Beyond Motivation: Investigating Thai English Major Students' Grit

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Abstract

Success in language learning has generally been attributed to students' motivation. However, beyond motivation is grit, a psychological construct that has rarely been mentioned in language learning research. This study therefore aimed to investigate the grit of 171 Thai students studying English as a Foreign Language (EFL), and the factors that might have influenced their grit as EFL learners. A questionnaire based on adapted grit scales and a focus-group discussion were used to collect the data. A statistical analysis was conducted on the questionnaire-derived data. Meta-inferences were made in relation to the transcribed orally- collected data from the focus group discussion in order to draw relevant conclusions. The findings revealed that participants' socio-cultural context influenced their consistency of interest and perseverance of effort at an above moderate level. This may have resulted in making them adaptable in their approach to achieving their learning goals. Future careers, societal needs, life purpose and the reputation as an English major student were found to contribute to the variance. It is suggested that a more perseverance-oriented approach coupled with proper mentoring sessions that is context-relevant should be incorporated into EFL programs to enhance students' interest and effort in attaining their goals.

Keywords: grit, consistent interest, perseverance of effort, socio-cultural context, Thai EFL learners

Introduction

Teacher: So, how do you improve your English?
Student: I speak to myself. I do not care what people say, whether I am getting out of my mind or not. If that will help me improve my level of English, I will to do it every day.

The above was a response given by a student during a casual discussion with the researchers about how she improves her level of English. The researchers wondered why the student would speak to herself as a way of improving her English language skills. It was then deduced from her response that she could be a motivated English major student. However, what could have driven her to use such an approach in her language learning process? This suggested that there was something more driving her quest to become a better language learner, which, in turn, prompted the current study on what lies beyond students' motivation to ensure they succeed as language learners in such a context.

As the most widely used language around the world in the 21st century, English serves as a vital tool for globalization in modern society and in numerous countries in various fields ranging from politics to business, technology and education (Foley, 2007; Schneider, 2018). Realizing the importance of English, Thailand has been investing in efforts to promote English learning and in teaching its population of EFL learners. These efforts have become more visible in recent decades due to the increase in the numbers of native or near-native speaking teachers of English in schools and higher education institutes, and the establishment of English programs at different levels (Kirkpatrick, 2012; Niemted, 2016). There have also been many different forms of English activities organized for both teachers (e.g. teacher training) and students (e.g., English camps, short-term exchange abroad programs) (British Council Thailand, 2014; Franz & Teo, 2017; Kirkpatrick, 2012; Rugasken & Harris, 2009). However, the outcome of these efforts has not been as fruitful as expected and this is reflected in the latest EF English language proficiency index, in which Thailand is ranked at the very low level (EF English Proficiency Index, 2019).

The discussion quoted previously took place at the same Thai university where the researchers conducted the present study. Like many universities in Thailand, this university aims to improve the standard of English of the students enrolled in its various English language courses (Kirkpatrick, 2012; Niemted, 2016). Thai EFL students try hard to sustain their learning motivation through participating in various English language activities. However, due to inadequate contextual opportunities for practice, motivation, which is seen as a crucial psychological construct necessary for successful language learning (Dörnyei, 2001; Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011) may not be sufficient in itself to enable the students to make the desired progress.

The personality construct grit has been suggested to play a pivotal role in helping students make the desired effort to improve their English language proficiency despite the challenges they face (Keegan, 2017). Keegan asserts that grit can effectively promote successful learning in English for Foreign or Second Language (EFL/ESL) learners who need to devote high levels of attention to English. Even though grit has been researched in other fields, especially in psychology (e.g. Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, & Kelly, 2007; Duckworth, Quinn, & Seligman, 2009), few studies have considered grit among EFL learners. Furthermore, compared to motivation, grit has not been investigated significantly in Asian EFL settings, particularly in Thailand (Changlek & Palanukulwong, 2015; Datu, Valdez, & King, 2016; Datu, Yuen, & Chen, 2017; Ebadi, Weisi, & Khaksar, 2018; Yamashita, 2018).

To make a meaningful contribution to current research, it is essential to investigate the psychological construct grit in different domains. In particular, it is necessary to gain insights into how grit influences students who study English as a foreign language in contexts that have received less attention such as studying at a Thai university. Greater knowledge of this construct would not only illuminate the role of grit in language learning in an EFL context but would also help language instructors to guide language learners more effectively during the learning process. It would also contribute to the literature of grit in English learning and teaching in a Thai EFL context.

Literature Review
Grit

Grit is a popular construct which has gained significant attention and has been well researched in several domains and contexts in recent years (Duckworth, Kirby, Tsukayama, Berstein, & Ericsson, 2010; Duckworth et al., 2007; Duckworth et al., 2009; Eskreis-Winkler, Shulman, Beal & Duckworth, 2014; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Grit has caused heated discussion in the fields of education and psychology and has also attracted the attention of the media, for instance, U.S. News, KQED and Education Week in the USA (Sheppard, 2016). The recent attention given to grit arises from the widespread belief of its potential to drive people to achieve success and other positive outcomes.

Through the psychological lens of Duckworth et al. (2007), Duckworth and Quinn (2009), and Duckworth et al. (2009), grit has been defined as the passion and perseverance shown towards the accomplishment of long-term goals through hard work and sustained enthusiasm regardless of the obstacles and the length of time it takes. In this study, grit is defined as the enthusiasm, persistence, and consistent interest that Thai students show in the long process of studying EFL as English majors to achieve high English proficiency.

Perseverance of Effort and Consistent Interest

The two main distinguishable measures that make grit unique are perseverance of effort and consistent interest. Perseverance of effort refers to the extent to which an individual is able to exert effort to achieve an objective in the face of setbacks. Consistent interest means the tendency of an individual to sustain interest or to remain passionate about a task for a long period of time. These two aspects have been seen as distinct but related (Duckworth & Quinn, 2009).

The proponents of grit suggest that it is a good predictor of academic and career success and positive outcomes in other fields (Duckworth et al., 2007; Duckworth et al., 2009; Maddi et al., 2012; Strayhorn, 2014). On the other hand, Credé, Tynan and Harms (2017), who conducted a meta-analysis of 88 studies relating to grit, argued that Duckworth and other scholars have

overemphasized the relationship between grit and academic outcomes since they found only a weak correlation between the two constructs. Further, Credé et al. (2017) suggested that grit is simply the personality construct of conscientiousness in a different guise while Kramer, MacLean and Martin (2018) pointed out that Duckworth and other proponents of grit did not adduce enough evidence to conceptualize grit as a hierarchical construct covering the two measures; perseverance of effort and consistency of interest. In addition, Rimfeld, Kovas, Dale, and Plomin (2016) contended that grit may be similar to the Big Five personality factors, which have been found to predict academic achievement. Nonetheless, their study found that one of the measures of grit, perseverance of effort, was associated with the variance found in levels of academic performance.

However, Duckworth et al. (2007) posit otherwise. They conceptualized grit as a personality dimension, arguing that grit is a construct that remains unchanged under different circumstances. Therefore, grit could be differentiated from other similar personality constructs because of its focus on long-term mental stamina, endurance, resilience and determination, and on different situations but not as an immediate achievable goal that allows immediate feedback (Reed, Pritschet, & Cutton, 2013). Grit has therefore been operationally defined to encompass the elements, passion/consistency of interest and perseverance of effort, which distinguish it from other similar constructs.

Relationship between Motivation and Grit

In contrast to grit as a barely changed construct, motivation has been regarded as a dynamic situation-specific construct in second/foreign language learning (Dörnyei, 2014; Waninge, Dörnyei & De Bot, 2014) and as one of the most important determinants of success in language acquisition (Dörnyei, 1994). Motivation in language learning can be defined as the degree to which a person expends effort to learn a language, which results from the eagerness to do so and the fulfillment obtained from the learning task (Dörnyei, 1998).

Motivation has been widely studied as a factor influencing achievement in second language acquisition along with other non-

cognitive constructs, such as personality, self- regulation, self-efficacy and resilience (Rimfeld et al., 2016; Yamashita, 2018). Maehr and Archer (1987) as cited in Keegan (2017) characterized motivation as relating to direction, persistence, continuing motivation, and activity level. This definition incorporates aspects of grit, which can also be regarded as an influential non-cognitive construct closely associated with other non-cognitive constructs such as motivation. *Figure 1*, which is based on the literature reviewed above that provides different perspectives on the definition of grit, illustrates the sub-constructs perseverance of effort and consistent interest, the correlation between different personality constructs, and grit. Grit correlates with motivation together with other constructs such as self-efficacy, resilience, and hardness.
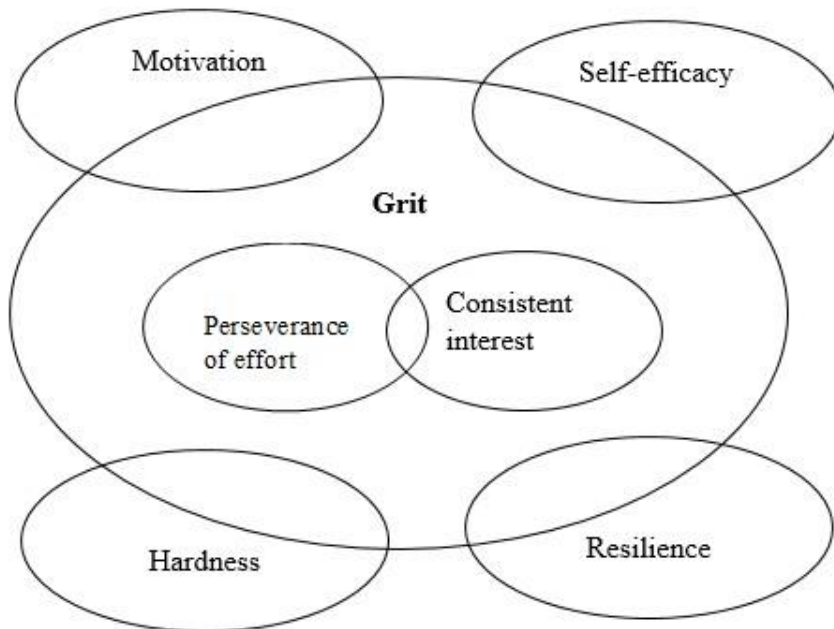
Figure 1. Relationship between grit and other non-cognitive constructs

Regarding motivation research in English learning and teaching, Boo, Dörnyei, and Ryan (2015) noted that the study of motivation in second language learning, particularly English, had been very active over the decade, 2005 – 2014 and they were able to trace 416 articles published in that period relating to L2

motivation research. Studies relating to motivation in Thailand have found that Thai EFL learners, who were mostly high school and university students, have higher instrumental/extrinsic motivation than integrative/intrinsic motivation (Cho & Teo, 2014; Choomthong & Chaichompoo, 2015; Degang, 2010; Lai & Aksornjarung, 2018; Oranpattanachai, 2013).

However, compared with motivation in second/foreign language acquisition, there has been substantially less investigation of the impact of grit in learning English as a foreign language. Table 1 details the number of studies traced in relation to grit in language acquisition, very few of which relate to EFL teaching and learning settings. Among those studies listed in Table 1, only 4 of them are specifically relevant to the EFL context, but their findings are inconclusive due to their different cultural contexts.

Hofstede (1980) posited that people from a highly individualized cultural setting have a strong sense of self-direction towards the goals they set for themselves. They therefore strongly emphasize their personal traits and view themselves as unique and distinct from others (Markus & Kitayama,1991). However, in collective cultures like those in Thailand, China, and the Philippines, priorities are given to pursuing group and interpersonal goals as opposed to defining and perceiving distinct goals for the individual (Changlek &Pananukulwong, 2015; Datu et al., 2016; Ebadi et al., 2018; Garcia, Cheung & Loredo – Abuyo, 2015; Kwan, Bond, & Singelis,1997). In a collectivist cultural setting people's interests and efforts are inextricably intertwined with the collective social good, and hence they would be more concerned about the interests of the society rather than the individual. Grit is therefore a relevant object of study in such a context because the way that people define themselves or are defined by others may have an effect on their grit.

Table 1. *A Brief Review of Empirical Studies on Grit*

Topics	Context/Setting	Findings	References
Grit and academic performance	USA Ivy League undergraduates / cadets US Military Academy, West Point	Grit did not correlate positively to IQ, but it was highly correlated with one of the Big Five, conscientiousness. Grit nonetheless demonstrated the incremental predictive validity of success measures over and beyond IQ and conscientiousness.	Duckworth et al., 2007
Grit and academic performance	College students in the Philippines	The participants' overall Grade Weight Average (GWA) was found to be high and their level of grit, fair. A direct relationship was found between GWA and the strength of grit.	Garcia, Cheung & Loredo – Abuyo, 2015
Grit-perseverance for a long-term goal and a growth mindset in learning computer programming	South African high school students	Though the correlation between grit, mindset, and the project results were moderate, students' submissions of their projects indicated a tendency towards persistence.	Kench, Hazelhurst, & Otulaja (2016)
Developing an ELT context-specific grit instrument	Iran	An acceptable reliability of 0.833 and validity results were found with a sample of 306 Iranian EFL learners.	Ebadi et al., 2018
Grit and prediction of Japanese language learning	USA university students	Even though grit was not found to be a significant predictor of success in SLA, the learners' grit, was significantly	Yamashita, 2018

Topics	Context/Setting	Findings	References
		correlated with their grades in Japanese language courses. Negative correlations were shown between their perseverance and some of their grading components.	
Predictive validity of motivation, anxiety, and grit on English language achievement	Thailand high school EFL learners	Overall, grit was positively correlated with motivation and negatively correlated with anxiety. High achievers seemed to have higher levels of motivation and grit, and lower levels of anxiety than low achievers.	Changlek & Palanukulwong, 2015
Validating the Short Grit Scale in a collectivist setting	University and high school students in the Philippines	In the Filipino collectivist culture, the perseverance of effort aspect of grit was more relevant than consistent interest.	Datu et al., 2016

In addition, it is worth noting that Kramer et al. (2018) suggested that neither of the two grit-assessment instruments, Grit-O and Grit-S, include any items that specifically relate to English learning. They suggested that "More research is necessary to investigate the distinction that might exist between grit as a global construct, and perhaps a more domain- specific conceptualization of the construct" (p39). Further, it has been noted that very few investigations of grit have been conducted in Asian collectivist cultural contexts such as Thailand (Datu et al., 2017).

However, Ericsson (2016) suggested that too much significance may be attached to grit as a contributor to success. Other educators have further complained that proponents of grit neglect the fact that learners may encounter a variety of socio-cultural problems, for instance, a negative socio-economic

situation and other education-related environmental factors ('MindShift', 2015). Duckworth et al. (2007) also recognized the significant role that environmental factors play and accepted that grit may affect individuals differently in different socio-cultural contexts. There is, therefore, a need for more investigation of grit in a Thai EFL collectivist cultural setting.

Research Questions

The research questions focused upon in this paper are:
1. To what extent do the English major students in this study demonstrate grit in studying English as a foreign language?
2. What factors influenced the English major students' grit in their learning context?

Methodology
Research Setting

The study was conducted in the South of Thailand (See Figure 2), where many people assume that tourism is flourishing. However, the specific research site is located in Thailand's deep-south, which is a very dissimilar region to the islands further north which are popular tourist destinations. Thailand's deep-south refers to the five provinces bordering Malaysia (Burke, Tweedie & Poocharoen, 2013) which are less exploited for tourism and have fewer supporting facilities. Therefore, few foreign tourists are attracted to this region (Ostheimer, 2015), and there are less opportunities for local students to use English except for the time that they spend learning English in classrooms and English camps and in undertaking projects or activities that are specifically organized by local schools or universities.
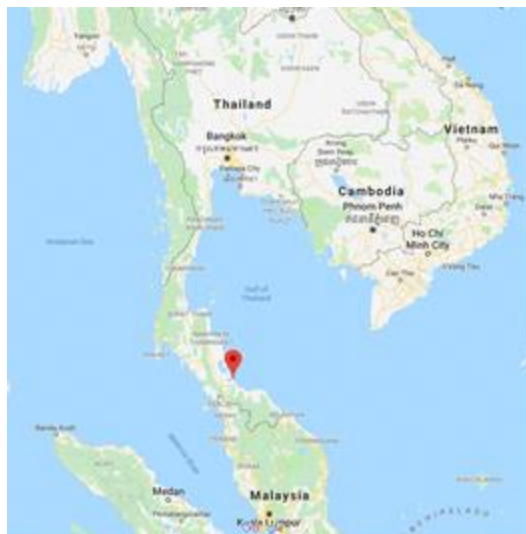
Figure 2. Map of Thailand showing the location of the research site (red marker)

Participants

The participants were second- and third-year English major students from the Faculty of Education and the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences (HuSO) at a university in the south of Thailand. One hundred and seventy-one (171) English major students from the two faculties voluntarily participated in this study. These students had enrolled in the English major programs in both faculties which had similar selection criteria, including but not limited to having sufficiently high scores in the Ordinary National Education Test. The overall English proficiency level of the students ranged mainly from lower intermediate to upper intermediate though some had a high proficiency level, according to their assessments at secondary Grade 6 in the Thai basic education system (English Language Institute, 2015 as cited in Franz & Teo, 2017).

Research Approach

A mixed methods approach including both quantitative and qualitative aspects was deemed appropriate for this theory-driven study (Plano Clark & Ivankova, 2016). A six- point Likert-scale-based questionnaire and focus-group discussion were designed and implemented to collect both quantitative and qualitative data. A visual model is presented in *Figure 3* to show the mixed methods

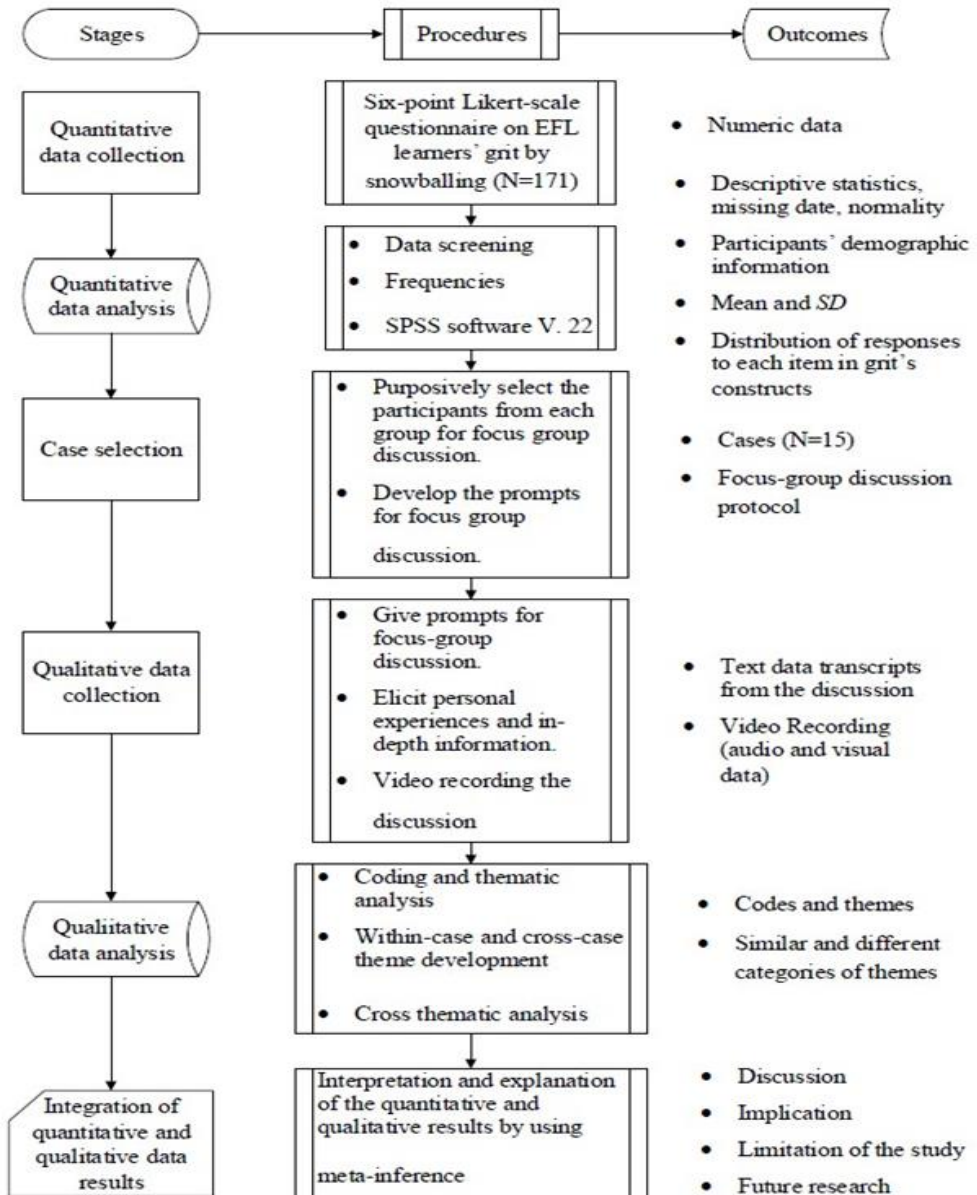sequential explanatory design. It shows the stages, the procedures and the outcomes of the whole study.

Stages	Procedures	Outcomes
Quantitative data collection	Six-point Likert-scale questionnaire on EFL learners' grit by snowballing (N=171)	• Numeric data • Descriptive statistics, missing date, normality
Quantitative data analysis	• Data screening • Frequencies • SPSS software V. 22	• Participants' demographic information • Mean and *SD* • Distribution of responses to each item in grit's constructs
Case selection	• Purposively select the participants from each group for focus group discussion. • Develop the prompts for focus group discussion.	• Cases (N=15) • Focus-group discussion protocol
Qualitative data collection	• Give prompts for focus-group discussion. • Elicit personal experiences and in-depth information. • Video recording the discussion	• Text data transcripts from the discussion • Video Recording (audio and visual data)
Qualitative data analysis	• Coding and thematic analysis • Within-case and cross-case theme development • Cross thematic analysis	• Codes and themes • Similar and different categories of themes
Integration of quantitative and qualitative data results	Interpretation and explanation of the quantitative and qualitative results by using meta-inference	• Discussion • Implication • Limitation of the study • Future research

Figure 3. Visual chart of the mixed methods research design for the study that was adapted from Creswell and Plano Clark (2018).

Research Instruments

Questionnaire

Development of Grit Items and Scale

A self-report questionnaire (see Appendix 1) was designed based on the Grit-O (original scale) and Grit-S (short form) scales, containing 12 and 8 items, respectively, which were adapted to suit the research context (Duckworth et al., 2007; Duckworth & Quinn, 2009). The questionnaire was divided into three sections. The first part collected the respondents' demographics. The second part collected data relating to the learners' consistent interest and the final part focused on the learners' perseverance of effort. Twenty items were adapted including nine items measuring consistency of interest and eleven items measuring perseverance of effort.

These items were constructed utilizing a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1, not like me at all to 6, very much like me with the purpose of preventing the Thai EFL learners' choosing a neutral option on a 5-point Likert scale (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011; Gyamfi & Sukseemuang, 2017). To prevent response bias, items 6, 7 and 8 in the consistency of interest section and items 14 and 16 in the perseverance of effort section were reversed (Wong, Rindfleisch, & Burroughs, 2003).

Validity and Reliability

After the items were developed by the first author they were reviewed by an independent educator and the second author to ensure their validity before being piloted. Based on their reviews and rigorous discussion, some items were modified to improve their clarity and consistency. The questionnaire was piloted among 31 English major students who shared similar characteristics with the intended respondents in the study but were not participants in the main study. The two subscales, consistency of interest and perseverance of effort had Cronbach Alpha Coefficients of .67 and .70 respectively. The overall value of the Cronbach Alpha Coefficient was .80, which was considered acceptable (DeVellis, 2003; Field, 2009) based on questionnaires used in earlier studies of grit, which had overall internal consistency indices of between .73 and .87, and .73 to .79 for

consistent interest items and .60 to .78 for perseverance of effort items (Duckworth et al., 2010; Maddi et al., 2013; VonCulin, Tsukayama, & Duckworth, 2014), respectively.

Data Collection

Before administering the questionnaire, the concept of grit and the purpose of the research was explained to participants. Completion of the questionnaire was voluntary. The distribution and collection of the questionnaires took one week. Some of the questionnaires were given directly to the respondents during lecture hours while some questionnaires were given to the instructors responsible for teaching English major students to be distributed to the participants. Others were distributed through snowballing (Heckathorn, 1997). Out of the 200 questionnaires distributed, 177 were collected for data analysis, which was at a return rate of 88.5 %, and eventually, 171 completed questionnaires were used in the final data analysis.

Focus Group Discussion

The researchers used purposive random sampling to select fifteen participants from among the final sample (seven from Education and eight from Humanities and Social Sciences). They were invited through a phone call to take part in a focus-group discussion and all gave their informed consent. The focus group discussions aimed to establish the beliefs that the students held about themselves as English major students and their learning context, and also to examine how their socio-cultural background influenced their grit.

The prompts for the focus-group discussion protocol (see Appendix 2) were developed based on the responses from the survey. Before the discussion, consent was sought from the respondents to video record the discussion for transcription purposes. They were assured that any information they provided would be kept confidential and that it would not affect their grades in the courses they were taking. The entire discussion took an hour and fifteen minutes.

Data Analysis and Reporting

The researchers conducted a descriptive statistical analysis (means and standard deviation), based on participant demographics, of the responses to the questionnaire using the SPSS V. 22 program. The findings were interpreted using the interval calculation from the 6-point Likert scale as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. *Interpretation of the mean values*

Interpretation	Scale	Mean Range
Very low	Not like me	1-1.83
Low	Like me	1.84-2.67
Moderate	Somewhat like me	2.68-3.50
Above moderate	Mostly like me	3.51-4.33
High	Not much like me	4.34-5.17
Very high	Very much like me	5.18-6.00

The researchers analyzed the video recording of the focus group discussion by transcribing the video recording twice in Bailey (2008) and Davidson (2009). The second transcription was carried out by the researchers to add relevant or remove irrelevant information. A thematic analysis was undertaken to find the most popular themes emerging from the discussion. Finally, meta-inferences were made to draw comprehensive conclusions from both the qualitative and quantitative results as suggested by Creswell and Plano Clark (2018) in order to answer the research questions.

A meta-inference is "an overall conclusion, explanation or understanding developed through an integration of the inferences obtained from the qualitative and quantitative strands of a mixed method study" (Tashakkori & Teddlie 2008: p 101). To ensure the credibility of inferences from the qualitative data analysis, two external reviewers were invited to examine the consistency of interpretations for the integrated results and to provide insights. Then the researchers responded to the external reviewers' comments and modified the interpretations of the integration of quantitative and qualitative results. The next section is a combination of results and discussion to address the research questions.

Results and Discussion
Demographics

As shown in *Figure 4*, 171 participants of whom 28 (16 %) were male and 143 (84 %) were female, returned completed questionnaires. Fifty-seven (33 %) were from the Faculty of Education while 114 (67 %) were from the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences (HuSO); 110 (64 %) were second year students and 61(36 %) were third year students.
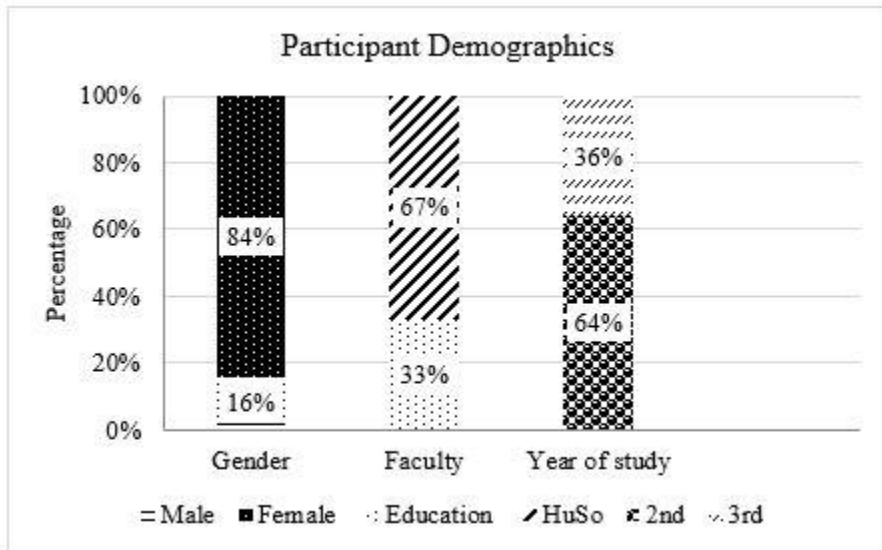

Figure 4. Participant demographics (N=171)

Extent of Students' Grit in Learning English as a Foreign Language

In this section, descriptive statistics are provided to demonstrate the extent of students' grit in their study of EFL. The findings of the students' overall grit and its sub-constructs are highlighted below.

Overall Grit

As shown in *Figure 5*, the students had an above-moderate level of grit (*M* = 4.03, *SD* = 0.45), which means that the students had more than a moderate degree of persistence and consistent interest in learning English. The level of perseverance of effort was rated as above moderate (*M* = 4.14, *SD* =0.56) as was the strength

of the students' consistent interest (M = 3.90, SD = 0.63). These results indicate the students can persist in making a continuous effort to maintain their interest in learning English in order to achieve certain goals in their studies or life.   Detailed data analysis of both perseverance of effort and consistent interest follow in the section below.
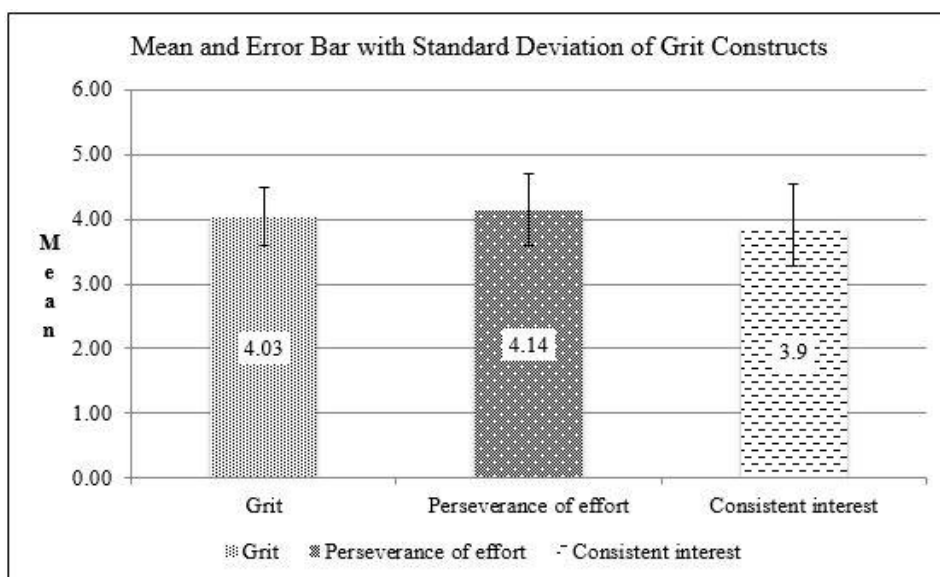

Figure 5. Mean and standard deviation (SD) of grit constructs

Perseverance of Effort

An overall above-moderate level (M = 4.14, SD = 0.56) was found for the students' perseverance of effort in learning English. This finding from the analysis of the responses to the questionnaire items was also supported by the focus group discussion data. A visual representation of the distribution of responses to the items relating to perseverance of effort together with their means and standard deviations is shown in *Figure 6* while the data are presented in Table 3. Six items, numbers 2, 3, 4, 6, 9, and 10, showed a high level of perseverance of effort while all the other items showed a moderate or an above-moderate level except for item 6, which had a low value, due to its negative wording.

Six out of 11 items on perseverance of effort were rated as high level. This result shows that the students do not give up

easily in their English language learning process when they encounter difficulties, barriers or challenges. They also try to find solutions to overcome the obstacles by spending more time to explore new knowledge. *Figure 6* shows that 40% to 60% of the students' responses to 8 out of 11 items fall in the range from "very much like me" to "somewhat like me". This distribution corresponds to the above-moderate level of the students' perseverant effort.
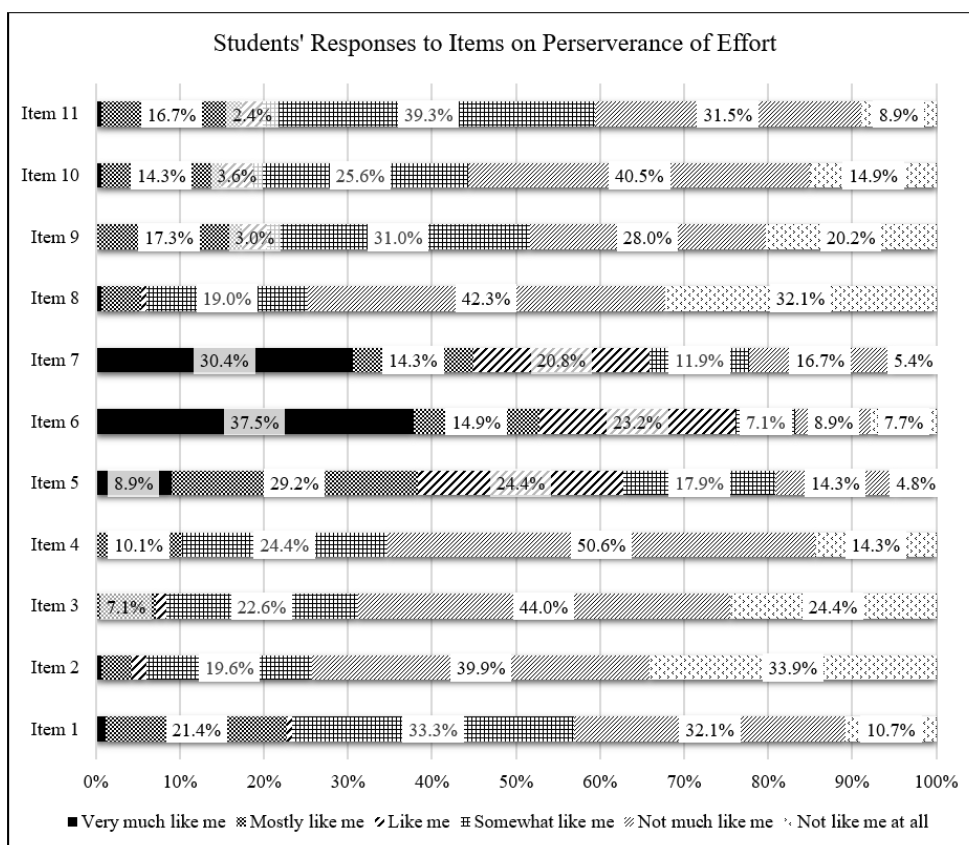

Figure 6. Response distribution of items on perseverance of effort

Table 3
Results of items on perseverance of effort

No.	Items	Mean	SD	Interpretation
1.	I finish whatever English activity I begin	4.28	1.01	Above moderate
2.	Getting a bad grade in English tests makes me try harder next time.	5.01	.97	High
3.	After I get an answer wrong, I keep going until I get it right.	4.83	.93	High
4.	I work hard to find a way to complete assignments no matter how difficult they are.	4.69	.84	High
5.	I feel frustrated and give up when I cannot figure out something in English.	3.18	1.33	Moderate
6.	Failing an English test makes me want to give up.	2.50	1.63	Low
7.	When I do not do well in an assignment, I decide it is not worth trying next time.	2.82	1.64	Moderate
8.	When I do not do well on a project, I think about how to do better next time	4.99	.92	High
9.	I always find at least a little bit of time to improve my English skills every day.	4.46	1.08	High
10.	I start learning new things when I have difficulties understanding the current ones.	4.48	1.06	High
11.	I keep working hard even when I feel like quitting.	4.25	.97	Above moderate
	Overall Mean	4.14	.56	Above moderate

Consistent Interest

The overall mean of the items in part 3 indicated that the students had an above- moderate level of consistent interest. The distribution of responses, the means and SDs are presented both visually and quantitatively in *Figure 7* and Table 4, respectively. Only three items, 12, 13, and 18 were interpreted as showing a high level of consistent interest, while the rest of the items displayed either a moderate or above moderate level.

Three of the items (12, 13, and 18) indicated that the students had a strong interest in being English major students, were passionate about the new things they learned, and did their best to achieve their future goals. Items 17 and 20, rated as above moderate level, revealed that the students carried out English projects with an above moderate degree of excitement and could sustain their interest in their studies. *Figure 7* indicates that 40%-

60% of the students' positive responses to seven out of 8 items were within the range from "very much like me" to "somewhat like me". This result, revealing an above moderate level of consistent interest, signifies that the students had a sustainable interest in their studies.
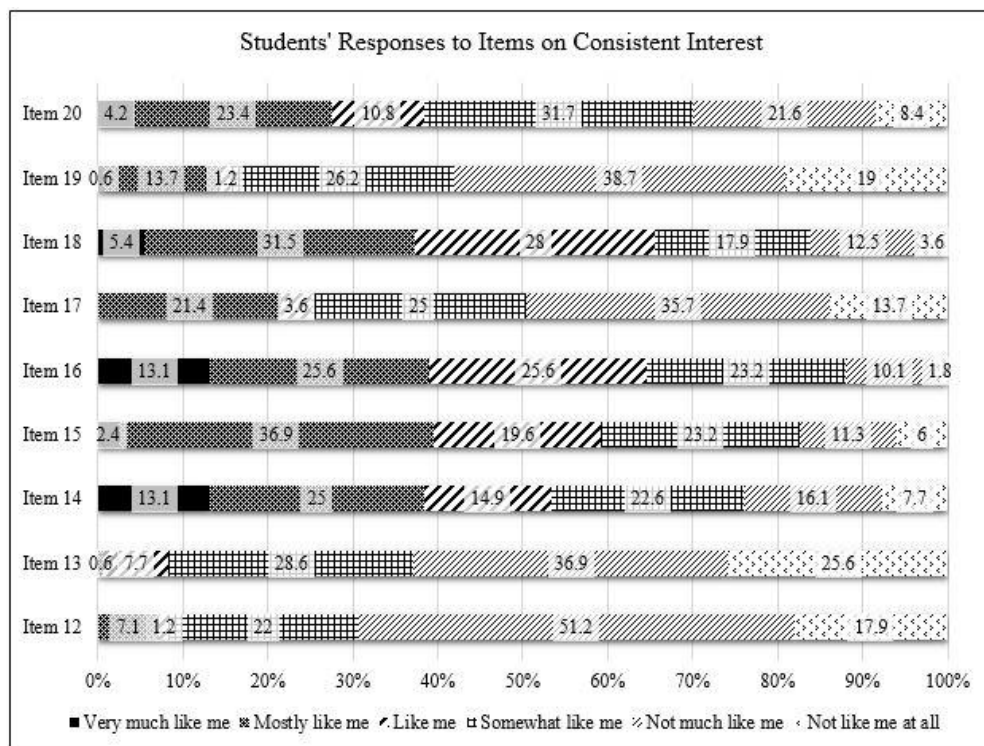

Figure 7. Response distribution of items on consistent interest

Table 4. *Results of items on consistent interest*

No.	Items	Mean	SD	Interpretation
12.	I am interested in the things I learn in school	4.76	.87	High
13.	I do my best in school to achieve my future goals.	4.76	.96	High
14.	Doing my best in school has nothing to do with my long-term goals.	3.36	1.45	Moderate
15.	I would rather keep doing the same school project than start on something new.	3.39	1.17	Moderate
16.	It is not worth doing my schoolwork if it will take a long time.	2.98	1.25	Moderate
17.	I feel excited when I do English projects.	4.33	1.08	Above moderate
18.	I get interested in certain English	3.17	1.22	Moderate

No.	Items	Mean	SD	Interpretation
	projects for a short time and I lose interest.			
19.	I feel energized when I try to learn something new.	4.56	1.04	High
20.	I do my work until it stops being interesting.	3.80	1.24	Above moderate
	Overall Mean	3.90	.63	Above moderate

Other factors that influenced students' grit

The purpose of this study was to investigate the grit of English major students, the relationship between the grit variables, and the factors that influenced their grit using a grit scale adapted from that of Duckworth et al. (2007), and Duckworth and Quinn (2009). A discussion of both the quantitative and qualitative phases of the study is presented next along with appropriate inferences and meta-inferences in relation to the grit construct.

Since the grit scale used in this study was based on that of Duckworth et al. (2007) and Duckworth and Quinn (2009), the quantitative instrument did not measure contextual impact on grit. Hence, given the diverse contextual influences on learners' grit, the qualitative instrument was designed to explore the contextual influences that may have affected the participants' quantitative responses.

The analysis showed a clear influence of the context as well as their personal experience and aspirations as English major students on grit. The participants revealed how the context and specific activities influenced their grit. They considered the following differences and behaviors as specific influences of their grit.

Interest

The analysis of the focus group discussion data revealed the influence of the socio-cultural context on learners' interest and perseverance. For the participants, consistent interest and perseverance did not necessarily mean maintaining one approach and ensuring that it worked or allowed them to achieve their objective as they also emphasized their ability to adapt to take advantage of any available opportunity.

No, I do not finish most of the tasks/activities like reading our book (academic work) that are assigned to me but I finish activities like the English camps and competitions I join. (Participant 9)

Hence, there was a divide in terms of how the students who participated in this study understood the concept of grit within their socio-culture context. This finding aligns with that of Suh (2002) who asserted that people would adjust their context-sensitive self to be relevant to their social conditions.

In this study, it was evident that the learners' interest arose from their own passion for learning English or from sources like their teachers or parents, or was associated with the reputation of the English major program in the university, and that these were among the factors that enhanced their grit.

I have been interested in (learning) English since I was in primary school. In high school, I had good teachers who organized (English) camps and also made us interview tourist(s). That made me passionate about studying English. (Participant 6)

I grew up on a popular island that had many tourists (together with my mum). I had to assist/guide tourists of different nationalities. That was when I started developing interest in learning English/to become an English major student. (Participant 4)

These aspects such as interest, passion and people in the lives of the students instilled some level of perseverance to continue improving the standard of their English. Specifically, the teachers organized extracurricular activities such as English contests, camps, mock interviews and tourist encounters to help them to stay focused and self-regulate their learning process.

Every time I join an activity, I begin with a positive attitude so if I face any bad situation I push myself because I know that it gets better. That is how I strive to finish my tasks or what I begin. For instance, at an inter-cultural expedition camp, I had difficulties communicating with campers and teachers in terms of organizing but I tried not to get upset. (Participant 8)

This finding is in line with that of Goodwin and Miller (2013) that teachers' influence helps students to unlock their grit. However, in this setting their interest was sometimes at its lowest ebb because of the non-availability of authentic contexts in which to practice.

Career

The analysis of the discussion data showed that the issue of career choices was a factor in students' grit. Being an English major student gave them a variety of career options, which meant that high English language attainment would put them in a better position in roles requiring English skills (Ng & Feldman, 2015).

> *I wanted to prove to my parents that I could be successful with English in any career not just as a government official (which my parents want) but I do not. (Participant 4)*
> *With my (English language) skills and knowledge, there are varieties of careers related to airline(s), business, hotel(s) and other career(s) in hospitality, I can choose from. (Participant 12)*

More specifically, the Thai students are not only confronting the challenges and competition posed by the wider and more open job market but also have more employment opportunities because of the ASEAN Economy Community (AEC) (ASEAN, 2015). The students' grit in EFL was driven by their career goals. This finding is in line with that of Rodríguez-Chaves and Chaves-Carballo (2019) who found that Costa Rican EFL students' high grit was shown by their concentration and perseverance on both their English learning and career goals.

> *I will (would) like to be a business person, I cannot do that without (learning) the English language. (Participant 15)*

Context and Reputation

Fame or reputation plays a paramount role in Thai society. There are rigorous hierarchal relationships built between people that necessitate politeness and respect. This hierarchy is based on social networks, dignity and reputation, age, education, and other

factors (Pornpitakpan, 2000). Thus, people try to keep and strengthen their public self-image, as would be expected from others in such a society (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

In the current research setting, some students felt that being enrolled in an English major program enhanced their reputation and this may have led the students to place greater significance on improving their English proficiency to live up to that reputation. However, the immediate context in which they were living and studying provided few opportunities. Some of the ways in which the reputation could pay dividends included careers in the tourism, airline, and hotel industries and as Thai English teachers. To some extent, this may have contributed to adjusting their interests to match their personal capabilities and social demands. On the other hand, the above moderate level of grit may owe more to the social context in which they were learning English since they were not able to sustain their desire to learn due to the non-availability of authentic situations in which to use the language. This might have affected their growth mindset and consequently their grit.

> *In this society, English is very popular and famous because not many people can speak English so when I can speak English I will be seen as a superstar. (Participant 2)*
> *(The) Education faculty is one of the famous faculties at our University, English major is also one of the famous majors so the respect I will get influenced me to study it. (Participant 6)*

There were a number of comments made in the focus group discussions regarding the effect of getting high grades. Some of the participants said that getting good or bad grades in a test did not discourage them from persevering in their learning. They focused mainly on the value and reputation attached to being an English major student. Others saw the efforts that they made towards getting good grades and the eventual good or bad grades they obtained as being not only beneficial to themselves but also to society as a whole. Moreover, some sections of Thai society place a high value on the practice of discipline, unity, tolerance of hardship, and the sufficiency economy philosophy, and these societal values may contribute to the students' perseverance of

effort, leading to the above-moderate level of their consistent interest (Ngammuk, 2011; UNESCO, 2007)

> *I feel discouraged because my friend had a higher score (than me) but maybe when I set my goals and I could not achieve it or do it, this pushes me to do better next time. (Participant 9)*

Conclusion

In summary, the study found an above-moderate level of grit in perseverance of effort and consistent interest among the Thai English major students who participated in the study. Both situational and personality influences were factors which underlay the level of grit detected. Among the situational factors were influences such as the participants' future careers, societal needs and the reputation of English major students. On the other hand, personality-based factors such as interest and life purpose also contributed to the variance in the individual findings from the discussion. Overall, these factors, embedded in the Thai collectivist cultural context, may have influenced the learners' grit.

The different themes emerging from the investigation of the two aspects of grit provide clues as to how the learning process should be structured. Hence, it is suggested that perseverance-oriented programs should be developed to make students display more grit to improve their learning outcomes. Keegan (2017:7-8) suggested that:

> *Language teachers should make grit a buzzword in their classrooms. Integrating more learner-reflection with all classroom activities or assessments can help build grit.*

Thus, improving the level of students' grit would necessitate proper coaching, instruction, and mentoring to encourage the students to persist and show consistent effort towards achieving their goals. This would enable learners to absorb efficient ways of persevering until they attain their goals. In a similar vein, Keegan (2017) suggested that teachers should not use labeling language to describe students' skills, but instead should emphasize how to overcome the challenges or obstacles in language learning. She also recommends that teachers should help students build up

practical long-term language learning goals and work out plans for reaching those goals.

Limitation of the research

The researchers may have stereotyped this group of subjects by relating them to their socio-cultural background when they tried to subtract important factors that could have affected the students' EFL grit. However, an attempt was made to minimize any stereotyping by using the external reviewers to avoid bias in the inferencing interpretations. A significant function of grit is to predict the students' learning achievement. A future study could follow up the students' final English achievement by collecting longitudinal data.

This study revealed themes contributing to the measures of grit in the Thai cultural context, but further research is needed to examine how these two measures operate and are influenced in other cultural contexts. Additionally, further studies could be conducted on the relationship between students' grit and their growth mindset. The study also suggests a need to investigate grit and English language learning in different, national, socio-cultural and educational contexts.

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Appendices
Appendix 1
Questionnaire
Grit of English Major Students Learning English as a Foreign Language

Dear Student,

This questionnaire aims to investigate English Major Students' Grit in Learning English as a Foreign Language at Thaksin University. As part of the study, the researchers additionally aim to understand what triggered students' interest in enrolling in an English Major program, their purpose and growth mindset towards the program they have been enrolled.

This questionnaire consists of four sections with scales ranging from *completely true* to *not at all true* and *very much like me* to *not all like me*. We therefore believe that you would answer the items as honestly as possible since this is the only means to guarantee the success of this research.

Your information and response to this questionnaire would be kept confidential and would not in any way have an impact on your grades.

Thank you very much for your corporation.

PLEASE PROVIDE THE INFORMATION BY TICKING THE BOX OR WRITING YOUR RESPONSE IN THE SPACE PROVIDED

Gender: ◎Male   ◎Female

Faculty: ◎Education   ◎HUSO

Phone number/Email: ....

Student number: ....

Please rate how each of the statements below may or may not apply to you in your English learning experience, from 1 *(very much like me) to 6(not like me at all).* There are no right or wrong answers, kindly answer them honestly.

Part 1.
Perseverance of Effort

No.	Items	Very much like me	Mostly like me	Like me	Somewhat like me	Not much like me	Not like me at all
1.	I finish whatever English activity I begin						
2.	Getting a bad grade in English tests makes me try harder next time.						
3.	After I get an answer wrong, I keep going until I get it right.						
4.	I work hard to find a way to complete assignments no matter how difficult they are.						
5.	I feel frustrated and give up when I cannot figure out something in English.						
6.	Failing an English test makes me want to give up.						
7.	When I do not do well in an assignment, I decide it is not worth trying next time.						
8.	When I don't do well on a project, I think about how to do better next time						
9.	I always find at least a little bit of time to improve my English skills every day.						
10.	I start learning new things when I have difficulties understanding the old ones.						
11.	I keep working hard even when I feel like quitting.						

Part 2.
Consistent Interest

No.	Items	Very much like me	Mostly like me	Like me	Somewhat like me	Not much like me	Not like me at all
12.	I am interested in the things I learn in school						
13.	I do my best in school to achieve my future goals.						
14.	Doing my best in school has nothing to do with my long-term goals.						
15.	I would rather keep doing the same school project than start on something new.						
16.	It is not worth doing my schoolwork if it will take a long time.						
17.	I feel excited when I do English projects.						
18	I get interested in certain English projects for a short time and I lose interest.						
19.	I feel energized when I try to learn something new.						
20.	I do my work until it stops being interesting.						

Any other comments (Optional)

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Appendix 2
Focus Group Discussion Prompts Protocol

a. Perseverance of Effort
1. How do you manage to finish whatever English activity they begin eg. Reading a book
2. How do you feel when you answer a question wrongly in class? How does it make you approach the questions asked?
3. When you get bad grades/do not do well in an English tests/exam, how do you feel? What steps do you take to improve it in the next tests/yourself?
4. When learning new things and you face difficulties or challenges/ frustrations what do you do?
5. Why did you keep working hard to complete a task in English even though you knew it was difficult/ frustrating to do? What motivates you? What do you do/how do you plan to finally finish the work?
5. How much time do you dedicate to studying English and what specific skill(s) do you focus on?

B. Consistent Interest
1. Could you tell me about an English activity/project you have done (for some time /in the past) that kept you engaged? What kept you engaged? Why?
2. Could you tell me about some English activities or projects you were interested in for a short time and lost interest in the process?
3. What attitude do you keep when you are doing an interesting English activity and you face difficulties in the process?
Or. What do you do when you face difficulties whiles doing an interesting English activity?
4. Are your long-term goals related to your major? What actions do you take/have you taken to achieve them?
5. How do you feel when you learn new things / about to do something new in English? why do you feel that way?
6. Would you keep learning in this English major program or change to another major? Why?

Thank Participants