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## Exploring Literacy in League of Legends

### **Introduction**

Much to the chagrin of parents all around the world, children and young adults spend a large portion of their leisure time playing video games. Many are concerned that this time has gone to waste, and that their children are not doing anything worthwhile. However, this may not be the case. In fact, research shows that spending lots of time playing video games can have many benefits, including improving literacy skills (Gumulak). One such example is League of Legends (hereafter League), a 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 in order to be successful. In order to win, you have 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 be applied in other walks of life. This topic interests me because I have been playing League for many years now, and I have a lot I can say about it. I will be exploring how literacy plays into the game, and to do so I will go over how individuals can affect team performance, team structure within the game, and the effects of ranking and player distinction.

## **How Individuals Can Affect Team Performance**

In order to properly convey information, I have grouped my current sources into three different categories. This is the first category—where we go over how individuals can affect team performance in League. Many players believe that one bad player can drag an entire team down with them if they decide to give up. This seems especially true in lower-ranked games, where players might not have the best technical knowledge of how the game works on a professional level. Furthermore, lower-elo players have less experience working together with their assigned teammates. This is where literacy comes in: players need to communicate with their teammates to coordinate their strategies or to try and motivate a player that has given up to continue playing the game.

The primary reason a player might affect the performance of the team as a whole is antisocial behavior. This is an umbrella term for negative behavior (also called toxic behavior) like putting other players down or trying to lose on purpose. Players typically do this if something makes them mad, like dying repeatedly or their teammate “stealing” an objective they thought to be “theirs” (Kou, “Regulating Anti-Social Behavior”). In my experience, many games of League devolve into name-calling and insulting, which means that whatever team is able to better regulate their emotions has the advantage.

This leads me into emotional regulation in games like League. Many players, even players that are typically level-headed, find that they can get extremely emotionally invested into games like League. This can cause them to be exasperated to the point of anger when something does not go as they expect it to. Thus, players need to have good emotional regulation skills, or the necessary literacy skills to help players calm down through the in-game chat box (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 teams are composed of five players, each with their own unique role. The game map is divided into three lanes and one jungle area for each team, and players are dispersed throughout the space accordingly. The roles are as follows: top lane, middle lane, bottom lane, the support (which helps the bottom lane player), and the jungler. These roles are designed to promote synergy and balance within the team, giving each player something to do and allowing the team 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 gave them, or sometimes a player is just trying to be difficult.

One issue with the aforementioned team structure is that, if you play alone, you will likely never play more than one game with the same teammates. Matches are made with random players in League, with no thought given to whether the players might work together as a team. Players have to be good at working together as a team with other players they have never met before, which can be a challenge to some (Kou, “Playing with Strangers”).

Another topic I can mention is the professional side of League, in which the opposite happens. Teams have been made months or years in advance and they have been practicing with each other near-daily since then under a coach. This is a separate form of literacy not experienced by most players of the game (Mora-Cantallos).

## **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 often take the game more seriously and become more likely to spend money on in-game items. Therefore, it is important for the game developers 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 assigned a rank. The ranks available to players are currently Iron, Bronze, Silver, Gold, Platinum, Diamond, Master, Grandmaster, and Challenger. 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 from their peers (Kou, “Ranking Practices”). The best Challenger players are constantly contacted by esports agencies hoping to recruit them onto a professional team. This leads me into professional League gameplay. At the highest level, players join a premade team of players and compete with other such teams in tournaments. In doing so, players can win thousands or millions in prize money.

Professional gameplay is something 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).

## Conclusion

The majority of the sources listed above contribute knowledge to the field, however a couple of them actually contain possible changes. For example, the sources about regulating anti-social behavior or emotional regulation on the player's side. I consider these sources strong in the fact that they are well-written professional research papers that were submitted to and published by legitimate journals. Furthermore, many of them relate to my topic, which leads me to their weaknesses. Many of these sources do not touch on literacy, which is why I plan to add some more semi-related sources (about video games in general rather than just League) in order to tie the ideas together. Another downside is that many of these sources are from six or seven years ago, which is a very long time in the gaming world. The relevant information to my paper remains mostly unchanged, however core game mechanics need to be updated. Thus for the initial steps of my research I was thinking about looking through the sources and seeing if there is anything I can take note of on my end that might have changed in recent years. I also want to look into any literacy-related aspects of the game myself, rather than trying to find sources related to them.

## Works Cited

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