Abang Mohamad Porkan (second left) greets the young players upon his arrival at Sibu Indoor Stadium.

Competitors truly engrossed in their game during the Sibu Esports Festival 2025, staged at Sibu Indoor Stadium.

Many people incorrectly perceive esports as mindless entertainment, but it is actually a strategic and structured activity.

Peter Boon
peterboon@theborneopost.com

Opportunities generated from digital battlegrounds

This is the first article of a two-part series on this global phenomenon, which discusses the possibility of it being incorporated into the school curriculum

ABDUL TAIB ROSLI

PROF ALAN TING

DATUK FELICIAN TEO

BY 2025, the global audience of electronic sports, or esports, is anticipated to exceed 640 million people, comprising 318 million avid fans and 322 million occasional viewers.

What began as a niche hobby has transformed into a global phenomenon, attracting massive audiences and generating billions in revenue.

The Asia-Pacific region is at the forefront, accounting for over 57 per cent of all esports spectators – China and the Philippines already representing 40 per cent of the worldwide fan base.

In the global esports market, the user base is projected to reach 896 million by 2029.

Worldwide, esports market revenue is expected to hit US$4.8 billion this year.

This revenue is projected to grow at an annual rate (compound annual growth rate in 2025-2029) of 5.56 per cent, leading to an estimated market volume of US$5.9 billion by 2029.

Economically, esports fosters local employment, boosts tourism, and encourages technological advancements around major events.

Culturally, esports celebrities have a significant impact on young people worldwide, and gaming is increasingly being integrated into educational curricula and public policy by governments and educational institutions.

Many people incorrectly perceive esports as simply mindless entertainment, but it is actually strategic and structured, requiring discipline, specific skills, and involvement in various professional roles.

In his view, Sibu Resident Abang Mohamad Porkan Abang Budiman says esports is no longer just a leisurely activity.

Speaking at the recent Sibu Esports Festival (SIESF) 2025, he noted its growth into a global industry that had opened up new opportunities in digital entrepreneurship, talent development and professional careers.

According to Sibu Division Esport Association (SDESA) president Abdul Taib Rosli, esports can help foster teamwork, critical thinking, digital literacy, and student engagement.

"It also creates inclusive communities for students who may not be involved in traditional sports or activities.

"Students learn strategic thinking, communication, leadership, time management, stress control, and even technical skills like streaming, 'shoutcasting', and also event organising," he told thesundaypost.

Abdul Taib said at the launch of the 'Honor of Kings Inter-School Esports Tournament' at Methodist Pilley Institute (MPI) in May this year, he had suggested the establishment of esports clubs in schools that showed interest.

"Should this initiative be of interest to the Sibu District Education Office, we at SDESA are willing to collaborate and provide information to the office towards facilitating the implementation (of esports clubs) at the school level.

He added that the activity could train students to think quickly, strategise and make sound decisions under real-time pressure.

Sibu MP Oscar Ling, meanwhile, pointed out esports as being more than just fun or entertainment.

"It also teaches important life values, in addition to promoting

teamwork.

"Whether you're coordinating an attack, defending the base, or adjusting strategies on the fly, you're relying on your teammates, and they're relying on you.

"This type of collaboration builds trust, communication, leadership and emotional intelligence.

"You learn how to win graciously, and how to lose with dignity.

"You learn that success isn't about doing everything yourself, but about doing your part for the team," said Ling, whose text-of-speech was read out by his special assistant Irene Wong at the 'Honor of Kings Inter-School Esports Tournament' in MPI.

Educationist Datuk Felician Teo believed that esports held great appeal for a wide range of students from diverse backgrounds.

"It will be beneficial to some students who may not be interested in traditional sports or clubs, but are interested in video games.

"Esports can motivate students who are easily distracted or lacking in interest and motivation in their studies.

"Esports is not just about playing video games. Students can learn valuable tech skills and roles which are highly

transferrable to academic or work settings," he said.

Teo added that esports could engage students in a competitive setting to help them set goals and achieve them.

"These are invaluable skills vital for future employment," he pointed out.

Integration into educational frameworks

The esports industry not only supports a wide array of specialised roles, but it also intersects with Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) fields, promoting skills that are highly valued in high-tech careers.

In this regard, Abdul Taib believed that esports could be integrated into the formal school curriculum.

"Yes, through subjects like Digital Media, Information and Communications Technology (ICT), Physical Education (for cognitive fitness), or even an elective module.

"Esports also supports STEM learning, psychology, and entrepreneurship components."

University of Technology Sarawak (UTS)'s School of Computing and Creative Media dean, Associate Prof Dr Alan Ting, pointed out that esports aligned perfectly with the digital and co-curricular strategy by

bridging game development, creative media and competitive innovation.

"At UTS School of Computing and Creative Media, esports is not treated as an isolated activity, but as an ecosystem that synergises with our Bachelor of Mobile Game Development (Honours) programme.

"Our curriculum includes courses such as Game Programming, Mobile Game Engines, Artificial Intelligence (AI) for Games, and Game Business and Marketing – all providing students with both the technical skills and the strategic understanding needed in esports.

"We also encourage student-led esports events, 'game jams', and content creation as co-curricular engagements," he said.

Question on career path

Asked about how schools could better prepare the students for actual careers in esports, Ting said as a start, they could go for curriculum integration.

"It's like our (UTS) inclusion of AI, multiplayer game design, and analytics.

"In addition, schools can go for industry partnerships with game studios, streaming platforms, and esports teams.

"It's also good to expose the students to live events and competitions where they can

take on roles beyond playing: for example, organising, streaming, doing analytics, and marketing."

Ting encouraged schools to get involved in research and innovation projects, encouraging them to explore solutions in training simulations, virtual-reality (VR) esports, or ethical AI matchmaking.

"By embedding esports into both teaching and hands-on experiences, we help students transition seamlessly into professional roles."

Abdul Taib's suggestion called for schools to organise or open the access to workshops, mentorship with industry professionals, exposure to tournament setting-ups, career talks, or even exposing the youths to technical and vocational education and training (TVET) pathways.

Adding on, he said Esports Integrated (ESI) had been working closely with the SDESA in promoting National Esports Development Guidelines (NESDEG).

According to Ting, esports is considered a viable career path for aspiring students, with it now being a significant part of the digital economy with professional opportunities spanning far beyond playing.

Echoing Ting's view, Teo pointed out that esports could be a viable career path.

"It is a big and growing industry that presents many pathways for students to develop careers in marketing, event management and game development – just to name a few.

"Students can also move on to pursue degrees and other related qualifications or courses.

Ting remarked: "Employers are increasingly looking for candidates with technical proficiency in game development, AI, and software tools.

"Additionally, potential candidates need to possess analytical thinking and creativity, which are enhanced through projects like the 'Final Year Project' and 'Mobile Game Deployment' courses.

"Teamwork, leadership, and

communication are the skills emphasised in our 'Professional Development and Leadership Skills Module'.

"Real-world experience can be gained from programmes such as our industrial-training semester and project-based coursework.

"Esports experience demonstrates resilience, adaptability and cultural fluency in digital communities, which are highly valued traits."

Does Malaysia has the infrastructure, talent pipeline?

Ting expressed confidence of Malaysia being well-positioned to support esports as a mainstream career path.

"We have a young, digitally-connected population, increasing Internet accessibility, and growing institutional support.

"Through initiatives like our Bachelor of Mobile Game Development, we are creating a talent pipeline that understands both the technical and business sides of esports.

"The inclusion of AI, analytics, XR (Extended Reality), and mobile-first design in our programme reflects the direction the global esports industry is moving toward.

"With continued policy support and investment in digital infrastructure, Malaysia can become a regional esports leader."

Concurring with Ting, Abdul Taib noted that Malaysia was progressing well in esports, boosted by government support, investments from the private sector, and rising talents.

"We still need stronger grassroots development and better career guidance at the school level. I believe the esports associations carry big weight in building and promoting the ecosystem for esports to stay on track.

"The government believes in and strongly supports this initiative, as evidenced by the special grants or allocations included in the National Budget each year," he pointed out.

● *Part II of the series, to be out next Sunday, will discuss the misconception of esports lacking academic and economic values, and the argument to dispel such myth.*

Photo shows the players battling it out during the 'Honor of Kings Inter-School Esports Tournament' at the MPI in Sibu. — Photo by Peter Boon

Abdul Taib (front, third left) and Wong, on his left, join others in a photo session, taken after the launch of the esports tournament at the MPI in Sibu.