing opportunities to have successful experiences and feeling that they are able to cope with various challenges and problems. Second, to provide opportunities for students to avoid a negative environment. Through positive real-world experiences, well-functioning relationships, successful self-esteem, students receive the opportunity to transform what they perceive from their environment into a way to get it (Novotny, 2011). These two things indicate that resilience is a

psychological source that is relevant to achieving academic success, as well as being flexible in dealing with adverse situations (Farida, 2016).

A student can grow academic resilience through four main factors (Resnick, Gwyther, & Roberto, 2011); self-esteem, social support, spirituality, and Positive Emotions. Positive emotions will develop potential coping strategies (Gloria & Steinhardt, 2016; Mathur & Sharma, 2015). As a positive coping strategy, it impacts the emergence of different psychological reactions when dealing with difficulties or the inability to survive (Steinhardt & Dolbier, 2008). One form of expression of positive emotions is self-compassion (Ehret, Joormann, & Berking, 2018; J. J. Park, Long, Choe, & Schallert, 2018; Zhang, Luo, Che, & Duan, 2016). Self-compassion will help emotional regulation strategies that will make individuals more adaptive to the pressures they experience that make them resilient (Finlay-Jones, Rees, & Kane, 2015). K. Neff (2004) found that self-compassion facilitates effective emotion regulation, a positive coping strategy (C. L. Park & Adler, 2003) and an important element of resilience (Lefebvre, Montani, & Courcy, 2020).

The results of the tracking literature show that self-compassion has a strong relationship with many psychological strengths, namely resilience (Kotera, Tsuda-mccaie, Edwards, & Bhandari, 2021; MacBeth & Gumley, 2012). Someone with better self-compassion will experience increased resilience (Bluth & Eisenlohr-Moul, 2017). Self-compassion contributes to academic resilience by increasing positive emotions (Hidayati, 2015), and most importantly, self-compassion is a process of connecting with oneself rather than a process that only focuses on one emotion (Finlay-Jones et al., 2015; K. D. Neff & Germer, 2013; K. D. Neff, Kirkpatrick, & Rude, 2007).

### *Method*

The method used in this study is a quantitative method with an experimental research strategy, namely quasi-experimental. The quasi-experimental study did not randomly place the subject (random assignment) as its main feature, so the subject was not randomly placed into the experiment. The quasi-experimental design used the untreated control group design with dependent pretest and posttest samples (Cook, Campbell, & Shadish, 2002).

The subjects involved in this study were 35 seventh semester students of the Psychology Study Program, Faculty of Psychology and Health, UIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya, and currently taking a thesis. From 35 students, they were grouped into two; the experiment and the control group. The experiment group consisted of 20 students and would be given PRO-SESSION (X), while the control group that would not be given PRO-SESSION (X) consisted of 15 students. The measuring instrument used is a resilience scale developed by (Grotberg, 1995) which looks at resilience through three things; I HAVE (External Supports), I AM (Inner Strengths), and I CAN

(Interpersonal and Problem-Solving Skills). The reliability value of the scale used is 0.831 of 35 items.

Self-compassion manipulation presents seven programs in the form of training compiled (K. D. Neff, 2012) in his article entitled “Exercises to Increase Self-Compassion” to increase individual self-compassion: (a). How Self Compassionate are You? (How do you love yourself?); (b) Exploring Self-Compassion Through Writing; (c) The Criticizer, The Criticized, And The Compassionate Observer ; (d) Changing Your Critical Self-Talk (Changing Your Critical Self-Talk); (e) Self-Compassion Journal (Diary of Self-Compassion); (f) Identifying What We Really Want; (g) Taking Care Of The Caregiver.

The experimental procedure was arranged referring to the self-compassion program from (K. D. Neff, 2012), which lasted for four days, including two days of training and three days of diary writing practice. The process of providing training for two days a day contains one session guided by the research of Khorami, Moeini, and Ghamarani (2016), who conducted self-compassion training in two sessions. During the next three days after the training, the experimental group was asked to write down all kinds of emotional experiences during the day (Murthi, 2012). Every day, the experimental group who had written in the diary book were asked to submit their writings by sending photos of the writing as evidence using the WhatsApp application.

### *Theoretical review*

Resilience is an abstract concept that describes a person's ability to cope with or adapt in situations that are felt or are actually detrimental or challenging (Chisholm-burns, Spivey, Sherwin, Williams, & Phelps, 2019). Specifically, academic resilience refers to the possibility of success even in a difficult environment or situation (Wang & Gordon, 2012). Academic resilience is a competency needed by students to be able to withstand stress and be able to display positive development and adjustment. Students with academic competence will be able to display adaptive behavior and good emotional health towards academic difficulties (Rachmawati, Multisari, Triyono, Simon, & Costa, 2021). Resilient students are interpreted as individuals who maintain high achievement and motivational performance even when faced with stressful events and conditions that put them at risk of poor performance (Alva, 1991; Cassidy, 2015). In other words, academic resilience describes a student's ability to improve academic performance after an adverse event such as a failure in an assessment (e.g., an exam) (Chisholm-burns et al., 2019).

Referring to Grotberg (1995), people who have resilience have the first three characteristics, I HAVE (External Supports), namely the resilience dimension that includes external support for individuals (individuals feel they have a family, and people who support and care about them). Second, I AM (Inner Strengths) is a dimension of resilience that includes positive strengths or

potentials from within (individuals feel optimistic, have self-esteem, and have empathy for others). Third, I CAN (Interpersonal and Problem-Solving Skills), a dimension of resilience that includes interpersonal relationships and problem-solving skills.

One may be loved (I HAVE), but if one has no inner strength (I AM) or no social skills (I CAN), one is not a resilient person. A person who has high self-esteem (I AM) but does not know how to communicate with others or how to solve problems (I CAN), and does not have someone to help (I HAVE), is not a resilient individual. Also, someone who may be very verbal and can speak well (I CAN) but lacks empathy (I AM) or does not learn from someone who might be considered a role model (I HAVE), the individual is not a resilient person. Resilience results from a combination or combination of these three characteristics (I HAVE, I AM, and I CAN) (Prinyaphol & Chongruksa, 2008).

As a Muslim student, real resilience is practiced in everyday life. Resilience in religious teachings is related to human limitations and help from the almighty God (Porzoor & Astaneh, 2021). In Islam, resilience is an obligation because by having good resilience, it means that a human being has tested his faith and agility as a Muslim (Nadhifah & Karimulloh, 2021; Wahidah, 2018). Beliefs about religion will influence how to deal with events and facilitate the process of adaptation and acceptance of events that are effective in reducing risky behavior (Porzoor & Astaneh, 2021). Thus, Islam teaches its followers to deal with various stressors as a result of God's will, or as a call for patience in His people. This perspective helps fight guilt, waiting, and need. Islam appeals to God as a way to relieve stress, and convince oneself to God's will in suffering and sickness (Annalakshmi & Abeer, 2011).

When students are experiencing many demands and challenges in the academic field, according to some students, it is difficult to deal with them, so students need academic resilience by believing that all humans will be given problems by Allah SWT, including the students themselves. However, students are also sure that the ordeal will not exceed the limit of their ability. Muslim students must always husnuzhon to Allah SWT that Allah will provide convenience after the difficulties faced, so that there is no feeling of weakness, sadness and even despair (Nadhifah & Karimulloh, 2021). In Surah Al-Insyirah 1-8, two verses are repeated: with difficulty, there is ease. This verse motivates humans to have resilience in the face of difficulties, and every difficulty will get happiness and peace and prosperity (Wahidah, 2018). The research results conducted by (Prinyaphol & Chongruksa, 2008) prove that Muslim and non-Muslim students (Thailand) have moderate resilience. Even though they have different religions, both students have the features of I have resilience (social support), I Can (interpersonal skills). Even though they belong to different religions, they both value social relationships, like living in harmony with nature and sharing with others, strengthening resilience.

In order to increase academic resilience among students, experts suggest increasing resilience through self-compassion (Kotera et al., 2021; Lahtinen, Järvinen, Kumlander, & Salmivalli, 2020). Individuals with greater self-compassion on themselves in an academic context when they fail, are more aware that failure is part of the general human experience, and pay more attention to negative emotions. Students will be more likely to see the experience of failure as an opportunity to learn and grow rather than an opportunity to learn and grow thereby supporting the adoption of more adaptive academic goals (Neff, Hsieh, & Dejitterat, 2005).

Self-compassion is an intrapersonal experience that does not depend on achievement or positive outcomes but is developed by engaging in a loving relationship with oneself, regardless of external factors (K. D. Neff, 2003). This perspective fosters a sense of autonomous motivation (Hope, Koestner, & Milyavskaya, 2014; K. D. Neff, Hsieh, & Dejitterat, 2005), an essential resource for resilience (Crane & Boga, 2017). The concept of self-compassion has three interrelated components that are demonstrated during times of illness and failure. Each component has two parts, the presence of one construct and the negation of the other (Barnard & Curry, 2011; K. D. Neff, 2003). These three concepts are: (a) being kind and understanding of oneself is great for self judgment, (b) seeing one's mistakes as part of human conditions and experiences that are more than isolation, and (c) holding thoughts and feelings in a mindful awareness rather than avoiding or over identifying (Barnard & Curry, 2011; Finlay-Jones et al., 2015; K. D. Neff, 2003). Therefore, premises suggest that intentional self-compassion can activate the calming system to produce feelings of peace, contentment and well-being, thereby creating more emotional space to connect with resilient coping strategies (Gilbert et al., 2008).

When individuals feel self compassion, experience and awareness of their own experiences, self respect and understanding, respect for someone's non judgment and failure, their own experiences in ordinary people. People who feel self compassion are also carried away by the pleasure of being free to see. Excessive identification causes individuals to exaggerate the dimensions of individual suffering and prevent individuals from having a more objective perspective on individual situations. On the other hand, self compassion can be said to require mindfulness with a balanced state of awareness in which thoughts and feelings are observed without judgment as they are without eliminating or changing them, but also without exaggerating or avoiding them (Neff, Hsieh, & Dejitterat, 2005).

Theoretically, the evolutionary and neurobiological model of tripartite affect regulation proposed by Gilbert (2015; Gilbert et al., 2008) can explain the power of self-compassion in facilitating emotion regulation and its relationship to positive outcomes. This model proposes three systems of emotion regulation and that all three systems are genetically inherited. The first system focuses on survival, which activates avoiding, fighting, and freezing when facing threats. This impulse activates the presence of negative emotions such as anger and fear. The second system is a

resource that motivates survival, such as getting rewards and generates emotions of competition, pride, enthusiasm, and joy. Both threats and resources encourage initiating the stress response. The third system is a calming system that is suitable for a state of peace and calm (Gilbert, 2015).

From this system, as research by Depue and Morrone-Strupinsky (2005) states that the activation of the calming system is related to the endorphins that are felt during a peaceful state which are needed to produce resilience. Consistent with this model, self-compassion efficiently activates system calming and disables system threats and resources. Thus, it can help individuals produce a positive state of resilience through effective emotion regulation.

In the view of Islam, Allah as the creator has a supreme nature, and the doctrine of Allah is merciful in Islam has also been ingrained from childhood to adulthood. Therefore, as a Muslim, the experience of the nature of Allah, who is most compassionate and merciful, is intrinsically embedded in the awareness that results in self-love. One example of the Qur'anic affirmation in particular on the subject of compassion, is the depiction of God as *Arḥam ar-Rāḥimīn* (the Most Merciful of all who may show compassion), which is shown several times, mainly in the form of quotes from stories from a number of Prophets. earlier included Moses, Jacob and Job, thereby demonstrating the universality of its significance.

## Discussion

Through 35 subjects divided into 20 subjects in the experimental group and 15 in the control group, the subject description data about the standard deviation of the experimental group was 3,164, and the control group was 2,800. From the data on academic resilience scores in the pre-test and post-test in the experimental and control groups, were compared using the Mann-Whitney U-Test analysis with the help of SPSS as follows:

Table 1. Mann-Whitney U-Test analysis

	Gain
Mann-Whitney U	72,000
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	,034

Table 1 shows that the gain score is 72,000 with the Asymp value. Sig. (2-tailed) < 0.05 is 0.034, which means that the self-compassion program can affect students' academic resilience. So there is a significant difference between the control group and the experimental group after participating in the PRO-SESSION program (Self Compassion Program). This shows that PRO-SESSION has a significant impact on students' academic resilience.

The next stage is to see how effective PRO-SESSION is in improving academic resilience in subjects by comparing scores between the experimental and control groups before and after

treatment (pre-test – post-test). The pre-test value of the experimental group was 25.45 lower than the control group of 27.2. This means that the control group has better academic resilience than the experimental group before the treatment. Meanwhile, in the post-test, the experimental group had a higher academic resilience score than the control group, 27.7 and 26.5, respectively. This means that the self-compassion program given to the experimental group is effective with an increase, while the control group has decreased compared to before the experiment.

Furthermore, the gain score calculation to see the improvement in the experimental group and control group can be shown in the following table:

Table 2. Student Academic Resilience Questionnaire Data with Gain Score

No	Experiment			Control		
	Pre-Test	Post-Test	Gain Score	Pre-Test	Post-Test	Gain Score
1	30	30	0	21	21	0
2	23	29	6	31	29	-2
3	28	32	4	31	30	-1
4	28	27	-1	30	28	-2
5	24	26	2	20	23	3
6	29	32	3	22	23	1
7	28	29	1	26	27	1
8	26	27	1	31	28	-3
9	30	32	2	22	23	1
10	25	23	-2	27	27	0
11	26	26	0	31	30	-1
12	22	24	2	29	27	-2
13	27	29	2	30	29	-1
14	25	31	6	28	27	-1
15	22	29	7	29	26	-3
16	25	25	0			
17	16	20	4			
18	25	27	2			
19	25	27	2			
20	25	29	4			
Mean	25,45	27,7	2,25	27,2	26,5	-0,667

The gain score was obtained from calculating the difference between the pre-test and post-test of each group, namely the experimental and control groups. From the gain score, it is known that the experimental group experienced an increase in score of 2.25 (27.7-25.45), while the control group experienced a decrease in score of -0.7 (26.5-27.2).

The results obtained show that the self-compassion program (PRO-SESSION) can increase the academic resilience of Muslim students. The results of this study support previous research that



self-compassion increases resilience (Kotera et al., 2021; MacBeth & Gumley, 2012; K. D. Neff et al., 2007). The higher the self-compassion of students, the higher their resilience (Finlay-Jones et al., 2015). Because self-compassion functions as an adaptation strategy to manage emotions by reducing negative emotions (Diedrich, Grant, Hofmann, Hiller, & Berking, 2014). Self-compassion is an important part and plays a role in positive emotions (Bluth & Eisenlohr-Moul, 2017) with high levels of positive emotions (Ehret et al., 2018), and low negative emotions (Finlay-Jones et al., 2015). In addition, self-compassion also affects a person to be more resilient because of reduced symptoms of depression (Diedrich et al., 2014).

These findings also strengthen previous research that self-compassion is related to academic resilience through mindfulness in underprivileged students. For underprivileged students, the impact of mindfulness on academic resilience will be high through self-compassion (Salsabila & Widyasari, 2021). The results of other research also show that self-compassion was found to be a significant predictor of resilience (Aydin Sünbül & Yerin Güneri, 2019).

These findings also strengthen previous research that academic resilience is needed in facing increasingly advanced academic challenges in the era of the industrial revolution 5.0. The survey results show that academically resilient students have competence, self-confidence, character, commitment, interest and are able to apply self-control in dealing with the difficulties they face. It's just that commitment is an important aspect for individuals to deal with academic situations. Commitment in oneself to overcome the difficulties encountered by acting effectively to eliminate them. Commitment is needed by students to become strong individuals by caring for themselves as a form of high emotionality. Commitment can be realized by individuals who have academic resilience by contributing to themselves and others as a form of academic concern (Rachmawati et al., 2021).

Self-compassion as a form of positive understanding helps one see a problem faced as a positive thing without judging oneself (K. Neff, 2004). In the general population, individuals who have self-compassion are less likely to experience mental health difficulties (K. D. Neff et al., 2007). Better mental health was found in Muslim students with higher levels of self-compassion (Ghorbani, Watson, Chen, & Norballa, 2012; Ghorbani et al., 2017).

According to the view of Islamic Psychology, self-compassion will affect the mental health of Muslim students as Muslims who must achieve a necessary form of self-control in responding to world problems by submitting and drawing closer to a merciful God (Ghorbani et al., 2012). As in QS Az Zumar verse 53, which means, "*Say: 'O creation of God, do not be discouraged from Allah's mercy among you who act against your own interests. Verily Allah forgives all sins. He is Forgiving and Merciful'*" (Shihab, 2020). Therefore, Muslim knowledge regarding the command to love oneself

(self-compassion) in religion will affect how to respond to various world problems and improve one's mental health (Ghorbani et al., 2012).

Meanwhile, more than 20 research results show that individuals who have high levels of self-compassion indicate reduced symptoms of depression and anxiety (MacBeth & Gumley, 2012). This proves that the pressures resulting from the inability to survive in the face of academic situations can be reduced with self-compassion. Because academic resilience plays a role in dealing with chronic underachievement when dealing with excessive feelings of anxiety, inability to deal with failure or chronic anxiety, anxiety and depression, and truancy and dissatisfaction from school, and when dealing with alienation (Martin & Marsh, 2008, 2009). Thus self-compassion becomes important for Muslim students.

In the humanistic theory, self-compassion from KD Neff (2003) is a concept that fosters self-love and can increase self-understanding (knowledge of self), which helps develop what Maslow calls "B-perception," i.e. non-judgmental, forgive, love, and accept the situation as it is. Meanwhile, in Rogers' point of view, self-compassion is in line with the concept of "unconditional positive regard" (unconditional positive regard). The feeling of a person's positive evaluation and self-evaluation without conditions can encourage a person to become better.

For Muslim students who have completed their final project, self-compassion can be used efficiently by activating the calming system and disabling the threat system and resources. Thus, it can help individuals produce a positive state of resilience through effective emotion regulation. According to Bluth & Eisenlohr-Moul (2017), someone who has better self-compassion is associated with increased resilience. For students, sometimes they do not consciously apply this concept, where when working on a final project, they have made mistakes (self-kindness), have wrong experiences (shared humanity) and noted that mindfulness is needed to make decisions as an element of self-compassion (Lewis & Ebbeck, 2014). When students have applied the element of self-compassion in completing the final project, they will get positive results and become more resilient.

## Conclusion

The results showed that the PRO-SESSION training (Self Compassion Program) could increase the academic resilience of Muslim students. The results showed an increase in the academic resilience of Muslim students, which was influenced by self-compassion behaviour. Thus, Muslim students are strongly encouraged to apply self-compassion in order to improve their academic resilience. In addition, researchers interested in researching the same topic can research with subjects who have different variations of pressure or stressors to see the role of self-compassion with other psychological attributes, such as problem-solving in various areas of life.

Resilience is a psychological resource that can help individuals to cope and adapt flexibly to make changes when under stress, in completing lecture assignments. The academic resilience of Muslim students is getting better when they have the ability to compassion and not criticism themselves by committing to solving difficulties. Difficulties will disappear with the presence of ease as a result of a sense of commitment to avoid academic difficulties.

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