

Grit in Pre-Service and In-Service Teachers with and Without Learning Disabilities: Professional Identity, Empowerment and Meaning in Life

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Abstract

This study examined grit, defined as perseverance and passion for long-term goals, among pre-service and in-service teachers with and without learning disabilities. The aim was to explore the associations between professional identity, empowerment, and meaning in life as both direct and mediating variables of grit, as well as differences in these variables among groups. The 408 participants completed demographic questionnaires and validated scales. Findings indicated significantly higher levels of perseverance among in-service teachers compared to pre-service teachers, with no difference in disability status. Concurrently, in-service teachers without disabilities reported the highest level of passion, while pre-service teachers with disabilities reported the lowest. Moreover, professional identity, empowerment, and meaning in life predicted grit, with meaning in life mediating these associations.

Education systems worldwide today face complex challenges stemming from teacher shortages, which directly affect teaching quality, learning processes, and student achievement (Castro, 2023; Weisblai, 2023). Teacher quality is considered a matter of national importance (Goodwin & Low, 2021), underscoring the need to retain those who choose education as a profession (Zavelevsky et al., 2022). At the same time, research indicates a rise in the number of pre-service (PSTs) and in-service teachers (ISTs) diagnosed with learning disabilities (LDs) (Niazov et al., 2022; Pellegrino et al., 2023). This reality highlights the necessity of adapting teacher education and professional development (PD) programs to meet diverse needs (Mandelblit, 2019; Pellegrino et al., 2023).

Within this context, the concept of grit, defined as perseverance and passion for long-term goals, has emerged as a central factor in teachers' success throughout their careers (Robertson-Kraft & Duckworth, 2014). Grit can be linked to other constructs that foster persistence and motivation in teaching, including professional identity (PI), empowerment, and meaning in life (MiL). Together, these variables form the foundation of teachers' self-efficacy, sustaining their commitment and capacity to remain in the profession (Duckworth et al., 2009).

Professional identity encompasses teachers' perceptions and beliefs about themselves and their role, evolving through academic training and professional experiences (Alsup, 2019). It reflects belonging to a professional community and a commitment to contributing to students and to society (Beijaard et al., 2004). Empowerment refers to teachers' sense of control and influence over educational processes, which can be enhanced by granting them autonomy to make pedagogical decisions and lead initiatives (Avidov-Ungar & Arviv-Elyashiv, 2018; Avidov-Ungar & Hanin-Itzak, 2019). Meaning in life, defined as a subjective sense of value, purpose, and significance (Heintzelman et al., 2020), enables teachers to connect their profession with broader life goals, strengthening resilience, motivation, and long-term commitment (Steger, 2013; Van Wingerden & Poell, 2019).

The present study aims to examine the interplay among grit, PI, empowerment, and MiL among PSTs and ISTs, comparing those with and without LDs. A deeper understanding of these relationships may offer theoretical contributions by guiding a novel framework for teachers' PD, and practical implications, by informing inclusive and equitable teacher education programs that enhance perseverance and retention in the profession.

Keywords

Grit, professional identity, empowerment, meaning in life, learning disabilities, teacher education.