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Grit in L2 Educational Contexts: A Scoping Review

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Abstract:

The recent years saw the surge of interest in psychological constructs essential to L2 teaching and learning. Among these constructs, grit received significant attention in L2 field. The present scoping review investigates the methodological trends, geographical distribution, and study foci of grit in L2 educational contexts from 2020 to 2025. In the present review, 293 articles were initially identified from Proquest, JSTOR, and DOAJ databases (N = 293). In the end, 89 articles were assessed for eligibility, and 50 articles were included in the final review (n = 50). The findings of the scoping review include (1) quantitative methodologies dominated the retrieved articles, (2) studies in Asian contexts were predominantly found, and (3) L2 learners rather than L2 teachers are the focus of most articles. The present study underscores the need (1) to include qualitative findings in various cultural contexts, and (2) to conduct more grit studies with L2 teacher foci to provide more diverse insights into grit in L2 educational contexts.

Keywords: *Grit, L2 Educational Contexts, Scoping Review, Language Learning Psychology*

1. INTRODUCTION

The recent decade has witnessed the flourishing attention on the psychology of L2 teaching/learning. Various non-cognitive constructs have been adopted into applied linguistics as they have demonstrated their significance in L2 affecting teaching/learning performance. For example, recent studies have demonstrated that L2 enjoyment affects their L2 performance (Botes et al., 2021; Dewaele & Dewaele, 2017) and L2 learning-self efficacy (Arfiandhani & Takeuchi, 2025; Derakhshan & Fathi, 2023). In another instance, L2 willingness to communicate has been reported to significantly affect L2 performance (Khajavy et al., 2018). Other studies also report that L2 self-efficacy significantly contributed to learners' L2 performance (Bai & Wang, 2023).

Among others, one of the psychological constructs that has received significant attention in recent years is grit. Originally studied extensively in psychology, grit refers to individuals' consistency of interest and perseverance of effort in pursuing their long-term goals (Duckworth et al., 2007). In L2 contexts, grit has been defined as individuals' endurance in pursuing their L2-related goals (Oxford & Khajavy, 2021). Grit in L2 contexts has been associated with various variables, including L2 performance (Khajavy et al., 2021), and L2 Willingness to Communicate (Lee, 2020). Therefore, it is essential to investigate the current trend of grit research in the L2 field to investigate the gaps in the available literature on grit. This brief report presents a scoping review of grit in the L2 educational context with subsequent recommendations for future studies. The following research questions guided the present study:

1. What methods have investigated grit in L2 educational contexts from 2015 to 2025?
2. Where were the settings of the studies under investigation?
3. Which subject was the focus of the studies under investigation?

2. METHOD

Secondary research such as meta-analysis, systematic literature review, and scoping review are frequently used in the L2 field to understand the research trend over the years and identify gaps in the literature. In the present study, we conducted a scoping review instead of a systematic literature review, as a scoping review can be utilized to examine emerging evidence in the field under investigation, which can be followed up by systematic literature reviews (Munn et al., 2018). In the present study, we employed a scoping review as opposed to a more rigorous systematic review, as a scoping review can present a broad overview regarding a particular topic regardless of the quality of retrieved articles (Tricco et al., 2016). Furthermore, unlike the observation by Datu (2021) that grit research has been predominantly conducted in Western industrialized settings, our preliminary findings suggest significant contributions from Asian contexts. To capture this broader geographical diversity, we purposefully included articles from open-access databases beyond strictly high-impact indexed journals (e.g., Scopus, SSCI), allowing for a more inclusive representation of research across varied L2 educational contexts. Therefore, the scoping review fits our intended aim.

In conducting the present study, we follow Tricco and colleagues' (2016) scoping review guide. Firstly, research questions were formulated, and eligibility criteria were

set. Second, we identified relevant studies from multiple databases. Third, data from the included studies were extracted. Finally, findings were reported. Figure 1 shows the study flow of the present scoping review.

Identifying Relevant Studies

The first step in the present scoping review was to identify relevant studies from available and accessible databases. We utilized relevant search key terms, such as: "L2 grit", "L2 teacher grit", and "Grit in ESL/EFL/L2 contexts" in looking up relevant studies. On May 1st, 2025, relevant articles were retrieved from the following databases: DOAJ Directory of Open Access Journals, ProQuest Directory, and JSTOR. Famous databases such as Scopus and Web of Science were intentionally excluded to allow for a more inclusive representation of research across varied L2 educational contexts beyond the domineering western hemisphere regions in both databases (Asubiaro et al., 2024). The references for the articles that were retrieved were imported into app.covidence.org to ease the following steps in the scoping review.

Data Screening

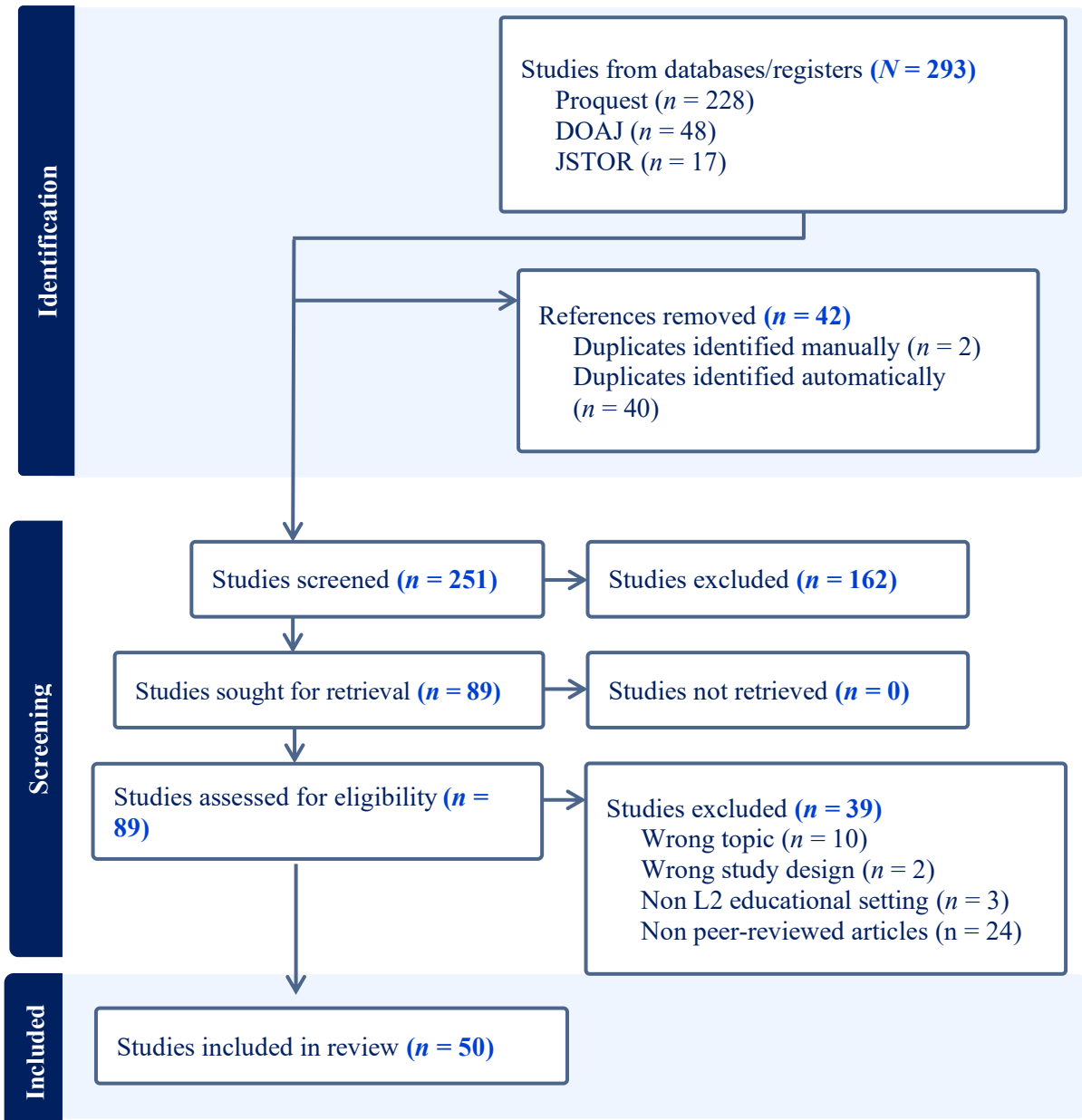
Upon completing the importing of relevant articles found in the databases, the articles, particularly their title and abstract, were further screened to ensure that no duplicate articles were included and only relevant articles were included in the following steps.

Inclusion and Exclusion

In this stage, we reviewed each article to find relevant information to answer the research questions. A review protocol was set to ensure that only articles that met eligibility criteria were included. Studies retrieved in the initial screening would not be included in the review if they did not meet the following criteria: (1) focused on grit in L2 educational contexts, (2) written in English, (3) a peer-reviewed article, and (4) empirical research. For instance, Oxford and Khajavy (2021) were removed because it was not empirical research. Their study synthesized how grit has been defined in domain-general and L2-specific domains.

Another example is that Katsarou and Chatzipanagiotou's (2025) study was excluded because the context of their study was higher education and not L2 educational contexts. Based on the eligibility criteria, 293 articles were initially retrieved from the databases (N = 293). Among them, 42 articles were automatically removed due to being duplicates. Figure 1 shows the flow of the screening procedure. In the end, a total of 50 articles were reviewed in the present study (n = 50) (Appendix).

Figure 1. Study Flows



3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Methodological Approaches

Multiple methodological approaches were employed to investigate grit in L2 educational contexts in the included studies. Quantitative methods predominated in the methodological approaches used, accounting for 92% ($n = 46$) of the studies reviewed. Qualitative studies accounted for only 4% ($n = 2$), and mixed-method approaches comprised the remaining 4% ($n = 2$) of the studies. This strong preference for quantitative methods aligns with the field's emphasis on establishing psychometric properties and statistical relationships between grit and other psychological constructs in L2 contexts.

Among the quantitative methods being utilized, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) emerged as the dominant analytical approach ($n = 23$), reflecting the field's focus and interest in examining related psychological constructs that interconnect with grit. This methodological trend is consistent with the conceptual complexity of grit research, which often investigates intricate networks of relationships between psychological constructs. Other quantitative designs included intervention studies with pre- and post-test designs ($n = 4$) and factor analyses (i.e., exploratory factor analysis (EFA), confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), principal component analysis (PCA), which were often used for scale validation).

The field has also witnessed the application of advanced quantitative methods, such as cross-lagged panel analysis, Partial Least Squares SEM (PLS-SEM), and Latent Class Factor Analysis-Common Factor Model (LCFA-CFM). Several studies employed multiple quantitative methods to address complex research questions. For example, Teimouri et al. (2022) utilized PCA and ANOVA to compare the effect of L2 aptitude and L2 grit on L2 achievement, exemplifying the methodological sophistication emerging in the field.

A representative example of studies utilizing SEM is Khajavy and his colleagues' (2021) investigation of the relationship between language mindset, grit, and foreign language achievement. With a substantial sample of university students ($N = 1,178$), their findings revealed that a growth language mindset weakly but positively predicted the perseverance of effort component of grit but not the consistency of interest. Interestingly, a fixed language mindset was not a predictor for either component of grit. This methodological approach allowed researchers to disentangle the differential relationships between mindset and distinct facets of grit, highlighting the value of sophisticated statistical methods in clarifying complex psychological relationships.

Qualitative designs were notably underrepresented, with only two studies ($n = 2$) employing this approach. Freiermuth et al. (2021) conducted a descriptive narrative-based study, collecting data through semi-structured interviews with gritty L2 learners ($n = 8$) from Thailand, Malaysia, Taiwan, and Japan. Their findings revealed that gritty L2 learners exhibited curiosity and consistent passion for learning L2. Additionally, these learners demonstrated a willingness to communicate in L2 and envisioned how to foster their L2 grittiness. The second qualitative study was conducted by Shirvan et al. (2021), who employed a process-tracing approach to examine a gritty L2 teacher's experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. This methodological approach offered valuable insights

into the dynamic nature of grit as it fluctuated in response to contextual challenges, highlighting the potential of qualitative methods to capture temporal and contextual dimensions of grit that may be missed in cross-sectional quantitative designs.

Mixed-method designs were also rare, with only two studies ($n = 2$) utilizing this integrated approach. Zawodniak et al. (2021) investigated differences in grit among 1st, second-, and 3rd-year university L2 students through questionnaires ($n = 99$) and follow-up interviews ($N = 12$). The results of one-way ANOVA suggested that differences in the consistency of interest component of grit were significant between 1st and 2nd-year students and between 1st and 3rd-year students, with overall grit slightly decreasing from 1st-year to 3rd-year. However, contrary to the quantitative data analysis result which suggests a linear pattern of decreasing grit level, the results of qualitative data analysis suggested the dynamicity of participants' grit. More specifically, the findings of the interview suggested that participants' determination to learn English fluctuated during their school year. This longitudinal perspective offered by mixed methods revealed developmental patterns in L2 grit.

The second mixed-method study by Nazari and Oghyanous (2021) investigated the relationships among L2 teachers' ($N = 325$) turnover intentions, occupational stress, psychological well-being, and grit. They conducted correlational analyses and supplemented these with interviews ($n = 20$). The results suggested that the negative relationship between occupational stress/turnover intentions and grit/psychological well-being was significantly stronger for novice teachers than experienced L2 teachers.

The predominance of quantitative methods, particularly SEM, indicates robust efforts to establish statistical relationships and causal pathways in L2 grit research. However, the limited presence of qualitative and mixed-method approaches represents a methodological gap that may restrict our understanding of the contextual, developmental, and phenomenological aspects of grit in L2 education. Future research would benefit from greater methodological diversity, particularly longitudinal designs that capture developmental trajectories of grit and qualitative approaches that illuminate the lived experiences of gritty L2 learners and teachers across diverse cultural contexts.

Geographical Distributions

From the retrieved studies in the past five years, only a minority were conducted in L1 English countries such as the United States of America ($n = 1$). Some other studies were conducted in Poland ($n = 1$) and multiple countries across Europe and North America ($n = 5$). The limited representation of Western contexts in our retrieved databases contrasts with Datu's (2021) assertion that grit studies were predominantly conducted in Western and industrialized countries. Since this claim was made prior to our current literature review, the results of this present study might indicate that the psychology of language learning/teaching, including grit constructs, has been embraced beyond Western industrialized countries. This shift suggests an important evolution in the field, as perspectives from culturally diverse backgrounds are crucial in providing culturally sensitive insights into grit manifestations in various educational contexts (Datu

et al., 2017; Kuruveettissery et al., 2021).

The results of our present study indicated that studies of grit in EFL contexts were conducted in East Asia, such as in China ($n = 7$), Japan ($n = 1$), and South Korea ($n = 1$). Notably, reviewed studies were predominantly conducted in L2 English countries in the Middle East and Asia, such as Iran ($n = 20$), Saudi Arabia ($n = 3$), Afghanistan ($n = 2$), and Indonesia ($n = 2$). One study was also noted to have been conducted across various countries, including Ethiopia, Kuwait, Malaysia, and Turkey.

The geographical distribution observed in our review aligns with emerging research trends noted by Alamer (2021) and Teimouri et al. (2021), who have highlighted the importance of domain-specific grit measurement in diverse L2 contexts. The predominance of studies from Iran ($n = 20$) is particularly noteworthy and may reflect the robust tradition of L2 motivation research in this context. This research concentration in non-Western contexts provides valuable opportunities to understand how grit manifests in collectivist societies, where different cultural values may influence perseverance and effort compared to individualistic Western contexts.

The growing representation of Asian countries in L2 grit research is also consistent with Sudina et al.'s (2021) cross-cultural validation study, which included participants from Japan, China, and North America contexts. This suggests an increasing recognition of the need to validate psychological constructs across diverse cultural settings. The diversity and geographical distributions of grit studies in L2 educational contexts highlight the flourishing interest in studies on grit beyond traditional research centers and underscore the field's movement toward greater cultural inclusivity.

The distribution of studies demonstrates a notable imbalance between high-income (HIC) and low- and middle-income countries (LMIC). Studies in HICs contributed 44% ($n = 22$) of the included research, while studies in LMICs accounted for 54% ($n = 27$). Additionally, research was primarily concentrated in Asia, while Europe and Africa remained relatively underrepresented. This disparity highlights a significant gap in the literature and suggests a need for increased research attention in underrepresented regions.

The focus of Studies: L2 Learners or L2 Teachers?

The reviewed articles displayed varying interest in the focus of the study. Studies focusing on L2 learners dominated the reviewed articles (80%, $n = 40$), while studies focusing on L2 teachers accounted for 18% of the included articles ($n = 9$). Only one study ($n = 1$) focused on pre-service L2 teachers and adopted a dual focus on their role as future L2 teachers and ongoing L2 learners, examining their interactions and relationships. In line with past findings, grit research in L2 field generally concerns L2 learners or L2 teachers (Oxford & Khajavy, 2021).

Among learner-focused studies, research participants spanned diverse age groups, with university students constituting the overwhelming majority (72%, $n = 36$), followed by high-school students. This concentration on university contexts may reflect practical considerations regarding participant accessibility in the contexts being investigated.

However, it also creates a significant gap in understanding how grit manifests across different developmental stages in L2 learning, such as at elementary or secondary school levels.

The challenging nature of L2 teaching has recognized the importance of various psychological constructs, with grit emerging as one of the most influential. Grit is related to teaching effectiveness (Robertson-Kraft & Duckworth, 2014). However, this connection between grit and teaching effectiveness poses questions about the relatively low interest in L2 teachers' grit, given that the findings of the study suggested that only a minority of articles retrieved focus on L2 teachers' grit.

The notably limited attention to pre-service L2 teachers ($n = 1$) represents a significant research gap, particularly considering the unique challenges faced by this population. The EFL settings offering less exposure to L2 may pose additional challenges for L2 learners (Zein, 2022), including pre-service EFL teachers still in their L2 learning stage. This situation might create additional challenges for them in developing linguistic proficiency and pedagogical competence. This dual challenge of simultaneously developing as both language learners and future language teachers creates a complex psychological landscape that warrants greater research attention.

Only one study had dual foci on both L2 learners and L2 teachers. Arfiandhani and Takeuchi (2025) investigated the relationship among pre-service EFL teachers' grit, L2 learning enjoyment, L2 teaching enjoyment, L2 teaching self-efficacy, and L2 learning self-efficacy. Their structural equation modeling analysis suggested that pre-service EFL teachers' grit mediated the effect of L2 learning enjoyment on L2 learning self-efficacy and the effect of L2 teaching enjoyment on L2 teaching self-efficacy.

The L2 learners and L2 teachers' foci of available grit studies in L2 educational contexts provide specific insights with more relevant and practical implications for these target populations. This growing number of domain-specific grit studies supports the call for more domain-specific grit studies (Teimouri et al., 2021), as domain-specific grit demonstrates better predictive validity than general grit (Sudina, Vernon et al., 2021). The results of the present scoping review indicate increasing recognition of the relevance of grit in L2 educational settings.

However, while valuable, the predominance of L2 learner-focused studies creates an imbalance in the present study. This finding is in line with past observation that language teachers' psychology receives relatively less attention in comparison to the psychology and emotions of L2 learners (Mercer, 2018). This imbalance may limit our understanding of how grit functions across the full spectrum of L2 educational stakeholders.

The significant underrepresentation of pre-service L2 teacher-focused research is particularly noteworthy given the critical role of teacher preparation in educational outcomes. Future research would benefit from greater attention to this population, especially considering their unique challenges in developing language proficiency and pedagogical competence in contexts with limited L2 exposure. A greater understanding of how grit manifests among pre-service L2 teachers could offer significant insights into how and what aspects to improve within teacher education programs. This understanding

may lead to more effective support for future L2 teachers' professional development. .

4. CONCLUSION

This scoping review presents the available studies on grit in L2 educational contexts from 2021 to 2025. Its findings demonstrate growing interest in grit within L2 educational contexts. Furthermore, the increasingly rigorous statistical analyses used in reviewed studies further indicate this growing scholarly attention. The flourishing topic and complexities indicated the significance and relevance of grit for both L2 teachers and L2 learners.

Three key findings emerged in the present study. First, quantitative methodologies (i.e., SEM, factor analysis, cluster analysis) dominated the retrieved studies, with SEM emerging as the most frequently utilized analysis method. In addition, qualitative analysis and mixed methods appear less frequently employed. Other advanced quantitative methodologies (i.e., cross-legged panel analysis, LCFA-CFM, PLS-SEM) were also utilized to study grit. Second, regarding geographical distributions, Asian L2 contexts predominated the retrieved articles, with Iran L2 settings emerging as the most researched L2 contexts. This finding might indicate the researchers' advancement and interest in L2 motivation research. Third, grit research focusing on L2 learners rather than L2 teachers significantly dominated the available studies.

The present study's findings presented the gaps in the methodology to include more qualitative-oriented studies, either as a single study or in mixed-method designs. As suggested by Oxford & Khajavy (2021), more personalized and qualitative data on individuals' experiences or goals might offer richer insights into the phenomenon. Future research might consider integrating qualitative approach and longitudinal data into L2 grit research to provide richer insights and understanding. Second, while geographical distributions that dominated Asian regions, particularly Iran, may indicate the interest and relevance of grit research, future works in other regions might offer insights across cultures. Expanding grit research into other less researched contexts in future studies may provide cross-cultural insights in diverse L2 educational settings. The present scoping review underscores the need for qualitative and longitudinal insights and varied cultural settings to understand grit in L2 educational contexts better.

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