



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

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Date Submitted:

August 7, 2025

Date Accepted:

September 30, 2025

Date Published:

October 30, 2025

Suggested Citation:

Alacida, C. et al (2025). Exploring Academic Decline Among E-Gamers: A Phenomenological Approach to Learners' Academic Experiences. *International Journal of Education, Literacies and Curriculum Studies*. 1 (1), 20 - 32.

Abstract

This qualitative study explored the real-life experiences of high school students who struggle with their academic performance because of excessive e-game playing. Through interviews with eight learners from different schools, the study gathered a variety of personal stories and insights. The findings revealed how playing e-games affects their schoolwork, study habits, academic responsibilities, emotional well-being, mental health and time management. While students acknowledged the recreational and cognitive benefits of e-games—such as stress relief, enjoyment, and improved thinking skills, most of them also experienced negative academic consequences. Participants shared that their gaming habits often led to poor time management, decreased study time, and lower academic achievement. Many learners reported feeling overwhelmed, anxious, and stressed as they struggled to balance school responsibilities with their gaming routines. Despite these challenges, the study also found hope in the experiences of some students made efforts to control their gaming habits through time management, self-discipline, and behavioral adjustments such as deleting games or limiting playtime. These changes led to the improvements in academic performance, better time use, and enhanced personal responsibility. Overall, this study highlights the negative academic and emotional impacts of excessive gaming and the potential for recovery and growth through intentional habit management. In today's digital world, where gaming is very common among young people. The study emphasizes the importance of guiding students toward healthier digital habits by involving parents, educators, and communities in promoting balanced lifestyles that prioritize education and well-being.

Keywords: *E-games, Academic Performance, Time Management, Student Well-being, Self-Discipline*



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Introduction

The rapid evolution of digital technology has led to the proliferation of electronic games (e-games), which have become a dominant form of entertainment among adolescents worldwide. In the Philippines, the popularity of e-games among high school learners continues to grow, fueled by accessibility to mobile devices and internet connectivity. While gaming can offer cognitive and social benefits, excessive engagement has been linked to adverse academic outcomes and emotional challenges (Cheng et al., 2021).

Recent studies have shown that problematic gaming behavior is associated with academic disengagement, time mismanagement, and impaired cognitive functions, such as attention and memory (Hu et al 2022; Hawi et al., 2020). Adolescents, particularly in developing countries, are vulnerable to these risks due to less structured home environments and insufficient digital literacy support from schools and guardians (Anderson et al., 2017). Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the situation, as lockdowns and online learning pushed learners toward longer and unregulated screen time, increasing their susceptibility to excessive gaming (Dong et al., 2020).

Although existing literature documents the negative consequences of excessive gaming, most studies adopt a quantitative approach, focusing on prevalence and correlation. There is a noticeable lack of qualitative studies that explore the subjective experiences of students grappling with gaming addiction and its impact on academic performance. This presents a critical gap, especially in the Philippine context, where students face unique social, economic, and cultural dynamics that shape their digital

behaviors. Multiple studies have reported a strong association between excessive gaming and poor academic performance. Gentile (2009) found that adolescents who spent more than three hours per day playing video games exhibited lower grades, skipped classes more frequently, and reported difficulties in completing assignments. Similarly, Lemmens et al. (2011) observed that excessive gaming behaviors led to a reduction in academic motivation and time management issues, both of which directly contribute to academic decline.

Excessive gaming is often linked to emotional and psychological challenges. Students who become dependent on gaming frequently report feelings of guilt, anxiety, and low self-esteem due to their declining academic performance (Chiu, 2014). In qualitative interviews conducted by Kim and Kim (2010), adolescent gamers described a dual identity: one where they thrived in a virtual world but struggled to maintain focus and motivation in the classroom. Prolonged gaming often leads to withdrawal from family and peers. Wei and Lo (2006) emphasize that mobile and online games, while socially connected in the digital realm, can lead to real-world social disconnection. This isolation exacerbates academic challenges, as learners may lack the support systems needed to recover academically.

In today's digital age, electronic games (e-games) have become a dominant part of youth culture, especially among Filipino high school learners. With the increasing availability of smartphones, affordable internet access, and social media platforms, many students now spend hours each day playing e-games such as Mobile Legends, Call of Duty, and PUBG. While these games offer



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entertainment and cognitive stimulation, they have also raised concerns among educators, parents, and psychologists due to their potential negative impact on academic performance and mental health.

Recent research has pointed to a strong connection between excessive online gaming and academic decline. In a Philippine-based study by Farillon et al. (2022), senior high school students who played games excessively were more likely to have lower class performance, with male students being more vulnerable. Similarly, Diongson (2024) found a negative correlation between gaming exposure and science performance among Grade 10 students, highlighting that those who spent more time gaming had difficulty focusing in class and completing academic tasks on time. These results reflect global trends. For instance, a Chinese study by Luo et al. (2023) revealed that students with higher levels of gaming addiction exhibited reduced behavioral and emotional engagement in class, which contributed to decreased academic motivation.

Internationally, meta-analyses have shown that while moderate gaming may help enhance executive functioning and spatial awareness, gaming addiction is consistently linked to poor school performance, reduced attention span, and poor time management (Chen & Peng, 2020; Paulus et al., 2018). A study conducted in Australia noted that gaming during weekdays—especially before bedtime—significantly reduced students' alertness and academic focus during school hours (Dowling et al., 2021).

In the Philippines, Soriano & Francisco (2020) observed that students who gamed for more than three hours per day commonly reported feeling anxious, tired, and less interested in school. These

findings are echoed by Dumrique & Castillo (2018), who noted that students who practiced time management and limited their gameplay to weekends or school breaks were less affected academically, suggesting that discipline and self-regulation play key roles in maintaining academic success.

The COVID-19 pandemic further intensified these challenges. With students spending more time at home and attending online classes, their access to games became more frequent and harder to control. As Dong et al. (2020) noted, the pandemic created an environment where adolescents were more susceptible to digital overuse due to stress, isolation, and boredom.

Given these findings, this study was conducted to examine the lived experiences of high school learners in Bohol who have struggled academically due to excessive e-game playing. Unlike many existing studies that rely on statistical data, this research uses a qualitative lens to capture students' personal narratives, emotions, and coping mechanisms.

Through this approach, the study hopes to offer insight into the internal conflicts faced by students—such as guilt, stress, and anxiety—when trying to balance gaming with academic responsibilities. Moreover, it seeks to understand how some students have managed to develop self-discipline and recover academically despite their challenges. These stories may serve as a guide for educators, parents, and school administrators in crafting interventions and policies that support learners in developing healthier digital

To address this gap, the present study seeks to explore the lived experiences of high school learners who



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have experienced academic decline due to excessive e-game playing. Through an interpretive phenomenological approach, this research aims to understand how these students make sense of their struggles, manage their emotional responses, and attempt to regain academic focus. The insights gathered will contribute to a deeper understanding of the psychosocial dimensions of digital addiction and offer practical implications for school administrators, teachers, and parents.

Research that explores the lived experiences of learners reveals deeper insights into how excessive gaming disrupts daily life. In a phenomenological study by Anandari (2019), high school students expressed internal conflicts between their desire to succeed academically and their compulsion to play games. Key themes included denial of the problem, emotional dependence on gaming, and eventual acknowledgment of academic consequences. These narratives highlight the complex relationship between gaming as both a coping mechanism and a source of distress.

Research Objectives: This research aims to uncover and describe the lived experiences of high school students facing academic challenges due to excessive e-game playing. It highlights their emotional struggles, behavioral adjustments, and the coping mechanisms they employ to restore academic performance. Balami (2015) studied the relationship between distance learner students' self-efficacy and academic performance; results showed that learners' self-efficacy has no significant relationship with their academic performance.

In this study, the researcher aims to contribute to Psychology and Education

by finding the impact of self- concept, self-esteem, and self-efficacy on senior high school students' academic performance.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The global body of literature on gaming and academic performance offers both caution and clarity. Gentile et al. (2011) found that adolescents who spend more than three hours a day gaming show signs of academic disengagement, poor time management, and reduced motivation. Chiu (2024) emphasized the emotional toll of gaming addiction, noting that students with gaming dependency often suffer from guilt, anxiety, and low self-esteem—especially when academic expectations are not met.

Moreover, Wei & Lo (2006) noted that while gaming may connect students to digital peers, it often leads to social disconnection in real-life settings, further isolating them and limiting access to supportive academic environments. Luo et al. (2023) also pointed out that problematic gaming behaviors diminish classroom participation and increase procrastination. However, there is also evidence that some gaming experiences, when controlled and purpose-driven, can develop students' strategic thinking and decision-making skills (Granic, Lobel & Engels, 2014). Despite this, the negative academic effects of unregulated gaming remain a concern, especially in contexts like the Philippines where household structures may not always provide the



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supervision needed to regulate screen time. The Philippines has yet to develop national strategies to integrate digital wellness into secondary school education. Therefore, this study seeks to fill the gap in qualitative literature in the local context by capturing how students themselves perceive the influence of e-games on their lives, academically, emotionally and socially.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study utilized a phenomenological research design, which seeks to understand how individuals perceive and make sense of their lived experiences. Phenomenology was selected because it emphasizes the participants' subjective experiences, emotional responses, and meaning-making processes (Van Manen, 2016). This design enabled the researchers to capture the complex interplay between excessive gaming behavior and academic struggles among high school learners (Anderson et al., 2017).

Participants and Sampling Technique

The participants were eight high school students from public schools in the municipality of Ubay and Mabini, Bohol, who self-reported experiencing academic difficulties due to excessive e-game playing. Purposive sampling was employed to select participants who met

the inclusion criteria: (1) currently enrolled in high school; (2) frequently engage in online or electronic games; and (3) acknowledge a decline in academic performance related to gaming behavior. Participants were identified through referrals and initial screening conducted by teachers and school personnel. Ethical guidelines, including informed consent and voluntary participation, were strictly observed throughout the study.

Research Instrument

The primary research instrument was a semi-structured interview guide developed by the researchers. The interview questions were designed to explore students' perceptions of how e-gaming affected their academic performance, emotions, study habits, and efforts to manage their behavior. Open-ended questions allowed for depth and flexibility in responses. Questions were validated through expert review and pilot-tested with two non-participant students to ensure clarity and relevance.

Data Gathering Procedure

After obtaining informed consent, the researchers conducted in-depth interviews with each participant, lasting between 30 to 45 minutes. Interviews were conducted face-to-face in a quiet setting within the school premises to ensure comfort and confidentiality. Responses were audio-recorded (with permission), transcribed verbatim, and



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reviewed for accuracy. The interview process took place over one week to allow flexibility and rapport-building.

Data Analysis Procedure

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step approach: familiarization with data, initial coding, theme identification, theme review, theme definition, and final reporting. Coding was both inductive and deductive, guided by recurring patterns in the narratives. Trustworthiness of the data was established through triangulation, member checking, and peer debriefing. Themes that emerged include: loss of academic focus, emotional exhaustion, internal conflict, and habit transformation.

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to ethical standards of qualitative research. Informed consent was secured from all participants and their guardians. Participants were assured of their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. Anonymity and confidentiality were maintained by assigning pseudonyms and omitting any identifying information. All data were securely stored and used solely for research purposes. The research protocol was reviewed and approved by the graduate studies ethics committee of Bohol Island State University.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Loss of Academic Focus

The theme emerge 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 shared that gaming often became a priority over studying, leading to



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 of Ampo, (2025), there is a raised concerns about how technology, when excessively relied upon, 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 brought about by digital overdependence a struggle similarly experienced by high school learners immersed in excessive e-game playing.

Based on the interview, Learners who are playing e-games have affected their school performance, mental health and study habits due to e-game playing.

E-games can be relaxation during vacant time, but it 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 to anxiety, lack of motivation, and cramming to finish activities. This implies that playing e-games irresponsibly has a negative effects and consequences. Highlighting the importance of time management between playing e-games and academic activities. In addressing loss of academic focus due to excessive playing e-games, students should know how to

balance their playing habits and studying through setting limitations and allotting time for playing and studying responsibly. It is important to manage their time responsibly so they can both enjoy playing and studying without compromising their academic performance. Also, parents should be aware of their children and monitor their academic progress. 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 major concerns. Learners described how gaming provided temporary relief but worsened mental health in the long term. In the interview, respondents mentioned about 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.



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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 shows that excessive e-game playing negatively affects students’ academic performance, focus, and mental health. Respondent 1 shared that gaming became a routine that led to 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. Also, Respondent 8 said that balancing gaming and studies becomes difficult during deadlines due to lack of time to prepare. Students should know how to balance playing and studying habits by setting limitations and 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) states that students being overwhelmed by the pressure to adapt to fast-changing digital tools, reporting that it affected their focus, well-being, and sense of competence. This emotional toll mirrors the experiences of learners facing academic decline due to excessive e-game playing. 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 diminished academic or professional performance.

Through these experiences, students should develop self-discipline and time management to avoid letting gaming interfere with their studies. Setting limits and prioritizing responsibilities can help to 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



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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' response 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 is possible through self-discipline, time management, and being responsible individual. Respondent 1 said that stopping e-games allowed them to focus more on their studies, which led to become productive 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 a students' play excessively. It is still possible to control gaming addiction through time management and minimize gaming habits. Also, it is important to set limitations, create a daily routine, and engage in collaborative or manipulative learning. Setting a specific time for studying and gaming can help students stay focused on their goals while still enjoying leisure activities in moderation.

CONCLUSION

This study gives us a clear idea of how excessive e-game playing affects high school students today. In this new generation, there have been so many changes, and one of them is how gaming has become a big part of students' lives. For many, playing games brings happiness, relaxation, and helps them think of strategies and techniques that sharpen their minds and boost their self-confidence. However, gaming also brings challenges, especially in managing their time, focusing on their studies, and aiming for higher grades. Many students today love playing e-games, and they shared how



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this habit sometimes caused them to neglect their school responsibilities. They often felt stressed and anxious because they struggled to balance gaming and studying. But despite their struggles and the times they felt addicted to gaming, some students still showed a little self-discipline. They learned to stop playing excessively and manage their time better, allowing them to improve their academic performance. Through their experiences, they realized that it's 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 imply that the school need to actively address the growing issue of excessive e-game use among students as it directly affects 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 learner to be a responsible user of technology. School Administrator make a program that should include on healthy gaming habit, time management and self-discipline, it is important also to provide counselling process about the long-term consequences of excessive gaming so that every learner must aware and they will learn from other experiences. Overall, the implication is clear: education systems must adapt to the

realities of digital life and develop holistic approaches that support students in balancing technology use with their academic and personal growth.

As e-games continue to be a popular part of students' lives, it is important for parents, teachers, and schools to guide young learners in finding a healthy balance between play and study. By offering support and encouraging responsible gaming habits, we can help students enjoy the benefits of technology without letting it harm their future goals.

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