



## GRIT AS A MODERATOR BETWEEN STUDENTS' INTENTION AND ORAL PRESENTATION PERFORMANCE: A CONCEPTUAL STUDY



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### ABSTRACT

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Effective communication skills at the workplace are acknowledged as a highly sought skill by employers among university students. However, an incongruity between employers' expectations and students' actual communication skills has been highlighted. An imperative subset of communication skills is oral presentation skills, which are found to be unsatisfactory among students. Thus, this conceptual study proposes examining the moderating influence of grit on the relationship between students' intention to present and their oral presentation performance. The theory of planned behaviour (TPB) is based upon modeling the relationship between students' intention, grit, and oral presentation performance. A quantitative method will be adopted using a questionnaire survey for the data collection. Simple random sampling will be employed to select respondents. The study involves a three-stage research process comprising (1) a pre-test, (2) a pilot study, and (3) actual fieldwork. The data obtained from the pilot study will be subjected to exploratory factor analysis (EFA) using SPSS. Subsequently, AMOS will use the data from the actual fieldwork for confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and moderation analysis. Results of the analyses are expected to provide more conclusive evidence on the strength of grit in influencing the relationship between students' intention and their oral presentation performance.

**Contribution/ Originality:** This study models the moderating influence of grit to provide further insight into the impact of grit. The relationship between students' intention and oral presentation performance is also proposed in this study to fill the gap in the existing literature.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The art of oratory has always been viewed as a perplexing yet fundamental art to master. In the new global economy, communication skills have become an essential competency utilised by various organisations. Thus, these skills are crucial for one to become a twenty-first-century global citizen (Chung, Yoo, Kim, Lee, & Zeidler, 2016). The 2018 Employer Research Report published by the Association of American Colleges and Universities note that fluent English oral communication skills are the first skill that executive and hiring managers look for in graduates. The 2020 QS Quacquarelli Symonds (2020) also ranks communication skills as first in importance as illustrated in Figure 1.



### Importance scores

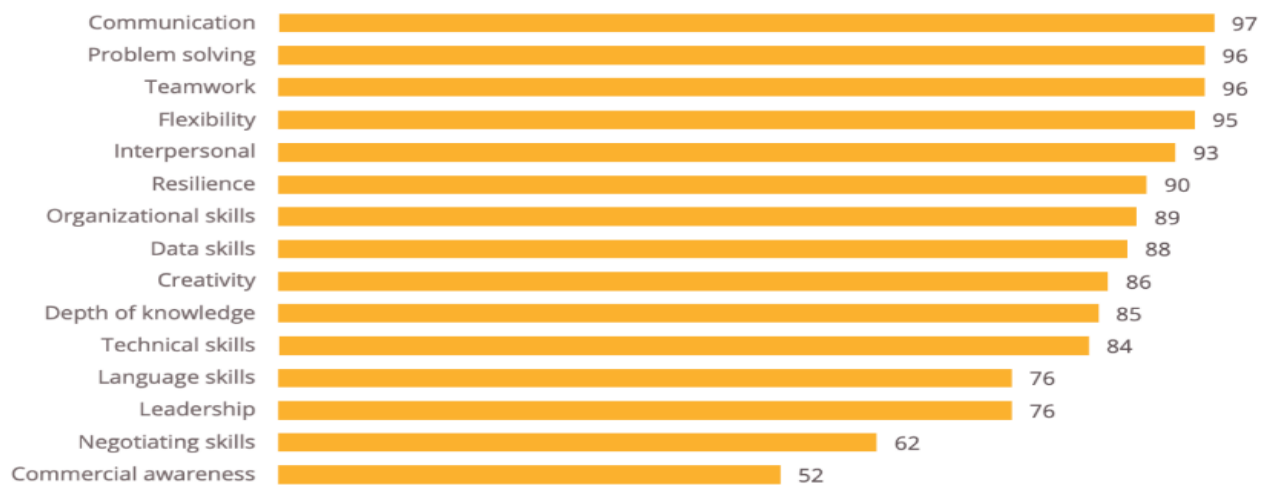


Figure-1. Importance scores of skills by employers.

Source: QS Quacquarelli Symonds (2020).

The significance of communication skills reinforces the need for students to master effective communication skills in the transition from university life to the professional employment sector. The prominence of this skill has always been emphasised in educational institutions in accordance with the Global Talent Competitiveness Index (Malaysia in the Global Competitiveness Report 2018, 2018). In the content-driven era, the conception of ideas is insufficient as pitching ideas and articulating them are viewed as imperative, if not more. As Singh (2021) inferred, effective oral communication in teams is the most important skill for students to acquire.

Nevertheless, the QS Quacquarelli Symonds (2019) notes that communicative competence is one of the top three skills that has the widest skill gap. A discrepancy was found between students' oral communication skills and employers' expectations. Also, previous studies have reported a mismatch between students' actual oral performance and their self-perceived speaking ability (Alwi & Sidhu, 2013; Subekti, 2020) and teacher oral assessment (Babaii, Taghaddomi, & Pashmforoosh, 2016). Marinho, de Medeiros, Gama, and Teixeira (2017) contend that female graduates find it more challenging to acquire communicative competence due to the concern of their high pitch and soft voice. Related literature also presents conclusive evidence that students' oral communication skills are an issue requiring further investigation.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. Oral Presentation Performance

Central to the entire discipline of oral communication is presentation skills, which have been increasingly receiving recognition from scholars and industry experts. The objective of oral presentation is to effectively communicate and present ideas in a more meaningful form as outlined by Mousawa and Elyas (2015). According to Hanifa and Yusra (2018), higher education students are required to deliver many oral presentations on a broad range of subjects using appropriate verbal communication. Such requirements can harness the communicative competence necessary for workplace communication. While presentation skills are a hindrance to giving classroom presentations, the activity was found to positively influence students' communicative competence (Riadil, 2020).

Despite the necessity of effective oral presentation skills, Singh (2021) in her analysis of external workplace communication activities in the employment sector identified that students were least prepared in giving formal presentations. This finding compels further research to identify the reasons for such circumstances. Drawing on

results from three different methods, Tian (2019) enlisted four primary causes that had contributed to unsatisfactory Korean students' English oral presentation performance. The causes were negative attitude towards classroom presentations, lack of preparation time, weak English language proficiency, and negative feedback from peers. These findings correspond to (a) (Raja, 2017), who indicated that the lack of confidence contributed to students' timid attitude during presentations in front of an audience, and (b) (Chandren & Yaacob, 2016), who mentioned the fear of feedback being the cause. Research has consistently shown that higher education students do not possess sufficient competence in the oral presentation skills needed for their learning and employment sector. Thus, this study aims to investigate the influence of two factors—students' intention and grit—on students' oral presentation performance, which is measured using their course grades.

## 2.2. Intention

The theory of planned behaviour (TPB) is one of the most widely referred theories to determine the factors that influence intention, which leads to the realisation of a behaviour. The theory proposes that intention is viewed as the core in TPB (Ajzen, 1991; Ajzen, 2002). Ajzen (1991) outlines intention as the extent to which an individual is willing to participate in a specific behaviour. A meta-analytic review of 185 independent studies based on the TPB model conducted by Armitage and Conner (2001) concluded that the theory is an excellent model for predicting intention with a multiple correlation of 0.63. The results from the review also indicated that the model accounted for 39 percent of the variance in intention, which is deemed as large by Cohen (1992). This conclusion is evidenced by a comprehensive body of literature that indicates intention to be the most important variable in influencing behaviour (Armitage, 2004; Asare, 2015; Chu & Chen, 2016; Kim, Yim, & Kim, 2014). Findings by Kautonen, van Gelderen, and Fink (2015) also note that intention accounts for 39% of behaviour.

The TPB also claims that intention to perform a behaviour is impacted by three factors: attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioural control (Ajzen, 1991). Attitude can be articulated as an individual's general assessment of a behaviour. Subjective norm explains the perceived social pressure from an individual's perspective to participate in a behaviour. Perceived behavioural control is described as an individual's perception of the easiness of participating in a behaviour (Ajzen, 1991; Ajzen, 2006; Knabe, 2012). Ajzen (1991) stressed that the more positive the attitude an individual possesses towards an action, the higher his or her belief that others would think positively if he/she takes the action (subjective norm). Also, the higher an individual's belief that his/her can conduct the action (perceived behavioural control), the more likely the actual action will happen. In conclusion, the more favourable the attitude and subjective norm, and the greater the perceived control, the stronger the intention of an individual in participating in a specific behaviour. Thus, this study intends to examine the influence of students' intention to participate in oral presentations on their performance.

## 2.3. Grit as a Moderator

Grit, as outlined by Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, and Kelly (2007), refers to the perseverance and passion for long-term goals. Duckworth et al. (2007) differentiate grit into two facets: consistency of interest and perseverance of effort. They further explain that grit involves exerting and maintaining the effort to address a challenge. In the same vein, Vera, Gavino, and Edwin (2015) conceptualise grit in an Asian setting as determination, passion for excellence, commitment to succeed. Duckworth et al. (2007) also hypothesised that grit is fundamental for high achievement activities, such as an interview with professionals and formal university examinations. The hypothesis is corroborated by Bowman, Hill, Denson, and Bronkema (2015), who identified grit to be vital in explaining academic achievement (GPA). Other studies (Flanagan & Einarson, 2017; Strayhorn, 2013) have also established grit as a significant predictor of examination grades.

Despite the recognition of grit in numerous academic and professional settings, the literature also notes that grit does not affect college students' academic achievements (Bazelais, Lemay, & Doleck, 2016). A systematic review

by Christopoulou, Lakioti, Pezirkianidis, Karakasidou, and Stalikas (2018) indicated that grit exerts weak to moderate influence on academic performance. This finding is aligned with Vera et al. (2015), who reported that the influence of grit on work performance is minimal. Grit was also identified to not exert any moderating effect on the relationships between job satisfaction and turnover intention (Castillo, 2020) and teacher autonomy support and social competence (Ma, Ma, & Lan, 2020).

The inconclusive empirical evidence on the influence on grit necessitates more extensive research. Also, this research extends our knowledge of grit as a moderator as little attention has been paid to the moderating influence on grit. Another noteworthy contribution of this conceptual study is the examination of the influence of grit in Malaysia, a country that practices a collectivist culture, where grit was found to be more apparent and valued (Datu, Valdez, & King, 2016; Ma et al., 2020). Thus, the central thesis of this paper is to propose that the moderating influence of grit be examined since its influence on the relationship remains unprecedented. The conceptual framework for examining the moderating influence of grit is illustrated in Figure 1.

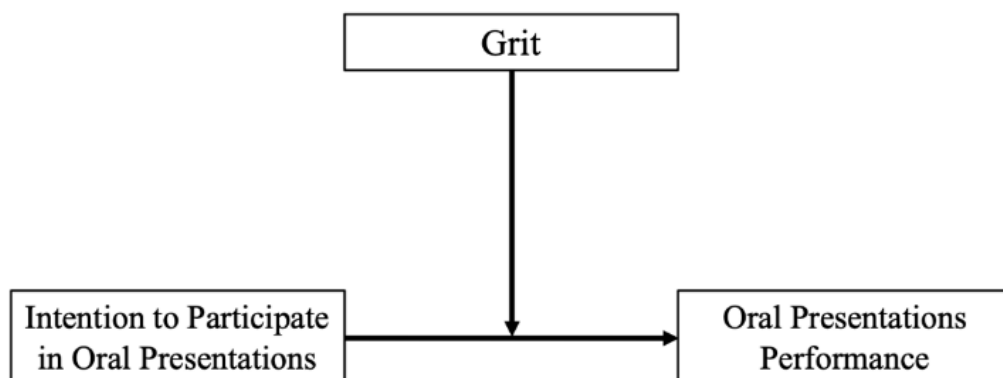


Figure-2. Conceptual Framework.

To measure grit in the context of oral presentations, the Grit-S scale developed by Duckworth and Quinn (2009) will be adopted. This scale is a more concise form of the original twelve-item Grit scale. To ensure its usability, Duckworth and Quinn examined the Grit-S scale in four separate research settings and reported that the scale demonstrated superior reliability and predictive validity, consensual validity, and test-retest validity (Duckworth & Quinn, 2009). For these reasons, the Grit-S scale will be used to measure grit among the targeted respondents in this study. The scale contains eight items, as listed in Table 1.

Table-1. Measuring items for grit.

No	Item	Scale	Source
	Consistency of Interest		
1.	I often set a goal but later choose to pursue a different one.	10-point interval scale 1=strongly disagree until 10=strongly agree	Adapted from Duckworth and Quinn (2009)
2.	I get obsessed with a certain idea for my presentation for a short time but later lose interest.		
3.	I have difficulty maintaining my focus on presentations that take up a lot of preparation time.		
4.	New ideas for presentations sometimes distract me.		
	Perseverance of Effort		
5.	I always finish whatever I started.	10-point interval scale 1=strongly disagree until 10=strongly agree	Adapted from Duckworth and Quinn (2009)
6.	Setbacks do not discourage me.		
7.	I am diligent		
8.	I am a hard worker.		

Source: Duckworth and Quinn (2009).

### 3. METHODOLOGY

This study will employ a quantitative method and a cross-sectional research design. The respondents will be selected based on the single criterion: they must be students of English for Oral Presentations (ELC590) course at a public university in Malaysia. This eligibility criterion is required to ensure that the data collected truly reflect the respondents' experience in participating in oral presentations. A simple random sampling method will be used to select the respondents.

A questionnaire will be used to gather data for the study. This study involves a three-stage research process. The first stage involves pre-testing the questionnaire to ensure that the questionnaire does not contain any ambiguous terms and to obtain feedback about the questionnaire design. The second stage will be a pilot study to identify any possible issues before the actual fieldwork. At this stage, the reliability of the questionnaire will be determined to ensure that the questionnaire does not contain any bias and is free of random error (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). Exploratory factor analysis will be conducted using the data obtained from the pilot study to explore and confirm the items needed for measuring the three constructs (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2014). The third stage involves the actual fieldwork with the respondents who fulfilled the criterion mentioned. Confirmatory factor analysis will be conducted on the data obtained from the actual fieldwork to assure that the measured variables accurately reflect the desired constructs (Awang, 2015; Flowers, Freeman, & Gladwell, 2017; Hair et al., 2014; Mohamad, Mohammad, Azman, Ali, & Awang, 2016).

The third stage of the study is a moderation analysis to examine the moderating influence of grit on the relationship between students' intention to present and their presentation performance. Moderator is defined as a variable that "interferes" in the relationship between an independent variable and a dependent variable (Awang, 2015; Hayes, 2018). Prior to conducting the moderation analysis using path analysis in AMOS, the effects of students' intention towards students' oral presentation performance is assumed to be significant, which is a requirement before introducing a moderator into a model (Awang, 2015).

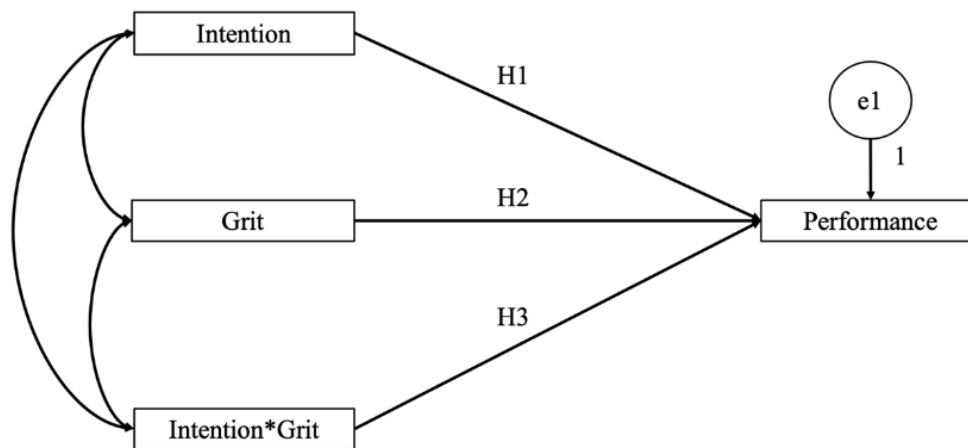


Figure-3. Modeling Grit as a Moderator in AMOS.

Figure 3 illustrates the three hypotheses that will be tested in the moderation analysis to determine the moderating influence of grit. As depicted in Equation 1, the independent variable is intention,  $X$ ; intention is the moderator,  $M$ ; while the dependent variable is performance,  $Y$ . In addition to  $X$ ,  $M$ , and  $Y$ , a new variable,  $XM$ , is created from the product of  $X$  multiplied with  $M$ . The relationships among these variables. The regression equation of the hypotheses in Figure 3 is depicted as follows:

Equation-1:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X + \beta_2 M + \beta_3 XM + e1 \quad (1)$$

As drawn in Figure 2, three hypotheses will be tested in the moderation analysis as described in Table 2.

Table-2. Summary of Hypotheses.

Hypothesis	Variables	Relationship	Testing
Hypothesis 1	Intention → Performance	X-Y	$\beta_1$
Hypothesis 2	Grit → Performance	M-Y	$\beta_2$
Hypothesis 3	Intention*Grit → Performance	XM-Y	$\beta_3$

The first step in determining if grit moderates the relationship between students' intention to participate and students' oral presentation performance is to determine that Hypothesis 3 ( $\beta_3$ ) is significant and Hypothesis 2 ( $\beta_2$ ) is not significant (Awang, 2015). If these conditions are fulfilled, thus, grit is concluded to moderate the relationship. Subsequently, the type of moderation is determined by referring to the significance or nonsignificance of Hypothesis 1 ( $\beta_1$ ). Two potential results might emerge based on Hypothesis 1: partial moderation or complete moderation. Table 3 summarises the indicators to determine the results of the moderation analysis.

Table-3. Indicators of moderation analysis results.

Aim	Hypothesis	Moderation occurred		Moderation did not occur
To determine if moderation has occurred	H3	Significant		Non-significant
	H2	Non-significant		Significant
To determine the type of moderation	H1	Significant	Non-Significant	Not applicable
		Partial moderation	Complete moderation	

#### 4. CONCLUSION

This paper seeks to fill the gap in previous studies by examining the moderating influence of grit on the relationship between students' intention to participate in oral presentations and their actual oral presentation performance. This relationship is also tested due to the uncertainty of the potential of grit as a moderator and the minimal number of studies that have examined the moderating influence of grit. The conceptualisation of this study is also motivated by Duckworth et al. (2007), who suggested more grit-related studies to be conducted in academic settings to explain the influence of grit on specific behaviours related to achievement. Thus, the current conceptual study not only provides an important opportunity for advancing the understanding of the relationship between students' intention and oral performance but also contributes to the body of literature on grit by investigating its moderating effect.

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