

Personality Traits and Emotional Intelligence in Elite Taekwondo Athletes

Rasgos de la personalidad e inteligencia emocional en taekwondistas de elite

Lynda Louise Laurin* 

PhD in Philosophy. United States. L3 Performance High-Performance Center.

Abstract

Introduction: The literature has provided evidence demonstrating relationships between certain personality traits and a better ability to regulate and manage emotions. **Objective:** To determine the relationship between different personality traits and emotional intelligence in American Taekwondo practitioners. **Methodology:** Descriptive and quantitative research was conducted in a group of Taekwondo practitioners who are part of sports camps affiliated with the national federation of the United States. The sample consisted of (n=470) participants belonging to different categories within this sport. During the study, personality traits were analyzed using the MINI IPIP, while emotional intelligence was assessed through the Schutte Self-Report Emotional Intelligence Test (SSEIT). **Results:** A negative correlation was identified in the trait of neuroticism (-0.047, $p < 0.310$), indicating that a higher score on the emotional intelligence test is associated with lower neuroticism, and vice versa. The other traits showed positive relationships with emotional intelligence. None of the variables exhibited statistically significant correlations. **Conclusion:** A consistent and significant relationship between personality traits according to the Five-Factor Model and emotional intelligence was not found. However, an inversely proportional relationship between emotional intelligence and the trait of neuroticism was highlighted, as these two aspects differ in terms of emotion management and regulation. Additionally, a trend toward openness to experience was observed in this group of Taekwondo practitioners.

Keywords: Personality traits, Five-Factor Model, emotional intelligence, Taekwondo practitioners, MINI IPIP.

* Correspondence to **Lynda Louise Laurin** Email: llltkd@gmail.com

Resumen

Introducción: La literatura ha proporcionado evidencia que demuestra las relaciones entre ciertos rasgos de la personalidad y una mayor capacidad para regular y gestionar las emociones. **Objetivo:** determinar la relación entre los diferentes rasgos de la personalidad y la inteligencia emocional en taekwondistas estadounidenses.

Metodología: investigación de tipo descriptivo y cuantitativo en un grupo de practicantes de Taekwondo que forman parte de los campamentos deportivos afiliados a la federación nacional de los Estados Unidos. La muestra estuvo conformada por (n=470) participantes pertenecientes a diferentes categorías dentro de este deporte. Durante el estudio, se analizaron los rasgos de la personalidad mediante el uso del MINI IPIP; al mismo tiempo se evaluó la inteligencia emocional a través de la prueba Schutte Self-Report Emotional Intelligence Test (SSEIT). **Resultados:** se identificó una correlación negativa en el rasgo de neuroticismo (-0,047 $p < 0,310$) indicando que una mayor puntuación en el test de inteligencia emocional se relaciona con un menor neuroticismo y viceversa. Los demás rasgos presentaron relaciones positivas con la inteligencia emocional. Ninguna de las variables presentó correlaciones estadísticamente significativas. **Conclusión:** No se encontró una relación consistente y significativa entre los rasgos de personalidad según el modelo de los 5 factores y la inteligencia emocional. Sin embargo, se destacó una relación inversamente proporcional entre la inteligencia emocional y el rasgo de neuroticismo, ya que estos dos aspectos difieren en términos de gestión y regulación de las emociones. Adicionalmente, se observó una tendencia hacia la apertura a la experiencia en este grupo de taekwondistas.

Palabras clave: Rasgos de la personalidad, modelo de los cinco grandes, inteligencia emocional, taekwondistas, MINI IPIP.

INTRODUCTION

Personality, a complex and diverse concept, has been a subject of interest and study for decades, as indicated by prominent researchers (Johnson *et al.*, 2016; DeNeve and Cooper, 1998; Allen and Laborde, 2019). These experts have proposed various theories and approaches to understand and describe the attributes that constitute personality and how they influence our behaviors and relationships with others. One of these theories for describing personality attributes is the well-known Five Factor Model.

Widely accepted in the field of psychology, this model aims to describe and organize personality traits into five fundamental dimensions. These dimensions are known as the “Big Five Traits” or the “Five Factors of Personality,” encompassing extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness to experience (Costa and McCrae, 1980; McCrae and Costa, 1999; Jylhä *et al.*, 2009; Costa and McCrae, 1992). Personality traits are essential elements for understanding our behaviors and interactions with the environment. Extraversion, neuroticism, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness to experience are

prominent examples of these attributes that shape our personality. These traits have the ability to influence multiple aspects of our lives, from the quality of our interpersonal interactions to our emotional state.

For instance, extraversion manifests in sociability, energy, and a desire to seek external stimuli. Researchers like McCrae and Costa (1999) describe it as a trait linked to extroversion, communication, and the ability to enjoy the company of others, while DeNeve and Cooper (1998) identify a positive relationship between extraversion and job satisfaction, as well as participation in social activities. In contrast, neuroticism involves a tendency to experience negative emotions such as anxiety, insecurity, and depression. Watson and Clark (1992) highlight that individuals with high levels of neuroticism tend to experience a wide range of negative emotions, and Jylhä *et al.* (2009) point out that this may be related to a higher risk of mental illnesses. Agreeableness, on the other hand, is characterized by qualities like empathy, generosity, and cooperation. Research such as that conducted by Graziano *et al.* (2007) reveals that agreeable individuals often show a greater willingness for cooperation and solidarity in interpersonal situations. Additionally, Johnson *et al.* (2016) underline the positive correlation between agreeableness and satisfaction in relationships and emotional health. Conscientiousness involves the ability to fulfill commitments and responsibilities, as well as possessing organization and reliability. Costa and McCrae (1992) define conscientious individuals as disciplined, duty-oriented, and goal-directed. Further research, like that of Roberts *et al.* (2007), suggests that conscientiousness is linked to long-term success in academic and professional domains. Lastly, openness to experience is characterized by curiosity, imagination, and aesthetic appreciation. McCrae and Costa (1987) describe open individuals as those who exhibit a greater willingness to explore new ideas and enjoy creative experiences. Silvia (2008) highlights that this openness is associated with creativity and an active pursuit of knowledge.

Understanding each of the traits comprising the Five Factor Model, a series of studies have sought to identify which of these traits is related to better emotional management. It has been observed that certain personality traits are associated with higher emotional intelligence (Bernarás *et al.*, 2011; Jacobo, 2015; Úbeda *et al.*, 2017). The latter is defined as “the ability to perceive, assess, and express emotions accurately, as well as the ability to understand and regulate one’s own emotions and those of others” (Salovey and Mayer, 1990, cited in Goleman, 1995, p. 34). Emotional intelligence plays a crucial role in various aspects of life. According to Mayer and Salovey (1997), “emotional intelligence is a solid predictor of success in life, including personal well-being, interpersonal relationships, and academic and occupational performance” (p. 10). Emotional intelligence can be developed and enhanced over time. According to Brackett and Rivers (2014), “emotional and social education is essential for cultivating emotional intelligence in individuals of all ages” (p. 273). Emotional intelligence has applications in fields such as education, clinical

psychology, and organizational leadership. Goleman (1998) asserts that “skills related to emotional intelligence are crucial for success in leadership and effective decision-making” (p. 94). Therefore, the objective of this study is to determine the relationship between personality traits and emotional intelligence in American taekwondo practitioners.

METHODOLOGY

Design

A quantitative study employing a quasi-experimental observational design was conducted to describe and identify correlations within a sample of elite taekwondo practitioners. The research focused on participants from sports camps sponsored by the United States Taekwondo Association (USAT) during the year 2023.

Population and Sample

The study group consisted of 470 participants from various categories, conveniently selected by the researchers using a non-probabilistic sampling method. Inclusion criteria required participants to be volunteers, members affiliated with the USA Taekwondo (USAT), and to have completed all stages of the study. Informed consent and assent from minor athletes were obtained through appropriate signatures.

Measurement Instruments

The MINI-IPIP scale, a shortened version of the IPIP-FFM scale, was used to assess the five major personality factors: Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Neuroticism, and Intellect/Imagination. This tool consists of 20 items evaluating each of these traits. Participants indicate the extent to which they identify with each item using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (completely disagree) to 5 (completely agree). It is noteworthy that some scale items are presented in reverse, such as the statement “I am not interested in other people’s problems.”

The MINI-IPIP has proven to be a reliable measure, supported by its consistency in repeated tests and validity concerning its ability to relate convergently, discriminatively, and with predefined criteria, according to previous studies (Donnellan *et al.*, 2006; Cooper *et al.*, 2010). To calculate the total score for each trait, the scores of individual scale items are summed. The interpretation of results is as follows: a higher score on a specific trait indicates a greater inclination toward that trait.

To assess the emotional intelligence of the practitioners, the Schutte Self-Report Emotional Intelligence Test (SSEIT) (Schutte, Malouff, *et al.*, 1998; Extremera and Fernandez, 2005) was chosen. The SSEIT is designed to measure the level of emotional intelligence in individuals. Developed by psychologist Mark Schutte and his team in 1998, this test consists of 33 questions evaluating various aspects of emotional intelligence, such as perception and understanding of one's own and others' emotions, as well as emotional regulation. Each question is answered on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 indicates "completely disagree" and 5 indicates "completely agree." Total scores are obtained by summing the responses to all questions (Schutte, Malouff, *et al.*, 1998; Extremera and Fernandez, 2005). Each subtest score is graded and then summed to get the overall score for the participant. Schutte and his colleagues report a reliability score of 0.90 for their Emotional Intelligence Scale. The overall EI score is quite reliable for adults and adolescents; however, the Emotion Utilization subscale has shown low reliability (Ciarrochi, Chan, and Bajgar, 2001).

Ethical Considerations

Throughout this research, strict compliance with the guidelines established by the 1974 Protection of Human Subjects Act, also known as the Biomedical Research Act, was observed. Additionally, respect for fundamental rights as protected by the 2013 Declaration of Helsinki issued by the World Medical Association (Helsinki Declaration and World Medical Association, 2013) was ensured.

Comprehensive information about the research's purpose, procedures involved, the voluntary nature of participation, and the absolute confidentiality of personal data was provided to all participants. In order to ensure full compliance, informed consent was obtained, signed by each participant. Furthermore, the practice of assigning codes to participants in the database instead of using their names was implemented to maximize privacy.

Statistical Analysis

Regarding statistical analysis, all collected data were entered into an Excel spreadsheet and subsequently transferred to the SPSS Version 25 statistical software for analysis. Categorical nature variables were described in terms of percentages and frequencies. To assess the normality of the distribution of continuous variables, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was applied in the case of samples with a size greater than 50. Continuous variables demonstrating a normal distribution were expressed in terms of mean and standard deviation (SD), while those not meeting this condition were presented in terms of median and interquartile range (IQR). Spearman's correlation test was used for correlation analysis, with a bilateral significance level set at $p \leq 0.05$.

RESULTS

The group of taekwondo practitioners from the USAT in the United States that was analyzed showed diversity in terms of categories, consisting of (n=153) cadet athletes, (n=149) junior athletes, and (n=168) senior athletes. Regarding gender, the study included (n=265) males and (n=205) females. The average age of the athletes was 15.2 ± 3.75 years.

Table 1. Sociodemographic Characteristics of the Population

Characteristics	N	%
Athletes' Gender		
Male	265	56,38
Female	205	43,62
Total	470	100
Athletes' Category		
Cadet	153	32,55
Junior	149	31,7
Senior	168	35,74
Total	470	100
	M	SD
Age of Athletes	15,28	$\pm 3,75$

***Note: M = mean; SD = standard deviation**

According to the results presented in both Table 2, it can be identified that the fundamental variables of this study exhibited an abnormal distribution, as their significance was $p < 0.005$. Therefore, the null hypothesis (H0) is rejected, and the alternative hypothesis (H1) is accepted.

Table 2. Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test for fundamental Variables

Characteristics	N	Test Statistic	Significance
Emotional Intelligence	470	0,111	0,000
Extraversion	470	0,088	0,000
Neuroticism	470	0,085	0,000
Agreeableness	470	0,085	0,000
Openness to Experience	470	0,089	0,000
Conscientiousness	470	0,091	0,000

According to the results presented in Table 3, it was possible to identify that the trait most identified by taekwondo practitioners was openness to experience (Mean 4.00 RIC P25=3.50; P75=4.25), and the least identified was neuroticism (Mean 2.50 RIC P25=2.25; P75=3.00). On the other hand, a total score of (Mean 132.0 RIC P25=120; P75=139) was identified in emotional intelligence.

Table 3. Measures of central tendency and dispersion of fundamental variables

Characteristics	N	M	SD	ME	IQR
Emotional Intelligence	470	129,39	±12,40	132,0	P25=120; P75=139
Extraversion	470	3,18	±0,89	3,25	P25=2,50; P75=4,00
Neuroticism	470	2,56	±0,63	2,50	P25=2,25; P75=3,00
Agreeableness	470	3,73	±0,75	3,73	P25=3,25; P75=4,25
Openness to Experience	470	3,86	±0,67	4,00	P25=3,50; P75=4,25
Conscientiousness	470	3,76	±0,74	3,76	P25=3,25 P75=4,25

**Note:* M = mean; ME = median; SD = standard deviation; IQR = interquartile range; P25 = 25th percentile; P75 = 75th percentile; W=watts; w/s = watts/seconds

According to the information presented in Table 4, a negative correlation was identified in the trait of neuroticism, indicating that a higher score in the emotional intelligence test is associated with lower neuroticism and vice versa. The other traits showed positive relationships with emotional intelligence. None of the variables presented statistically significant correlations.

Tabla 4. Spearman's Rho Correlation between the Variables of Interest

Characteristics	Emotional Intelligence	
	Spearman's Rho coefficient	P value
Extraversion	0,027	0,561
Neuroticism	-0,047	0,310
Agreeableness	0,001	0,983
Openness to Experience	0,057	0,218
Conscientiousness	0,018	0,695

DISCUSSION

The main purpose of this study was to analyze the relationship between emotional intelligence and personality traits. A negative correlation was identified between neuroticism and emotional intelligence ($r = -0.047$, $p < 0.310$), suggesting that an increase in emotional intelligence scores is associated with a decrease in neuroticism levels. This inverse relationship can be explained because emotional intelligence is defined as the ability to recognize, understand, and manage one's own emotions, as well as the emotions of others (Lane *et al.*, 2010). Individuals with high emotional intelligence are usually aware of their emotions and have the ability to manage them effectively. They also tend to show empathy and understanding towards the emotions of others, aiding in maintaining healthy interpersonal relationships (Lane *et al.*, 2010; Pacheco y Berrocal, 2004; Pérez *et al.*, 2019). On the other hand, neuroticism is characterized by a tendency to experience negative emotions more frequently and to react exaggeratedly to stress and emotional challenges. This can lead to anxiety, worry, and emotional instability. These arguments suggest an incompatibility between emotional intelligence and neuroticism, explaining the negative relationship between these two constructs (Bernarás *et al.*, 2011; Jacobo, 2015; Úbeda *et al.*, 2017).

Furthermore, openness to experience emerged as a notable trait in this population of taekwondo practitioners, showing a positive correlation with emotional intelligence (Fernández, 2023). This suggests that individuals with higher openness to experience tend to have a greater ability to empathize with others and understand their emotions. This empathetic ability is fundamental in emotional intelligence, involving the perception and responsive understanding of others' emotions (Lane *et al.*, 2010; Fernández, 2023). Individuals with high openness to experience tend to adapt better to changing emotional situations. They can manage both their own emotions and those of others in various circumstances, becoming a key skill within the framework of emotional intelligence.

Openness to experience is also related to an innate desire to learn and understand the surrounding world. This knowledge-seeking inclination can encompass both understanding emotions and their influence on people. In other words, individuals with openness to experience often display a natural interest in developing their emotional intelligence (Bernarás *et al.*, 2011; Úbeda *et al.*, 2017).

Regarding the emotional intelligence scores, it was observed that they behaved similarly when compared to elite Iranian footballers, as they obtained scores of 132.92 ± 10.75 , while our evaluated taekwondo practitioners scored 132.0 (P25=120; P75=139). This comparison can be explained by the fact that elite athletes often develop and exhibit high emotional intelligence due to various specific factors and challenges they face throughout their sports careers (Angoorani *et al.*, 2020). Elite athletes are regularly in high-pressure situations, such as major competitions and crucial matchups. To achieve optimal performance under these circumstances, they must develop emotional skills that enable them to manage stress, anxiety, and psychological pressure effectively. Self-awareness is a key piece in the emotional intelligence puzzle, as elite athletes tend to be highly aware of their emotions and understand how these emotions can influence their performance. This self-awareness facilitates the identification and management of emotions that could hinder their performance (García y Ruiz, 2013).

Additionally, emotional resilience becomes essential in the world of elite sports, as athletes face defeats, injuries, and constant challenges in their careers. High emotional intelligence allows them to recover from these adversities, maintain motivation, and continue to improve. Elite athletes also need to have strong emotional control to avoid impulsive or emotional reactions during games. This involves staying calm in intense situations and making rational decisions at critical moments (Reche *et al.*, 2020).

Furthermore, emotional intelligence is intimately related to the self-regulation of motivation. Since elite athletes face long periods of training and competition, it is essential that they maintain their motivation over time. High emotional intelligence enables them to understand and manage the sources of their motivation. Lastly, effective communication plays a crucial role in sports teams. Athletes with high emotional intelligence can communicate more effectively with their teammates and coaches, which can improve team cohesion and, ultimately, overall performance (Fernández, 2023).

Regarding personality traits according to the 5-factor model, elite taekwondo athletes may exhibit higher openness to experience, and this is due to several factors intrinsically linked to the peculiarities of their sport and personal experiences. Taekwondo is a sport with a considerable international presence, and elite athletes often compete in events around the world (Bridge *et al.*, 2009). This gives them the opportunity to interact with individuals from diverse cultures and backgrounds, stimulating their inclination towards new experiences and perspectives (Vargas *et al.*, 2010; Laurin *et al.*, 2023; Granados *et*

al., 2013). It is important to note that taekwondo is not limited solely to being a sport but also constitutes a martial art with deep philosophical roots. Taekwondo practitioners often feel a genuine interest in the philosophy, history, and traditions associated with this discipline (Abad, 2005). This interest can foster a inclination towards intellectual curiosity and openness to new ideas. Additionally, taekwondo is a sport that requires creativity in the application of its techniques and movements. Elite athletes often explore and develop new strategies and tactics to gain advantages over their opponents. Competition in elite events typically involves facing athletes from different countries and taekwondo styles. This can lead athletes to adapt to different competition approaches and, as a result, develop greater openness to new strategies and approaches (Vargas *et al.*, 2010; Laurin *et al.*, 2023).

Finally, it is important to highlight that elite taekwondo practitioners do not identify with neuroticism for various reasons. Firstly, these athletes undergo rigorous physical and mental training that includes techniques for handling stress and anxiety, enabling them to effectively deal with stressful situations in their sports careers. This preparation reduces the likelihood of experiencing high levels of neuroticism in competitive environments. Additionally, throughout their careers, elite taekwondo athletes develop strong emotional self-control skills (Granados *et al.*, 2013). They learn to stay calm under pressure, control their emotions, and avoid impulsive reactions, reducing the tendency toward excessively negative emotional responses. These athletes have a performance-focused mindset and a constant improvement mindset, allowing them to maintain a positive and constructive attitude instead of falling into negativity or worry. Resilience is another characteristic often observed in elite athletes, as they have faced challenges, injuries, and defeats in their careers and have learned to recover and move forward. This resilience contributes to a lower propensity for neuroticism (Reche *et al.*, 2020). Finally, combat sports, such as taekwondo, require a strong and confident competitive mindset. Elite athletes trust in their abilities and their ability to overcome opponents, providing them with confidence and self-assurance instead of neuroticism-related insecurities (Vargas *et al.*, 2010; Laurin *et al.*, 2023).

Limitations and Strengths

One of the main limitations of this study lies in its purely descriptive and correlational approach, focusing on presenting results by establishing relationships without investigating causality or effects between the findings. However, it is important to note that the study has a considerable sample of participants who were evaluated. Consequently, it is recommended that future research adopt an experimental approach allowing for the comparison of experimental and control groups.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, in this population of taekwondo practitioners, a consistent and significant relationship was not found between personality traits according to the 5-factor model and emotional intelligence. However, an inversely proportional relationship between emotional intelligence and the trait of neuroticism was highlighted, as these two aspects differ in terms of emotion management and regulation. Additionally, a trend towards openness to experience was observed in this group of taekwondo practitioners. This is attributed to the international nature of taekwondo, with diverse philosophical influences and cultural roots. This dynamic and evolving sport requires a high dose of creativity, strategy, and tactics, fostering curiosity and a inclination towards versatility among its practitioners.

Funding Sources

None

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest.

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Recibido: 05 de febrero de 2024

Aceptado: 14 de marzo de 2024