

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the background of the study, research questions, objectives of the study, scope of the study, significance of the study, state of the art, and clarification of related terms.

1.1 Background of Study

Education, quoted by Martin Luther King, Jr., enables us to think efficiently and objectively. Education should provide people with the ability to think critically and recognize truth from falsehood, relevance from irrelevance, and reality from illusion (King, 1947). The purpose of education is achieved when individuals possess intelligence and character. In an educational setting, characters constitute social-emotional competencies. Social-emotional competencies represent one domain of Student Learning Outcomes, encompassing students' understanding of themselves and relationships with others (Esdal, 2018). Competencies of this domain are self-efficacy, positive self-image, growth mindset, curiosity, self-awareness, self-management, perseverance, social awareness, relationship skills, collaboration, and generosity.

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL), an alternative term for social-emotional outcomes, has been growing rapidly and is promoting positive development in students' emotional, social, and academic domains across ages and backgrounds (Jazaieri, 2018; Sklad et al., 2012; Weissberg et al., 2015). Moreover, SEL competencies contribute to students' future readiness by preparing them with the skills needed to thrive in a rapidly interconnected world (Plate et al., 2026). However, Jazaieri (2018) found that a particular competence from the SEL program is absent, and that is compassion. He added that compassion training programs are more common among college students than among children and teenagers, as he

believed college students were more accessible in an academic research setting.

Compassion refers to the recognition of the suffering of others and commitment to relieve it. Practicing compassion naturally aligns with altruism, characterized by unconditional kindness toward all beings (Ekman, 2013; Ricard, 2016). The goal of altruism is valuing others' welfare and preventing suffering; hence, empathy would be the trait to recognize this. However, empathy and compassion are different constructs of SEL (Jazaieri, 2018) which were discussed in the next chapter. Psychological theorists have emphasized that positive relationships with others are important for human development and survival (Seppala et al., 2013). Therefore, cultivating compassion is essential for maintaining positive relationships, as studies have shown that compassion can be learned and taught across all age groups (Huang, 2022; Jazaieri, 2018; Seppala et al., 2013).

The study of compassion has been growing over the years (Goldin & Jazaieri, 2017; Jazaieri, 2018; Kirby, 2017; Rifkin, 2019) mainly in psychology, psychotherapy, neuroscience, and religion. Goldin & Jazaieri (2017) conducted a study examined the effects of compassion training on regulating participants' affective states (anxiety, calm, fatigue, alertness), which resulted in promoting self-efficacy and self-acceptance. However, as previously noted, the studies found on compassion implementation have been dominated by scientific disciplines.

Although research on compassion has expanded, studies examining its implementation in education settings remain limited. A study by Rifkin (2019) investigated how teaching compassion in the Russian language and literature curriculum is a worthy activity, as it reflected the true purpose of a liberal arts education, developed critical thinking and creative problem-solving through the discussion of complex problems. Despite its challenges, Rifkin reinforced the existence of compassion in the curriculum to demonstrate the value of compassion to foster students into compassionate adults and citizens, as intended by this approach. As previously noted, the

studies on compassion training were dominated by adult participants or college students.

This aligns with the fact that higher education is an ideal space for transformative learning. Rashedi et al. (2015) claimed that college students store a much longer effect on shaping their cognitive, moral, and psychosocial characteristics; therefore, higher education is the perfect place to cultivate compassion. Additionally, interesting studies emerged from teachers' perspectives on compassion. A literature review by Huang (2022) revealed that teachers' mindfulness and compassion are positively linked with students' enjoyment in learning. Therefore, teachers and educators need to act upon compassion to provide a positive learning environment and enhance students' academic development. A descriptive survey by Çalışoğlu (2018) found that classroom teachers' levels of compassion varied according to factors such as gender, marital status, work settlement, and period of office. Hence, the researcher recommended that increasing teachers' compassion would positively impact their relationship with students by providing in-service training, seminars, and even self-help books to support this development.

Compassion, as a part of social-emotional competencies, promotes not only affective skills but also cognitive skills. According to Gilbert (2009), cultivating compassion involves imagination, creative thinking, and reflection. These cognitive processes enable individuals to interpret sensory inputs and regulate desire, emotions, and various bodily functions, including ruminating and problem-solving. Similarly, Goldin & Jazaieri (2017) argue that compassion begins with cognitive competence, such as the awareness and recognition of suffering. Unlike sympathy and empathy, compassion motivates intentional action to alleviate suffering; therefore, it requires critical analysis of problems, informed decision-making, and the development of sustainable actions. In the Indonesian higher education curriculum context, social competencies are positioned within the character or values competencies emphasized in National Standards for Higher

Education (Permendikbud No. 3 of 2020), thereby contributing to the graduate competency standard.

Socio-emotional competencies support sustainability as reflected in both mindset and action. Previous studies have emphasized that fostering sustainable behaviours and actions in educational settings is essential, as they enable learners to address real-world problems, explore ethical alternatives to traditional solutions, and contribute to the well-being of present and future generations (Ben-Eliyahu, 2021; Estrada et al., 2021; Sandell et al., 2005). This perspective aligns with the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, which emphasize that education should foster changes in knowledge, values, and attitudes to address recurring issues and promote a sustainable society (Estrada et al., 2021; UNESCO, 2017). Educational practices that support sustainable development, particularly in the classroom setting, are characterized by engaging students in addressing real-world problems through dialogue and equitable participation (Sandell et al., 2005), encouraging both independent and collaborative learning (Ben-Eliyahu, 2021), and developing their capacity for decision-making and critical reflection (Plate et al., 2026). Therefore, these characteristics can be realised through an appropriate pedagogical approach that reflects the principles of sustainability. In this study, problem-based learning was selected as the approach that aligns with these characteristics.

Problem-based learning (PBL) is a student-centred pedagogical approach that aligns with the principles of sustainable education by engaging students in authentic problems, collaboration, and self-directed learning. Throughout this process, students develop problem-solving skills by identifying problems and acquiring relevant knowledge and skills (Kilbane & Milman, 2013). PBL emphasizes independent and self-directed learning, collaborative learning, teachers as facilitators, active and equal participation, learning motivation, teamwork, problem-solving, engagement with the task, and all learning modes, such as pictures, articles, data, and videos, to solve the problem (Ali, 2019). Although PBL has been applicable across various disciplines, this study focuses on its implementation in

English Language Teaching (ELT), especially in higher education contexts. Previous studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of PBL in ELT contexts. For example, a quasi-experimental study by K k & Duman (2023) revealed that PBL effectively improves students' problem-solving, academic, and social and language skills. In a similar vein, Ghufon & Ermawati (2018) found that PBL improved students' problem-solving and self-directed learning, reduced students' nervousness, raised self-confidence and motivation, and improved students' ability to learn in an EFL writing class. Nevertheless, both studies noted the challenges in implementing PBL, such as extensive preparation, organized class management, cultural differences, and tedious and repetitive steps. Despite the documented benefits of PBL in ELT, little attention has been given to integrating compassion into PBL for writing instruction.

Existing literature has documented studies on social and environmental issues within the ELT context. Katunich & Goulah (2021) argued that these studies found interconnections between language learning and such issues, particularly those involving cultures, communities, and the environment. This interconnection enables language learning to focus not only on linguistic features but also on sustainable practices in addressing the existing crisis. As noted previously, discussing such issues is inseparable from socio-emotional competencies. Such issues cover diverse topics that encourage learners to explore further, thereby broadening their worldviews (Sandell et al., 2005) and may evoke their emotional responses (Pent n Herrera, 2020), prompting them to voice their thoughts or express their emotions through any form of communication, including written texts.

Socio-emotional competencies play an important role in writing, as writing involves both cognitive and affective skills. As a form of communication, writing embodies an interaction between the writer and the reader, in which the writer conveys their attitude and sensitivity toward the content and anticipates readers' engagement (Hyland & Tse, 2004). This aligns with a study by Nijakowska (2013), which revealed that affective components of reader-writer were demonstrated in textbook writing through

a politeness strategies framework. However, challenges in writing remain when writers encounter negative affective experiences (French, 2018).

As a productive skill, writing activities train learners' ability to produce language in the target language. As a form of communication, writing can be used for various purposes, such as academic, entertainment, business, medical, and other professional contexts. In higher education, students are expected to produce various forms of academic texts, such as research papers, proposals, laboratory reports, literature reviews, and even books (Sari et al., 2021). Writing constitutes a core academic skill involving three stages: planning by setting goals, generating ideas, and organizing ideas; translating by putting a writing plan into action; and reviewing by evaluating, editing, and revising (Graham & Sandmel, 2011). Despite its importance, writing remains challenging for both students and teachers. Teachers or tutors, particularly in tertiary education, still experience difficulties in implementing teaching strategies and techniques to assist students' writing process, as students' writing outcomes are often far from the expected requirements (Ouahidi, 2021). The study suggested further research on this topic to determine concrete strategies for helping teachers overcome this issue and enhance the quality of teaching writing in tertiary education.

Highlighting the limited studies on compassion within ELT praxes, particularly in the Indonesian context, and its integration with PBL for writing skills inspired the researcher to conduct this study. This paper explored how the problem-based learning model for writing can be integrated with compassion through a research and development design.

1.2 Research Questions

Based on the needs of this study, the researcher proposed a main research question: **“How is compassion infused in the problem-based learning model for writing skills of BELE students?”** Four sub-questions were constructed to provide a thorough and systematic exploration of the main question:

1. To what extent are the existing learning models for the writing skills of BELE students infused with compassion skills?
2. How are the procedures to infuse compassion skills into the problem-based learning model for the writing skills of BELE students?
3. How is the design of the compassion skills-infused problem-based learning model for the writing skills of BELE students?
4. How is the feasibility of a compassion skills-infused problem-based learning model for the writing skills of BELE students?

1.1 Objectives of the Study

Four proposed objectives of the research questions are:

1. To determine whether the existing learning model writing skills of BELE students infused compassion skills.
2. To describe the procedures of infusing compassion skills into the problem-based learning model for the writing skills of BELE students.
3. To design a compassion skills-infused problem-based learning model for the writing skills of BELE students.
4. To prove the feasibility of a compassion skills-infused problem-based learning model for the writing skills of BELE students.

1.4 Scope of the Study

This present study focused on developing a compassion-infused problem-based learning model for a writing class in the English Language Education Program. This study employed design-based research, namely the SAM (Successive Approximations Model). As a result, the study produced a prototype of a problem-based learning model infused with compassion for the writing class. Following the SAM design, the researcher underwent three stages. Data for the first stage of this study were drawn from existing learning models used in three writing courses across three universities in the Jabodetabek area and were collected during the odd

semester of the 2025-2026 academic year. The study was conducted over eleven months, starting from library research to develop the prototype.

1.5 Significance of the Study

The study will contribute to the growing research literature on problem-based learning models and compassion skill-infused learning models for writing competencies. The benefits are elaborated below:

- Theoretical significance: the study provides an extension of existing research literature on the problem-based learning model infused with compassion skills for writing competencies, especially for tertiary education.
- Practical significance: the study provides practical benefits for some parties, as listed below:
 - a. For policymakers: to enforce the importance of compassion skills in the curriculum.
 - b. For teachers or instructors: to infuse compassion skills in a problem-based learning model, especially for writing skills, with thorough preparation.
 - c. For students: to engage in a problem-solving learning model infused with compassion skills, especially expressing and demonstrating their thoughts, ideas, and reflections through writing.

1.6 State of the Art

The growing interest in cultivating compassion skills in educational settings, particularly in tertiary ELT contexts, reflects the increasing recognition of students' social-emotional needs. However, research on compassion remains relatively limited in Indonesian educational settings. Huang (2022) embraced this approach by stating that positive constructive emotions in second language acquisition are needed to support students' language learning experiences. She added that compassion is considered a

skill cultivated through learning and practice. As mentioned before, compassion has been predominantly studied in fields such as religion, psychology, and medicine. Nevertheless, the growing interest in fostering positive social-emotional learning suggests that compassion is a promising skill for supporting students' affective and cognitive competencies, and importantly, their development as healthy individuals. Therefore, creating a positive teaching and learning environment requires both teachers and students to develop and practice compassion skills.

Regarding the purpose of the present study, previous research has examined compassion in relation to English language and teaching, with relatively limited attention given to students' compassion in ELT contexts. Three studies on teachers' compassion were conducted by Çalışoğlu (2018), Rajabi & Ghezelsefloo (2020), and Huang (2022), whose results agreed that teachers' compassion is as important as students' compassion. Rajabi & Ghezelsefloo (2020) encouraged language teachers to cultivate self-compassion to reduce job stress and improve job-related affective well-being. Despite the variety of factors influencing teachers' well-being (Çalışoğlu, 2018), cultivating mindfulness and compassion can help teachers to create a safe environment and positive relationships with students in and outside the classroom (Huang, 2022). Compared with research on teachers' compassion, studies examining students' compassion in ELT settings appear to be more limited. Chiquito (2023), for instance, explained how one-on-one support through teacher collaboration, compassion, and student engagement effectively assists students academically. Moreover, the study showed that one-on-one support helps students overcome their reading difficulties and improve their academic goals.

Furthermore, the present study provides strategies for developing writing skills through problem-based learning infused with compassion skills. Writing is challenging for both students and teachers. Ouahidi (2021) reported that some tertiary-level instructors still experience difficulties in incorporating appropriate teaching strategies and techniques to support

students' writing process. Writing in higher education requires rigorous steps, including setting goals, generating ideas and organizing ideas; translating ideas into written texts; and reviewing by evaluating, editing, and revising.

Several studies have demonstrated the potential of PBL to facilitate students' writing development. Sari et al. (2021) promoted problem-based learning to assist students with scientific writing. Similarly, an experimental study conducted with Nigerian undergraduate students by Aliyu et al. (2020) demonstrated that PBL significantly improved their overall writing performance. Additionally, the study highlighted that the feedback from lecturers tremendously helped students to make necessary changes to their final writings. Bilgin & Yildiz (2024) reported that PBL enhanced Iraqi college students' writing performance, increased their motivation, and improved critical thinking. These findings indicate that PBL can support both students' linguistic development and affective dimensions of writing.

When implemented according to its proper syntax, PBL can also incorporate principles associated with inquiry-based learning and communicative language teaching. Through PBL activities, students encounter problems, investigate them through research, and exchange ideas in communicative activities. Such processes can provide opportunities for students to engage actively and collaboratively in writing while developing problem-solving and critical thinking skills. Therefore, the present study developed a prototype of a problem-based learning model for writing skills that is infused with compassion skills for Bachelor of English Language Learning students.

1.7 Clarification of Related Terms

a. Compassion

Ricard (2016) defined compassion as a form of altruistic love of a confronted other's suffering. As a Buddhist monk, he added that Buddhism defines it as the wish of all beings to be free from suffering and the causes of suffering. Goetz et al. (2010) defined compassion as

the feeling appeared after witnessing one's suffering and having a desire to help. Jazaieri (2018) proposed four components of compassion, which are an awareness of suffering (cognitive component), a sympathetic concern related to being emotionally moved by suffering (affective component), a wish to see relief of the suffering (intentional component), and a responsiveness or readiness to help relieve that suffering (motivational component).

b. Problem-based learning model.

PBL is an active learning model with a student-centred approach and allows students to develop problem-solving skills with academic content standards and see how it is applicable in real life (Kilbane & Milman, 2013). Students will foster problem-solving competencies, including analysis by identifying problems and addressing problems by application and synthesis. Ali (2019) stated the principles of this learning model, including an independent and self-directed learning model, learning done collaboratively, teachers as facilitators, all participants actively and equally involved, students learn about motivation, teamwork, problem-solving, and engagement with the task, and all modes, such as pictures, articles, data, video, can be used as learning materials to solve the problem.

c. Writing skills

Writing is an important skill for learners through which they convey their ideas and thoughts clearly (Alrouji, 2020). According to Brown & Abeywickrama (2018), there are four types of writing, including imitative, intensive, responsive, and extensive writing. Each type is based on the expected outcome or purpose of the writing. Furthermore, micro-skills and macro-skills of writing describe students' expected proficiency, starting from basic linguistic writing skills to complex structure and context of writing.

d. BELE (Bachelor of English Language Education)

BELE is a study program specializing in English Language Education for higher education. Each university may use different terminology for

naming its language study program, such as ELESP or ELEP. The objectives of this major are to prepare students with knowledge and skills of English language teaching and learning, to contribute to research in the English Education setting, and to facilitate students' becoming professionals in English language teaching and learning.

