The relationship between perceived discrimination and Chinese migrant children’s school adjustment: A moderated mediation model of identity conflict and grit

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Abstract
Research has revealed that perceived discrimination may be a risk factor against school adjustment among Chinese migrant children. However, few studies have examined the underlying mechanisms that may mediate or moderate this association. To fill this gap, this study examined the mediating role of identity conflict and moderating role of grit in the association between perceived discrimination and school adjustment. A sample of 732 Chinese migrant children completed measures of perceived discrimination, school adjustment, identity conflict, and grit. Results showed that identity conflict mediated the relationship between perceived discrimination and school adjustment among Chinese migrant children. Moreover, this mediating effect of identity conflict between perceived discrimination and school adjustment was moderated by grit, with the effect being weaker for Chinese migrant children with higher grit. These findings illuminate the underlying influence of identity conflict and grit in the link between perceived discrimination and school adjustment of Chinese migrant children. Limitations and implications of this study were discussed.

Keywords
perceived discrimination, identity conflict, grit, school adjustment, migrant children

Introduction
As a result of the rapid development of China’s economy, a large number of rural surplus laborers have migrated to cities. In this process, many of their children have become migrants themselves. “Migrant children” refers to rural children aged 6 to 14 who have left their registered places of residence to a city with their parents for more than half a year (Chen & Feng, 2019). The National Statistical Report on Chinese Education Development (2017) demonstrates that the number of Chinese migrant children in the compulsory education stage has reached 1,066,300. In this context, solving the compulsory education of migrant children has become one of the most prominent problems in the field of education in China. School is the most important learning and activity place for migrant children to prepare them to enter urban life, and school adjustment has become the most important aspect of migrant children’s urban adjustment—a vital indicator of their mental health. A study by Kupersmid and Coie (1990) found that school adjustment is an important predictor of reducing adolescent problem behavior. Meanwhile, studies indicated that school adjustment has a significant positive predictive effect on the learning engagement, academic performance, and life satisfaction of migrant children in China (Cao & Liu, 2018; Peng et al., 2011). However, migrant children face challenges and threats in the process of school adjustment due to factors such as social discrimination. Indeed, some studies have found that urban migrant children’s school adjustment levels are significantly lower than those of urban children.

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(Yang et al., 2020; Zhang, 2016). Therefore, it is necessary to investigate the mechanism of Chinese migrant children’s school adjustment.

**Perceived discrimination and Chinese migrant children’s school adjustment**

Perceived discrimination is one of the risk factors for migrant children’s school adjustment. It refers to the unfair, negative, and harmful treatment of the individual’s perception of his membership in the group to which he belongs. It may manifest as actual discriminatory behaviors, refusal attitudes, or certain unreasonable social systems (Major et al., 2002; Pascoe & Smart-Richman, 2009). A meta-analysis of perceived discrimination among Chinese migrant children showed that there was a significant negative correlation between perceived discrimination and positive mental health indicators, but a significant positive correlation between perceived discrimination and negative mental health indicators (Han et al., 2020). An empirical study indicated that the discrimination against Chinese migrant children was an important reason for the difficulties they encounter in the adaptation process (Liu, 2008). When migrant children migrate to cities, they often experience unfair treatment from the system and social exclusion from some citizens. Such discrimination fosters the belief in individuals that the manner in which they are treated is primarily influenced by external and unchangeable factors. According to the theory of learned helplessness, once an individual finds that he cannot control his future destiny, he or she will develop a huge sense of helplessness leading to a series of psychological problems (Abramson et al., 1978). Many empirical studies have found that perceived discrimination has a significant impact on the problem behavior, life satisfaction, and school adjustment among Chinese migrant children (Jia et al., 2020; Zhang & Tan, 2019; Zhu et al., 2015).

The theory of symbolic interactionism further notes that the individual’s self-concept is mainly established through interaction with others: that is, individuals often use others’ feedback evaluation to establish self-concepts (Brownfield & Thompson, 2005). Once migrant children enter urban schools, they may be discriminated against and excluded by urban teachers and classmates due to language barriers and weak learning foundations. Migrant children may then internalize the negatively biased attitude of discriminators into their own views and demonstrate corresponding behaviors, thus reducing their level of school adjustment. Previous research by Buhs and Ladd (2001) has found that peer rejection has a significant negative predictive effect on children’s school adjustment. Peer rejection can not only significantly reduce children’s classroom participation and willingness to attend school, but it also has a significant negative predictive effect on their academic achievement. A longitudinal study found that perceived discrimination has a one-way and negative impact on school adjustment of Chinese migrant children (Zhang et al., 2016).

Nevertheless, little research has been conducted on the inherent mechanism of perceived discrimination in migrant children’s school adjustment. Furthermore, the underlying mediating mechanism (i.e., how perceived discrimination influences school adjustment) and moderating mechanism (i.e., when this mediating mechanism works) involved in this association between perceived discrimination and migrant children’s school adjustment are largely unknown. To reveal these mechanisms, the present research constructed a moderated mediation model to examine the mediating role of identity conflict and the moderating role of grit in the relation between perceived discrimination and school adjustment among Chinese migrant children.

**Identity conflict as a mediator**

Previous research has revealed that identity is a protective factor in migrant children’s school adjustment (Spencer et al., 2001). The study further noted that ethnic identity may produce a variety of adjustments that have positive educational outcomes (Bernal et al., 1991; Medina et al., 2020). However, Chinese migrant children often encounter problems with their social identity when they migrate to the city from a rural area. Because migrant children have a dual identity of “rural” and “urban,” an identity conflict may occur. Identity conflicts have been associated with negative psychological outcomes across many different identity domains (Hirsh & Kang, 2016). The mechanistic dynamics mode of identity conflict indicates that the activation of each identity within a person boosts the salience of any associated normative standards for behavior. When these salient behavioral norms are incompatible with each other, there is an increase in conflict-related activity in the Behavioral Inhibition System (BIS). Once activated, the BIS is responsible for the many consequences of identity conflict, including anxiety, decreased cognitive function, and social behavior problems. Hence, migrant children have the dual identity of “rural” and “urban,” which may boost different behavioral norms. The simultaneous activation of two incompatible norms produces behavioral conflict that in turn triggers the BIS. The activated BIS might then lead to anxiety, decreased cognitive function, and social behavior problems, thereby reducing migrant children’s levels of school adjustment. Several empirical studies have explored the relationship between identity conflicts and school adjustment and have found that the former not only has a significant positive predictive effect on individual psychological symptoms (Carter et al., 2005; Silverstein et al., 1990; Spiegler et al., 2019), but also significantly reduces the urban adjustment level of migrant children (Liu et al., 2012). Accordingly, it is reasonable...
to assume that identity conflict may be one of the risk factors in migrant children’s school adjustment.

Meanwhile, Tom (2006) viewed discrimination as the exclusion of disadvantaged groups by mainstream groups. Such exclusion leads to the disadvantaged group’s perception of the weak status of their own group and to identity conflict, which in turn leads to the emergence of poor adjustment. Research found that discrimination was a risk factor that might trigger an identity conflict in individuals, that is, the higher the perceived discrimination, the more serious the identity conflict (Leong & Ward, 2000; Giuliani et al., 2018). It was also found that perceived discrimination is a significant positive predictor for Chinese migrant children’s identity conflict (Liu et al., 2012). Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 1:** Identity conflict mediates the relation between perceived discrimination and Chinese migrant children’s school adjustment.

### Grit as a moderator

Grit, defined as perseverance and passion for long-term goals, is an important positive personality trait that has a significant positive predictive effect on educational attainment, academic achievement, and retention (Duckworth et al., 2007; Duckworth & Quinn, 2009). Recent research has further found that grit was associated with increased engagement, academic achievement, academic responsibility, motivation, and higher school satisfaction (Bowman et al., 2015; Eskreis-Winkler et al., 2014; Tang et al., 2019). Accordingly, we assume that grit may be an important positive personality trait that is positively related to migrant children’s school adjustment.

The Protective Model of Resilience believes that for children who are disadvantaged or under stress, protective factors can effectively buffer the negative impact of risk factors on their development and promote individual elastic development (Garment et al., 1984). Numerous studies have found that positive personality traits can effectively reduce the impact of risk factors on individual mental health and maladjustment, thus contributing to the development of individual resilience (Bonanno & Diminch, 2013; Fletcher & Sarkar, 2013). Grit is recognized as an important protective factor for individual mental health and adaptive behaviors (Datu et al., 2018; Pennings et al., 2015; Salles et al., 2014). Pennings et al. (2015) have further noted that it is an important protective factor for individuals to cope with risk factors and promote the development of individual resilience. Grit is defined as trait-level perseverance and passion for long-term goals (Duckworth et al., 2007). Individuals with a high level of grit regard the realization of long-term goals as a marathon. In the process of realization, they often find ways to overcome various obstacles and persevere to the end. Empirical studies have also found that grit can not only effectively reduce the impact of negative life events on suicidal intentions (Blalock et al., 2015) but also effectively buffer the negative impact of stress on Latin American college students’ academic performance (O’Neal et al., 2016). Therefore, according to the Protective Model of Resilience, grit may buffer the impact of perceived discrimination and identity conflict on school adjustment among Chinese migrant children.

Furthermore, based on previous research on the combination of mediation and moderation models (e.g., Edwards & Lambert, 2007; Muller et al., 2005), if identity conflict mediates the relationship between perceived discrimination and school adjustment and, simultaneously, grit moderates the association between identity conflict and school adjustment, then the mediating effect of identity conflict will be moderated by grit. This can be represented as a moderated mediation model involving identity conflict and grit in the relation between perceived discrimination and school adjustment. Thus, we propose the following hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 2:** Grit moderates the relationship between perceived discrimination and school adjustment among Chinese migrant children, with the effect of perceived discrimination being weaker for migrant children with higher grit.

**Hypothesis 3:** Grit also moderates the mediating effect of identity conflict in the relationship between perceived discrimination and school adjustment among Chinese migrant children, with the effect of identity conflict being weaker for migrant children with higher grit.

### The present study

This study tested the mechanisms underlying the relationship between perceived discrimination and school adjustment among Chinese migrant children. Specifically, we used gender and number of transfers as covariates and examined a moderated mediation model to answer three questions: (a) whether identity conflict mediates the relationship between perceived discrimination and school adjustment
adjustment among Chinese migrant children; (b) whether grit moderates the relationship between perceived discrimination and school adjustment; and (c) whether grit moderates the mediating effect of identity conflict in the relationship between perceived discrimination and school adjustment. Testing mediator and moderator variables in a single model could generate more comprehensive information than assessing two separate models. We anticipated that the moderated mediation model in the present study (see Figure 1) would not only explain how perceived discrimination influences school adjustment among Chinese migrant children, but also indicate when this mediating mechanism works.

Methods

Participants

In this study, Chinese migrant children were recruited from three of the most economically developed cities from Jiangsu Province in China, namely: Suzhou, Changzhou, and Nantong. We adopted the convenience sampling method to select two primary schools from each city. From the target schools, a total of 791 Chinese migrant children were surveyed based on cluster sampling and 732 (92.54%) responded. The eligibility criteria for migrant children in the present study included the following: (1) no household register (i.e., hukou) in the migrant city (Suzhou, Changzhou, and Nantong) and (2) temporarily living with parents who have migrated to developed cities (Suzhou, Changzhou, and Nantong) for employment for more than 6 months. The sample’s mean age was 10.84 years (SD = 0.41, with an age range of 10 to 12 years). They consist of 402 males (54.92%) and 330 females (45.08%). In this sampling survey, the migrant children had resided in the city between 6 months and 11.5 years (M = 4.57 years, SD = 3.79 years). There were 76 (10.38%) participants from single-parent families and 128 (17.49%) participants were the only children in their families. In terms of the educational background of the migrant children’s parents, 412 (56.28%) reported that their fathers obtained primary school education or below, 258 (35.25%) reported junior high school education, and 62 (8.47%) reported senior high school education. Additionally, 462 (63.11%) reported that their mothers obtained primary school education or below, 202 (27.60%) reported junior high school education, and 68 (9.29%) reported senior high school education.

Measurements

Perceived discrimination. The revised version of the Individual Perceived Discrimination Questionnaire (IPDQ) (Liu, 2008) was used in this study. Based on the previous interviews with migrant children in Jiangsu Province, we revised the IPDQ. The IPDQ-R lists seven cases in which migrant children may experience discrimination (e.g., “Some city children are not willing to play with me and hide from me”), which are rated on a 4-point scale (1 = never, 4 = always). Higher scores reflect higher levels of perceived discrimination. The factor analysis was conducted using the method of maximal variance orthogonal rotation to extract the principal components. Only one factor was found, which can explain the overall variance of 57.40%. The factor load of each item ranges from 0.44 to 0.68. Cronbach’s α for the IPDQ-R was 0.83. In addition, confirmatory factor analysis indicated that the one-factor model demonstrated a good fit to the data $x^2/df = 5.13$, $CFI = 0.94$, $TLI = 0.92$, $SRMR = 0.05$, and $RMSEA = 0.06$.

Identity conflict. The Chinese version (Liu et al., 2012) of the Identity Conflict Scale (ICS; Leong & Ward, 2000) was used in this study. This self-report instrument contains 14 items (e.g., “Since coming to the city, I often wonder who I really am”), assessing the level of migrant children’s identity conflict. Participants were instructed to rate the extent of each item on a 5-point scale (1 = strongly agree, 5 = strongly disagree). Higher scores reflected higher levels of identity conflict. In our study, Cronbach’s α for the ICS was 0.79.

Grit. The Short Grit Scale (GRIT-S; Duckworth & Quinn, 2009) was used in this study. A previous study has found that this scale is equally applicable to Chinese students (Li et al., 2018). The scale includes eight items assessing two factors related to grit: interest (e.g., “I often set a goal but later choose to pursue a different one”) and effort (e.g., “I finish whatever I begin”). Participants rated each item on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (Not at all like me) to 5 (Very much like me), with higher scores reflecting higher grit. In our study, Cronbach’s α for the GRIT-S was 0.78.

School adjustment. School adjustment levels were measured with the School Adjustment Scale of Migrant Children (SAS-MC; Li, 2011). This comprises 30 items that assess five factors of school adjustment: teacher–student relationship, peer relationship, academic adjustment, school environment adjustment, and self-evaluation. Participants rate these items on a 5-point scale (1 = strongly agree, 5 = strongly disagree). Higher scores reflect higher levels of school adjustment. In our study, Cronbach’s α for the SAS-MC was 0.89.

Procedure

Participants were recruited from six primary schools in Suzhou, Changzhou, and Nantong. The survey was completed in their classrooms during school hours. To ensure that the participants can understand the meaning of the
questionnaire items, each class was equipped with two trained psychology graduate students responsible for explaining the questions and answering the questionnaire. Prior to the survey, the researchers obtained consent forms signed by students and their parents. All participants volunteered to participate in this study and completed a 25-min. questionnaire using a paper-pencil format. The questionnaires were anonymous.

Statistical analysis

In our study, the collected data were analyzed using SPSS 23.0 and MPLUS7.0. First, we used descriptive statistics to examine the characteristics of the measured variables. We then used Pearson’s correlation to evaluate the correlations between variables. Finally, we used MPLUS7.0 to test the hypothesized moderated mediation model involving identity conflict and grit in the relationship between perceived discrimination and school adjustment among Chinese migrant children, with structural equation modeling (SEM). School adjustment and grit were treated as latent variables, while perceived discrimination and identity conflict were treated as observed variables. The bootstrapping method was used to test the significance of all effects in this study. The robust standard error and confidence interval of parameter estimation were obtained by constructing 1000 bootstrap samples with a sample size of 732 people. The absence of zero in the confidence interval indicated statistical significance (Erceg-Hurn & Mirosevich, 2008).

Results

Descriptive statistics and correlations of main study variables

The results of the descriptive statistics and correlation analyses between observed variables are presented in Table 1. Gender was positively correlated with all observed variables of school adjustment ($p<0.01$, $p<0.001$), while the number of transfers was negatively correlated with all observed variables of school adjustment ($p<0.001$). Perceived discrimination was positively correlated with identity conflict ($p<0.001$), but negatively correlated with the observed variables of grit and school adjustment ($p<0.001$). Identity conflict was not significantly correlated with the observed variables of grit, but was negatively correlated with the observed variables of school adjustment ($p<0.001$). There was a significant positive correlation between the observation variables of grit and school adjustment ($p<0.001$).

Measurement model testing

Confirmatory factor analysis was done to validate the factor structure of the study variables. The hypothesized four-factor measurement model provided a good fit, $\chi^2/df=3.99$, $p<0.001$, $CFI=0.94$, $TLI=0.93$, and $RMSEA=0.05$. In the measurement model, all factor loadings for the indicators of the latent variables were significant ($p<0.001$) and greater than 0.5, indicating that both latent factors were well represented by their respective indicators.

Hypothesized model testing

First, this study tested the hypothesized moderated model with the structural equation modeling (SEM). The mediation model fitted the data well ($\chi^2/df=5.82$, $CFI=0.94$, $TLI=0.91$, $SRMR=0.06$, and $RMSEA=0.07$). Perceived discrimination was negatively associated with school adjustment ($b=-0.42$, $p<0.001$) before accounting for the mediation variable. After the mediator was taken into account, the direct was weakened ($b=-0.34$, $p<0.001$). Furthermore, in the mediator model (see Figure 2), perceived discrimination was positively correlated with identity conflict ($b=0.40$, $p<0.001$) and identity conflict was negatively associated with school adjustment ($b=-0.20$, $p<0.001$). Consistent with Hypothesis 1, results of bootstrapping analyses suggested that identity conflict partially mediated the relationship between perceived discrimination and school adjustment (indirect effect $=0.08$, $p<0.05$, Boot $LLCI=-0.12$, $Boot ULCI=-0.05$, direct effect $=-0.34$, $p<0.001$, Boot $LLCI=-0.41$, $Boot ULCI=-0.27$).

Second, after identifying the mediation effect of identity conflict on the association between perceived discrimination and school adjustment, we investigated whether the mediation effect was moderated by grit. The moderated mediation model was tested with structural equation modeling as well (see Figure 3), which showed that it fitted the data well ($\chi^2/df=4.05$, $CFI=0.95$, $TLI=0.93$, $SRMR=0.04$, and $RMSEA=0.06$). Perceived discrimination and identity conflict were significantly associated with school adjustment ($b=-0.09$, $p<0.05$, $b=-0.24$, $p<0.001$). Meanwhile, perceived discrimination was significantly associated with identity conflict ($b=0.40$, $p<0.001$). Grit moderated the association between identity conflict and school adjustment ($b=0.13$, $p<0.001$), but did not moderate the association between perceived discrimination and school adjustment ($b=0.03$, $p>0.05$).

Furthermore, following the recommendation of Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff (2003), the present study operationalized low, middle, and high levels of grit as being one standard deviation above the mean, and one standard deviation below the mean. Table 2 presents the estimates, standard errors, significance value, and bootstrap value of the conditional indirect effects for identity conflict. Results showed that the conditional
indirect effects were weaker in the high grit condition (indirect effect = −0.05, \( p < 0.05 \)) than those in the middle and low grit conditions (indirect effect = −0.10, \( p < 0.01 \), and indirect effect = −0.15, \( p < 0.001 \)). Hence, the indirect effect of perceived discrimination on school adjustment through identity conflict was observed when grit was moderate to low, but not when grit was high. Therefore, Hypothesis 2 was not supported, but Hypothesis 3 was.

**Discussion**

This study constructed a moderated mediation model to examine the mechanisms underlying the relationship between perceived discrimination and Chinese migrant children’s school adjustment. The results indicated that high perceived discrimination could reduce the level of school adjustment among Chinese migrant children, partly due to their identity conflict, and grit could buffer the influence of identity conflict on school adjustment.

![Figure 2](image2.png)  
**Figure 2.** The mediating effect of identity conflict in the association between perceived discrimination and school adjustment. *** \( p < 0.001 \).

![Figure 3](image3.png)  
**Figure 3.** The moderating effect of grit on the direct path and second stage of the indirect association. PD: Perceived Discrimination, IC: Identity Conflict, SA: School Adjustment. *\( p < 0.05 \), **\( p < 0.01 \), ***\( p < 0.001 \).

The **mediating role of identity conflict**

First, our study found that perceived discrimination could significantly negatively predict Chinese migrant children’s school adjustment. This result is similar to previous studies on school adjustment among Chinese migrant children (Jiang, 2016; Zhang et al., 2016). Lazarus and Folkman (1984) indicated that discrimination affects members of vulnerable groups, putting them in a state of stress, ultimately leading to a series of stress responses. Previous studies have also found that stressful life events significantly contribute to the prediction of subsequent school performance (Alva & De Los Reyes, 1999;
Table 2. Moderated mediated result for identity conflict across levels of grit.

| Level of grit | $Z_{\text{grit}}$ | Indirect effect | Boot SE | Boot LLCI | Boot ULCI |
|---------------|------------------|----------------|---------|-----------|-----------|
| Low           | -1               | -0.15***       | 0.03    | -0.20     | -0.10     |
| Middle        | 0                | -0.10**        | 0.02    | -0.13     | -0.07     |
| High          | 1                | -0.05*         | 0.02    | -0.08     | -0.02     |

Note: *$p < 0.05$, **$p < 0.01$, ***$p < 0.001$.

Dubois et al., 1992). Meanwhile, as previously mentioned, Brownfield and Thompson (2005) pointed out that the individual’s self-concept is mainly established through interaction with others. Individuals who are discriminated against are likely to internalize others’ negative attitudes towards themselves and gradually demonstrate negative behavior patterns that are consistent with the negative impressions of others. That is to say, on the one hand, discrimination against migrant children can cause them psychological stress and reduce the level of their school adjustment. On the other hand, migrant children may internalize the negatively biased attitude of discriminators and demonstrate corresponding behaviors, thus reducing the level of school adjustment.

Second, our study indicated that Chinese migrant children’s identity conflict mediated the relationship between perceived discrimination and school adjustment. Previous studies have demonstrated the association between identity conflicts and negative psychological outcomes (Carter et al., 2005; Liu et al., 2012). To the best of our knowledge, this is the first time that the effect of identity conflict on school adjustment has been tested. According to the mechanistic dynamics mode of identity conflict, the dual identity of “rural” and “urban” often produces behavioral conflict in migrant children that in turn triggers the BIS. Once activated, the BIS might lead to anxiety, decreased cognitive function, and social behavior problems, thereby reducing migrant children’s level of school adjustment. Meeus (2011) also indicates that identity is embedded in a positive proximal interpersonal context in adolescence and that the links between identity and the interpersonal context seem to strengthen from the beginning of early adolescence. For most migrant children, long-term urban life experiences have enabled them to learn the culture and behavior of the city. Therefore, they have the dual identity of “rural” and “urban.” However, their exclusion from urban life due to factors such as discrimination makes it difficult for migrant children to truly consider themselves “urban people.” Moreover, their long-term urban life experience makes it impossible for them to identify themselves as “rural people.” Consequently, migrant children undergo an identity conflict. Berry’s (1997) acculturation model referred to migrant children with low urban and rural identities as marginalizationists, who settle into a pattern of conflict with resultant acculturative stress or psychopathology. As such, perceived discrimination can increase the risk of identity conflict, while identity conflict decreases migrant children’s level of school adjustment.

The moderating role of grit

Our study also found that the effect that identity conflict exerted on school adjustment for migrant children was moderated by grit. Specifically, perceived discrimination led to identity conflict, which could induce the level of school adjustment in migrant children. However, grit could buffer the impact of identity conflict on school adjustment. This result was consistent with previous research identifying the protective role of grit in suicidal intentions and academic performance from risk factors for the young adults (Blalock et al., 2015; O’Neal et al., 2016).

Grit can promote the development of individual resilience through both perseverance and passion for long-term goals. First, grit is one of an individual’s future-oriented personality strengths, such as hope. Gritty individuals tend to focus more on long-term goals, allowing them to minimize the attention to the current stress predicament they are in. Grit in particular keeps migrant children’s spotlight of attention on long-term goals for the future, even when they are deeply involved in identity conflict. Moreover, grit is a fuel moving individuals toward their long-term goals (O’Neal et al., 2016). Gritty individuals might also make efforts to apply more effective problem-solving to overcome obstacles in achieving long-term goals. As previously mentioned, identity conflict is a risk factor for the school adjustment of migrant children. However, grit can motivate individuals to develop a social support system or other beneficial strategy to reduce the harm caused by identity conflicts, such as anxiety or social behavior problems. Thus, grit can buffer the impact of identity conflict on school adjustment.

The findings of this study indicated that after identity conflict and grit were included in the model, the direct effect of perceived discrimination on school adjustment was weakened to a nearly critical value of significance level. This indicates that perceived discrimination had a negative impact on school adjustment mainly through identity conflict as an internal risk factor, which is similar to a previous study (Liu et al., 2012). Therefore, grit moderated the mediating effect of identity conflict in the relationship between perceived discrimination and school adjustment among Chinese migrant children, not the direct effect of perceived discrimination on school adjustment. Previous studies found that grit can buffer the impact of external risk factors on individual mental health and adaptive behaviors (Blalock et al., 2015; O’Neal et al., 2016), while ignoring in-depth exploration of its internal mechanism. Our findings addressed this relative gap in the literature.
Implications
The model tested demonstrated that high perceived discrimination could reduce the level of school adjustment among Chinese migrant children, partly due to their identity conflict. Grit could buffer the influence of identity conflict on school adjustment. To our knowledge, our study is the first to focus on the underlying influence of identity conflict and grit in the association between perceived discrimination and school adjustment of Chinese migrant children in the context of a protective model of resilience and a mechanistic dynamic model of identity conflict. This study’s conclusion provides a new perspective of the relationship between discrimination perception and school adjustment among Chinese migrant children. Another contribution of this study is the exploration of the moderating role of grit in the association between identity conflict and school adjustment among Chinese migrant children. Previous studies found that grit can buffer the impact of external risk factors on individual mental health and adaptive behaviors. This study found that grit can additionally buffer the negative impact of internal risk factors on individual adaptive behaviors, which addressed a gap in the literature.

Results of the current study may have important implications for interventions and promotions targeting school adjustment among Chinese migrant children. First, the Chinese government should vigorously promote registered residence system reform, strive to eliminate the root causes of discrimination against migrant children, and create a favorable environment for their healthy development. Second, this study found that migrant children’s identity conflict decreased the level of school adjustment. Parents, teachers, and other educators should help migrant children improve the level of identity integration that may stop their identity conflict. Social support can effectively increase the identity integration among migrant children (Ni & Li, 2014) to reduce the influence of perceived discrimination on their school adaptation. Third, the present study found that grit could buffer the influence of identity conflict on school adjustment. Longitudinal data and neuropsychological findings on brain development found the possibility of enhancing grit (Hwang & Nam, 2021). Educators can enhance migrant children’s grit through intervention strategies in the cognitive, behavioral, and emotional domains.

Limitations of this study
Several limitations of this study need to be mentioned. First, this was a cross-sectional survey and cannot establish causal relationships between the variables. Therefore, we must interpret our results with caution. It is necessary to use longitudinal or experimental research to provide evidence for causal relationships in the assumptions of this study. Second, the self-report method was used for data collection in this study, which involves the risk of social desirability bias, recall bias, or other types of bias (Fischer & Fick, 1993). Therefore, future studies may obtain data from multiple informants (e.g., parents, teachers, and peer reports). Third, the participant sample in this study may not represent all Chinese migrant children, as it was derived from just three developed cities in Jiangsu Province, China. Therefore, future research needs to expand the sampling population range of migrant children from more developed cities in China.

Conclusion
In conclusion, the current study offers new data about the relationship between perceived discrimination and school adjustment among migrant children. Furthermore, our study contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of the inherent mechanism between migrant children’s perceived discrimination and school adjustment. To the best of our knowledge, this study is the first to test the mediating role of identity conflict in the relationship between perceived discrimination and school adjustment, as well as the moderating role of grit in the association between identity conflict and school adjustment among Chinese migrant children. Specifically, high perceived discrimination can lead to identity conflict, which could reduce the level of school adjustment among Chinese migrant children. However, grit could buffer the impact of identity conflict on school adjustment.

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