The Role of Social-Emotional Learning Skills in Peer-Bullying Experiences in Students with Learning Disabilities

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
	The purpose of this study is to explore the social-emotional learning (SEL) abilities and experiences of peer bullying among students with learning disabilities (LD), considering various demographic factors, and to determine whether SEL levels can predict their exposure to peer bullying. In line with the relational survey method, the sample included 219 students with learning disabilities, aged 13-16, who were selected through a convenience sampling approach. Datas were collected withPersonal Information Form, the Adolescent Peer Relationships Assessment Scale Victim Form, and the SEL Skills Scale. Data analysis was conducted using SPSS 29, with descriptive statistics, independent samples t-tests, ANOVA for detecting differences, correlation analysis for identifying relationships between variables, and multiple linear regression tests to assess predictive power. The findings indicated that the SEL skill levels and experiences of peer bullying among students with disabilities significantly differed based on gender and the socio-economic status of the family. Furthermore, a significant relationship was found between students' SEL skills and their exposure to peer bullying. It was also determined that the subdimensions of SEL skills in LD students predicted their experiences of peer bullying.

Özel Öğrenme Güçlüğünde Sosyal Duygusal Öğrenme Becerilerinin Akran Zorbalığına Maruz Kalmadaki Rolü

ÖZET

Bu araştırmada özel öğrenme güçlüğü (ÖÖG) tanılı öğrencilerin sosyal duygusal öğrenme becerileriyle akran zorbalığına maruz kalma durumlarını bazı demografik değişkenler açısından incelemek ve sosyal duygusal öğrenme düzeyinin akran zorbalığına maruz kalma durumunu yordayıp yordamadığını belirlemek amaçlanmıştır. Araştırma grubu, uygun örnekleme yöntemiyle belirlenen 13-16 yaş arasındaki özel öğrenme güçlüğü olan 219 öğrenci oluşturmuştur. İlişkisel tarama modelinde desenlenen bu araştırmanın veri toplama sürecinde Kişisel Bilgi Formu, Ergen Akran İlişkileri Belirleme Ölçeği Mağdur Formu ve Sosyal Duygusal Öğrenme Becerileri Ölçeği kullanılmış; veri analizi ise bağımsız örneklemler t-testi, ANOVA ve doğrusal regresyon yöntemleriyle gerçekleştirilmiştir. Araştırmanın bulguları, ÖÖG olan öğrencilerin sosyal duygusal öğrenme beceri düzeylerinin ve akran zorbalığına maruz kalma durumlarının cinsiyete ve ailenin sosyoekonomik durumuna göre anlamlı düzeyde farklılaştığını, öğrencilerin sosyal duygusal öğrenme becerileriyle akran zorbalığına maruz kalmaları arasında anlamlı bir ilişki olduğunu ve ÖÖG olan öğrencilerin sosyal duygusal öğrenme becerileri alt boyutlarının, akran zorbalığına maruz kalma durumlarını yordadığı belirlenmiştir.

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INTRODUCTION

Special learning disability (SLD) or leaning disability (LD), which is an umbrella concept, is a neurodevelopmental disorder in which there is a discrepancy between the age, intelligence level and educational performance of students with normal or above normal intelligence level, the cause of which is not yet fully known, and which commonly manifests as reading difficulties (dyslexia), writing difficulties (dysgraphia) and mathematics difficulties (dyscalculia) (Baydık, 2011; Korkmazlar, 2003). In this study, the term "LD" has been preferred. From the early period, LD can give symptoms such as having problems in motor skills, communicating, attention and concentration skills, expressing emotions, exhibiting age-appropriate behaviors, making friends or giving emotional reactions appropriate to the situation (Karaca et al., 2018). Moreover, the poor social skills and difficulty in maintaining peer relationships among students with LD lead to their isolation from peer groups (Urfalı, Dadandı & Şahin, 2018), experience peer rejection, and have problems interacting with adults (Elias, 2004). In particular, the fact that their peers succeed in a shorter time with less effort than them can cause students with LD to experience feelings of failure, disappointment and depression (Duncan et al., 1999; Kavale & Forness, 1996). Students who get angry when they experience disappointment may direct their anger towards their friends, teachers or mothers (Ersoy & Avcı, 2001). In addition, students with LD have difficulty in recognizing both their own and others' emotions and expressing these emotions in words (Elias, 2004). Thus, the SEL skills of students with LD, who constantly experience problems in both academic and social skills, are negatively affected (Morgan, 1989).

SEL is divided into five categories as (1) self-awareness, (2) self-management, (3) social awareness, (4) relationship development skills, and (5) responsible decision making (Weisberg & Cascarino, 2013). Self-awareness is defined as recognizing one's strengths and weaknesses, being self-confident, and self-managing; self-management is described as controlling one's emotional reactions, coping with stress, and working effectively towards goals; social awareness is defined as understanding other people's feelings, empathizing, and respecting different perspectives; relationship development skills are defined as actively listening to others, communicating and cooperating with them, and acting in accordance with social norms; and responsible decision-making is defined as evaluating the consequences of actions, considering ethical standards, and thinking about the welfare of others. SEL skills encompass abilities like setting positive goals, making decisions, forming empathic relationships, and managing emotions (CASEL, 2020; Weissberg & Cascarino, 2013), along with communication, self-esteem-boosting, problem-solving skills, and stress coping strategies (Kabakçı, 2006).According to Shanker (2014), these are defined as the process of acquiring and effectively utilizing the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to identify and manage emotions. There are studies (Morocco et al., 2001; Nelson et al., 2003; Rinaldi, 2003) indicating that there is a relationship between SEL skills and LD and that having LD may lead to SEL problems. The concept of SEL focuses on enhancing students' resilience when faced with challenges and supporting their coping abilities (Graczyk et al., 2001), while emphasizing the importance of social-emotional agents in developing academic skills (Elias, 2004). The SEL skills of students with LD are also adversely impacted by their low academic performance. It is stated that students with LD are happier and more harmonious before school; however, when they begin primary school, their emotional issues become more prominent, and it is evident that LD has not only academic but also social and emotional impacts (Karaca et al., 2018; Meadan & Halle, 2004). Acquisition of skills related to SEL enables students to establish healthy relationships and social support networks, engage in positive social interactions, adapt easily to changing life conditions, and reduce the likelihood of exhibiting behavior problems (Elias, 2004; Jones & Kahn, 2017).

As social-emotional development is shaped by the environment, building positive relationships with others is crucial. In this context, bullying, which is expressed as repeated and unwanted aggressive behaviors, is usually learned from the environment (Espelage, 2014). According to Olweus and Limber (2010), bullying refers to aggressive behaviors that create a power imbalance between the bully and the victim. European Community Wales (2001) categorized bullying into five: physical, verbal, emotional and relational, sexual and cyberbullying. Physical bullying occurs when an individual or group engages in physical actions such as hitting, pushing, or poking (A.C.B.P.S, 2009; Rigby & Slee, 1991). Verbal bullying, on the other hand, involves behaviors like name-calling, insults, racist comments, and similar actions (Rigby & Slee, 1991). Emotional and relational bullying is bullying in the form of lying about someone, spreading rumors, excluding someone, and imitating someone (Björkqvist & Lagerspetz, 1992; Boswort et al., 1999; Rivers & Smith, 1994). Cyberbullying includes verbal, hidden and psychological bullying using e-mail, mobile phones, social networking sites, etc. (Çivilidağ, 2013); sexual bullying includes behaviors such as spreading false rumors about the person, using sexually explicit expressions, sending disturbing messages, touching, hugging and kissing with malicious intent (European Community Wales, 2001). In the context of the people to whom bullying is directed, we come across peer bullying. Some studies on peer bullying (Kepenekci-Karaman & Çinkir, 2006; Pişkin, 2002; Yurtal & Cenkseven, 2016) show that the rate of students exposed to bullying is between 30% and 65%. Peer bullying is "when a person is repeatedly subjected to deliberate aggression and attack by another people or people who are physically, mentally or spiritually stronger than him/her" (Olweus, 1993). The reasons why a student bullies another student are stated as having fun, getting revenge, getting money or other things, seeing others bullying, showing how tough he/she is, thinking that other children are wimps, and angering the bullying child (Rigby, 2008). It has been revealed that students diagnosed with LD are exposed to peer bullying due to their social skill deficits and problem behaviors (Aydemir, 2024) and that peer bullying is more prevalent in inclusive classrooms where students with LD are present (Aydar, 2019). It is observed that having a disability can be enough for an individual to experience bullying, with children who have mental or physical disabilities being more likely to be bullied compared to typically developing children. A similar situation applies to students with LD who are academically unsuccessful and at high risk of being ostracized by their peers (Heiman, 2004; Heinman & Olenik-Shemesh, 2020; Narváez et al., 2021). Research suggests that students with LD face an increased likelihood of being bullied compared to their peers without disabilities (Dawkins, 1996; Sharp & Smith, 2002). For example, Ziegler et al. (1991) discovered that the rates of bullying among students with LD in Toronto were twice as high as those of typically developing students.

The acquisition of SEL skills is seen as a protective function against bullying and these skills facilitate individuals to cope with difficult situations (Wang et al., 2019). In this regard, educators, policymakers, and researchers are working to enhance students' SEL skills and foster a positive school environment. It has been noted that in schools where students possess strong SEL skills, social competence and academic performance improve, absenteeism decreases, suspension rates are lower, and disciplinary incidents and disruptive behaviors decline (Durlak et al., 2011). According to Weissberg and O'Brien (2004), SEL skills strengthen students' ability to resist the adverse effects of bullying. It is proposed that enhancing SEL skills can decrease students' vulnerability to bullying and shield them from its negative effects. Studies conducted in this direction have shown that SEL skills development programs reduce students' bullying behaviors and reduce the incidence of homophobic name-calling and sexual harassment. In addition, as a result of SEL skills development programs, bullying behaviors towards students with disabilities were also observed to decrease (Fisher & Frey, 2009). Longitudinal research on the academic achievements of students with LD highlights the importance of social support from family, educators, and peers. This support plays a vital role in their

adjustment to society and is strongly associated with their self-esteem and general well-being. Students who lack sufficient social support may develop a poor self-image due to difficulties in forming close friendships, establishing insecure relationships with peers, and experiencing feelings of anger and sadness when faced with peer rejection. This may have a detrimental effect on the overall well-being of students with LD. Research highlights that, besides the social support from peers and family, SEL skills are crucial for their success. These skills help individuals enhance their emotional intelligence, improve their social interactions, and better manage challenging situations. Therefore, it is important that intervention programs for the education of students with LD focus on developing their SEL skills in addition to providing them with social support. Thus, the ability of these individuals to cope with difficulties such as peer bullying can be increased (Heiman & Olenik Shemesh, 2020).

Research (Bourke & Burgman, 2010; Espelage et al., 2015; Garrett, 2023; Humphrey et al., 2007; Kaukiainen et al., 2002; Lindsay & McPherson, 2012; Özkan et al., 2023; Nabuzoka, 2003; Reiter & Lapidot-Lefler, 2007; Sarı & Pürsün, 2019; Saylor & Leach, 2009; Terzioğlu, 2022) has shown that students with disabilities are frequently targeted by bullying behaviors. Moreover, these studies emphasize that improving social skills like communication, empathy, and problem-solving in students with disabilities can reduce peer bullying and promote healthier relationships among peers. There are also studies (Baumeister et al.,2007; Berchiatti et al., 2022; Kalafatoğlu, 2023; Mishna, 2003; Sivrikaya & Eldeniz Çetin, 2023; Weinreich et al., 2023; Yıldız, 2004) that address the SEL skills of students with LD and peer bullying of these students individually. These studies focused on whether bullying behaviors towards students with LD vary according to social status, the relationship between psychiatric disorders and exposure of students with LD to peer bullying, students' views and experiences on SEL skills, life satisfaction and hope, and psychosocial characteristics, problems and education of students with LD. In the national literature, there is only one study (Aydemir, 2024) that examines the relationship between social-emotional learning skills of students with specific learning disabilities and their susceptibility to peer bullying. This study stated that the social skills deficits of students with LD were a significant factor in their vulnerability to peer bullying and emphasized the need to improve these students' coping skills in dealing with peer bullying. All of this indicates the importance of thoroughly exploring the impact of SEL skills in students with LD and how these skills relate to their experiences of peer bullying. Building on the findings of such a study, preventive SEL intervention programs can be designed to help these students combat peer bullying. Consequently, this research sought to investigate the SEL abilities and bullying experiences of students with LD, aged 13-16, in relation to certain demographic factors, and to assess whether their SEL skills can predict their susceptibility to bullying.

The study aimed to answer the following questions:

1. Do the SEL skills of students with LD and their experiences of peer bullying vary based on demographic variables (gender, grade level, and family socio-economic status)?

2. Is there a significant relationship between SEL skills of students with LD and exposure to peer bullying?

3. Do SEL skills of students with LD predict their exposure to peer bullying?

METHOD

This section provides details on the research design, participants, data collection process as well as the data analysis.

Research Design

This study used the relational survey model to examine if the SEL skills of students with LD vary significantly according to specific demographic variables, if there is a connection between their SEL skills and their exposure to peer bullying, and whether their SEL skills can predict their experiences with peer bullying. In the relational survey approach, the research hypotheses are examined, and predictions are made by identifying the direction and intensity of the relationships between two or more variables using correlation and regression analyses (Karasar, 2016). To align with the objectives of this study, the initial focus was on exploring the relationships between the SEL skills of students with LD and various factors, such as gender, grade level, academic performance, parents' education levels, socio-economic status, and parental living arrangements. Following this, an attempt was made to assess whether these students' SEL skills could predict their vulnerability to bullying.

Participants

In the research, it was planned to determine the sample in districts with different rankings by taking into account the Turkish Statistical Institute (TURKSTAT) socioeconomic development data of Istanbul districts and Istanbul Governorship Open Door socioeconomic development ranking data (Can et al., 2023). In this context, Ataşehir, Avcılar, Büyükçekmece, Fatih, Güngören and Zeytinburnu districts of Istanbul were selected. The study group consisted of 219 students, aged 13-16, diagnosed with LD, who were enrolled in the Support Education Program for SLD at special education and rehabilitation centers. These students were selected using the convenience sampling method (Büyüköztürk et al., 2008) which involves choosing participants from a target group that is easily accessible and practical due to constraints related to time, budget, and workforce. The inclusion criteria for the participants were (1) having a hospital report and a Guidance and Research Center (GRC) report showing a diagnosis of LD and (2) having an intelligence level of normal or above normal according to this report. Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of students with LD.

Table 1
Students' Demographic Characteristics

Variable	Groups	f	%
Age	13	77	35.2
	14	67	30.6
	15	51	23.3
	16	24	11
Gender	Female	89	40.6
	Male	130	59.4
Grade	6	57	26
	7	88	40.2
	8	74	33.8

Table 1
Students' Demographic Characteristics (continue)

Variable	Groups	f	%
*Grade Point Average	Under 45	10	4.6
	45-54	31	14.2

	55-69	103	47
	70-84	54	24.7
	85-100	21	9.6
Mother's Graduation	İlliterate	12	5.5
	Primary school	31	14.2
	Secondary school	80	36.5
	High school	61	27.9
	University	35	16
Father's Graduation	İlliterate	2	9
	Primary school	28	12.8
	Secondary school	45	20.5
	High school	83	37.9
	University	61	27.9
Parents' Cohabitation Status	Married	195	89
	Divorced	24	11
Socio-Economic Status	Low	58	26.5
	Medium	127	58
	High	34	15.5

* This information was obtained from the responses given to the relevant question in the Personal Information Form.

Of the students, 40.6% were female and 59.4% were male. In terms of grade levels, 26% were in 6th grade, 40.2% in 7th grade, and 33.8% in 8th grade. Regarding academic achievement, 4.6% of the students had a Grade Point Average (GPA) below 45, 14.2% had a GPA between 45-54, 47% had a GPA between 55-69, 24.7% had a GPA between 70-84, and 9.6% had a GPA between 85-100. When examining the educational levels of parents, 5.5% of mothers and 9% of fathers were illiterate, 14.2% of mothers and 12.8% of fathers had completed elementary education, 36.5% of mothers and 20.5% of fathers had attended secondary school, 27.9% of mothers and 37.9% of fathers had graduated from high school, and 16% of mothers and 27.9% of fathers had obtained university degrees. Additionally, 89% of the students' parents live together, while 11% live apart.

In determining the students in this study, institutional permission was first obtained from the private special education and rehabilitation centers where the students attended; then the parents of the students were asked to sign the *Informed Consent Form* and their permission was obtained.

Data Collection Tools

In the research, demographic data of the students were gathered through the Personal Information Form, their SEL abilities were evaluated using the SEL Skills Scale, and their experiences with bullying were assessed using the Victim Form of the Adolescent Peer Relationship Identification Scale (Seçer, 2014).

Personal Information Form

This form, which was prepared based on the information in the literature, is a form that includes 8 questions about gender, grade, parents' graduation, parents' relationship status, socio-economic level

of the family and the student's grade point average.

SEL Skills Scale (SELSS)

In this study, the SELSS was utilized to assess students' SEL abilities. Developed by Kabakçı and Owen (2010), the scale contains 40 items and is rated on a 4-point scale: 1-Not at all appropriate, 2-Somewhat appropriate, 3-Quite appropriate, and 4-Completely appropriate. The scale is divided into four sub-categories: problem-solving skills (11 items), communication skills (9 items), stress management skills (10 items), and self-esteem boosting skills (10 items). The scale's possible score range is from 40 to 160, with lower scores indicating insufficient SEL skills and higher scores reflecting stronger SEL abilities (Kabakçı & Owen, 2010).

Adolescent Peer Relationship Scale Bully and Victim Form (APRSB-VF)

In the study, the APRSB-VF, developed by Parada (2000) and adapted into Turkish by Seçer (2014), was used to assess the level of peer bullying, with validity and reliability studies conducted. This scale, designed to assess the frequency of bullying behaviors and the extent of exposure to bullying among middle and high school students, contains 18 items. The items are rated on a scale from 1 (Never) to 6 (Every day), with 2 representing Sometimes, 3 indicating Once or twice a month, 4 meaning Once a week, and 5 corresponding to Several times a week. The Victim Form includes three sub-dimensions: verbal, physical, and emotional victimization. The scale has a minimum score of 18 and a maximum score of 108 (Seçer, 2014).

Data Collection Process

Before administering the scales in this study, permission was obtained from the authors who developed or adapted the scales. Ethics committee approval was then sought from the Biruni University Scientific Research Ethics Committee. Institutional approval was obtained from the special education and rehabilitation centers where the research would take place, and consent was acquired from the parents of the students who would participate through the Parent Consent Form. Once all required permissions were obtained, parents were requested to fill out the Personal Information Form given to them. The SELSS and the Victim Form from the Adolescent Peer Relations Bully and Victim Form were completed through one-on-one interviews with the students.

Data Analysis

The data collected through the Personal Information Form were summarized in a descriptive table displaying frequencies and percentages. To assess whether demographic variables affected the scores obtained from the scales, independent samples t-tests and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) were conducted (Büyüköztürk, 2020). To identify which groups showed significant differences in the ANOVA analysis, the Scheffe test was applied as a post-hoc test when the variances were homogeneously distributed, and the Games-Howell test was used as a post-hoc test when the variances were not homogeneously distributed. Both the Scheffe and Games-Howell tests are reliable and commonly used when the sample sizes in the groups differ from each other (Cevahir, 2020).

The data collected from the SELSS and the Adolescent Peer Relationship Scale Victim Form were input into the SPSS-29 program for analysis. During this stage, the necessary checks were performed, and 7 out of 226 data points were excluded due to incomplete responses to the scale questions, leaving 219 valid data points for analysis. Initially, the skewness and kurtosis coefficients were calculated to assess the normality of the data, and the results showed that the coefficients fell between -1 and +1, indicating that the data were normally distributed (Büyüköztürk, 2020). Next, Cronbach's alpha coefficients were calculated for the scales to assess their reliability. According to

existing literature, Cronbach's alpha values range from 0 to 1, with values above .60 considered acceptable and values exceeding .7 indicating good reliability (George & Mallery, 2019; Pallant, 2017). In this study, the Cronbach's alpha values for the two scales ranged from .82 to .97, with the SELSS having a coefficient of .97 and the Adolescent Peer Relationship Scale Victim Form having a coefficient of .94. The statistical data for these scales are presented in Table 2.

Table 2
Statistics on Scales

Scales	N	Min.	Max.	$\bar{x}$	ss	Skewness	Kurtosis	Cronbach Alfa
SELSS	219	48	153	105	22.45	.66	-.540	.97
CS	219	9	35	24.14	5.31	.034	-.560	.89
PSS	219	11	44	28.62	6.88	.044	-.397	.94
SCS	219	11	39	25.79	5.77	.147	-.469	.87
SEBS	219	10	40	27.20	6.81	-.013	-.831	.95
PRSVF	219	18	83	40.84	14.57	.455	-.183	.94
VV	219	6	29	14.24	5.04	.623	.281	.82
EV	219	6	30	14.09	5.36	.528	-.219	.85
PV	219	6	30	12.51	5.05	.418	-.400	.89

SELSS: SEL Skills Scale, CS: Communication Skills, PSS: Problem Solving Skills, SCS: Stress Coping Skills, SEBS: Self-Esteem-Boosting Skills, PRSVF: Peer Relations Scale Victim Form, VV: Verbal Victimization, EV: Emotional Victimization, PV: Physical Victimization

Pearson correlation analysis was performed to determine the relationship between students' SEL skills and their exposure to peer bullying. In interpreting the correlation coefficient (r), which provides quantitative data about the strength and direction of the relationship between two variables, a value of .10-.29 is considered a low-level relationship, a value of .30-.49 is considered a medium-level relationship, and a value of .50+ is considered a high-level relationship (Cohen, 1988; Field, 2009).

Linear regression analyzes were conducted to determine whether students' SEL skills predicted their exposure to peer bullying. One of the most important conditions of linear regression analyzes is that there is a multi-collinearity problem among the independent variables. The fact that the relationship between independent variables is above .8 and/or .9 indicates that there may be a multicollinearity problem (Büyüköztürk, 2020). For this reason, the SELSS general score was not included in the multiple regression due to its high correlation with its subscales. As a result, both simple and multiple linear regression analyses were performed in this study. Simple linear regression was used to examine the predictive ability of the general score of the SELSS and the overall score and sub-dimension scores of the Peer Relations Scale Victim Form. Multiple linear regression analysis was employed to evaluate the predictive power of the four sub-dimensions of the SELSS, along with the total score and sub-dimensions of the Peer Relations Scale Victim Form.

FINDINGS

In this study, findings are presented regarding (1) whether the SEL skills of students with LD and their exposure to peer bullying differ based on demographic variables, (2) the level of the relationship between the SEL skills of students with LD and their exposure to bullying, and (3) the predictive power of students' SEL skills on their exposure to peer bullying.

Findings on the Demographic Characteristics of Students with LD

Findings regarding whether the scores obtained from the SELSS and the Peer Relations Scale-Victim Form by students with LD differ based on gender, grade level, and family socio-economic status are presented below in order.

Table 3
t-Test Results for Gender

Variables	Gender	N	X̄	ss	T	p
SELSS	Female	89	117	21.87	6.727	.00*
	Male	130	98.05	19.46		
CS	Female	89	26.81	5.14	6.768	.00*
	Male	130	22.31	4.61		
PSS	Female	89	32.18	6.64	6.979	.00*
	Male	130	26.19	5.94		
SCS	Female	89	28.11	5.92	5.214	.00*
	Male	130	24.20	5.11		
SEBS	Female	89	29.90	6.43	5.123	.00*
	Male	130	25.35	6.46		
PRSVF	Female	89	35.12	13.34	-5.074	.00*
	Male	130	44.76	14.11		
VV	Female	89	12.49	4.71		.00*
	Male	130	15.43	4.93	4.419	
EV	Female	89	12.48	5.27		.00*
	Male	130	15.19	5.16	3.783	
PV	Female	89	10.14	4.37		.00*
	Male	130	14.13	4.86	6.202	

*p < .05

As seen in Table 3, there is a notable difference in the overall average scores on the SELSS between male and female students with LD. Specifically, female students score significantly higher than their male counterparts, both in the total score (X̄=117) and across various subdimensions, including communication skills (X̄=26.81), problem-solving abilities (X̄=32.18), stress coping techniques (X̄=28.11), and self-improvement strategies (X̄=29.90).

It is also observed that the total mean scores of students on the Peer Relations Scale - Victim Form show a significant difference based on gender. Accordingly, females have significantly lower mean scores than males in the overall score (X̄=44.76), as well as in the subdimensions of verbal victimization (X̄=12.49), emotional victimization (X̄=12.48), and physical victimization (X̄=10.14).

Tablo 4
ANOVA Results Regarding Grade Level Variable

Variables	Grade	N	x̄	S	F	P
SELSS	6	57	102.95	21.88	1.081	0.34
	7	88	105.16	21.49		
	8	74	108.62	23.94		
	Total	219	105.75	22.45		
CS	6	57	23.54	5.51	1.658	0.19
	7	88	23.76	5.02		
	8	74	25.04	5.44		
	Total	219	24.14	5.31		
PSS	6	57	27.54	6.99	1.715	0.18
	7	88	28.40	6.43		
	8	74	29.73	7.25		
	Total	219	28.63	6.88		
SCS	6	57	24.82	5.59	1.159	0.32
	7	88	26.30	5.35		
	8	74	25.93	6.35		
	Total	219	25.79	5.77		
SEBS	6	57	27.04	6.70	0.66	0.52
	7	88	26.70	6.56		
	8	74	27.92	7.20		
	Total	219	27.20	6.81		
PRSVF	6	57	42.19	15.29	0.542	0.58
	7	88	41.06	13.80		
	8	74	39.55	14.98		
	Total	219	40.84	14.57		
VV	6	57	14.46	5.24	0.103	0.90
	7	88	14.26	4.74		
	8	74	14.05	5.29		
	Total	219	14.24	5.04		
EV	6	57	14.56	5.53	0.427	0.65
	7	88	14.13	5.06		
	8	74	13.69	5.62		
	Total	219	14.09	5.36		

Tablo 4
ANOVA Results Regarding Grade Level Variable (continue)

Variables	Grade	N	x̄	S	F	P
PV	6	57	13.18	5.38	1.249	0.29

7	88	12.67	5.01	
8	74	11.81	4.83	
Total	219	12.51	5.06	

Table 4 shows that there is no statistically significant difference in the scores of students with LD on the scales based on grade level (p > .05).

Tablo 5
ANOVA Results Regarding Socio-Economic Level

Variables	Socio-Economic Status	N	X	ss	F	p	Significant Difference
SELSS	L	58	85.41	13.97	95.612	.00*	(Scheffe)
	M	127	107.46	17.45			L-M
	H	34	134.06	16.31			L-H
	Total	219	105.75	22.45			M-H
CS	L	58	19.62	3.56	80.59	.00*	(Scheffe)
	M	127	24.46	4.32			L-M
	H	34	30.62	3.67			L-H
	Total	219	24.14	5.31			M-H
PSS	L	58	23.38	4.82	58.388	.00*	(Scheffe)
	M	127	28.96	5.75			L-M
	H	34	36.32	6.08			L-H
	Total	219	28.63	6.88			M-H
SCS	L	58	21.38	3.45	60.245	.00*	(Games-Howell)
	M	127	26.05	4.90			L-M
	H	34	32.35	5.40			L-H
	Total	219	25.79	5.77			M-H
SEBS	L	58	21.03	5.05	77.656	.00*	(Games-Howell)
	M	127	27.99	5.52			L-M
	H	34	34.76	4.23			L-H
	Total	219	27.20	6.81			M-H
PRSVF	L	58	51.81	12.26	46.675	.00*	(Games-Howell)
	M	127	39.62	12.88			L-M
	H	34	26.71	9.28			L-H
	Total	219	40.84	14.57			M-H

Tablo 5
ANOVA Results Regarding Socio-Economic Level (continue)

Variables	Socio-Economic Status	N	X	ss	F	p	Significant Difference
VV	L	58	17.60	4.42	32.148	.00*	(Scheffe)
	M	127	13.83	4.58			L-M

	H	34	10.06	3.97			L-H
	Total	219	14.24	5.04			M-H
	L	58	17.60	4.56	35.68	.00*	(Games-Howell)
EV	M	127	13.81	5.00			L-M
	H	34	9.15	3.39			L-H
	Total	219	14.09	5.36			M-H
	L	58	16.60	4.17	54.151	.00*	(Games-Howell)
PV	M	127	11.98	4.42			L-M
	H	34	7.50	2.78			L-H
	Total	219	12.51	5.06			M-H

*p < .05
L: Low, M: Medium, H: High

The scores obtained by students from the scales differ according to their families' socio-economic levels. Accordingly, the overall mean score of the SELSS of students with LD living in low socio-economic status (SES) families ($\bar{X}$=85.41) is significantly lower than both the mean score of students from middle-SES families ($\bar{X}$=107.46) and the mean score of students from high-SES families ($\bar{X}$=134.06) (F=95.612; p<.05). Additionally, the overall mean score of students from middle-SES families ($\bar{X}$=107.46) is statistically significantly lower than that of students from high-SES families ($\bar{X}$=134.06) (F=95.612; p<.05).

The overall mean score of the Peer Relations Scale-Victim Form (PRS-VF) of students from low-SES families ($\bar{X}$=51.81) is significantly higher than the mean score of students from middle-SES families ($\bar{X}$=39.62) and the mean score of students from high-SES families ($\bar{X}$=26.71) (F=46.675; p<.05). Furthermore, the overall mean score of students from middle-SES families ($\bar{X}$=39.62) is statistically significantly higher than that of students from high-SES families ($\bar{X}$=26.71) (F=46.675; p<.05).

Findings Regarding Exposure to Bullying

In this section, findings regarding the relationship between the SEL skills of students with LD and their exposure to peer bullying are included.

Table 6
The Relationship Between the SEL Skills of Students with LD and Their Exposure to Peer Bullying

	SELSS	CS	PSS	CSS	SISW	PRSVF	VV	EV	PV
SELSS									
CS	931**	1							
PSS	944**	843**	1						
CSS	875**	761**	829**	1					
SEBS	875**	794**	742**	607**	1				
PRSVF	.606**	.543**	.539**	.502**	.604**	1			

VV	-.548**	-.476**	-.490**	-.466**	-.545**	-954**	.1		
EV	-.559**	-.499**	-.492**	-.444**	-.581**	-956**	.900**	.1	
PV	-.607**	-.561**	-.543**	-.510**	-.582**	-916**	.797**	.795**	.

**p < .01

According to Table 6, there are statistically significant relationships between the scores of students with LD on the SELSS and the Peer Relations Scale - Victim Form (PRS-VF). Accordingly, there is a high-level, statistically significant negative correlation between the overall SELSS score and the overall PRS-VF score (r = -.606), verbal victimization score (r = -.548), emotional victimization score (r = -.559), and physical victimization score (r = -.607).

There is also a high-level, statistically significant negative correlation between students' SELSS communication skills scores and the overall PRS-VF score (r = -.543). When examining other subdimensions of SELSS, it is observed that there is a high-level, statistically significant negative correlation between problem-solving skills scores (r = -.539), coping with stress skills scores (r = -.502), self-enhancement skills scores (r = -.604), and the overall PRS-VF score.

In the verbal victimization subdimension, there is a moderate, statistically significant negative correlation between students' communication skills (r = -.476; p<.01), problem-solving skills (r = -.490), coping with stress skills (r = -.466), and self-enhancement skills (r = -.545) scores and the overall verbal victimization score.

In the emotional victimization subdimension, there is a moderate, statistically significant negative correlation between communication skills (r = -.499), problem-solving skills (r = -.492), and coping with stress skills (r = -.492) scores and the overall emotional victimization score. Additionally, there is a statistically significant negative correlation between self-enhancement skills scores (r = -.581) and the overall emotional victimization score.

In the physical victimization subdimension, there is a high-level, statistically significant negative correlation between students' communication skills (r = -.561), problem-solving skills (r = -.543), coping with stress skills (r = -.510), and self-enhancement skills (r = -.582) scores and the overall physical victimization score.

Findings on the Predictive Power of SEL Skills on Exposure to Peer Bullying

A multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to determine the predictive power of the SEL skills of students with LD on their exposure to peer bullying.

Table 7
Predictive Power of the SEL Skills Scale Overall Score on Peer Bullying

		Coefficients					Model			
Dependent Variables	Independent Variables	B	Standard Mistake B	B	t	p	df	F	p	R²
PRSVF	Constant	4.580	.210		21.770	.00	1	126.051	.00*	.367

General Point	SELSS General Point	-.874	.078	-.606	-11.227	.000*	217			
Verbal Victimization	Constant	4.544	.230		19.770	.000	1 217	93.146	.00*	.300
	SELSS General Point	-.821	.085	-.548	-9.651	.000*				
Emotional Victimization	Constant	4.703	.242		19.423	.000	1 217	98.790	.00*	.313
	SELSS General Point	-.891	.090	-.559	-9.939	.000*				
Physical Victimization	Constant	4.493	.219		20.528	.000	1 217	126.445	.00*	.368
	SELSS General Point	-.911	.081	-.607	-11.245	.000*				

*p < .05

Students' overall SELSS scores significantly predict their scores on the Peer Relations Scale - Victim Form (PRS-VF). Accordingly, the overall SELSS score statistically significantly predicts the overall PRS-VF score ($F_{1,217}=126.051$; p<.05) and explains 36.7% of the variance in the overall PRS-VF score.

The overall SELSS score statistically significantly predicts the verbal victimization score ($F_{1,217}=93.146$; p<.05) and explains 30% of the variance in verbal victimization.

The overall SELSS score statistically significantly predicts the emotional victimization score ($F_{1,217}=98.790$; p<.05) and explains 31.3% of the variance in emotional victimization.

The overall SELSS score statistically significantly predicts the physical victimization score ($F_{1,217}=126.445$; p<.05) and explains 36.8% of the variance in physical victimization.

Table 8
Predictive Power of the SELSS Subdimensions on Peer Bullying

Dependent Variables	Independent Variables	B	Standard Mistake B	β	t	p	df	F	p	Corrected R²
PRSVF Genel Puanı	Consant	4.575	.214		21.400	.000	4 214	34.870	.00*	.383
	CS	-.002	.158	-.001	-.013	.990				
	PSS	-.056	.157	-.043	-.358	.721				
	SCS	-.262	.137	-.187	-1.906	.058				
	SISW	-.544	.108	-.458	-5.055	.000*				
VV	Consant	4.537	.234		19.387	.000	4 214	26.076	.00*	.315
	CS	.119	.173	.083	.685	.494				
	PSS	-.069	.172	-.052	-.403	.687				
	SCS	-.321	.150	-.220	-2.131	.034*				
	SISW	-.542	.118	-.439	-4.605	.000*				
EV	Consant	4.675	.244		19.122	.000	4 214	28.913	.00*	.339
	CS	.035	.181	.023	.192	.848				
	PSS	-.056	.179	-.039	-.311	.756				
	SCS	-.204	.157	-.131	-1.295	.197				
	SEBS	-.643	.123	-.490	-5.228	.000*				
PV	Consant	4.514	.225		20.066	.000	4	32.998	.00*	.370

CS	-.160	.167	-.112	-.958	.339	214
PSS	-.043	.165	-.032	-.263	.793	
SCS	-.262	.145	-.179	-1.810	.072	

*p < .05

The scores obtained by students with LD from the subscales of the SELSS significantly predict their overall scores and subscale scores on the Peer Relations Scale-Victim Form (PRS-VF). Accordingly, the variables of communication skills, problem-solving skills, coping with stress skills, and self-enhancement skills collectively and significantly predict the overall PRS-VF score ($F4,214=34.187$; p<.05) and explain 38.3% of the variance in the overall PRS-VF score. It is observed that only the self-enhancement skills score makes a significant contribution to this model (p<.05).

The variables of communication skills, problem-solving skills, coping with stress skills, and self-enhancement skills collectively and significantly predict the verbal victimization score ($F4,214=26.076$; p<.05), the emotional victimization score ($F4,214=28.913$; p<.05), and the physical victimization score ($F4,214=32.998$; p<.05). These variables explain 31.5% of the variance in verbal victimization, 33.9% of the variance in emotional victimization, and 37% of the variance in physical victimization. It is observed that only the self-enhancement skills score makes a significant contribution to all three models (p<.05).

DISCUSSION

This study was conducted to explore the SEL skills and bullying experiences of students with LD, aged 13-16, in relation to certain demographic variables (gender, grade level, and family socioeconomic status), and to assess whether SEL levels can predict exposure to peer bullying.

The first finding of the study indicates that students' SEL levels and experiences of peer bullying differ by gender and family socioeconomic status; however, these factors do not vary according to grade level. The study showed that female students possess more advanced SEL skills than their male counterparts. It was found that female students exhibit stronger communication skills than male students (Martinez, 2002; Roseberry, 1997; Elcik & Bayındır, 2015). They were also found to be more competent in interpersonal communication skills, especially in empathy (Şirin et al., 2018). This enables girls to use words more effectively and express their emotions more clearly (Roseberry, 1997).The OECD (Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development) Social and Emotional Skills Survey Turkey Preliminary Report (2021) emphasized that there is a relationship between the socioeconomic status of families and children's social emotional skills.

In social life, girls are expected to demonstrate more positive social skills than boys. This expectation, along with differences in upbringing, is thought to contribute to their higher communication skill scores (Springs, 2002). Additionally, it was found that female students have more developed problem-solving and stress-coping skills than male students. Girls tend to produce more effective and sensitive solutions in situations involving peer pressure and share their experiences more openly with peers and parents in stressful situations (Churney, 2000; Rossman & Rosenberg, 1992). Similarly, it has been observed that girls with SLD have better well-being and receive more parental support compared to boys (Heiman & Olenik-Shemesh, 2020).

When examining the first finding in terms of exposure to peer bullying, it was found that female students had lower Peer Relations Scale-Victim Form (PRS-VF) scores than male students, meaning that males were exposed to peer bullying more frequently than females. Studies have shown that behaviors involving physical aggression, such as intimidation and direct attacks, are more common among males (Cenkseven Önder & Yalnızca Yıldırım, 2017; Polat & Sohbet, 2020) and that they are

more likely than females to experience bullying behaviors involving indirect aggression (Kılıçarslan et al., 2023). Another study conducted by Weinreich et al. (2023) also revealed that male students were more prone to being exposed to peer bullying.

This study also found that socioeconomic status is a variable that causes differences in students' SEL and PRS-VF general score averages. According to this finding, students from low socioeconomic backgrounds scored lower on the SEL scale compared to those from middle and high socioeconomic backgrounds. Parental socioeconomic status is a significant factor affecting children's academic achievement, and it is well known that there is a connection between parents' socioeconomic status and children's outcomes. Socioeconomic status is also linked to mental health, as children from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are more prone to exhibiting psychosomatic symptoms or maladaptive behaviors (Shabeeda, 2023). In addition, there are studies reporting that students in families with low socioeconomic status are more exposed to peer bullying (Çalışkan et al., 2018; Güven, 2015; Özkan & Gökçearslan Çiftçi, 2010), as well as studies reporting that there is no relationship between socioeconomic status of families and students' exposure to peer bullying (Sanada, 2025; Süzük & Akıncı, 2022).

When examining the results related to grade level, it was discovered that neither the SEL skills nor the experiences of peer bullying among the students differed based on their grade level. This finding is in contrast to the outcomes reported in similar studies in the literature. For example, Eccles (2004) indicated that sixth grade was identified as the strongest predictor of skills that enhance self-esteem, a subdimension of SEL, with these skills diminishing as grade level increased. This finding is consistent with Churney's (2000) results, which suggest that the onset of adolescence negatively affects students' perceptions of their self-esteem. On the other hand, although there are studies showing that aggression decreases with increasing age (Başaran, 2008; Nair, 2014), there are also studies that reveal that there is no significant relationship between age and peer bullying and overlap with the findings of this study (Aydar, 2019).

The second finding showed that there is a significant relationship between the SEL skills and experiences of peer bullying among students with disabilities when comparing their overall scores on the scales and the scores from the subdimensions of the scales. Based on this finding, a regression analysis was conducted to determine whether the SEL skills of SEN students predicted their experiences of peer bullying. The results indicated that stress management skills, communication skills, skills enhancing self-esteem and problem-solving skills significantly predicted the students' experiences of peer bullying. Among the SEL skills, the subdimension of skills enhancing self-esteem was found to be the strongest predictor of the various types of peer bullying. The relationship between self-esteem-boosting skills and peer bullying is a frequently studied topic in psychological research. For instance, Kaukiainen et al. (2002) examined the link between learning difficulties, social intelligence, and self-concept, along with their relationship to bullying and victimization issues. They discovered that social intelligence was positively associated with learning abilities but negatively correlated with victimization. In another study, Jankauskiene et al. (2008) investigated the connection between bullying behaviors, psychosocial health indicators (such as self-esteem, happiness, and relationships with family and teachers), and demographic factors in schools. They found a correlation between victimization and the development of low self-esteem. Research on peer bullying with students with and without LD (Berchiatti et al., 2022; Rose et al., 2013) supported that students with LD who have high social support and develop quality peer relationships are less likely to be victimized. The fact that students with LD have poor social skills and this prevents them from forming constructive bonds with their peers increases their risk of being bullied (Marini et al., 2023).

There are also various studies on the relationship between stress management skills, one of the

SDL skills, and peer bullying. For example, Eldiorita and Layyinah (2016) found that factors such as social competence (e.g., cooperation, empathy, and self-control) and school stress (e.g., teacher interaction) significantly affect bullying behavior in adolescence and that students who experience stress are more prone to bullying. Similarly, Irshad and Atta (2013) found that low social competence and school stress have an impact on bullying behavior. Östberg et al. (2018) found that the stress experienced by students was effective in their exposure to bullying.

Fox and Boulton (2005) found that students who are exposed to bullying generally have low social skills. In addition, Champion et al. (2003) stated that behaviors such as cooperation may be a protective factor against bullying, especially for female students. Toblin et al. (2005) showed that bullying students tend to have low social skills. It is seen that all students with special needs, including SLD, generally have poor social skills (Rose et al., 2011) and are exposed to bullying due to peer rejection as a result of language difficulties and inhibition (Luciano & Savage, 2007).

In preventing and reducing peer bullying, developing problem-solving skills and teaching social skills help students strengthen their interpersonal relationships, better manage their emotions and resolve conflicts effectively, and improve their self-efficacy (Espelage et al., 2015;; Soleimani & Moharam Zade, 2018; Silva et al., 2018). Efforts to improve students' social-emotional learning skills will reduce the likelihood of experiencing peer bullying (Nickerson et al., 2019). Moreover, as Rose et. all. (2013) stated, schools' implementation of anti-bullying intervention programs that include peer social support and increase peer acceptance will reduce the risk of peer bullying for both typically developing students and students with special needs.

CONCLUSION

The study found that the SEL skills of students aged 13-16 with disabilities significantly varied according to gender, grade point average, parental education levels, and economic status, but there was no significant variation based on grade level, age, or parental marital status. Additionally, it was determined that the students' experiences of peer bullying significantly varied according to gender, grade point average, parent's graduation, and economic status, but there was no significant effect of grade level, age, or parental marital status.

The research revealed that SEL skills, particularly those enhancing self-esteem, significantly predicted various forms of peer bullying, with a high negative correlation observed specifically with physical victimization. There was a significant relationship between SEL skills and experiences of bullying. Regression analysis showed that stress management skills, communication skills, skills enhancing self-esteem, and problem-solving skills significantly predicted experiences of peer bullying. A significant relationship was found between victimization and the participants' communication, problem-solving, stress management, and self-esteem-boosting skills.

SUGGESTIONS

Studies on the SEL skills of students with disabilities will help in understanding the challenges they face and, by enhancing their self-efficacy, will lead them to success both in school and in society (Elias, 2004; Heiman & Olenik-Shemesh, 2020). An effective SEL program that involves the entire school, as well as support from families and the community, will strengthen students' SEL skills (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Considering the findings of this research, the following recommendations are suggested to support students with disabilities in coping with peer bullying.

- Conduct awareness-raising activities about students with disabilities for school management,

teachers, students, and parents.

- Encourage students with disabilities to interact more with their peers, and encourage their peers to interact more with students with disabilities.

- Inform the parents of students with disabilities about how they can support their children's school life and coping strategies for peer bullying.

- Schools should review their anti-bullying policies and ensure special measures are taken for both typically developing and students with disabilities.

- Develop and implement intervention programs to prevent peer bullying.

- Enhance the communication and social skills of both typically developing and students with disabilities.

Ethical Statement

This article is based on the first author's master's thesis. Ethics committee approval was obtained from Biruni University Graduate Education Institute Scientific Research Ethics Committee in order to conduct the research (Date: 20/05/2024, Decision No: 2024-BİAEK/01-35). The research did not contain any ethical drawbacks.

Ethics Committee Approval

20/05/2024 dated and numbered 2024-BİAEK/01-35 was given by Biruni University, Graduate Education Institute Scientific Research Ethics Committee ethics committee.

Author Contributions

Research Design (CRediT 1) Author 1 (%60) – Author 2 (%40)

Data Collection (CRediT 2) Author 1 (%100) – Author 2 (%0)

Research - Data analysis - Validation (CRediT 3-4-6-11) Author 1 (%60) – Author 2 (%40)

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Finance

This study was not supported by any other institution. No financial support was received during the research process.

Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest in this study.

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