

Navigating the Digital Playground: Lived Experiences, Risks, and Benefits of Online Gaming among Senior High School Students

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study explores the multifaceted experiences of senior high school students engaged in online gaming, examining both the risks and benefits through their narratives. Using in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with 15 participants from Sto. Tomas National High School in Loreto, Agusan del Sur, Philippines, the study unveils three superordinate themes that drive gaming engagement: enjoyment as habitual behavior, social connection through friends, and gaming as a stress-relieving distraction. While gaming offers perceived benefits such as enhanced teamwork, self-confidence, and cognitive abilities, it also poses significant threats, including an unhealthy lifestyle leading to missed meals and irregular sleep patterns, as well as physical ailments like headaches and back pain. The study further reveals students' susceptibility to gaming as a coping mechanism for stress and anger, highlighting the need for self-discipline and time management. These findings underscore the complex interplay between the allure and potential harm of online gaming, offering critical insights for educators, parents, and policymakers to foster a balanced digital environment that supports students' well-being and academic success. Moreover, this study helps parents understand the risks and benefits of online gaming, including its impact on the social and emotional well-being of students' online gamers. Additionally, the policymakers will help create engaging platforms that will help educate the public on policy matters about online gaming.

Keywords: online gaming, student well-being, digital health, cognitive development, self-discipline

INTRODUCTION

Online gaming has become a popular form of entertainment and social interaction in the digital age. This serves as a platform for socialization, collaboration, skill development, and creativity. It refers to the practice of playing video games over the internet with other players, either cooperatively or competitively, in real-time or asynchronously. The landscape of online gaming is diverse, encompassing a wide range of genres, platforms, and communities that cater to players of all ages and interests.

Online gaming gained popularity and has been a vital part of entertainment and leisure activities in households around the world Reyes & Lopez, (2020). Some studies highlighted the negative consequences of excessive gaming, along with its prevalence and associated risk factors Kuss, D. J., (2013). Clinical studies have shown that people addicted to the Internet may experience various biopsychological symptoms that are similar to those experienced by people addicted to drugs or other substances. These symptoms

include things like mood swings, tolerance build-up, withdrawal symptoms, and relapse. The overuse of the internet has also been tied to several negative psychosocial effects, such as mental illnesses like anxiety and depression, as well as personality disorders like introversion and psychoticism, and it is a grave risk to mental health Kuss, D. J. & Griffiths, M. D., (2012).

However, online gaming has brought benefits to many people, particularly students. They used this as leisure. It serves as a stress reliever, challenge and competition, relaxation, enjoyment, social interaction, and even mental escape from the real world. The academic performance of the students is not affected even if they play online games. Their grades are still good enough (Dumrique & Castillo 2018).

In response to the risks and benefits of online gaming, several pieces of literature have emerged, aiming to understand and address the dilemma. Noticeably, the study of Rodriguez, et.al, (2017) has suggested that cognitive-behavior therapy (CBT) is one of the most commonly applied treatments for online addictions. The cognitive-behavioral therapy is a comprehensive approach used to treat online gaming addiction in students. It addresses the underlying causes of addiction and helps them develop healthier habits (Grinspoon, P., 2020). Additionally, research by Karapetsas, A. et. al., (2014) states that family therapy is used in addressing online gaming addiction because young people are primarily preoccupied with online gaming, and parents must have a major role in the process of prevention and putting limitations. This includes an amount of time devoted to online platforms, providing their children with alternatives like socializing with their friends, and urging them to relax their eyes twenty minutes after using the computer.

Despite the substantial contributions of existing research, there is a gap in understanding the benefits of online gaming for students because most of the research tends to focus on the negative aspects of online gaming. Present literature often addresses and explores many factors contributing to online gaming, such as psychological and environmental factors yet the positive aspects or benefits have remained less studied. According to Ani, et al. (2023), the negative effects of online gaming include a decline in academic performance due to addiction, resulting in lack of sleep, unfinished homework, and decreased interest in school activities and social interaction. The positive aspects are that online games serve as a stress reliever, challenge and competition, relaxation, enjoyment, social interaction, and even mental escape from the real world. (Dumrique & Castillo, 2018).

The significance of the study lies in its potential to promote awareness in society about the risks and benefits of online gaming for students. This provides insights into educational institutions and policymakers to be open in understanding this current dilemma. In this investigation, the researchers explored the experiences of students' online gamers, specifically, they found out how these experiences of online gaming affect their academic performance.

In the study exploring the lived experiences of students' online gamers, the Health Belief Model (HBM) was used as a theoretical framework where individuals' health-related behaviors are influenced by their beliefs about the severity of a health condition, their susceptibility to it, the benefits of acting to prevent or control it, and the barriers they perceive to making changes. In the context of online gaming, the HBM can be used to examine how individuals about the consequences of excessive gaming, their perceived susceptibility to addiction, and their perceived benefits and barriers to reducing or quitting gaming influence beliefs in their behavior (Devi, B., Devi, R., Pradhan, S. & Lepcha, N., 2022).

This study aims to unveil the educational risks and benefits of online gaming for senior high school students of Sto. Tomas National High School. Specifically, it intends to answer the following questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of students who engage in online gaming?
2. What factors lead to students becoming susceptible to online gaming?
3. How do individuals perceive the severity of online gaming and its impact on their health?

4. What are the perceived benefits to the students that trigger online gaming?
5. What are the perceived barriers that affect the students to decline from online gaming?
6. How do individuals perceive the threat of online gaming to their academic performance and well-being?
7. How do personal experiences or witnessing the negative consequences of online gaming serve as cues to action in students seeking treatment or support?
8. How do students perceive self-efficacy in overcoming online gaming?
9. How do students take actions to reduce or quit online gaming that could result in a likelihood of action?

METHOD

This section explains the methodology employed in this study to answer the research questions about the “Risks and Benefits of Online Gaming.

The researchers chose the phenomenological inquiry as the research design for this study, recognizing its suitability to explore the lived experiences of students’ online gamers towards their academic pursuits. The researchers encourage students’ online gamers to express their experiences through the focus group discussion and in-depth interviews. Using interviews and interview guide questionnaires provides rich narratives essential for subsequent thematic analysis.

To ensure a comprehensive understanding of the lived experiences of students’ online gamers, the researchers chose seven (7) participants for focus group discussion and five (5) participants for in-depth interviews. The Purposive sampling technique was used in this study. Qualitative research requires standardization of procedures and selection of participants to remove the potential influence of external variables and ensure the generalizability of results (Sargeant, 2012). Based on Creswell, et al. (2018) while there are no hard and fast rules around how many people you should be involved in your research, some researchers estimate between ten (10) and fifty (50) participants as being sufficient depending on your type of research and research question. The participants are senior high school students of Sto. Tomas National High School.

The study was conducted at Sto. Tomas National High School, Sto. Tomas, Loreto Agusan del Sur. The researchers followed a systematic data-gathering procedure to ensure the accuracy, rigor, and validity of the qualitative data. Before the conduct of the study, a letter was sent to the school head for approval to conduct a focus group discussion and in-depth interviews with the chosen students. Taking legalities into account the consent form was provided beforehand for the chosen online gamers. Each participant received forms containing permission for the whole interview that will be recorded for transcription purposes. In the latter part of the interview, the participants were assured that all data and information would remain confidential.

The research instrument which includes the interview guide for the Focus Group Discussion (FGD’s) and Key Informant Interviews (KII’s), plays a significant role in the success of this phenomenological study. The researchers designed each instrument component anchored on insights from well-known authors in qualitative research. The interview guide is based on the practices outlined by Belmonte, et.al, (2019).

The researchers ensure the trustworthiness of the study to establish the validity and reliability of its findings, particularly in the context of phenomenological inquiry. In this research, the researchers utilized (Lincoln, et al., 1985) criteria for assessing the trustworthiness of the study. The four criteria include credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

In many studies and research, each action should take legalities into account. According to Patel, Chapman, Luo, Woodruff & Arora (2012), everyone should have more respect for fellow creators in

this field regardless of different views and methods. The interview process must not affect the participants in any way, whether intentionally or unintentionally. This study sought the participants' approval through written informed consent. It contains primary information about the study and an option to withdraw from participating, whatever the circumstances may be. As mandated by the Republic Act 10173, any personal information that the participants freely gave will remain confidential and not cause any violation under the Data Privacy Act. The student respondents in this study were assured confidentiality. Participants were assigned a pseudonym and they assumed that the information shared by them was not identifiable. Data, including field notes, documents, transcriptions, and audio tapes were kept in the researcher's home in a secure cabinet. Data were retained until the completion of the study and the defense of the research.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the lived experiences of the students who engaged in online gaming and insights of participants on their daily activities. It further presents the discussion of the key findings derived from the major themes answering the research question.

Lived Experiences of Online Gamers

Senior High School students-participants shared their first-hand accounts and impressions of being Student Online Gamers. These experiences become their daily challenges and struggles in pursuit of education. The personal experiences of the students that led them to engage in online gaming were determined by the three superordinate themes under this section: (a) "*Habitual Behavior: Enjoyment*", (b) "*Friends: Social Connection*", and (c) "*Distraction: Stress Reliever*". These were distinct among 5 respondents in an in-depth interview and 7 respondents in a focus group discussion.

Habitual Behavior: Enjoyment

With its global expansion, online gaming has become a major global entertainment and cultural phenomenon. As a result, practically all teenagers like playing video games online, and Filipino teens are no exception. Most respondents stated that their motivation for playing online games was entertainment, enjoyment, and fun. They prefer gaming as a form of entertainment and enjoyment over other leisure activities.

"I enjoy it when I can start a game ..." (IDI2)

"I have fun ..." (IDI1)

"To enjoy myself, I prefer to entertain myself. It is better to play than to wander" (FGD4)

Furthermore, the respondents established gaming as a pastime and habitual activity to combat boredom, stress, and problems.

"... it is boring when I can't play games especially and I am used to it." (IDI2)

"I am bored at home, so to get rid of it, I thought of playing on the computer since it is close to our house. It became my past time." (FGD1)

"It gives me joy especially when I get stressed in our class, ..." (FGD5)

This result is supported by Wong & Lam (2016) who state "Games are simply good fun providing great enjoyment. They loved the excitement and satisfaction derived from playing and winning games". Teenagers are just having fun and they use gaming as a leisure activity. (Dumrique & Castillo 2018). It is

undeniable that playing online games can provide some incomparable pleasure. Some people claim that playing online games is just a pastime, stress-reliever, relaxation, and fun (Ani, et al. 2023).

Distraction: Stress Reliever

The respondents indicated that they use games as a coping mechanism for stress and family issues, as well as a way to escape boredom. Thus, the respondents immerse themselves in online gaming as a means of distraction and relief from personal concerns.

“... and I’ll get rid of stress and problems.” (IDI1)

“... By playing ML, I can divert my attention, I can’t think about the problem anymore.” (IDI4)

“It gives me joy especially when I get stressed in our class, I immediately switch to playing to get rid of my problem.” (IDI5)

“I started a computer game because of my family problem and to relieve my stress.” (FGD1)

“I probably missed home, so I used my time to play ...” (FGD3)

“Relieve the feeling of boredom. I want to entertain myself. It is better to play than to wander.” (FGD5)

“Especially when I don’t have a friend at home, I play to get rid of the problems or stress with my family and my schooling.” (FGD6)

“... so that I can have fun and lose my mind about the problems at home.” (FGD7)

This result is supported by Agusman and Marohan (2019) who described the learning process of many teenagers who feel unable to face the academic demands they find in the world of education and experience stress, most of them relieve stress by playing online games. Gaming is more entertaining and a stress reliever, it is a recreational activity that can help relieve stress when engaged in it purposively (Perlas & Ea, 2023). Teens who play online games are just having fun and they do not just actually play because of some sort of seriousness, but also because they just want to feel relief. During school hours, students tend to feel stressed due to loads of schoolwork, and playing it will relieve their stress (Dumrique & Castillo, 2018). Furthermore, according to Ani, et al. (2023) one of the most popular trends among teenagers is internet gaming because they use it as a leisure activity, stress-reliever, relaxation and pastime. In addition, according to Garnada, (2020), computer games are one way to ease our boredom, but sometimes it leads to addiction because of a lack of self-discipline

Friends: Social Connection

A small number of respondents stated that they first became interested in playing online games because of their friends. They believe that playing video games will help them stay socially connected to their friends, make new ones, and keep up with current trends and fashions.

“I’ll have fun and I’ll get to know new friends, ...” (IDI1)

“I’ve been influenced by friends to keep up with fashion.” (IDI3)

“Friends pushed me to play because I didn’t want to be out of place. It’s just a trip with friends. ...” (IDI4)

“I started an online game because of my friends. They are the ones who enticed me so that I can have fun ...” (FGD7)

This is supported by Wong & Lam (2016) who said several players treasured the opportunity to meet new friends at the Internet cafes creating topics for sharing and discussing their personal experiences, strategies to win weapons, and defeat enemies. They also established social relationships through online interactions. Added to this, online gaming is one of the widely used leisure activities by many people since playing video games has many reasons to be played, for it can be a stress reliever, challenge and competition, relaxation, enjoyment, social interaction, and even mentally escaping from the real world (Dumrique & Castillo, 2018). Most students’ online gamers responded that they could socialize with their friends and other people of different cultures (Ani, et al., 2023). Playing online games results in a positive effect on the social behavior of the respondents because even if the respondents play online games still their personal interaction with others is not affected. They still have their friends personally and can socialize effectively (Dumrique & Castillo, 2018). In online communities, social contact and communication with other players often lead to the creation of friendships and interpersonal growth (Pietersen, Coetzee, Owczarek, Elliker & Ackermann (2018).

Perceived Susceptibility of Students Engaged in Online Gaming

The two subordinate themes in this section – (a) *“Habitual Behavior: Distraction”* and (b) *“Enjoyment and Competition”* – determined the experiences of the respondents that made them susceptible to online gaming.

Habitual Behavior: Distraction

Based on the data provided by the respondents, it appears that their uncomfortable and upsetting situations—such as issues related to stress, boredom, and anger—have made them more likely to play games. They divert their attention from their anger, irritation, and even acts of violence by playing entertaining internet games. Additionally, they use games as a diversion from their negative thoughts.

“I divert my problem or anger to the game. It’s better for me than getting drunk.” (IDI1)

“There are times when I’m very stressed, I play games to entertain myself and not to think bad things.” (IDI4)

“I will release my anger there rather than hurting someone.” (FGD4)

“I made a defense mechanism, that’s where I release my anger” (FGD5)

“... also, to get rid of the problem I was thinking about.” (FGD6)

This result is supported by Dumrique & Castillo (2018) who states that technologies are very good at distracting people. In mark with this development, online gaming was created to give entertainment to people. Vally, Laconi, & Kaliszewska-Czeremska, (2020) describe that problematic gamers produced higher scores for maladaptive coping strategies and the use of immature, neurotic, and autistic fantasy defenses. The inappropriate usage of playing online games also leads to some problems such as being distracted in school. It is where the attention of the child is divided that even their health and social life is unknowingly affected.

Habitual Behavior: Enjoyment

As was noted in the preceding section, the respondents’ motivation to play online games was because of the

enjoyment, entertainment, and fun in them. Thus, for the same reason, they are more likely to play online games. The respondents emphasized the fun and enjoyment of competition in the game regardless of the gender of their opponent. The idea of playing, socializing with new people, and competing against pros is also exciting to them. They also mentioned that the prizes and rewards they would receive upon winning inclined them to play online games.

“There are games sometimes and then there is a prize. If I win, I will have more fun.” (IDI1)

“... With playing online, it makes me happy.” (FGD2)

“I started an online game; it was a way to bring me happiness. I also meet new friends while playing online games.” (FGD2)

“... I also like to be challenged, especially if my opponent is a girl.” (FGD5)

Perlas & Ea (2023) provide compelling evidence that gaming serves as more than mere entertainment; it is a medium that fosters creativity and hones real-life skills. Their research demonstrates that engaging in games, whether online or in-person, significantly boosts mood and presents intellectual challenges that keep players engaged. The study reveals a fascinating psychological dynamic: most gamers experience a sense of satisfaction and reward upon victory, while defeat, rather than discouraging them, heightens their determination. A loss prompts players to reevaluate their strategies, sparking an eagerness to restart the game and experiment with alternative tactics, ultimately driving them toward mastery. This resilience in the face of setbacks mirrors the perseverance needed in real-world scenarios, suggesting that gaming cultivates a growth mindset essential for personal and professional development.

Perceived Severity of Students Engaged in Online Gaming

Feeling Disturbed and Angry

Most of the respondents said they feel so agitated when someone else interrupts them in a play that they are in the middle of since they want to win and finish the game well. They admitted that they were easily irritated by spouses, parents, or siblings who asked them to do something, called them names, or reprimanded them during the game. They were upset because the disruption caused them to lose their composure and focus, which could have resulted in their team losing the game or losing their credit score. They become so angry that they yell at people and respond angrily to their parents.

“I get angry especially when my game is interrupted” (IDI 2)

“Sometimes, because of my anger I can answer my parents. ...” (IDI 3)

“It frustrates me, it irritates me especially and disturbs me.” (IDI 5)

“When I’m enjoying it so much, I’m so excited to beat my opponent, then someone scolds me and orders me, I get angry because my game will be interrupted. I don’t want to be disturbed.” (FGD 1)

“I don’t want to be disturbed when I play, I get angry. I don’t like getting my credit scores down. I want to avoid my groups being different if I can’t give them my attention.” (FGD 5)

Behnke, Chwiłkowska, & Kaczmarek’s (2021) comprehensive study corroborates this finding, revealing that gaming is a powerful medium capable of evoking a broad spectrum of emotional responses. These range from exhilarating positive emotions such as amusement to intense negative emotions like anger. Notably, their research pinpoints game design as a critical factor in triggering strong negative emotions,

particularly when it incorporates violent content or graphic depictions of death. Such visceral imagery not only heightens emotional arousal but does so on both physiological and subjective levels, suggesting a deep-seated, multi-dimensional impact. Beyond visual content, the study breaks new ground by identifying specific in-game behaviors that act as catalysts for negative emotions. Poor team communication, intra-team criticism, individual underperformance, and the psychological blow of losing matches that were considered “in the bag” all contribute to a player’s emotional downturn. This nuanced understanding of gaming’s emotional landscape underscores its complexity, highlighting how factors ranging from visual design to interpersonal dynamics can profoundly shape a player’s emotional journey.

Perceived Benefits of Students Engaged in Online Gaming

Teamwork and Understanding

You can play games alone or with other people in groups. Players learn leadership, understanding, and respect while playing online games. According to the responses, winning the game taught them the importance of communication and teamwork among teammates. Along the lines of cooperation and communication, they have developed empathy for other players and an open mind toward both winning and losing. Additionally, they learned to easily ignore negative comments or bragging, not ideal words from other players.

“... When we are a group, there is teamwork and understanding.” (IDI 5)

“... I’m also not easily offended during the game by the trash talk of my opponents. I don’t mind, I’m open-minded.” (FGD 3)

“... I will learn, especially in the group, that I will play my role so that we don’t lose, it will be difficult for me to win.” (FGD 4)

“When I started a game, I already knew how to play with a group or teamwork. can’t brag. win or lose, it’s still a group.” (FGD 6)

Perlas & Ea (2023) emphasize that children’s social and emotional development is deeply rooted in their interpersonal interactions. Liao, Pham, Cheng & Teng (2020) find that team participation experience and teamwork knowledge positively influence gaming team identification and norm compliance, respectively, both of which enhance team commitment. They note that this commitment can stem from various factors like psychological ownership and quality communication. (Pietersen, Coetzee, Owczarek, Elliker & Ackermann (2018) highlight that online games foster a sense of belonging in online communities, with socializing and competitiveness being the primary motivators. Interestingly, playing with strangers can also be enjoyable and lead to new connections.

Self-Confidence

Many of the participants gained confidence from playing games, which made them more comfortable expressing and displaying themselves to others. Most of the gamers said that they no longer felt embarrassed to hang out with their friends because they had figured out how to talk to them. They saw that they learned how to use devices, which increased confidence in themselves, and that they gained self-assurance. They also learned to know where they fit in the crowd.

“I know how to talk to my friends. I’m not ashamed to be with them anymore.” (IDI 2)

“Yes, my thinking has improved, I am focused, and I know where to place myself.” (IDI 4)

“To develop my skills, especially to operate on my gadgets. ...” (FGD 7)

This result is supported by Perlas & Ea (2023) that peers could have a big impact on how you behave. Having friends who will encourage you to become the person you want to be in your life is vital. Realizing how individuals can affect your self-esteem is the first step in taking control of your life and developing a healthy self-image. Monley, Liese & Oberleitner (2024) said that playing video games helps gamers to be equipped to meet their basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness where gamers often experience a sense of agency, skill, and connection to others when playing video games.

Cognitive abilities: Attention

It takes coordination and effort to play games, whether they be computer or mobile games. To play the game and their teammates better, one needs the hands to work, the brain to think and formulate strategies, and the eyes to see. The respondents to the interview highlighted how they developed their ability to concentrate and pay attention to the game and winning methods. They observed how they gained expertise in strategy and preparation to outwit their rivals. They also gained the ability to read the movements of their opponents.

“I developed my knowledge of how-to game plan to defeat the opponent.” (IDI 1)

“... think of strategies on how to defeat the opponents. and planning how to defend without being damaged by the enemy.” (FGD 1)

“I have noticed a lot in my body since I started playing, my hand is fast-hand or fast, I know how to read the opponent’s moves, and I know how to psycho the partner. I know how to adjust myself.” (FGD 5)

“... Then my thinking is, you should advance again so that you don’t lose to the opponent” (FGD 7)

The study’s findings are supported by several researchers. Perlas & Ea (2023) assert that video gaming enhances cognitive abilities, portraying gamers as brilliant, wise decision-makers, creative, and highly collaborative. Wong & Lam (2016) report that interviewees found gaming satisfying, fostering teamwork, sociability, and cognitive agility. Games targeting memory, reasoning, and logic were seen as cognitive boosters, improving players’ strategic thinking and creativity. Ani et al. (2023) highlight that online games develop 21st-century skills like collaboration, problem-solving, and communication, with daily gamers outscoring average students in reading and writing. Dumrique & Castillo (2018) notes that puzzle and adventure games make players’ minds more active, aiding decision-making in tight situations. Karlsson (2024) identifies skills developed through gaming: problem-solving, patience, concentration, critical thinking, and teamwork. Ani et al. (2023) further state that child gamers have better memory, problem-solving, synchronization, and critical-thinking skills. Importantly, Garnada (2023) finds that gamers are aware of health risks like sleeplessness and delayed eating.

Perceived Barriers of Students Engaged in Online Gaming

Technical Problem: Internet Connection and Electricity

Since the majority of games rely on the internet, players need to have a reliable internet connection to enjoy themselves immensely while playing. The most frequent challenge that students run into when playing online games is this one. They emphasized how their inability to cooperate and participate fully in the ongoing game is hampered by the poor internet connection, which makes them frustrated and sometimes unable to focus. They also remarked that they can’t play the game when the light goes out because computers require electricity to run and mobile phones require charging when their batteries run low.

“Slow internet connections are usually a hindrance when we play games ...” (IDI 4)

“The biggest problem here is the slow internet signal and no electricity or blackout.” (IDI5)

“The biggest obstacle, especially when we play on the computer and online games is the signal. If the cellphone or computer does not get a strong signal, the quality of the internet will be intermittent.” (FGD 1)

“For me, the problem when playing online is that the internet connection is slow. can't concentrate because it's loading.” (FGD 7)

This result is supported by Djannah, Tentama & Sinanto (2021) who state that online gamers encountered significant barriers in their attempts to reduce gaming time. The researchers identified several key factors that make it challenging for players to disengage from their virtual worlds: social pressure through friends' invitations, creating a sense of obligation or fear of missing out; boredom in today's fast-paced environment, where games offer an engaging escape; the inherent excitement and thrill experienced during gameplay, providing a powerful emotional pull; the existence of free time, which games can fill effortlessly; and the ubiquity of high-speed internet, making engaging multiplayer experiences just a click away. These multifaceted factors—spanning social, emotional, and technological domains—collectively make it difficult for gamers to curtail their online gaming habits.

Family Responsibilities

The respondents additionally took into consideration the obligations they had within their houses. The respondents stated that while they are still in school and live with their parents, their parents often urge them to help out around the house and reprimand them when they play too much.

“... Internet connection and my parents, I know that their guidance is also for my well-being.” (IDI 3)

“... that's when Mom makes me do chores around the house.” (IDI4)

“... Second, when the game starts then your mom will order you, there's nothing you can do, stop so you don't get scolded.” (FGD 7)

“For me, based on my experience, the obstacles of playing ML are my responsibilities as a father to find a job so that I can support my family's needs” (FGD 1)

Four (4) of the respondents said that their perceived barriers to online gaming is due to their family responsibilities. They were scolded by their mother while playing because of declining or delaying the household chores. One of the respondents said that he almost broke his family because of gaming. Instead of searching job so that he can provide the needs of his family, the gamer is busy with online gaming. This result is supported by Perlas & Ea (2023) who state that when a person is addicted to video games, they start to establish a gaming habit that negatively affects important elements of everyday life. In addition, Tas, I., (2017) said that gaming addiction was found to be positively related to depressive mood, feelings of insignificance and guilt, major depression, shyness and internet addiction, aggression and narcissism, depression, low academic achievement, behavioral problems, and negatively related to self-control. As what have Garnada, (2020) said internet gaming addiction is associated with various negative consequences. According to Wong & Lam (2016) “the perceived deleterious effects of gaming addiction were reduced time and interest in other important activities, poor academic performance, physical harms, and emotional distress, disrupted friendship with non-gaming peers, risked family relationship and financial problems”.

Perceived Threat of Students Engaged in Online Gaming

Unhealthy Lifestyle

Many gamers neglect to take care of themselves, eat meals on time, and even get enough sleep because they are too preoccupied with their games and spend too much time playing them resulting in an unhealthy lifestyle. According to the respondents, they have noticed that they frequently miss meals, sleep late, or occasionally don't get any sleep at all.

"What I noticed is when I enjoy playing games, I forget to eat and then I can sleep for a long time at night ..." (FGD 1)

"I get sick sometimes because I can't think, I can't eat at the right time, ..." (FGD 2)

"I can't eat at mealtimes because I'm enjoying a game, I can't keep track of the time, because it's too much fun, and that's why I always lack sleep." (FGD 6)

This result is supported by Djannah, Tentama & Sinanto (2021) who state that participants often stay up late, have difficult time management, often delay eating, have heartburn, delayed urination, feel dizzy, tired, and have back pain. Online gamers experienced insomnia, yet they knew about the dangers of staying up late, the risks of delaying eating, and the dangers of holding back urination. Garnada (2022) said that the psychological consequences of internet gaming addiction include sacrificing real-life relationships, other pastime activities, sleep, work, education, socializing, and relationships, obsession with gaming, and a lack of real-life relationships, lack of attention, aggression and hostility, stress, dysfunctional coping, worse academic achievement, problems with verbal memory, and low well-being and high loneliness. It ultimately affects lifestyle, function, and behavior (Ani, et al. 2023). Sayeed, Rasel, Habibullah, & Hossain (2021) states that adolescents suffer from several forms of psychological problems including mental health, depression, loneliness, insomnia, and low self-control due to mobile game addiction.

Body Pains

The majority of respondents placed a strong emphasis on the outcome of leading an unhealthy lifestyle as a result of it. They experienced various physical problems, including headaches from playing too much, even late at night; hand pains from playing with their hands too much; back pains from sitting too much and not adopting proper posture; and dizziness and blurred vision from excessive radiation exposure from the screens. They felt tired and sick from these body aches.

"When I keep playing, the result is headache, hand pain, sometimes my fingers can't bend because they are numb." (IDI 1)

"Sometimes my vision is blurry and then my head and back hurt." (IDI 5)

"... I feel dizzy, and then my body feels weak." (FGD 2)

"Sometimes, for a long time I sit in front of my cellphone or computer and play online games. I feel blurred in my vision." (FGD 7)

This result is supported by Djannah, Tentama & Sinanto (2021) who state that the health effects that arise from game addiction are changes in diet and sleep patterns that have negative impacts, such as ulcers and anemia in-game players. Online gamers experienced eye pain due to prolonged viewing of the smartphone screen. Kwok, Leung, Poon, & Fung (2021) state that negative consequences on mental and physical health,

such as anxiety disorder, depression, suicidal ideation, more frequent headaches, and musculoskeletal pain. Garnada (2020) said that prolonged and excessive use of these games can cause, mainly in children, a number of physical and psychological problems which may include obsessive, addictive behavior, dehumanization of the player, desensitizing of feelings, personality changes, hyperactivity, learning disorders, premature maturing of children, psychomotor disorders, health problems due to lack of exercise and tendonitis. Djannah, Tentama & Sinanto (2021) said that all participants experienced fatigue, sore and sore eyes, then dizziness, firefly eyes, decreased visual acuity, heartburn, chills, the risk of developing ulcers, and the risk of developing urinary tract infections.

The Cues to the Action of Students Engaged in Online Gaming

Self-discipline

It is alarming to see and hear various cases of the result of an unhealthy lifestyle among online gamers. Addiction and physical pains are just some of the illnesses and sickness a gamer could have when they neglect proper management of themselves. The respondents stated that they were worried of getting sick if they kept playing without thinking about what was appropriate or required. They have thus thought about disciplining themselves in a way that would enable them to stay out of situations like this. They talked about exercising self-control by setting limits on their playing time and self-discipline by going to bed and eating at the appropriate times.

“...I can still control myself in terms of playing and I also eat before playing.” (IDI 3)

“I also get nervous sometimes, I just think if it happens to me, what will I do, including my parents, they will also be bothered. I thought I should limit my playing.” (IDI 4)

“... I get scared because it might happen to me, so now, I control myself and time management again.” (FGD 1)

“... I will only limit the time to play and then just manage the time so that I don't get sick.” (FGD 2)

This result is supported by the study of Acland, D. & Chow, V. (2018) some players have self-identified self-control problems, leading to longer and more frequent play than they would prefer, and demand for commitment. On the other hand, in the study of Hillard (2017) stated that for a hobbyist gamer, time management can be difficult. Video games can be a valuable tool for stress management for many students balancing both work and school. However, as gaming communities become larger and more complex, time requirements can often increase. However, in the study of Tabvuma, Carter-Rogers, Brophy, Smith, & Sutherland (2022), time management training can help develop students' self-control, which helps students spend less time on leisure activities and more time on activities that are associated with student success.

The Self-Efficacy of Students Engaged in Online Gaming

Most of the participants believe to seriously want to change their habits and keep trying to decline or stop gaming. However, some participants do not know how to change their habits.

“Yes, seriously.” (IDI1)

“Yes, very sure.” (IDI3)

“Yes, I'm serious, but I don't know how.” (IDI5)

“Yes, I want to change, but I can’t,” (FGD1)

“I want to be serious, but my friends, all of whom are game players, find it difficult.” (FGD 4)

“Yes, seriously, mas.” (FGD5)

“But I will still try.” (FGD5)

This result is supported by Djannah, Tentama & Sinanto (2021), who found that engagement in online gaming is intricately linked with players’ health beliefs and self-efficacy. Their groundbreaking study reveals that many gamers hold strong convictions about the potential benefits of their hobby, viewing it not merely as entertainment but as a medium that can positively impact their well-being. More fascinatingly, the researchers discovered a correlation between gaming and an enhanced sense of self-efficacy—particularly in the domain of health behaviors. Participants who were deeply involved in online games showed greater confidence in their ability to adopt and maintain healthy lifestyle choices, specifically those aimed at reducing disease risks. This suggests that the problem-solving skills, strategic thinking, and perseverance cultivated in virtual environments may translate into real-world health management. For instance, a gamer accustomed to optimizing character stats or devising complex raid strategies might apply similar analytical approaches to optimizing their diet or exercise routine. Furthermore, the study hints that the sense of achievement and control experienced in games could boost overall self-esteem, empowering individuals to take proactive steps in their health journey. This research challenges stereotypes about gaming’s negative health impacts, suggesting it might, counterintuitively, foster a more health-conscious mindset.

The Likelihood of Action of Students Engaged in Online Gaming

Not A Gamer: Get a Hobby

Some students haven’t played any online games yet. Maybe they are too young to have found out about it, or maybe their parents forbid them from having their own phones. Those who haven’t played online games yet or are just getting started are advised by the responders to take up a different hobby. A recreational, physical activity like basketball, to prevent them from being overly dependent on and addicted to internet gaming.

“What I can advise to children like me to find other hobbies like playing basketball so as not to get addicted to online games.” (FGD 4)

“While they have never played Mobile Legends, find another hobby. ...” (FGD 6)

The result of the study is supported by Majamaki & Hellman (2015), who assert that effectively balancing gaming with other life activities hinges on prioritization and scheduling. Their research, conducted across diverse gamer demographics, reveals that successful integration of gaming into daily life isn’t about abstinence but strategic time management. High-functioning gamers, they found, treat gaming as one component of a well-rounded lifestyle, not as its centerpiece. These individuals meticulously plan their days, allocating specific time slots for gaming, much as they would for work, study, or exercise. Some even use digital calendars or productivity apps to ensure gaming doesn’t encroach on other commitments. Interestingly, the study shows that this structured approach often enhances gaming enjoyment; with time constraints, players focus more intently, deriving deeper satisfaction from their sessions. This finding aligns perfectly with Cleofas’s (2021) seminal work on student well-being. He describes self-care practices not as indulgences but as essential shields against psychological challenges. In the context of gaming, setting boundaries and maintaining a balanced schedule are forms of self-care, protecting students from potential

pitfalls like addiction or academic neglect. Moreover, his research indicates that such practices do more than prevent harm—they actively boost student outcomes. A gamer who judiciously manages their hobby alongside studying and social interactions may experience reduced stress, better sleep patterns, and enhanced cognitive function, all contributing to improved academic performance.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The investigation of the lived experiences of student's risks and benefits of online gaming on their behaviors highlighted the significance and the necessity of the study. The result of this study would hopefully determine and help the participants understand the impact of online games on them.

Thus, the study contribution solely depends on the revelation of participants and informants based on their experiences, the coping mechanism that they exerted, and their perception and insights on the experiences of student online gamers. A qualitative approach is far from an advantage to this investigation for it deals with understanding rather than interpreting certain and relevant experiences. This also invites opportunities and ideas for future research as much as there is a great deal more to be learned from the lived experiences, challenges encountered, and aspirations of every student gamer.

Moreover, the school guidance advocates shall provide services to guide and help the students solve common problems about their behavior towards online gaming. Parents may always monitor and motivate their children to limit their exposure to computers and lead to the right and good things that they may spend their time on. The school shall craft policies that will prohibit learners from using cellular phones on school premises during class hours. The school shall also coordinate with stakeholders, particularly the Barangay Local Government Unit to strengthen the implementation of the policies regarding online gaming among students.

IMPLICATION FOR PRACTICE

The following implications for practice are offered based on the findings:

On the Lived Experiences of the Student Online Gamers. The shared lived experiences of the informants and participants divulged how they struggle with online gaming. Some of the participants are happy playing online games. They said that it helped them to relieve stress and problems. On the other hand, most of the participants suffered from the effects of addiction to mobile games. Some often lose hours of sleep and get scolded by their parents because of excessive playing. It is also seen that they suffered from eye constraints and financial difficulty and they were able to skip meals due to gaming.

Coping with the difficulties encountered the Student Online Gamers address the challenges encountered by limiting leisure time, they said by limiting leisure time they can easily control their addiction. On the other hand, few of the participants replied that they manage personal responsibilities and school obligations. This helped them prioritize their personal responsibilities and school obligations. This helped them realize that they were spending too much on the game and it caused financial difficulties for them. Additionally, the respondents also said that having time to nap also helped them get through the day. It helps them to be mentally stable. These signify indeed that these positive values capture how someone should look at life. It is so important to see your problems positively so you can find solutions easily.

Aspiration and Insights of Student Online Gamers. The student online gamers are so vivid in considering and suggesting that if you let the game control you it could result in a bad situation. But if you can control the game, you can control when to stop and when to play it can help you relieve your stress. In addition to that, the respondents now realize that gaming is not that important and there's no need to spend much

money, you need to value your money and spend it in a good way.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This study was limited only to Sto. Tomas National High School in the Municipality of Loreto, Agusan del Sur.

As the findings of this study are not generalized beyond 15 participants and informants, future research may be conducted investigating the lived experiences of student online gamers from other districts to substantiate the findings.

Second, to the parent. Parents can benefit from understanding the risks and benefits associated with online gaming, including its impact on their children's social and emotional well-being. Parents must provide tight for children's online gaming activities can help mitigate potential risks.

Third, the policymaker will promote civic engagement. Collaboration with game developers can help policymakers create engaging platforms that educate the public on policy matters. This can promote civic engagement and foster a better understanding of policy issues in the community.

Future research may be conducted investigating the challenges encountered by student online gamers in other parts of the country to add to the set rules and guidelines the research base, other ideas, and issues related to it.

Also, further research may be done to re-interview some of the participants and informants in the study to see whether their views and perceptions have changed over some time.

Further research could be conducted to find out the students' lived experiences on their addiction to mobile games.

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