

## Research Paper



# Relationship of dispositional mindfulness and grit on self-leadership strategies of student-leaders in philippine higher educational institutions

Elyssa Maria Fatima G. Virrey<sup>1\*</sup> , Nicole L. Lozano<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1,2</sup>College of Teacher Development, Faculty of Behavioral and Social Sciences, Philippine Normal University – Manila, Philippines.

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## ABSTRACT

Acknowledging the dearth of research investigating the associations between self-leadership, dispositional mindfulness, and grit, the current study explored the relationships among the three constructs. Particularly, the study explored dispositional mindfulness and grit factors as predictors of three self-leadership strategies: behavior-focused, natural rewards, and constructive thought. Data was collected among student-leaders (n = 208) in Philippine Higher Educational Institutions. The results of the correlation analysis conducted showed positive associations among the self-leadership strategies and grit, specifically the perseverance of effort factor. Interestingly, dispositional mindfulness and the strategies are not significantly correlated. Regression analysis also revealed that the perseverance of effort grit factor significantly predicts the three self-leadership strategies among the variables. Results infer that grit among student-leaders contributes to self-leadership, which can provide implications in developing self-leadership programs for student-leaders.

### Corresponding Author:

Elyssa Maria Fatima G. Virrey

College of Teacher Development, Faculty of Behavioral and Social Sciences, Philippine Normal University – Manila, Philippines.

Email: [virrey.emfg@pnu.edu.ph](mailto:virrey.emfg@pnu.edu.ph)

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Leaders play a crucial role as a guide and driving force in decision-making and other organizational tasks, whether in school, work, or the community. According to the APA Dictionary of Psychology,

leadership involves processes of organizing, motivating, and directing people to reach a certain goal. Several theories and approaches have been established to understand the multifaceted concept of being a leader. The trait approach to leadership, for instance, focuses on the traits of different leaders. It aims to examine effective leadership based on the observation of various characteristics of leaders, successful or not. In the study by [1] they provided a summary table regarding the traits of effective leaders as reported by past researchers. Some traits are consistent in literature; they revolve around alertness, self-confidence, emotional stability (referred to as emotional balance in other studies), adaptability and adjustment, and drive. Aside from leadership directed toward leading and motivating others, another concept that has been gaining interest is self-leadership. Defined as a continuous process of self-evaluation, direction, motivation, and influence to achieve positive behavioral growth and performance, self-leadership is a core concept that experts see as an integral part of being a great leader for others [2].

Considering the leadership traits previously mentioned, a psychological concept called “mindfulness” has been associated with effective leadership. Mindfulness, as defined by the APA Dictionary of Psychology, is an individual’s awareness of internal thoughts and external perceptions. It is often incorporated in therapeutic techniques to teach individuals to intentionally be present in the moment and cultivate awareness. In relation to this, [3] focused on dispositional mindfulness. Dispositional mindfulness emphasizes a person’s inherent tendency to engage in mindful states in every day experiences, even without the knowledge of mindfulness practices and training. Moreover, dispositional mindfulness is a trait that comes naturally to individuals. With a greater emphasis on individual differences, leaders are seen to possess certain traits that enable them to be effective leaders-and one of these traits is being mindful.

Aside from mindfulness, grit has also been linked to leadership. Grit is a concept defined as the passion for perseverance and long-term goals [4]. The main proponents of studying this trait propose that this trait is present in the most prominent leaders of today the main reason why they continue to lead and achieve. In the study of [5] they found that individuals who present high levels of grit lead and support others by example in standing up and making a difference in existing conditions in our society. Moreover, they revealed that people with high grit levels frequently exhibit modeling and innovating behaviors.

There have been associations between leadership, mindfulness, and grit. However, there are vital constructs and other relationships that can still be studied. Specifically, other facets of effective leadership, such as self-leadership, can be investigated, as well as traits that might have an influence on the said construct. Indeed, there are still research gaps and other perspectives that the literature has not yet explored, and the current research aims to address these gaps.

## 2. RELATED WORK

### 2.1. Self-Leadership

Along with leadership that is focused on inspiring and guiding others, self-leadership is a concept that has grown in popularity. [6] Described self-leadership as simply “the process of influencing oneself.” In recent sources, self-leadership is described as a fundamental idea that experts perceive as being a crucial component of becoming an excellent leader for others. It is defined as a constant process of self-evaluation, direction, motivation, and influence to accomplish good behavioral growth and performance [2].

[7] Released a revised 35-item questionnaire to measure the construct based on previous scales from other authors. In 2012, an abbreviated version was released consisting of a 9-item scale [8]. There are three major strategies of self-leadership: behavior-focused, natural reward, and constructive thought.

Behavior-focused focuses on self-observation, self-reward, and feedback which emphasizes a person’s self-awareness and focus. On the other hand, natural reward focuses on strategies that involve giving attention to rewarding aspects of a task and finding joy in doing a particular activity. Lastly, constructive thought in self-leadership is a group of strategies that aims to let individuals identify destructive thought patterns that can affect their performance. Constructive thought strategies give importance to identifying distorted views of reality and promote positive and constructive self-talk to initiate more productive and effective behavioral patterns from individuals.

[9] Conveyed in their research review that measurement of self-leadership (use of scales), psychological empowerment, organizational performance, work satisfaction, stress and anxiety, and emotional regulation have emerged as the major topics of research in self-leadership during the past ten years.

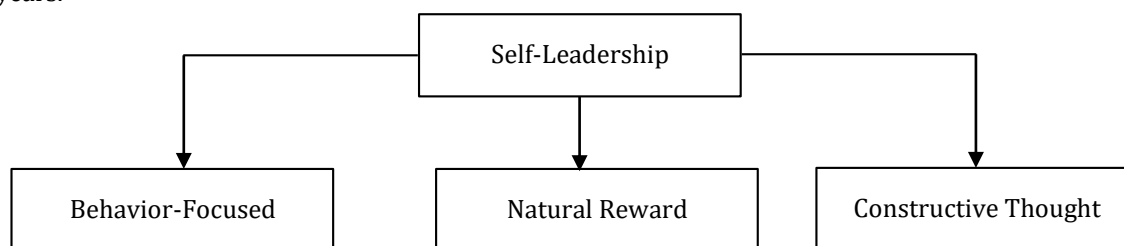


Figure 1. Self-Leadership Strategies

As shown in Figure 1, there are three self-leadership strategies. Behavior-focused focuses on self-observation, self-reward, and feedback which emphasizes a person's self-awareness and focus. On the other hand, natural reward focuses on strategies that involve giving attention to rewarding aspects of a task and finding joy in doing a particular activity. Lastly, constructive thought in self-leadership is a group of strategies that aims to let individuals identify destructive thought patterns that can affect their performance. Constructive thought strategies give importance to identifying distorted views of reality and promote positive and constructive self-talk to initiate more productive and effective behavioral patterns from individuals.

## 2.2. Dispositional Mindfulness

Mindfulness is mainly understood and studied in different forms. One of which is a type of mindfulness called dispositional mindfulness. The concept is supported by the idea that mindfulness can be regarded as an inherent capability of individuals [10]. Dispositional mindfulness refers to the natural tendency of individuals to be mindful as they face different life situations, even without having any experience in mindfulness training or practices. Studies on dispositional mindfulness are mostly concentrated on its connections with psychological health and personality. The researchers include different psychological health factors, including stress, depression, anxiety, and overall well-being, with participants coming from the general adult population and students [9]. Reinforcing this is the research review conducted by [11], [12] wherein they found that dispositional mindfulness research has centered on psychometric concerns and outcome-focused factors, including stress, well-being, and therapeutic interventions.

## 2.3. Dispositional Mindfulness and Leadership

Mindfulness and leadership have an established positive correlation among existing literature. [13] Found a significant correlation in the total flexibility score of participant leaders in connection to the characteristics of mindfulness. The findings indicate that mindfulness is favorably correlated with the leader flexibility score overall and its two dualities, long-term plan vs. short-term execution. Compellingly, [14] discovered that mindfulness correlates favorably with organizational leadership transformation and leadership self-mastery using structural equation modeling.

Still, the research work of [14] also utilized data from supervising managers of their respondents to get more accurate data for leadership performance. Studies in mindfulness and leadership often look at mindfulness that can be enhanced through practice. They often suggest mindfulness-based interventions that can lead to positive leadership behavioral outcomes. Little research specifically discusses on focus on dispositional mindfulness when it comes to leadership.

In terms of dispositional mindfulness and leadership, there is a finding in the study of [15] which stated that natural-reward strategies have the highest correlation with mindfulness, followed by, behavior-focused strategies and constructive thought pattern strategies. A different scale was used in the said study. On the other hand, [16] reported that mindfulness is highly correlated with all of the component strategies

of self-leadership in respondents with mindfulness practices. These can also suggest that mindfulness practices may increase the likelihood of higher self-leadership levels.

#### 2.4. Grit

Grit is a concept defined as the passion for perseverance and long-term goals [4]. It is composed of two components: consistency of interest and perseverance of effort. Consistency of interest pertains to an individual's tendency to stick to the same interests over a long period of time while perseverance of effort is the extent to which an individual will exert effort in achieving a goal amidst diversities or challenges in life. The leading proponents of researching this non-cognitive trait claim that the most well-known leaders of today possess this trait, which is the primary factor in their ability to lead and succeed. As mentioned by [4], most people might change paths and lose the drive to continue in certain situations like disappointment or boredom. Regardless, gritty individuals will continue the course toward what they want to achieve.

Currently, measuring grit is through self-report scales developed by the team of Angela Duckworth. The scales used are the Original Grit Scale which is termed as "Grit-O" or the Short Grit Scale called the "Grit-S". The original scale is composed of 12 items, while the short version was reduced to eight items. Research surrounding grit centers on associations between grit and positive outcomes in school, career, organizational behaviors, and well-being [17]. Present studies have maximized the use of both Western and Asian samples. [18] Investigated grit and its relationship with academic success and well-being of Filipino High School Students.

Results revealed that academic agency, behavioral, cognitive, and emotional involvement were all positively predicted by grit. Career outcomes and work-related functioning were also positively linked to grit. [19]'s study presented that self-efficacy in terms of career exploration in University Students in the Philippines is associated with grit, while gritty workers are less prone to burnout.

#### 2.5. Grit and Leadership

A review of different literature also suggests a positive relationship between grit and leadership. The [20] found out that transformative leadership activity were predicted by grit, basing from observations and self-report measures. From the study, grit has indeed have predictive ability with transformational leadership behavior. The results emphasize different implication of grit for selecting, nurturing, and developing leaders. Moreover, the study by [21] reported that the grit variable "perseverance" had a greater link than the factor consistency of interest and that grit positively connected with effective leadership. These results offer a strong rationale for providing leaders with learning opportunities that might hasten the development of grit and effective leadership. Interestingly, there are a number of published articles that looked at the associations among grit and self-leadership.

The study by [22] investigated the self-leadership, grit, and performance of Taekwondo players. Results of the said study showed that first, both interest consistency grit and effort perseverance grit benefited from self-leadership. Second, it was discovered that effort persistence grit and interest consistency grit both have a beneficial effect on performance. Third, performance was enhanced through self-leadership. Furthermore, the study of [23] explored college life adjustment, grit, and self-leadership behaviors. Similar to the first studies, relationships are all positive. Grit and self-leadership, grit and college life adjustment, and grit and self-leadership all showed significant correlations. Correlations are indeed present in grit and self-leadership studies, however, dimensions of the self-leadership strategies were not thoroughly discussed.

#### 2.6. Present Study

The present study seeks to investigate the relationship between dispositional mindfulness and grit in self-leadership strategies among student leaders in Higher Educational Institutions. Existing research in self-leadership encapsulates the relationship of the concept in work-related variables like job performance and organizational management. It was just recently that the trend in self-leadership studies is now in education-specific topics [24]. The importance of self-leadership in effective leadership has long been established, and it would be interesting to investigate self-leadership in student-leaders serving in their

university organizations. Moreover, although there is existing research on mindfulness and leadership, the majority of studies are from US and Europe. There is a lack of representation samples from Asian countries, especially the Philippines.

The current studies in mindfulness and leadership also report inconsistent results when it comes to the three self-leadership strategies. Thus, the present study can give a more in-depth understanding of the said variables. To address the mentioned gaps in the literature and existing studies, the present study specifically aims to determine the relationship between the unidimensional concept of mindfulness, the two dimensions of grit, and the three self-leadership strategies.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Design

A quantitative correlational design was used to investigate the relationship between the three variables involved in the study dispositional mindfulness, grit, and self-leadership. The study utilized self-report survey questionnaires to gather data. Thus, a cross-sectional design was also used in gathering data at one point in time.

#### 3.2 Sample

Through purposive and convenience sampling, two-hundred-eight ( $n = 208$ ) student-leaders among higher-educational institutions in South Manila responded to the survey (38.94% males, 61.06% females). The age of the respondents ranges from 18 to 29 years old ( $M = 20.6$ ;  $SD = 2.04$ ). The student-leaders are all undergraduate students. Specifically, the respondents are student leaders in their central student council/government. The student-leaders are college-level and currently holding a position in their school organizations.

#### 3.3 Instruments

The research utilized three instruments: the Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS), the Short Grit Scale (Grit-S), and the Revised Self-Leadership Questionnaire (RSLQ). The MAAS, a 15-item scale developed by [10] to measure dispositional mindfulness, demonstrated strong reliability with a Cronbach's alpha of .909. The Grit-S, an 8-item scale developed to assess perseverance and consistency of interest, showed acceptable reliability with a Cronbach's alpha of .721. Additionally, the RSLQ, a 35-item questionnaire created by [7] for evaluating self-leadership strategies, exhibited excellent reliability with a Cronbach's alpha of .939.

#### 3.4 Procedures and Data Analysis

The first part of the online questionnaire administered through Google Forms collected the informed consent, demographic, and contact information of the student-leaders. Afterward, the respondents were asked to accomplish three self-report questionnaires about dispositional mindfulness, grit, and self-leadership strategies.

After gathering data, it was transferred to a spreadsheet for data cleaning. Using the scoring protocol for every questionnaire, scores were calculated. The statistical analysis was conducted using the Jamovi 2.4.1 program. Multiple correlation analysis was used to determine the relationship between dispositional mindfulness, grit factors, and the three self-leadership strategies. Multiple regression analysis was also used to determine whether dispositional mindfulness and the two grit factors can predict self-leadership.

## 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1 Correlation Analysis of Self-Leadership Strategies, Dispositional Mindfulness, and Grit Factors

Correlation Analyses in Table 1 show the relationships among self-leadership strategies, dispositional mindfulness, and grit factors. Analyses revealed that behavior-focused strategies have a

positive significant relationship with grit, specifically, perseverance of effort ( $r = 0.406$ ;  $p < .001$ ). Natural-reward strategies were also positively correlated with the same grit factor ( $r = 0.333$ ;  $p < .001$ ). Lastly, constructive thought strategies were also found to be positively related to perseverance of effort ( $r = 0.359$ ;  $p < .001$ ). Interestingly, dispositional mindfulness was significantly associated with the grit factor, consistency of interest ( $r = 0.527$ ;  $p < .001$ ).

**Table 1.** Correlation Analysis of Self-Leadership Strategies, Dispositional Mindfulness, and Grit Factors

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1 Behavior-focused Strategies	–					
2 Natural-reward Strategies	0.721***	–				
3 Constructive Thought Strategies	0.696***	0.693***	–			
4 Dispositional Mindfulness	0.076	0.062	-0.056	–		
5 Consistency of Interest	0.131	0.055	-0.057	0.527***	–	
6 Perseverance of Effort	0.406***	0.333***	0.359***	0.133	0.176*	–
Note. * $p < .05$ , ** $p < .01$ , *** $p < .001$						

#### 4.2 Multiple Regression Analysis with Self-leadership Strategies as Outcome Variable

Table 2 presents the results of the regression analysis, which intends to look at the extent to which dispositional mindfulness and the two grit factors will predict self-leadership. The results show that 17.5% of the changes in self-leadership strategies are explained by the three predictors,  $F(3, 204) = 14.4$ ,  $p < .001$ . Among the three predictors, the grit factor perseverance of effort ( $B = .33185$ ,  $t = 6.5204$ ,  $p < .001$ ), or the extent to which an individual would exert effort amidst the adversities of life, showed a statistically significant impact on self-leadership.

**Table 2.** Multiple Regression Analysis with Self-Leadership as Outcome Variable

Variables	B	SE	t	p	R <sup>2</sup>
Dispositional Mindfulness	-0.01373	0.0403	-0.3408	0.734	
Consistency of Interest	-0.00268	0.0437	-0.0614	0.951	0.175
Perseverance of Effort	0.33185	0.0509	6.5204	<.001	

Specifically, 16.9% of the changes in behavior-focused strategies are accounted to the three predictors,  $F(3, 204) = 13.8$ ,  $p < .001$ . This is shown in Table 3 as it presents the behavior-focused strategies as outcome variable with perseverance of effort ( $B = .32089$ ,  $t = 6.091$ ,  $p < .001$ ) as the main predictor.

**Table 3.** Multiple Regression Analysis with Behavior-focused Strategies as Outcome Variable

Variables	B	SE	t	p	R <sup>2</sup>
Dispositional Mindfulness	-0.00722	0.0417	-0.173	0.863	
Consistency of Interest	0.04105	0.0452	0.908	0.908	0.169
Perseverance of Effort	0.32089	0.0527	6.091	6.091	

Moreover, 11.2% of changes in natural-reward strategies are explained by dispositional mindfulness and the grit factors  $F(3, 204) = 8.54$ ,  $p < .001$ . As shown in Table 4, the best predictor of natural-reward strategies is the second grit factor, perseverance of effort ( $B = .3074$ ,  $t = 4.959$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

**Table 4.** Multiple Regression Analysis with Natural Reward Strategies as Outcome Variable

Variables	B	SE	t	p	R <sup>2</sup>
Dispositional Mindfulness	0.0170	0.0491	0.347	0.729	
Consistency of Interest	-0.0123	0.0532	-0.231	0.818	0.112
Perseverance of Effort	0.3074	0.0620	4.959	<.001	



Lastly, 14.6% of changes in constructive thought strategies are due to the influence of dispositional mindfulness and the grit factors  $F(3, 204) = 11.6, p < .001$ . Table 5 also proves that the perseverance of effort ( $B = .3582, t = 5.827, p < .001$ ) was still the main predictor for this self-leadership strategy.

**Table 5.** Multiple Regression Analysis with Constructive Thought Strategies as Outcome Variable

Variables	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>
Dispositional Mindfulness	-0.0370	0.0487	-0.759	0.449	
Consistency of Interest	-0.0643	0.0528	-1.218	0.225	0.146
Perseverance of Effort	0.3582	0.0615	5.827	<.001	

### Self-leadership and Grit

It is interesting that the obtained results revealed that among the two components of grit, it's the perseverance of effort that significantly predicted the three self-leadership strategies. The Consistency of interest factor, or the tendency of individuals to stick to their interests over a period of time did not significantly correlate with the strategies. Particularly, results imply that being consistent with one's interest does not predict engagement in behavior-focused strategies. These strategies aim to adapt to current experiences and situations to achieve expected or set outcomes [7]. Meaning, behavior-focused strategies give more importance to flexibility to what situations can arise, so consistency of interest might not be relevant. Moreover, natural-reward and constructive thought strategies were also not predicted by the consistency of interest factor. As previously mentioned, natural-reward strategies emphasize the effort to look for enjoyable and rewarding factors of a given task, no matter how difficult, or uninteresting it is for an individual. On the other hand, constructive thought strategies are behaviors and cognitions that include identifying dysfunctional beliefs and focusing on positive visualization and self-talk.

The ideas are further supported by the results of the study by [25], wherein the perseverance of effort factor was reported to be a better predictor of psychological outcomes than the consistency of interest factor. In the same study, the researchers also stated that cross-cultural differences exist in measuring the grit construct. They concluded that in collectivist cultures, perseverance of effort might be more relevant because individuals in collectivist settings give more importance to group goals. In return, when individuals see that their goals are not aligned with their society or significant others, they will align their goals with them - breaking the idea of consistency. The pattern of results is consistent with the studies of [26] and [27], wherein they found that perseverance of effort is a better predictor of career success and consistency of interest had weak correlations with well-being and personality strengths respectively.

Perseverance of effort emerged as the significant predictor of the three self-leadership strategies. Distinctly, the results of this research provide supporting evidence that being perseverant and exerting effort increases the likelihood of having behavior-focused strategies. Having the trait of working hard amidst life's challenges influences the way we set goals, track our progress and the like. These results are consistent with the claim that people with high levels of grit tend to be goal-oriented and lead themselves to achieve the goals they set for themselves [28].

The results also highlight that being able to continue working towards a goal despite setbacks might indicate engagement in natural-reward strategies, like purposely seeking out help and finding rewarding aspects of work. Furthermore, [28] stated that gritty people can better tune out negative life events. These people consistently focus on factors that can help lessen the negative impact of difficult or distressing situations they face in their lives. As gritty individuals persevere and exert effort, they also actively reframe their negative experiences and thoughts, which helps them behave effectively to reach their goals [28]. In relation to this, people who practice constructive thought strategies will talk themselves through unpleasant situations and consistently assess their cognitions to ensure that it is functional. The results of the study strongly suggest that gritty individuals with high perseverance of effort levels also practice constructive thought strategies. The results are consistent with the claim of [29] wherein they stated that grit enables students to reframe their negative experiences so they can have new insights about their experiences, in return, they are able to relieve unpleasant emotions.

### Self-leadership and Dispositional Mindfulness

The results also highlight that the level of dispositional mindfulness among student-leaders is not significantly associated with their levels of self-leadership strategies. Particularly, dispositional mindfulness cannot be considered a strong predictor of self-leadership strategies. In terms of self-leadership and dispositional mindfulness, few researchers have explained the intersection of the two constructs. For instance, [30] stated that mindfulness and self-leadership strongly emphasize self-regulation. Self-regulation is deeply connected to self-observation, a facet under the behavior-focused strategy of self-leadership.

However, the results suggest that there are other factors that can contribute to the increase of self-leadership strategies among student-leaders. Further, the insignificant relationship between self-leadership strategies and dispositional mindfulness might be supported by the findings of [31] wherein emotional stability did not yield a significant positive correlation with behavior-focused strategies and cognitive-thought strategies.

### Self-Leadership, Dispositional Mindfulness, and Grit

In accordance with the trait approach to leadership, which assumes that certain traits are strongly associated with the effectiveness of leaders, the study aims to see whether the combination of dispositional mindfulness, a naturally occurring trait of being attentive and aware of moment-to-moment experiences, and grit, a non-cognitive trait that pertains to passion and perseverance for long term goals can predict self-leadership strategies. Interestingly, it was evident that only the perseverance of effort factor remained the strongest predictor among the three variables. Moreover, behavior-focused strategies are the outcome variable that is best predicted by the independent variables, followed by constructive thought and natural rewards. Meaning, that grit, especially the perseverance of effort factor, is most reflected in the behavior of self-leaders. Lastly, the results imply that self-leadership success is not only influenced by certain traits, and there are other factors that need to be considered.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The results of the study were able to assert the strong relationship between the three self-leadership strategies and grit. Particularly, the perseverance of effort factor of grit emerged as the significant predictor of the strategies compared to the consistency of interest factor. Interestingly, dispositional mindfulness levels of student-leaders are not significantly correlated with the levels of the three self-leadership strategies. Additionally, behavior-focused strategies are the outcome variable best predicted by the independent variables, followed by constructive thought and natural rewards. This suggests that grit, particularly the perseverance of effort component, is most evident in how self-leaders behave. The results emphasize that grit positively influences self-leadership. Indeed, the present study is one of the rare investigations validating the role of grit in self-leadership strategies among student-leaders.

The results of the study have practical implications for the academic setting. From the findings, the development of student-leadership programs that promote grit factors, specifically perseverance of effort, can be done to encourage leaders to exert effort and persevere while navigating their challenging roles. This can be possible by integrating the grit concept into different leadership development programs. Given the complexity of being a student leader, faced with extra workloads and people to manage, it is vital to investigate the different factors that might contribute to the improvement and development of student leaders. Moreso, before one can lead others, one should know how to lead oneself first. Looking at leadership from the inside is an important aspect of becoming an influential leader. Thus, self-leadership should be given greater value. The study brought to light the importance of grit in self-leadership. Thus, efforts to further develop self-leadership among student-leaders should also highlight the integration of the concept of grit, especially the perseverance of effort factor. School administrators and mental health professionals inside the academe (guidance counselors, psychologists, etc.) can lead the implementation of such programs.



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### Author Contributions Statement

Name of Author	C	M	So	Va	Fo	I	R	D	O	E	Vi	Su	P	Fu
Elyssa Maria Fatima G. Virrey	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Nicole L. Lozano		✓		✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓

C : Conceptualization

M : Methodology

So : Software

Va : Validation

Fo : Formal analysis

I : Investigation

R : Resources

D : Data Curation

O : Writing - Original Draft

E : Writing - Review & Editing

Vi : Visualization

Su : Supervision

P : Project administration

Fu : Funding acquisition

### Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

### Informed Consent

Informed consent was obtained from all survey respondents prior to their participation in the study. Participants were assured of the confidentiality of their responses and their right to withdraw at any stage without penalty.

### Ethical Approval

This research complied with all relevant national regulations and institutional policies and was conducted in accordance with the ethical principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration. Informed consent was obtained from all respondents prior to their participation, and confidentiality as well as voluntary participation were strictly observed.

### Data Availability

The data that support the results of this study are available from the corresponding author, upon reasonable request. To protect the privacy and confidentiality of research participants, the data are not publicly available.

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#### BIOGRAPHIES OF AUTHORS

	<p><b>Elyssa Maria Fatima G. Virrey</b><sup>id</sup>, received her bachelor's and master's degrees in Psychology and Counseling from the Philippine Normal University, Manila, Philippines, through a five-year straight program. She is currently serving as a Guidance Counselor at San Beda College-Alabang, where she provides counseling services, conducts seminars, and engages in student development programs. Her research interests include mental health, help-seeking behavior, school climate, and social-emotional competence. She has co-authored and published several research articles in peer-reviewed journals and has presented her work at local and international conferences. Beyond counseling and research, she actively delivers talks and workshops on leadership, growth mindset, and personal development to diverse audiences. She can be contacted at Email: <a href="mailto:elyssavirrey.work@gmail.com">elyssavirrey.work@gmail.com</a></p>
	<p><b>Nicole L. Lozano</b><sup>id</sup>, received her bachelor's and master's degrees in Psychology and Counseling through a five-year straight program at the Philippine Normal University in Manila, Philippines. Her research interests include mental health, parent-child relationships, help-seeking behavior, and student well-being. She has participated in various local and international research conferences, where she presented co-authored and published research articles. Aside from research, she actively takes part in seminars and discussions on mental health. Her academic and professional interests focus on promoting effective interventions, and advancing the welfare of students and teachers. She aspires to contribute to the broader discourse on improving mental health and the quality of life of Filipinos within the context of culture. She can be contacted at Email: <a href="mailto:nicolelozano1902@gmail.com">nicolelozano1902@gmail.com</a></p>