

GROUP COMMUNICATION IN A MOBILE LEGENDS ESPORTS TEAM DURING THE MPL INDONESIA COMPETITION: A CASE STUDY OF DEWA UNITED ESPORTS

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Article Info

Article history:

Received June, 2026

Accepted June, 2026

Keyword:

Group Communication;
Functional Group
Communication Theory;
Esports; Mobile Legends;
MPL Indonesia.

Abstract

This study examines the role of group communication in supporting the performance of a Mobile Legends esports team, specifically Dewa United Esports in the Mobile Legends Professional League (MPL) Indonesia. Employing a qualitative approach and a case study method, this research seeks to gain an in-depth understanding of communication dynamics within a professional esports team. Data were collected through observations, semi-structured interviews, and documentation of team activities during the preparation, competition, and post-match evaluation stages. The analysis was guided by the Functional Group Communication Theory, which emphasizes four primary functions of group communication: problem analysis, goal setting, identification of alternatives, and evaluation of consequences. The findings indicate that group communication plays a strategic role in enabling the team to interpret game situations, align strategies, formulate alternative courses of action, and evaluate implemented decisions. Within Dewa United Esports, communication functions not only as a medium for information exchange but also as a central mechanism for collective decision-making in a dynamic and highly competitive environment. The study also identified several communication barriers, including emotional pressure during matches, communication overload during critical moments, and differences in situational interpretation among players. These barriers were addressed through the division of communication roles, the use of shared terminology, and continuous evaluation practices. The findings reinforce the relevance of Functional Group Communication Theory in explaining communication dynamics within professional esports and highlight the importance of high-quality group communication in supporting team coordination and performance.

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Penelitian ini mengkaji peran komunikasi kelompok dalam mendukung kinerja tim esports *Mobile Legends*, khususnya tim Dewa United Esports dalam menghadapi kompetisi *Mobile Legends Professional League* (MPL) Indonesia. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode studi kasus untuk memperoleh pemahaman mendalam mengenai dinamika komunikasi yang berlangsung dalam tim profesional. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi, wawancara semi-terstruktur, dan dokumentasi terhadap aktivitas tim pada tahap persiapan, pelaksanaan pertandingan, serta evaluasi pascapertandingan.

Analisis penelitian menggunakan *Functional Group Communication Theory* yang menekankan empat fungsi utama komunikasi kelompok, yaitu analisis masalah, penetapan tujuan, identifikasi alternatif, dan evaluasi konsekuensi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa komunikasi kelompok memegang peranan strategis dalam membantu tim membaca situasi permainan, menyelaraskan strategi, merumuskan alternatif tindakan, serta mengevaluasi keputusan yang telah diambil. Dalam konteks ini, komunikasi tidak hanya berfungsi sebagai sarana pertukaran informasi, tetapi juga menjadi mekanisme utama dalam proses pengambilan keputusan kolektif di tengah situasi kompetitif yang dinamis dan penuh tekanan. Penelitian ini juga menemukan adanya sejumlah hambatan komunikasi, di antaranya tekanan emosional selama pertandingan, potensi komunikasi yang terlalu padat pada momen-momen krusial, serta perbedaan interpretasi terhadap situasi permainan antarpemain. Berbagai hambatan tersebut diatasi melalui pembagian peran komunikasi yang jelas, penggunaan istilah yang dipahami bersama, serta pelaksanaan evaluasi secara rutin dan berkelanjutan. Temuan penelitian ini memperkuat relevansi *Functional Group Communication Theory* dalam menjelaskan dinamika komunikasi pada konteks esports profesional, sekaligus menegaskan bahwa kualitas komunikasi kelompok merupakan faktor penting dalam mendukung efektivitas koordinasi dan performa tim.

INTRODUCTION

The development of esports as a global phenomenon has demonstrated a significant transformation in the world of digital entertainment and professional competition. In Indonesia, esports has experienced rapid growth alongside the increasing popularity of team-based digital games, particularly multiplayer online battle arena (MOBA) games such as *Mobile Legends*. The *Mobile Legends Professional League* (MPL) Indonesia has become one of the major competitions that brings together esports teams in a highly competitive environment that requires not only technical skills but also coordination, strategy, and effective communication (Ananda et al., 2022; MPL Indonesia, 2025; Gisbert-Pérez et al., 2024).

In the context of professional esports competitions, team success is determined not only by the individual abilities of players but also by the effectiveness of group communication in supporting rapid and accurate decision-making. Players use callouts as a form of brief communication to convey important information quickly to their teammates (Rusk et al., 2024). The constantly changing in-game situations, which occur within seconds, require

every team member to communicate information accurately, understand the game conditions, and align strategies in real time. Delays in information delivery, misinterpretation of opponents' rotations, or differences in perception among players can directly affect the outcome of a match (Sasmita, 2020; Rusk et al., 2024).

Communication within esports teams possesses characteristics that differ from group communication in conventional organizations. Interactions occur rapidly, briefly, and are role-based, requiring each player to convey essential information regarding game conditions, such as enemy positions, objective opportunities, and tactical decisions within a limited timeframe. Furthermore, communication takes place in three primary stages: pre-match, during the match, and post-match, each of which serves strategic functions in supporting team performance (Perdana, 2018; Sasmita, 2020; Eldadi et al., 2025).

In practice, group communication functions not only as a means of exchanging information but also as a mechanism for collective decision-making. Effective groups require clear

information exchange, active listening, and shared understanding to produce appropriate decisions (Hirokawa & Gouran, 1980; Keyton, 2011). In the context of esports teams, group communication helps team members understand their respective roles, adjust their actions to collective strategies, and respond adaptively to changing game situations (Wardyaningrum, 2015; Darmasetiadi & Oktawati, 2024).

Several previous studies have shown that communication within gaming communities plays an important role in building coordination, cohesion, and game strategies. Research on virtual communication among *Mobile Legends* players found that interactions among players occur through information exchange, coordination, and social support, all of which serve strategic functions within the game (Ananda et al., 2022). Other studies have demonstrated that group communication in gaming teams contributes to the effectiveness of teamwork and coordination, although these studies remain within the context of non-professional communities (Sasmita, 2020; Gani & Sari, 2024). Nevertheless, studies that specifically examine group communication in professional esports teams remain

relatively limited, particularly concerning decision-making processes in competitive situations. Recent research has shown that communication, coordination, and decision-making are key factors influencing the performance of professional esports teams (Gisbert-Pérez et al., 2024; Rodríguez-Robaina & Collins, 2026). Therefore, more in-depth studies are needed to understand how group communication functions within professional esports teams operating under high competitive pressure.

Based on this background, the present study analyzes the dynamics of group communication within the Dewa United Esports team participating in MPL Indonesia. The analysis employs the Functional Group Communication Theory developed by Hirokawa and Gouran, which emphasizes four primary functions of group communication: problem analysis, goal setting, identification of alternatives, and evaluation of consequences (Hirokawa & Gouran, 1980). From this perspective, group communication is understood not merely as a process of message transmission but as a functional mechanism that supports collective

decision-making in competitive situations.

Accordingly, this study aims to analyze how group communication within professional esports teams functions in identifying problems, establishing goals, developing strategic alternatives, and evaluating decisions made during matches. Furthermore, this study identifies communication barriers that emerge and the efforts undertaken to overcome them, with the expectation of contributing to the development of group communication studies, particularly within the continuously evolving context of professional esports.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative approach using a case study method. The qualitative approach was selected because the study aimed to gain an in-depth understanding of the dynamics of group communication within a professional esports team. The case study method was chosen because the research focused on a particular case, namely group communication within Dewa United Esports while competing in the Mobile Legends Professional League (MPL) Indonesia (Yin, 2018).

The study was conducted with Dewa United Esports, which is based in Tangerang and participated in MPL Indonesia Season 15. The research was carried out from April to June 2025. The focus of the study was directed toward the group communication processes that occurred during training sessions, match preparations, competitions, and post-match evaluations.

The research subjects were determined through purposive sampling, in which informants were selected based on their direct involvement in the team's group communication processes. The informants consisted of two core players and one team manager. The core players were selected because they were directly involved in communication during matches, whereas the manager was chosen due to her role in observing team dynamics, maintaining coordination, and supporting the team's evaluation process (Yin, 2018).

The first informant was Maybeee, who served as the gold laner. This informant was selected because of his direct involvement in in-game communication, particularly in conveying lane conditions, requesting protection, informing teammates about item

readiness, and providing considerations before taking objectives or engaging in team fights. The second informant was Muezzaa, who served as the roamer. This informant was selected because the roamer has high mobility during gameplay and plays an important role in reading map situations, warning teammates, and coordinating rotations. The third informant was Novita Sari, the team manager. She was selected because of her role in monitoring the team's communication dynamics, maintaining players' non-technical conditions, and supporting internal evaluation and coordination processes.

Data in this study were collected through observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation. Observations were conducted to identify patterns of group communication that emerged during team activities, including training sessions, match preparations, and post-match evaluations. The observations focused on verbal and non-verbal communication, the distribution of communication roles, decision-making patterns, players' responses to changing match situations, and communication barriers that emerged within the team. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to ensure that the researcher

had a set of guiding questions while also allowing informants to explain their experiences more openly. The interview questions were developed based on the four primary functions of Functional Group Communication Theory: problem analysis, goal setting, identification of alternatives, and evaluation of consequences. In addition, the interviews explored communication barriers experienced by the team and the strategies employed to overcome them.

Documentation was used to complement the data obtained from observations and interviews. The documents analyzed included match recordings, match replays, team evaluation notes, match information, and online news reports relevant to Dewa United Esports' activities in the MPL competition. These documents were utilized to strengthen the researcher's understanding of the match context, the roles of each player, and the competitive situations that influenced team communication.

Data analysis was conducted using the interactive model developed by Miles and Huberman, which consists of three stages: data reduction, data display, and

conclusion drawing. During the data reduction stage, the researcher selected data relevant to the research focus, particularly data related to the four functions of group communication in Functional Group Communication Theory. In the data display stage, the findings were organized into the categories of problem analysis, goal setting, identification of alternatives, evaluation of consequences, and communication barriers within the team. Finally, during the conclusion-drawing stage, the researcher interpreted the relationships between the field findings and the theoretical framework to explain the role of group communication in supporting the performance of professional esports teams (Miles et al., 2014; Hirokawa & Gouran, 1980).

The validity of the data was strengthened through source triangulation and method triangulation. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing information obtained from the players and the team manager. Meanwhile, method triangulation was carried out by comparing the findings from interviews, observations, and documentation. Through this approach, the research findings did not rely solely

on a single data source but were verified through several complementary forms of data (Miles et al., 2014; Yin, 2018).

In conducting this research, the researcher paid careful attention to ethical considerations by obtaining the informants' consent before conducting the interviews. The informants were provided with explanations regarding the objectives of the study, the use of the data, and their rights to provide or withhold certain information. The data used in this study were presented solely for academic purposes while maintaining the interests and internal confidentiality of the team.

DISCUSSION

This study was analyzed using the Functional Group Communication Theory, which emphasizes four primary functions of group communication. Within Dewa United Esports, these four functions were evident in communication processes before, during, and after matches. In addition, this study identified several communication barriers arising from competitive pressure, differences in situational interpretation, and the need for rapid decision-making.

The problem-analysis function was observed when players communicated obstacles that occurred during matches. In Mobile Legends, problems may include pressured lanes, unreadable enemy rotations, the loss of objectives, or shifts in game momentum. These situations must be identified immediately so that the team can determine the appropriate course of action.

Within Dewa United Esports, the problem-analysis process was carried out through the contributions of each player according to their respective roles. Muezzaa, as the roamer, played an essential role in reading the map situation and providing warnings to the team. Due to the nature of the roamer's position, which requires movement across various areas of the map, he frequently became one of the primary sources of information when changes occurred during the match. Information provided by the roamer helped other players understand enemy movements, potential threats, and rotation opportunities that could be utilized.

Maybeee, as the gold laner, also played a role in communicating problems occurring in his lane. When farming was

disrupted, the lane was under pressure, or item conditions were not yet optimal, such information needed to be communicated immediately so that the team could provide assistance or adjust its strategic focus. This finding indicates that problem analysis did not originate from a single player but was formed through information exchange among team members.

From a managerial perspective, Novita Sari observed that team problems were not limited to technical aspects of the game but also involved players' mental conditions, emotions, and focus. When tensions increased or communication became unstable, the manager's role was to monitor the situation and support the team's stabilization process. Therefore, problem analysis in professional esports teams encompasses both technical and non-technical dimensions (Wardyaningrum, 2015; Darmasetiadi & Oktawati, 2024).

These findings demonstrate that the problem-analysis function in Functional Group Communication Theory was reflected through rapid, open, and role-based information exchange. Muezzaa contributed through map analysis, Maybeee through information regarding

lane conditions, and Novita through observations of the team's overall dynamics. The problem-identification process within Dewa United Esports was collective and did not depend on a single individual.

The goal-setting function was evident in briefing sessions, draft-pick discussions, and the determination of gameplay priorities. Team goals were not limited to achieving victory but also included more operational targets, such as securing specific objectives, maintaining lane control, delaying team fights, or preserving game tempo. In group decision-making processes, goal setting helps team members move in the same direction.

At this stage, communication functioned to create a shared understanding among team members. Each player needed to understand the team's priorities so that decisions would not conflict with one another. Goal setting was also flexible because it could change according to the circumstances of the match. In Mobile Legends competitions, initial strategies do not always proceed as planned, requiring teams to adapt their objectives based on actual in-game conditions.

As the gold laner, Maybeee played a role in understanding and communicating information regarding lane readiness, item progression, and potential damage contribution. This information was important because decisions to attack, defend, or secure objectives depended heavily on the readiness of key players. Meanwhile, Muezzaa, as the roamer, assisted the team in adjusting its objectives when in-game conditions changed. If the initial strategy proved ineffective, the roamer could redirect the team's focus toward more realistic objectives.

Novita Sari, as the team manager, viewed goal setting not only in the context of individual matches but also in terms of the team's long-term objectives throughout the competition. These objectives included improving league standings, enhancing performance consistency, and maintaining player motivation. Thus, goal setting within Dewa United Esports occurred at two levels: tactical objectives during matches and strategic objectives throughout the competition.

Within the framework of Functional Group Communication Theory, goal setting enables groups to move in the

same direction. In Dewa United Esports, this function was reflected through strategic alignment before matches and the adjustment of objectives when game conditions changed. Communication became an essential mechanism for ensuring that all team members maintained a shared understanding despite the dynamic nature of competition.

The function of identifying alternatives became evident when initial strategies did not proceed according to plan. Under such circumstances, the team needed to explore other options, such as changing rotations, avoiding team fights, securing minor objectives, implementing split-push strategies, or waiting for specific items before launching attacks. The ability to develop alternative strategies is essential because esports competitions are fast-paced and highly dynamic (Hirokawa & Gouran, 1980; Sasmita, 2020).

Muezzaa, as the roamer, occupied an important position in proposing alternative strategies because he had broad access to information regarding map conditions and enemy movements. When initial strategies proved ineffective, the roamer could help

redirect the team's focus, avoid high-risk engagements, or pursue alternative objectives. Due to his high mobility, the roamer became one of the primary links in the process of strategic adaptation.

Maybee also participated in identifying alternatives, particularly when conditions in the gold lane did not allow for aggressive play. In such situations, he could inform the team that it would be better to delay team fights, wait for certain items, or request temporary assistance from teammates. Information from the gold laner was particularly important because the readiness of the damage dealer significantly influenced the team's decisions regarding major engagements.

From a managerial perspective, Novita Sari noted that alternative strategies did not emerge solely as spontaneous responses during matches but were also prepared before competitions through discussions and evaluations. The team needed contingency plans to be better prepared for changes in opponents' strategies. Such preparations prevented the team from relying exclusively on a single gameplay pattern.

According to Functional Group Communication Theory, identifying alternatives is crucial because effective groups do not become fixated on a single option. Teams must consider several possible actions before determining the most appropriate decision. Within Dewa United Esports, this function was reflected in the ability of both players and management to remain open to strategic changes during preparation and competition.

The function of evaluating consequences appeared in two forms: rapid evaluation during matches and in-depth evaluation after matches had concluded. Rapid evaluation occurred when the team assessed whether particular decisions, such as ganks, team fights, or rotations, were beneficial or detrimental. Post-match evaluations were conducted through gameplay reviews, draft discussions, and assessments of team communication (Hirokawa & Gouran, 1980; Sasmita, 2020).

At this stage, Maybeee played a role in assessing whether the team was prepared to engage in combat or whether it would be better to maintain the game's tempo. As the gold laner, he needed to consider item readiness,

positioning, and potential contributions during team fights. This information became an essential component of the team's subsequent decision-making process.

Muezzaa played a role in real-time evaluation, particularly when the team made mistakes, lost objectives, or found itself in unfavorable situations. Under such circumstances, communication was required to reset, regroup, or avoid further errors. Real-time evaluation was critical because teams could not always wait until the match had ended to correct their decisions.

Novita Sari viewed team evaluation from a broader perspective. Evaluation encompassed not only technical aspects of gameplay but also communication, mental readiness, and cooperative dynamics among players. In the context of professional teams, post-match evaluation served as a forum for assessing strategic effectiveness, correcting mistakes, and maintaining team stability.

These findings indicate that the evaluation of consequences within Dewa United Esports involved three primary dimensions. First, technical

evaluation, including drafts, objectives, rotations, and team fights. Second, communication evaluation, including information clarity, message timing, and player coordination. Third, non-technical evaluation, including mental conditions, emotions, and player readiness.

Within the framework of Functional Group Communication Theory, evaluating consequences helps groups understand the impacts of decisions that have already been made. In Dewa United Esports, evaluation was not merely used to determine victory or defeat but also to improve communication processes and strategic planning for future matches.

Although group communication within Dewa United Esports was relatively structured, this study also identified several communication barriers. These barriers emerged primarily in match situations requiring rapid responses, high levels of pressure, and extremely brief coordination. In group communication, such barriers may influence message delivery, shared understanding, and decision-making processes.

The first barrier was the potential for excessively crowded communication. During matches, every player possessed information that they wished to communicate. However, when too many players spoke simultaneously, important information could be overshadowed by other conversations. This situation could create confusion and hinder decision-making.

The second barrier was related to emotional pressure during competition. When the team lost objectives, made mistakes, or came under significant pressure from opponents, communication tended to become more tense. If emotional conditions were not managed effectively, communication could become less effective and potentially lead to blame among team members.

The third barrier involved differences in situational interpretation among players. Each role has a distinct perspective based on its responsibilities. The roamer, gold laner, jungler, mid laner, and EXP laner may perceive gameplay priorities differently. If these differences are not immediately aligned, the team may experience miscommunication in decision-making

(Hirokawa & Gouran, 1980; Ananda et al., 2022).

To overcome these barriers, the team implemented a communication role division consisting of shotcaller, observer, and executor. The shotcaller served as the primary decision-maker, the observer monitored enemy movements and map conditions, and the executor implemented decisions according to team directives. This division helped filter information so that communication did not become excessively crowded and decisions could be made more quickly. Furthermore, the use of commonly understood terminology enabled messages to be communicated briefly, clearly, and accurately.

These communication barriers indicate that group communication in professional esports does not always operate ideally. However, the team's ability to manage such barriers constitutes an important component of communication effectiveness. Within the framework of Functional Group Communication Theory, communication barriers can influence all four primary functions, ranging from problem analysis and goal setting to the

identification of alternatives and evaluation of consequences. Therefore, team success is determined not only by the presence of communication but also by the ability to maintain communication quality under highly pressured circumstances (Hirokawa & Gouran, 1980).

The role of communication within Dewa United Esports was reflected through the contributions of each informant according to their respective positions. Maybeee, as the gold laner, was responsible for communicating conditions in the gold lane, particularly when farming was disrupted, items were not yet ready, or the lane was under pressure. This information helped the team understand the readiness of its damage dealer before deciding whether to engage in team fights, defend, or secure objectives.

Muezzaa, as the roamer, played an important role in reading map situations, observing enemy movements, providing early warnings, and assisting with rotation coordination. In the problem-analysis function, he contributed by providing information regarding changes in game situations. In goal setting, he helped adjust gameplay

priorities when in-game conditions changed. In identifying alternatives, he proposed rotation changes, objective shifts, or decisions to avoid risky engagements. In evaluating consequences, he assessed team readiness before initiating fights or called for regrouping when conditions were unfavorable.

Novita Sari, as the team manager, played a role in observing team communication dynamics from a non-technical perspective. She paid attention to players' emotional conditions, focus, motivation, and communication stability. In problem analysis, she helped identify obstacles related to mental conditions and team atmosphere. In goal setting, she supported the team's long-term objectives throughout the competition. In identifying alternatives, she emphasized the importance of contingency planning during team preparation. In evaluating consequences, she provided post-match feedback and assessed the impact of communication patterns on team readiness.

Based on these findings, group communication functions within Dewa United Esports were not carried out by a

single individual but were the result of contributions from various roles. Each member occupied a different position within the communication process, yet all were interconnected in the team's decision-making process. This demonstrates that group communication in professional esports is functional, collaborative, and situational.

Overall, group communication within Dewa United Esports functioned not only as a means of information exchange but also as a mechanism for decision-making. The problem-analysis function was reflected in players' ability to interpret match situations, the goal-setting function in strategic alignment and gameplay priorities, the identification-of-alternatives function in the team's ability to adjust strategies when conditions changed, and the evaluation-of-consequences function in the review and improvement processes following implemented decisions.

However, the effectiveness of communication continued to face challenges, including emotional pressure, excessively crowded communication, and differences in situational interpretation. Therefore,

effective communication within professional esports teams is determined not only by the intensity of communication but also by role clarity, information accuracy, and the team's ability to manage competitive pressure.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that group communication plays an important role in supporting the performance of Dewa United Esports in the Mobile Legends Professional League (MPL) Indonesia competition. From the perspective of Functional Group Communication Theory, group communication within the team is reflected through four primary functions: problem analysis, goal setting, identification of alternatives, and evaluation of consequences.

In the problem-analysis function, communication helps the team identify gameplay obstacles, such as lane pressure, changes in enemy rotations, loss of momentum, and players' mental conditions. In the goal-setting function, communication serves to align strategies, determine gameplay priorities, and maintain the team's direction throughout the competition. In the identification-of-alternatives

function, communication enables the team to seek alternative strategies when the initial plan does not proceed as expected. In the evaluation-of-consequences function, communication is used to assess the impact of decisions, correct mistakes, and formulate strategies for subsequent matches.

This study also found that team communication does not always operate without challenges. The identified barriers include the potential for excessively crowded communication, emotional pressure during matches, and differences in situational interpretation among players. These barriers may affect the quality of decision-making if they are not managed effectively. To address these challenges, the team established communication role divisions, utilized commonly understood terminology, and conducted regular evaluations.

From a theoretical perspective, this study reinforces the relevance of Functional Group Communication Theory in the context of professional esports. The theory can be used not only to analyze group communication in conventional organizations but also to examine communication processes

within competitive digital teams operating in fast-paced, strategic, and high-pressure environments. From a practical perspective, this study provides insights for coaches, managers, and esports players to pay greater attention to the quality of group communication as an essential component of strategies aimed at improving team performance.

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