



## Research Article

# The mediating role of coping skills in the relationship between technology addiction and emotion regulation skills in gifted adolescents

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### Abstract

Gifted adolescents are individuals who can combine knowledge, skills and creativity and use them effectively in one or more of the valuable areas of human performance. The importance of examining technology addiction, emotion regulation and coping skills in adolescents is increasing. The main purpose of this study is to examine the mediating role of coping skills in the relationship between technology addiction and emotion regulation skills in gifted adolescents. In this direction, the relational screening model was applied in this study. The study group of the study is 246 adolescents between the ages of 10-18 who study at Science and Art Centers and volunteered to participate in the study. In the study, "Demographic Information Form", "Technology Addiction Scale", "Emotion Regulation Scale in Children and Adolescents" and "Coping Scale for Adolescents" were applied and data were obtained. In demographic variables, the means of two groups were compared and independent sample t-test was performed. One-way ANOVA test was used in comparisons of more than two independent groups. In the evaluation of the dependent variable by the independent variable/variables, both univariate and multivariate regression analysis were performed. Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated in the relationship analysis of the scales. As a result of the data analysis, it was determined that the level of technology addiction of adolescents was significantly high. The "negative coping" and "avoidant coping" levels of adolescents were significantly high. "Active coping" levels were significantly low. When the mediating role of coping skills in the relationship between technology addiction and emotion regulation skills in gifted adolescents was examined; according to the results obtained, it was determined that there was a negative and significant relationship between technology addiction and active coping. It was determined that there was a positive and significant relationship between technology addiction and negative coping. Coping strategy does not play a mediating role in the relationship between technology addiction and emotion regulation skills. However, in the analyses performed; it was shown that "avoidant coping strategy" played a full mediating role in the relationship between technology addiction and emotion regulation skills. When the mediating role of active coping strategies in the relationship between technology addiction and emotion regulation skills was examined; it was determined that active coping strategies did not play a mediating role. It is anticipated that the research will provide important information infrastructure for interventions regarding technology addiction, emotion regulation and coping skills of gifted adolescents.

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## Introduction

Gifted children are defined as individuals who exhibit advanced talent or potential in one or more specific areas when compared to their peers or others in the environment. Gifted individuals stand out in their ability to think, compare, and interpret (Kitsantas et al., 2017). Special talent, on the other hand, is the individual's ability to be different in their knowledge and practices and to perform a special skill specific to a field better than others (Özer, 2023). If an individual

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is naturally good at something, it can be interpreted as having a special talent (Renzulli, 1998, p. 134). Individuals with special talents generally have superior potential for success in intellectual-academic abilities, creative thinking styles, leadership potential, and artistic-psychomotor abilities (Davis & Rimm, 2004). If an individual works to be good at something, or needs to receive education, that person is thought to have a skill (Pfeiffer, 2002). Therefore, giftedness is an open, dynamic, multidimensional concept that has the capacity to create increasingly complex behaviors through self-organization and self-direction (Cresswell, 2007) should be defined

Gifted children are defined as extraordinary children due to the special skills they possess. There are studies emphasizing that being gifted occurs in a specific area, such as those who are scientifically, mathematically, and even artistically gifted (Kiewra & Rom, 2019; Stuart & Beste, 2011). Gifted individuals tend to use technological tools frequently to access fast and accurate information (Mudrak & Zabrodska, 2015). The use of technology and computers is a frequently used method in the education of gifted and talented individuals (Moqbel & Kock, 2018). Since gifted and talented children have special needs that require the integration of different types of technology into their curricula, the use of technology and computers in the education of gifted and talented individuals is recommended (Kurnaz & Tepe, 2019). Technological applications appeal to many characteristics of gifted and talented children, such as rapid information processing, complexity and depth capacity, and inductive learning (Clark, 2015). In a study examining the attitudes of gifted and talented high school students towards technology, it was explained that many of them use technology throughout their learning process (Hökelekli and Gündüz, 2004). Studies on technology addiction should be defined show that addiction is rapidly spreading (Karabulut-Coşkun and Akar, 2022; Khan, 2019; Turkey Digital Report, 2023). It is important to examine the technology use of gifted and talented children because they can quickly learn how to use technology and use it in their studies and projects.

Gifted and talented individuals need to use emotion regulation skills to control technology addiction. Emotion regulation is defined as the ability to exert control over one's own emotional state (McMahon & Naragon-Gainey, 2019). Hill and Updegraff (2012) state that emotion regulation involves not only regulating negative emotions but also regulating positive emotions. Rey and other researchers (2020) state that emotion regulation is the neural, cognitive, and behavioral processes that maintain, strengthen, or weaken emotional arousal and behavioral tendencies. Therefore, the intensity and duration of emotional reactions are important in emotion regulation. Emotions can be sustained, adjusted, or changed (Özbay et al., 2012). Emotional intensity is higher in gifted and talented children than in their peers (Eren et al., 2018). Gifted children with higher emotional intensity need to develop coping skills for emotion management (Hughes et al., 2020). It is important to investigate how gifted individuals manage their emotions and cope with problems in situations such as technology addiction. Coping skills are behaviors aimed at maintaining internal integrity at the highest level in stressful situations encountered in life, calming the individual down, and continuing their daily life at an optimal level (Parker & Endler, 1992). Using certain coping attitudes to minimize the negative effects of stressful events or factors is a universal behavior (Falsetti & Resnick, 1997). In addition, coping is related to the ability to eliminate the damage caused by stress and to use stress as a tool for development (Özbay et al., 2012). Therefore, it is important to reveal the factors that affect coping skills in gifted individuals. In this context, this study aims to shed more detail on the complex relationship between emotion regulation skills and technology addiction of gifted adolescents and to reveal the effect of coping skills. This analysis has the potential to understand the effects of technology use on the emotional development of gifted individuals and to fill the gaps in knowledge in this area. In this context, the findings of the study may help us better understand the interactions of gifted children with technology and develop special education strategies for this group. This study aimed to determine the mediating role of coping skills in the relationship between technology addiction and emotion regulation skills in gifted adolescents.

## Method

### Research model

The relational screening model was applied in this study. Relationships between concepts are investigated through relational analysis applied in quantitative research. Relationships between concepts determined in line with the main purpose are the situation that helps the researcher answer the research questions (Akarsu and Akarsu, 2019).

### Study group

The sample of this study consists of 246 participants between the ages of 10 and 18. Adolescents between the ages of 10-18 who are studying at Science and Art Centers (SAC) in Konya province and who volunteered to take part in the research were included in the study. The criteria for inclusion in the study were determined as being between the ages of 10-18; studying at BİLSEM; and volunteering to participate in the research. The sample of this study consists of 246 participants, 122 (% 49.6) female and 124 (% 50.4) male. 35 (% 14.2) of the participants were an only child; 147 (% 59.8) were the first child. 130 (% 52.8) of the participants' mothers were 40 years old or younger and 63 (% 25.6) of the mothers were high school graduates. 66 (% 26.8) of the fathers were 40 years old or younger; 197 of the fathers (% 80.1) have a university degree or higher.

### Data collection tools

This study was conducted to examine the mediating role of coping skills in the relationship between technology addiction and emotion regulation skills in gifted children and data were obtained by applying the “Demographic Information Form”, “Technology Addiction Scale”, “Emotion Regulation Scale in Children and Adolescents” and “Coping Scale for Adolescents”.

### Technology Addiction Scale

A validity and reliability analysis of the scale in Turkish was conducted by Aydın (2017) and the scale consists of 24 items and 4 dimensions. The scale has four sub-dimensions: “using social networks” (6 items), “instant messaging” (6 items), “playing online games” (6 items), and “using websites” (6 items). The highest score that can be obtained for the entire scale is 120 and the lowest score is 24.

### Scale for Emotion Regulation in Children and Adolescents

The scale was adapted to Turkish by Tetik (2019). In the development of the scale, the scale was applied to 1048 adolescents between the ages of 10-18. The scale's language validity was performed, and then Confirmatory Factor Analysis was performed to measure its structural validity. The scale has sub-dimensions of “reappraisal” (items 1, 3, 5, 7, 8, 10) and “suppression” (items 2, 4, 6, 9). There is no reverse-scored item in the scale. A 5-point Likert-type assessment is applied. There are 10 items in total in the scale. It is understood that the use of emotion regulation strategy increases as the scores obtained in the scale increase (Tetik, 2019).

### Coping Scale for Adolescents

The scale was adapted to Turkish by Bedel, Işık, and Hamarta (2014). The study was conducted on 453 adolescents. The scale consists of 15 items. The scale has “active coping”, “avoidant coping” and “negative coping” sub-dimensions. The scale is a 4-point Likert type. A minimum of 3 and a maximum of 33 points can be obtained from the scale.

### Data analysis

SPSS program was used in the analysis of the data. In the evaluation of demographic characteristics and scale scores, descriptive statistics such as frequency, percentage, arithmetic mean, standard deviation, minimum, maximum, normality distribution analysis were performed. Independent sample t-test was applied in the comparison of the means of two groups in demographic variables. One-way ANOVA test result was used in the comparison of more than two independent groups. Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated in the relationship analysis of the scales. All statistical analysis test results were evaluated at the 0.05 significance level.

## Results

In this study conducted to examine the mediating role of coping skills in the relationship between technology addiction and emotion regulation skills in gifted adolescents; the lowest-highest values, mean-standard deviation values and skewness-kurtosis values were examined in the variables. The findings are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1.** The lowest-highest values, mean-standard deviation values and skewness-kurtosis values of the research variables

Variables	n	Lowest	Highest	Mean	S	Skewness	Kurtosis
Technology Addiction	244	21	112	50.65	17.73	.71	.15
Social Networking	243	6	30	13.72	5.19	.61	-.13
Instant Messaging	244	6	30	12.16	4.97	.81	.28
Online Gaming	243	6	30	13.00	5.61	.70	-.29
Website Usage	244	6	30	11.87	5.59	.81	.83
Emotion Regulation	246	10	50	31.70	7.00	-.39	.46
Suppression	246	4	20	11.59	3.58	.15	-.06
Reappraisal	246	6	30	20.11	5.18	-.32	.00
Negative Coping	246	0	9	2.57	1.62	.66	.81
Active Coping	246	0	12	6.80	2.48	-.38	.35
Avoidant Coping	246	0	12	5.98	2.23	.29	.68

According to Table 1; technology addiction average was calculated as  $50.65 \pm 17.73$ , social network usage average was  $13.72 \pm 5.19$ , instant messaging average was  $12.16 \pm 4.97$ , online gaming average was  $13.00 \pm 5.61$ , and website usage average was  $11.87 \pm 5.59$ . These results show that the data meets the normality assumption.

In the study group; it was determined that variables such as gender, mother and father education status, mother and father employment status, family type, family economic status and number of siblings were not affected by the factors of “technology addiction, emotion regulation” and “coping skills”.

In order to compare the participants’ technology addiction, emotion regulation and coping levels according to age group, a t-test was conducted for independent groups. The findings are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Comparison of technology addiction, emotion regulation and coping levels according to age group

Variables	Age	n	Mean	S	Lower	Upper	t	p
Technology Addiction	10-12 years	89	45.27	14.60	-12.99	-3.94	-3.682	.000*
	13-18 years	155	53.74	18.65				
Emotional Regulation	10-12 years	91	30.63	7.23	-3.51	.12	-1.843	.067
	13-18 years	155	32.32	6.81				
Negative Coping	10-12 years	91	2.05	1.46	-1.23	-.41	-3.920	.000*
	13-18 years	155	2.87	1.64				
Active Coping	10-12 years	91	7.41	2.49	.32	1.59	2.964	.003*
	13-18 years	155	6.45	2.41				
Avoidant Coping	10-12 years	91	5.57	1.83	-1.22	-.07	-2.196	.029*
	13-18 years	155	6.21	2.41				

According to Table 2; the technology addiction level of gifted adolescents is significantly high ( $t_{(242)} = -3.682$ ,  $p < .001$ ). In addition, the negative coping and avoidant coping levels of gifted adolescents are significantly high ( $t_{(242)} = -3.920$ ,  $p < .001$ ;  $t_{(242)} = -2.196$ ,  $p < .05$ , respectively). On the contrary, their active coping levels are significantly lower ( $t_{(242)} = 2.964$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

In line with the main purpose of this study, the mediating role of coping skills in the relationship between technology addiction and emotion regulation skills in gifted children and adolescents was examined from here on. The criteria of Baron and Kenny (1986) were taken into consideration as the basic starting point in the mediating variable analysis. According to Baron and Kenny (1986), in order for a variable to be a mediating variable, the following 4 criteria must be met. These are; (1). The relationship between the predictor and the predicted variables should be significant, (2). The relationship between the mediator and the predictor variable should be significant, (3). There should be a significant

relationship between the mediator and the predicted variable, (4). When the mediator and the predictor variable are entered into the regression analysis simultaneously, the previously significant relationship between the predictor and the predicted variable should cease to be significant or the previous significance level should decrease (Baron & Kenny, 1986). For this reason, Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationships between all variables. According to the results obtained, it was determined that there was a negative and significant relationship between technology addiction and active coping ( $r = -.144, p < .05$ ). On the contrary, there was a positive and significant relationship between technology addiction and negative coping and avoidant coping ( $r = -.475, p < .001$ ;  $r = .375, p < .001$ , respectively). There is also a positive and significant relationship between technology addiction and emotion regulation ( $r = .290, p < .001$ ). The findings are presented in Table 3.

**Table 3.** Relationships between technology addiction, emotion regulation and coping levels

Variables	TA	ER	AcC	NC	AvC
Technology Addiction	$r$ 1				
	$p$ -				
Emotional Regulation	$r$ ,290***	1			
	$p$ ,000	-			
Active Coping	$r$ -,144*	,192**	1		
	$p$ ,024	,002	-		
Negative Coping	$r$ ,475***	,219**	-,235**	1	
	$p$ ,000	,001	,000	-	
Avoidant Coping	$r$ ,375***	,558***	,050	,368***	1
	$p$ ,000	,000	,434	,000	-

TA: Technology Addiction ER: Emotional Regulation AcC: Active Coping NC: Negative Coping AvC: Avoidant Coping

These results show that the three criteria listed above by Baron and Kenny (1986) are met; negative coping strategies and active coping strategies do not play a mediating role.

### Discussion, Conclusion and Recommendations

In this study, it was shown that the level of technology addiction of adolescents is significantly high. The participants' technology addiction, emotion regulation and coping levels were compared according to gender, number of children in the family, birth order, age of mother and father, education level of mother and father, income status of the family, presence of a special needs individual in the family or a sick/elderly individual cared for by the parent, and the results obtained did not show a significant difference between the groups in terms of the mean of any variable.

When the mediating role of coping skills in the relationship between technology addiction and emotion regulation skills in gifted adolescents was examined, the results obtained showed that there is a negative and significant relationship between technology addiction and active coping. On the contrary, there is a positive and significant relationship between technology addiction and negative coping and avoidant coping. There is also a positive and significant relationship between technology addiction and emotion regulation.

The use of technological devices is an indispensable element of adolescents' lives. Internet use is common in gifted children (Arslankoç et al., 2023). Access to information on the Internet is fast, but it also carries risks for adolescents. It is thought that the steps to be taken to prevent and intervene in these risks are important.

A study examined the effect of internet and computer game addiction of gifted children on school social behavior. As a result of the research, it was determined that boys' internet use and computer game playing time were more than girls. Internet and computer use increases with age. Yavuz (2018) examined the levels of internet and game addiction and perceived social support in gifted adolescents. In this study, it was determined that internet addiction did not differ according to gender, and it was emphasized that game addiction was high in boys. Internet and game addiction levels differ according to age. Technology addiction is high in adolescents aged 12-17. Ayhan-Bostancı (2020) examined the relationship between computer addiction and social skill levels of gifted children. According to the results of this study;

computer, internet and computer game addiction did not change according to gender. Factors in the internet environment such as computer games, especially online games, and chat rooms attract more attention from boys.

Gifted adolescents have higher emotional sensitivity (Ackerman, 1997) and are more likely to experience social exclusion (Jost, 2006) than their typically developing peers. Peer relationships can be useful in regulating the intense emotional sensitivity of gifted adolescents. However, technology addiction can cause them to experience limitations in peer relationships. As a result, they may be more dependent on the internet for emotional regulation than their normal peers.

When the mediating role of coping strategies in the relationship between technology addiction and emotion regulation skills was examined, it was determined that technology addiction had a positive and significant difference in emotion regulation skills. This result showed that the avoidant coping strategy played a full mediating role. In this study, the regression analyses on technology addiction and emotion regulation explained this positively and significantly.

In the study conducted by Braunstein, Gross, and Ochsner (2017), it was reported that depression and technology addiction were present in adolescents with emotion regulation problems. Gavriel-Fried and Ronen (2016) stated that there was a relationship between self-control and social support in adolescents with risky behaviors. According to this study, the probability of technology addiction is high in adolescents with emotion regulation problems. Ivcevic and Brackett (2014) compared school success and emotion regulation skills. They stated that emotion regulation problems were higher in adolescents with technology addiction.

In our study, the technology addiction average was calculated as  $50.65 \pm 17.73$ , the social network usage average was  $13.72 \pm 5.19$ , the instant messaging average was  $12.16 \pm 4.97$ , the online game playing average was  $13.00 \pm 5.61$ , and the website usage average was  $11.87 \pm 5.59$ . In addition, the emotion regulation average was  $31.70 \pm 7.00$ , the suppression average was  $11.59 \pm 3.58$ , and the reappraisal average was  $20.11 \pm 5.18$ . Roberts and other researchers (2014) reported that as the duration and frequency of technological device use increased in gifted and talented adolescents, technology addiction increased. Technology addiction creates deprivation, difficulty in control, functional disorder, and social isolation. In our study, it was determined that there was a negative relationship between technology addiction and coping. On the contrary, a positive and significant relationship was found between technology addiction and negative coping. When the literature is examined, it is seen that it is important to address stress and coping issues during adolescence for healthy development (Khan, 2019; Kurnaz and Tepe, 2019; Zammuner, 2019). Adolescence is a complex period in which adaptation is made to internal and external environmental challenges. Therefore, how adolescents cope with such changes and challenges is of great importance. According to the results of the study; It is thought that comparative studies can be conducted between adolescents who go to the Science and Art Center and students who do not; cognitive behavioral-based group guidance programs can be organized to prevent technology addiction in gifted adolescents and experimental studies can be conducted on their effectiveness. The research was conducted with adolescents who attend BİLSEM. Similar studies can be conducted with primary school students who attend SAC. Most technological devices are used with the internet. It can be preferred to have only one computer connected to the internet at home for a certain order and controlled use of the internet. In this way, the gifted adolescent will not be able to access the internet during the hours when other family members will be online and will be able to learn to postpone this desire. Instructors working in schools and SACs can meet with adolescents who have technology addiction and low coping and emotion regulation skills and provide one-on-one and group guidance. Seminars can be organized for the families of these students to explain how gifted children can be taught anger coping and emotion regulation skills in a healthy family environment. Since emotion management can determine the choice of coping style that affects technology addiction levels, it is important to develop awareness in gifted adolescents on these issues.

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