

## An Examination of University Students' Purposes for Participating in E-sports in Their Leisure Time and Their Motivations for Participation\*

Sezer ŞANLI<sup>1</sup>, Meriç ÖDEMİŞ<sup>2</sup>

### ABSTRACT

**Purpose:** The purpose of this study was to examine university students' purposes and motivations for participating in e-sports.

**Method:** The sample consisted of 478 volunteer university students (mean age =  $21.36 \pm 3.11$  years), 273 male and 205 female. A personal information form containing demographic information, an e-sports participation motivation scale, and a digital leisure activities participation purposes scale were used in the study. Since the normality test revealed that the data had a normal distribution, the Independent T-test was used to determine the differences for comparing two independent groups, and the One-Way Anova test was used for comparing more than two groups.

**Results:** A significant difference in motivation for participating in e-sports was found between genders, with this difference favoring males. Differences in motivation for e-sports participation were also observed when evaluated by faculty. Furthermore, it was determined that individuals who engage in physical activity have a higher motivation to participate in e-sports compared to those who do not.

**Conclusion:** In conclusion, this study revealed that the goals and motivations of university students participating in esports include the desire to succeed in a competitive environment, easy access to esports games, and the desire to play and enjoy them.

**Keywords:** E-sport, Motivation, University students.

### ÖZET

#### Üniversite Öğrencilerinin Serbest Zamanlarında E-sporlara Katılma Amaçları ve Katılım Motivasyonlarının İncelenmesi

**Amaç:** Bu çalışmanın amacı üniversite öğrencilerinin e-sporlara katılım amaçlarını ve motivasyonlarını incelemektir.

**Yöntem:** Örneklem, 273 erkek ve 205 kadın olmak üzere 478 gönüllü üniversite öğrencisinden (ortalama yaş =  $21,36 \pm 3,11$  yıl) oluşmuştur. Çalışmada demografik bilgileri içeren bir kişisel bilgi formu, e-spor katılım motivasyon ölçeği ve dijital boş zaman etkinliklerine katılım amaçları ölçeği kullanılmıştır. Normallik testi verilerin normal dağılıma sahip olduğunu gösterdiğinden, iki bağımsız grubu karşılaştırmak için bağımsız T testi, ikiden fazla grubu karşılaştırmak için ise tek yönlü Anova testi kullanılmıştır.

**Bulgular:** Cinsiyetler arasında e-sporlara katılma motivasyonunda önemli bir fark bulundu ve bu fark erkekler lehineydi. Ayrıca, öğrenim görülen fakülteye göre değerlendirildiğinde e-sporlara katılma motivasyonunda farklılıklar gözlemlendi. Bunun yanı sıra fiziksel aktivite yapan bireylerin, yapmayanlara kıyasla e-sporlara katılma motivasyonunun daha yüksek olduğu belirlendi.

**Sonuç:** Sonuç olarak, bu çalışma, e-sporlara katılan üniversite öğrencilerinin amaç ve motivasyonlarının rekabetçi bir ortamda başarılı olma arzusu, e-spor oyunlarına kolay erişim ve bu oyunları oynayıp eğlenme isteğini içerdiğini ortaya koymuştur.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** E-sport, Motivasyon, Üniversite öğrencisi

<sup>1</sup> Alanya Alaaddin Keykubat University, Postgraduate Education Institute, Antalya/TÜRKİYE. sezer6177@hotmail.com, ORCID: 0009-0000-1712-2512

<sup>2</sup> Alanya Alaaddin Keykubat University, Faculty of Sport Sciences, Antalya/TÜRKİYE. meric.odemis@alanya.edu.tr, ORCID: 0000-0002-2034-4295

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## INTRODUCTION

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Throughout history, play has been considered a fundamental human activity that fulfills individuals' needs for entertainment, learning, and social interaction. As a cultural phenomenon, play is not only a means of leisure but also plays a significant role in the formation of social structures and meaning systems (Huizinga, 1938). With the acceleration of technological advancements, the concept of gaming has also transformed and moved to digital environments. Today, digital games not only satisfy individuals' need for entertainment but have also become an important tool for establishing social interaction, developing identities, and fulfilling psychological needs (Ryan et al., 2006).

Digital leisure time is a type of leisure time in which individuals can participate in digital environments for various purposes such as gaming, entertainment, socialising, and communication, without any spatial restrictions, with the help of digital technologies (Er and Cengiz, 2022). Other researchers have defined it similarly, stating that it is any freely chosen activity carried out using digital technologies, during leisure time (Sintas et al., 2015). Current changes in technology and service networks have led to changes in our understanding of free time and games, paving the way for the emergence of new games (Yıldız et al., 2020).

The accessibility of digital games and their instant feedback mechanisms are among the important factors that increase individuals' motivation levels and encourage participation in e-sports (Hamari & Sjöblom, 2017). Furthermore, e-sports not only provides a competitive environment but also serves functions such as building social connections, developing a sense of belonging, and escaping the stresses of daily life (Himmelstein et al., 2017). In this respect, the motivation for participation in e-sports is considered a holistic structure that meets both the internal and external needs of the individual.

Electronic sports (e-sports), a popular activity among individuals, has become an industry with the advancement of computer-based gaming systems, establishing itself internationally. With its accessibility, reach, and the benefits it offers to individuals, e-sports has emerged as a popular recreational activity in the technological age (Yayla and Güven, 2020). By 2025, there will be 3.32 billion players worldwide. Asia leads with 1.48 billion players (46%), followed by Europe (715 million) and Latin America (420 million) (Kumar, 2025). E-sports encompasses activities in which individuals or teams compete online or offline using electronic devices to achieve a specific goal at the end of the game (Korotin et al., 2019; Tesfed, 2025).

Due to many factors such as game prices, sponsorship agreements, global tournament organisations, prizes, and player transfers, e-sports has begun to find its place among other sports and is considered one of the leading sports of the 21st century (Yılmaz and Karaoğlu, 2019; Hamari and Sjöblom, 2017). E-sports has been designated as one of the sports to be included in the competition at the 2022 Asian Games by the Olympic Council of Asia (OCA) (Wattanapisit et al., 2020). In 2024, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) had decided to organize the world's first Olympic E-sports Games. The first e-sports games will be held in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, in 2027 (Olympics.com).

One of the factors affecting the performance of e-sports players is motivation (Şimşek et al., 2023). Recent studies in the field of e-sports show that participants' motivations are generally driven by aspects such as entertainment, escapism, acquiring knowledge, career, competition, success, leisure time, skill, emotion, team spirit, and earnings (Güngör Gülsoy and Tunca, 2023; Nguyen & Daxauer, 2025). In light of this information, this study aims to examine the purposes and motivations for participating in e-sports, which are quite popular among university students.

## METHOD

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### Research Model and Procedure

Since the research aims to examine university students' purposes and motivations for participating in e-sports in their free time, a quantitative design with descriptive survey model was used.

### Sample Group

Before starting the data collection process, the target audience of the study, students at Akdeniz University and Alanya Alaaddin Keykubat University, were carefully informed about the study, demographic questions, and scales. Data was collected from 232 students at Alaaddin Keykubat University and 246 students at Akdeniz University, reaching a total of 478 students (mean age =  $21.36 \pm 3.11$  years), and their information was prepared for analysis. When the demographic characteristics of the participants were examined, 57.1% of participants are male, 42.9% are female, and in terms of monthly income distribution, 81.8% of participants earn 17.000 TL or less, 6.7% earn between 17.000 and 20.000 TL, and 11.5% earn 20.000 TL or more. When examining the departments, 24.9% are in Private Security and Protection, 15.7% are in Economics, 13.8% are in Sports Management, and 10.9% are in Recreation. When

examining the classes, 41.8% are in the first class, while 31.6% are in the second class. When examining weekly free time, 47.3% have more than 11 hours, and 23.8% have 4-7 hours. When weekly digital gaming times are examined, 69.9% play digital games for 1-3 hours, and 10.9% play digital games for 4-7 hours. When participation in physical activity is analyzed, 22% of participants do not engage in physical activity, while 78% do.

### **Data Collection Method**

#### **Data collection tool**

The data collection tools used in the study are the digital leisure time activity participation scale and the e-sports participation motivation scale. In addition to the scales, there is also a personal information form containing questions about demographic variables such as weekly leisure time, digital game time, and participation in physical activities.

#### ***E-sports participation motivation scale***

Developed in 2019 by Nazlı Deniz Öz and Ferhat Üstün, this 47-item scale is a 5-point Likert scale consisting of the sub-dimensions ‘Taxonomic Domain,’ ‘Competence,’ ‘Relational Self,’ ‘Competitive Success,’ and ‘Leisure Time.’ In the validity and reliability study conducted by Nazlı Deniz Öz and Ferhat Üstün (2019), the internal consistency coefficient of the scale was 0.980 (Öz and Üstün, 2019). In this study, the reliability score determined by the Cronbach Alpha coefficient for the total reliability dimension was found to be 0.94. In addition, the internal consistency coefficient of the scale was found to be 0.95 in the taxonomic sub-dimension, 0.95 in the competence sub-dimension, 0.89 in the relational self sub-dimension, 0.90 in the competitive success sub-dimension, and 0.92 in the free time sub-dimension.

#### ***Scale of Participation Goals in Digital Leisure Time Activities***

The Digital Leisure Time Activities Participation Scale (DSZEKMÖ) was developed by Recep Cengiz and Batuhan Er in 2022. It is a 7-point Likert scale consisting of a total of 24 items with the sub-dimensions of ‘Games’, ‘Entertainment’, ‘Socialisation’, and ‘Communication’. In the validity and reliability study conducted on the scale, the internal consistency coefficient was found to be 0.816 for the game sub-dimension, 0.852 for the entertainment sub-dimension, 0.798 for the socialisation sub-dimension, and 0.799 for the communication sub-dimension (Er and Cengiz, 2022). In this study, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient was found to be 0.92 when considering the overall reliability dimension of the scale. Additionally, the internal consistency coefficient of the scale used in our study was found to be 0.88 for the game sub-dimension, 0.94 for the entertainment sub-dimension, 0.93 for the socialisation sub-dimension, and 0.92 for the communication sub-dimension.

## Data analysis

IBM SPSS 25 software was used to analyze the data obtained from a total of 478 university students. The distribution structure of the data was examined using the Skewness-Kurtosis test according to the skewness and kurtosis coefficients, and the skewness values were found to be between -0.492 and 0.076, and the kurtosis values were found to be between -1.086 and -0.609. According to Tabacnik and Fidell (2013), skewness and kurtosis values between -1.5 and +1.5 are interpreted as indicating a normal distribution. Since the data from the study met the assumptions of parametric tests, it was found to follow a normal distribution. The arithmetic mean and standard deviation values of the collected data were determined; an independent t-test was performed for the comparison of two independent groups, and a one-way ANOVA test was performed for the comparison of more than two groups. In the interpretation of the statistical analysis, a significance level of  $p < 0.05$  was considered.

## Research Ethics

The study was approved by the Alanya Alaaddin Keykubat University Social and Human Sciences Field Scientific Research Ethics Committee (Decision number: 2023/08).

## RESULTS

**Table 1.** Average scores for motivation to participate in e-sports and purposes for participating in digital games

|                                            | Sub-dimensions      | N   | Minimum | Maximum | Mean $\pm$ SD     |
|--------------------------------------------|---------------------|-----|---------|---------|-------------------|
| Motivation to participate in e-sports      | Taxonomic Domain    | 478 | 1       | 5       | 2.6074 $\pm$ 1.05 |
|                                            | Competence          | 478 | 1       | 5       | 2.5409 $\pm$ 1.14 |
|                                            | Relational Self     | 478 | 1       | 5       | 2.3721 $\pm$ 1.05 |
|                                            | Competitive Success | 478 | 1       | 5       | 2.7618 $\pm$ 1.11 |
|                                            | Free Time           | 478 | 1       | 5       | 2.6388 $\pm$ 1.16 |
| Purposes of participation in digital games | Game                | 478 | 1       | 7       | 4.4247 $\pm$ 1.76 |
|                                            | Entertainment       | 478 | 1       | 7       | 4.2459 $\pm$ 1.71 |
|                                            | Socialisation       | 478 | 1       | 7       | 3.8879 $\pm$ 1.83 |
|                                            | Communication       | 478 | 1       | 7       | 4.0807 $\pm$ 1.78 |

According to Table 1, the average scores of the sub-dimensions of competition, success, and free time are higher than other sub-dimensions in terms of participants' motivation to participate in e-sports. When examining the purposes of participating in digital games, it is understood that the average scores of the sub-dimensions related to gaming and entertainment are higher than others.

**Table 2.** Comparison of e-sports participation motivation scores according to gender variable

| Sub-dimensions      | Gender | N   | Mean $\pm$ SD   | t     | p            |
|---------------------|--------|-----|-----------------|-------|--------------|
| Taxonomic Domain    | Man    | 273 | 2.91 $\pm$ 1.01 | 7.814 | <b>0.000</b> |
|                     | Female | 205 | 2.19 $\pm$ 0.96 |       |              |
| Competence          | Man    | 273 | 2.77 $\pm$ 1.14 | 5.208 | <b>0.000</b> |
|                     | Female | 205 | 2.23 $\pm$ 1.06 |       |              |
| Relational Self     | Man    | 273 | 2.56 $\pm$ 1.03 | 4.743 | <b>0.000</b> |
|                     | Female | 205 | 2.11 $\pm$ 1.00 |       |              |
| Competitive Success | Man    | 273 | 2.95 $\pm$ 1.08 | 4.591 | <b>0.000</b> |
|                     | Female | 205 | 2.49 $\pm$ 1.07 |       |              |
| Free Time           | Man    | 273 | 2.86 $\pm$ 1.11 | 4.975 | <b>0.000</b> |
|                     | Female | 205 | 2.34 $\pm$ 1.15 |       |              |

p<0,05

In Table 2, when examining the distribution of e-sports participation motivation according to gender significant differences were found in all sub-dimensions (p<0.05). This difference is in favour of male students.

**Table 3.** Comparison of scores for purposes of participation in digital leisure activities according to gender variable

| Sub-dimensions | Gender | N   | Mean $\pm$ SD   | t     | p            |
|----------------|--------|-----|-----------------|-------|--------------|
| Game           | Man    | 273 | 4.63 $\pm$ 1.72 | 3.052 | <b>0.002</b> |
|                | Female | 205 | 4.14 $\pm$ 1.76 |       |              |
| Entertainment  | Man    | 273 | 4.41 $\pm$ 1.68 | 2.490 | <b>0.013</b> |
|                | Female | 205 | 4.02 $\pm$ 1.72 |       |              |
| Socialisation  | Man    | 273 | 3.96 $\pm$ 1.85 | 1.121 | 0.263        |
|                | Female | 205 | 3.77 $\pm$ 1.80 |       |              |
| Communication  | Man    | 273 | 4.14 $\pm$ 1.79 | 0.839 | 0.402        |
|                | Female | 205 | 4.00 $\pm$ 1.77 |       |              |

When the purposes of participating in digital leisure activities were analysed according to gender in Table 3, a significant difference was found between male and female university students in the categories of games and entertainment (p<0.05).

**Table 4.** Comparison of e-sports participation motivation scores according to faculty variable

| Sub-dimensions   | Faculty                              | N   | Mean $\pm$ SD   | F     | p            |
|------------------|--------------------------------------|-----|-----------------|-------|--------------|
| Taxonomic Domain | Economic and Administrative Sciences | 75  | 2.31 $\pm$ 1.02 | 4.571 | <b>0.000</b> |
|                  | Engineering                          | 93  | 2.71 $\pm$ 0.97 |       |              |
|                  | Tourism                              | 13  | 2.04 $\pm$ 1.10 |       |              |
|                  | Sport Sciences                       | 163 | 2.75 $\pm$ 1.06 |       |              |
|                  | Communication                        | 15  | 1.85 $\pm$ 1.05 |       |              |
|                  | Vocational College                   | 119 | 2.67 $\pm$ 1.05 |       |              |
| Competence       | Economic and Administrative Sciences | 75  | 2.22 $\pm$ 1.05 | 3.033 | <b>0.010</b> |
|                  | Engineering                          | 93  | 2.56 $\pm$ 1.01 |       |              |
|                  | Tourism                              | 13  | 2.36 $\pm$ 1.22 |       |              |
|                  | Sport Sciences                       | 163 | 2.67 $\pm$ 1.16 |       |              |
|                  | Communication                        | 15  | 1.87 $\pm$ 0.80 |       |              |
|                  | Vocational College                   | 119 | 2.66 $\pm$ 1.23 |       |              |

|                     |                                      |     |           |       |              |
|---------------------|--------------------------------------|-----|-----------|-------|--------------|
| Relational Self     | Economic and Administrative Sciences | 75  | 2.13±0.98 | 2.614 | <b>0.024</b> |
|                     | Engineering                          | 93  | 2.39±0.85 |       |              |
|                     | Tourism                              | 13  | 1.94±0.97 |       |              |
|                     | Sport Sciences                       | 163 | 2.48±1.11 |       |              |
|                     | Communication                        | 15  | 1.84±0.82 |       |              |
|                     | Vocational College                   | 119 | 2.48±1.13 |       |              |
| Competitive Success | Economic and Administrative Sciences | 75  | 2.53±1.02 | 3.975 | <b>0.002</b> |
|                     | Engineering                          | 93  | 2.72±0.89 |       |              |
|                     | Tourism                              | 13  | 2.16±1.01 |       |              |
|                     | Sport Sciences                       | 163 | 2.90±1.17 |       |              |
|                     | Communication                        | 15  | 2.01±0.98 |       |              |
|                     | Vocational College                   | 119 | 2.91±1.18 |       |              |
| Free Time           | Economic and Administrative Sciences | 75  | 2.25±1.10 | 3.782 | <b>0.002</b> |
|                     | Engineering                          | 93  | 2.81±1.02 |       |              |
|                     | Tourism                              | 13  | 2.31±1.27 |       |              |
|                     | Sport Sciences                       | 163 | 2.82±1.22 |       |              |
|                     | Communication                        | 15  | 2.12±1.05 |       |              |
|                     | Vocational College                   | 119 | 2.60±1.16 |       |              |

When comparing e-Sports participation motivation according to faculty variables in Table 4, a significant difference was found in all sub-dimensions ( $p<0.05$ ).

**Table 5.** Comparison of the purposes of participation in digital leisure activities according to faculty variable

| Sub-dimensions | Faculty                              | N   | Mean±SD   | F     | P     |
|----------------|--------------------------------------|-----|-----------|-------|-------|
| Game           | Economic and Administrative Sciences | 75  | 4.22±1.62 | 2.188 | 0.054 |
|                | Engineering                          | 93  | 4.85±1.35 |       |       |
|                | Tourism                              | 13  | 3.83±2.03 |       |       |
|                | Sport Sciences                       | 163 | 4.45±1.77 |       |       |
|                | Communication                        | 15  | 3.72±2.23 |       |       |
|                | Vocational College                   | 119 | 4.33±1.94 |       |       |
| Entertainment  | Economic and Administrative Sciences | 75  | 3.92±1.55 | 1.368 | 0.235 |
|                | Engineering                          | 93  | 4.27±1.35 |       |       |
|                | Tourism                              | 13  | 4.01±1.96 |       |       |
|                | Sport Sciences                       | 163 | 4.36±1.84 |       |       |
|                | Communication                        | 15  | 3.58±2.28 |       |       |
|                | Vocational College                   | 119 | 4.39±1.76 |       |       |
| Socialisation  | Economic and Administrative Sciences | 75  | 3.92±1.76 | 1.979 | 0.080 |
|                | Engineering                          | 93  | 3.41±1.50 |       |       |
|                | Tourism                              | 13  | 3.46±1.90 |       |       |
|                | Sport Sciences                       | 163 | 4.07±1.92 |       |       |
|                | Communication                        | 15  | 3.71±2.26 |       |       |
|                | Vocational College                   | 119 | 4.07±1.89 |       |       |
| Communication  | Economic and Administrative Sciences | 75  | 4.00±1.62 | .316  | 0.903 |
|                | Engineering                          | 93  | 3.94±1.48 |       |       |
|                | Tourism                              | 13  | 3.86±1.87 |       |       |
|                | Sport Sciences                       | 163 | 4.13±1.95 |       |       |
|                | Communication                        | 15  | 4.04±2.30 |       |       |
|                | Vocational College                   | 119 | 4.21±1.82 |       |       |

Table 5 shows that no statistically significant difference was found when comparing the participants' purposes for participating in digital leisure activities with all sub-dimensions, across the various faculties they studied at ( $p>0.05$ ).

**Table 6.** Comparison of scores for purposes of participation in digital leisure activities according to income distribution variable

| Sub-dimensions | Salary                       | N   | Mean±SD   | F     | p     |
|----------------|------------------------------|-----|-----------|-------|-------|
| Game           | 17.000 TL or Less            | 391 | 4.45±1.68 | 0.547 | 0.579 |
|                | Between 17.001 and 20.000 TL | 32  | 4.42±1.84 |       |       |
|                | 20.001 TL and More           | 55  | 4.19±2.17 |       |       |
| Entertainment  | 17.000 TL or Less            | 391 | 4.31±1.64 | 2.124 | 0.121 |
|                | Between 17.001 and 20.000 TL | 32  | 4.14±1.80 |       |       |
|                | 20.001 TL and More           | 55  | 3.81±2.06 |       |       |
| Socialisation  | 17.000 TL or Less            | 391 | 3.96±1.78 | 2.198 | 0.112 |
|                | Between 17.001 and 20.000 TL | 32  | 3.70±1.87 |       |       |
|                | 20.001 TL and More           | 55  | 3.43±2.08 |       |       |
| Communication  | 17.000 TL or Less            | 391 | 4.14±1.70 | 4.801 | 0.009 |
|                | Between 17.001 and 20.000 TL | 32  | 4.15±1.88 |       |       |
|                | 20.001 TL and More           | 55  | 3.38±2.11 |       |       |

When the data presented in Table 6 concerning the income distribution of participants were analysed together with all sub-dimensions of the purposes of participating in digital leisure activities, no significant difference was found in the sub-dimensions of Games, Entertainment, and Socialisation ( $p>0.05$ ). However, in the Communication sub-dimension, a statistically significant difference was observed among those earning between 17.001 and 20.000 TL ( $p<0.05$ ).

**Table 7.** Comparison of e-sports participation motivation scores according to participants' digital gaming time

| Sub-dimensions      | Digital gaming time    | N   | Mean±SD   | F     | p     |
|---------------------|------------------------|-----|-----------|-------|-------|
| Taxonomic Domain    | Between 1 and 3 hours  | 334 | 2.57±1.00 | 0.232 | 0.874 |
|                     | Between 4 and 7 hours  | 52  | 2.59±1.10 |       |       |
|                     | Between 8 and 11 hours | 44  | 2.39±1.07 |       |       |
|                     | More than 11 hours     | 48  | 2.58±.936 |       |       |
| Competence          | Between 1 and 3 hours  | 334 | 2.45±1.07 | 0.413 | 0.744 |
|                     | Between 4 and 7 hours  | 52  | 2.59±1.03 |       |       |
|                     | Between 8 and 11 hours | 44  | 2.27±1.20 |       |       |
|                     | More than 11 hours     | 48  | 2.53±1.11 |       |       |
| Relational Self     | Between 1 and 3 hours  | 334 | 2.27±.946 | 0.780 | 0.506 |
|                     | Between 4 and 7 hours  | 52  | 2.9±.902  |       |       |
|                     | Between 8 and 11 hours | 44  | 2.10±1.07 |       |       |
|                     | More than 11 hours     | 48  | 2.30±.914 |       |       |
| Competitive Success | Between 1 and 3 hours  | 334 | 2.61±.968 | 1.036 | 0.377 |
|                     | Between 4 and 7 hours  | 52  | 2.92±1.16 |       |       |
|                     | Between 8 and 11 hours | 44  | 2.49±1.04 |       |       |
|                     | More than 11 hours     | 48  | 2.67±1.11 |       |       |
| Free Time           | Between 1 and 3 hours  | 334 | 2.53±1.07 | 0.406 | 0.749 |
|                     | Between 4 and 7 hours  | 52  | 2.76±1.21 |       |       |
|                     | Between 8 and 11 hours | 44  | 2.48±1.33 |       |       |
|                     | More than 11 hours     | 48  | 2.55±1.08 |       |       |

Table 7 shows that no significant difference was found when comparing participants' digital game playing times across all sub-dimensions of e-sports participation motivation ( $p>0.05$ ).

**Table 8.** Comparison of e-sports participation motivation scores between individuals who participate in physical activity and those who do not

| Sub-dimensions      | Participation status | N   | Mean± SD  | t      | p            |
|---------------------|----------------------|-----|-----------|--------|--------------|
| Taxonomic Domain    | No                   | 105 | 2.40±0.96 | -2.221 | <b>0.027</b> |
|                     | Yes                  | 373 | 2.66±1.07 |        |              |
| Competence          | No                   | 105 | 2.37±1.06 | -1.659 | 0.098        |
|                     | Yes                  | 373 | 2.58±1.15 |        |              |
| Relational Self     | No                   | 105 | 2.17±0.91 | -2.139 | <b>0.033</b> |
|                     | Yes                  | 373 | 2.42±1.07 |        |              |
| Competitive Success | No                   | 105 | 2.75±1.04 | -0.76  | 0.939        |
|                     | Yes                  | 373 | 2.76±1.12 |        |              |
| Free Time           | No                   | 105 | 2.44±1.09 | -1.959 | 0.051        |
|                     | Yes                  | 373 | 2.69±1.17 |        |              |

When Table 8 is examined, it is seen that the average scores of individuals participating in physical activity are higher than those of individuals not participating in physical activity in all sub-dimensions. When the total motivation scores for e-sports participation are examined, a significant difference is seen in the sub-dimensions of 'Taxonomic Domain' and 'Relational Self' ( $p<0.05$ ) no statistically significant difference was detected in the 'Competence,' 'Competitive Success,' and 'Leisure Time' sub-dimensions based on the physical activity participation status variable ( $p>0.05$ ).

## DISCUSSION

The aim of the study is to examine university students' purposes and motivations for participating in e-sports in their free time. The results of the study suggest that participants' motivations for participating in e-sports are influenced by their desire to achieve success in a competitive environment, the ease of access to e-sports, and their preference for spending free time this way. When examining the purposes of participating in digital games, it is understood that the primary motivations are to play games and have fun. When other studies in the literature are examined, it is seen that the factors affecting e-sports motivation include gaming passion, enjoyment, income generation, career development, skill demonstration, socialisation, desire to improve gaming skills, communication, desire to play sports, free time evaluation, and team spirit. (Gülsoy and Tunca 2024; Cranner et al., 2021; Lokhman et al., 2018; Mustafaoğlu et al., 2018; Seo, 2016; Weiner and Dwyer, 2017; Hamari and Sjöblom, 2017; Himmelstein et al., 2017; Saleh et al., 2018; Gül et al., 2019; Öz and Üstün, 2019, Ayas, 2020). Frostling and

Henningsson (2009) found that in their study, digital games are a way to communicate and form social bonds with people from different cultures. There are studies that investigate the purpose of playing games as part of participation in digital leisure activities (Chiang et al., 2008).

According to the gender variable, significant difference were observed that favored male students in all sub-dimensions of e-sports participation motivation. With this result, it can be said that male students' motivation to participate in e-sports is higher than that of female students. There are studies that reported results similar to our study (Bilgin and Çavuşoğlu, 2025; Yaraş and Efe, 2025; Üstün et al., 2022). However, in the study titled “E-Sports Participation Motivations: Zula Example,” by Kabalay (2022), the difference in the gender variable was analyzed and found to be in favor of women. Similar to this result, another study found a difference in the competence sub-dimension, in favor of female university students (Arslan et al., 2024). In addition, Yıldız et al. (2020) conducted a study titled "Examining the Motivation Levels of Licensed E-sports Participants," and found that, based on gender, males had higher scores in the taxonomic domain and competitive success subscales, but there were no differences in the competence, relational self, and leisure subscales. When the purposes of participation in digital leisure activities were analyzed, a difference was observed between groups in the gaming and entertainment subscales. This could be due to male students finding digital games more fun and appealing than other recreational activities. Researchers have stated in their study that male e-sports players are interested in e-sports because of competition and achieving success (Yıldız et al., 2020).

A difference in motivation for participation in e-sports was observed based on the faculty variable. It can be noted that students of the Faculty of Sport Sciences are more interested in e-sports than students from other faculties, while traditional sports are less appealing to them. No significant difference was found between students of these faculties in terms of their purposes for participating in digital leisure activities. This could be because university students have similar purposes for participation. However, Yaraş and Efe (2025) reported differences between faculties in their study. They also noted that motivation to play digital games differed depending on the type of high school (Bilgin & Çavuşoğlu, 2025). When looking at middle school students, no difference was observed in their motivation to play digital games based on their grade level (Altay & Koç, 2022).

When e-sports participation motivation scores were examined in relation to another variable (income distribution) no significant difference was detected. University students

generally having a similar income level may not have caused a difference in their motivation to participate in e-sports. There is a study that parallels the results of this study (Arslan et al., 2024). However, in the study by Kabalay (2022), no significant difference was observed in the competence, relational self, and leisure sub-dimensions with respect to the income distribution variable, while a significant difference was found in the taxonomic area sub-dimension. Başıoğlu et al. (2023) found that individuals with low income levels had relatively higher scores than other participants in all sub-dimensions of the e-sports Participation Motivation Scale (Taxonomic area, Competence, Relational self, Competence success, and Leisure) according to the income level variable, but there was no statistically significant difference. In addition, Yıldız et al. (2020) found no significant difference in motivation for e-sports participation between employed and unemployed participants. When the motivation for participation in digital leisure activities was examined based on income distribution, a significant difference was found only in the communication sub-dimension. This significant difference in the communication sub-dimension may indicate that university students view digital games as a communication tool in a globalizing world.

When all sub-dimensions of e-sports participation motivation were compared according to the duration of digital game play, no significant difference was detected. This result can be interpreted as indicating that participants' e-sports participation motivation was not being affected by game duration and that they participated in e-sports with the same motivation level. In the study conducted by Üstün et al. (2022), no statistical significance was found in the competence, relational self, competition, and achievement sub-dimensions when daily game playing time was examined while a significant difference was found in the taxonomic domain and leisure time evaluation sub-dimensions. In addition, studies found significant differences in the taxonomic domain, competence, relational self, competition, success, and leisure time sub-dimensions (Kabalay, 2022). Research has shown that motivation for e-sports games differs depending on the amount of time spent playing digital games (Yaraş & Efe, 2025; Şahin et al., 2025).

When the participants' motivation to participate in e-sports was examined in terms of their physical activity participation, a significant difference was observed in the 'Taxonomic Domain' and 'Relational Self' sub-dimensions. The reason why individuals who engage in physical activity had relatively higher scores than those who did not may be because university students play digital games to develop their affective and cognitive skills, create a social setting in a different context, and experience the motivation of working as a team. Another study found

that participants' motivation to play digital games did not differ based on the duration of their daily physical activity participation (Bilgin and Çavuşoğlu, 2025). It was concluded that most professional e-sports players in European and Latin American countries engage in moderate to high levels of physical activity, and players with low levels of physical activity had high motivation across all dimensions (Giakoni-Ramírez et al., 2022).

### **Limitations**

The sample was limited to students from two universities, restricting the generalizability of the results. In addition, factors such as game genre, level of competitive participation, gaming experience, and psychological characteristics were not assessed and may have influenced participants' motivations.

## **CONCLUSIONS and RECOMMENDATIONS**

This study examined university students' purposes and motivations for participating in e-sports during their free time. The primary factors highlighted were the desire for success in a competitive environment, easy access to e-sports games, and having fun. Furthermore, male students' motivation to participate in e-sports was higher than that of female students. Male students participated in digital leisure activities primarily for gaming and entertainment. There was no difference in motivations and purposes for e-sports participation among students from related faculties. While no difference in e-sports participation motivation was observed across income distributions, there was a difference in participation purposes for digital leisure activities. While there was a difference in e-sports participation motivation during digital gameplay, there was no difference in participation purposes for digital leisure activities. Participants who engaged in physical activity had significantly higher motivation for e-sports participation specifically in the taxonomic domain and relational self sub-dimensions than those who did not. Future studies could make comparisons based on game type or with different sample groups.

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