Investigation of the Relationship Between Internet Addiction and Emotional Intelligence Levels in University Students

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Extended Summary

Purpose
Aside from all its functions facilitating human life and contributing to the social development, the internet has become a medium occupying a central position in the lives of some users who find it highly challenging to resist the attraction of it (Kir and Sulak, 2014). Unconscious use of the internet poses threats to individual and social life. This situation, which is called internet addiction gives rise to many problems such as excessive use of the internet, inability to control the time spent on the internet, intense anxiety/concern felt in the case of restriction on access to the internet, difficulty in managing the time spent on the internet, depression, loneliness, reduced social interaction with the community and family members, neurotic and psychological complications and deterioration in the quality of social and family life. These problems arising from excessive and uncontrollable use of the internet are defined as “problematic” due to its negative effects on individuals’ academic, financial, family and professional lives. Although some reasons for internet addiction are listed, it is generally agreed that the need for socialization and initiation and maintenance of social relations is the main reason. Being able to communicate meets some psychological and social needs. When individuals who desire to express themselves and their personal needs cannot establish healthy communication, they tend to perceive other members of society as repulsive and dangerous. The most outstanding factors that make the internet attractive include the ability of the individual to establish communication over the internet that he/she cannot have the chance in his/her social life, to express his/her thoughts and feelings freely, to mask himself/herself, to hide his/her real identity, to introduce himself/herself to people as he/she wishes and to communicate whenever he/she wants. Emotional intelligence is an issue that must be taken into consideration in creating a healthy society because it enables the individual to be aware of himself/herself, to accept himself/herself, to produce beneficial actions for the society and himself/herself and to maintain healthy relations with other members of the society. The most basic skill of human being to be successful in the social adaptation process is to communicate with other people. Developing healthy communication and relationship skills can be related to the individual’s personality traits and psychological awareness. In the current study, it was attempted to determine whether there is a relationship between emotional intelligence which is the basis of communication skills with other people and internet addiction level. In addition, it was investigated whether the internet addiction scores and emotional intelligence levels of the participants vary significantly depending on gender, age, economic status of the family and the field of study.

Method
The current study was conducted in line with the descriptive survey model. The study was carried out on 150 university students attending the Department of Psychological Counselling in the Education Faculty and the Department of Economics at Kafkas University in the 2018-2019 academic year. The data of the study were collected by using a personal information form developed by the researcher and two measurement tools. These are the Emotional Intelligence Scale developed by Schutte et al. (1998) and the Young Internet Addiction Test Short Form developed by Young.

Conclusion and Discussion
The findings of the current study have revealed that there is a significant and negative correlation between emotional intelligence and internet addiction. Moreover, two sub-dimensions of emotional intelligence which are making use of emotions and expressing emotions were found to be significant predictors of the participants’ internet addiction. In the current study, the gender variable was found to be not leading to significant differences in the participants’ technology addiction and emotional intelligence levels. Another finding of the study is that the higher the income level of the students is, the higher their internet addiction becomes, yet the less their emotional intelligence is. A similar finding has been reported by studies aiming to perform a comparative investigation of the internet addiction of students with high and low socio-economic conditions and the students with high socio-economic conditions were found to be more likely to be internet addict. Another factor addressed in relation to the development of emotional intelligence is the age variable. According to the findings of the current study, the emotional intelligence scores of the participants aged 26 years old or older were found to be significantly higher than those of the other age groups. No statistically significant correlation was found between the age variable and technology addiction.
When the participants’ internet addiction and emotional intelligence scores were examined in relation to the field of study, the internet addiction means that the score of the economics students was found to be higher than that of the education faculty students. When their emotional intelligence scores were examined, the scores of the education faculty students from the emotional intelligence scale’s sub-dimensions of pessimism, expressing emotions and making use of emotions were found to be higher than those of the economics students. Given that emotional intelligence can be developed through education, higher emotional intelligence scores of the education faculty students can be related to the contents of their curriculum such as psychology, well-being, empathy, personality, and social characteristics.

Given that internet addicts use the internet for 40-60 hours a week, it is inevitable that this will negatively affect their business and school lives. In addition, sleep deprivation, excessive fatigue, deterioration of the immune system and muscle diseases bring about many health problems. Considering the results of this and many other studies conducted on this addiction that is believed to decrease the quality of life and emotional intelligence to which this addiction is thought to be related, the educational implications can be summarized as follows:

Emotional intelligence is a skill that can be developed and strengthened through education. For this reason, the development of emotional intelligence should be given importance at all levels of education from kindergarten to higher education. For this, different intelligence profiles of children should be taken into consideration. For addicts, they should be advised to use external stoppers that specify a period of time for them to terminate the internet session. In addition to all these, the most important application is to develop pleasant feelings about real-life activities so that they can establish emotional ties with other people and share their feelings. An education program that supports the development of emotional intelligence, is based on social relations and makes students active will be effective in preventing the formation of many types of addiction, not just internet addiction.