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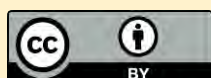
Enhancing Talent Management through Serious Games: A Key Factor in Improving the Quality of 'Organizational Human' Work Life

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ARTICLE INFO		ABSTRACT
Article History: <i>Received: 15 November 2023</i> <i>Revised: 05 January 2024</i> <i>Accepted: 10 February 2024</i>		SUBJECT & OBJECTIVES: In their quest for survival, organizations must comprehend and adapt to the evolving conditions of the modern environment. This necessity fosters organizational dynamism and enhances productivity. In the meantime, human resources, as the vital force of the organization, play a crucial role in fulfilling its mission and vision. Therefore, the recruitment and development of human resources emerge as fundamental components of effective human resource management. This study aims to investigate serious games in organizational talent management, with a focus on serious games. METHOD & FINDING: This research employed a mixed-method approach, and thematic analysis was utilized to explore the typology of serious games and examine their impact on two dimensions: talent attraction and development and their influence on enhancing the quality of organizational human work life. Also, an expert panel of seven human resources professionals, experienced in assessment centers and serious games, facilitated the thematic search process. CONCLUSION: In terms of categorizing serious games in talent management and their role in enhancing the QWL for organizational humans, 188 codes were extracted, of which sixteen core themes were related to talent attraction and development. Of the sixteen themes identified, three themes were focused on talent attraction: role-playing, oral presentation, and gamified psychological testing. Six themes were dedicated to talent development: educational energizers, educational icebreakers, educational nudges, escape rooms, storytelling, and virtual simulations. Additionally, seven themes were effective for both talent attraction and development: boot camps, group discussions, board games, case studies, handicraft creation, information search, and gamification.
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Introduction

Organizations continually strive for dynamism and sustainability, which are essential for maintaining their position by adapting to temporal conditions. To ensure this, a deep understanding of the environment and the necessary methodologies for achieving organizational dynamism and sustainability is required. Moreover, the responsibility for realizing the vision, goals, and mission of an organization lies directly with its human resources (HR), acknowledged as the most valuable asset of any organization.

Research reveals that organizations often struggle with recruiting, developing, and retaining flexible and adaptable employees within their talent management frameworks. This indicates that organizations face challenges in identifying and utilizing employee competencies to meet their goals (*Vural et al, 2012, p.341*).

It is also noteworthy that traditional approaches to training and development may no longer serve organizational needs effectively. Creating competitive advantages and addressing challenges requires innovative approaches to training and development (*Noe, 2020*).

In such a situation, and by researching the historical studies of the world, it is observed that some countries develop relations due to the connections or interests that have been created at the level of their leaders and

elites, or according to their positions and relations, and even in at a higher level, due to border and geographical commonalities and military necessities in the defense of each other's rights, they form union and consortium, such as The United Nations (UN), The Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), The Arab League (AL), The Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), The Commonwealth of Nations (CN), The European Union (EU), Member States of NATO, Australia and New Zealand and America Security Treaty (ANZUS), etc (*Badra, 2022a, p.176*).

Consequently, serious games have attracted the attention of HR managers in advanced organizations as a means to enhance the identification and development of future leaders, thereby improving the Quality of Work Life (QWL) in the contemporary era.

The hadith of Imam Ali, which represents the two-way relationship between individual and organizational reform, can indicate the synergy between human resource development and organizational goals. He said, "If a man sets right matters between himself and Allah, then Allah sets right matters between him and other people; and if a man sets right the affairs of his next life then Allah sets right for him the affairs of this world. Whoever is a preacher for himself is protected by Allah" (*Sharīf al-Raḍī, 11th century CE, Wisdom. 89*).

On the other hand, understanding organizations in terms of strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats, the degree of understanding of the future and the ability to adapt to the requirements of the new era, and the quantitative and qualitative improvement of human resources in the talent management process indicate the need to take serious and managerial games seriously in the organizational system, and the research findings can lead the application of the research problem to the attraction and development of organizational resource with the approach of improving the QWL towards achieving organizational goals.

Considering this problem design, considering human resources as a factor in the organization's movement toward achieving organizational goals requires, first of all, understanding the requirements of organizational human resources. Therefore, the main question of the research is: what is the typology of serious games in talent management and its effect on giving meaning to the QWL of organizational humans in the contemporary era?

Theoretical Foundations

Serious games play a significant role in talent management by enhancing the quality and meaning of organizational human work life. These interactive and engaging tools are designed not only for entertainment but to address various aspects of professional development, learning, and employee engagement. By

integrating serious games into talent management strategies, organizations can foster skill development, improve communication, and promote problem-solving abilities among employees.

Moreover, these games help create a dynamic and stimulating work environment, encouraging employees to connect with their roles on a deeper level. This approach contributes to a more meaningful work experience by aligning employees' personal growth with organizational objectives. As a result, serious games serve as a valuable tool in enhancing productivity, motivation, and the overall well-being of the workforce, making them an integral part of modern talent management practices.

Different perspectives exist regarding the definition of serious games. One perspective holds that a serious game should include a genuine entertainment element that appears to merge with a practical purpose (*Silzer & Dowell, 2009*).

A serious game has the potential to enrich the user's experience through multifaceted interaction, which can be useful in various fields such as education, health training, or interpersonal communication (*Ma et al, 2011*). While serious games can indeed be entertaining, their primary purpose is to educate and impart skills and experiences to their audience (*Khani Kordabadi, 2014*).

One notable advantage of using serious games is their ability to create

motivational factors that significantly enhance learning. Researchers argue that serious games help develop critical thinking, foster creativity, and enhance skills related to problem-solving and decision-making. Furthermore, serious

games provide a unique platform for learning by situating knowledge attraction within meaningful and practical scenarios (*Lameras et al, 2017, p. 972*).

The criteria for game evaluation tools are listed in the table below:

Table 1. Classification Criteria of the Evaluation and Development Center's Auxiliary Tools from Taylor's Perspective

Criteria	Examples
Audience	Senior Managers Operational Managers Basic Managers Talented Employees in both Public and Private Organizations
Goal	Recruitment and Identification Learning and Development Research and Investigation
Applicable Tools	Educational Games Simulations Role-Playing Group Physical Activities Group Discussions Analytical Exercises Information Search Psychological Assessments

(Taylor, 2007)

While entertainment games focus on enjoyment and emphasize valuable experiences, serious games focus on learning elements and emphasize problem-solving.

On the other hand, talent management is a process that begins with identifying talent and progresses toward development, advancement, and flourishing, with advancements in information and communication technologies providing innovative solutions in this field (*Triantafyllidou & Lappas, 2022*).

The process of talent management involves assessing organizational needs for talent to execute business strategies, discovering and identifying the capacity

of existing talents within the organization, and evaluating talent readiness for higher job positions (*Wright et al, 2017*).

In summary, scholars in this field emphasize the importance of talent attraction, development, retention, and preservation, viewing human resources as organizational talent.

Another key concept discussed in this research is the organizational human and enhancing their QWL. Organizational human refers to the presence and performance of individuals within organizational roles. Organizational humans are those who contribute to the organization in response to various stimuli (*Scott, 2002*).

While definitions in organizational theory may indicate a universal truth about organizations, multiple, diverse theories exist that are not necessarily consistent with each other (*Hatch & Cunliffe, 2013*). Also, from the perspective of Mulla Sadra, the organizational human exercises will and deliberation (*Gaeeni, 2018, p. 105*).

Finally, QWL directly refers to conceptualizing a human-centered lifestyle within an organization. QWL reflects the real conditions of work in the organization, displaying employees' unique attitudes and feelings toward their jobs (*Beaudin & Edgar, 2003*). It is a method that strengthens employee satisfaction and performance (*Rose et al, 2006, p. 61*). Accordingly, QWL encompasses methods and approaches aimed at preserving motivated HR to achieve optimal performance, productivity, and organizational goals.

Literature Review

- ❑ Fatehi Jefroodi (2023) examined effective criteria within the theory of organizational games, which assesses the interactions and interdependent relationships among multiple decision-makers.
- ❑ Mohammadian et al (2022) studied the effectiveness of gamification in recruitment processes, focusing on a tourism company. Their findings indicated that gamified recruitment processes were well-received by stakeholders, including customers, managers, and attendants. The research suggests that other companies in tourism, hospitality, and related fields might also benefit from redesigning their human resource management processes through gamification.
- ❑ Pacheco-Velazquez et al (2023) proposed a collaborative method for creating serious games, aiming to achieve goals beyond entertainment, such as learning, behavior change, or skill development. This structured approach increases the likelihood of producing engaging, effective, and learning-friendly games. Overall, collaborative approaches and active learning have emerged as priorities, integrating technological tools. Consequently, simulations and serious games are seen as effective strategies in education, offering advantages like enhanced critical thinking, creativity, problem-solving skills, and better retention of practical knowledge.
- ❑ Allal-Chérif et al (2022) investigated the role of virtual reality, artificial intelligence, and augmented reality games in educational sciences, such as physics. Reviewing studies from 2011 to 2021, they analyzed common evaluation methods and assessed their strengths and weaknesses. The results show that serious games have improved the

educational experience in both sciences and other fields.

Despite the volume of previous studies, direct research focused on the categorization of serious games in talent management and their role in enhancing the QWL in the contemporary era was not found. This highlights the unique contribution of the present study in addressing a gap in the existing literature.

Research Theoretical Framework

Human resource issues, including recruitment, selection, training, and retention under the concept of QWL, have directed the focus of organizational leaders and managers toward solving issues related to these areas. The success and leadership of organizations in promoting the QWL for organizational HR in the modern era largely depend on these factors.

More importantly, The Holy Qur'an emphasizes the dignity of human beings and describes them as custodians on Earth, as indicated in the following verse:

"And surely We have honored the children of Adam, and We carry them in the land and the sea, and We have given them of the good things, and We have made them to excel by an appropriate excellence over most of those whom We have created" (The Qur'an, 17: 70).

In this context, preparing employees both mentally and physically as

organizational talents requires organizational leaders to address various issues. One of these essential approaches is the use of organizational games, which is the main focus of this study. Specifically, the study explores serious games in talent management and their role in enhancing the QWL for organizational humans in the modern era.

The concept of serious games in talent management can be related to the butterfly effect, a management metaphor. According to this theory, predicting a complex system is impossible without considering all minor factors that might have even a minimal impact on the system. Every system has points where slight changes can lead to significant transformations (Entezari & Azizi Bandarabadi, 2017).

In this way, organizational talents can achieve inner peace and organizational productivity through various serious games. This selection process is akin to an artist leaving a mark on the creation canvas, a unique work in the realm of relationships and connections, displayed in the classroom and teaching logic. Therefore, serious games become an integral part of talent management, where concepts emerge from a philosophical approach, transforming employees into decision-makers who help the organization achieve its goals (Badra, 2022b, pp. 298-299).

On the other hand, many studies have shown that serious games can

improve engagement, motivation, learning strategies, and cognition. The prominent benefits of serious games may be enjoyment, followed by increased happiness, satisfaction, and positive attitudes. Serious games make the audience enjoy themselves while playing, increasing their levels of happiness and satisfaction, and improving their attitudes toward

learning. Keeping the challenges at an appropriate level is the key to maintaining players' interest in the game; also, a collaborative environment can be used to increase the level of audience enthusiasm for the game (*Laamarti et al, 2014*).

The following diagram depicts the conceptual framework of the research according to the explanations given:

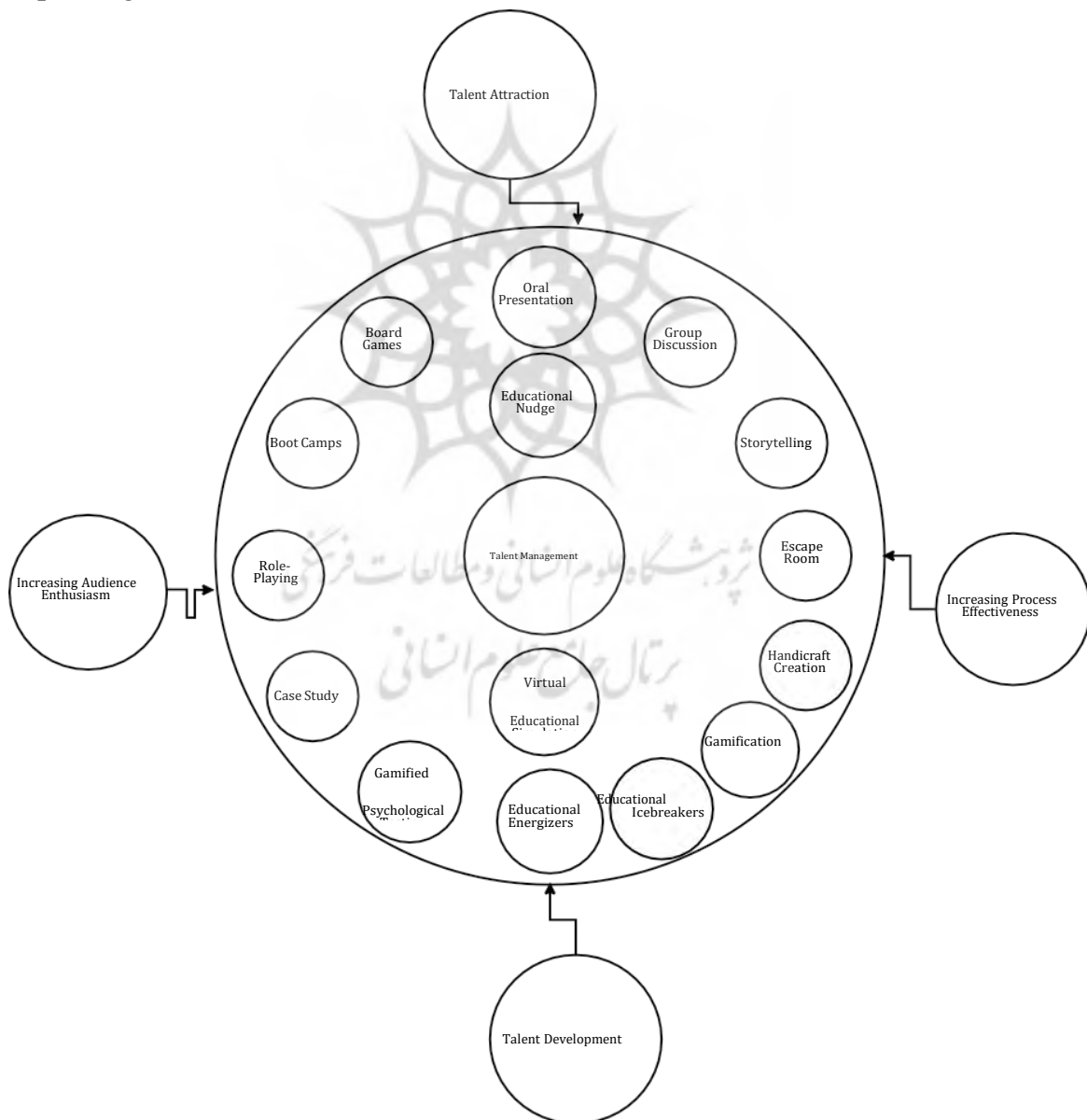


Diagram 1. Research Theoretical Framework

Thematic Analysis and Research Findings

Following the initial open coding, 188 codes were extracted. To avoid lengthening the article, only the results of this process are reported here. Next, secondary coding was

conducted based on the frequency and thematic relevance of the codes, grouping them into primary themes. This step involved categorizing serious games according to their frequency, as detailed in the table below:

Table 2. Condensation and Classification of Serious Games in Talent Management

Basic Theme (Secondary Code)	Frequency	Organizer Theme	Inclusive Theme
Storytelling	16	Talent Attraction and Development	Serious Games
Board Games	24		
Information Search	10		
Handicraft Creation	27		
Group Discussion	19		
Role-Playing	12		
Educational Icebreakers	5		
Educational Energizers	5		
Virtual Educational Simulation	21		
Educational Nudge	17		
Gamification (Points, Badges, List of Elected)	6		
Case Study	10		
Escape Room	3		
Boot Camps	4		
Oral Presentation	3		
Gamified Psychological Testing	6		

In this stage, thematic analysis categorized serious games into primary and secondary codes, identifying which types of games were more effective for talent attraction, talent development, or

both. A panel of experts was asked which games were most suitable for enhancing the QWL for organizational humans. The results are shown in the table below:

Table 3. A Validated Positioning of Serious Games in Talent Management

Games	Talent Attraction	Talent Development	Application in Talent Attraction and Development	
			Increasing Audience Enthusiasm	Increasing Process Effectiveness
Storytelling	2	6	5	4
Board Games	4	6	4	4
Information Search	5	5	2	6
Handicraft Creation	6	4	6	2
Group Discussion	5	7	3	6
Role-Playing	7	4	2	6
Educational Icebreakers	1	6	7	4
Educational Energizers	0	7	7	5
Virtual Educational Simulation	4	5	2	6
Educational Nudge	1	6	4	5
Gamification (Points, Badges, List of Elected)	6	4	4	4
Case Study	4	5	1	6
Escape Room	3	5	7	2
Boot Camps	4	5	2	6
Oral Presentation	7	3	4	3
Gamified Psychological Testing	6	3	4	4

The thematic categorization of serious games in talent management, as outlined above, was based on feedback from a panel of seven HR experts. From the 188 initial and secondary codes identified in the exploratory coding phase, 2 Organizer Themes and 16 Basic themes

were identified, which were thematized under the overarching theme of serious games in talent management. Accordingly, the network of themes of this type of game is drawn in Table 3 as shown in the following diagram:

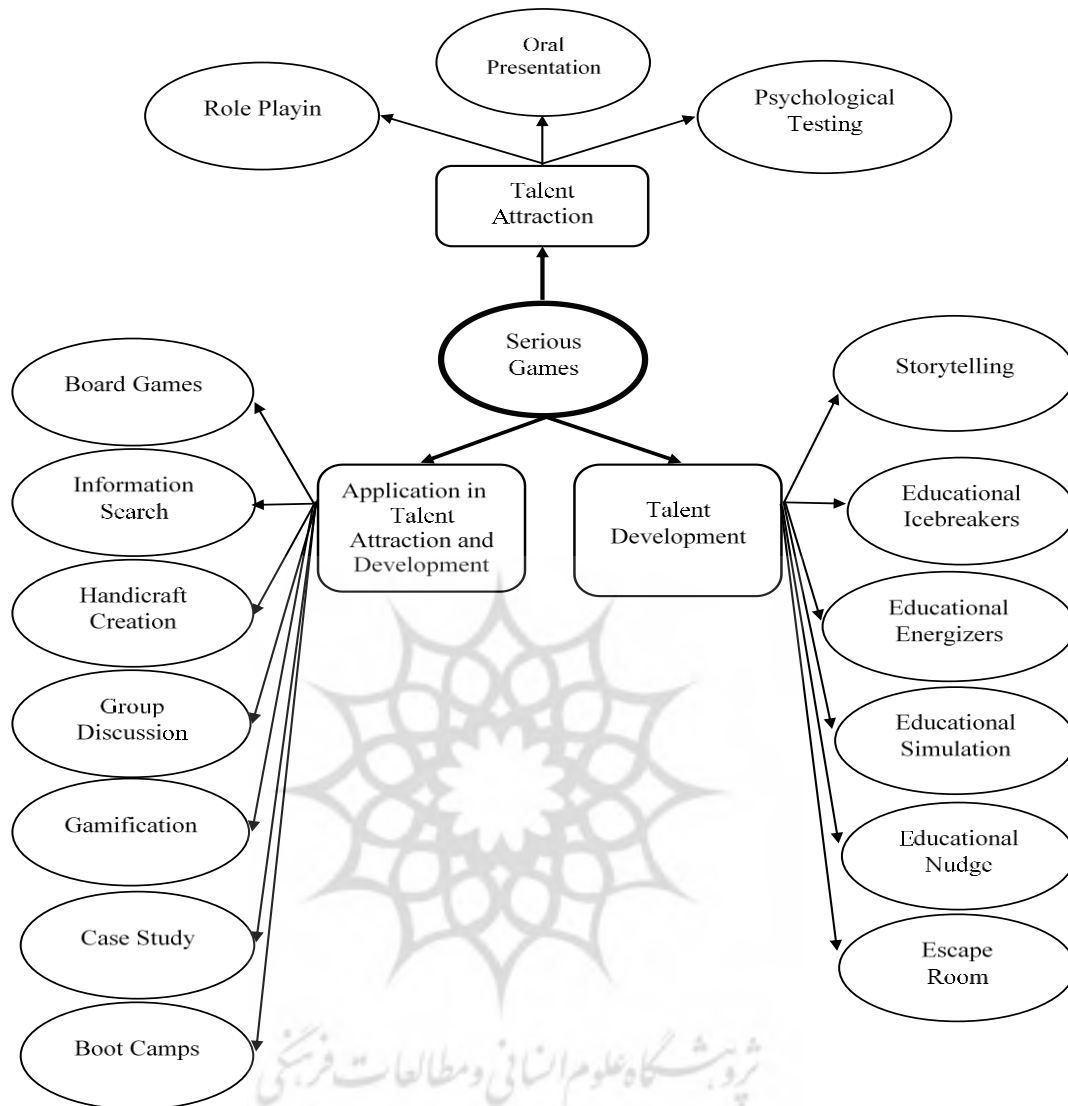


Diagram 2. Themes Analysis Network of Serious Games in Talent Management

It is important to note that serious games identified through thematic analysis, such as board games, information search, and group discussion, can enhance talent attraction and development. Also, certain games are more suited for either attraction or development alone, while others serve both purposes effectively.

Conclusion

To address the primary research question regarding the categorization of serious games in talent management and their role in enhancing the QWL for organizational humans, a total of 195 codes were initially extracted. Following a review and scientific consensus, some codes were omitted, resulting in a final analysis of 188 codes. Sixteen basic

themes related to talent attraction and development were identified.

In the subsequent phase, a questionnaire was developed and distributed among a panel of seven HR experts, with data analyzed through thematic analysis. Out of the 16 identified themes, three were found to be exclusively beneficial for talent attraction, six were specifically beneficial for talent development, and seven were effective for both attraction and development. Additionally, the panel's feedback highlighted the importance of both process effectiveness and audience engagement in these serious games.

The basic themes identified as serious game criteria for talent attraction and development include board games, information search, handicraft creation, group discussions, role-playing, boot camps, gamification, case studies, oral presentations, gamified psychological tests, storytelling, escape rooms, educational icebreakers, educational energizers, virtual simulations, and educational nudges. Of these, three are suited solely for attraction (role-playing, oral presentation, gamified psychological testing), six are designated for development alone (educational energizers, educational icebreakers, educational nudges, escape rooms, storytelling, virtual simulations), and seven serve both purposes (boot camps, group discussions, board

games, case studies, handicraft creation, information search, and gamification).

From the final 188 themes identified, 21 codes were specific to talent attraction, 67 codes focused on talent development, and 100 codes applied to both attraction and development. These codes served as primary themes, emphasizing the importance of serious games in talent management and their role in enhancing the QWL for organizational humans in the modern era. Based on these findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

☐ Utilizing Group and Collaborative Games in Talent Attraction and Development: To increase engagement and efficiency in talent attraction and development processes, it is recommended to use games that encourage audience participation, such as energizers, icebreakers, board games, and handicraft creation.

☐ Improving Traditional Methods with Purposeful Games for Talent Attraction and Development: Since tools like role-playing and boot camps were among the most commonly used in this study, it is suggested to enhance traditional methods by integrating purposeful games for talent attraction and development in organizations.

- ❑ Replacing Single-Purpose Games with Multipurpose Games like Boot Camps: To improve both talent attraction and retention rates, consider using multipurpose games like Boot Camps, which are effective for both attraction and development.
- ❑ Localizing Serious Games According to Cultural Structure for Public and Private Sector Organizations: Instead of using games that may not align with cultural norms, it is advised to consider culturally adapted games for organizational environments in Iran. For example, simulation and board games designed by Iranian researchers in academic institutions like Imam Hossein University can be more effective in local contexts.

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Author Contributions

The content of the article was written by the corresponding author. At the same time, the second author was

present in the writing of the thesis and the third author was a co-researcher in the content review of the paper. Therefore, all three authors participated in writing the paper.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interests regarding the publication of this manuscript.

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