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The Voice from Indonesia: A Qualitative Exploration of *Grit* among Indonesian School Counsellors

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Abstract

Grit, characterized by a combination of consistent interest and persistence towards long-term goals, is increasingly recognized as an important factor in professional career success. However, research on grit among school counsellors is limited, especially in Indonesia, where counsellors face unique cultural and systemic challenges. This study examines the factors that influence grit in school counsellors that persist in their profession despite the complexities of education in Indonesia. A qualitative approach was used in this study with semi-structured interviews with seven participants who were selected based on gender representation, work experience, and school type. The thematic analysis revealed six main themes that influenced grit: intrinsic motivation, social support, professional motivation, work environment, resource constraints, and personal coping strategies. These findings emphasize the importance of the interaction between individual resilience and systemic support when building grit. The practical implications of this study include the development of professional development programs and institutional policies to improve the career sustainability and resilience of school counsellors, which will ultimately improve the quality of counselling services in Indonesia.

Keywords

Grit, school counsellors, career sustainability, professional resilience, Indonesia

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La Voz de Indonesia: Una Exploración Cualitativa sobre el *Grit* en Consejeros Escolares

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Resumen

El *grit*, definido como la persistencia e interés constante hacia metas a largo plazo, es clave para el éxito profesional. No obstante, la investigación sobre este constructo en consejeros escolares es limitada, especialmente ante los desafíos sistémicos de Indonesia. Este estudio cualitativo examina los factores que influyen en el *grit* de consejeros que permanecen en su profesión pese a las complejidades educativas locales. Se realizaron entrevistas semiestructuradas a siete participantes, seleccionados por género, experiencia y tipo de escuela. El análisis temático reveló seis factores determinantes: motivación intrínseca, apoyo social, motivación profesional, entorno laboral, limitaciones de recursos y estrategias de afrontamiento personal. Los hallazgos subrayan que el desarrollo del *grit* depende de la interacción entre la resiliencia individual y el apoyo institucional. Las implicaciones prácticas sugieren que el diseño de programas de desarrollo profesional y políticas institucionales robustas es esencial para fortalecer la sostenibilidad de la carrera y la resiliencia de los consejeros. En última instancia, estas acciones garantizan una mejora sustancial en la calidad de los servicios de orientación educativa en el contexto Indonesio.

Palabras clave

Grit, consejeros escolares, sostenibilidad de la carrera, resiliencia profesional, Indonesia

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Grit is an important non-cognitive trait in educational psychology, reflecting sustained perseverance and consistency of interest in pursuing long-term goals (Duckworth, 2016; Duckworth et al., 2007). Although widely studied in Western contexts, few, if any, published studies have qualitatively examined how Indonesian school counsellors experience and maintain grit within their cultural and institutional environment. Existing research predominantly uses quantitative approaches and emphasizes individualistic perspectives, leaving a notable gap in understanding grit in collectivist and resource-limited settings. Investigating this gap can contribute to refining theoretical models of grit and to informing practical strategies in educational institutions operating under challenging conditions.

Indonesia presents a distinctive environment for studying grit among school counsellors. The national counsellor–student ratio considerably exceeds international recommendations, while institutional support is uneven (Mulyaningsih, 2022; Pratiwi et al., 2022). These circumstances create persistent workload pressures, requiring high levels of perseverance, adaptability, and socioemotional regulation. In addition, Indonesia’s collectivist orientation and the ethos of *gotong royong* (mutual cooperation) offer a culturally rich context for examining how grit is manifested and sustained. Exploring grit under these conditions allows for a better understanding of how non-cognitive traits are shaped by both systemic constraints and collective values and provides insights that may be transferable to other under-researched contexts.

While grit has traditionally been conceptualized as an individual trait, collectivist contexts may influence its expression in more prosocial and community-oriented ways. By situating grit within the ethic of *gotong royong*, the present study seeks to extend the theoretical scope of grit from a purely individualistic construct to one that encompasses collective commitment, social support, and prosocial persistence. Perseverance may thus be sustained not only by personal motivation but also reinforced by communal duty and shared responsibility—elements often underexplored in grit theory developed in individualistic societies.

Cross-cultural research further supports this rationale. Studies among Filipino students in collectivist settings highlight a model emphasizing perseverance of effort and adaptability to situational demands rather than rigid consistency of interest (Datu et al., 2016; 2017). Credé (2018) similarly questions the universality of consistency of interests, while Agrawal et al. (2022) underscore the role of proactive and adaptive behaviours in challenging contexts. Collectively, these findings highlight the need for culturally grounded analyses and provide a foundation for adapting grit models to collectivist environments. Engaging with this literature strengthens both the theoretical and empirical basis for examining grit in non-Western professional contexts.

Despite psychometric validation of grit scales, little is known about how Indonesian school counsellors experience and sustain grit in daily practice. Prior studies have prioritized measurement rather than contextual experience, leaving qualitative dimensions underexplored, especially in collectivist and resource-limited environments. This gap limits understanding of how grit functions in professions that require long-term engagement and socioemotional resilience, such as school counselling.

School counsellors operate in professional contexts where grit is particularly relevant. They are tasked with providing continuous academic, socioemotional, and career guidance to large student populations, often with limited resources and support. Western studies indicate that counsellors generally exhibit high perseverance of effort but variable consistency of interest (Mullen et al., 2020; Mullen & Crowe, 2018). Yet how Indonesian school counsellors mobilize grit within the constraints of their work environment and cultural expectations remains unexplored. Addressing this gap provides an opportunity to inform context-sensitive policy and practice tailored to collectivist societies.

Beyond the immediate professional context, grit is associated with positive outcomes across educational and psychological domains. According to Duckworth (2016) and (Eskreis-Winkler et al., 2016), four key psychological assets which are interest, deliberate practice, purpose, and hope, collectively sustain commitment to long-term goals. These assets act as protective factors that support persistence, motivation, and optimal functioning across contexts (Caza et al., 2020; Stoffel & Cain, 2018; Warren & Hale, 2020).

By addressing this gap, the present study seeks to contribute by qualitatively examining how Indonesian school counsellors sustain grit in their daily practice. Using thematic analysis, it contextualizes existing grit factor models within collectivist and resource-limited contexts and generates insights to inform policy and practice. This approach provides both theoretical contributions, by extending grit from an individualistic framework to a collectivist-informed construct, and practical contributions, by offering evidence-based recommendations for strengthening support systems for school counsellors operating under persistent professional demands.

Method

This study employs a qualitative approach to explore how school counsellors experience and conceptualize grit. By utilizing semi-structured interviews, the research seeks to uncover the in-depth, lived experiences of participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2023), identifying the underlying meanings attributed to grit in their professional lives through thematic analysis.

Participation Selection and Sampling

Participants were selected via purposive sampling to ensure diversity in gender, professional experience, and school type. Inclusion criteria required participants to: (a) be currently employed as school counsellors, (b) possess at least five years of professional experience, and (c) hold direct responsibility for student counselling services. This five-year threshold ensures participants have encountered sustained challenges—a critical context for examining the development of grit. Recruitment spanned public, private, and boarding schools across urban and semi-urban areas to reflect varied organizational and cultural settings.

Data Collection

Data were gathered through in-depth interviews using a semi-structured protocol (Appendix A). The guide, based on Duckworth's (2007) grit framework, was adapted to include culturally relevant dimensions such as collectivist values and contextual challenges in Indonesia. Topics included career pathways, coping strategies, and reflections on the two grit dimensions: consistency of interest and perseverance of effort. Interviews were conducted online via Zoom or Google Meet, lasting 60–90 minutes each. Sessions were audio-recorded with consent and transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step framework to ensure rigor. Initial codes were generated inductively using in-vivo and descriptive coding. To enhance reliability, a second researcher independently reviewed a subset of transcripts, with discrepancies resolved through iterative discussion. Related codes were collated into preliminary themes and refined through constant comparison across the data corpus. Credibility was further strengthened via triangulation—cross-checking themes with field notes—and peer debriefing with two independent qualitative researchers. Qualitative analysis software (e.g., NVivo 14) was utilized to systematize the coding process and improve transparency.

Ethical Consideration

The study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of Universiti Malaya (UM. TNC2/UMREC_3741). All participants provided written informed consent and were notified of their right to withdraw. Confidentiality was maintained by assigning unique identifiers to each participant; all data were stored on password-protected devices accessible only to the research team.

Results

The study involved seven school counsellors (five females, two males) with 6 to 22 years of professional experience across public, private, and boarding schools. All participants met the five-year minimum experience threshold, providing mature perspectives on sustaining grit within the Indonesian context. This diverse demographic ensures a comprehensive understanding of perseverance and commitment across varied organizational settings. Participant details are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1*Profile of the Key Informants*

Participant ID	Gender	Years of Experience	School type
Counsellor 01	Female	13 years	Public school
Counsellor 02	Female	8 years	Private school
Counsellor 03	Female	12 years	Public School
Counsellor 04	Male	6 years	Boarding school
Counsellor 05	Male	22 years	Public school
Counsellor 06	Female	10 years	Private School
Counsellor 07	Female	15 years	Public School

Thematic analysis identified six major themes and associated subthemes regarding the factors contributing to school counsellors' grit. These outcomes, categorized in Table 1, are discussed in detail below.

Table 2*Summary of Themes and Code Examples*

Themes	Codes
Intrinsic motivation	Calling Spiritual values Altruism
Social support	Family support Attitudes and perceptions of society Peer support
Professional motivation and development	Income stability Job reputation Self-development opportunities
Work environment	School management support Team work
Resource limitations	Time Personnel (human resource) Budgets and facilities
Personal coping strategies	Community involvement Recreation Worship

Theme 1: Intrinsic motivation***Calling***

Some participants stated that they entered this profession because of a calling. This influenced their ability to find reasons to persist in the guidance and counselling profession in schools. School counsellors in rural areas are shared, “I feel needed and called to help. The thing I like most about my job is when I see students finally helped to develop their potential, or their problems solved” Counsellor 07.

The calling they expressed had been realised long before they decided on a college major during high school. The calling persisted and tended to increase after completing bachelor in guidance and counselling. The school counsellors expressed,

“I feel like this job has been calling for me from the beginning. Since junior high school, I have enjoyed listening to my friends’ stories. Then, when I determined there was a job like a school counsellor I looked into college majors.” Counsellor 03.

Spiritual Values

Spiritual values are often mentioned as playing an important role in the process of participants remaining in the school counselling profession. A counsellor working at a boarding school stated, “... I see this job as a form of my worship to Allah.” Counsellors 04.

Intrinsic values that are oriented towards the afterlife provide energy when facing barriers in work as a school counsellor. School counsellors said, “If I receive a salary every month as a school counsellor, every day that I provide services, I am rewarded by Allah SWT. I will always keep this in mind.” Counsellors 06.

The belief that working as a school counsellor and helping others will bring goodness to oneself. One counsellor mentioned, “This job is a means for me to become the best person in the eyes of God, that is, someone beneficial to others.” Counsellor 05.

Altruism

Participants articulated the influence of altruism, which acts as a motivator and source of meaning that helps school counsellors persist in their profession. Counsellors often actively engage in finding solutions to student problems, even outside their formal responsibilities. School counsellors shared, “I often get in touch or hear from them outside school hours. “I cannot just ignore it; I must ensure they get the support they need, especially if it's something serious.” Counsellor 07

Altruism affects job satisfaction for school counsellors as helpers in schools. Counsellors that are altruistic feel fulfilled when they see positive results from their efforts, which reduces their possibility of quitting the job. “When I manage to solve their problems, it gives me a sense of satisfaction that cannot be measured using money.” Counsellor 02

Their services are guided by values of empathy, compassion, and a genuine desire to make positive changes in students’ lives. The school counsellor asserted, “My job is not only about listening to students’ vents’, but also about truly understanding how they feel and accompanying them to find solutions.” Counsellor 01

Intrinsic motivation which are comprising calling, spiritual values, and altruism, functions as the foundational pillar of grit for Indonesian school counsellors. These interconnected subthemes transform professional duties into a moral and spiritual mission. By framing their work as a lifelong calling and a form of worship, counsellors develop a resilient professional identity that transcends resource constraints. This suggests that in a collectivist and religious context, grit is not merely an individual trait but a value-driven commitment to prosocial impact.

Theme 2: Social Support

Family Support

Family dynamics significantly influence a counsellor's professional endurance. Emotional and practical backing from partners or parents provides the stability necessary to manage a demanding workload. For many, this support translates into the professional freedom required for field-based duties:

"I feel more confident in this profession because my husband is willing to give me the freedom, such as if I need to do a home visit to a distant location, which means I might be late coming home."
Counsellor 07

Conversely, the absence of a familial support system, especially for those with caregiving responsibilities, acts as a primary drain on professional energy and service quality: "I work while taking care of a toddler without family support while living away from home, which really drains my energy, and in the end, I can only provide minimal counselling services because I'm exhausted." Counsellor 02

Attitudes and Perceptions of Society

The perceived value of school counselling within the community directly impacts a counsellor's perseverance. External validation from parents serves as a powerful motivator, reinforcing their sense of utility. "When parents come and thank me for helping them make their child more confident, I feel very useful." Counsellor 03.

However, the profession remains burdened by persistent stigmas. The emotional labor of constantly defending their role against misconceptions from both parents and colleagues, creates significant professional fatigue. School counsellor explained, "There are still many parents and even fellow teachers who think that children who go to the counselling room are problematic. Sometimes I feel exhausted because I have to keep explaining my role." Counsellor 02.

Peer Support

Supportive colleagues can provide both emotional and professional encouragement. Good collaboration helps counselors overcome daily challenges. Having peers to share experiences is essential. School counsellors expressed, "My team and I often discuss difficult cases, and it makes me feel less alone." Counsellor 01.

Having colleagues who share the same sense of responsibility, such as always contributing to program implementation, is a strength. School counsellors shared, "I am grateful to have coworkers with a great work ethic. When someone feels overwhelmed, we are used to helping each other." Counsellor 06.

On the other hand, when peer support was lacking, participants tended to experience a decline in motivation and interest in their work. "I feel like I am working alone, even though the incentives are the same. Sometimes, this makes me lazy to work at my best." Counsellor 03.

Social support constitutes a multidimensional network—encompassing familial, societal, and peer-level influences—that underpins counsellor perseverance. While emotional stability at home and validation from the community fuel professional motivation, systemic stigmas and peer inequity act as significant barriers. These findings highlight that grit is not sustained in isolation; it is deeply contingent upon a supportive social ecosystem that reinforces the counsellor's commitment and well-being.

Theme 3: Professional Motivation and Development

Income Stability

Financial security, particularly through fixed salaries and benefits, serves as a foundational anchor for professional persistence. For civil servants (PNS), this stability acts as a critical buffer against economic volatility, as evidenced during the pandemic: "As a civil servant, I feel more financially secure, especially during the pandemic. This is the main factor that has kept me in this profession." Counsellor 07.

Beyond current income, long-term security through pension guarantees reinforces the decision to remain in the profession: "The guaranteed pension as a civil servant provides security for my old age." Counsellor 05.

Opportunities for Self-Development

Continuous professional growth through structured training and workshops enhances competency and sustains engagement. Both public and private sector counsellors highlighted the importance of institutional support in facilitating these opportunities: "Almost every semester, there are training sessions, webinars, or workshops as a form of competency enhancement." Counsellor 04.

For those in private foundations, performance-based compensation and subsidized professional development provide a comparable sense of support: "... Even though I work in the private sector, my income is relatively good. Furthermore, for self-development, I am facilitated without having to spend on it myself." Counsellor 02.

Job Reputation

As part of the teaching profession, school counsellors are often respected for their role in contributing to the character development of students. This brings pride and professional satisfaction. "Although the salary as a teacher is not very high, it is a respectable profession. Parents often thank me for guiding their children, and that makes me feel appreciated." Counsellor 06.

Some participants work as counsellors in rural and underdeveloped (3T) areas, where teaching is more respected than in urban areas. One school counsellor shared "Sometimes parents give fruits or harvested crops as a token of respect for the teachers of their children. That makes me happy." Counsellor 02.

Professional motivation and development emerged as a key factor sustaining school counsellors' commitment to their roles. Income stability, particularly for civil servant counsellors (PNS) with fixed salaries and pension guarantees, provided financial security that allowed participants to focus on their professional responsibilities without undue stress. Counselors in private or foundation-based roles also highlighted the importance of predictable income and performance-based compensation in maintaining motivation. Alongside financial stability, opportunities for self-development—including training sessions, workshops, and webinars—were frequently cited as important for enhancing competencies and addressing evolving challenges in the counselling profession.

Job reputation further reinforced professional motivation. Participants reported that recognition from parents, students, and the community, as well as social respect associated with teaching and counselling, strengthened their sense of pride and professional satisfaction. In rural or underdeveloped regions, community appreciation, including informal tokens of respect, contributed to sustained engagement. Collectively, income security, opportunities for professional growth, and positive reputation interacted to support counsellors' perseverance, enhance job satisfaction, and foster continuous development in their educational practice.

Theme 4: Work Environment

School Management Support

Support from school management includes recognition of the importance of the counsellor's role as an integral part of the educational process, which leads to the provision of facilities and policies that support the counsellor's work. When management can accommodate the needs of counsellors to provide optimal guidance and counselling services, counsellors are more likely to feel motivated and passionate about their work. A school counsellor shared,

"I am fortunate to have the trust and support of the principal and vice-principal of student affairs. They always take time to listen to the challenges I face and facilitate the needs I submit for the benefit of the guidance and counselling program." Counsellor 01.

However, a lack of support can lead to emotional burden. A school counsellor expressed, "Unfortunately, the programs that my team and I have designed are often considered unimportant. I often feel frustrated, especially when the program is crucial for the students." Counsellor 07.

Teamwork

Teamwork is an important factor that influences the decision to remain in this profession. Teamwork is closely related to task and responsibility distribution. All participants expressed being part of a team that is administratively considered the school counselling team. A school counsellor shared, "The communication and way in which the team works greatly affect whether or not I feel comfortable in the workplace." Counsellor 07.

The majority of participants mentioned that the number of team members also affected the workload distribution. "There are only two counsellors in our school, and we are overwhelmed. There are days when I feel like I just want to be quit." Counsellor 05. "I recruited additional staff to be part of our school counselling team after several years of being a single fighter." Now, it's much more comfortable." Counsellor 04.

The work environment, encompassing both school management support and teamwork, was identified as a critical factor in sustaining school counsellors' engagement and effectiveness. Support from school management, including recognition of the counsellor's integral role, provision of resources, and responsiveness to requests, was consistently associated with higher motivation and professional satisfaction. Conversely, insufficient support was reported to cause frustration and emotional strain. Teamwork within the counselling team also influenced counsellors' ability to manage workloads effectively; participants highlighted that collaborative communication, equitable task distribution, and mutual assistance enhanced both individual well-being and collective performance. Together, management support and a cooperative team environment created a professional ecosystem that fostered resilience, motivation, and sustained commitment among school counsellors, enabling them to deliver optimal guidance and counselling services.

Theme 5: Resource Limitations

Time

The number of participants faces various challenges that affect the quality of services they can provide. One of the main challenges is the lack of dedicated time for counselling activities, which makes it difficult for them to balance addressing student issues with other administrative tasks. Participants explained, "There are no fixed BK hours, so I often have to adjust my schedule with other tasks, and it becomes very overwhelming." Counsellor 05. "We cannot implement the ideal counselling program because we have to fight for time slots." Counsellor 07

Personnel (Human Resources)

Many participants expressed the lack of school counsellors. One counsellor must handle a large number of students that exceeds the ideal counsellor-to-student ratio (1:150). The school counsellor explained, "My counsellor-to-student ratio is far from ideal. Sometimes I feel overwhelmed and unable to pay full attention to each student." Counsellor 06.

The limited number of counsellors affects the achievement of programs and the division of work. "We must share the workload with just two people, which makes us really overwhelmed." Counsellor 05.

Budgets and Facilities

A sufficient budget allows school counsellors to implement various development programs for students, such as life skills workshops, group counselling, and career guidance programs. Additionally, a budget is also needed for continuous training for counsellors, which can enhance the quality of services they provide. "If there was enough funding, I could hold more workshops or activities that would benefit the students. Without the funds, I feel limited in presenting material or organising activities that could help them grow." Counsellor 04.

Adequate facilities, such as a comfortable and private counselling room, can support the effective delivery of services. On the other hand, an inadequate counselling room or a lack of supporting facilities can make it difficult for counsellors to perform their duties. School counselor shared, "Our counselling room is negligible and is often disturbed by noise from outside. Sometimes students feel uncomfortable speaking openly due to the lack of privacy. This certainly affects the quality of counselling I can provide." Counsellor 02.

Resource limitations, encompassing insufficient time, inadequate staffing, and constrained budgets, emerged as significant impediments to effective guidance and counselling in Indonesian schools. Participants highlighted that these constraints limit their capacity to deliver comprehensive services, balance administrative responsibilities, and implement development programs optimally. The shortage of trained personnel often results in an overwhelming workload, while insufficient financial and material resources restrict opportunities for professional growth and innovation in service delivery. Time constraints further exacerbate stress, reducing the depth and quality of student support. Collectively, these limitations pose challenges not only to daily operational effectiveness but also to counsellors' motivation, job satisfaction, and long-term resilience.

Theme 6: Personal Coping Strategies

Community Involvement

Getting involved in communities whether related to the profession (such as counselling associations) or other social groups, provides participants with opportunities to share experiences, gain support, and feel more connected. Communities also function as spaces for learning from peers and developing professional skills. One counsellor shared: "I enjoy attending community forums that discuss the latest phenomena because they help me understand the current issues among students age." Counsellor 07.

Participants also joined hobby communities, such as Pou*d Fit. "When I feel overwhelmed, I immediately join the Pou*d Fit community. It really helps me." Counsellor 01.

Communities in the form of associations often organise professional development activities, such as counselling training, assessment, and service planning, as one participant noted: "I almost always participate in ABKIN or MGBK activities in my area to meet colleagues and to improve my skills as a counsellor." Counsellor 02.

Recreation

Recreation, such as vacationing with friends and family, was mentioned by participants as helping to reduce stress and recharge their energy. This activity allows them to step away from work pressures and take care of their mental and physical well-being. "Every weekend, I go cycling with my family. It helps me release stress and bring me back to work feeling refreshed." Counsellor 04. "Usually, travelling to new places helps me recharge my energy." Counsellor 01. "Sometimes, I go to the mall or dine out with friends to relieve boredom. I also watch Netflix to relax." Counsellor 03.

Worship

Participants shared that religious activities such as prayer and reading the Quran helped them find inner peace. One counsellor explained: "Prayer (e.g. *shalat*) and reading the Quran are my ways of turning to Allah. They gave me peace and strength to continue with my work." Counsellor 06.

Participants expressed that they engage in religious practices because they believe that God will help and provide solutions to life's problems, including challenges encountered in their work. "Sometimes we feel stuck and do not know how to solve the problem. But, usually, after performing the Tahajud prayer, I feel enlightened." Counsellor 02. "Maybe not immediately, but I have always felt that God has played a significant role in the success of my career." Counsellor 04.

Personal coping strategies emerged as vital contributors to the resilience and psychological well-being of school counsellors. Engagement in professional and hobby-related communities provides opportunities for sharing experiences, gaining support, and enhancing professional skills. Recreational activities, such as spending time with family, travelling, or pursuing hobbies, allow counsellors to step away from work-related stress and rejuvenate both physically and mentally. Additionally, religious and spiritual practices, including prayer and reading the Quran, offer inner peace and spiritual strength, enabling counsellors to navigate emotional and professional challenges effectively. Collectively, these coping strategies support counsellors in maintaining their commitment, motivation, and effectiveness in the guidance and counselling profession.

The findings indicate that grit among Indonesian school counsellors is influenced by multiple, interrelated factors. Intrinsic motivation, encompassing calling, spiritual values, and altruism, provides a foundational drive that sustains professional commitment. Social support from family, peers, and society reinforces resilience and enhances work engagement. Professional motivation, including income stability, job reputation, and opportunities for self-development, contributes to ongoing growth and career satisfaction. A supportive work

environment, characterised by management backing and effective teamwork, further strengthens counsellors' ability to perform effectively. Resource limitations such as time constraints, insufficient personnel, and restricted budgets, pose challenges that necessitate adaptive strategies. Finally, personal coping strategies, such as engagement in communities, recreation, and spiritual practices, enable counsellors to maintain psychological well-being and navigate occupational stress. Together, these dimensions create a holistic understanding of the conditions that cultivate grit, highlighting the dynamic interplay of personal, social, and professional factors that sustain perseverance and effectiveness in school counselling.

Discussion

This study explored the factors contributing to grit among school counsellors in the Indonesian context. Grit is a relatively new construct with potentially wide-reaching implications for school counsellors (Mullen & Crowe, 2018). Participants reported various resource limitations that negatively affected their enthusiasm and interest in their work, including constraints on time, budgets, and counselling service facilities. These challenges provide critical backdrop for understanding how intrinsic and extrinsic factors interact to shape grit within this professional context.

The existing disparities, along with challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, inconsistent service hours, and concerns about counsellors' proficiency, exacerbate the burdens and complexities faced by professionals in this field (Bali-Mahomed et al., 2022; Blake, 2023; McCarthy et al., 2010; Mullen & Crowe, 2017). In Indonesia, these challenges are intensified by a significant imbalance in the counsellor-to-student ratio. With approximately 58,000 school counsellors serving around 45 million students across elementary to senior high schools, the ratio far exceeds international recommendations, reflecting a shortfall of about 242,000 counsellors nationwide (Kementerian Pendidikan Dasar dan Menengah, 2025; Tempo, 2023). While no official disaggregated data exist on rural–urban or school-level distributions, these figures provide crucial context for understanding the resilience and sustained commitment of Indonesian school counsellors working under resource-constrained conditions. Such structural pressures contextualize the need for personal resilience and professional grit, which emerge as recurring themes in participants' narratives.

Maintaining persistence in the profession of school counselling is far from easy, given the heavy and complex workload. Helping-oriented professions oriented inherently pose significant challenges, with risks of compassion fatigue and burnout due to high-pressure environments and demanding workloads (Kim & Lambie, 2018; Mullen et al., 2020; Mullen & Gutierrez, 2016). This was confirmed through the narratives of participants who shared the numerous challenges they faced while serving as school counsellors in Indonesia for over five years. Nevertheless, all participants reported remaining committed and passionate about their roles. This persistence underscores the importance of both personal motivation and systemic supports in sustaining grit.

Most participants identified calling as one of the strongest factors that enabled them to sustain their interest and dedication in their work as school counsellors. Several participants acknowledged that this sense of calling was present long before they pursued a degree in

guidance and counselling. Existing research consistently demonstrates a link between the perception of calling and both organisational and career commitment (Dobrow et al., 2011; Duffy et al., 2011; Thompson & Bunderson, 2019), and follow-up studies highlight career commitment as a mediator between calling and various work-related outcomes, including organisational commitment, intention to leave, and job satisfaction (Allan & Duffy, 2014). These findings complement the current study's result, reinforcing that calling functions as a key personal resource in promoting professional perseverance and engagement.

The participants also believed in their inherent sense of altruism, which motivated them to serve and assist students. In Indonesian culture, the concept of *gotong royong* (mutual cooperation or helping each other) is a foundational principle of daily life. This aligns closely with the nature of altruism, which inspires individuals to make sacrifices for the benefit of others.

Most participants expressed that they often felt compelled to offer selfless support to students in need, whether through emotional, social, or psychological assistance. To situate this finding within a broader context, it is notable that altruism is not exclusive to Indonesia but represents a universal aspect of the counselling profession. For example, a phenomenological study in Scotland involving nine counsellors highlighted that altruism is central to professional identity, encompassing self-care and well-being as essential components for effective practice (Limberg et al., 2018). By comparing these findings, it becomes evident that while the core motivation to help others is shared across contexts, the expression of altruism is culturally mediated: in Indonesia, communal norms such as *gotong royong* reinforce selfless behavior, whereas in Scotland, professional expectations and reflective practice are the primary drivers. This comparison illustrates both universal and culturally specific dimensions of altruism, emphasizing that grit is shaped not only by individual traits but also by socio-cultural context.

In this context, school counsellors exhibit a strong sense of intrinsic motivation, which significantly impacts their resilience despite the challenges they face in their work. This finding aligns with the previous research, which found that individuals who perceive their work as meaningful tend to be more motivated and capable of enduring challenges (Muenks et al., 2017). Intrinsic motivation, driven by internal satisfaction with helping others and making a difference, empowers counsellors to maintain their commitment and passion for their profession. This intrinsic drive functions as a critical buffer against professional stress, highlighting how personal motivation interacts with external pressures to sustain perseverance.

Conversely, some studies have highlighted that excessive or unbalanced passion can backfire. For instance, Schmidt et al. (2021) found that when passion becomes overly dominant without being balanced by other aspects of life, such as family and mental health, it may lead to burnout or failure to sustain perseverance. This is reflected in some participants' experiences, suggesting that grit alone is insufficient for sustainable professional engagement without complementary coping mechanisms and work-life balance.

Tough (2013) posited that grit is a more critical determinant than talent or intelligence in achieving long-term success. However, several studies have suggested that perseverance in undervalued or unsupported work can lead to burnout and a decline in work quality. This is echoed in the findings of Jordan et al. (2019), which emphasize the importance of support systems in sustaining perseverance in challenging work environments. Together, these perspectives underscore that grit operates within a dynamic system, where both personal traits

and environmental supports determine outcomes. Interestingly, this study found that school counsellors employ various coping strategies to maintain perseverance. Despite the significant challenges they face, many counsellors adopt healthy coping mechanisms, such as engaging in religious practices, talking with their spouses or colleagues, and participating in recreational activities, to maintain their emotional balance. This finding is consistent with the importance of stress management and emotional resilience in sustaining grit (Duckworth, A.L. & Gross, 2014). However, the effectiveness of these strategies is amplified when combined with social and organizational support, reinforcing the interplay between individual agency and contextual factors.

On the other hand, some studies have indicated that without adequate external support, coping strategies that rely solely on individuals may limit their effectiveness. For example, Sonnentag & Fritz (2015) found that without social support and a proper workload management system, individuals who depend on single coping strategies, such as recreational activities or talking to friends, may experience emotional burnout. Social support, whether from family, colleagues, or school management, also plays a crucial role in maintaining grit. Although many school counsellors feel burned out and inadequately supported, they persevere because they recognize the importance of their role in students' lives. This emphasizes that grit is not purely an individual characteristic but is co-constructed within a supportive ecosystem.

In addition, professional motivation was identified as a key factor that strengthens grit among school counsellors. Participants in this study highlighted those various benefits, such as income stability, social status, and good job reputation, serve as sources of motivation to persevere in the profession. These factors not only provide material rewards but also strengthen a sense of meaning and job satisfaction, which ultimately supports students' ability to be grittier in the school counselling profession.

This study identifies the factors contributing to grit among school counsellors. The themes identified from the data analysis provide new directions for further research while reinforcing the understanding of the relationship between the factors that influence grit and its impacts. However, like other studies, this research has limitations, particularly in terms of regional representation and school types in Indonesia, which may not fully reflect the sociocultural dynamics comprehensively. Additionally, these findings require additional quantitative data to strengthen their validity. Nonetheless, knowledge about the factors that influence grit contributes significantly to the literature in the fields of educational psychology and counselling. These findings not only open opportunities for the professional development of school counsellors but also serve as a foundation for policy development that supports the school counselling profession in Indonesia in a more comprehensive and sustainable manner.

Conclusion

This qualitative study demonstrates that grit among Indonesian school counsellors is a multifaceted, culturally embedded construct rather than a mere individual trait. It emerges from a dynamic interplay of intrinsic motivation, social support, and professional incentives that sustain perseverance despite resource constraints. Consequently, fostering grit requires interventions tailored to Indonesia's collectivist context, specifically by strengthening peer-

support networks and institutional recognition alongside adaptive coping skills. Our findings suggest that systemic investment in human resources and a supportive organizational culture is essential for enhancing the quality of counselling services. While the specific regional focus limits generalizability, this research provides in-depth insights into the lived experiences of Indonesian counsellors, contributing to the global understanding of grit. Future studies should employ longitudinal or mixed methods designs to explore grit's development across diverse professional and cultural settings.

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Author Contributions

The authors confirm their contribution to the article as follows: Conceptualization, Yuli Nurmalasari and Poh Li Lau; methodology, Yuli Nurmalasari and Poh Li Lau; formal analysis, Yuli Nurmalasari; investigation, Yuli Nurmalasari; resources, Yuli Nurmalasari and Poh Li Lau; data curation, Yuli Nurmalasari and Poh Li Lau; writing—original draft preparation, Yuli Nurmalasari; writing—review and editing, Yuli Nurmalasari and Poh Li Lau; visualization, Yuli Nurmalasari; supervision, Poh Li Lau; funding acquisition, Yuli Nurmalasari. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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Appendix A

Semi-Structured Interview Guide

The interview guide was developed based on Duckworth's (2007) grit framework and adapted to the Indonesian school counselling context. It covered two main domains: (1) perseverance in professional challenges and (2) consistency of interest.

Introductory Script

"Thank you for participating in this study. We're interested in your experiences as a school counsellor, especially how you sustain your motivation and commitment over time. There are no right or wrong answers; please share openly. All information will be kept confidential."

Table A1

Semi-Structured Interview Questions Based on Grit Framework and Contextual Factors

Section	Focus Area	Interview Questions
Section 1	Background and Context	1. Can you briefly describe your current role as a school counsellor (school type, number of students served, years of experience)? 2. How did you first decide to become a school counsellor?
Section 2	Perseverance and Adaptability	3. Can you tell me about some of the most significant challenges you've faced as a school counsellor? 4. How do you usually cope when faced with heavy workloads, limited support, or difficult student cases? 5. Can you share an example of a time when you felt like giving up but chose to persist? What helped you?
Section 3	Consistency of Interest	6. What motivates you to stay in the counselling profession? 7. Have your interests or goals in counselling changed over time? If so, how? 8. How do you maintain your sense of purpose and passion in your work?
Section 4	Contextual Supports and Barriers	9. What kinds of support (institutional, community, or peer) help you sustain your work? 10. In your view, how do cultural values affect your perseverance as a counsellor? 11. Are there any factors outside work (family, spirituality) that help you maintain your commitment?
Section 5	Reflection and Recommendations	12. Looking back on your career, what factors have most contributed to your resilience or grit? 13. What advice would you give to new school counsellors about sustaining themselves in this profession? 14. How do you think policy makers could better support counsellors?

Closing Script

“Is there anything else you’d like to add about your experience as a school counsellor that we haven’t discussed? Thank you for your time and insights.”