

How do Self-Compassion and Cognitive Flexibility Shape Pre-Service English Language Teachers' Resilience? The Path from Self-Care to Strength

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Abstract

The present study sought to examine the association between pre-service second or foreign language (L2) teachers' self-compassion (SC) and teacher resilience (TR), with the mediation of cognitive flexibility (CF). To accomplish this, a total of 353 participants voluntarily completed a set of scales. Results from a structural equation modeling analysis indicated that these three constructs are positively related. Specifically, SC was found to significantly predict TR, and CF significantly mediated the association between the constructs. The results also showed that the indirect effect of SC on TR through CF was significant, indicating that flexible cognition helps transform self-directed compassion into resilient professional functioning in L2 teaching. The findings imply that self-compassionate teachers of the English language are more likely to remain resilient in their profession, and this association is fostered when coupled with their flexible cognition in language teaching. Implications are offered for teacher education, including incorporating reflective practices that cultivate SC and activities that train flexible thinking and adaptive problem-solving. The study contributes to growing evidence that affective and cognitive resources jointly support resilience in language teacher development.

Keywords: Self-compassion, resilience, cognitive flexibility, pre-service L2 teachers, L2 teacher psychology

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1. Introduction

The field of second or foreign language (L2) teacher psychology has recently experienced a paradigm shift toward positive psychology, focusing on the cultivation of psychological strengths so as to enhance teachers' professional development and well-being in L2 teaching (Dewaele et al., 2019; MacIntyre et al., 2019; Mercer & Gregersen, 2020; Kruk et al., 2026; Solhi et al., 2026; Wang et al., 2022). L2 teaching is a demanding profession (MacIntyre et al., 2020), and L2 teachers are frequently exposed to emotional demands and linguistic challenges, thereby necessitating adaptive resources that enable them to manage uncertainty and sustain their motivation to teach (Wang et al., 2024). Recent studies have also underscored the growing importance of affective factors in shaping L2 teachers' professional development and well-being (e.g., Derakhshan & Pawlak, 2025; Derakhshan & Taghizadeh, 2025; Derakhshan et al., 2024; Seyri & Ghiasvand, 2025; Xu et al., 2025). Thus, positive psychological attributes can serve as both protective buffers and proactive resources that support long-term teacher well-being (Mercer & Kostoulas, 2018).

Three positive psychological attributes of teachers that have recently gained increasing attention in L2 research are teacher resilience (TR), self-compassion (SC), and cognitive flexibility (CF) (e.g., Derakhshan et al., 2022; Elmas & Aksoy, 2026; Hu, 2023; Kesen Mutlu & Solhi, 2024). Specifically, the studies highlight the significance of these positive psychological variables in helping L2 teachers maintain motivation and adapt to the unpredictable and cognitively demanding nature of L2 teaching (Derakhshan et al., 2022; Gkonou et al., 2020; Greenier et al., 2021). SC, situated at the intersection of emotional regulation and positive self-regard (Inwood & Ferrari, 2018; Neff, 2003a), is hypothesized in the present study to contribute to both CF and TR. More specifically, SC functions as an initiating affective resource that can foster L2 teachers' behavioral-cognitive skills and ability to successfully adapt to stressors. SC is recognized as a foundational psychological resource that supports self-regulation, psychological safety, and adaptive functioning in challenging professional environments (Kotera & Gordon, 2021; Lefebvre et al., 2020). Considering the higher emotional vulnerability of pre-service L2 teachers (Meihami & Esmaili, 2024), it appears intriguing to explore how pre-service L2

teachers' assessment of their SC can contribute to their professional resilience, with the mediation of their flexible cognition.

Although SC, CF, and TR have each received growing scholarly attention in research on L2 teacher psychology, limited research has examined the associations among these constructs within a single comprehensive model. More specifically, the mediating role of CF in the relationship between SC and TR remains underexplored, particularly among pre-service L2 teachers. Addressing this gap can provide important insights into how affective and cognitive resources jointly operate in tandem. Uncovering these underlying mechanisms is crucial for early-career teacher development, as it can inform practices that empower pre-service L2 teachers to manage professional challenges.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Self-Compassion

Neff (2003a) conceptualizes SC as a multi-dimensional construct including self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness. These dimensions enable individuals to respond to personal failures or distress with balance and understanding rather than harsh self-judgment (Chio et al., 2021; Neff, 2003a). In the emotionally demanding context of L2 teaching, SC functions not merely as a passive coping mechanism but as a foundational affective resource (Hu, 2023; Zhang & Fathi, 2024). Distinct from self-esteem, which often relies on performance-based validation and can fluctuate during professional setbacks (Hallsten et al., 2005; Rubio, 2007), SC provides teachers with a stable, unconditional form of self-acceptance (Hu, 2023). Grounded in this stability, SC enables teachers to regulate self-critical reactions and maintain emotional equilibrium during pedagogical setbacks, thereby reducing vulnerability to stress and burnout (Connor, 2021; Koçak et al., 2023; Moè & Katz, 2020).

Recent empirical studies in English as a foreign language (EFL) contexts have further affirmed the importance of SC as a predictor of resilience. Specifically, higher levels of SC provide teachers with an essential psychological buffer against the stressors inherent in the L2 teaching profession, underscoring its relevance for managing emotional demands and sustaining motivation in linguistically and

culturally complex teaching environments (Hu, 2023). Beyond its protective role in challenging professional contexts, SC may strengthen teachers' motivational and professional resources by fostering greater self-efficacy and mastery-oriented engagement, both of which contribute to sustained professional commitment and reflective practice (Liao et al., 2021; Neff et al., 2005). Accordingly, in L2 teaching contexts where teachers are frequently prone to stress and professional challenges, SC helps preserve commitment and professional identity (Beaumont et al., 2016; Neff & Germer, 2017). Furthermore, the interplay between SC and resilience involves other indirect adaptive capacities. Research suggests that SC indirectly enhances emotional regulation (Çam et al., 2023), attentional control (O'Hare et al., 2023), and self-awareness (Wu & Qin, 2025). Taken together, these factors play a crucial role in teachers' capacity to manage emotional demands, respond constructively to professional challenges, and sustain resilient functioning (Er & Deniz, 2022; Neff & Germer, 2017).

2.2. Teacher Resilience

Building upon SC as an affective dimension, TR emerges as a key adaptive outcome that enables teachers to persist through adversity, sustain professional motivation, and navigate pedagogical challenges in L2 teaching (Gu & Day, 2013; Mansfield et al., 2016). TR is generally conceptualized as teachers' capacity for positive adaptation when confronted with professional adversity (Clarà, 2017; Gu, 2014; Derakhshan et al., 2022). Drawing on Hiver's (2018) operationalization, TR can be defined as L2 teachers' ability to sustain effective functioning amid work-related challenges. Resilience is generally understood as a dynamic and context-sensitive capacity (Hiver, 2018). The present study contributes to this understanding by examining how it may be shaped by the interplay between SC (an affective variable) and CF (a behavioral-cognitive skill). This argument is further supported by Hu (2023), who identified SC as a direct antecedent of TR in EFL settings, lending empirical support to the premise that affective resources such as SC may play a substantial role in teachers' adaptive capacity. Moreover, teachers with high levels of resilience demonstrate emotional balance, optimism, reflective competence, and professional

agency (Qin et al., 2023), traits that are especially relevant in L2 teaching, where educators often contend with linguistic insecurity, performance pressure, and diverse learner needs (Howard & Johnson, 2004; Jantri & Phusawisot, 2021; Tait, 2008; Taylor, 2013). These attributes have been shown to support classroom effectiveness and long-term well-being in both pre-service and in-service teachers (e.g., Khammat, 2022; Kim & Kim, 2024; Qin et al., 2023).

Taken together, prior research suggests that resilience may be shaped by the interaction of internal psychological resources such as SC and CF (Janapati & Vijayalakshmi, 2024; Moè & Katz, 2020; Ying & Han, 2009). While SC promotes resilience by enabling individuals to respond to challenges with greater self-understanding, emotional balance, and composure (Neff & Germer, 2017; O'Hare et al., 2023), CF provides the adaptive cognitive capacity to generate alternative perspectives and behavioral responses amid changing professional demands (Martin & Rubin, 1995; Spiro et al., 1988). In teacher education contexts, such flexibility supports cognitive control, instructional decision-making, and adaptive shifts between pedagogical approaches (Erarslan, 2023; Öztürk et al., 2022). However, despite growing evidence for the individual contributions of SC and CF to resilience, limited research has examined how these resources interact to jointly shape resilience in L2 teacher education.

2.3. Cognitive Flexibility

CF refers to an individual's capacity to identify viable alternatives, respond constructively to changing circumstances, and maintain self-efficacy in navigating and adapting to new or uncertain situations (Dennis & Vander Wal, 2010; Malkoç & Mutlu, 2019; Martin & Rubin, 1995). In the context of teacher development, CF supports reflection, emotion regulation, and pedagogical problem-solving (Erarslan, 2023; Li, 2023; Öztürk et al., 2022). This behavioral-cognitive skill is closely associated with SC. Specifically, individuals with higher levels of SC tend to exhibit greater CF, approaching difficulties with openness and reduced emotional reactivity (Arici-Ozcan et al., 2019; Er & Deniz, 2022; Neff & Knox, 2017). Recent work emphasizes the importance of adaptive coping processes in resilience development,

with evidence that cognitive-emotional flexibility plays a mediating role in sustaining teachers' well-being (Hu, 2023). Indeed, flexible cognitive processing enables L2 teachers to reinterpret stressful experiences, cope constructively, and maintain professional engagement (Gabrys et al., 2018).

The mechanism through which CF fosters TR is deeply tied to how teachers process challenging experiences and regulate their emotions. Specifically, the ability to mentally shift perspectives, which is a core component of CF, provides the foundation for cognitive and metacognitive reflection, which are critical predictors of a teacher's capacity to thrive (Ayoobiyan & Rashidi, 2021). Furthermore, the interplay between CF and emotion regulation is pivotal, as teachers with higher CF are more likely to engage in cognitive reappraisal as an adaptive emotion regulation strategy (Kesen Mutlu & Solhi, 2024). Given that flexible cognition empowers them to smoothly transition between various perspectives, they are more likely to constructively reinterpret anxiety-provoking situations instead of maladaptively suppressing their emotions. Viewed collectively, existing evidence suggests that CF may function as a cognitive-emotional bridge that links affective resources with adaptive professional functioning. Thus, CF appears theoretically well positioned to translate internal affective resources, including SC, into sustained adaptive outcomes, especially TR.

Yet, although a body of studies has explored the role of CF in the relationship between self-regulation and resilience (e.g., Nakhostin-Khayyat et al., 2024), limited research has examined how CF mediates the relationship between SC and resilience, particularly in the context of EFL teaching. The present study aims to reduce this gap by testing a structural model in which CF functions as a mediator between SC and TR among English language teachers at the beginning of their careers.

2.4. Theoretical Framework of the Study

The present study is informed by three complementary theoretical perspectives that illuminate the interrelations among SC, CF, and TR in the professional development

of pre-service L2 teachers. Within Bandura's (2001) social cognitive framework, SC may be understood as an awareness that strengthens self-efficacy and fosters reflective practice, thereby enabling teachers to sustain resilience and adjust pedagogical strategies with greater flexibility. Fredrickson's (2004) broaden-and-build theory further accounts for the role of positive emotions in this process, positing that the affective states cultivated through SC broaden momentary thought-action repertoires and, over time, consolidate enduring psychological capacities such as resilience and cognitive adaptability in L2 teaching. Finally, Mezirow's (1997) transformative learning theory highlights the important role of critical reflection in reshaping entrenched assumptions, suggesting that new perspectives emerge through the reinterpretation of experiences. In this respect, SC may serve as an affective catalyst for deep reflection, enabling teachers to question and reconsider prior assumptions about themselves and their professional practice. CF, in turn, facilitates the translation of these reframed understandings into adaptive professional responses, thereby supporting resilience in the face of professional challenges.

Overall, these theoretical perspectives offer a sound rationale for examining how SC may initiate a broadened cognitive stance that supports flexible coping and ultimately strengthens resilience. Thus, the present study conceptualizes SC as a key affective resource, one that activates expansive cognitive patterns and lays the groundwork for building durable psychological capacities essential for professional resilience. Within this framework, CF represents the adaptive cognitive mechanism through which affective resources are translated into resilient functioning. Moreover, prior research supports the premise that SC enhances flexible cognition (Ghosh & Halder, 2020; Neff & Knox, 2017) and that CF promotes resilience by enabling adaptive adjustment and sustained professional engagement (Fathi & Derakhshan, 2022). Despite a body of studies on SC, CF, and resilience, the relationships among these three psychological variables among pre-service L2 teachers have remained underexplored. To address this research gap, the present study sought answers to the following research questions (RQs):

RQ1. What is the relationship between pre-service L2 teachers' self-compassion, cognitive flexibility, and resilience?

RQ2. Does pre-service L2 teachers' cognitive flexibility mediate the relationship between self-compassion and resilience?

3. Methodology

3.1. Participants and context

The research involved 353 (M age = 22.03, SD = 2.16), including 246 females and 99 males, while eight participants chose not to disclose their gender. They were senior English-major students undertaking their teaching practicum as pre-service English language teachers in different schools. Using a snowball sampling method (Johnson, 2014), participants were recruited from nine different universities across Türkiye. Participation was voluntary, and no incentives were offered. In the English language teaching programs at Turkish universities, students are expected to complete a four-year teacher preparation program offered by the university's school of education. The initial years are devoted to general English, education theory, and philosophy courses, along with methodology and approaches specific to ELT. The subsequent terms include more academic and practical courses such as second language acquisition, teaching skills, and microteaching experiences. The program finalizes 28-week practicum courses in which students teach at the elementary, secondary, and high school levels. At the time of the study, participants had completed most of the theoretical and practical courses and were undertaking their teaching practicum.

3.2. Instruments

3.2.1. Cognitive flexibility scale

CF was measured using Martin and Rubin's (1995) Cognitive Flexibility Scale. The Scale consists of 12 items and assesses participants' (a) willingness to be flexible and adapt to the new situation, (b) self-efficacy in being flexible, and (c) awareness that in any given situation there are options and alternatives available (Martin and Rubin, 1995). The participants rated the items on a 6-point Likert scale (12 items; e.g., "I can communicate an idea in many different ways"), ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). In the developers' study, the internal consistency coefficient was

reported as .80, and the reliability coefficient was .83. Several studies similarly indicated high internal consistency of the scale (e.g., Malkoç & Mutlu, 2019; Maltby et al., 2004). In the current study, the reliability analysis showed a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .85.

3.2.2. Teacher resilience scale

To assess L2 teacher resilience, Callegari et al.'s (2016) Teacher Resilience Scale was used. The scale consists of 14 items rated on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 7 (strongly disagree). The scale consists of five subfactors: meaning and purposeful life (3 items; e.g., "My life has meaning"), perseverance (2 items; e.g., "I am determined"), equanimity (2 items; e.g., "I usually take things in stride"), self-reliance (5 items; e.g., "I usually manage one way or another"), and authenticity (2 items; e.g., "I am friends with myself"). Previous research has confirmed the reliability and validity of the Teacher Resilience Scale (e.g., Derakhshan et al., 2022; Proietti Ergün & Dewaele, 2021). In the current study, reliability analysis revealed that the Cronbach's alpha coefficient was .84, showing strong internal consistency.

3.2.3. Self-compassion scale

Three subdimensions of Neff's (2003b) Self-Compassion Scale were used to evaluate L2 teachers' levels of self-compassion. The full version of the scale consists of 26 items across six subscales: Self-Kindness, Common Humanity, Mindfulness (positive components), and Self-Judgment, Isolation, and Over-Identification (negative components). Each item is scored on a five-point Likert scale, from 1 (almost never) to 5 (almost always). The present study included only three positive subscales—Self-Kindness (5 items; e.g., "I try to be loving towards myself when I'm feeling emotional pain"), Common Humanity (4 items; e.g., "When things are going badly for me, I see the difficulties as part of life that everyone goes through"), and Mindfulness (4 items; e.g., "When something upsets me, I try to keep my emotions in balance"). Therefore, the present study did not operationalize global self-compassion as measured by the full SCS. Instead, it focused specifically on the positive or compassionate components of

the construct. This was theoretically aligned with several educational theories, including the broaden-and-build framework (Fredrickson, 2001), which emphasizes how positive emotions can expand individuals' thought-action repertoires and support the development of enduring personal and psychological resources. More specifically, the modeling of the study would provide insights into the intricate association between positive self-relating, balanced awareness, and adaptive cognitive expansion. In Neff's study (2003b), the reported Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the scale was .92, and its test-retest reliability was .93. In another study by Koçak et al. (2023), the calculated internal consistency of the scale was strong, with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .88. For the current study, it was found to be .90, displaying strong internal consistency.

3.3. Data Collection Procedures

Prior to data collection, ELT department chairs from nine different universities were contacted and informed about the purpose and the scope of the study. They were requested to share the online questionnaire with the volunteering pre-service L2 teachers in their departments. All participants provided informed consent before completing the questionnaire. Data were collected over a two-month period during the spring semester of the 2024-2025 academic year. In total, 353 responses were obtained.

3.4. Data Analysis

The main analysis was conducted in a sequential step. First, means, standard deviations, skewness, kurtosis, and Pearson correlations were computed for each variable. Moreover, various measures of reliability were estimated, such as Cronbach's alpha, McDonald's omega, and Guttman's lambda. Second, a two-step approach was employed to test the study hypotheses, in line with the recommendations of Anderson and Gerbing (1988). We used AMOS 24 to evaluate the mediating role of CF in the relationship between SC and TR. Initially, the measurement model was tested, assessing the indirect associations. To assess the model's fit, indices such as RMSEA, SRMR, GFI, TLI, CFI, NFI, and IFI were examined. The acceptable fit criteria were defined as RMSEA and SRMR values less than 0.08 and GFI, TLI, CFI, NFI, and IFI

values greater than 0.90, as suggested in previous literature (Hu & Bentler, 1999). The significance of the mediating variable was examined through a bootstrapping method with 5,000 samples, which produced 95% confidence intervals (CI) for the indirect effects. Indirect effects with bootstrapped 95% CIs that did not include zero, which is regarded as statistically significant according to Hayes (2018). All statistical analyses were carried out with IBM SPSS Statistics 27, AMOS Graphics, and JASP version 0.11.1.

4. Results

4.1. Preliminary Analysis

The mean scores were 46.11 (± 6.92) for CF, 44.12 (± 10.5) for SC, and 78.61 (± 10.50) for TR (see Table 1). Skewness (-0.94 to -0.11) and kurtosis (-0.07 to 1.22) values fell within the acceptable range for SEM (see Brown, 2006), indicating normal distribution of study variables. Specifically, skewness coefficients ranged between -0.94 and -0.11 , while kurtosis coefficients ranged between 1.22 and -0.07 . Furthermore, all reliability coefficients were deemed acceptable. Composite reliability and average variance extracted were calculated using the standardized factor loadings from the final measurement model. The CR values were .77 for CF, .85 for SC components, and .81 for TR, indicating acceptable composite reliability across the constructs. The AVE values were .63 for CF, .66 for SC components, and .47 for TR. Thus, CF and SC components exceeded the commonly recommended .50 threshold for convergent validity. Although the AVE value for TR was slightly below this threshold, its composite reliability remained acceptable, suggesting that the construct retained adequate reliability and could be retained in the structural model (Hair et al., 2019). Discriminant validity was further evaluated using the Fornell–Larcker criterion by comparing each construct’s AVE with its squared correlations with the other latent constructs (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive Statistics and Reliabilities									
Variables	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis	α	ω	λ_6	CR	AVE
1. CF	6.11	.92	-0.41	0.43	.81	.80	.82	.77	.63
2. PSCC	4.12	0.50	-0.11	-0.07	.90	.89	.91	.85	.66
3. TR	8.61	0.50	-0.94	1.22	.84	.84	.85	.81	.47

* Note: α = Cronbach's alpha; ω = McDonald's omega; λ_6 = Guttman's lambda 6; CR = Composite Reliability; AVE = Average Variance Extracted. CR and AVE were calculated based on the standardized factor loadings from the final measurement model

As evident in Table 2, CF was positively and significantly associated with TR ($r = .50$, $p < .01$) and SC ($r = .43$, $p < .01$). Among the components of SC, common humanity ($r = .36$), self-kindness ($r = .43$), and mindfulness ($r = .43$) showed the strongest links to CF. Similarly, subdimensions of TR, including self-reliance ($r = .50$) and perseverance ($r = .50$), demonstrated the strongest associations with CF. These findings suggest theoretically consistent links between the core constructs of the study.

Table 2
Latent Correlations among Variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Cognitive flexibility									
2. Common humanity ^{SC}	.36**								
3. Self-kindness ^{SC}	.35**	.62*							
4. Mindfulness ^{SC}	.43**	.68*	.67*						
5. Self-reliance ^{TR}	.60**	.33*	.32*	.61*					
6. Purpose ^{TR}	.50**	.43*	.43*	.43*	.61*				
7. Equanimity ^{TR}	.36**	.18*	.40*	.38*	.35*	.55*			

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
8. Authenticity ^{TR}	.36**	.44* *	.43* *	.38* *	.36* *	.38* *	.51* *		
9. Perseverance ^{TR}	.50**	.34* *	.41* *	.39* *	.44* *	.45* *	.48* *	.60* *	

Note. ** $p < .01$. ^{SC} and ^{TR} are subscales for self-compassion and teacher resilience, respectively.

4.2. Measurement Model

We evaluated a measurement model encompassing three latent variables (i.e., CF, SC, and TR) and 10 observed variables. Due to its unidimensional structure, the CF was represented by two item parcels created to enhance indicator reliability and model parsimony (see Little et al., 2002). The SC components and TR were modeled using their theoretically established subscales as observed indicators. Overall, the model demonstrated a good fit: $\chi^2(32, N=354) = 93.710$, $\chi^2/df = 2.92$; RMSEA = 0.074, SRMR = 0.039, GFI = 0.945, TLI = 0.944, CFI = 0.960, NFI = 0.941, and IFI = 0.960. All indicators had significant factor loadings, ranging from 0.51 to 0.86, confirming that each indicator represented its corresponding variable effectively.

4.2. Structural Model

Upon establishing the adequacy of the measurement model, we then examined the structural model, which assessed whether CF mediated the association between SC components and TR. The resulting structural model exhibited acceptable fit indices: $\chi^2(50, N = 354) = 141.321$, $\chi^2/df = 2.82$; RMSEA = 0.072 [CI: 0.058-0.086], SRMR = 0.048, GFI = 0.945, TLI = 0.944, CFI = 0.960, NFI = 0.941, and IFI = 0.960. All indicators showed significant factor loadings.

The direct path from SC components to TR was significant ($\beta = .241$, $p < .01$). In addition, bootstrapping analysis (5,000 samples) indicated a significant indirect path from SC components to TR through CF ($B = .317$, 95% CI [.204, .468]), supporting the hypothesized mediation. The findings related to the mediated model are displayed in Figure 1 and detailed in Table 3. Taken together, the results support the hypothesized mediation model showing a significant direct path from SC components

to TR and a significant indirect path through CF.

Figure 1

Structural Equation Model with Standardized Path Coefficients

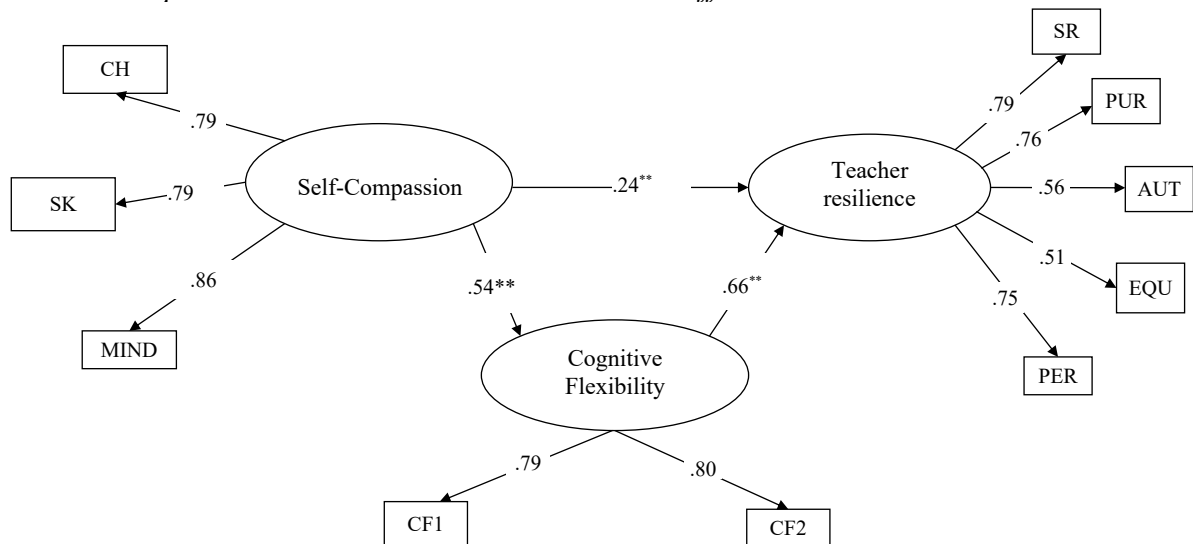


Table 3

Standardized Path Estimates and Bootstrap Confidence Intervals for the Mediation Model

Path	Estimate	SE	Lower 95% CI	Upper 95% CI
Direct				
SC → CF	.647	.085	.455	.794
CF → TR	.509	.083	.335	.657
SC → TR	.522	.121	.274	.752
Indirect effect				
SC → CF → TR	.317	.067	.204	.468

Note: SC=Positive Self-compassion Components; CF = Cognitive flexibility; TR = Teacher resilience. Indirect effects were estimated using 5,000 bootstrap samples. CI = Confidence Interval.

5. Discussion

The aim of the present study was twofold: we first explored the associations between pre-service EFL teachers' SC, CF, and TR, and then probed how their CF mediates between SC and TR. The findings revealed strong and positive associations between

SC, CF, and TR. The components of SC that demonstrated the strongest correlations with CF were common humanity, self-kindness, and mindfulness. The close interplay between pre-service L2 teachers' SC and CF highlights how their ability to turn compassion inward—specifically through recognizing common humanity, treating themselves with kindness, and maintaining mindfulness—can enable them to approach challenges with adaptability and a willingness to consider alternative solutions in language teaching. This finding underscores how emotional and cognitive aspects of teacher functioning operate in tandem to foster adaptability in L2 teaching contexts. This prominent relationship can be unraveled through the lens of Fredrickson's (2004) broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions, explaining how positive self-oriented emotions, such as self-kindness and mindfulness, broaden cognition, and facilitate flexible thinking in L2 teaching. The positive association between SC and CF is also consistent with Cırcır and Tagay's (2024) findings, which demonstrated that SC was positively linked with CF in adolescents.

The study also revealed a positive link between SC and TR. In other words, different facets of pre-service L2 teachers' SC can enable them to sustain their capacity to adapt in the face of professional adversity. This is echoed in Hu's (2023) research, which reported a positive correlation between teacher SC and TR, suggesting that higher levels of SC are associated with greater resilience in managing professional challenges. Indeed, given that SC fosters adaptive stress-coping strategies (Namaziandost et al., 2025), it can enhance pre-service L2 teachers' resilience by enabling them to maintain their capacity so as to manage occupational challenges in language teaching. The current study also showed that CF had the strongest associations with self-reliance and perseverance—two components of TR. The finding underscores that pre-service teachers' willingness to remain flexible, along with their awareness that there might be alternative ways to approach a situation, enable them to sustain confidence and perseverance in challenging L2 teaching contexts. The close association between L2 teachers' CF and TR is further consistent with Li's (2023) study, which found a direct and significant correlation between EFL teachers' CF and workplace buoyancy—a type of resilience that refers to the ability to cope with everyday setbacks (Martin & Evans, 2022).

The findings also revealed a direct and significant impact of SC on TR and an

indirect and significant contribution of SC on TR through CF. The positive impact of L2 teachers' SC on TR aligns with Hu's (2023) research, which indicated that L2 teachers' SC had direct positive effects on their resilience and that higher levels of SC were linked to greater TR. This finding indicates how SC can function as a vital psychological asset to protect pre-service L2 teachers against professional challenges. The major positive impact of teachers' SC on resilience is also confirmed by Rehman et al.'s (2024) research, highlighting how teachers' SC can positively contribute to the relationship between resilience and mental health. Thus, self-compassionate L2 teachers, equipped with the core components of common humanity, self-kindness, and mindfulness, are more likely to approach professional setbacks with understanding, strengthening their overall resilience. The significant mediating role of CF between pre-service L2 teachers' SC and resilience highlights the crucial function of adaptive thinking in linking self-directed compassion with the capacity to cope with professional demands. By fostering reflective thinking and creative problem-solving (Erarslan, 2023), CF acts as a bridge through which compassion toward oneself can be transformed into the ability to effectively respond to major occupational adversity in L2 teaching contexts. A strand of L2 research has also demonstrated how L2 teachers' flexible cognition can shape different aspects of their professional well-being (e.g., Kesen Mutlu & Solhi, 2024; Orakcı & Khalili, 2025). Indeed, the path from SC to CF and ultimately to TR can be seen as a chain, where self-directed compassion underpins flexible thinking, and this adaptability, in turn, fortifies pre-service EFL teachers' capacity to persevere and thrive amid professional challenges.

5.1. Implications, Limitations, and Future Directions

Several implications can be drawn from the findings. Given that CF mediated the association between EFL teachers' SC and TR, teacher education programs may consider integrating activities that support self-kindness, common humanity, mindfulness, and adaptive cognitive strategies in pre-service teacher education. First, within theoretical and methodological courses such as classroom management and microteaching, programs can systematically integrate structured SC and CF

workshops. To develop basic self-compassion skills, teacher educators could utilize guided self-reflection, compassionate letter-writing, and peer-sharing circles (Neff & Germer, 2013; Neff & Germer, 2018). Creating these collaborative networks helps pre-service teachers realize that professional setbacks are a universal aspect of L2 teaching (Neff, 2023). In situations where pre-service L2 teachers' feeling of relatedness is fostered, they are less likely to experience excessive self-criticism or the perception that L2 teaching struggles are unique to them. Establishing this self-compassionate mindset is an essential step so as to lower emotional reactivity, which in turn can enable pre-service teachers to become more receptive to developing CF. Building upon this emotional safety, educators can then foster CF by incorporating brainstorming exercises and role-playing activities to promote flexible thinking and adaptive responses to diverse classroom settings (Kesen Mutlu & Solhi, 2024). Additionally, scenario-based problem-solving tasks can be incorporated to encourage pre-service teachers to generate and evaluate multiple pedagogical responses to challenging classroom situations.

Moreover, during the practicum and field observation phase, mentor-led interventions can activate SC and CF as core mechanisms that build teacher resilience. Specifically, cultivating a sense of relatedness and belonging in the practicum helps pre-service teachers transform experiences of failure into opportunities for growth and professional engagement (Ünsal-Görkemoglu & Solhi, 2023). In observation-based sessions, teacher mentors may encourage pre-service L2 teachers to reflect on how they would approach similar teaching scenarios, exploring alternative strategies and solutions for handling challenges effectively. Through such cognitive rehearsal, prospective teachers can strengthen their decision-making skills and enhance their ability to respond adaptively in L2 classrooms (Kesen Mutlu & Solhi, 2024). Moreover, to cultivate metacognitive reflection, pre-service L2 teachers need to be encouraged to keep reflective journals where they report challenges, how they respond, and what they learn. This can help to recognize patterns and growth over time. To further solidify this process, practicum programs can implement collaborative reflection activities such as peer-observations and video-recorded self-evaluations (Ayoobiyan & Rashidi, 2021).

There are several limitations to consider when interpreting these findings. First,

the study focused only on pre-service L2 teachers. This sampling constraint may have influenced the strength of the observed relationships, as pre-service teachers might encounter greater uncertainty and professional challenges (Ünsal-Görkemoglu & Solhi, 2023), making the interplay among SC, CF, and TR particularly salient. Therefore, the findings should be interpreted with caution and may not be fully generalizable to more experienced teachers. Future research could examine these associations focusing on in-service L2 teachers with greater teaching experience to determine how teaching experience influences the relationships among SC, CF, and TR. Second, self-report scales were used to measure the interplay among the three constructs. All variables were assessed through participants' self-evaluations in a single data collection session. Future research could collect data from multiple sources (e.g., mentor evaluations, classroom observations, reflective journals), employing longitudinal designs with temporally separated measurements, and applying statistical techniques to assess and control for common method variance. Moreover, the present study included only the three positive components of the Self-Compassion Scale, namely self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness. Although Neff (2016) notes that researchers may examine subscales or composite scores, she also conceptualizes SC as a dynamic balance between compassionate and uncompassionate responses to suffering. Therefore, the present findings should be interpreted as reflecting positive SC components rather than global SC as measured by the full SCS. Future research could examine whether the full SCS, separate positive and negative composites, or all components show similar associations with CF and TR. Additionally, item 5 of the Cognitive Flexibility Scale (I seldom have a choice when deciding how to behave) was removed due to negative inter-item correlations, suggesting it contradicted the intended construct. Therefore, the exclusion of this item might have narrowed the conceptual coverage of CF. However, this issue may stem from cultural differences in how choice and agency are perceived, underscoring the need for further validation and potential revision of items in cross-cultural settings. Finally, as artificial intelligence (AI) increasingly reshapes L2 education, future research should explore the interplay of emotions in AI-mediated teaching environments, particularly how L2 teachers experience AI-related emotional challenges, such as foreign language teaching anxiety (see Derakhshan, 2026). While

recent studies have begun to address AI-related emotional engagement among EFL learners (e.g., Derakhshan, 2025), examining these emotional dynamics from the teachers' perspective can provide deeper insights into how educators experience, interpret, and respond to the emotional demands of AI-mediated language teaching. More specifically, future studies could investigate whether psychological resources such as self-compassion and cognitive flexibility help pre-service L2 teachers cope with technology-related stress and sustain resilience in AI-enhanced instructional settings.

6. Conclusion

This study highlights the intricate interplay among self-compassion, cognitive flexibility, and teacher resilience in pre-service L2 teachers. The results indicated that SC directly predicts TR, and CF functions as a significant mediator in the association between positive SC and TR. These findings suggest that pre-service L2 teachers who cultivate self-compassion and flexible thinking are better equipped to sustain their professional well-being. Specifically, the study underscores the significance of both emotional and cognitive factors in supporting resilient L2 teaching. Overall, fostering SC and CF in teacher education programs plays a crucial role in enhancing pre-service teachers' resilience, contributing to more effective L2 teaching practices.

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