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Customer

The Mediating effect of Language Enjoyment on the relationship between L2 Grit and Language Proficiency

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Abstract

This quantitative study examines Region XI, Philippines' college students' L2 grit and language proficiency as mediated by their language learning motivation. It employed a stratified random sampling technique to decide its participants while Google Forms collected its data. Validity and reliability tests and descriptive statistics were used to describe the constructs used to assess its tools. SmartPLS 4.0 standard algorithm bootstrapping was also employed to evaluate the hypothesized model for the mediation analysis. On its findings, the tools are proven valid and reliable. In L2 grit and language enjoyment, the participants demonstrated a high level. Meanwhile, a slightly more than adequate language proficiency was also revealed. In the mediation analysis, language enjoyment substantially mediated the relationship between L2 grit and language proficiency.

Keywords

Introduction

The decline in language proficiency among L2 learners raises significant concerns within the Philippine academic landscape. The latest results from the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) indicate a reduced language proficiency among Filipino students, who have consistently ranked in the bottom ten for two consecutive assessments (OECD, 2023). The gradual decline in college students' English proficiency was also evident in the findings of Casta and Cachuela (2017). Further, Manuel (2022) highlighted the students' inadequate performance on the National Achievement Test (NAT). The Philippines, recognized as a leading English-speaking nation, faced scrutiny regarding its reputation, leading the Department of Education to implement programs and interventions to address the issue (Mariñas, 2021). Should this performance continue to prosper, the advancement of our English proficiency is far from promised.

The study of second language acquisition has progressively emphasized the significance of non-cognitive elements like grit and enjoyment in achieving success in language learning. Anchored to Duckworth et al.'s (2016) Grit theory, language learners who exhibit a strong sense of perseverance can surmount the challenges posed by unavoidable setbacks. The concept of grit, characterized by perseverance and passion for long-term objectives, has substantially affected learners' motivation and success across different educational settings (Pawlak et al., 2022; Pan et al., 2022). In a similar vein, the enjoyment of foreign languages has surfaced as a significant positive emotion that boosts learners' engagement and performance in the process of language acquisition (Lee & Hsieh, 2020; Wang & Chen, 2023).

Prior investigations have shown that L2 grit and FLE play distinct roles in influencing language learning results. For example, studies indicate that elevated levels of L2 grit correlate with more significant effort and persistence in language learning activities, resulting in improved language proficiency (Chou et al., 2023; Liu et al., 2021). Similarly, FLE has been shown to enhance learners' motivation and communication readiness, essential for effective language acquisition (Lee & Hsieh, 2020; Zhao et al., 2023).

Numerous investigations have suggested the interrelation of these constructs. A longitudinal study indicated a simultaneous increase in L2 grit and FLE among EFL learners, implying that these traits develop together over time (Shirvan et al., 2021). A further investigation emphasized the intermediary function of learning enjoyment within the connection between teacher support and L2 grit, suggesting that enjoyment may bolster learners' cognitive resources and persistent effort (Hejazi & Sadoughi, 2022). Furthermore, a study on online L2 Chinese learning indicated that FLE serves as a beneficial mediator between grit and language achievement, reinforcing the possible mediating function of FLE (Zhao et al., 2023).

However, even with these insights, a considerable gap persists in comprehending the role of FLE in mediating the connection between L2 grit and language proficiency across various learning contexts and populations. Many current studies have concentrated on particular language learning contexts or have yet to investigate the mediating influence of FLE. For example, investigations have examined the direct impacts of L2 grit and FLE on language performance (Chou et al., 2023; Liu et al., 2021), yet there is a scarcity of research focusing on the indirect pathways that connect these constructs and their influence on language proficiency. In recent years, the increasing focus on examining L2 grit and language proficiency has significantly contributed to fostering a positive learning experience for L2 learners. Innovative studies have demonstrated that non-cognitive skills such as L2 grit can support L2 learners in reaching their long-term objectives (Duckworth et al., 2007). Locally, few studies address the

mediating effect of language enjoyment on the relationship between L2 grit and language proficiency. Therefore, this study seeks to address this gap by examining the role of FLE in mediating its relationship to enhance our comprehension of the intricate interactions between these constructs and their influence on language learning success.

As one of the first to explore the mediating effect of language enjoyment on college students' L2 grit and language proficiency, this paper adds value to both the theoretical and practical aspects of higher education. Through a theoretical perspective, this study aims to explore the mediating effect of the specified

variables, offering valuable insights into the principles of positive psychology and potentially guiding the creation of a more effective and suitable curriculum. This study will analyze how language enjoyment, directly and indirectly, influences the connection between L2 grit and language proficiency. This study also aims to identify the predictive factors of non-cognitive skills while offering practical implications for educators to enhance pedagogical practices in the Philippine education system. It will serve as a resource for policymakers to develop suitable interventions and support systems for Filipino students and assist students in addressing their current challenges in L2 learning.

Materials and Methods

This study aimed to assess the mediating effect of language enjoyment on the relationship between L2 grit and language proficiency of college students in Region XI. A quantitative research design was employed, explicitly utilizing a non-experimental correlational approach. As Creswell and Creswell (2023) outlined, the quantitative research approach involves systematically gathering, analyzing, and interpreting data and information, usually acquired through surveys or experimental studies. Moreover, a structured approach for assessing objective hypotheses by experimentally investigating the relationships among variables is referred to as quantitative study design. This approach employed numerical data to quantify the variables under investigation to achieve measurable outcomes. The collected data can subsequently undergo statistical and numerical analysis.

Furthermore, quantitative research design denotes a systematic approach for evaluating objective hypotheses through the experimental analysis of the relationships between variables. This approach quantifies the factors examined through numerical data, resulting in measurable outcomes. After gathering data, one can conduct statistical and numerical analysis.

The instruments employed to assess the variables were sourced from Kaushanskaya et al. (2020) for language proficiency, Teimouri et

al. (2022) for L2 Grit, and Dewaele et al. (2018) for language learning enjoyment. The data was gathered through online Google Forms surveys targeting tertiary students enrolled in various programs at multiple universities and colleges in Region XI, Philippines. The questionnaires utilized a 5-point Likert scale format. The study examined the diverse population of college students in Region XI, Philippines. Hence, the stratified random selection method was utilized to select the participants. This approach employs categorization and random selection to derive groups from a singular population. It initially categorizes the target population and draws fundamental random samples from each category. Then, the selected samples from various strata were combined to form a unified sample (Iliyasu & Etikan, 2021), and this approach best fits the aim of the study.

A priori power analysis was conducted with G*Power.15 Faul et al. (2007) demonstrated that in order to examine the hypothesis concerning the influence of L2 motivation and enjoyment in language learning on the mediation of the relationship between L2 grit and language proficiency in college students, a sample size of N = 129 is required to attain 80% power for identifying a medium effect ($f2 = 0.15$) at a significance level of =.05. In the model featuring two predictors, the critical t value was determined to be 1.9879342. The calculated noncentral parameter amounted to 3.6537652, with 86 degrees of freedom (Df).

This study thoroughly examines the intricate relationships among language learning enjoyment, L2 motivation, L2 grit, and language proficiency within the college community. Our substantial sample size of N = 408, surpassing the established criterion. The instruments were subjected to rigorous validation and pilot testing by professionals.

The instrument's validity and reliability were assessed through Cronbach's alpha. In contrast, the convergent validity was evaluated using Average Variance Extracted (AVE). Additionally, the assessment of college students' L2 Grit, Language Proficiency, Language Learning Enjoyment, and L2 Motivation was conducted utilizing the Jamovi program version 2.0, incorporating descriptive statistics like the mean and standard deviation. The hypothesized mediation model was assessed using SmarPLS 4.0 software, which employed the bootstrapping standardized algorithm. This analysis considered the model's direct, indirect, and total effects and the effect sizes for each path.

Results

Table 1.1: Reliability and Validity of the Measurement Model

	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
L2 Grit	0.915	0.917	0.932	0.664
Language Enjoyment	0.954	0.957	0.961	0.732
Language Proficiency	0.851	0.867	0.909	0.768

According to Hair et al. (2019), assessing the reliability and validity of constructs sets priority before proceeding to the data analysis. Internal loading, Cronbach alpha, and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) are crucial metrics in determining the constructs' internal consistency, reliability, and convergent validity. The construct's internal loading ranges from 0.725 to 0.896, exceeding the 0.708 thresholds implicated by Hair et al. (2019). This result suggests that more than 50% of the variance of the indicator was explained.

Cronbach's alpha is a commonly used statistic for measuring internal consistency, which evaluates how well the items in the variables above measure the same underlying concept. Hair et al. (2019) recommend a minimum threshold of 0.7 for exploratory research and 0.8 for confirmatory research to suggest good reliability. L2 Grit has a Cronbach's alpha of 0.915, indicating excellent reliability. This result suggests that the items used to measure L2 Grit are highly correlated and consistently reflect the underlying construct. Language Enjoyment shows an alpha of 0.954, which is exceptionally high, demonstrating solid reliability. The items consistently capture the construct of enjoyment in language learning. Language Proficiency has an alpha of 0.851, indicating good reliability, with all items providing a consistent measure of proficiency. These alpha values across the constructs suggest that the items used for measurement demonstrate a high degree of internal consistency, making them suitable for research purposes.

The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) metric measures the amount of variance captured by a construct compared to the variance due to measurement error. According to Hair et al. (2019), an AVE of 0.5 or higher indicates that the construct explains more than half of the variance in the indicators, which supports convergent validity. L2 Grit has an AVE of 0.664, which exceeds the 0.5 threshold, indicating that the construct has adequate validity in measuring its variance. Language Enjoyment has an AVE of 0.732, which is notably high, suggesting strong convergent validity for this construct. Language Proficiency shows an AVE of 0.768, the highest among the constructs, indicating excellent convergent validity. This

high AVE value implies that the construct explains a substantial portion of the variance in its indicators.

Based on the metrics provided and using Hair et al. (2019) as a reference, L2 Grit, Language Enjoyment, and Language Proficiency constructs demonstrate robust reliability and validity. The Cronbach's alpha values are well above the recommended thresholds, signifying internal solid consistency. The composite reliability scores confirm this, with values consistently exceeding the 0.7 guideline. Finally, the AVE values validate the convergent validity of the constructs, as each exceeds the 0.5 minimum standard.

Table 2. Status of College Students' L2 Grit, Language Enjoyment, L2 Motivation, and Language Proficiency

	N	Mean	Title 3	Description
L2 Grit	836	3.65	0.799	High
Language Enjoyment	836	4.04	0.874	High
Language proficiency	836	6.97	1.746	Slightly more than adequate

Table 2 shows the mean and statistical measures analyzed from the 836 participants. L2 Grit, referring to perseverance and passion in L2 learning, has a high mean of 3.65. This result suggests that, on average, college students demonstrate considerable persistence and dedication to language learning goals, consistent with literature emphasizing the role of grit in academic success. Teimouri et al. (2020) confirm that grit is a significant predictor of language achievement, particularly in students who face challenges but persist through difficulties. Their findings support the table's description of L2 Grit as "high." Duckworth et al. (2007) also validate the importance of grit, suggesting that students who maintain perseverance and passion in their learning are likelier to succeed, even in the face of obstacles. However, Khajavy et al. (2020) provide a counterpoint, suggesting that more than grit is needed to achieve language proficiency. They argue that with the proper external support or motivation, high grit leads to improved performance, which slightly challenges the universal validity of high grit leading to success.

Language Enjoyment refers to the pleasure learners derive from engaging in language learning activities. The table reports a high level of enjoyment among college students, with a mean of 4.04, suggesting that most students find learning a second language enjoyable. Dewaele et al. (2018) highlight the role of enjoyment in lowering foreign language anxiety, which directly contributes to better performance and greater motivation. This finding supports the claim that high enjoyment is crucial for successful language learning, as indicated in the table. Gao (2023) reinforces this claim by identifying a strong positive correlation between enjoyment and language achievement, particularly in learners who experience less stress during language tasks. However, Pan (2022) offers a critique, arguing that while enjoyment is essential, it may not be enough to drive significant improvements in proficiency. Enjoyment might decrease when faced with challenging tasks or if the learner needs more proper guidance, thus limiting its long-term impact.

The mean score of 6.97 for Language Proficiency suggests that college students perceive their language abilities as slightly above "adequate." However, the relatively high SD of 1.746 points to significant variability, with some students demonstrating strong proficiency and others falling below this level. This range is consistent with Botezatu et al. (2021), who identified similar patterns of variability in proficiency among second language learners, emphasizing the role of factors such as classroom environment and personal motivation in determining proficiency outcomes. Inada (2022) further validates these findings, noting that students who experience higher levels of enjoyment and motivation tend to show better proficiency, though the progression is not uniform across all learners. Meanwhile, Hejazi

and Sadoughi (2022) argue that while grit and enjoyment positively correlate with proficiency, they caution against over-reliance on these factors. Learners with high grit and enjoyment may still face significant hurdles in proficiency if they do not have access to quality teaching or sufficient language practice.
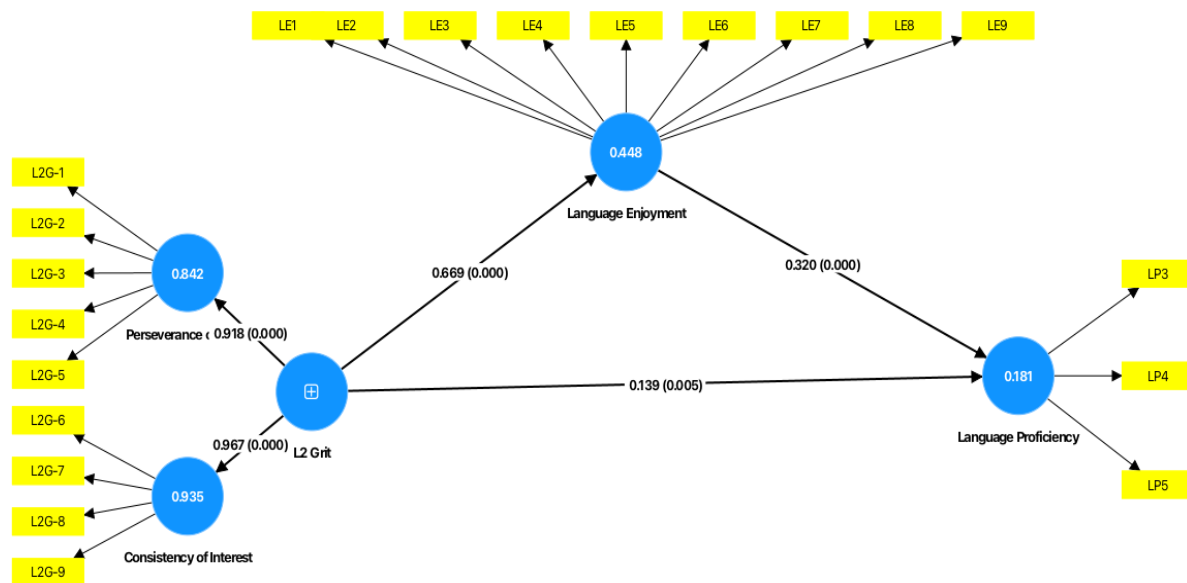

Figure 1. Mediator's Impact – Results using SmartPLS 4.0

The intricate mediation process is explained by incorporating a third variable, a mediator, which helps establish the relationship between the predictor and criterion variables (Hayes et al., 2011). In this research, Language Enjoyment functioned as a mediator to better understand the complex association between L2 Grit and the language proficiency of college students. The mediation model was rigorously tested using the widely recognized bootstrapping method in SmartPLS 4.0. The data in Table 3 shows a strong and significant relationship between L2 Grit and Language Enjoyment (β = 0.669, T = 25.303 p < 0.001). This finding demonstrates that higher levels of L2 Grit are associated with greater language enjoyment among college students. This finding aligns with studies such as those by Pawlak et al. (2022), highlighting that students with more extraordinary perseverance and passion (characteristics of L2 Grit) tend to derive more enjoyment from language learning activities. Similarly, Shirvan et al. (2021) confirmed that L2 Grit and Foreign Language Enjoyment (FLE) growth is positively correlated. This claim supports the idea that students who maintain a sustained interest and effort in their language studies are more likely to enjoy the learning process.

Table 3 also reveals that Language Enjoyment significantly predicts Language Proficiency (β = 0.320, T = 6.707, p < 0.001). This finding suggests that college students who enjoy their language learning experiences tend to perform better in proficiency. Inada (2022) showed that students who enjoy language learning experience improvements in their English proficiency. Additionally, Wang et al. (2023) found that motivation mediates the relationship between language enjoyment and proficiency, reinforcing the idea that enjoyment fuels engagement and proficiency.

Discussion

The direct effect of L2 Grit on Language Proficiency is modest but significant ($\beta = 0.139$, $T = 2.837$, $p = 0.005$), indicating that perseverance and passion (aspects of grit) contribute to proficiency, though to a lesser extent than enjoyment does. This result parallels Sicam and Lucas (2016), who characterize Filipinos as passionate learners of English who still experience challenges in learning the language. It also elaborates on the varying perceptions of the participants, as most respondents came from universities, which affected the results of the study. Meanwhile, studies by Hao (2023) and Mikami (2023) found a positive relationship between perseverance in language learning and proficiency levels, as indicated in the study.

However, table 3 shows a significant indirect effect of L2 Grit on Language Proficiency through Language Enjoyment (coefficient = 0.214, $p < 0.001$). This finding indicates that L2 Grit indirectly influences proficiency by increasing the student's enjoyment of language learning, which enhances their proficiency. This finding corroborates Castro et al.'s (2023) claim that Filipino students find value in exposing themselves to the English language. It elaborates on their enjoyment of situating themselves in various contexts to improve their English proficiency. Further, Shirvan and Alamer (2022), who presented a model connecting psychological needs, L2 Grit, and language achievement, emphasized that L2 Grit impacts proficiency mainly through emotional factors like enjoyment. They demonstrated that persistence in learning (a key component of grit) is linked to language success and that positive emotions, such as enjoyment, mediate this relationship. The total effect of L2 Grit on Language Proficiency, which combines both direct and indirect effects, is 0.353 ($p < 0.001$), suggesting that L2 Grit has a notable impact on proficiency, but much of this effect is mediated by enjoyment. Pan (2022) applied the control-value theory to explain the interaction between L2 Grit and Foreign Language Enjoyment (FLE). This theory suggests that enjoyment derived from feeling in control of learning activities can enhance grit, leading to better language proficiency outcomes, hence supporting the study's claim. Lee (2020) further reinforced this mediation effect, showing that both perseverance (L2 Grit) and enjoyment in classroom settings increase the willingness to communicate, which, in turn, positively influences language proficiency. This finding demonstrates the indirect effect of grit through enjoyment on proficiency.

Table 3. L2 Grit, Language Proficiency, L2 Motivation, and Language Enjoyment Variables' Direct Effects, Indirect Effects, and

Total Effects						
	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (|O/STDEV|)	P values	BI (2.50%; 97.50%)
L2 Grit -> Language Enjoyment	0.669	0.669	0.026	25.303	0	(0.614; 0.720)
L2 Grit -> Language Proficiency	0.139	0.138	0.049	2.837	0.005	(0.042; 0.233)
Language Enjoyment -> Language Proficiency	0.320	0.321	0.048	6.707	0	(0.228; 0.412)
Indirect effects						
L2 Grit -> Language Proficiency	0.214	0.215	0.032	6.602	0	(0.152; 0.278)
Total effects						
L2 Grit -> Language Proficiency	0.353	0.353	0.038	9.378	0	(0.278; 0.424)
R2 = 0.181 Adjusted R2 = 0.179						

Conclusion

The study underscores the significant relationship between the variables, validating the three hypotheses. It underscores the full mediating power of language enjoyment in increasing the impact of L2 grit on college students' language proficiency, hence validating the hypothesized mediation model. Its substantive findings in the direct effect of L2 grit on language proficiency expand the understanding that, though contributing, it is more effective when accompanied by language learning enjoyment. This insight highlights the significance of fostering an enjoyable classroom climate by integrating engaging language games, creative output-making activities, and exposure to diverse English learning contexts, complementing the established perseverance of students in learning the language. Teachers' training on implementing positive reinforcements will also create a positive classroom culture where students' L2 grit and language enjoyment are enhanced. The integration of positive psychology in the classroom setting promises a noteworthy point in improving the English language teaching conditions in the Philippines suited to the needs and interests of its learners.

Despite the commendable insights, the study leaves a fault that needs to be considered for further study. The participants' demographic profile and language maturity may imply temporal instability of the constructs; hence, they should be given attention for future endeavors. We recommend a longitudinal study for the constructs to solidify the variability of the study. A qualitative approach to explain the facets contributing to the study's results is also recommended to understand better the diverse conditions of the relationship of variables studied. Focusing on younger students' level of L2 grit, language enjoyment, and language proficiency can also better provide a holistic understanding of the dynamic interplay of positive psychology in improving the students' proficiency in the English language.

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