

# 3rd Tarumanagara International Conference on the Applications of Social Sciences and Humanities (TICASH 2021)

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Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities  
Research Volume 655

Online  
24 - 25 August 2022

 Springer

Part 1 of 3



# The Role of Social Support and Grit Towards Academic Engagement among College Students

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## ABSTRACT

The majority of university graduates are not qualified for the competency and working standard under the specialty of their working fields. Therefore, in order to develop high quality of the human resources, a sufficient academic engagement, which depends on the abundance of resources, is highly needed. The purpose of this research is to examine the role of social support and grit towards academic engagement among college students. To maximize the resources, this research utilizes social support as the social resources and grit as the personal resources. Using the quantitative non-experimental method, this research distributed three questionnaires: The Utrecht Work Engagement Scale – 17 (UWES-17), Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS), and Grit-O to 385 college students. The result shows that both social support and grit positively affected the academic engagement among college students separately and simultaneously. Further analysis reveals that perseverance of effort, social support from family and lecturer played most important role for college students' academic engagement.

**Keywords:** *academic engagement, college students, grit, social support*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Facing the era of global competition, high-quality human resources who also have interdisciplinary competency are urgently needed. Mardiana [1] stated that, in 2017, there were only 37% of Indonesian formal education graduates who fulfilled the qualifications, competency, and working standard under their respective working fields. Thus, the government, in this case, the Ministry of Education and Culture, should be prepared to develop an education program that can generate work-ready human resources. This program is even more important, considering the data based on the Ministry of Research and Technology (in [2]), the absorption of the workforce from 2017 university graduates was very low, at 17.5%, which he predicted will not change in the next 5 years if nothing is done to change the status quo.

Moreover, the general director of science and technological resources stated university graduates contributed to unemployment, which then burdens the country (in [2]). Thus, an effective and relevant university programs must be built based on the national development system to generate better human resources, professional workforce who are more adaptable towards any situations, changes, and development in the work climate post-university. To synchronize the academic performance with the quality of knowledge, there needs to be an active participation, maximum effort, and a good relationship between the students and the university institution so that

they can be formed into high-quality, competent, and adaptable human resources. Not only the students' grades and presence in classes, but also their academic engagement is important.

Schaufeli et al. [3] stated that when students are engaged, they will show their vigorous, full of dedication, and absorption toward their studies. Furthermore, Bakker [4] stated academic engagement could lead to better academic performance, more productivity, and experience better health. However, optimum personal and social resources would be needed to enhance students' level of engagement. This study applied social support as social resources. College students (18-25 years old) still need social support and they naturally seek for other's support when facing a problem [13] [3]. Zimet [5] stated there are 3 dimensions of individuals' social lives: family, friends, and significant others such as lecturer. Previous research by Jayarathna [6] finds a significant role of social support in academic engagement among Sri Lanka first-year undergraduate.

To optimize the resources, this study utilized grit as personal resources as well. College students are more likely to have a higher grit than younger individuals, they already set more precise goals to achieve [7] [8]. Grit has been associated with academic success. Prior research conducted by Hodge et al. [9] found a significant role of grit in academic engagement among Australian college students. Thus, social support and grit are psychosocially and developmentally relevant resources for college students to increase their level of academic engagement.

However, limited research has been done to examine the role of social support and grit in academic engagement among Indonesian college students.

Schaufeli et al. [3] states that academic engagement is defined as a positive, fulfilling, academic-related state of mind and characterized by 3 dimensions of itself: (a) vigor, when students feel energetic and resilient; (b) dedication, when students show enthusiasm, pride and feel challenged; and (c) absorption, when student being fully concentrated and engrossed for doing their academic works. Bakker [4] suggests that an individual who is engaged has positive emotions, healthier, and becomes more productive that could lead to positive performance. Moreover, Bakker [4] states the main drivers of students' academic engagement are the abundance of resources. Hobfoll et al. [10] classify resources into personal resources, which is the resource that we have in ourselves and social resources, which is the resource that we sought from other individuals. Thus, academic engagement is very affected by social resources and personal resources.

Sarafino and Smith [11] stated social support is actions performed by other individuals or communities by offering help, care, comfort, and esteem so the receiver of social support feels loved, valued, and realize that they are part of a community. Furthermore, the individual that received social support could have some perspectives and believe that there will be other support available if they are needed in the future. The perspective of available social support depends on experiences of getting the actual help and support from social support resources such as family, friends, and significant others [12] [5].

Social support is classified as social resources. When an individual has limited resource, social support is perceived meaningful because they can rely on other individual or community to offer the resources they lack, give some motivation or remove them from difficulties so they can optimize their resources [9] [13].

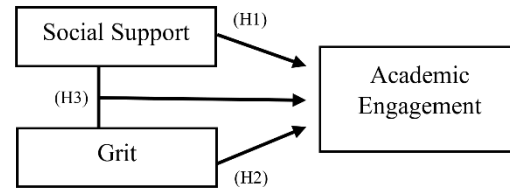
Grit has been defined as perseverance and passion for long term goals [5]. Duckworth et al. [5] emphasized, there are two dimensions of grit namely perseverance of effort which is working strenuously toward challenges, and consistency of interest which means maintaining ones' interest over the challenging future. College students with a high level of grit, feel challenged if they are facing difficulty and failure. Instead, they are consistently doing their job and striving toward their goals.

Based on the literature reviews, here are 3 hypotheses proposed in this study:

(H1): Social support contributes a significant role towards academic engagement among college students.

(H2): Grit contributes a significant role towards academic engagement among college students.

(H3): Social support and grit contribute a significant role towards academic engagement among college students.



**Figure 1** Research Hypotheses Model

**2. METHODS**

This study was using a quantitative non-experimental method. 385 college students participate in this study. The average age of the participants was 20 years old, 88 of them were male (22.1%) and 300 of them were female (77.9%). Participants completed a self-reported questionnaire through an online platform. Demographic characteristics of participants can be seen in (Table 1).

**Table 1** Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Gender	Male	22.1%
	Female	77.9%
Age	18-19 years old	28.8%
	20-21 years old	63.9%
	22-23 years old	7%
	24-25 years old	0.3%
Participant's Academic Year	2016	1.3%
	2017	34.5%
	2018	32.7%
	2019	23.1%
	2020	8.3%
Faculty of	Psychology	44.7%
	Medicine	12.2%
	Engineering	11.9%
	Economics and Business	11.2%
	Information Technology	7.8%
	Law	7%
	Art and Design	3.1%
	Communication	2.1%

Student Academic engagement was assessed using *The Utrecht Work Engagement Scale – 17* (UWES-17) for students [14]. UWES-17 for students, which measured 3 dimensions of academic engagement, namely vigor, dedication, and absorption. This scale has 17 items in the questionnaire and consists of 6 items of vigor, 5 items of dedication, and 6 items of absorption. One sample item in this scale is: “When I’m doing my work as a student, I feel bursting with energy”. The overall Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients of this scale is  $\alpha=0.953$  and the reliability coefficients of each dimension is: vigor ( $\alpha=0.886$ ), dedication ( $\alpha=0.818$ ), absorption ( $\alpha=0.904$ ). Besides, each item of the scale is valid, no items was discarded.

*Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support* (MSPSS) [5] was used to assess the participant's level of social support. MSPSS is a 12-item questionnaire that measures participants' perspectives of social support from family, friends, and significant others. This study focuses on social support from family, friends, and lecturer as significant others figure. One sample item for this scale is "I get the emotional help and support I need from my family". All items are valid and reliable, where the overall Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients of this scale are  $\alpha=0.814$  and the reliability coefficients of each social support source is: family ( $\alpha=0.905$ ), friends ( $\alpha=0.739$ ), and lecturer ( $\alpha=0.894$ ).

Grit was assessed by administering 12-item of the Grit-O scale [8]. This scale consists of 6 questions that measure participants' perseverance of effort and 6 questions measure the participants' consistency of interests. One sample item in this scale is "I have overcome setbacks to conquer an important challenge". Moreover, the overall Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients of this scale are 0.761 and the overall Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients of perseverance of effort ( $\alpha=0.784$ ) and consistency of interest ( $\alpha=0.750$ ). However, item number 11 has been deleted due to invalidity item results during the pilot-test.

To reveals the college students' level of academic engagement, this study conducted a descriptive analysis to compare hypothetical means to the level of empirical means. This study obtained hypothetical means by determining the median value of every measurements' Likert scale. If the variable scales' empirical means are lower than the hypothetical means, then it will be classified into a low category. Otherwise, if the variable scales' empirical means are higher than the hypothetical means, it will be classified into a high category.

This study used 6 points of likert scale for UWES-17 for students. The hypothetical means for this scale is 3.5. Based on the result, it showed that college students' level of academic engagement characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption is high (Table 2).

**Table 2** College Students' Level of Academic

Dimensions	Empirical Means	Interpretation
Vigor	3.996	High
Dedication	4.655	High
Absorption	3.968	High
Variable		
Academic Engagement	4.207	High

*Engagement Based on Means*

For the social support measurement, this study used MSPSS which has 7 points of likert scale. The hypothetical means is 4. The result showed, college students' level of social support from family, friends, and overall social support is high. However, it showed that the social support from lecturer classified in low category

(table 3). It indicates that college students' perspectives of social support from their lecturer are low.

**Table 3** College Students' Level of Social Support Based on Means

Dimensions	Empirical Means	Interpretation
Family	5.246	High
Friends	5.466	High
Lecturer	3.992	Low
Variable		
Social Support	4.901	High

The Grit-o has 5 points of likert scale. The hypothetical means is 3. The result showed, college students' level of perseverance of effort and overall grit is high. However, the empirical means of the consistency of interest is lower than the hypothetical means (Table 4). It indicates that college student's interest is still inconsistent.

**Table 4** College Students' Level of Grit-O Descriptive Based on Means

Dimensions	Empirical Means	Interpretation
Perseverance of Effort	3.571	High
Consistency of Interest	2.76	Low
Variable		
Grit	3.167	High

To test the hypotheses, simple regression and multiple regression were conducted. The data were normally distributed using a one-sample Kolmogorov Smirnov residual method ( $p=0.200 > 0.05$ ). According to the simple regression analysis for social support in academic engagement, the result shows standardized coefficient beta  $\beta = 0.461$  with  $R^2 = 0.212$ ,  $p = 0.00 < 0.05$  (Table 5). It indicates that there was a significant and positive role of social support towards academic engagement with a percentage of 21.2%. For grit and academic engagement, the result showed standardized coefficient beta  $\beta= 0.423$  with  $R^2 = 0.179$ ,  $p = 0.00 < 0.05$  (Table 5). It implies that there was a significant and positive role of grit towards academic engagement with a percentage of 17.9%.

**Table 5** Results of Simple Regression among Variables Partially

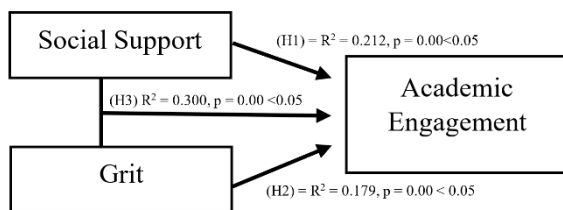
Variables	R <sup>2</sup>	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	Standardized Coefficient Beta (β)	Sig. (p)
Social Support	0.212	0.210	0.461	0.00
Grit	0.179	0.177	0.323	0.00

To discover the role of social support and grit in academic engagement simultaneously, multiple regression was conducted. The result shows  $R^2 = 0.300$ ,  $p = 0.00 < 0.05$  with standardized coefficient beta for social support  $\beta=0.366$  and for grit  $\beta=0.311$  (Table 6). It reveals that there is a significant and positive impact of social support and grit towards academic engagement among college students, and the contribution is 30%.

**Table 6** Result of Multiple Regression among Variables Simultaneously

Variables	R <sup>2</sup>	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	Standardized Coefficient Beta (β)	Sig. (p)
(Constant)				
Social Support, Grit	0.300	0.296	0.366 0.311	0.000

Based on the hypotheses testing results, the final model of the study is exhibited in Figure 2:



**Figure 2** Model of the Study

This study also completes a further analysis to discover the most important dimension role in academic engagement. Simple regression for each dimension of social support and grit was conducted. The results show that, partially, social support from family contributes 16% ( $p=0.00$ ); friends contribute 6.2% ( $p=0.00$ ); and lecturer contributes 13.9% ( $p=0.00$ ) in academic engagement among college students (Table 7).

**Table 7** Results of Simple Regression among Social Support Dimensions

Variables	R <sup>2</sup>	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	Standardized Coefficient Beta (β)	Sig. (p)
Family	0.162	0.160	0.403	0.00
Friends	0.062	0.060	0.249	0.00
Lecturer	0.139	0.137	0.373	0.00

Furthermore, the results show that partially, the perseverance of effort contributes 24.5 % and consistency of interest contributes 3.2% in academic engagement among college students (Table 8).

**Table 8** Result of Simple Regression among Grit Dimensions

Variables	R <sup>2</sup>	Adj. R <sup>2</sup>	Standardized Coefficient Beta (β)	Sig. (p)
Perseverance of Effort	0.245	0.243	0.495	0.00
Consistency of Interest	0.032	0.029	0.178	0.00

### 3. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study suggest there is a significant and positive impact of social support and grit towards academic engagement among college students. This finding supports the prior research by Jayarathna [6] that stated there is a significant role of social support in academic engagement among Sri Lanka college students. This finding is also consistent with Hodge et al. [9] who stated that there is a significant role of grit towards academic engagement among Australian college students. Social support will make an individual feel calm and individuals with a sufficient amount of social support will take a lot of advice on how to deal with difficulties [15] [16]. Moreover, individuals with a high level of grit will maximize their effort and consistent with the activity that they attend [8] [17]. With a higher level of grit and social support, college students will feel calmer, show persistence when doing their studies, and believe that other individuals will deliver their support whenever needed. Thus, college students are more focused, feel encouraged, and more engaged.

Other findings in this study show that partially, social support as social resources plays a greater role than grit as personal support. Social support contributes 21.2%. Sarafino [11] stated social support may influence individual through buffering hypothesis by protecting the individual against of negative effect and direct effect hypothesis that maintains social support benefit all the time, regardless there are any actual stressors or not. Through buffering and direct effect, college students with a high level of social support will experience positive energy and feel safe, they may believe that someone will help them and become more engaged.

Grit contributes 17.9% towards academic engagement. This finding contradicts with Bakker [4] that stated personal resources can be independent predictors of engagement because an individual who is engaged can control their social resources. However, this study also presents a further analysis that measures the role of each dimension of grit in academic engagement. The result shows that perseverance of effort, one of the dimensions of grit, contributed the biggest role among the other dimensions of personal and social resources examined in this study. This finding is consistent with the result of prior research conducted by Hodge et al. [9] who stated that

perseverance of effort was the largest contributor to academic engagement among college students.

Perseverance of effort contributes 24.5% and consistency of interest contributes 3.2%. Based on the descriptive variables' analysis, it shows that students' level of perseverance of effort is high and consistency of interest are low. This finding is consistent with the previous study conducted by Datu [17] who suggested that a nation with collectivist culture including Indonesia shows a lower consistency of interest because collectivist culture emphasizes highly value of relationship harmonies, thus individuals are more likely to change their interest to fulfil other individual's expectation and social norm.

Further analysis also discovers social support from family contributes the highest amount of percentage (16.2%), higher than social support from lecturers (13.9%) and friends (6.2%) in academic engagement. It implies that family and lecturer play an important figure to enhance students' academic engagement. However, based on the descriptive variables' analysis, college students' social support from lecturer is low. From that result, this study also investigates the items from MSPSS that participants' responses are below the hypothetical means. The empirical means for items number 2 and 10 are lower than the hypothetical means which indicates that students need to be heard and more comfort.

There are several limitations on this study. First, there is a significant imbalanced proportion of male and female participants. Future research will need better sampling techniques. Online self-report measures were used to measure students' level of social support, grit, and academic engagement which creates the possibility of bias responses. However, this study conducts anonymity to reduce the bias possibility so participants can make sure that their identities are safe. It is suggested to add another method (e.g qualitative procedures) to enrich a comprehensive information. Lastly, the prior research that integrates the role of social and personal resources in academic engagement is limited. Considering the importance of resources and academic engagement, future researchers are suggested to explore other resources to enhance the findings regarding to academic engagement.

Practically, based on the results of this study, we advise universities to design a system that allows the students, lecturers, and their families to be actively involved in the academic process. There needs to be an effective communication between all of the aforementioned individuals. Lecturers can give more appreciation and feedback inside the class so that the student feels more heard and more respected. The family can support the students emotionally by listening to the students' problems and giving them their long-term visual perspectives so that the students truly feel like they are being helped in making a decision.

This study also suggested that the students can increase their discipline, find a suitable way of studying, and improve their time management so that their perseverance of effort is formed. To increase their consistency of interest, students can explore on things they are interested in, become more focus on their chosen activities, and be

confident of any choices that they have made. Additionally, they can also talk with their friends, families, and significant others when they face a problem.

Sufficient social support and greater level of grit enable students to enhance their vigor, dedication, and absorption, so that a conducive, supportive, and comfortable academic environment is developed. With the support of high academic engagement, hopefully, the students can achieve better academic performance and can apply any knowledge that they have got. Thus, university graduates will show a higher level of work readiness, followed by the competency standards of their fields.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

According to the result of measurements, this study implies that there is a positive and significant role of social support and grit among college students, partially and simultaneously. Partially, social support contributes 21.2 % towards academic engagement among college students. It indicates that students who have an abundance of social support from family, friends, and lecturer, are more likely to have higher academic engagement. Moreover, Grit contributes 17.9% towards academic engagement among college students. Simultaneously, social support and grit contributes 30% towards academic engagement among college students.

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