Thriving predicts grit through self-efficacy among Filipino students enrolled in online education: The moderating role of academic stress

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THRIVING PREDICTS GRIT THROUGH SELF-EFFICACY AMONG FILIPINO STUDENTS ENROLLED IN ONLINE EDUCATION: THE MODERATING ROLE OF ACADEMIC STRESS

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Abstract. Empirical studies conducted in the Philippines show that learners struggle amidst the abrupt implementation of online education due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The present study was conducted to determine if students can thrive in such a difficult situation and if this thriving is instrumental in building grit, that is, perseverance in achieving long-term goals. There were 181 university students (39 males, 135 females, 7 unidentified) who took part in an online survey. It was investigated if thriving can predict grit directly and indirectly through self-efficacy and if this link is moderated by academic stress. The results showed that thriving is associated with higher grit and this relationship is mediated by self-efficacy. It was also shown that the impact of thriving on grit was strongest when academic stress is high.

Key words: Academic stress, COVID-19, Grit, Online education, Self-efficacy, Thriving

INTRODUCTION

The abrupt transition from face-to-face classes to online or distance learning setup has caught both students and teachers unprepared. The United Nations (UN, 2020) has stated that the COVID-19 outbreak has caused the largest school closure in history, affecting 94% of students around the globe or around 1.58 billion children and youth. UN further stated that those who have poor digital skills and those who have difficulties in accessing distance learning alternatives are the most vulnerable group in this situation. In some instances, learners may have the resources to access the learning materials, but their immediate environment is not conducive for learning. Learners from developing countries (such as the Philippines) are in a very difficult situation. Also, Filipinos are still battling the pandemic and its consequences. The extant literature suggests that Filipinos are combating not just the pandemic but also its detrimental effects on mental health (Montano & Acebes, 2020; Nicomedes & Avila, 2020). The current situation in the Philippines put Filipino students at a very high risk.

In the attempt to reduce the transmission of the virus, the Department of Education (2020) of the Philippines has resorted to online learning as the medium of instruction for the
Thriving, self-efficacy, and grit

academic year 2020-2021. However, a recently conducted national survey has shown that there are a number of obstacles encountered in this sudden transition to online learning (Baticulon et al., 2020). These hurdles can be categorized as technological (i.e., lack of computer literacy), domestic (i.e., family conflicts), community (i.e., unstable internet and power shortages), institutional (i.e., lack of teacher competencies), and individual (e.g., physical and psychological health). It is important to note, however, that these difficulties existed even prior to the pandemic. For example, Bedewy and Gabriel (2015) examined student perceptions of academic stress. Three facets of academic stress emerged: stress related to academic expectations (e.g., competition), faculty work and examination (e.g., deadlines and workload), and academic self-perceptions (e.g., fear or failure and lack of confidence). Perhaps what makes the current situation difficult is that students are facing both pandemic stress and academic stress at the same time. Moreover, research suggests that academics stress (Deb, Strodl, & Sun, 2015; Subramani & Kadhiravan, 2017) and pandemic stress (Montano & Acebes, 2020) are both detrimental to mental health. The present study was conducted to determine if students can thrive amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, if thriving is instrumental in developing long-term goals, conceptualized as grit, and if self-efficacy mediates the effects of thriving on grit. The potential role of academic stress as moderator of the indirect relationship between thriving and grit through self-efficacy was also investigated.

Thriving

Experiencing an adversity may result to four outcomes (O'Leary & Ickovics, 1995). The survivors may (1) experience a continuous downfall (succumbing), (2) survive with impairment, (3) return to the level of functioning prior to the adversity (resilience), or (4) flourish in the face of hardship and surpass their normal level of functioning. The fourth tendency is what O'Leary and Ickovics (1995) referred to as thriving. In Carver’s (1998) review, it was argued that thriving has various psychological manifestations. The survivors may gain new skills and knowledge, develop self-confidence, and experience enhanced interpersonal relations. It is notable, however, that not all individuals can thrive and there are situations that may impede thriving. Carver (1998) agreed with Deci and Ryan’s (1985) claim that a controlling environment – deadlines or surveillance – can undermine motivation which, in turn, impedes thriving. Benson and Scales (2009), however, suggested that a person should be described as more or less thriving-oriented instead of thriving or not thriving.

Perry and colleagues (2015) tried to unveil factors that promote thriving among teachers in a challenging educational context. In their case study of a teacher, they found that the fulfillment of psychological needs (autonomy, competence, and relatedness), the presence of self-efficacy and engagement, and the experience of the well-being are all crucial in achieving optimal psychological functioning. In a more recent study, Montano (2021) investigated if students’ academic engagement was instrumental in fulfilling their psychological needs amidst the present crisis. The results revealed that engagement in one’s academic duties can lead to flourishing because it allows one to fulfill their psychological needs.
Thriving, self-efficacy, and grit

Therefore, it can be argued that despite the challenges posited by the distance learning setup in the country, learners still have the capability to thrive and achieve good psychological health. Also, since thriving is about surpassing one’s level of functioning in face of adversity, it can be argued that thriving can be a pathway to cultivating passion and perseverance which is more commonly known as grit in psychological research.

Grit

Grit is defined as perseverance on, and passion for, long-term goals. “Grit involves working strenuously toward challenges, maintaining effort and interest over years despite failure, adversity, and plateaus in progress. The gritty individual approaches achievement as a marathon; his or her advantage is stamina. While disappointment or boredom may lead most people to change trajectory, the gritty individual stays the course” (Duckworth et al., 2007, pp. 1087-1088). Duckworth and colleagues (2007) concluded that grit has two facets: consistency of interests and perseverance of effort. Furthermore, it is important to note that grit is not synonymous with conscientiousness. The former is characterized by perseverance to achieve a goal that may take months or even longer to attain. Also, it is not the same with need for achievement because grit can make a person stay on track even in the absence of positive feedback. Duckworth and Quinn (2009) found that gritty quiz bee contestants were more likely to advance than their less gritty counterparts. Moreover, it was also found that grit predicts success rather than the opposite.

Datu, Yuen, and Chen (2017) in their review pointed out that only a handful of grit studies has been conducted in collectivistic setting. Most of the existing studies were conducted in Western societies (e.g., Duckworth et al., 2007; Duckworth & Quinn, 2009; Duckworth et al., 2010) and this calls for more empirical research among individuals from collectivistic cultures. Research carried out in a collectivistic setting showed that grit can be a predictor of work engagement (Suzuki et al., 2015), better mental health (Datu et al., 2019), academic engagement and higher well-being (Datu, Valdez, & King, 2015, 2016; Datu, Yuen, & Chen, 2018). Thus, prior suggests that being gritty can be a predictor of success as well as other equally important psychological outcomes in various areas of functioning.

With these, it can be argued that grit can be present in challenging situations. Thus, the present study explored if thriving is associated with grit among learners in a distance learning setup. Prior empirical research explored the various outcomes of grit. In this study, however, the aim was to investigate if thriving in the current adversity situation due to COVID-19 fosters grit. Datu et al. (2017) pointed out that grit is usually studied alongside academic success and other academic outcomes. There is need for studies that will explore how grit relates with other key learner characteristics or resources such as self-regulation, self-efficacy, and academic buoyancy or the capability to deal with day-to-day stressors in the school setting. In this study, the assumption was that self-efficacy acts as mediator in the proposed link between thriving and grit, and this relationship will be moderated by academic stress.
Thriving, self-efficacy, and grit

Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy has been defined as “belief in one’s capabilities to mobilize the motivation, cognitive resources and courses of action needed to meet given situation demands” (Wood & Bandura, 1989, p. 408). Moreover, self-efficacy reduces “vulnerability to stress and depression in taxing situations and strengthens resiliency in adversity” (Bandura, 2001, p. 10). Being efficacious even in the most taxing environment can help one attain optimal psychological functioning or well-being (Burger & Samuel, 2017; Moeini et al., 2008). This suggests that believing in one’s own capability to bring about a particular outcome, even in a very stressful environment, can be an important factor in attaining optimal functioning. There is also evidence showing that positive emotions can predict self-efficacy and other positive academic outcomes (Oriol-Granado et al., 2017; Villavicencio & Bernardo, 2016). Since thriving is defined as state of positive functioning at its fullest range, including positive emotions (Su, Tay, & Diener, 2014), it can also be argued that thriving can enhance one’s level of self-efficacy.

Academic stress

College students face numerous challenges and stressors in various areas of everyday functioning. The stressors faced by undergraduates may include anxiety about exams, mental health concerns, problems in close interpersonal relationships, bereavement, loneliness, low self-esteem, making difficult decisions, and many more (Kumaraswamy, 2013). If one is exposed to a prolonged period of stress, there is increased probability that one will experience psychological distress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). At the same time, there is also evidence showing that not all people react to stress in the same manner (e.g., Dweck & Leggett, 1988). Some people may react to stress in a helpless, maladaptive way, while others may mobilize their resources to find new strategies to face the stressor. In this study, it was explored if students’ level of academic stress moderates the relationship of thriving with grit through self-efficacy. Specifically, if one does not thrive amidst stress, one may fail to reach one’s goals and feel less efficacious. In contrast, those who thrive amidst a challenging situation are the ones who are more likely to experience growth and self-efficacy (Carver, 1998).

The present study

Research suggests that the COVID-19 pandemic and the measures employed to curb the virus transmission may be detrimental to mental health (Montano & Acebes, 2020; Nicomedes & Avila, 2020). Moreover, the transition from face-to-face instruction to remote or distance learning may have caught the Filipino learners unprepared (Baticulon et al., 2021). At the same time, the literature also suggests that university students have the capability to stay optimistic and resilient in this situation (Miranda & Cruz, 2020). In the Miranda and Cruz (2020) study, it was shown that learner optimism amidst the pandemic crisis positively
Thriving, self-efficacy, and grit

predicted subjective well-being through the mediating effect of resilience. Hence, resilience plays an integral part in attaining optimal psychological functioning in face of adversity.

The present research aimed to extend what is currently known about students’ response to the COVID-19 crisis and the subsequent distance learning implemented. Specifically, to investigate whether students thrive – i.e., surpass the pre-adversity level of functioning – and if this can increase grit or passion for long-term goals. The Broaden-and-Build theory of positive emotions (Fredrickson, 2004) posits that the experience of well-being can enhance various psychological outcomes such as one’s psychological resources (Hobfoll, 2002), psychological capital (Luthans, Youssef, & Avolio, 2007) and other lasting outcomes. Prior research has shown that positive psychological virtues such as hope (Vela, Lu, Lenz, & Hinojosa, 2015) and positive affect (Hill, Burrow, & Bronk, 2016) predict passion and perseverance for long-term goals. Furthermore, Brown et al. (2017, p. 171) argued that thriving individuals are “energized by their personal talents and interests”. Since thriving is an indicator of well-being (Su et al., 2014) and grit is defined as the passion and perseverance for long-term goals, it is plausible to assume that there is a positive relationship between thriving and grit.

The present study also investigated if the link between thriving and grit is mediated by one’s level of self-efficacy. Since the Broaden-and-Build theory posits that positive emotions can enhance personal resources, including self-efficacy, it was hypothesized that thriving can build one’s self-efficacy. Self-efficacy can be “state-like” or “trait-like” personal characteristic (Luthans & Youssef-Morgan, 2017). Grit, on the other hand, is generally considered as trait. This suggests that self-efficacy can be conceived of as a proximal outcome while grit as distal outcome of thriving. This implies that self-efficacy may serve as a mediator, that is, a pathway or a mechanism that explains how thriving can lead to grit. Extant empirical literature has already shown that positive emotions are positively associated with self-efficacy (e.g., Oriol-Granado et al., 2017; Villavicencio & Bernardo, 2016). The present study investigated whether linking thriving not just to proximal outcomes, such as self-efficacy, but also to a trait-like outcome (grit) through self-efficacy.

Academic stress in this study was assumed to moderate this indirect relationship between thriving and grit through self-efficacy. Research has shown that individuals may differ how they handle and interpret the meaning of negative experiences (Dweck & Leggett, 1988; Vandewalle, Nerstad, & Dysvik, 2019). In this study, it was explored whether academic stress moderates the link between thriving and grit through self-efficacy. The proposed model is illustrated in Figure 1. In this study, the following hypotheses were be tested:

H1: Thriving will positively predict grit.
H2: Thriving will positively predict self-efficacy.
H3: Self-efficacy will positively predict grit.
H4: Self-efficacy will mediate the relationship between thriving and grit.
H5: Academic stress will moderate the indirect relationship between thriving and grit through self-efficacy.
Thriving, self-efficacy, and grit

Figure 1. Hypothesized moderated mediation model

METHOD

Participants

The participants in this study were university students in Manila, Philippines. The sample comprised 181 students, 39 males and 135 females. Seven of them opted not to disclose their gender. Their mean age was 19.9 years ($SD = 1.61$). They studied, among others, hotel and restaurant management, business administration, tourism, and psychology. More information about the demographic characteristics of the participants can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>$f$</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>21.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>74.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NA</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Below Php 10,579.00 monthly income</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>19.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Php 10,957 to Php 21,914 monthly income</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>28.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Php 21,914 to Php 43,828 monthly income</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>17.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Php 43,828 to Php 76,66 monthly income</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>16.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Php 76,669 to Php 131,484 monthly income</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Php 131,483 to Php 219,140 monthly income</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Php 219,140 and above monthly income</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Php stands for Philippine Peso. We asked them to indicate their family come (parental income). This variable was included to make sure that the sample was well-distributed. Most of the respondents are not yet working.
**Measures**

The questionnaires were administered in Google Forms. None of the scales used in this study were translated to Filipino since English is the medium of instruction in the country. The reliability indices of the measures regard the present sample.

**Thriving**

The Brief Inventory of Thriving (BIT) by Su et al. (2014) was used to measure thriving. It is composed of 10 items (i.e., I feel good most of the time) that are rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). The reliability of the inventory was .91.

**Grit**

Grit was measured with the Grit-S or 8-item version of the Grit scale (Duckworth & Quinn, 2009). It consists of two factors: Perseverance of Effort (e.g., I am diligent) and Consistency of Interest (e.g., New ideas and projects sometimes distract me from previous ones). The Perseverance of Effort subscale had moderate reliability, α = .65, while Consistency of Interest had α = .69.

**Self-efficacy**

Self-efficacy was assessed using the General Self-Efficacy scale (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995). It is a 10-item questionnaire rated on the scale of 1 (Not at all true) to 4 (Exactly true). Internal consistency reliability was .91.

**Academic stress**

Academic stress was measured using the 18-item Academic Stress Scale by Bedewy and Gabriel (2015). Responses were on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Example item is: “Competition with my peers for grades is quite intense”. The scale consists of four factors, namely, Pressure to Perform (α = .63), Perceptions of Workload (α = .71), Academic Self-perception (α = .65), and Time Restraints (α = .64).

**RESULTS**

Preliminary analyses were conducted before testing the proposed model. Descriptive statistics were used along with Pearson r correlations between the mean scores of the variables of the study (see Table 2). To test the proposed moderated mediation model, PROCESS Macro by Hayes (2012) was utilized. Specifically, to establish the relationship between thriving and grit, simple linear mediation was used. Then, to test the simple mediation model, PROCESS Macro Model 4 was utilized with self-efficacy as mediator. Model 4 is used when testing simple mediation models with one independent variables, one dependent variable and one (or
more) mediators. Finally, to test the proposed moderated mediation model, Model 7 was used with academic stress as moderator. Model 7 is very similar to Model 4 but with the addition of a moderator in the relationship of the independent variables and the mediator. Academic stress was added as the moderator variable in the analysis using Model 7.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics and correlations between the measures of the study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Age</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Thriving</td>
<td>.032</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Academic stress</td>
<td>-.134</td>
<td>-.478***</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. General self-efficacy</td>
<td>.085</td>
<td>.682***</td>
<td>-.384***</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Grit</td>
<td>.095</td>
<td>.559***</td>
<td>-.48***</td>
<td>.566***</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>19.9</td>
<td>3.55</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>2.98</td>
<td>3.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard deviation</td>
<td>1.61</td>
<td>0.797</td>
<td>0.572</td>
<td>0.612</td>
<td>0.606</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: *** p < .001

Mediation analyses

To test the first hypothesis, a simple linear regression analysis was conducted. The results showed that thriving was positively associated with grit, B = .43, t = 9.01, p < .001, accounting for 30.8% of the variance in the criterion variable, F(1, 179) = 81.3, p < .001. Thus, H1 was supported. Before proceeding to test the moderated mediation model, a simple mediation analysis was executed. Gender and income were entered as control variables in the first step of the regression models but did not significantly predict grit. The analyses revealed that thriving was positively associated with self-efficacy, B = .50, t = 11.46, p < .001. Self-efficacy, in turn, was positively associated with grit, B = .39, t = 4.21, p < .001. These findings support H2 and H3. The indirect effect of thriving on grit through self-efficacy was significant, B = .17, 95% CI [.088, .254], supporting H4. The confidence intervals were completely above zero which is Hayes’ (2013) basis for establishing significance. The mediation model accounted for 39.44% of variance of grit which is higher compared to the R² value of 30.8% in the simple regression analysis to test H1. It is notable that thriving still had a significant direct effect on grit even when the mediator was present in the model, B = .24, t = 3.89, p < .001. Hence, there was partial rather than full mediation.

To test moderated mediation, Model 7 of PROCESS macro was utilized. Results revealed that there was a significant interaction between thriving and academic stress in predicting self-efficacy (see Table 3). The association of thriving with self-efficacy was significant on all three levels of the moderator. The low level of the moderator was one standard deviation below the mean academic stress score while the high level was one standard deviation above the mean. Specifically, the greatest impact of thriving on self-efficacy was observed when academic stress was high. To help visualize these findings, the
Thriving, self-efficacy, and grit

interaction plots are presented in Figure 2. As shown in the graphic presentation, those who were low on thriving had lower self-efficacy in highly stressful situations. On the other hand, those who thrived more were also the ones who felt more efficacious even when stressed.

![Graphic presentation of the moderating effect of academic stress on the relationship of thriving and self-efficacy](image)

Figure 2. Graphic presentation of the moderating effect of academic stress on the relationship of thriving and self-efficacy

The index of moderated mediation was above zero, which means that the indirect relationship of thriving on grit through self-efficacy was moderated by academic stress, supporting H5. Specifically, this indirect relationship was strongest when the value of academic stress was high rather than low. These results suggest that academic stress moderated the indirect link of thriving with grit through self-efficacy. These results are also shown in Table 3.
Table 3. Moderated mediation analysis for academic stress moderating general self-efficacy's mediation of thriving and grit

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor</th>
<th>Mediator Model</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thriving</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>8.98</td>
<td>&lt; .001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic stress</td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.13</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>-1.92</td>
<td>.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thriving x Academic Stress</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>2.72</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.10</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>-1.36</td>
<td>.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>0.02</td>
<td>1.00</td>
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<td>0.12</td>
<td>.91</td>
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<td>Academic Stress Score</td>
<td>Conditional effects at Academic Stress ± 1 SD</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effect</td>
<td>SE</td>
<td>LLCI</td>
<td>ULCI</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-1.00 (Low Stress)</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td>.197</td>
<td>.477</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.00 (Mean Stress)</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>.350</td>
<td>.547</td>
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<tr>
<td>+1.00 (High Stress)</td>
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<td>.446</td>
<td>.674</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Predictor</td>
<td>Dependent Variable Model</td>
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<td>SE</td>
<td>t</td>
<td>p</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thriving</td>
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<td>0.24</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>3.89</td>
<td>&lt; .001</td>
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<tr>
<td>Self-efficacy</td>
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<td>0.08</td>
<td>4.21</td>
<td>&lt; .001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>1.20</td>
<td>.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
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<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>1.93</td>
<td>.06</td>
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<tr>
<td>Academic stress score</td>
<td>Conditional Effects at Academic Stress ± 1 SD</td>
<td>Effect</td>
<td>SE</td>
<td>LLCI</td>
<td>ULCI</td>
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<tr>
<td>-1.00</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.19</td>
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<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.15</td>
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<tr>
<td>+1.00</td>
<td>0.19</td>
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DISCUSSION

The COVID-19 outbreak forced educational institutions all over the world to implement alternative ways of delivering education in attempt to slow down the transmission of the virus. However, there is evidence showing that schools, teachers and learners were not completely prepared for this sudden transition (Baticulon et al., 2021). Both learners and
Thriving, self-efficacy, and grit

educators are struggling with the implementation of online education. Moreover, there are also findings showing that the pandemic can also be detrimental to the mental health of those affected (Montano & Acebes, 2020; Nicomedes & Avila, 2020). The present study was conducted to determine if thriving can be experienced despite the adversities brought about by the COVID outbreak. Also, it was explored if thriving can be a predictor of grit among distance learning students and if self-efficacy mediates this relationship. Academic stress was added as a moderator in the proposed model since there are findings indicating that people may differ in the way they appraise and react to stress (e.g., Dweck & Leggett, 1988). Some individuals may be overwhelmed to stress and adversity while others use it as an opportunity to grow and attain higher levels of functioning (Carver, 1998).

The results of this study revealed that thriving has a positive association with grit. This suggests that students thriving in adversity are more likely to report higher grit, that is, passion and perseverance. This finding supported the first hypothesis (H1). The results also confirmed H2 that thriving can be a predictor of higher self-efficacy. This suggests that students who thrive are also more likely to have higher confidence in their abilities. Moreover, self-efficacy was also significantly positively related with grit. This means that students who feel efficacious are also more likely to stay on track in pursuit of their long-term goals. The simple mediation model (H4) was supported, which means that thriving can increase grit among university students through the enhancement of general self-efficacy.

The study also showed that there was a significant interaction between thriving and academic stress in predicting general self-efficacy (see Figure 2). Interestingly, those who thrive the most can still feel efficacious even in the presence of high academic stress. On the other hand, those who are less thriving may feel lack of efficacy when highly stressed. Hence, these findings suggest that academic stress may moderate self-efficacy. Stress may be perceived differently depending on one's level of thriving. Thus, there are individuals who, in the face of stress, can mobilize their resources and thrive, which makes them feel effective, but there are others who do not thrive and feel less effective.

Thus, the hypothesized moderated mediation model was supported, confirming H5. The findings showed that the indirect relationship of thriving and grit through self-efficacy was moderated by academic stress. And interestingly, this effect was strongest when academic stress was high. This means that stress, although detrimental in other contexts, may also be an important piece of the puzzle in achieving good psychological health. Of course, as the results suggest, stress by itself does not lead to grit if the students are not thriving in the first place. This supports the propositions of Carver (1998) that thriving can help the person recover faster and elevate their pre-adversity level of functioning. This happens because the individuals who thrive can utilize the stressful situation as an opportunity in which they can gain skills and knowledge that will help them surpass the adversity. Yet, Carver warned that the challenging situation should be malleable to allow any gains or else it will only lead to loss. Carver (1998) stated that “if the circumstances are even more extreme, growth – thriving - may be precluded”. Perhaps this is the explanation as to why some students were not able to thrive or at least feel effective in the face of adversity.

The present study also contributed to what is known about grit in the Filipino context. Previous studies about grit conducted among Filipinos showed that it can be instrumental in achieving various optimal outcomes such as well-being and academic engagement (Datu et
Thriving, self-efficacy, and grit

al., 2015, 2016). The main contribution of this study was that it showed that thriving and self-efficacy are key pathways in achieving grit among university students facing adversity. Even in demanding situations, students can mobilize their personal resources to feel effective and efficacious, which in turn can help enable passion and perseverance in their studies.

Implications of the findings

The findings of the present study are in line with the propositions of the Conservation of Resources (CoR) Theory (Hobfoll et al., 2002) as well as the Broaden-and-Build Theory (Fredrickson, 2004). The CoR theory posits that in the face of adversity, there is a tendency for individuals to gather and safekeep resources that will make it more likely for them to survive (Hobfoll et al., 2002, 2018). The resources are being mobilized as a way of coping with stress, and this can also be a pathway in obtaining as well as cultivating other valuable resources. In the present study, thriving can be considered as the key resource that helped the students gather and secure other resources in the midst of difficulty. It is plausible that one’s resources facilitate positive appraisal of events (past, present and future) as well as mitigate the negativity bias (Luthans & Youssef-Morgan, 2017; Youssef-Morgan & Luthans, 2015).

Also, the findings of the study are in line with the propositions of Fredrickson’s (2004) Broaden-and-Build Theory of positive emotions. The said theory posits that the experience of positive emotions and well-being can help build one’s personal resources as well as other enduring psychological outcomes. The present study showed that thriving can help one cultivate a proximal and state-like gain such as self-efficacy as well as distal and trait-like benefit such as passion and perseverance in pursuing long-term goals.

Limitations of the study

This study is not without limitations. First, it focused only on university students in an academic institution in Manila. This means that these results may not be generalizable to all populations and there is a need for replication to determine if these findings are supported. Moreover, a correlational design was utilized. This means that although the proposed models are significant, it cannot be said that there is a cause-and-effect relationship between the variables. There might be some other mediating or moderating variables that should be explored in future research so that more can be uncovered about thriving and the development of other important personal resources. Also, the data in this research was gathered in a very specific point in time. Future studies can utilize more rigorous designs, such as longitudinal ones, to determine how thriving, self-efficacy, and grit change over time and if they have meaningful associations with each other.
Conclusions

Even with the abovementioned limitations, the present study offered evidence that can contribute to what is presently known about the impact of COVID-19 on the well-being of learners. This study showed that not all students respond to the present situation in the same manner. Some students may thrive and flourish as they mobilize their personal capabilities allowing them to have determination to pursue long-term goals. On the other hand, those who were overwhelmed by the present crisis may find it hard to thrive, making it challenging for them to feel efficacious and gritty. Concerning practice, the present findings could be useful for school administrators, teachers, counselors, and psychologists to help students mobilize their resources and maximize their capabilities in the face of adversity so that they can develop grit in the pursuit of their long-term goals.

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Thriving, self-efficacy, and grit


Thriving, self-efficacy, and grit


