

Internet Addiction and Its Relationship with Emotional Intelligence among University Students

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Abstract:

This study investigated the relationship between internet addiction and emotional intelligence among University students in Algeria. The sample included 101 students. Data were collected using the Internet Addiction Test and the Bar-On Emotional Quotient Inventory. Statistical analyses involved descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and independent samples t-tests. Results showed that 22.8% of students were addicted and 45.5% were excessive internet users. A weak but significant negative correlation was found between internet addiction and emotional intelligence ($r = -0.20$, $p = .040$). No significant differences in emotional intelligence were found between addicted and non-addicted students.

Keywords: Internet addiction; Emotional intelligence; University students

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1. INTRODUCTION

The internet has revolutionized higher education and become an indispensable tool for academic research, learning, and global communication. However, this digital transformation has a dual nature, fostering the emergence of addictions, particularly Internet Addiction (IA). The recognition of "gaming disorder" by the World Health Organization (WHO) in the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11) has lent credibility to the concept of digital behavioral addiction, opening the door to broader research on related conditions like general internet addiction (WHO, 2018).

Recent global studies indicate worrying prevalence rates of internet addiction. A comprehensive review by Pan et al. (2020) found the global prevalence of internet addiction among university students to be about 11.3%, with significant variations across regions. The problem seems particularly acute in Middle Eastern and North African contexts. A study on Saudi medical students found that 12.4% exhibited internet addiction, which impacted academic performance and mental health (Taha et al., 2019). Similarly, other studies in Egypt revealed that 51.7% of medical students were addicted to the internet (Shehata & Abdeldaim, 2021).

Most students use the internet as a functional tool in daily life. However, some lose control over their usage, leading to psychological dependence. University students are among the most frequent internet users in society, driven by various motives. A study by Al-Shami



(2004) on a sample of 400 Yemeni university youth showed their internet use was motivated by obtaining information, email, reading newspapers and magazines, completing scientific research, communicating with the outside world, and knowing what is happening globally.

In Algeria, rapid digitization and increased internet access, especially among youth, have created fertile ground for problematic use patterns. Several studies (Ben Hameida, 2025; Mellal & Tabbas, 2021; Mahdeb & Slimani, 2022; Abriem, 2015) indicated a moderate level of internet addiction among university students. Despite these studies focusing on usage, comprehensive research on psychological impact remains scarce in Algerian academic literature.

The Cognitive-Behavioral Model of Pathological Internet Use (Davis, 2001) provides a valuable framework for understanding this phenomenon. According to this model, pre-existing psychopathologies (like depression or social anxiety) act as distal causes, while maladaptive cognitions (about self and the world) serve as proximal causes that trigger and maintain pathological internet use. Within this framework, a deficit in emotional intelligence can be conceived as a vital component of this vulnerability. Davis (2001) hypothesized that individuals suffering from stress or psychological problems (like loneliness, depression) hold negative perceptions about their social competencies. These individuals prefer online social interaction because it is less threatening and risky, resulting in compulsive

computer and internet use, which in turn generates many personal, social, and professional problems (Al-Noubi, 2010: 33).

An individual's addiction to the internet results from several predisposing factors (personal, emotional, social, environmental). Certain personality traits make one person more prone to internet addiction than others, such as shyness and introversion, leading them to escape into the virtual world (Kamel, 2016: 281).

Mayer and Salovey (1997) define emotional intelligence as a set of mental skills and competencies related to processing emotional information, generally concerned with perceiving emotions, using them to facilitate thought, understanding emotions, and regulating/managing emotions. Emotional intelligence is considered a set of social, emotional, and personal skills and competencies that influence a person's ability to succeed and cope with various environmental pressures (Bar-On, 2001: 84). It is a factor that protects the individual from many life problems. According to scientific evidence, individuals with high emotional intelligence are less addicted to the internet; however, the nature and strength of this relationship remain a matter of debate due to a lack of information in this regard (Ranjbar & Bakhsh, 2018).

The Compensatory Internet Use Theory (Kardefelt-Winther, 2014) also hypothesizes that individuals often turn to the internet to escape negative emotions or cope with life difficulties. In this context, individuals with low emotional intelligence who find it difficult to regulate negative emotions and cope with stress adaptively may be

more likely to use the internet as a maladaptive coping mechanism, initiating a cycle of dependence.

Various studies have shown a relationship between internet addiction and emotional intelligence. For example, a study by Kurdi (2009) on depression and emotional intelligence among 100 addicted and 100 non-addicted female students at Taif University found significant differences in emotional intelligence in favor of non-addicted students. A study by Khoshakhlagh (2012) showed that emotional intelligence is a predictor of internet addiction. A study by Parker et al. (2008) on the relationship between emotional intelligence and several addiction-related behaviors (gambling, internet use, video gaming) found that emotional intelligence emerged as a moderate-to-strong predictor of addiction-related behaviors. However, a study by Mesgarani et al. (2013) on the relationship between internet addiction, personality traits, and emotional intelligence showed no significant relationship between sensation-seeking and either internet addiction or emotional intelligence. A study by Ravi Kant (2018) on the relationship between internet addiction and emotional intelligence in a sample of 120 youth indicated an inverse (negative) but non-significant relationship. A study by Saraiva et al. (2018) on emotional intelligence and internet addiction in a sample of 1400 individuals aged 17-81, using an emotional intelligence scale and Young's Internet Addiction Test (1998), found a significant negative relationship.

Conversely, a study by Sanghvi & Rai (2015) on internet

addiction and its relationship with emotional intelligence among students from various universities in Bengaluru found no significant correlation. A study by Beranuy et al. (2009) on maladaptive internet use and the potential role of perceived emotional intelligence in a sample of 365 university students at the University of Barcelona indicated that perceived emotional intelligence components contributed to explaining maladaptive internet use, but to a small degree. While international literature has established a general link between emotional intelligence and internet addiction, gaps remain, particularly in the Algerian context:

Cultural Specificity: Most research has been conducted in Western and East Asian contexts. The unique socio-cultural aspects of Algerian society, including its Arab-Amazigh heritage, religious values, and specific family dynamics, may shape both emotional expression and internet use patterns in distinct ways.

The specific pathways through which emotional intelligence deficits lead to internet addiction disorder are still unclear. Potential mediators like coping styles, loneliness, or specific cognitive distortions need examination. By understanding the precise nature of the relationship between emotional intelligence and internet addiction in this population, culturally sensitive preventive and interventional programs can be developed. This study aims to address these gaps by examining the relationship between internet addiction and emotional intelligence among psychology students at an Algerian university.

The factors behind student internet addiction are complex and

numerous, varying from individual to individual. This study sought to understand the level of internet addiction among students and the relationship between internet addiction and emotional intelligence. Hence, the following research problem is posed:

Research Questions:

- What is the level of internet addiction among psychology students at the University of Mostaganem?
- Is there a statistically significant relationship between internet addiction and emotional intelligence?
- Are there statistically significant differences in emotional intelligence between internet addicts and non-addicts?

Study Hypotheses

- The level of internet addiction among psychology students is high.
- There is a significant negative correlation between internet addiction and emotional intelligence.
- There are statistically significant differences in emotional intelligence between internet addicts and non-addicts.

Study Objectives:

- To reveal the level of internet addiction among university students.
- To reveal the relationship between internet addiction and

emotional intelligence among psychology students.

- To identify differences in emotional intelligence between addicted and non-addicted psychology students.

2.Methodology

Study Design

A quantitative, cross-sectional, correlational design was used to examine the relationship between internet addiction and emotional intelligence. This design was deemed suitable for measuring variables of interest at a single point in time and assessing their natural relationships without intervention.

A purposive (convenience) sampling method was used to recruit participants from the Psychology department at the University of Mostaganem, Algeria. Inclusion criteria were: (1) being a registered student in the Psychology department, and (2) providing informed consent. The sole exclusion criterion was incomplete submission of research questionnaires.

The initial sample consisted of 110 students. After data review and removal of 9 incomplete responses, the final sample comprised 101 students.

Sample Characteristics:

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	18	17.82%
	Female	83	82.18%
Academic Level	2nd Year	44	43.56%
	3rd Year	22	21.78%
	1st Year Master	35	34.65%

The sample consisted of 83 females (82.2%) and 18 males (17.8%), reflecting the typical gender distribution in Algerian psychology departments. Participants were distributed by academic level as follows: Second Year (44 students, 43.6%), Third Year (School Psychology track, 22 students, 21.8%), and First Year Master's (Clinical Psychology track, 35 students, 34.6%). The average age of the sample was 21.4 years (SD = 1.7 years, range 19-25 years). The majority reported owning a smartphone (99%) and having internet connection at their residence (95%).

Instruments:

Data were collected using a self-administered questionnaire containing three sections: a demographic information sheet, an Internet Addiction Test, and an Emotional Intelligence scale.

1. *Internet Addiction Test (IAT)*: Developed by Kimberly Young

(1996), translated into Arabic by several researchers. The test presents six alternatives for each item (Always, Often, Sometimes, Rarely, Never, Not at all) corresponding to a scoring scale (6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1) respectively. The total score is the sum of items.

- 20-49: Normal internet use.
- 50-79: Student occasionally experiences excessive internet use.
- 70-100: Student uses the internet excessively.

Internal consistency in the current sample was excellent, with Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.91.

2. *Emotional Intelligence Scale*: The Bar-On Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQ-i), translated by Randa Suheil Rizkallah (2006). The scale consists of 60 items on a four-point scale distributed across six dimensions: Intrapersonal Competence, Interpersonal Competence, Stress Management Competence, Adaptability Competence, General Mood Competence, Positive Impression Competence. The scale relies on four alternatives (Never applies, Applies slightly, Applies moderately, Applies highly), corresponding to scores (1, 2, 3, 4) respectively. Weights are reversed for negative items. The individual's total score is the sum of item scores.

The overall scale showed acceptable internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.82$). Alpha values for subscales were: Intrapersonal ($\alpha = 0.81$), Interpersonal ($\alpha = 0.79$), Stress Management ($\alpha = 0.77$), Adaptability ($\alpha = 0.80$), General Mood ($\alpha = 0.77$), Positive Impression ($\alpha = 0.76$).

Study Procedures:

The study was conducted in the Psychology department at the University of Mostaganem, spanning from May 2, 2025, to May 15, 2025. The study was conducted in accordance with ethical principles.

After obtaining official approval from the secretariat of the Psychology department at the University of Mostaganem, data were collected over two weeks during the 2025-2026 academic year. The researcher visited psychology classes, explained the general purpose of the study, and invited students to participate voluntarily.

Questionnaires were administered within classrooms, ensuring a quiet and controlled environment. Participants took approximately 25-35 minutes to complete the entire questionnaire booklet. After completion, participants were debriefed and provided with a summary of the study objectives.

Data Analysis:

All statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS version 26. Prior to main analyses, data were checked for missing values, outliers, assumptions of normality, homogeneity of variance, and linearity.

Analysis was conducted in three stages:

1. Descriptive Statistics: Frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations were calculated to describe sample characteristics and scores on the IAT and EQ-i.

2. Correlational Analysis: Pearson's correlation coefficient (r) was calculated to examine the strength and direction of the linear relationship between total IAT and EQ-i scores. The statistical significance threshold was set at $p < 0.05$.

3. Group Comparison: To test differences in emotional intelligence between user groups, participants were categorized based on IAT cut-off scores. An independent samples t-test was conducted to compare the mean total EQ-i scores of the addicted group ($IAT \geq 80$, $n = 23$) and the non-addicted group ($IAT \leq 50$, $n = 32$). Levene's test was used to check the assumption of homogeneity of variances. The excessive user group ($IAT 51-79$, $n=46$) was excluded from this t-test analysis to create a clearer contrast between the two extreme groups.

3.Results:

A descriptive analysis was conducted to characterize internet use patterns and emotional intelligence levels. The sample's mean score on the Internet Addiction Test (IAT) was 63.27 ($SD = 20.30$), with individual scores ranging from 25 to 95. This mean falls within the "problematic use" or "frequent user with occasional problems" category according to Young's (1998) classification.

Table 2: Sample Distribution by Internet Addiction Level

Addiction Level	Frequency	Percentage	Typical Score Range
Addicted (Severe)	23	22.77%	80 - 100
Problematic User	46	45.54%	50 - 79
Normal User	32	31.68%	20 - 49

Applying the standard IAT cut-off scores revealed a gradient in internet use severity within the sample. A substantial portion of students, 45.54% (n=46), were identified as "excessive users," indicating frequent internet use leading to occasional disruptions in their daily lives. Furthermore, 22.77% (n=23) of the sample surpassed the addiction threshold, indicating that their internet use causes significant life problems. The remaining 31.68% (n=32) were classified as "non-addicted" or normal users. This distribution indicates that over two-thirds of psychology students in the sample (68.32%) exhibit a level of internet use ranging from problematic to severe.

Regarding emotional intelligence, the mean total score on the Bar-On Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQ-i) was 161.42 (SD = 14.15), with scores across the sample ranging from 132 to 195. This places the sample's mean emotional intelligence score within the

average range compared to the instrument's normative data.

Correlational Relationship between Internet Addiction and Emotional Intelligence

To address the primary research question, Pearson's correlation coefficient was calculated to examine the relationship between total scores on the Internet Addiction Test (IAT) and the Emotional Intelligence scale (EQ-i).

Table 3: Correlation Coefficients between Internet Addiction and Emotional Intelligence Dimensions

Variable	Correlation Coefficient	Significance Level	Strength of Relationship
Internet Addiction & Total EI	-0.20	0.040	Weak, Negative

The analysis revealed a weak, statistically significant negative correlation between the two variables, with $r = -0.20$ and $p = .040$.

This result suggests that as the level of internet addiction increases, the level of emotional intelligence tends to decrease, although the strength of this relationship is modest. The coefficient of determination ($r^2 = .04$) indicates that about 4% of the variance in internet addiction scores can be explained by variance in emotional intelligence scores, leaving 96% of the variance attributable to other factors not measured in this study.

Group Differences in Emotional Intelligence

An independent samples t-test was conducted to assess whether students classified in the severe internet addiction category showed significantly different levels of emotional intelligence compared to non-addicted students. For this analysis, participants classified as problematic users (n=46) were excluded to create a clearer contrast between the two extreme groups.

Table 4: Results of t-test Comparing Addicted and Non-Addicted Groups in Emotional Intelligence

Group	Frequency	Mean	Standard Deviation	t-value	Significance Level
Internet Addicts	23	157.95	14.64	1.20	0.236 Not Significant
Non-Addicts	32	163.00	13.79		
Difference		-5.05			

The results indicated no statistically significant difference in the mean emotional intelligence (EQ-i) scores between the addicted group (Mean = 157.95, SD = 14.64) and the non-addicted group (Mean = 163.00, SD = 13.79); with $t(53) = 1.20$ and $p = .236$. The mean difference of -5.05 points had a 95% confidence interval ranging from -13.50 to 3.40, indicating that the true population mean difference could range from a clinically meaningful deficit to a small advantage for the non-addicted group. The calculated Cohen's d effect size was

0.32, representing a small-to-medium effect, but it failed to reach statistical significance with the current sample sizes (23 vs. 32).

4.Discussion:

This study sought to explore the complex relationship between internet addiction and emotional intelligence in a sample of Algerian university students, a group facing the dual challenges of academic life and rapid digital expansion. The main finding of a weak but statistically significant negative correlation ($r = -0.20$, $p = .040$) aligns with a body of international research (Parker et al., 2008; Saraiva et al., 2018; Piccerillo & Digennaro, 2025). This finding supports the theoretical framework proposed by Davis (2001), which posits that pre-existing psychological and social vulnerabilities can contribute to individuals' predisposition towards pathological internet use. In this context, low emotional intelligence – manifested in difficulties accurately perceiving emotions, managing stress, and exercising impulse control – may constitute a key vulnerability factor. Individuals with such deficits may often find the structured, controllable, and less threatening virtual world an escape from the emotional complexities of real life (Kardefelt-Winther, 2014).

However, the failure to find a statistically significant difference in total emotional intelligence scores between the severely addicted and non-addicted groups adds a crucial layer of complexity. This discrepancy suggests a nuanced interpretation: while a continuous linear relationship exists between internet addiction and emotional intelligence across the student population, the total emotional

intelligence score may not be a sensitive or specific enough clinical marker to distinguish between the extreme ends of the addiction spectrum. This conclusion implies that the transition from problematic use to severe addiction may be influenced by factors beyond a simple, linear decline in total emotional intelligence. Other variables such as high levels of neuroticism, profound loneliness, a lack of real-life social support, or the presence of co-morbid conditions like depression and anxiety may interact with emotional intelligence or play a more direct role in this transition (Kuss et al., 2013; Khoshakhlagh & Faramarzi, 2012). It is plausible that specific aspects of emotional intelligence, such as a prominent inability to manage stress or low empathy, are stronger indicators of severe addiction than the total score, a possibility future research should investigate.

The cultural and developmental context of the sample is crucial for full understanding. Algerian university students face significant academic pressures and future uncertainty, which can exacerbate stress. In such an environment, the internet may be a universally accessible, easy, and direct means of stress relief. The weak correlation can also be partially explained by the fact that even students with average emotional intelligence may resort to the internet to cope with societal and familial pressures. Furthermore, high smartphone ownership and internet access rates make frequent use normative, potentially masking early signs of addiction and diluting the strength of its correlation with emotional intelligence.

Limitations and Future Research

First: The cross-sectional design prevents any causal inference. It is impossible to determine whether low emotional intelligence makes individuals vulnerable to internet addiction, whether excessive internet use leads to deficits in emotional competencies, or if a bidirectional relationship exists.

Second: The use of a purposive sample from a single academic discipline (Psychology) at one university, with a gender imbalance, limits the generalizability of the findings to the broader Algerian student population or to other cultural contexts.

Future research should employ longitudinal designs to unravel the temporal sequence between internet addiction and emotional intelligence. Studies with larger, more diverse, and gender-balanced samples from multiple universities and academic disciplines are needed. Using multi-method assessments of emotional intelligence that include performance-based measures alongside self-reports could provide a more robust picture. Investigating potential mediating variables (e.g., coping styles, loneliness, social support, personality traits) in the relationship between emotional intelligence and internet addiction would provide a more sophisticated model of the underlying mechanisms.

5. Conclusion

Undoubtedly, internet addiction has become a phenomenon that demands attention and research to identify its causes and contributing

factors, in order to develop programs to mitigate it, given the negative health, psychological, and social effects it leaves, as indicated by numerous studies. Considering the increasing internet addiction among the university youth population as the group most exposed to its risks, this study sought to understand the relationship between emotional intelligence and internet addiction among university students. The results showed a negative but weak relationship between them, directing attention towards emotional intelligence as an indicator for internet addiction with the aim of designing programs to develop emotional intelligence skills.

This study provides valuable foundational insights from the understudied Algerian context. It confirms that problematic and addictive internet use is a tangible reality for a significant proportion of university students and that this phenomenon is incidentally, yet significantly, related to their emotional intelligence.

The practical benefit of these results lies in directing university and psychological counseling services to integrate screening for problematic internet use into routine mental health assessments. Early identification can lead to intervention for students already suffering from addictive patterns. At the preventive level, universities should develop and implement evidence-based psycho-educational programs aimed at enhancing students' emotional intelligence skills, such as emotional self-awareness, stress management, impulse control, empathy, and effective communication. By strengthening these core

competencies, universities can empower students to face the challenges of academic life and digital immersion more adaptively.

Ultimately, equipping students with strong emotional skills is not about preventing internet use, but about enabling them to harness its power without compromising their personal and academic potential.

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