OYUNDAN KƏNAR: **AZƏRBAYCANDA İNTELLEKTUAL OYUN İŞTİRAKÇILARININ BACARIQLARININ ARTIRILMASINDA VƏ SOSİAL İNKİŞAFINDA İNTELLEKTUAL OYUNLARIN ROLU**

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ANNOTASİYA

Bu araşdırma Azərbaycanda intellektual oyunların iştirakçıların ünsiyyət bacarıqlarına, komanda işinə və sosial mənsubiyyət hissinə təsirini araşdırır. Bu məqsədlə müntəzəm olaraq intellektual oyunlarla məşğul olan yüzdən çox iştirakçıdan bu fəaliyyətlərin onların koqnitiv və sosial inkişafına təsirini anlamaq üçün məlumat toplanıb. Araşdırmada kəmiyyət metodundan istifadə olunub. Nəticələr göstərir ki, intellektual oyunlar ünsiyyət bacarıqlarını əhəmiyyətli dərəcədə artırır. Oyunçular müzakirələrdə özlərini daha inamlı hiss etdiklərini və mürəkkəb fikirləri ifadə etmək qabiliyyətlərinin inkişaf etdiyini bildirirlər. Bundan əlavə, bu oyunlar komanda işi bacarıqlarını inkişaf etidirir, çünki iştirakçılar əməkdaşlıq etməyi və münaqişələrin həlli üsullarını öyrənirlər. Bir çox oyunçunun uzunmüddətli əlaqələr formalaşdırması nəticəsində sosial mənsubiyyət hissi də əhəmiyyətli dərəcədə güclənir. Bu müsbət nəticələrə baxmayaraq, tədqiqat gender dinamikası və sosial-mədəni amillərin iştirak səviyyəsinə təsiri üzrə əlavə araşdırmaların aparılmasının vacibliyini vurğulayır. Ümumilikdə, bu araşdırma göstərir ki, intellektual oyunlar həm koqnitiv, həm də sosial inkişafa töhfə verir, həyat bacarıqlarının artırılması və cəmiyyət daxilində inklüzivliyin təşviq edilməsi üçün dəyərli imkanlar təklif edir.

Açar sözlər: İntellektual oyunlar, ünsiyyət, komanda işi, sosial mənsubiyyət, Azərbaycan.

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BEYOND THE GAME: **THE ROLE OF INTELLECTUAL GAMES IN DEVELOPING SKILLS AND COMMUNITIES OF INTELLECTUAL GAMES PARTICIPANTS IN AZERBAIJAN**

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the impact of intellectual games on communication skills, teamwork, and social belonging among participants in Azerbaijan. Using a quantitative approach, data was collected from over a hundred participants who regularly engage in intellectual games to understand how these activities affect their cognitive and social development. The findings suggest that intellectual games significantly enhance communication abilities, with players reporting improved confidence in discussions and the ability to express complex ideas. Furthermore, these games foster teamwork skills, as participants develop better collaboration and conflict-resolution techniques. Social belonging is also strengthened, with many players forming lasting connections. Despite these positive results, the study highlights the need for further research into the impact of gender dynamics and socio-cultural factors on participation levels. Overall, this study demonstrates that intellectual games contribute to cognitive and social growth, offering valuable opportunities for enhancing life skills and fostering inclusivity within the community.

Keywords: Intellectual games, communication, teamwork, social belonging, Azerbaijan.

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INTRODUCTION

Quizbowl champion Andrew Hart describes intellectual games as "a game you don't know, played by people you don't know, who know lots of things you don't know" (Hart, 2015, para. 1). Intellectual games have turned into an inseparable part of many people's lives, as the number of people playing such games has grown significantly worldwide. As Novoselov (2020) states, their number can be compared to the number of chess or video game players in a country.

Intellectual games are played all across the world including in Germany, the UK, the United States, Central and Eastern Asia (Novoselov, 2020). However, these games have evolved into much more than forms of entertainment and hold great importance in post-Soviet countries, especially in Azerbaijan. Additionally, intellectual games are described as powerful tools that improve communicative skills, and social, socio-psychological, personal, and professional qualities of a person besides intellectual development (Mandel, 2009). The rise of these games in Azerbaijan dates back to the late 20th century, with the introduction of What? Where? When? (WWW) in the 1970s, which was followed by other popular formats like Brain Ring, Your Game (Svoya Igra), and Khamsa National Intellectual Game (ChGK, 2007; Novoselov, 2020). These games have evolved over time, with What? Where? When? transforming into a widely played synchronous format, while other games like Brain Ring broadcast on Azerbaijani channels since 2013 (The Ministry of Education, 2013). The popularity of these games has led to the creation of university intellectual games clubs, organizations, and frequent tournaments forming a key part of the intellectual culture in Azerbaijan. In fact, Baku is recognized as a major intellectual games hub, connecting players from Azerbaijan, Georgia, Central Asia, and Turkey (Novoselov, 2020).

There is a lack of research with regard to intellectual games globally, and it is almost nonexistent when it comes to Azerbaijan. Although it might cause hardships in obtaining existing data, this research aims to bridge the gap. The purpose of this research is to explore the cognitive, social, and personal impacts of intellectual games in Azerbaijan, particularly focusing on how they affect communication skills, teamwork, and social belonging of the players. By examining the intellectual games community in Azerbaijan, this research aims to provide an understanding of the role intellectual games play in shaping individuals' intellectual and social lives.

This study seeks to answer the following research question: What is the impact of playing intellectual games on communication skills, teamwork, and social belonging among players in Azerbaijan?

While conducting this analysis, the research will explore the social composition of intellectual game participants in Azerbaijan, the factors that contribute to their game engagement, and the ways these games affect intellectual and personal development.

The findings of this research aim to provide valuable insights into the intellectual games landscape in Azerbaijan and offer recommendations for players, organizers, and institutions seeking to utilize these games for educational and developmental purposes. This paper commences by providing background on intellectual games globally, moving on to Azerbaijan, followed by previous studies on the topic, and then methodology and survey design. It proceeds with a description of findings and discussion, ending with concluding remarks.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The definition of an intellectual game

Throughout history, games have been regarded as a unique socio-cultural phenomenon with their philosophical, psychological, and cultural aspects. The definition of the word game varies in different contexts, with the Great Encyclopedic Dictionary defining it as "...a type of unproductive activity, the motive of which lies not in its results, but in the process itself. In

the history of human society, play is intertwined with magic, cult behavior, etc. It is of great importance in the upbringing, education, and development of children as a means of psychological preparation for future life situations." (The Great Encyclopedia, 2001, p. 434).

Intellectual games have existed for centuries in various forms. The phrase intellectual game is usually associated with games like chess, go, or other similar types, not considering the nature of the "What? Where? When?" and other types of trivia (Zyukina et al., 2020). In the United States, there have been games since 1964 that fit the description of intellectual games, such as "Quiz" and "Jeopardy". In the USSR, the new wave of intellectual games commenced with the "What? Where? When?" game by Vladimir Voroshilov in 1975 (ChGK, 2007). In their initial years, these games served the purpose of entertaining the nations, yet recently their role has turned out to be more than a mere distraction. In the research by Mandel (2009), supported by experiments conducted in various countries (Japan, 1986-1987; USA, 1980-2002, Israel, 2001-2003), it should be noted that whereas those riddles and the games mentioned above provide an allegorical description of an object or phenomenon, intellectual games go beyond merely testing knowledge and skills. They delve into the depth of questions, simulate the participants' continuous development, and contribute to the increase of knowledge.

Thus, according to Mandel (2009), an intellectual game is an individual or collective performance of tasks that call for productive thinking to understand subject and social reality within a limited time and competition. These games include both elements of education and gaming, stimulating theoretical thinking that requires the formulation of concepts and the implementation of basic mental operations like classification, analysis, and synthesis of information. Although there are numerous types of these games, their mission is one. They contribute to the intellectual abilities of individuals by helping the mind to find connections, analyze, observe, and combine facts (Mandel, 2009).

Game types

The most popular intellectual game, "What? Where? When?" was created by Voroshilov for a TV program in the late 20th century. In this form, one team consisting of six players aims to find an answer to questions within a minute. Additionally, the game required logic, intuition, and other skills along with knowledge to answer the questions (ChGK, 2007). As the game became popular, a new sport version became prevalent where multiple teams could play the questions, generally between 36 and 90 questions, in written form. These "synchronized" tournaments usually take place once a week (Novoselov, 2020).

Besides "WWW", "Brain Ring" (or in international format, "Quiz") is quite popular. The game consists of two teams competing against each other for a certain number of questions that should be answered within 20 seconds. The game has been airing on Azerbaijani television channels since 2013 (The Ministry of Education, 2013).

Individual types of games, such as "Jeopardy" and its Soviet version "Svoya igra" ("Own game"), require players to answer questions in different fields in several rounds to determine the winner (Rijov, 2004).

Another popular intellectual game in the country is Khamsa National Intellectual Game, which was introduced in 2007, with similar patterns to "Erudit-Quartet". This game involved four teams competing with one individual on a specific topic for four game categories. Questions are divided into topics with five questions in each (Khamsa National Intellectual Game, 2012).

The previous research suggests that globally, two large intellectual games hubs exist, one of which is Baku, connecting the players of Azerbaijan, Georgia, Central Asia, and Turkey (Novoselov, 2020). In Azerbaijan, there is the Federation of Intellectual Games, along with several intellectual game university clubs and organizations. In addition, almost every university has its own intellectual games club (Milli.az, 2015).

The impact of intellectual games on teamwork, communication skills, and social belonging

Csikszentmihalyi (2013) mentions that for the development of intellect, an individual's activity in free time is more significant than that during working hours. In this regard, intellectual training during leisure time helps with keeping a high level of mental activity. Csikszentmihalyi further suggests (2013) that such activity helps a person's mind enter a state of "flow", which can be compared with feelings of "happiness" and therefore explains the growing demand for intellectual games today. In the last decades of the twentieth century, intellectual games have turned out to be more than mere entertainment and more of a passion, turning into an integral part of the personality as the years pass in playing these games (Goldin, 2009). With tournaments held almost weekly for more than a decade, intellectual games in Azerbaijan have also reached a level where it is viewed as more than entertainment.

The questions asked in the TV show allowed researchers to determine the average age of people interested in such activities and were later used in training at various schools and universities (Zyukina et al., 2020). Numerous studies conducted in different countries indicate that people constantly engaged in mental work think freshly like younger people (Mandel, 2009). The human brain contains vast natural capabilities, and intellectual activity attracts people who are not quite young. Thus, the need to play remains until old age among individuals (Isaenko, 2002). In addition, the research suggests that the participants of games upgrade their communication skills and expand their knowledge while enjoying their free time (Mandel, 2009). It is a great achievement that intellectual games have suppressed screens into natural environments and become an engaging activity with a significant increase in the number of participants in this "movement" (Mandel, 2009). Moreover, another element of the intellectual game community is its composition. In general, these games attract workaholics and socially active people (Goldin, 2009). Due to a shortage of data, there is no information on the background of intellectual games players, which is one of the elements the survey is determined to explore.

Previous research has analyzed intellectual games usage for educational purposes, however, it viewed concepts like the ability to work in a team and structure knowledge (Filin, 2008). Further research on these concepts implied that games like "What? Where? When?", "Own game", "Brain ring", and "Erudite-Quartets" have indicated the greatest opportunities for developing the mentioned factors (Romanova et al., 2016). According to Zyukina et al. (2020), the team members of intellectual games should be selected based on similar interests. Additionally, this way of selection helps with the issue of individuals socializing and communicating. A study by Blonsky (2021) explored intellectual game team results at the Russian Open Academy of Transport to assess the influence of intellectual games on the students' personality and discovered that participating in intellectual games increased teamwork skills along with knowledge. This study is an opportunity to have an insight into the impact of intellectual games on players' communication skills and teamwork abilities.

The research has also implied that team-structured intellectual games have contributed to the socialization of the players as they create opportunities to find individuals of "their own" and strengthen the ties between existing friends with this type of entertainment (Goldin, 2009). The same research further confirms that as these connections bloom, the ties between teams turn into friendship to the level of a family and thus, games create social units. It would be informative to obtain information on social ties and feelings of belonging to the intellectual community of Azerbaijan.

The review of existing literature indicates that there is a shortage of information on intellectual games not only on a global level but also in Azerbaijan. This literature review seeks to address this gap by examining the current

composition of the intellectual games community of Azerbaijan, assessing the games' influence on communication, teamwork, and socialization skills. With this aim, the research is also laying a foundation for the subsequent exploration of this topic. Thus, the findings of this research will help to have a better understanding of the current trends in the intellectual sphere and benefit both players and organizations holding intellectual games to more effectively implement events that provide beyond mere entertainment.

METHODOLOGY

This research will employ quantitative primary data sources for analysis. Quantitative data will be gathered through a survey taken by the players of intellectual games in Azerbaijan, which includes multiple-choice questions. The survey question will be provided based on the previous research by Mandel (2009) and Blonsky (2021). Before the full survey distribution, a pilot study was conducted with 20 participants to test the clarity and relevance of the questionnaire. Feedback from the pilot respondents led to minor alterations in question wording to improve comprehension. The survey questions were designed to comprehend the basic structure of the intellectual community of the country, preceded by questions related to the aforementioned factors. The survey consists of four sections: demographic information, questions on communication skills, teamwork-related aspects, and social belonging factors.

Furthermore, it includes multiple-choice questions and statements rated on a five-point Likert scale. The sample group is made up of individuals who play various intellectual games at school, university, and the national level in Azerbaijan. The survey data will be collected via Google Forms and analyzed using descriptive statistics, primarily focusing on percentages and mean scores. The findings will be presented through bar and pie charts to visually illustrate key patterns and distributions.

FINDINGS

This research paper aimed to explore how participating in intellectual games impacts communication, teamwork skills, and social belonging among players in Azerbaijan. As intellectual games evolved from screens to daily life, the composition of the intellectual game community started to form and indirectly attracted a specific group of people (Mandel, 2009). Previous studies included the structure of the communities to some extent, which mainly describes the majority of players as socially active and workaholics (Goldin, 2009).

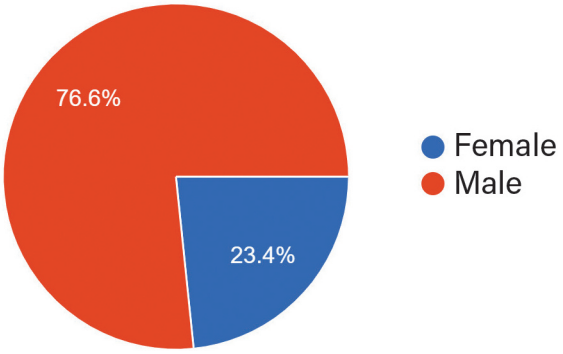
This survey was held among the members of the intellectual game community across Azerbaijan. Participants were selected using a purposive sampling approach, as mainly individuals engaged in intellectual games were invited to participate. Additionally, snowball sampling was employed. The survey was distributed online through social media platforms and direct contact with known intellectual game players. The majority of the questions were multiple-choice questions. The number of survey respondents was 107, with various backgrounds with regard to age, gender, work experience, etc. Ethical principles were carefully followed throughout the research. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were informed about the purpose of the study before completing the survey. The survey was anonymous and included a confidentiality statement emphasizing data privacy and the right to withdraw at any time.

Firstly, as the survey indicates, 76.6% of survey participants were male, and the remaining 23.4% were female (Graph 1).

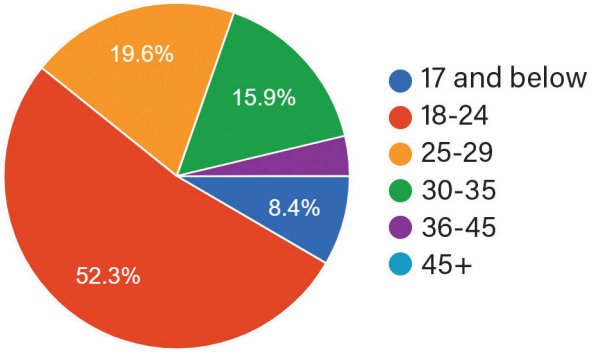
The age of participants ranged from "17 and below" to "36 to 45". According to the age groups, the ratio of respondents was as follows: "17 and below" – 8.4 percent, "18-24" – 52.3 percent, "25-29" – 19.6 percent, "30-35" – 15.9 percent, "36-45" – 3.7 percent, and "45+" – 0 percent. From the responses, it is evident that the majority of participants are below 35 (Graph 2).

Coming to the duration of playing intellectual games, respondents' experiences ranged from

Graph 1 Gender distribution of respondents



Graph 2 Age proportion of respondents



"less than one year" to "more than twenty years". The responses were as follows – 6.5% of players have been competing for less than a year, 11.2% for 1-2 years, 33.6% for 3-5 years, 29.9% for 6-10 years, 16.8% for 10-20 years, and 1.9% for more than 20 years. It is possible to observe that the majority of players have experience of 3 to 10 years. Regarding the frequency of playing intellectual games, more than half, 51.4% of respondents play several times a month. 26.2% of players compete several times a week, 19.6% several times a year, and the remaining 2.8% once a year or less. Another important element was the occupation of the members of the Azerbaijani intellectual game community, where the responses were diverse. 28% of the respondents were either students or did not have a job, 14% worked in the banking and finance sector, 10.3% in the education sector, 9% in the government sector, 8.4% in IT, 7.5% in sales and marketing, 7.5% in the health sector, 4.7% in engineering, and 2.8% were business owners. The remaining respondents equaled less than 2%, included employees of HR, risk analysis, journalism, project management, tourism, media, and legal fields. For the type of games played, 95.3% of respondents played "What? Where? When?", followed by 74.8% "Khamsa" and "Erudit-quartet", 57% for "Own game", and 45.8% for other types – "Brain Ring" and various quizzes. 85% of participants played more than two types of games.

Communication skills

Previous research, such as that conducted by Mandel (2009) and Zyukina et al. (2020), found intellectual games' positive influence on the communication skills of the participants. One of the main aims of this survey was to find out how playing intellectual games impacts communication skills. The respondents measured communication skill-related statements on a five-point Likert scale of "1" as completely disagree, "2" as disagree, "3" being neutral, "4" as agree, and "5" as completely agree. The responses demonstrate that playing intellectual games has improved an individual's ability to express ideas clearly during discussions. Out of 107 respondents, 39.3% completely agreed, 38.3% agreed, 12.1% were neutral, 3.7% disagreed, and 6.5% completely disagreed with this statement. Next, to the assertion that respondents felt more confident when speaking in group settings due to experience in intellectual games, the players' reactions were as follows: 43.9% completely agreed, 31.8% agreed, 14% were neutral, 5.6% disagreed, and 4.7% completely disagreed. Moreover, the survey measured whether intellectual games have helped to articulate complex ideas more effectively. For this statement, 29.0% of respondents completely agreed, 38.3% of respondents agreed, 26.2% of respondents were neutral, and the remaining 6.5% of respondents responded negatively. For the last statement of communication skills,

which is players often sharing thoughts and suggestions during intellectual games without hesitation, 44.9% completely agreed, 33.6% agreed, 13.1% were neutral, 4.7% disagreed, and the remaining 3.7% completely disagreed.

The analysis reveals notable variations across demographic characteristics in all statements regarding communication skills. A significant majority of respondents completely agreed that intellectual games improved their communication skills, with strong agreement among individuals with over six years of experience, particularly in education, healthcare, and engineering. Responses for agreeing consisted mostly of players up to the age of 29 with varying experience levels, working in the fields of law, banking, and journalism. Neutral responses came from individuals playing less frequently. Disagreement was observed among both new and highly experienced players, particularly in education and healthcare. Completely disagreeing participants were mostly individuals with either extensive experience of more than 10 years or very little exposure, especially from self-employed sectors and employees of the banking and government sectors. Overall, males dominated the responses in all agreement categories, especially individuals with experience from 6 to more than 10 years. Females were more represented in the "neutral" and "disagree" categories, particularly those with 1–5 years of experience. These findings suggest that while intellectual games generally enhance communication skills, their impact varies based on experience level, profession, and individual perception.

Teamwork

Previous research has shown that intellectual games have contributed to the ability to work in a team (Filin, 2008). Furthermore, a study by Blonsky (2021) indicates that, besides increasing knowledge, participating in intellectual games positively affects teamwork skills. For understanding whether participating in team-based intellectual games strengthens the ability to collaborate with others, 73.8% of responses either agreed or completely agreed with the statement. Next, to measure whether intellectual games increase the effectiveness of participants in organizing and coordinating tasks in team settings, the responses were as follows: 76.6% of participants believed that intellectual games have contributed to them organizing and coordinating tasks in team settings, 23.3% of participants were neutral, and 9.3% participants disagreed. For the statement "Playing intellectual games has taught me how to manage conflicts within a team constructively", 26.1% of players completely agreed, 32.7% of players agreed, 26.1% of players were neutral, 7.4% of players disagreed, and 7.4% of players completely disagreed. Moreover, 34.5% of participants often relied on teammates' strengths to achieve success during intellectual games, whereas 30.8% were neutral and 12.1% disagreed. Lastly, the majority of the participants, 42.9%, agreed, and 33.6% completely agreed that they felt more confident in team-based environments after participating in intellectual games.

The overall analysis reveals that intellectual games have a generally positive impact on teamwork skills, with the majority of respondents agreeing on all statements. Agreement was strongest among individuals with 3-10 years of experience and players up to 29 years old, particularly in sales, banking, IT, and healthcare. Neutral responses were more common among those with 1-2 years or over 10 years of experience, particularly among players in healthcare and journalism. Disagreement and complete disagreement were noted among both inexperienced and highly experienced players, especially among law employees and entrepreneurs, reinforcing that the impact of intellectual games on teamwork varies based on experience level, profession, and engagement frequency. Overall, females generally expressed higher agreement levels, whereas males showed more variation in their responses.

Social belonging

The research by Zyukina et al. (2020) suggests that when the team members of intellectual games are selected based on similar interests, it helps with strengthening social ties.

Additionally, the socialization of players contributes to making new lasting friendships (Goldin, 2009). For measuring social belonging in this survey, a variety of results were displayed for the statement "Playing intellectual games makes me feel like I'm part of a community". Thus, 28% of participants completely agreed with the statement, 28.9% of participants agreed with the statement, 28.9% of participants were neutral, 7.4% of participants disagreed, and 6.5% of participants completely disagreed. For forming meaningful friendships through intellectual games, 71% of respondents supported the statement. However, 12.1% of responses were negative. Furthermore, 41.1% of participants completely agreed that they often interact with other players outside of intellectual game sessions, 19.6% were neutral, and 6.5% completely disagreed. Finally, for the statement "playing intellectual games has helped me connect with others who share my interests", more than half of the respondents – 59.8% of survey takers - completely agreed, 26.1% agreed, 8.4% stayed neutral, 0.93% disagreed, and 4.6% completely disagreed.

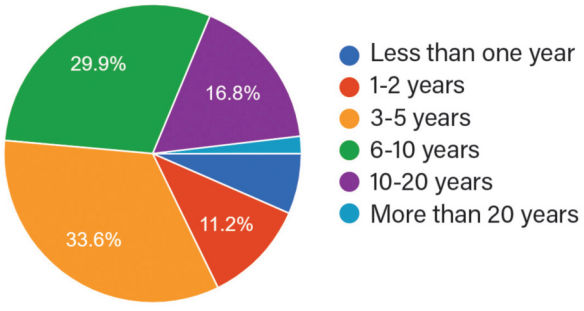
The analysis shows that a sense of belonging and social connections through intellectual games varies by experience, age, profession, and frequency of participation. Younger participants up to 24 years old with 3-5 years of experience, particularly working in the fields of banking, healthcare, and the public sector, reported stronger feelings of community and meaningful friendships. Those who played games weekly or monthly also felt more connected. In contrast, individuals with less than a year or more than 20 years of experience tended to have a weaker sense of belonging and fewer social interactions. Males and females were similarly likely to report forming connections, though age and experience played a more significant role in forming social connections.

DISCUSSION

Starting with the first indicator of the community's composition, the gender proportion indicates an unequal divide between males and females in the Azerbaijani intellectual game community. Considering the games both on television and outside broadcast, it is implied that this sphere is a male-dominated field. This trend might be rooted in societal patterns where competitive or knowledge-based activities are perceived as more appealing to men. To encourage more women to participate in intellectual games, some initiatives like female-only tournaments have been undertaken within the community (ADA Intellectual Games Club, 2022). However, as the gap is significant, there is a great need for initiatives aimed at fostering gender diversity within the community.

Next, the age ranges were intentionally divided at the age of 29, as in the Republic of Azerbaijan, the youth are considered up to the mentioned age according to the law "On Youth Policy" (2002), and most official competitions impose that age limit. The trend in age groups is likely to be attributed to factors such as school and university clubs fostering interest in intellectual games. The results indicate that the majority of players are youth, however, this study also supports previous research (Isaenko, 2002) that intellectual games are a lifelong experience, and players still compete even up to the age of 45.

Graph 3 Duration of playing intellectual games



Regarding the duration of playing intellectual games, as most participants are young and can be exposed to intellectual games from school years, they have on average 3 to 10 years' experience. Correspondingly, the older survey

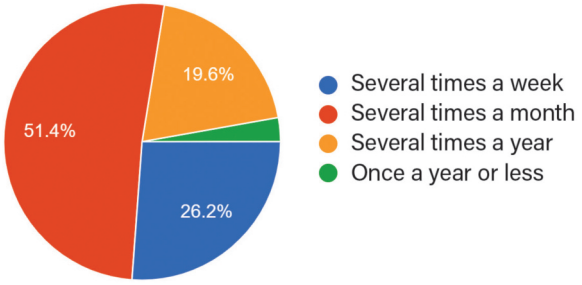
takers have been in the field for up to 20 years. Moreover, for the frequency of playing intellectual games, most players keep themselves busy with intellectual games at least monthly.

Coming to the occupation of players, there was a great variety of occupations. The main spheres were banking and finance, education, the government sector, IT, sales and marketing, and the medical field. Considering that the majority of respondents fell into the age category of 18-24, the ones who did not have a job were mainly students.

The results for the game types are not surprising. Taking into account that "What? Where? When?" sport style is the most suitable for the maximum number of people playing at the same time, it has become the most popular game. Additionally, it matches with previous research that the popularization of the game in television shows for decades has contributed to it being the most preferred one (Novoselov, 2020). Nevertheless, Khamsa/Erudit-quartet, "Own game" and quizzes maintain popularity as well.

The ability to communicate effectively is a critical skill that intellectual games can influence, as suggested by prior research (Mandel, 2009; Zyukina et al., 2020). To understand this impact, the responses to communication-related statements were analyzed in relation to the years participants have spent playing intellectual games. Firstly, the results suggest that among respondents who played for 1 to 5 years, 82% agreed with playing games' positive impact on the ability to express ideas clearly during discussions. For players with 6–10 years and more than 10 years of experience, the agreement levels were slightly lower, at 75% and 70%, respectively. A similar trend was observed for players' feeling more confident when speaking in group settings due to experience in intellectual games. The data indicates that intellectual games consistently build confidence over time, with many respondents in all categories agreeing with this assertion. Moreover, the percentage of participants agreeing with the intellectual game's help to formulate complex ideas

Graph 4 Frequency of playing intellectual games



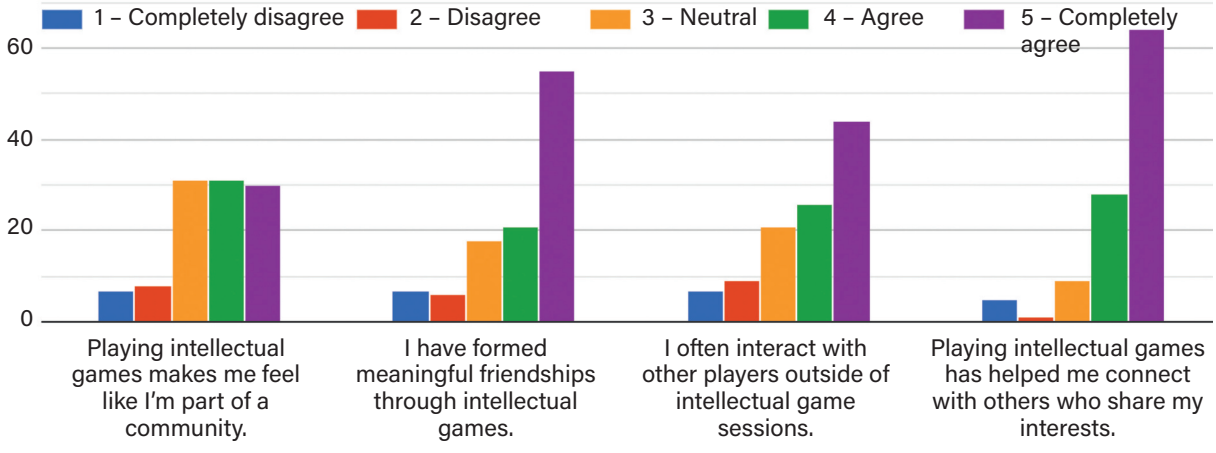
effectively was higher than sixty percent for all categories. This reinforces the idea that intellectual games provide long-term benefits for participants in developing advanced communication skills. Lastly, in evaluating the ease of sharing thoughts and suggestions during intellectual games, participants with extensive experience of 10+ years showed high levels of agreement, with over 80% reporting no hesitation in voicing their ideas. Meanwhile, newer players with less than a year of experience also reported low levels of hesitation, indicating that the players are comfortable in the environment. These findings align with Mandel's (2009) research, which highlights the role of intellectual games in fostering effective communication. Over time, these games are becoming a platform for players to refine their ability to engage in meaningful discussions, express ideas clearly, and participate in complex team dialogues.

Team-based intellectual games provide a distinctive platform for individuals to develop and refine teamwork skills, blending both entertainment and intellectual engagement (Mandel, 2009; Zyukina et al., 2020). These games not only foster collaboration and coordination but also encourage players to support each other's strengths, which is an inseparable part of successful teamwork (Romanova et al., 2016). Despite the years spent playing intellectual games, the indicators for all participants were above 60% regarding the statement that participating in team-based intellectual games has strengthened the ability to collaborate with others. This demonstrates that intellectual

games contribute universally to fostering teamwork, irrespective of experience levels. Additionally, the results strongly supported the statement about intellectual games' positive influence on effective organizing and coordinating tasks in team settings. However, when it comes to managing conflicts within a team constructively, the responses were less definitive. Players with 1–5 years of experience predominantly answered neutrally, and this trend was similarly observed in players with 6–10 years and 10+ years of experience. This neutrality may suggest that while intellectual games encourage collaboration, they may not inherently teach conflict resolution skills, or that players rely on external mechanisms to address conflicts. Another intriguing result was observed for participants relying on my teammates' strengths to achieve success during intellectual games. While players with 1–5 years and 10+ years of experience displayed neutral tendencies, players with 6–10 years of experience gave a mix of negative and neutral responses. This deviation could indicate that mid-level players, possibly during a phase of developing deeper expertise and self-reliance, might find it harder to rely on teammates compared to newer or more experienced players. Lastly, players with all years of experience feel more confident in team-based environments thanks to participating in intellectual games. These findings align with prior studies (Filin, 2008; Blonsky, 2021), which emphasize the role of intellectual games in enhancing teamwork-related skills, including collaboration, organization, and confidence in group dynamics.

In the long term, the social impact of intellectual games extends beyond the frames of competitions. To compare social belonging to the community of intellectual games players, which might be defined as the identity of individuals as intellectual game players, the duration of playing intellectual games was selected to better have insight into how prolonged participation influences a sense of community of intellectual games players, the development of lasting friendships, and the depth of social connections formed within the intellectual game community. For feeling like a part of the community, it is interesting that around 60% of respondents answered positively for both experiences of 1-5 years and 6-10 years. However, for players with more than ten years of experience, only 40% agreed that they felt part of the community. This might imply that as players evolve, they might be busy with other opportunities and thus do not feel social belonging much. In cross-examination with frequency of playing, the results show that those who play weekly feel more like a part of the community, and 46% of those who play annually or less felt positive. Thus, for the less duration in the

Graph 5 Social belonging



intellectual game community, the majority of respondents still feel part of the intellectual game community, matching Goldin's (2009) assertion that the intellectual community forms a social unit. For lasting friendships, the research indicates that those who have experience in playing for 6-10 years have established more friendships in the community. For players of 1-5 years' experience, the positive answers equal 65%, and for players of 10+ years, the number is 70%. This implies that it might take some time for players to feel closeness, yet as the years pass, factors like age and career might be a barrier to long-lasting relations. Nevertheless, these findings corroborate the research by Goldin (2009) that intellectual games help with establishing connections that turn into long-lasting friendships. Coming to the frequency of interacting with other players outside of intellectual game sessions, the highest positive results were observed among players with 6 to 10 years of experience. Despite this, for all categories, the number of positive indicators was above 60%. Moreover, in cross-examination with the frequency of playing intellectual games, it is evident that as the frequency of playing intellectual games increases, interaction with other players outside of intellectual game sessions also rises. The results imply that playing intellectual games has helped to find people with mutual interests, regardless of the duration of playing, as the number of people completely agreeing with that statement for each category exceeded at least 80%. For players of 6-10 years, the indicator was at a record, 91%. Therefore, the claims in a study by Zyukina et al. (2020) that the intellectual community attracts members with similar interests and helps with their socializing are confirmed. Overall, the findings indicate that playing intellectual games fosters social belonging, with both duration and frequency playing critical roles. Weekly participation appears to strengthen community ties most effectively, while even less frequent involvement provides meaningful social connections.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations could be made to provide better insight into the intellectual community of Azerbaijan. Firstly, the gender proportion of the intellectual game community in Azerbaijan appears to be male-dominated. While this survey does not explore the underlying causes, cultural norms, and historical trends, further research could provide more insight into these dynamics. Exploring these factors could help create a more inclusive environment by addressing potential barriers and promoting gender diversity. Next, given the importance of lasting friendships and social connections observed in the findings, intellectual game communities should actively encourage networking opportunities, to maintain bonds between players not limited to meeting only at intellectual competitions. While some players primarily interact in the competitions and have limited contact outside of them, others are more social and form lasting friendships. Encouraging these interactions could help promote connections that exceed the boundaries of the competitions. Lastly, more research is required to investigate the specific socio-cultural factors influencing the social dynamics of intellectual game players, as well as the potential impacts of personal commitments such as career and family on players' sense of community. These recommendations aim to build upon the current understanding and help refine the framework for future research on intellectual games.

This study has several limitations. First, the sample size is relatively small and skewed toward younger participants, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, the reliance on self-reported data might create the possibility of bias, as participants may have overestimated their skills. Finally, although the focus on intellectual games within Azerbaijan provides valuable information on the local community, it restricts the scope of the findings, and future research could benefit from exploring and comparing global communities.

To conclude, this paper explored the impact of intellectual games on communication skills, teamwork, and social belonging among players in Azerbaijan. The findings suggest that these games positively influence all three areas. Participants reported improved communication abilities, including more confident participation in group discussions and the ability to form complex ideas. Teamwork skills were also enhanced, with players noting better collaboration and conflict resolution. Additionally, intellectual games fostered a sense of social belonging, with many participants forming lasting connections. Despite these positive outcomes, the research identified areas for further investigation, such as the gender imbalance within the community and the socio-cultural factors that may influence participation. In conclusion, intellectual games contribute significantly to cognitive and social growth by helping players develop essential life skills and build strong social networks. By promoting diversity and deeper social connections, intellectual games can further foster a more inclusive community.

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