


Chapter 2

Skills Reloaded: Harnessing Esports for Communication and Collaboration Development in College

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ABSTRACT

This study explores how collegiate esports programs can develop essential communication and collaboration skills among Generation Z college graduates. Given Gen Z's digital nativity and preference for interactive learning, the research examines esports' role in enhancing soft skills. Using a social constructivist framework, the study reviews video content and podcasts from five collegiate esports programs, identifying frequent demonstrations of teamwork, communication, and time management. Findings suggest that esports can bridge the gap between education and workforce requirements, highlighting its potential in cultivating a competent and adaptable workforce. Future research should develop rubrics for assessing soft skills in esports, conduct longitudinal studies on career outcomes, and explore specific esports genres' impact on skill development.

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INTRODUCTION

Some say that Generation Z (children born between 1997-2012), the second generation after Generation X (children of the 70s and 80s), college graduates, and today's workforce managers mixed about as well as oil and water. Generation (Gen) Z, the *location-aware* generation, is now entering the workforce with different perspectives and goal aspirations than previous generations (Aggarwal et al., 2022). This generation is distinguished by its digital nativity, having grown up with smartphones, social media, and instant access to information. Huss (2023) refers to them as the post-millennials, who account for approximately 2.47 billion individuals. Early exposure to technology has changed the communication styles, learning preferences, and career expectations of this cohort.

Global factors and past experiences, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, have led Gen Z to prefer participating in online learning. The pandemic significantly accelerated the adoption of digital learning platforms, compelling educational institutions to pivot to online modes of instruction almost overnight. Nearly 100 million students worldwide enrolled in web-based courses (Vlasova, 2022). This shift has highlighted how Gen Z leverages technology for their education. Still, it has also underscored the challenges educators face in engaging this tech-savvy yet attention-challenged generation.

Research indicates that Gen Z students value flexibility, personalization, and interactive content in their educational experiences (Yu, 2020). They are less inclined to respond to traditional didactic teaching methods and more likely to thrive in environments that offer real-time feedback, multimedia resources, and collaborative opportunities. Integrating gamification, virtual simulations, and other innovative pedagogical tools has been shown to enhanced their learning outcomes (Duterte, 2024; Li et al., 2023).

To build on this, Gen Z's approach to knowledge acquisition is often pragmatic and goal-oriented. They seek practical skills and knowledge that can be directly applied to their career aspirations (Nikolić & Lazarević, 2022). This contrasts with previous generations' more theoretical and abstract learning preferences (Nikolić & Lazarević, 2022). This has implications not only for educational institutions, but also for employers who must adapt their training and development programs to meet the expectations of this generation in the emerging workforce.

Given these characteristics, educators and employers must both understand and adapt to Gen Z's unique needs and preferences. By doing so, they can better harness this generation's potential, ensuring that their technological proficiency and innovative spirit are effectively channeled toward personal and professional growth. To explore this connection further, this chapter presents a qualitative study analyzing how collegiate esports participation contributes to the development of soft skills in

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