

Development of an Intervention Program based on Grit and Psychological Well-Being to Alleviate Acculturative Stress among Foreign Students

San Juan, Felisse Marianne Z.

University of Santo Tomas, Manila, Philippines
ehfehmsanjuan@yahoo.com / +63 956 873 6099
Unit 4B Villa la Casitas, Barangay Poblacion Dos,
Santo Tomas, Batangas 4234, Philippines

Abstract

Studying in higher educational institutions can be particularly stressful, even more so if conducted in a foreign country away from familiar people and environment. The types of stress could be academic, financial or acculturative, and could develop into psychological illnesses if left unaddressed. This study aimed at proposing a psychological intervention program founded on grit and psychological well-being to alleviate acculturative stress among international students in the Philippines. Nineteen foreign students were selected as participants for the first phase of the study that confirmed that grit and psychological well-being have a strong positive correlation ($r=0.85$). Results further showed, however, that grit and psychological well-being both have a strong negative correlation with acculturative stress at $r=-0.90$ and

$r=-0.80$, respectively. Five participants from the original roster were randomly selected to join Phase 2 which involved a qualitative investigation of their experiences. The data were thematically analysed and generated the following themes: preparation, support, openness, and confidence. All these results were utilized in the development of an intervention program for foreign students.

Keywords: foreign students, acculturative stress, grit, psychological well-being, psychological intervention

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Introduction

Rapid increase in movements for a borderless global community has caused many

Philippine Higher Education Institutions to follow suit and set internationalization as one strategic priority. As an effect, we welcomed student mobility and the number of inbound foreign students in the country increased.

This influx did not come without challenges for the schools as much as for the foreign students such as those related to migration, racial discrimination, finances, climate, housing, language barrier, cultural adjustment, among others (Cheng, 2013).

International students who travel and visit other countries for education may suffer from psychological illnesses due to separation from their families, difficulties in coping up and adapting to a new culture (Sherman, 2010). Acculturative stress is one of the most common problems that occurs whenever a student experiences culture shock and separation anxiety. Berry et al (2016) defined it as a reduction in health status of individuals undergoing acculturation. This may affect the student's personal and academic life, and hinder his or her stay in the host country.

Previous researches claimed that among students, those who have higher grit (Guerrero et al, 2015) and psychological well-being (Salles et al, 2014) are more likely to persevere, finish school, and achieve their goals. Grit and psychological well-being were found to be correlated – measuring grit is one way to recognize those

who are at risk for low psychological well-being and identify those who can benefit from

additional support, and vice versa. Vela et al (2018) and Schwartz et al (2013), on the other hand, discussed the association of psychological grit and well-being to acculturation, respectively. They both mentioned that acculturation positively influences the two variables. Understandably, acculturative stress has a negative relationship with grit and well-being (Revollo, 2010).

In this study, the researcher focused on proposing an intervention program grounded on grit and psychological well-being to alleviate acculturative stress among foreign students. Levels of their grit and psychological well-being were first measured then computed for any correlation. The results, alongside the qualitative data gathered during an interview, were used as bases for the proposed intervention program.

Literature Review and Theoretical Concept

Roga et al (2015) attested that internationalization is becoming distinctly one of the primary needs of colleges in Europe, as well as around the world. True enough, McKenna and her colleagues (2017) stated that in 2012, there was a world-

wide increase of more than five million students who travelled abroad for education, doubling the number in 2005. In 2016, the most number came from Asia, which was 53% of the foreign students' population. Yang et al (2017) cited Adler (1975) in saying that there are several benefits of being international students such as cultural learning and personal growth through crosscultural adjustment. The Culture Learning Theory conceptualizes that cross-cultural travelers have to learn culturally-relevant social skills in order to survive in their host country or culture (Zhou et al, 2017). It postulates that the factors affecting adjustment are knowledge about a new culture, cultural distance between home culture and host culture, language or communication competence. Foreign students leave their comfort zone and adjust to new challenges physically, culturally, and linguistically based on the location (Smith and Khawaja, 2011). Unfortunately, when foreign students could not adapt to these differences, they experience isolation, depression, and culture or transition shock. Another psychological concern experienced by foreign students is accul-

turative stress, a process whereby they deal with and integrate both cultures in their everyday lives (Nailevna, 2017). Berry (2005) described it to happen when the individual is affected emotionally and physiologically due to his or her reaction to a new environment that has unfamiliar cultural values, customs, and expectations. International students are more exposed to stressors than their native counterparts. Some of these are financial concerns (increasing tuition fees and living expenses), emotional stressors, and academic demands (Kosheleva, Amarnor & Chernobilsky, 2015). They need to develop bicultural competence that is to maintain their own values as they adjust to the challenges of their host country. The need to master another language to keep up with the academic and life demands can also be taxing as it is time bound. The climate difference can also contribute to their overall level of stress. All these they experience, away from the usual familial support. Ray and Brown (2015) noted that grit is a soft skill necessary for academic success and is important to survive stressful situations. Salles, Cohen and Mueller

(2014) found it to be a predictor of later psychological well-being. In their study, they discovered that people who are persevering are also happy and with low chances of experiencing burnout. Meanwhile, those individuals who have low levels of well-being are at risk for burnout and are bound to leave their programs rather than complete them. This is why they must be identified as early as possible and given psychological support to ensure program success. Vela et al (2018), Schwartz et al (2013) and Revollo (2010) discussed the relationships among the variables. Grit is correlated with psychological well-being, and are both positively influenced by acculturation. It was said that if a student successfully acculturates, this has a positive effect on his or her grit and sense of well-being. On the other hand, if unsuccessful, the student may tend to question his or her capabilities and be unhappy. Grit and psychological well-being, moreover, have a negative correlation with acculturative stress. Thus, the purpose of this study is to propose an intervention program that could fight off stress brought about by accultura-

tion, using the existing relationships among grit, psychological well-being and acculturative stress. The levels of the foreign students' grit, psychological well-being and acculturative stress are also presented, alongside qualitative data on their experiences in the Philippines.

Statement of the Problem

This paper aimed to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the levels of the participants':
 - a. grit,
 - b. psychological well-being, and
 - c. acculturative stress?
2. What is the relationship between:
 - a. grit and psychological well-being?
 - b. grit and acculturative stress?
 - c. psychological well-being and acculturative stress?
3. What experiences do foreign students in the Philippines have in terms of living and studying in the country?
4. What design of intervention program can be proposed to alleviate acculturative stress among foreign students in the Philippines?

Methodology

In this study, the mixed methods approach was used. Phase 1 involved a descriptive correlational method to present the levels of grit, psychological well-being and acculturative stress of the participants. Phase 2 involved a qualitative method

of interviewing the participants on their experiences as foreign students in the Philippines.

The data were thematically analysed and utilized in the development of the proposed intervention program.

Participants

Nineteen foreign students who have completed at least a year of study in various universities in the National Capital Region and Region 4A of the Philippines participated in the study. They were chosen regardless of their gender, academic program, religion, and country of origin. The participants were contacted through schools' international students associations and internationalization offices. Ten male students and nine female students participated in the study (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Gender Distribution of Participants

8.5

9

9.5

10

10.5

Female Male

Gender Distribution

Of the participants, 58% are in Second Year College, 31% are in Third Year, and the remaining 11% in their terminal year level. Majority of them at 42% are

taking up premedicine, while engineering and business tied in second place at 26%. The rest are enrolled in hospitality courses.

Figure 2. Nationality Distribution of Participants

Meanwhile, the countries represented are India (32%), Nigeria (26%), Pakistan (11%), Nepal (11%), Korea (5%), Japan (5%), United States of America (5%), and Papua New Guinea (5%).

Instrumentations

For Phase 1, the 12-item Grit Scale, 42-item Ryff's Psychological Well-Being (RPWB)

Scale, and the 36-item Acculturative Stress Scale for International Students were used.

Grit Scale

Angela Duckworth developed the Grit Scale which has several variations:

the 12-item

and 17-item versions. Both versions are rated by assigning the following points: 5 =

Very much like me, 4 =

Mostly like me, 3 = Somewhat like me, 2 = Not much like me,

1 = Not like me at all;

or for the reverse scored: 1= Very much like me, 2= Mostly like

me, 3= Somewhat like me, 4= Mostly like me, and 5= Not like me at all.

In the shorter version, the following items are scored as 5 = Very much like me, 4 =

Mostly like me,

3 = Somewhat like me, 2 = Not much like me, 1 = Not like me at all.

3 = Somewhat like me, 2 = Not much like me, 1 = Not like me at all: 1, 4, 6, 9, and 12.

Meanwhile, the reverse scored items are 2, 3, 5, 7, 8, 10, and 11. The points should be added up and divided by 12. The maximum score on this scale is 5 (extremely gritty),

and the lowest is 1 (not at all gritty).

Ryff's Psychological Well-Being (RPWB) Scale

The Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Scale (Ryff & Keyes, 1995) was created by Dr.

Carol Ryff. It has forty-two items that have six dimensions namely self-acceptance,

environmental mastery, positive relations with others, personal growth, purpose in life,

and autonomy. Subscales with their respective item numbers are as follows: autonomy

0

2

4

6

8

1

Nationality Distribution

Nigerian Papua New Guinean

American

Pakistani Indian Nepalese

Korean Japanese

(1, 7, 13, 19, 25, 31, 37), environmental mastery (2, 8, 14, 20, 26, 32, 38), personal growth

(3, 9, 15, 21, 27, 33, 39), positive relation

with others (4, 10, 16, 22, 28, 34,

40), purpose

in life (5, 11, 17, 23, 29, 35, 41), and self-acceptance (6, 12, 18, 24, 30, 36, 42).

Participants

are asked to rate statements on a six-point scale, with 1 indicating strong disagreement

and 6 indicating strong agreement.

Half of the items in this test are

reversed scored: 3,

5, 10, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 23, 26, 27, 30, 31, 32, 34, 36, 39, and 41.

High scores

indicate well-being in that aspect in the participant's life. On the other

hand, low scores

indicate that the participant experiences difficulty in that area of his/her life. This scale

has a high internal consistency with a coefficient ranging from .86 to .95, and its

purpose is to check an individual's psychological well-being (whether it is high or low).

High scorers in Self-Acceptance are said to possess a positive attitude toward the self

and accepts one's positive and negative qualities. Low scorers are disappointed with

what has occurred in their past life.

As for the dimension Positive

Relations with Others,

high scorers have satisfying relationships with others, while low scorers are isolated

and frustrated in interpersonal relationships.

Autonomy high scorers

evaluate self by

personal standards; low scorers are concerned about the expectations and evaluations of others. High scores in Environmental Mastery mean a sense of competence in managing his or her environment. Low scorers in this dimension have difficulty managing everyday affairs. Purpose in Life high scorers have reasons for living while those who score low lack a sense of direction. Personal Growth high scores indicate a sense of continued development; low scores, on the other hand, mean a sense of personal stagnation (Ryff and Keyes, 1995).

Acculturative Stress Scale for International Students (ASSIS)
The ASSIS is a five-point Likert scale that was designed to assess the acculturative stress of international students such as guilt, perceived discrimination, perceived hatred, homesickness, fear, and stress due to change. This was developed by Sandhu and Asrabadi (1994) and can be rated as follows: 1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Not

Sure, 4=Agree, and 5=Strongly Agree.

Interview Guide
For Phase 2 Interview, an interview guide was designed to probe the experiences of foreign students in studying and liv-

ing in the Philippines. The ten-item guide was validated by three experts in Psychology and language before being used. The questions centered on the students' challenges when they arrived and strategies employed to alleviate the hardships. The roles of families, friends, schools, etc. were also dealt with.

Data Gathering Procedures

Letters of request were sent to schools and international students organizations to solicit participation. Once the volunteer participants were identified they were each requested to sign the consent form and oriented as to the design of the study. The researcher first conducted a pilot test before proceeding to the actual phases. Their demographics were taken note of for reporting. For Phase 1, three scales were administered namely, Grit Scale, Ryff's Psychological Well-Being (RPWB) Scale, and Acculturative Stress Scale for International Students. The scores were computed and interpreted, and later on statistically analysed for correlations. For Phase 2, the researcher randomly chose participants for the interview, taking into consideration their scores in the ASSIS. The

data collected during the interview were transcribed and initial ideas and thoughts were also noted down. After reading and re-reading, which important part to immerse in the data, the transcriptions were presented to the participants for their validation.

Data Analysis

Weighted means were used to assess the participants' levels of grit, psychological wellbeing and acculturative stress. To measure the correlations, Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient or Pearson R Correlation was used. This test determines the relationship between two continuous variables or at least one of the two variables. If proven to have significant relationship with the use of the probability value or significant value (strength of relationship), the Pearson r value will test the direction of the relationship, either direct or inverse relationship. The validated transcription of the interview was re-read to ensure the researcher's closeness with the data. It was then subjected to the coding phase. The codes were generated based on their relevance to the research question. The next stage involved combining similar codes into themes.

Any theme that did not have enough supporting data was discarded. Once the themes were established, the researcher underwent coding again to ensure that no code was missed. When the themes all fitted together, they were named and accompanied by detailed analysis. The final part involved choosing examples of lines from the transcription to illustrate the themes.

Results and Discussion

Phase 1

It was found that majority of the participants are Somewhat Gritty (47.37%), while 42.11% are Mostly Gritty and 10.53% are Seldom Gritty. Nobody fared as Extremely Gritty or Not at All Gritty. The average grit score of all the participants is 3.72 which could be interpreted as Somewhat Gritty-Mostly Gritty. Figure 3. Grit Scale Results

Meanwhile, the average Psychological Well-Being score of the participants is 4.02 out of 6 (Strong PWB). Of the PWB dimensions, participants scored highest in autonomy and positive relations with others, at 31.58% each. This was followed by purpose in life (15.79%), then self-acceptance and environmental mastery at 10.53%. Personal

growth ranked lowest at 5.27%.

0
2
4
6
8
10
Extremely
Gritty
Mostly
Gritty
Somewhat
Gritty
Seldom
Gritty
Not at all
Gritty

Grit Scale Results

Figure 4. Ryff's PWB Scale Results - PWB Dimensions

Based from the results from the ASSIS, 47.37% of the participants scored high in acculturative stress. The rest had medium to low levels (52.63%).

Figure 5. ASSIS Results

Upon statistical treatment, it confirmed the findings of Salles, Cohen and Mueller

(2014) that grit and psychological well-being have a strong positive correlation ($r=0.85$).

This means that as an individual's level of grit increases, we can expect his or her psychological well-being to do the same, and vice versa. This also suggests that individuals whose goal is to intensify their grit level, may work on improv-

ing their psychological well-being. The same is true if one wants to improve his or her PWB. In a nutshell, individuals who are well and happy (PWB) may also be persevering to achieve long term goals (grit), and vice versa.

Meanwhile, it was found that grit and psychological well-being are both negatively

correlated to acculturative stress. The values generated from their scores were $r=-0.90$

for grit-acculturative stress and $r=-0.80$ for PWB-acculturative stress.

This states that if

a student has high grit and PWB levels, his or her acculturative stress

could be low. Or,

if a student has high acculturative stress, his or her grit and PWB may be affected badly.

PWB Dimensions

SA PG AUT PRwO PIL EM

Results of ASSIS

Low Medium High

Phase 2

Figure 6. Emerging Themes from Interview

Based on the analysis of data obtained, this investigation unfolds the experiences of foreign students in the Philippines. It was found that there are four major themes that could determine the impact of acculturative stress on foreign students and that they may

also use to lessen its ill-effects. These are preparation, continued familial support, and connecting to roots, and are believed to work with grit and psychological well-being to produce positive results in the lives of foreign students.

“Preparation” encompasses not only the series of activities the international student had to do before leaving for the host country but also the sustained self-orientation he

undergoes beyond arrival in the Philippines. The former covers researching in the Internet and books typically about what to expect from the country and its people, checking the website of future school to get familiar with its history and services, actually calling school officials to get more information and even visiting the country and school to have a tour.

“My dad even accompanied me to the Philippines to check on the school I would study in. We spoke with the school officials and I think that was helpful in preparing myself.” (P14)

Others take advantage that friends and fellow countrymen have experience in studying and living in the Philippines, and they ask for first-hand information.

“It was helpful I have some former schoolmates who were here in the

Philippines ahead of me. They provided me with much information enough to

guide me even before I learn things directly.”(P17)

“I also asked some of my friends who are already there to give me firsthand information.”(P11)

Failing to prepare, as the old saying goes, has its own detriments.

“The preparations I made were mostly academics. Looking at it right now, I should have prepared even more by reading carefully about the new

country and the school. I kept on asking myself if I am the right fit for the Philippines. I could have avoided that if I came a little more prepared.”(P8)

As reported, they can continue this preparation by familiarizing themselves to the

culture by asking and interviewing natives even after arrival.

“I ask. I’m very vocal when I do not know something.”(P17)

Academic advising and sustained orientation activities can also help avoid future

problems. The focus may not only be on expected academic performance but also on

cultural assimilation. Workshops on the local dialect can be given to those having

language troubles or anyone interested. Free &Kriz (2016) even proposed helping

students to access supplies, technology and practical help (e.g. leading

them to the market or restaurant). The next theme is “Continued Familial Support.” Prior to the technological era, international students reported familial support as one of their motivations for academic success. Fortunately this time calling and video-chatting is just one click away and this familial support can extend “virtually” regardless of distance. “I talk to my parents back home and they constantly remind me that things will be fine...”(P8) “They are supportive and told me I should just focus on the goal... gives me advice, even until now. So I think that's helpful.”(P14) “I contact home frequently.”(P17) “...continued communication with family back home. They assure me that everything is well there and that gives me peace of mind being away. They tell me I can finish and that helps.”(P2) This supports a study made by Nathanson and Marcenko (1995), as cited by Furnham (2004), that relocating to another country for studies is not always stressful for students. They argued that stability and support in the family life can secure a child's well-being. Since acculturation is a process that involves embracing another culture while rooted in

the original culture, this regular contact home is the chance to re-connect with the original culture and the familiar components it contains. This is related to the third theme that arose which is “Connecting to Roots.” This has two categories: connecting with people they have shared attributes with (e.g. fellow foreign student, fellow African) and talking about their origin. “For some time, I was not eating well and I looked forward to gatherings (with) fellow Nigerians every one or two weeks. That is when we cook our native dishes and we dance and bond.”(P14) “I talk with my fellow foreign students. It helps to know that I am not the only one who experiences this.”(P2) Furnham (2004) found that to maintain positive well-being of students, they have to maintain, in this particular order, a good network with fellow foreign students from the same country, host nationals, then other friends and acquaintances. “(It helps that) I also have a best friend from the same country of origin and we talk.”(P17) There must also be an emphasis on building up a socially strong school group that consists of international students com-

ing from the same country, who can eventually mix with those from other countries, and then with domestic students. Group or individual counseling is an ideal activity to ensure early intervention for problems. International student associations may be institutionalized to provide an avenue for them to spearhead and participate in projects that can expose them to other people and the community that is hosting them. Nailevna (2017) attested to the role of including them in institutional and social activities in enhancing psychological adjustment. It was a common report of the participants that remembering their roots and being given the opportunity to talk about it in their new environment can be “therapeutic” and stressalleviating. “...when they ask me to share about my country – it gives a different meaning to me being here. Taking versus giving.”(P2) “(The most fun thing about being a foreign student here) is sharing what we have back home.” (P11) International students arrive in the Philippines and in any other host country with the “taking” mindset, that is, “take all the learnings,” “bring the diploma home,” “learn about their culture,” “speak their lan-

guage,” among others. All these only add to the stress that they are already feeling because this requires either change or assimilation. This chance then to share about their own roots switches the “taking” mindset to a “giving” mindset and could lessen the stress they feel. Talking about one’s own country and practices can elicit a sense of pride and happiness. A category under this is “symbiosis” wherein foreign students and Filipinos help each other to succeed. An example would be when a Korean student who had difficulty learning English partnered with a Filipino student who can and wants to be fluent in Hangul (Korean language). Another is an American participant who taught English to underprivileged children while in turn using the experience in the far-flung area to complete her social science research. The two other themes fall under outcomes – “gaining independence” and “building relations.”If successful in overcoming acculturative stress, international students are able to enjoy the fruits of studying in another country which are freedom and gaining new friends. These two are the most commonly reported outcomes by the

participants that they said they enjoy or look forward to.

“Gaining independence (is the most valuable learning). It proves I can do things without people's help all the time.”(P11)

“Number one would be that I am able to prove to myself that I can stand on my own. The joys of testing myself and actually surviving. Also meeting new people and learning new things like culture and norms, etc.” (P17)

“Independence. When I think about it, that's what I am gaining in return for all these. That makes me happy.” (P14)

“Being able to prove that I can survive on my own makes me happy.”(P2)

These findings support the Ryff's PWB Scale results of the participants where they scored highest in the dimensions Autonomy and Positive Relations with others (31.58%). Positive Relations with Others high scorers have satisfying relationships with others, while Autonomy high scorers evaluate self by personal standards and not concerned about the expectations and evaluations of others.

In conclusion, this study confirms the positive relationship between grit and psychological well-being, and the negative correlation they both have with

acculturative stress. Further, the author unearthed themes that may help avoid or alleviate acculturative stress, as well as the positive outcomes that come from coping well with acculturation.

Intervention Program

Given all these data, the following intervention program is proposed: Effective Acculturation Intervention Program for International Students

Intervention Description: As the names suggests, this intervention program aims to assist foreign students in better acculturating in their host country and diminish the stress it brings about. This one-week program includes stress management exercises, relaxation techniques, visualizations, mentoring assignments to improve on grit, and anecdote writing focused on big and small achievements to develop PWB.

Exercise Objective/s Duration

Stress Management
 Relaxation Techniques
 Breathing Exercises
 Expressive Art Technique

To manage the biological and psychological symptoms of stress

To teach the participants techniques on how to control or even positively express the manifestations

of stress
 To reduce the harmful effects of stress to the mind and body
 1 hour
 Visualizations To effectively visualize the participants' Best
 1 hour
 Possible Foreign Students Selves
 To facilitate goal setting of participants
 To heighten positive expectations for the future
 To develop a sense of personal ability and adequacy
 Mentoring
 Role playing
 Group Discussion
 To improve the level of one's grit
 To develop esteem by taking on important "roles" and playing them during sessions that will serve as practice
 To develop empathy for other members
 To test leadership and perseverance
 1 hour
 Anecdote writing
 Strengths vs Weaknesses
 All the Good Things
 To reflect on and celebrate past achievements
 To remind participants of their efforts and successes
 To remind them that these

successes can be repeated
 1 hour
Scope and Limitations
 The study focused only on international undergraduate students who have completed at least one year of study in the Philippines. They were chosen regardless of gender, religion, country of origin, and academic program. The age bracket required was 18-25 years old. The participants all came from private higher educational institutions. These demographics were simply recorded for reporting in this study and were not used in the correlations. It is recommended though by this author that for future research purposes, these demographic variables be utilized to provide a more grounded and comprehensive result. The researcher was aware that language could be a barrier in the collection of data since the participants of the study are of different nationalities and their language proficiency levels are varying. Nonetheless, all interactions were rendered in the English language.

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*Author: San Juan, Felisse Marianne Z.

*Affiliation: University of Santo Tomas, Manila, Philippines

*Contact email: ehfehmsanjuan@yahoo.com

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Data Article

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Abstract

Studying in higher educational institutions can be particularly stressful,

even more so if conducted in a foreign country away from familiar people and environment. The types of stress could be academic, financial or acculturative, and could develop into psychological illnesses if left unaddressed. This study aimed at proposing a psychological intervention program founded on grit and psychological well-being to alleviate acculturative stress among international students in the Philippines. Nineteen foreign students were selected as participants for the first phase of the study that confirmed that grit and psychological well-being have a strong positive correlation ($r=0.85$). Results further showed, however, that grit and psychological well-being both have a strong negative correlation with acculturative stress at $r=-0.90$ and $r=-0.80$, respectively. Five participants from the original roster were randomly selected to join Phase 2 which involved a qualitative investigation of their experiences. The data were thematically analysed and generated the following themes: preparation, support, openness, and confidence. All these results were utilized in the development of an intervention program for foreign students.

Specifications Table [Please fill in right-hand column of the table below.]

Subject area Psychology
 More specific subject area
 Psychological Intervention
 Clinical Psychology
 Type of data Graphs and Tables
 How data was acquired Grit Scale by Angela Duckworth
 Ryff's Psychological Well-Being (RPWB) Scale
 Interview Guide
 Data format Analyzed
 Experimental factors Statistical and Analytical Treatment of collected data
 Experimental features Weighted means were used to assess the participants' levels of grit, psychological well-being and acculturative stress. To measure the correlations, Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient or Pearson R Correlation was used. This test determines the relationship between two continuous variables or at least one of the two variables. If proven to have significant relationship with the use of the probability value or significant value (strength of relationship), the Pearson r value will test the direction of the relationship, either direct or inverse relationship
 Data source location Luzon, Philippines
 Data accessibility Data is with this article
 Value of the Data
 ♦ Provide background on levels of grit, psychological well-being and

acculturative stress among international students
 Provide major themes in alleviating acculturative stress among international students that may offer foundation for theory grounding of future researchers
 Data
 Phase 1
 It was found that majority of the participants are Somewhat Gritty (47.37%), while 42.11% are Mostly Gritty and 10.53% are Seldom Gritty. Nobody fared as Extremely Gritty or Not at All Gritty. The average grit score of all the participants is 3.72 which could be interpreted as Somewhat Gritty-Mostly Gritty.
 Figure 3. Grit Scale Results
 Meanwhile, the average Psychological Well-Being score of the participants is 4.02 out of 6 (Strong PWB). Of the PWB dimensions, participants scored highest in autonomy and positive relations with others, at 31.58% each. This was followed by purpose in life(15.79%), then self-acceptance and environmental mastery at 10.53%. Personal growth ranked lowest at 5.27%.
 Figure 4. Ryff's PWB Scale Results - PWB Dimensions
 Based from the results from the ASSIS, 47.37% of the participants scored high in acculturative stress. The rest had medium to low levels (52.63%).
 Figure 5. ASSIS Results

Upon statistical treatment, it confirmed the findings of Salles, Cohen and Mueller (2014) that grit and psychological well-being have a strong positive correlation ($r=0.85$).

This means that as an

0

2

4

6

8

10

Extremely

Gritty

Mostly

Gritty

Somewhat

Gritty

Seldom

Gritty

Not at all

Gritty

Grit Scale Results

PWB Dimensions

SA PG AUT PRwO PIL EM

Results of ASSIS

Low Medium High

individual's level of grit increases, we can expect his or her psychological well-being to do the

same, and vice versa. This also suggests that individuals whose goal is to intensify their grit level,

may work on improving their psychological well-being. The same is true if one wants to improve

his or her PWB. In a nutshell, individuals who are well and happy (PWB) may also be persevering

to achieve long term goals (grit), and

vice versa.

Meanwhile, it was found that grit and psychological well-being are both negatively correlated to

acculturative stress. The values generated from their scores were $r=-0.90$ for grit-acculturative

stress and $r=-0.80$ for PWB-acculturative stress. This states that if a student has high grit and PWB

levels, his or her acculturative stress could be low. Or, if a student has high acculturative stress,

his or her grit and PWB may be affected badly.

Phase 2

Figure 6. Emerging Themes from Interview

Based on the analysis of data obtained, this investigation unfolds the experiences of foreign

students in the Philippines. It was found that there are four major themes that could determine the

impact of acculturative stress on foreign students and that they may also use to lessen its ill-effects.

These are preparation, continued familial support, and connecting to roots, and are believed to

work with grit and psychological well-being to produce positive results in the lives of foreign

students.

“Preparation” encompasses not only the series of activities the international student had to do

before leaving for the host country

but also the sustained self-orientation he undergoes beyond

arrival in the Philippines. The former covers researching in the Internet and books typically about what to expect from the country and its people, checking the website of future school to get familiar with its history and services, actually calling school officials to get more information and even visiting the country and school to have a tour.

“My dad even accompanied me to the Philippines to check on the school I would study in. We spoke with the school officials and I think that was helpful in preparing myself.” (P14)

Others take advantage that friends and fellow countrymen have experience in studying and living in the Philippines, and they ask for first-hand information.

“It was helpful I have some former schoolmates who were here in the Philippines ahead of me. They provided me with much information enough to guide me even before I learn things directly.”(P17)

“I also asked some of my friends who are already there to give me first-hand information.”(P11)

Failing to prepare, as the old saying goes, has its own detriments.

“The preparations I made were mostly academics. Looking at it right now, I should have prepared even more by reading carefully about the new country and

the school. I kept on asking myself if I am the right fit for the Philippines. I could have avoided that if I came a little more prepared.”(P8)

As reported, they can continue this preparation by familiarizing themselves to the culture by asking and interviewing natives even after arrival.

“I ask. I'm very vocal when I do not know something.”(P17)

Academic advising and sustained orientation activities can also help avoid future problems. The focus may not only be on expected academic performance but also on cultural assimilation.

Workshops on the local dialect can be given to those having language troubles or anyone interested. Free &Kriz (2016) even proposed helping students to access supplies, technology and practical help (e.g. leading them to the market or restaurant).

The next theme is “Continued Familial Support.” Prior to the technological era, international students reported familial support as one of their motivations for academic success. Fortunately this time calling and video-chatting is just one click away and this familial support can extend “virtually” regardless of distance.

“I talk to my parents back home and they constantly remind me that things will be fine...”(P8)

“They are supportive and told me I should just focus on the goal... gives me advice, even until now. So I think that's helpful.”(P14)

“I contact home frequently.”(P17)

“...continued communication with family back home. They assure me that everything is well there and that gives me peace of mind being away. They tell me I can finish and that helps.”(P2)

This supports a study made by Nathanson and Marcenko (1995), as cited by Furnham (2004), that relocating to another country for studies is not always stressful for students. They argued that stability and support in the family life can secure a child's well-being. Since acculturation is a process that involves embracing another culture while rooted in the original culture, this regular contact home is the chance to re-connect with the original culture and the familiar components it contains. This is related to the third theme that arose which is “Connecting to Roots.” This has two categories: connecting with people they have shared attributes with (e.g. fellow foreign student, fellow African) and talking about their origin.

“For some time, I was not eating well and I looked forward to gatherings (with) fellow Nigerians every one or two

weeks. That is when we cook our native dishes and we dance and bond.”(P14)

“I talk with my fellow foreign students. It helps to know that I am not the only one who experiences this.”(P2)

Furnham (2004) found that to maintain positive well-being of students, they have to maintain, in this particular order, a good network with fellow foreign students from the same country, host nationals, then other friends and acquaintances.

“(It helps that) I also have a best friend from the same country of origin and we talk.”(P17)

There must also be an emphasis on building up a socially strong school group that consists of international students coming from the same country, who can eventually mix with those from other countries, and then with domestic students. Group or individual counseling is an ideal activity to ensure early intervention for problems. International student associations may be institutionalized to provide an avenue for them to spearhead and participate in projects that can expose them to other people and the community that is hosting them. Nailevna (2017) attested to the role of including them in institutional and social activities in enhancing psychological

adjustment.

It was a common report of the participants that remembering their roots and being given the opportunity to talk about it in their new environment can be “therapeutic” and stress-alleviating.

“...when they ask me to share about my country – it gives a different meaning to me being here. Taking versus giving.”(P2)

“(The most fun thing about being a foreign student here) is sharing what we have back home.” (P11)

International students arrive in the Philippines and in any other host country with the “taking” mindset, that is, “take all the learnings,” “bring the diploma home,” “learn about their culture,” “speak their language,” among others. All these only add to the stress that they are already feeling because this requires either change or assimilation. This chance then to share about their own roots switches the “taking” mindset to a “giving” mindset and could lessen the stress they feel. Talking about one’s own country and practices can elicit a sense of pride and happiness.

A category under this is “symbiosis” wherein foreign students and Filipinos help each other to succeed. An example would be when a Korean student who had difficulty learning English

partnered with a Filipino student who can and wants to be fluent in Hangul (Korean language).

Another is an American participant who taught English to underprivileged children while in turn using the experience in the far-flung area to complete her social science research.

The two other themes fall under outcomes – “gaining independence” and “building relations.” If successful in overcoming acculturative stress, international students are able to enjoy the fruits of studying in another country which are freedom and gaining new friends.

These two are the most commonly reported outcomes by the participants that they said they enjoy or look forward to.

“Gaining independence (is the most valuable learning). It proves I can do things without people's help all the time.”(P11)

“Number one would be that I am able to prove to myself that I can stand on my own. The joys of testing myself and actually surviving. Also meeting new people and learning new things like culture and norms, etc.” (P17)

“Independence. When I think about it, that's what I am gaining in return for all

these. That makes me happy.” (P14)

“Being able to prove that I can survive on my own makes me

happy.”(P2)

These findings support the Ryff’s PWB Scale results of the participants where they scored highest in the dimensions Autonomy and Positive Relations with others (31.58%). Positive Relations with Others high scorers have satisfying relationships with others, while Autonomy high scorers evaluate self by personal standards and not concerned about the expectations and evaluations of others.

In conclusion, this study confirms the positive relationship between grit and psychological wellbeing, and the negative correlation they both have with acculturative stress.

Further, the author unearthed themes that may help avoid or alleviate acculturative stress, as well as the positive outcomes that come from coping well with acculturation.

Experimental Design, Materials, and Methods

In this study, the mixed methods approach was used. Phase 1 involved a descriptive-correlational method to present the levels of grit, psychological well-being and acculturative stress of the participants. Phase 2 involved a qualitative method of interviewing the participants on their experiences as foreign students in the Philippines. The data were thematically analysed and utilized in the development of the proposed

intervention program.

Participants

Nineteen foreign students who have completed at least a year of study in various universities in the National Capital Region and Region 4A of the Philippines participated in the study. They were chosen regardless of their gender, academic program, religion, and country of origin. The participants were contacted through schools’ international students associations and internationalization offices.

Ten male students and nine female students participated in the study (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Gender Distribution of Participants

Of the participants, 58% are in Second Year College, 31% are in Third Year, and the remaining 11% in their terminal year level. Majority of them at 42% are taking up pre-medicine, while engineering and business tied in second place at 26%. The rest are enrolled in hospitality courses.

Figure 2. Nationality Distribution of Participants

Meanwhile, the countries represented are India (32%), Nigeria (26%), Pakistan (11%), Nepal (11%), Korea (5%), Japan (5%), United States of America (5%), and Papua New Guinea (5%).

8.5

9

9.5

10
10.5
Female Male
Gender Distribution
0
2
4
6
8
1
Nationality Distribution
Nigerian Papua New Guinean
American
Pakistani Indian Nepalese
Korean Japanese
Instrumentations
For Phase 1, the 12-item Grit Scale, 42-item Ryff's Psychological Well-Being (RPWB) Scale, and the 36-item Acculturative Stress Scale for International Students were used.

Grit Scale
Angela Duckworth developed the Grit Scale which has several variations: the 12-item and 17-item versions. Both versions are rated by assigning the following points: 5 = Very much like me, 4 = Mostly like me, 3 = Somewhat like me, 2 = Not much like me, 1 = Not like me at all; or for the reverse scored: 1= Very much like me, 2= Mostly like me, 3= Somewhat like me, 4= Mostly like me, and 5= Not like me at all. In the shorter version, the following items are scored as 5 = Very much like me, 4 = Mostly like me, 3 = Somewhat like me, 2 = Not much like me, 1 = Not like me

at all: 1, 4, 6, 9, and 12. Meanwhile, the reverse scored items are 2, 3, 5, 7, 8, 10, and 11. The points should be added up and divided by 12. The maximum score on this scale is 5 (extremely gritty), and the lowest is 1 (not at all gritty).

Ryff's Psychological Well-Being (RPWB) Scale

The Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Scale (Ryff & Keyes, 1995) was created by Dr. Carol Ryff.

It has forty-two items that have six dimensions namely self-acceptance, environmental mastery, positive relations with others, personal growth, purpose in life, and autonomy. Subscales with their respective item numbers are as follows: autonomy (1, 7, 13, 19, 25, 31, 37), environmental mastery (2, 8, 14, 20, 26, 32, 38), personal growth (3, 9, 15, 21, 27, 33, 39), positive relation with others (4, 10, 16, 22, 28, 34, 40), purpose in life (5, 11, 17, 23, 29, 35, 41), and self-acceptance (6, 12, 18, 24, 30, 36, 42). Participants are asked to rate statements on a six-point scale, with 1 indicating strong disagreement and 6 indicating strong agreement. Half of the items in this test are reversed scored: 3, 5, 10, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 23, 26, 27, 30, 31, 32, 34, 36, 39, and 41. High scores indicate well-being in that aspect in the participant's life. On the other hand, low scores indicate that the

participant experiences difficulty in that area of his/her life. This scale has a high internal consistency with a coefficient ranging from .86 to .95, and its purpose is to check an individual's psychological well-being (whether it is high or low). High scorers in Self-Acceptance are said to possess a positive attitude toward the self and accepts one's positive and negative qualities. Low scorers are disappointed with what has occurred in their past life. As for the dimension Positive Relations with Others, high scorers have satisfying relationships with others, while low scorers are isolated and frustrated in interpersonal relationships. Autonomy high scorers evaluate self by personal standards; low scorers are concerned about the expectations and evaluations of others. High scores in Environmental Mastery mean a sense of competence in managing his or her environment. Low scorers in this dimension have difficulty managing everyday affairs. Purpose in Life high scorers have reasons for living while those who score low lack a sense of direction. Personal Growth high scores indicate a sense of continued development; low scores, on the other hand, mean a sense of personal stagnation (Ryff and Keyes, 1995). Acculturative Stress Scale for

International Students (ASSIS)
The ASSIS is a five-point Likert scale that was designed to assess the acculturative stress of international students such as guilt, perceived discrimination, perceived hatred, homesickness, fear, and stress due to change. This was developed by Sandhu and Asrabadi (1994) and can be rated as follows: 1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Not Sure, 4=Agree, and 5=Strongly Agree.

Interview Guide

For Phase 2 Interview, an interview guide was designed to probe the experiences of foreign students in studying and living in the Philippines. The ten-item guide was validated by three experts in Psychology and language before being used. The questions centered on the students' challenges when they arrived and strategies employed to alleviate the hardships. The roles of families, friends, schools, etc. were also dealt with.

Data Gathering Procedures

Letters of request were sent to schools and international students organizations to solicit participation. Once the volunteer participants were identified they were each requested to sign the consent form and oriented as to the design of the study. The researcher first conducted a pilot test before proceeding to the actual phases. Their demographics were taken

note of for reporting. For Phase 1, three scales were administered namely, Grit Scale, Ryff's Psychological Well-Being (RPWB) Scale, and Acculturative Stress Scale for International Students. The scores were computed and interpreted, and later on statistically analysed for correlations. For Phase 2, the researcher randomly chose participants for the interview, taking into consideration their scores in the ASSIS. The data collected during the interview were transcribed and initial ideas and thoughts were also noted down. After reading and re-reading, which important part to immerse in the data, the transcriptions were presented to the participants for their validation.

Data Analysis

Weighted means were used to assess the participants' levels of grit, psychological well-being and acculturative stress. To measure the correlations, Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient or Pearson R Correlation was used. This test determines the relationship between two continuous variables or at least one of the two variables. If proven to have significant relationship with the use of the probability value or significant value (strength of relationship), the Pearson r value will test the direction of the relationship, either direct or inverse relationship. The validated transcription of the

interview was re-read to ensure the researcher's closeness with the data. It was then subjected to the coding phase. The codes were generated based on their relevance to the research question. The next stage involved combining similar codes into themes. Any theme that did not have enough supporting data was discarded. Once the themes were established, the researcher underwent coding again to ensure that no code was missed. When the themes all fitted together, they were named and accompanied by detailed analysis. The final part involved choosing examples of lines from the transcription to illustrate the themes.

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