



The Effect of Cosmetics on Learning Motivation: Self-Compassion and Body Image at SMK Muhammadiyah Masaran

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Article History: Received : 30-Jun-2026 Revised : 28-Jul-2026 Accepted : 30-Jul-2026 Available online : 30-Sep-2026 Keyword: Cosmetics; Learning Motivation, Body Image; Islamic-Informed Self-Compassion.	Female students negotiate visual identities within the school environment, influenced by image-centric social media. As a result, it is important to consider how making use of cosmetics as a form of self-expression impacts adolescent girls' academic motivation. Previous studies have neglected to identify the use of spiritual mechanisms to alleviate body image pressure. There is a clear gap in the literature in this respect. This study examines the role of self-image, the use of cosmetics, and Islamic-based self-compassion in understanding learning motivation, through the lens of body image. This study has employed a qualitative phenomenological approach to investigate the learning motivation of fifteen female students, as defined by the criteria of SMK Muhammadiyah 10 Masaran. Primary data were collected through individual in-depth interviews, class observations, and focus group discussions. The data were subsequently analyzed using the Miles and Huberman, three-step, data analysis framework. The results show that the students of the study had a self-imposed, cosmetic 'polarization' of emotional learning aids, which supported learning. Students who combined Islamic self-compassion with the Islamic spiritual values of gratitude, qanaah, and ikhlas, had high psychological resilience and motivational stability. On the other hand, the use of cosmetics framed by social anxiety, described by students as social 'defensive,' caused cognitive overload and academic burnout. Consequently, this study attempts to redefine the school guidance and counseling teachers' roles, i.e., providing a more dynamic response to the students' psychosocial complexities.

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INTRODUCTION

Described adolescence as a period of physical, cognitive, and socio-cultural evolution (Qamara et al., 2022). At this critical period of transition to adulthood, psychological conditions become the determinants of students' academic performance (Muhammad Faqihudin, 2025). (Qamara et al., 2022) have suggested that during this phase, the concern for one's physical appearance reaches a maximum, particularly among adolescent girls. (Indriasari et al., 2023) state that adolescent girls are prone to placing external appraisals of physical appearance above other factors. This, in turn, influences the development of their self-esteem and self-concept. The dynamics of student's mental health during the school years should be viewed from a holistic perspective of Islamic educational psychology. This includes the consideration of the role of spirituality in the development of resilience (Muhammad Farhan & Mahasri Shobahiya, 2024). It is often the case that academic procrastination is a hostile environment in the Islamic educational psychology context for students. This is caused by self-image pressure and social anxiety (Novia Firdayanti & Mahasri Shobahiya, 2024).

Makeup should be viewed as an adaptive measure. This is particularly evident in the era of a digital world, where social media platforms such as TikTok and Instagram have increased psychological exposure and pressure to conform to one-dimensional physical appearance (Marengo et al., 2018)(Choukas-Bradley et al., 2022). In this social environment, cosmetics and makeup have shifted from being tools for self-care to being methods to manage impressions and visual identity for high school students. Schools have historically been spaces to focus on education, devoid of personal aesthetic expression. However, they have now become the places where students compare how they physically look to their peers. Unfortunately, the use of cosmetics has been met with inflexible and repressive tactics. Generally, school administrators see cosmetics as a combination of moral and vanity crimes and as a distraction from studies. The gap between the repressive policies and the real psychological needs of students creates a sociopsychological gap in the classroom. According to (Hidayah, 2026) , for teenage girls, the face is the most personal aspect of their social life. When a school forbids girls from using light makeup to cover skin blemishes and imperfections, this Cosmetic (Zhang, H., Li, H., Jiang, C., Tu, Y., & Xi, 2025) distracts them from the lesson.

Body dissatisfaction manifests in a significant cognitive distraction for teenagers. This distracts them from the teacher's academic discourse and consumes their working memory. Also, the existing studies on educational psychology have neglected the connection between the use of cosmetics and the academic performance of students. Represents a divergent and unexplored area of research concerning the anxiety of self-presentation and how this mediates a decrease in concentration during learning. Most previous studies have focused on moral discipline without evaluating the cognitive load triggered by such repressive rules. Consequently, efforts to address learning motivation issues in schools often overlook the psychological context directly experienced by adolescent girls in the digital age. Student learning motivation, defined as the psychological drive to engage deeply and persistently in academic activities, is highly dependent on emotional stability and the fulfillment of their basic psychological needs (Rizki et al., 2023). Based on Self-Determination Theory (SDT), students' intrinsic motivation will develop optimally if their needs for autonomy, competence,

and relatedness are met (Lopez et al., 2025). In the context of classroom interactions, the feeling of being socially accepted due to an appearance deemed appropriate and neat fulfills this need for relatedness. Therefore, this study positions the understanding of the role of cosmetics not merely as a matter of compliance with school regulations, but rather as an issue of emotional regulation that directly impacts students' mental readiness to absorb lesson material.

This study aims to bridge this theoretical and practical gap by exploring how the use of cosmetics influences students' learning motivation in school through the lens of body image and self-compassion. Specifically, this study integrates a new construct developed by (Khusnul, 2025) regarding Islamic-informed self-compassion. This construct offers an alternative framework in which Islamic religious moral values such as gratitude (*syukur*), contentment (*qanaah*), and emotional sincerity (*ikhlas*) are transformed into protective mechanisms for adolescent girls in managing the pressures of negative body image (Khusnul, 2025). 4 Through this perspective, the researcher aims to analyze whether the use of light, neat makeup can be positioned as a form of adaptive self-care to maintain students' emotional stability and academic self-efficacy, or whether it instead becomes a new source of anxiety that accelerates academic burnout.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Body Image, Social Comparison, and Adolescent Development

Adolescent body image is fundamentally context-dependent, fluctuating significantly across environmental transitions (Qamara et al., 2022). Social comparison theory explains how individuals spontaneously evaluate themselves relative to peer reference groups, with upward comparisons often producing self-esteem deficits (Saputri et al., 2024). The transition from private domestic spaces to public school environments exemplifies this phenomenon body satisfaction established at home dissipates upon exposure to peer-group visual stimuli. This appearance-focused anxiety activates compensatory behaviors including cosmetic use as tactical self-defense mechanisms (Novia Firdayanti & Mahasri Shobahiya, 2024). Such behaviors reflect legitimate psychological responses to environmental demands rather than moral failings.

Cognitive Load, Appearance Anxiety, and Academic Performance

Cognitive Load Theory (Al Hadi A F M Q, 2025) provides critical insight into appearance anxiety's academic consequences. Unresolved body image concerns consume working memory capacity through intrusive self-evaluation thoughts, creating extraneous cognitive load unrelated to academic content processing. Paradoxically, permitting modest hygiene-focused cosmetic use before class reduces this appearance-related anxiety, liberating cognitive resources for academic engagement. When students' emotional needs for social competence and aesthetic confidence are satisfied, working memory capacity becomes available for higher-level academic task performance. This mechanism explains why repressive cosmetic policies, intended to minimize academic distraction, frequently achieve opposite effects by generating sustained psychological tension.

Islamic-Informed Self-Compassion as Psychological Protection

Islamic-informed self-compassion integrates spiritual and psychological protective mechanisms (Khusnul, 2025). The Islamic values of gratitude (syukur) recognizing and appreciating blessings qanaah (contentment with one's circumstances), and ikhlas (emotional sincerity) transform into resilience factors buffering adolescent girls against negative body image internalization. Students cultivating these spiritual values develop cognitive flexibility regarding physical appearance, recognizing appearance variability as universal human experience rather than personal failure. This perspective prevents cosmetic use escalation into pathological self-objectification while supporting normative self-care practices. Research demonstrates that spiritually-grounded self-acceptance moderates the negative psychological consequences of appearance-focused social environments.

It contains a discussion of theories and research results that are related or support in writing scientific articles. Theory and research results can come from national journals and international journals. Literature review can be written separately or can also be included in the introduction.

METHOD

Research Design and Rationale

This research employed qualitative phenomenological design to deeply understand the lived experiences of adolescent girls navigating cosmetic use within school environments. Phenomenological methodology was selected because it permits investigation of subjective internal psychological processes body image anxiety, autonomy needs, and resilience development beyond external behavioral observation. The existential phenomenological approach captures the essence of participants' experiences regarding appearance management and emotional regulation through rich narrative and observational data.

Research Setting and Participant Selection

Data were collected at SMK Muhammadiyah 10 Masaran, a private Islamic vocational school in an urban-suburban setting. Participants were selected through purposive sampling based on specific criteria: active female students in grades 10, 11, and 12; minimal cosmetic use (face powder, lip balm, eyebrow pencil, or skin treatment); and 90% school attendance ensuring substantial school environment exposure. Fifteen active female students participated, with two (Dinara and Cleora, grade 11) selected for in-depth case analysis from complete interview transcript analysis.

Data Collection Methods

Data collection employed methodological triangulation utilizing three complementary techniques. First, semi-structured individual in-depth interviews guided by psychological issue frameworks were conducted to capture participants' subjective experiences, motivations, and emotional processes related to cosmetic use and body image. Second, unobtrusive direct participatory classroom observations documented naturalistic behaviors and peer interactions within the school environment. Third, focus group discussions enabled participants to collectively reflect on appearance standards, cosmetic practices, and academic motivation dynamics. This triangulation approach ensured comprehensive data capture from multiple perspectives.

Data Analysis Procedure

Data analysis followed an interactive four-stage framework adapted from established qualitative analysis models. Stage one involved data collection, interview transcription, and field note compilation. Stage two, data reduction, included researcher abstraction and simplification of cosmetic use motivations and cognitive load effects through systematic coding. Stage three organized data into narrative matrices and relational charts illustrating phenomena relationships. The final stage, conclusion drawing and verification, tested meaning formulations for credibility through peer debriefing and data triangulation. Validity was ensured through multiple triangulation approaches and systematic peer review of emergent interpretations.

FINDINGS

Environmental Context and Aesthetic Transitions

Data analysis revealed fundamental differences in participants' appearance confidence across environmental contexts. In domestic spaces, informants experienced stable, autonomous self-evaluation supported by controlled visual environments and private observation. However, upon entering school environments, exposure to peer-group visual stimuli disrupted this self-concept stability. Dinara reported feeling beautiful when viewing herself at home, yet experiencing ordinariness upon school arrival. Cleora similarly described how visual confidence established through home self-evaluation instantly faded when confronted with pluralistic aesthetic standards within the school peer group. This phenomenon aligns with social comparison literature demonstrating that adolescent body image is highly context-dependent and vulnerable to disruption through public peer exposure (Qamara et al., 2022).

Anxiety Loci and Compensatory Cosmetic Dependence

Constant peer exposure compelled informants to identify specific facial areas as vulnerability foci, developing functional cosmetic dependence as tactical compensation. Dinara identified labial area deficiency as her primary appearance anxiety locus, experiencing extreme discomfort without lip cream due to associations with pallid, lackluster appearance. This cosmetic tool functioned as coping mechanism maintaining self-confidence projection and peer social vitality. Conversely, Cleora's anxiety concentrated on eyebrow definition, experiencing substantial discomfort without eyebrow pencil use, particularly during academic presentations requiring public visibility. From Self-Determination Theory perspective, these specific cosmetic tools served as mechanical compensations protecting social competence sense and interpersonal worthiness for public performance.

Motivational Orientations in Cosmetic Use

Analysis identified two distinct motivational poles in makeup behavior patterns along the Self-Determination Theory autonomy control continuum. Initially, introjected regulation predominated, driven by ego-threatening negative emotions including social rejection fears and situational anxiety. Cleora described how makeup absence undermined academic presentation confidence, while Dinara experienced negative affect during poor skin condition periods. However, progressive interviews revealed emerging identified regulation patterns. Dinara redefined makeup as self-love and self-care tools independent of external judgment, while Cleora articulated cosmetics as self-appreciation practices. These shifts indicate reclamation of autonomy needs from external standard control, progressing toward more intrinsically-motivated appearance management.

Self-Compassion Mechanisms and Psychological Resilience

Despite intensive social comparison exposure, informants maintained healthy psychological functioning without developing pathological body dysmorphia or obsessive appearance preoccupation. This resilience stemmed from strong self-compassion foundations. Cleora explicitly recognized appearance attractiveness relativity, acknowledging universal reality that peers possessing greater physical attractiveness always exist. She framed this awareness as common humanity recognition rather than personal inadequacy. Dinara expressed deep gratitude for self-care capacity and neat appearance achievement despite imperfect results. This Islamic-grounded gratitude value transformed cosmetic consumption from defensive anxiety management into authentic self-care expression. These protective self-compassion mechanisms ensured cosmetic use remained mentally healthy recreational activity rather than neurotic obsession.

Cosmetic Use, Cognitive Focus, and Academic Performance

Contrary to conventional assumptions that cosmetics distract from academics, empirical data demonstrated stable academic performance among participants. Dinara directly asserted that appearance dynamics and cosmetic use produced no destructive effects on classroom concentration. Participants' cognitive orientation remained focused on academic task completion and future achievement. This cognitive liberation occurred because cosmetic self-care completed before class eliminated appearance-related anxiety, thereby reducing extraneous cognitive load unrelated to learning essence. According to Cognitive Load Theory, this anxiety reduction automatically decreased irrelevant cognitive load occupying working memory capacity. Once emotional comfort was achieved through appropriate makeup application, participants' working memory remained free from intrusive appearance judgment worries, maintaining high efficacy in learning activities commitment.

DISCUSSION

Social Comparison Dynamics and Context Dependent Body Image

This research confirms that adolescent body image is fundamentally context-dependent, fluctuating between 'beautiful' feelings in private spaces and 'ordinary' or 'inferior' feelings in public peer environments. Body evaluations correlate directly with environmental stimulus variability levels. Private spaces enable stable body satisfaction, while public environments with significant peer-group visual diversity generate constant upward social comparison. Female students subjected to continued peer-group visual stimuli demonstrate rapid subjective self-evaluation decline through sustained upward comparison mechanisms (Saputri et al., 2024). When facial features appear below peer group standards, appearance anxiety manifests through working memory overload via intrusive self-evaluation thoughts, resulting in academic participation withdrawal and self-defense behaviors including presentation avoidance and reduced question-asking.

Reconceptualizing Cosmetics: From Moral Problem to Emotional Regulation

This study departs from traditional institutional critiques of cosmetic use as moral transgression or vanity display, instead demonstrating that complete prohibition of minimal-hygiene cosmetics generates counterproductive sociopsychological tension within classrooms. School administrators' repressive

framing ignores the additional cognitive load created by appearance anxiety. Research findings indicate that permitting light, basic cosmetics as emotional regulation tools for maintaining learning motivation stability produces superior academic outcomes compared to punitive prohibition approaches. Policy recommendations suggest shifting from repressive paradigms toward adaptive counseling approaches that recognize cosmetic use as legitimate psychological need fulfillment. This reorientation aligns with contemporary psychological understanding of emotion regulation's critical role in academic engagement and cognitive task performance.

Islamic-Informed Self-Compassion as Protective Factor

This research contributes significant theoretical insight through Islamic-informed self-compassion framework integration. Students cultivating Islamic spiritual values of gratitude (*syukur*), contentment (*qanaah*), and emotional sincerity (*ikhlas*) within cosmetic practices demonstrate enhanced psychological resilience against negative body image internalization. These spiritual values transform appearance management from defensive anxiety reduction into expressive-authentic self-care practice. This mechanism extends existing Self-Determination Theory and body image theory applications by demonstrating spiritually-grounded cultural framework effectiveness in moderating appearance anxiety consequences. Guidance and Counseling professionals should move beyond moral judgment frameworks toward creating 'Positive Body Image' group guidance programs combining cognitive behavioral interventions with self-compassion development and Islamic spiritual value cultivation.

CONCLUSION

This qualitative phenomenological study successfully revealed complex, multifaceted influences of cosmetic use on female students' learning motivation, mediated through body image and self-compassion psychological conditions. Cosmetics function as vital emotional regulation tools reducing appearance anxiety, liberating working memory from cognitive overload, and strengthening academic self-efficacy through state-dependent learning mechanisms. Students integrating Islamic spiritual values demonstrate enhanced resilience preventing pathological appearance obsession while supporting healthy self-care practices.

Methodological limitations include single-school focus and limited qualitative participant sample, restricting generalization to heterogeneous populations across public and secular educational contexts. Future research should employ mixed-methods approaches and large-scale quantitative investigations testing causal relationships, Islamic-informed self-compassion mediating effects, and positive body image intervention model effectiveness across diverse institutional types. Enhanced understanding of appearance management's complex relationship with academic motivation will enable educational policymakers to develop psychologically-informed approaches balancing legitimate student psychological needs with institutional discipline objectives.

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