

The Impact of Mobile Legends and Free Fire Online Games on Interest in Playing Football Among Youth in Kampung Bugis Village, Biau District, Buol Regency

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to (1) determine the impact of playing Mobile Legends on interest in playing football, (2) determine the impact of playing Free Fire on interest in playing football, and (3) understand the difference in impact between Mobile Legends and Free Fire on interest in playing football among the younger generation in Kampung Bugis Village, Biau District, Buol Regency. This study used a quantitative descriptive method, with a population and sample consisting of 30 young people aged 15–25 years. The sampling technique utilized total sampling. Data collection techniques were carried out through observation, questionnaires, and documentation. Data were analyzed using quantitative descriptive analysis with percentages and multiple linear regression. The results showed that the Mobile Legends variable obtained an average value of 80.4%, while the Free Fire variable obtained an average value of 67.2%. Interest in playing football obtained an average value of 69%. Based on multiple linear regression analysis, the regression coefficient for Mobile Legends was 0.52, the regression coefficient for Free Fire was 0.64, and the constant was 52.61. The regression coefficient for Free Fire was larger than that for Mobile Legends in this research model. The findings indicate that Mobile Legends and Free Fire games can have both positive and negative impacts. Positive impacts include entertainment, virtual social interaction, strategic ability, coordination, and reflexes, whereas excessive use has the potential to reduce time spent on physical activities, including playing football.

Keywords: Impact, Mobile Legends, Free Fire, Interest in Playing Football, Younger Generation.

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INTRODUCTION

The development of digital technology has brought about changes in various aspects of life, including entertainment and sports. Online games such as Mobile Legends and Free Fire are increasingly favored by the younger generation, which has the potential to affect their interest in physical activities such as playing football. In modern times, Mobile Legends and Free Fire are familiar parts of daily life, particularly among today's youth; electronic games or online games have spread everywhere, even globally. Online games possess addictive qualities that can affect psychology and significantly influence an individual's interest in engaging in direct physical sports like football.

Globalization, technological advancements, industrialization, and increasingly sophisticated information systems have yielded countless technological products of various types that satisfy human needs for education, health, or mere entertainment. One technological product currently popular and exciting among students is video games and online games. Video games continue to evolve into diverse forms—including Nintendo, Sega, and online games—with online games becoming particularly trendy among youth in

recent years. Online games serve as entertainment and a source of pleasure for humans (Adiningtiyas, 2017).

Originally emerging as a medium of communication, the internet has brought significant changes to human life. As a technology, it has transformed communication such that space and time dimensions no longer pose barriers. The emergence of the internet led smartphone developers to compete in introducing various features, including online gaming. Online games are digital games playable only when devices are connected to an internet network, allowing users to connect simultaneously with other players accessing the game.

Supported by network systems such as Xbox, Nintendo, PlayStation, PC games, and smartphones, online games function not only as entertainment but also as platforms for socialization and education (Martini et al., 2018). Naturally, playing online games brings both positive and negative impacts. Playing these games without leaving the house can cause individuals to become negligent and neglect necessary obligations.

The impacts of online games can be categorized into positive and negative effects. Positive impacts include skill development, hand-eye coordination, social and collaboration skills, language development, and a source of entertainment and relaxation. Negative impacts include dependence and addiction, physical health issues, social isolation, financial impact, and stress levels (Saputra et al., 2024). When youth spend excessive time gaming, it can lead to academic decline, disrupt social life, and reduce interest in physical sports. Prolonged online gaming also negatively affects physical health, causing vision problems, poor posture, and sleep disturbances, leading youth to spend less time interacting directly with family and friends in favor of virtual activities over a healthy social life.

As online gaming grows in popularity—particularly mobile-based team games like Mobile Legends and Free Fire which rely on strategy, individual skill, and teamwork—there has been a shift in interest patterns and physical activity among adolescents and children. Football is a team sport requiring teamwork among 11 players per team on a field (10 outfield players and 1 goalkeeper), utilizing specific basic techniques such as heading, controlling, dribbling, and kicking. Beyond physical health benefits, football teaches social skills like teamwork, discipline, and sportsmanship. However, recent years show a declining interest in playing football among youth, largely attributed to the growing attraction of online games offering instant gratification, virtual competition, and digital social engagement.

Sports serve as a nation-unifying tool that shapes individual and collective character while energizing other development sectors. Physical activity performed regularly improves fitness, health, and specific skills across all ages. Initial observations and interviews with adolescents and parents in Kampung Bugis Village, Biau District, Buol Regency reveal that online gaming strongly influences youth interest in playing football, where a decline in football participation is clearly visible. The local football pitch, once bustling, has become increasingly quiet, with participation among youth aged 15–25 estimated to have dropped by 30%–50%. Youth spend 2 to 5 hours daily playing these games individually or with peers without participating in official Buol Regency e-sports events.

This study is crucial because youth currently spend more time in front of screens than in physical activities. Reduced football participation could impact physical health (sedentary lifestyle, obesity) and real-world social interaction. Notably, the local club Bahari Bugis FC won the Maninang Cup 2 open tournament (featuring 32 teams) within the last 3 years. If current trends continue, declining youth engagement in sports could

harm physical fitness, direct social skills, and the future regeneration of professional football talent locally and nationally. Thus, this study examines the impact of Mobile Legends and Free Fire on youth interest in playing football in Kampung Bugis Village, Biau District, Buol Regency.

METHOD

This research employs a descriptive quantitative method. Quantitative research is grounded in positivism philosophy, used to examine specific populations or samples using research instruments and statistical data analysis to test established hypotheses (Sugiyono, 2020). Descriptive quantitative research aims to systematically and factually describe phenomena, characteristics, or relationships between variables based on numerical data (Handayani, 2020).

The study was conducted in Kampung Bugis Village, Biau District, Buol Regency, from January 9, 2026, to February 11, 2026. The population comprises all youth aged 15 to 25 years residing in Kampung Bugis Village who play Mobile Legends and Free Fire and have an interest or involvement in football, totaling 30 people. Because the sample covers the entire population of 30 individuals using total sampling, this study is classified as a population research study (Asrulla et al., 2023; Sulistiyowati, 2017). Data collection was conducted via observation, questionnaires (52 items: 16 items for Mobile Legends, 16 for Free Fire, 20 for football interest), and documentation. Analysis was performed using percentages and multiple linear regression.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Data were obtained from 30 respondents aged 15–25 years using a 52-item questionnaire. The results indicate a significant divergence between digital activities and physical sports. Most respondents allocate free time to Mobile Legends or Free Fire rather than football. Dominant online gamers experience virtual social interaction and digital strategic skills, but face risks of reduced physical activity, eye fatigue, and sacrificed rest time. Conversely, youth interested in football experience positive effects on physical health, direct team cohesion, and movement discipline.

Data Description

1. Mobile Legends Variable (X1)

Data regarding Mobile Legends (X1) engagement among respondents were categorized into four response levels, as shown in Table 1 below:

Category	Interval	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	> 52	5	16.67%
Agree	45 – 51	9	30.00%
Less Agree	38 – 44	6	20.00%
Disagree	< 37	10	33.33%
Total	-	30	100.00%

Table 1. Distribution, Frequency, and Percentage of Mobile Legends (X1)

2. Free Fire Variable (X2)

Data regarding Free Fire (X2) engagement among respondents are presented in Table 2 below:

Category	Interval	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	> 50.75	6	20.00%
Agree	43.5 – 50.75	11	36.66%
Less Agree	36.25 – 43.5	5	16.66%
Disagree	< 36.25	8	26.66%
Total	-	30	100.00%

Table 2. Distribution, Frequency, and Percentage of Free Fire (X2)

3. Football Interest Variable (Y)

Data regarding interest in playing football (Y) among respondents are presented in Table 3 below:

Category	Interval	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	> 65.5	5	16.66%
Agree	58 – 65.5	1	3.33%
Less Agree	50.5 – 58	19	63.33%
Disagree	< 50.5	5	16.66%
Total	-	30	100.00%

Table 3. Distribution, Frequency, and Percentage of Football Interest (Y)

DISCUSSION

The rapid advancement of technology and information has deeply impacted human life. Mobile phones, developed for communication and social media, have become primary tools for online gaming. Online games meet primary needs for relief from boredom, yet excessive play triggers addiction, keeping youth in front of screens, reducing peer face-to-face interaction, and causing physical health issues like obesity and sleep disorders (Ganda & Hidayat, 2021; Gatot Waluyo, 2025). Sports like football offer vital alternatives to foster physical, social, and mental health.

During youth development, individuals seek identity and stress relief. However, excessive competitive gaming (Mobile Legends, Free Fire, PUBG) increases mental health risks, frustration, and distraction from academic and physical responsibilities (Tri & Siahaan, 2024). Nevertheless, online gaming can offer positive benefits like virtual teamwork and communication if managed wisely alongside physical activity (Rahman et al., 2022).

Impact of Mobile Legends on Football Interest

The Mobile Legends variable obtained an average score of 80.4%. While it develops hand-eye agility, reflex speed, English language skills, and creative thinking, excessive play leads to forgetting time/responsibilities, sedentary habits, and reduced interest in football. Regression analysis yields a coefficient of 0.52 for Mobile Legends, reflecting its role within the regression model.

Impact of Free Fire on Football Interest

The Free Fire variable achieved an average score of 67.2% (with 'Agree' being the largest category at 36.66%). Positive aspects include reflex speed, hand-eye coordination, and virtual social interaction. However, high intensity reduces physical activity time. The regression coefficient for Free Fire is 0.64.

Youth Interest in Playing Football

Interest in playing football averaged 69%, with 63.33% of respondents falling into the 'Less Agree' category. This underscores that while interest exists, sports participation faces strong competition from digital entertainment, warranting community intervention.

Difference in Impact Between Mobile Legends and Free Fire

Multiple linear regression analysis yielded the equation:

Regression Equation: $Y = 52.61 + 0.52 X_1 + 0.64 X_2$

Where X_1 is Mobile Legends and X_2 is Free Fire. Free Fire exhibited a higher regression coefficient (0.64) than Mobile Legends (0.52) in this model. Overall, both games present positive digital benefits and potential negative physical trade-offs depending on screen time.

CONCLUSION

1. Mobile Legends has a significant impact on football interest, averaging 80.4% with a regression coefficient of 0.52. It offers reflex and cognitive benefits but risks physical inactivity when played excessively.
2. Free Fire impacts football interest with an average score of 67.2% and a regression coefficient of 0.64, presenting similar trade-offs between virtual social interaction and reduced physical activity.
3. The regression equation $Y = 52.61 + 0.52 X_1 + 0.64 X_2$ demonstrates a higher regression coefficient for Free Fire than Mobile Legends in this research model. Overall football interest averaged 69%, with 63.33% in the 'Less Agree' category.
4. Balancing digital entertainment with physical sports is essential for healthy youth physical and social development.

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