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|Research Article / Araştırma Makalesi|

An Examination of the "Addiction and Addiction Prevention" Course Using Activity-Based Teaching Methods: A Qualitative Study

Etkinlik Temelli Öğretim Yöntemleriyle "Bağımlılık ve Bağımlılıkla Mücadele" Dersinin İncelenmesi: Nitel Bir Araştırma

Özge Canoğulları[1]

Keywords

Activity-Based learning

Addiction education

Empathy development

Coping skills

Inductive thematic analysis

Abstract

This study aimed to examine prospective educators' experiences, perspectives, and perceived competencies regarding activity-based instructional practices implemented throughout an undergraduate "Addiction and Addiction Prevention" course. The study employed a qualitative descriptive design utilizing inductive thematic analysis. The study group comprised a complete cohort of 55 undergraduate students (100% participation rate) enrolled in the course and meeting predefined inclusion criteria at a public university in Türkiye during the 2025–2026 academic year. Qualitative data were collected through semi-structured focus group interviews exploring participants' lived experiences with case analyses, role-playing simulations, creative activity design, and addiction-themed television series reflections. The dataset was analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase inductive thematic analysis framework. The thematic analysis revealed that activity-based instruction consolidated abstract theoretical knowledge into experiential learning, transforming students from passive recipients into active agents. Findings demonstrated that role-playing, narrative case analyses, and cinemeducation deconstructed moralistic stereotypes, facilitating a conceptual transition toward a biopsychosocial model of addiction while fostering empathy for affected individuals and families. Furthermore, participants reported ecologically transferring acquired coping competencies—such as refusal assertiveness, boundary-setting, and digital self-regulation—into daily peer and personal contexts, while navigating nuanced social anxieties and fears of peer exclusion during boundary enforcement. Integrating experiential, drama-based, and narrative instructional modalities into higher education addiction curricula holistically fosters prospective educators' cognitive comprehension, affective sensitivity, and preventive behavioral efficacy, thereby strengthening their professional readiness for school-based prevention.

Anahtar Sözcükler

Etkinlik temelli öğrenme

Bağımlılık eğitimi

Empati gelişimi

Baş etme becerileri

Tümevarımsal tematik analiz

Öz

Bu araştırma, yükseköğretim düzeyindeki "Bağımlılık ve Bağımlılıkla Mücadele" dersinde uygulanan etkinlik temelli öğretim yöntemlerinin, öğretmen adayı öğrencilerin bağımlılık olgusuna yönelik algıları, empati gelişimleri, baş etme becerileri ve pedagojik deneyimleri üzerindeki yansımalarını derinlemesine incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Araştırmada nitel betimsel desen kullanılmıştır. Çalışma grubunu, 2025-2026 eğitim-öğretim yılında Türkiye'deki bir devlet üniversitesinde derse kayıtlı olan ve belirlenen katılım ölçütlerini karşılayan 55 lisans öğrencisinden oluşan tam çalışma grubu (%100 katılım oranı) oluşturmaktadır. Araştırma verileri; vaka analizleri, rol oynama çalışmaları, yaratıcı etkinlik tasarımları ve bağımlılık temalı dizi analizlerini içeren yarı yapılandırılmış odak grup görüşmeleri aracılığıyla toplanmıştır. Elde edilen nitel veriler, Braun ve Clarke'ın (2006) altı aşamalı tümevarımsal tematik analiz yaklaşımıyla çözümlenmiştir. Tematik analiz sonucunda; etkinlik temelli öğretimin teorik bilgiyi somutlaştırarak kalıcı öğrenmeyi sağladığı ve öğrencileri pasif dinleyici rolünden aktif katılımcı rolüne dönüştürdüğü saptanmıştır. Bulgular, özellikle vaka analizi, rol oynama ve dizi incelemelerinin (sinemayla eğitim) öğrencilerde bağımlı bireylere ve ailelerine yönelik damgalayıcı önyargıları kırarak, bağımlılığı ahlaki bir "irade zayıflığı" yerine biyopsikososyal bir süreç olarak yeniden anlamlandırmalarını sağladığını ortaya koymuştur. Ayrıca öğrencilerin "hayır deme", "sınır koyma" ve öz-düzenleme becerilerini günlük yaşamlarındaki akran baskısı ve dijital ekran sınırlandırması gibi riskli durumlara aktarabildikleri, bununla birlikte akran ortamında sınır koyarken sosyal dışlanma kaygısı gibi uygulama güçlükleri de deneyimledikleri belirlenmiştir. Araştırma sonuçları, yükseköğretim bağımlılık önleme programlarında deneyimsel, dramatik ve anlatı temelli materyallerin kullanımının; öğrencilerin sadece bilişsel değil, duyuşsal (empati, damgalamayı azaltma) ve davranışsal (öz-yeterlik, risk yönetimi) boyutlarda çok yönlü gelişimini desteklediğini ve geleceğin eğitimcilerine koruyucu-önleyici mesleki yeterlik kazandırdığını göstermektedir.

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Introduction

Addiction is defined as a condition characterized by repetitive patterns of behavior that are difficult to control and that negatively affect an individual's physical, psychological, or social functioning (American Psychiatric Association [APA], 2013). Addictive behaviors are commonly classified into two broad categories: Substance-related addictions and behavioral addictions. Substance-related addictions refer to dependence on psychoactive substances such as alcohol, tobacco, cannabis, and cocaine (Volkow & Koob, 2015). In contrast, behavioral addictions emerge independently of substance use and are marked by a persistent inability to regulate or limit engagement in specific behaviors. Examples of behavioral addictions include gambling, internet use, social media use, online gaming, and compulsive buying (Grant et al., 2010; Kuss & Griffiths, 2015).

With the rapid advancement of digital technologies, behavioral addictions have become increasingly prevalent and are now recognized as a significant risk factor, particularly among young people (Sussman et al., 2011). Empirical studies indicate that behavioral addictions in youth are associated with a wide range of adverse outcomes, including poorer academic performance, deterioration in social relationships, reduced psychological well-being, and sleep-related problems (Andreassen, 2015; Marino et al., 2018). Therefore, the early identification of addictive behaviors and the development of effective prevention and early intervention strategies have become a priority for both public health and educational systems.

University students constitute a particularly vulnerable group in this context. The university period coincides with a critical developmental stage characterized by identity formation, increasing autonomy, and intensified peer relationships, all of which may heighten susceptibility to both substance-related and behavioral addictions (Arnett, 2000). In addition, university students often experience greater accessibility to alcohol, tobacco, and other substances, as well as increased exposure to digital technologies and online environments (Kuss et al., 2013; Wechsler & Nelson, 2008). The convergence of these developmental and environmental risk factors places university students at an elevated risk for engaging in addictive behaviors.

In response to this risk profile, higher education institutions have increasingly incorporated addiction and addiction prevention courses into their curricula. These courses aim not only to provide students with knowledge about substance-related and behavioral addictions, but also to help them recognize risky situations and develop protective and coping skills. However, the existing literature suggests that addiction education programs are predominantly based on informational and theoretical content. Programs that rely primarily on knowledge transmission have been found to be limited in their ability to produce sustained changes in attitudes and behaviors (Botvin & Griffin, 2004; Nation et al., 2003). As a result, the question of *how addiction and addiction prevention courses should be designed and implemented to foster meaningful learning and behavioral change* has emerged as a significant problem area within educational research.

Despite the recognized vulnerability of university students, preventive efforts within higher education settings remain limited. Most studies in the field are descriptive or cross-sectional, focusing mainly on prevalence rates rather than on the development, implementation, or evaluation of structured, pedagogy-driven prevention and intervention programs (Hamarta et al., 2021; Saletti et al., 2021). This gap highlights the need for educational approaches that move beyond traditional lecturing and actively engage students in the learning process, particularly through methods that address cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions of learning.

Similarly, research conducted in Türkiye indicates that both substance-related and behavioral addiction rates among university students are substantial (Elik & Karadeniz, 2025), while students frequently exhibit notable knowledge deficits and misconceptions regarding addictive processes (Sanal et al., 2020). Despite this high prevalence, these findings are not accompanied by a parallel increase in evidence-based preventive interventions, and institutional prevention initiatives within higher education remain limited in scope and accessibility (Müderrisoğlu, 2008; Yoldaş & Demircioğlu, 2020). This gap underscores the urgent need to strengthen addiction prevention and early intervention courses, as well as campus-based counseling and prevention services, through structured, theory-driven, and culturally responsive educational approaches.

One promising framework for addressing this need is activity-based learning, which is grounded in constructivist learning theory and emphasizes students' active engagement in the learning process through experience, reflection, and interaction (Fosnot, 2013). Rather than positioning students as passive recipients of information, activity-based learning facilitates knowledge construction through problem-solving, discussion, role assumption, and reflective practices. A substantial body of research demonstrates that active and activity-based learning approaches enhance academic achievement, learner motivation, and the retention of learning outcomes (Prince, 2004; Freeman et al., 2014). These benefits are particularly salient in subject areas with a strong affective component, such as addiction education, where attitudinal and behavioral change is a primary instructional goal. At the same time, the literature also acknowledges that activity-based approaches require careful instructional planning and effective classroom management, placing additional demands on educators (Steinhardt et al., 2020).

Within addiction prevention education, various activity-based instructional strategies have been employed to promote deeper learning and psychosocial skill development. Case-based learning, for instance, enables students to analyze real-life or realistic scenarios, thereby strengthening critical thinking and problem-solving skills (Herreid, 2007). In the context of addiction education, case analyses help students understand how individuals become involved in addictive behaviors, identify risk and protective factors, and explore possible intervention pathways. This approach has been shown to challenge simplistic interpretations of addiction as merely a failure of willpower and to foster a more multidimensional understanding of addiction processes (Herreid, 2007; Livingston et al., 2012; Steinhardt et al., 2017).

Role-playing represents another widely used experiential learning strategy in addiction education. By assuming different social roles, students are able to experience situations from multiple perspectives, which supports empathy development and social skill acquisition (Dodson et al., 2017). Empirical studies indicate that role-playing activities enhance students' readiness to manage real-life situations, particularly those involving peer pressure, stigma, refusal skills, and boundary setting (Rao & Stupans, 2012). In addiction-related contexts, such activities provide a safe environment in which students can rehearse adaptive responses to high-risk situations.

In addition, media- and narrative-based reflective practices, such as the analysis of addiction-themed television series or films, have gained increasing attention in educational research. Narrative learning approaches posit that individuals construct meaning through stories and that emotional engagement plays a critical role in deep learning (Green & Brock, 2000). Media-based materials allow students to identify with characters, reflect on complex emotional and behavioral dynamics, and critically examine their own beliefs and biases regarding addiction. Previous studies suggest that such approaches are particularly effective among university students, for whom digital and visual media constitute a familiar and influential learning medium (Alexander et al., 1994; Koch & Dollarhide, 2000).

Beyond instructional methods, addiction prevention education increasingly emphasizes the development of key psychosocial outcomes, including changes in perception, empathy, and coping skills. Perception is a foundational component of learning, as it shapes how individuals interpret, organize, and respond to information (Ertmer & Newby, 2018). In domains characterized by strong social stigma, such as addiction, perceptual change is considered a prerequisite for attitudinal and behavioral transformation (Corrigan et al., 2012; Livingston et al., 2012). Empathy, defined as the capacity to understand and share the feelings and experiences of others, is a particularly critical outcome in the education of future helping professionals (Elliott et al., 2018; Rogers, 1957). Research demonstrates that enhanced empathy is associated with reduced stigmatizing attitudes and more supportive responses toward individuals with addiction (Nolan, 2024).

Coping skills constitute another essential dimension of effective addiction prevention. Drawing on stress and coping theory, coping skills refer to the cognitive and behavioral strategies individuals use to manage stressful and risky situations (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). In addiction prevention contexts, skills such as saying no, setting boundaries, and managing peer pressure are central to reducing vulnerability. The literature consistently indicates that prevention programs integrating knowledge acquisition with empathy development and coping skill enhancement yield more effective and sustainable outcomes than those

focusing solely on information provision (Botvin & Griffin, 2004; King & Delfabbro, 2018; Gasmi & Al Nadabi, 2023).

Taken together, these findings indicate that activity-based and experiential learning approaches provide a strong pedagogical framework for addiction prevention education in higher education. By engaging students cognitively, emotionally, and behaviorally, such approaches move beyond mere awareness-raising and support meaningful learning and the transfer of preventive skills to real-life contexts. Despite these promising outcomes, the existing literature on university-based addiction prevention programs remains largely dominated by quantitative research designs (Hamarta et al., 2021; Yoldaş & Demircioğlu, 2020), which primarily focus on prevalence rates or outcome measurements.

Qualitative studies that explore students' subjective experiences, perceptions, and meaning-making processes—particularly in relation to activity-based learning in addiction education—are notably limited (Neale et al., 2005; Simpson & Bluthenthal, 2020). Moreover, although addiction prevention education during the university period aims to increase students' knowledge, this increase does not always translate into changes in attitudes and behaviors. Many addiction-related courses in higher education continue to rely heavily on the transmission of theoretical content, offering limited opportunities for active participation and experiential learning. Consequently, there is a clear need for in-depth qualitative research that examines how activity-based teaching methods influence students' perceptions of addiction, empathic development, and coping skills. In this context, exploring how activity-based teaching practices implemented in the "Addiction and Addiction Prevention" course are reflected in students' learning processes has the potential to address a significant gap in the literature. Accordingly, the present study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. How do activity-based teaching practices affect students' perceptions of addiction?
2. How do students' empathy levels and perspectives towards individuals with addiction change during this process?
3. How do the coping skills acquired in class (saying no, setting boundaries, etc.) reflect in students' daily life experiences?
4. What are the effects of different activity types (case analysis, role-playing, series analysis, etc.) on the permanence of learning and awareness?

Method

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design utilizing inductive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Sandelowski, 2000). Qualitative descriptive studies are particularly well suited for educational and psychosocial inquiry where the primary objective is to provide a comprehensive, ecologically valid, and rich description of participants' experiences, perceptions, and meaning-making processes within a specific instructional context without imposing predetermined theoretical constraints (Kim et al., 2017; Sandelowski, 2000).

Within this framework, the study examined university students' experiences, perspectives, and perceived competencies regarding the activity-based instructional practices implemented throughout an "Addiction and Addiction Prevention" course. An inductive thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was utilized to systematically identify, analyze, and report patterned meanings and cross-cutting themes across the qualitative focus group dataset. This design allowed for an in-depth understanding of how prospective professionals experienced and made sense of active learning and reflective practices in addiction education.

Participants and Data Collection

The study group comprised a complete cohort of all 55 undergraduate students (42 female, 13 male) enrolled in the elective "Addiction and Addiction Prevention" course (total enrollment N = 55, 100%

participation rate) within the Faculty of Education at Artvin Çoruh University in Türkiye during the Fall semester of the 2025–2026 academic year. Of the participants, 76.36% (n = 42) were female and 23.64% (n = 13) were male. The participants were drawn from various teacher education programs, including Turkish Language Teaching (n = 17, 30.9%), Social Studies Teaching (n = 14, 25.5%), Guidance and Psychological Counseling (n = 8, 14.5%), Elementary Mathematics Teaching (n = 6, 10.9%), Preschool Teaching (n = 6, 10.9%), and Primary School Teaching (n = 4, 7.3%).

Because the entire enrolled cohort voluntarily agreed to take part in the study, data collection encompassed the full population of the course rather than a sampled subset. All participants fulfilled the predefined inclusion criteria: having maintained regular attendance throughout the 14-week academic term, having actively completed all in-class activity modules (case studies, role-playing, creative designs, and media reflections), and having voluntarily consented to participate in the post-course focus group interviews. Establishing these clear eligibility boundaries ensured that the participants represented information-rich cases capable of providing nuanced insights into the pedagogical process under investigation (Patton, 2015).

Data were collected exclusively through semi-structured focus group interviews conducted across five distinct sessions upon the completion of the 14-week instructional semester in January 2026. Each focus group comprised 10 to 12 participants and lasted approximately 40 to 45 minutes. Following the completion of in-class activities, students were asked six open-ended questions designed to elicit their perceptions, experiences, and reflections regarding the course and the instructional methods employed. The interview questions were developed by the researcher in line with the objectives of the study and the relevant literature on addiction and addiction prevention and activity-based learning. Because the semi-structured interview protocol was originally developed by the researcher specifically for this study, no external scale permission was required.

To ensure content validity and clarity, the initial set of interview questions was reviewed by three independent experts in the fields of psychological counselling and guidance and educational sciences. Revisions were made based on expert feedback to improve the relevance, clarity, and comprehensiveness of the questions. Although a formal pilot study was not conducted, expert review played a central role in refining the interview form. In addition, the flexible nature of semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to use follow-up probes during the interviews when necessary to clarify participants' responses and explore their experiences in greater depth, while maintaining a consistent interview structure across participants and across all five focus group sessions.

Procedure

Prior to the commencement of instructional activities and data collection, ethical approval for the study was applied for in September 2025 and officially granted by the Ethics Committee of Artvin Çoruh University on October 15, 2025 (Decision Date: 15.10.2025). All research procedures were conducted in accordance with the ethical principles outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki, including respect for participants' autonomy, voluntary participation, confidentiality, and the right to withdraw from the study at any stage without penalty. Participants were explicitly informed that their participation in the study and focus group interviews was entirely voluntary and would have no bearing on their course evaluation, grading, or academic standing.

Following the approval process, the implementation phase of the study was carried out within the scope of the *Addiction and Addiction Prevention* course during the Fall semester of the 2025–2026 academic year. In mid-October 2025, students enrolled in the course were first provided with foundational theoretical information on substance-related and behavioral addictions. This introductory phase aimed to establish a common conceptual framework and ensure that all participants possessed baseline knowledge regarding addiction types, risk factors, and prevention approaches.

Between November and December 2025, students were divided into small groups and assigned different types of addiction, including social media addiction, gaming addiction, shopping addiction, smartphone addiction, tobacco use, and alcohol use. Each group explored its assigned topic through activity-based learning tasks. These activities encompassed case analyses grounded in real-life or hypothetical scenarios, psychodrama and role-playing exercises, as well as the development of creative products or

preventive interventions tailored to the specific addiction type. Upon the conclusion of the 14-week instructional semester in January 2026, qualitative focus group interviews were carried out to capture students' comprehensive evaluations and lived experiences.

Within the scope of the activity-based learning process, case analysis activities were implemented to enable students to examine addiction-related situations grounded in real-life contexts. Rather than using pre-written or hypothetical scenarios, students were encouraged to construct their own case materials based on authentic experiences and observations related to the assigned addiction topics. To this end, students first conducted online research to identify real-life examples of addiction cases corresponding to their assigned themes. When suitable examples could not be identified through secondary sources, students were guided to collect primary data through ethically appropriate informal fieldwork activities.

For instance, in groups focusing on smoking addiction, students developed semi-structured interview questions and visited selected workplaces to conduct brief interviews with adults who reported smoking behaviors. These interviews aimed to explore factors such as initiation, maintenance, social influences, and perceived difficulties in quitting, and the collected narratives were later transformed into case materials for in-class analysis. In the social media addiction group, a student who voluntarily identified as experiencing problematic social media use documented their daily digital routines by recording a short video illustrating patterns of smartphone and social media engagement throughout the day. This material was used as a case example to facilitate discussions on time management, compulsive use, and self-regulation.

Role-playing activities were designed to help students recognize addiction processes, explore social and familial dynamics surrounding addiction, and practice potential coping and intervention strategies. For each type of addiction addressed in the course, students worked in small groups to collaboratively write original scenarios rather than using pre-existing scripts. The primary aim of these scenarios was twofold: First, to increase awareness by illustrating how addictive behaviors emerge and are maintained; and second, to present possible solution pathways through communication, social support, and help-seeking behaviors. Scenarios typically depicted everyday situations involving peer pressure, family interactions, and moments of decision-making, thereby reflecting realistic social contexts familiar to university students.

For example, in scenarios focusing on substance addiction, students constructed short theatrical sketches portraying a young individual’s initial exposure to substances through peer influence, the reactions of family members, and the emotional and behavioral consequences of this process. These narratives often included moments of conflict, denial, and support, culminating in the individual’s recognition of the problem and openness to seeking help. The inclusion of roles such as family members, peers, and school counselors allowed students to explore multiple perspectives and intervention points within the same scenario.

Within the scope of the course, students were also encouraged to design original, creative activities and materials aimed at increasing awareness of addiction-related behaviors and actively involving the entire class in the learning process. Each group developed interactive activities tailored to their assigned addiction topic, with the primary objective of transforming abstract concepts into concrete, embodied experiences. These creative activities were designed not merely as games, but as experiential learning tools that allowed students to observe, feel, and reflect on the cognitive, emotional, and social effects of addictive behaviors. By integrating movement, symbolic roles, and peer interaction, the activities enabled participants to actively engage with the learning content rather than remaining passive observers.

For example, in an activity designed to raise awareness about smartphone addiction, students created an interactive exercise in which different roles represented communication, comprehension, and digital distractions. While some students attempted to convey messages, others acted as constant “notification parasites,” interrupting the communication process. Through this experiential setup, participants directly experienced how smartphone notifications can disrupt attention, interpersonal communication, and the natural flow of interaction in everyday life.

Similarly, in activities addressing gaming addiction, students developed a symbolic “maze game” in which progress was determined by statements representing either healthy behaviors or addiction-related patterns. Healthy behaviors allowed faster progress through the maze, whereas addiction-related behaviors

slowed advancement. This metaphorical structure helped students concretely visualize how addictive behaviors can hinder personal development and delay reaching life goals.

In addition, students were encouraged to watch selected episodes of the television series "*Böyle Bitmesin"* that address substance use, alcohol addiction, gambling addiction, and eating addiction. Students' reflections and feedback on these episodes were subsequently collected and incorporated into class discussions. Throughout the process, students actively engaged in collaborative learning and presented their work to their peers during class sessions, facilitating discussion, reflection, and peer feedback.

Across all activity-based implementations—including case analyses, role-playing, creative activity design, and addiction-themed television series analyses—learning was consolidated through structured reflection and guided group discussions conducted immediately after each activity. These reflective sessions enabled students to critically examine their experiences, emotional reactions, and behavioral responses, and to explicitly connect in-class activities with real-life addiction-related risk situations. In particular, television series analyses supported students in exploring addiction narratives through characters and storylines, facilitating emotional engagement and perspective-taking. Overall, the discussions focused on awareness development, empathy, risk recognition, and the practical application of coping strategies. In this way, activity-based teaching functioned not only as an instructional method but also as a reflective learning process that supported students' cognitive, affective, and behavioral development while fostering meaningful and transferable learning outcomes.

Following the completion of all instructional activities in January 2026, qualitative focus group interviews were conducted as outlined above, with written informed consent obtained from all participants prior to audio recording (yielding approximately 220 minutes of data across the five sessions). The semi-structured interview protocol comprised six core open-ended questions designed to examine participants' experiences, affective shifts, and behavioral reflections:

1. *How did the activity-based teaching practices (case analyses, role-playing, creative tasks) implemented in this course influence your general understanding and perspectives regarding addiction?*
2. *In what ways did these experiential activities affect your empathy levels and attitudes toward individuals struggling with addiction and their families?*
3. *How have the coping mechanisms, boundary-setting strategies, and refusal skills practiced in class reflected upon your daily routines, digital media use, and peer relationships?*
4. *When you compare the different instructional modalities (role-play simulations, authentic case studies, material design), which one had the most lasting impact on your learning, and why?*
5. *Based on your own experiences, what constructive suggestions or critiques would you offer regarding the instructional approach, duration, and structure of the Addiction and Addiction Prevention course for future semesters?*
6. *How did analyzing addiction narratives through the television series 'Böyle Bitmesin' contribute to your emotional engagement and understanding of the psychosocial dynamics of addiction?*

To ensure equal opportunity for expression, facilitated round-robin sharing and non-directive probing were utilized. All audio recordings were transcribed verbatim and anonymized using participant codes (S1–S55) to protect confidentiality, with data securely archived solely for research purposes.

Data Analysis

The qualitative data obtained exclusively from the verbatim transcripts of the five focus group sessions were analyzed using inductive thematic analysis following the systematic six-phase framework outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). Initially, the data were examined to identify patterned meanings, perceptions, and evaluations regarding the activity-based instructional practices implemented in the "Addiction and Addiction Prevention" course. This analytical approach enabled the organization of large amounts of qualitative narrative into coherent, cross-cutting themes without imposing predetermined theoretical categories. The data analysis process consisted of the following stages:

1. Familiarization with the Data: All audio recordings were transcribed verbatim and read repeatedly along with contextual field notes to achieve deep immersion and familiarity with participants' accounts.
2. Generating Initial Codes: The transcripts were coded systematically line by line, generating initial semantic and latent codes that reflected participants' expressed concepts, lived experiences, challenges, and empathetic shifts.
3. Searching for Themes: Meaningfully related codes were organized into broader clusters and candidate subthemes across the entire dataset.
4. Reviewing and Refining Themes: Candidate themes were checked against both the specific coded excerpts and the entire dataset to ensure internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity.
5. Defining and Naming Themes: The final thematic structure was conceptualized, defined, and named to capture the core essence of students' instructional and psychological experiences.
6. Producing the Report: The identified themes were synthesized and supported with explicit, contextualized participant quotations, linking each quotation directly to its corresponding code/theme while incorporating both positive outcomes and critical variations/difficulties experienced by students.

Trustworthiness

To establish the methodological rigor and trustworthiness of the qualitative inquiry, Lincoln and Guba's (1985) four criteria—credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability—were systematically addressed:

- Credibility (Internal Validity): Prolonged engagement was established through the researcher's immersion across the 14-week semester. Member checking was conducted with a subset of participants (n = 8) to verify that the transcribed statements and thematic interpretations accurately represented their perspectives. Furthermore, multiple verbatim quotations were reported to substantiate every thematic category.
- Transferability (External Validity): A thick description of the instructional context, weekly activity modules, participant characteristics, and pedagogical implementation was provided to enable readers and educators to assess the applicability of the findings to similar higher education settings.
- Dependability (Reliability): The research process, including protocol development, data collection timing, and coding procedures, was documented comprehensively. To ensure coding consistency, an independent qualitative researcher served as a second coder. Both coders independently analyzed a randomly selected subset of 25% of the total transcribed text segments across the five focus group sessions using the same codebook. Intercoder reliability was calculated using Miles and Huberman's (1994) formula [Reliability = Agreement / (Agreement + Disagreement)], yielding an agreement coefficient of 0.87. Disagreements were deliberated through consensus meetings until 100% agreement was achieved.
- Confirmability (Objectivity): An audit trail was maintained, consisting of raw interview transcripts, reflexive field notes, intermediate coding matrices, and coding consensus records. To minimize subjective bias, an external expert in educational psychology audited the alignment between the raw data extracts and the final thematic interpretations.

Researcher Reflexivity

In qualitative inquiry, the researcher's background and institutional positioning can influence the research process. In this study, the author held a dual role as both the course instructor and the primary qualitative researcher. While this positionality provided rich contextual understanding and facilitated rapport with students, it also introduced potential risks of social desirability bias or power asymmetry during focus groups. To mitigate these dynamics, several procedural safeguards were instituted: (a) focus group interviews were conducted only after the complete conclusion of the course and after final semester grading was finalized; (b) participants were explicitly assured that their reflections, whether positive, neutral, or

critical, would have zero academic consequence; (c) the interviewer maintained a non-directive, neutral facilitation posture using standardized open-ended probes; (d) an independent second coder audited the transcripts to ensure that interpretations were data-driven rather than teacher-expected; and (e) deliberate analytical attention was directed toward capturing deviant cases, participant hesitations, and pedagogical challenges.

Findings

The qualitative analysis revealed that activity-based instructional practices exerted multifaceted influences on prospective educators across three interconnected dimensions: (a) cognitive consolidation and active engagement, (b) affective transformation and professional readiness, and (c) relational dynamics and participatory challenges. The corresponding themes, codes, and participant frequencies are summarized in Table 1.

In the frequency tables presented below, frequencies (f) denote the total number of individual participants whose qualitative narratives contributed to each specific code. Because open-ended focus group discussions allowed participants to articulate multiple perspectives across distinct pedagogical aspects, the total frequencies within subthemes may exceed the sample size ($N = 55$).

Table 1

Prospective Educators' Perceptions Regarding the Educational and Experiential Impacts of Activity-Based Practices

Theme	Code	Frequency
Quality of the Learning Process	Retention of knowledge	21
	Active participation	16
	Learning by doing and experiencing	14
	Concretization and realism	13
	Student-centered approach	3
Process-Related Advantages	Enjoyable and engaging learning environment	20
	Practice-oriented learning (opposed to rote/theoretical learning)	14
	Peer interaction and group work	8
	Moving away from a boring and passive classroom atmosphere	2
Gains and Awareness	Increased awareness and consciousness	13
	Development of empathy	8
	Professional preparation and problem-solving skills	4
	Self-confidence and self-expression skills	3
	Behavioral change (e.g., reduced smoking or smartphone use)	2
Pedagogical Challenges (Deviant/Complex Cases)	Initial performance anxiety	4

Participants consistently emphasized that experiential activities bridged the gap between abstract theoretical knowledge and real-world application. Rather than passively receiving standardized information on addiction models, students engaged in active role-play, case simulations, and reflective discussions. This experiential approach facilitated cognitive retention and concretized the complex psychosocial dynamics of addictive behaviors:

"The activity-based practices helped me understand addiction not only theoretically but also through experience and reflection. Role-playing and case analyses enabled me to better comprehend the experiences, decisions, and consequences faced by individuals with addiction. Compared to traditional courses, the most important difference was shifting from being a passive listener to an active participant, which made learning more meaningful and lasting." [S12, Codes: Retention of knowledge; Learning by doing and experiencing; Active participation]

Beyond cognitive gains, the interactive format fostered profound shifts in participants' affective domains. Enacting authentic life scenarios allowed prospective teachers to deconstruct stigmatizing preconceptions and cultivate empathetic understanding toward individuals struggling with addiction. Furthermore, engaging with multidimensional case scenarios reinforced their professional self-efficacy, helping them conceptualize early identification and preventive school-based interventions:

"Through case studies on gaming addiction, we clearly observed how excessive gaming negatively affects individuals by limiting their social relationships to virtual environments and disrupting family life and academic performance. These activities helped us internalize the importance of being more informed and proactive in preventing gaming addiction among our future students." [S41, Codes: Professional preparation; Increased awareness and consciousness]

While the collaborative and gamified environment was predominantly experienced as motivating and liberating compared to conventional lecture formats, a critical variation emerged regarding the initial vulnerability associated with active performance. A few participants noted that stepping into public role-play exercises initially triggered performance anxiety and social discomfort before evolving into self-confidence and communicative resilience:

"One of the most significant contributions of the course was improving my self-expression skills and self-confidence. Through role-playing activities conducted in front of others, I learned to manage anxiety and pressure more effectively. Case analyses and presentations also enhanced my research and referencing skills and helped me feel more confident speaking in public, contributing to my professional preparation." [S27, Codes: Self-confidence and self-expression skills; Initial performance anxiety]

Qualitative analysis indicated that engaging with narrative-based and immersive instructional tools triggered profound cognitive reframing and affective shifts among prospective educators. Participants transitioned from superficial moral judgments toward multidimensional systemic empathy regarding addictive behaviors. The identified themes, codes, and participant frequencies are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Pedagogical Triggers and Resulting Cognitive-Affective Shifts in Empathy and Stigma Reduction

Theme	Code	Frequency
Influential Experiential Triggers	Case analyses and real-life narratives (e.g., Amanda Todd case)	18
	Cyberbullying and social media–related scenario activities	15
	Films/TV series analysis and substance addiction narratives	10
	Role-playing and immersive psychodrama exercises	9
	Technology and smartphone addiction self-tracking practices	8
Cognitive and Affective Restructuring	Reduction of prejudice and non-judgmental attitude restructuring	14
	Reframing addiction: Transition from "willpower deficit" to "complex process"	12
	Systemic empathy: Recognizing victim vulnerability and familial helplessness	11
	Critical self-awareness and self-regulation of personal habits	10
	Supportive professional posture	9

Concrete case analyses and tragic real-world narratives emerged as the most potent pedagogical triggers for emotional immersion and reflective thinking. Rather than encountering sanitized clinical definitions, prospective teachers engaged with the lived realities of victims and struggling individuals. Exploring the devastating psychological trajectory of cyberbullying and digital victimization allowed students to deconstruct the emotional vulnerability underlying compulsive or self-destructive behaviors:

"Among all the activities, case analyses affected me the most, particularly the cyberbullying case involving a girl who died by suicide. Understanding how deeply she cared about others' opinions, felt rejected, and eventually perceived herself as worthless was both heartbreaking and thought-provoking. This experience made me reflect on the importance of self-worth, self-confidence, and not defining oneself through external validation." [S5, Codes: Case analyses and real-life narratives; Cyberbullying and social media activities; Systemic empathy]

The immersive exposure to narrative media, film analyses, and role-playing facilitated a critical epistemic shift: participants dismantled the conventional "moral model" of addiction—which stigmatizes substance or behavioral dependence as a personal moral failure or sheer lack of willpower—and

reconstructed it as a complex, systemic biopsychosocial process. This conceptual transformation fostered genuine empathy not only for the struggling individuals but also for their co-affected family systems:

"Before this course, I subconsciously judged individuals with addiction, assuming it was entirely a matter of weak willpower or a personal choice to ruin one's life. The role-playing activities and film analyses completely altered my perception. Experiencing their helplessness and systemic despair made me realize that addiction is a chronic, deeply rooted struggle requiring compassionate professional support rather than social condemnation." [S18, Codes: Reduction of prejudice; Reframing addiction as a complex process; Supportive professional posture]

Engaging in self-tracking tasks and digital addiction simulations prompted students to turn the analytical lens inward. By recognizing their own vulnerability to digital overuse and impulsive screen time, prospective teachers bridged the divide between "the addict" and "oneself," further eroding judgmental superiority:

"The activities we conducted on smartphone addiction affected me the most. They clearly demonstrated how excessive phone use negatively influences daily life, social relationships, and awareness of one's surroundings. Before these activities, I was not fully aware of the severity of these effects, but the presentations and practices significantly changed my perspective." [S34, Codes: Technology and smartphone addiction practices; Critical self-awareness and self-regulation]

Qualitative findings demonstrated that the psychosocial coping competencies acquired during the course transcended theoretical comprehension and were ecologically transferred into participants' daily routines. Students mobilized behavioral self-regulation, assertiveness, and refusal efficacy across various personal and social risk contexts, while also navigating nuanced challenges in sustaining long-term behavioral modifications. The corresponding themes, codes, and participant frequencies are displayed in Table 3.

Table 3

Ecological Transfer of Acquired Coping Strategies, Real-Life Application Contexts, And Implementation Variations

Theme	Code	Frequency
Applied Coping Strategies	Saying no (against peer pressure)	26
	Setting boundaries (screen time and social environment)	18
	Avoiding risky environments	9
	Crisis management and self-regulation	6
Real-World Application Contexts	Refusing cigarette offers	19
	Limiting technology/social media use	12
	Avoiding alcohol- or substance-related settings	8
	Mindful self-regulation of unhealthy eating patterns	4
Psychosocial Outcomes & Variations	Behavioral cessation or substantial reduction (smoking, gaming)	7
	Enhanced emotional safety, autonomy, and psychological relief	5
	Peer advocacy and functioning as a positive health role model	4
	Overcoming fear of social exclusion and reduced need for peer approval	4
	Implementation challenges and friction in sustaining consistency (Deviant/Complex Case)	3

The most prevalent behavioral transfer observed was the cultivation of assertive refusal skills. Participants utilized structured communication strategies practiced during role-playing simulations to establish firm interpersonal boundaries, particularly when confronted with direct peer pressure regarding tobacco and substance experimentation:

"Yes, I applied these skills in a situation involving peer pressure. A friend repeatedly offered me cigarettes, claiming they were harmless and even beneficial. As the insistence increased, I clearly stated that I did not want to smoke and firmly said no." [S7, Codes: Saying no (against peer pressure); Refusing cigarette offers]

Beyond substance-related risks, students successfully implemented behavioral self-contracting and stimulus control techniques within the realm of digital behaviors. By monitoring screen time and consciously establishing tech-free zones, prospective educators translated conceptual awareness into tangible lifestyle adjustments:

"This course helped me learn how to say no and set boundaries. Previously, my screen time was excessive. After the in-class discussions, I learned how to limit my screen time and applied these strategies, which has reduced my smartphone and social media use." [S45, Codes: Setting boundaries (screen time); Limiting technology/social media use]

"After the healthy living presentation, I set personal boundaries regarding my eating habits. Although I used to consume a lot of junk food, I now pay more attention to healthy eating and try to regulate my behavior more consciously." [S26, Codes: Mindful self-regulation of unhealthy eating patterns; Setting boundaries]

In alignment with qualitative rigor and the exploration of deviant cases, the analysis revealed that behavioral change was neither linear nor uniformly effortless. A small subset of students reported experiencing internal friction, guilt, or interpersonal hesitation when attempting to maintain boundary consistency, illustrating the complex, gradual nature of habit restructuring in early adulthood:

"Although the strategies we discussed were very clear in class, putting them into practice in my actual social circle proved quite challenging. When close friends pressured me to stay online late at night or attend certain gatherings, I still found it difficult to say no consistently without feeling the anxiety of being socially left out. I am still working through this process and trying to build the courage to hold my boundaries firmly." [S31, Codes: Implementation challenges and friction; Overcoming fear of social exclusion and reduced need for peer approval]

The analysis of participants' evaluative reflections highlighted how distinct active instructional modalities differentially catalyzed cognitive, affective, and skill-based learning domains. While immersive dramatic exercises and authentic case analyses emerged as the primary catalysts for profound emotional and cognitive restructuring, creative design tasks supported synthetic pedagogical competence. The distribution of codes and frequencies is outlined in Table 4.

Table 4

Comparative Pedagogical Impacts of Instructional Modalities and Associated Developmental Domains

Theme	Code	Frequency
Most Impactful Instructional Modality	Role-Playing and psychodrama simulations	22
	Case analysis and authentic scenario exploration	21
	Creative activity and preventive material design	10
Primary Domain of Personal/Professional Growth	Emotional awareness, empathy, and perspective taking	25
	Theoretical knowledge acquisition and cognitive restructuring	17
	Applied skill development (problem solving, crisis management)	6

Role-playing exercises functioned as experiential catalysts that moved students from external observers to embodied participants. Taking on the personas of individuals experiencing addiction or their marginalized family members allowed prospective professionals to visceralize affective distress, internal conflict, and stigmatization:

"The method that had the most lasting impact on me was role-playing. This was because I did not only listen; I experienced and felt the situation. The area in which this method contributed the most was emotional awareness. By putting myself in someone else's place, I learned to develop empathy and to look at events from different perspectives." [S39, Codes: Role-Playing; Emotional awareness and empathy]

"Among the methods, role-playing had the most profound impact on me. The role-playing activity related to eating disorders enabled me to understand the issue not only at a cognitive level but through its human dimensions. I experienced the thought patterns, body image anxieties, and internal conflicts of an

individual with an eating disorder, realizing it is deeply tied to self-esteem and social pressures rather than mere food intake." [S51, Codes: Role-Playing; Emotional awareness and empathy]

Engaging with multidimensional, authentic case studies provided an essential bridge between conceptual etiology and real-world intervention strategies. Participants highlighted those deconstructing complex real-life trajectories (e.g., severe cyberbullying or progressive chemical dependency) sharpened their analytical reasoning and preventive problem-solving skills:

"For me, authentic case analyses left the most enduring impact. Examining real-life trajectories step by step allowed us to trace the root causes, environmental triggers, and turning points in an individual's addiction process. It contributed immensely to both my theoretical knowledge and diagnostic thinking, helping me realize how critical early school-based detection and timely crisis intervention are for our future educational roles." [S14, Codes: Case analysis; Theoretical knowledge acquisition; Applied skill development]

Participating in the hands-on creation of preventive educational games, brochures, and instructional modules encouraged students to synthesize scientific literature into accessible community tools, strengthening their pedagogical self-efficacy:

"I think designing activities was more lasting. Because when students actively participate in an activity related to a topic, empathy and awareness increase. For this reason, emotional awareness becomes stronger. Through the activities prepared by our classmates, we were able to understand who had what kind of impact on us, how we affected others, and what kinds of habits people have. By reinforcing these experiences, we can become more attentive and mindful in our future relationships." [S23, Codes: Creative activity and preventive material design; Applied skill development; Emotional awareness]

Participants' evaluative reflections provided critical pedagogical insights for optimizing future iterations of the course. While students affirmed the value of the active learning framework, their constructive critiques converged on three strategic directions: (a) authentic field integration, (b) structural and physical environment optimizations, and (c) curriculum and material diversification. The thematic distribution of student recommendations is presented in Table 5.

Table 5

Student Recommendations for Improving the Addiction Prevention Course

Theme	Code	Frequency
Field Applications and Visits	Inviting experts, counselors, or individuals in recovery as guest speakers	8
	Organizing visits to addiction treatment centers (e.g., AMATEM, Yeşilay)	6
	Conducting awareness activities in external institutions (e.g., middle schools)	1
Course Structure and Time Management	Shortening and streamlining theoretical presentations	6
	Reducing group size (smaller working groups)	3
	Increasing course hours or offering the course as a compulsory subject	2
Methodological and Activity Diversity	Increasing the number and/or duration of activities and practices	7
	Incorporating alternative techniques (e.g., debates, interviews, posters, music)	4
	Conducting role-playing activities in more suitable or professional settings	3
Content-Related Suggestions	Adding topics such as social media, technology, caffeine, and sports addiction	2
	Recommending books and films related to addiction	2
Satisfaction with the Current Structure	Maintaining the course as it is (no change suggested)	12

A prominent pedagogical suggestion was integrating real-world narratives and field experts directly into the classroom environment. Prospective educators highlighted that engaging with recovery experiences and field specialists would make the course more impactful:

"More activities related to social media and technology addiction could be added to the course content. Allocating slightly more time for these activities would be beneficial. In addition, inviting real-life guests (such

as experts, counselors, or individuals in recovery) could make the course more impactful and memorable." [S3, Codes: Inviting experts, counselors, or individuals in recovery as guest speakers; Adding topics such as social media and technology addiction]

Participants also provided constructive feedback regarding the allocation of instructional time, emphasizing the need to expand practical workshops and active learning tasks:

"Based on my own experiences, I have several suggestions to make the Addiction Prevention course more effective in future semesters. First, increasing the number of practice-based activities would be beneficial. Methods such as role-playing and case analysis, in particular, help students understand and internalize the topics more deeply; therefore, more time could be allocated to these types of activities." [S47, Code: Increasing the number and/or duration of activities and practices]

Concurrently, a substantial proportion of participants affirmed the efficacy of the current instructional architecture, noting that the dual structure—beginning with baseline conceptual knowledge followed by weekly thematic group workshops—was well balanced:

"In my opinion, everything was structured as it should be. I believe that in the first sessions, it is important for all students to gain at least a basic understanding of different types of addiction. Afterwards, as we did, having each group present its own topic on a weekly basis was very appropriate. Overall, the course progressed very effectively." [S15, Code: Maintaining the course as it is (no change suggested)]

Qualitative analysis of participants' narrative reflections on the television series *Böyle Bitmesin* demonstrated that visual media and character-driven storytelling served as powerful vehicles for vicarious learning and emotional transportation. By analyzing complex dramatizations of chemical and behavioral addictions, prospective educators developed a systemic understanding of addiction etiology, recognizing interpersonal trauma, familial codependency, and devastating social ripple effects. The distribution of themes, codes, and frequencies is presented in Table 6.

Table 6

Analysis of the TV Series Böyle Bitmesin: Reasons for Impact and Developed Awareness

Theme	Code	Frequency
Most Impactful Episode	Substance addiction (Merve's story – Episode 46)	32
	Eating addiction (Şirin's story – Episode 33)	18
	Alcohol addiction (Dr. Servet / Dr. Aylin – Episode 44)	12
	Gambling addiction (Nasuh's story – Episode 42)	11
Reasons for Impact	Family breakdown: Divorce risk, harm to children/siblings	24
	Irreversible consequences: Death, suicide attempt, sexual assault/abuse	21
	Psychological depth: Low self-esteem, feelings of worthlessness, denial and lying	15
	Trust violation: Harm caused by a close relative or friend	14
	Physical violence: Loss of control during crises, violence toward a baby/child	9
Developed Awareness	Understanding that addiction destroys not only the individual but the entire social environment	26
	Importance of early detection and unconditional family support	15
	The vital value of the principles "never starting" and "saying no"	12
	Understanding underlying traumas (e.g., childhood abuse, violence) before judging	8

The narrative exploring substance addiction generated the highest emotional resonance, primarily due to its portrayal of irreversible consequences and boundary violations. Participants were deeply moved by how initial vulnerability and trust violations within familial relationships escalated into catastrophic outcomes, highlighting the systemic ripple effect of chemical dependency:

"The episode of Böyle Bitmesin that affected me the most was the one focusing on substance addiction (Episode 46). This episode clearly demonstrated how addiction negatively affects not only the individual but

also their family and social environment. Witnessing how a person gradually loses control and begins to harm loved ones helped me realize the seriousness of addiction. It also emphasized that one should be cautious about trust and that when an addicted individual accepts treatment, they need strong support. In Merve's case, her mother initially did not support her and even reported her, whereas her father stood by her side. This showed me that recovery must first be desired by the individual, but family support plays a crucial role. I was also deeply affected by the alcohol addiction storyline, particularly the trauma of a doctor who had been exposed to domestic violence at a young age and later killed intoxicated patients because they reminded her of her father." [S18, Codes: Substance addiction (Merve's story – Episode 46); Understanding that addiction destroys not only the individual but the entire social environment; Importance of early detection and unconditional family support; Trust violation]

Analyzing alcohol addiction through clinical and domestic lenses enabled students to recognize the destructive intersection between unresolved childhood trauma, emotional dysregulation, and domestic violence. Witnessing how parental addiction inflicts chronic psychological harm on children reinforced the urgency of early identification and protective interventions:

"The episode that affected me the most was the one addressing alcohol addiction. It portrayed an alcoholic doctor who had married under family pressure and neglected his wife and child. He was involved in a relationship with another female doctor at the hospital and displayed aggressive behavior, shouting and psychologically abusing his wife when intoxicated. At one point, his behavior even escalated to the risk of harming his child. The episode also revealed that several alcoholic patients had died for similar reasons. Additionally, the female doctor's unresolved trauma—stemming from her father's alcoholism and the murder of her mother—led her to attempt to kill alcohol-dependent patients. This episode powerfully illustrated how alcohol addiction can transform into violence and devastate both children and families." [S32, Codes: Alcohol addiction (Dr. Servet / Dr. Aylin – Episode 44); Family breakdown: Divorce risk, harm to children/siblings; Physical violence: Loss of control during crises; Understanding underlying traumas before judging]

The dramatization of eating addiction expanded participants' diagnostic and empathetic perspectives beyond chemical substances. By observing the character's internal struggle with low self-worth and projection of body dissatisfaction onto marital and parental relationships, students internalized the psychological core of behavioral dependencies:

"The eating addiction episode created significant awareness for me. The character Şirin's constant feelings of worthlessness and the way she reflected these emotions onto her family and social environment were deeply distressing. When she looked in the mirror, she perceived herself as overweight and believed that her husband no longer loved her and was unfaithful. Even when her husband tried to do something kind—such as taking her out to dinner or buying her a bracelet—she focused on criticizing her body instead of enjoying the moment, which also made her husband feel inadequate. She frequently asked her child questions such as 'You're ashamed of me, you want a thin mother, don't you?' which caused emotional harm to the child. Through this episode, I realized once again that addiction affects not only the individual but deeply impacts the entire family." [S55, Codes: Eating addiction (Şirin's story – Episode 33); Psychological depth: Low self-esteem, feelings of worthlessness; Understanding that addiction destroys not only the individual but the entire social environment]

Discussion

The findings of the present study illuminate that prospective educators perceived activity-based teaching methods implemented in the Addiction and Addiction Prevention course as meaningful contributors to their cognitive, emotional, and behavioral development. The results suggest that experiential learning practices—such as role playing, case analyses, creative activity design, and media-based reflections—not only enhanced students' understanding of addiction-related concepts but also fostered perceived empathy, emotional awareness, coping skills, and real-life behavioral self-regulation. In particular, participants articulated a heightened awareness of addiction as a complex psychosocial process rather than a simple matter of willpower, alongside perceived self-efficacy in resisting peer pressure, setting personal boundaries,

and navigating risky interpersonal contexts. These findings highlight the pedagogical promise of student-centered and practice-oriented approaches in higher education addiction curricula.

A key psychological shift captured across participants' qualitative accounts is the transition from a reductive "moral model" toward a systemic "biopsychosocial model" of addiction. By deconstructing stereotypical assumptions through authentic case explorations, participants dismantled judgmental attitudes and reframed addiction as a multifaceted vulnerability requiring professional compassion rather than moral condemnation. This shift is crucial for mitigating social stigma among future educational professionals. Furthermore, the findings suggest that experiential modalities, particularly role playing and narrative case analyses, were perceived as the most transformative components of the instructional design. These methods facilitated affective engagement and enabled prospective teachers to internalize abstract concepts by connecting them with lived human struggles. This outcome aligns with literature emphasizing that active and experiential learning approaches deepen reflective engagement, conceptual retention, and preventive competence in addiction-related teacher and counselor training (Steinhardt et al., 2017; Steinhardt et al., 2020).

Furthermore, participatory learning models that encourage collaboration, critical reflection, and interactive skill rehearsal have been documented as particularly effective in addiction prevention initiatives targeting youth and emerging adults. Such approaches enable learners to function as active agents in the meaning-making process rather than passive recipients of didactic information, thereby facilitating deeper conceptual internalization and sustainable learning outcomes (Botvin & Griffin, 2004; Mellanby et al., 2000; Tobler et al., 2000).

Another notable finding concerns students' reported ecological transfer of coping strategies—such as resisting peer pressure, establishing interpersonal boundaries, and self-regulating digital screen time—into their daily routines. The qualitative accounts suggest that experiential and skill-oriented instructional modules bolstered participants' perceived self-efficacy to recognize high-risk situations and enact protective behavioral choices. Prior scholarship corroborates that educational interventions focusing on assertiveness, self-regulation, and boundary-setting significantly reduce vulnerability to behavioral and substance-related risks, particularly within digital and peer-driven contexts (Baumeister et al., 2006; Epstein et al., 2000). However, in alignment with the qualitative nuances and implementation friction identified in this study, participants also noted that asserting boundaries in real-world peer networks occasionally provoked social anxieties and fears of exclusion. This highlights that behavioral habit restructuring among university students is an iterative, socially situated process that requires ongoing reinforcement rather than an immediate, friction-free transformation (Bandura, 2004; Steinberg & Monahan, 2007). Nevertheless, it is critical to contextualize these perceived gains within broader prevention literature, which cautions that in-class skill training and short-term simulation exercises do not automatically ensure sustained behavioral transformation (Nation et al., 2003; Stockings et al., 2016). Prior evaluation studies demonstrate that university students frequently encounter substantial dissonance when transferring simulated refusal tactics into entrenched social circles, where powerful peer norms, social desirability, and situational pressures can quickly erode classroom gains—a phenomenon often described as intervention decay (Nation et al., 2003; Tobler et al., 2000). Furthermore, literature complicates the presumed direct link between acquired awareness and actual practice, highlighting that enhanced cognitive comprehension or self-reported assertiveness during academic coursework does not reliably predict actual abstinence or effective boundary maintenance in complex, emotionally charged real-life settings (Moreira et al., 2009; Stockings et al., 2016). This critical divergence underscores that while active learning fosters vital initial self-efficacy, classroom-based pedagogy alone cannot serve as an isolated panacea without systemic, campus-wide ecological reinforcement.

Systematic reviews and meta-analyses indicate that structured psychosocial and preventive educational programs implemented in higher education contexts can enhance self-regulatory capacities, mitigate impulsive behaviors, and foster adaptive coping strategies among university students (Moreira et al., 2009; Saletti et al., 2021; Scott-Sheldon et al., 2016). The application of acquired refusal and boundary-setting skills in daily life, as described by participants in this study, suggests that activity-based addiction education can bridge the gap between classroom pedagogy and ecological contexts. Such real-life transfer serves as a primary benchmark for the pedagogical validity of university-level preventive education, which

seeks to cultivate long-term personal consciousness and professional resilience rather than deliver targeted clinical therapy.

The findings also reveal that media-based learning and narrative immersion, particularly the structured reflection on addiction-themed television series episodes (*Böyle Bitmesin*), played a crucial role in cultivating emotional awareness and systemic empathy among prospective educators. Narrative exposure enabled students to observe the psychological, social, and familial consequences of addiction in a concrete and emotionally engaging manner. This finding is supported by previous studies demonstrating that narrative transportation and character-driven storytelling serve as powerful pedagogical tools for deconstructing stigma and fostering nuanced understandings of addictive disorders (Alexander et al., 1994; Green & Brock, 2000; Koch & Dollarhide, 2000). Research on narrative-based and cinemeducation approaches indicates that emotionally engaging stories facilitate perspective-taking, bridge cognitive dissonance, and help learners recognize the intergenerational trauma and systemic ripple effects within families. Such approaches encourage prospective teachers to move beyond moralistic judgments and develop a compassionate, supportive professional posture toward struggling individuals and their families. At the same time, this narrative-driven emotional resonance must be interpreted with critical caution. Stigma-reduction and media-effects literature highlights that vicarious media exposure has inherent pedagogical boundaries. In their meta-analysis, Corrigan et al. (2012) demonstrated that while video-mediated depictions stimulate initial attitude shifts, filmed or fictionalized portrayals yield significantly smaller effect sizes in reducing public stigma and social distance compared to direct, face-to-face contact with affected individuals. Furthermore, systematic evaluations of addiction-related anti-stigma interventions caution that acute emotional engagement stimulated during classroom-based narrative viewing does not inherently translate into objective, non-stigmatizing professional competencies or long-term behavioral advocacy in real-world practice (Livingston et al., 2012). Highly dramatized portrayals also carry the potential risk of provoking defensive avoidance if students perceive character trajectories as extreme or detached from everyday school settings. This critical divergence underscores that narrative media tools should not be utilized in isolation; rather, they require carefully structured debriefing and integration with direct community partnerships to translate vicarious empathy into durable professional readiness.

In addition to these gains, interpreting the pedagogical challenges and student recommendations identified in this study provides vital insights for instructional design. Although active modalities were widely embraced, participants highlighted initial performance anxiety during public role-play exercises, as well as logistical constraints regarding instructional time and classroom space. These observations align with experiential learning literature emphasizing that psychodrama and interactive simulations require carefully scaffolded psychological safety, structured debriefing phases, and adequate physical environments to prevent cognitive overload and performance stress (Kolb, 2014; Steinhardt et al., 2020). Furthermore, prospective educators' calls for field-based visits (e.g., AMATEM, Yeşilay) and direct dialogue with individuals in recovery reflect a desire to consolidate classroom learning through situated ecological exposure, reinforcing the value of university-community partnerships in prevention science.

From a preventive and educational perspective, the findings underscore the strategic role of higher education curricula as critical arenas for primary prevention and early awareness. University students represent a population navigating identity exploration, academic stress, and increased autonomy—factors that can heighten vulnerability to both chemical and behavioral risks. In this regard, activity-based instruction within the "Addiction and Addiction Prevention" course functions as an empowering framework by fostering critical reflection, self-regulation, and emotional insight before maladaptive behaviors become entrenched. Rather than delivering clinical treatment, such courses contribute to universal prevention by strengthening students' psychological resilience and professional intervention competencies. This aligns with contemporary public health and prevention frameworks emphasizing student empowerment, self-awareness, and environmental literacy as essential pillars of sustainable behavior change in emerging adulthood (Botvin & Griffin, 2004; Stockings et al., 2016).

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, several recommendations can be proposed for educational practice, program development, and policy:

- **Instructional Design and Experiential Safety:** Addiction and Addiction Prevention courses in higher education should prioritize activity-based and experiential learning methods rather than relying predominantly on theoretical lectures. Given that public role-play and simulation exercises can provoke initial performance anxiety, educators must scaffold activities within a safe, non-judgmental classroom climate and provide structured debriefing sessions.
- **Cinemeducation and Narrative Integration:** Incorporating media-based materials such as films, documentaries, or television series portraying addiction experiences is recommended. Narrative exposure enhances emotional awareness, facilitates perspective-taking, and supports students in understanding the broader intergenerational and psychosocial impact of addiction on families and communities.
- **Ecological Coping and Behavioral Skills:** Course content should continue to emphasize assertiveness training, boundary setting, and decision-making processes relevant to students' everyday lives. Addressing contemporary behavioral addictions—such as social media, digital technology, and gaming—alongside targeted discussions on navigating peer pressure and fear of social exclusion—will further increase the practical relevance and preventive efficacy of addiction education for university populations.
- **Community and Clinical Field Partnerships:** Collaboration with external institutions and professionals is recommended to enrich course content. Inviting experts, counselors, or individuals with lived recovery experiences, as well as organizing field visits to addiction treatment or prevention centers (e.g., AMATEM, Yeşilay), will strengthen students' experiential learning and professional readiness.

Limitations and Future Research

Several methodological and contextual limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings of this qualitative study:

- **Contextual and Sample Boundaries**: This research was conducted within a single undergraduate elective Addiction and Addiction Prevention course at a single public university in Türkiye. Consequently, the qualitative findings are contextually situated and do not aim for statistical generalizability across diverse academic disciplines, institutions, or cultural settings.
- **Self-Report and Social Desirability Dynamics**: The data relied predominantly on end-of-semester qualitative focus group discussions and participant self-reports. Although extensive reflexivity measures, anonymized student coding (S1–S55), voluntary participation protocols, and post-grading analytical procedures were strictly implemented, the dual instructor-researcher dynamic presents inherent potential for social desirability bias and peer conformity during group interactions.
- **Cross-Sectional Assessment of Behavioral Transfer**: The qualitative data captured self-reported perceived behavioral changes at the conclusion of the 14-week intervention. The long-term retention of acquired coping mechanisms and the professional translation of preventive competencies into future K–12 classroom practices could not be longitudinally observed.
- **Avenues for Future Inquiries**: Future research would benefit from employing multi-site comparative designs and longitudinal follow-ups tracking prospective educators into their initial induction teaching years. Integrating mixed-method approaches—combining qualitative depth with validated psychometric measures of stigma, refusal self-efficacy, and objective behavioral metrics (e.g., digital screen-time tracking)—would provide a more comprehensive, multi-layered evaluation of preventive educational interventions.

Conclusion

The findings of this study illuminate that activity-based and student-centered teaching methods implemented in the Addiction and Addiction Prevention course were perceived as meaningful contributors to prospective educators' cognitive, emotional, and behavioral development. The course enabled students to deconstruct reductionist moral assumptions and conceptualize addiction as a multifaceted biopsychosocial phenomenon rather than a matter of personal weakness or moral failure. Through experiential learning activities such as role playing, case analyses, group discussions, creative preventive material design, and media-based reflections, students developed increased awareness, empathy, and sensitivity toward individuals struggling with addiction and their families.

The results further indicate that learning outcomes extended beyond theoretical understanding and were ecologically transferred into students' daily lives. Participants reported applying coping strategies such as resisting peer pressure, setting personal boundaries, regulating digital media use, and making more conscious behavioral choices. Concurrently, qualitative reflections brought to light critical implementation nuances, showing that asserting interpersonal boundaries in existing social networks can initially induce social friction and exclusion anxieties, underscoring that behavioral habit restructuring is an ongoing developmental trajectory. These findings suggest that awareness-based and skills-oriented addiction education can facilitate the transfer of learning from academic settings to real-life contexts, which is a key indicator of effective preventive education at the higher education level.

Additionally, media-based learning activities, particularly the analysis of addiction-themed television narratives (*Böyle Bitmesin*), played a critical role in enhancing emotional engagement and empathy. Exposure to multidimensional, character-driven stories allowed students to observe the psychological, familial, and social consequences of addiction in a concrete manner, fostering deeper reflection and reducing stigmatizing attitudes. Overall, the study highlights the pedagogical value of integrating experiential, reflective, and narrative-based approaches into addiction education programs for prospective teachers and counselors.

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Declaration of AI Usage Statement

In this study, the AI tool(s) ChatGPT, Gemini and DeepL Translator were used. The tools were utilized for supportive purposes only, and the scope of use was limited to language editing, grammar correction, and translation of certain parts of the manuscript. All content generated or suggested by AI has been reviewed for accuracy and originality by the author, who takes full responsibility.

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