

Exploring The Drive to Learn A Foreign Language among Undergraduates

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Abstract

Learning a foreign language is a challenging task. Martin et al (2022) proposed three strategies for successful learning: grit, motivational beliefs, and self-regulated learning. The purpose of this quantitative study was to explore learners' perceptions of these three strategies and to find out whether they contribute to academic success. A purposive sample of 30 undergraduate students from a public university responded to this survey. The instrument used was a 5 Likert scale survey derived from (Martin et al., 2022). The survey was divided into 4 parts. Part one has items about demographic information. Part two has 12 items on Grit. Part three has 22 items on motivational beliefs and part four has 22 items on self-regulated learning strategies. The findings indicated that students had positive perceptions of grit in learning. Findings also suggested that students needed motivational beliefs, including self-efficacy, intrinsic value, and test anxiety to be successful in learning. Students very often used cognitive strategies in foreign language learning by self-regulating their learning of the foreign language. Future research may investigate the relationship between grit, motivational beliefs, and self-regulated learning. In addition, future research could test the effectiveness of specific interventions designed to enhance grit, motivation, and self-regulated learning in other settings.

Keywords: Grit, Motivation, Self-Regulated Learning, Foreign Language, Undergraduates

Introduction

Background of Study

Today, it is necessary to learn other languages and communicate with native speakers of other languages. In foreign language learning, learning strategies are steps that students take to enhance their own learning. Strategies are particularly important for language learning because they are tools for active, self-directed involvement, which is essential for the development of communicative competence (Oxford, 1990).

Tong et al (2022) also agree that learning a foreign language is a challenging task as it requires a great deal of effort and dedication and a considerable degree of student involvement. Student engagement has been defined as a multidimensional construct related to learners that addresses the perceptual, sentimental, behavioral, and affective facets of student learning (Reeve, 2013; Chiu, 2022). This concept has been found to be associated with effective learning, preservation, tenacity, and learning perceptions of students (Dao & Sato, 2021; Hiver et al., 2021).

Indeed, agency is inherent in students' ability to regulate, control and monitor their own learning. The effective regulation of learners' cognitive, affective and behavioural processes as they interact in the learning environment is critical to their academic success (Code, 2020). As academic success and learning effectiveness relies on motivation (Dita et al., 2020; Syifa, 2024), it was suggested that college students should stimulate their motivation for independent learning, enhance their motivation in order to learn and develop independent learning skills in learning (Lei et al., 2024).

In a study by Siok et al (2023) on the motivation of Malaysian undergraduate students to learn a foreign language, the researchers concluded that online language learning can be tailored to the needs of the students, especially the technical requirements, so as to maximise their motivation. However, it is unclear which strategy is most important in predicting academic success or learning effectiveness. As proposed by Martin et al (2022), there are three strategies for successful learning: grit, motivational beliefs, and self-regulated learning. The question is whether grit, motivational beliefs, and self-regulated learning contribute uniquely and directly to academic success. Therefore, this study was conducted to investigate this question. The results of the study will benefit students and teachers in improving their teaching and learning skills to master foreign languages.

Statement of Problem

Wang (2021) suggested that grit plays an important role in the learning and teaching process as resilient learners are more likely to participate in classroom activities and are also motivated to cope with challenges in difficult situations. Furthermore, in order to guard against these difficulties as well as self-control in dealing with unpredictable situations, a similar concept called resilience has emerged in positive psychology, which describes grit and emphasises people's abilities. In addition, language learners' engagement and performance in a foreign or second language classroom can be improved through self-regulated learning, which is seen as one of the most talked about issues in learning and psychology.

Ayllón-Salas et al (2024) revealed that grit and self-regulated strategies have become increasingly important in the last decade due to their relationship with personal and academic progress. In this regard, many studies have investigated these two constructs as protective factors against academic failure, but none of them have examined the association between these two constructs with the aim of improving the understanding of secondary education students. Therefore, the study fills a knowledge gap by investigating how grit predicts the use of self-regulated learning strategies in a sample of 965 high school participants. For this purpose, grit, learning strategies, and motivation were measured. Findings suggest that grit may be a significant predictor of the self-regulated learning component. Thus, gritty learners direct their motivation and effort toward meaningful goals, thereby potentially increasing

their academic achievement. This study suggests that understanding the associations between different non-cognitive skills is important for understanding how students learn and maximise their potential at the academic level. Considering the recommendations and shortcomings of the above studies, this study attempts to bridge the gap by discussing three strategies for undergraduate students to succeed in their studies, i.e., grit, motivation, and self-regulation (Martin et al., 2022).

Objective of Study and Research Questions

This study is done to explore perception of learners on their use of learning strategies. Specifically, this study is done to answer the following questions;

- (i) How do learners perceive grit in learning?
- (ii) How do learners perceive motivation in learning?
- (iii) How do learners perceive self-regulated learning in learning?

Literature Review

Grit in Learning

Since the claim by Duckworth et al (2007), "grit entails working strenuously toward challenges, maintaining effort and interest over years despite failure, adversity, and plateaus in progress ", grit has received increasing attention from academics and the public. Grit adds additional predictive value beyond the natural performance criteria or inherent ability, which is as important as the skills that determine student's success (Duckworth et al., 2007, 2021; Li et al., 2018). As defined by Duckworth et al (2007), consistency of interest and persistence of effort are the two lower-order components that make up grit. Consistency of interest is related to an individual's tendency to expend sustained energy over a long period of time, even in the face of challenges, obstacles, or setbacks, rather than perseverance, which is associated with consistency of enthusiasm for more complex goals. While the two-factor structure proposed by Duckworth et al (2021) has drawn attention, studies such as those conducted by Sulla et al (2018); Postigo et al (2021) have presented evidence for a one-dimensional structure. These different perspectives highlight the complexity and ongoing discussion around certain aspects of grit. In brief, grit plays a vital role in shaping individuals' educational journeys and personal growth. Despite a wealth of research on the importance of grit in life, there are still significant gaps in the understanding of its specific role in undergraduate foreign language learning. This study aims to address this gap by exploring how undergraduate foreign language students perceive grit in learning.

Motivation to Learn

According to Filgona et al (2020), motivation is what makes someone know, act, understand, believe, or gain certain skills that satisfy the person's needs. Many researchers have addressed motivation and its role in the learning process, including instrumental and integrative orientations as suggested by (Gardner, 1985). Instrumental orientation refers to the fact that learners learn a language because of specific external goals, such as the desire to achieve good grades in a subject or to gain career opportunities. On the other hand, integrative orientation refers to the learning of a language for the purpose of cultural interaction with the native community. Affective variables, which are attitudes, orientations, anxiety, and motivation, have been shown to be as important as language proficiency in predicting second language (L2) performance. There are two types of motivation, intrinsic and extrinsic. Deci & Ryan (2000) defined intrinsic motivation as motivation that comes from the

individual and leads to enjoyment of the learning process and increases student competence in learning an academic task; extrinsic motivation is the achievement or avoidance of something outside the self. Students with extrinsic motivation work towards achieving a desired grade or external rewards such as awards or money. Several studies have confirmed that motivated learners tend to perform better in second language acquisition than less motivated learners (Gong et al., 2020; Sudina, 2021).

Past Studies on Grit and Motivation in Learning

There have been many studies in the past on grit and motivation in learning. Sun and Mu (2023) conducted a study that delved into the complex network of motivational factors influencing the satisfaction of intermediate English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students' online learning in mainland China. A diverse sample of 496 EFL students participated in the study. Structural equation modelling was used as the method of analysis. The results of the study revealed a significant and positive relationship between ideal second language L2 self and second language L2 grit and online learning satisfaction. In addition, online learning self-efficacy emerged as a significant mediator between ideal L2 self and online learning satisfaction and between L2 grit and online learning satisfaction. These findings provide valuable insights into the dynamics of motivation in online language learning environments. They provide practical implications for educators and instructional designers seeking to enhance students' online learning experiences.

In another study conducted by Derakhshan and Fathi (2023), researchers investigated the relationship between foreign language enjoyment (FLE), L2 grit, online learning self-efficacy (OLSE), and online learning engagement among Iranian EFL. The study involved 578 Iranian EFL who completed four constructed self-report measures. Validated factor analysis and structural equation modelling were used to confirm the validity of the scales and test the hypothesised models. The results of the study indicated that FLE and OLSE positively influenced online learning engagement. In addition, online self-efficacy was found to moderate the relationship between L2 grit and online learning engagement. These results highlight the importance of FLE and OLSE in promoting online learning engagement and the mediating role of online self-efficacy in the interaction between L2 grit and online learning engagement. This study further deepens the understanding of the factors that influence EFL's engagement in online learning and has important implications for both theory and practice.

Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 shows the conceptual framework of the study. This study investigates learners' perception on grit, motivation and self-regulated learning. According to Rahmat et al (2021), one motivator for learning is the environment. A conducive environment can give learners confidence and become independent. This study is rooted from Martin et al (2022) who presented three strategies for successful learning. Firstly, learners need grit such as consistency of interest and perseverance. Next, they need motivational beliefs such as self-efficacy, intrinsic value and test anxiety. Lastly, they also use self-regulated learning strategies such as cognitive strategy use and self-regulation.

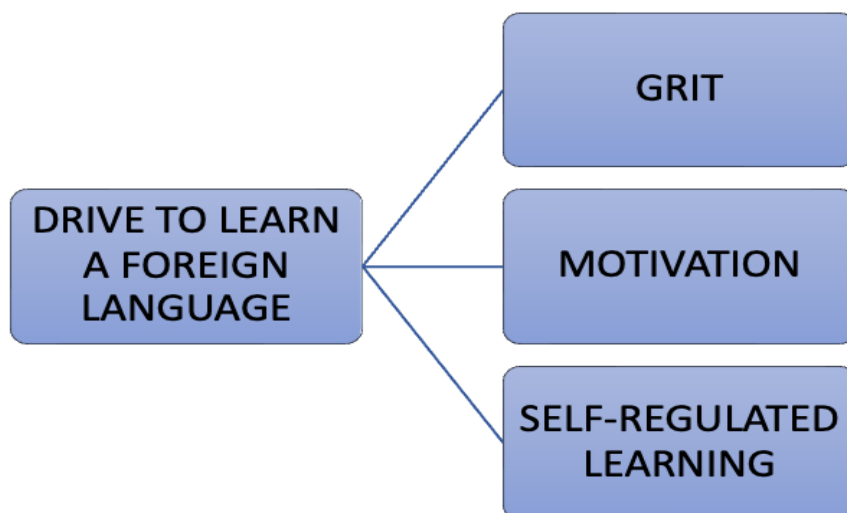


Figure 1- Conceptual Framework of the Study
Grit, Motivation and Self-Regulated Learning in Learning a Foreign Language

Methodology

This quantitative study is done to explore motivation factors for learning among undergraduates. A purposive sample of 30 participants from a public university responded to the survey. The instrument used is a 5 Likert-scale survey and is rooted from Martin et al (2022) to reveal the variables in table 1 below. The survey has 4 parts. Part one has items on demographic profile. Part two has 12 items on Grit. Part three has 22 items on motivational beliefs and part four has 22 items on self-regulated learning strategies.

Table 1
Distribution of Items in the Survey

PART	STRATEGY		SCALE	No Of Items		Cronbach alpha
ONE	DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE					
TWO	GRIT		CONSISTENCY OF INTEREST	6	12	.793
			PERSEVERANCE	6		
THREE	MOTIVATIONAL BELIEFS	A	SELF-EFFICACY	9	22	.928
		B	INTRINSIC VALUE	9		
		C	TEST ANXIETY	4		
FOUR	SELF-REGULATED LEARNING STRATEGIES	D	COGNITIVE STRATEGY USE	13	22	.921
		E	SELF-REGULATION	9		
	TOTAL NO OF ITEMS				56	.960

Table 1 also shows the reliability of the survey. SPSS analysis was done to investigate the reliability of the instrument. Individual analysis shows a Cronbach alpha of .793 for Grit, a

Cronbach alpha of Cronbach alpha of .928 for Motivational beliefs, a Cronbach alpha of .921 for Self-Regulated Learning Strategies and an overall of .960 for all 56 items; thus, revealing a good reliability of the instrument used. Further analysis using SPSS is done to present findings to answer the research questions for this study.

Findings

Findings for Demographic Profile

Table 2

Percentage for Gender

1	Male	37%
2	Female	73%

Table 2 shows the percentage for gender. 37% of the respondents are male and 73% are female.

Table 3

Percentage for Discipline

1	Science & Technology	80%
2	Humanities & Social Sciences	20%
3	Business	0%

Table 3 shows the percentage for discipline. 80% of the respondents are from Science & Technology. Next, 20% are from Humanities & Social Sciences. No respondents were from the Business discipline.

Table 4

Percentage for Semester

1	1-3	47%
2	4 and above	53%

Table 4 shows the percentage for the semester. 47% are in semester 1-3 and 53% of the respondents are in semester 4 and above.

Findings for Grit

This section presents data to answer research question 1- How do learners perceive grit in learning? In the context of this study, grit is sub-categorized into (i) consistency of interest and (ii) perseverance of effort.

Table 5

Mean for (i) CONSISTENCY OF INTEREST (6 items)

	Mean
GCIQ1 I often set a goal but later choose to pursue a different one.	3.4
GCIQ2 New ideas and new projects sometimes distract me from previous ones.	3.6
GCIQ3 I become interested in new pursuits every few months.	3.4
GCIQ4 My interests change from year to year.	3.8

GCIQ5 I have been obsessed with a certain idea or project for a short time but later lost interest.	3.3
GCIQ6 I have difficulty maintaining my focus on projects that take more than a few months to complete.	3.6

Table 5 above shows the mean for consistency of interest. The highest mean is 3.8 for the item “GCIQ4 My interests change from year to year”. Next two items share the same mean of 3.6 and they are “GCIQ2 New ideas and new projects sometimes distract me from previous ones” and “GCIQ6 I have difficulty maintaining my focus on projects that take more than a few months to complete”. The lowest mean is 3.3 for “GCIQ5 I have been obsessed with a certain idea or project for a short time but later lost interest”. Generally, the results suggest that students in this study very often changed their interests after learning new ideas or projects.

Table 6

Mean for (ii) PERSEVERANCE OF EFFORT (6 items)

	Mean
GCPQ1 I have achieved a goal that took years of work.	3.6
GCPQ2 I have overcome setbacks to conquer an important challenge.	3.6
GCPQ3 Setbacks don't discourage me.	3.4
GCPQ4 I finish whatever I begin.	4
GCPQ5 I am a hard worker.	3.9
GCPQ6 I am diligent.	3.8

Table 6 presents the means for perseverance of effort. The highest mean is 3.9 for the item “GCPQ5 I am a hard worker”. This is followed by the item “GCPQ6 I am diligent” with a mean of 3.8. The lowest mean is 3.4 for “GCPQ3 Setbacks don't discourage me”. The results indicate that students very often overcame setbacks to achieve their learning goals.

Findings for Motivation in Learning

This section presents data to answer research question 2- How do learners perceive motivation in learning? In the context of this study, motivational beliefs are measured by (i) self-efficacy, (ii) intrinsic value and (iii) test anxiety.

Table 7

Mean for (i) SELF-EFFICACY (9 items)

	Mean
MBSEQ1 Compared with other students in this class I expect to do well.	3.9
MBSEQ2 I'm certain I can understand the ideas taught in this course.	4
MBSEQ3 I expect to do very well in this class.	4.1
MBSEQ4 Compared with others in this class, I think I'm a good student.	3.4
MBSEQ5 I am sure I can do an excellent job on the problems and tasks assigned for this class.	3.8
MBSEQ6 I think I will receive a good grade in this class.	3.7
MBSEQ7 My study skills are excellent compared with others in this class.	3.4
MBSEQ8 Compared with other students in this class I think I know a great deal about the subject.	3.5
MBSEQ9 I know that I will be able to learn the material for this class.	3.8

Table 7 shows the mean for self-efficacy. The highest mean is 4.1 for the item “MBSEQ3 I expect to do very well in this class”. This is followed by the mean of 4 for the item “MBSEQ2 I'm certain I can understand the ideas taught in this course”. Two items share the lowest mean of 3.4 and they are “MBSEQ4 Compared with others in this class, I think I'm a good student” and “MBSEQ7 My study skills are excellent compared with others in this class”. Overall, students very often believed they were good and capable of completing tasks or achieving goal.

Table 8

Mean for (ii) INTRINSIC VALUE (9 items)

	Mean
MBIVQ1 I prefer class work that is challenging so I can learn new things.	3.7
MBIVQ2 It is important for me to learn what is being taught in this class.	4.2
MBIVQ3 I like what I am learning in this class.	4.2
MBIVQ 4 I think I will be able to use what I learn in this class in other classes.	3.9
MBIVQ 5 I often choose paper topics I will learn something from even if they require more work.	3.7
MBIVQ 6 Even when I do poorly on a test I try to learn from my mistakes.	4
MBIVQ7 I think that what I am learning in this class is useful for me to know.	4.3
MBIVQ 8 I think that what we are learning in this class is interesting.	4.3
MBIVQ 9 Understanding this subject is important to me.	4.1

Table 8 presents the mean for intrinsic value. Two items share the highest mean of 4.3 and they are “MBIVQ7 I think that what I am learning in this class is useful for me to know” and “MBIVQ8 I think that what we are learning in this class is interesting”. Next, two items share the mean of 4.2 and they are “MBIVQ2 It is important for me to learn what is being taught in this class” and “MBIVQ3 I like what I am learning in this class”. The lowest mean is 3.7 for two items and they are “MBIVQ1 I prefer class work that is challenging so I can learn new things” and “MBIVQ5 I often choose paper topics I will learn something from even if they require more work”. The results show that students very often intrinsically motivated to learn the subject.

Table 9

Mean for (iii) TEST ANXIETY (4 items)

	Mean
MBTAQ1 I am so nervous during a test that I cannot remember facts I have learned.	3.8
MBTAQ2 I have an uneasy, upset feeling when I take a test.	3.5
MBTAQ3 I worry a great deal about tests.	3.7
MBTAQ4 When I take a test, I think about how poorly I am doing.	3.8

Table 9 presents the mean for test anxiety. Two items share the highest mean of 3.8 and they are “MBTAQ1 I am so nervous during a test that I cannot remember facts I have learned” and “MBTAQ4 When I take a test, I think about how poorly I am doing”. The lowest mean is 3.5 for the item “MBTAQ2 I have an uneasy, upset feeling when I take a test”. In general, students very often had test anxiety.

Findings for Self-Regulated Learning

This section presents data to answer research question 3- How do learners perceive self-regulated learning in learning? In the context of this study, this is measured by (i) cognitive strategy use and (ii) self-regulation.

Table 10

Mean for (i) COGNITIVE STRATEGY USE (13 items)

	Mean
SRLSCSUQ1 When I study for a test, I try to put together the information from class and from the book.	4.1
SRLSCSUQ2 When I do homework, I try to remember what the teacher said in class so I can answer the questions correctly.	4.1
SRLSCSUQ3 It is hard for me to decide what the main ideas are in what I read.	3.3
SRLSCSUQ4 When I study, I put important ideas into my own words.	3.8
SRLSCSUQ5 I always try to understand what the teacher is saying even if it doesn't make sense.	3.9
SRLSCSUQ6 When I study for a test, I try to remember as many facts as I can.	4.2
SRLSCSUQ7 When studying, I copy my notes over to help me remember material.	4
SRLSCSUQ8 When I study for a test, I practice saying the important facts over and over to myself.	4.1
SRLSCSUQ9 I use what I have learned from old homework assignments and the textbook to do new assignments.	4
SRLSCSUQ10 When I am studying a topic, I try to make everything fit together.	3.9
SRLSCSUQ11 When I read material for this class, I say the words over and over to myself to help me remember.	4.2
SRLSCSUQ12 I outline the chapters in my book to help me study.	4.1
SRLSCSUQ13 When reading I try to connect the things, I am reading about with what I already know.	4.1

Table 10 shows the mean for cognitive strategy use. Two items share the highest mean of 4.2 and they are “SRLSCSUQ6 When I study for a test, I try to remember as many facts as I can”

and “SRLSCSUQ11When I read material for this class, I say the words over and over to myself to help me remember”. The lowest mean is 3.3 for the item “SRLSCSUQ3 It is hard for me to decide what the main ideas are in what I read”.

The average mean score of 4.0 for the use of cognitive strategy reveals students very often applied cognitive strategy in foreign language learning.

Table 11

Mean for (ii) SELF-REGULATION (9 items)

	Mean
SRLSSRQ1 I ask myself questions to make sure I know the material I have been studying.	4
SRLSSRQ2 When work is hard I either give up or study only the easy parts.	3.4
SRLSSRQ3 I work on practice exercises and answer end of chapter questions even when I don't have to.	3.7
SRLSSRQ4 Even when study materials are dull and uninteresting, I keep working until I finish.	3.8
SRLSSRQ5 Before I begin studying, I think about the things I will need to do to learn.	3.7
SRLSSRQ6 I often find that I have been reading for class but don't know what it is all about.	3.5
SRLSSRQ7 I find that when the teacher is talking, I think of other things and don't really listen to what is being said.	3.2
SRLSSRQ8 When I'm reading, I stop once in a while and go over what I have read.	3.7
SRLSSRQ9 I work hard to get a good grade even when I don't like a class.	4

Table 11 shows the mean for self-regulation. Two items share the highest mean of 4 and they are “SRLSSRQ1 I ask myself questions to make sure I know the material I have been studying” and “SRLSSRQ9 I work hard to get a good grade even when I don't like a class”. The lowest mean is 3.2 for the item “SRLSSRQ7 I find that when the teacher is talking, I think of other things and don't really listen to what is being said”. In general, students very often learned foreign languages through self-regulation.

Conclusion

Summary of Findings and Discussions

Overall, the findings indicate that students have positive perception of grit, motivation and self-regulated learning in foreign language learning. Students have a positive perception of grit in learning. Even if they changed their interest after learning a new idea or project, they could overcome setbacks to achieve their learning goals and thus gain learning satisfaction. This is in line with the findings of Sun and Mu (2023) who mentioned that there is a positive correlation between L2 grit and learning satisfaction. This finding also supports Ayllón-Salas et al (2024) mentioning that gritty learners direct their motivation and effort toward meaningful goals, thus potentially increasing their academic achievement.

Findings also suggest that students needed motivational beliefs, including self-efficacy, intrinsic value, and test anxiety to achieve successful learning. Students often believed that they were good and could complete tasks or achieve goals. Students were usually intrinsically motivated to study the subject and test anxiety was prevalent among them. It is clear that

motivated students tend to perform better in foreign language acquisition than less motivated learners, as suggested by (Gong et al., 2020; Sudina, 2021).

Regarding the perception of self-regulated learning, the results of the study show that students very often used cognitive strategies in foreign language learning by self-regulating their learning of the foreign language. As mentioned by Wang (2021), this definitely improves students' engagement and performance in the foreign language classroom.

Pedagogical Implications and Suggestions for Future Research

The results of the study highlight the role of grit, motivation and self-regulated learning in promoting successful foreign language learning among undergraduate students. Based on the results of this study, there are several implications for future research to consider. First, future research may investigate the relationship between these three strategies. In addition, future research could test the effectiveness of specific interventions designed to enhance grit, motivation, and self-regulated learning in foreign language learning in other settings.

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