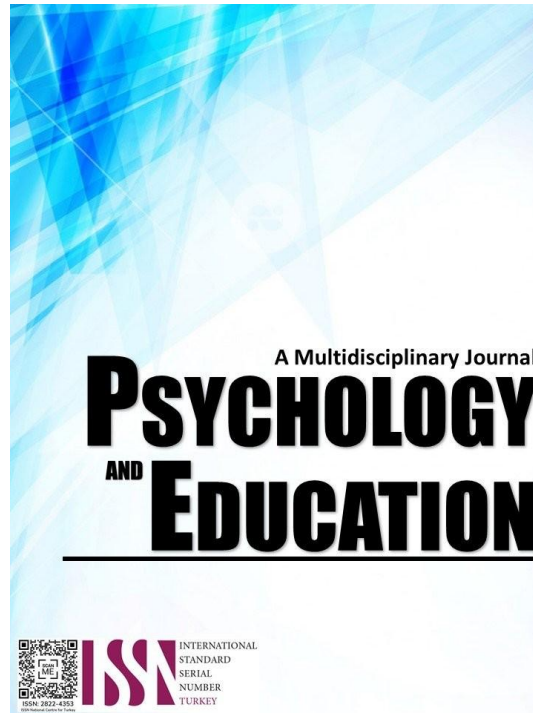


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Exploring Academic Decline Among E-Gamers: A Phenomenological Approach to Learners' Academic Experiences

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Abstract

This qualitative study explored the lived experiences of secondary school students who experienced academic decline due to excessive electronic gaming. E-games have become a dominant recreational activity among adolescents, often providing enjoyment, social connection, and cognitive stimulation. However, prolonged engagement has been linked to academic difficulties, including poor time management, reduced study habits, and emotional strain. The purpose of this study was to examine how learners described their academic and personal struggles while engaging in excessive gaming, and how they attempted to regain academic stability. Using a phenomenological design, eight participants from public secondary schools in the Philippines were purposively selected. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis approach. Findings revealed three overarching themes: (1) Loss of Academic Focus—students reported neglecting schoolwork, experiencing declining grades, and failing to balance study and play; (2) Emotional and Mental Strain—participants described guilt, stress, and anxiety associated with excessive gaming; and (3) Struggles in Balancing Priorities—learners struggled to regulate gaming behavior but showed resilience through self-discipline, limiting playtime, and behavioral adjustments such as deleting games. This study highlights the dual nature of gaming, as it serves both as a coping strategy and a source of academic stress. It emphasizes the importance of parental guidance, teacher intervention, and school-based digital literacy programs that support responsible gaming habits.

Keywords: *e-games, academic performance, student well-being, phenomenology, self-discipline*

Introduction

The rapid development of digital technology has made electronic games (e-games) one of the most popular leisure activities among adolescents worldwide. In the Philippines, improved internet connectivity and widespread mobile device access have contributed to the growing number of young people playing online games such as Mobile Legends, Call of Duty, and PUBG. While gaming serves as a form of entertainment, relaxation, and social interaction, it has also been linked to academic challenges.

Scholars have reported that excessive gaming hurts learners' academic performance, time management, and motivation (Gentile, 2009; Lemmens et al., 2011; Hawi et al., 2020). Hu et al. (2022) further noted that students who spent long hours on games were more likely to experience concentration difficulties. In the Philippine context, Dumrique and Castillo (2018) observed that online gaming addiction was significantly correlated with poor study habits. These findings are consistent with Anderson et al. (2017), who emphasized that adolescents are particularly vulnerable to problematic internet use, especially in developing countries where digital literacy programs are limited. Despite this, research also highlights that gaming can enhance problem-solving skills and serve as a coping mechanism for stress (Chiu, 2024).

Although previous studies have examined the prevalence and correlation between gaming and academic outcomes, many have employed quantitative approaches. Fewer qualitative investigations have explored the lived experiences of student gamers, particularly in the Philippines, where socio-cultural influences shape gaming behavior. This study addresses this gap. Students' increasing engagement in e-games has raised concerns about declining academic performance, poor time management, and mental health struggles. Understanding these experiences from learners' perspectives is essential to inform interventions that promote balanced digital habits.

This study contributes to the growing body of literature on adolescent gaming behavior by providing in-depth accounts of learners' struggles and coping mechanisms. Its findings have implications for teachers, parents, and policymakers in designing educational programs that promote responsible gaming, support students' well-being, and encourage time management skills.

Research Questions

The general objective of this study was to explore the lived experiences of learners who experienced academic decline due to excessive gaming. Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. How do students describe their academic challenges associated with excessive e-game playing?
2. What emotional and personal struggles do learners experience in relation to gaming?
3. What strategies do students adopt to manage or recover from academic decline caused by gaming?



Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive phenomenological design to capture the lived experiences of students who experienced academic decline due to gaming. Phenomenology is suitable for examining participants’ meanings and perspectives in depth (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Respondents

Eight learners from public secondary schools in a province in the Philippines were purposively selected. The inclusion criteria required participants to (a) be enrolled in high school, (b) have reported a decline in academic performance linked to excessive gaming, and (c) voluntarily consent to participate. Confidentiality was maintained by withholding specific school names.

Instrument

A semi-structured interview guide was used to collect data. The guide was reviewed and validated by two experts in qualitative research to ensure clarity, relevance, and alignment with the research objectives. Sample questions included: “Can you describe how gaming has affected your school performance?” and “What strategies have you tried to balance gaming and academics?”

Procedure

The research process involved several steps to ensure rigor and ethical conduct. First, approval was obtained from the school authorities, and informed consent was secured from all participants prior to data collection. One-on-one interviews were then conducted, each lasting approximately 30–45 minutes, either face-to-face or via online platforms, depending on the participant's availability and convenience. All interviews were transcribed verbatim to preserve the authenticity of participants’ accounts. To enhance credibility, transcripts were returned to participants for validation and accuracy checking. Finally, the data were analyzed thematically, following the six-phase approach of Braun and Clarke (2006), which included familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six-phase thematic analysis framework: familiarization, coding, theme development, review, definition, and reporting. Codes were generated inductively and clustered into themes that reflected shared meanings.

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to ethical principles of confidentiality, voluntary participation, and informed consent (APA, 2020). Identifying details such as participants’ names and schools were anonymized to protect privacy.

Results and Discussion

Table 1. *Thematic Summary of Findings*

<i>Theme</i>	<i>Subtheme</i>	<i>Supporting Evidence (Sample Quote)</i>
Loss of Academic Focus	Neglect of schoolwork	“I often forgot to do assignments because I was too busy playing.”
	Declining grades	“My scores dropped because I spent less time studying.”
Emotional and Mental Strain	Feelings of guilt and stress	“I felt guilty whenever my teachers noticed my performance getting worse.”
	Anxiety and lack of sleep	“I lost sleep because I stayed up late to play.”
Struggles in Balancing Priorities	Difficulty in self-regulation	“Even when I promised to limit my playtime, I couldn’t resist.”
	Recovery strategies	“I deleted my games to focus on my studies.”

The findings indicate that excessive gaming led to significant academic challenges, including neglect of responsibilities and lower performance, consistent with the studies of Gentile (2009) and Dumrique and Castillo (2018). Students also experienced emotional strain such as guilt, anxiety, and stress, echoing Wei and Lo (2006), who linked gaming addiction to mental health concerns.

Despite these challenges, participants demonstrated resilience by adopting coping mechanisms such as limiting game time and practicing self-discipline. These strategies align with Soriano and Francisco’s (2020) findings on behavioral adjustments among adolescents.

Overall, the results suggest that while gaming can provide recreational and cognitive benefits, excessive engagement creates academic risks. The balance between gaming and academic responsibilities remains a critical challenge for learners.

Loss of Academic Focus

The theme that emerges in the analysis of the first set of data is the decline in academic concentration due to excessive e-game playing. Three (3) respondents said:

Respondent 1, Distraction is one word that I can describe how playing e-games affected my school performance and study habits. In addition, I can't manage my time well because of the desire to play. Although e-games make me relax sometimes, I will not deny the fact that it is also the cause for being distracted when it comes to my school performance and study habits.

Respondent 4 Playing online games has affected my school performance and study habits by damaging my mental health. Balancing both activities is very hard especially when I am always tempted to play games rather than focusing on my academics, since playing online games ease my stress but give a negative impact to my personal academic life.

Respondent 5, Playing E-Games made me enjoy short breaks and helped me think faster. But when I played too much, I had less time for studying. There was a time when I played E-Games so much that I got lazy and didn't feel like doing school work. It made me miss some tasks and feel bad afterward.

Students reported that gaming often became a priority over studying, resulting in unfinished tasks, skipped reviews, and poor academic performance. These findings support Hu et al. (2022) and Cheng et al. (2021), who confirmed that gaming addiction disrupts attention and academic routines. In the study by Ampo (2025), concerns have been raised about how excessive reliance on technology can hinder deep engagement and critical thinking. One participant noted that constant access to AI-generated content made them feel "detached from the learning process," echoing the broader issue of academic disengagement driven by digital overdependence—a struggle also experienced by high school learners immersed in excessive e-game play.

Based on the interview, Learners who play e-games have affected their school performance, mental health, and study habits.

E-games can be a form of relaxation during free time, but they can lead to distractions in school performance and study habits. Students who play games excessively may become addicted to games and lose interest in studying, which also results in anxiety, lack of motivation, and cramming to finish activities. This implies that irresponsible e-gaming has adverse effects. Highlighting the importance of time management between playing e-games and academic activities. To address the loss of academic focus caused by excessive gaming, students should learn to balance their gaming habits with studying by setting limits and allocating time to both activities in a responsible manner. It is important to manage their time responsibly so they can both enjoy playing and studying without compromising their academic performance. Additionally, parents should be aware of their children's academic progress and monitor their progress closely. Strengthen disciplines and encourage open communication to keep in touch with their children. Parents can also introduce manipulative games during leisure hours, which enables children to enjoy and foster their learning.

Emotional and Mental Strain

Emotional fatigue, stress, and anxiety emerged as significant concerns. Learners described how gaming provided temporary relief but worsened mental health in the long term. In the interview, respondents mentioned the challenges they face in balancing their gaming and academic responsibilities:

Respondent 1, It is stressful and tiring, for playing e-games became my routine back then. I lost my focus and balance on academic responsibilities. It's really hard to balance when playing games became my habit instead of academic things. I experienced not studying because of playing, I also experienced lack of sleep because of playing and truthfully speaking it did affect me. It did ruin me for somehow doing my responsibilities.

Respondent 4, I feel anxious and worried at the same time, because balancing gaming and academic responsibilities makes my mental health worse. Since I am always tempted to play more rather than focusing on my responsibilities in school. Because the more I play the more activities and pressure I feel. Playing games can lessen my stress but sometimes it has its own perks.

Respondent 8, "lisod kaayo samot nag ting deadline na" It's really difficult, especially when deadlines are near.

E-games can be a stress-reliever or enjoyment, but excessive and uncontrolled playing could lead to academic decline, mental health issues, and stress. The responses of respondents show that excessive e-game playing negatively affects students' academic performance, focus, and mental health. Respondent 1 shared that gaming had become a routine that led to a loss of focus, lack of sleep, and failure to fulfill academic responsibilities. Respondent 4 expressed feelings of anxiety and stress due to the constant temptation to play, which worsened their mental health and made it harder to manage school tasks. Additionally, Respondent 8 stated that balancing gaming and studies becomes challenging during deadlines due to a lack of time to prepare. Students should learn to balance their playing and studying habits by setting apparent limitations and maintaining discipline.

This aligns with Dong et al. (2020), who found that adolescents using games as coping tools were more prone to psychological strain. Similarly, Anderson et al. (2017) linked problematic internet use with emotional instability among youth. Ampo et al. (2025) state that students are being overwhelmed by the pressure to adapt to rapidly changing digital tools, reporting that this affects their focus, well-being, and sense of competence. This emotional toll mirrors the experiences of learners facing academic decline due to excessive gaming on electronic devices. Like teachers overwhelmed by digital demands, students immersed in prolonged gaming also experience mental fatigue, loss of focus, and emotional detachment from academic responsibilities. Both groups are responding to different forms of digital saturation—but with similar outcomes: stress, distraction, and a decline in academic or professional performance.

Through these experiences, students should develop self-discipline and practical time management skills to avoid letting gaming

interfere with their academic studies. Setting limits and prioritizing responsibilities can help prevent academic decline and emotional stress. It is essential to recognize the consequences of excessive gaming and take proactive steps to maintain a healthy balance between leisure and education.

Struggles in Balancing Priorities

Students were aware of the negative consequences of gaming but struggled to stop. This behavioral dissonance reflects a psychological addiction cycle, as noted by Griffiths et al. (2019), where gaming offers short-term gratification while long-term consequences are ignored. According to the respondents' responses on how they manage or change gaming habits:

Respondent 1, Yes, I stopped playing e-games and focused on things most especially to my studies and I can say that it really helps me to grow become productive not just as a student but also as a person.

Respondent 3, Yes, I try to play only after doing my school work. I made a rule to finish my school work first before playing. Because my grades were getting low and I wanted to do better. Now, I had more time to study and my grades got better.

Respondent 7, It's hard to find enough time for both games and school. I wish I could do better at both, but it's a struggle.

It implies the challenges of students in balancing gaming and academics, but they also said positive changes are possible through self-discipline, time management, and being a responsible individual. Respondent 1 said that stopping e-gaming allowed them to focus more on their studies, leading to increased productivity and personal development. Respondent 3 gaming habits can be managed by setting a rule to complete schoolwork before playing, resulting in better grades and more efficient use of time. Meanwhile, Respondent 7 acknowledged the difficulty of managing both gaming and academic tasks, expressing a desire to do well in both but struggling to find the right balance.

Playing e-games can lead to addiction, loss of focus, and poor academic performance when students play excessively. It is still possible to control gaming addiction through time management and minimize gaming habits. Additionally, it is essential to establish boundaries, maintain a daily routine, and engage in collaborative or hands-on learning. Setting a specific time for studying and gaming can help students stay focused on their goals while still enjoying leisure activities in moderation.

Conclusions

This study provides a clear understanding of how excessive e-game playing affects high school students today. In this new generation, numerous changes have occurred, and one of them is the significant role gaming has come to play in students' lives. For many, playing games brings happiness and relaxation, and helps them develop strategies and techniques that sharpen their minds and boost their self-confidence.

However, gaming also presents challenges, especially in managing time, focusing on studies, and striving for higher grades. Many students today love playing e-games, and they shared how this habit sometimes causes them to neglect their school responsibilities. They often felt stressed and anxious because they struggled to balance gaming and studying.

However, despite their struggles and the times they felt addicted to gaming, some students still demonstrated a modicum of self-discipline. They learned to stop playing excessively and to manage their time more effectively, which improved their academic performance. Through their experiences, they realized that it is not good to give all their time and energy to gaming. As students, they must learn to discipline themselves and focus on their future.

The findings of this study suggest that schools need to actively address the growing issue of excessive e-game use among students, as it directly impacts their academic performance, study habits, and emotional well-being. Educators and school administrators should recognize that gaming addiction is not just a personal issue, but an educational concern that requires structured intervention. The results suggest that every teacher should also be trained on how to teach learners to be responsible users of technology. School Administrators should develop a program that includes healthy gaming habits, time management, and self-discipline. It is also important to provide counselling on the long-term consequences of excessive gaming so that every learner is aware and can learn from other experiences.

Overall, the implication is clear: education systems must adapt to the realities of digital life and develop comprehensive approaches that support students in striking a balance between technology use and their academic and personal growth.

As e-games continue to be a significant part of students' lives, parents, teachers, and schools need to guide young learners in finding a healthy balance between play and academic pursuits. By offering support and encouraging responsible gaming habits, we can help students enjoy the benefits of technology without compromising their future goals.

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