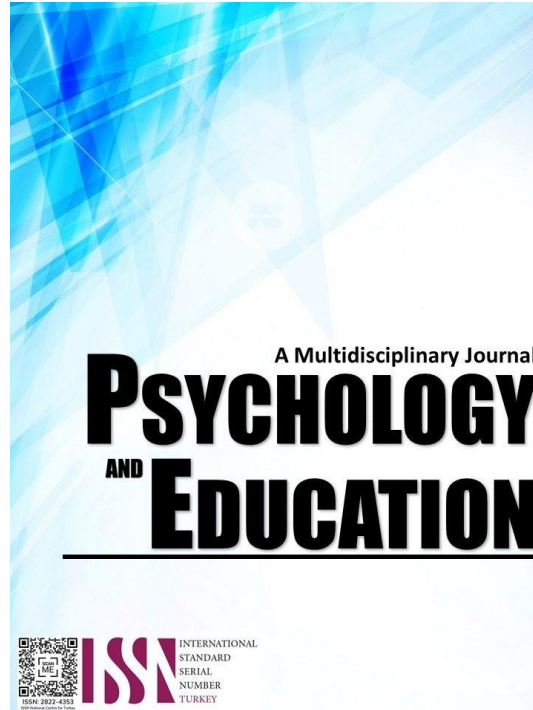


# TORN BETWEEN TWO LOVERS: THE PLIGHT OF STUDENTS HOOKED ON MOBILE GAMES



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## Torn Between Two Lovers: The Plight of Students Hooked on Mobile Games

Detchie Van A. Compania,\* Judith S. Rabacal  
For affiliations and correspondence, see the last page.

### Abstract

This study explored the plight of students hooked on mobile games to determine the challenges and strategies in balancing mobile gaming and academic responsibilities and the factors contributing to mobile gaming addiction. The study was conducted to provide strategies and interventions to mitigate the negative impacts of mobile gaming and promote a balanced, healthy lifestyle for students. The study used an exploratory sequential mixed-methods research design, effectively combining the strengths of the qualitative and quantitative approaches to understand students' experiences comprehensively. This study was conducted on junior high school students, with ten students for the qualitative phase and 161 students for the quantitative phase in the thirteen secondary schools in the Division of Escalante City, Negros Occidental, who excessively play mobile games (Mobile Legends, Call of Duty, Roblox, and Minecraft). The qualitative data were analyzed in Phase 1 and determined three emergent themes: Theme 1, Challenges in Balancing Mobile Gaming, and Academic Responsibilities, which included difficulties in managing their time, school assignments or tasks, and facing various health problems. Theme 2: Strategies for Balancing Mobile Gaming and Academic Responsibilities encompassing self-regulation skills such as self-discipline, time management, goal-setting, and prioritization. Theme 3: The Contributing Factors to Mobile Gaming Addiction, which included the attachment between the mobile game and the player, social dynamics, game mechanics and features, and enjoying leisure and fighting boredom. The qualitative findings were used to develop survey questionnaires, and quantitative findings verified the results during phase 2. Most participants who avidly played mobile games were male students rather than female students. Mobile gaming is prevalent among adolescents aged 12-14, and most game preference is Mobile Legends: Bang Bang, followed by Call of Duty (COD). This study enhanced the findings through comprehensive data analysis and integration; the results serve as a basis for educational leaders, teachers, and policymakers to provide a thorough understanding of the impact of mobile gaming, provide effective strategies and interventions to mitigate mobile gaming addiction and promote a balanced, healthy lifestyle for students.

**Keywords:** *mobile games, students, addiction*

### Introduction

The advancement of mobile internet and smart mobile devices embody technological developments that have made mobile games popular, with 2.2 billion users around the globe (Liao, 2020). A study by Husna et al. (2022) stated that excessive mobile playing and internet use may lead to addiction. The World Health Organization, in 2019, identified this addiction as "gaming disorder," a behavioral pattern that has impaired control over gaming and interferes with personal, social, and educational functions.

Mobile gaming captivated the attention of individuals across all demographics, and the students are no exception. They have adopted mobile gaming as entertainment and a break from academic life (Li et al., 2022). It became a student's platform to interact and communicate to enhance cognitive skills, such as strategic thinking and problem-solving (Green & Seitz, 2021). While it offers cognitive and social benefits, it also presents challenges related to academic performance (Chiu et al., 2022), physical and psychological health problems (Nawaser et al., 2024), and mental issues (Hassan et al., 2023).

Studies about the impacts of mobile gaming have been conducted worldwide. However, few focused on discussing the precarious experiences of students hooked on mobile games and how they manage their academic responsibilities. Although mobile games offer benefits, their addictive nature can negatively impact students' well-being (Kurt et al., 2024). The given phenomenon motivated the researcher to capture the plight of students hooked on mobile games in the Division of Escalante City secondary schools. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for educators, parents, and policymakers to foster a balanced approach to mobile gaming, optimizing its benefits while mitigating potential risks in student's lives. This goal was envisioned to reduce the negative impacts of mobile gaming on the lives of the students concerned.

### Research Questions

This study aimed to explore the plight of students hooked on mobile games. It entrenched concrete data to obtain a thorough understanding of the student's experiences, specifically sought to answer the research questions:

1. What are the personal challenges of students hooked on mobile games when balancing their gaming habits and academic responsibilities?
2. What personal strategies are employed by students hooked on mobile games when balancing their gaming habits and academic responsibilities?
3. What factors contribute to students becoming addicted to mobile games?

4. To what extent do the students experience the identified challenges in balancing mobile gaming and academic responsibilities?
5. To what extent do the students experience the identified strategies in balancing mobile gaming and academic responsibilities?
6. To what extent do the identified factors contribute to mobile gaming addiction among the students?
7. What are effective strategies and interventions to help students manage and reduce mobile gaming addiction?

## Methodology

### Research Design

This study utilized an exploratory sequential mixed-methods research design. According to Creswell (2016), a mixed-method design effectively combines the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative approaches. This study aimed to capture a well-rounded understanding of the engagements and experiences lived by students who are hooked on mobile games. It integrated qualitative and quantitative approaches to comprehensively investigate the phenomenon of mobile gaming addiction among the students in the secondary schools of the division of Escalante City. This study was conducted in two sequential phases. Phase 1 used qualitative methods to gain an in-depth understanding of the experiences of students heavily engaged in mobile gaming. It explored the detailed ways students face challenges and strategies in balancing gaming habits and academic responsibilities, and it revealed underlying factors leading to mobile gaming addiction. Phase 2 employed quantitative methods to analyze and assess the perceptions of avid mobile gamers. It determined the extent to which students' experiences faced challenges, employed strategies in balancing mobile gaming and academic responsibilities, and to what extent the identified factors contributed to mobile gaming addiction. This phase used the themes and insights from the qualitative phase to offer a broader perspective and understanding of the study.

### Participants

The study was conducted in the secondary schools, within the Division of Escalante City, Negros Occidental, for the School Year 2024-2025. For the qualitative phase, the participants of this study included ten (10) junior high school students identified as being highly involved in mobile gaming. For the quantitative phase, a broader population of students across 13 schools was surveyed to collect quantitative data. They were purposively selected to gather deep, rich data offering comprehensive insights, and experiences essential to this study. They were chosen based on the inclusion criteria:

Students who play any of these games: Mobile Legends: Bang Bang, Call of Duty (COD), Roblox, and Minecraft Plays both while at home and school, with or without financial expenses, at least 2-4 hours a day, played for at least one year, aged 12 – 18 in a public secondary school

Table 1. Respondents of the Study

<i>Channels</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Total</i>
School A	9	1	10
School B	16	5	21
School C	9	2	11
School D	10	0	10
School E	7	0	7
School F	6	2	8
School G	8	2	10
School H	8	4	12
School I	9	8	17
School J	6	2	8
School K	8	2	10
School L	14	7	21
School M	12	4	16
Grand Total	122	39	161

For the qualitative phase, this study employed purposive sampling, a type of non-probability sampling where researchers use their judgment to select participants from the population for the study (Campbell et al. 2020). Ten (10) junior high school students identified as being heavily involved in mobile gaming and qualified for the inclusion criteria are the participants of the interviews in this study. The researcher employed a complete enumeration using the total population sampling technique for the quantitative phase. This method examines the entire population with particular characteristics (Laerd Dissertation, 2012). Hence, the respondents of the survey questionnaires were junior high school students who qualified for the inclusion criteria, were given consent from their parents, and voluntarily participated in this study.

### Instrument

The researcher collected the data utilizing two sequential methods, including interviews in the Qualitative phase and followed by surveys in the Quantitative phase. For the Qualitative Phase, the interview guide questions were utilized as the primary data-gathering instrument to determine the plight of students hooked on mobile games. This method involved asking open-ended questions to explore participants' in-depth thoughts, experiences, and perspectives, allowing for a nuanced understanding of the research topic (Creswell et al., 2021). It was comprised of two parts: Part I dealt with the brief background information of the interviewees, including their grade

level, sex, age, type of mobile game played, and amount of money spent when playing. Part II dealt with the primary and probing questions focused on the students' engagement as mobile gamers. For the Quantitative Phase, a survey questionnaire was developed anchored to the qualitative results, to gather valid and reliable data. This method gathers information on participants' behaviors, attitudes, and characteristics, allowing researchers to analyze trends and patterns across a broad population (Creswell et al., 2016). The 45-item survey questionnaire was composed of four parts. Part I contained the profiles of the participants: sex, age, grade level, type of mobile game, and time and money spent on mobile gaming. Part II contained questions about the students' challenges in balancing mobile gaming and academic responsibilities, Part III contained the students' employed strategies in balancing mobile gaming and academic responsibilities, and Part IV contained the factors contributing to mobile gaming addiction. It used a five-point Likert scale extending from 5 (Strongly Agree), 4 (Agree), 3 (Undecided), 2 (Disagree), and 1 (Strongly Disagree).

Table 2. *Rating Scale*

<i>Scale</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
1.00 - 1.80	Strongly disagree
1.81 - 2.60	Disagree
2.61 - 3.40	Undecided
3.41 - 4.20	Agree
4.21 - 5.00	Strongly Agree

### Procedure

Before the conduct of this study, the researcher secured an ethical clearance from the State University of Northern Negros Graduate School ethics committee to ensure that this study meets the ethical standards and achieves the complete protection of the participants who are minors. Then, the researcher secured a written permit asking for the permission and approval of the Schools Division Superintendent to gather the data regarding the junior high school students who are avid mobile game players, in the Division of Escalante City, for the school year 2024-2025. Upon approval, the researcher communicated to the school heads, parents, and students through informed consent, stating the study's title, purpose, and ethical considerations. The participants were given a consent form and a brief orientation regarding the study's title, content, and purpose. The researcher guaranteed that their responses and identities were kept confidential and anonymous. The researcher used validated self-made interview guide questions to gather the qualitative data. The interviews were conducted using an audio-recorder mobile application and were scheduled every 4 p.m. after class. The interview was conducted in the dialects "Sinugbuanong Bisaya" and "Filipino" language, which the participants can easily understand and are comfortable with. For general readability, their responses were translated into English. Right after the interview, a short debriefing was facilitated for the participants to process and review their narratives. A researcher-made questionnaire was provided to the participants to gather the quantitative data. A brief orientation was conducted before the survey commenced, and the participants were given a consent form. The researcher encouraged the participants to be truthful in answering the questionnaire. Right after, they were rewarded with appreciation for their time, effort, and contribution to this study. The data were gathered, tallied, and tabulated from the items in the survey questionnaires by utilizing appropriate statistical processes.

### Data Analysis

The researcher employed a phenomenological approach to analyzing the participants' data. It included all participants' statements from the audio-recorded interviews, which are essential to determining the characteristics and casual practices of students hooked on mobile games. For research questions one, two, and three, the researcher utilized thematic analysis to identify and analyze themes about the students' strategies and challenges in balancing mobile gaming and academic responsibilities and the factors contributing to mobile gaming addiction. The researcher used Creswell's (2016) 5-step data analysis, which included managing and organizing data, reading and writing memos for emerging ideas, describing and classifying codes into themes, assessing and developing interpretations, and visualizing and representing the data. Mean, standard deviation and frequency distribution were used to determine the extent to which students experience the identified challenges and strategies for balancing academics and mobile gaming. Descriptive statistics were used to determine the extent of the identified factors contributing to mobile gaming addiction, and factor analysis was used to identify the strength of the factors contributing to mobile gaming addiction. Triangulation was used to integrate qualitative insights with quantitative data to provide a comprehensive understanding of the impact of mobile gaming on students. The researcher used data visualization to provide a graphical representation of data to make this study's complex data more accessible and understandable.

### Ethical Considerations

The study followed practices to uphold the ethical standards. This study ensured ethical oversight and privacy, it has undergone review, consent, and approval by an ethics committee to ensure it meets the ethical standards. The researcher guaranteed that the participants were protected by keeping their responses and identities confidential and anonymous. The data regarding the number of students who play mobile games were gathered after the acquisition of ethical clearance and the division superintendent's approval. The researcher secured informed consent and/or assent by providing written informed consent from both students and their parents or guardians (for minors). Their participation in this study was purely voluntary, with the option to withdraw at any time without repercussions. If the parents allow their children to participate, the student-participants still have the freedom to join or not. Confidentiality and transparency were ensured by using unique identifiers rather than the participants' names to protect their identities. All reports and publications



ensured that no individual’s personal information was disclosed. The researcher ensured a supportive environment that allowed the participants to skip questions or withdraw if they felt uncomfortable. Participants’ well-being was also monitored throughout the study and responded promptly to any signs of distress. After completing the interviews and surveys, the participants received compensation to acknowledge their time and effort invested in this study and made sure that the compensation did not influence the participants’ responses. By adhering to these practices, the study aimed to conduct research ethically, respect participants’ rights, and effectively address potential concerns.

## Results and Discussion

### Qualitative Phase

These essential themes elucidated the plight of students hooked on mobile games: Challenges in Balancing Mobile Gaming and Academic Responsibilities, Strategies in Balancing Mobile Gaming and Academic Responsibilities, and Factors Contributing to Mobile Gaming Addiction. The purposively selected participants are adolescents aged 12 to 18 who have been avid mobile game players for one year or more. They are enrolled in Grades 7 to 10 this school year, 2024-2025, in the Division of Escalante City. They played Mobile Legends: Bang Bang, Call of Duty, Roblox, and Minecraft. They spent two to 12 hours playing mobile games and spent ₱20.00 to ₱1,000.00 on internet load and in-game purchases.

Table 3. Summary of Qualitative Findings

Themes	Sub-themes	Findings	Quotes
Challenges in Balancing Mobile Gaming and Academic Responsibilities	Academic Performance	Mobile Gaming interferes with academic responsibilities, such as doing assignments and performing tasks, causes tardiness and absenteeism, and time management difficulties.	<p>“Yes, I go to school late. Or do not go to school sometimes when I am tired from playing games” (P1)</p> <p>“Yes, I cannot do my assignments, and I submit my performance tasks or outputs late or with low quality” (P3)</p> <p>“When I am in the middle of the game, I sometimes forget about the time. And add more time to play whenever I won.” (P2)</p>
	Personal Health	Personal Health includes the students’ physical, mental, emotional, and social domains. Mobile gaming can cause exhaustion among students, which can be brought on by sleep deprivation, headaches, eye strain, and skipped meals. It can also cause academic demotivation due to fatigue and negatively affects social relationships.	<p>“It affects my sleep. Staying up late for almost 10 hours can cause consequences in my body like sleepiness. Being so tired that I cannot function” (P1)</p> <p>“I skip meals. I have a lack of sleep. I have headaches and irritated eyes” (P2)</p> <p>“It can destroy my family relationships because I do not listen to them if they have favors. I cannot eat on time” (P3),</p> <p>“I am unmotivated to study. Because I feel tired.” (P4),</p>
Strategies in Balancing Mobile Gaming and Academic Responsibilities	Self-Discipline	Students develop self-control such as limiting gaming time, and resisting game temptations.	<p>“When my grades started to increase, I learned to control myself. I limit my time.” (P5)</p> <p>“Before, I could not control. I played ten games in a maximum of 12 hours. But now, I finish my school tasks ahead of time.” (P10)</p>
	Time Management	Students have schedules for gaming and studying. They tend to do their school tasks first before playing mobile games.	<p>“Yes, when I finish playing games at 11 p.m., I wake up early so that I can still go to school.” (P2) “Yes, I do my school tasks first before playing.” (P3)</p>
	Goal-Setting Prioritization	Students adjust their gaming habits to improve the performance at school. Education is valued over mobile gaming	<p>“I stay awake during class hours. I want to maintain my grades.” (P1)</p> <p>“I learned to prioritize. I play games during my free time.” (P4)</p>
Factors Contributing to Mobile Gaming Addiction	Emotional Attachment	Students built strong emotional bond with mobile games. It is their escape from their real-life stress. They feel excited and motivated whenever they have defeats or victories	<p>“I forget my problems because I am more focused on my game. I have a goal to achieve.” (P3)</p> <p>“I feel excited. It feels like you were really in the game.” (P8)</p>
	Social Dynamics	Their interests on mobile gaming were influenced by friends and social media such as Facebook and TikTok.	<p>“Because of my friends, I discovered it is fun playing games on mobile phones.” (P5)</p> <p>“Encouraged by friends who are players.” (P4)</p>



	Students maintained supportive relationships from their parents and friends. Mobile gaming creates strong bonds with friends who share the same interests	“My mother does not care about stuff like that because she always knew that I love playing games.” (P1) “It did not affect my social life because all my friends are mobile gamers.” (P5)
Game Mechanics and Motivations	Game features such as rewards, ranks, and achievements encourage prolonged mobile gaming. They are encouraged to keep playing when they lose and ranked down	“I enjoy playing games to achieve a higher rank.” (P3) “When I fall on a lower rank because of multiple defeats, I continue to play the game to win.” (P10)
Leisure and Boredom relief	Students play mobile game as their stress-reliever	“It is my stress reliever and for leisure. I play when I am bored.” (P2) “I got bored. I always find ways just to play.” (P10)

**Theme 1: Challenges in Balancing Mobile Gaming and Academic Responsibilities**

Students faced challenges as they were confronted with the impacts of mobile Gaming on their academic performance and Personal Health, as confirmed and verbalized by the participants. Mobile Gaming interferes with academic responsibilities, such as doing assignments and performing tasks, and causes tardiness and absenteeism. They had time management difficulties and were demotivated to do their best in school. Personal Health includes the students' physical, mental, emotional, and social domains. Mobile gaming can cause exhaustion among students, which can be brought on by sleep deprivation, headaches, eye strain, and skipped meals. It can also cause academic demotivation (Rochmayanti, 2021), preoccupation (Yilmaz et al., 2023), stress and affect relationships with family and friends.

**Theme 2: Strategies in Balancing Mobile Gaming and Academic Responsibilities**

It is always challenging to balance multiple activities. Students are put into a decision-making situation and are opted to do what is best for them and continue learning. Here are the strategies shared and verbalized by the students in balancing mobile gaming and academic responsibilities: self-regulation skills (Zhang et al., 2024) such as self-discipline, time management, Goal-setting, and Prioritization. They employ self-discipline (Chen & Wang, 2022) when they fight gaming temptations and distractions, limit their gaming time, and stop playing games when someone reminds them to do so. They manage their time by setting schedules for their gaming time and studies and self-control by setting time limits for gaming. They also adjusted to improve their school performance through goal-setting (Zhang, 2024), such as doing their assignment before playing and waking up early so that they can attend school. Prioritization means they value education more than mobile gaming because they say they still have dreams they want to achieve.

**Theme 3: Factors Contributing to Mobile Gaming Addiction**

Mobile games have already become a part of students' lives and have built a strong emotional attachment to them. The game's challenges and features bring them to another world, allowing them to feel empowered and forget their problems for a while. The level of interest in mobile games is caused by social dynamics, influences, and the availability of smartphones. The Mobile games were discovered through social media such as Facebook and TikTok, and some were introduced by their friends. Mobile Gaming can also affect the students' Family and Peer relationships. A supportive relationship is described when parents support them with their hobbies and when the students have common likes and interests with their friends who are mobile game players, too (Gong & Huang, 2023). The game mechanics, features, and challenges affect students who struggle to balance mobile gaming and academic responsibilities. Game-related pressures can cause prolonged time spent on mobile gaming. Whether they win or lose, they are more motivated to play repeatedly. The game rewards are extrinsic motivations that inspire them to continue playing, gain more incentives, and upgrade their rank. Furthermore, punishments like points deduction and eventually falling on a lower rank are propellers of continuous engagement in the game. Adolescents prefer more active over passive activities. One of the students' activities is fighting their boredom using mobile games (Elhai et al., 2021). As mentioned by the participants, this is their way of escaping from the real world, it is a form of entertainment (Sayeed et al., 2021), and an opportunity to enjoy their leisure.

**Quantitative Phase**

A researcher-made questionnaire was developed and then used to conduct surveys. The test items were grounded on the qualitative results in this study and identified emergent themes which are the faced challenges and the self-regulation strategies employed in balancing mobile gaming and academic responsibilities, and the factors contributing to mobile gaming addiction. The challenges faced include the confrontation of mobile gaming's impacts on students' academic performance (tardiness, absenteeism, undone assignments or performance tasks, and time management difficulties) and their health (mental, physical, emotional, and social) since it directly affects students' learning engagement in school. The students employed self-regulation strategies, which include Self-discipline, Time management, Goal-setting, and Prioritization. The factors contributing to students' mobile gaming addiction are emotional attachment, social dynamics, game mechanics and features, and enjoying leisure and combatting boredom. Results revealed that out of 161 participants from 13 schools in the Division of Escalante City, the majority were formed by male students, with 122 (76.8%) and 39 female (24.2%) student participants who were avid mobile gamers. Research has shown that males are more prone to mobile gaming than females (Sayeed et al., 2021), and male students are more likely to show addictive behaviors in mobile games than female students.

Most participants are 12-14 years old, with 92 students, 57.1% of the total population, and 69 students aged 15-18, or 42.9%. Previous research findings showed a high prevalence of mobile gaming addiction among adolescents (Deng et al., 2024). The respondents were distributed across various grade levels: 15 participants (9.3%) in Grade 7, 52 participants (32.3%) in Grade 8, 29 participants (18%) in Grade 9, and 65 participants (40.4%) in Grade 10 which has the most significant number of mobile gamers. In terms of game preferences, 102 respondents (63.4%) play Mobile Legends, 32 (19.9%) play Call of Duty, 14 (8.7%) play Roblox, and 13 (8.1%) play Minecraft. Mobile Legends: Bang Bang is the most common mobile game adolescents play, which has an essential influence on students' gaming habits. Regarding gaming hours, out of 161 respondents, 128 students, or 79.5%, reported playing for 2 to 4 hours, and the remaining respondents played for 5 hours and a maximum of 11 or more hours. Parents and teachers should be aware of this since students who play 4-10 hours or more indicate an alarming level of addictive gaming behavior (Zhang et al., 2024). When it comes to money spent on gaming, 115 respondents (71.4%) spend ₱20 to ₱100, 30 respondents (18.6%) spend ₱200 to ₱400, 10 respondents (6.2%) spend ₱500 to ₱700, and 6 respondents (3.7%) spend ₱800 or more. It was stated that the youth's waste of time and money has the highest rating of negative impact of mobile phone dependence (Lopez-Fernandez et al., 2021). In-game purchases may lead to deeper investments in mobile gaming, such as buying hero skins or upgrades of character appearance, diamonds as in-game currencies, heroes, and blueprints of hero weapons, clothing, and accessories.

Table 4. *Extent of Challenges in Balancing Mobile Gaming and Academic Responsibilities of Junior High School Students*

<i>Challenges in Balancing Mobile Gaming and Academic Responsibilities</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Decision</i>
Academic Responsibilities	2.36	0.75	Low Extent
1. I came to school late because of mobile gaming.	1.95	1.04	Low Extent
2. Mobile gaming affects my ability to do my assignments.	2.77	1.32	High Extent
3. I have chronic absences in school.	1.52	0.83	Low Extent
4. Managing my time for my studies and mobile gaming is difficult.	2.83	1.19	High Extent
5. I neglected important school tasks to play mobile games.	2.19	1.20	Low Extent
Mental Health	3.21	1.07	High Extent
6. I think about playing mobile games when I am in school.	2.82	1.23	High Extent
7. I am unmotivated to study because of mobile gaming.	2.41	1.22	Low Extent
Physical Health	2.82	0.92	High Extent
8. I lack sleep because of mobile gaming.	3.01	1.23	High Extent
9. I had headaches and eye strain after playing mobile games.	2.88	1.27	High Extent
10. My body feels tired after playing mobile games.	2.63	1.22	Low Extent
11. I skipped meals while playing mobile games.	2.76	1.25	High Extent
Emotional Health	3.21	1.07	High Extent
12. My stress level is affected by mobile gaming.	3.11	1.30	High Extent
13. I felt angered and frustrated as a mobile gamer.	3.31	1.17	High Extent
Social Health	2.86	1.04	High Extent
14. I argued with my family and friends because of mobile gaming.	2.22	1.32	Low Extent
15. My parents scold me when I excessively play mobile games.	3.50	1.21	High Extent

Note:  $N = 161$ , SA = Strongly Agree; A = Agree; UN = Undecided; D = Disagree; SD = Strongly Disagree; Decision:  $39.914/15 = 2.661$

The data analysis results in Table 4 show the challenges faced by the students, specifically on academic responsibilities, with a mean of (2.357), mental health (3.208), physical health (2.818), emotional health (3.208), and social health (2.860). In terms of academic responsibilities, the majority of the respondents appeared to have a high extent of faced challenges by acknowledging that (2) mobile gaming affects their ability to do assignments ( $m=2.770$ ,  $SD=1.319$ ) and that it is (4) difficult for them to manage time with their studies and mobile gaming ( $m=2.826$ ,  $SD=1.186$ ). This means that gaming affects their commitment to do their assignments and time management. Zhang & Lui (2020) found that excessive mobile gaming is associated with poorer academic outcomes and could decrease focus and attention in class and affect students' time management, study habits, and overall academic performance. On the other hand, the majority of the respondents had a low extent of tardiness, revealed by the results that they (1) came to school late because of mobile gaming ( $m=1.950$ ,  $SD=1.042$ ) and absenteeism, (3) they had chronic absences in school ( $m=1.516$ ,  $SD=.830$ ) and (5) had neglected important school tasks to play mobile games ( $m=2.193$ ,  $SD=1.196$ ). Results show that students display minimal tardiness and absenteeism, suggesting their commitment to punctuality and attendance and valuing education.

Regarding mental health, most respondents were challenged by their preoccupation (6) with thinking about their mobile games while in school ( $m=2.839$ ,  $SD=1.234$ ); Feng, S. (2022) stated that it is difficult for learners to concentrate since their minds are preoccupied with their games. On the other hand, to a low extent, they felt (7) unmotivated to study because of mobile gaming ( $m=2.410$ ,  $SD=1.217$ ). This means that they can still provide commitment to their studies. In terms of physical health, the majority of the respondents had a high extent of challenges, which caused them to have (8) lack of sleep because of mobile gaming ( $m=3.006$ ,  $SD=1.232$ ), (9) headaches and eye strain after playing mobile games ( $m=2.882$ ,  $SD=1.272$ ), and (11) skipped meals while playing mobile games ( $m=2.758$ ,  $SD=1.254$ ). Thus, playing games consumes their time for mobile gaming instead of sleeping, resting, and eating. The negative impacts

of lack of sleep include sleepiness during class hours, lack of focus, change of appetite (Khan et al., 2024) and mood (Garcia et al., 2021), eye strain and headaches (Sayeed, 2021). On the other hand, the majority had a low extent of (10) feeling that their body was tired after playing mobile games. This shows that students still have an active and responsive body after playing mobile games despite the abovementioned physical issues. Regarding emotional health, most respondents had a high extent of (12) stress levels affected by mobile gaming ( $m=3.106$ ,  $SD=1.302$ ) and (13) anger and frustration as a mobile gamer ( $m=3.311$ ,  $SD=1.169$ ). Previous studies reflected that mobile gaming addiction causes problems such as frequent stress and frustration and anger and anxiety. Regarding social health, most respondents had a high extent of challenges when (15) they were scolded by their parents for excessively playing mobile games ( $m=3.503$ ,  $SD=1.210$ ). Parent-child relationship and parenting are essential since these are the causal factors that affect gaming addiction among children aged 5–18 years old. On the other hand, most respondents had a low extent of challenges in facing (14) arguments with family and friends because of mobile gaming ( $m=2.217$ ,  $SD=1.321$ ). The study by Chen et al. (2022) indicates that although mobile gaming can promote social relationships, it can also result in social isolation in real-world interaction.

Table 5. *Extent of Strategies in Balancing Mobile Gaming and Academic Responsibilities of Junior High School Students*

<i>Strategies for Balancing Mobile Gaming and Academic Responsibilities</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Decision</i>
Self-Discipline	3.73	0.68	Low Extent
1. I fight game temptations to do my school tasks.	3.68	1.13	Low Extent
2. I stopped playing mobile games once my parents told me so.	3.67	1.17	Low Extent
3. I am not distracted by mobile games while doing school tasks or assignments.	3.51	1.07	Low Extent
4. I play mobile games during my free time.	4.08	1.09	High Extent
5. I stop playing when I exceed my gaming time.	3.47	1.10	Low Extent
Time Management	3.61	1.08	Low Extent
6. I set time limits for playing mobile games.	3.58	1.21	Low Extent
7. I stop playing when I exceed my limited gaming time.	3.45	1.19	Low Extent
8. I set schedules for my studies and mobile gaming.	3.63	1.16	Low Extent
9. I can control my time playing mobile games.	3.89	3.38	Low Extent
Goal-Setting	4.23	0.64	High Extent
10. I do my assignments before playing mobile games.	4.05	1.04	High Extent
11. I wake up early to attend school.	4.35	0.92	High Extent
12. I control my gaming habits to improve my academic performance.	4.30	0.83	High Extent
Prioritization	4.41	0.57	High Extent
13. When I face deadlines, I prioritize my studies over gaming.	4.39	0.87	High Extent
14. Between mobile gaming and academic responsibilities, I choose to accomplish my academic tasks first.	4.15	0.92	High Extent
15. My academic responsibilities are more important than mobile gaming.	4.68	0.62	High Extent

Note:  $N = 161$ , SA = Strongly Agree; A = Agree; UN = Undecided; D = Disagree; SD = Strongly Disagree; Decision:  $58.894/15 = 3.926$ .

Table 5 presents the extent of junior high school students' strategies in balancing mobile gaming and academic responsibilities according to subfactors: self-discipline (3.734), time management (3.606), goal-setting (4.234), and prioritization (4.408). In terms of self-discipline, the majority of the respondents had a low extent to (1) fight game temptations to do my school tasks ( $m=3.683$ ,  $SD=1.126$ ), (2) stop playing mobile games once parents told them so ( $m=3.665$ ,  $SD=1.167$ ), (3) not be distracted by mobile games while doing school tasks or assignments ( $m=3.509$ ,  $SD=1.073$ ), and (5) stop playing when exceeded gaming time ( $m=3.472$ ,  $SD=1.101$ ). This means they are distracted by their mobile game while doing tasks in school, unable to resist game temptations, and inability to stop playing (Li et al., 2022). On the other hand, they had a high extent to (4) play mobile games during their free time ( $m=4.081$ ,  $SD=1.090$ ).

The results show that students employ minimal strategies in balancing mobile gaming and academic responsibilities. Thus, they are still tempted and distracted from their studies by playing mobile games. Only a few students listen to their parents, and most ineffectively manage excessive gaming habits. In terms of time management, the majority of the respondents had low extent to (6) set time limits for playing mobile games ( $m=3.584$ ,  $SD=1.207$ ), (7) stop playing when exceeded limited gaming time ( $m=3.447$ ,  $SD=1.193$ ), (8) setting schedules for studies and mobile gaming ( $m=3.634$ ,  $SD=1.155$ ) and (9) control time in playing video games ( $m=3.894$ ,  $SD=3.383$ ). The result confirms that students had difficulty managing their time and setting schedules for mobile gaming and academic responsibilities (Lee et al., 2021). In terms of goal-setting, the majority of the respondents had a high extent of (10) doing their assignments before playing mobile games ( $m= 4.050$ ,  $SD=1.042$ ), (11) waking up early to attend school ( $m=4.348$ ,  $SD=.917$ ), and (12) controlling their gaming habits to improve their academic performance ( $m=4.304$ ,  $SD=.829$ ). The results show the students' commitment despite the challenges they faced with the impacts of mobile gaming. Meanwhile, in terms of prioritization, the majority of the respondents had a high extent of (13) prioritizing studies over gaming when faced with deadlines ( $m=4.391$ ,  $SD=.874$ ), (14) choosing to accomplish academic tasks first rather than mobile gaming ( $m=4.149$ ,  $SD=.923$ ), and (15) acknowledging that academic responsibilities are more important than mobile gaming ( $m=4.683$ ,  $SD=.617$ ). This shows that students persevere to face their responsibilities as learners, improve their academic performance, and eventually finish their studies with high hopes. They must plan,

create a productive routine, record their gaming time, and use apps such as timers to remind them to stop when they exceed their time limit.

Table 6. *Extent of Contributing Factors to Mobile Gaming Addiction in Junior High School Students*

<i>Contributing Factors to Mobile Gaming Addiction</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Decision</i>
Emotional Attachment	3.25	0.69	Low Extent
1. My game and I have a strong connection; it brings me to another world.	3.22	1.13	Low Extent
2. Losing the game motivates me to play again until I win.	3.71	1.09	High Extent
3. Winning the game motivates me to play again to proceed to a higher rank.	3.91	1.02	High Extent
4. I forget my problems whenever I play games.	3.60	1.16	High Extent
5. I feel stressed and upset when I cannot play mobile games.	2.39	1.04	Low Extent
6. I neglected important school tasks to play mobile games.	2.70	1.29	Low Extent
Social Dynamics	3.48	0.66	Low Extent
7. I discovered my mobile game through my friends and social media (FB and TikTok)	3.92	1.16	High Extent
8. I play with my friends, who are also mobile gamers.	4.14	1.12	High Extent
9. My parents support me in playing mobile games.	2.39	1.01	Low Extent
Game Mechanics and Features	3.42	0.95	Low Extent
10. I feel pressured by the game challenges.	3.11	1.19	Low Extent
11. I am disappointed when I lose, so I play again to be satisfied.	3.34	1.30	High Extent
12. I am inspired to play because of the game rewards and incentives.	3.82	1.16	High Extent
Leisure and Boredom	4.20	0.71	High Extent
13. I enjoy playing mobile games because I am entertained.	4.29	0.78	High Extent
14. I play mobile games because it makes me happy and satisfied.	4.06	0.87	High Extent
15. I use mobile games to fight boredom.	4.24	0.80	High Extent

Note:  $N = 161$ , SA = Strongly Agree; A = Agree; UN = Undecided; D = Disagree; SD = Strongly Disagree; Decision:  $52.831/15 = 3.522$ .

Table 6 shows data analysis of the extent to which emotional attachment (3.254), social dynamics (3.482), game mechanics and features (3.422), leisure, and boredom (4.199) factors contribute to mobile addiction in junior high school students. In terms of emotional attachment, the majority of the respondents had a high extent to (2) play the game again after losing ( $m=3.708$ ,  $SD=1.088$ ), (3) feel motivated to play the game again after winning to proceed to a higher rank ( $m=3.907$ ,  $SD=1.017$ ), and (4) play the mobile games to forget problems ( $m=3.602$ ,  $SD=1.163$ ). Losing and winning the game engages them in an emulation, wherein they strive hard to win and proceed to a higher rank. On the other hand, the majority of the respondents had a low extent to (1) feel that they have a strong connection with the game ( $m=3.217$ ,  $SD=1.127$ ), (5) feel stressed and upset when they cannot play mobile games ( $m=2.391$ ,  $SD=1.038$ ), and (6) neglected important school tasks to play mobile games ( $m=2.696$ ,  $SD=1.285$ ). This means that mobile games have a minimal attachment to the players.

Regarding social dynamics, most respondents had a high extent to (7) discover mobile games through friends and social media ( $m=3.919$ ,  $SD=1.156$ ) and (8) play with friends who are also mobile gamers ( $m=4.143$ ,  $SD=1.123$ ). The availability of devices and accessibility of social media, such as Facebook and TikTok, invite them to play excessively.

Moreover, Peer factor also influences their gaming habits; students with friends who are mobile gamers are also a common factor that encourages them to play repeatedly. Meanwhile, the majority had a low extent of having (9) support from parents to play mobile games ( $m=2.385$ ,  $SD=1.007$ ).

The results show that mobile gamers receive support from their parents but to a low extent. Mobile gaming provides opportunities for student-players to connect with friends and family, but it also provides a barrier to their intimate relationships (Przybylski & Weinstein, 2019).

Regarding game mechanics and features, most respondents had a high extent of (11) playing again after being disappointed in losing ( $m=3.335$ ,  $SD=1.304$ ) and (12) being inspired to play to receive game rewards and incentives ( $m=3.820$ ,  $SD=1.161$ ). Losing and winning the game challenges tempt students to play excessively; they find it hard to stop playing until they reach satisfaction because of emulation. The game rewards persuade players to play repeatedly and purchase (Cheong et al., 2021), it also encourages them to play longer and practice compulsive habits. On the other hand, most respondents felt pressured by the game challenges ( $m=3.112$ ,  $SD=1.194$ ) to a low extent (10). This means that, instead of being pressured, they love being challenged; this is what makes them enjoy playing (Przybylski & Weinstein, 2019).

In terms of leisure and boredom, the majority of the respondents had a high extent in (13) enjoying playing mobile games because they are entertained ( $m=4.292$ ,  $SD=.780$ ), (14) playing mobile games because it makes them happy and satisfied ( $m=4.062$ ,  $SD=.871$ ), and (15) using mobile games to fight boredom ( $m=4.242$ ,  $SD=.804$ ). Wang et al. (2024) stated that people spend their leisure time playing online games since many consider it fun and meaningful (Hussain et al., 2023). They also engage in gaming because it is their way to relieve stress and modify their mood (Wang et al., 2024).



*Table 7. Eigenvalues, Percentages of Variance, and Cumulative Percentages for Factors for 15 Contributing Factors to Mobile Gaming Addiction Questionnaire*

Factor	Eigenvalue	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1 – Motivation	4.560	30.402	30.402
2 – Emotion	2.064	13.757	44.159
3 – Pressures	1.635	10.898	55.057
4 – Community	1.282	8.549	63.606
5 - Connection	1.039	6.923	70.529

The factor analysis used principal component analysis (CPA) for extraction and variance rotation with Kaiser Normalization. The Kiaser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO)measure of sampling adequacy was .752, indicating an acceptable level of sustainability of the data for factor analysis. Bartlett’s test of Sphericity was significant, having  $\chi^2(105) = 993.224, p < .001$ , supporting the factorability of the correlation matrix.

The analysis identified five distinct factors. The first factor, “Motivation,” explained 30.402% of the variance and included items 2, 3, 11, and 12. The second factor, “Emotion,” explained 13.757% of the variance and included items 13, 14, and 15. The third factor, “Pressures,” explained 10.898% of the variance and included items 5,6 and 10. The fourth factor, “Community,” explained 8.549% of the variance and included items 4, 7, and 8. The fifth factor, “Connection,” explained 6.923% of the variance and included items 1 and 9. These factors collectively explained 70.539% of the variance, confirming that the questionnaire successfully captures the five underlyingly constructs.

*Table 8. Results from Factor Analysis of Contributing Factors to Mobile Gaming Addiction Questionnaire*

Contributing Factors to Mobile Gaming Addiction	Factor Loading					Community
	1	2	3	4	5	
Factor 1: Motivation						
2 Losing the game motivates me to play again until I win.	.855	.064	.062	.116	.071	.757
11 I am disappointed when I lose, so I play.	.722	.091	.328	.122	-.070	.656
12 I am inspired to play because of the game rewards and incentives.	.603	.348	.356	-.056	.007	.614
3 Winning the game motivated me to play again to proceed to a higher rank.	.602	.235	.109	.337	-.212	.587
Factor 2: Emotions						
15 I use mobile games to fight boredom.	-.020	.898	.198	.089	-.001	.853
14 I play mobile games because it makes me happy and satisfied.	.231	.865	.090	.120	.142	.844
13 I enjoy playing mobile games because I am entertained.	.450	.667	-.206	.100	.148	.721
Factor 3: Pressures						
6 I neglected important school tasks to play mobile games.	.063	.200	.837	-.042	-.072	.751
10 I feel pressured by the game challenges.	.296	-.044	.695	-.046	.293	.660
5 I feel stressed and upset when I cannot play mobile games.	.299	-.006	.654	.146	.447	.738
Factor 4: Community						
4 I forget my problems whenever I play games.	-.040	.144	.041	.767	.341	.729
8 I play with my friends, who are also mobile gamers.	.311	.087	-.211	.766	-.056	.739
7 I discovered my mobile game through my friends and social media (FB, TikTok)	.148	.039	.204	.600	-.435	.615
Factor 5: Connection						
9 My parents support me in playing mobile games.	-.252	.130	.203	-.034	.715	.634
1 My game and I have a strong connection; it brings me to another world.	.483	.153	.126	.134	.624	.679

*Note: N = 307. Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization. Rotation converged in 9 iterations. Factor loadings above .50 are in bold.*

Fifteen questions considered to be the factors contributing to mobile gaming addiction were analyzed using principal component analysis with Varimax rotation. The analysis identified five factors that accounted for 70.54% of the total variance across all variables. Factor 1 was labeled motivation to play mobile games due to the high loadings of the following items: losing the game motivates me to play again until I win; I am disappointed when I fail, so I play; I am inspired to play because of the game rewards and incentives; winning the game motivates me to play again to proceed to a higher rank. The first factor explained 30.402% of the variance. The second factor was labeled emotions. This factor was labeled as such due to the high loadings by the following factors: I use mobile games to fight boredom; I play mobile games because they make me happy and satisfied; I enjoy playing mobile games because I am entertained. Factor 2 explained 13.757% of the variance. Factor 3 was labeled pressures because of the high loadings by the following factors: I neglected important school tasks to play mobile games; I feel pressured with the game challenges; I feel stressed and upset when I cannot play mobile games. The third factor explained 10.898% of the variance. Factor 4 explained 8.549% of the variance and was named community due to the high loadings by the factors: I forget my problems whenever I play games; I play with my friends who are also mobile gamers; and I discovered my mobile game through my friends and social media (Facebook and TikTok). The fifth factor has a 6.923 variance and was labeled connection because of high loadings by the following factors: My parents support me in

playing mobile games; my game and I have a strong connection—it brings me to another world.

## Simulacrum

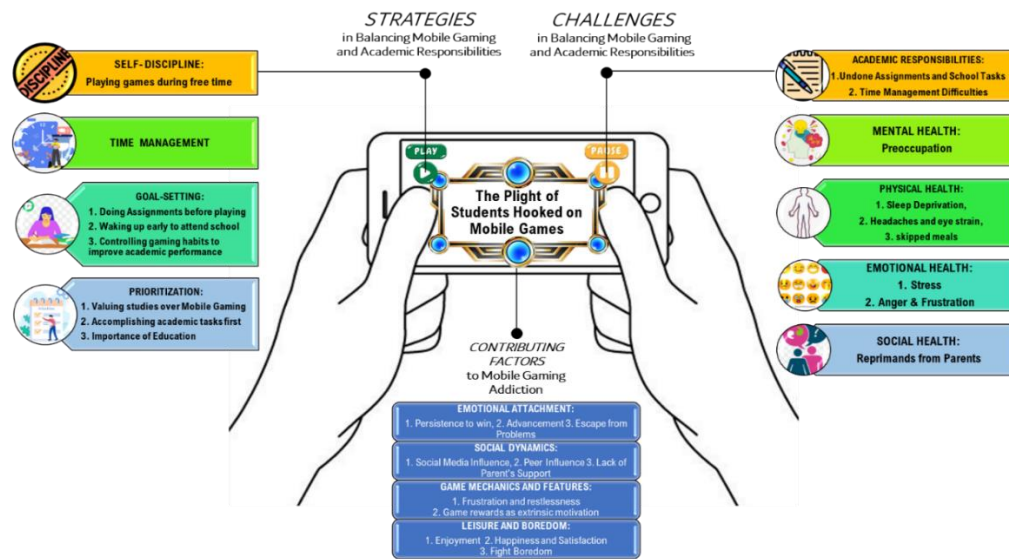


Figure 1. *Simulacrum of the Research Findings*

This study identified emergent themes based on the research findings. These are Theme 1: The Mission Deployment: Confronting the Challenges in Balancing Mobile Gaming and Academic Responsibilities, Theme 2: The Tournament Battle: Strategies to Balance Mobile Gaming and Academic Responsibilities, and Theme 3: The Contributing Factors to Mobile Gaming Addiction.

### Theme 1: The Mission Deployment: Confronting the Challenges in Balancing Mobile Gaming and Academic Responsibilities

As students hooked on mobile games tend to balance mobile gaming and academic responsibilities, they are placed into a hot seat and struggle to face their dilemmas. In general, they faced challenges to a low extent regarding their academic responsibilities ( $m= 2.357$ ,  $SD= .748$ ). This includes school tardiness, absences, and undone assignments; however, students' time management difficulties and academic demotivation must be given much attention. Marcelo (2023) noted that prolonged game engagement may affect learners' behavior, health, lifestyles, and study habits. Previous studies have also stated that gaming can disrupt obligations, leading to lower school performance. A high extent of challenges students faced with mental health (preoccupation), physical health (sleep deprivation, headaches, eye strain), emotional health (stress, anger, and frustration), and social health (trials on facing parents' reprimands). Mobile Gaming has a substantial impact on students' academic performance; it can interfere with or distract students from doing their school work because of the excessive use of mobile phones. It causes staying late at night and exhaustion, which results in tardiness, absenteeism, undone school tasks, and time management difficulties. This affects their academic performance in school and has an alarming impact on their health. Students are preoccupied with their mobile games while at home or in school; which is why they have academic demotivation (Mental), however, to a low extent. They also suffer from sleep deprivation and poor eating habits (due to skipped meals), which can cause problems with their nutrition, headaches, eye strain, and a low extent of body exhaustion (Physical). Mobile games cause students to exhibit aggressive behaviors such as (Emotional). Stress, anger, and frustration are caused by game-related pressure (Hussain et al., 2023). Studies have shown that mobile gaming can decrease interactions and may deteriorate social relationships (Chamarro et al., 2020). In this study, students argued with their family and friends (Social). The students are more prone to unhealthy socialization because they disagree about mobile gaming. Reprimands from their parents are potent reminders that good parenting is essential in guiding students to make wise decisions and choose what is best for them.

### Theme 2: The Tournament Battle: Strategies to Balance Mobile Gaming and Academic Responsibilities

To address their dilemmas, students employ self-regulation strategies to alleviate the challenges of mobile gaming addiction. These strategies include self-discipline, time management, goal-setting, and prioritization. Self-regulation is controlling one's thoughts, emotions, and behavior. Instilling self-discipline is controlling the threatful distractions to one's social, emotional, and cognitive domains. Students can control their gaming habits by setting rules and boundaries. The results show that students employ minimal self-discipline; the only strategy that protrudes is when they are playing during their free time. They cannot stop playing when gaming time is excessive and cannot resist game temptations and distractions. Time management is the key to controlling the excessive duration of mobile gaming. Unfortunately, students showed a low extent of time management skills. According to Jamin et al. (2022), when players have increased the intensity of play, the game becomes a distraction and distracts them from the real world. Goal-setting involves students setting boundaries between mobile gaming and academics. They value their education more, so they set goals to develop their academic performance by waking up early to attend school, making time for studies, and doing school tasks before playing games.

They learn to adjust and sacrifice to attain continued learning through improving self-control (Permana, 2020). Prioritization is the students' ability to categorize what they love based on its importance. The students' responses underpin that despite their love of gaming, they assured that their education was more valuable and that they were still emboldened to reach their dreams in life through learning.

### **Theme 3: The Contributing Factors to Mobile Gaming Addiction**

The young generation nowadays is vulnerable to changes. Particularly with the trend of mobile gaming. Positive emotions like enjoyment and empowerment from winning increase gaming time, while negative emotions from defeat can drive continued play. Social environments greatly influence gaming habits, device ownership and availability of social media applications are some factors that influence gaming addiction, such as the influence of social media (Facebook, TikTok) or peers, and curiosity leads to more involvement, with players who feel excitement, relief, and entertainment. However, gaming can negatively impact social relationships, particularly with family, since parents play a crucial role in managing their children, balancing support and discipline (Wang et al., 2021). Peer influence can either strengthen or harm friendships depending on whether gaming is prioritized over social interactions. Game mechanics and features also impact emotional responses, with players experiencing stress, frustration, or excitement depending on their success in the game. Gaming offers accessible and enjoyable escape, satisfying players' desires for empowerment and entertainment.

### **Conclusions**

The study's results and analysis elucidate the students' challenges and strategies to balance mobile gaming and academic responsibilities and identify factors contributing to mobile gaming addiction. Exploring students' experiences as mobile gamers will serve as an instigation for schools to combat the impacts of mobile gaming addiction, be attentive to the challenges faced by mobile gamers, and be aware of the factors propelling mobile gaming addiction. Understanding these significant aspects will help educate school leaders, educators, policymakers, and parents about the risks of mobile gaming addiction.

This study provides perspectives regarding students' experiences as they balance mobile gaming and academic responsibilities. Students faced challenges such as the inability to do their school assignments, time management difficulties, preoccupation, sleep deprivation, headaches and eye strain, and skipped meals.

Furthermore, they also had problems handling their emotional stress, anger, frustration, and trials in addressing their parents' reprimands. They employed strategies that they found to be effective, such as playing games during their free time, doing their assignments ahead of time, waking up early to attend school, controlling gaming habits to improve their academic performance, and prioritizing and valuing education over mobile gaming.

Based on the qualitative and quantitative methods and factor analysis, the factors contributing to students' mobile gaming addiction are motivation leading to emulation, receiving in-game rewards and incentives, and ratifying promotion. Another is emotion, which imbibes satisfaction, entertainment, and enjoyment brought by the game. Next is pressure from school work, game challenges, and emotional stress. Community comprises peer influences, social media influences, and escapism from the real world. Lastly is the connection, the handcuff that binds the relationship between the mobile game and the player and the relationship between the students and their parents, which plays a very crucial role in mitigating mobile gaming addiction.

This generation has lived with dynamic individuals and advanced technologies. However, many concerns and gaps emerged despite the rich societal and economic developments. As an important societal unit, schools continue implementing learner-centered enhancements in education. Students are the primary beneficiaries of this study; it aims to create a panorama of their challenges and strategies in balancing mobile gaming and academic responsibilities and factors contributing to their mobile gaming addiction. The results of this study are the basis for crafting beneficial or effective strategies and interventions for students hooked on mobile games.

**Awareness Programs:** Conduct awareness programs that educate students, parents, teachers, school heads, and stakeholders about the risks of mobile gaming addiction and promote alternative recreational activities. It may include Counseling and Support Services, wherein schools introduce counseling services that specifically address gaming addiction, providing psychological support and coping strategies for affected students.

**Support System:** Parental Involvement Programs: Offering workshops and resources for parents can help them understand gaming addiction and effectively manage their children's gaming habits. Time Management Training: Schools could provide time management and self-regulation workshops to help students balance gaming and academic responsibilities.

**Policy Development:** Screen Time Guidelines: Schools should establish policies to limit students' screen time during school hours and encourage a balanced and purposeful approach to technology use. Extracurricular Activities: Encouraging participation in sports, arts, and other extracurricular activities can offer students alternative ways to spend their free time. Digital Literacy Integration: Integrating Digital literacy in lesson plans embraces teaching 21st-century skills and applying game-based learning. Teachers should adopt advanced technologies and methods to deliver quality, equitable, and accessible education. The Department of Education already provides digital devices by implementing the MATATAG agenda; thus, teachers must learn and acquire knowledge and skills to utilize these devices in their classes efficiently and effectively.

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### **Affiliations and Corresponding Information**

**Detchie Van A. Compania**

Washington National High School  
Department of Education – Philippines

**Judith S. Rabacal**

State University of Northern Negros – Philippines