



UNRAVELING E-SPORTS FEVER AMONG COLLEGE STUDENTS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL INQUIRY

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ABSTRACT

E-sports has rapidly emerged as a global phenomenon, particularly among college students, who balance their passion for competitive gaming with academic and extracurricular commitments. This study employs a qualitative, phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of 9 freshmen from Sultan Kudarat State University (SKSU) across its ACCESS, Tacurong, and, Isulan campuses during the academic year 2024-2025. Thematic analysis was utilized to interpret the data, revealing key factors that shape students' motivations, behaviors, and strategies in engaging with e-sports. Findings indicate that early exposure to gaming, social influences, and personal motivations play significant roles in sustaining students' participation in e-sports. While some students perceive gaming as a platform for skill development and career opportunities, others struggle with societal stigma and balancing academic responsibilities. The study highlights both the positive and negative impacts of e-sports, with benefits including improved time management, problem-solving abilities, and teamwork, but also challenges such as academic distractions, family tensions, and sleep deprivation. Students employ various strategies to balance e-sports and academics, including structured time management, setting study goals, prioritizing responsibilities, and adjusting daily schedules. Challenges such as limited resources, social stigma, and academic strain persist, yet e-sports also offer potential career pathways and networking opportunities. Based on these findings, recommendations include establishing e-sports development programs, implementing policy guidelines, organizing tournaments, integrating gamification in teaching, and conducting further research on the academic and psychological effects of e-sports to optimize its benefits while mitigating risks.

Keywords: e-sports, competitive gaming, social influences, academics

Background of Study

E-Sport or competitive video gaming has emerged as a global phenomenon, captivating millions of participants and spectators, particularly among college students. Its popularity has transcended leisure activity, evolving into a competitive domain where players can achieve professional status and substantial rewards. However, this rise has introduced new dynamics into the lives of college students, influencing their academic performance, social interactions, and physical well-being. While e-sports offers opportunities for skill development and collaboration, concerns about its potential to disrupt academic priorities and athletic pursuits remain understudied.

F-Globally, the e-sports industry has grown into a billion-dollar enterprise, with colleges and universities incorporating e-sports programs into curricula (Jenny et al., 2017).



At this time, Esports programs continue to grow in universities in the United States and globally. (Jenny et al. 2021) stated that several universities offered Esports degrees, including Danube University Kerns in Austria, which offered a Master of Science in Esports and Competitive Gaming, along with Becker College in the United States and Staffordshire University in the United Kingdom, which offered a bachelor's degree in Esports. According to Kauwelo and Winter (2019), in 2017, 40 colleges invested four million dollars in developing and implementing an Esports program. In 2018, 200 universities and colleges supported an Esports program in which they offered 15 million dollars in scholarships. (Kauwelo & Winter, 2019). Studies suggest that participation in e-sports fosters teamwork, strategic thinking, and communication skills (Freeman & Wohn, 2020).

G-Philippine News Agency (2023) highlights Northern Mindanao's victory in the e-sports pilot event at the 2023 Palarong Pambansa. The event included *Mobile Legends Bang Bang* as a demonstration sport, showcasing the competitive gaming skills of the region's youth. The event's success has encouraged the further influence of e-sports into mainstream sports events in the Philippines. In South Central Mindanao, e-sports fever among college students is a growing trend, with local tournaments and gaming communities thriving across the region. Yet, the cultural and educational implications of this phenomenon remain underexplored. Studies on e-sports in this region are sparse and often focus on the economic or recreational aspects. It leaves a gap in the literature addressing how college students in South Central Mindanao navigate the interplay between e-sports, academic responsibilities, and social dynamics. This study seeks to fill this gap by capturing students lived experiences from this region. This study explores the lived experiences of college students immersed in e-sports, focusing on how they balance their passion for gaming with academic responsibilities and extracurricular commitments.

Research Questions

This study explored the lived experiences of college students immersed in e-sports, focusing on how they balance their passion for gaming with academic responsibilities and extracurricular commitments among Sultan Kudarat Campuses for the academic year 2024-2025. It answered the following key questions:

1. What lived experiences shape the motivations and behaviors of college students participating in e-sports?
2. How do college students perceive the impact of e-sports on their academic performance, social relationships, and personal well-being?
3. What challenges and opportunities do college students encounter as they engage in e-sports competitively and recreationally?
4. How do college students balance their e-sports involvement with academic and extracurricular responsibilities?

Theoretical Framework



The study's framework visually represents the key variables, their relationships, and the underlying theories that guide the research. This study is anchored to Self-Determination Theory (1985), Flow Theory (1975), and Social Learning Theory (1963).

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) posits that individuals are intrinsically motivated to pursue activities that satisfy their psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

Further, **Flow Theory**, proposed by Csikszentmihalyi (1975), describes a state of optimal experience characterized by intense focus, high levels of concentration, and a sense of enjoyment during an activity.

Furthermore, **Social Learning Theory**, proposed by Bandura (1977), emphasizes the role of observational learning, modeling, and reinforcement in shaping individuals' behavior.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE AND STUDIES

This chapter presents the theories, principles, and ideas of various authors and other researchers related to this study's issues. These are reflected in books, magazines, journals, and other studies.

E-Sports Fever Among College Students

The growing popularity of e-sports among college students globally has sparked significant interest in how it affects academic life, social interactions, and personal well-being. According to Jenny et al. (2020), e-sports have become a cultural force, especially in college communities, where students often engage in competitive gaming as entertainment and a potential career. The industry's rapid growth has also led to establishing e-sports programs at universities worldwide, providing students with opportunities to develop skills beyond traditional academic subjects.

E-Sports

T-sports in the classroom have gained significant attention globally as educators explore innovative ways to engage students and enhance learning outcomes. In international settings, E-sports integration into education has been studied for its potential to promote critical thinking, problem-solving, teamwork, and digital literacy skills among students (Hamari & Sjöblom, 2017).

METHODOLOGY

3. 1 Research Design

In this study, qualitative research, specifically the phenomenological approach, was employed to explore the lived experiences of college students immersed in e-sports, focusing on how they balance their passion for gaming with academic responsibilities and extracurricular commitments among Sultan Kudarat Campuses for the academic year 2024-2025. The phenomenological approach in qualitative research is instrumental in exploring and understanding individuals lived experiences. It enables researchers to delve deeply into participants' perceptions, emotions, and interpretations of specific phenomena,



providing rich, nuanced insights that might be overlooked by other methodologies (Gunawan et al. 2021).

Participants of the Study

The participants were the selected 9 Freshmen at Sultan Kudarat State University, ACCESS, Tacurong, and Isulan Campus, Sultan Kudarat, for the school year 2024-2025. The selection of 9 freshmen from Sultan Kudarat State University (SKSU), ACCESS, Tacurong, and Isulan campuses for this study on e-sports fever among college students is justified based on several factors. Freshmen represent a pivotal stage in students' academic and social lives, where new habits, interests, and social dynamics emerge, making them an ideal group to examine the onset of e-sports participation (Arnett, 2018).

Research Instruments

This study employed an in-depth interview (IDI) for the participants and a focus group discussion (FGD) for cross-validation. In-depth interviewing is a qualitative research technique involving intensive individual interviews with a few respondents to explore their perspectives on a particular idea, program, or situation. In-depth interviews are useful when you want detailed information about a person's thoughts and behaviors or to explore new issues in depth. Interviews often provide context to other data (such as outcome data), offering a complete picture of what happened in the program and why (Boyce et al., 2018). Interview questions were generated by the researcher and validated through content validity.

Data Gathering Procedure

Data are gathered through methodical scientific techniques. In this study, the stages of the data collection process are described as a researcher's guide to help the researcher collect thorough data.

Upon acquiring permission to conduct the study from the Dean of Graduate School, Sultan Kudarat State University, the researcher sent letters of communication to the office of the Director of SKSU ACCESS, Tacurong, and Isulan Campus, and the study participants. The Researcher Adviser and the Dean of the Graduate School signed the letters. The researcher properly coordinated and facilitated all communication. Further, the researcher also solicited permission and approval from the participants to prove their voluntary participation in the study.

Data Analysis Method

In conducting data analysis for this study, the researcher employed thematic analysis. According to Moustakas (1994), thematic analysis emphasizes identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns and themes within the data. It organizes and describes all data in detail. There are six (6) steps covered in thematic analysis:

Ethical Considerations

The researcher must ensure the participants' welfare and protect them from needless stress (Cacciattolo, 2015).



Social Value. This research's findings can strengthen feedback for secondary public-school students and teachers, academic coordinators, and department heads. The results can be disseminated via webinars, research forums, and legitimate international and national academic journals. Furthermore, the researcher expects to publish this research in an appropriate journal.

Informed Consent. Before commencing the IDI, the researcher submitted a letter of request to the school principal to conduct the research study. When they expressed willingness to participate in the research, the researcher sent permission letters to perform the IDI for participants signed by the researcher and the participants. Then, the researcher obtained verbal and written approval from the participants by having them sign the consent form.

Vulnerability of the research participants. The researcher assessed Potential vulnerabilities within the context of the research study. However, the researcher sought approval from competent and credible personnel to ensure the study abides by specific established procedures. The participants may be vulnerable because they could have a hidden condition that may be triggered when exposed.

Risks, benefits, and safety. The researcher is completely aware of the risks that participants may encounter; these risks may be psychological, such as trauma, or legal, such as loss of confidentiality. To ensure that the risks listed do not affect the participants in this research project, the researcher ensured they were well informed about the research study, its objective, and the benefits it can provide.

Privacy and confidentiality of information. The primary worry expressed by participants when requested to participate in a research study is the protection of their privacy and confidentiality. Contrary to what appears, it is not. In research, privacy pertains to the protection of individuals, whereas confidentiality implies the protection of information. In order to ensure privacy and confidentiality, the participants' concerns were alleviated, and coding and pseudonyms were utilized. Doing so secured the confidentiality of the participants' information and their individuality.

Justice. Justice in research refers to the fair and reasonable selection of participants. When selecting participants, consideration was given to the needs of the study rather than accessibility. It indicated that the selection process was based on individuals who met the inclusion criteria, which requires that participants for the IDI be active and officially MAPEH teachers. Regarding feedback, participants are expected to be open to sharing their experiences.

Transparency. The methods and procedures employed in disseminating findings must be clear and truthful to maintain transparency. Therefore, the results were carefully analyzed, and relevant supporting materials were included in the appendix for the reader's convenience.

Adequacy of facilities. In order to effectively exploit the utilization of necessary resources and facilitate the completion of the research study, the researcher used the internet to its fullest capacity to access scholarly articles and



citations that helped in the development of the researcher's understanding, analysis, transcription, and interpretation of the collected data.

Community Involvement. Community involvement in research is an inclusive participation process that fosters the genuine partnership of individuals connected by common situations, special interests, or geographical proximity to address challenges that impact the welfare of the focused community (Ahmed et al., 2010).

Discussion of Findings

Emerging Theme 1: Early Exposure to Gaming

Many students' involvement in e-sports stems from their early exposure to gaming, which ignited their passion and enjoyment. Their childhood experiences with video games influenced their decision to participate in competitive gaming. College Students shared their early exposure to gaming with the following statements:

My early gaming experiences influenced my decision to participate in e-sports because I want and enjoy playing online games. -Spiderman

Noong una, laro lamang ito para sa akin—isang paraan ng pagpapalipas-oras at kasiyahan. Ngunit napansin ko ang sarili kong nagiging mas seryoso sa paglalaro. *[At first, it was just a game for me, a way to pass the time and have fun. But I noticed myself becoming more serious about playing.] -Superman*

Emerging Theme 2: Influence of Social Circles

Friends and peer encouragement significantly impact students' engagement in e-sports. Some participants were influenced by their social circles to explore competitive gaming. College Students shared their social circles with the following statements:

I was not really into online gaming. It was just my leisure hobby before. I joined e-sports during intramurals in school because my fellow student recruited me. -Wonderwoman

I have always played online games since I was a kid and set it as a steppingstone for me that influenced me to play e-sports. -Captain Amerika

Emerging Theme 3: Personal and External Motivation

Students are driven to participate in e-sports due to personal motivation, competitive nature, and social support from peers. College Students shared their **Personal and External Motivation** for gaming with the following statements:



Isa sa mga pangunahing personal na dahilan ay ang aking likas na kompetitibong pag-uugali. [One of the main personal reasons is my naturally competitive nature.] -Batman

Number one is my interest in becoming a pro player. Second is my passion for gaming. -**Ironman**

Emerging Theme 4: Cultural and Social Perception of E-Sports

Social perceptions, cultural influences, and stigma shape E-sports participation. Some students face societal misconceptions about gaming but perceive it as an avenue for personal growth. College students shared their **Cultural and Social Perceptions of E-Sports** with the following statements:

It shaped my perspective by the engagement and enthusiasm brought by playing with people. -Spiderman

Sa kultura natin, madalas na ituring ang paglalaro ng video games bilang isang simpleng libangan o pampalipas-oras. [In our culture, playing video games is often seen as a mere pastime or entertainment.] -Batman

Emerging Theme 5: Career Aspirations in E-Sports

For some students, e-sports is more than a hobby—it serves as a steppingstone toward career aspirations, such as becoming professional gamers or streamers or entering the gaming industry. Students shared their **Career Aspirations in E-Sports with these statements:**

My personal goal in e-sports is to be a streamer someday. Join a competition regarding e-sports. -Spiderman

Marami akong personal na layunin na inuugnay sa aking pakikilahok sa e-sports. Nais kong magkaroon ng career sa gaming industry. [I have many personal goals related to my participation in e-sports. I want to have a career in the gaming industry.] -Batman

Conclusions

The following conclusions are based on the synthesized emerging themes and the participants' experiences:

College students' engagement in e-sports is significantly shaped by their early exposure to gaming, peer influences, and personal motivations. This



highlights the importance of social circles and intrinsic passion in sustaining their participation.

While e-sports contribute to developing time management, cognitive, and teamwork skills, students also face challenges such as academic distractions, family tensions, and disruptions in their daily routines, demonstrating both positive and negative effects on their overall well-being.

Limited access to resources, social stigma, and the need for academic balance present many student challenges. However, e-sports also provide opportunities for skill enhancement, networking, and career development, including scholarships and professional pathways.

College students employ structured time management strategies, prioritize responsibilities, and adjust daily schedules to balance gaming and academic obligations. They demonstrate a conscious effort to integrate e-sports into their lives without compromising essential commitments.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusions, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. **State Colleges and Universities may establish an E-sports Development Program** that includes academic support, career pathways in the gaming industry, and partnerships with e-sports organizations. This program may promote responsible gaming, provide scholarships for skilled players, and integrate e-sports into academic discussions related to technology, digital media, and business.
2. **School Administrators may implement E-sports Policy Guidelines** that regulate student participation, ensuring a healthy balance between gaming and academics. These guidelines may include study-hour requirements, structured e-sports club activities, and parental engagement programs to address academic performance and well-being concerns.
3. **Sports Coordinators may organize E-sports Tournaments and Training Programs** to harness students' passion while fostering teamwork, discipline, and leadership skills. These events may also encourage structured training schedules emphasizing time management, physical activity, and mental well-being.
4. **Teachers may integrate Gamification Strategies in Teaching** to make learning more engaging and interactive, leveraging students' interest in e-sports. This can include game-based learning modules, simulation exercises, and real-world applications of gaming concepts in subjects like mathematics, physics, and communication.
5. **Future Researchers may conduct studies on the Academic and Psychological Impact of E-sports** to generate data-driven recommendations on how e-sports can be utilized for skill development while mitigating its negative effects on students' academic performance, mental health, and social relationships.

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