

# Relationship between emotional intelligence in elite coaches and the Grit personality of American taekwondo athletes

Relación entre la Inteligencia emocional en entrenadores de elite y la personalidad Grit de taekwondistas estadounidenses

Relação entre a inteligência emocional em treinadores de elite e a personalidade Grit dos atletas de taekwondo americanos



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**Rip**  
**17<sup>3</sup>**

Volumen 17 #3 sep -dic  
17 Años



ID: **10.33881/2027-1786.rip.17301**

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**Alt Title / Título alternativo:**

**[en]:** Relationship between emotional intelligence in elite coaches and the Grit personality of American taekwondo athletes

**[es]:** Relación entre la Inteligencia emocional en entrenadores de elite y la personalidad Grit de taekwondistas estadounidenses

**[pt]:** Relação entre a inteligência emocional em treinadores de elite e a personalidade Grit dos atletas de taekwondo americanos

**Author (s) / Autor (es):**

Laurin

**Keywords / Palabras Clave:**

**[en]:** Emotional intelligence, Grit, Grit personality, Taekwondo athletes

**[es]:** Inteligencia emocional, Grit, Personalidad grit, Taekwondistas

**[pt]:** Inteligência emocional, Grit, Personalidade Grit, Atletas de Taekwondo

**Proyecto / Project:**

No reporta

**Financiación / Funding:**

No reporta

**Submitted:** 2024-01-24

**Acepted:** 2024-04-02

## Resumen

**Introducción:** La inteligencia emocional y el Grit son constructos psicológicos que han sido estudiado ampliamente em diversos ámbitos, incluyendo al deporte. **Objetivo:** evaluar la relación entre la inteligencia emocional de los entrenadores y la personalidad grit en deportistas y su impacto en el rendimiento deportivo. **Metodología:** Estudio descriptivo y cuantitativo transversal en una población de Taekwondistas pertenecientes a campamentos deportivos asociados a la federación nacional de Estados Unidos (USAT) y desarrollado en el centro de alto rendimiento de L3 perfomance en la ciudad de Colony, Texas. La muestra, compuesta por (N= 470) participantes de diversas categorías. Se evaluó la personalidad grit mediante la escala de grit y la inteligencia emocional a través de la prueba Schutte Self-Report Emotional Intelligence Test (SSEIT). **Resultados:** Después del análisis de correlación con la prueba r de Pearson, se pudo identificar relaciones positivas y negativas, siendo la única relación positiva la de variable Grit: perseverancia al esfuerzo, lo que sugiere que a una mayor inteligencia emocional de los entrenadores una alta perseverancia al esfuerzo de los atletas siendo una correlación positiva fuerte  $p=0,963$  pero no estadísticamente significativa. **Conclusión:** Finalmente se puede concluir que este estudio no encontró una relación estadísticamente significativa entre la inteligencia emocional de los entrenadores y la personalidad grit de los atletas. Aunque existen investigaciones previas que sugieren una posible influencia positiva de la inteligencia emocional de los entrenadores en la perseverancia y determinación de los atletas; Sin embargo, los hallazgos de este estudio en particular no respaldan esa relación

## Abstract

**Introduction:** Emotional intelligence and Grit are psychological constructs that have been extensively studied in various fields, including sports. **Objective:** To evaluate the relationship between coaches' emotional intelligence and athletes' Grit personality and its impact on sports performance. **Methodology:** A descriptive and cross-sectional quantitative study was conducted on a population of Taekwondo athletes belonging to sports camps associated with the national federation of the United States (USAT), and conducted at the L3 Performance High-Performance Center in The Colony, Texas. The sample consisted of (N=470) participants from various categories. Grit personality was assessed using the Grit Scale, and emotional intelligence was measured using the Schutte Self-Report Emotional Intelligence Test (SSEIT). **Results:** After correlational analysis using Pearson's r test, positive and negative relationships were identified. The only positive relationship found was between the Grit variable and effort perseverance in athletes, with a strong positive correlation ( $p=0.963$ ), but not statistically significant. **Conclusion:** In conclusion, this study did not find a statistically significant relationship between coaches' emotional intelligence and athletes' Grit personality. While previous research suggests a possible positive influence of coaches' emotional intelligence on athletes' perseverance and determination, the findings of this particular study do not support that relationship

## Resumo

**Introdução:** Inteligência emocional e Grit são construtos psicológicos que têm sido amplamente estudados em diversos campos, incluindo o esporte. **Objetivo:** Avaliar a relação entre a inteligência emocional dos treinadores e a personalidade Grit dos atletas e seu impacto no desempenho esportivo. **Metodologia:** Foi conduzido um estudo quantitativo descritivo e transversal em uma população de atletas de Taekwondo pertencentes a acampamentos esportivos associados à federação nacional dos Estados Unidos (USAT), e realizado no Centro de Alto Desempenho L3 Performance em The Colony, Texas. A amostra consistiu de (N=470) participantes de várias categorias. A personalidade Grit foi avaliada usando a Escala Grit, e a inteligência emocional foi medida usando o Teste de Inteligência Emocional de Autorrelato de Schutte (SSEIT). **Resultados:** Após análise correlacional usando o teste r de Pearson, foram identificadas relações positivas e negativas. A única relação positiva encontrada foi entre a variável Grit e perseverança no esforço, sugerindo que uma maior inteligência emocional nos treinadores está associada a uma maior perseverança no esforço dos atletas, com uma correlação positiva forte ( $p=0.963$ ), mas não estatisticamente significativa. **Conclusão:** Em conclusão, este estudo não encontrou uma relação estatisticamente significativa entre a inteligência emocional dos treinadores e a personalidade Grit dos atletas. Embora pesquisas anteriores sugiram uma possível influência positiva da inteligência emocional dos treinadores na perseverança e determinação dos atletas, os achados deste estudo em particular não sustentam essa relação.

## Citar como:

Laurin, L. L. (2024). Relación entre la Inteligencia emocional en entrenadores de elite y la personalidad Grit de taekwondistas estadounidenses. Revista Iberoamericana de Psicología, 17 (3), 1-8. Obtenido de: <https://reviberopsicologia.ibero.edu.co/article/view/2886>

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# Relationship between emotional intelligence in elite coaches and the Grit personality of American taekwondo athletes

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## Introduction

Emotional intelligence and the personality trait Grit are two psychological constructs that have gained significant importance in the field of sports in recent years. Emotional intelligence refers to individuals' ability to identify, understand, and regulate their own emotions, as well as the emotions of others, while the Grit personality is associated with perseverance and passion in pursuing long-term goals (Mayer, & Salovey, 1997; Goleman, 1995; Muñoz, et al., 2022; Duckworth, et al., 2007).

Regarding emotional intelligence, it is a psychological aspect that has been extensively investigated in the sports context (Castro, et al., 2020; Swayer, et al., 2018; Gil, et al., 2020). However, most of these studies have focused on evaluating athletes, overlooking other crucial actors, such as coaches. It is important to consider the significance of emotional intelligence in coaches, as it can have a significant impact on athletes' performance and motivation under their guidance. Goleman asserts that emotional intelligence involves perceiving and managing one's own emotions, as well as those of others, to guide thought and behavior (Goleman, 1995; Mayer, & Salovey, 1997). Accordingly, a coach with high emotional intelligence can understand and respond to the emotional needs of their athletes, positively influencing coach-athlete relationships, communication, and understanding of each individual, thus enhancing their behaviors (Castro, et al., 2018).

## Relationship between emotional intelligence in elite coaches and the Grit personality

Recent research has found evidence of the relationship between coaches' emotional intelligence and athletes' performance. For instance, a study by Castro, et al. (2018) revealed that athletes with coaches possessing high emotional intelligence displayed improved performance and greater satisfaction in their training. Additionally, athletes reported higher confidence and commitment to the team. Other studies have shown that coaches with high emotional intelligence can better handle stress and conflicts with athletes and other team members (Aguinaga et al., 2023). Coaches' emotional intelligence has also been positively linked to their leadership ability and their capacity to create a positive team environment (Llanos et al., 2023). In this light, emotional intelligence emerges as a crucial factor in athletes' performance and motivation, warranting consideration and evaluation in the selection and training of coaches.

On the other hand, Grit is a psychological construct referring to perseverance and passion for long-term goals, also studied in various contexts like emotional intelligence. According to Duckworth and Quinn (2009), Grit comprises two components: passion and perseverance. Perseverance refers to the ability to work hard and persist despite challenges, while passion pertains to motivation and commitment to long-term goals. Recent research has uncovered a connection between Grit and sports performance. For example, a study by Crust & Clough (2017) found that athletes with higher Grit levels exhibited better performance and greater resilience to injuries. Another study by Atkinson and Martin (2020) indicated that rugby players with higher Grit levels were more likely to be selected for higher-level teams. Moreover, Grit has been identified as a predictor of athletes' motivation and commitment. A study by Stambulova et al. (2021) demonstrated that athletes with higher Grit levels displayed increased intrinsic motivation and greater commitment to the sport.

In the sports context, these skills can be crucial for success and optimal performance. Recent research suggests that athletes with high levels of Grit are better equipped to face challenges and adversities in sports competition, providing them with a competitive advantage over those lacking these skills (Castro, et al., 2020; Swayer, et al., 2018; Laurin, et al., 2023; Duckworth, et al., 2007; Duckworth, et al., 2009).

Given all the aforementioned points, the main hypothesis of this study is to identify whether higher emotional intelligence in coaches is related to greater Grit in practicing taekwondo athletes or if, alternatively, these two variables are not associated. It is noteworthy that this is one of the first attempts to relate these two constructs in taekwondo athletes, as literature investigating their association is scarce and limited. Previous studies on this topic have been conducted in different contexts and disciplines. For instance, a study by Watson and Kleinert (2019) found a positive relationship between coaches' emotional intelligence and athletes' perseverance. In this study, athletes reported higher levels of perseverance and endurance in long-duration sports when their coaches had higher levels of emotional intelligence. Another study by Choi et al. (2020) found that coaches with higher emotional intelligence had a greater ability to handle stressful situations and assist athletes in maintaining a positive focus and perseverant attitude.

Furthermore, coaches' emotional intelligence can influence how they manage relationships with athletes. A study by Laborde et al. (2016) found that coaches with higher emotional intelligence had a greater ability to establish trustful and collaborative relationships with athletes, subsequently enhancing athletes' performance and perseverance. However, in the taekwondo sports context, most research has linked emotional intelligence to other aspects, such as anxiety levels in taekwondists (Castro, et al., 2020), the relationship between emotio-

nal intelligence and taekwondo practice (Fernandez, 2013), as well as an analysis of emotional intelligence and other psychological skills in referees of this discipline (Nabilpour, et al., 2020), but none associated with traits similar to passion and perseverance.

As for Grit, various studies have evaluated this construct in taekwondo athletes (Swayer, et al., 2018; Laurin, et al., 2023), although most of them focus on its relationship with sports performance. It is relevant to highlight that existing studies on the relationship between Grit and emotional intelligence have mostly been conducted in non-athlete populations, such as the study by Agustina et al. (2023), which found a significant relationship between Grit and emotional regulation in high school students. This suggests that these two constructs may be associated. This lack of specific research in taekwondo athletes indicates a gap in the literature and justifies the need to expand knowledge in this area, serving as a fundamental motivation for this study. Therefore, this study will assess the relationship between coaches' emotional intelligence and athletes' Grit and its impact on sports performance. The underlying mechanisms explaining the relationship between these skills and sports performance will be explored, and implications for sports practice will be discussed.

## Methodology

### Design

A descriptive and cross-sectional quantitative study was conducted on a population of Taekwondo practitioners affiliated with sports camps associated with the national Taekwondo organization in the United States (USAT).

### Participants

The sample, comprising (N=470) participants across diverse categories, was conveniently selected by the researchers using a non-probabilistic sampling method. Eligibility criteria mandated participants to be volunteers and affiliated with USA Taekwondo (USAT), residing in proximity or having easy access to the L3 Performance High-Performance Center in The Colony, Texas, and having successfully completed all stages of the study. Furthermore, consent and informed assent were specifically obtained, especially for athletes below the legal age of majority.

### Measurement instruments

To obtain the necessary data, formal permission was sought through letters addressed to the directors of Taekwondo camps. Once authorization was obtained, all participants were invited to an informational meeting where the study's purposes, procedures, and expected outcomes were explained. Participants were provided with a consent and informed assent form for their signatures. Subsequently, basic sociodemographic data, such as age, gender, and category, were collected. Finally, assessments of the main variables of interest in this research were conducted.

Measurements were taken in the morning hours at each Taekwondo camp during the preparatory period when athletes were not in the



competition phase. This timing is crucial as self-reported data can be influenced by the moment of evaluation.

The measurement instrument used to assess the personality trait GRIT in athletes in this research was the Grit Scale questionnaire, developed by Angela Duckworth and Christopher Peterson in 2007 (Duckworth & Peterson, 2007).

The Grit Scale is a self-administered questionnaire consisting of two subscales: consistency of interest (interest and perseverance for long-term goals) and perseverance (persistence and determination despite obstacles) (Duckworth et al., 2007). It comprises 12 items, each with a 5-point Likert scale response ranging from 1 (not like me at all) to 5 (very much like me). Example items include “I am committed for the long run in what I do” and “I like to have a set of goals to work towards” (Duckworth et al., 2007). The Grit Scale questionnaire has demonstrated good internal consistency and construct validity, with consistent results across different populations and cultures (Credé et al., 2017; Eskreis-Winkler et al., 2014). Moreover, it has been used in various research studies across different fields, including education, sports, and health (Eskreis-Winkler et al., 2014; Roberts et al., 2019).

For the assessment of emotional intelligence in coaches, the Schutte Self-Report Emotional Intelligence Test (SSEIT) was chosen (Schutte, Malouff, et al. 1998; Extremera and Fernandez, 2005).

The Schutte Self-Report Emotional Intelligence Test is a measure designed to assess the level of emotional intelligence in individuals. Developed by psychologist Mark Schutte and colleagues in 1998, the test consists of 33 items that measure different aspects of emotional intelligence, such as perception and understanding of one’s own and others’ emotions, as well as emotional regulation. Each item is responded to on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 represents “strongly disagree” and 5 represents “strongly agree.” Total scores are obtained by summing the responses to all items (Schutte, Malouff, et al. 1998; Extremera and Fernandez, 2005).

Procedure

To gather data, formal permission was requested through a letter addressed to the directors and coaches of each taekwondo camp affiliated with USA Taekwondo (USAT). Once authorization was obtained, taekwondo athletes were summoned to the L3 Performance High-Performance Center located in The Colony, Texas. The procedures and objectives of the study were explained, and informed consent and assent documents were provided. Since some athletes were minors, consent was properly signed and completed by the athlete’s parent or responsible guardian. Additionally, sociodemographic data such as age, gender, and group affiliation were recorded.

Data collection took place in the morning when athletes were not in the competition stage. The respective questionnaires were handed out for physical completion. Each assigned coach, along with the researcher, assisted in accurately filling out the questionnaire, addressing any doubts or concerns that arose as the tests were being answered.

Ethical Considerations

Throughout this study, the rights protected by the 2013 Helsinki Declaration were respected. Participants were provided with information about the study’s purpose, procedures to be followed, the

voluntary nature of their participation, and the privacy of their data, formalized through the signing of informed consent. Participants were identified with codes in the database to safeguard their privacy.

Statistical Analysis

To analyze the collected information, all data were entered into an Excel spreadsheet and transferred to the statistical software SPSS Version 25. Categorical variables were described in terms of percentages and frequencies. The normality of data (for samples >50) was checked using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. In the case of continuous variables with non-normal distribution, they were reported as median and interquartile range, while variables with normal distribution were reported as mean and standard deviation. The Pearson correlation coefficient was used to assess the relationship between variables, with a two-tailed significance level set at  $p \leq 0.05$ .

Results

The sample of American taekwondo practitioners affiliated with the USAT was heterogeneous with respect to categories, comprising (n=153) cadets, (n=149) Juniors, and (n=168) seniors. Regarding gender, (n=265) males and (n=205) females were evaluated. The assessed coaches included (n=17) males and (n=3) females. The mean age of the athletes was  $15.2 \pm 3.75$ , and the median age of the coaches was 35.00, with P25=33.00 and P75=46.50.

Table 1. Sociodemographic Characteristics of the Population

Characteristics	N	%
Athletes' Gender		
Male	265	56.38
Female	205	43.62
Total	470	100
Coaches' Gender		
Male	17	15
Female	3	85
Total	20	100
Athletes' Category		
Cadet	153	32.55
Junior	149	31.7
Senior	168	35.74
Total	470	100
	M/ME*	SD/IQR*
Age of Athletes	15.28	$\pm 3.75$
Age of Coaches	35.00*	P25=33.00; P75=46.50*

Note: M = mean; ME = median; SD = standard deviation; IQR = interquartile range; P25 = 25th percentile; P75 = 75th percentile.

According to the results obtained from the athletes and coaches, it was possible to identify that the athletes had a high grit score of 3.96, and the subscale with the highest score was perseverance, suggesting that these athletes are highly determined. On the other hand, the emotional intelligence of the coaches was high, with a score of  $135.25 \pm 8.55$ .



Table 2.  
Measures of central tendency and dispersion of the variables of interest

Characteristics	M	SD	ME	IQR
Total Grit Athletes	3.96	±0.49	4.00	P25=3.60 P75=4.30
Grit Consciousness Interest Athletes	3.82	±0.69	3.80	P25=3.40 P75=4.40
Grit Perseverance Effort Athletes	4.10	±0.52	4.20	P25=3.80 P75=4.20
Emotional Intelligence Coaches	135.25	±8.55	136.00	P25=127.50 P75=142.75

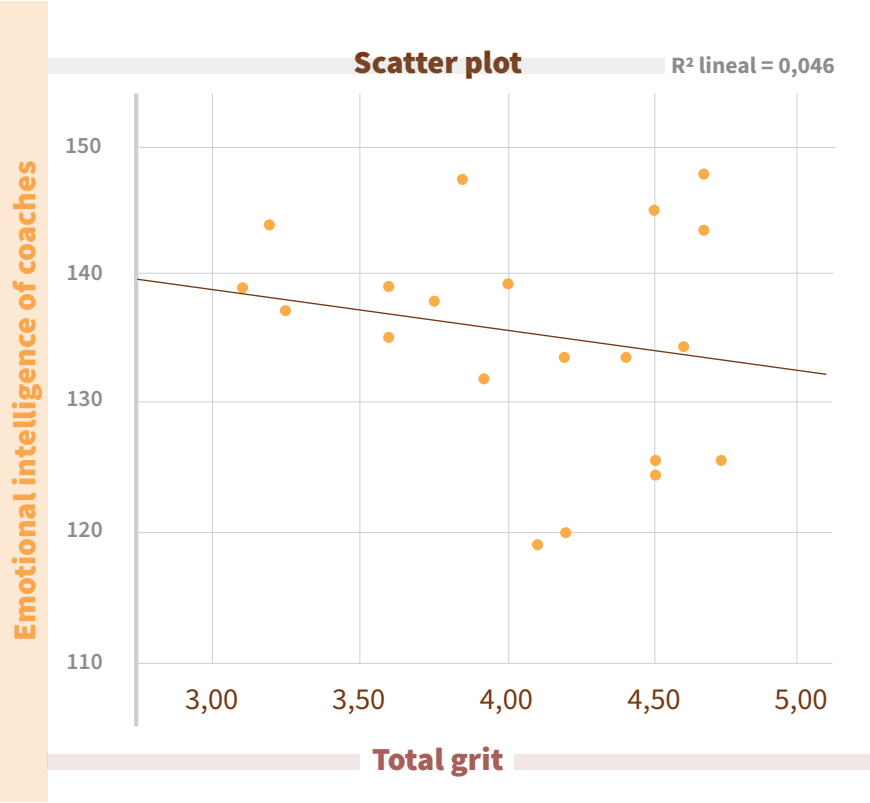
Note: M = mean; ME = median; SD = standard deviation; IQR = interquartile range; P25 = 25th percentile; P75 = 75th percentile.

After the correlation analysis using the Pearson r test, positive and negative relationships were identified. The only positive relationship found was with the variable Grit: Perseverance Effort, suggesting that higher emotional intelligence in coaches is positively correlated with high perseverance effort in athletes, with a strong positive correlation of  $p=0.963$  but not statistically significant.

Table 3.  
Pearson Correlation between Variables of Interest

Characteristics	Emotional Intelligence of Coaches	
	Pearson's r Coefficient	P value
Total Grit	-0.215	0.363
Grit: Consciousness of Interest	-0.349	0.132
Grit: Perseverance Effort	0.011	0.963

Graph 1.  
Simple Scatter Plot between Coaches' Emotional Intelligence and Athletes' Grit



Graph 2.  
Simple Scatter Plot between Coaches' Emotional Intelligence and Athletes' Grit: Awareness of Interest



Graph 3.  
Simple Scatter Plot between Coaches' Emotional Intelligence and Athletes' Grit: Perseverance to Effort



## Discussion

The aim of this research was to determine whether the emotional intelligence of coaches favored the grit (determination) of athletes. According to the findings, it was indicated that there is no statistically significant relationship between emotional intelligence and the grit scale. Likewise, there is no strong relationship between intelligence and the sub-scales of perseverance effort and consciousness of interest.

Despite the aforementioned, some studies did find a relationship between these constructs or similar variables. For example, a study conducted by Laborde, Guillén, et al. (2016) examined the relationship between coaches' emotional intelligence and athletes' perseverance in the sport of triathlon. The results indicated a significant correlation between coaches' emotional intelligence and athletes' perseverance in the sport, suggesting that coaches with higher emotional intelligence might have a positive impact on athletes' motivation and persistence.

Additionally, another study by Davis, et al. 2018 found that athletes' perception of their coaches' emotional intelligence was positively related to their satisfaction in sports and commitment to the team. These findings suggest that coaches with well-developed emotional skills can have a significant impact on athletes' motivation and commitment.

According to the literature, a potential relationship between emotional intelligence and variables related to perseverance has been observed; however, it is important to note that the influence of coaches' emotional intelligence may be affected by other factors, such as the coach's personality and leadership style, as well as the team culture (Thelwell et al. 2008). Therefore, further research is needed to better understand how coaches' emotional intelligence influences athletes' perseverance in different sports contexts.

Research suggests that coaches' emotional intelligence can have a significant impact on athletes' perseverance and motivation in sports. Therefore, attention should be paid to the emotional skills of coaches and their development in training and coaching.

Grit, defined as perseverance and passion for long-term goals, has been identified as a significant predictor of success in various contexts, including sports (Duckworth et al., 2007). Additionally, coaches' emotional intelligence has been shown to be an important factor in athletes' motivation and performance (Ntoumanis et al., 2011). Therefore, the hypothesis has been raised that coaches' emotional intelligence may influence athletes' grit personality.

Several studies have investigated the relationship between coaches' emotional intelligence and athletes' grit personality. For example, in a study by Kim & Shin (2021), a significant positive correlation was found between coaches' emotional intelligence and the grit personality of college football players. The authors concluded that coaches with high emotional intelligence can help athletes develop a stronger grit personality.

Furthermore, in a longitudinal study by Hill et al. (2018), it was found that athletes whose coaches had higher emotional intelligence experienced a significant increase in grit personality throughout the season. The authors suggested that coaches with high emotional intelligence can provide a more positive and supportive environment that promotes athletes' perseverance and passion for long-term goals. This contrasts with our results; due to the cross-sectional nature of our study, it is likely that responses may change over time, particularly in self-reported questionnaires. (Martinez, et al. 2019)

However, there are also studies that have found mixed or null results in the relationship between coaches' emotional intelligence and athletes' grit personality. For example, in a study by Li et al. (2021), no significant correlation was found between coaches' emotional intelligence and the grit personality of college basketball players.

The discrepancies observed in the studies can be attributed to various factors, including the employed methodological design, sociocultural context, the type of studied population, as well as specific aspects such as the age of participants or the sample size (Del Toro, Arévalo et al., 2012). With this study encompassing a diversity of opinions and

involving up to (n=20) coaches with their respective groups of taekwondo practitioners, the potential for obtaining ambivalent results is acknowledged.

In summary, although the results are mixed, evidence suggests that coaches' emotional intelligence may influence athletes' grit personality. More research is needed to fully understand how coaches can foster grit personality in athletes, but emotional intelligence seems to be an important factor to consider. Coaches can benefit from training in emotional intelligence and developing skills to promote perseverance and passion for long-term goals in their athletes.

## Limitations

One of the main limitations of this study is its descriptive focus, as it centered on describing the results and did not seek to establish causal relationships among the findings. However, despite this limitation, the study boasts a substantial sample of evaluated participants. Therefore, it is recommended that future research adopts an experimental design and a more comprehensive explanatory scope, comparing intervention and control groups. Conducting further studies in this area of psychology is necessary to contrast and expand knowledge in this field of application.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, this study did not find a statistically significant relationship between the emotional intelligence of coaches and the grit personality of athletes. Although previous research suggests a possible positive influence of coaches' emotional intelligence on athletes' perseverance and determination, the findings of this particular study do not support that relationship. It is important to consider that other factors, such as the personality and leadership style of the coach, as well as the team culture, may influence the relationship between coaches' emotional intelligence and athletes' grit personality. Further research is required to better understand how coaches can foster grit personality in athletes and how emotional intelligence may play a role in it. Coaches could benefit from training in emotional intelligence and developing skills to promote perseverance and passion for long-term goals in their athletes.

## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest.

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