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Perceptions and behaviors toward electronic sports (E-sports) among students of the University of information and communication technology: Thai Nguyen University, Vietnam

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Abstract

This study examines perceptions and behaviors toward electronic sports (e-sports) among 338 students at the University of Information and Communication Technology – Thai Nguyen University using a questionnaire-based survey. The results indicate that students generally hold positive perceptions of e-sports, with 84.3% recognizing it as an official sport and acknowledging benefits such as the development of strategic thinking and teamwork skills. Students' participation in e-sports is mostly at a reasonable level and primarily for individual recreational purposes; however, participation in organized activities remains limited despite relatively high interest in future involvement. These findings provide a scientific basis for the orientation and management of e-sports activities in higher education.

Keywords: Electronic sports, e-sports, perception, behaviour, students, University of information and communication technology, Thai Nguyen University

Introduction

In the context of digital transformation and the Fourth Industrial Revolution, information and communication technologies have exerted a strong influence on educational, recreational, and physical activity practices. Along with the development of digital infrastructure and the internet, electronic sports (e-sports) have become increasingly popular, particularly among young people and university students. E-sports are no longer merely a form of entertainment but are gradually being organized under professional competitive models with established rules and a growing ecosystem, exhibiting key characteristics of a modern sport.

From a legal perspective, the Law on Physical Training and Sports (Amended and supplemented in 2018) ^[1] affirms the role of sports activities in promoting comprehensive human development and encourages the diversification of sports forms in line with advances in science and technology. The Law on Education (2019) ^[2] emphasizes physical education, the promotion of healthy lifestyles, and the development of learners' comprehensive competencies within higher education institutions. In addition, Resolution No. 29-NQ/TW on fundamental and comprehensive reform of education and training, together with the Strategy for the Development of Physical Training and Sports in Vietnam to 2030 with a vision to 2045, provides orientations linking sports development with technological application and the needs of younger generations. These documents form an important legal and policy basis for studying and guiding emerging sports such as e-sports.

In practice, e-sports in Vietnam have gradually gained social recognition, as evidenced by their inclusion in competitions at the SEA Games and their strong development within youth and student communities. However, students' perceptions and participation behaviors related to e-sports remain diverse, and unregulated or poorly guided participation may negatively affect health, academic performance, and daily life.

The University of Information and Communication Technology – Thai Nguyen University is a higher education institution specializing in the training of human resources in the fields of technology and communication.

Its students have a high level of access to digital technologies and a strong interest in activities within the digital environment, including e-sports. Nevertheless, research on students' perceptions and behaviors toward e-sports at the university remains limited and does not yet fully reflect the current situation.

Based on the above theoretical, legal, and practical foundations, the study entitled "Perceptions and Behaviors toward Electronic Sports (E-sports) among Students of the University of Information and Communication Technology – Thai Nguyen University, Vietnam" is necessary. The study aims to provide a scientific basis for the management, orientation, and organization of appropriate e-sports activities within the higher education environment.

Research Methods

The study was conducted using a cross-sectional descriptive design with a sociological survey based on a structured questionnaire. The study sample consisted of 338 full-time undergraduate students at the University of Information and Communication Technology – Thai Nguyen University, selected using a convenience sampling method. Data were collected through questionnaire-based interviews focusing on students' perceptions and behaviors toward electronic sports (e-sports). The data were analyzed using descriptive statistical methods, including percentage calculations.

Results and Discussion

The study interviewed 338 students, including 107 male students and 231 female students, primarily first-year students at the University of Information and Communication Technology – Thai Nguyen University, regarding their perceptions and behaviors toward e-sports. The results are presented in the tables below:

Table 1: Students' perceptions of e-sports (n = 338)

Perception	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Electronic games for entertainment	70	20.7
An organized competitive sport with clear rules	236	39.8
A potential career in modern society	28	8.3
No different from ordinary gaming	04	1.2

Table 1 shows a clear differentiation in students' perceptions of e-sports. The highest proportion of students perceived e-sports as an organized competitive sport with clear rules (39.8%), while 20.7% viewed e-sports mainly as an entertainment activity. Only 1.2% considered e-sports no different from ordinary video gaming. These findings indicate that most students have a relatively accurate understanding of the nature of e-sports, although a small proportion still lacks a comprehensive perception of its role within modern sports.

Table 5: Students' perceptions of the impact of e-sports on academic performance (n = 338)

Perception	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Negative impact	7.0	2.1
No impact	37	11.0
Positive impact if time is well managed	292	86.9

Table 5 reflects students' balanced perceptions of the impact of e-sports on academic performance. Most students (86.9%) believed that e-sports could have a positive effect on learning if time is properly managed, whereas only 2.1%

Table 2: Students' self-assessed level of knowledge about e-sports (n = 338)

Level	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Very low	13	3.8
Low	27	8.0
Moderate	127	37.6
Good	128	37.9
High	43	12.7

Table 2 indicates that students' self-assessed level of knowledge about e-sports is predominantly at a medium to good level, accounting for 75.5% of respondents. The proportion of students reporting a high level of understanding was 12.7%, whereas those with low or very low knowledge accounted for only 11.8%. This suggests that students have relatively good access to information about e-sports, which is consistent with the technological and digital orientation of the university, although in-depth understanding remains limited.

Table 3: Students' perceptions of whether e-sports is an official sport (n = 338)

Perception	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	285	84.3
No	06	1.8
Uncertain	47	13.9

Table 3 demonstrates a high level of agreement regarding the official status of e-sports, with 84.3% of students considering e-sports an official sport. However, 13.9% of respondents were uncertain, and 1.8% did not recognize e-sports as a sport. This finding reflects the reality that, despite growing social acceptance, the official status of e-sports has not yet been fully and uniformly perceived among students.

Table 4: Students' perceptions of the benefits of e-sports (n = 338)

Perception	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Development of strategic thinking	298	88.2
Improvement of teamwork skills	235	69.5
Career and income opportunities	164	48.5
Healthy form of entertainment	198	58.6
No clear benefits	09	2.7

Table 4 highlights students' positive perceptions of the benefits of e-sports. A large majority of students reported that e-sports contributes to the development of strategic thinking (88.2%) and teamwork skills (69.5%). In addition, 58.6% perceived e-sports as a form of healthy entertainment, and 48.5% recognized its potential for career opportunities and income generation. Only 2.7% of respondents believed that e-sports provides no clear benefits, indicating an overall positive perception among students.

perceived a negative impact. This suggests that students are generally aware of the importance of self-regulation when engaging in e-sports activities.

Table 6: Level of students' participation in e-sports (n = 338)

Level	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Never	30	8.9
Rarely	51	15.1
Occasionally	169	50
Frequently	88	26

Table 6 shows that students' participation in e-sports is relatively moderate, with 50.0% participating occasionally and 26.0% participating frequently. The proportion of students who never participate in e-sports was relatively low (8.9%), indicating that e-sports has become a common activity in students' daily lives.

Table 7: Duration of students' e-sports participation per day (n = 338)

Duration	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Do not play	43	12.7
Less than 1 hour	89	26.3
1–2 hours	143	42.3
2–4 hours	48	14.2
More than 4 hours	15	4.4

Table 7 indicates that the most common duration of e-sports participation is 1–2 hours per day (42.3%), followed by less than 1 hour per day (26.3%). Only 4.4% of students reported participating for more than 4 hours per day, suggesting that most students engage in e-sports at a reasonable level without widespread signs of excessive involvement.

Table 8: Forms of students' participation in e-sports (n = 338)

Form	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Individual recreational play	180	53.3
Organized play	60	17.8
Online/offline competitions	33	9.8
Watching livestreams or tournaments	24	7.1
Do not participate	41	12.1

Table 8 shows that the predominant form of e-sports participation among students is individual recreational play (53.3%). Participation in organized play (17.8%) and online/offline competitions (9.8%) remains limited, indicating that e-sports activities among students are largely spontaneous and lack formal organization within the university context.

Table 9: Students' participation in the university's e-sports clubs/teams (n = 338)

Level	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Have participated	38	11.2
Have not participated but interested	145	42.9
Have not participated and not interested	155	45.9

Table 9 reveals that only 11.2% of students have participated in an e-sports club or team at the university. However, a substantial proportion of students (42.9%) reported having an interest in participating in the future, highlighting significant potential for the development of organized e-sports clubs and teams within the university.

Management Implications and Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, several management implications and recommendations can be proposed. First, universities should strengthen communication and educational initiatives to enhance students' understanding of

the nature, role, and value of e-sports, particularly for those who remain uncertain about its official status.

Second, there is a need to establish and develop formal e-sports clubs and teams within the university to meet students' growing interest, thereby transforming e-sports activities from spontaneous participation into organized and well-managed programs.

Third, universities should consider integrating e-sports into extracurricular activities and skill development programs, thereby leveraging its potential benefits for strategic thinking, teamwork, and digital competence.

Fourth, clear guidelines and regulations regarding participation time and formats should be developed to help students balance academic responsibilities, physical activity, and recreational engagement, minimizing potential negative effects.

Finally, the findings suggest the need for further in-depth research on e-sports in higher education, particularly regarding its relationship with students' health, academic performance, and career orientation.

Conclusion

The survey results of 338 students at the University of Information and Communication Technology – Thai Nguyen University indicate that students have relatively positive perceptions of electronic sports (e-sports), with the majority recognizing e-sports as an official sport and acknowledging its benefits, such as the development of strategic thinking and teamwork skills. Students' participation in e-sports is generally at a reasonable level, with the most common duration being 1–2 hours per day and primarily in the form of individual recreational play. However, participation in organized e-sports activities remains limited, while students' interest in future participation is relatively high, suggesting significant potential for the development of formal e-sports models within the university. Therefore, the university should consider establishing and organizing well-structured e-sports clubs and activities, combined with guidance on skill development and time management, to maximize positive outcomes and minimize potential negative effects of e-sports on students.

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