



E-ISSN: 2706-8927
P-ISSN: 2706-8919
www.allstudyjournal.com
IJAAS 2022; 4(4): 109-112
Received: 11-08-2022
Accepted: 17-09-2022

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Assessing grit and meaning in life of college students: A correlational study

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Abstract

In recent years, positive psychology has become the center of attraction for researchers, indicating it's time to focus on strengths rather than weaknesses. This present study tries to investigate the influence of grit on the meaning in the life of college students. Grit is a non-cognitive trait of personality having two dimensions which consist of Perseverance of Effort and Consistency of Interest. While meaning in life is a construct of existential psychology having two dimensions such as the Presence of Meaning in life and the Search for meaning in life. This study was conducted through an online survey of 150 college students within the age range of 17-25 years. The Grit-S scale developed by Duckworth *et al.* (2007) and the meaning of life questionnaire (MLQ) developed by Steger, *et al.* (2006) were used in the present study. The results indicate that there is a statistically positive association between the dimensions of grit and meaning in life. This study drives implications for students, parents, teachers, and counselors for the growth of students. Therefore, various educational institutes must provide psychoeducation and conduct workshops related to these positive constructs.

Keywords: Grit, meaning of life, psychoeducation

Introductions

Students want to achieve their goals and depending on their goals they enrolled in various courses in their college life. Success depends upon commitment to efforts. Grit is a non-cognitive trait of personality which is referred as perseverance and passion for long-term goals, and it leaves a great impact on students' achievements. It is linked with the most challenging goals (Duckworth and Gross, 2014) ^[11]. For youth, the most satisfying thing is their career, achievements, and relationships, as it is the time to develop their own independent identity. For achievement one must retain two characteristics over time until a goal is attained, one is persistence in working for a long-term goal, second is interest in doing so. Angela Duckworth (2016) ^[9] coined the term grit in her book, "*Grit: The power of Passion and Perseverance*". Duckworth describes two dimensions of grit; "*Perseverance of effort*" means doing work consistently even in adverse circumstances second is the "*consistency of interest*" the capacity to devote a lot of time to a particular goal while remaining passionate about it. A three-dimensional model of grit (Datu, Yuen, & Chen, 2017) ^[7] also exists, first two dimensions are same as the Duckworth model while third one the ability of *adaptability to situations* was added. Grit is associated with so many aspects of success such as academic achievement, (Datu, Yuen, & Chen, 2017) ^[7], and employee engagement at work (Duckworth & Quinn, 2009) ^[10]. It is associated with increased motivation, also associated with academic diligence, academic achievement (Bowman *et al.*, 2015, Rimfeld *et al.*, 2016) ^[3, 24], persistence in difficult tasks (Lucas, Gratch, Cheng, & Marsella, 2015) ^[19], self-concept clarity (Fite, Lindeman, Rogers, with increased subjective well-being, higher life satisfaction and lower depression (Jin & Kim, 2017) ^[17]. In this present piece of research, we focus on how grit is related to the existential aspect of an individual by assessing the relationship of grit and meaning in life.

How much an individual perceives his life as meaningful indicates his psychological awareness of motivation, purpose and indirectly related to happiness also. From very earlier almost all psychologists agree with the psychological need of meaning in life. The perception that one's existence has significance, purpose, and coherence reflects one's sense of meaning in life. (Heintzleman and King, 2014) ^[15]. Many studies highlight a fundamental human need-meaning in life that significantly affects psychological and physical well-being (Vail and Routledge, 2020) ^[27]. Existential psychologists mainly focused on the meaning of life.

Friedrich Nietzsche (1889), a German Philosopher proposed, "He who has a why to live for can bear almost any how". These lines of wisdom inspire Victor Frankl who later become the father of existential psychology. Victor Frankl, an existentialist first talked about the meaning of life from his real-life experiences. Frankl's (1963) work, particularly *Man's Search for Meaning*, has been given credit for the emergence of meaning as an important variable. Other researchers focused on this variable after the publication of *Man's Search for Meaning* in [1984, (1946)]. Maddi (1970) also argued that the search for meaning is a fundamental human motivation. For Frankl 1984 (1946), Life meaning is defined as a person's belief that their life has significance and extends beyond the transient present. Compared to a happy life, a meaningful life has been portrayed as somehow better, rarer, and more morally upstanding. Steger (2012) [27] defined meaning as "the web of connections, understandings, and interpretations that aids in making plans to focus our efforts on realizing our desired future and in helping us to become conscious of our experience. Frankl (1967) argued that humans are characterized by a "will to meaning," an innate drive to find meaning and significance in their lives, and that failure to achieve meaning results in psychological distress. A person's sense of meaning is believed to be generally stable, undergoing gradual transformations across the lifespan in conjunction with changing beliefs and value systems (Reker & Wong, 1988). Frankl (1967) believes that life has meaning under all conditions, even those of suffering. He asserts that when a person's search for meaning is blocked, existential frustration results, which can eventually lead to 'noogenic neurosis', a pathological condition. Frankl also talked about logotherapy for treating various problems in life. In logotherapy, three techniques are described mainly as paradoxical intention, dereflection and Socratic dialogue. Meaning in life creates more optimism and brings well-being in individual life. (Ho, Cheung, & Cheung, 2010). Meaning of life also promotes the pursuit of social connections. (Stavrova and Luhmann, 2016) [25].

A Rising Corpus of Research in this field Demonstrates a Significant Relationship between the Two Variables Mentioned Above.

Research conducted by Datu, *et al.*, (2019) [5] showed that grit is associated meaning of life with their dimension. Participants for this study consisted of 361 South Korean workers. The researchers also found that the presence of meaning doesn't only associate with grit but also with a low level of depression. The study revealed that the meaning of life and grit traits were positively associated with Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB). Hauge, (2022) [14] conducted an online survey of 228 participants to explore the association between grit and the presence of meaning in life. Findings came out with a strong correlation between these two variables and it also suggests that grit is also strongly associated with general flow proneness. Results of another study conducted on 704 nurses, state a strong positive link exists between grit and the meaning of life. Additionally, the study considered how hope and social support influenced grit and the purpose of life. Yang & Wu, (2021) [32]. Another study found search for meaning and hope are significant predictors of psychological grit. Findings also revealed that a high level of hope favorably predicted grit whereas a high level of search for meaning in life inversely predicted

psychological grit (Vela, Lu, Lenz, & Hinojosa, 2015) [29]. Datu, & Fincham (2022) [8] conducted a cross-cultural study on 643 American and 546 Filipino students. Results of their study claim that grit dimensions are highly correlated with the meaning of life. They also explored that grit and meaning of life also effects well-being, related need satisfaction, increase happiness and decrease anxiety among undergraduate students. Muhammad, Ahmad, and Zohra (2021) [21] carried out research on 482 undergraduate students to know the pathways of Grit among undergraduate students. The results of the study came out with the facts that the meaning of life, subjective well-being, resilience, hope and subjective happiness are the positive factors that contribute to the prediction of psychological grit. Lund, Liang, Mousseau, Matyjaszczyk, and Fleurizar (2019) [20] examined a cross-cultural study on 195 emerging adults (18-25 years). According to study findings, students who are grittier are more purposeful in life. Indicating that both are positively correlated.

The research done so far in this area paints a clear picture of the relationship between grit and the meaning of life. The review described above also shows that research in this area has been done on nurses, school students, and employees, and it also shows the necessity for research on college students. Studies on these two variables in the Indian setting are scarce, according to an analysis of earlier research. In light of these, the researcher made the decision to investigate the relationship between grit and the purpose of life among college students.

Objective of the study

To study the association between Grit and Meaning in life of College Students.

Hypothesis

There would be a significant association between Grit and Meaning in life of College Students.

Method

Participants and procedure

Participants for this study were 150 college students with having age range between 17-25 years. 50% of the sample consisted of female (n= 75) and 50% were male (n=75) students. 55.6% of the respondents were in PG and 44.4% were in UG. 67.5% of students were rural while 32.5% of students were urban.

The purposive sampling technique was used for data collection. An online survey was used to collect data in order to analyze the relationships between these two variables. Two sets of questionnaires of related variables were converted into an online form using Google Forms, and a link was created and sent via any social media channel, including Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram. The form consists of 3 sections which are: Section A, which seeks informed consent and demographic details of the respondents including gender, age, qualification and residential area; Section B was consisting of the Grit scale (12 items); Section C was for the Meaning of life sale (10-items). Prior to requesting participants for their consent to participate in the study voluntarily, informed consent was first obtained. Respondents were only permitted to complete the questionnaire in the next section if they agreed to participate in the study. The obtained information was then examined using a suitable statistical technique.

Research Design: A correlational research design was used to assess the relationship between Grit and Meaning in Life of college students.

Measure: Following tools were used in the present study:

Grit was assessed by short Grit scale (Grit-S) by Duckworth *et al.* (2007). It contains 12 items which are composed of two factors. The initial first factor entails 6 items that indicate consistency of interest and later 6 six items indicated preservance. This scale demonstrates high internal consistency .85 and has predictive validity as assessed by Duckworth & Quinn (2009)^[10]. Items are rated on a 5-point from 1= very much like to me to 5= not like me at all. Items pertaining to “consistency of interest” (2, 3, 5, 7, 8, 11) were reversely scored.

Meaning of life was assessed by the Meaning of life Questionnaire (MLSQ) developed by Steger, M. F. (2006)^[26]. It consisted of 10 items having two main sub-dimensions: 1) Presence of meaning in life and 2) Search for meaning in life. The responses are based on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from ranges from 1 (absolutely untrue) to 7 (absolutely true). For measuring the presence of meaning, items need to be reverse-coded (1, 4, 5, 6, & 9). It has good internal consistency ($\alpha = .84-.91$ for each subscale) and has good Construct validity and Criterion validity. A high score signifies a high meaning in life or vice versa.

Results and Discussion

Table 1: Descriptive statistics and correlation matrices explaining the relationship between Grit and Meaning in life of college students.

		Mean	Std. Deviation	Grit	Meaning
Grit	Pearson Correlation	32.632	7.054	1	.438**
	Sig. (2-tailed)				.000
	N			150	150
Meaning	Pearson Correlation	31.47	10.666	.438**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)			.000	
	N			150	150

Note: **p ≤0.01, * p ≤0.05

Table 2: Shows the Mean, SD, and Correlation coefficient between the dimensions of Grit and Meaning in life of college students.

Variables		Presence of Meaning in Life	Search for Meaning in Life
	Mean (S.D)	16.67(5.35)	14.79(7.45)
Perseverance of Effort	14.43(4.31)	.440**	.236*
Consistency of Interest	18.19(5.37)	.189*	.243**

Note: **p ≤0.01, * p ≤0.05

Table 1. has indicated grit is statistically correlated related with meaning in life ($r=.438, p<0.01$). Table 2. Shows the dimension of grit is statistically correlated with the dimension of the meaning of life. The First dimension of grit i.e., the Perseverance of effort is positively correlated with the Presence of Meaning in life ($r=.440, p<0.05$) and also positively correlated with the Search for Meaning in Life (.236, $p<0.01$). The second dimension of grit i.e., Consistency of Interest also shows a statistically significant positive correlation with the Presence of Meaning in Life

(.189, $p<0.01$) and is also positively associated with Search for Meaning in Life ($r=.243, p<0.05$).

Discussion

The main purpose of the research was to know the relationship between Grit and meaning in life of the college students. The overall score on the purposed scales of both these variables shows a significant positive association i.e., .438, stating that having high grit trait is related to high meaning in the life of the students. This finding was consistent with previous studies on different populations (Datu, & Fincham, 2022; Hauge, 2022)^[8, 14]. The presence of gritty trait and the Presence of meaning increase the well-being of students (Datu, Valdez, & King, 2016)^[6] and it is also associated with a low risk of suicidal ideation among young emerging adults (Kleiman, Adams, Kashdan, & Riskind, 2013)^[18].

The first dimension of grit is Perseverance of effort, which refers that the ability to be consistent at work despite having any situation in life is positively associated with the presence of meaning in life. In other words, individuals who know the significance of their life are found to be more persistent in their work for achieving goals. Students who feel their existence matters are likely to more determined about their goals. These findings are also supported by previous studies. Furthermore, a positive relationship is found between Perseverance of effort and the second dimension of Meaning in life i.e., the search for meaning in life. Indicating that individuals who are engaging in searching for purpose are more persistent in work. Similar results were found by a previous study stating that students who are diligent in class have fortitude and seek purpose in life students maintain high academic performance (Batres, 2011)^[2].

The second dimension of grit, Consistency of efforts is positively correlated with the Presence of meaning in life. The study conducted by Datu, & Fincham (2022)^[8] corroborates the findings of our study by indicating that those who experience purpose in their lives are more motivated at work. The presence of meaning refers to the awareness of one’s existence in the world. Moreover, our study also finds a statistically significant positive relationship between the Consistency of efforts and the Search for meaning in life. It suggests that students who are striving for significance in their lives, are found to be more consistent in putting their effort towards accomplishing their goals in life.

Limitations of study

There was a lack of Indian context studies found to refer. The study includes a limited number of students, to make generalizations at a larger scale study should replicate with larger numbers of participants.

Implications of the study

The present study reveals a positive relationship between grit and the meaning in life of college students. This existing study has implications for students, parents, academicians and counselors. This would help them to improve on their goal by putting in persistent efforts. Schools, universities and other academic institutes must conduct various workshops related to the development of these variables and it would also help in spreading that awareness about these positive constructs. Identifying these variables, especially the meaning of life would also be helpful for counselors as

these are related to the growth and well-being of individuals.

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