

# Students Engagement in Digital Games (Digital Addiction)

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## ABSTRACT

The study investigates how senior high school students view digital games. Although students report that digital games provide opportunities for relaxation, enjoyment, and a connection to peers as the primary motivators driving play, they also highlight problematic aspects of use including gaming addiction, which may impact academic motivation and learning outcomes in negative ways. The findings present accounts from qualitative interviews with Grade 11 students from Silae National High School who recounted playing digital games after school on personal devices such as mobile phones, while balancing classroom obligations, homework, and family responsibilities. This occurred in resource-poor contexts where institutional guidelines for responsible gaming and digital well-being rarely exist. While many Philippine studies have quantified the link between online gaming and academic performance, generally reporting moderate negative impacts of regular gaming on grades, attention, and classroom participation (DepEd Region VIII, 2023; Rufo, 2023; Sumibcay, 2024; see also Mahmud et al., 2023), relatively few have qualitatively examined how senior high school students themselves make sense of digital games both as stress relief and academic risk in their everyday school lives.

Although recent qualitative research on the lived experiences of online gaming among Filipino senior high school students offers a glimpse into the rich and complex tapestry of habitual pleasure, social connectedness, stress relief, as well as preliminary signs of addiction, such studies are limited in number and typically focus on single or bimodal states. The students' narratives suggest that, while they often seek relief from stress, boredom, loneliness, and pressure from studies and family by playing digital games for escape or relaxation (echoing some local evidence [e.g., DepEd Region VIII, 2023] as well as international research [e.g., Mahmud et al., 2023; Rufo, 2023; Sun et al., 2023]), excessive gaming is reported to cause significant problems with time management and distract them from school tasks, leading to sleep deprivation or missed opportunities for academic engagement. This research aims to describe and explore the perspectives and experiences of senior high school students in a Filipino public school concerning digital games, and how their engagement with digital games relates to balancing gaming time with academic performance and learning outcomes.

This study concludes with important suggestions for digital game engagement in a senior high school setting. It highlights students' perspectives, offering contextualized information that enriches findings beyond correlational statistics by illustrating how gaming, stress, family matters, and schooling intersect within real-life contexts. Findings specific to school-based guidance programs, as well as the role of the home in advocating responsible gaming, time management, and self-regulation strategies for students, would benefit homeroom advisories and parent-teacher initiatives promoting digital well-being in senior high school. Senior high schools should also ensure that discussions of digital well-being are incorporated into existing academic work and pastoral care structures. Future prospects may involve designing and piloting such targeted interventions as structured time-management workshops, digital wellness modules, or game-oriented learning approaches to harness student interest in digital games while counterbalancing their deleterious impacts on academic engagement and health, supported by emerging evidence from the Philippines and elsewhere that properly guided student engagement can alleviate the negative academic impact of online gaming (Mahmud et al., 2023; Online Gaming Addiction..., 2024; Sun et al., 2023).

Keywords: Digital Gaming, Digital Addiction, Learning Outcomes, Student Engagement, Time Management

## INTRODUCTION

Recent qualitative data supports the notion that many senior high school students view digital games primarily as a tool for retreat, entertainment, socialization, and temporary escape from academic and personal tension. However, they also struggle to manage their time effectively, leading to sleep loss and distractions that negatively affect learning outcomes. This tension between stress relief and academic disruption echoes a broader trend among Filipino adolescents, where increased online or computer game addiction has been associated with depression, poor mental health, and diminished school performance (Cajayon et al., 2020; Lingad, 2024; Rufo, 2023; Tibon & Dela Cruz, 2022; see also Fabito et al., 2019).

Significant gaps persist in understanding students' experiences when they engage with digital games as a meaningful, complex practice. This includes their explanations for playing and how they negotiate academic tasks versus gaming goals through intrinsic motivations, particularly in public secondary schools within the Philippine context, where access to guidance resources and digital literacy development opportunities are scarce. This stands in distinct contrast to previous local research, which often focused on quantitative relationships between online gaming and either depression (Cajayon et al., 2020), mental well-being (de la Cruz & colleagues, 2024), or academic performance among high school and senior high school students (Fabito et al., 2019; Rufo, 2023; Tibon & Dela Cruz, 2022). These earlier studies underscore the lack of qualitative research investigating student-voiced accounts of how gaming becomes interwoven with coping, identity construction, peer relationships, and academic goal setting within specific school contexts in the Philippines.

Global research from 2019–2025 indicates a link between less engagement in learning, lower motivation to study, and poorer achievement, all associated with digital or online game addiction, as detailed in English literature (Meral, 2019; Rahman et al., 2025; Sun et al., 2023). Furthermore, while depression and other psychosocial factors predict the risk of developing problematic gaming, better academic performance appears to be protective against electronic games and social media addiction (Rahman et al., 2025). Despite these findings, such studies primarily originate from non-Philippine contexts and predominantly employ large-scale quantitative designs. This highlights a need for qualitative interpretations that could capture not only how Filipino senior high school students discuss digital game engagement but also describe their experiences with the term “digital addict” and illustrate how peers successfully balance gaming with academic responsibilities.

### Statement Of the Problem

The objective of this study is to collect the experiences of students involved in digital games (digital addiction). This research will answer the following questions:

1. What are your reasons for engaging in digital games?
2. What challenges in balancing digital games with your learning outcomes?
3. How did you address the challenges of balancing digital games and learning outcomes?
4. What recommendations would you give to your fellow students regarding digital games and academic responsibilities?

## METHODOLOGY

Utilizing a descriptive qualitative research design, this study sought to gain insight into the self-reported experiences and perspectives of senior high school students on their digital gaming participation and its association with learning gains. When researchers aim to present a thick, clear description of participants' experiences and views instead of testing hypotheses or constructing formal theory, a descriptive qualitative design is suitable (Gumba & Sabandal, 2024; Perceptions of academic staff and students..., 2023).

This qualitative study was conducted at Silae National High School in Malaybalay City. The subjects were fifteen Grade 11 senior high school students from Silae National High School, Division of Malaybalay City.

These students had easy access to mobile phones and online games but lacked formal guidance about digital well-being, which could lead to difficulties with responsible gaming. The sample was obtained using criterion sampling, a type of purposive sampling strategy used in previous Philippine qualitative studies on gaming and Internet Gaming Disorder (Gumba & Sabandal, 2024; de Guzman & Sy, 2020; Villaflor & Soriano, 2020). They were selected through purposive sampling based on the following criteria: (a) currently enrolled in basic education or senior high school, and (b) playing digital games regularly (at least several times per week). This involved inviting only participants who self-reported regular experience in playing digital games from the total senior high school student population, with further purposive selection to ensure representation across different strands and genders and cover varied experiences and perspectives related to school. All students who met the inclusion criteria and returned signed parental consent and student assent forms were included in the final sample.

Data were collected using a short, semi-structured qualitative questionnaire comprising four open-ended survey questions. These questions explored reasons for playing digital games, challenges in integrating digital games with learning outcomes, ways to overcome these challenges, and advice they would provide their peers regarding digital games and academic obligations. Written narrative responses were obtained in the school at a mutually agreed time to allow all participants the opportunity to write lengthy free-text responses in their own words, minimizing disruption to regular classes, a procedure consistent with other school-based qualitative investigations of students' gaming experiences. Data analysis employed an inductive thematic analysis approach. Responses from the survey were examined and coded to reveal themes and patterns identified within students' interactions with digital games.

Ethical issues entailed anonymization of names (e.g., P1–P15), secure file storage, and reporting only summary patterns and de-identified quotes. Following a descriptive qualitative design, criterion sampling, open-ended questioning, and inductive thematic analysis, the methodology establishes credible, contextualized evidence for how academic experiences of digital game engagement are lived by 15 student participants in a Philippine public school senior high school setting. This responds to the existing call (Huo et al., 2022; Lumpe et al., 2021; Vosniadou & Shwangyia, 2018) for more qualitative accounts of gaming, solicited directly from students themselves, that can further inform us about the nature of the interplay between gaming and academic engagement (Gumba & Sabandal, 2024; Mahmud et al., 2023; Sun et al., 2023).

## RESULTS

A thematic analysis of digital games to which students are exposed, about the concept of digital addiction, revealed four major themes. Theme 1, “Digital Games as a Source of Enjoyment, Stress Relief, and Personal Growth,” was perceived as emotionally comforting and helpful in relieving stress, with some students viewing digital games to cope with loneliness. Digital games also strengthen problem-solving skills, creativity, and reflection. Theme 2, “Time Management Difficulties,” encompassed challenges related to poor time management that led to academic setbacks and was associated with mood disorders triggered by video game engagement. These problems were categorized within frameworks such as Time-management Theory and constructs addressing unstructured distraction caused by compulsive gaming behaviors. Such behaviors lead to consequences like disrupted sleep hygiene, impaired cognition, or unmet responsibilities resulting in negative outcomes. Theme 3, “Learning Self-Regulation with Time Management and Goal Setting, Prioritization, and Limits on Gaming,” reflected emerging strategies students used to maintain balance between gaming and school responsibilities. Theme 4, “Advocating Responsibility in Games (by prioritizing academic activities, limiting the frequency and number of games played, and keeping track of time spent studying to prevent academic and family setbacks),” reported that peers can assist by monitoring gaming time usage so that academic tasks remain a top priority. The analysis highlights the need to find a healthy balance between days entirely devoted to study and days that allow for some gaming, which, even during weekends, will be very challenging, particularly regarding time management.

### Reasons For Engaging in Digital Games

Generated theme: Digital games as a source of enjoyment, stress relief, and personal growth Students do not play digital games to kill time, but rather they play to escape the real world when schoolwork gets too tough or

times get tough. Gaming gives them an escape, a way to unwind and a stress relief. It cultivates various abilities, from problem-solving and coordination to creativity and emotional control. Digital games give students an enjoyable and beneficial way to practice emotional health and self-improvement. In this way, digital gaming serves as a source of both entertainment and skill development, enabling students to interact with new technologies as well as peers while developing self-efficacy in the learning process.

One participant explained, “I play video games after school to get as many friends as I can; even though everything is far away” (P1). Another wrote, “I play digital games and it is my hobby as well that gets me to stop thinking about my problems for a while” (P2). For P3, “Every time I play digital games, it gives me these comfort feelings and helps to lessen the pressure within my studies a bit so I can unwind.” Similarly, P4 stated, “I play digital games to de-stress,” while P8 shared, “When I am playing digital games instead of thinking about work and how bored I am, that makes me feel more relieved.” P5 remarked: “It gives me some peace and relief to my mind from thinking about the problem that is causing me this pressure.” P7 described using gaming to escapes stress from studies and family issues. P9 stated, “I prefer digital games because I like finding out new technology about graphics, attributes and entertainment. This helped alleviate stress in studies.” P10 added that “Digital games will develop the skills in problem solving, coordination and creativity,” and P13 commented, “It can make me learn new things ways of gaining knowledge.”

### **Challenges In Balancing Digital Games With Learning Outcomes**

Generated theme: Time management difficulties and academic disruption due to excessive gaming Students rank uncontrolled noise, school distractions like homesickness, poor sleep habits and procrastination high on a list of barriers to line up gaming with academics. They admit to dedicating "way too long" on games, frequently losing track of time while gaming or binging YouTube content. This often leads to them rushing the homework they need to do so that they can squeeze as much sleep in before school, and then they can't concentrate in class which adds to their lack of productivity academically. To some students, the word "addiction" is a literalist term; they argue that compulsive gaming produces missed homework assignments and less time devoted to studying which then leads to poorer academic performance.

P1 describing experiencing a “lapse of time when playing for a long session, the studies that were missed, staying up at night makes difficult to stay focus in class or reviewing lessons.” P2 similarly outlined “time management, distraction, lack of sleep and bad performance in school that lost them track of everything on their plate.” P3 stated, “I encounter problems in overabundance of digital games that I might not always finish my assignments, I forget about time management easily which may lead to cramming all of my activities.” P4 further noted, “Online games distract me from studying.” On the other hand, P5 elaborated, “Time management is difficult due to forgotten studying and reading my important entries in the notebook delayed submitting of school outputs.” P6 reported “the distraction from my studies, and not being involved in school activities.” P7 highlighted that “playing games for hours at night without sleep leads to sluggishness and inattention in class.” Finally, P15 stated, “Time management is an issue; I spend all my time playing digital games and have little time to do schoolwork.”

### **Ways Of Addressing the Challenges in Balancing Digital Games and Learning Outcomes**

Generated theme: Developing self-regulation through time management, prioritization, and limits on gaming Students address their challenges in digital games by practicing self-regulation strategies such as time management, prioritizing schoolwork, physically removing phones while studying, and increasing focus on academics and offline activities. They highlighted several strategies: structuring time management plans, using digital games as a reward after completing tasks, exercising self-control, seeking a balance between study and play, and developing an emerging awareness of responsible game use.

As (P1) explained, “I use a timer (one hour on school days, two on weekends) and I do all my schoolwork then play. I would put my phone down whenever I read.” P2 commented, “I am keeping myself aware of the time I spend on games, and it sounds like this: I play games on weekends. Instead of doing after-school gaming.” P3 stated, “For time management I would communicate to and prepare myself by specifying times for playing it in the digital games domain.” According to P4, “Setting a limit on playing digital games and writing down and

organizing school activities for everything I have to do is important.” P6 and P7 described similar approaches: “I use time management to cope with the issue” (P6); and “I prepare a schedule for when digital games will be played and then study” (P7). P9 emphasized that, “of importance is to do my academics first and that will only be followed by when I must play digital games. I will make a schedule of when I play my digital games as well as study.” P12 concluded, “I will exercise self-control and it will not get addicted to digital games”.

### **Recommendations To Fellow Students Regarding Digital Games And Academic Responsibilities**

Generated theme: Advocating responsible gaming by prioritizing academics, setting limits, and maintaining balance Play games and do schoolwork you can handle. Manage your time, know your limits, and play no more than one game per day to avoid gaming too much and damaging schoolwork, health, and relationships. They show digital games as possibly beneficial when played in moderation, but should one play more than necessary, they advise focusing on school first, practicing outside activities next, and making gaming always secondary to academic life.

P1) suggested that “focusing on schoolwork first will be helpful to set a routine, and know your limits.” In a similar line, P2 remarked, “Digital games can be constructive when utilized properly and responsibly. Focus only on schoolwork, be organized to keep track of what needs to be done, view distractions as unfocused, don't be forced off from our fellow classmates, and refresh using technology for study with a twist of fun.” Another participant emphasized, “Never forget that sometimes you can have too much of a good thing. Playing digital games, all the time is not good for health” (P3). P4 added, “Know the limits of digital games,” and P5 mentioned that “It is important to know the pros and cons of digital games on your learning. In relation to that, time management is an extremely vital point.” P6 recommended that “place aside the digital video games and contemplate their studies.” P7 advised, “Specify a time frame for playing digital games, do not disturb your study time, and take time out to participate in physical activities, including indoor and outdoor games.” P9 wrote, “Always finish your schoolwork first before you switch on digital games. Know how to master yourself regarding digital games; do not treat them as your life and learn to reward yourself after academically accomplishing your work.” P13 cautioned, “Do not consume all of your time into playing digital games, as this will inevitably lead to plenty of issues in association with gaming, especially concerning your studies, and wasting time away from relatives and associates.”

## **DISCUSSION**

The findings of this study portray digital games as a double-edged sword in the lives of senior high school students in Philippines public schools. It is providing enjoyment, stress relief, and opportunities for personal growth while creating substantial risks for time management, academic engagement, and well-being when use becomes excessive or poorly regulated. Students' accounts illustrated how digital games are woven into their daily routines as a coping mechanism, a leisure activity, and a social practice.

Digital games as stress relief, enjoyment, and social connection Qualitative analysis of students' experiences with video games revealed they relied on these digital activities to de-stress, escape academic and personal pressures, address feelings of isolation or loneliness, build social relationships. They also saw gaming as a means of honing problem-solving, coordination, creativity and emotional control skills. This finding is consistent with local and international studies, which show that online gaming is primarily motivated by relaxation, enjoyment or socialization among adolescents and young adults. For instance, it was recently reported that Filipino undergraduates utilized video games as a coping strategy to counteract academic stressors to restore energy and provide temporary reprieve from the pressures of academia (de Guzman & Sy 2024), while according to Gumba and Sabandal (2024) senior high school valedictorians viewed gaming not only merely as an outlet against nonacademic stress but also considered this activity recreational in nature or socializing with peers. For instance, Capinpin (2022) also noted that games served as an escape from emotional distress for many senior high school Filipino students although playing a lot could still affect their academic performance. International work also emphasizes enjoyment, challenge and relaxation as major motives for youth gamers to play (Meral, 2019) along with interaction peer.

Given this perspective, students focused on emotional appeasement and social cohesion indication that digital gaming conceptually provides temporary psychological enhancements as well as growth domain termination if data mining remains restrained. These results are consistent with a wider literature indicating that carefully allocated the limited use of digital games may sometimes be beneficial for motivation and coping, based particularly on the notion that brief periods spent playing video games in between academic goals can provide some balance to a heavy curriculum as opposed to being an all-consuming focal point in daily life.

Time management difficulties and academic disruption due to excessive gaming The second theme revealed that struggle with time management and described the academic disruption that followed unregulated gaming. Gaming played at relatively high levels among adolescents was associated with depressive symptoms, and impairments of academic functioning found a local study (Labana et al., 2020). Previous research conducted about the impact of online gaming on academic performance of senior high students found that regular playing has a small significant negative effect on assignment, quiz, class participation and paperwork and examination, mainly mediated amid time displacement and distraction (Rufo, 2023). According to the study 'Internet gaming disorder and its association with depression, anxiety, and stress among Filipino public high school students', there was a significant correlation observed between gaming disorder and higher severity in depression, anxiety, and stress — circumstances that hinder attention span, motivation to engage in academic work will be poorer (Calvario 2023)

A review of the global issue of behavioral technology addictions noted that riding high on this phenomenon, overuse of electronic video games was associated with lower academic achievement and reduced motivation towards school (partly due to more hours being devoted to gaming versus study) (Rahman et al., 2025). Discussion the above-mentioned research found that the relationship between online game addiction and academic performance was that gaming addiction could predict reduced academic performance, and learning engagement negatively impacted the relationship between game addiction and academic performance (Sun et al., 2023). Finally, research on gaming behavior among students found that long hours of gaming are a detriment to self-reported academic performance, with time spent playing and class absences being significant predictors (Arreola & Hernando, 2023).

Developing self-regulation through time management, prioritization, and limits on gaming The third theme focuses on how students attempted to manage the risks of gaming through self-regulation strategies. Recent studies show that Filipino gamers keep track of their hours logged during the weekends and weekdays, refrain from skipping classes for gaming purposes and take part in study group discussions to lessen gaming's detrimental effects on academic outcomes (Arreola & Hernando, 2023). For example, local studies have documented that goal setting task prioritization and self-monitoring where new skill sets are melded from gaming with academic requirements negotiate the demands of gaming with school (Orioque & Selpa 2021). Following this, a study from Dela Cruz et al. (2025) on mobile game distractions and time management among Philippine senior high school students shows that those with proper schedule control face lesser academic problems due to gaming.

Global studies on time management and self-regulation from gaming studies globally indicate that students with gaming-specific timetables, using games as contingent rewards report few academic problems (Li & Tsai, 2021; review in Lam et al., 2019). Studies conducted on technology addiction show that protective factors, such as high levels of academic involvement and limitations in electronic game usage are associated with lower risk for problematic gaming and influence grades negatively (Rahman et al., 2025). Ultimately, analyses of student gaming behavior find that self-regulation strategies like monitoring gaming time, managing ratio of study to play and exercising self-control can help students regulate their online games (Arreola & Hernando, 2023)—and appear similar to strategies utilized by the students in this dataset.

Advocating responsible gaming by prioritizing academics, setting limits, and maintaining balance The fourth theme demonstrated that students were mindful of their own gaming habits, and they took it upon themselves to encourage responsible recreation among their peers. They counselled peers to focus on studies, limit gaming time, not to treat console games as their 'life', and to implement physical and offline activities. A local study about online gaming behaviors among some Filipino students recommended regulated time spent on games, never ditching class, and only enrolling in units that can be managed alongside academic performance (Arreola

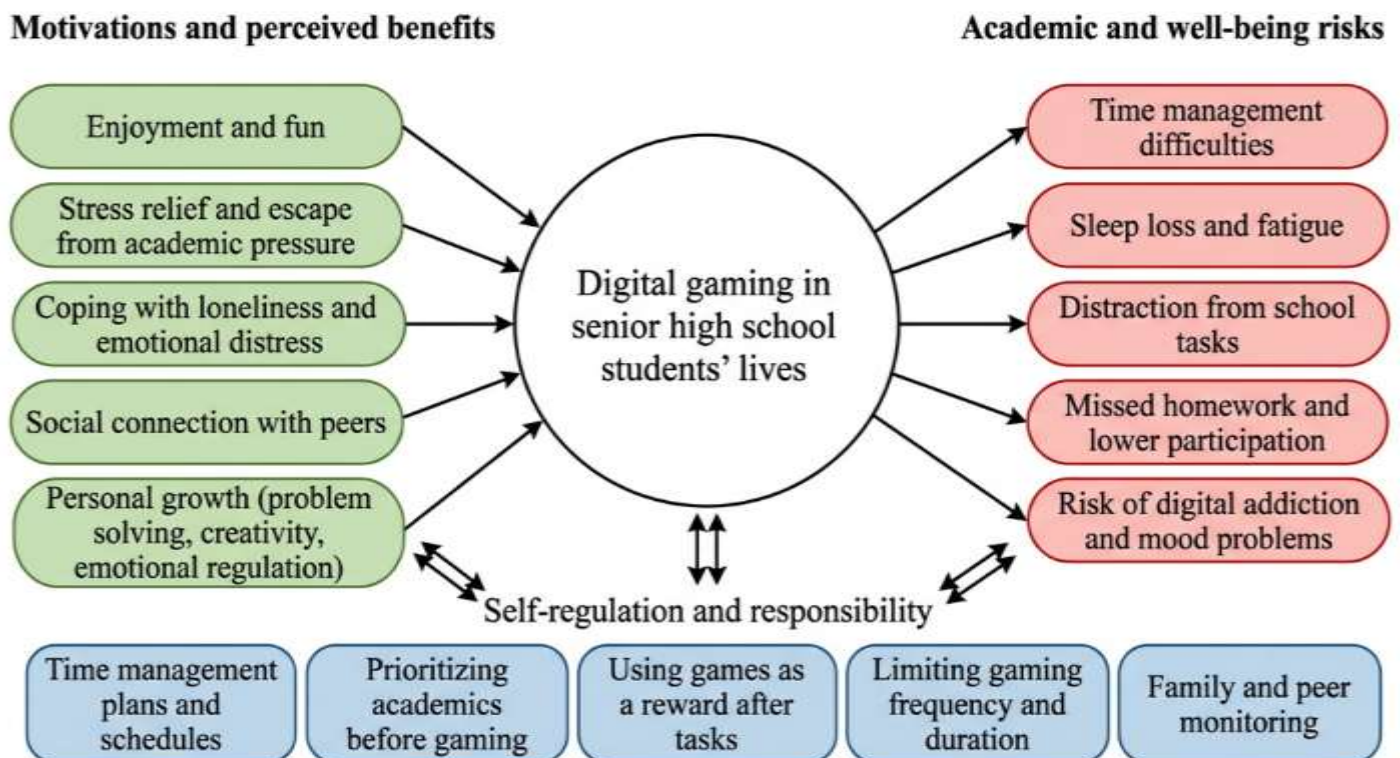
& Hernando, 2023). Research in the Philippines on gaming and academic performance indicates that students must attend to academic tasks first before gaming time during school days so there is no negative impact on grades (Rufo, 2023).

Kline (2021) found that students under stress often replace intensive study with less taxing entertainment options; an implication of this finding in international work on student self-regulation is that, irrespective of wider business models, there should be thresholds where engagement with leisure activities like gaming may support both motivation and academic outcomes when considered as a reward for completed academic tasks and set within clear limits (Li & Tsai, 2021). Based on the research into technology addiction, international guidelines have been established and recommend that students: (1) learn to use games responsibly; (2) self-impose boundaries; (3) prioritize academic work over gaming time; and (4) engage in offline activities as part of healthy digital habits (Rahman et al., 2025).

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

This study revealed the evidence that digital games are a double-edged sword for students: they constitute enjoyable, stress-relieving, socially connective, and self-developing experiences; yet can all too easily become time wasting, sleep delirious and school disrupting if overused. The participants said they relied on the games to cope with the academic pressure, loneliness and emotional distress. According to Zhang et al., 2023; Alharbi & Al Qahtani, 2024, that online game addiction diminishes behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement, resulting in lower academic achievement motivation, as well as poorer academic performance. However, many students also reported time-blindness, skipping sleep, all-nighters and class absences which has been demonstrated in research to correlate negatively with learning engagement and academic performance while positively correlating with mental health indices such as depression, anxiety or stress. Which has been demonstrated in research from Philippine and international studies that relate failing grades and high rates of school failure to excessive gaming, collectively indicating that the core problem is not gaming itself per se, but rather the absence of limits, self-regulation, or adult supervision, which allows leisure game playing to invade significant learning time and responsibilities (Salenga & Caoili, 2020). Digital games are a positive source of leisure and a dangerous contributor to academic decline; therefore, their sustainable use needs to be established.

Figure X. Thematic map of students’ engagement with digital games as a double-edged sword



As for the composite thematic map, it indicates that senior high school students engagement with digital games is a function of interacting personal, contextual and external factors in which motivation to be engaged on gaming depends upon individual as well as social process whilst preference of gameplaying also leads academic problems; thus ensuing self-regulatory strategies triggered up so that any harmful effects from such game participation can be avoided. At the center of this diagram, is a node with 'Digital gaming in senior high school students' lives' which indicates how games are intertwined into contexts such as schooling and home for all the various Digital Game dimensions identified.

Based on the findings, it is recommended that students consciously prioritize their academic responsibilities through build coping mechanisms by structuring game and study sessions, scheduling time for both study and gaming in a way that treats digital games as a reward after completing academic work, rather than the other way around. For educators, integrating digital game-based learning activities in classrooms can align students' interests with educational outcomes. The school must offer seminars and workshops on digital wellness that highlight the benefits of gaming, as well as its potential harms, prompting students to reflect on their patterns of gaming behavior by developing personal action plans for balance. However, parents must exercise authority to control gaming hours, establish a healthy lifestyle that prioritizes sleep and study, provide other leisure options to decrease dependence on digital games, and maintain discussions about the pros and cons of gaming, fostering an understanding of its academic and health effects. Finally, the study recommends addressing how different genres of games, patterns of social versus solo play, and family monitoring practices shape the line between healthy and unhealthy digital engagement. Locally grounded evidence from the Philippines and the region has shown that interventions should take into account gaming as both a form of stress relief and an academic risk (by providing students and parents opportunities to co-construct routines and rules to establish protocols for sleep, study time, and face-to-face relationships, while allowing reasonable play, according to Salenga & Caoili, 2020).

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