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<div align="center">Exploring and Teaching Literacy with League of Legends</div>

Introduction

Much to the chagrin of parents worldwide, both children and young adults spend a large portion of their leisure time playing video games. Many are concerned that this time is going entirely to waste or that their children are not doing anything worthwhile. However, this might not be the case. Research shows that spending time playing video games can have many benefits, such as improving your literacy skills (Gumulak). One game that could help is League of Legends, a popular and strategy-heavy online game that constantly requires players to read and comprehend text. The game is full of lore and information that you need to understand to succeed. In order to win, you need to be able to communicate with your teammates and utilize the multitude of information presented to you. This requires you to have—or learn—good reading comprehension and other literacy-related skills, many of which can apply to different walks of life. This topic interests me because I have been an active League player for many years now, so I know just about everything you can about the game. I have always been interested in how people can learn life skills from video games. I will explore how literacy plays into the game and how the game may be able to teach literacy, and to do so, I will go over how individual players can affect their team's performance, the team structure within the game, and the effects of ranking and player distinction.

Review of Literature

How Individuals Can Affect Team Performance

In order to properly convey my research, I have grouped my sources into three different categories. This is the first of those categories where we go over how individuals can affect the performance of their team. Many League players believe a game is over as soon as one player decides to give up. This seems especially true in lower-ranked games, where players lack the technical knowledge they need to win without one of their team members. Furthermore, many lower-elo players have less experience working together with randomly assigned teammates. This is where literacy comes in: players must communicate with their teammates to coordinate their strategies or try and motivate players that want to stop playing.

The primary reason a player might affect the performance of the team as a whole is anti-social or otherwise toxic behavior. These are umbrella terms for negative behavior, such as insulting other players or trying to lose by choice. Players will typically act like this if something makes them mad, like dying repeatedly or if a teammate "steals" an objective they decided would rightfully be theirs. It's also worth mentioning that some players will queue for a game with the sole purpose of messing with their teammates. Players that engage in this behavior are referred to as "trolls." In my experience, many games of League devolve into name-calling and insults, which means that whatever team is able to better regulate their emotions has the advantage. This leads me to emotional regulation in online games like League. Many players, even players that are typically level-headed, find that they get extremely emotionally invested in winning. This can cause them to be exasperated to the point of rage when something does not go as they expect it to. Thus, players either need to have good emotional regulation skills or the necessary literacy skills to help other players calm down (Kou, "Emotion Regulation").

Team Structure Within the Game

The second source category goes over how teams are structured within League. The game is designed so that each team is composed of five players, and each player is given their own unique role. The game map is divided into three lanes and one jungle area for each team, and players disperse throughout the space accordingly.

Figure 1. The Summoner's Rift map in League with various important areas marked.

The roles are as follows: top lane, middle lane, bottom lane, the support—which helps the bottom lane player in their lane—and the "jungler," who gets the jungle on their team's side. The jungle is highlighted in either red or blue, depending on the team. These roles are designed to

promote synergy and balance within the team, giving each player something to do and allowing them to work together to win the game. Literacy comes in when you realize that not everything goes as smoothly as the players might hope—sometimes a player does not want to play the role the game assigned them, or sometimes a player is just trying to be difficult.

One issue with the aforementioned team structure is that, due to the game's massive popularity and the relative randomness by which teams are selected, you will likely never play more than a single game with the same players. The game divides players into teams based on their average performance, not caring about how these players might work together as a team. Players have to learn good teamwork skills and play nicely with other players they have never met before, which can pose a challenge to some (Kou, "Playing with Strangers").

Another topic worth mentioning is the professional side of League, in which the opposite happens. Teams are created months or years in advance from players at the highest possible level, and they practice relentlessly under an assigned coach. This is a separate form of literacy that is not experienced by most players of the game (Mora-Cantallops).

The Effects of Ranking and Player Distinction

The last category goes over how ranking works and the effects of player distinction within that ranked system. Many players find that ranking up and achieving distinction among their peers is the main reason they are motivated to continue playing the game. Players who play the ranked modes tend to take the game more seriously and become more likely to spend money on in-game items. Therefore, it is important for the developers of the game to create systems that promote ranked gameplay as well as player retention.

The ranking system in League works as follows: players queue for a game in a separate mode that has been specifically designated for competitive play. Based on their performance in this mode, they are divided into ranks. The ranks available to players at the time of writing are Iron, Bronze, Silver, Gold, Platinum, Diamond, Master, and Challenger in order of worst to best. The vast majority of players, however, are ranked between Bronze and Gold. Players in any other rank are statistical outliers, and players among the top ranks achieve great distinction and popularity (Kou, "Ranking Practices"). The best Challenger players are constantly contacted by esports agencies hoping to recruit them onto a professional team. This leads me further into professional League gameplay. At the highest level, players can join premade teams of players to compete with other such groups in big, sponsored tournaments. In doing so, players may win thousands or millions of dollars in prize money.

Professional gameplay is something many players dream of one day participating in. This is just one of the many methods League uses to retain players. Other methods include getting players hooked on in-game transactions or trying to control how likely players are to win games based on how much they have played the game recently (Demediuk).

Methodology

Interviewing a Player

I am fortunate enough to have a friend who was willing to sit through an interview about his experiences with League of Legends and his interactions with other players. It was important to me that the interviewee had a long history with the game and was highly knowledgeable. My friend, who has been playing since he was eleven and has always been a great source of information on League of Legends, fits my criteria perfectly. I contacted him via Discord and

presented him with seven questions about the game, his experiences, and the connection between League of Legends and literacy. The list of questions can be found in the first appendix section. The interview questions were sent on November 29, 2022, and I received his answers the very next day. His responses were helpful and added to the information I had already gathered from the sources in the Literature Review section. Overall, the interview helped to further my understanding of the relationship between League of Legends and literacy.

Surveying Fellow Students

To complement my interview-based approach, I created a survey using Google Forms and distributed it to a number of students from the University of Central Florida in a Discord server dedicated to League of Legends. All members of the server are currently enrolled in the university and likely fall into the 18-24 age group. The survey consisted of nine questions, which were similar to the interview questions but should provide a more statistically-based means of answering my questions. In total, I received 39 responses to the survey. The questions I asked in this survey are featured in the second appendix section. My aim in creating this survey was to use the results to draw some clear conclusions about League of Legends and its relationship to literacy.

Strengths and Limitations

One of the most significant drawbacks of my research methods is that all of the participants are of the same age group and attending the same college, which could lead to a lack of statistical variety in their responses. Ideally, I would have spoken to the survey respondents in person or further screened them before asking any questions. Also, since the survey was sent out

randomly, some respondents may not have put as much effort into answering the questions as others. I liked my interview more than my survey, but I feel that I could have done better. The questions were not as detailed as I had hoped, and the responses were not as insightful. Nevertheless, there is still a lot of valuable information to be gleaned from this, so I am not overly concerned. I trust the respondent's answers, as they are an experienced and informed player of the game.

Results

Interviewing a Player

The player I interviewed mentioned that they had been playing the game for seven years, beginning when they were eleven. This is consistent with the addition of champion Ekko, which they remembered was added just before they started to play. Their father taught them to use the popular website, MOBAFire, to learn how to play champions and what items to build. This website is still frequently used, featuring a large community of users who upload detailed guides to help other players.

This player reported spending a great deal of time viewing educational YouTube videos about League of Legends, with some videos focusing on the game in general and others on specific champions or mechanics. Additionally, this player watched League videos meant solely to entertain and has also investigated the lore behind the game, exploring the backstory of one of the champions they play (Appendix A, 3). Furthermore, this player watched Arcane, a popular League-based animated show released by the game's creators in partnership with Netflix. The show focuses on the background of two major cities in the game's world: Piltover and Zaun. Aside from MOBAFire, this player also used websites such as League of Graphs and LoLalytics.

League of Graphs rates the player's performance in past games, while LoLalytics provides detailed statistics on champions and the win rate for each set of items the player can choose.
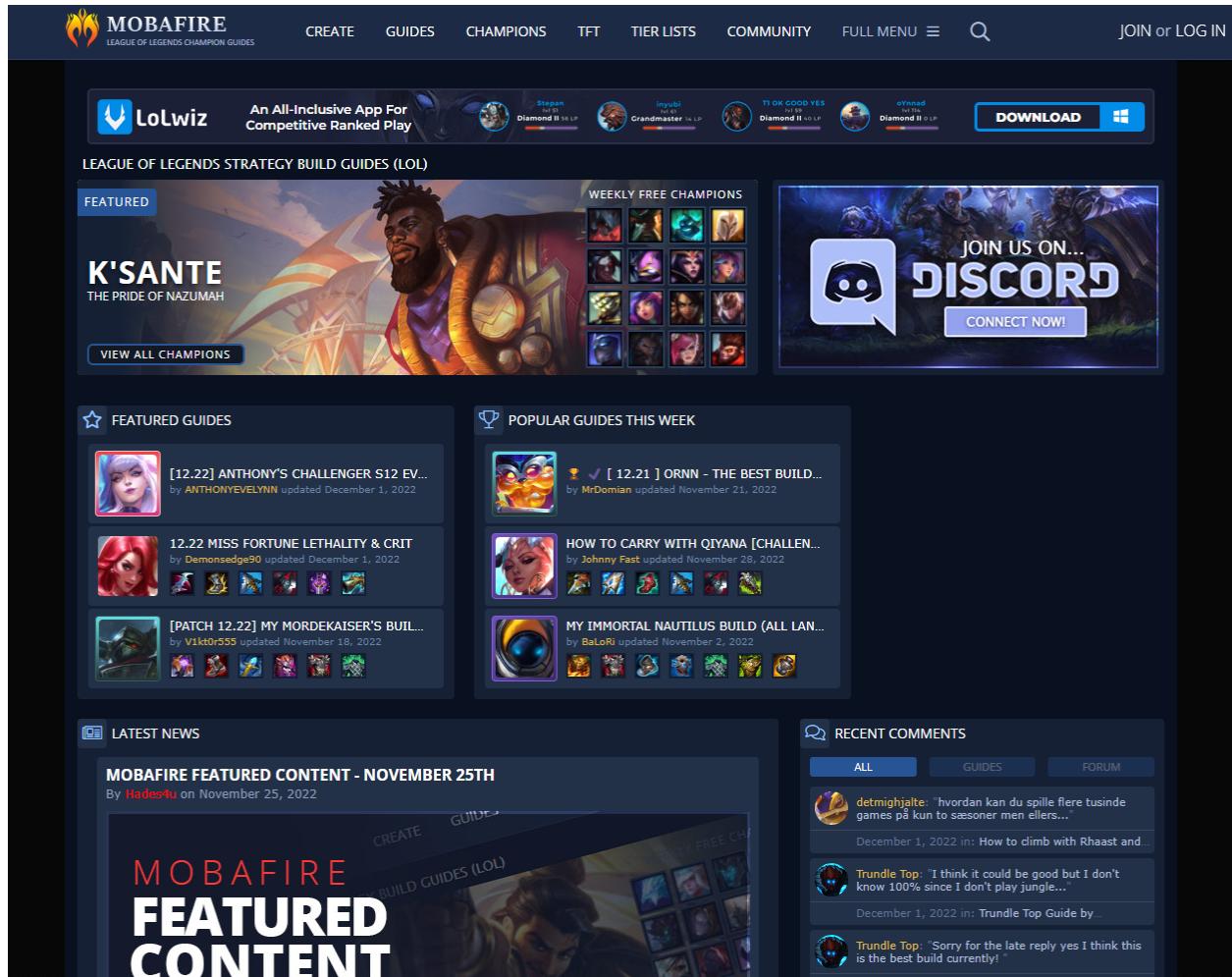

Figure 2. The homepage of the MOBAFire (mobafire.com) website at the time of writing. Notice how the site provides both guides and a forum section for players.

When asked how often they play the game, the player responded that they usually play with their friends for a couple of nights each week. They noted that they had made friends while playing League but don't believe it to be an effective way to meet new people. The player also

mentioned that they expect to encounter toxic players each time they open the game, and this is such a common occurrence that "it's more of a given" than a surprise (Appendix A, 6). The player believes that games often spiral out of control when players start arguing.

The final question posed to the player was about the relationship between the game and literacy. In response, the player suggested that this depends on the definition of literacy, but they believe there is a connection. They attribute some of their knowledge of the English language and their ability to use computers and websites to search for information to League.

Surveying Fellow Students

I surveyed 39 students on their League of Legends habits and opinions in relation to literacy. Most played between 0-2 hours (35%), 2-4 hours (33%), 4-6 hours (18%), or 6+ hours (14%) per week. Additionally, 15% had played the game for less than a year, 47% had played for 1-3 years, and 38% had played for more than three years. When asked how they communicated with their peers about League, 18% said they used the in-game chat, 5% used the game client's chat system, 46% used Discord/Skype/Teamspeak, 3% spoke in person, and 28% used another method. The majority of respondents (92%) reported having witnessed toxic behavior in the game, with 64% of them admitting to participating in it. Additionally, 38% of respondents said they used statistic-tracking websites, and 85% had read or watched League's lore. 74% had watched League esports matches, and when asked if they felt League had improved their literacy, 51% answered affirmatively, while 49% answered negatively.

Discussion

There are many different ways you can interpret literacy, and after my research, I have a grasp on how a game like League of Legends could help teach it. To gain a better understanding of this concept, I conducted both an interview and a survey. The interviewee was able to provide a much more detailed look into his thoughts on the subject, but I can't ignore the results of the survey, either. Even if only half of the survey takers believed that League of Legends taught them something about literacy, this still implies that the game has the potential to be used as an educational tool.

One statement from my interviewee that particularly resonated with me was that "League taught [him] some of what [he] know[s] about English" (Appendix A, 7). This reminded me of a study conducted by Akdeniz University in Turkey, which concluded that students could become more proficient in the English language by playing and communicating in League of Legends (Şimşek). Since many of the people who answered my survey played the game with their friends, it makes sense that the younger players would be exposed to more of the English language. It could be a discussion among friends, or it could be a bunch of people insulting each other back and forth. Regardless, exposure to the English language leads to curiosity, which fosters education.

Additionally, the interviewee discussed how League of Legends provided education in technological literacy by teaching him how to use a computer, how to navigate websites, and how to gather the information he needed from these websites. As mentioned in the earlier sections, both our interviewee and many of the survey takers have used many websites in conjunction with their League of Legends gameplay. Some such sites include League of Graphs, LoLalytics, and MOBAFire (Appendix A, 4). These sites provide knowledge about the game and

reading content for players of all ages. Longer guides include up to or over four thousand words, which is the same length as this research paper. League players will read these guides to get better at their champions and then, without even realizing it, start to grasp concepts in the English language better.

Overall, it is evident that League of Legends has the potential to be used as an educational tool to teach literacy. Through both the survey and the interview, it was made clear that the game has helped people gain a better understanding of the English language. Additionally, the game has helped people gain a better understanding of technological literacy by teaching them how to use a computer and navigate websites. Although the game may not be the most practical way to teach literacy, it can certainly be a valuable tool in doing so.

Appendix A: Interview

1. How long have you been playing League of Legends? How old were you when you first started playing the game?

  I've been playing League of Legends for many years now, and I began back when the champion Ekko was released. That makes it seven years now that I've been playing, which means I was eleven when I started.

2. What sort of resources did you use when learning how to play the game? This can include anything you believe might have helped you.

  My dad introduced me to the game, and he told me that I should use a website called MOBAFire to figure out how to play each champion. He wanted me to start with a champion named Annie, so he had me look her up on MOBAFire and find out what was viable. I also watched many educational YouTube videos on how to play the game or champions I was interested in.

3. Have you consumed any League-related content? Even something as simple as looking further into the backstory of one of the champions counts.

  Besides the educational side of YouTube, I've also watched a ton of entertainment-based League videos. I've looked a little bit into the backstory of one of the main champions I play as well, since I was curious. And, if it counts, I watched Arcane back when it came out.

4. Do you use any websites in conjunction with your gameplay? This could be a statistic-tracking website or a website you use to look up your enemies before the fight.

  I use a website called League of Graphs to see how I've done in the past games I play, and I've moved from MOBAFire to LoLalytics to see what I should build.

5. How often do you play the game with your friends? Have you met people through League, or do you play with friends you already knew outside of the game?

  Almost every time I play League I'm playing with some of my friends. We usually play whenever we aren't busy with classes, so a couple nights per week. I've met some old friends through League, but I wouldn't say it's the greatest game for meeting new people.

6. How often do you come across toxicity in the game? How often do you see people arguing while playing the game?

  Every time I open up League I prepare myself to encounter toxic players. At this point it's more of a given than a "Will it happen today?" However, I can say that I see toxic players more in the ranked mode rather than casual play. Generally, as soon as players start arguing, the game spirals out of control.

Appendix A: Interview — Continued

7. Being as detailed as possible, how do you think the concept of literacy relates to League? Do you think the game influenced how you learned the English language?

  I think that, depending on how wide your definition of literacy is, League definitely relates to literacy. You can learn a lot about literacy from the game—since I started back when I was eleven I'm pretty sure League taught me some of what I know about English. Also, the game drastically improved my ability to use computers. It taught me how to search through websites for information I needed, among other things.

Appendix B: Student Survey Questions

1. How often do you play League of Legends?
   ● Zero to two hours per week.
   ● Three to five hours per week.
   ● Six to eight hours per week.
   ● Nine or more hours per week.

2. How long have you been playing League of Legends?
   ● I've been playing for under one year.
   ● I've been playing for one to three years.
   ● I've been playing for more than three years.

3. What is the best way to communicate about League of Legends?
   ● The in-game chat.
   ● The game client's chat system.
   ● Discord/Skype/Teamspeak.
   ● In person.
   ● Another way.

4. Have you seen toxic behavior in League of Legends? [y/n]

5. Have you participated in toxic behavior in League of Legends? [y/n]

6. Do you utilize statistic-tracking websites? [y/n]

7. Have you read/watched any of the League of Legends lore? [y/n]

8. Have you watched any League of Legends esports games? [y/n]

9. Do you feel like League of Legends has improved your literacy skills in any way? [y/n]

Appendix C: Student Survey Results

1.

Zero to two hours.	14
Two to four hours.	13
Four to six hours.	7
Six or more hours.	5

2.

Under one year.	6
One to three years.	19
More than three years.	14

3.

The in-game chat.	7
The game client's chat system.	2
Discord/Skype/Teamspeak.	18
In person.	1
Another way.	11

4. 36 yes | 3 no
5. 25 yes | 14 no
6. 15 yes | 24 no
7. 33 yes | 6 no
8. 29 yes | 10 no
9. 20 yes | 19 no

Appendix D: Interview Consent Form

Exploring Literacy in League of Legends
Jackson Benson for ENC1102_CMB-22Fall 00179

The purpose of this study is to gain insight from League of Legends players of varying skill levels and ideologies as related to human literacy. It is important to understand what participating in this research study will entail. If there are any questions, please contact the researcher for more information.

This interview will be conducted via a survey on Google Forms. A series of questions will be asked which the participant should answer based on their own personal opinions of the topic. The interview will take roughly ten minutes to complete.

The results of this interview will remain confidential and I will not be collecting emails or other identifiable personal information. There are no risks associated with completing this study. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You can withdraw from the study at any time, for any reason, without incurring any cost.

If you have any further questions about the study, please contact jelricb@knights.ucf.edu. Sign below if you have read and understand the above text and agree to take part in the study.

Participant's Signature _____ Date _____
Investigator's Signature _____ Date _____

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