

ELECTRONIC SPORTS CAREER AND EDUCATION

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Abstract. This review examines e-sports, a phenomenon that has emerged in recent years, rapidly increased in popularity, and gained a predominantly young audience. E-sports is now regarded as a viable career option. The review discusses the nature of e-sports, its brief historical development into a professional gaming career, and its similarities and differences compared to traditional sports. It also highlights the annual high-reward global tournaments organized for each game genre within the e-sports sector and the strong appeal these events hold for younger generations. Teachers report that students are increasingly distancing themselves from the formal education system and gravitating toward e-sports, which offers excitement, enjoyment, and the possibility of high earnings. The study evaluates the mental, psychological, and physical benefits and drawbacks of e-sports participation. Extended computer use may lead to health problems such as carpal tunnel syndrome and suppression of the immune system. Finally, the review discusses how the education system should approach e-sports. For younger generations, e-sports may be perceived as a new career path, yet it may also be viewed as a monetized form of gaming addiction. Students should be supported in evaluating e-sports as a career option realistically. Adaptations within the curriculum may be necessary to integrate e-sports as an educational and professional pathway.

Keywords: Electronic sports, e-sports, competitive gaming, career, education.

Introduction

The shaping of the world according to human needs has led to remarkable transformations in the field of technology over the past century. Technological advancements have generated significant changes across all domains, including the field of sports. Through the integration of technology, sport-specific digital programs have been developed, sports have been introduced to broader audiences, and numerous improvements have been achieved within the sporting sector.

While technology has played an essential role in the development of sports, it has also enabled the emergence of entirely new branches within the discipline. As a result, a new concept has entered the world of sports: e-sports (electronic sports). Many people are still unfamiliar with this term. However, e-sports possesses its own star players, fan bases, teams, jerseys, leagues, and competitive systems-differing only in the fact that all activities occur online or via local networks, with players often remaining physically stationary [1].

In the literature, e-sports also appears under terms such as electronic games, cyber games, or online gaming. Globally, its most recognized name is competitive gaming. Over the years, the number of e-sports viewers and followers has consistently increased. For example, while 8.5 million people watched the League of Legends World Championship final live in 2013, the same number of viewers watched that year's NHL Stanley Cup finals. In 2014, the League of Legends final reached 27 million viewers, whereas the NBA finals attracted 18 million viewers. It is predicted that the gap between such figures will continue to widen in the future.

E-sports is a sport branch built upon online games. Although there is no universally agreed-upon definition of electronic sports, it is generally equated with professional, competitive

gaming. Electronic sports can be described as a sport in which individuals from any part of the world meet online to compete, or gather at scheduled local or international large-scale tournaments to play games in person.

Among the most popular e-sports titles worldwide are Dota 2, Counter-Strike: Global Offensive, League of Legends, and Hearthstone. E-sports requires reaction time similar to that of a goalkeeper in football, strategic thinking comparable to chess, and precise timing akin to ice hockey. In essence, it incorporates various mental and physical components found in traditional sports. As noted by Dota 2 commentator Toby Dawson, Dota is often described as “a combination of chess and football” [2].

E-sports can thus be considered a sport in which individuals develop both their mental and physical abilities while engaging with information and communication technologies.

Historical development of electronic sports

Electronic sports, in fact, emerged alongside the earliest computer games, yet the concept has gained significant popularity only over the past 6–7 years. During the 1970s, with the rise of Atari, young people began playing games together in arcade halls. These arcades became fundamental spaces where gaming culture was formed and developed. With the introduction of gaming consoles, entertainment transitioned from single-player games to multiplayer experiences, marking the beginning of competitive gaming.

Rapid technological advances also influenced the gaming industry. As games transitioned onto computers, it became possible for two individuals to play together in the same virtual environment through personal computers. By the 1980s, computers began to be interconnected through networks such as ARPANET and NSFNET. During the 1990s, the emergence of the World Wide Web replaced local networks like NSFNET, creating a unified global network. As a result, the internet became globally accessible, and the establishment of internet cafés further expanded the popularity of competitive gaming [3].

With the rise of the internet and local gaming cafés, the gaming industry underwent extraordinary transformations. As the number of players increased, interest in competitive gaming grew as well. As competitive gaming evolved into an industry, prize-bearing tournaments began to appear. Prior to the 1997 “Red Annihilation” tournament in Europe, few people imagined that money could be earned from gaming. Although prize-winning tournaments were held annually thereafter, the prize pools remained modest-typically \$1,000 or \$2,500-making an electronic sports career far from appealing.

A major turning point in the dramatic expansion of prize pools occurred in 2011. Valve entered into an agreement with the creators of the original Dota (based on Frozen Throne) and released Dota 2. In the summer of 2011, Valve organized The International, featuring a prize pool of \$1,600,000. From this moment on, the gaming sector began to be viewed as a legitimate career path. The prize pool of The International continued to rise each year. By the summer of 2016, the tournament reached a prize pool of \$20,770,460, with the winning team receiving \$9,139,000.

With the rapid growth of the gaming industry, the concept of a professional gaming career emerged. Professional e-sports athletes are now considered on par with athletes in traditional sports. As the gaming sector became recognized as a sport and prize pools reached unprecedented levels, a career in professional gaming became increasingly attractive. Students’ interest in traditional sports has declined, while their engagement with e-sports has risen. Today, many students envision earning their livelihood through playing games or streaming their gameplay [4].

E-sports and traditional sports

Sport, initially an individual activity, later acquired a social dimension and spread widely across communities. Numerous definitions of sport have been proposed throughout history. According to one definition, sport is a cultural phenomenon that develops an individual's abilities, enables socialization, fosters integration with society, improves mental and physical well-being, and is practiced individually or collectively as a leisure activity under specific rules or as a full-time professional occupation. Another definition describes sport as a biological, pedagogical, and social endeavor that enhances physical activity, motor skills, mental, emotional, and social behaviors within a structured framework, and aims to test these abilities through competition. In general, sport may be defined as a set of physical and mental activities governed by specific rules and techniques, performed for physical development, enjoyment, and competition.

When e-sports is evaluated within the framework of sport definitions, both similarities and differences emerge. Both are practiced individually or in teams. Success in both requires superior individual skill compared to competitors, as well as high levels of coordination, synchronization, and teamwork. Both involve cognitive effort, and precise timing is crucial in the execution of movements and decisions. However, while traditional sports are conducted in physical environments, e-sports take place in virtual settings. The primary distinction is that traditional sports require significantly more physical exertion. E-sports, on the other hand, require comparatively minimal financial resources, whereas traditional sports demand considerable branch-specific financial support. For e-sports, possession of a computer and gaming equipment is generally sufficient.

Traditional sports consist of various branches such as football, basketball, and volleyball, each with its own tournaments and leagues. E-sports is not very different in this respect. It includes multiple categories-such as League of Legends, Dota 2, and Counter-Strike: Global Offensive-each having its own leagues and annual tournaments. Most of these games are 5-vs-5 strategy, adventure, or action titles, though single-player competitions such as StarCraft also exist. A general comparison indicates that e-sports games and traditional sports branches both possess competitive leagues and structured tournaments, and both require tactical and strategic thinking [5].

According to some scholars, individuals pursuing e-sports careers are also real athletes. Research shows that e-sports players exhibit similar physical demands, stress levels, excitement patterns, and neural activation in brain regions as traditional athletes. For example, both a marathon runner and an e-sports player may reach heart rates of approximately 160–180 beats per minute during performance. Despite such similarities and differences, there is no full consensus on whether e-sports should be classified as a discipline within the traditional definition of sport. E-sports can also be considered an entirely separate field of study. Many people still view e-sports as trivial or illegitimate. The primary reason for this misconception is that the majority of e-sports followers belong to younger generations. A decade ago, young people admired football and basketball alongside adults. Today, however, while younger generations are increasingly drawn to e-sports, adult interest in this area remains limited. Consequently, the rapid growth of the e-sports audience often goes unnoticed by adults, who have never regarded gaming as a sport and therefore lack knowledge about e-sports.

Certain groups strongly oppose classifying computer games as a sport. When evaluated in terms of physical exertion, the distinction between basketball or football and activities such as chess or Jenga becomes evident. While football requires continuous bodily movement, Jenga involves merely lifting and placing small wooden blocks. Should Jenga then also be considered a

sport? The argument regarding insufficient physical effort is frequently used by those who deny e-sports' legitimacy as sport.

Despite ongoing debates, interest in e-sports increases exponentially each year. While the global e-sports fan base was 58 million in 2012, it rose to 89 million in 2014, and it is estimated to reach 145 million in 2017. In 2014, although 2.2 billion people worldwide showed interest in traditional sports, only 1.6 billion actively participated in them. These figures indicate that the number of e-sports followers is expected to reach extraordinary levels in the coming years. As discussions continue over whether competitive gaming should be considered a sport, it is increasingly evident that e-sports has already evolved into a significant industry [6].

A global evaluation of e-sports

E-sports has been highly popular in Asian countries such as South Korea and China for more than a decade. With increasing recognition from Western countries, e-sports has rapidly expanded and continues to grow. The rise in the number of e-sports followers has already been discussed, yet a further question arises: How has e-sports spread so quickly? This growth cannot be explained solely by the interest of the younger generation; other factors are also influential. One of the most significant factors is the enormous financial volume within the gaming industry.

Research on e-sports revenues reveals striking findings. According to a report published by Newzoo, the gaming industry generated 130 million dollars in revenue in 2012; this increased to 194 million dollars in 2014, with revenue forecasts for 2017 estimated at 465 million dollars. However, it became apparent that these predictions were too conservative. In February 2017, Newzoo reported that global e-sports revenues had already reached 696 million dollars. Newzoo further projected that this figure would rise to 1.5 billion dollars by 2020.

How does the industry reach such massive financial levels? Two of the most critical contributors are the investments made by game publishers and the role of sponsorships. Game developers promote their games by organizing large-scale tournaments with substantial prize pools. As previously mentioned, the prize pool of The International Dota 2 Tournament 2016 reached nearly 20 million dollars. Valve does not finance the entire prize pool alone; instead, it engages the gaming community. There is competition even among users themselves: Dota 2 and League of Legends players frequently debate which game is superior or more popular. Users also invest in their preferred game to elevate its standing.

This is where the compendium and pool system comes into play. Users design cosmetic items, costumes, and equipment for game characters and sell them to other players through the platform. Revenue is distributed among the platform (e.g., Steam for Dota 2), the user who created the item, and the tournament prize pool. This cycle functions like a positive feedback mechanism- as contributions increase, the pool grows, encouraging users to invest even more [7].

Additional contributions to the prize pool come from ticket sales, advertisements, and sponsorships. Tickets for major championships are sold, and a portion of the sales is added to the prize pool. Teams and tournament organizers also have their own sponsors. Each team receives sponsorship income and pays salaries to players. However, these salaries vary significantly across regions: while players in China and Indonesia may earn around \$400 USD per month, players in Europe often earn around \$1600 USD. Players typically keep up to 80% of their prize money, with the remainder allocated to the team.

Major tournament sponsorships are often provided by companies such as ASUS and Monster. Throughout the year, these sponsors organize tournaments offering prize pools ranging from \$250,000 to \$1 million. Even amateur players can easily participate in competitions. Daily small-prize tournaments worth \$50, and monthly tournaments offering \$10,000, are common (Heaven, 2014). E-sports players join qualifiers throughout the year to secure spots in major

tournaments and compete for large prizes. Considering that every game category has its own prize structure, it is unsurprising that e-sports revenues continue to grow rapidly.

As the demand for e-sports increases, it has also started to find its place within the education system. Universities in China and Malaysia now offer Dota 2 courses. E-sports is taken so seriously in East Asian countries that governments themselves provide support. For example, when Chongqing Energy College in China opened a Dota 2 course, approximately 100 students applied immediately. These courses involve analyzing important past games, developing team coordination, producing real-time strategies during gameplay, and engaging in group discussions [8].

Similar practices have begun to emerge in Western countries in the form of gaming houses. Students spend weekends practicing in such environments. Some Western universities even offer scholarships to students who possess a professional e-sports license.

Conclusion

E-sports has now become a legitimate career option, with its follower base reaching remarkable numbers within a relatively short period of 6–7 years. As the interest of younger generations shifts from traditional sports toward e-sports, adults largely remain unaware of this transition. This study discussed the growth of e-sports over the years and the reasons behind young people's increasing interest in it. The pleasure derived from gaming and the extraordinarily large prize pools offered in tournaments make e-sports even more attractive.

However, when considering that a child must compete against millions of global rivals to succeed in an e-sports career, early engagement with computers, spending long hours gaming, and developing strategic skills become prerequisites. Under such circumstances, the risk of becoming addicted to gaming becomes inevitable.

Researchers continue to debate the psychological, cognitive, and physical effects of video games. The transformation of gaming into a professional career through e-sports adds a new layer of complexity to the debate. Despite being considered a career, e-sports does not guarantee financial stability, and most players end their careers before the age of 30. With millions aspiring to become professional gamers, only a very small percentage succeed, raising concerns about long-term career planning.

Some countries have begun integrating e-sports into their education systems. Universities in China and Malaysia now offer gaming courses, and some even provide scholarships for professional e-sports players. Yet, considering the realities of the digital age, an important question arises: Should students truly be encouraged to pursue an e-sports career? In many schools, even students who cannot become professional players aspire to become game streamers. This leads to further questions about whether educational institutions should recognize e-sports as a potential career path.

Perhaps the solution lies in helping students maintain a balance between gaming aspirations and academic success. Many adults still perceive the idea of building a career through computer games as irrational and unacceptable. However, the world is increasingly moving in this direction, and the growing desire among young people to pursue e-sports should not be ignored.

A clear disconnect exists between educators and the e-sports generation. While parents often remain unaware of this trend, educators must not remain uninformed. Considering rising unemployment among university graduates, the sense of hopelessness felt by the younger generation, and their inclination toward gaming as a potential career is understandable. The education system is already challenged by issues such as substance abuse and behavioral

problems. Without proper understanding of e-sports, an additional gap between educators and students may emerge in the coming years.

An e-sports career may manifest either as a monetized form of gaming addiction or as a path where significant effort yields limited returns. Currently, e-sports is simply unknown to many parents and educators. As a potential future trend, it is essential for stakeholders to become knowledgeable about it. E-sports-with its advantages and disadvantages-should be presented to students in a way that allows them to make informed and healthy career decisions.

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