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Validation Analysis to Integrate Esports into Existing Tourism Education

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Abstract

This study explores the integration of esports education into tourism curricula, focusing on the development of an "Esports Fundamentals" course at Kyoto University of Foreign Studies. By analyzing student feedback from existing game-based and event management courses, we identify key areas where esports education can enhance tourism studies. The research provides insights into curriculum design that bridges traditional tourism education with the emerging esports industry, addressing the growing demand for specialized skills in this sector. There were four primary aims with this research:

- To assess the relevance of esports education in tourism curricula.
- To identify key components for an Esports Fundamentals course based on existing course feedback.
- To propose a curriculum design that integrates esports with traditional tourism and event management studies.
- To explore how esports education can prepare students for emerging career opportunities in tourism.

A mixed-methods approach was used, analyzing survey data and student testimonials from Game Based Tourism and Online Event Management courses. Results showed strong student interest in game-based and technology-driven approaches to tourism. Students demonstrated proficiency in applying game design principles to tourism contexts and expressed belief in the career relevance of these skills. The study revealed a need for specialized esports education within the tourism curriculum to address industry trends and student interests. The study concludes that integrating an Esports Fundamentals course into tourism curricula is both timely and valuable. The proposed course, encompassing global esports event business models, event design, streaming for destination marketing, and esports management, builds upon existing coursework while addressing the unique aspects of the esports industry. This curriculum innovation positions students at the forefront of the emerging esports tourism sector, equipping them with specialized knowledge and skills for diverse career opportunities.

Keywords: Esports, Tourism Education, MICE Tourism, Curriculum Design, Game Based Learning

Highlights

- First study to propose esports curriculum integration in tourism higher education
- Analyzes student feedback to inform esports course design
- Identifies key components for an Esports Fundamentals course in tourism studies
- Demonstrates the relevance of esports education to tourism career preparation
- Provides a framework for curriculum adaptation in response to industry trends

Introduction: The Esport Olympic Games

This study investigates the rationale and design for introducing a new "Esports Fundamentals" course into the curriculum of the Department of Global Tourism at Kyoto University of Foreign Studies. The research builds upon a 2024 study, which identified a perceived value in esports studies among tourism students. Our purpose is to examine how this new course can complement existing coursework and meet the evolving needs of students preparing for careers in the rapidly growing esports tourism sector (Hawkinson, 2024). To achieve this, we analyze student surveys and testimonials from two existing courses closely related to esports: Game Based Tourism and Online Event Management (as part of MICE [Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions] Tourism). These courses provide a foundation in game design principles, event management, and technology integration in tourism contexts. By examining student experiences and perceptions in these courses, we aim to identify key areas where an esports-specific course can enhance the curriculum and prepare students for the unique challenges and opportunities in esports tourism. A central research question guiding this study is: How can an Esports Fundamentals course be designed to effectively build upon existing tourism coursework while addressing the specific needs of the esports industry in a tourism context?

Esports in Contemporary Tourism

With the rise of esports tourism, sports tourism, which was once only connected with live sporting events, has changed, morphing into 'hybrid' events where online and live participants mix. This new aspect centers on competitive events in electronic sports that take place in specific locations as well as online. As in more traditional sports tourism, esports tourism incorporates regular tourist activities including dining, hotel, and entertainment in addition to the virtual aspect of the events, which are both online and in-person (Çetin & Coşkuner, 2021). This hybrid model has challenges and opportunities in tourism contexts, including the ability to market destinations to new markets, and allowing participants to participate remotely, at little cost. For these reasons, past research as pointed to advantages of developing tourism destinations like Central and South America, as the events are accessible to a large number of online participants and only need to host a relatively small number of in-person visitors and thus the ratio of facilitation needs to number of participants could potentially be very high (Leon et al., 2022). This could allow for high exposure and low-cost marketing to take place at the same time as lower-cost small to mid-size event hosting. This means less developed MICE organizations that at least have some technical expertise could host events with large numbers of participants but only need to host a small percentage of them at the destination (Çetin & Coşkuner, 2021).

Esports in Higher Education

The rapid growth of the esports industry in recent years has driven increased interest in esports education at the university level. As the economic and cultural importance of esports has expanded, higher education institutions have begun developing academic programs to prepare students for careers in this emerging field (Scott et al., 2021; Jenny et al., 2021). The first esports degree program appears to have been offered in 2004 by Danube-University Krems in Austria. This was followed by programs focused on esports performance and broadcasting at Chunnam Techno University in South Korea in 2007 and Ahlman College in Finland in 2016. More widespread adoption began in 2018, with Becker College in the United States, Staffordshire University in the United Kingdom, and Kajaani University of Applied Sciences in Finland each launching undergraduate esports degrees (Jenny et al., 2021). Since then, the number of esports academic programs has grown rapidly. A comprehensive inventory identified 95 esports bachelor's degrees, master's degrees, technical degrees,

certificates, or undergraduate minor programs offered by 74 higher education institutions globally as of early 2021. The majority of these programs are concentrated in North America and Europe, with 44.6% located in the United States and 17.6% in France. Most (80%) focus on esports business topics such as management and marketing (Jenny et al., 2021). However, there is not yet consensus on what an esports curriculum should include. Existing programs tend to span a wide variety of disciplines beyond computer science, including live events management, sports science, marketing, video production, and community management (Scott et al., 2021). This multidisciplinary nature creates challenges for traditional degree pathways and departmental structures. Additionally, the novelty of the esports industry makes it difficult for educators to fully understand the career prospects and skill requirements for graduates. There are calls for more research into commercial activities in the esports sector to inform curriculum development. As the field matures, there is a need to develop frameworks and model curricula to guide the design of esports programs. Despite the growth in academic offerings, esports education remains an emerging area. Continued research is needed to align curriculum with industry needs, address the interdisciplinary complexity, and establish best practices for esports in higher education. As the field evolves, educators will play a key role in preparing students for careers in this dynamic and rapidly expanding industry.

Trends in Esports-Related Concepts in Tourism Education

The rapid growth of the esports industry is driving increased interest in esports education at the university level, particularly within tourism and hospitality programs. As the economic and cultural importance of esports has expanded, higher education institutions have begun developing academic programs to prepare students for careers in this emerging field (Jenny et al., 2021; Scott et al., 2021). A key trend is the integration of experiential learning and role-play pedagogy into esports curricula. Studies have found that role-playing increases student learning, engagement, and development of industry-specific and transferable skills (Bopp & Karadakis, 2023). For example, Bopp and Karadakis (2023) implemented role-play in an Introduction to Esport course, allowing students to take on various roles in planning and executing a live esports competition. This provided hands-on experience with event management, production, broadcasting, and other key industry functions. Another trend is the focus on understanding the “Gen Z” consumer, who makes up a large portion of the esports audience. Esports courses emphasize topics like digital marketing, social media engagement, and creating personalized experiences that appeal to younger demographics (de Freitas, 2021). There is also growing attention on the economic impact of esports events on local tourism and hospitality industries. Curriculum developers are grappling with the multidisciplinary nature of esports, which spans areas including business, media production, technology, and sports science. Programs are taking varied approaches, with some offering specialized esports degrees while others integrate esports content into existing majors. There is not yet consensus on standard curriculum components, though common areas include esports business/management, media production, event management, and game design (de Freitas, 2021; Jenny et al., 2021; Scott et al., 2021). The lack of an established governing body for esports presents challenges for developing standardized educational programs. However, it also creates opportunities for universities to help shape industry standards through their curricula and research. Partnerships between academia and industry are becoming more common to ensure programs align with workforce needs (Bopp & Karadakis, 2023; de Freitas, 2021). As esports continues to grow, tourism and hospitality programs are recognizing the need to prepare students for careers in this space. Key focuses include experiential learning, understanding “Gen Z” consumers, economic impacts, and navigating the multidisciplinary nature of the industry (Bopp & Karadakis, 2023; de Freitas, 2021; Jenny et al., 2021; Scott et al., 2021).

Initial Studies in Student Perceptions

The integration of esports into higher education tourism curricula represents a significant development in adapting to evolving industry trends. A recent study conducted by Hawkinson (2024) explored student attitudes towards esports and its perceived relevance to careers in the tourism and MICE industries. This research provides crucial insights that inform the current approach to curriculum development. The study revealed a spectrum of engagement with gaming among tourism students, with a majority identifying as casual gamers and a notable minority actively participating in or spectating esports events. This baseline of familiarity with gaming culture suggests a potential receptiveness to esports-related educational content (Hawkinson, 2024). A key finding was the discrepancy between personal interest in esports and the perceived career relevance of esports knowledge. While not all students expressed strong personal interest in studying esports, there was widespread recognition of its potential value in future tourism industry careers. This perception aligns with the growing significance of esports events within the MICE sector (Hawkinson, 2024). The research also indicated substantial student interest in enrolling in esports-related courses or programs, suggesting a readiness for curriculum innovation in this direction. Notably, students proposed diverse esports event concepts beyond traditional competitive formats, indicating potential for creative approaches to esports education within tourism studies (Hawkinson, 2024). A pilot esports event conducted as part of the study demonstrated the feasibility of integrating such activities into an academic setting. This practical component highlighted both student engagement and logistical considerations for future, larger-scale implementations (Hawkinson, 2024). These findings collectively underscore the potential benefits of incorporating esports into tourism studies programs. They suggest that such integration could enhance students' skill sets and knowledge base relevant to emerging career opportunities in the tourism and MICE industries, while simultaneously leveraging the motivational aspects of gaming to boost engagement in educational contexts (Hawkinson, 2024).

Current Coursework Related to Esports in Tourism

MICE Tourism

The MICE Tourism course offers students a comprehensive exploration of the Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions (MICE) industry, with a specific focus on Kyoto, Japan as a case study. This course provides a unique blend of theoretical knowledge and practical application in the field of event management within the tourism and hospitality sector. Students begin by examining the MICE industry in Kyoto, gaining insights from local resources such as the Kyoto City MICE Office, Kyoto City Tourism Association, and the Kyoto Convention & Visitors Bureau. This regional focus allows for a deep understanding of how MICE tourism operates in a real-world context. The course then progresses through the five stages of event management, providing students with a structured approach to planning and executing successful events. The culmination of this learning is a hands-on project where students simulate the planning and execution of an online event within the Kyoto MICE jurisdiction. This practical component allows students to apply their knowledge in a realistic scenario, enhancing their understanding of the challenges and opportunities in the MICE industry. Throughout the course, students engage in various activities including discussions, presentations, and the development of event proposals, ensuring a well-rounded understanding of MICE tourism and event management principles.

Figure 1. Students Sharing VR tours at Future Hub, Lab for Immersive Learning and Esports

Games Based Tourism

The emergence of esports as a significant driver of tourism presents new opportunities and challenges for destination marketers and event organizers. In response to this trend, educational initiatives such as the "Game Based Tourism" course, developed by Eric Hawkinson at Kyoto University of Foreign Studies, offer valuable insights into the application of game design principles to tourism experiences (Alizadeh & Hawkinson, 2021; Hawkinson & Artemciukas, 2018). This course provides a comprehensive framework for understanding and implementing gamification strategies in tourism contexts, which can be particularly relevant to the burgeoning field of esports tourism. The course curriculum encompasses a range of topics, beginning with an exploration of the fundamental elements that constitute the game experience. This foundational knowledge is crucial for tourism professionals seeking to create engaging esports-related experiences. As Hawkinson (2013) notes in his earlier work on board game design for language learning, understanding the core mechanics of games is essential for crafting experiences that effectively motivate and engage participants.

Building upon this foundation, the course delves into gamer psychology, offering insights into player motivations and behaviors. This psychological perspective is particularly relevant to esports tourism, where understanding the needs and desires of both players and spectators is crucial for creating compelling events and surrounding tourism experiences. The course's emphasis on diverse player types aligns with the global nature of esports, potentially informing strategies for cross-cultural appeal in esports tourism initiatives. The exploration of gamification principles within the course provides a theoretical framework that can be applied to various aspects of esports tourism. For instance, the gamification of destination marketing strategies could enhance the appeal of esports venues and host cities, potentially increasing tourist engagement and length of stay. This approach resonates with Hawkinson's (2013) findings on the effectiveness of game-based approaches in educational contexts, suggesting similar benefits could be realized in tourism settings.

A key component of the course is the focus on location-based game design, exemplified by the HoloHunters project. This practical application of augmented reality (AR) technology in creating interactive, place-based experiences has direct implications for esports tourism. AR technologies could be employed to create immersive viewing experiences for esports fans, both at the venue and for remote spectators, thereby expanding the reach and impact of esports events. This aligns with broader trends in tourism technology integration, as discussed by Guttentag (2010) in the context of virtual reality applications in tourism. The course's

emphasis on rapid prototyping and iterative design, utilizing tools like Reality Labo, equips students with practical skills for creating and refining tourism experiences. In the context of esports tourism, these skills could be applied to develop innovative event concepts, interactive fan experiences, or gamified tours of esports venues and surrounding areas (Guttentag, 2010). This hands-on approach reflects Hawkinson's (2013) advocacy for experiential learning in game design education.

Moreover, the course's holistic approach to game design, encompassing elements such as narrative development and user interface design, provides a comprehensive skill set for creating cohesive esports tourism experiences. These skills could be applied to develop compelling storylines around esports events, design intuitive digital interfaces for event information and navigation, or create gamified applications that encourage exploration of host destinations. In conclusion, the "Game Based Tourism" course offers a valuable educational framework for addressing the unique challenges and opportunities presented by esports tourism. By integrating game design principles, psychological insights, and practical skills in experience creation, the course prepares tourism professionals to innovate in this emerging field. As esports continues to grow as a driver of tourism, educational initiatives like this will play a crucial role in equipping the industry with the knowledge and skills needed to capitalize on this trend effectively.

Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods approach to gather and analyze data from two existing courses: Game Based Tourism and Online Event Management (part of MICE Tourism). The methodology consisted of three main components: analysis of student reactions to the Game Based Tourism course, a survey instrument, and student testimonials. This multi-faceted approach allowed for a comprehensive understanding of student experiences, perceptions, and learning outcomes, providing valuable insights to inform the development of the proposed Esports Fundamentals course.

Study Participants

Students of coursework related to this study participated in this research in the form of optional survey and video testimonials. The courses began in 2018 and the number of students in these courses grew year after year. The average profile of the participants remained similar over the study. A large majority of participants were Japanese between ages of 18 and 21. The mix of male and female fluctuated slightly, having a close to even split between the sexes. Students were not offered anything to motivate them to participate in the study or testimonials. Most students filled out the survey near the end of the term, but only 1-5 students every year opted to submit a video testimonial.

Student Reactions to Game Based Tourism

To provide context for the survey and testimonial data, it is important to describe the final project in the Game Based Tourism course. Based on the transcript provided, the final project involved students designing their own location-based game using tools like Reality Labo. The project required students to go through several stages, including brainstorming ideas, researching locations, creating a game design document, and developing digital assets. Students were tasked with defining clear objectives for their games, mapping out player journeys, selecting key locations, and considering how to onboard players. They were encouraged to use tools like Google Maps to visualize their game's layout and progression. The project emphasized creating immersive experiences by incorporating story elements, characters, challenges, and quizzes at various locations. Students had to consider what digital

assets (such as photos, graphics, videos, or 360-degree tours) they would need to create to guide players through their game. This hands-on project allowed students to apply the game design principles and location-based gaming concepts learned throughout the course to create a practical, playable experience.

Survey Instrument

The Game Based Tourism course, which debuted in 2020, employs a comprehensive feedback mechanism to continually assess and improve its effectiveness. A key component of this feedback system is an end-of-course survey, implemented starting from 2021. This survey instrument serves as a vital tool for the instructor to gauge students' reception of the course, evaluate the relevance and utility of the content, and assess the appropriateness of the tools, software, and platforms used throughout the semester. Designed as an anonymous and optional Google Form, the survey is administered in person during the final class session, with dedicated time allocated for students to complete it. This approach ensures a high response rate and allows for immediate reflection on the course experience. The survey covers various aspects of the course, including the perceived usefulness of the material, the likelihood of applying learned skills in the future, interest in further study in the field, and, more recently, the effectiveness of specific tools like Reality Labo. By systematically collecting this data, the instructor can make data-driven decisions to refine the curriculum, adjust teaching methodologies, and enhance the overall learning experience in subsequent iterations of the course. The instrument asks a set of questions related to the satisfaction, perceived learning value, and predicted future usefulness of their course participation. Most questions are given on a 7-point Likert scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Data collection and retention statements are given along with informed consent statements are given to read and agree to before the survey was started.

Student Testimonials

As part of the Game Based Tourism course, students were given the optional assignment to create a 2-5 minute video testimonial summarizing their learning experiences and final projects. The invitation to submit a video testimonial was completely optional and there were no external motivating factors to compel students. Thus, each term there were only 1-5 videos submitted. These videos served as a reflective exercise for students to articulate key concepts they had learned and describe the location-based game design projects they had developed. The videos were uploaded to YouTube and provide transcripts that hint at insights into the students' perspectives on the course content, their learning outcomes, and the practical application of game design principles to tourism contexts. The transcripts were used to perform a simple thematic analysis where statements made to support or refute overall survey data were mentioned, such as mentions of valuable lessons learned. This information simply serves as a qualitative foundation to give further context to the survey results in the discussion and conclusion.

Results

The findings of this study provide valuable insights into the potential integration of esports education into tourism curricula, particularly through the development of an "Esports Fundamentals" course. By analyzing student feedback and experiences from existing game-based and event management courses, we have identified key areas where esports education can enhance and complement traditional tourism studies.

Survey Results

The Game Based Tourism course survey data spans four years, with varying response rates each year. Starting with 10 responses in 2021, participation increased substantially to 32 responses in 2022 and 33 in 2023, before reaching 43 responses in 2024. The data reveals a consistent downward trend in mean scores across all metrics, with the most pronounced decline occurring in 2024. Course usefulness scores decreased from 5.60 in 2021 to 4.86 in 2024, while future skills application dropped from 5.80 to 4.95 over the same period. Despite this decline, all metrics remained above the midpoint of the 7-point scale. Standard deviations remained relatively stable (ranging from 1.11 to 1.60), suggesting consistent variability in student responses despite the increasing sample size. The most substantial year-over-year decline occurred between 2023 and 2024, where all metrics showed drops of approximately 0.5 points. This pattern warrants further investigation into potential contributing factors, as it could be correlated to the drastic changes in delivery during and post pandemic and different levels of face-to-face and on-demand contents were needed.

Table 1 - Student Reactions to Game Based Tourism

Question	Metric	2021 n=10	2022 n=32	2023 n=33	2024 n=43
This course taught me useful things	Mean	5.6	5.5	5.39	4.86
	High	7	7	7	7
	Low	2	1	3	2
	StdDev	1.43	1.44	1.13	1.39
I think I will use the skills I learned in this class in the future	Mean	5.8	5.59	5.33	4.95
	High	7	7	7	7 7
	Low	2	2	2	2
	StdDev	1.47	1.32	1.24	1.36
If there were another course about this subject I would take it	Mean	5.2	5.34	5.33	4.81
	High	7	7	7	7
	Low	3	2	3	2
	StdDev	1.6	1.29	1.11	1.51
I want to keep studying this subject further	Mean	5	5.22	5.27	4.77
	High	7	7	7	7
	Low	2	2	3	2
	StdDev	1.41	1.36	1.18	1.47

Analysis of the Game Based Tourism data reveals a consistent downward trend across all metrics from 2021-2024, though scores remain above the scale midpoint. To contextualize these findings, it is valuable to examine data from the MICE Tourism course, which operated within the same institutional framework during the same period. While both courses share similar evaluation criteria, their trajectories and student responses demonstrate notable differences, particularly in terms of score stability and sample size distribution.

Table 2 - Student Reactions to MICE Tourism (Online Event Management)

Question	Metric	2021 n=24	2022 n=19	2023 n=28	2024 n=24
This course taught me useful things	Mean	5.67	5.04	5.73	5.51
	High	7	7	7	7
	Low	3	3	3	3
	StdDev	1.15	1.12	1.23	1.34
I think I will use the skills I learned in this class in the future	Mean	5.71	5.21	5.65	5.42
	High	7	7	7	7
	Low	3	3	2	3
	StdDev	0.91	1.21	1.49	1.45
If there were another course about this subject I would take it	Mean	5.33	4.75	5.38	5.12
	High	7	7	7	7
	Low	2	2	2	2
	StdDev	1.08	1.33	1.42	1.48
I want to keep studying this subject further	Mean	5.29	4.71	5.42	5.15
	High	7	7	7	7
	Low	2	2	3	3
	StdDev	1.23	1.37	1.44	1.52

The MICE Tourism course data reveals different patterns compared to the Game Based Tourism results. While both courses maintained scores above the scale midpoint (4.0), MICE Tourism demonstrated greater stability across the four-year period:

1. Course Usefulness showed less variation, ranging from 5.04 to 5.73, with 2022 marking the lowest point rather than showing a continuous decline.
2. Future Skills Application maintained relatively consistent means between 5.21-5.71, suggesting students consistently perceived professional relevance in the course content.
3. Interest in Additional Courses and Continued Subject Interest showed similar patterns, with slight fluctuations rather than the steady decline observed in Game Based Tourism.
4. Standard deviations generally increased over the four years across all metrics, indicating growing variability in student responses. This could suggest increasing diversity in student expectations or needs.

The contrast between these two courses' evaluation patterns merits further investigation. While Game Based Tourism showed consistent declines, MICE Tourism maintained more stable ratings despite similar cohorts and institutional context. This difference could reflect maturity of curriculum design, alignment with industry needs, or varying student expectations between the two subject areas. To help formalize and standardize student projects centered around location-based game prototypes for tourism, a tool called Reality Labo was introduced as a required component in the Game Based Tourism course starting in 2023. This tool aimed to provide students with a consistent platform for creating and implementing their game designs. To evaluate the effectiveness of this tool and its impact on students' learning and enthusiasm for location-based game design, a survey was conducted following the 2023 course implementation. The survey focused on three key aspects: the usefulness of Reality Labo, its ease of learning, and students' desire to create more AR games or tours after using the tool. The results of this survey, presented below, offer initial insights into the tool's reception and its potential for fostering interest in location-based game design for tourism applications.

Table 3. Student Response to Reality Labo

Question	Metric	2023 (n=33)	2024 (n=43)
Reality Labo was a useful tool	Mean	4.81	4.44
	High	7	7
	Low	2	1
	StdDev	1.11	1.71
Reality Labo was easy to learn	Mean	4.56	4.12
	High	7	7
	Low	1	1
	StdDev	1.37	1.56
I want to make more AR games/tours	Mean	4.85	4.21
	High	7	7
	Low	3	1
	StdDev	1.23	1.66

Discussion

Trend analysis

A notable trend observed in the data is the relative stability or slight decline in mean scores across the years, particularly evident in the 2024 results. This pattern warrants careful consideration. Several factors may contribute to this trend. Firstly, as the course evolves and incorporates more advanced technologies and concepts, students may face a steeper learning curve, potentially impacting their perceived ease of use and overall satisfaction. The integration of tools like Reality Labo, while innovative, might present new challenges for students, especially those less familiar with AR technologies. Additionally, the novelty effect of game-based learning in tourism education may be wearing off as such approaches become more commonplace, leading to more critical assessments by students. The COVID-19 pandemic's lingering effects on education delivery and student expectations could also play a role, with possible shifts between online and in-person learning affecting student experiences. Moreover, as the field of esports and game-based tourism rapidly evolves, there may be a widening gap between course content and the latest industry developments, potentially influencing student perceptions of relevance and utility. The higher standard deviations in recent years suggest a more diverse range of student experiences, which could indicate that the course is catering well to some students while others find it challenging to engage with the material or technology. This trend underscores the need for continuous curriculum adaptation, perhaps with more personalized learning paths to accommodate diverse student needs and backgrounds in this dynamic field.

Impact of AI Integration and Usage

A critical factor that likely contributed to the observed trends, particularly in 2024, is the dramatic increase in AI usage among students and the introduction of AI-related coursework. This shift represents a significant change in the learning environment and student approach to coursework. The integration of AI tools into the curriculum, while innovative, may have led to a period of adjustment for both students and instructors. Some students might have found the AI tools helpful in summarizing content or generating ideas, potentially reducing direct engagement with course materials. This could explain the lower scores in areas related to course usefulness and desire for further study. The higher standard deviations in 2024 might reflect the varied levels of AI adoption and proficiency among students, with some embracing the technology while others struggled to integrate it effectively into their learning process. Moreover, the introduction of AI-related content into the curriculum may have competed for attention with traditional course elements, potentially affecting students' perceptions of course focus and relevance. This rapid technological shift underscores the need for careful consideration of how AI tools are integrated into the curriculum, ensuring they enhance rather than detract from core learning objectives. Future iterations of the course may need to strike a balance between leveraging AI capabilities and maintaining hands-on, experiential learning that has been a hallmark of game-based tourism education.

Student Testimonials

The student testimonials revealed several common themes and project types. Many students emphasized how the course helped them understand game mechanics and analyze games from a developer's perspective rather than just as players. Several mentioned creating location-based games using augmented reality (AR) technology, with projects focused on familiarizing users with specific locations like university campuses or cities. For example, one student designed a game to help new students navigate the university library, while another

created a multilingual game for learning everyday expressions around campus. Students also noted challenges they encountered, such as technical issues with AR platforms or difficulties in implementing certain game features. Overall, the projects demonstrated students' ability to apply game design concepts to create engaging, educational experiences relevant to tourism and location-based learning.

The 2024 student feedback revealed a more nuanced and varied experience compared to previous years. While some students continued to find value in the course, others expressed challenges that may have contributed to the overall lower scores. Technical difficulties with course platforms and navigation were cited as significant obstacles, potentially hindering student engagement. Some students voiced a preference for in-person, collaborative learning experiences, suggesting that the online format may not have fully met their expectations. The use of tools like Reality Labo received mixed reviews, with some finding it difficult yet enjoyable, while others felt it lacked motivation. Interestingly, there were indications of students relying on AI tools to summarize course content, which may have impacted direct engagement with the material. These diverse experiences underscore the importance of continual adaptation in course design, addressing technical issues, and balancing online and in-person learning components to meet varying student needs and learning styles in the rapidly evolving field of game-based tourism education.

This study marks an important step towards adapting tourism education to the rapidly evolving digital landscape. The proposed Esports Fundamentals course represents not just an addition to the curriculum, but a strategic alignment with industry trends and student interests. As the esports tourism sector continues to grow, institutions that embrace this educational innovation will be better positioned to prepare students for the diverse and dynamic career opportunities that lie ahead. Continued research and curriculum refinement will be essential to ensure that tourism education remains at the forefront of this exciting intersection between technology, gaming, and tourism.

Limitations

This study, while providing valuable insights into the implementation of esports education in tourism curricula, has several limitations that should be acknowledged. Firstly, the sample size, particularly for the 2024 data (N=43), is relatively small, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to broader student populations. Additionally, the lack of comprehensive demographic data on participants restricts our ability to analyze how factors such as age, gender, or prior gaming experience might influence perceptions and outcomes. The study also relies heavily on self-reported data, which can be subject to response bias. Furthermore, the research is limited to a single institution, potentially overlooking variations that might exist across different educational contexts or geographical regions. The longitudinal aspect of the study, while valuable, covers only a short period, which may not fully capture long-term trends or the impact of rapidly evolving technologies in the field. Future research should address these limitations by expanding the sample size, collecting more detailed demographic information, incorporating data from multiple institutions, and extending the timeframe of the study to provide a more comprehensive understanding of esports education in tourism curricula.

Future Research

As the esports industry continues to evolve, future research should focus on tracking the outcomes of this course, including student satisfaction, career placements, and its impact on local esports and tourism industries. Regular curriculum reviews and updates will be crucial to ensure the course remains relevant and effective in preparing students for this dynamic field.

Ultimately, the Esports Fundamentals course has the potential to position Kyoto University of Foreign Studies at the forefront of esports tourism education, equipping students with the skills and knowledge needed to thrive in this rapidly growing sector.

Conclusion

This study has examined the rationale and design for a new "Esports Fundamentals" course within the Department of Global Tourism at Kyoto University of Foreign Studies. Building on Hawkinson's 2024 study, which highlighted the perceived value of esports studies among tourism students, our research analyzed student surveys and testimonials from two existing courses: Game Based Tourism and Online Event Management (part of MICE Tourism).

The findings reveal a strong student interest in game-based and technology-driven approaches to tourism, with students consistently expressing the belief that these skills will be applicable to their future careers. The Game Based Tourism course demonstrated students' ability to apply game design principles to tourism contexts, particularly through the creation of location-based games using augmented reality technology. Meanwhile, the MICE Tourism course provided a solid foundation in event planning and execution, with a focus on online contexts and local industry relevance. These results, viewed through the lens of curriculum studies, suggest that an Esports Fundamentals course would not only be well-received but would also fill a crucial gap in the current curriculum. The proposed course aligns with key principles of effective curriculum design, including relevance, progression, integration, experiential learning, and technology literacy. Based on these findings, we propose that the Esports Fundamentals course should encompass several core components. These include the study of global esports event business models, event design specific to esports, streaming and broadcasting for local destination marketing, esports management, technology in esports, and the impact of esports on tourism development. By incorporating these elements, the course would provide a comprehensive introduction to the field while building upon and complementing the existing curriculum. The introduction of this course represents a timely and valuable addition to the Global Tourism curriculum. It responds to industry trends, student interests, and the need for specialized knowledge in this emerging field. By building on the strengths of existing courses and addressing the unique aspects of esports, this new course will prepare students for diverse career opportunities at the intersection of esports, events, and tourism.

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