

Students' Mental Load Viewed from Self-Compassion

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the role of self-compassion in mental load among high school students. The study employed a quantitative correlational design and involved 262 students from three high schools in Yogyakarta. Data were collected using the Mental Load Scale and the Self-Compassion Scale. Based on the results of this study, both instruments showed adequate validity and reliability as indicated by AVE, Cronbach's Alpha, and Composite Reliability values. Analysis was conducted using Partial Least Squares (PLS) based Structural Equation Modeling with SmartPLS 4.0. The validity results showed that all aspects had an Average Variance Extracted (AVE) > 0.50, while internal reliability for all aspects was good with Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability > 0.70. The results showed that total self-compassion had a significant role in total mental load ($\beta = 0.133$, $p < 0.05$) and mental load aspects ($\beta = 0.025$, $p < 0.05$). However, total self-compassion also played an indirect role in mental effort aspects through total mental load as a mediator (T-statistic > 1.96, $p < 0.05$). The R-square values indicate strong predictive ability in most aspects, including the mental load aspect (0.942) and the mental effort aspect (0.936). These findings indicate that students with higher levels of self-compassion tend to cope more adaptively with academic and emotional pressures. Therefore, school-based guidance and counseling services can be utilized to help students manage mental load by strengthening self-compassion through individual or group counseling.

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Introduction

Adolescence is a challenging transitional period during which students face high academic, social, and emotional demands. High school students often experience heavy academic burdens, which, combined with lack of sleep, loneliness, and low physical activity,

increase vulnerability to depression and anxiety (Wang et al., 2025). These demands contribute to mental load, reflected in stress, anxiety, feelings of chaos, and negative self-evaluation (Dewangan et al., 2023). Low resilience, poor emotional regulation, limited social relationships, and unsupportive school environments can worsen stress, trigger burnout, and negatively affect learning motivation and psychological well-being (Pontes et al., 2024). Such pressures may accumulate, disrupting emotional balance and daily academic functioning.

In this study, mental load refers to cognitive and emotional burdens from multiple simultaneous demands (Krell, 2017). Psychological pressure occurs when students must manage academic tasks, school activities, and social demands at the same time (Dean et al., 2022). It reflects the effort needed to understand lessons, complete assignments, and fulfill academic responsibilities (Krell, 2017). Mental load can result from complex life situations and social pressures (Adolph, 2016). In high school students, it comes from academic and extracurricular demands, such as piled-up assignments, competition for grades, expectations from parents and teachers, and involvement in time- and energy-consuming activities, supported by Koch, (2018). High mental load can lead to prolonged stress, anxiety, depression, emotional exhaustion, sleep disturbances, and even a decrease in motivation and academic performance.

The issue of mental load among high school students in Indonesia is diverse and complex due to environmental, social, and regional socioeconomic factors. In Jakarta, academic and social pressures are associated with depression, anxiety, and suicide risk (Yusuf & ., 2018). Meanwhile, adolescents in Yogyakarta report stress levels of 29.1%, anxiety 46.6%, and depression 24.6% (Ismail et al., 2023). These findings highlight the urgency of preventive efforts by schools and government institutions in addressing students' mental health problems.

Based on interviews with nine students from three schools in Yogyakarta City, identified academic workload and environmental pressure as main sources of mental load. Students reported feeling overwhelmed by busy schedules, heavy assignments, high parental expectations, academic difficulties, and uncertainty in choosing majors. These conditions triggered fatigue, stress, self-blame, and decreased motivation, increasing the need for support from Guidance and Counseling teachers.

Research by Dale et al., (2023) shows that students who use positive coping strategies, such as positive appraisal and emotion management, have higher life satisfaction, better academic adjustment, and mental health, whereas negative coping strategies worsen

psychopathological symptoms. High mental pressure is linked to low tolerance for cognitive load, decreased learning motivation, and symptoms of stress, anxiety, and depression, especially among students with low psychological well-being. These findings highlight the importance of internal psychological resources, such as self-compassion, to help students cope adaptively with academic pressure.

Self-compassion is a dispositional tendency to treat oneself with kindness and understanding when confronted with challenges and setbacks. According to Neff et al., (2021) It helps students reduce self-criticism, accept imperfections, and handle academic setbacks without losing motivation. This attitude fosters emotional calmness, empathy, and resilience, supporting psychological well-being (Kristin Neff, 2017). Research by Stutts et al., (2018) indicates that self-compassion reduces the negative effects of stress on depression and anxiety. In addition, Ponkosonsirilert et al., (2022) alleviates mental load arising from academic and social demands. Thus, self-compassion becomes an important aspect in building emotional balance that plays a role in maintaining students' mental health in the school environment.

According to Neff et al., (2021) self-compassion comprises six components; self-kindness, being kind to oneself; self-judgment, tendency to criticize oneself; common humanity, recognizing shared human experiences; isolation, feeling alone in suffering; mindfulness, balanced awareness of emotions; and over-identification, overly focusing on negative thoughts. Developing self-compassion helps students manage academic pressure, regulate emotions, and handle mental load more adaptively.

Self-compassion acts as an effective protector by helping students manage academic pressure, social demands, and emotional changes (Kong et al., 2022). Students with self-compassion can accept difficult experiences, soothe themselves during stress, and maintain emotional stability (Wibowo & Naini, 2021). It also supports emotion regulation, aiding recovery from failures or disappointments caused by school or friendships (Syafitri et al., 2024). Self-compassion is positively correlated with resilience, curiosity, and openness to new experiences, helping students bounce back from academic and emotional challenges (Bluth et al., 2018). Strengthening self-compassion in high school students is thus crucial for mental health and optimal personal development.

Although various studies have confirmed the role of self-compassion in mental health and resilience among high school students, research directly linking self-compassion to mental load remains limited. Most studies focus on emotion regulation, psychological well-

being, or academic resilience without explicitly addressing mental load as a multidimensional construct (Edlyn et al., 2025). This limitation highlights the need for more in-depth research on the relationship between self-compassion and mental load among high school students, particularly in the Indonesian context.

Although previous studies have consistently demonstrated the role of self-compassion in mental health, emotional regulation, and academic resilience among adolescents, research explicitly examining its relationship with mental load remains limited. Most studies emphasize psychological well-being or stress without addressing mental load as a multidimensional construct (Ramadhan et al., 2024). The findings of this study are expected to serve as a foundation for developing school-based guidance and counseling programs that strengthen self-compassion and support students in managing mental load more effectively.

Given the important role of schools and Guidance and Counseling services in supporting students' psychological adjustment, understanding factors that help students manage mental load is essential (Ramadhan *et al.*, 2024). The findings are expected to provide empirical evidence to support the development of school-based guidance and counseling programs aimed at strengthening self-compassion as an adaptive strategy for managing academic pressure and maintaining students' psychological well-being. Therefore, this study examines the role of self-compassion in total mental load, including mental load aspects and mental effort aspects, among high school students.

Method

This study This study uses a quantitative approach with a correlational method aimed at examining students' mental load in relation to self-compassion. The research was conducted at three schools in the Yogyakarta City area, with a total of 262 respondents. The sampling technique used purposive sampling, which involved selecting schools that represent a variety of educational characteristics, such as public schools, boarding schools, and religious-based schools. The criteria for the selected students were: students in grades X, XI, and XII aged 15–18 years, actively enrolled in the 2025 academic year, willing to complete the research instruments sincerely, and recommended by the Guidance and Counseling Teacher.

Data were collected using two psychological scales. Mental load was measured using an adapted scale developed by Krell (2017), consisting of 12 items with good reliability (Cronbach's alpha = 0.856). Self-compassion was assessed using the Self-Compassion Scale (SCS) adapted from Neff et al. (2021), comprising 26 items measuring self-kindness, self-

judgment, common humanity, isolation, mindfulness, and over-identification, with satisfactory reliability (Cronbach's alpha = 0.819).

Findings and Discussion

Findings

Instrument validity and reliability were assessed using SmartPLS 4.0. Based on the criteria suggested by Hair et al., (2021), all indicators in this study show outer loading values above 0.70, indicating that the measurement model meets the requirements for validity and reliability.

Validity is also supported by the AVE (Average Variance Extracted) value, which should be above 0.5, as well as composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha above 0.7 to ensure that the instrument is truly reliable. In the initial stage of analysis, a check is performed on all items to observe the outer loading values. Items with outer loading values below 0.70 were removed. An outer loading value of 0.70 or higher indicates that an item explains at least 50% of the variance of the construct, and is therefore considered valid. Thus, only items that meet the validity and reliability criteria will be used in subsequent analyses, making the research results more accurate and reliable. Figure 1 below shows the results of the initial validity analysis, displaying the outer loading values for each item before the process of item removal based on instrument feasibility criteria.

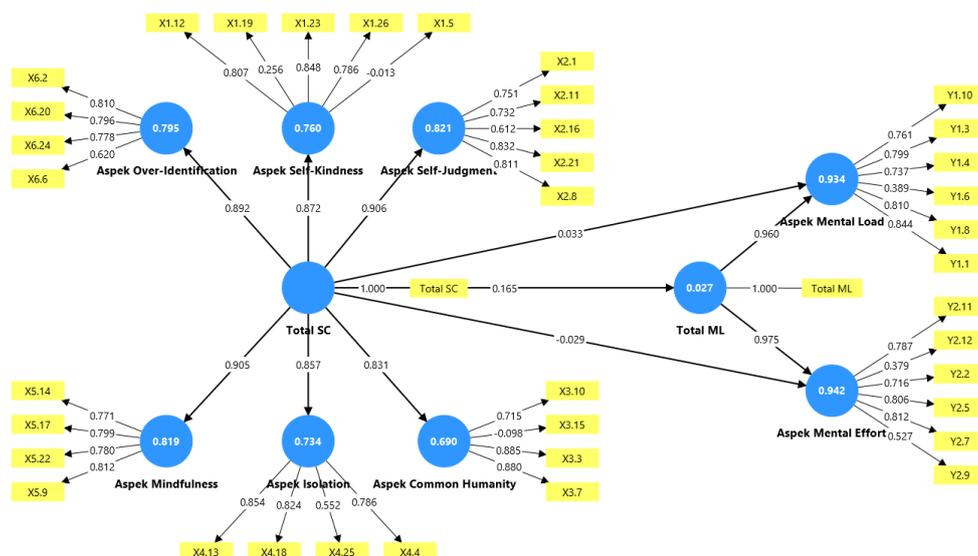


Figure 1. Initial Outer Model Output

The analysis results of the initial outer model output indicated that several items had outer loading values below 0.70, thus failing to meet the instrument eligibility criteria. In the Self-Kindness aspect, item X1.19 had a value of 0.256 and X1.26 was 0.013. In the Self-

Judgment aspect, item X2.16 scored 0.612. Meanwhile, in the Common Humanity aspect, item X3.15 showed a value of 0.098. For the Isolation aspect, item X4.25 had a value of 0.552, and in the Over-Identification aspect, item X6.6 was 0.620. In the mental load aspect, item Y1.4 recorded a value of 0.389. As for the mental effort aspect, items Y2.12 and Y2.9 had values of 0.379 and 0.527, respectively. These items were eliminated because they were not valid and failed to meet the indicator eligibility criteria, making them unsuitable for use in further model testing.

Table 1. Average Variance Extracted (AVE)

Variabel	Aspek	AVE	Keterangan
<i>Mental Load</i>	<i>Mental Load</i>	0.636	Valid
	<i>Mental Effort</i>	0.650	Valid
<i>Self-Compassion</i>	<i>Self-Kindness</i>	0.672	Valid
	<i>Self-Judgment</i>	0.639	Valid
	<i>Common Humanity</i>	0.691	Valid
	<i>Isolation</i>	0.723	Valid
	<i>Mindfulness</i>	0.625	Valid
	<i>Over-Identification</i>	0.667	Valid

Based on the analysis of average variance extracted, all aspects measured in this study have Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values above 0.50. The AVE values for Mental Load, Mental Effort, Self-Kindness, Self-Judgment, Common Humanity, Isolation, Mindfulness, and Over-Identification are 0.636, 0.650, 0.672, 0.639, 0.691, 0.723, 0.625, and 0.667, respectively. These results indicate that each aspect can explain more than half of the variance of the indicators that constitute it. Therefore, all constructs in this study can be considered convergently valid and suitable for use in the next stage of analysis.

Table 2. Value of Cronbach Alpha and Composite Reliability

Variabel	Aspek	Cronbach Alpha	Composite Reliability	Keterangan
<i>Mental Load</i>	<i>Mental Load</i>	0.856	0.859	Reliabel
	<i>Mental Effort</i>	0.819	0.820	Reliabel
<i>Self-Compassion</i>	<i>Self-Kindness</i>	0.755	0.755	Reliabel
	<i>Self-Judgment</i>	0.810	0.811	Reliabel
	<i>Common Humanity</i>	0.769	0.767	Reliabel
	<i>Isolation</i>	0.807	0.808	Reliabel
	<i>Mindfulness</i>	0.800	0.800	Reliabel
	<i>Over-Identification</i>	0.750	0.750	Reliabel

The analysis results of the Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability values show that all measured aspects have Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability values above 0.70. For example, Mental Load scored 0.856 and 0.859, Mental Effort 0.819 and 0.820, Self-Kindness 0.755 and 0.755, Self-Judgment 0.810 and 0.811, Common Humanity 0.769 and 0.767,

Isolation 0.807 and 0.808, Mindfulness 0.800 and 0.800, and Over-Identification 0.750 and 0.750. These results indicate that each aspect has good internal consistency. Therefore, the instrument used in this study can be considered reliable as it is capable of producing stable and trustworthy data, making it suitable for further analysis.

Table 3. Outer Loading Item Validitas

Variabel	AVE	Item	Outer Loading	Keterangan	
<i>Mental Load</i>	<i>Mental Load</i>	Y1.1	0.866	Valid	
		Y1.3	0.783	Valid	
		Y1.4	0.748	Valid	
		Y1.8	0.834	Valid	
		Y1.10	0.748	Valid	
<i>Mental Effort</i>	<i>Mental Effort</i>	Y2.2	0.720	Valid	
		Y2.5	0.856	Valid	
		Y2.7	0.821	Valid	
		Y2.11	0.823	Valid	
<i>Self-Compassion</i>	<i>Self-Kindness</i>	X1.12	0.820	Valid	
		X1.23	0.856	Valid	
		X1.26	0.782	Valid	
	<i>Self-Judgment</i>	<i>Self-Judgment</i>	X2.1	0.754	Valid
			X2.8	0.834	Valid
			X2.11	0.745	Valid
			X2.21	0.859	Valid
	<i>Common Humanity</i>	<i>Common Humanity</i>	X3.3	0.888	Valid
			X3.7	0.883	Valid
			X3.10	0.709	Valid
<i>Isolation</i>	<i>Isolation</i>	X4.4	0.788	Valid	
		X4.13	0.889	Valid	
		X4.18	0.870	Valid	
<i>Mindfulness</i>	<i>Mindfulness</i>	X5.9	0.813	Valid	
		X5.14	0.774	Valid	
		X5.17	0.797	Valid	
		X5.22	0.778	Valid	
<i>Over-Identification</i>	<i>Over-Identification</i>	X6.2	0.809	Valid	
		X6.20	0.833	Valid	
		X6.24	0.808	Valid	

The results of the item outer loading validity showed that all items had outer loading values above the minimum standard, so each item is considered valid. These results indicate that each indicator is able to represent its construct well and is suitable to be used in the subsequent research analysis process.

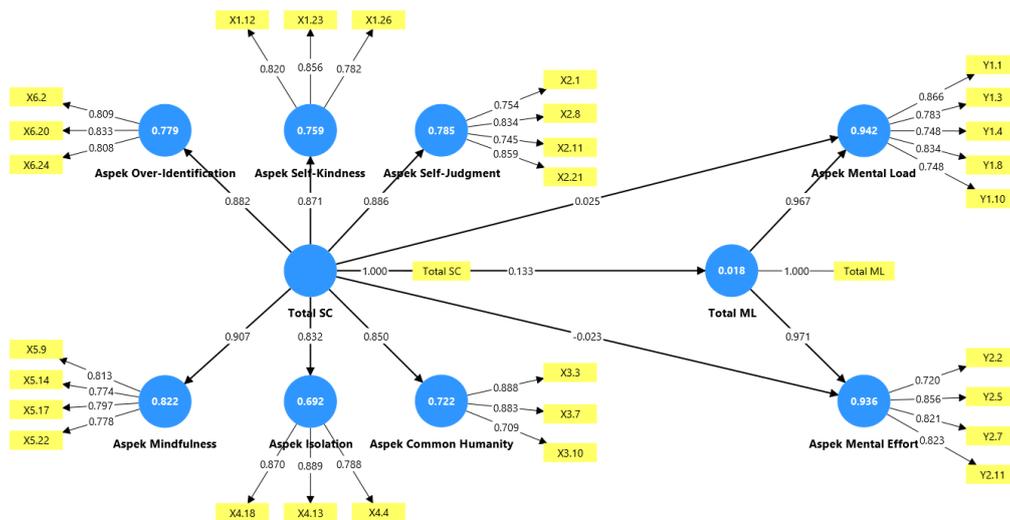


Figure 2. Final Model Output

The structural modeling results in this study indicate that self-compassion is associated with a lower mental load in students. The coefficient value of $\beta = 0.133$ shows that the higher the self-compassion, the lower the total mental load experienced. The role of self-compassion in the aspects of mental load is also observed, albeit relatively small ($\beta = 0.025$), indicating a tendency for lower mental load as self-compassion increases. Additionally, self-compassion is related to lower mental effort, shown by the coefficient value of $\beta = -0.023$, where students with higher self-compassion tend to exhibit lower mental effort when completing tasks. Overall, these findings affirm that increasing self-compassion plays a role in variations in the levels of mental load and mental effort, both overall and in individual aspects.

R-square values are divided into several categories, namely ≥ 0.67 indicating a strong role, around 0.33 indicating a moderate role, and around 0.19 indicating a weak role (Hair et al., 2021). The analysis results show that almost all aspects in the model have strong predictive ability. Mental Load Aspect has an R-square 0.942 and Mental Effort Aspect has an R-square 0.936, Total Mental Load 0.950, all in very strong category, indicating that these two aspects are very well explained by the model. Overall, the model is able to explain most variables effectively.

Table 4. Bootstrapping Path Coefficients Results for Direct Effect

Koefisien Jalur	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values	Keterangan
Total SC -> Aspek Mental Effort	-0.023	-0.024	0.012	1.916	0.028	Tidak Terbukti
Total SC -> Aspek Mental Load	0.025	0.026	0.011	2.256	0.012	Terbukti
Total SC -> Total ML	0.133	0.134	0.067	1.987	0.023	Terbukti

The results of the bootstrapping test show that some of the relationships between variables in the model are statistically significant, indicated by T-statistic values >1.96 and p-values <0.05. This suggests that the influence between variables in the model is supported by the data and can be considered significant. However, there is one path, namely the influence of Total Self-Compassion on the Mental Effort Aspect, which is not statistically proven because its T-statistic value is below the minimum threshold, even though its p-value is significant.

Table 5. Results of Specific Indirect Effect

Koefisien Jalur	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values	Keterangan
Total SC -> Total ML -> Aspek Mental Effort	0.129	0.130	0.065	1.978	0.024	Terbukti
Total SC -> Total ML -> Aspek Mental Load	0.128	0.129	0.065	1.990	0.023	Terbukti

The results of the specific indirect effect analysis indicate that total self-compassion influences mental effort and mental load through the role of total mental load as a mediator. The coefficients of these two indirect effects are significant, as shown by the T-statistic values >1.96 and p-values <0.05. These findings confirm that the level of self-compassion can shape students' mental responses, where its impact on mental effort and mental load occurs indirectly through total mental load as a mediator. Thus, the process of enhancing self-compassion not only has a direct effect but also significantly affects mental effort and mental load through the mediating mechanism of total mental load.

Discussion

This study shows that self-compassion plays a significant role in reducing mental load in high school students, both directly and through the indirect mediating effect of total mental

load. In general, self-compassion has been proven to have a significant effect on most variables in the model, except for mental effort, which shows no direct effect. This condition illustrates that students' ability to be kind to themselves, understand difficult experiences as part of the human condition, and maintain emotional balance is crucial in reducing psychological stress from academic demands (Syafitri et al., 2024). These findings are consistent with Neff et al., (2021), which state that self-compassion helps individuals respond to difficulties more adaptively, thereby reducing emotional stress. In this research model, the role of self-compassion on total mental load was found to be significant, so students with higher levels of self-compassion tend to have lower mental load. This also supports Dale et al., (2023), that emotion regulation plays a role in reducing psychological burden in students. Thus, the findings of this study affirm that strengthening self-compassion in students is an important strategy to consider in lowering mental load and improving their psychological well-being in the school environment.

The role of self-compassion on aspects of mental load and mental effort shows an interesting dynamic. Self-compassion has been shown to reduce mental load aspects in students, although its effect is relatively small compared to other variables. This is understandable because mental load aspects is a cognitive and emotional response to the amount of academic demands, as Krell, (2017), explains that mental load aspects arises when someone has to process multiple tasks simultaneously. Self-compassion, as the ability to accept oneself and maintain emotional balance, plays a role in reducing the pressure that arises during the learning process. This explanation aligns with findings that self-compassion acts as a protective factor against stress and psychological pressure in adolescents (Marsh et al., 2018). On the other hand, self-compassion does not show a significant effect on mental effort aspects. According to Krell, (2017), mental effort aspects is largely determined by the difficulty of the task and cognitive demands, and is therefore not entirely influenced by emotional conditions or self-compassion attitudes. However, self-compassion can still indirectly influence aspects of mental effort through the total mental load. With high self-compassion, students are able to reduce the total mental load they experience, so their focus, attention, and mental energy are better directed when facing academic tasks, even though the difficulty level of the tasks remains the same. Therefore, even if students have a high level of self-compassion, they still need to exert the same amount of mental effort when tackling complex academic tasks.

This study is in line with the findings of Puspita et al., (2025), who emphasized that self-compassion can manage anxiety, improve emotional regulation skills, and reduce negative thoughts in students. Furthermore, the research shows that the relationship between aspects that form mental load, such as mental effort and mental load, is also influenced by the total mental load experienced by students. Based on these findings, strengthening self-compassion becomes important because it can help students face academic pressures with more stable emotions, better self-acceptance, and the ability to understand that challenges are part of the learning experience.

From the perspective of model strength, the R-square values for most variables in this study indicate a strong category, meaning that the SEM model used has high predictive capability. Hair et al., (2021) explain that an R-square value above 0.67 indicates very good predictive strength, and in this study, almost all aspects, including mental load and mental effort, have values above this threshold. This condition indicates that the model is able to explain the dependent variables comprehensively, so the relationships between variables can be statistically trusted. These findings show that the research model successfully depicts the dynamics between self-compassion and mental load in high school students strongly and stably, and provides a solid basis for the interpretation of results and practical implications of this study.

The relevance of the research results to high school students can be understood through the characteristics of adolescence as a transitional phase filled with academic, social, and emotional demands. These conditions can increase the risk of stress, anxiety, and mental fatigue, as explained by Dewangan et al., (2023) dan Ismail et al., (2023) in the context of students in Yogyakarta. This study's findings indicate that self-compassion helps students cope with these various pressures. Students who are able to treat themselves with more compassion tend to more easily accept shortcomings, stabilize emotions, and manage stress, making mental pressure feel lighter. This aligns with the findings of Stutts et al., (2018) which showed that self-compassion is associated with a reduction in symptoms of stress and anxiety in adolescents. Thus, strengthening self-compassion in high school students is a crucial step in helping them cope with various developmental demands and maintaining mental health continuously.

Compared to previous studies, these findings further strengthen the evidence of the important role of self-compassion in supporting students' psychological well-being and academic resilience. Ponkosonsirilert et al., (2022) showed that self-compassion is effective in

managing burnout among high school students in Thailand, while Bluth et al., (2018) found its connection with increased emotional resilience in students. Other research in Indonesia also shows that self-compassion is positively associated with psychological well-being in adolescents who are victims of bullying (Naichiendami & Sartika, 2022). Self-compassion plays a significant role in enhancing subjective well-being and academic resilience (Humaira et al., 2023). Thus, this study provides an additional contribution by showing that self-compassion not only affects psychological variables in general but also specifically impacts total mental load and has an indirect effect on mental effort, thereby expanding the understanding of the benefits of self-compassion in the context of high school students.

Theoretically, these results reinforce the conceptual model of self-compassion developed by Kristin Neff and help clarify how aspects of self-compassion interact with the mental load experienced by students. Practically, this study provides important implications for schools and Guidance and Counseling teachers in designing self-compassion enhancement programs to help students manage academic pressure. Ramadhan et al., (2024) emphasize that increasing self-compassion in high school students can support mental health and help students cope with failure more adaptively. Therefore, guidance services can integrate mindfulness training, self-acceptance strategies, and self-judgment reduction techniques into Guidance and Counseling programs. This implementation can be carried out through regular classroom sessions, specialized workshops, or group mentoring, so that students get consistent practice and hands-on experience in developing self-compassion. Moreover, teachers and counselors can utilize self-reflection methods, emotional journals, or empathy-based activities to encourage students to identify their own stress and coping strategies. This approach not only helps students cope with daily academic pressures but also equips them with emotional skills that can be applied in various social and personal situations outside of school. Thus, this program can strengthen students' ability to stabilize emotions, accept their shortcomings, and enhance mental resilience sustainably.

This study has several limitations, particularly regarding generalization, as it was conducted in only three schools within one city, so the conditions of students in other areas may differ. Furthermore, the use of a cross-sectional design limits the study's ability to detect changes in mental load and self-compassion over the long term. The instruments used also only measure students' perceptions, so additional data through observation or behavior-based assessments are needed to provide a more comprehensive picture of mental load and self-compassion. For future research, it is recommended to conduct longitudinal studies to

monitor changes in mental load and self-compassion over time. Subsequent studies can also expand the variables by including other factors such as social support, coping strategies, or self-efficacy to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of students' psychological dynamics. In addition, studies in schools with different cultural and environmental characteristics are needed to broaden the scope of findings and strengthen the generalization of research results.

Conclusion

This study aims to examine the role of self-compassion on mental load in high school students. The results indicate that self-compassion plays an important role in helping students reduce both academic and emotional pressure. Self-compassion contributes to strengthening positive aspects such as self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness, while being associated with lower negative aspects such as self-judgment, isolation, and over-identification. Although it does not have a direct effect on mental effort, self-compassion still provides an indirect role through total mental load, thereby contributing to a more stable psychological condition. These findings confirm that students with higher self-compassion tend to have lower mental load. Practically, this research implies the importance of strengthening self-compassion in educational services and counseling guidance as an adaptive strategy to help students cope with academic demands and maintain mental health sustainably.

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