

THE EFFECT OF LOVING-KINDNESS MEDITATION INTERVENTION ON SELF-COMPASSION IN TEACHERS OF CHILDREN WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES

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ABSTRACT

Failure or unpleasant events can happen at any time, to anyone. In responding to negative events experienced, some individuals respond positively, some negatively. Previous research has shown that a negative response to failure and painful experiences is a picture of low self-compassion that can cause individuals to underestimate themselves, experience depression, and isolate themselves. In other studies, it is said that a person's self-compassion can be increased through appropriate coping. A Loving-Kindness Meditation (LKM) is one of the coping techniques or methods which is concluded to be able to increase individual self-compassion. In this quasi-experimental study, the focus of the researcher was to conduct an intervention on the participants to see whether the LKM was effective in increasing the participants' self-compassion. This research was conducted at a special school "X" in Ciledug, Tangerang, involving 20 teachers of children with intellectual disabilities (ID) as participants. The sampling technique used was the purposive sampling technique. The processing data using a different test pre-test and post-test with the help of the SPSS program. The results of the study note that the *t*-count produced is -1.948 with a *p*-value of 0.083. As the *p*-value (0.083) < significance level ($\alpha = 10\%$), it means that at the 10% level of significance there is a significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores in the experimental group (EG). Therefore, it can be concluded that the LKM intervention is effective in increasing self-compassion in teachers of children with ID.

Keywords: Self-compassion, loving-kindness meditation, teacher, intellectual disability, stress

1. PREFACE

As the most important role in the whole process of school education, teacher behavior is a determining factor for fostering and developing students' personalities. Designing teaching, managing teaching, assessing learning outcomes, directing learning, and as student mentors are the central roles that are carried out by a teacher today. Apart from being at school, teachers also play a role in the family and society. From a psychological perspective, a teacher is an expert educator who understands educational psychology and can apply it in their daily tasks.

At present, the roles of teachers have expanded, including trainer, counselor, learning manager, participant, leader, learner, and author. Therefore, as an educator and mentor, the position of the teacher cannot be separated from the teacher as a person. The teacher's personality greatly influences their role as an educator and mentor. In practice, apart from formal interactions, educating and guiding also occurs in informal interactions, not only being taught but also being influenced. The teacher's personality is a unity between their individual characteristics and their role as educator, teacher, and mentor.

The Ministry of Education and Culture (Kemendikbud), the Directorate General of Teachers and Education Personnel (Ditjen GTK) of the Republic of Indonesia, are currently holding the Mover Teacher Education Program (PPGP), Merdeka learning episode fifth. In the first batch in 2020, 19,218 teachers registered and a total of 2,800 teachers graduated, while in the second batch in

2021, 17,091 registered teachers, and a total of 2,800 teachers graduated. This program aims to encourage aspiring teachers to become future educational leaders who are student-centered and view children with respect; unite understanding, vision, and mission of education, motivate, and strengthen prospective teachers in facing various challenges in education.

A teacher needs to join a reinforcement program in dealing with various challenges in the world of education, given that teachers are vulnerable to enormous stress when dealing with the needs and expectations of students, parents, administrators, and local communities. Stressors in the daily life of teachers include how to facilitate appropriate student behavior, develop effective curricula, learning activities that meet children's learning needs, and the increased workload associated with increasing demands for accountability including high-stake testing. Therefore, a positive coping strategy is needed for teachers to reduce negative responses that can lead to physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion, so that the response become positive and self-compassion as well as mental health improved. Carrying out the practice of holistic health reflection is one approach that can mitigate stress for teachers. The practice of reflection offers a promising approach to promoting teacher health, besides developing empathy and self-compassion or involving a desire for health and well-being for oneself which leads to proactive behavior to improve one's situation.

Neff defining self-compassion as how a person relates to themselves when experiencing a painful event positively. She constructed the Self-Compassion Scale with 26 items, which are categorized into six main components that interact with each other in a dynamic system. It has been shown on her research that an individual with high self-compassion shows increased self-kindness and decreased self-judgment, increased common humanity and decreased isolation, and increased mindfulness and reduced over-identification or excessive self-assessment. Self-compassion is consistently positively associated with mental health.

Compassion involves being open and moved by the suffering of others so that one wants to relieve their suffering. This also includes offering non-judgmental patience, kindness, and understanding to others, acknowledging that all humans are imperfect and make mistakes. Similarly, self-compassion involves being open and moved by one's own suffering, experiencing feelings of self-care and kindness, taking an understanding, nonjudgmental attitude toward one's shortcomings and failures, and acknowledging that one's own experiences are part of a common human experience.

In previous studies, it was shown that LKM can increase well-being and positive emotions in clinical and non-clinical populations, which can improve mental health in students; LKM affects emotional development and prosocial behavior; able to develop an affective state of unconditional kindness to everyone; and provides potentially useful strategies for a variety of different psychological problems involving interpersonal processes, such as depression, social anxiety, marital conflict, anger, and dealing with long-term caregiver tensions.

LKM is a reflection practice in the form of an intrinsic personal activity undertaken to facilitate mental clarity, through which many teachers and professionals are helped. For teachers who suffer from emotional exhaustion, it is important to practice reflection, because through reflection, teachers can avoid the decline in their relationship with colleagues and students. LKM can increase mindfulness along with the growth of positive emotions, practice self-compassion, and empathy for oneself and others.

LKM is promoted because it is a reflective technique that can increase feelings of warmth and care for oneself and others, through quiet contemplation in a sitting position, LKM starts from the easy contemplation stage to a more challenging type of contemplation. A person who practices LKM possesses a calm mind because the feeling of compassion leads to peace. Even though this mind may say something bad about itself, at the same time it will also have an attitude of self-acceptance, patience, and an open heart. This abundant peace produces a feeling of being one with all aspects of life, because the happiness achieved does not depend on things outside the self, nor does it depend on the circumstances.

Peace as the consequence of loving-kindness is the kind of happiness that gives one the ability to concentrate. Serenity is the most important element in order to generate or to concentrate thoughts. A loving-kindness phrases are self-reflection techniques that have been practiced for thousands of years. Loving-kindness is also known as metta. According to Gunaratana, metta is a Buddhist teaching that was transmitted orally from generation to generation for almost five centuries before the monks in Sri Lanka wrote it down in 29 BC. In his book, "Loving-Kindness in English: The Practice of Metta", he wrote that metta is not an ordinary love, it is a quality of love that an individual experiences throughout his or her entire life, a love that has no ulterior motive — and there is no opposite. Love that can never be hate; the love-hate dichotomy does not apply at all. When a person says that he loves someone else or something, it is usually related to that person's appearance, behavior, idea, or attitude that fills the flaws in him.

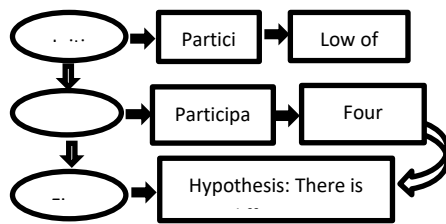
People tend to like it when things are smooth and easy, but when things get tough, they may feel otherwise. When one's love is situational, what is called "love" is not metta, but lust, greed, or even exploitation. In line with the notion of metta, Hofmann et al. define metta as an 'unconditional mental state', a benevolent attitude towards all beings which is closely related to the practice of mindfulness. This is in line with Kabat-Zinn's statement that the practice of compassion is, in fact, the basis of from the practice of mindfulness, which requires an orientation of non-judgment, not being greedy, not rejecting the present state or acceptance of the present and not being attached to the past, an orientation that invites and makes room for calm, clarity of mind and heart, and understanding.

The research framework emerged based on the observational learning method of social cognitive learning theory. In this learning method, participants will learn new behaviors through examples or modeling observed in the intervention session. The four stages of observational learning include the process of attention, retention, production, and motivation which will then produce self-efficacy or a belief to produce the expected behavior independently, which is driven by the participants' intrinsic motivation.

Cognitively, this learning mechanism involves self-regulation sub-function to produce the expected behavior. During the intervention process, in the participant's cognition there will be self-observation, then self-evaluation, and self-reaction which encourages participants to do self-reflection in the form of rewards or sanctions, emotional responses, and actions to change their life goals. Changes in life goals that begin with the desire to make self-improvement by switching from a difficult old condition to a recovery state, which the researchers describe in the following framework.

Figure 1

Research Thinking Framework



2. RESEARCH METHOD

The participants in this study were 20 teachers of children with intellectual disabilities from Kindergarten to Vocational High School at Special School "X" in the Ciledug area, Tangerang. Characteristics of participants are male and female, age range between 22 years and over 40 years, have at least 3 years of teaching experience in special schools as teacher for children with a special needs (e.g. intellectual disabilities, autism teachers, and others). Other factors such as religion, ethnicity, and education level were not limited by the researcher.

In EG the age composition of participants were 100% above 40 years and all of them are female, while in CG the age range of participants is wider, i.e., 28-33 years by 20%, 33-40 years by 10%, and over 40 years by 70%. The CG participants are two males and eight females. The age range in this study refers to Levinson's theory which says that the age of 40 to 65 years is a middle age and the age of 40-45 years is the mid-life transition.

Research shows that character changes significantly between early and middle adulthood, the process of change begins at the midlife transition (although the form and extent of change varies greatly) and continues throughout the ages. One of the developmental tasks of this transition is to initiate a new step in individuation, that in this phase the individual can become more compassionate, more reflective and wise, less oppressed by inner conflicts and external demands, and more genuinely in love with oneself and others.

The selection of Special School "X" in the Ciledug area, Tangerang, was based on the results of the researchers' initial observations and interviews with the principal and 3 senior teachers at the school, which ultimately led the researchers to find indications of low teacher compassion. This phenomenon was caused by several unfavorable situations, i.e., the limited interaction of teachers with students, parents, and other related parties, where everything has to be done virtually during the Covid-19 Pandemic. Thus, it becomes difficult for teachers to monitor their students who are children with ID, due to health protocols imposed by the government, as well as parental concerns about being exposed to the Covid-19 virus;

Management demands that teachers become more creative in increasing the effectiveness of teaching and learning; continue to make adjustments to the digital technology-based curriculum; deal with and handle complaints from parents who have difficulty in handling their ID children, due to the limited capacity of parents in the knowledge and skills of handling ID children; financial problems, both on the part of parents of students and teachers' families personally as a result of a termination of employment that befell the breadwinner of the family; students are not participating

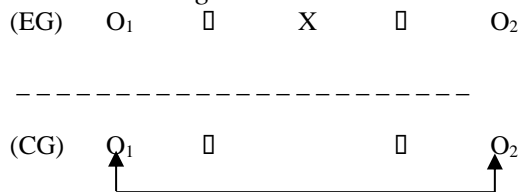
in the online learning process to the fullest; some internal conflicts among some teachers; prolonged grief of a senior teacher due to her husband who died exposed to Covid-19; reduced time for social gatherings leading to boredom and loneliness; as well as the teachers who was worried about the future of their students who are considered not fully independent.

With the approval of the principal and supervisor, the researcher finally decided to conduct research at the school.

This research is a quasi-experimental quantitative research in which the grouping is not done randomly, and the sampling technique used is purposive sampling. The research design used was a two matched groups design, with the provision of a pre-test post-test and 4 sessions of LKM intervention, as shown in Figure 2 below:

Figure 2

Research Design Chart



Note: O₁ as self-compassion measurement before LKM intervention; O₂ as self-compassion measurement after the LKM intervention; and X as the LKM intervention treatment.

During the intervention, the researcher was assisted by an assistant in charge of handling multimedia and displaying intervention materials, while for the implementation of the intervention program, the researcher did this independently, from the beginning to the end of the session. Researchers played the role of presenters, reflectors of LKM, as well as hosts during the program, considering that all intervention activities are carried out online, from 11.30 AM to 12.30 PM.

The intervention program includes psychoeducation and LKM practice. In the psychoeducational series, the method prepared is a lecture on the two research variables, LKM and self-compassion, i.e., how the two variables are interrelated and important for the promotion of individual psychological well-being and mental health; how the high and low of self-compassion impactful on oneself and others, as well as its benefits in a daily life and for the future; simulation of the gesture of compassion, i.e., demonstration using both hands; and video playback as a modeling method of a positive emotion, connectedness, and self-kindness.

The LKM practice is done in a relaxed and quiet position, where participants will be directed to repeat the phrase spoken by the reflector, “may be safe, may be peaceful, may be healthy, may you live with ease.” The first phrase is addressed to someone who loves us sincerely, who is always supportive and is a person with whom we feel safe when we are with them; then to yourself; then a neutral person, i.e., someone we know but not very closely, it could be someone we meet on public transportation, supermarkets or others;

Next, is someone close to us, such as workmates, family, or people in our inner circle; on the community, i.e., people who live in the same city as us or colleagues in the organization; and lastly, all creation and living beings, the hope of which is that they all live a healthy and happy life.

The research instrument used was the Self-Compassion Scale (SCS) with 26 items, that had been adapted into Indonesian language with a reliability value of Cronbach's Alpha of .872. The procedure of this research begins with distributing pre-test questionnaires to the target participants (n=20) to get the group with low self-compassion as an EG; followed by 4 sessions of LKM intervention for 4 days for 60 minutes each and ended with a post-test for all EG and CG participants.

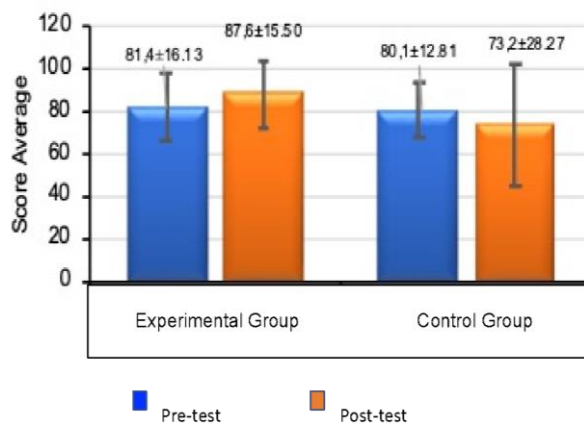
Statistical data processing using the SPSS program began with a data normality test which aims to determine whether or not the data is normal as a basic assumption before performing the t-test. The normality test of the data was carried out using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov, with the criteria that if the p-value > level of significance (alpha = 5%) then the existing data was declared to be normally distributed, H0: normal data, H1: abnormal data.

After the data is declared normal, a difference test between pre-test and post-test scores followed, using a parametric paired t-test, with the following hypothesis: H0: There is no difference in pre-test and post-test scores. H1: There is a difference in the pre-test and post-test scores.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Based on the results of the descriptive statistical analysis below, it can be seen that the 10 respondents who were used as research samples in each test, the minimum pre-test score on EG was 52.00 and the maximum score was 114.00. This shows that the score in this research sample ranges from 52.00 to 114.00. Meanwhile, the minimum post-test score for EG is 71.00 and the maximum score is 126.00. This shows that the score in this research sample ranges from 71.00 to 126.00.

Figure 3
Descriptive Analysis



The average pre-test score on EG in table 1 is 81.40 and the standard deviation is 16.13. When compared, the average post-test score on EG tends to be higher at 87.60 with a standard deviation of 15.50.

Figure 4

Descriptive Analysis

| Group | Test | N | Minimum | Maximum | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|--------------|-----------|----|---------|---------|-------|----------------|
| Experimental | pre-test | 10 | 52.00 | 114.00 | 81.40 | 16.13 |
| | post-test | 10 | 71.00 | 126.00 | 87.60 | 15.50 |
| Control | pre-test | 10 | 57.00 | 96.00 | 80.10 | 12.81 |
| | post-test | 10 | 0.00 | 94.00 | 73.20 | 28.28 |

Based on Table 2, the normality test of the data below, it can be seen that the normality test on the pre-test and post-test data of each group resulted in a *p* value > level of significance (alpha = 5%), so at the 5% level of significance it can be concluded that the pre-test data and post-test in each group was declared normally distributed. Therefore, a parametric difference test can be carried out in this case.

Figure 5

Normality Test Data

| Group | Sub Test | KS Statistic | db | <i>p</i> value |
|--------------|-----------|--------------|----|----------------|
| Experimental | Pre-test | 0.219 | 10 | 0.192 |
| | Post-test | 0.240 | 10 | 0.108 |
| Control | Pre-test | 0.166 | 10 | 0.200 |
| | Post-test | 0.231 | 10 | 0.139 |

** significant *p* value < 0.05; * significant *p* value < 0.1

Below are the results of the pre-test post-test measurement on EG, where the post-test average score on EG is higher than the pre-test score, which is 87.60 with a standard deviation of 15.50 on the posttest score, while the average pretest score is 81.40 with a standard deviation of 16.13.

Figure 6

Experimental Group Difference Test

| Group | Mean | Std. Deviation | t-Count | <i>P</i> value |
|-----------|-------|----------------|---------|----------------|
| Pre-test | 81.40 | 16.13 | -1.948 | 0.083* |
| Post-test | 87.60 | 15.50 | | |

** significant *p* value < 0.05; * significant *p* value < 0.1

In statistical testing, it is known that the t-count produced is -1.948 with a *p* value of 0.083. Considering that the *p* value (0.083) < level of significance (alpha = 10%), therefore H1 is accepted, which means that at the 10% real level it can be stated that there is a significant difference in the EG pre-test and post-test scores, which results in changes to participants' self-compassion.

Referring to the formulation of the research problem through two measurements given to EG, which are pre-test and post-test, the results of statistical testing prove that the LKM intervention program, which was given with the observational learning method from social cognitive theory, succeeded in forming new behavioral patterns in participants, so it can be concluded that LKM is effective in increasing the self-compassion in teachers of children with ID.

“*The broaden and built theory of positive emotions*” stated that in human evolution it is important for an individual to have positive emotions towards his happiness, in which the individual will invest the resources he currently has, in order to build something better, and very valuable so that later in the future the results will bring the individual to a better level than before. Even though it is very possible that the person concerned does not realize that he is building something very valuable. Basically, both negative and positive emotions move people to act.

Self-compassion, by definition, involves the same quality, which that an individual is required to recognize his or her suffering and acknowledge it from the start, so that when they are moved by pain, they can recognize when suffering is coming to hit them. An individual must be willing to turn to the pain he or she is experiencing and acknowledge it with mindfulness. Mindfulness is a type of balanced awareness that doesn't deny, avoid, or exaggerate experiences from moment to moment. In this receptive state of mind an individual becomes aware of his negative thoughts and feelings and is able to deal with them, without fighting or denying them.

In this study, the changes in participants were reflected in the examples of their statements submitted in the intervention program evaluation form, i.e., the more they can understand their shortcomings, weaknesses, and love themselves, they want to enjoy their life more gratefully for life in any situation; they felt more comfortable and able to overcome difficulties and self-emotions, being more relax, calm, relieved, and more self-love.

During the intervention session, there were confessions from participants that so far, they did not understand how to deal with guilt from past failures, did not understand coping method for the suffering they experienced.

Suffering is a specific state associated with events that threaten the integrity of human being. This condition is multidimensional and dynamic, where a person will experience severe pressure, threatened and disturbed by self-regulation process or self-regulation, however, other studies argue that optimism is positively associated with a coping strategy approach that aims to eliminate, reduce or manage stressors and emotions. Optimism can protect individuals against depression, can improve performance and improve physical and mental well-being.

The attitude of optimism or self-confidence of individuals who have a high level of self-confidence will automatically form a sense of personal efficacy which will control cognitive processes, affective processes, and motivational processes. This is marked by the individual's belief in the quality and ability of oneself so that it can regulate the behavior that will be carried out to achieve a target or goal.

The participant's testified that according to their understanding, as a wife, it is their duty to serve their husband and children, at any time, at any cost, including during a recreation moment. As a caregivers, they believe it is their responsibility to keep the family comfortable and well-served. Some participants admitted that the only coping they have known so far was crying and sleeping. Participants realized that they needed to change from their old attitude, and become more self-loving. A participant admitted that she had never once thanked herself for her hard work and achievements. They had no idea that by thanking oneself is actually a reward form as well as form of self-acceptance and gratitude.

Gratitude is a distinctive pleasant feeling that arises when we receive kindness, compassion and love, benefits, or altruistic help from others, especially things that we do not deserve because they did not come from our own effort.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Through two measurements given to participants, i.e., pre-test and post-test as well as the provision of LKM intervention program, concluded that through statistical testing showed that the four-session LKM intervention was effective in developing the compassion in teachers of children with intellectual disabilities.

Paradigm changes and new behaviors are manifested in participant attitudes, and self-acceptance was the key to the changes that are experienced by participants in this study. This shows that when self-compassion increases, the individual can love themselves and love others more, see that failure and suffering as natural things, which can happen to anyone, and be able to view life with a balanced, not overidentified, which assumes that one failure will continue to bring him down. Another change that has emerged is an optimistic attitude, having hope and planning to change for the better and having new achievement targets.

The first limitation of this research is that the reflection is not guided by a certified reflector, but by the researcher themselves, so that at the time of implementation, the guidance provided was less than optimal. Second, the implementation of the intervention was carried out at lunch time, so it was possible that the participants' focus was somewhat disturbed, because they had not relaxed enough after teaching in class, and had to attend the session immediately.

For further researchers, in order to make more thorough preparations, in order to carry out tighter control over secondary variables that can contaminate the dependent variable to be measured. This research can also be carried out in the realm of industrial or clinical psychology, and can be tried with a wider possible demographic variance of participants.

Further researchers can also conduct similar research on parents of children with ID as respondents, so it is hoped that the stress of parents in dealing with children with intellectual disabilities can be helped by getting LKM coping, as well as increasing their self-compassion. In this study, researchers used an observational learning model from social cognitive theory to further researchers, maybe it could be tried to use other learning methods approaches.

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