

## Research Article

# Stretching Boundaries: Unraveling Teachers' Challenges and Strategies in Cultivating Self-Compassion

**Sawsan Awwad-Tabry\***Faculty of Graduate Studies, Oranim Academic College,  
Kiryat Tiv'on 36006, Israel**\*Corresponding author: Sawsan Awwad-Tabry**Faculty of Graduate Studies, Oranim Academic College,  
Kiryat Tiv'on 36006, Israel.

Tel: +972-546705899; Fax: +972-46466305

Email: sawsanawwad4@gmail.com

**Received:** February 02, 2024**Accepted:** February 16, 2024**Published:** February 23, 2024**Abstract**

**Background:** Teaching is inherently a highly stressful profession, which can significantly affect teachers' well-being. Although self-compassion research has predominantly centered on mental health in the medical professions, there is a notable gap in empirical knowledge concerning self-compassion within the educational field. Considering the limited qualitative research available on teachers' perceptions of self-compassion, this study represents a pioneering endeavor.

**Methods:** This study employed a qualitative-phenomenological methodology and included 34 teachers from Israel. Semi-structured interviews provided an in-depth exploration of self-compassion, revealing participants' experiences, challenges, and coping strategies.

**Results:** Three pivotal themes were uncovered. "Bridging the Compassion Gap: From Others to Self" reflects teachers' challenges in extending compassion to themselves. "Challenging Complacency: Silent Reflection and Self-Prioritization" illustrates self-compassion practices involving reflection, self-prioritization, and mindfulness. "Resilience Buffers: Positivity, Patience, and Acceptance" captures the role of self-compassion in managing stress, fostering positivity, and enhancing resilience.

**Conclusion:** This study highlights the complex nature of self-compassion among teachers, addressing challenges such as the novel concept of "compassion dissonance" and promoting reflective resilience. To support teachers, tailored interventions should bridge the gap between self-compassion for oneself and others. Incorporating self-compassion practices into teacher education and fostering supportive school environments are crucial steps forward.

**Keywords:** Self-compassion; Teachers' well-being; Resilience buffers; Qualitative research; Teachers self-care; Mindfulness; Self-reflective practices

**Introduction**

Compassion, defined as the ability to empathize with and alleviate the suffering of others, has garnered significant attention in the literature [11,17,21,41]. Within the realm of positive psychology, self-compassion has emerged as a construct with three fundamental components: self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness, as originally proposed by Neff (2023). Self-kindness involves treating oneself with kindness rather than harsh self-judgment when confronted with suffering. Common humanity refers to recognizing one's failures as part of the human experience, fostering connection instead of isolation. Mindfulness entails maintaining a balanced awareness of the present moment, without becoming excessively identified with distressing thoughts and emotions [21].

Research has shown that self-compassion contributes to individuals' social and emotional competence and overall well-being [26,43]. High levels of self-compassion have been associated with lower pain assessment, reduced psychological distress, and improved health and emotional well-being [3,17,19]. In work settings, self-compassion has been recognized as a beneficial coping strategy for managing and protecting against stress, anxiety, and burnout [13,24]. Self-compassion enables individuals to take responsibility for their situations, deal with failures, learn from mistakes, and promote positive change [28]. Moreover, self-compassion can proactively help individuals navigate predictable work-related stressors and prevent potential harm to their well-being [36].

Although research on self-compassion is more advanced in the field of psychology, particularly concerning its association with psychological wellness [10,21,24,25,26], studies have predominantly focused on mental health and medical professionals, creating a gap in empirical knowledge regarding self-compassion in the educational profession. Teaching is inherently a highly stressful occupation, impacting teachers' personal, social, and psychological well-being [42]. The stressors of teaching can lead to negative consequences such as burnout, increased attrition rates, and compromised student outcomes [30,42]. Recognizing the significance of teachers' well-being, there is a growing need to address their mental health, as it can alleviate burnout, promote retention, and enhance both teacher and student experiences [42].

Existing studies in the educational literature have primarily focused on mindfulness practices and intervention programs, overlooking the broader construct of self-compassion [1,5]. Studies have shown that self-compassion may serve as a protective element that reduces teachers' job-related stress by strengthening resilience and coping mechanisms and enhancing teachers' well-being [20,27,37]. Studies have shown the advantages of developing a compassionate self for the purpose of teacher resilience, increased levels of self-efficacy and satisfaction [15,22,23], and enhanced social and mental well-being [4,16,18,22]. Self-compassion has also been found to yield benefits such as managing difficult thoughts and emotions [15,22,30,37]. Research from Europe and the USA has shown that self-compassion, as a component of mindfulness interventions, promotes well-being among teachers [1,5]. For example, teachers who engaged in mindfulness training exhibited increased forgiveness and compassion toward themselves and their students [5]. Mindfulness training programs have been effective in enhancing teachers' well-being and self-efficacy, and in reducing negative psychological symptoms [35].

The present study contributes a qualitative perspective to a field traditionally reliant on quantitative methods [9,14,36]. The aim of this study was to deepen our understanding of teachers' self-compassion, shedding light on their perceptions, opinions, and experiences. This approach offers valuable insights into the lived experiences of participants.

The present study was guided by the following research inquiries: What are the perceptions and conceptualizations of self-compassion among teachers? In what ways does self-compassion manifest itself in the lives of teachers? How do teachers perceive the impact of self-compassion on both their personal and professional lives?

## Method

### Approach

A qualitative research approach was employed to explore various interpretations of reality. This paradigm was deemed suitable for the study as it involves collecting subjective data based on participants' experiences and their personal understanding of the phenomenon at hand [7]. We utilized a qualitative-phenomenological methodology, with the aim of achieving a comprehensive understanding of phenomena by immersing the researcher in the participants' world and experiences [7,39].

### Participants and Sample

Purposive sampling was employed to select teachers, so as to capture diverse perspectives. The sample for the current

study included a total of 34 teachers from across Israel, the majority of whom were women (76.47%), identified as Jewish (85.29%), and had an average age of 33.73 years (SD=11.08). Professionally, participants reported an average of 10.1 years (SD=9.23) of experience in education and worked an average of 40.56 hours per week (SD = 10.03). Exclusion criteria were: (1) student teachers, and (2) substitute teachers.

### Data Collection

A semi-structured interview guide, developed after reviewing the relevant literature, served as the foundation for exploring the research objectives. This guide provided a structured framework while allowing for flexibility in both the order and adaptation of questions, to suit the flow of conversation. Participants were encouraged to introduce additional topics or concerns organically.

The interviews delved into various dimensions of self-compassion, encompassing participants' narratives about its role in their daily lives, their personal experiences with self-compassion, and their responses to stress, failure, or challenges in teacher task completion. In this way we aimed to gain insights into participants' lived experiences and the meanings they attributed to them [7]. Sample questions included: How would you describe the role of self-compassion in your daily life? Can you recall an event where you felt you acted with compassion toward yourself? How do you typically treat yourself when faced with a stressful situation at work, when you have failed, or when you encounter difficulty in completing a task? .

### Procedure

The study received ethical approval from the Institutional Review Board of the author's university (approval number 5321150). Data collection occurred between December 2022 and February 2023. Informed consent was provided voluntarily by participants after receiving a brief explanation of the research objectives. The interviews took place at locations chosen by the participants. These settings varied based on the convenience and preference of each participant, ensuring comfort and privacy during the discussions. These interviews, lasting approximately one hour each, were recorded and subsequently transcribed. After the interviews, participants were provided with contact information for additional support in case of emotional distress. Data collection ceased when theoretical saturation was reached, meaning that further interviews yielded no new information for analysis [7].

The interviews were conducted in Hebrew by two proficient researchers in qualitative methodology, with one holding a professorship and the other possessing a doctoral degree. The recorded interviews were translated from Hebrew to English and rigorously cross-verified by two native English speakers, one of whom was a professional translator. Data analysis commenced only after all interviews had been completed.

### Data Analysis

The thematic data analysis process began after data collection. It consisted of several key stages to ensure a thorough and rigorous examination of the information [34]. First, to immerse themselves in the data and gain a comprehensive understanding, the researchers extensively reviewed all collected information. Second, open coding techniques were applied as one researcher examined each interview transcript line by line, making notes to identify the initial units of meaning and facilitate the

naming of subthemes. Third, the identified subthemes were reviewed by another researcher, and discussions were held to refine and clarify them. Fourth, axial coding was implemented to reveal context and content-related connections between themes and subthemes [29]. A comprehensive comparison of all interviews was carried out to consolidate meanings and assign names to the themes. Subsequently, the initial codes were further analyzed to create higher-order theoretical codes. Finally, the results were integrated by conceptually reordering the core themes that had emerged, placing them back into context. This process allowed for the analysis and integration of large volumes of data and the generation of meaningful abstractions and interpretations [7,38,39].

### Trustworthiness

To ensure methodological rigor and trustworthiness [2], data were meticulously handled and analyzed. This process included verbatim transcription of interviews, independent transcript reviews for diverse perspectives, acknowledgment and bracketing of researchers' biases for transparency, and a rigorous translation verification by native speakers, including a professional translator. Texts were categorically analyzed by two experienced qualitative researchers, achieving consensus on data categorization for reliability. Additionally, the researchers engaged in peer debriefings and triangulation with field experts to validate their findings as authentic representations of participants' expressed meanings [7].

### Results

Examining the rich tapestry of experiences and reflections shared by teachers, the current findings unveil a meaningful narrative centered around the pivotal role of self-compassion in their lives. These findings shed light on the multifaceted nature of self-compassion among teachers, touching upon various aspects of their personal and professional journeys. This section delves into the heart of their stories, unraveling their challenges and strategies in practicing and cultivating self-compassion. From navigating "compassion dissonance"—a novel concept that comprises the delicate balance between extending compassion outwardly while also directing it inwardly—to embracing reflective practices and self-prioritization as essential components of self-compassion, the teachers' narratives offer a vivid portrayal of their experiences. Moreover, the current findings illuminate how self-compassion acts as a resilience buffer, empowering teachers to confront daily challenges with positivity, patience, and acceptance. These themes intertwine to form the essence of this study, underscoring the significance of self-compassion in the lives of teachers and its implications for their well-being and resilience.

#### Theme 1: Bridging the Compassion Gap: From Others to Self

The challenge for teachers of extending compassion to themselves despite their capacity to show compassion to others is reflected in this theme. Participants described compassion as the ability to forgive, respond non-judgmentally, empathize, and understand others, even in the face of their mistakes and shortcomings. Compassion, for them, meant going beyond mere awareness of another's suffering and taking action that would benefit the individual.

*Showing compassion by my definition is being aware of another person's suffering but with a desire, or better yet, a commitment to take the pain off that person. That is, first I have to understand what the other person is going through,*

*but I can't remain at this level because it would feel like mere pity, I have to take some kind of action that benefits them. (Anne, 46 years old).*

While these teachers demonstrated a deep understanding of compassion, as the awareness of another person's suffering coupled with a commitment to alleviate it, they also revealed a disparity in their capacity to apply the same level of compassion to themselves. They attributed this disparity to the inherent nature of the teaching profession, which revolves around consistently assisting and supporting others.

*In difficult situations, I am usually primarily oriented toward helping others. I feel like I'm constantly on duty even if that's not my role. That's how I am, and that's why I'm constantly on alert, mentally. In difficult situations at work, I tend to think that if it's hard for me, it's probably hard for the person next to me, so I'm very oriented toward wanting to help others. Over the years I have developed an awareness of this, but I still haven't managed to reach a point where before I look to help others, I take care of my own problems first. (Amber, 56 years old).*

Some participants admitted struggling to practice self-compassion during stressful events, often resorting to self-criticism. They noted that self-compassion usually emerged in hindsight, after the event had concluded.

*It's very hard for me to remember to be self-compassionate when facing difficult situations. First, I will be self-critical, look back at where I made the mistake and what can be corrected. I will dwell on it, even too much, and ask a lot of what-ifs... I will also consult with a good friend or colleague I trust. Although no matter what she says to reassure me, if it's still fresh in my mind, it will be difficult for me to let go and act with self-compassion. Only when I know that the story is over and it's all behind me can I be more forgiving toward myself. (Debby, 32 years old).*

Teachers acknowledged that their lack of self-compassion triggered a cycle of negative emotions, including anger and guilt. They shared that self-compassion often came after a process of self-reflection and acceptance, indicating that self-compassion occurred at a later stage.

*Compassion for myself always comes at a later stage. First I will go through all the other stages: anger, frustration, criticism, and self-judgment. I reflect on why I did this and why I didn't do that. I go through the whole process in my head and analyze every word I said. And I get angry with myself for every wrong word I said, why people misunderstood me and what I actually meant... It usually takes me a while to let go. I have to stretch the boundaries until I'm finally able to be kind to myself. Then I can say to her [myself], "It's okay, you're okay... everything is okay. Let's try to move on." (Edline, 47 years old).*

In summary, teachers face challenges in extending compassion to themselves despite their capacity to show compassion to others. This theme highlights the struggle and the gap between these two forms of compassion, revolving around the difficulties teachers encounter when applying the same principles to themselves as they do to others.

#### Theme 2: Challenging Complacency: Silent Reflection and Self-Prioritization

The question of how some teachers found self-compassion

invaluable when facing personal challenges is captured in this theme. The significance of reflective contemplation about their desires and needs is evident, especially when critical decisions arise. Teachers emphasized the importance of being present in "the here and now," involving mindfulness and fostering self-attentiveness.

*I still slip up, obviously. Who doesn't? But I recognize the slip-up when it happens, and I stop, and I remain at the bottom for a little while. I must stay there and feel it. Then I start looking up and lifting my head. It [the slip-up] does not paralyze me anymore. So, you can say I practice self-compassion out of choice. (Shannon, 46 years old).*

Teachers such as Shannon emphasized recognizing the moments when they faltered and accepting them as a natural part of life. They stopped, stayed with their feelings, and eventually "lifted themselves up." They described the outcome as a feeling of tranquility and self-assuredness in their choices and actions.

*We were on a trekking trip to the desert this week. We walked for many, many miles. It was very difficult for me. On the second day, I asked myself, "What is it that you feel you need right now? What's right for you?" Then I decided: "You need to be alone! You need quiet and calm!" I apprised everyone. They were shocked and tried to convince me to continue with them, but I insisted on staying behind. It was very difficult for them, but to me, it felt like the right thing to do. I was very content, because I really used the tool of listening and self-acceptance, which is actually self-compassion. (Jenny, 56 years old).*

To practice self-compassion effectively, teachers expressed the need to create distance from the situation, both physically and emotionally. This detachment allowed them to gain a broader perspective, minimize self-blame, and reduce self-criticism.

*During our yearly school trip, memories from the trip last year came back to me. I realized I'd been unkind and really tough on two of my students back then. But after taking a good, hard look at it, I started being kinder to myself. I figured I needed to think about what was going on around me back then and what I was dealing with, instead of just beating myself up over how I acted. (Tom, 27 years old).*

In summary, this theme captures the way in which teachers found self-compassion through reflective contemplation and self-prioritization when facing personal challenges. This theme emphasizes the significance of mindfulness and self-attentiveness as tools to foster self-compassion in their lives.

### **Theme 3: Resilience Buffers: Positivity, Patience, and Acceptance**

The issue of how self-compassion played a pivotal role in helping study participants cope with daily challenges – namely, coping with failure, juggling multiple roles, and managing stressful situations – is illustrated in this theme. Participants viewed self-compassion as a way to acknowledge their efforts, accept imperfections, and find positivity in challenging situations.

*In situations where I have difficulties or when I fail, I treat myself with compassion, knowing I did everything I could in that given situation. I am a person who tends to see the glass half full. I have an awareness of the disadvantages and advantages in every situation. This helps me have compassion for myself and understand that not everything will always*

*go smoothly, nor can I be at my best in everything I do. So, I prefer to focus on the positive things. (Layla, 24 years old).*

Participants also discussed using self-compassion to cope with stress and distressing situations, describing introspection, patience, and understanding as key tools for navigating stress.

*In difficult stressful situations, I breathe deeply for a moment, and remind myself to wait with a reaction until I feel I have control over how and what I'm going to say. I never want to react immediately. First, I need to hear all the details, take it all in, and observe attentively how I feel about things. This way I feel much more comfortable with my reaction, no matter what it is, whether it's with acceptance or resistance. (Laura, 23 years old).*

Managing multiple roles, including being a professional (i.e., a teacher), parent, caregiver, and mentor, was a recurring challenge. Self-compassion helped the teachers embrace their human limitations and navigate these complexities effectively.

*One day, late in the evening, my daughter asked me if I could drive her to work the next morning. I knew I couldn't because I had to drive her little brothers to school, and I also had an important meeting at work. I didn't know what to do. At first, I broke down and cried because it hurt that I wasn't able to do everything that my children needed and act professionally at the same time. Then I "got my act together" and had a good conversation with myself: "You're okay, you can't do everything, there's nothing you can do about that. Forgive yourself." (Jasmine, 48 years old).*

Some participants described their use of self-compassion as a deliberate, non-judgmental introspection about their mental and physical states, coupled with acceptance and understanding.

*"When I practice self-compassion, I consciously pause to observe my thoughts and emotions without criticism or self-blame. It's like offering myself the same kindness and understanding that I would offer to a friend going through a tough time." (Anne, 46 years old).*

This practice enabled them to relax, adopt a broader perspective on their circumstances, and normalize their experiences, ultimately bolstering their self-confidence.

Overall, the three themes revealed in this study illustrate the complex interplay of self-compassion in teachers' lives.

## **Discussion**

This qualitative study explored the multifaceted nature of self-compassion in teachers' lives, encompassing both their personal and professional realms. The findings revealed three key themes that attest to the intricate nature of self-compassion among teachers and lays the groundwork for future research and exploration in this field.

### **Bridging the Compassion Gap: Teachers' Challenges in Extending Self-Compassion**

The study findings revealed a striking paradox among teachers: Their remarkable capacity for expressing compassion toward others in contrast with the significant challenges they face when attempting to apply similar principles of compassion to themselves. This intriguing phenomenon signifies the misalignment between teachers' ability to extend compassion outwardly and their struggles to direct the same compassion inwardly.

To the best of the authors' knowledge, no previous studies on self-compassion have explored and analyzed this disconnect between extending compassion to others and grappling with its application inwardly, to which we have assigned the novel expression, compassion dissonance.

In contrast to the “empathy gap” concept in the field of psychology, which reflects challenges in extending empathy and compassion to others outside one's immediate social group [6,40], “compassion dissonance” pertains to the internal struggle to extend the same compassion inwardly. While the “empathy gap” focuses on external empathy across social divisions, “compassion dissonance” highlights the internal conflict teachers experience when trying to balance their own well-being with their professional teaching profession demands.

The concept of “compassion dissonance” resonates with existing research that highlights the social, emotional, and occupational benefits of self-compassion for teachers. Self-compassion has been linked to numerous advantages in the teaching profession, including adaptability to changes in their work, reduced employment-related anxiety, and enhanced overall life satisfaction [26]. Moreover, self-compassion has shown associations with a decrease in occupational stress and burnout, as well as a reduction in symptoms of anxiety and depression [30]. Additionally, it plays a crucial role in helping teachers access and seek assistance during difficult circumstances [10]. These well-documented benefits of self-compassion underscore its relevance in addressing the challenges associated with teachers' internal conflicts. While the existing literature on self-compassion among teachers has predominantly emphasized the positive effects of interventions such as mindfulness training [1,5], and the connection between self-compassion and enhanced self-efficacy, satisfaction, and social well-being [15,22,23], the current findings on the concept of “compassion dissonance” provide unique insights into the complexities of self-compassion among teachers.

### **Challenging Complacency: Silent Reflection and Self-Prioritization**

In this section, we delved into the distinct self-compassion practices adopted by teachers in their efforts to confront complacency and address personal challenges. The findings of the current study revealed that teachers engage in reflective contemplation, self-prioritization, and mindfulness as part of their self-compassion practices, thereby strengthening their capacity to face these challenges with resilience and self-awareness. These practices align with Schön's concept of self-reflection, a cornerstone of reflective practice in education [32]. Teachers actively embrace self-assessment and critical examination of their actions and decisions, mirroring the reflective practices advocated in the educational literature. This process not only widens their perspective but also empowers them to mitigate self-blame and reduce self-criticism—essential components of reflective resilience.

Furthermore, the study underscores the pivotal role of self-prioritization within teachers' self-compassion practices, directly addressing complacency within their professional roles. Engaging in contemplation regarding their desires and needs, especially during significant decisions, proves central to nurturing their self-compassion. These findings align with the principles of mindfulness initially proposed by Neff (2023) and resonate with the existing literature on mindfulness-based interventions and training programs for teachers [1,5,35]. These

programs underscore the importance of recognizing emotional responses, taking moments to acknowledge feelings, and deliberately choosing self-compassion—integral aspects of reflective resilience.

Moreover, our findings align well with self-determination theory (SDT), which posits that individuals have intrinsic needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness [31]. In the context of our study, teachers' engagement in reflective practices and self-prioritization can be seen as efforts to fulfill these intrinsic needs, thereby enhancing their motivation and self-regulation. Self-determination theory helps illuminate how the pursuit of self-compassion aligns with fundamental psychological needs, reinforcing its importance in addressing complacency and nurturing resilience among teachers.

Carol Dweck's research on mindset theory [8] provides a valuable lens through which to understand the dynamics of self-compassion among teachers in the current study. Her work highlights the critical link between mindset, motivation, and self-regulation, offering insights into how self-compassion can be a catalyst for personal and professional growth in the teaching profession. As the current study demonstrates, teachers actively engage in self-reflection and self-compassion practices, aligning with the principles of a growth mindset. By fostering this mindset, teachers not only challenge complacency but also empower themselves to continuously improve and adapt to the challenges inherent in their teaching roles. Thus, Dweck's mindset theory adds depth to the understanding of self-compassion's role in teachers' well-being and resilience.

### **Resilience Buffers: Positivity, Patience, and Acceptance**

The findings of the current study unveiled how teachers perceived self-compassion as a wellspring of strength, equipping them to navigate daily challenges with a positive outlook, patience, and an increased acceptance of their human limitations, thus highlighting the concept of “resilience buffers” grounded in resilience theory [33]. This study illuminates the role of self-compassion as a resilience buffer in addressing the demands of teaching, managing stress, and cultivating positivity amid adversity, drawing parallels with the broader principles of stress resilience.

These findings align with prior research emphasizing self-compassion's role in coping with daily challenges and bolstering resilience among teachers [20,30], showcasing its relevance within the context of stress resilience theory. Self-compassion has been observed to assist teachers in stress management, accepting imperfections, and finding positivity in challenging situations—attributes rooted in self-compassion's principles of self-kindness and common humanity [21].

This theme also resonates with research focused on the challenges teachers face in juggling multiple roles and responsibilities [42], providing valuable insights into how self-compassion aligns with stress resilience theory. Participants in the current study discussed how self-compassion facilitated the embrace of their human limitations and effective navigation of these complexities, consistent with the notion that self-compassion can enhance resilience and diminish burnout among teachers [15,30]. By connecting the concept of “resilience buffers” to resilience theory [33], the current study further underscores the importance of self-compassion as a protective factor that enables teachers to effectively cope with stress and adversity while aligning with established theories in resilience research.

It is worth mentioning that while both terms “reflective resilience” and “resilience buffers” align with existing research underscoring self-compassion's role in promoting resilience among teachers, they diverge in their emphasis. “Reflective resilience” delves into reflective practices and self-prioritization aspects of self-compassion, showcasing how teachers engage in self-assessment and critical examination of their actions and decisions. In contrast, “resilience buffers” hones in on self-compassion's role in fostering positivity, patience, and acceptance, illustrating how it helps teachers embrace their human limitations and navigate their multifaceted roles, ultimately enhancing their emotional and psychological resilience.

In summary, the concept of “compassion dissonance” illuminates the internal conflict teachers experience in extending self-compassion to themselves, emphasizing the need for tailored interventions. Additionally, the current study findings highlight the importance of reflective practices, self-prioritization, and mindfulness, underscoring their role in nurturing self-compassion. Finally, self-compassion emerged as a resilience buffer, equipping teachers with positivity, patience, and acceptance in the face of daily challenges, aligning with prior research on self-compassion's role in promoting resilience among teachers. Together, these insights contribute to our understanding of self-compassion among teachers and provide a foundation for future research and support initiatives in this essential field.

### Practical Recommendations

In light of the multifaceted nature of self-compassion explored in this qualitative study, practical recommendations emerge for teachers and teacher education programs. It is crucial to implement targeted interventions and support systems to help teachers address internal conflicts in self-compassion. These interventions will bridge the gap between teachers' caregiving nature and self-compassion struggles, enhancing their well-being. Teacher education programs should incorporate practices such as reflection, self-prioritization, and mindfulness to promote resilience and self-awareness. Emphasizing emotional recognition and self-compassion is essential. Equipping teachers with strategies to harness self-compassion as a source of strength for stress management and effective role navigation is vital. Lastly, fostering supportive school environments that nurture self-compassion among teachers is essential. These recommendations bridge theory and practice, offering tangible ways to enhance teachers' well-being and resilience in their demanding profession.

### Limitations

Although a substantial cohort of participants took part in this qualitative study, it is imperative to acknowledge that the entire participant pool consisted of Israeli teachers. Consequently, it is crucial to exercise caution when extending the findings to other demographic groups and cultural contexts, as variations may exist due to cultural, demographic, and geographical disparities. Enhancing the external validity and generalizability of these findings can be attained through the inclusion of a more heterogeneous participant sample encompassing diverse cultural backgrounds and demographics, transcending national boundaries. Furthermore, this study relied primarily upon an open semi-structured interview format as the exclusive data collection method. To enhance the comprehensiveness of future research in this area, researchers are encouraged to consider using additional qualitative research methods, such as direct observation, or opting for a mixed-methods approach that

combines qualitative data with quantitative surveys.

### Conclusion

This study sheds light on the multifaceted nature of self-compassion among teachers, guiding them on a transformative journey from internal conflict – “compassion dissonance” – to introspective strength via reflective resilience. These facets ultimately nurture and act as resilience buffers essential for thriving in the challenging landscape of the teaching profession.

In addition to this exploration, our study introduces the novel concept of “compassion dissonance,” which underscores the significance of addressing the gap between teachers' outward compassion and their internal struggles with self-compassion. This concept highlights the internal conflicts teachers encounter in their quest for self-compassion.

By delving into these emerging themes and introducing new concepts, this study provides a comprehensive understanding of teachers' perceptions of self-compassion. This qualitative study serves as a foundational step, offering insights and directions for future research and interventions aimed at cultivating self-compassion among teachers. Recognizing the pivotal role of self-compassion in their overall well-being, this study paves the way for improved support and development within the teaching profession.

### References

1. Akpan PL, Saunders PJ. From shame to mindfulness and self-compassion: A teacher's journey to greater self-efficacy. *Journal of the International Society for Teacher Education*. 2017; 21: 41–9.
2. Anney VN. Ensuring the quality of the findings of qualitative research: Looking at trustworthiness criteria. 2014.
3. Bag SD, Kilby CJ, Kent JN, Brooker J, Sherman KA. Resilience, self-compassion, and indices of psychological wellbeing: A not so simple set of relationships. *Australian Psychologist*. 2022; 54: 249–57.
4. Beaumont E, Durkin M, Hollins Martin CJ, Carson J. Measuring relationships between self-compassion, compassion fatigue, burnout and wellbeing in student counsellors and student cognitive behavioural psychotherapists: A quantitative survey. *Counselling and Psychotherapy Research*. 2016; 16: 15–23.
5. Berkovich-Ohana A, Lavy S, Shanboor K. Effects of a mindfulness intervention among Arab teachers are mediated by decentering: A pilot study. *Frontiers in psychology*. 2020; 11: 542986.
6. Cikara M, Bruneau EG, Saxe RR. Us and them: Intergroup failures of empathy. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*. 2011; 20: 149–53.
7. Creswell JW, Poth C. *Qualitative inquiry and research design*. 4th ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc. 2018.
8. Dweck CS. *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*. Random House. 2006.
9. Flook L, Goldberg SB, Pinger L, Bonus K, Davidson RJ. Mindfulness for teachers: A pilot study to assess effects on stress, burnout, and teaching efficacy. *Mind, Brain, and Education*. 2013; 7: 182–95.
10. Freeman S. *Emotions in teaching: self-compassion*. Brigham Young University. 2016.
11. Gibbons S, Newberry M. Exploring self-compassion as a means of emotion regulation in teaching. *Teacher Development*. 2023;

- 27: 19–35.
12. Gilbert P. Compassion focused therapy. *Spirituality and Psychiatry*. 2022; 262.
  13. Hashem Z, Zeinoun P. Self-Compassion Explains Less Burnout Among Healthcare Professionals. *Mindfulness*. 2020; 11: 2542–51.
  14. Hwang Y-S, Medvedev ON, Krägeloh C, Hand K, Noh J-E, Singh NN. The Role of Dispositional Mindfulness and Self-compassion in Educator Stress. *Mindfulness*. 2019; 10: 1692–702.
  15. Jennings PA. Early childhood teachers' well-being, mindfulness, and self-compassion in relation to classroom quality and attitudes towards challenging students. *Mindfulness*. 2015; 6: 732–43.
  16. Leaviss J, Uttley L. Psychotherapeutic benefits of compassion-focused therapy: An early systematic review. *Psychological medicine*. 2015; 45: 927–45.
  17. Lou X, Wang H, Minkov M. The correlation between self-compassion and depression revisited: a three-level meta-analysis. *Mindfulness*. 2022; 13: 2128–39.
  18. Moè A, Katz I. Self-compassionate teachers are more autonomy supportive and structuring whereas self-derogating teachers are more controlling and chaotic: The mediating role of need satisfaction and burnout. *Teaching and Teacher Education*. 2020; 96: 103173.
  19. Munroe M. Positive embodiment for wellbeing researchers and practitioners: A narrative review of emerging constructs, measurement tools, implications, and future directions. *International Journal of Wellbeing*. 2022; 12.
  20. Naemi AM, Faghihi S. The effectiveness of cognitive self-compassion on resiliency, psychological well-being and distress tolerance of female teachers of elementary schools in Sabzevar. *Journal of School Psychology*. 2021; 10: 134–47.
  21. Neff KD. Self-Compassion: Theory, Methods, Research, and Intervention. *Annual Review of Psychology*. 2023; 74: 193–218.
  22. Neff KD, Davidson O. Self-compassion: Embracing suffering with kindness. In: *Mindfulness in positive psychology: The science of meditation and wellbeing*. 2016; 37–50.
  23. Neff KD, Germer CK. A pilot study and randomized controlled trial of the mindful self-compassion program. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*. 2013; 69: 28–44.
  24. Neff KD, Kirkpatrick KL, Rude SS. Self-compassion and adaptive psychological functioning. *Journal of research in personality*. 2007; 41: 139–54.
  25. Neff KD, Knox MC, Long P, Gregory K. Caring for others without losing yourself: An adaptation of the mindful self-compassion program for healthcare communities. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*. 2020; 76: 1543–62.
  26. Postareff L, Lahdenperä J, Virtanen V. The role of self-compassion in teachers' psychological well-being in face-to-face and online teaching during COVID-19. *Ammattikasvatuksen Aika-kauskirja*. 2021; 23: 13–27.
  27. Ragni B, Sulla F, Toto GA, Limone P. Validation of the self-compassion scale in a sample of Italian special needs teacher. *Frontiers in Psychology*. 2023; 14: 1103021.
  28. Ramsey A, Govind T, Lam JA, Palmer BW, Jeste DV, Lee EE. Self-compassion, but not compassion toward others, is associated with better physical health: A cross-sectional study. *Schizophrenia Research*. 2023; 255: 17–23.
  29. Richards KAR, Gaudreault KL, Starck JR, Woods AM. Physical education teachers' perceptions of perceived mattering and marginalization. *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy*. 2018; 23: 445–59.
  30. Roeser RW, Schonert-Reichl KA, Jha A, Cullen M, Wallace L, Wilensky R, et al. Mindfulness training and reductions in teacher stress and burnout: Results from two randomized, waitlist-control field trials. *Journal of Educational Psychology*. 2013; 105: 787–804.
  31. Ryan RM, Deci EL. Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation from a self-determination theory perspective: Definitions, theory, practices, and future directions. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*. 2020; 61: 101860.
  32. Schön DA. *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action*. New York: Basic Books. 1983.
  33. Smith BW, Epstein EM, Ortiz JA, Christopher PJ, Tooley EM. The foundations of resilience: what are the critical resources for bouncing back from stress? In: *Resilience in children, adolescents, and adults: Translating research into practice*. 2013; 167–87.
  34. Smith JA. *Qualitative psychology: A practical guide to research methods*. Qualitative psychology. 2015; 1–312.
  35. Tarrasch R, Berger R, Grossman D. *Mindfulness and Compassion as Key Factors in Improving Teacher's Well Being*. Springer Mindfulness. 2020; 11: 1–13.
  36. Taylor C, Harrison J, Haimovitz K, Oberle E, Thomson K, Schonert-Reichl K, et al. Examining ways that a mindfulness-based intervention reduces stress in public school teachers: A mixed-methods study. *Mindfulness*. 2016; 7: 115–29.
  37. Tiwari GK, Pandey R, Rai PK, Pandey R, Verma Y, Parihar P, et al. Self-compassion as an intrapersonal resource of perceived positive mental health outcomes: A thematic analysis. *Mental Health, Religion & Culture*. 2020; 23: 550–69.
  38. Tuffour I. A critical overview of interpretative phenomenological analysis: A contemporary qualitative research approach. *Journal of healthcare communications*. 2017; 2: 52–38.
  39. Vagle MD. *Crafting phenomenological research*. 2018.
  40. Boven L, Lowenstein G. Empathy gaps in emotional perspective taking. In: Malle B, Hodges S, editors. *Other minds: How humans bridge the divide between self and others*. New York, NY: Guilford Press. 2005; 284–97.
  41. Wampole D, Kohli H. Social Work Students' Definition and Practice of Self-Compassion as a Guide for Curriculum Enrichment. *Journal of Teaching in Social Work*. 2023; 43: 211–25.
  42. Wicke BL. The Intersection of personal and professional stress in the lives of public middle school teachers: A qualitative case study. *American Journal of Qualitative Research*. 2021; 5: 211–23.
  43. Zessin U, Dickhäuser O, Garbade S. The relationship between self-compassion and well-being: A meta-analysis. *Applied Psychology: Health and Well-Being*. 2015; 7: 340–64.