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The role of emotional intelligence and internet gaming disorder in predicting high school students' social-emotional learning skills

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Highlights:

- Male students demonstrated significantly higher levels of emotional intelligence than female students, although the effect size was small.
- Male students exhibited significantly and substantially higher levels of internet gaming disorder compared to female students.
- Emotional intelligence positively predicted the task articulation, peer relationship, and self-regulation dimensions of social-emotional learning.
- Internet gaming disorder negatively predicted the task articulation and peer relationship dimensions of social-emotional learning.

Abstract

This study examines the role of emotional intelligence (EI) and internet gaming disorder (IGD) in predicting high school students' social-emotional learning skills (SELS). The study used a correlational survey design with a sample of 435 high school students. Researchers collected data using the Delaware Social-Emotional Learning Scale, the Emotional Intelligence Scale–Adolescent Short Form, and the Internet Gaming Disorder Scale–Short Form. The findings showed that students demonstrated moderate SELS, above-average EI, and low IGD. While SELS did not differ significantly by gender or grade level, male students scored significantly higher than female students on both EI and IGD. Pearson correlation analyses indicated significant positive relationships between EI and SELS, and significant negative relationships between IGD and SELS. Standard multiple regression analyses further showed that EI significantly predicted all subdimensions of SELS, whereas IGD negatively predicted the task articulation and peer relationship subdimensions. Based on these findings, programs and practices aimed at enhancing high school students' SELS should incorporate activities that strengthen emotional intelligence within the curriculum, while preventive measures addressing IGD should be an integral part of this process.

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1. Introduction

In recent years, curriculum development efforts in Türkiye have increasingly adopted a holistic approach that supports not only students' cognitive development but also their social and emotional learning skills. In this context, the curriculum development initiatives carried out by the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) in 2017 and 2018 included principles emphasizing students' ability to cope with challenges associated with social-emotional learning skills (SELS) (MoNE, 2018). Similarly, the Türkiye Maarif Modeli, which began implementation in 2024, addresses social-emotional learning skills as an interdisciplinary curriculum component and positions them as integral to all courses (MoNE, 2024). In this respect, the model conceptualizes social-emotional learning not merely as an implicit outcome, but as a core competency area that supports students' psychological, social, and moral development. The "competent and virtuous individual" profile at the center of the model refers to individuals who can demonstrate empathy, regulate their emotions, assume responsibility, and develop healthy relationships. Within the Virtue–Value–Action Framework, students are also expected to acquire socially and emotionally grounded values such as respect, responsibility, and justice (MoNE, 2024; Özden & Yaşar, 2025).

Social-emotional learning refers to the process of equipping students with the abilities, attitudes, and skills necessary to recognize and manage their emotions, solve problems effectively, establish positive relationships with others, demonstrate empathy, and strive toward achieving personal and social goals (CASEL [Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning], 2020; Elias & Moceri, 2012; Kaşıkçı, 2022; Melikoğlu, 2020; Zins & Elias, 2007). McCombs (2004) and Norris (2003) further emphasized the needs and goals of both individuals and society in their definitions. In this regard, McCombs (2004) conceptualized social-emotional learning as the process of acquiring the skills needed to become a productive member of society by integrating emotions, thoughts, and behaviors. Similarly, Norris (2003) defined it as an approach that teaches individuals to recognize, regulate, and express the social and emotional dimensions of their lives, thereby enabling them to cope successfully with important life tasks. Recent studies on the effectiveness of SEL programs show that these programs contribute significantly to students' multidimensional development. Numerous studies have reported the positive effects of SEL programs on academic achievement (Esen Aygün & Şahin Taşkın, 2022; Corcoran et al., 2018; Fairless et al., 2021). These studies also highlight the positive outcomes of SEL programs across domains such as classroom climate (Esen Aygün & Şahin Taşkın, 2022), social life, happiness, and well-being (Özhan et al., 2023). Furthermore, the OECD Survey on Social and Emotional Skills: Türkiye Preliminary Report published by MoNE (2021) emphasized that the social-emotional learning approach facilitates learning and may serve as an important educational approach, particularly in supporting disadvantaged students. The primary objective of social-emotional learning programs is to enhance individuals' SELS. SELS consist of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making skills (CASEL, 2020). Self-awareness is the capacity to accurately identify one's emotions and thoughts and understand how they influence behavior. Self-management, on the other hand, refers to the ability to regulate emotions, thoughts, and behaviors effectively in a variety of situations. Social awareness encompasses the skills required to understand and empathize with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds, as well as to comprehend social and ethical standards of behavior. Relationship skills refer to the ability to establish and maintain healthy relationships with different individuals and groups. Responsible decision-making, on the other hand, involves the ability to make constructive and respectful choices regarding personal behavior and social interactions across various situations (CASEL, 2020). In Türkiye, SELS have been classified within the Türkiye Holistic Model based on the K–12 Skills Framework, using an approach that is consistent with the literature and sensitive to the country's educational philosophy. Accordingly, SELS consist of three main components: self-skills, social life skills, and integrated/common skills. Self-skills include self-awareness, self-regulation, and self-reflection, whereas social life skills comprise communication, collaboration, and social awareness skills. Integrated/common skills include adaptation, flexibility, and responsible decision-making (Özhan et al., 2023). To improve the effectiveness of social-emotional learning programs and structure them more

effectively within educational settings, SELS should be addressed alongside psychological, cognitive, social, and individual variables that may influence their development. Examining which variables affect SELS and how strongly they predict these skills may help develop high-quality, effective social-emotional learning programs. In this context, emotional intelligence (EI), which centers on the capacity to perceive, understand, and regulate emotions, emerges as an important construct in SELS development.

When developing SELS, consider the characteristics of different developmental periods. During adolescence, individuals may experience various difficulties as they adapt to changes in their physical structure, emotions, thoughts, and behaviors. In terms of social development, as parental influence decreases and autonomy strengthens, peer relationships become increasingly important; adolescents develop a need for acceptance, approval, and inclusion within peer groups (Çivilidağ, 2013). Nevertheless, adolescents whose social-emotional skills are supported during this period tend to demonstrate more positive developmental outcomes in these domains (Yaman & Yalçıntaş, 2024). During adolescence, when social-emotional development is particularly critical, it becomes theoretically and practically necessary to investigate the variables that may positively or negatively influence the development of these skills.The literature indicates that the social-emotional learning approach is grounded in EI and the theory of multiple intelligences; therefore, these two concepts are complementary (Karamanlı Gül, 2019). Salovey and Mayer (1990) defined EI as the ability to recognize one's own emotions and those of others, distinguish between these emotions, regulate one's emotions, and use them in thoughts and behaviors (as cited in Yıldız, 2021). Similarly, Goleman (2004) described emotional intelligence as the ability to motivate oneself, persist despite setbacks, delay gratification by controlling impulses, regulate mood, prevent distress from impairing thinking, empathize with others, and maintain hope (as cited in Tekin, 2014). Studies on the importance of EI in the learning process have demonstrated that this construct plays a critical role in both academic achievement and personal development. Researchers emphasizing the vital role of EI in learning argue that emotional intelligence should be used not only to plan individuals' lives by considering their needs, physical conditions, and social relationships, but also in learning environments (Akman, 2018). Studies examining the relationship between secondary school students' EI levels and academic achievement have reported a significant positive association between these two variables (Kılıç & Çeliköz, 2021; İyibaş & Akın, 2021). EI is also closely related to students' SELS (İşeri, 2016). By helping individuals understand and regulate their social and emotional dimensions, EI enables them to communicate effectively and successfully (Zins et al., 2004, as cited in Paliç et al., 2023). EI is a major component of social-emotional learning, and these two constructs are believed to work together to promote high achievement, enduring positive behaviors, and overall life success (Tengey, 2016, as cited in Aydoğan, 2023). Research demonstrating the relationship between SELS and EI suggests that these concepts conceptually overlap and complement one another. However, examining the extent to which they complement or explain each other remains important for developing a deeper understanding of the relationship between these constructs.

In addition to factors such as EI that may positively influence adolescents' SELS, other factors may negatively affect the development of these competencies. IGD may develop into a behavioral pattern that leads adolescents to withdraw from real-life social relationships and reduce face-to-face interactions, making it more difficult for them to manage their emotional processes effectively. In this context, IGD is considered a potential risk factor that may adversely affect the development of adolescents' SELS (Aslan et al., 2022; Dursun & Çapan, 2018; Lemmens et al., 2015; Öztürk & Traş, 2024). Some theoretical models in the literature may help explain this risk relationship. According to the Social Skill Deficit Model, individuals who feel inadequate in their social skills tend to prefer internet-based communication over face-to-face interaction. Over time, this tendency can lay the groundwork for internet addiction (Caplan, 2003, as cited in Demirci, 2025). In this context, IGD is thought to also negatively affect the broader development and use of social-emotional learning skills. The I-PACE Model, in turn, holds that in individuals with problematic gaming behavior, mechanisms such as impulse control and the ability to delay gratification become weakened. The model refers to this as diminished inhibitory control. This, in turn, can make individuals' decision-making more focused on short-term rewards (Brand

et al., 2016, as cited in Şalvarlı, 2023). This diminished inhibitory control is also thought to weaken broader self-regulatory capacity, as reflected in the self-regulation subdimension of SELS. Since the early 2000s, accelerating digitalization, along with widespread internet use and easier access to technological devices, has led adolescents to spend more time in digital environments. During this period, social factors such as rapid urbanization and inadequate recreational play areas also contributed to the shift from traditional play activities to digital games (Gentile, 2009, as cited in Dursun & Çapan, 2018). As a result of all these developments, internet addiction and IGD have increasingly become significant contemporary problems. Internet games include digital games that adolescents play on computers and similar devices and that, through online connectivity, bring together individuals in different places within a virtual environment. Enriched with visual elements and designed around user interaction, these games have become among the most widely played forms of entertainment today (Günay, 2011). In the DSM-5 (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders of the American Psychiatric Association), IGD is defined as persistent and recurrent internet use, typically involving gaming with other players, that leads to clinically significant impairment or distress (American Psychiatric Association, 2022). According to the ICD-11 (International Classification of Diseases, 11th Revision), IGD refers to persistent or recurrent gaming behavior involving digital or video games, whether online or offline, occurring over at least 12 months. This pattern of behavior is characterized by impaired control over gaming with respect to its onset, frequency, intensity, duration, termination, and context; increasing prioritization of gaming over other daily activities and personal interests; and the continuation or escalation of gaming behavior despite the presence of negative consequences (Yıldız & Tamam, 2024).

Large-scale international studies (Deng et al., 2024; Stevens et al., 2021; Kim et al., 2022; Zhou et al., 2024) consistently report IGD prevalence among adolescents and young adults. These studies report an IGD prevalence ranging from 1.6% to 6.7%. Studies conducted in Türkiye similarly indicate noteworthy prevalence rates. In the study by Bingöl Karagöz (2017), 3% of students fully met the diagnostic criteria for computer game addiction, while 72.7% were classified as belonging to a high-risk group. Likewise, Tuncay and Göger (2022) found that 16.3% of high school students were classified as addicted to games. From an educational perspective, IGD has been shown to reduce students' academic achievement (Aslan et al., 2022), decrease motivation to study (Rahayu et al., 2021), and negatively affect school engagement (Zhu et al., 2015). Özcan and Balcı Çelik (2021) also emphasized that excessive gaming behavior is concerning due to its detrimental effects on both the quality of social relationships and academic achievement. Digital game addiction leads to psychological and social problems, and these consequences also negatively influence individuals' levels of social skills (Aslan et al., 2022; Aksu et al., 2022). Building on this, IGD has also been associated with withdrawal from peer interactions and reduced capacity for task-oriented behavior -both core components of SELS (Stockdale & Coyne, 2018; Gökçearslan et al., 2016; M. N. Baş, 2022). Taken together, these findings suggest that the healthy social relationship environment necessary for the effective development of social-emotional learning may be negatively affected by students' IGD behaviors. On the other hand, although few studies have examined the relationship between EI and IGD. In Aksoy's (2020) study, the relationship between adolescents' problematic internet use and EI was investigated, and the findings revealed that the well-being, self-control, emotionality, and sociability subdimensions of EI significantly predicted problematic internet use among adolescents. Given the conceptual proximity between EI and social-emotional learning, these findings provide important evidence that high levels of EI may serve as a protective factor against IGD.

In contrast, studies have shown that IGD negatively affects adolescents' social skills, emotion regulation capacities, and academic performance, and that adolescents with gaming addiction tend to exhibit lower positive social skill scores and higher negative social skill scores. Although the literature includes studies examining the relationship of SELS with EI and the relationship of digital game addiction, as a broader construct encompassing IGD, with various psychological variables, no study has been identified that investigates these three variables together, particularly with regard to the role of EI and IGD in predicting students' SELS. Furthermore, most existing studies examining these relationships have primarily been conducted with university students or adults. In this context, adolescence is a critical

period for social-emotional development, and the ongoing development of EI skills and intensive engagement in internet gaming behaviors during this period increase the need to examine these three variables collectively. Moreover, the literature includes studies examining gender and grade level differences in SELS (Durualp, 2014; Akcaalan, 2016; Melikoğlu, 2020; Okur et al., 2022; Aksoy, 2020; Eryıldırım & Gülözer, 2023; Kaşkaya, 2024), EI (Yıldız, 2021; İyibaş & Akın, 2021; Sarıkan, 2023; Yetkin & Yetkin, 2023; Özey, 2022), and IGD (Aksu et al., 2022; Bağcı & Albayrak Özer, 2021; Göldağ, 2018; Varlı, 2023; Aksoy, 2021). However, the findings remain inconsistent, and studies conducted specifically with high school students in the Turkish context are limited (Aksoy, 2020; Okur et al., 2022; Tetik & Aktan, 2021). Examining these demographic variables is therefore considered necessary to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the factors associated with SELS during adolescence. As a pioneering study investigating the role of EI and IGD in predicting adolescents' SELS, this research has the potential to make significant theoretical and practical contributions. Understanding the effects of EI and IGD on SELS is likely to inform educational policies and practices aimed at enhancing students' SELS, particularly during the implementation of the Türkiye Yüzyılı Maarif Modeli. Based on these needs and considerations, the present study aims to examine the role of EI and IGD in predicting high school students' SELS, to determine the current levels of these variables, and to investigate whether they differ according to gender and grade level. In line with this overall purpose, the following research questions were addressed:

1. What are the levels of high school students' SELS, EI, and IGD?
2. Do high school students' levels of SELS, EI, and IGD differ according to gender?
3. Do high school students' levels of SELS, EI, and IGD differ according to grade level?
4. Is there a significant relationship among high school students' SELS, EI, and IGD levels?
5. Do EI and IGD significantly predict SELS and its subdimensions?

1. Method

2.1. Research Design

This cross-sectional correlational survey examines relationships among high school students' SELS, EI, and IGD, as well as the extent to which EI and IGD predict SELS levels. In addition, the study aims to determine current levels of these variables and examine whether they differ by gender and grade level.

1.2. Population and Sample of the Study

The target population of the present study comprises approximately 5,328,812 students enrolled in secondary education institutions across Turkey, based on the 2024–2025 academic year statistics published by the Ministry of National Education (MoNE, 2025). As the 2025–2026 statistical data had not yet been made publicly available at the time of the study, the figures from the preceding academic year were used as the reference. The study used convenience sampling to select the sample. This method was preferred because it facilitates easy access to the target population (Etikan et al., 2016). Accordingly, the research sample comprised 435 students enrolled in three public high schools—two in the Marmara region and one in the Aegean region—during the 2025–2026 academic year. The minimum sample size required to represent the target population was determined using the sample size table provided by Krejcie and Morgan (1970). Table 1 presents the descriptive characteristics of the participants.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of the Participating High School Students

Variable	Category	f	%
Gender	Female	243	55.9
	Male	192	44.1
High School type	Anatolian	165	37.9
	Science	116	26.7
	Vocational and technical Anatolian	154	35.4
Grade level	9th grade	174	40.0
	10th grade	151	34.7
	11th grade	56	12.9
	12th grade	54	12.4

Age	14	80	18.4
	15	162	37.2
	16	102	23.4
	17	62	3
	18	29	6.7
Device ownership*	Laptop	165	37.1
	Desktop	81	18.6
	Tablet	151	34.7
	Smartphone	423	97.2
	None	7	1.6
Daily device usage time	0–1 h	17	3.9
	1–3 h	119	27.4
	3–5 h	157	36.1
	5–7 h	86	19.8
	7–9 h	33	7.6
	9+ h	22	5.1
Daily internet usage time	0–1 h	27	6.2
	1–3 h	136	31.3
	3–5 h	151	34.7
	5–7 h	83	19.1
	7–9 h	20	4.6
	9+ h	18	4.1
Preferred game type	Adventure	125	28.7
	Strategy	174	40.0
	Sports	87	20.0
	Fighting	87	20.0
	Other	137	31.5
Game playing frequency	1 day	59	13.6
	2 days	65	14.9
	3 days	75	17.2
	4 days	46	10.6
	5 days	23	5.3
	6 days	8	1.8
	Every day	145	33.3

The majority of the participants were female (55.6%). The participants of the study are students enrolled in three different high school types. As shown in Table 1, the number of students across different school types is relatively balanced. Nevertheless, the majority of the participants are enrolled in Anatolian High Schools (37.9%), whereas the smallest proportion of students attends Science High Schools (26.7%). Most students were in the 9th and 10th grades. Nearly all participants reported owning a smartphone (97.2%). The majority of students reported using digital devices between 3–5 hours daily. Regarding internet usage, most students reported spending 1–5 hours online per day. Strategy and adventure games were among the most preferred game types, and a considerable proportion of students reported playing internet games every day.

2.3. Measures

2.3.1. Personal Information Form

It was developed by the researcher to determine the personal and demographic characteristics of the participants. This form includes questions regarding the participants' gender, age, grade level, computer ownership status, duration of computer and internet use, types of games they play on the internet, and the amount of time they spend playing internet games.

2.3.2. Social Emotional Learning Scale (SELS)

The scale developed by Coryn et al. (2009, as cited in Arslan & Akın, 2013) to measure SELS of primary school students was adapted into Turkish by Arslan and Akın (2013). The results of the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) indicated that the three-factor structure of the scale demonstrated good fit indices (χ^2 = 264.67, df = 153, χ^2/df = 3.21, RMSEA = .049, NFI = .96, CFI = .98, IFI = .98, RFI = .95, GFI = .92, AGFI = .90). In addition, the correlations among the factors were found to be high and significant. Factor loadings ranged between 0.445 and 0.727. Although the model demonstrated an acceptable level of fit, it should be noted that CFI and TLI values fell slightly below the conventional

threshold of .90, and factor loadings ranged from small-to-moderate to acceptable levels. These findings suggest that the psychometric properties of the scale may be somewhat limited in the context of high school students. For the reliability analysis, the internal consistency coefficient (Cronbach's alpha) was found to be .90 for the overall scale, .87 for the task articulation sub-dimension, .78 for the peer relations sub-dimension, and .76 for the self-regulation sub-dimension. The test–retest reliability coefficient of the scale was calculated as .71. In the present study, the scale was administered to a sample consisting of high school students. In order to test the construct validity of the scale in this sample, CFA was conducted. When the fit indices of the three-factor model were examined, it was determined that the model demonstrated an acceptable level of fit (χ^2 = 537, df = 167, RMSEA = .078, TLI = .84, CFI = .85, SRMR = .054). In addition, the correlations among the factors were found to be high and significant. Factor loadings ranged between 0.445 and 0.727. To determine the reliability of the scale, Cronbach's alpha coefficients were calculated. According to the findings obtained, the alpha values were .71 for the first sub-dimension, .80 for the second sub-dimension, and .74 for the third sub-dimension. The overall reliability coefficient of the scale was found to be α = .89.

The Turkish adaptation of the scale consists of a total of 20 items. The scale comprises three sub-dimensions: task articulation, peer relations, and self-regulation. The items in the scale are rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale. In order to determine students' SELS levels based on the data obtained from the measurement instrument, the following score intervals were used:

1.00- 1.80 "very low"
1.81 – 2.60 "low"
2.61 – 3.40 "moderate"
3.41 – 4.20 "high"
4.21 – 5.00 "very high"

2.3.3. Emotional Intelligence Scale- Adolescence Short Form (TEIQue-ASF)

The scale developed by Petrides and Furnham (2001, as cited in Ergin & Deveci Sirin, 2023) to assess adolescents' EI characteristics was adapted into Turkish by Ergin and Deveci Sirin (2023). The scale was designed for adolescents aged 12–17 and can also be administered to individuals aged 11. In the adaptation study, EFA and CFA were conducted to examine the construct validity of the scale. The EFA results supported a four-factor structure, which was found to explain 51.17% of the total variance. The CFA results indicated that the four-factor structure of the scale demonstrated acceptable fit indices (χ^2/df = 4.16, GFI = .95, AGFI = .96, CFI = .92, TLI = .89, NFI = .90, RMSEA = .05, SRMR = .04). For the reliability analysis, the internal consistency coefficients (Cronbach's alpha) were found to be .77 for the well-being sub-dimension, .70 for the self-control sub-dimension, .69 for the sociability sub-dimension, .65 for the emotionality sub-dimension, and .78 for the overall scale. The test–retest reliability coefficient was calculated as .67. In the present study, only the total score obtained from the scale was used, and the Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient for the overall scale was calculated as .85.

The Turkish form of the scale consists of a total of 15 items and includes four dimensions: well-being, self-control, sociability, and emotionality. The items in the scale are rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale and are scored as "Strongly Disagree, Mostly Disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, Mostly Agree, Strongly Agree." In order to determine students' EI levels based on the data obtained from the measurement instrument, the following score intervals were used:

1.00– 1.85 "very low"
1.86 – 2.71 "low"
2.72 – 3.57 "slightly low"
3.58 – 4.43 "moderate"
4.44 – 5.29 "slightly high"
5.30 - 6.14 "high"
6.15 - 7.00 "very high"

2.3.4. Internet Gaming Disorder Scale- Short Form (IGDS9-SF)

The Internet Gaming Disorder Scale–Short Form was developed by Pontes and Griffiths (2015, as cited in Evren et al., 2018). Evren et al. (2018) conducted the Turkish adaptation of the scale. The scale

consists of 9 items and has a unidimensional structure. In the adaptation study, both EFA and CFA were conducted to examine the construct validity of the scale. The EFA results supported the single-factor structure, explaining 54.68% of the total variance. The CFA results indicated that the single-factor structure of the scale demonstrated acceptable fit indices (χ^2/df = 4.32, GFI = .982, CFI = .985, TLI = .976, RMSEA = .052). The internal consistency coefficient (Cronbach's alpha) of the scale was calculated as .89. In the present study, only the total score obtained from the scale was used, and the Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient for the overall scale was calculated as .85.

The items in the scale are rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale and scored as "1 = Never, 2 = Rarely, 3 = Sometimes, 4 = Often, 5 = Very Often." In order to determine students' IGD levels based on the data obtained from the measurement instrument, the following score intervals were used.

1.00– 1.80 "very low"
1.81 – 2.60 "low"
2.61 – 3.40 "moderate"
3.41 – 4.20 "high"
4.21 – 5.00 "very high"

2.4. Data Collection and Analysis

Before data collection, the researchers obtained institutional permission from the Provincial Directorate of National Education. The researchers obtained written informed consent from both parents and students. The researchers also obtained ethics committee approval from the university ethics board before initiating data collection. The researcher obtained permission for all scales used in the study. Data were collected through face-to-face administration in classroom settings. School administrators coordinated data collection. To minimize potential administrator bias, prior to administering the scales, the researcher informed students about the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, the confidentiality of their responses, and the absence of right or wrong answers. Written instructions covering the same information were also included at the beginning of the scale forms. Following the researcher's briefing, classroom teachers supervised completion of the scales. These procedural precautions are considered effective strategies for reducing potential common method bias in self-report research (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Data collection took approximately 20–25 minutes per classroom. The data were analyzed using the Jamovi program. Descriptive statistics were used to describe students' demographics and certain behavioral characteristics. To examine the relationship between students' SELS and EI and IGD, and the extent to which these variables predict SELS, we conducted correlation and multiple regression analyses, respectively. The level of statistical significance was set at $p < .05$.

Before starting the analyses, it was examined whether the data met the assumptions of normality, linearity, homoscedasticity, and multicollinearity. To identify outliers, Mahalanobis distance and Cook's Distance values were examined. As a result of the analyses, six observations were identified as potential outliers and removed from the dataset, yielding a final sample of 435 participants. We then repeated the analyses on the cleaned dataset. The Mahalanobis distance values in the cleaned dataset ranged from 0.00417 to 10.2, with no values falling below the $p < .001$ threshold, indicating the absence of remaining outliers. Cook's Distance values ranged from 5.81e-9 to 0.0914, all well below the critical threshold of 1, confirming that no observations exerted undue influence on the regression model. The Durbin-Watson statistic was calculated as 2.04 ($p = .698$), indicating no evidence of autocorrelation among the residuals. In the second stage, the normality of the data was examined using both skewness and kurtosis values as well as the Shapiro–Wilk test (Pallant, 2020). The analysis showed skewness values ranging from -0.582 to 0.648 and kurtosis values ranging from -0.531 to 2.17. In addition, when the results of the Shapiro–Wilk test were examined, it was observed that the p-values for IGD and SELS variables were less than .001, whereas the p-value for the EI variable was greater than .05. Although the Shapiro–Wilk test results indicated that the normality assumption was violated for some variables, it is known that this test is highly sensitive to small deviations in large samples. Therefore, skewness and kurtosis values were also taken into account in the assessment of normality. George and Mallery (2010) state that skewness and kurtosis values between -2 and +2 are sufficient for normal distribution. Accordingly, considering that the sample size was also adequate, the data were assumed to be normally distributed. Before proceeding to multiple

regression analysis, the presence of multicollinearity among the independent variables was examined. In this context, variance inflation factor (VIF) and tolerance values were evaluated. According to the analysis results, VIF values for the independent variables in all models ranged between 1.01 and 1.13, and tolerance values ranged between .886 and .986. These values being within acceptable limits indicate that there is no multicollinearity problem among the independent variables.

2. Results

3.1. What are the levels of high school students' SELS, EI, and IGD?

Table 2. High School Students' SELS, EI, and IGD Levels

Variable	Mean	Median	SD	Level
IGD	1.95	1.78	0.780	Low
SELS	3.73	3.75	0.586	Moderate
EI	4.50	4.47	1.02	Slightly high

Table 2 shows that participants' mean IGD scores are low, their mean SELS scores are moderate, and their mean EI scores are slightly high.

3.2. Do students' SELS, EI, and IGD levels differ by gender?

An independent-samples t-test was conducted to examine whether participants' mean SELS, IGD, and EI scores differed by gender. The results of the analysis are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Analysis of Students' SELS, EI, and IGD Levels by Gender Variable

	Gender	N	M	SD	t	p	Cohen's d
SELS	Female	243	3.76	0.56	1.29	.197	.125
	Male	192	3.69	0.61			
EI	Female	243	4.39	1.03	-2.63	<.001	-.254
	Male	192	4.65	0.99			
IGD	Female	243	1.77	0.73	-6.14	<001	-.593
	Male	192	2.20	0.77			

When examining the analyses in Table 3, male students scored significantly higher than female students on IGD. The effect size (-0.593) indicates a moderate practical significance (Cohen, 1988). For EI scores, male students also scored significantly higher than female students. However, the effect size for this difference (-0.254) remains small (Cohen, 1988). In contrast, no statistically significant difference was found between female and male students in terms of SELS scores.

3.3. Do students' SELS, EI, and IGD levels differ by grade level?

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to examine whether the mean scores of participants' SELS, IGD, and EI levels differed by grade level. Table 4 presents the results of the analysis.

Table 4. Analysis of SELS, EI, and IGD Levels According to Grade Level

	Grade level	n	M	S	F	p
SELS	9th grade	174	3.77	0.627	0.855	.419
	10th grade	151	3.74	0.568		
	11th grade	56	3.68	0.436		
	12th grade	54	3.63	0.628		
EI	9th grade	174	4.61	1.075	1.706	.193
	10th grade	151	4.48	1.009		
	11th grade	56	4.47	0.850		
	12th grade	54	4.26	1.038		
IGD	9th grade	174	1.99	0.811	0.256	.819
	10th grade	151	1.92	0.760		
	11th grade	56	1.94	0.804		
	12th grade	54	1.91	0.714		

As shown in Table 4, high school students' IGD, EI, and SELS scores do not differ by grade level.

3.4. Is there a significant relationship among SELS, EI, and IGD levels?

Table 5 presents the Pearson product–moment correlation analysis showing the relationships between high school students' SELS and their EI and IGD levels.

Table 5. Results of the Pearson Correlation Analysis Examining the Relationships Among SELS, EI, and IGD

Variable	Task definition	Peer relationships	Self-regulation	SELS
EI	0.566	0.415	0.492	.567
SELS	0.848	0.857	0.871	-
IGD	-0.268	-0.249	-0.236	-.291

All correlation coefficients were statistically significant at $p < .001$.

Cohen (1988) states that correlation values between .10 and .30 indicate a "low" level, between .30 and .50 a "moderate" level, and .50 and above a "high" level of relationship. Table 5 shows that EI has positive, significant relationships with the total SELS score and all its sub-dimensions (r ranging between .415 and .566, $p < .001$). In contrast, IGD is found to have negative and significant relationships with the total SELS score and its sub-dimensions (r ranging between -.236 and -.291, $p < .001$). These findings indicate that EI supports SELS, whereas IGD is negatively associated with it.

3.5. Do EI and IGD significantly predict students' SELS and its sub-dimensions?

Table 6 presents the results of the multiple regression analysis used to determine whether high school students' EI and IGD levels significantly predict SELS.

Table 6. Results of the Multiple Linear Regression Analysis of EI and IGD as Predictors of SELS

	R	R^2	ΔR^2	F	df	B	β	t	p
Variables									
Task definition	0.572	0.327	0.327	105	2,432				
Constant						2.103		12.60	<.001
EI						0.358	.537	12.81	<.001
IGD						-0.076	-.087	-2.08	.038
Peer relationships	0.431	0.186	0.186	49.2	2,432				
Constant						2.948		16.28	<.001
EI						0.246	.373	8.10	<.001
IGD						-0.107	-.123	-2.67	.008
Self-regulation	0.497	0.247	0.247	71.0	2,432				
Constant						2.484		14.03	<.001
EI						0.311	.465	10.49	<.001
IGD						-0.069	-.079	-1.78	.075
SELS Total	0.577	0.333	0.333	108	2,432				
Constant						2.532		17.80	<.001
EI						0.303	.529	12.69	<.001
IGD						-0.085	-.113	-2.70	.007

As shown in Table 6, EI significantly predicts all SELS sub-dimensions. The model related to the first dimension, task definition, explains 32.7% of the total variance. In this dimension, EI has a strong and positive effect, whereas IGD has a weak negative effect. The model related to the second dimension, peer relationships, explains 18.6% of the variance, and both variables are significant predictors. In this dimension, EI has a moderate positive effect, while IGD has a negative effect. The model for the third dimension, self-regulation, explains 24.7% of the variance, and only EI is a significant predictor, whereas IGD does not show a statistically significant effect. These findings indicate that EI consistently predicts all sub-dimensions, while IGD has a weaker and dimension-dependent effect. EI and IGD together explain 33.3% of the variance in the total SELS score. These findings demonstrate that EI plays a strong role in enhancing SELS, whereas IGD exhibits a weaker and more selective negative predictive role across SELS dimensions.

3. Discussion

According to the findings of the study, students demonstrated moderate levels of SELS, while their EI levels were above average. The relatively favorable SELS and EI levels may be explained by curriculum activities aimed at enhancing SELS through educational programs introduced in recent years in schools (MoNE, 2018, 2024). On the other hand, these findings may also be associated with adolescence being a critical developmental period for emotion regulation and interpersonal awareness (Durualp, 2014; Steinberg, 2015). During this period, adolescents experience intense emotional interactions within family and peer relationships while simultaneously developing their emotion regulation skills. The findings of studies conducted with secondary school students in Türkiye (Aksoy, 2020; İşeri, 2016; Kılıç & Çeliköz, 2021) are also consistent with the results of the present study. Kılıç and Çeliköz (2021) found that secondary school students' EI levels were above average. Similarly, in İşeri's (2016) study, high school students' mean EI scores were found to be above the midpoint of the scale used in the research.

In the present study, students' IGD levels were found to be low. This finding is consistent with studies indicating that although problematic gaming behavior is prevalent in the general population, it does not typically reach a clinical level of disorder (Lemmens et al., 2015; Przybylski et al., 2017). However, there are also findings in literature that differ from the results of the present study. In a study conducted with 517 high school students, Göldağ (2018) found that, according to the monothetic format, only 3.3% of students were classified as digitally game addicted. This rate suggests that the clinical prevalence of the disorder is relatively limited. On the other hand, according to the polythetic format, 22.6% of the same sample could be considered digitally game addicted. Likewise, Danacı and Dereboy (2023), in their study involving 980 high school students, reported that 33.7% of adolescents were classified within the at-risk gamer group according to the polythetic format. Taken together, these findings suggest that the low mean IGD scores observed in the present study do not indicate the complete absence of the disorder. Rather, although the majority of the sample remained below the clinical threshold, the existence of a subgroup at risk should not be overlooked.

The findings of the present study indicate that students' SELS did not differ according to gender. This result is consistent with the findings of a large number of studies in the literature (Aksoy, 2020; Eryıldırım & Gülözer, 2023; Kaşkaya, 2024; Melikoğlu, 2020; Okur et al., 2022). When the development of SELS during adolescence is considered within the context of maturation processes, it is known that identity development, peer relationships, and emotion regulation constitute fundamental developmental tasks experienced by adolescents during this period, regardless of gender (Santrock, 2009). These shared developmental experiences may contribute to similar patterns in the development of SELS among both groups. Nevertheless, some studies in the literature have reported that female students' SELS are significantly higher than those of male students (Akcaalan, 2016; Durualp, 2014; İşeri, 2016). In this regard, the findings from the Türkiye sample of the OECD Survey on Social and Emotional Skills (MoNE, 2021), conducted across nine countries, are particularly noteworthy. These findings suggest that the development of SELS may undergo a gender-related transformation during adolescence. At the age of 10, female students outperform their male peers in task performance, cooperation, open-mindedness, and self-efficacy; however, by the age of 15, this pattern changes considerably. Male students demonstrate higher levels in emotion regulation and interaction with others, whereas female students maintain higher mean scores only in the subskills of responsibility, empathy, collaboration, and tolerance (as cited in Yaman & Yalçıntaş, 2024).

In the present study, students' IGD levels differed significantly by gender, with a large effect size. Male students were found to have substantially higher scores than female students. This finding is consistent with numerous studies in the literature on digital game addiction, problematic internet use, and IGD (Aksu et al., 2022; Bağcı & Albayrak Özer, 2021; M. N. Baş, 2022; Şimşek et al., 2023; Türkoğlu, 2013; Varlı, 2023; Vigna-Taglianti et al., 2017). Vigna-Taglianti et al. (2017) reported that male students use the internet far more intensively than female students for online gaming, file downloading, and similar competitive activities, whereas female students tend to use the internet more for information seeking, chatting, and social networking purposes. A large proportion of the content produced by the gaming

industry consists of competitive elements such as sports competitions, war games, and economic rivalry. This situation closely aligns with male players' stronger competitive motivation, need for achievement, and higher perceptions of self-efficacy, making it one of the primary determinants of gender differences in gaming preferences (Hartmann & Klimmt, 2006). In addition, online gaming among male adolescents often functions as a means of peer bonding and social status display; this social pressure may transform gaming into a more compelling and persistent habit. Ko et al. (2005, as cited in Aksu et al., 2022) suggested that the increased motivation for gaming among males may be associated with feelings of achievement and social interaction. However, contrary to the findings of the present study, Danacı and Dereboy (2023), in their large-scale study conducted with 980 high school students, reported that problematic internet use and digital gaming behavior scores did not differ significantly according to gender.

Another finding of the study is that male students' EI scores are significantly higher than those of female students. This finding may be considered partially inconsistent with the general trend reported in the literature. Studies have generally indicated that females tend to have higher EI scores than males (İyibaş & Akın, 2021) or that no significant gender differences exist in EI levels (Aksoy, 2021; İşeri, 2016; Yetkin & Yetkin, 2023). On the other hand, although relatively limited in number, some studies have similarly reported significantly higher EI levels among males (Kong & Zhao, 2013; Shi & Wang, 2007). In addition, several studies suggest that gender differences may vary across EI subdimensions, favoring either males or females depending on the dimension examined. For example, İyibaş and Akın (2021) also found that the stress management subdimension was significantly higher among male students. Similarly, Bar-On (2006) reported no significant gender difference in overall EI scores; however, analyses of the subdimensions revealed that women scored higher than men in emotional awareness, empathy, and interpersonal relationships, whereas men obtained higher scores in self-regard, stress management, flexibility, and optimism.

The present study revealed that high school students' SELS, EI, and IGD scores did not differ significantly according to grade level. These findings are consistent with previous studies in the literature (Aksoy, 2020; Eryıldırım & Gülözer, 2023; Melikoğlu, 2020). In contrast, other studies indicate that students' SELS decreases as grade level increases (Durualp, 2014; İşeri, 2016; Kabakçı & Korkut, 2008). The absence of significant differences in EI scores across grade levels in the present study may be explained by the relatively stable nature of EI as an individual characteristic shaped by biological maturation and long-term life experiences, rather than by short-term academic processes (Mayer et al., 2008). Studies conducted with high school students (İşeri, 2016; Kılıç & Çeliköz, 2021) also support this view. However, Yetkin and Yetkin (2023) found that high school students' EI scores increased significantly as grade level increased, emphasizing that emotional intelligence skills may continue to develop as individuals progress in age and educational level. With regard to students' IGD scores, the findings of the present study indicated no significant differences according to grade level. Similarly, the majority of studies in the literature have reported that IGD or problematic internet use among high school students does not differ significantly by grade level (Aksoy, 2021; Bağcı & Albayrak Özer, 2021; Danacı & Dereboy, 2023; Şimşek et al., 2023). Nevertheless, although no statistically significant differences were observed across grade levels in the present study, a slight downward trend in students' IGD levels was identified as grade level increased. Consistent with this finding, several studies in the literature (Ö. Baş, 2022; Ceyhan, 2011; Türkoğlu, 2013) have reported that ninth- and tenth-grade students exhibited significantly higher problematic internet use scores compared to eleventh- and twelfth-grade students. This trend may be explained by the increasing academic workload and examination pressure experienced by upper-grade students, which may relatively limit the amount of time allocated to gaming activities. Similarly, Ceyhan (2011) attributed this pattern to the pressure associated with university entrance examination preparation during the final years of secondary education.

The findings of the present study indicate that EI demonstrated positive and significant relationships with overall SELS. This finding is consistent with the results of studies in the literature (İşeri, 2016; Esen Aygün & Şahin Taşkın, 2022). In addition, the findings of the present study revealed that EI

significantly predicted both overall SELS and its subdimensions among high school students. These findings empirically support the conceptual and theoretical connection between EI and social-emotional learning reported in the literature (Çakır Çelebi & Uğur, 2021). Empirical studies in literature also support the findings of the present study. In an experimental study conducted by Çakır Çelebi and Uğur (2021), a social-emotional skills training program developed based on the EI models proposed by Bar-On and Goleman significantly increased middle school students' levels in the intrapersonal, interpersonal, and stress management subdimensions of EI. This finding suggests that the relationship between these two constructs is reciprocal, indicating that while EI fosters social-emotional learning, interventions focused on social-emotional learning may also strengthen EI. Brackett and Rivers (2014) also argued that EI may enhance the effectiveness of social-emotional learning programs and that the integration of these two constructs is critical for student achievement.

When the findings of the present study are evaluated in terms of subdimensions, EI appears to demonstrate the strongest relationship with, and the strongest predictive effect on, the self-regulation subdimension. It may therefore be suggested that individuals with high emotional intelligence are better able to manage their impulses and emotional reactions effectively (Ergin & Deveci Sirin, 2023), which in turn contributes to the strengthening of self-regulation skills. The findings of the present study also revealed that EI was significantly associated with the peer relationships subdimension and significantly predicted peer relationships. Based on these findings, it may be argued that EI supports individuals' ability to empathize with others and perceive social cues more rapidly. Similarly, Goleman (2018) stated that empathetic individuals perceive social signals more quickly and are more successful in recognizing the needs of others (as cited in Yıldız, 2021). In addition, the positive relationship identified between students' task articulation skills and their EI levels suggests that individuals with higher EI are able to define learning tasks more clearly and manage task processes more consciously.

According to the findings of the study, high school students' IGD behaviors demonstrated significant negative relationships with overall SELS and all SELS subdimensions. In addition, IGD was found to negatively predict high school students' overall SELS, as well as the peer relationships and task articulation subdimensions. Although IGD did not significantly predict all subdimensions of SELS individually, it was found to have a significant effect on the overall SELS score when the subdimensions were considered collectively. This finding may be explained by the fact that the total score captures the shared negative variance across the subdimensions and possesses higher reliability than the individual subdimensions.These findings suggest that excessive and uncontrolled internet gaming may adversely affect adolescents' social, emotional, and task-oriented development. The findings are consistent with the literature emphasizing the negative effects of IGD on adolescents' developmental processes. The negative relationship identified between IGD and the peer relationships subdimension of social-emotional learning may indicate that adolescents who spend excessive amounts of time playing internet games tend to withdraw from face-to-face social interactions. The lack of direct interpersonal interaction resulting from IGD may, in turn, limit adolescents' opportunities to develop social skills such as sensitivity to cultural differences and empathy. Likewise, the literature suggests that individuals who spend prolonged periods on social media or in virtual environments often experience difficulties in forming real-world friendships, encounter challenges in social communication, and face serious problems related to socialization (Aslan et al., 2022; Demirci, 2025; Melikoğlu, 2020). In a study conducted with primary school students, Öztürk and Traş (2024) found significant decreases in both bullying scores and IGD scores within the experimental group that participated in an intervention program based on IGD and emotion regulation skills. This finding experimentally confirms that reducing IGD levels has a direct positive effect on peer relationships and highlights the functional nature of the relationship between these two variables. The researchers also reported that emotion regulation skills were negatively associated with challenging peer experiences and that individuals with higher emotional awareness demonstrated healthier peer relationships. In this context, the negative predictive effect of IGD on the peer relationships subdimension of social-emotional learning may stem not only from the increased amount of time spent in online environments, but also from deeper mechanisms through which the

disorder restricts the development of social skills such as emotional awareness and empathy. Similarly, the negative relationship observed between IGD and the self-regulation subdimension may also be considered theoretically consistent. Self-regulation is a multidimensional construct encompassing behavioral, emotional, and cognitive regulation processes and involves individuals' ability to plan and manage their behaviors (Kaşıkçı, 2022).

Individuals with high levels of self-regulation skills may be considered capable of delaying short-term gratification in order to achieve long-term goals (Gökçearslan et al., 2016). At the core of individuals' IGD behaviors lie loss of control over gaming and the inability to stop playing (Şalvarlı, 2023), as well as weakened impulse control (Argyriou et al., 2017, as cited in Şalvarlı, 2023). Studies in the literature similarly indicate that individuals with higher level ol IGD exhibit weaker impulse control and comparatively lower levels of mental health and cognitive functioning than non-addicted individuals (Stockdale & Coyne, 2018). The negative relationship identified between IGD and the task articulation subdimension in the present study may suggest that higher level of IGD may impair students' abilities to assume responsibility, understand tasks, and fulfill assigned duties. Within the context of social-emotional learning, task articulation involves individuals' accurate understanding of their responsibilities and obligations. Likewise, the literature emphasizes that IGD-related behaviors may contribute to tendencies among students to avoid taking responsibility and postpone social obligations (M. N. Baş, 2022). The findings of the present study may also be considered consistent with studies in the literature examining the relationship between gaming addiction and student achievement (Aslan et al., 2022; Demirci, 2025).

Aslan et al. (2022) identified a significant and strong relationship between digital game addiction and low academic achievement, revealing that students with gaming addiction demonstrated significantly lower motivation to study compared to non-addicted students. The amount of time allocated to digital gaming, which may lead students to neglect educational and social activities, was identified as one of the primary sources of this negative outcome.

4.1. Implications for Theory and Practice

The findings of the study empirically confirm the theoretical overlap between EI and SELS and reveal that IGD functions as a risk factor affecting adolescents' social-emotional development. The fact that EI and IGD together explain a significant portion of the variance in SELS provides a more comprehensive theoretical framework for understanding the predictors of social-emotional learning skills during adolescence. From a practical perspective, the findings emphasize the importance of integrating activities aimed at developing EI into the curriculum, considering that the Türkiye Yüzyılı Maarif Modeli positions SELS as a cross-curricular competency area. In addition, school psychological counselors may design group-based intervention programs targeting emotion regulation and interpersonal skills. In the context of IGD, placing greater emphasis on school-based digital awareness initiatives and providing early psychological support to at-risk students can be considered effective preventive strategies for safeguarding adolescents' social-emotional development.

4.2. Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This study, conducted using a cross-sectional survey model, does not allow for establishing causal relationships among the variables. Collecting data solely through self-report scales may introduce social desirability bias. Additionally, the use of a convenience sampling method limits the generalizability of the findings. Because the study included participants from only three public high schools affiliated with the Turkish Ministry of National Education—two in the Marmara region and one in the Aegean region—the findings may not be generalizable to other educational settings or regions. Furthermore, only EI and IGD were examined, while other variables that may affect SELS, such as parental attitudes, peer pressure, and socioeconomic status, were excluded from the scope of the research. For future research, it is recommended to conduct longitudinal and experimental studies to reveal causal relationships among variables. The sample should be diversified by including different school types and regions, and family and environmental variables affecting SELS should also be incorporated into the model. Moreover,

experimental studies testing the effects of EI-focused intervention programs on SELS would make significant contributions to the literature. Another limitation of the present study is that all variables were measured using self-report instruments. Although procedural remedies were implemented to minimize the potential effects of common method bias, future studies may benefit from employing multiple sources of information to reduce potential common method effects. In addition, the confirmatory factor analysis conducted on the Social-Emotional Learning Scale revealed that the scale's psychometric properties were acceptable yet limited within the high school student sample. Future studies are recommended to further examine the construct validity of this scale with high school populations.

4. Conclusion

This study examined how emotional intelligence (EI) and internet gaming disorder (IGD) predict high school students' SELS. The findings reveal that EI is a strong and consistent predictor of SELS. EI significantly and positively predicted all sub-dimensions of SELS—task articulation, peer relations, and self-regulation—providing empirical support for the theoretical integration of these two constructs. In contrast, IGD negatively predicted SELS and its sub-dimensions of task articulation and peer relations, while it did not show a significant predictive effect on the self-regulation dimension. Together, EI and IGD explain 33.3% of the variance in SELS, indicating that these two variables play a determining role in students' social-emotional development. Gender analyses showed that SELS follow a pattern independent of gender, whereas EI and IGD differ significantly in favor of male students. Grade level, on the other hand, did not lead to a significant difference across any of the three variables. In light of these findings, it is recommended to expand EI-focused intervention programs in educational settings and to strengthen preventive measures against IGD. Particularly, given that the Türkiye Yüzyılı Maarif Modeli positions SELS as a holistic competency area, integrating EI-enhancing activities into the curriculum and implementing awareness programs regarding digital game use may make meaningful contributions to students' social-emotional development.

Statement of Researcher

Researchers' contribution rate statement:

G.F.G: Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Data Curation, Formal Analysis, Visualization, Writing – Original Draft, Writing – Review & Editing.

Conflict statement:

The author declares that she has no conflict of interest.

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All procedures followed were by the ethical standards of the responsible committee on human experimentation (institutional and national) and with the Helsinki Declaration of 1975, as revised in 2000. Informed consent was obtained from all participants for being included in the study. This research was approved by the İstanbul Kültür University Ethics Committee's Social and Human Sciences Ethics Committee's decision, No. 20, dated 23/01/2026.

Author Biography

Dr. Gülten Feryal Gündüz has been a faculty member in the Department of Guidance and Psychological Counseling at the Faculty of Education, Istanbul Kültür University since 2021, where she holds the rank of Associate Professor. She earned her bachelor's degree in Computer Education from Gazi University and completed both her master's and doctoral degrees in Curriculum and Instruction at Anadolu University. Before embarking on her academic career, she served as an information technology teacher in public schools under the Ministry of National Education. She also held an expert position at the Provincial Directorate of National Education, where she was involved in

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