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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

A Japan-Korea Comparative Study on Welfare Professional Training; Focusing on Grit and Self-esteem Scores

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to clarify the relationship between grit and self-esteem scores among university students taking welfare professional training courses in Japan and South Korea (Korea). The grit and self-esteem scores of 100 first- to fourth-year students at a Japanese university adopting a 4-year curriculum for certified social and care worker training and 100 first- to second-year students at a Korean college adopting a 2-year curriculum for social worker training were measured using the Japanese-version Short Grit Scale and Rosenberg's Self-esteem Scale to analyze the relationship between the 2 scores, as well as differences between Japan and Korea. An anonymous online questionnaire survey was conducted using Google Forms, and 92 and 93 responses were obtained in Japan (valid response rate: 92.0%) and Korea (93.0%), respectively. There was a weak positive correlation between the grit and self-esteem scores, and both scores were significantly higher in Korea, suggesting the necessity of assessing the trainability of Japanese university students with lower grit and self-esteem scores.

Future studies should examine whether these scores change as the school year progresses and whether grit and self-esteem scores improve with training.

Key-words: grit, self-esteem, welfare professional training, Japan-Korea comparison

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I. Introduction

As of 2022, Japan's aging rate is 29.1%, which is the highest in the world, followed by Italy (24.1%), Finland (23.3%), and other European countries¹. According to future projections, other Asian countries are also expected to face rapid aging in the future. The situation is especially serious in South Korea (Korea), where the population is rapidly declining. Korea's current aging rate is 17.5%, but it is estimated to far surpass that of Japan in the future, exceeding 46% by 2070, and become the highest in the world². Access to care services has already been guaranteed as a right in both Japan with a long-term care insurance system (established in 2000) and Korea with a long-term elderly care insurance system (2008)^{3, 4}. However, they are facing various challenges in operating these services, as reported in previous Japan-Korea comparative studies on care management⁵, welfare marketing⁶, care service support institutions⁷, and care costs and the evaluation of family caregiving⁸. From a future perspective, care professional training is likely to become more important in the 2 countries. Certified care workers in Japan and care workers in Korea are institutionally defined as national qualifications, but the training curriculum markedly varies between them. The Japanese curriculum for certified care worker training requires 1,850 hours to complete, whereas the Korean curriculum for care worker training only requires 240 hours to complete. In the latter, specialty is a point to be addressed⁹, and, therefore, it may be revised based on the former in the future.

Professionals need to have various qualities. The importance of comprehensive and specialized support provided by professionals in welfare settings has been emphasized in various reports¹⁰⁻¹³, requiring welfare professionals to be capable of collaborating with medical and other professionals. In this respect, not only knowledge and skills, but also the ability to address the affective domain may be an important quality. Self-esteem is a concept corresponding to the affective domain. Self-esteem refers to self-perceptions, including self-respect and self-acceptance, and it represents one's senses and emotions about his/her own values and abilities¹⁴. Rosenberg's Self-esteem Scale is the most widely used to measure self-esteem, defining it as the degree to which one can see him/herself as a respectable and valuable person, rather than self-confidence or superiority gained by comparison with others¹⁴. Based on this, self-esteem may be a competency required for collaboration with other professionals. Additionally, in professional training, self-improvement or the ability to maintain interest and concern is also required after graduation from a training school. These are defined as "perseverance and passion for long-term goals"¹⁵, which may be explained by the concept "grit". A previous study involving physical therapist school students reported that grit scores were higher among students with an established view on medical professionals¹⁶. Furthermore, students with higher grit scores have been reported to be characterized by a lower dropout rate at the United States Military Academy¹⁷, and obtain excellent results in spelling contests¹⁸, but no studies have examined students at welfare professional training schools.

We will now discuss the reasons for conducting this Japan-Korea comparative study on welfare professional training. As mentioned above, Japan currently has the highest aging rate in the world, but Korea's aging population has been progressing remarkably, and it is estimated that the aging rate of Korea will surpass that of Japan by 2070. Korea once established a long-term elderly care insurance system based on the Japanese long-term care insurance system, but the system has recently been under consideration for revision¹⁹⁾. There, the content of care provided and the importance of multidisciplinary cooperation are also expected to be discussed. Furthermore, Korea may revise its training curriculum for care worker in the future, referring to the Japanese curriculum for certified care worker training.

Japan and Korea have different social and cultural backgrounds. In addition, religion and ethics also have an impact on field of care, so it is not clear whether the current situation in Japan can be directly used as a reference for curriculum revision in South Korea. However, even under such circumstances, a comparative study of the characteristics of Japanese and Korean students regarding self-esteem, one of the concepts in the affective domain that is thought to influence multidisciplinary cooperation, and grit, which is thought to influence self-improvement after graduation from training schools, would be valuable enough as basic data to consider in curriculum design. We believe that this comparison of the characteristics of Japanese and Korean students in terms of grit, which is thought to influence self-esteem and self-improvement after graduation from training schools, is of sufficient value as basic data for examining curriculum.

Furthermore, this is significant not only for Korea but also for Japan. In Japan, there are issues regarding the profession of care, and in particular, collaboration with medical professionals is considered an urgent issue^{20, 21)}. In order to realize effective multidisciplinary collaboration, it is significant to understand the characteristics of students enrolled in Japanese welfare professional training programs regarding self-esteem and grit, and to examine the curriculum. Therefore, the present study examined grit levels and tendencies regarding self-esteem among university students taking welfare professional training courses in Japan and Korea, as well as differences between the 2 countries.

II. Subjects and Methods

1. Subjects

In Japan, 100 students were randomly sampled according to the ratio of the number of students in each grade from the 1st to 4th grades in which the author is in charge of the classes. In South Korea, 100 students were randomly sampled according to the ratio of the number of students in each grade from the 1st to 2nd grades in which the co-author is in charge of the classes.

2. Study period

For both Japan and Korea, the survey was conducted from September 1, 2022 to September 30, 2022.

3. Methods

1) Procedures to distribute a questionnaire and collect responses

An anonymous online questionnaire survey using Google Forms was conducted by the author in Japan and by the co-author in Korea. They sent a letter of request for cooperation with a Google Forms URL for response to the Japanese and Korean students, respectively. Each respondent directly accessed the URL.

2) Study items

(1) Basic attributes

The questionnaire examined the school year (grade), sex, and national qualification/qualifications to be obtained before graduation.

(2) Grit Scale (Table 1)

To clarify the students' grit levels, the Japanese-version Short Grit Scale ²²⁾ created by Nishikawa et al. was used. This scale consists of 4 items to measure <Perseverance of Effort> as perseverance and 4 items to measure <Consistency of Interests> as passion, a total of 8 items¹⁹⁾. The present study adopted a 5-point answering scale: "Not like me at all" (score: 1), "Not much like me" (2), "Somewhat like me" (3), "Mostly like me" (4), and "Very much like me" (5). The 4 items to measure <Consistency of Interest> (statements 3, 5, 6, and 8) are reverse scales.

<Table 1> Short Grit Scale

Perseverance of Effort
1. I finish whatever I begin.
2. I am a hard worker.
4. Setbacks don't discourage me.
7. I am diligent.
Consistency of Interest
3. I have difficulty maintaining my focus on projects that take more than a few months to complete. (R)
5. I have been obsessed with a certain idea or project for a short time but later lost interest. (R)
6. I often set a goal but later choose to pursue a different one. (R)
8. New ideas and projects sometimes distract me from previous ones. (R)
(R): reverse scale

(3) Self-Esteem Scale (Table 2)

To measure self-esteem, a Japanese version of Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale, created by Mimura & Griffiths²³⁾ was used, adopting a 4-point answering scale: "Strongly disagree" (score: 1), "Disagree" (2), "Agree" (3), and "Strongly agree" (4). Concerning Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale, Uchida & Ueno¹⁴⁾ observe that among the many Japanese versions available, there are no differences in the translation of the statements, but the answering scale varies from 4- to 7-point, seeing this as a problem, while reporting that a 4-point answering scale is adopted in most cases overseas. Based on this, the present study adopted a 4-point answering scale. Statements 2, 5, 6, 8, and 9 are reverse scales.

(4) Translation of the statements

The co-author, Jong Uk BACK, translated the statements in the 2 scales into Korean. To increase the accuracy of the translation, a Korean researcher living in Japan translated these Korean versions back into Japanese, and the author and co-author confirmed that there were no differences between these and the original versions.

<Table 2> Short Grit Scale

-
1. On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.
 2. At times I think I am no good at all. (R)
 3. I feel that I have a number of good qualities.
 4. I am able to do things as well as most other people.
 5. I feel I do not have much to be proud of. (R)
 6. I certainly feel useless at times. (R)
 7. I feel that I'm a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others.
 8. I wish I could have more respect for myself. (R)
 9. All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure. (R)
 10. I take a positive attitude toward myself.
-

(R): reverse scale

3) Analytical methods

For the reverse scales, Cronbach's alpha was calculated after reverse scoring to measure the reliability (internal consistency) of the Grit Scale and Self-Esteem Scale. For the Grit Scale, consisting of 2 subscales, <Perseverance of Effort> and <Consistency of Interest>, Cronbach's alpha was calculated for each subscale. For the Self-Esteem Scale, which has been reported to have a one-factor structure¹⁴⁾, Cronbach's alpha was calculated for all 10 statements as one factor. Subsequently, based on the findings of previous studies^{15, 24)}, grit scores were calculated by dividing the total Grit Scale score by 8 (number of statements). Then, to clarify the relationship between grit and self-esteem scores, Spearman's rank

correlation coefficient was calculated. Furthermore, for Japan-Korea comparison of grit and self-esteem scores, Mann-Whitney *U*-test was conducted. Statistical analysis was performed using IBM SPSS Statistics 28.0, with the significance level set at $P < 0.05$.

4) Ethical considerations

When sending a letter of request for cooperation and URL for response by e-mail, the following notes were inserted into the top and bottom of the letter of request and questionnaire, asking respondents to check the box "I agree" if they agreed with these conditions before answering the questionnaire: cooperation in the study is voluntary; the researchers cannot identify respondents; responding/not responding or the contents of responses will not influence academic achievements in any way; and there will no disadvantageous treatment for those who do not cooperate.

This study was conducted with the approval of the Faculty of Human Life Design, Toyo University (approval number: L2022-007S).

III. Results

1. Response rates and respondents' basic attributes (Table 3)

There were 92 and 93 responses in Japan (valid response rate: 92.0%) and Korea (93.0%), respectively. As there were no missing data, all responses were adopted for analysis.

2. Grit scores (Table 4, Figure 1)

Cronbach's alpha representing internal consistency was 0.78 for both subscales of the Grit Scale, <Perseverance of Effort> and <Consistency of Interest>. On calculating grit scores by dividing the total Grit Scale score by 8 (number of statements), the median (first to third quartile) was 3.0 (2.8-3.5) overall, 2.9 (2.4-3.1) in Japan, and 3.4 (3.0-3.8) in Korea.

3. Self-esteem scores (Table 4, Figure 2)

Cronbach's alpha representing the internal consistency of the Self-Esteem Scale was 0.79. The median (first to third quartile) self-esteem score was 28 (23-33) overall, 24 (20-28) in Japan, and 31 (28-34) in Korea.

4. Relationship between grit and self-esteem scores

The relationship between grit and self-esteem scores was explained by a Spearman's rank correlation coefficient of 0.319 ($P < 0.01$).

5. Japan-Korea comparison of grit and self-esteem scores (Table 4, Figures 1&2)

Mann-Whitney *U*-test for the Japan-Korea comparison revealed that both the grit and self-esteem scores were significantly higher in Korea ($P < 0.01$ in both cases).

<Table 3> Respondents' Basic Attributes

Item Category	Japan (n=92)		Korea (n=93)	
	number (person)	rate (%)	number (person)	rate (%)
Sex				
Female	54	58.7	61	65.6
Male	36	39.1	32	34.4
Unknown (no answer)	2	2.2	0	0
School year (grade)				
1 st grade	31	33.7	34	36.6
2 nd grade	34	37.0	58	62.4
3 rd grade	11	12.0	0	0
4 th grade	16	17.4	0	0
Unknown (no answer)	0	0.0	1	1.1
National qualification/qualifications to be obtained before graduation (multiple answers allowed; the percentage is the ratio to 'n')				
Certified social workers	77	83.7	83	89.2
Certified care workers (care workers in Korea)	79	85.9	4	4.3
Others	2	1.1	11	11.8

<Table 4> Total Grit Scale Score, Grit and Self-esteem Scores in Japan and Korea

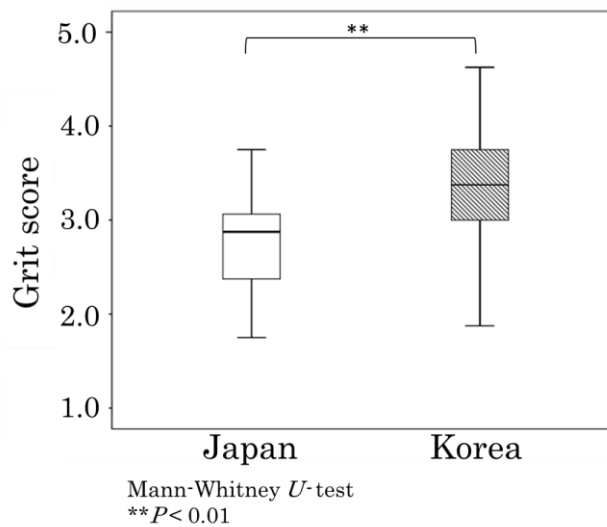
	Japan	Korea	<i>P</i> - value
Grit score	2.9 (2.4-3.1)	3.4 (3.0-3.8)	<i>P</i> < 0.01
Self-esteem score	24 (20-28)	31 (28-34)	<i>P</i> < 0.01

The values shown in the table are medians (first to third quartile).

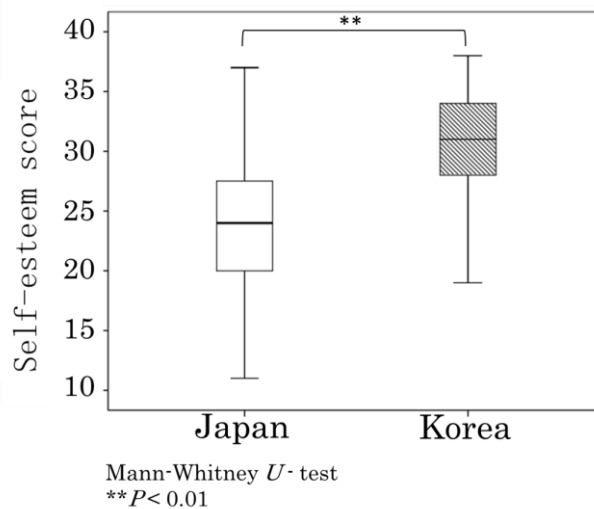
Grit score=Total Grit Scale score/8 (number of statements)

Mann-Whitney *U*-test

***P* < 0.01



<Figure 1> Japan-Korea Comparison of Grit Scores



<Figure 2> Japan-Korea Comparison of Self-esteem Scores

IV. Discussion

Based on the results, the relationship between grit and self-esteem scores, characteristics of Japan and Korea, and their relationships with welfare professional training are discussed as follows: First, the value representing the reliability of the Grit Scale used in the study was 0.78 for both <Perseverance of Effort> with 4 statements and <Consistency of Interest> with 4 statements. Similarly, the reliability coefficient for the Self-Esteem Scale was 0.79. Thus, internal consistency was within the permissible range in both cases. The correlation coefficient between grit and self-esteem scores was 0.319,

revealing a weak positive correlation. As self-esteem is easily changeable in a short period²⁵⁾, it is necessary to measure it several times and adopt a mean value as each person's intra-individual average, if possible. Nevertheless, as the values obtained in the present study were similar to those in previous studies involving physical therapist school students²⁴⁾ and 1,300 adults²⁶⁾, the grit and self-esteem scores are likely to have a weak positive correlation.

As for the grit scores, they were significantly higher in Korea than in Japan. In both of the 2 previous Japanese studies involving physical therapist school students²⁴⁾ and 1,300 adults²⁶⁾, the median grit score was 3.1. In the present study, the median was 3.4 in Korea and 2.9 in Japan, suggesting a tendency of grit scores to be low among Japanese students and high among Korean students. Takehashi et al.²⁷⁾ examined the relationship between grit scores and long-term goal achievement rates, and reported a rate of passing the second round of the teacher employment examination and being hired as a teacher was higher among students with higher grit scores. Based on the idea that higher grit scores are more desirable, as shown in these reports, it may be necessary to assess the trainability of Japanese students with lower grit scores, and if they are trainable, to consider appropriate training methods for them. Another challenge for future studies is to clarify whether the higher grit scores of Korean students result from education and experience or congenital factors.

Self-esteem scores were also significantly lower in Japan than in Korea. A previous study performed an international comparison of self-esteem, involving university students in Japan, Korea, Singapore (Chinese), Canada (Asian), and the USA (Caucasian), and reported that self-esteem was the highest in the USA, followed in order by Korea, Singapore, Canada, and Japan, revealing the lowest self-esteem of Japanese students²⁸⁾. Self-esteem was also significantly lower in Japan in a study conducted by Furukawa et al.²⁹⁾ to compare Japanese and Korean care workers. Thus, low self-esteem may be characteristic of Japanese people, and this also indicates the necessity of assessing the trainability of those with lower scores in welfare professional training courses, similarly to the case of the above-mentioned grit scores.

The higher grit and self-esteem scores of Korean college students may have been a favorable outcome of professional training. On the other hand, there are some points to note about this. High self-esteem leads to the conviction that one is accepted by others, which may make him/her complacent with the status quo. Among welfare professionals, this is less problematic if they are providing highly specialized services, but if not, they may have the risk of continuing inappropriate care. In their training, it may be important to promote professional development while establishing appropriate education systems.

Finally, we discuss the limitations of this study and future issues to be addressed. This is a cross-sectional study at one point in time, and an element of chance cannot be excluded. It is also not clear at this time whether grit scores and self-esteem scores can improve with training.

Future work must be done to determine whether grit scores and self-esteem scores can improve with training by increasing the number of subjects surveyed and then investigating whether these scores change as the school year progresses and whether they change before and after practical training at a facility. The influence of academic performance and the educational environment on these scores should also be examined to determine whether they are related to the Grade Point Average (GPA: calculated by a specific method for the evaluation of student performance based on grade points for each subject).

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