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ML O LM: Stories of Mobile Legend Gamers in Accomplishing Learning Modules AMIDST COVID-19 Pandemic: A Case Study

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ABSTRACT

The Covid 19 pandemic has heightened the use of mobile phones among learners all over the globe. Hence, the students who got involved and soon got addicted into playing mobile games whether these are pre-installed, offline, or online have also increased significantly. This addiction may be associated to learners' academic performance especially in the implementation of the new learning modality in the School Year 2021-2022. To highlight this issue, the researcher conducted a study describing and revealing the experiences of the two junior high school students, who were habitual mobile legend gamers, and the impact of their addiction to learning module accomplishment and submission. The researcher utilized judgmental sampling technique in this study which qualified the two participants among many of those who met the requirements because of the significant changes on their academic performance relevant to excessive playing of Mobile Legends. Analytic strategy and descriptive approach by Yin (2014) as also used in the study of Cadosales (2018), was employed to gather and analyze data focusing on the common themes emerging from their stories as they battle on the adverse effect of playing ML while accomplishing LM. A narrative story was created through inquiries and storytelling based on the transcribed interview responses. From the two Mobile Legend gamers' revelation of the cases, themes based on their highlighted stories were described, analyzed, and compared to Mobile Legend's heroes and characteristics. The findings of the study affirmed that stress, depression, isolation, and lack of actual communication and socialization lead the two cases to venture in engaging themselves into playing mobile legends. Moreover, their academic performance was badly affected when associated to excessive and unrestrained playing of Mobile Legends.

Key Words: Mobile Legends, Academic Performance, Learning Modules, Case Study, Philippines, Mobile Games Addiction

Introduction

"*No pain, no game*" and "*No game, no fame*". Both statements were frequently uttered by a fourteen-year-old Junior High School student/gamer at Binulasan Integrated School, Isko, who is an active player of the legendary online game "Mobile Legends".

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought major break worldwide, causing the most severe global education disruption in history. The corona virus feared everyone which heightened the use of mobile phone among learners who got bored and stress in accomplishing their learning modules. As reported by the Business World, Mobile Legends, which is one of the most popular games in the world marked over one billion installs, and 100 million monthly active users in November 2020, where 100 million registered users and 25 million active users were from the Philippines. According to (Aviso et.al., 2020), mobile legends constitutes adverse outcomes to the behavior, health, lifestyles, and most importantly to the academic performance of the students. Thus, the researcher conducted a study which aimed to highlight the experiences and explored challenges of the two selected Junior High School students who were habitual Mobile Legend gamers and the impact of their addiction to their learning module accomplishment, submission, and academic performance

Specifically, it sought answers to the following questions:

1. Why does mobile legends seem to be appealing among learners?
2. How may the study habits of ML Online Gamers be described and analyzed?
3. How does the academic performance of the students be affected before and after playing ML?
4. What are the challenges experienced in accomplishing and submitting learning modules?
5. How do they cope up and overcome with theirchallenges?
6. What gainful insights may be drawn based on the findings?

Methodology

In order to develop a thorough understanding of the case, a single-case study design by Yin (2014) as also used in the study of Jordan

(2008), which has been cited in the study of Cadosales (2018) was utilized to reveal the untold experiences and stories of the two Junior High School students who were habitual Mobile Legend gamers and the impact of their addiction to their Learning Modules accomplishment and submission. A case study is acceptable to use if a contemporary phenomenon is being investigated in the context of real-life situations, as pointed out by Yin (2014).

Research Setting

Binulasan Integrated School is the locale of this study. It is a public educational institution situated at Brgy. Binulasan, Infanta, Quezon with a school ID of 500028. It is located along the highway and near the coastline with about 6 km drive from the town proper. BIS has 91 nationally funded teachers, 36 Elementary teachers, 43 Junior High School Teachers, 12 Senior High School Teachers, and 5 Non- teaching personnel. The school has 1133 Elementary pupils, 1259 JHS students and 323 SHS students divided into 26 classes of ES, 26 classes of JHS, and 7 classes of SHS.

Research Participants

The research participants of this study were the two selected Junior High School students who were currently enrolled at Binulasan Integrated School. These two participants were chosen among many of those who were qualified because of the significant changes to their academic performance during the School Year 2020-2021 relevant to excessive playing of Mobile Legends. Judgmental or purposive sampling technique was utilized in this study.

Research Instruments

The research instrument used in this study was personal unstructured interview. Here, the interviewer does not generate any specific set of standardized questions for research, rather he or she asks different questions in line with the context and purpose of the systematic investigation, (Formplus 2020). In addition, according to Burino, et al. (2017), it may often take place straight investigation or other way round. Observation will also be used as a method by the researcher to identify varied emotions and mannerisms relative to the experiences and ideas shared by the research participants.

Data Gathering Procedures and Techniques

A letter of permission to conduct the study was forwarded to the school head of Binulasan Integrated School and to the District Supervisor. Moreover, the researcher obtained participant's parent consent for the purpose of undertaking the study. Initial interview had also been done by the researcher with the student's adviser and parents for a background check and verification of the students' academic performance.

Meanwhile, the researcher explained to the participants the overview and focus of this study. To collect the needed inputs in this study, the researcher engaged different techniques in qualitative research. These were the structured interview, participant observation, narrative inquiry and storytelling.

Research Ethical Consideration

The ethical considerations were ensured throughout the study. The researcher explained to the participants the overview and focus of study. Since the participants of this study were minors, parents were given an informed consent letter and participants were asked to volunteer for the study, understanding all the rights of withdrawal and refusal. There were no data seek which could exhibit participants' direct identity like names, telephone numbers, address, area or national identification number. The anonymity of the research participants was kept with utmost confidentiality. Ethical and professional considerations were always observed while in the conduct of the study.

Revelation of the Case

Case Study 1-Isko

Isko is a fourteen-year-old lad who grew up in a family of educators. In fact, his mother and father are both teachers. In addition, his three uncles and an aunt are also teachers. He is the first son and first grandson in the family. This means that Isko has all the means to study since his family can afford him to send to school.

Growing up, Isko was sent to an exclusive school in Infanta when he was a preschooler. *"I remember the time when I learned to read, write, and count at the age of five. My parents are very happy. They are so proud of me"*. That was the very moment when his family concluded that he could be a great achiever in class. Isko pursued his elementary years and showed diligence in academic performance. He graduated in Elementary with special awards and with good academic performance.

Similarly, he showed constant progress when he stepped into Junior High School at Binulasan Integrated School. He was a consistent honor student in grade seven and eight. *"Isko was very studios, he was good in class. He could easily grasp the lesson"*, said his adviser in grade seven. *"He was friendly, he had a lot of friends because I guess he was approachable. He was my favorite, he gives brightness to a day whenever he smiles"*, his adviser in grade eight added.

However, everything seemed to change when he eventually stepped into Grade 9. This was the school year when the global pandemic brought drastic effect to the educational sector all over the world. Despite the threat of Covid 19, his parents decided to enroll him through printed modular distance learning. *"This learning modality is quite tough for me, studying at home is boring. I missed my classmates and friends in school"*. This was the time when Isko lose his interest in studying and started to use mobile phone. And that is how his story about the famous Mobile Legend game developed.

A Knight that Battles Against Boredom

Challenged by the situation he was in, Isko was able to balance the accomplishing of learning module and playing mobile legends at the same time. However, during the second quarter and as the days went by, he got fed up of the routine and found mobile legends as more interesting than accomplishing his learning modules. *"At first, I enjoy answering my modules because the lessons are easy, but as time went on, the activities became more and more difficult, and that is the moment I stop answering my module"*. said Isko. Later, Isko has eventually found out that his self-dedication has shifted from accomplishing LM first to playing ML.

The subtheme "A Knight that Battles Against Boredom" is the term that best fit to describe how Mobile Legends saved the learners from boredom, stress, and even the difficulties in accomplishing their learning modules during the pandemic. Given the fact that this is the first time learners of today's generation experienced lockdown, the feeling of depression and isolation instead of socialization and actual communication had been taken place.

Valir – Son of Flames

Valir's characteristics and superpowers can be described as Isko's study habits before getting addicted to playing ML. The fire symbolizes his passion, desire, and hope. The torch with a burning flame is even used by the Department of Education to represent the power and knowledge. Isko was described both by his advisers as "studios, good in class, and brightness bringer whenever he smiles". It was even shown in his school records that he made good grades before the pandemic and getting attached to playing mobile legends. However, fire does not always portray positive outcomes. When fire is not used properly, it can cause great damage and perilous destruction, worst, it may lead to death. That is when Cecilion – the Embrace of Night started to join in the battlefield.

Cecilion – Embrace of Night

Cecilion's characteristics and skills can be associated to Isko's academic performance after getting addicted to ML. Due to stress and difficulties in answering his modules, Isko learned to embrace the night. *"I usually turn the pages of my modules in the morning and decide whether I can answer the activities or not. Some of the activities were still manageable and answerable, but most were difficult to accomplish. I hate being stressed so I do excuse myself whenever it is impossible for me to answer the modules. I would just play ML"*.

Bats are nocturnal bird, they are awake at night, just like Isko, he is awake at night playing ML in the dark. Bats as Cecilion's special skill often represent death in the sense of letting go of the old and bringing in the new. Hence, ironically, Isko let go of his good performance in school, and begun to take the risk of embracing the night which leads to academic failure. Thus, Isko needed someone to motivate him, someone who will support him. There she goes joining in the battle – Rafaela, The Wings of Holiness.

Rafaela – The Wings of Holiness

Rafaela, the classic support in Mobile Legends also known as Wings of Holiness is one of the Guardians of the Palace alongside Uranus and Kaja. She's well-rounded support that heals, boosts teammates' movement speed, and equipped with skills to damage, slow, and stun enemies. Her skills, holy healing, and holy baptism.

Since Isko has started to embrace the night playing ML, he would wake up usually by ten in the morning. There is no chance for him to finish answering all his modules, so *"I would ask my parents to help me answering the activities in the modules. Sometimes, I divide the modules to my family members, those who are teachers too."* Isko said. These people who helped Isko in accomplishing his modules are learning warriors who support and give hope to him. They work as a team in the battlefield to make him win the game not only in ML, but also in his schooling.

Moskov – Spear of Quiescence

Isko has met a lot of problems and challenges as he got addicted to playing mobile legends. *"I often dream of myself playing ML, sometimes it made me feel that I am in the actual battle."* Almost every night, he would go to his granny's house sitting alone in the dark corner, trying to avoid distractions from anyone. *"I would usually hear him talking all alone by himself in the wee hours, shouting awful and foul words as if he was talking to a foe. He would not even listen to me, when I told him to stop playing and sleep, worst is he would mock to my face and sometimes talkback to me*

like I am of his age", his granny exclaimed. The spear of quiescence has hit him so bad that he has totally disregarded answering and submitting his learning modules.

This resulted him to not answer and submit his learning modules on time. As I personally interviewed Isko in their house, I see learning modules of different subjects of the consecutive weeks piled unanswered. According to him, it is also the reason why he loses his interest in answering the modules. *"Whenever I see those pile of modules, it would just give me stress. I would rather play ML to entertain myself"*, he said. He had already envisioned that he may not make it this school year, and it is totally fine for him. *"I am still young to be in grade nine, so it is not a problem"*, he said. As he said the previous statements, I know that there is somehow a regret, I could feel and could see it through his eyes. Isko quit schooling but promised that he would be focusing his study next school year.

I ended up the interview with this question, "If you had a chance to be one of the heroes in Mobile legends, who would that be and why? *"I would choose Diggie – the timekeeper. He is not my most picked hero, but he could reverse time. If I could only turn back time, I would have answered and submit my modules on time, I would have listened to my parents, and I wouldn't have quit schooling".* Lastly, I asked him, "In the next school year, what will you choose, LM o ML? Isko closed the conversation with "*LM na po*!"

Case Study 2-Queenie

Queenie is a fifteen-year-old lass who was raised in a simple family. She was the second eldest among the 8 siblings. Unlike Isko, Queenie grew up in a broken family. Her parents got separated when she was ten. *"My father left us for his mistress"*. By that time, only her mother works to put food on the table and to be able to send them to school. *"It is very hard to work and support my family alone. My husband left me for someone he just met while fishing in Aurora province."* her mother said.

Queenie did not experience to buy delicious food during recess and lunch time, it is because, her money was just enough for her transportation expenses. *"I just sit alone in the corner looking at my classmates eating banana cue, cake, candies, etc. Sometimes, my good friends give me food".* Life was not easy for her.

Despite the hardships in life, Queenie still managed to finish her schooling in Elementary. She was so happy. At that time, she never thought of going to high school. She would just want to help her mother working and let her older brother to finish high school first. But her mother wanted her to study, so her mom asked her boss to take Queenie to look after the twins. To make the story short, Queenie works to take care of the twins. She only took care of the twins when her bosses are at work. Her bosses promised her that they would support her study in high school. Some of Queenie's hard-earned money was given to her mom for expenses at home.

Queenie was able to accomplish and submit the modules during the first and second quarter, according to her adviser. But suddenly has changed when she learned how to play mobile legend which was introduced by her boyfriend.

Meeting My Knight and Shining Armor in the Battlefield

Covid19 affected Queenie so much. She missed a lot of things such as meeting her friends and family, playing with her siblings, swimming at the beach, etc. *"It was stressful and boring moment of that time. I was waiting for my boyfriend's response, but I could not get a hold of him. He messaged me back after 30 minutes. He told me that he was busy in a ranked game."* Queenie said. Queenie downloaded ML and asked her bf to teach him how to play it. *"It is a nice online game. I felt like I am very powerful. I also enjoyed playing with my bf in a game, he kept on saving me when someone attacked me, I also support him when he is being attacked."* said she. Later, ML became their chatting, meeting, and dating field together with their other friends.

"Meeting My Knight and Shining Armor in the Battlefield" best explains how she got involved in the game. This becomes their platform in meeting and chatting without any interruptions.

Mathilda – Swift Plume

Before getting involved in ML, Queenie's plume was always used to answer the learning modules. She is as swift as Mathilda's plume in accomplishing the set of activities in the LM. She also used to be the initiator in her circle of friends to finish and submit the modules on time. *"During the first and second quarter in school, I always submit my modules though some of the answers were not totally correct"* she said. Her performance in school, though average, was significantly consistent. On the other hand, because of her being so supportive, she also took the risk in supporting her boyfriend by downloading ML and playing it with him. Soon, his Knight in Shining Armor turns into "Leomord – The Hell Knight".

Leomord – The Hell Knight

When Queenie started to meet Leomord, everything seemed to fall into pieces. She had skipped answering the modules. According to her adviser, she never gets and returns the module during the third quarter. This made the adviser home visit her. Upon home visitation, her adviser found the reasons behind her not accomplishing and submitting the modules. *"I will stop schooling na po", I could not answer all the activities given to me. It's quite hard for me to work and study at the same time"*, Queenie said. *"I was really shocked when she made mention those statements, I never knew that she was not answering her modules. I often asked her if she had already accomplished them, and she would say yes!",* her boss said. This made her boss talk to her adviser privately. According to Queenie's adviser as revealed by her boss, she often heard Queenie talking to her boyfriend over the phone inside the comfort room about "ranked games, heroes, mobile legends". This proved the reasons behind her not accomplishing the modules.

Queenie's study habit and urge for learning can be associated to Leomord's characteristics and powers. Problems and challenges had been encountered as she was trying to accomplish her learning modules. Her momentum in accomplishing modules was decimated and soon became a phantom steed. In addition, her boyfriend's influence can also be related to Leomord's personalities, welcoming her in the dark night while enjoying killing opponents in the battlefield.

Angela – The Guard/Support Bunny Love

"Everything that's done in the dark must come to light". Queenie opened everything why she got involved and eventually got addicted to playing ML. She also mentioned that those numerous activities in the different LM's made here stressed and depressed which resulted here to skip answering them.

To address this problem, the adviser had to create an agreement among them. *"Queenie is a good student. I believe that she really wants to finish her schooling. She loves her mother, and she apologized to her boss already for what she did"*, her adviser exclaimed. Some of Queenie's subject teacher conducted an online intervention class for her, some modified the LMs to lessen the unnecessary activities.

Queenie persistently attended the online intervention class and accomplished all the activities in ML. She said that she had even forgotten about playing the Mobile Legends. *"I thought the stress I felt while answering the LM is worse than playing ML. Now I have come to realize that, when you play ML, you will be stressed when you have been defeated in a ranked game, while in answering the LM, yes, you would get stressed, but when you accomplished them all, stress turned into the feeling of success"*, Queenie said.

I ended the interview with Queenie by asking her this question, "If you had a chance to be one of the heroes in Mobile legends, who would that be and why?" *"Sir, I would love to be like Angela-The LoveBunny because just like her, I would like to have a capability of healing those students who are also addicted in playing ML and could not focus on their schooling. I would like to tell them that it's never too late, that there's still hope, and that they would have to call upon their parents and adviser in school for the love and support that they might probably need"*.

Synthesis of the Cases

The two cases revealed that stress, depression, feeling of isolation, and lack of communication among friends during this time of pandemic were the great factors that contributed to their addiction in playing ML and not accomplishing their LM's. Such result was supported in the findings of (Sheren, 2020 where she found that students who are unable to socialize and make connections as easily as they could prior to the pandemic may increase feelings of isolation and depression. Hence, students might do something to minimize stress to avoid the negative consequences of long-term stress (Kwaah, 2020).

Meanwhile, both participant's academic performances in school prior to getting addicted in Mobile Legends were remarkably outstanding and satisfactory. However, both of their performances in school were significantly affected after getting addicted to playing Mobile Legends. This resulted one of the participants to quit schooling, while the other got almost failing grades. According to (Cornillez Jr., 2020), the poor performance of the students in academics is significantly interpreted as less favorable when linked to playing online mobile games.

This study also identified the problems and coping mechanisms of the two participants during the accomplishment of their learning modules while into playing mobile legends. Both of the participants made mention that the numbers of activities in the modules are too many and too difficult which affect their interest and motivation in answering the LM's. The instructions and some concepts in the learning modules require repetitive reading to understand. Due to these problems, late submission and incomplete answers in their modules were observed. Hence, they would prefer, browsing the internet, watching TV, chatting online through different social media platforms, and playing online games (Kwaah, 2020). In addition, according to Fernando (2020), "modular learning is challenging because learners are required to read and reread."

Finally, both participants portray positive mindset towards their studies in the following school year. When asked, if they had a chance to be one of the heroes in Mobile Legends, who would that be and why? Isko chose to be "Diggie", the timekeeper who could revert the time. This shows that he somehow regrets the time when he would have chosen to accomplish the LM's that to play ML. On the other hand, Queenie chose "Angela", the Lovebunny who has the capability of healing and giving support and guidance among her allies, as Queenie saw the importance of valuing the people who supported and guided her in studies. This study made them realize that LM should not be taken for granted and that playing ML has significantly affected their academic performance. Hence, the interrogative statement "ML o LM" should not be a question that a learner should choose from.

Although these findings were generated only from two case studies, yet these can provide significant data to value the importance of accomplishing students' learning modules as to improve their academic performance in times of pandemic, to inform the educational institutions regarding the numbers of activities, essential competencies, and context in the learning modules, and to be aware of the undesirable effect of playing mobile legends among learners.

Conclusion

Based on the synthesis of the findings, the following conclusions were drawn:

1. The revealed stories of the two cases shed light on the realities that students went through difficulties in accomplishing their learning modules due to the effect of Covid 19 which resulted them to get involved and soon be addicted to playing mobile legends.
2. This study also identified that not only male, but also female got addicted to online gaming.
3. Numerous activities in the learning modules, aside from worksheets and supplementary activities contributed to the lack of interest and

motivation, and stress in accomplishing their LM's which may lead to entertaining themselves by playing mobile games.

4. The findings of the study affirmed that stress, depression, isolation, and lack of actual communication and socialization lead the two cases to venture in engaging themselves into playing mobile legends.

5. Furthermore, their academic performance when associated to excessive and unrestrained playing of mobile games has an adverse consequence.

6. Finally, the voices of the two mobile legend gamers in their revelations of their real-life experiences provided a different lens in pursuing and improving their studies amidst the threat and effect of Covid 19 pandemic.

Recommendation

In the light of the aforementioned findings and conclusions, the following are hereby recommended:

1. Teachers should closely and consistently monitor and inform parents and students regarding the status of module accomplishment and submission thru constant communication and or conduct home visitation at least once a week while strictly following the minimum health standards. Modification of work sheets and other supplementary activities without compromising the most essential competencies should also be done to lessen the activities in the modules. Continuous intervention program should also be conducted to those struggling students.

2. Parents should have a regular supervision of their students' daily learning tasks and SLM's accomplishment. Guidance, love, motivation and support should be observed at home.

3. Students should adhere or adopt to the Weekly Home Learning Plan provided by the teachers. Watch educational videos that will help them on the lessons that they find difficult instead of playing Mobile Legends.

4. Collaboration of Sangguniang Barangay and Kabataan (SB,SK) of each barangay should set a conducive learning environment and propose program such as Group Study or Study Buddy to promote actual communication and socialization with fellow students while learning, of course considering the number of participants and strictly following the health protocols. They could also use fund intended for education for reinforcement activity, reward/merit system for students who accomplished their learning modules on time.

5. Future researchers may replicate or continue this study in another setting such as elementary, or even college students who are also Mobile Legend gamers utilizing different methodologies. In depth explanatory mixed method approach with a greater number of participants is highly recommended.

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