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ANALYSIS OF KARATE ATHLETES' EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO COMPETITION PERFORMANCE

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ABSTRAK

The high cognitive and emotional demands in martial arts, particularly in karate competitions, create intense psychological pressure that requires athletes to regulate their emotions effectively, making emotional intelligence a crucial mechanism that protects athletes from anxiety and performance decline while enabling them to maintain focus, control techniques, and make accurate decisions during matches. This study aims to analyze the dynamics of karate athletes' emotional intelligence and its relationship with performance in competitive situations. This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study design involving six athletes and two coaches. Data collection was conducted through observation, semi-structured interviews, questionnaires, and documentation, then analyzed using NVivo to identify themes and conceptual relationships. The results show that emotional intelligence, which includes emotional awareness, emotional control, and self-motivation, plays a significant role in maintaining the stability of athletes' performance during competitions. Data visualization reveals that competitive pressure is multidimensional, including nervousness, pressure, frustration, worry, and fear. Athletes with good emotional regulation skills tend to be better at managing anxiety, maintaining focus, and maintaining the quality of their techniques and decision-making. These findings confirm that emotional intelligence functions as a protective mechanism against performance decline due to match pressure. Therefore, the development of emotional intelligence needs to be systematically integrated into karate athlete training programs to support long-term performance consistency.

Keyword: *Emotional Intelligence, Karate, Athletes, Competition Performance, Emotion Regulation, Competitive Anxiety.*

INTRODUCTION

In competitive sports, particularly martial arts such as karate, an athlete's performance is not only determined by physical strength and technical skills but is also strongly influenced by complex psychological factors, particularly the ability to regulate emotions during competition. Karate has unique competitive characteristics compared to many other sports, including a rapid point-scoring system, the need for split-second tactical decision-making, and the potential for physical contact and injury, all of which can significantly increase the emotional pressure athletes experience during matches. These conditions require athletes to remain calm, focused, and able to control their emotional responses as match dynamics rapidly change.

Research indicates that combat sports often generate high levels of psychological stress because athletes must make quick decisions under intense competitive pressure (Fernández et al., 2020). Emotional intelligence is considered an important psychological factor that helps athletes manage emotional responses in competitive situations (Aditya et al., 2025). Several recent studies also show that emotional regulation abilities contribute to maintaining athletes' performance stability when facing high competitive stress (Nawir 1a-E et al., 2018) emotional intelligence has been found to support concentration, confidence, and decision-making quality among martial arts athletes during matches (Sonjaya et al., 2024) Similar findings were also reported by (Guangqi et al., 2025) who emphasized that emotional intelligence plays an important role in supporting athletes' performance consistency in competitive environments.

Emotional intelligence is the ability to recognize and manage one's own emotions, motivate oneself, understand others' emotions, and build effective social relationships (Goleman, 1998). In the context of sports performance, emotional intelligence helps athletes regulate emotional responses and make more effective decisions during competition. Emotional intelligence also helps athletes manage stress and maintain focus in high-pressure situations, which is crucial when they must quickly evaluate tactical options during a match (Esposito et al., 2024). For example, when a karate athlete is behind in points, the ability to manage anxiety and frustration helps the athlete think more clearly and choose the most appropriate strategy, such as increasing attacking intensity to gain points or defending while waiting for an opponent's mistake. Athletes with well-developed emotional intelligence are better able to remain composed, analyze the match situation objectively, and adjust their tactics according to the competition dynamics (Campo et al., 2016) explain that individuals with higher emotional intelligence tend to demonstrate stronger mental resilience and greater psychological adaptability, enabling them to respond more effectively to challenging and stressful competitive situations.

However, in reality, the decline in karate athletes' performance is often not caused by limitations in physical ability or technical skills, but rather by their inability to regulate emotions when facing competitive pressure. Emotional disturbances such as excessive anxiety, loss of concentration, and impulsive reactions can disrupt how effectively athletes apply strategies and techniques during matches. In karate, especially in kumite, athletes must coordinate speed, timing, balance, and strike accuracy within a very short reaction time. Emotional instability can interfere with motor coordination, leading to less precise movements and reduced effectiveness of attacks or defensive actions. According to (Tamminen et al., 2022), unmanaged negative emotions can disrupt athletes' focus and movement coordination during competitions.

In karate, where victory is often determined within fractions of a second, the inability to control emotions can directly affect reaction speed, timing accuracy, and the precision of techniques performed during kumite exchanges or kata sequences. When athletes experience high levels of anxiety or emotional pressure, their motor responses may become slower and less controlled, leading to mistimed attacks, ineffective blocking, or technical errors that reduce scoring opportunities. (Friesen, 2020) found that competitive anxiety is associated with poorer decision-making quality among high-performance athletes, which in the context of karate may lead to inappropriate tactical choices such as attacking at the wrong moment or failing to anticipate an opponent's movement. Consequently, poor emotional regulation can significantly reduce the overall performance of karate athletes during competition.

From a theoretical perspective, factors that can interfere with athletes' cognitive functions, such as focus, behavior control, and tactical decision-making, can be caused by an inability to control emotions. Emotional intelligence is a mental ability that influences emotional responses to stress and environmental pressures, according to (Mayer et al., 2019). However, in sports coaching, especially karate, the training approach still tends to focus on physical and technical aspects, while emotional intelligence development has not been included in specially designed training programs. (Alif et al., 2024) emphasizes that an imbalance between physical and psychological training can prevent athletes from achieving their best performance levels. Therefore, there is a theoretical difference between the understanding of emotional intelligence

as an important component of karate athletes' performance and its practice in the coaching system.

To address the decline in performance among karate athletes due to difficulties managing emotions during competition, it is important to understand how emotional processes influence athletes' behavior and decision-making in competitive situations. Rather than focusing directly on improving performance outcomes, this study explores how emotional intelligence operates within the competitive experiences of karate athletes and how emotional regulation mechanisms shape their responses to pressure. Understanding these mechanisms is essential for coaches and sport practitioners in designing training environments that support athletes' psychological readiness alongside physical and technical preparation.

Within emotional intelligence theory, emotional self-awareness, impulse control, and the ability to positively interpret competitive pressure are considered important components in managing emotional responses during performance. Recent research suggests that adaptive emotion regulation strategies help individuals manage negative emotional reactions before they interfere with behavior and performance in demanding situations (Murat Ozan & Ismail Secer, 2022). In the context of sport, emotional regulation training has been shown to support athletes in maintaining concentration, emotional stability, and effective decision-making during high-pressure competitions (Campo et al., 2019). Therefore, exploring how karate athletes experience and regulate emotions during competition can provide deeper insights into the psychological mechanisms that influence their performance dynamics.

Experience-based psychological training, such as emotional communication between coaches and athletes, competition pressure simulations, and post-match reflection, is the ideal approach. This analysis aims to provide empirical insights to help athletes, coaches, and karate training managers improve athletes' emotional readiness for competition (Aliyas et al., 2024). Contextual and reflective psychological methods improve athletes' emotional awareness better than common psychological interventions. In addition, there is evidence that emotional intelligence-based approaches can improve martial artists' mental resilience and performance consistency. (Gucciardi et al., 2021) emphasizing that a nurturing environment that supports emotional growth will help athletes better adapt to the pressures of competition. Ideally, karate athlete training programs should combine emotional intelligence with physical and technical training. According to sports psychology theory, peak performance can only be achieved through a balance of physical, technical, and psychological readiness. However, in reality, athlete training programs still treat psychology as an additional component rather than the main focus of training. (Syafira et al., 2025) saying that many sports coaching environments fail to combine psychological skills with athletes' daily training.

Most research on emotional intelligence in sports still uses a correlational, quantitative approach, which tends to emphasize relationships between variables but has not fully described the emotional dynamics athletes experience in real competition situations. Quantitative studies often focus on measuring levels of emotional intelligence and their statistical association with performance outcomes, while the complex emotional experiences that occur during matches remain less explored. To better understand athletes' subjective experiences—such as how they perceive pressure, interpret emotional responses, and manage performance during competition a qualitative approach is considered more appropriate because it allows deeper exploration of athletes' lived experiences and contextual factors (Acebes-Sánchez et al., 2021).

This condition indicates a gap between existing coaching practices and the focus of previous research, particularly regarding the development of emotional intelligence among karate athletes. Although emotional control is frequently emphasized in training environments, few studies have examined how athletes actually experience, interpret, and regulate emotions in real competitive situations. Emotional intelligence is understood as the ability to perceive, understand, and manage emotions effectively in oneself and others (Sagitarius, 2020). In competitive sport contexts, emotional responses such as anxiety, pressure, and motivation play an important role in influencing athlete behavior and performance (Emmerling & Cherniss, 2025). Therefore, further

qualitative investigation is needed to understand the mechanisms of emotional intelligence within the competitive context of karate.

Based on empirical and theoretical research, it can be concluded that emotional intelligence is a psychological factor that greatly influences the performance of karate athletes. Emotional intelligence refers to the capacity to recognize, regulate, and utilize emotions effectively in various situations (Bru-Luna et al., 2021). Poor emotional control skills can affect athletes' focus, decision-making, and behavioral balance during competition. Emotion regulation theory explains that the ability to manage emotional responses allows individuals to maintain cognitive stability and optimal functioning under pressure (Kim et al., 2024). In sport psychology, emotional regulation is closely related to maintaining optimal performance during competition (Nam et al., 2025). However, there is still a gap between ideal concepts and their application in practice, both in management and in academic research. Therefore, this study is significant for exploring in depth the dynamics of emotional intelligence in karate athletes and its relationship with performance in competition, in order to contribute, theoretically and practically, to the improvement of more comprehensive sports coaching.

However, this study has several limitations that must be considered when interpreting the results. This study only focuses on the experiences and views of the research subjects in a specific context, so the results cannot be generalized to all karate athletes. Qualitative research generally aims to understand phenomena within a specific context rather than producing findings that can be generalized broadly (Hamilton & Finley, 2019). This study emphasizes the analysis of the emotional intelligence dimension without involving other psychological variables that may also affect athlete performance, such as motivation to achieve, self-confidence, and anxiety during competition, which are recognized as important psychological factors influencing sport performance. Furthermore, this study was conducted within a limited time frame, so it was not able to capture the dynamics of changes in athletes' emotional intelligence over the long term. The data collection process relied on interviews and observations, which contain potential subjectivity from both researchers and respondents, a characteristic commonly found in qualitative research (Chand, 2025). Therefore, the results of this study should be interpreted as a contextual description that reflects the circumstances at the time of the study, rather than as definitive conclusions.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative, multiple-case study design to obtain an in-depth understanding of karate athletes' emotional intelligence and its relationship with performance during competitions. Qualitative research emphasizes understanding human experiences, perceptions, and meanings within their natural context (Usman et al., 2025). A multiple case study design allows the researcher to explore similarities and differences across participants' experiences, thereby providing a richer, more contextualized understanding of emotional processes within competitive karate environments. This approach focuses on athletes' and coaches' subjective experiences, perceptions, and interpretations of emotion management during training and competition, enabling a comprehensive exploration of how emotional intelligence supports performance stability. Emotional intelligence theory explains that individuals' ability to recognize, understand, and manage emotions plays an important role in behavior regulation and performance in demanding situations (Kim et al., 2024).

The research participants consisted of six active karate athletes and two coaches who were directly involved in the training process. Participants were selected using purposive sampling based on several criteria: athletes who trained regularly, had participated in at least one official competition within the last two years, held blue to brown belt ranks, and were willing to participate in interviews. Purposive sampling is commonly used in qualitative research to select participants who possess specific characteristics relevant to the research objectives, enabling a deeper understanding of the phenomenon being studied (Hamilton & Finley, 2019). These belt levels were intentionally selected because they represent intermediate-level athletes who already

possess sufficient technical mastery and competitive experience but are still developing psychological maturity and emotional regulation during competition. In sport psychology, intermediate athletes are often considered to be at a developmental stage where psychological skills, including emotional control and coping strategies, become increasingly important for performance improvement. This stage is considered important because athletes at the intermediate level often experience increasing competitive pressure while still refining their psychological coping strategies.

Data were collected through observation, semi-structured interviews, questionnaires, and documentation. The use of multiple data collection techniques is intended to strengthen the validity of qualitative research through methodological triangulation. The questionnaire was used as a methodological triangulation tool to support qualitative findings by providing descriptive information about athletes' emotional intelligence tendencies. The questionnaire indicators were adapted from the Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS), which measures four main dimensions of emotional intelligence self-emotion: appraisal, others' emotion appraisal, emotion regulation, and use of emotion (Ramadhani et al., 2016). Respondents rated each statement using a frequency scale ranging from Never to Very Often. Interviews were conducted to explore athletes' emotional experiences during competition, the types of competitive pressure they encounter, emotion regulation strategies, and their perceived influence on performance. Observation focused on athletes' behavioral responses during training and simulated match situations, while documentation served as supporting data to strengthen the credibility and trustworthiness of the research findings.

Conceptually, the questionnaire indicators were organized into a conceptual mapping of emotional intelligence components, as follows: Emotional Intelligence (Main Construct).

1. Self-Emotion Appraisal: the ability to recognize and understand one's own emotional state during training or competition
2. Others' Emotion Appraisal: ability to interpret the emotional expressions of opponents, teammates, or coaches
3. Emotion Regulation: the ability to control anxiety, frustration, and impulsive reactions during competitive situations
4. Use of Emotion: ability to channel emotional energy into motivation, focus, and tactical decision-making during matches

Data analysis was conducted descriptively using an interactive qualitative analysis model comprising data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. The analysis process involved organizing interview transcripts, observation notes, and questionnaire summaries to identify emerging patterns related to emotional experiences and performance dynamics. Coding and theme identification were carried out inductively using NVivo 12 Pro, enabling the researcher to identify conceptual relationships and thematic patterns that explain how emotional intelligence shapes competitive performance in karate athletes. To ensure the credibility of the findings, data triangulation and method triangulation were applied by comparing results obtained from interviews, observations, questionnaires, and documentation.

RESULTS

Research on karate athletes' emotional intelligence and its relationship to competition performance shows that their ability to recognize, regulate, and utilize emotions contributes significantly to performance stability during competition. Emotional intelligence has been proven to help athletes control anxiety, maintain concentration, and maintain the quality of their techniques and movements when under the pressure of competition.

This study involved six athletes and two coaches as key informants. Data collection was conducted through observation, interviews, and questionnaires, which were analyzed using NVivo 12 Pro to map themes, relationships among concepts, and response patterns. The analysis identified a number of central themes, such as emotional awareness, emotional regulation, self-

motivation, anxiety management, and technical performance quality, which are interconnected in the context of competition.

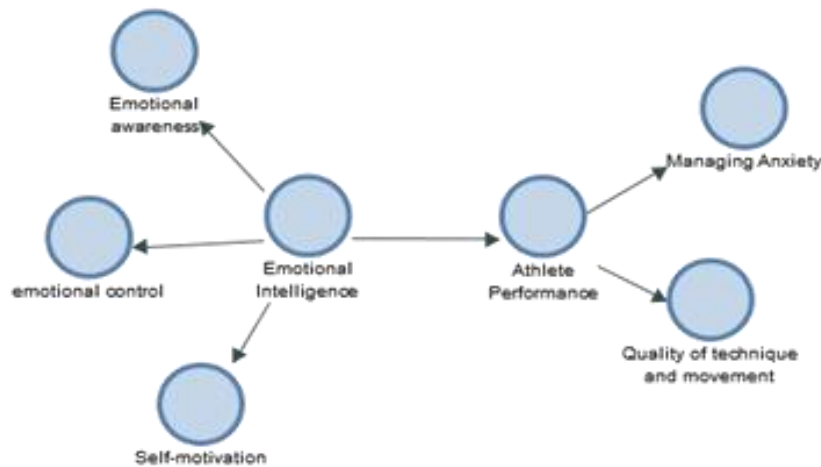


Figure 1. Concept map of the influence of emotional intelligence on athletic performance

The results of a qualitative analysis using NVivo indicate that emotional intelligence directly influences athletes' performance during competitions. The conceptual model produced shows that emotional intelligence consists of three main components: emotional awareness, emotional control, and self-motivation, which simultaneously influence athletes' ability to manage anxiety and maintain the quality of their techniques and movements during competitions. These findings are reinforced by a questionnaire administered to six respondents, which showed a predominance of responses in the Frequently (F) and Very Frequently (VF) categories across all emotional intelligence indicators.

Regarding the Self Emotion Appraisal, the majority of respondents reported frequently to very frequently recognizing their own emotions. This indicates that athletes have good emotional awareness, a key prerequisite for regulating emotions under competitive pressure. In the Others' Emotion Appraisal indicator, the dominance of "Often" and "Very Often" responses indicates that athletes can understand the emotions of others, including coaches and teammates. This ability supports psychological stability by enabling effective communication and adaptive responses to the game's dynamics. The Use of Emotion indicator received the highest percentage in the "Very Often" category, indicating that athletes can use emotions as a source of motivation and positive energy. In the context of performance, this ability plays an important role in maintaining fighting spirit, especially when facing situations of falling behind in points or external pressure.

Meanwhile, regarding Emotion Regulation, the majority of respondents answered "Often," although a higher proportion answered "Sometimes" than for other indicators. This shows that emotion regulation is already in the good category, but it still needs strengthening, especially in high-pressure competition situations. Integratively, the NVivo model and the questionnaire results indicate that emotional intelligence serves as a protective mechanism against performance decline driven by anxiety and pressure. Athletes who have good emotional awareness, can control their emotional responses, and use emotions constructively tend to be better able to maintain focus, think clearly, and maintain technical quality during competition. Thus, in the context of this qualitative study, it can be concluded that emotional intelligence not only functions as an individual psychological competency but also as a determining factor in maintaining the performance stability of karate athletes in competitive situations. These findings emphasize the importance of emotional intelligence training as an integral part of athlete training programs.

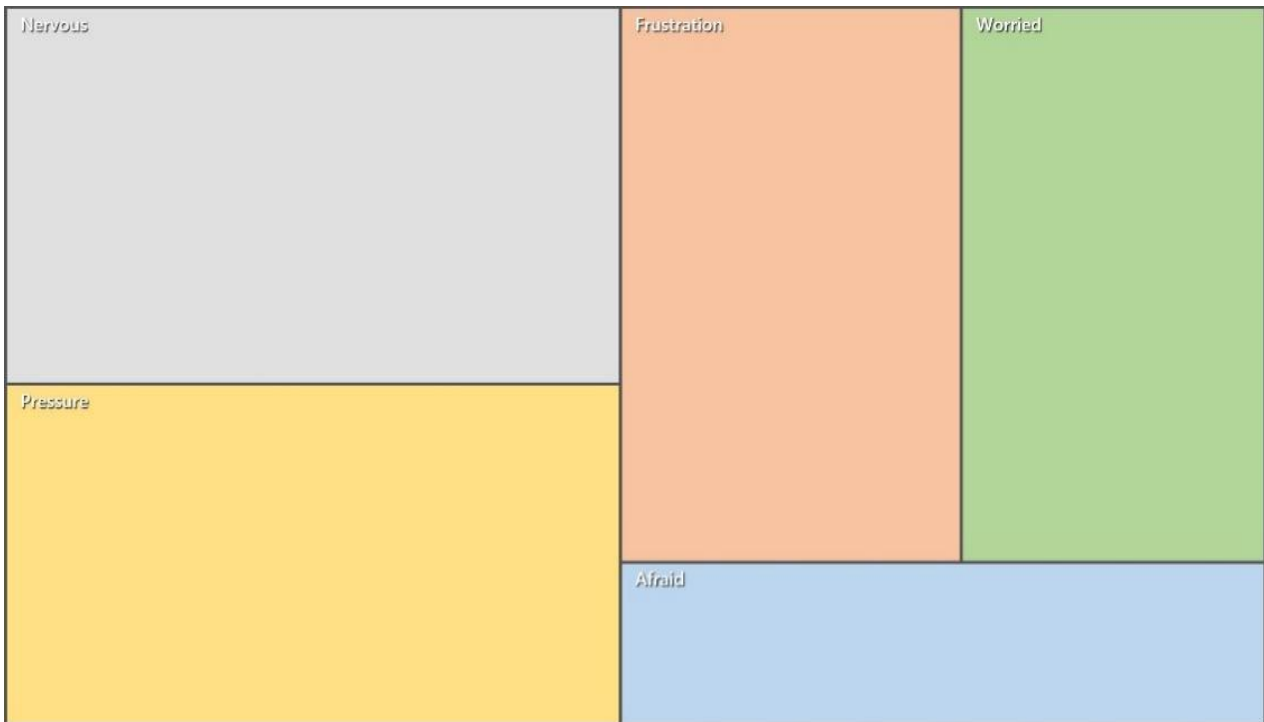


Figure 2. Hierarchy Chart Forms of Pressure and Anxiety During Competition

The results of NVivo data analysis, visualized as a treemap, show that the anxiety and pressure experienced by karate athletes during competitions fall into five main categories: nervous, pressure, frustration, worried, and afraid. The size of each field in the visualization indicates the frequency or dominance of the theme in the interview data. The category of frustration appears to be a dominant aspect. This shows that athletes often experience frustration during matches, especially when they make technical errors, lose points, or when their strategies do not go according to plan. One athlete stated, “When I make a technical error or lose points, I feel annoyed with myself, so I have to quickly regain my composure so that I don't get carried away by my emotions.” This statement shows that frustration arises as a reactive emotional response to situational obstacles that occur directly in the arena.

The nervous category also occupies a large portion of the visualization. Nervousness generally arises before the match begins and at crucial moments during the match. One athlete revealed, “Before stepping onto the mat, I definitely feel nervous, especially if my opponent looks strong.” This condition is related to the tension of facing an opponent, performance expectations, and the pressure to perform at one's best. Nervousness in this context is a form of situational anxiety that is both physiological and psychological. Furthermore, the pressure category describes the pressure felt by athletes, whether it comes from external or internal factors. External pressure can come from the expectations of coaches, parents, and the atmosphere of the competition, while internal pressure is related to personal goals and the desire to win. One athlete said, “Sometimes I feel like I have to win because I've been training for a long time and don't want to disappoint my coach.” This kind of pressure has the potential to affect emotional stability and concentration if it is not managed adaptively.

The worried category indicates cognitive anxiety, characterized by worrying about the possible outcomes of the match, mistakes, or failure. One athlete said, “During the match, I thought about what would happen if I lost, so my focus was disrupted.” This worry is cognitive in nature and can interfere with focus if it occurs repeatedly. Meanwhile, the afraid category reflects fear related

to specific threats, such as facing a stronger opponent or concerns about injury. One athlete revealed, *“If the opponent is more senior or bigger, sometimes fear arises first.”* This statement indicates a perceived threat that affects the athlete's mental readiness.

Overall, the visualization results show that the pressure and anxiety experienced by karate athletes are multidimensional, involving emotional aspects (frustration, nervousness, fear), cognitive aspects (worry), and situational pressure. The dominance of these categories, reinforced by the athletes' direct statements, indicates that competitions are contexts with high psychological intensity. Therefore, the ability to manage emotions is an essential factor in maintaining mental stability, sustaining focus, and supporting optimal performance during competitions.

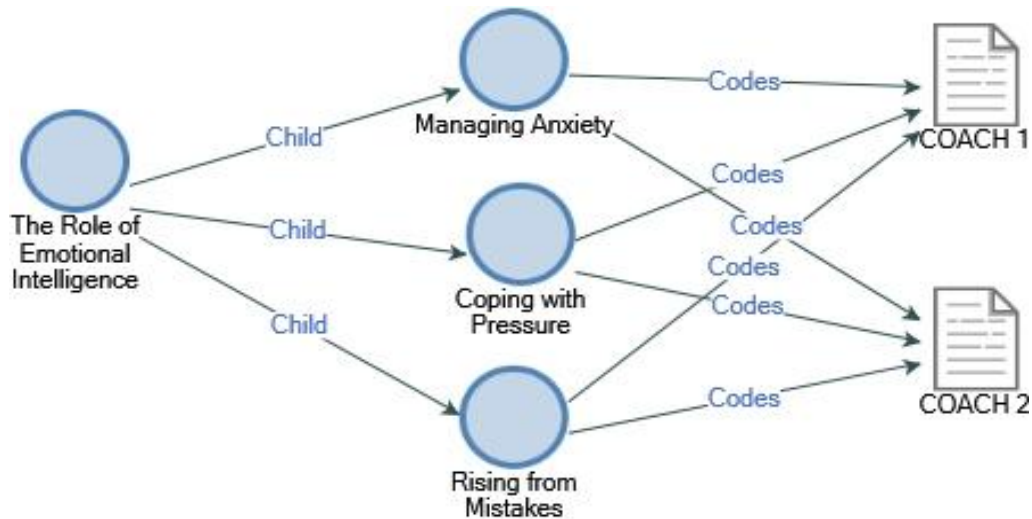


Figure 3. Concept map the role of emotional intelligence

The results of the NVivo analysis show that emotional intelligence plays a major role in influencing athlete performance through three key dimensions: managing anxiety, coping with pressure, and learning from mistakes. These three aspects are direct derivatives of the role of emotional intelligence in competition and constitute the psychological mechanisms that support performance stability. The dimension of managing anxiety describes an athlete's ability to control anxiety before and during a competition, thereby maintaining focus and technical stability. Coaches emphasize that anxiety is a natural response, but how it is managed is what sets athletes apart. One coach stated, *“Athletes who have good emotional control usually remain calm when they enter the arena. Even though they are tense, they can regulate their breathing and continue to execute their strategy.”* This statement shows that anxiety management is directly related to mental preparedness and the effectiveness of technical execution.

Meanwhile, the dimension of rising from mistakes reflects the athlete's ability to bounce back immediately after making a mistake or losing points, so that they do not get stuck in prolonged frustration. Coaches emphasize that mistakes are part of the game's dynamics, but the response to mistakes determines whether performance continues. One coach said, *“What I often see is that if athletes dwell on their mistakes for too long, their performance immediately drops. But if they bounce back quickly, they can usually turn things around.”* This statement shows that the ability to recover emotionally quickly is an important factor in maintaining momentum and competitiveness.

The code relationships from each dimension connected to the informants (coaches) show that these three aspects consistently appear in the interview data and reinforce each other. The coaches' perspectives provide empirical validation that emotional intelligence is not only apparent in athletes' internal attitudes but also observable in their behavior and responses during matches. Overall, this model confirms that emotional intelligence serves as a psychological foundation that enables athletes to maintain consistent performance in competitive situations.

Anxiety management, the ability to cope with pressure, and the readiness to bounce back from mistakes form an adaptive system that maintains the athlete's technical stability, focus, and confidence throughout the game.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that emotional intelligence plays a strategic role in maintaining the stability of karate athletes' performance during competitions. The data analysis shows that athletes who can recognize, regulate, and use their emotions tend to perform more consistently under competitive pressure. Emotional intelligence is generally defined as the ability to perceive, understand, regulate, and use emotions effectively in oneself and others (Alfiannur & Ramli, 2024). In competitive sports, this ability becomes particularly important because athletes are frequently exposed to psychological stressors, such as time pressure, scoring dynamics, and opponent strategies. The results of this study suggest that emotional awareness, emotional control, and self-motivation emerge as key components that help athletes maintain concentration and behavioral stability during matches.

The influence of emotional intelligence on karate performance can be explained through several psychological mechanisms that operate during competition. Karate requires rapid cognitive processing, precise motor execution, and tactical decision-making within a limited time frame. Emotional instability, such as excessive anxiety or frustration, can disrupt attentional focus and impair decision-making processes. Emotion regulation theory holds that individuals who manage emotional responses effectively tend to maintain better cognitive functioning under pressure (Nawir et al., 2018). When athletes successfully regulate emotions such as nervousness or fear, cognitive resources can remain directed toward tactical analysis, reaction timing, and movement execution. Conversely, poor emotional control may increase cognitive interference, leading to hesitation, loss of focus, or impulsive decisions during matches.

of emotional intelligence in sports performance. A meta-analysis conducted by (MacCann et al., 2022) found that emotional intelligence is positively associated with performance outcomes and the ability to adapt to competitive stress. Similar findings were reported by (Amaro & Brandão, 2023), who demonstrated that effective emotional regulation contributes to improved attentional control and sustained focus in competitive athletes. These findings support the argument that emotional abilities function as an important psychological resource that helps athletes maintain optimal performance levels during high-pressure situations. In karate, where matches involve rapid scoring changes and intense interaction with opponents, maintaining emotional balance is a critical determinant of competitive effectiveness.

The conceptual model generated through NVivo analysis further illustrates that emotional awareness, emotional control, and self-motivation form an interconnected psychological system that supports performance stability. Athletes who possess strong emotional awareness are able to identify early signs of anxiety or pressure, allowing them to apply regulation strategies before emotions escalate. This pattern aligns with the findings of (Lulu et al., 2025), who found that athletes with higher emotional intelligence demonstrate more adaptive stress responses and stronger emotional regulation abilities in competitive contexts. These results suggest that emotional intelligence does not function as a single isolated ability but rather as an integrated psychological process that influences how athletes perceive and respond to competitive challenges.

The questionnaire results also reveal that the responses "Often" and "Very Often" dominate the indicators of Self-Emotion Appraisal and Use of Emotion. This pattern indicates that athletes tend to utilize emotional states as a source of motivation and positive energy during competition. According to (Bisagno et al., 2022) facilitative emotions such as enthusiasm, controlled tension, and competitive excitement can enhance cognitive alertness and motor responsiveness in sport performance. From this perspective, emotions should not always be viewed as disruptive factors. When managed effectively, emotional activation can contribute positively to motivation, energy mobilization, and competitive engagement.

The NVivo treemap visualization, which identifies emotional categories such as nervousness, pressure, frustration, worry, and fear, also confirms that competitive anxiety experienced by athletes is multidimensional. Sports anxiety involves interactions between cognitive components (negative thoughts and worry), somatic responses (physiological arousal), and behavioral reactions during performance situations (Gabrys & Wontorczyk, 2023). The presence of multiple emotional responses in this study indicates that athletes experience complex psychological dynamics during matches. Emotional intelligence helps athletes interpret these internal signals and regulate them so that emotional arousal remains within an optimal performance zone.

Among the emotional categories identified, frustration appears as one of the most dominant triggers of emotional disturbance. This frustration generally arises when athletes make technical errors, lose points, or feel unable to execute planned strategies. The ability to recover emotionally after mistakes plays a critical role in maintaining performance momentum during competition. Research by (Syarah, 2024) shows that athletes with stronger emotional regulation skills are better able to reframe negative experiences and redirect their attention to the next tactical action. In contrast, athletes who remain trapped in frustration often experience declining concentration and reduced decision-making effectiveness.

The categories of nervousness and pressure that emerged strongly in this study are also consistent with research on athlete resilience. According to (Gao et al., 2026), psychological resilience in athletes is developed through the capacity to adaptively manage internal and external pressures. Emotional intelligence contributes to this process by enabling athletes to reinterpret pressure as a challenge rather than a threat. This reinterpretation helps maintain confidence and supports more effective tactical decision-making during competition. From a theoretical perspective, this study's findings reinforce the view that emotional intelligence serves as a psychological mediator between competitive pressure and athletic performance. Emotional intelligence enables athletes to transform emotional reactions into adaptive responses that support cognitive focus and behavioral control. These findings contribute to the growing body of sport psychology literature emphasizing the importance of emotional competencies in high-performance sport environments (Regborn et al., 2025).

From a practical perspective, the results highlight the importance of integrating psychological skill development within karate training programs. Mental training strategies such as pressure-simulation exercises, breathing regulation techniques, positive self-talk, and structured post-match reflection can help athletes strengthen their emotional regulation. Evidence-based psychological training programs have been shown to improve emotional control and competitive performance when applied systematically in sports coaching (Park & Jeon, 2023). Therefore, karate coaching systems should not focus solely on technical and physical preparation but should also incorporate structured emotional intelligence development into the overall athlete development program.

Overall, this study's results indicate that emotional intelligence serves as an adaptive psychological foundation that supports performance stability in competitive situations. Through emotional awareness, regulation, and motivational control, athletes can maintain focus, respond effectively to pressure, and recover quickly from mistakes. Consequently, the development of emotional intelligence should be considered an integral component of performance-based coaching systems for karate athletes.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that emotional intelligence is an essential psychological foundation for stable performance by karate athletes in a competitive environment. Key findings indicate that emotional awareness, control, and motivation play crucial roles in helping athletes manage multidimensional pressure and maintain concentration and quality of technique execution. Scientifically, this study contributes by strengthening the concept of emotional intelligence as an adaptive mechanism mediating the relationship between competitive pressure and athletic

performance. Practical implications emphasize the urgency of integrating mental training into athlete training curricula, the active role of coaches in developing emotional intelligence, and the importance of a sport psychology approach in holistic karate coaching. Suggested directions for future research include expanding the sample size and the level of competition, and employing mixed-methods to examine the relationship between emotional intelligence and performance in greater depth.

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