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**GRIT: An Essential Ingredient of Success in the EFL Classroom**

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**ABSTRACT**

Grit, which is defined as the tendency to sustain interest in and effort toward very long-term goals, has become a central phenomenon in recent educational research. Grit provides learners with perseverance to master their skills and become more competent. Developing grit is as significant as developing their cognitive strategies and skills. Grit has a large impact on academic achievement. This study aims to explore how grit relates to the academic success of different English as a foreign language learner (EFL) populations in a college context. The study provides data regarding the participants' levels of grit as well as whether their levels of grit have a relation with students' achievement scores. Plus, participants' characteristics along with their goals will be revealed in relation to their grit levels. The data analysis revealed striking results on grit which is an under-researched concept in the English language teaching contexts and its impact on the language learning process.

**Key Words:** Achievement, EFL, goal setting, grit, success.

**1. Introduction**

Based on the collection of biographical information on eminent judges, statesmen, scientists, poets, musicians, painters, and wrestlers, Galton (1892) suggests that success in any field is not accompanied by ability alone (cited in Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, & Kelly, 2007: 1088); there are some other factors that have an impact on success. Individuals' intellectual talent to achievement is a well-researched phenomenon; however, very little is known about other individual differences that predict success. Success has long been on the agenda of scholars conducting research in education. Therefore, a number of studies have been carried out to shed light on what success is, what factors have an impact on success, whether there are potential ways in which learners' success is increased and so forth. As a core concept in education, it has also grasped the attention of English language teaching (ELT) scholars. The term has been revisited in various language teaching contexts, the characteristics of a successful language learner have been identified, and the ways of helping learners become successful language learners have been discussed (Keegan, 2017). With regard to success and as response to the question who the successful learner is, the term grit has arisen in recent educational

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research. It has been suggested in the literature that in addition to IQ, grit is essential to high achievement. As Duckworth et al. (2007) assert, grit is one of the most vital personal qualities that is shared by the most prominent leaders in every field.

## 2. Literature Review

Scholars have gathered empirical evidence regarding the development and fostering of grit. The major themes that have emerged in literature are growth mindset, independence and self-efficacy, and belonging (Dyer, 2016). In addition to these themes, how grit relates to goal-setting and achievement has also been researched (Duckworth et al., 2007). In this study, grit will be examined in terms of achievement and goal-setting in English as a foreign language context because it results in more fruitful and satisfactory learning processes not only in the classroom but also outside the classroom. Thus, first, what *grit* means has to be defined.

### 2.1. Defining grit

Grit, as an essential concept in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, has also become a central phenomenon in recent educational research (Gray & Mannahan, 2017). As Duckworth states (2016), grit plays a much more important role in success than talent. To illustrate, adults with higher levels of grit are more likely to pursue their graduate-level education (WSSDA Research Blast, 2014). That is why defining grit is essential to better understand its role in education. Grit is defined as “the tendency to sustain interest in and effort toward very long-term goals” (Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, & Kelly, 2007: 1087). In a more recent study, grit has been defined as “a passion and perseverance to accomplish long-term goals whatever the obstacles and no matter how long it may take” (Duckworth & Quinn, 2009: 541). In this sense, gritty individuals have determination, perseverance, an ability to set clear goals, and patience, and flexibility in coping with the obstacles they encounter. In sum, perseverance of effort and consistency over time are strong indicators of grit (Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, & Kelly, 2007; Von Culin, Tsukayma, & Duckworth, 2014).

Grit also displays the capacity for interpersonal connection, collaboration, and an inner strength that helps individuals to set their goals. Dweck (2005) proposes that grit and effort provide creative geniuses with extraordinary motivation to overcome setbacks that they encounter (cited in Robert, 2009). In Duckworth et al.'s (2007) research, grit has been referred to as an important predictor of success for a variety of individuals, including students at West Point Military Academy, National Spelling Bee contestants, salespeople at a vacation-time-share company, and Teach for America teachers. The study reveals that the "grittier" students tend to be not only tougher but also more determined. Students that have high levels of grit regard learning as a journey and value the multiple stages in the learning process. In a nutshell, grit is of paramount importance in education.

### 2.2. The importance of grit in education

There has been a recent shift in the education movement which values a competency-based or mastery-based system. That is, one of the major roles education plays is to encourage individuals to work toward their learning goals and master their abilities (Horn, 2013). As Duckworth et al. (2007: 1100) point out paraphrasing Benjamin Franklin, “the goal of an education is not just to learn a little about a lot but also a lot about a little”. That is, it is grit that provides learners with perseverance to

master their skills and become more competent. It should be noted that learning to be gritty is possible. Hence, educators and leaders should incorporate elements of grit into learning environments which promote perseverance and resilience, for experience and environment can affect personality traits (WSSDA Research Blast, 2014). By designing learning environments that promote these traits, educators can help learners become grittier individuals. (<https://www.edutopia.org/blog/foster-grit-in-classroom-andrew-miller>). In this way, students, as high achievers, will be able to cope with the challenges they may face even after graduation and will become life-long problem solvers.

### 2.3. Grit and achievement

Grit has a large impact on academic achievement. Scholars conducting research on grit propose an innovative way to produce higher-achieving learners: developing learners' grit, which is a non-cognitive trait (Keegan, 2017). Developing grit is as significant as developing their cognitive strategies and skills. In order for achievement, not only cognitive strategies and talent but also effort, as one of the vital elements of grit, is required. As Duckworth (2013) points out, effort is vital for success since it determines the level of intensity, direction, and duration of an individual's exertions toward a goal, which is accompanied by success. Achievement is considered "a marathon", not a sprint, by gritty learners who are determined to succeed (Duckworth et al., 2007: 1088). Hence, educators should explore the characteristics of gritty learners.

Learners who have grit tend to be more successful, determined, goal-oriented, and hard-working. To illustrate, in Duckworth et al.'s (2007) study, grit scores were associated with higher GPAs ( $r = .25$ ,  $p = .01$ ), a relationship which was even stronger when SAT scores were held constant ( $r = .34$ ,  $p = .001$ ). In his study, Bloom (1985: 544) also asserted that accomplished individuals, namely, prodigies, practiced hard day after day, for at least 10 or 15 years, to become the best in their fields (cited in Duckworth et al., 2007: 1100). In every studied field, he observed that a strong interest in that particular field, a strong desire to reach "a high level of attainment" in the field, and a "willingness to put in great amounts of time and effort" were among the general qualities which highly-achieving individuals possessed. These learners regard academic difficulties and confusion as speed bumps, not obstacles to learning (Paff, 2016). That is to say, they opt for persistence and are not likely to easily give up. In a similar vein, Winner (1996: 293), in her study of prodigies, concluded that "Creators must be able to persist in the face of difficulty and overcome the many obstacles in the way of creative discovery... Drive and energy in childhood are more predictive of success, if not creativity, than is IQ or some other more domain-specific ability" (cited in Duckworth et al., 2007: 1100).

To conclude, gritty learners are more advantageous compared to other learners due to the high levels of stamina they possess (Keegan, 2017). The likelihood is higher for the grittier students to perform better and receive better grades. Plus, they are also more likely to graduate (WSSDA Research Blast, 2014). To conclude, students with grit are highly-achieving learners who set long-term goals.

### 2.4. Grit and goal setting

Grit is defined as perseverance and desire to attain long-term goals (Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, & Kelly, 2007; Robert, 2009; Duckworth, 2013; Keegan, 2017). Success is not only about how smart learners are, it is also about how long they can maintain a drive to attain their goals (Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, & Kelly, 2007; Dyer, 2016). Sticking with long-term goals over time enables

individuals to complete higher levels of education, which suggests that grit, goal-setting, and education are all intertwined. In Naiman et al.'s (1978: 9) study regarding the good language learners, when students were "asked which language they would like to learn, many subjects mentioned specific goals" (cited in Keegan, 2017). It could be stated that these students who were driven by their goals in the language learning process were gritty learners. Oxford and Shearin (1994) also indicate that learners' accepted goals may be related to motivation and performance. That is why, language teachers should spend more time on goal setting in the L2 classroom. Striving for long-term goals is a key component of grit. That is, persistence and goal setting should be highlighted for learners' attainment of the goals they have set (Keegan, 2017).

Gritty individuals are more likely to work determinedly towards challenges, maintain effort, and interest for long periods of time despite experiencing failure and adversity (<https://www.forbes.com/sites/margaretperlis/2013/10/29/5-characteristics-of-grit-what-it-is-why-you-need-it-and-do-you-have-it/#6ff1c5da4f7b>). Thus, building grit in the classroom requires an understanding of how crucial setting long-term goals is. Learners should be guided to set specific, realistic, and personalized long-term goals for their learning and set a realistic time frame. All in all, teachers should encourage students to be persistent and pursue their goals, which is the key to success in all learning contexts, including the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context.

## 2.5. Grit in the EFL context

Personality traits, as one of the self-factors, are among essential psychological factors which affect second or foreign language acquisition (Cook, 2001). The most successful students with high academic success have a set of characteristics which other students, including those with high IQs, do not possess. Grit, among these personality traits, has recently attracted the attention of many educators and institutions, such as the U.S. Department of Education (2013). Grit is considered to be one of the vital traits a learner should possess in order to be successful in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (U.S. Department of Education 2013; Changlek & Palanukulwong, 2015). Therefore, understanding the role of grit in overall success and the factors that relate grit to language learning should be on the research agenda of language teachers (Keegan, 2017).

Grit is crucial for all individuals, regardless of their levels, ages, abilities, and it has a value in all educational contexts, including English as a second or foreign language since becoming proficient in the target language is closely related to setting long-term goals, so language learners should be informed that achieving language proficiency is a demanding goal that may take years to achieve. Based on his experience in language teaching, Keegan (2017: 2) points out how essential understanding grit in the language classroom is:

Throughout my teaching experiences in foreign-language settings as well as in university intensive-English programs, I have witnessed students with apparently strong language skills fail to become successful language learners over time, and I have also witnessed students with initially weak language skills go on to become highly successful language learners. Perhaps these differences are due, at least in part, to grit.

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Understanding grit enables language teachers to understand why some language learners might be more successful than others providing a pattern for success and failure. It is the gritty language learners that “tend to display higher levels persistence upon encountering setbacks, and this leads to success” (Duckworth & Gross 2014: 322). In contrast, being a talented and gifted language learner is not solely a potential predictor of achievement (Keegan, 2017). In other words, the language-learning ability requires focus, hard work, and persistence. Hence, it is particularly language teachers who should take the implications of grit research into consideration for more fruitful language teaching and learning processes. Understanding the vital role that grit has in overall success and the factors that connect grit to language learning should be of great interest and value to all language teachers. In summary, language teachers should consider how to foster grit in learners in order to be able to have more successful language learners (Keegan, 2017).

Although certain characteristics and features as indicative of grit were addressed decades ago (Keegan, 2017), second-language (L2) researchers have not yet conducted specific research on grit or the Grit Scale to measure grit in language learning. To gain valuable insights into the reasons for some second -or foreign- language learners’ success, examining grit is inevitable (Keegan, 2017). This enables the researchers to understand why some language learners fail while others are successful in learning English. As Naiman et al. (1978: 17) previously described, a good language learner is persistent; in other words, it is the one who “also finds ways to overcome obstacles, whether linguistic, affective or environmental.” (cited in Ellis, 2008). Hence, this study aims at exploring the relation of grit to the academic success of different EFL learner populations in a college context revealing the characteristics of gritty language learners referring to the goals they set in the language learning process.

## 2.6. Grit in the EFL context

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In the light of these, it can be stated that exploring grit in the ELT context is of utmost importance. Grit, perseverance, and success are closely associated (Shechtman, DeBarger, Dornsife, Rosier, & Yarnall, 2013). Grittier learners are more likely to experience higher levels of motivation, endurance, and success in the learning process (Duckworth et al., 2007). Thus, this study aims at exploring the relation of grit to the academic success of different EFL learner populations in a college context and reveal the relationship of learners’ levels of grit with the goals they set. The following research questions guided this study:

1. How does grit relate to EFL college students’ academic success?
2. How do the grit scores of graduate students and external transfer students compare?
3. How do the EFL learners with different grit levels compare in terms of goal-setting?
4. What are the self-reported characteristics of EFL learners with lower levels of grit?
5. What are the self-reported characteristics of EFL learners with higher levels of grit?



### 3. Method

To be able to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the research questions, a mixed-methods research design has been employed in the present study. As Creswell (2014: 215) puts it, ““mixing” or blending of data, it can be argued, provides a stronger understanding of the problem or question than either by itself.” In addition to quantitative research instruments, interviews, defined as “the core method in qualitative research” (Richards, 2009), were also utilized in the study.

#### 3.1. Participants

Convenience sampling (Dörnyei, 2007) was used in the study as only the students of the first researcher were included in the study. The members of the target population met certain practical criteria, including easy accessibility, geographical proximity, and availability at a given time, or the willingness to participate in the study. The participants of the study were adult EFL learners (N=37) who were learning English in Academic Year 2017-2018 to be able to pursue their college education at a state institute of technology -the only institute of technology in Turkey- where the medium of instruction is English. That is, they were preparatory year students with A2 level of proficiency in English.

Two groups of students, graduate students and external transfer students, were involved in the study. It has been suggested in the literature that learners with higher levels of grit are more likely to pursue their academic studies, grittier people go to school longer and switch careers less often (Duckworth et al., 2007). As the participants in both groups were either graduate students or external transfer students, they met this criterion.

The number of the students in the former group was 17. Students participated in the study were from various departments, including Architecture (N:1), Bioengineering (N:1), Biotechnology (N:3), City and Regional Planning (N:1), Civil Engineering (N:2), Electrical-Electronics Engineering (N:1), Energy Engineering (N:1), Food Engineering (N:1), Mathematics (N:1), Mechanical Engineering (N:4), and Physics (N: 1). The age range was between 21 and 28, and the mean age of the participants was 23.76. In the latter group, the number of the students was 20. Students in this group were also from different departments. Their departments were Architecture (N:3), Chemical Engineering (N:1), Chemistry (N:2), City and Regional Planning (N:2), Civil Engineering (N:2), Computer Engineering (N:2), Food Engineering (N:2), Mechanical Engineering (N:1), Molecular Biology and Genetics (N:3), and Physics (N:2). Similar to group 1, the age range was between 20 and 27. The mean was 22.26. In sum, 17 female and 20 male students participated in the study.

#### 3.2. Data Collection Instruments

The quantitative instrument was the short grit scale (Grit-S), a self-report questionnaire, which asks questions to measure “Consistency of Interest and Perseverance of Effort.” (Duckworth & Quinn, 2009: 172). The 8-item Likert scale, which was a more efficient measure of grit was developed and validated by Duckworth and Quinn (2009). It was not only shorter and but also psychometrically stronger than the 12-item Grit-O (Grit-Original, 2009). Responses to items on the questionnaires were recorded on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from “very much like me” to “not like me at all”. The scale has been tested and evaluated in many different settings (Duckworth & Quinn, 2009), which indicates that it

has a very strong internal and external validity and reliability (Cronbach's alpha = .79) (Dyer, 2016). The second quantitative measure was students' achievement test scores. A qualitative approach was also adopted to reveal the characteristics of the students with higher and lower levels of grit and examine the goals students set. Hence, participants were asked to submit goal cards, and semi-structured interviews were conducted.

### 3.3. Data Collection Procedure

The Grit-S scale was administered by the researcher. The students who volunteered to take part in the study were asked to fill in the scale. The researcher provided participants with further explanations to ensure their full comprehension of the scale. Following the administration of the scales, all the participants were provided with goal cards and asked to write the long-term and short-term goals they have set along with their rationales. The goal cards were collected to ensure participants' thoughtful thinking and reflection on their goals.

After analyzing the quantitative data and the goal cards, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with students from both groups (graduate and external transfer) in order to reveal the characteristics of EFL students with higher and lower levels of grit and explore further about students' goals. To determine the interviewees, the participants were divided according to the 27% technique (Changlek, & Palanukulwong, 2015). Namely, the top and bottom 27% scorers of students were categorized as students with the high grit levels and students with the lowest grit levels. There were eight students in each group (N=16). The selected participants based on the criterion mentioned above were invited to take part in the study. However, participants with the highest grit levels in both groups (N=2), namely, the graduate group and the external transfer group, did not accept to take part in the study. After the exclusion of these participants, interviews were administered with the next highest-ranking students in both groups. The participants were asked to sign a consent form prior to the interviews. All of the interviews were video recorded and transcribed, and the transcriptions were translated into English.

### 3.4. Data Analysis

SPSS 24 was used to analyze the quantitative data. In order to reveal how students' grit scores related to their achievement test scores, Pearson correlation scores were computed. Independent samples *t*-test was computed to compare graduate students' and transfer students' grit scores. As for the analysis of the qualitative data, categorization was employed.

## 4. Results and Discussion

The results of the study confirmed that "*grit* is about having an "ultimate concern" which can be defined as a *goal* individuals care about so much that it organizes and gives meaning to almost everything they do" (<https://angeladuckworth.com/qa/>). In this sense, grit and goal-setting are closely linked (Duckworth et al., 2007). That is, it is one of the core ingredients of success in the EFL context. The findings of this study, which was conducted to explore grit in an EFL context, are presented in the order of the research questions. Details regarding the participants' grit levels in both groups are presented in Table 1.



**Table 1.** Grit levels of graduate and external transfer students.

GS: graduate students; ETS: external transfer students.

Grit Levels	Groups	
	GS (N=17)	ETS (N=20)
5-4	29.41%	45%
3.99-3	58.82%	50%
2.99-2	11.76%	5%
1.99-1	N/A	N/A

The majority of the graduate students (58%) had grit levels between 3.99 and 3. In a similar vein, 50% of the external transfer students had grit levels between 3.99 and 3. Only one third of the participants in the graduate group had grit scores between 5 and 4. In contrast, the percentage of students falling into this category was 45%. The percentage of the students with grit scores between 2.99 and 2 almost doubled in the former group. None of the participants fell into the lowest grit score category (1.99-1). To put in a nutshell, the number of the grittier students in the latter group was higher.

RQ 1. How does grit relate to EFL college students' academic success?

The first research question sought whether there was a relationship between students' grit scores and achievement test scores. Pearson correlation was computed to examine the strength and direction of this linear relationship. The results showed that, for the graduate group, variables were negatively correlated. The correlation coefficient was  $r = -.519$  ( $n=17$ ,  $p=0.033$ ) which is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed). This finding indicated a reverse relationship between graduate students' achievement scores and grit scores. That is, as students' achievement scores increased, their grit levels decreased, or that as their grit levels increased, the achievement scores decreased. As for the external students, the correlation coefficient was  $r = .175$  ( $n=20$ ,  $p=0.461$ ), which indicated a positive relationship between the two variables. However, this correlation was not significant. Although these findings confirmed the findings of some of the previous studies (e.g., Bazalais, P., Lemay, D.J., & Doleck, T., 2016), the results did not align with the results of Duckworth et al.'s (2007) study and Cross's study (2014) which revealed that grittier individuals performed better at the highest academic levels. This may have been due to the self-reporting tools that were used in the study to measure students' grit levels or students' self-misperception of their grit levels.

RQ 2. How do the grit scores of graduate students and transfer students compare?

In the former group, the highest grit level was 5, which was the maximum possible score in the scale, and the lowest score was 2.5. In the latter group, however, the highest score was 4.62, and the lowest score was 2.62. Table 2 presents details regarding the grit scores of graduate and external transfer students.

**Table 2.** Grit scores of graduate students and transfer students.

Groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	df	p
Graduate	173.	6812	.60913			
External Transfer	20	3.7975	.54005			
				-.616	35	0.542

The mean grit score of the former group was 3.68, and the mean score of the latter group was 3.79. The independent samples *t*-test value indicated that there was not a significant difference between the grit scores of both groups. Participants' in both groups had academic goals to achieve, and they have determined to pursue their academic studies. As a result, the slight difference in the mean scores of graduate student and external transfer student groups yielded an anticipated result. However, the grit scores of the graduate students were expected to be higher as the doctoral students were a largely gritty group in Cross's (2014) study. The students' being MSc students, not doctoral students, may have led to this difference.

RQ 3. How do the EFL learners with different grit levels compare in terms of goal-setting?

Out of the seventeen graduate students, fifteen students submitted their goal cards; however, two students (GS1, GS17) did not submit their goal cards. Table 3 presents graduate students' short-term and long-term goals.

**Table 3.** Graduate students' grit levels, short-term and long-term goals.

Grit Level	STG	LTG
5-4	<p><b>GS2*(4.37)</b>--complete the English preparatory class.</p> <p><b>GS3(4.25)</b>--pass the preparatory class successfully w/o wasting time.</p> <p><b>GS4(4.12)</b>--have fluent English, graduate from the MSc program w/ a good degree.</p> <p><b>GS5(4)</b>--pass the proficiency exam, find a part-time job.</p>	<p><b>GS2(4.37)</b>--complete her MSc program, discover a new drug and save lives, create a brand, write a lot of articles in English.</p> <p><b>GS3(4.25)</b>--be happy and peaceful, have a good career.</p> <p><b>GS4(4.12)</b>--be a manager in a good company, improve himself in every field of mechanical engineering, establish his own company.</p> <p><b>GS5(4)</b>--open her own company about wind turbines, resume her doctorate program of Quantum Physics at University of Cambridge.</p>
3.99-3	<p><b>GS6(3.87)</b>--go abroad (to min. 5 countries), buy a motorcycle, learn C++ (the language used in computers), become a social person, do exercise, learn English.</p> <p><b>GS7(3.75)</b>--go to the USA (through temporary work and travel opportunities), go to Europe on Erasmus, finish school in 5 years.</p> <p><b>GS8(3.75)</b>--graduate from the MSc program, speak English fluently, travel to Prague.</p> <p><b>GS9(3.62)</b>--earn money in the first half of his life, do the things that he enjoys without having the concern of earning money.</p> <p><b>GS10 (3.62)</b>--complete the MSc program in Bioengineering in 2.5 years, work as a research assistant.</p>	<p><b>GS6(3.87)</b>--be a good son and brother, be more cultured, help other people, be a patriot.</p> <p><b>GS7(3.75)</b>--complete a PhD degree abroad, work for a big company abroad, live in the USA or Belgium.</p> <p><b>GS8(3.75)</b>--graduate from a PhD program, work at university, design and build her own farm house.</p> <p><b>GS9(3.62)</b>--live in the house that he has designed, read books, spend time with my family, design and produce robots in his office freely and share what he does with the world as open source.</p>

3.99-3	<p><b>GS11(3.62)</b>--pass the proficiency exam, make a project.</p> <p><b>GS12(3.62)</b>--speak and write English fluently, graduate from MSc program successfully, earn a PhD degree, learn ceramics art, travel to Nordic countries, be a part of a project related to her interests.</p> <p><b>GS13(3.62)</b>--graduate from the MSc program, open her office in Izmir.</p> <p><b>GS14(3.12)</b>--visit new countries, improve her English, save money, have more international friends, learn how to cook.</p> <p><b>GS15(3)</b>--finish university and finish his smart drone.</p>	<p><b>GS10(3.62)</b>--do a PhD on Bioengineering, have a good job.</p> <p><b>GS11(3.62)</b>--finish MSc w/ a good project, start PhD in the USA, be healthy and happy, begin her career.</p> <p><b>GS12(3.62)</b>--graduate from a PhD program successfully, have a job that makes her happy, give a number of speeches at different countries, go to her favorite singers' concerts, build her mountain house with her family, visit ancient cities all around the world.</p> <p><b>GS13(3.62)</b>--be a successful businesswoman.</p> <p><b>GS14(3.12)</b>--lose weight, start her own business, learn a new language, have her own YouTube channel.</p> <p><b>GS15(3)</b>--N/A</p>
2.99-2	<b>GS16(2.75)</b> --learn English and become a research assistant.	<b>GS16(2.75)</b> --become a worldwide famous mathematician.
1.99-1	None	None

*GS: graduate student; \*: grit scale scores; STG: short-term goals, LTG: long-term goals.*

The majority of the graduate students (66.66%) had set a short-term goal that was related to either passing the English proficiency exam or improving their skills in English. Completing the MSc programs they were enrolled in, becoming a research assistant, and earning a PhD degree were among the academic goals students have set as their short-term goals. Almost 50% of the students set personal goals for themselves as short-term goals, including buying a motorbike, becoming a social person, going to Europe on Erasmus or the USA, learning ceramic arts, travelling to Nordic countries, and learning how to cook. The students had a desire for not only graduating from school, completing their MSc programs, or learning English, but also they wanted to be very successful. To put it simply, they wanted to achieve their goals in the best way possible. Most of their goals were specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and timely.

Similar to their short-term goals, students had elaborate long-term goals. 40% of the students had the goal of pursuing their doctoral education in the long run. They aspired to write a number of academic articles in English and give a number of speeches in different countries. In addition to their educational goals, students had career-related goals, such as working for a big company, working abroad, working as a manager, creating their own brand, and starting their own business. Some of the students, however, had more project-based goals: designing and producing robots and working on wind turbines. Their long-term goals included being a good citizen, having a peaceful life, and going to concerts, as personal goals, as well. In sum, the majority of the students, who were forward-thinking and ambitious, aimed to design, produce, and make a difference. The grittiest students had the most elaborate and specific goals. This finding confirmed the fact that grit, passion and persistence for long-term goals were closely linked, and that grit was a vital element of the successful attainment of long-term goals (Duckworth et al., 2007). They had a great desire to achieve something extraordinary. In other words, they had carved their paths to create their own future. On the whole, they had a clear vision and were good at the specification of their goals, which suggests that they were skilled destination planners.

Out of the twenty external transfer students, seventeen students submitted their goal cards; however, three students (ETS5, ETS11, ETS15) did not submit their goal cards. External transfer students' short-term and long-term goals have been presented in the following table.

**Table 4.** External transfer students' grit levels, short-term and long-term goals

ETS: external transfer student; \*: grit scale scores; STG: short-term goals, LTG: long-term goals.

Grit Levels	STG	LTG
5-4	<p>ETS1*(4.62)--have a peaceful life, study for the physics course, read the books on his reading list, publish his poetry book, publish his novel.</p> <p>ETS2(4.5)-- pass the preparatory class w/o having to attend the summer school, learn English well, do sports, lose weight, have a better physical appearance, have a healthier diet, and maintain a healthy lifestyle.</p> <p>ETS3(4.37)--pass the preparatory year and graduate within five years, learn everything regarding her department in five years' time, have a good command of English.</p> <p>ETS4(4.25)--pass the preparatory year and go abroad in the nearest future.</p> <p>ETS6(4.25)--graduate from university, learn two or more languages to be able to speak informally.</p> <p>ETS7(4.12)--pass all the exams in the preparatory class successfully, lose 10 kilos by the end of the fall semester.</p> <p>ETS8(4.12)--speak English fluently.</p> <p>ETS9(4)--meet valuable people in his work, school and social environments.</p>	<p>ETS1(4.62)--have peace and money, become a research assistant, publish two novels, translate plays and poems, publish a lot of poetry books, write a lot of articles on physics, write scenarios for the short film to be published by his friend and help with behind the camera.</p> <p>ETS2(4.5)--spend the upcoming four years effectively, go abroad on Erasmus and meet different people, and learn about different cultures and places, be successful in her career, meet her love, and become a good mother.</p> <p>ETS3(4.37)--become an academician, write a book, improve herself and learn about different subjects, build a house for herself w/ a garden, library and so forth to maintain a happy life.</p> <p>ETS4(4.25)--have a good GPA in his department to be able to go abroad for an internship, live abroad.</p> <p>ETS6(4.25)--live abroad in countries such as Norway, Sweden, Finland, Germany, and Japan and improve his scientific research skills, become an expert in his subject.</p> <p>ETS7(4.12)--improve herself in Computer Engineering and take part in important projects, learn other foreign languages.</p> <p>ETS8(4.12)--read and comprehend academic texts, express himself better in English.</p> <p>ETS9(4)--succeed in staying focused on his goals.</p> <p>ETS10(3.87)--finish school, have a job, have a good career, start her own business, be a healthy person, go abroad and improve her English, marry someone that she loves and be very happy.</p> <p>ETS12 (3.62)--found a planning and construction company w/ his brother.</p> <p>ETS13(3.62)--work abroad after he graduates from university.</p> <p>ETS14(3.62)--graduate from the institute and work abroad.</p> <p>ETS16(3.5)--graduate successfully.</p> <p>ETS17(3.25)--finish school successfully and have a good career abroad.</p> <p>ETS18(3)--become an expert in artificial intelligence, improve his project.</p> <p>ETS19(3)--improve her vocabulary and grammar knowledge so that she can write academic articles on chemistry, speak fluently to be able to present a paper regarding her subject area in a symposium.</p>
3.99-3	<p>ETS10(3.87)--pass the preparatory class, learn English, speak and write more fluently in English, change her department, study food engineering, do sport to become fit, spend time on her hobbies, not be a desperate and pessimistic person and become calmer person, improve her anger management skills, spend more time for herself and have fun, fulfil her religious duties, get rid of her monotonous lifestyle, gain self-confidence and not have prejudice.</p> <p>ETS12(3.62)--pass the preparatory class, graduate from university.</p> <p>ETS13(3.62)--graduate from university at the expected time, improve his English.</p> <p>ETS14 (3.62)--do homework on a regular basis, learn English, pass the preparatory class.</p> <p>ETS16(3.5)--pass the preparatory class.</p> <p>ETS17(3.25)--improve his English, pass the preparatory class.</p> <p>ETS18(3)--get rid of the preparatory class.</p> <p>ETS19(3)--improve her vocabulary knowledge, improve her writing skills in English, do more listening practice to be able to understand fluent speakers of English.</p>	<p>ETS10(3.87)--finish school, have a job, have a good career, start her own business, be a healthy person, go abroad and improve her English, marry someone that she loves and be very happy.</p> <p>ETS12 (3.62)--found a planning and construction company w/ his brother.</p> <p>ETS13(3.62)--work abroad after he graduates from university.</p> <p>ETS14(3.62)--graduate from the institute and work abroad.</p> <p>ETS16(3.5)--graduate successfully.</p> <p>ETS17(3.25)--finish school successfully and have a good career abroad.</p> <p>ETS18(3)--become an expert in artificial intelligence, improve his project.</p> <p>ETS19(3)--improve her vocabulary and grammar knowledge so that she can write academic articles on chemistry, speak fluently to be able to present a paper regarding her subject area in a symposium.</p>
2.99-2	ETS20(2.62)--improve her English and go abroad to see new places, have an internship abroad, go abroad on Erasmus.	ETS20(2.62)--have a good job.
1.99-1	None	None

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The majority of the short-term goals the external transfer students set were academic goals. 58.82% of the students listed passing the preparatory class among the short-term goals they had set. 41.17% students set personal goals, including reading books, publishing a poetry book/novel, learning two or more languages to be able to speak informally, losing 10 kilos, improving anger management skills, fulfilling religious duties, and going abroad to see new places in addition to their academic goals. 47% of the students aimed to have a good command of English. One student's response revealed that s/he experienced problems in completing the tasks outside the classroom, which may suggest that the student had some time-management problems. Overall, students demonstrated high levels of self-awareness. That is to say, they were good at assessing their strengths and constraints.

Similar to graduate students' long-term goals, the goals external transfer students aimed to achieve in the long run were more elaborately-set. 52.94% of the students set academic goals for themselves. They aimed to successfully graduate from university, become a research assistant or an academician, wanted to read and understand academic texts, and, finally, have a good GPA. 41.17% of the students pursued the goal of going abroad after completing their degrees. As a result, they deemed improving their English skills to be crucial. Among personal goals, writing scenarios for the short film, becoming a good mother, and being a healthy person can be listed. The grittier students desired to achieve more compared to the students with lower levels of grit. They provided an elaborate list of academic, career-related, and personal goals. Indeed, this was the anticipated result of the study, people who possess grit not only finish current goals but also are able to continually seek after long-term goals. "The gritty individual not only finishes his tasks at hand, but pursues a given aim over years" (Duckworth et al., 2007: 1089). The less gritty students, in contrast, tended to have simpler goals that can easily be achieved.

In brief, both graduate students and external transfer students with high levels of grit tended to pursue more complex and original goals. They desired to achieve more compared to their classmates who had lower levels of grit.

*RQ 4. What are self-reported characteristics of EFL learners with lower levels of grit?*

Interviews were administered with eight students -four students from each group- that had the lowest grit scores. Table 5 displays the self-reported characteristics of EFL learners falling into the category of less gritty learners.

**Table 5.** Self-reported characteristics of EFL learners with lower levels of grit.

Student	Grit Level	Self-reported Learner Characteristics
GS17	2.5	does not set goals as he thinks goals will change him, considers short-term goals more important, does whatever he wants, just focuses on the present time, considers himself a systematic learner to some extent as his system constantly changes.
GS16	2.75	considers having a goal important, considers short and long-term goals equally important, not only sets goals but also tries to attain them, wants to be very successful, but he thinks he is a bit lazy, considers himself to be ambitious but has problems in realizing his dreams.
GS15	3	considers goals a core philosophy in life, has short-term and long term goals because he considers them equally important, does not easily give up, moves on from the setback he has faced, has self-discipline, has a goal card, does not go to sleep before achieving his daily goals (e.g., learning 10 English words every day).
GS14	3.12	has both short-term and long-term goals since she thinks goals push her to work harder, revises her goals on a weekly basis, sticks her goal card in front of her desk every month, considers long-term goals to be more important, thinks she is a hardworking, self-confident, responsible, and an independent individual.
ETS 20	2.62	considers goals important, but started to set goals after she became a student at this institute, sets goals when she feels herself good, thinks that achieving goals is more important than setting goals, feels more motivated when she achieves her short-term goals, gets bored and gives up easily, is pessimistic.
ETS 19	3	could not set goals as she could not figure out what she liked and wanted to do in life, considers achieving goals to be more important than setting them, thinks long-term goals are more important, has self-discipline, is a perfectionist, can make decisions independently, can regulate her life.
ETS18	3	considers goals to be very important, both sets goals and tries to achieve them, easily gets bored, especially when he is not interested in the subject, may have difficulty in concentration, thinks he is whimsical, does not have a schedule, does not make plans, considers himself to be systematic as long as he likes what he is doing.
ETS 17	3.25	thinks having goals in life is crucial as they determine where to go, considers achieving goals more important than setting goals, thinks that long-term goals are more important because she can motivate herself to achieve her short-term goals, is indecisive, self-confident, and ambitious, finishes whatever she starts, experiences difficulty in planning, not in achieving what she has planned to do.

*GS: graduate student; ETS: external transfer student.*



The self-reported characteristics of the students that fell into the “less gritty learners” category were similar. As the grit levels decreased, the importance students gave to setting goals decreased as well. However, students with relatively higher grit levels set more specific goals, prepared goal cards, and revised their goals on a regular basis, which were in line with Duckworth et al.’s study (2007). Grit requires to be cognitively decisive to stay focused on long-term goals (Duckworth et al., 2007; McClelland, Koestner, & Weinberger, 1989; cited in Cross, 2014). That is to say, it is not “an incessant subconscious drive for achievement” (Cross, 2014, pp. 8-9). They also reported that they were more self-confident, hardworking, responsible, and ambitious. Some of the students, on the other hand, stated that due to being lazy, they had difficulty in attaining the goals they had set. A minority of the students reported that they were present-focused, which prevented them from planning ahead. In general, they could all set goals, yet they could not persevere to achieve success. Briefly, interviews conducted with students who were less gritty revealed that they experienced problems in identifying what they liked, determining what they wanted to achieve, achieving the goals they had set, concentrating, and being optimistic. As a result, it could be stated that they tended to easily give up. They could not stay focused and be a systematic learner to realize their dreams. In sum, they lacked the self-control which was an essential requirement of being a gritty individual.

*RQ 5. What are the self-reported characteristics of EFL learners with higher levels of grit?*

In order to explore the characteristics of the students with higher levels of grit, interviews were conducted with eight students -four students from each group- that had the highest grit scores. In Table 6, the self-reported characteristics of EFL learners who have the highest levels of grit have been presented.

**Table 6.** Self-reported characteristics of EFL learners with higher levels of grit.

Student	Grit Level	Self-reported Learner Characteristics
GS2	4.37	thinks goals are crucial, does not easily give up, learns lessons from her mistakes, makes plans all the time, even constructs a checklist in her mind which she checks during the day, is disciplined, goal-oriented, and stubborn.
GS3	4.25	thinks goals in life are really important as goals put her in action, considers both short-term goals and long-term goals to be equally important, achieves the goals she sets, forces herself to realize her goals, does not like to experience failures, experiences failures only when she feels bad, is ambitious, has self-regulation skills, exerts a lot of effort in a task she wants to achieve.
GS4	4.12	has been setting goals since he started university, has very specific long-term and short-term goals, sets goals and achieves them, is overambitious, is very focused, hardworking, and self-disciplined, completes the tasks that he starts, learns lessons from his failures, assesses his strengths and weaknesses and tries to improve his skills, has good organization skills.
GS5	4	thinks goals are important to reach a desired end in life, has changed the way she looked at life after learning about her illness (cancer), has a number of goals which she definitely wants to achieve, thinks that thinking about death pushes her to stay focused to achieve her goals, considers long-term goals more important as short-term goals are just pieces of the puzzle, is goal-oriented, is not very hardworking and ambitious.
ETS2	4.5	thinks that having goals is extremely important, has left her job to become a molecular biologist, has achieved all the goals she has set so far, considers long-term goals more important, is ambitious, success-oriented, and stubborn, does not give up easily, is not easily demotivated when she gets low marks from the exams, focuses more on the process rather than the product as a learner in the leaning process.
ETS3	4.37	thinks that goals have a crucial impact on our lives, has been setting goals since she had a great success in secondary school, was the top student in secondary school, high school and vocational school, considers long-term goals more important, is self-confident: she thinks that she can always be successful, is persistent, ambitious, hardworking, and well-organized, thinks that being hardworking is more important than being intelligent.
ETS4	4.25	considers the goals that he can achieve more important, always achieves the goals he sets, thinks that long-term goals are more important, breaks his long-term goals into pieces to achieve them more easily and not to be demoralized, is persistent, is disciplined, has plans, tries alternative ways when he cannot reach his goals.
ETS5	4.25	thinks that one definitely has to have goals in life, sets goals to overcome the failures he experiences, considers long-term goals more important, is ambitious and organized, feels frustrated when he fails, does not easily give up, thinks that setbacks are not permanent.

*GS: graduate student; ETS: external transfer student.*

Students' responses revealed that the grittiest students had a number of common attributes. To start with, they tended to be persistent, not giving up easily. They exerted effort to accomplish their goals since they were aware of the fact that hard work is the key to success. That is, they were goal-oriented. Plus, they were ambitious, organized, and self-disciplined, which suggested that they had the control over their lives. Another common characteristic they had was about finishing whatever they started to do. Most importantly, they learned lessons from the failures they had experienced, thought that these setbacks were temporary, and valued the process more rather than the product. They valued not only short-term goals but also long-term goals. In GS3's terms, an individual had to crawl first to be able to run. That is why, they broke down their large goals into manageable chunks and tried their best to achieve their goals. In short, they were success-oriented and skilled destination planners (Cross, 2014; Duckworth et al., 2007; Duckworth & Gross, 2014; Dyer, 2016).

## 5. Conclusion

The study revealed that students' grit levels and academic achievement scores did not relate to each other. For the graduate students, variables were negatively correlated. The correlation coefficient was  $r=-.519$  which was significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed) *indicating a reverse relationship between graduate students' achievement scores and grit scores*. As for the external students, the correlation coefficient was  $r=.175$ , which indicated a positive relationship between the two variables. However, this correlation was not significant.

The study also showed that *both* graduate students and external transfer students, who had determined to pursue their academic lives, had similar levels of grit. The number of grittier students was higher in the latter group. However, there was not a significant difference between both groups in terms of the mean scores of students' grit levels.

With regard to the goals students from both groups set, it could be stated that the grittiest students had the most elaborate and specific goals. They had a great desire to achieve something extraordinary. This does align with the study of Cross (2014) which claims that higher grit scores are associated with higher educational attainment. Demonstrating high levels of self-awareness and self-control, these students could assess their strengths and constraints. This finding supports the traits of gritty individuals by Duckworth et al. (2007), who stated that even in the face of difficulties or hardship, the gritty individuals, will not lose interest or passion and tend to work harder toward their goals. Students with lower levels of grit, on the other hand, had simpler goals that they could easily achieve or had no goals at all since they were present-focused.

Finally, the grittiest and the least gritty students displayed a number of different attributes. Students in the former group reported that they were goal and success-oriented, hardworking, persistent, ambitious, self-confident, organized, and forward-thinking individuals, whereas students in the latter group asserted that they experienced problems in identifying what they liked, they could not determine what they wanted to achieve and could not achieve the goals they had set. They also could not concentrate on their goals and be optimistic, which led to lack of perseverance. These findings support the study of Furnham, Nuygards and Chamorro-Premuzie (2013) who found that personality traits played an essential role in academic achievement.

Grit, perseverance, and tenacity are the essential elements that impact learners' ability to succeed to be prepared for the demands of today's world. Thus, it is of paramount importance that education leaders and educators explore more about non-cognitive qualities of learners including grit and create environments that help learners further these qualities (Dyer, 2016). In other words, grit, tenacity and perseverance must be prioritized not only in school curricula but also in teacher development programs. Further research should be implemented, especially in the foreign language learning contexts, to understand and measure the concept of grit and explore how it is related to goal-setting and success through longitudinal data. Future studies should seek to answer the question of whether grit can be instilled in the learning process, including the language learning process, and explore the effect of growth mindset on grit, goal-setting and achievement as "grit is essential to high achievement" (Duckworth et al., 2007: 1088).

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