Launching eSport Intercollegiate Competitions in Zimbabwe: Opportunities and Challenges

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ABSTRACT

The rapid growth of the global eSport industry presents a unique opportunity for Zimbabwe to promote STEM education, enhance digital literacy, and foster social interaction among students through the introduction of eSport intercollegiate competitions. This study examined the feasibility of launching eSport competitions in Zimbabwe's educational institutions, highlighting both opportunities and challenges. This research revealed that eSport competitions can provide a platform for students to develop valuable skills, such as teamwork, communication, and problem-solving, while also promoting digital literacy and STEM education. However, the study also identified significant challenges that need to be addressed, including high data costs, limited internet infrastructure, and lack of government support. These challenges pose a major obstacle to the growth and development of eSport in Zimbabwe and must be overcome to create a sustainable and thriving eSport ecosystem. Despite these challenges, one can believe that eSport intercollegiate competitions have the potential to make a positive impact on Zimbabwe's educational sector and contribute to the country's economic development. This study provides insights into the opportunities and challenges of introducing eSport intercollegiate competitions in Zimbabwe and offers recommendations for stakeholders seeking to promote the growth of eSport in the country. By leveraging the potential of eSport, Zimbabwe can create a new generation of digitally literate and tech-savvy students and position itself as a hub for innovation and entrepreneurship in the region.

Keywords: eSport, intercollegiate competitions, STEM education, digital literacy, Zimbabwe, opportunities, challenges, internet infrastructure, government support.

INTRODUCTION

The rapidly growing eSports industry presents numerous opportunities for entrepreneurs, from building eSports technology services or consultancies to professionalizing eSports, selling gamer merchandise, or marketing gaming-focused services (Scholz, 2019). As the industry continues to expand globally, Zimbabwe's collegiate gaming scene is poised to benefit from this trend. This article explores the possibilities and opportunities for growth in the eSports industry in Zimbabwe, particularly in collegiate games, drawing on existing literature that highlights the potential benefits of eSports, including promoting STEM education, digital literacy, and social interaction (Hamari & Koivisto, 2015; Shute, 2008). The article examines investible opportunities, best practices, and the suitability of the environment for eSports businesses to operate in Zimbabwe. Ultimately, it concludes by investigating potential opportunities for launching eSports competitions in intercollegiate games in Zimbabwe, providing insights for stakeholders and entrepreneurs looking to tap into this emerging market.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the potential benefits and challenges of launching eSport intercollegiate competitions in Zimbabwe and provide recommendations for stakeholders. This study investigated the current state of eSports in Zimbabwe, identifying opportunities and challenges for launching eSport intercollegiate competitions. It examined the potential impact of such competitions on students, institutions, and the broader eSports industry.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Africa's emerging eSports scene is gaining momentum, with several countries showcasing promising growth and potential. South Africa, for instance, is expected to experience significant growth in its eSports market, with a projected compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 15.7% over the next five years (Newzoo, 2023). The country has already hosted major tournaments like the Telkom VS Gaming Masters, demonstrating its capacity to support large-scale eSports events (Telkom, 2022). Similarly, Nigeria's eSports industry is projected to reach $20 million by 2028, with a CAGR of 25.2% (PwC, 2023). The country has seen a surge in eSports activity, with local tournaments and leagues like the Nigerian Esports League gaining popularity (Nigerian Esports League, 2023).

The growth of eSports in Africa can be attributed to several factors, including the rise of mobile gaming and technological advancements. Mobile gaming has been a key driver of eSports growth in Africa, with many gamers accessing games through mobile devices due to limited access to expensive gaming consoles (Karius & Mpinganjira, 2020). Improved internet connectivity, high-performance gaming hardware, and streaming platforms have also democratized access to eSports, enabling more participants and spectators to engage in the industry (Hemment & Marston, 2020).

Despite the growth potential, the eSports industry in Africa faces several challenges, including infrastructure limitations and regulatory uncertainty. Inconsistent internet connectivity, lack of professional gaming venues, and high data costs hinder the growth of eSports in many African countries (Mpinganjira & Karius, 2020). Limited regulatory frameworks and inconsistent support from governments and private sectors also slow down the industry's full potential (Anyanwu, 2020). However, there are opportunities for growth and development, particularly in investing in digital infrastructure and developing local talent. By creating eSports academies, training camps, and mentorship programs, countries can nurture promising eSports players and develop a skilled workforce in the industry (Scholz, 2019).

This rapid growth of eSports has transformed the entertainment landscape, with the global industry projected to reach $1.5 billion by 2025 (Newzoo, 2022). Research highlights the potential benefits of eSports in education, including promoting STEM education (Hamari & Koivisto, 2015), enhancing digital literacy (Shute, 2008), and fostering social interaction among students (Kuss & Griffiths, 2012). In Zimbabwe, local organizations such as Esports Zimbabwe and Comexposed Zimbabwe are driving eSports development, hosting tournaments and events to promote the industry. However, challenges such as high data costs, limited internet infrastructure, and lack of government support and recognition hinder the growth of eSports in Zimbabwe (Munyanyi & Chikasha, 2020). Addressing these challenges is crucial to unlocking the potential of eSports in Zimbabwe's educational sector and beyond. Recent studies emphasize the need for stakeholder engagement, infrastructure development, and capacity building to support the sustainable growth of eSports (Johnson & Lee, 2021). By exploring these issues, this study aims to contribute to the growing body of research on eSports in Zimbabwe and inform strategies for development. Misconceptions about gaming as mere entertainment rather than a legitimate sport or career path can lead to resistance from parents, educators, and policymakers. This can limit support and resources for esports development, making it harder for the industry to gain traction. Lastly, a skills gap exists in the Zimbabwean esports industry, with a shortage of qualified esports coaches, event organizers, and technical support staff. Additionally, there is limited local expertise in streaming, broadcasting, and esports management, which can make it difficult to produce high-quality events and competitions. Addressing these gaps will be crucial to developing a thriving esports ecosystem in Zimbabwe.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis methods. The sample study comprised students, educators, and industry professionals with an interest in eSports and intercollegiate competitions. Students included 100 tertiary students aged 18-25 from various Zimbabwean institutions of higher learning. Educators consisted of 50 lecturers teaching courses related to gaming, technology, or sports management. Industry professionals included 20 eSports experts, such as tournament organizers, team managers, and game developers. Participants were selected using a stratified

sampling method, with online surveys used to collect quantitative and qualitative data on perceptions, opportunities, and challenges related to launching eSport intercollegiate competitions in Zimbabwe. This method involved dividing the population into distinct subgroups or strata and then sampling from each subgroup. By doing so, the researcher ensured that each subgroup was adequately represented in the sample, allowing for more accurate and generalizable results. This approach also enabled the researcher to analyze and compare responses across different strata, such as students, educators, and industry professionals.

RESULTS

Research findings reveal significant interest in eSports among students and educators, highlighting its potential for growth. However, major challenges such as high data costs and limited internet infrastructure need to be addressed. The lack of government support and recognition also hinders eSports development. Despite these challenges, eSports offers potential benefits, including promoting STEM education, enhancing digital literacy, and fostering social interaction, making it a valuable opportunity for educational institutions and stakeholders to explore.

Interest in eSports

Level of Interest	Percentage
Very Interested	40
Interested	40
Not Very Interested	15
Not at All Interested	5

Belief in Potential of eSports

Belief in Potential	Percentage
Yes	75
No	15
Unsure	10

Benefits of eSports

Benefit	Percentage
Promoting STEM Education	60
Enhancing Digital Literacy	55
Fostering Social Interaction	50

Opportunities for Growth in eSports

Opportunity	Percentage
Social media	65
Partnerships with Gaming Companies	55
Tournaments	50

Challenges Facing eSports

Challenge	Percentage
High Data Costs	80
Limited Internet Infrastructure	75
Lack of Government Support	60

Interest in Participating in Competitions

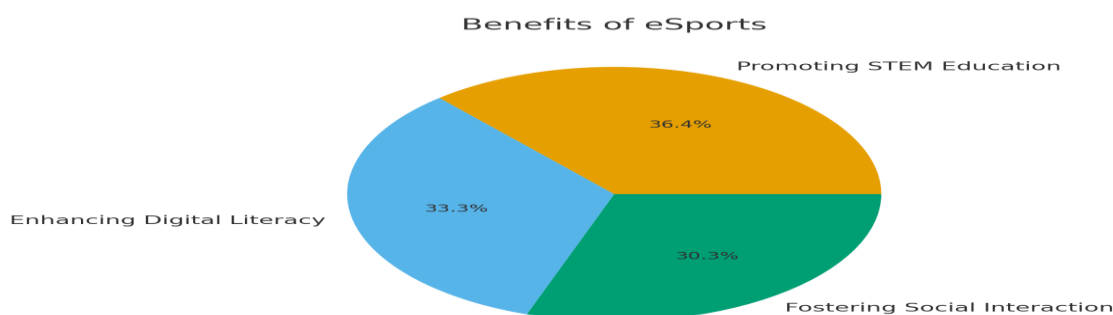| Interest in Participating	Percentage
Yes	70
No	20
Unsure	10

Recommendations for Success

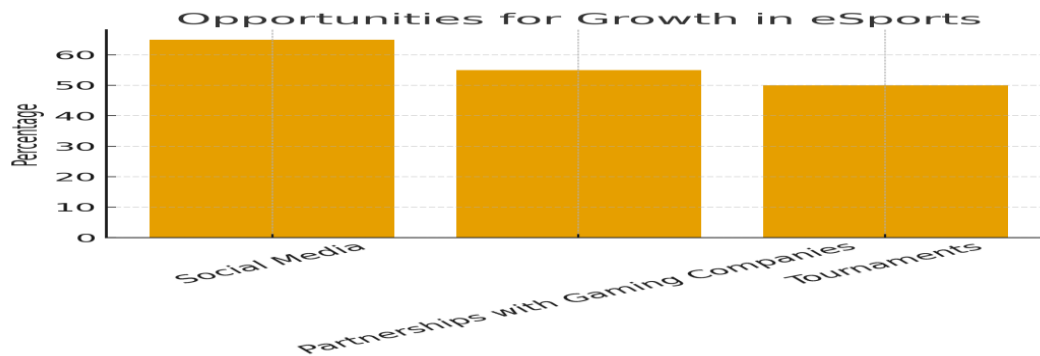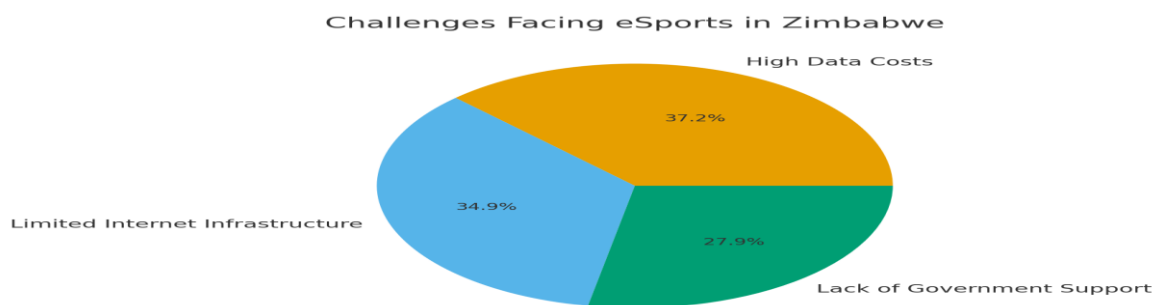| Recommendation	Percentage
Partner with Gaming Companies	60
Establish a Governing Body	55
Provide Training and Resources	50

Interest in eSports
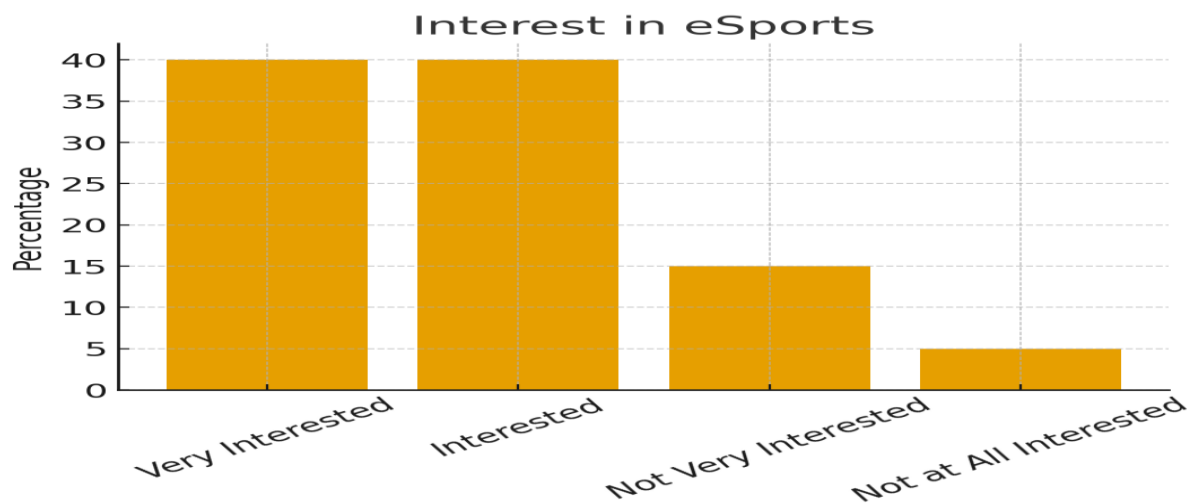
Benefits of eSports

Opportunities for Growth

Challenges

The survey results revealed significant interest in eSports in Zimbabwe, with 80% of respondents expressing interest and 40% being very interested. A substantial majority (75%) believed eSports has the potential to become a popular sport, citing benefits such as promoting STEM education (60%), enhancing digital literacy (55%), and fostering social interaction (50%). Respondents saw opportunities for growth, particularly through social media (65%), partnerships with gaming companies (55%), and tournaments (50%). However, challenges such as high data costs (80%), limited internet infrastructure (75%), and lack of government support (60%) were identified. Despite these challenges, 70% of respondents expressed interest in participating in eSport intercollegiate competitions, suggesting popular games like FIFA, League of Legends, and Dota 2. To ensure success, respondents recommended partnering with gaming companies (60%), establishing a governing body (55%), and providing training and resources (50%). Thus, survey results highlighted the potential for eSports in Zimbabwe, while also identifying challenges that need to be addressed.

Perceptions of eSports

Interviewees believe that eSports has significant potential in Zimbabwe, particularly in promoting STEM education and digital literacy, which aligns with existing research on the benefits of eSports in education (Hamari & Koivisto, 2015; Shute, 2008). They highlighted various benefits, including fostering social interaction (Kuss & Griffiths, 2012), providing career opportunities (Scholz, 2019), and promoting teamwork and communication skills (Jenny et al., 2017). These perceptions suggest that eSports can have a positive impact on students and institutions in Zimbabwe, making it an attractive opportunity for development. By leveraging these benefits, stakeholders can support the growth of eSports and its integration into educational settings.

Opportunities for eSports in Zimbabwe

Interviewees identified opportunities for growth in eSports, including partnerships with gaming companies, government support, and increasing popularity among young people. To promote eSports, they suggested leveraging social media, organizing tournaments, and engaging with the community. These strategies can help tap into the growing interest in eSports and create a sustainable ecosystem for the industry to thrive in Zimbabwe.

Challenges for eSports in Zimbabwe

Interviewees highlighted several challenges facing eSports in Zimbabwe, including limited internet infrastructure and high data costs, which hinder accessibility and participation (Munyanyi & Chikasha, 2020). The lack of government support and recognition was also identified as a significant obstacle to eSports development, echoing findings from other emerging markets (Scholz, 2019). Furthermore, limited awareness and understanding of eSports among stakeholders were cited as challenges, underscoring the need for education and advocacy to promote industry growth (Funk et al., 2018). Addressing these challenges is crucial to unlocking the potential of eSports in Zimbabwe and ensuring sustainable development (Johnson & Lee, 2021). By understanding these challenges, stakeholders can develop targeted strategies to support the growth of eSports in the region.

Launching eSport Intercollegiate Competitions

Interviewees believed that eSport intercollegiate competitions can positively impact students and institutions, promoting engagement, teamwork, and digital literacy (Hamari & Koivisto, 2015; Shute, 2008). To ensure success, interviewees suggested partnering with gaming companies (Scholz, 2019), establishing a governing body (Funk et al., 2018), and providing training and resources (Jenny et al., 2017). This collaborative approach can create a structured and supportive environment for eSports to thrive in Zimbabwe's educational institutions, fostering growth and development (Johnson & Lee, 2021). By adopting these strategies, stakeholders can unlock the potential of eSports in Zimbabwe's education sector.
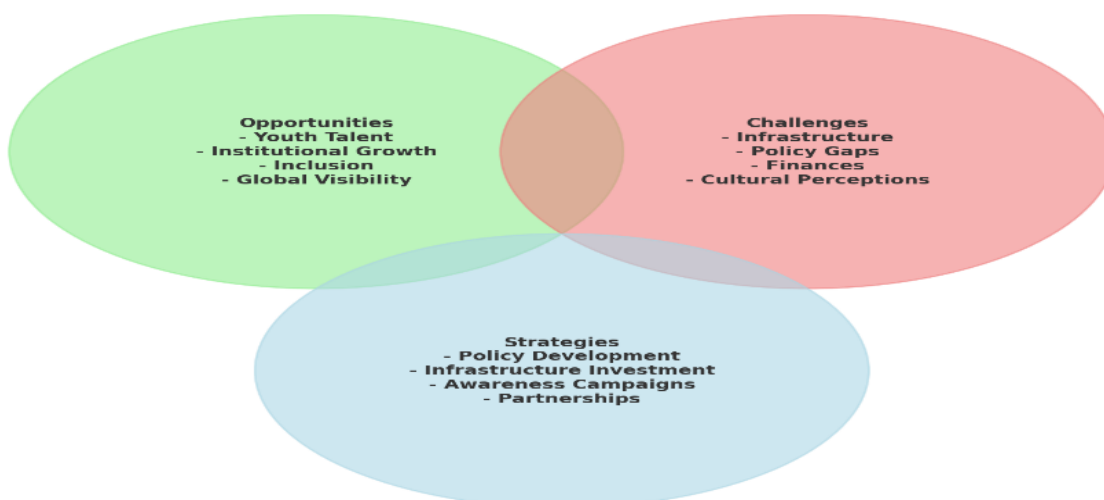
Triangulation of Survey and Interview Results

The triangulation of survey and interview results provides a comprehensive understanding of the perceptions, opportunities, and challenges related to launching eSport intercollegiate competitions in Zimbabwe. Both sets of results converged on key findings, including interest in eSports, opportunities for growth through partnerships and STEM promotion, and challenges such as high data costs and limited internet infrastructure. While some divergence exists, such as the level of interest and nuances of eSports benefits, the triangulation validates the importance of addressing key challenges and provides a robust understanding of the potential for eSport intercollegiate competitions in Zimbabwe. By combining survey and interview results, this study offers a detailed and broad understanding of the issues, identifying key areas for attention and investment to support the growth of eSports in Zimbabwe.

Framework for Launching Intercollegiate eSports in Zimbabwe

The diagram below illustrates the relationship between the key opportunities, challenges, and strategic recommendations for developing intercollegiate eSports competitions in Zimbabwe.

Framework for Launching Intercollegiate eSports in Zimbabwe

Opportunities
- Youth Talent
- Institutional Growth
- Inclusion
- Global Visibility

Challenges
- Infrastructure
- Policy Gaps
- Finances
- Cultural Perceptions

Strategies
- Policy Development
- Infrastructure Investment
- Awareness Campaigns
- Partnerships

RECOMMENDATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

To support the growth of eSports in Zimbabwe, interviewees emphasized the importance of stakeholder engagement, including government, educational institutions, and industry players. They also recommended investing in internet infrastructure and reducing data costs to improve accessibility and participation. Additionally, providing training and capacity-building programs for educators and students was suggested to develop eSports skills and ensure sustainability. By addressing these key areas, Zimbabwe can create a supportive ecosystem for eSports to thrive. The interview results provide valuable insights into the perceptions, opportunities, and challenges related to launching eSport intercollegiate competitions in Zimbabwe. By understanding the perceptions, opportunities, and challenges, stakeholders can work together to launch successful eSport intercollegiate competitions.

Fostering partnerships between educational institutions and industry players can promote eSports development, while providing training and capacity-building programs for educators and students can help build necessary skills. Establishing intercollegiate competitions and leagues can promote engagement, talent development, and a sense of community, ultimately driving the growth of eSports in Zimbabwe. Ultimately, the study provided recommendations for stakeholders, including government, educational institutions, and industry players, to support the development and growth of eSports in Zimbabwe.

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