

Leadership Styles and Grit Personality in Elite Taekwondo Coaches: A Cross- Sectional Correlational Study

*Estilos de liderazgo y personalidad grit en entrenadores de
taekwondo de élite: estudio correlacional transversal*

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ABSTRACT

Leadership styles and grit personality are critical constructs in sport psychology and coaching effectiveness. This study aimed to determine the relationship between leadership styles and grit personality in elite taekwondo coaches. A quantitative, descriptive-correlational, cross-sectional design was applied to a sample of 20 coaches affiliated with USA Taekwondo (USAT). Leadership styles were assessed using the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ 5X), and grit personality was measured using the Grit Scale. Results revealed a statistically significant negative relationship between laissez-faire leadership and grit personality ($p < 0.001$), including its subdimensions of consistency of interest and perseverance of effort. Coaches with higher grit scores were less likely to exhibit passive leadership behaviors. Transformational leadership emerged as the predominant style ($M = 3.20 \pm 0.59$), while grit levels were high ($M = 4.25 \pm 0.44$), particularly in perseverance ($M = 4.45 \pm 0.40$). No significant associations were found between grit and transactional or transformational leadership. These findings suggest that higher levels of passion and perseverance are inversely associated with non-leadership tendencies, reinforcing the relevance of active leadership approaches in elite sport coaching contexts.

Keywords: Transformational Leadership; Laissez-Faire Leadership; Grit Scale; Sport Coaching; Personality Traits; Taekwondo; Quantitative Research

RESUMEN

Los estilos de liderazgo y la personalidad grit son constructos clave en la psicología del deporte y la eficacia del entrenamiento. El objetivo de este estudio fue determinar la relación entre los estilos de liderazgo y la personalidad grit en entrenadores de taekwondo de élite. Se empleó un diseño cuantitativo, descriptivo-correlacional y de corte transversal en una muestra de 20 entrenadores afiliados a USA Taekwondo (USAT). Los estilos de liderazgo se evaluaron mediante el Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ 5X), y la personalidad grit mediante la Grit Scale. Los resultados evidenciaron una relación negativa y estadísticamente significativa entre el liderazgo laissez-faire y la personalidad grit ($p < 0,001$), incluyendo sus dimensiones de consistencia de interés y perseverancia en el esfuerzo. Los entrenadores con mayores niveles de grit mostraron menor tendencia a adoptar estilos de liderazgo pasivos. El liderazgo transformacional fue el predominante ($M = 3,20 \pm 0,59$), mientras que los niveles de grit fueron altos ($M = 4,25 \pm 0,44$), especialmente en perseverancia ($M = 4,45 \pm 0,40$). No se encontraron asociaciones significativas entre grit y los estilos transaccional o transformacional. Estos hallazgos sugieren que mayores niveles de pasión y perseverancia se asocian inversamente con el no liderazgo, destacando la relevancia de enfoques activos en el entrenamiento deportivo de élite.

Palabras Clave: Liderazgo transformacional; Liderazgo laissez-faire; Escala Grit; Entrenamiento deportivo; Rasgos de personalidad; Taekwondo; Investigación cuantitativa

INTRODUCTION

Leadership in sports plays an essential role in the development and performance of athletes and teams. It has been demonstrated that effective leadership can influence motivation, team cohesion, decision-making, and ultimately, competitive success. Similarly, leadership is crucial for fostering an environment where athletes can maximize their potential and achieve exceptional levels of performance. Sports leaders can influence team culture, individual and collective motivation, and effective resource management (Chelladurai, 2007, p. 225).

Leadership in sports can make the difference between a talented team that fails to reach its potential and one that exceeds expectations. Leaders can create a learning environment, open communication, and trust that enables athletes to perform at their best under high-pressure situations (Weinberg & Gould, 2019, p. 346). Effective coaches are inspiring leaders who can guide athletes toward shared goals and trigger intrinsic motivation. Their influence can transcend athletic performance and have a positive impact on athletes' personal and professional lives (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003, p. 757).

Through literature, various leadership styles distinguishing leaders have been investigated. An example is transactional leadership, characterized by a leadership approach based on the exchange relationship between the leader and followers. In this approach, clear expectations are set, and rewards and sanctions are used to stimulate and guide performance. Numerous studies have explored the impacts of transactional leadership in various contexts, including the sports realm. According to Avolio, Bass, and Jung (1999), transactional leadership involves creating agreements and pacts between the leader and followers, emphasizing the importance of reward exchange and meeting established expectations.

Another widely recognized style in literature is transformational leadership, characterized by inspiring and motivating followers to reach their maximum potential and achieve goals beyond expectations. This leadership style has been extensively studied in sports, demonstrating its positive impact on athletes' performance and satisfaction (Kao and Sai, 2016). Bass & Riggio (2006) describe transformational leadership as a process in which leaders foster intrinsic motivation, personal development, and followers' commitment. Transformational leaders create an inspiring vision, provide a positive behavioral model, and stimulate athletes' growth and development.

Finally, we encounter *laissez-faire* leadership, a leadership style characterized by the leader's lack of intervention or active direction. *Laissez-faire* leaders tend to be passive, avoiding making decisions or providing guidance to followers. Although this style may have certain benefits in specific contexts, it can also have negative effects, especially in a coaching setting. A *laissez-faire* coach may not provide the necessary direction and guidance for athletes' proper development. This can result in confusion about expectations and goals, negatively affecting team performance (Zenger & Folkman, 2014). The lack of constant supervision and feedback from the coach can lead to a lack of improvement and athlete growth. Feedback is essential for identifying areas of improvement and providing an opportunity to correct mistakes (Eisenbach, Watson, & Pillai, 1999). The absence of a leader who inspires and motivates athletes could result in a decrease in commitment and motivation. *Laissez-faire* leaders often do not provide the necessary stimulus to maintain a high level of effort and dedication (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

On the other hand, there is a construct known as grit personality, which has gained relevance in the sports realm due to its influence on athletes' performance and success. Grit is defined as a combination of passion and long-term perseverance in pursuing goals. Grit personality, combining passion for long-term goals with perseverance, is fundamental for success in sports. Coaches showing high levels of grit tend to maintain focus, persist despite obstacles, and constantly strive for improvement, making a difference in enhancing their athletes' competitive performance (Duckworth et al., 2007, p. 1087).

Although there is limited evidence in the literature suggesting a significant relationship between leadership and grit personality, it is possible that the latter may impact the

leadership styles adopted by coaches, influencing their ability to inspire athletes toward persistence and determination in achieving long-term goals. Coaches with a high degree of grit have the potential to become role models, fostering resilience and perseverance in athletes (Duckworth et al., 2007, p. 1087). Additionally, coaches have the ability to shape their approach toward the long-term development of athletes. Those with a pronounced grit personality may adopt a leadership style that promotes both persistence and continuous effort for both individual and collective improvement (Feltz et al., 2018, p. 314).

Grit personality in coaches can have a direct influence on cultivating a grit mindset in athletes, through the nuance of their leadership style. By encouraging passion, perseverance, and resilience in the team, an increase in commitment and persistence towards achieving sports goals can be achieved (Knechtle et al., 2020, p. 17). Despite this, it is still necessary to establish robust relationships between these two constructs. In light of all the aforementioned, the fundamental purpose of this study was to establish the relationship between different leadership styles and the presence of grit personality in elite coaches

METHODOLOGY

Design

A cross-sectional, descriptive-correlational, and quantitative research was conducted with a group of elite taekwondo coaches participating in sports camps organized by the national taekwondo entity in the United States (USAT).

Population and sample

The study group consisted of 20 coaches selected by the researchers using a non-random sampling method, specifically chosen for convenience. Inclusion criteria required participants to be volunteers, affiliated with USA Taekwondo (USAT), and to have completed all phases of the study. Informed written consent was obtained with proper authorization.

Instruments

For the assessment of coaches' leadership, the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ 5X) was chosen, a tool used to measure leadership style in various organizational environments. Developed by Bass & Avolio in 2000, MLQ 5X aims to assess various aspects of leadership and followers' perceptions of their leaders. The MLQ 5X questionnaire consists of three primary scales for leadership evaluation, addressing different dimensions: transformational, transactional, and Passive/Laissez-faire. The questionnaire employs Likert scales, where participants express their level of agreement or disagreement with statements related to their leaders' behavior (Bass & Avolio, 2000).

The assessment instrument used to analyze the GRIT personality trait in coaches within this study was the Grit Scale questionnaire, developed by Angela Duckworth and Christopher Peterson in 2007 (Duckworth and Peterson, 2007). The Grit Scale is a self-reported questionnaire with two subscales: consistency of interest (interest and perseverance toward long-term goals) and perseverance (persistence and determination despite obstacles) (Duckworth et al., 2007). It consists of 12 statements, each with a 5-point Likert scale response ranging from 1 (not at all like me) to 5 (very much like me). Statements include examples such as “I am committed to long-term goals” and “I like having a set of goals to work toward” (Duckworth et al., 2007). The Grit Scale questionnaire has demonstrated strong internal consistency and construct validity, yielding similar results across various populations and cultures (Credé et al., 2017; Eskreis-Winkler et al., 2014). It has also been used in various research fields, including education, sports, and health (Eskreis-Winkler et al., 2014; Roberts et al., 2019).

Procedure

To obtain the necessary data, formal permission was obtained through letters addressed to the directors of Taekwondo camps. Once authorization was granted, all coaches were invited to an informative meeting where the study’s objectives, methods, and expected results were explained. A form of informed consent was provided for them to sign. Essential sociodemographic data, such as age and gender, were collected. Finally, measurements of the main variables of interest in this research were carried out.

Data collection took place in the morning hours at each taekwondo camp during the preparation phase, i.e., when coaches were not in the competition stage. This is crucial as self-reported data can vary depending on the assessment timing.

Regarding how coaches exercise their leadership, the MLQ 5X questionnaire was used, physically provided to coaches for completion. Similarly, it was for the evaluation of the GRIT personality. Clarifications were provided for any doubts or questions during the process. It was ensured that each participant responded completely, and the obtained data were entered into a database.

Ethical considerations

Throughout this research, the guidelines established by the National Research Act of 1974, also known as the Biomedical Research Act, were strictly followed, as well as the rights safeguarded by the 2013 Declaration of Helsinki. Participants were provided with comprehensive information about the study’s purpose, procedures involved, the voluntary nature of their participation, and the confidentiality safeguarding of their personal data. To ensure compliance, informed and signed consent was obtained from each participant.

Additionally, to preserve their privacy, participants were assigned codes in the database instead of using their names directly.

Statistical analysis

To analyze the collected data, they were entered into an Excel spreadsheet and subsequently transferred to the statistical software SPSS Version 25. Categorical variables were described in terms of frequencies and percentages. To assess data normality (for samples less than 50), the Shapiro-Wilk test was applied. For continuous variables showing a non-normal distribution, they were presented using the median and interquartile range, while those with a normal distribution were presented using the mean and standard deviation. To evaluate the relationship between variables, the Pearson correlation coefficient R or Spearman's Rho was used, considering a bilateral significance level set at $p \leq 0.05$.

RESULTS

Based on the information presented in Table 1, it is observed that the coach population is predominantly composed of men, with a total of 17 male participants, while female coaches represent a total of 3 participants, making a total of 20 participants overall. Regarding the age of the coaches, a measure of central tendency and dispersion was determined, placing the average age at 35.00 years, with a 25th percentile (P25) of 33.00 years and a 75th percentile (P75) of 46.50 years.

Table 1.
Sociodemographic characteristics of the population

Characteristics	N	%
Coaches' Gender		
Male	17	15
Female	3	85
Total	20	100
	ME	IQR
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 presented in both Table 2, it can be observed that only the variable of transactional leadership exhibited a non-normal distribution, as its significance was $p < 0.005$. Therefore, we reject the null hypothesis (H0) and accept the alternative hypothesis (H1). On the other hand, the variables of Transformational Leadership, Not being a leader, and Grit personality showed a normal distribution, so we accept H0.

Table 2.
Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test for Fundamental Variables

Characteristics	N	Test Statistic	Significance
Grit Personality	20	0,195	0,044
Grit: Consistency of Interest	20	0,164	0,162
Grit: Perseverance in Effort	20	0,193	0,050
Transactional Leadership	20	0,300	0,000*
Transformational Leadership	20	0,228	0,008
Non-leadership	20	0,188	0,061

According to the information presented in Table 3, it was possible to identify that the sample of coaches was predominantly characterized by a transformational leadership style with a mean of 3.20 ± 0.59 . These coaches are known for seeking to inspire and motivate athletes to reach their full potential, transform them, and help them improve personally. On the other hand, the leadership style with which they felt least identified was Laissez-faire, also known as “Not being a leader.” Additionally, a high score on the Grit scale was identified, corresponding to an average of 4.25 ± 0.44 , along with strong perseverance in effort at 4.45 ± 0.40 .

Table 3.
Measures of Central Tendency and Dispersion for Key Variables

Characteristics	N	ME	IQR
Transactional Leadership	20	2,69	P25= 2,53; P75= 2,97
		N	SD
Transformational Leadership	20	3,20	$\pm 0,59$
Non-leadership	20	0,96	$\pm 0,60$
Grit Personality	20	4,25	$\pm 0,44$
Grit: Consistency of Interest	20	4,05	$\pm 0,55$
Grit: Perseverance in Effort	20	4,45	$\pm 0,40$

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

In correspondence with the correlation analysis, it was determined that transactional and transformational leadership are not strongly associated with grit personality, consistency of interest, and perseverance in effort. On the other hand, a negative and statistically significant relationship was identified between “Not being a leader,” grit personality ($p < 0.000$), consistency of interest ($p > 0.000$), and perseverance in effort ($p < 0.002$). This suggests that the higher the participants score on these personality scales, the less they identify with the Laissez-faire leadership style, and vice versa.

Table 4.
Spearman’s Rho and Pearson’s r Correlation between the Variables of Interest

Characteristics	Grit Personality		Grit: Consistency of Interest		Grit: Perseverance in Effort	
	Spearman’s Rho Coefficient	P value	Spearman’s Rho Coefficient	P value	Spearman’s Rho Coefficient	P value
	/ Pearson’s r Coefficient		/ Pearson’s r Coefficient		/ Pearson’s r Coefficient	
Transactional Leadership	-0,025*	0,916	-0,128*	0,589	0,115*	0,628
Transformational Leadership	0,095	0,691	0,029	0,904	0,164	0,489
Non-leadership	-0,815	0,000**	-0,818	0,000**	-0,640	0,002**

*Note: * = Pearson’s r Test; ** = Statistically Significant*

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to determine the relationship between leadership styles and grit personality. According to the findings, only the variable “Not being a leader” or laissez-faire leadership showed negative and statistically significant correlations. These results suggest an inverse relationship between GRIT personality and laissez-faire leadership. As individuals show more determination and passion for their goals, they are more likely to adopt a leadership style that provides more active and structured guidance rather than a laissez-faire leadership, which may not offer the necessary guidance and support to achieve those goals (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Duckworth, 2016; Duckworth, Peterson, et al., 2007; Eagly, Johannesen et al., 2003; Skogstad et al., 2007).

GRIT often involves intrinsic motivation, where individuals are driven by their passion and personal commitment to achieving meaningful goals (Duckworth, 2016; Duckworth, Peterson, et al., 2007). Laissez-faire leadership may not provide the level of intrinsic motivation needed to foster GRIT, as those who wish to adopt it may not feel engaged or inspired, fostering an unstructured leadership environment (Eagly, Johannesen et al., 2003; Bass & Riggio, 2006). Laissez-faire leadership is often associated with role ambiguity and a lack of clarity regarding responsibilities and expectations. This ambiguity could hinder individuals identifying with this leadership style from focusing and persevering in their long-term goals, affecting the relationship between laissez-faire leadership and GRIT (Skogstad, Einarsen, et al., 2007). Moreover, GRIT implies self-discipline and personal structure to continuously work toward long-term goals (Duckworth & Eskreis, 2013; Laurin, Sáez et al., 2021). Laissez-faire leadership may not provide the necessary structure to facilitate the development of the self-discipline and personal organization required for GRIT (Sharma & Singh, 2013; Bass & Riggio, 2006; Avolio & Bass, 2000). In this context, we can infer that the lack of relationship between laissez-faire leadership and GRIT may result from the incompatibility of elements and values associated with these two concepts. While GRIT is based on passion, perseverance, and self-discipline, laissez-faire leadership tends to lack the direction and support needed to encourage and sustain these characteristics.

Regarding the leadership style most identified with by this population, which was transformational, it can be said that transformational leadership has been identified as an effective approach for development and performance in the sports context (Arthur, C. A., Bastardo, et al., 2017; Kao & Tsai, 2016; Turnnidge, & Côté, 2020). Transformational leaders in sports inspire and motivate athletes by creating a shared vision, promoting individual growth, and fostering a sense of purpose and unity in the team. These leaders use effective communication, empathy, and constructive feedback to positively influence athlete performance and well-being (Turnnidge, & Côté, 2020). The relationship between transformational leadership and sports has been studied in various sports disciplines and competition levels. Transformational coaches can have a significant impact on athletes' intrinsic motivation, commitment to the sport, and willingness to overcome challenges (Kao & Tsai, 2016). Furthermore, transformational leadership has been found to be positively related to team performance, athlete satisfaction, and personal development (Arthur, C. A., Bastardo, et al., 2017; Kao & Tsai, 2016).

The results of this study provide valuable information about participants' GRIT personality, with an average score of 4.25 on the measurement scale. The obtained score suggests that participants exhibit a significant level of passion and perseverance in pursuing long-term goals (Duckworth et al., 2007). The average score of 4.25 on the GRIT scale is at a moderate to high level, indicating that participants possess a notable degree of determination and commitment to facing challenges and working toward long-term

goals. These findings are consistent with previous research demonstrating the importance of GRIT in achieving accomplishments and success in various contexts, including sports (Duckworth et al., 2007). In comparison with a study conducted by Martínez-Moreno et al., in 2021, involving 335 coaches from various sports clubs, average scores of 2.94 ± 0.83 on the consistency of interest subscale and 3.93 ± 0.53 on the passion subscale were found, which are lower than the results presented here, despite evaluating populations with similar characteristics. On the other hand, the average Grit scores of the coaches in our study are higher than those found by Musso et al. in 2019 and the averages for 25-year-old adults identified by Sigmundsson et al. in 2020. This difference may be justified because the participants in our study are elite coaches, while the previously mentioned studies assessed ordinary individuals. Therefore, it can be inferred that coaches must possess higher levels of grit since they play a fundamental role in the success and holistic development of athletes, and it is essential that they exemplify and encourage these qualities. By modeling and promoting determination, passion, and perseverance, coaches can inspire athletes to overcome obstacles and strive continuously to achieve their goals.

Limitations and strengths

It is evident that the focus of this study is novel, as it is one of the few attempts to evaluate Grit with leadership styles, especially among coaches, as most studies focus on athletes. However, this may limit discussions due to the scarce literature on these two constructs.

Another limitation is the selection of the population, which was non-probabilistic, compromising the external validity of the study, and the methodology may not be extrapolated to apply to other populations. It is recommended for future studies to use probabilistic samples.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion drawn from these results is that as the score on the GRIT scale (measuring passion and perseverance) increases, the presence and influence of laissez-faire leadership decrease. This implies that coaches who show more passion and perseverance in pursuing their goals are less likely to be satisfied or content with adopting a laissez-faire leadership approach, characterized by delegation and lack of supervision. On the other hand, it was identified that the leadership style most identified with by this population was transformational. This style is positively related to team performance, athlete satisfaction, and personal development. It was also determined that coaches have high levels of grit compared to previous studies. The combination of high determination and adopting transformational leadership can be an excellent alternative to improving athletes' sports performance.

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