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Developing and Validating an Existentialist Curriculum Scale with Emphasis on Teaching-Learning Strategies

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Abstract

The present study aimed to develop and validate an existentialist curriculum scale with an emphasis on the teaching–learning strategies component. A sequential exploratory mixed-methods approach was adopted. In the qualitative phase, a case study method was employed. Participants included professors, experts, and teachers familiar with the existentialist school of thought. Using purposive sampling of typical cases, theoretical saturation was reached with 25 participants. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, and the trustworthiness of the findings was established based on credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. The qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis. In the quantitative phase, a descriptive survey design was employed. The statistical population for scale validation consisted of elementary school teachers in Sari County, Iran, from whom 250 participants were selected using proportionate stratified random sampling. Data were collected using a researcher-developed questionnaire. The developed scale comprised four main criteria: educational environment, teacher, student, and existentialist teaching method. The results of the factor analysis confirmed the proposed structure of the scale, indicating that the four-dimensional model consisting of educational environment, teacher, student, and existentialist teaching method was supported.

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Extended Abstract

Introduction

Existentialism, as a philosophical approach emphasizing human freedom, choice, responsibility, individuality, and the search for meaning, has important implications for educational theory and practice. From an existentialist perspective, curriculum and teaching-learning processes should recognize learners as unique and autonomous individuals and provide opportunities for personal choice, responsibility, self-expression, and meaningful engagement. Despite the theoretical relevance of existentialist principles to education, there is a lack of empirically developed and psychometrically validated instruments for assessing teaching-learning strategies from an existentialist perspective. The present study therefore aimed to construct and validate an existentialist curriculum scale, with particular emphasis on teaching-learning strategies and their major dimensions.

Method

The research employed a sequential exploratory mixed-methods design. In the qualitative phase, a case study approach was used. Participants included professors, experts, and teachers familiar with existentialist thought who were selected purposively. Twenty-five participants were interviewed until theoretical saturation was reached. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, and credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability were used to establish the trustworthiness of the qualitative findings. Data were analyzed through qualitative content analysis. In the quantitative phase, a descriptive-survey method was employed. The statistical population consisted of elementary school teachers in Sari, from whom 250 participants were selected using proportional stratified random sampling based on the Morgan sampling table. A researcher-made questionnaire was developed from the qualitative findings. The initial scale comprised four main criteria: existentialist educational space, existentialist teacher, existentialist student, and existentialist teaching method. The psychometric properties of the scale were examined using exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses and reliability measures.

Results

Qualitative content analysis identified one overarching theme, four organizing themes—existentialist educational space, existentialist teacher, existentialist student, and existentialist teaching method—and 31 basic themes. The educational space emphasized flexibility, individual differences, emergent curriculum, non-linear educational processes, and a warm, calm, and empathetic atmosphere. The existentialist teacher was characterized by humane and respectful relationships, unconditional acceptance, flexibility, openness to diverse perspectives, facilitation of learning, and recognition of students' unique capacities. The existentialist student was conceptualized as a free, independent, unique, and responsible individual who actively participates in learning and exercises the right to make choices. The teaching method emphasized flexibility, integration of diverse instructional methods and tools, avoidance of predetermined structures, and attention to human relationships and individual differences. In the quantitative phase, data from 250 teachers were analyzed using SPSS and SmartPLS. The results indicated satisfactory factor loadings and t-values for all items. Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability coefficients exceeded 0.70, and AVE values were above 0.50 for all components. The overall Cronbach's alpha was 0.97. The R^2, Q^2, SRMR, and NFI indices also indicated satisfactory measurement-model fit, supporting the validity and reliability of the developed scale.

Discussion

The findings indicate that teaching-learning strategies can be conceptualized within an

existentialist framework through the interconnected dimensions of educational space, teacher, student, and teaching method. Rather than treating existentialist education as a collection of isolated instructional techniques, the findings suggest that its educational meaning emerges from the interaction of these dimensions. An existentialist educational environment should create conditions for freedom, choice, responsibility, dialogue, and personal development. Within such an environment, the teacher functions primarily as a facilitator who supports reflection, self-awareness, choice, and self-expression rather than merely transmitting knowledge. The student is regarded as an active and responsible individual whose experiences, interests, needs, and individuality are central to the learning process. Teaching methods, accordingly, should encourage questioning, dialogue, critical thinking, personal experience, active participation, and meaningful choice. The psychometric findings further demonstrate that these dimensions can be operationalized through a reliable and valid measurement instrument. The developed scale can therefore provide researchers, teachers, and curriculum specialists with a framework for examining the extent to which teaching-learning practices are consistent with existentialist principles. It may also support the identification of strengths and areas for improvement in classroom practices and contribute to the development of learning environments that foster students' autonomy, self-awareness, responsibility, creativity, and meaningful participation.

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