

## Motivation and Grit: Predictors of language learning achievement<sup>\*</sup>

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### Abstract

This present study explored the psychological factors of *motivation*, *anxiety*, and *grit* in learning English as a foreign language. The aims were 1) to examine the relationships between *motivation*, *anxiety*, and *grit* of high and low achievers, and 2) to investigate the predictive validity of *motivation*, *anxiety*, and *grit* on English language achievement. One hundred and eighty Matthayom 6 students of PSU Wittayanusorn School, Songkla, responded to three sets of questionnaires: *Learning Motivation Questionnaire*, *Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Questionnaire*, and *Grit Scale*. The subjects' English language GPA was also used to determine their level of achievement. Statistical results revealed the following: 1) among the high achievers, motivation and grit were significantly and positively correlated, while a significant and inverse relationship between anxiety and grit was found; 2) among the low achievers, the correlation between motivation and anxiety was significant and positive; and 3) *fear of negative evaluation*, *test anxiety*, and *intrinsic motivation* were the significantly powerful predictors in English language learning achievement for all learners. It is recommended that foreign language instructors should design a classroom environment which enhances motivation, promotes the personality trait of grit, and reduces anxiety.

**Keywords:** Language Learning Motivation, Language Learning Anxiety, Grit, English  
Language Learning Achievement

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## บทคัดย่อ

งานวิจัยนี้นำเสนอการศึกษาปัจจัยทางด้านแรงจูงใจ ความวิตกกังวล และความเพียร ในการเรียนรู้ภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาต่างประเทศ จุดมุ่งหมายคือ 1) เพื่อศึกษาความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างแรงจูงใจ ความวิตกกังวล และความเพียรของนักเรียนที่มีผลสัมฤทธิ์ทางการเรียนภาษาอังกฤษสูงและต่ำ และ 2) เพื่อศึกษาตัวพยากรณ์ด้านแรงจูงใจ ความวิตกกังวล และความเพียรต่อผลสัมฤทธิ์ทางการเรียนภาษาอังกฤษ กลุ่มเป้าหมายคือนักเรียนชั้นมัธยมศึกษาปีที่ 6 จำนวน 180 คน ของโรงเรียน มอ.วิทยานุสรณ์ จังหวัดสงขลา เครื่องมือที่ใช้ในการวิจัยประกอบด้วย 1) แบบสอบถามแรงจูงใจในการเรียน 2) แบบสอบถามความวิตกกังวลในการเรียนภาษาต่างประเทศ 3) แบบสอบถามความเพียรในการเรียน และ 4) ผลสัมฤทธิ์ทางการเรียนภาษาอังกฤษ ผลการศึกษาพบว่า 1) แรงจูงใจและความเพียรในการเรียนภาษา มีความสัมพันธ์กันในเชิงบวกอย่างมีนัยสำคัญ ในขณะที่ความวิตกกังวลและความเพียรมีความสัมพันธ์กันในเชิงลบอย่างมีนัยสำคัญในกลุ่มที่มีผลสัมฤทธิ์ทางการเรียนภาษาอังกฤษสูง 2) ความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างแรงจูงใจและความวิตกกังวลมีความสัมพันธ์กันในเชิงลบอย่างมีนัยสำคัญในกลุ่มที่มีผลสัมฤทธิ์ทางการเรียนภาษาอังกฤษต่ำ และ 3) ความวิตกกังวลในการถูกประเมินผลเชิงลบ ความวิตกกังวลในการสอบ และแรงจูงใจภายใน เป็นตัวแปรที่สามารถพยากรณ์ผลสัมฤทธิ์ทางการเรียนภาษาอังกฤษของกลุ่มตัวอย่างทั้งหมด ข้อเสนอแนะจากผลการวิจัยคือ อาจารย์ผู้สอนภาษาต่างประเทศควรจัดสภาพแวดล้อมในห้องเรียนเพื่อเพิ่มแรงจูงใจ ส่งเสริมบุคลิกนิสัยด้านความเพียรและลดความวิตกกังวลในตัวผู้เรียน

**คำสำคัญ:** แรงจูงใจในการเรียนภาษา ความวิตกกังวลในการเรียนภาษา ความเพียร ความสำเร็จในการเรียนภาษา

## Introduction

### 1. Background of the Study

English is an important foreign language in the Thai context. According to the 1999 Education Act and the subsequent National Education Curriculum implemented in 2002, the English language has been placed “at the forefront of national intellectual development” (Wongsothorn, 2003: 445). Since then, English in the Thai context has shifted from an academic subject of study to the language of communication (Baker, 2012). Thais learn English and use it mainly for communicating in foreign trading, international diplomacy, gaining access to scientific, technological and literacy materials for instance. The role of English is increasing as Thailand is one of the ASEAN founders and English is used, as stated in Article 34 of the ASEAN Charter, as a lingua franca within the ASEAN Community. In fact, English has been employed as an ASEAN working language since 1967 as claimed by McArthur (2002, cited in Nomnian, 2014). Despite this fact, English proficiency among Thais is rated at a very low level as declared by the EF English Proficiency Index (2013) is far from satisfactory. This is consistent with the fact that Thai students’ English language performance on the national tests such as the Ordinary

National Educational Test (O-NET) or the General Aptitude Test (GAT). The English language mean scores of Thai students on both tests have been in a critical stage for years because they have not reached even half of the total score (NIETS, 2013).

It is widely accepted that psychological factors have played a powerful role in language learning, especially in second or foreign language acquisition. *Motivation* is considered one of the most significant affective factors that influence L2 learning success (Dörnyei 1998). A lot of studies have been carried out to find out the effect of different types of motivation on language learning achievement (Gardner et.al 1987; Spolsky 1989; Gardner et.al 2004; Dörnyei & Ushioda 2011). Gardner (1985, cited in Scarcella & Oxford 1992:51) views that motivation “strongly influences the degree to which learners take advantage of opportunities to use the language”. Knowledge of a second language can possibly be achieved in learners with sufficient motivation, regardless of aptitude or other cognitive competence (Dörnyei 2001).

Based on the self-determination theory suggested by Deci and Ryan (1989), two types of motivation are categorized: *extrinsic* and *intrinsic*. Individuals perform a specific activity because of internal rewards, such as joy, pleasure, and satisfaction of curiosity which are intrinsically motivated. Even when faced with complicated problems, students who possess *intrinsic* motivation tend to persevere in the task and benefit from their mistakes (Walker et al, 2006). Besides, intrinsically motivated individuals have learning satisfaction and participate in any learning activities in part because they are open to their chosen field and have a good plan based on their interest (Paiwithayasiritham, 2013). Extrinsically motivated individuals, on the other hand, engage in an activity or task because of reasons which are unrelated to the activity itself. These reasons can be the expectation of prizes, good grades, or even a positive feedback (Vansteenkiste et al, 2006).

Another factor in the psycho-linguistic dimension that has been paid much attention to by language researchers is *anxiety*. For many students, learning a foreign language can be an anxiety-provoking experience for various reasons. Foreign language anxiety is different from anxiety in other disciplines; it is “a phenomenon related to but distinguishable from other specific anxiety”, Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope, (1986: 129). Foreign language anxiety is “a distinct complex construct of self-perception, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of language learning process” (ibid: 128). For Clement (1980), foreign language anxiety is referred to as learners’ complex psychological construct of their feelings, self-esteem, and self-confidence. According to MacIntyre and

Gardner (1994), foreign language anxiety occurs in a second or foreign language setting, including speaking, listening, and learning with a feeling of tension and apprehension.

Horwitz and Young (1991) categorize foreign language anxiety into three dimensions: *communication apprehension* originating from the learners' lack of linguistic or communicative competence; *fear of negative evaluation*, arising when the learners are anxious about others who would measure them negatively, and *test anxiety*, an apprehension over academic evaluation such as a fear of failure in an exam. Anxiety is viewed to facilitate if it enhances or motivates the individuals to involve or remain in the activity, whereas, it is considered debilitating when it withdraws the individuals from the task (Scovel, 1978, cited in Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991).

A personality trait is another remarkable psychological factor which influences second or foreign language acquisition (Cook, 2001). The issue of personality factors that guide students to success both in school and life has been widely discussed, especially among psychologists and educators. They have discovered that those students who tended to be the most successful in their studies had a set of characteristics which even those students with high IQs or SAT scores might not have. In other words, IQ or SAT scores are not the only factors to predict whether the learners would be successful in their programs. Some characteristics play a significant role as well. Among those personality traits, *grit* is being specially highlighted by many educators and institutions, including the U.S. Department of Education (2013). *Grit* is viewed as one of the most important traits that any individual should possess to be successful in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (U.S. Department of Education 2013).

Duckworth et al. (2009: 541) define *grit* as “a passion and perseverance to accomplish long-term goals whatever the obstacles and no matter how long it may take”. Character Educational Partnership (2008, cited in Tough, 2012) has categorized characters into two types: moral characters and performance characters. The former embodies ethical values such as fairness, generosity, and honesty, while the latter includes values like effort, diligence, and perseverance. Tough (2012) viewed that *grit* is one of the performance characters which can lead individuals to a better performance, which will later result in successful goals.

Robert (2009) remarks that *grit* is the drive that promotes many important skills such as collaboration, creative thinking, and coping with changes, that pave the way to a successful life. Dweck (2005, cited in Robert, 2009) comments that *grit* and effort are the symbols of many creative geniuses who were just ordinary people who become extraordinary motivated with the ability to thrive on obstacles. Furthermore, Dweck (2009) claims that many creative

researchers agree that the influential ingredients in creative achievement are perseverance and resilience, which are the two main traits of grit. According to Duckworth et al. (2007, cited in Tough, 2012: 92), volition or a strong will to achieve goals, which is a part of grit, must work together with motivation because volition does not help much if students are not motivated to success, '*and so motivation alone is insufficient without the volitional fortitude to follow through on goals*'.

*Perseverance of effort* and *consistency of interest* are two main traits of *grit* (Duckworth et al., 2007). The former reflects commitment and effort towards one's goals while the latter reflects focus and dedication to a small set of important goals over a long period of time.

To date, no psycho-linguistic studies have examined how individual differences in grit manifest themselves in foreign language learning anxiety and motivation. Therefore, this present study aimed to investigate the correlations between motivation, anxiety and grit in learning English as a foreign language among learners with different language achievement.

## 2.Purposes of the Study

This study aimed to investigate the relationships between psychological factors of *motivation*, *anxiety*, and *grit* on English language achievement. Specifically, the study attempted to:

- 1) examine the relationships between *motivation*, *anxiety*, and *grit* of the high and low achievers,
- 2) investigate the predictive validity of *motivation*, *anxiety*, and *grit* on English language achievement.

## Research Methodology

### 1. Participants

One hundred and eighty Matthayom 6 students of PSU Wittayanusorn School, Hat Yai, Songkla, in 2014 academic year were selected to participate in the present study.

### 2.Instruments

Three sets of questionnaires were employed in this study, and responses to items on the questionnaires were recorded on a 4-point Likert-type scale ranging from (4) “strongly agree” to (1) “strongly disagree”.

2.1 **Learning Motivation Questionnaire**, adapted from Language Learning Orientation Scale, developed by Noels et al. (2000) with 9 items regarding *intrinsic* motivation and 9 items on *extrinsic* motivation.

2.2 **Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Questionnaire**, adapted from Horwitz et al. (1986), with 20 items focusing on three dimensions of anxiety: *communication apprehension*, *test anxiety*, and *fear of negative evaluation*.

2.3 **Grit Scale**, an 8-item questionnaire developed by Duckworth and Quinn (2009), measuring two main traits of grit: *perseverance of effort* and *consistent interest*.

2.4 **The subjects’ English Language Achievement**: a 5-semester English language GPA to represent subjects’ achievements in language learning.

### 3. Procedures and Data Collection

To accomplish the purposes of this study, the following steps were taken:

3.1 The 180 subjects of the study were asked to respond to the 3 questionnaires in the first semester of academic year 2014.

3.2 English language GPA of the subjects in 5 semesters (semester 1 and 2 of Matthayom 4 and 5, and semester 1 of Matthayom 6) was taken as their English achievement.

3.3 The subjects were divided according to 27% technique, namely the top and bottom 27% scorers of English language GPA into high and low achievers. There were 48 students in each group.

3.4 The data obtained were analyzed and interpreted.

### 4. Data Analysis

To answer the first research question, the data was analyzed by computing through Pearson’s Correlation to establish relationships between motivation, anxiety, and grit in language learning. To find out which factors, anxiety, motivation, or grit, best predicted English language performance, Linear Regression analysis was used.

## Results and Findings

**Research Question 1: What are the relationships between motivation, anxiety, and grit of high and low achievers?**

The results from the analysis on whether the high achievers' overall motivation, anxiety, and grit as well as their aspects were related to each other are summarized in Table 1

**Table 1:** Correlations between each aspect of motivation, anxiety, and grit of the high achievers

	1	1.1	1.2	2	2.1	2.2	2.3	3	3.1	3.2
1. Motivation	1	.808**	.880**	-.196	-.141	-.266*	-.130	.321*	.375**	.183
1.1 Extrinsic		1	.431**	-.147	-.162	-.184	-.058	.244*	.315*	.111
1.2 Intrinsic			1	-.179	-.074	-.272*	-.147	.305*	.330*	.200
2. Anxiety				1	.891**	.583**	.898**	-.350**	-.158	-.439**
2.1 Commu.					1	.369**	.701**	-.354**	-.160	-.445**
2.2 Test						1	.311*	-.409**	-.236	-.465**
2.3 Negative							1	-.173	-.052	-.242*
3. Grit								1	.856**	.872**
3.1 Effort									1	.493**
3.2 Interest										1

\*\* . Significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed). \* . Significant at the 0.05 level (1-tailed).

From Table 1, the correlation analysis shows a negative correlation, though not significant, between motivation and anxiety ( $r = -.196$ ). However, the relationship between overall motivation and anxiety type of *test anxiety*, was significant and negative, though quite low ( $r = -.266$ ,  $p < .05$ ). This indicates that the more motivated the students were, the less anxious they were in taking a test. It was also found that anxiety and grit were negatively and significantly correlated ( $r = -.350$ ,  $p < .01$ ), indicating that the high achievers had a low level of anxiety but a high level of grit, and vice versa. However, a significant and positive, though weak, correlation can be seen between the high achievers' motivation as well as all type of motivation – *extrinsic* and *intrinsic* and grit in learning English ( $r = .321$ ,  $.244$ ,  $.305$  respectively,  $p < .05$ ). That is, the higher the level of motivation the high achievers had, the higher the level of their grit.

A closer look at Table 1 shows that the high achievers' *extrinsic* motivation was significantly and positively correlated with *intrinsic* motivation and *perseverance of effort* ( $r$

= .431,  $p < .01$  and .315,  $p < .05$  respectively). These correlations indicate that the high achievers who were extrinsically motivated were also intrinsically motivated as well as exerted more effort to achieve goals in learning English.

Table 1 also demonstrates a significant and positive, though weak, relationship between *intrinsic* motivation and *perseverance of effort* ( $r = .330$ ,  $p < .05$ ). It shows that the high achievers who had high *intrinsic* motivation would also had a high level of *perseverance of effort*. Furthermore, the relationship between *intrinsic* motivation and *test anxiety* was found to be negatively and significantly correlated ( $r = -.272$ ,  $p < .05$ ). That is, the high achievers who had a high level of *intrinsic* motivation would likely be less anxious when taking a test in English.

Findings under each category also demonstrate interesting relationship, for example under anxiety, there were strong, significant, and positive relationships between *communication apprehension* and *fear of negative evaluation* ( $r = .701$ ,  $p < .01$ ). This suggests that the high achievers having difficulty communicating in English would be fearful of other people criticizing on their English performance. Interestingly, every aspect of anxiety was negatively correlated to all aspects of grit, where *communication apprehension* and *test anxiety* were moderately and significantly correlated to the grit facet of *consistency of interest* ( $r = -.445$  and  $-.465$  respectively,  $p < .01$ ), while *fear of negative evaluation* had a significant, though weak, correlation with *consistency of interest* ( $r = -.242$ ,  $p < .05$ ). This means that the high achievers who had difficulty communicating in English, taking tests, and being judged by others on their English had more consistent interest and exerted more effort in learning English and vice versa.

Under grit, there exists a significant and positive correlation between the subjects' *perseverance of effort* and *consistency of interest* ( $r = .493$ ,  $p < .01$ ). That is, within the high achievers, the more the effort they exerted, the more consistent their interest would be. In brief, the high achievers had high motivation and grit but low anxiety in language learning.

Below is Table 2 which shows the results from the analysis on whether the low achievers' overall motivation, anxiety, and grit as well as their aspects were related to each other.

In Table 2, there was a positive and significant correlation between motivation and anxiety among the low achievers ( $r = .439$ ,  $p < .01$ ). That is, the higher the level of their motivation, the higher their anxiety. It is interesting to find that the correlation between motivation and grit in this group was positive but non-significant, while their anxiety and grit was inversely but insignificantly correlated. In other words, the increasing level of their



motivation would not result in the increase of their grit, while the increasing level of their anxiety would not decrease their level of grit. The low achievers seemed to have high motivation but low grit and high anxiety.

Relationships between each aspect of motivation, anxiety, and grit are also shown in Table 2. A significant and positive correlation was found between *extrinsic* and *intrinsic* motivation ( $r = .462, p < .01$ ), indicating that the low achievers who were extrinsically motivated were also intrinsically motivated. The findings show that the two aspects of motivation – *extrinsic* and *intrinsic* – were significantly and positively correlated with *communication apprehension* and *fear of negative evaluation* ( $r = .337, .474$  respectively,  $p < .01$ , and  $r = .258, .301$  respectively,  $p < .05$ ). In addition, the relationships between *intrinsic* motivation and *test anxiety* were found to be significant and positive, with a weak correlation ( $r = .367, p < .01$ ). These correlations show that as their level of *intrinsic* motivation increased, so did their level of *test anxiety*. These correlations indicate that although the low achievers who were extrinsically and extrinsically motivated, they tended to feel uneasy when communicating in English and being criticized by others. They also had high level of test anxiety.

**Table 2:** Correlations between each aspect of motivation, anxiety, and grit of the low achievers

	1	1.1	1.2	2	2.1	2.2	2.3	3	3.1	3.2
1. Motivation	1	.808**	.896**	.439**	.483**	.352**	.329*	.198	.311*	-.022
1.1 Extrinsic		1	.462**	.311*	.337**	.216	.258*	.087	.219	-.095
1.2 Intrinsic			1	.427**	.474**	.367**	.301*	.233	.303*	.038
2. Anxiety				1	.912**	.813**	.925**	-.101	-.015	-.136
2.1 Commu.					1	.628**	.744**	.092	.180	-.046
2.2 Test						1	.671**	-.211	-.124	-.189
2.3 Negative							1	-.201	-.139	-.158
3. Grit								1	.748**	.731**
3.1 Effort									1	.094
3.2 Interest										1

\*\* . Significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed). \* . Significant at the 0.05 level (1-tailed)

Interestingly, under motivation and grit, only *intrinsic* motivation and *perseverance of effort* was significantly and positively correlated, with a weak correlation ( $r = .303, p < .05$ ), indicating that the higher their intrinsic motivation, the higher their effort in language learning.

The findings further revealed that the relationships between all aspects of anxiety were strong and significant. This means that when the low achievers experienced one type of anxiety, they would also suffer from the others types of anxiety. However, the results show that almost every aspect of anxiety and grit were negatively and insignificantly correlated, with a weak correlation. This indicates that, in this study, the low achiever's level of *communication apprehension*, *test anxiety*, *fear of negative evaluation* and grit facets of *perseverance of effort*, *consistency of interest* were not related. Lastly, no significant relationship was found between *perseverance of effort* and *consistency of interest* under grit. In other words, these two facets are not related among the low achievers.

### **Research Question 2: Which factor, motivation, anxiety, or grit, best predicts English language achievement?**

To answer which factor best predicts English language learning achievement, multiple regressions were performed. To fulfill the function, three variables - *fear of negative evaluation* (NEGATIV), *test anxiety* (TEST), and *intrinsic* motivation (INTRIN) - were regressed onto all the 180 subjects' English language learning achievement i.e. grades of five semesters. The results obtained are presented in Table 3.

**Table 3:** Regression analysis for English language learning achievement

Variables	Unstandardized Coefficients		t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error			Tolerance	VIF
(Constant)	4.247	.372	11.408	.000		
NEGATIV	-.398	.132	-3.023	.003	.608	1.645
TEST	-.265	.096	-2.775	.006	.611	1.636
INTRIN	.186	.086	2.167	.032	.985	1.015
R = 0.457    Adj. R <sup>2</sup> = 0.195    F = 15.360    Sig. = 0.00						

In Table 3, the model accounted for 19.5% of the variance ( $F = 15.36, p = 0.00, \text{Adj. } R^2 = 0.195$ ). The multiple regression analyses show coefficients from the regression models as well as levels of significance, and that all the coefficients were statistically significant. The table shows that three of the measured variables were included in the models in terms of

achievement in English. Among these three variables, *fear of negative evaluation* was the most powerful predictor of the students' English language learning achievement ( $\beta = -.398$ ,  $t = -3.023$ ,  $p = .003$ ), followed by *test anxiety* ( $\beta = -.265$ ,  $t = -2.775$ ,  $p = .006$ ), and *intrinsic motivation* ( $\beta = .186$ ,  $t = 2.167$ ,  $p = .032$ ). *Fear of negative evaluation* and *test anxiety* were negative predictors, whereas *intrinsic motivation* was a positive one. In other words, the subjects who had *fear of negative evaluation* and high *test anxiety* tended to be less successful in language learning. Those who were intrinsically motivated tended to be more successful in doing so.

## Discussion

This study aimed to investigate the correlations between three non-cognitive factors of motivation, anxiety, and grit, as well as their aspects in learning English as a foreign language. Particularly, the study focused on the two groups of subjects: the high and low achievers. The findings are discussed based on the research questions of the study as follows.

### 1. The correlations of motivation, anxiety, and grit of the high and low achievers

The high achievers' overall motivation and *test anxiety* were significantly and negatively correlated. In other words, as their level of motivation increased, their level of *test anxiety* decreased. This result is in line with the studies by Jain and Sidhu (2013), Khodadady and Khajavy (2013), and Puengpipatrakul (2007), who found that highly motivated foreign language learners were less anxious in their foreign language class. Furthermore, the result is supported by Gardner et al. (2004); Dörnyei & Ushioda (2011), who proposed that the students who performed well in their foreign language class tended to have higher motivation and lower anxiety than their peers.

On the other hand, the low achievers' motivation and anxiety were positively and significantly correlated, and almost every aspect of anxiety was significantly correlated to both *extrinsic* and *intrinsic* motivation. This indicates that the more motivated the students were, the more anxious they were. In other words, though their motivation was high, their anxiety was also high. Thus, for the low achievers, no matter how high their motivation was, their anxiety tended to adversely affect their English language achievement. This represented the notion of debilitating anxiety among this group as suggested by Oxford (1999).

Differences were found in terms of anxiety and grit of the high and low achievers. Overall anxiety and grit among the high achievers were significantly and negatively correlated,

indicating that the less anxious the high achievers were in learning English, the higher level their grit would be. On the contrary, there was no significant correlation between anxiety and grit among the low achievers. In other words, anxiety and grit were not related in their language learning. According to Gass and Selinker (1994), learning a foreign language is a long process in which the learners will definitely encounter nervousness, anxiety, or stress. These feelings are obstacles and hardships, and if individuals are not gritty enough, they cannot overcome those circumstances which will eventually affect their learning achievements.

The high and low achievers were also different in terms of motivation and grit. Among the high achievers, the correlation between overall motivation as well as its aspects (*extrinsic* and *intrinsic*) and grit were significant and positive. In other words, as their level of *extrinsic* and *intrinsic* motivation increased, so did their level of grit. However, among the low achievers, there was no significant correlation between motivation and grit. In other words, motivation and grit were not related in learning English among the low achievers. The result is consistent with the study by Sharrock (2013) who found that both forms of motivation, especially *intrinsic*, were related to grit among the students participating in an inquiry based science project, creating interactive museum quality exhibits over one semester in a 10<sup>th</sup> grade chemistry class.

The present study further revealed that both high and low achievers' *extrinsic* and *intrinsic* motivations were significantly correlated. They learned English not only because they enjoyed or felt satisfied to do so, but also because it was useful for their future careers or could improve their grades. However, both *extrinsic* and *intrinsic* motivations of the high achievers showed a positive and significant correlation with *perseverance of effort*. The high achievers had high motivation; they put more effort in learning English. This is not the case with the low achievers. According to Duckworth et al. (2007, cited in Tough, 2012), to achieve higher order goals, one must not only exert effort but also be motivated, since the effort and motivation work together. Without one another, the goals cannot be achieved. Besides, according to Dweck (2005, cited in Robert, 2009), when individuals are gritty, their motivation increases, and this helps them to overcome, or at least reduce, the obstacles.

An inverse and significant relationship was found between *intrinsic* motivation and *test anxiety* among the high achievers. In other words, as their level of *intrinsic* motivation increased, their level of *test anxiety* decreased. Since the intrinsically motivated learners learned English because of the enjoyment and personal satisfaction, thus they were not apprehensive in academic evaluation even if it concerned their grades.

Finally, the study showed that the high achievers had more consistent interest even when they faced difficulty communicating in English, taking a test, or being criticized by others, while this was not found among the low achievers. It explains the traits of gritty individuals by Duckworth et al. (2007), who stated that even in the face of difficulties or hardship, the gritty individuals, will not lose interest or passion and tend to work harder toward their goals

## 2. Factors predicting English language learning achievement

Regression analysis was used to examine the predictability of English language achievements by motivation, anxiety and grit. It indicated that *fear of negative evaluation*, *test anxiety*, and *intrinsic* motivation were the three significant predictors of total English learning achievements. The subjects who were more apprehensive about being criticized by other people and anxious in taking a test would be more likely to perform poorer in their English class. Meanwhile, the subjects who were more intrinsically motivated were more inclined to achieve higher goals in their English language learning. This result was consistent with Liu and Huang's (2010) study. They found that *intrinsic* motivation and fear of being negatively evaluated were powerful predictors in learning English as a foreign language.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

The current study aimed to investigate the correlations between motivation, anxiety, and grit as well as their aspects in learning English as a foreign language among the high and low achievers. The subjects were 180 Matthayom 6 students of PSU Wittayanusorn School, Songkla. The main findings from the study revealed that the high achievers' anxiety and grit were found to be significantly and inversely correlated. The higher the level of their grit was, the lower the level of their anxiety was. The high achievers who were more motivated were also grittier in learning English. Among the low achievers, as their level of motivation increased, their level of anxiety also increased. In other words, even though their motivation was high, their anxiety was also high that it negatively affected their language learning achievement. In the regression analysis, it was found that *fear of negative evaluation*, *test anxiety*, and *intrinsic* motivation were most powerful predictors in learning English as a foreign language among all subjects.

Based on the result of this study, foreign language instructors should be aware of the psychological factors of motivation, anxiety, and the personality trait of grit. Specifically, the instructors should provide a learning environment which does not only enhance students' motivation to learn, but also promotes the personality trait of grit. For examples, to enhance

the motivation, the instructors can give positive feedbacks that encourage students to improve their ability. The task assigned to students should not be too difficult or too easy. To promote the grit, the instructors should value the students' struggle and effort to success, and support the belief that people are able to develop and change to become better by learning from setbacks and failures.

Besides, since anxiety was found to be harmful to the students' achievement, reducing it in learning languages was important, particularly, apprehension about negative criticisms and worry in taking exams were the factors which could affect their language learning achievements. Finally, intrinsic motivation should be strengthened because it could predict students' language learning achievements.

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