



STUDENTS' GRIT AND THEIR STATUS IN THE JOB MARKET

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UPÓR STUDENTÓW A ICH STATUS NA RYNKU PRACY

Słowa kluczowe: upór, studenci, praca zawodowa studentów, Krótka Skala Uporu (Grit-S)

Streszczenie. Celem badania było zweryfikowanie, czy upór studentów jest różnicowany przez ich status na rynku pracy (pracujący vs. niepracujący). W badaniu wykorzystano metodę sondażu diagnostycznego. Posłużono się Krótką Skalą Uporu (Grit-S) opracowaną przez Angelę Duckworth i Patricka Quinna. Badacze definiują upór jako „pasję i wytrwałość w realizacji długoterminowych celów” (Duckworth, Quinn, 2009, s. 166). Badania przeprowadzono wśród 177 studentów w wieku od 17 do 33 lat ($M = 20,25$, $SD = 2,12$), studiujących w trybie stacjonarnym na Uniwersytecie Opolskim. Z przeprowadzonych analiz wynika, że studentów łączących studia z pracą cechuje wyższy poziom uporu niż tych, którzy tylko studiują. Rezultaty te sugerują, że łączenie obowiązków akademickich z zawodowymi może sprzyjać wytrwałości.

Keywords: grit, students, students' employment, the Short Grit Scale (Grit-S)

Abstract. The aim of the study was to verify whether students' grit is differentiated by their status in the labour market (employed vs. unemployed). The study employed a diagnostic survey method. The Short Grit Scale (Grit-S) developed by Angela Duckworth and Patrick Quinn was used. These researchers define grit as “passion and perseverance for long-term goals” (Duckworth, Quinn, 2009, p. 166). The research was conducted among 177 students aged 17 to 33 years ($M = 20.25$, $SD = 2.12$), studying full-time at the University of Opole. The analyses indicate that students who combine studies with work demonstrate a higher level of grit than those who only study. These results suggest that balancing academic and professional responsibilities may foster perseverance.

Introduction

Expectations for students entering the job market are becoming increasingly complex and require both hard (technical) and soft (social) skills. Employers expect graduates to possess specific skills related to their field, such as proficiency in specialized software, knowledge of technology, programming, and so on. Students should be able to analyze data, think critically, and find solutions to complex problems. Employers also expect young workers to be able to communicate information clearly and effectively, collaborate in teams, and negotiate. As today's job market changes dynamically, students must be ready to quickly acquire new skills, adapt to changing conditions, and handle uncertainty.

A trait that can be helpful in achieving success, whether in education or in a career, is grit, as described by psychologist Angela Duckworth, who defines it as “passion and perseverance in the pursuit of long-term goals” (Duckworth, Quinn, 2009, p. 166). Grit can also be understood as mental toughness, persistence in action, and commitment to one's goals. Duckworth is the author of the following equation: talent * effort = skill; skill * effort = success. Describing the relationship between these three factors, she concluded that without effort, talent is merely untapped potential, and skills are just what an individual could have done but didn't (Duckworth, 2016, p. 46).

The concept of grit has been applied in numerous studies, which indicate that grit correlates with conscientiousness (Credé, Tynan, Harms, 2017; Duckworth, Quinn, 2009), academic performance (Beyhan, 2016; Hodge et al., 2017), academic motivation (Eskreis-Winkler et al., 2014), science achievement (Kelly et al., 2014), and completion of postgraduate education (Palisoc et al., 2017). Grit also has a significant relationship with higher levels of life achievement (Abuhassan, Bates, 2015).

Student employment activity

In recent years, it has become increasingly common for students to combine studies with work. Various factors contribute to this trend, including the rising costs of education and daily living expenses. Some students are forced to take up work to cover the cost of renting accommodation, as their parents are unable to provide financial security during their higher education. According to a study conducted by Milena Bącik, Przemysław Gawarkiewicz, and Katarzyna Siewicz

(2010) among 90 working students from the University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn, three-quarters (76%) of them would quit their jobs if they received sufficient financial support from their parents. Only one in five respondents (19%) would continue working.

Due to high living costs, some students choose to commute to university from their family homes. Research by CBOS (Boguszewski, 2017) indicates that students and learners represent the largest group (50%) among single people aged 18–24 who live with their parents. It is worth noting that employers often offer flexible working hours, allowing students to better align work with their academic schedules. Part-time jobs and remote work have also become more common and accessible. Based on research conducted among 245 students from six universities, it was found that over half of the respondents (61.6%) combine their studies with work. It was also noted that the work is often unrelated to their field of study, suggesting that financial reasons are the primary motivation for taking up employment (Dudło, Duda, Knapik, 2016).

Izabela Ostoj (2016) conducted an analysis of the motives for employment among full-time students ($N = 316$) at the University of Economics in Katowice. At the time of the study, nearly half (49%) of the respondents were employed or running their own businesses. The researcher found that the most common reason for students seeking employment was the need to generate income, with the main factor influencing their choice of a specific job being the salary offered. When asked about the reasons for taking up work, more than half of the surveyed students indicated financial motives. The second most important reason, cited by one-third of respondents, was the awareness of the necessity to gain work experience.

Research by Marek Rocki (2021), which utilized data from the nationwide system monitoring the economic outcomes of graduates who earned their diplomas in 2018, confirm opinions about the positive role of professional experience. Among those with work experience, the unemployment rate was twice as low as in the group without such experience. Additionally, individuals who had not worked previously earned an average salary approximately 35% lower.

Marek Kunasz (2022) conducted research among 426 students beginning full-time studies at the University of Szczecin to analyze their work experiences. Based on the collected data, the researcher found that more than half of the respondents had work experience in the retail and gastronomy sectors. The most common job positions held by students included roles such as salesperson, cashier, and customer advisor (in grocery stores, clothing shops, or gas stations).

In the gastronomy sector, respondents worked as waiter-bartenders, cooks, and delivery drivers. Some students also held managerial positions in both sectors. Additionally, respondents engaged in work in transportation and warehousing (as warehouse workers, couriers, or drivers), as well as in areas related to culture, entertainment, and recreation (as instructors or customer service staff). The researcher also noted that students without work experience reported lower levels of conscientiousness compared to those who were employed, with this relationship being statistically significant only among women.

Agnieszka Franczyk (2022) conducted a study among 126 full-time students at the University of Opole across various fields of study. Her research revealed that students perceive employment activity as a marker of success. When asked to describe a significant situation in which they achieved success, the young people pointed to events such as handling a difficult task at work, securing or starting a job, receiving recognition at work, getting promoted, starting a business, or obtaining an internship. Nearly one in four students described a professional achievement as a form of success.

Research problems and hypotheses

The main research problem is encapsulated in the question: Does student grit differ based on their employment status (employed vs. unemployed)? Based on a literature review (Griffin et al., 2016), which indicates that employed individuals scored higher on the Short Grit Scale (Grit-S), it is hypothesized that a similar pattern will be observed among students. Specifically, it is assumed that students who combine studies with work will exhibit higher levels of grit compared to those who are not employed.

Research procedure

Participants

The study involved 177 students aged between 17 and 33 years ($M = 20.25$, $SD = 2.12$), enrolled in full-time programs at the University of Opole. The fields of study included Pedagogy, Preschool and Early Childhood Pedagogy, Sociology, Design and Communication, Polish Philology, German Philology, and Social Work. The sample was non-probabilistic. Descriptive statistics for the study group are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for the study group of students ($N = 177$)

Gender	Employed students		Unemployed students		Overall	
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
Women	87	49.2	68	38.4	155	87.6
Men	15	8.4	7	4.0	22	12.4
Total	102	57.6	75	42.4	177	100

Source: own research.

In the research sample, the majority were women (87.6%). More than half of the respondents were solely students (57.6%), while the remaining participants combined their studies with professional work (42.4%).

Research tools

The study employed the Short Grit Scale (Grit-S) developed by Angela Duckworth and Patrick Quinn (2009) in its Polish adaptation by Patrycja Wyszynska and colleagues (2017). The scale consists of 8 statements covering two dimensions: Interest Consistency and Effort Perseverance. Respondents rate these statements on a 5-point Likert scale, where 5 means *Very much like me* and 1 means *Not at all like me*. For items 1, 3, 5 and 6, a reversed scale should be applied. To calculate the overall score, sum the points from all responses and divide the total by 8. The maximum score on the Grit-S is 5 (indicating a high level of grit), and the minimum is 1 (indicating a complete lack of grit). The Cronbach’s Alpha reliability coefficient for the scale is 0.82.

Research procedure

The study was conducted in December 2022 using a diagnostic survey method. Students were asked to fill out a Google form, which included the Grit-S and a demographic questionnaire, during academic sessions. Participation in the study was anonymous and voluntary.

Empirical data were analyzed using Statistica 13.3. Due to the failure to meet the assumptions required for parametric tests, the non-parametric Mann-Whitney *U* test was used. A significance level of $p < 0.05$ was adopted to indicate statistically significant differences between groups.

Results

Figure 1 displays the distribution of results concerning students' grit levels as measured by the Grit-S Scale. The reliability of the tool was also assessed, revealing that the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient is 0.73, which is considered satisfactory.

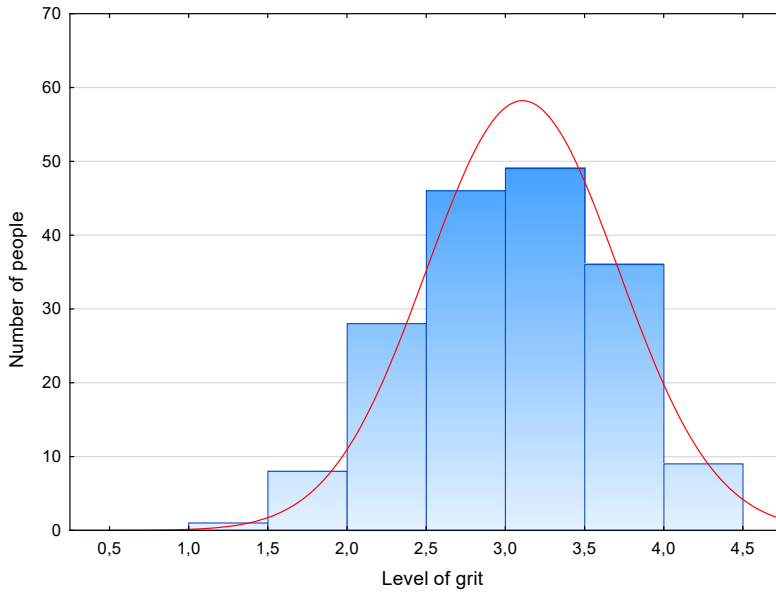


Figure 1. Distribution of students' grit levels as measured by the Grit-S Scale ($N = 177$)

Source: own research.

The data analysis reveals that 5.1% of students have a very low level of grit, which is similar to the percentage with a very high level of grit (5.1%). Scores in the range of 2 to 3 were obtained by 41.8% of respondents, while nearly half of the participants (48%) scored between 3 and 4 points. The range of scores is from 1.25 to 4.5 ($M = 3.1$, $SD = 0.61$). The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test indicates that the distribution is consistent with a normal distribution ($p > 0.05$).

To verify whether students' grit levels differ based on their employment status, the Mann-Whitney U test was conducted (tab. 2).

Table 2. Results of the Mann-Whitney *U* Test for differences in grit levels between employed and unemployed students

Items of the Short Grit Scale	Unemployed students (<i>N</i> = 102)			Employed students (<i>N</i> = 75)			<i>Z</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>Me</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>Me</i>	<i>SD</i>		
1. New ideas and projects sometimes distract me from previous ones.	2.32	2	0.95	2.65	3	1.02	-2.07	0.04
2. Setbacks don't discourage me.	2.75	3	1.15	2.73	3	1.07	0.15	<i>n.s.</i>
3. I have been obsessed with a certain idea or project for a short time but later lost interest.	2.38	2	1.16	2.55	2	1.15	-0.92	<i>n.s.</i>
4. I am a hard worker.	3.54	4	0.94	3.99	4	0.94	-3.16	0,002
5. I often set a goal but later choose to pursue a different one.	2.92	3	1.20	3.15	3	1.17	-1.36	<i>n.s.</i>
6. I have difficulty maintaining my focus on projects that take more than a few months to complete.	2.31	2	1.25	2.60	2	1.25	-1.56	<i>n.s.</i>
7. I finish whatever I begin.	3.53	4	1.02	3.77	4	1.05	-1.62	<i>n.s.</i>
8. I am diligent.	3.60	4	1.05	3.64	4	0.98	-0.10	<i>n.s.</i>
Overall score	23.36	23	5.29	25.08	25	5.84	-2.03	0.04

Note. *M* – mean, *Me* – median, *SD* – standard deviation, *n.s.* – not significant.
Source: own research.

Based on the analysis of the data presented in Table 2, it can be concluded that working students have a significantly higher overall score on the Grit Scale compared to non-working students ($p < 0.04$). Furthermore, students who combine work with studies rate their diligence significantly higher ($p < 0.002$) than those who are only studying, and they also significantly less frequently experience distraction by new projects and ideas, diverting their attention from those they had previously started ($p < 0.04$). Items 1, 3, 5, and 6 used a reversed scale (5 – *Not at all like me*; 1 – *Very much like me*), so a higher mean indicates a result reflecting a higher level of grit.

Conclusions

Research indicates that students who combine work with their studies exhibit higher levels of grit, as measured by the Grit-S Scale, compared to those who only study. Thus, the hypothesis that students' grit would vary by their

employment status has been positively validated. In attempting to explain this result, it can be noted that working while studying requires students to manage their time more effectively, as they must divide their attention between professional and academic responsibilities. This organization of life demands perseverance and self-discipline, which may contribute to a higher level of grit. As Chathurika Kannangara and colleagues (2018) show, grit correlates with self-control. Duckworth defines self-control as the “capacity to regulate attention, emotion, and behavior in the presence of temptation” (Duckworth, 2014, p. 1).

The results of our own research also indicate that students who combine work with studies rate their diligence significantly higher and experience distraction from new projects and ideas, diverting their attention from those they had previously started, significantly less often than non-working students. Perhaps combining studies with work serves as a form of self-control training, making it easier to develop perseverance in pursuing long-term goals. It is also likely that students who are professionally active do not engage in new projects that could distract them due to a lack of time and their focus on the responsibilities arising from balancing study with paid work. Professionally active students certainly often face multiple challenges simultaneously. This may contribute to the development of grit, which is defined as the ability to persist in pursuing a goal despite difficulties (Duckworth, 2007).

Students who work are likely to have a stronger motivation to achieve their goals, as they often face the necessity of self-financing their education and related expenses. This motivation can translate into greater determination in pursuing both professional and academic goals. Research indicates that grit correlates with greater effectiveness in achieving goals (Sheldon et al., 2015).

Moreover, students who balance work with study must be flexible and able to adapt to changing circumstances. This ability to adapt may enhance their perseverance, which in turn can lead to higher scores on the Grit-S Scale. Juggling multiple responsibilities can be a source of stress. However, individuals who effectively manage such burdens develop resilience in the face of adversity. These experiences likely influence young people's sense of self-efficacy, which, as research shows, correlates with grit (Usher et al., 2019).

In conclusion, the obtained results suggest that the daily challenges of balancing work and studies require significant commitment and perseverance from students, which may be associated with higher scores on the Grit-S Scale. However, the presented analyses do not permit conclusions regarding causality, making this topic worthy of further exploration. Future research should include more

detailed data regarding students' employment (e.g., industry, type of contract, and the number of hours per month devoted to paid work). Additionally, efforts should be made to ensure a more balanced gender distribution among respondents (as women predominated in this study). Future research projects could also examine the relationship between grit and variables such as locus of control, hope for success, and growth mindset.

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