

Grit and Academic Burnout among Accountancy Students in Pakistan: Mediating Role of Academic Resilience

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Abstract

The intended focus of this study on the accountancy students in Pakistan is due to the pressure to excel academically combined with a heavy workload, high academic pressure and frequent examinations leads to high levels of academic burnout among accountancy students. The present study was carried out to identify the relationship between grit, academic resilience and academic burnout among accountancy students. Data was comprised of 400 accountancy students of which 202 were males and 198 females who were recruited through purposive sampling technique. Their age ranged from 19-26 years ($M = 22.09$; $SD = 2.06$). Three scales were used to collect responses from participants; Academic Resilience Scale (ARS-30) (Cassidy, 2016), Copenhagen Burnout Inventory (Campos et al., 2013) and 12-Item-Grit Scale (Duckworth et al., 2007). The correlation analysis revealed significantly positive relationship between grit and academic resilience while significantly negative correlation with academic burnout. Moreover, the linear regression analysis established grit as the strongest negative predictor of academic burnout while mediation analysis observed the role of academic resilience between grit and academic burnout. The present research is helpful in understanding the role of these variables and their impact on accountancy students. The findings of the study would help in developing effective counseling and resilience enhancement interventions to facilitate accountancy students to deal with their academic burnout.

Keywords: Academic Burnout, Academic Resilience, Accountancy Students, Grit

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Introduction

The essence of education is to nurture learning and personal growth in individuals. It aims is to equip learners with the knowledge, skills and competencies they need to thrive both personally and socially. On the contrary, an overarching dependence on computable goals and objectives in the

education institutes in Pakistan more often than not means students are expected to meet certain predefined values and standards set forth. Consequently, a high pressure environment and poor teaching standards have been created for students. The pressure to meet or exceed set forth standards leads to burnout, anxiety, and diverting one's focus from developing a deep understanding of the subject matter and own personal growth to achieving or maintaining certain grades (Memon, 2007).

A relatively recent study confirmed the presence of academic burnout in almost the entirety of student body that it surveyed (96.25%) with the main cause of academic stress as posited by the students comprising of lack of time management (90%), the semester system and regular exams and assessments (86%), monumental study load (80%), financial constraints (78%),

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favoritism and discrimination (72%), ineffective teacher student relationship (68%), conventional teaching styles (60%), expectations pertaining to family (56%), and difficulty in adjustment to the university environment (44%) (Saeed et al., 2020).

In general, individuals with grit are more likely to achieve their long-term goals by harnessing their passion and using academic objectives as a driving force. They possess a strong determination to exercise self-control, enabling them to persist in the face of challenges and highly stressful situations (Duckworth et al., 2007). Grit has been defined as “perseverance and passion for long terms goals and objectives. Grit has two fundamental dimensions, 1) consistency of interest 2) perseverance of effort Duckworth et al. (2007). Akos & Kretchmar (2017) discovered that grit significantly predicted high level of GPA in undergraduate students, similarly, Pate et al. (2017) also concluded that grit score was seemed to be an independent predictor of high academic performance in a sample population of students studying pharmacy in the US. It was indicated that grittier students emphasized higher level of academic performance and better sense of academic satisfaction in the relevantly study by Lin & Chang (2017).

Duckworth (2016) further accentuated the link between grit and resilience and argued that grit and determination have been integral in increasing resilience when faced with adversities or to overcome challenges in pursuance of a goal. Grit and resilience are often known as significant tenet in coping with mental health compressions it is considered to be an important part in order to study better understand and recover at-risk student’s chances of academic success and their wellbeing (Waxman et al., 2003). It is rational to undertake that gritty learner or more specifically students tend to involve more in academics related work and tend to feel less emotionally frustrated as high level

of academic load is significantly related to a higher level of academic burnout (Law, 2010; Yang, 2004).

Duckworth (2013) has also argued that there is an overlap between grit and resilience as part of being gritty includes exhibiting resilience in the face of adversity. These psychological constructs have not been scrutinized for their probable part in the success of accountancy students as they persevere in their relevant domain of study. The hardships of accountancy students seemed to be quite substantial and massively wasted if the student is unable to complete or attain their respective degree since they would have spent large sums of money to cover tuition cost in addition to mental effort and fatigue concurred in order to secure it. Research has emphasized that the construct related to grit and academic resilience seems to be equally relevant in terms of how they illustrate some common sides of human behavior in pursuit of goal despite hardship and adversities (Almeida, 2016; Cassidy, 2016).

Academic resilience espouses the concept of resilience and its relevance in educational context which is defined as, “capacity to overcome acute and/or chronic adversity that is seen as a major threat to a student’s educational development” (Martin, 2013). Previous research has also explained the comparisons and differences among grit and resilience (Goodman et al., 2017; Perkins-Gough, 2013). Being gritty means holding goals and benefits for a long period and excelling in the presence of difficulties. Therefore, similar to resilience, grit encompasses a coping process in challenging situations. Both academic resilience and grit are anticipated to help students to secure positive development (Pekins-Gough, 2013) Resilience in academic context is characterized by students who can overcome academic setbacks and failure through their personal skill set while their counterparts,

those with low resilience continue to perform badly and fail (Martin & Marsh, 2006). Another study (Smith & Emerson, 2021) also found that academic resilience can also diminish the association between academic burnout and academic failure. Even with this moderating effect, the results show that resilience primarily serves as a compensating mechanism by serving as an independent external predictor of distress and burnout. Among notable studies on academic resilience and academic burnout is Kamalpour et al. (2017) based on a descriptive correlational model which studied academic burnout and resilience among nursing students in Iran (a country with similar arching culture as of Pakistan). The analysis of responses of 161 participants aged between 19-24 with a distribution of 37.3% males and 62.7% females revealed a significant relationship between academic resilience and academic burnout with students with higher resilience scores experiencing lower levels of academic burnout.

It is evident that being exposed to extended periods of physically and emotionally demanding tasks can diminish an individual's energy which can lead to burnout. While there is a variety of ways in which academic burnout can be defined, Schaufeli et al. (2002) describe it as the perceived feeling of exhaustion engendering from tough academic requirements from institutions, and the pervading pessimistic feeling about assignment and study schedule.

Academic burnout is largely viewed as a product of three subcomponents such as cynicism, academic inefficiency and exhaustion (Maslach & Jackson, 1986). In Smith and Emerson (2021)'s study using 443 American accountant students recruited from four different colleges, it was shown that academic resilience and academic burnout were negatively correlated, whereas poor academic performance and other negative

outcomes, namely emotional fatigue or exhaustion and psychological distress, were positively associated. However, study under consideration states that each aspect of academic burnout is a clear indication of predicted psychological distress.

According to Blackwell et al. (2007), individuals can regard their personal abilities differently and hold distinct mindset about academic situations and their personal capacity and ability within such contexts thereby approaching their challenges and setbacks in a different way. Students who fall closer to the incremental side believe that abilities can be enhanced through effort which inculcates in them the predisposition to thrive in the face of challenges and view stressful conditions as an opportunity for personal (Haimovitz & Dweck, 2017). To summarize, these students exhibit greater internal locus of control by their innate belief that poor performance is the product of lack of effort than their personal ability.

Incremental theorists are often found perfectionists and mastery oriented as they are quicker in recovering from failures, maintain greater internal locus of control, exhibit more effort towards a goal, evince low helplessness attribution, and exhibit a more profound system of self-regulation. Conversely, those falling closer to entity theory maintain that abilities are innate and natural in individuals as there are certain strengths and weaknesses imbued within individuals with only a small window of improvement (Haimovitz & Dweck, 2017). These students exhibit lower scores in internal locus of control and are often concerned with evaluating their personal capacity of competence due to apprehensions over having a small amount of a specific ability. These students are often found competing for greater levels of performance and focus on demonstrating high performance and avoid negative evaluation of their ability. These students are more

likely to withdraw when academic challenges arise and exhibit helpless behaviors in face of difficulties (Ommundsen et al., 2005; Robins & Pals, 2002; Tempelaar et al., 2015).

The tenets and constructs of grit are such that it is predisposed towards the incremental view of the self-theory as entity theorists have a predilection towards learned helplessness as they may feel that the circumstances are out of their control. This also shows a weak locus of control in incremental theorists. Additionally, since being seen as intelligent is important to entity theorists, they may turn down the tasks in which they believe that they have lesser competency. The analogy can be drawn between the first-year accountancy dropouts who withdraw from The Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA) and Chartered Accountants (CA) due to actual or pre-emptive failure (Dweck, 2013). Burnout has not been adequately studied in the students at the local level especially when it comes to the accounting profession there is not much indigenous literature available on grit and academic resilience which are being studied in this research on accounting students. No substantial studies have been done in Pakistan to study academic burnout particularly in accountancy students. Most of the findings of research findings in the past have therefore been generalized from other disciplines such as medicine and law.

Much of the literature particularly on academic burnout in Pakistan ingeniously is based on medical students (Jahan et al., 2016). The important point in the present study is the selected population on which the study has been conducted. It has been established that there is a literature gap in indigenous studies and most of the studies exploring these variables have been conducted in western societies which is altogether has a distinct culture and Environment (Bowman et al., 2015).

Objectives

The current study aims to study the relationship among grit, academic resilience and academic burnout. Furthermore, study also aims to identify the role of academic resilience as mediator among grit and academic burnout.

Method

Research Design

This study adopted a cross-sectional design.

Sample Characteristics

Nonprobability purposive sampling was adopted for this study. The sample consisted of 400 participants of which 202 were male and the remainder 198 being female. The sample size was determined through G* power analysis (Faul et al., 2007). The age range of the sample was from 19 to 26 years.

Procedure

Data for the main study was collected from multiple schools of accountancy. Questionnaires were filled by the CA and ACCA students in classroom following formal approval by the college administration. Confidentiality and voluntary participation of the students were ensured.

Inclusion Criteria

Students pursuing formal education in accountancy in prominent institutions of Lahore such as SKANS School of Accountancy, College of Accountancy and Finance (CFE), Professional Academy of Commerce (PAC), Hisab School of Accountancy (HAS) and College of Accountancy & Professional Studies (CAPS) were included in the research. The only notable convention with the inclusion criteria was the condition that the candidate should have attended more than 2 years of regular college studying ACCA and CA.

Exclusion Criteria

As for exclusion, those who have qualified for their certification of accountancy were excluded from the study to prevent misleading analysis. Participants having

physical and psychological impairment were also excluded in the study.

Measures

Academic Resilience

Academic resilience is defined as the ability to overcome the challenges encountered in pursuing personal, professional and academic goals. It can be viewed as the ability of a person to redeem themselves from an adversity through successfully overcoming the risks factors of learning difficulties (Coronado-Hijón, 2017). The present study has employed Academic Resilience scale by Cassidy (2016). The scale comprises of 30 items in total subdivided within three main subscales. 1) Perseverance subscales comprising of total 14 items. 2) Reflecting and adaptive help seeking subscales includes 9 items. 3) Negative effect and emotional response subscale includes total 7 items. The responses in this scale are arranged in a Likert scale with 1 denoting likeliness and 5 denoting unlikeliness. The Cronbach's alpha for the scale indicates .90 reliability.

Grit

Duckworth et al. (2007) the perseverance and passion for long term goals, grit can be understood as a positive psychological construct which includes channeling passion, perseverance, and resilience to achieve a long-term goal/objective which is driven by intrinsic motivation and greater internal locus of control. To measure Grit among students, The Grit Scale by (Duckworth et al., 2007) was employed. The GRIT scale comprises of 12 items with 2 main subscales 1) (COI) consistency of interest subscale includes total 6 items. 2) (POE) Perseverance of effort subscale includes total 6 items. The scale is relatively simple to use with a rating range of 5, with 1 indicates denominating lack of grit and 5 being extremely gritty. The Cronbach's alpha for the scale represents .85 reliability.

Academic Burnout

Burnout can be defined as a degree of psychological or physical fatigue

experienced by an individual (Shaughnessy & Moore, 2010). Maslach and Jackson (1986) which defines academic burnout as the amalgamation of exhaustion, diminished personal accomplishments and 14 other depersonalizations. The Copenhagen Burnout Inventory Student Version (Campos et al., 2013) was employed to measure academic burnout among students. The Copenhagen burnout inventory CBI has been segregated into 4 distinct sub-scales namely; 1) personal burnout includes total 6 items, 2) studies-related burnout subscale includes total 7 items, 3) classmate-related burnout subscale includes total 6 items, and 4) instructor-related burnout includes total 6 items. Personal burnout, studies-related burnout, classmate-related burnout, and instructor-related burnout. The responses to the scale are arranged as a Likert type scale with 1 denoting never, and 5 denoting always. The Cronbach's alpha for the scale signifies .87 reliability.

Hypotheses

- There would be negative relationship between grit and academic burnout.
- There would be positive relationship between grit and academic resilience.
- Grit will be likely to predict academic burnout among accountancy students.
- Academic Resilience will be likely to predict academic burnout among accountancy students.
- Academic resilience will mediate the relationship between grit and academic burnout.

Results

Final sample consisted of 400 participants ($M_{age} = 22.09$; $SD = 2.06$).

Table 1

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Grit	40.10	6.43	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
COI	17.30	3.30	.49**	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
PE	21.90	3.68	.74**	.04	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
AR	112.4	15.95	.50**	.10*	.52**	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
P	54.10	8.76	.46**	.08-	.50**	.94**	-	-	-	-	-	-
RAHS	35.22	5.52	.37**	-.02	.48**	.86**	.76	-	-	-	-	-
NAE	23.12	4.58	.43**	.23**	.27**	.64**	.45**	.31**	-	-	-	-
AB	35.49	8.58	-.28**	-.11*	-.18**	-.24**	-.20**	-.15**	-	-	-	-
									-.28**			
PB	16.59	4.20	-.17**	-.05	-.09**	-.49	-.01	.01	-.15**	-.27**	-	-
SRB	18.64	4.18	-.31**	-.09*	-.23**	-.43**	-.43**	-.37	-.21**	-.25**	-.60	-

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .001$

Note. COI= consistency of interest; PE= perseverance of effort; AR= Academic Resilience; P= perseverance; RAHS= Reflective Adaptive Help Seeking; NAER= Negative Affect and Emotional Response; AB=Academic Burnout; PB=personal Burnout; SRB=School Related Burnout

The results indicated that grit was positively correlated with academic resilience ($r = .50$, $p < .001$). On the other hand, grit was found to be significantly negatively correlated with academic burnout ($r = .28$, $p < .05$).

Table 2

Hierarchical Regression Analysis of Demographics, Academic Resilience, Grit and Academic Burnout (N=400)

Models	<i>B</i>	<i>95% CI for B</i>		<i>SEB</i>	<i>β</i>	<i>R</i> ²	<i>Δ R</i> ²
		<i>LL</i>	<i>UL</i>				
Step 1							
Age	.12	-.27	.50	.20	.02	.04	.03***
Education	1.7	.27	3.8	.84	.10***		
Step 2							
COI	-.12	-.04	.63	.17	-.04	.11	.09***
POE	-.04	.82	.88	.20	-.04		
Step 3							
NAER	-.39	-.50	-.08	.10	-.30**		

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Note: NAER= Negative Adaptive Emotional Response; COI= consistency of interest; POE= Perseverance of effort B= unstandardized Coefficient Beta, LL = lower Limit, UL = Upper Limit, SEB= Standardized error Beta, β = Beta, R^2 = R square, ΔR^2 = Adjusted R square

Results showed that education was found to be 10% positively significant predictor of academic burnout. ($B=.10$, $p < .001$). Consistency of interest and perseverance of effort were positive significant predictors. In addition, grit was a highly negative significant predictor of academic burnout. It shows that those who have grit will have less

academic burnout. Academic Resilience including along with their subscales Perseverance, RAHS and NAER were added. However, in Academic resilience scale only one of its subscales (NAER) has accounted for significant difference i.e., NAER (Negative Adaptive Help Seeking) has negatively 30% predicted burnout. Whereas none of the subscale of GRIT i.e., COI and POE accounted for significant differences.

Table 3

Mediation Analysis between Grit and Academic Burnout through Negative affect & Emotional Response (N=400)

Variables	β	t	p
Grit \rightarrow Academic Burnout	-.27	-3.80	.001
NAER \rightarrow Academic Burnout	-.37	-3.98	.01
Grit \rightarrow NAER	.31	9.57	.01
Grit + NAER \rightarrow Academic Burnout	-.11	-3.79	.01

Note. NAER= Negative Adaptive Emotional Response β = Standardized regression Coefficient

The results indicated that grit was a significant predictor of NAER and academic burnout. Furthermore, negative affect and emotional response showed the partial mediation β -.37, 95% CI between grit and

academic burnout. Hence, negative affect and emotional response was found to be partially significant between grit and academic burnout. no other subscales of academic

resilience showed any mediation and significant differences.

Discussion

The present study was carried out to identify the relationship between grit, academic resilience and academic burnout among accountancy students. The results indicated a negative relationship between grit and academic burnout. As hypothesized, the present study shows a negative relationship between grit and academic burnout in a sample of 400 Pakistan accountant students. Colloquially, this can be explained using the constituents of grit as consistency of Interest and perseverance of effort (Duckworth et al., 2007). It is argued that academic burnout is the negative outcome of engaging in study activities which are stressful for a longer period of time (Lin & Huang, 2014). However, having inculcated in oneself a strong work ethic derived from interest in the study (consistency of interest) and the innate trait of perseverance of effort can lead to lower levels of burnout experienced by the participants who are gritty.

The results of the investigations corroborate with various previous studies which have seen similar negative correlation between the two (Dam et al., 2018; Jumat et al., 2020; Kang & Choi, 2021). It is worth mentioning that Kang and Choi used a relative and probabilistic approach in their study to investigate the relationship between grit and academic burnout. It was observed that the relatively higher grit group exhibited lower probability or burnout than the low grit group. Whilst the studies used as reference are not strictly related to accountancy, however, since the relationship of grit and academic burnout is observed to be negative in nature such that gritty people are likely to experience lower levels of academic burnout, generalizations can be allowed in analysis. Additionally, it is also observed that the demands of various careers may vary, however, academic burnout; because it is

contingent upon the individual, can likely occur in any profession.

Since grit is a passion and perseverance for long term goals and academic resilience is the ability of a person to bounce back from a misfortune of academic nature, it is likely that people with higher scores of grit will also have higher levels of academic resilience. The second hypothesis was supported by a strong correlation between grit and academic resilience. It can be argued that there cannot really be a dichotomy between the two concepts in academic contexts as the factors that contextualize the two are similar. It can also be argued that students who are determined to have higher levels of grit will naturally have greater academic resilience scores because their responses will somewhat be homogenous.

The hypothesis that academic resilience will mediate the relationship between grit and academic burnout was tested using mediation analysis which revealed only partial mediation with a β of -.08, 95% CI showing that academic resilience to be partially significant between grit and academic burnout. The individual relationship between grit, academic resilience and burnout is detailed in Table 3 of the results which shows the correlation between the variables independent of a mediator. However, this finding explores if academic resilience accounts for the association between grit and academic burnout.

The present literature on the mediating role of academic resilience is devoid of depth to fit the perspective of this research. For instance, a study (Seçer & Ulaş, 2020) revealed that academic resilience will have a strong protective function against problematic school attendance and can positively affect school attachment. It can be argued that the two variables of the study may have an association with grit and academic

burnout with burnout leading to problematic school attendance and grit leading to higher attendance, but this speculation can only be regarded as a conjecture and further study is required to determine the mediating role of academic resilience.

Similarly, another parallel can be drawn from an Iranian study (Bahrami et al., 2017), which studied the interrelationship of perception of learning environment and academic burnout using academic resilience as a mediator. The results of the study conformed with the investigation that academic resilience had a negative correlation (0.55) with academic burnout. Additionally, it also confirmed that the indirect effect of learning environment on academic burnout via academic resilience as significant. Here, again, although not fully relevant to the specific contexts of this research, what can be safely assumed is that academic resilience affects all study related outcomes.

Conclusively, since studies are conducted in a controlled environment and are specific to their methodology and investigation areas, the best possible study which can be used as corroboratory evidence for our study is presented by Fiorilli et al. (2020) who studied the relationship between Trait Emotional Intelligence (TEI), school burnout, resilience, and academic anxiety. The study explored the relationship between TEI and school burnout using resilience and academic anxiety as mediators. An exploration into the definitions of the said variables appear identical in context to this study thereby making it a satisfactory resource for drawing intelligible deductions. They segregated the variables in a dichotomous way i.e., studying the effect of their positive and negative implications terming variables such as grit and resilience as positive psychological resources while burnout and academic anxiety as negative elements to the overall academic performance. The study found that positive

resources and emotional perceptions have a preventive effect on negative elements such as academic burnout and anxiety. Additionally, the results of this study are in consistence/accordance with existing literature (Petrides et al., 2018).

Limitations

It should also be noted that the study has some natural limitations associated to it which are inherent of the methodology used. For instance, the limitations associated with the scales used are implied in the findings of the research. Additionally, while diligent care was expended in limiting biases and prevention of superfluity, conformity, interpretational ambiguity, and other limitations of surveys and questionnaires, it cannot be ensured that the results will be free from material or immaterial misstatement on the part of participants. Further research can be conducted to study the effect gender can have over the different variables and concepts in this study as analysis pointed out. It can also be viewed as one of the inherent limitations of the scales which are used to quantitatively determine these abstract contextualization as the statements can often induce sense of insecurity in participants who therefore give the answer to better their social acceptability.

Sample was collected from different institutions of Lahore and thus the result findings of the current study cannot be generalized to overall population of Pakistan. Further, since this study is conducted on accountancy student in Pakistan, the generalizability of its findings can be objected on student bodies in countries which have a different culture, economic conditions, and social institutions. Moreover, in later studies, qualitative, experimental methodology can be employed. The questionnaire, experiments, and scales can also have researcher's bias on top as the study design can overlook certain elements which

can affect the outcome of results in substantiated manner.

Implications

The present research will be employed to see accountancy students' academic difficulties so that accountants will be able to get academic counseling to achieve grit and academic resilience to deal with academic burnout. The existing research will help accounting students to address negative effects of academic burnout through the advocacy of resilience enhancement interventions. Educating and fostering students about their distinct tendency towards reaching long term goals is considered a first and utmost step to fulfilling the potential gap to overcome their academic adversity. Students can take benefits from preventive effective strategies from their respective academic counselors.

Academic counselors can immensely assist student's belief to build their understanding to know the connections between thoughts, emotions and behaviors that are important aspects of Rationale Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT). As a result, students can deliberately improve their level of metacognitive skills and tend to be more adaptive to recognizing irrational thoughts that seems to hamper their academic performance. The ongoing research will carry out the basic rehabilitating interventions that can also be given to students a secure zone, understanding of self-accomplishment and affirmative potential (Reddy et al., 2018). Further, the finding of this research will be effective to contemporary researchers, academic counselors, rule makers and community health officials.

Conclusion

Grit was found to have a positive correlation with academic resilience and weak negative correlation with academic burnout. Ultimately, partial mediation was observed of the role of academic resilience between

grit and academic burnout. Finally, more research is required to understand the meditative role of academic resilience with grit and academic burnout. The present study will provide an understanding about psychological suffering of accountancy students with respect to their academic failure and academic burnout. Further it will help accounting students to address negative effects of academic burnout through the advocacy of resilience enhancement interventions.

Contribution of Authors

Ayesha Khan: Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Data Curation, Formal Analysis, Writing – Original Draft
Haziq Mehmood: Methodology, Writing - Reviewing & Editing, Supervision
Sadiah Huda: Formal Analysis, Writing - Reviewing & Editing

Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest declared by authors.

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Data Availability Statement

The datasets of the current study are not available publicly due to ethical reasons but are available from the corresponding author [H.M.] upon the reasonable request.

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