

Self-Compassion As A Mediator Of Grit And Academic Anxiety

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ABSTRACT

Academic anxiety is a widespread issue for students. While previous studies have explored how external factors like schools can help, less is known about how personal qualities might influence this anxiety. This research examines how self-compassion may mediate the impact of grit on academic anxiety among college students from religious institutions. To assess grit, self-compassion, and academic anxiety, three established questionnaires were used: the Grit Scale (GS), the Self-Compassion Scale (SCS), and the Academic Anxiety Scale (AAS). Online surveys were completed by 306 selected students from three faith-based colleges. While self-compassion did not directly influence how grit ($\beta = -0.018$; $p = 0.570$) affected academic anxiety, it did partially mediate the relationship between grit and anxiety ($\beta = -0.097$; $p = 0.050$). This suggests that having self-compassion can indirectly help reduce anxiety, especially when combined with grit. Overall, the study found that personal qualities such as grit and self-compassion can significantly and directly lower academic anxiety. This study investigates the role of self-compassion in mediating the relationship between grit and academic anxiety, revealing that self-compassion plays a crucial role in influencing these other factors and indirectly reducing academic anxiety. This study offers valuable insights for educational psychologists, students, teachers, psychologists, and future researchers.

Keywords: Grit, Self-Compassion, and Academic Anxiety

INTRODUCTION

Academic anxiety is a significant issue among university students in different countries. In India, 1.8% of academically anxious students committed suicide due to failing exams (Reddy et al., 2018). A study in the Philippines found a strong correlation between academic struggles and anxiety (Alibudbud, 2021). As students face a heavier academic burden, the learning process becomes more challenging (Choudhury & Sharma, 2020). Factors contributing to academic anxiety include lack of preparation, unsatisfactory grades, fear of failure, family pressure, professor's behavior, time management issues, and study skills (Duraku, 2017). Consequently, students experience academic anxiety as a significant problem they face.

The current study aims to address a significant gap in the existing literature on academic anxiety. While previous research has established a negative relationship between grit (Duckworth & Seligman, 2005; Celik & Saricam, 2016; Muenks et al., 2017; Xiao et al., 2021) and self-compassion on academic anxiety. (O'Driscoll & McAleese, 2022), the extent to which

self-compassion mediates the relationship between these variables remains unexplored. Understanding the mediating role of self-compassion between grit and academic anxiety is important as it reveals which factors affect academic performance. Previous research has demonstrated its influence in areas such as perfectionism, life satisfaction, and personal growth (Sahin, 2021; Umandap & Teh, 2020). While self-compassion has been shown to correlate positively with various positive psychology variables (Ge et al., 2019; Booker & Dunsmore, 2019; Demirci et al., 2019; Shin, 2019; Wayment et al., 2016; Wilson et al., 2020) its mediating role in the context of academic anxiety remains unexplored. This study aims to systematically examine the interconnectedness of grit and academic anxiety, with self-compassion as a key mediator.

This study aimed to determine if self-compassion can act as a mediator between undergraduate students' grit and academic anxiety. This study intended to answer the following research question, “Does self-compassion mediate the relationship between grit and academic anxiety?”. The goal of this study is to recognize if there is enough evidence to reject the null hypothesis that self-compassion does not mediate the relationship between grit and academic anxiety. Structural equation modeling (SEM) was used to investigate the mediating role of self-compassion in the relationships between cognitive flexibility, grit, and academic anxiety. The study used purposive sampling to select three comparable institutions and cluster random sampling to select 306 undergraduate students from these institutions. The survey used the Grit Scale, Self-Compassion Scale (SCS), and Academic Anxiety Scale (AAS) to gather data.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The study reviewed existing literature on grit, academic anxiety, and self-compassion, and presented the theoretical framework and key concepts.

Grit is a combination of passion and perseverance that drives individuals to overcome challenges and achieve long-term goals (Duckworth et al., 2007). Passion is a strong motivator that drives individuals to pursue long-term goals with persistence and commitment (Verner-Filion et al., 2020). While passion alone may not guarantee success, it's a crucial component of grit, which also requires perseverance. Perseverance is the ability to persist in pursuing long-term goals despite challenges (Disabato et al., 2019). Studies have shown that perseverance is a strong predictor of academic success, even when passion is low (Wolters & Hussain, 2015; Cr  d   et al., 2017).

Academic anxiety can negatively impact academic performance (Shakir, 2014). While moderate levels of anxiety can motivate students, high levels can impair their learning ability and lead to lower grades (Nadeem et al., 2012). Studies have shown that females and private school students tend to experience higher levels of academic anxiety than males and public-school students, respectively (Nadeem et al., 2012; Mahajan, 2015).

Self-compassion, comprising self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness, is a vital component of positive adjustment (Neff, 2003). Research has consistently linked self-compassion to lower levels of anxiety, depression, and negative emotions (Neff et al., 2007; Egan, 2022; Macbeth & Gumley, 2012). Moreover, it can enhance resilience, emotional well-being, and performance in various domains (Breines & Chen, 2012; Neff & Germer, 2013). While gender differences exist, self-compassion is generally associated with positive outcomes for both men and women (Yarnell et al., 2019). Ultimately, self-compassion

can help individuals cope with challenges, improve their mental health, and succeed academically and professionally (Long & Neff, 2018; Marshall et al., 2015).

Grit and academic anxiety have an inverse relationship (Musumari et al., 2018; Hoffert, 2017; Celik & Sariçam, 2016). Studies have shown that higher levels of grit are associated with lower levels of academic anxiety (Tuckwiller & Dardick, 2018; Özhan & Boyacı, 2018). Additionally, grit can positively influence foreign language performance by increasing enjoyment and reducing anxiety (Liu & Wang, 2021). While both passion and perseverance are components of grit, their impact on academic anxiety may differ between genders (Xiao et al., 2021). For males, perseverance may be more important in reducing anxiety, while passion may have a stronger effect for females. In the context of student-athletes, anxiety can negatively affect grit and performance (Criticos et al., 2020). Overall, fostering grit can be beneficial for reducing academic anxiety and improving academic performance.

Self-compassion is a powerful tool for reducing academic anxiety (Van Dam et al., 2011; O'Driscoll & McAleese, 2022; Hajiazizi & Ho, 2017; Lee & Lee, 2022). Studies have shown that individuals with higher levels of self-compassion tend to experience lower levels of academic anxiety and depression (Neff, Hsieh, et al., 2007; Cheraghian et al., 2016; Egan et al., 2022). Interventions focused on self-compassion can be effective in managing academic anxiety (McEwan et al., 2018; Salehzadeh Einabad et al., 2017). These interventions often involve compassionate imagery and breathing exercises, which can help individuals cope with anxiety and improve their overall well-being.

This study is grounded in Duckworth's Theory of Grit (2007), which emphasizes the importance of perseverance and passion for achieving long-term goals. It also draws on Neff's Three Elements of Self-Compassion (2003), which include self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness. Finally, the study anchors on Cassady's theory of Academic Anxiety (Cassady et al., 2019), which posits that academic anxiety is a form of general anxiety that can be either facilitative or debilitating depending on its severity and an individual's coping mechanisms.

This literature review investigates the relationship between grit, academic anxiety, and self-compassion. Grit, a combination of passion and perseverance, is crucial for achieving long-term goals (Duckworth et al., 2007). Academic anxiety, while moderate levels can be motivating, can negatively impact performance when excessive (Shakir, 2014). Self-compassion, comprising self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness, is a vital tool for reducing anxiety and enhancing well-being (Neff, 2003; Neff et al., 2007; Egan, 2022). Although grit and self-compassion both reduce academic anxiety, studies regarding the mediation of the three variables are lacking.

METHODS

The following are the research methods used in this study: the research design, participant selection, data collection, analysis, and ethical considerations. Structural equation modeling (SEM) was used to analyze the mediating relationships between variables in this study (Suhr, 2006). The study focused on undergraduate students from faith-based tertiary institutions in the Philippines. Purposive sampling was used to select three comparable

institutions, and cluster random sampling was used to select participants from these institutions (Simkus, 2022; Thomas, 2022).

For the collection of data, structured questionnaires on the variables grit, self-compassion, and academic anxiety were used. The three scales were the Grit Scale, Self-compassion Scale (SCS), and Academic Anxiety Scale (AAS). To test the reliability of the questionnaires, a pilot study was conducted. The Grit Scale, a 12-item questionnaire, measured participants' interests and perseverance in achieving long-term goals (A. L. Duckworth et al., 2007). Items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 ("Not like me at all") to 5 ("Very much like me"). The scale's reliability was confirmed through a pilot study, demonstrating a Cronbach's alpha of .78, indicating its validity and reliability for measuring overall grit. The Self-Compassion Scale (SCS) is a 26-item questionnaire that measures self-compassion (Neff, 2003). Responses are rated on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 ("Almost Never") to 5 ("Almost Always"). The scale's reliability was confirmed in a pilot study, demonstrating a Cronbach's alpha of .89, indicating its psychometric soundness and validity for measuring self-compassion. The Academic Anxiety Scale (AAS) is an 11-item questionnaire that measures academic anxiety in university students (Cassady et al., 2019). Responses are rated on a 4-point Likert scale from 1 ("Not at all typical of me") to 4 ("Very typical of me"). The scale's reliability was confirmed in a pilot study, demonstrating a Cronbach's alpha of .89, indicating its psychometric soundness and validity for measuring academic anxiety. The instruments mentioned above were validated by experts (statisticians and psychometricians) at the Adventist University of the Philippines.

The study obtained ethical approval, distributed questionnaires, and collected completed responses within one month. A statistician analyzed the data using Jamovi and Smart PLS Software. Mediation analysis assessed the mediating role of self-compassion.

The study ensured informed consent, confidentiality, and anonymity. Personal information was kept confidential, and anonymity was maintained by excluding identifying details.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The following section investigates the mediating influence of self-compassion on the relationship between grit and academic anxiety with supporting research.

Table 1 shows the participants' overall levels of grit, self-compassion, and academic anxiety. The results show that the participants' overall grit level is moderate ($M = 3.14$; $SD = 0.47$), indicating that they have a moderate amount of perseverance and passion for achieving their long-term goals. They are likely to continue working towards their goals and not give up easily when faced with challenges (Saville et al., 2018; Stoeber et al., 2011). The study found that the participants' overall level of self-compassion was moderate ($M=3.12$; $SD=.44$). This indicates that they generally treated themselves with kindness and understanding when faced with difficult situations or personal shortcomings (Neff, 2003). The results show that the participants' overall level of academic anxiety is moderate ($M=2.89$; $SD=.81$). This indicates that they may feel worried, anxious, or stressed about their academic tasks, such as studying, taking quizzes or exams, or completing requirements (C. Zhang et al., 2022). Overall, it is revealed that the participants experience moderate levels of grit, self-compassion, and academic anxiety.

Table 1. Participants’ Level of Grit, Self-Compassion, and Academic Anxiety

Variable	Mean	SD	Verbal Interpretation
Grit	3.14	0.47	Moderate
Self-Compassion	3.12	0.44	Moderate
Academic Anxiety	2.89	0.81	Moderate

N = 306 1-1.80 – Very Low 1.81-2.60 –Low 2.61-3.40 – Moderate 3.41-4.20 –High 4.21-5.00 – Very High.

Source: Calculated by Rugianni Skye E. Budayao, Iramhel N. Talon, and Sheryll Ann M. Castillo

Figure 1 reveals the mediation effects of self-compassion in the influence of grit on academic anxiety.

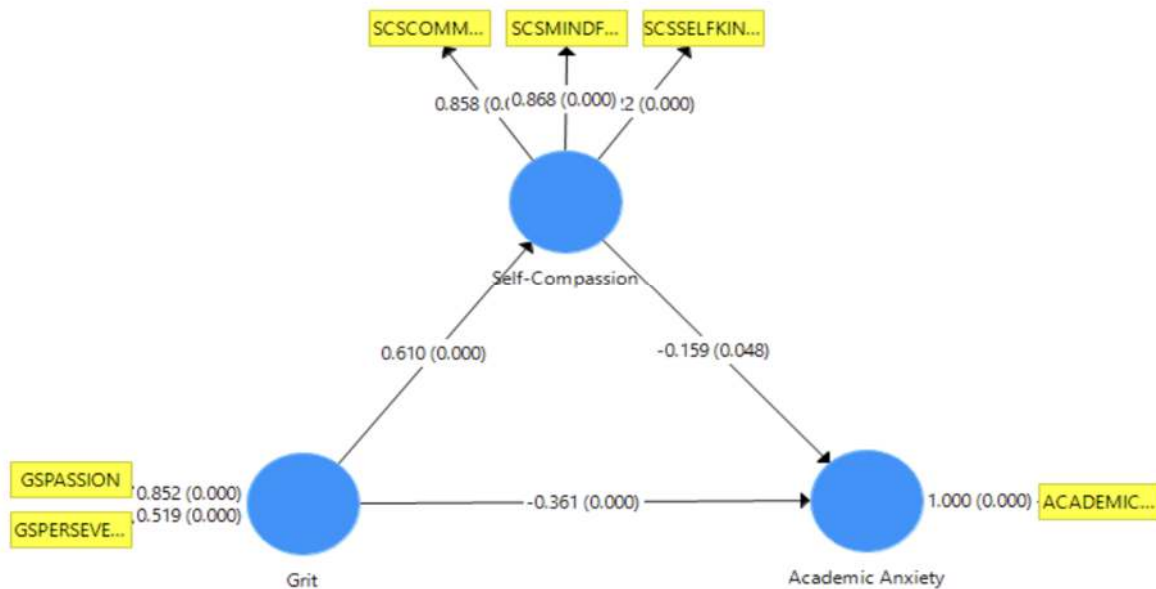


Figure 1. Mediation Effects of Self-Compassion in the Influence of Grit on Academic Anxiety

Table 2. Mediation Effects of Self-compassion in the Influence of Grit on Academic Anxiety

Path Name	Total Effect			Direct Effect			Indirect Effect		
	β	T	p	β	T	p	β	T	p
GS->SC	-0.458	10.07	0.00	-0.361	5.13	0.00	-0.097	1.96	0.05
->AA		6			9	0		0	0

Legend: GS=Grit Scale, SC=Self-compassion, AA=Academic Anxiety

A mediation analysis was conducted to determine if self-compassion influences the relationship between grit and academic anxiety. The results (see Table 2) revealed a significant total effect, indicating that higher levels of grit are associated with lower levels of academic anxiety ($\beta = -0.458$, $t = 10.076$, $p = 0.000$). Even when controlling for self-compassion, a significant direct effect was found, confirming the negative association between grit and academic anxiety. Additionally, a significant indirect effect suggests that self-compassion partially mediates this relationship, suggesting that it can help explain the connection between grit and academic anxiety.

Although the results show that self-compassion mediates the relationship between grit and academic anxiety, the stronger direct effect of grit suggests that it has a significant and direct influence on academic anxiety, independent of self-compassion. The overall model confirms that self-compassion does play a mediating role in the relationship between grit and academic anxiety. Therefore, we can reject the null hypothesis, as self-compassion significantly partially mediates and influences the relationship between grit and academic anxiety.

CONCLUSION, IMPLICATION, SUGGESTION, AND LIMITATIONS

The study's findings confirm academic anxiety among undergraduate students, aligning with the theory of Academic Anxiety. Grit, characterized by perseverance and passion, helps students navigate academic challenges, supported by the theory of Grit. Self-compassion, evident in students' resilience, suggests that they are kind and forgiving towards themselves. The theory of Self-compassion supports the idea that self-compassion can be beneficial in managing academic anxieties. Therefore, individuals with higher grit and self-compassion can better cope with academic stress, reducing academic anxiety levels. The theory of Self-Compassion suggests that being kind to oneself may not directly influence academic anxiety. Instead, cultivating grit alone may be more effective in reducing academic anxiety among students.

The researchers have the following suggestions: to effectively reduce academic anxiety, students are recommended to focus on developing grit and self-compassion. By setting achievable goals and treating themselves with kindness, understanding, and forgiveness, students can enhance their grit and self-compassion. These skills can help students navigate academic challenges, adapt to new learning environments, and improve their overall well-being and academic performance.

This study faced limitations due to its focus on young adult undergraduate students (ages 18 – 24 years old) in faith-based tertiary schools in the Philippines. The sample size and online survey methods might have biased the demographic representation. The unbalanced population and data, particularly in the religion variable, could limit the generalizability of the findings.

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