Construction and validation of the Adolescent Life Project Scale (EPROVA)

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Abstract

The importance of a life project lies in orienting actions towards positive ways of living, promoting responsibility in adolescence. Therefore, the objective was to design and validate the Adolescent Life Project Scale (EPROVA, from its initials in Spanish). High school students between the ages of 14 and 20 participated, with an average age of 16 years, 52.75% male, 46.94% female and 0.31% of another gender, from the Colegio Nacional de Educación Técnica plantel Azcapotzalco, México. The sampling was non-probabilistic by convenience. The scale was applied online to a total of 637 students. An Exploratory Factor Analysis was performed and the internal consistency was calculated by means of a Cronbach's Alpha analysis. The AFE grouped the instrument into 5 factors with an explained variance of 47%, which are, Self-expression (α = .89), Self-direction (α = .83), Autonomy (α = .62), Modes of time use (α = .68) and External tools (α = .77). It is concluded that the instrument is valid and reliable in the adolescent population of Mexico City, so it will be useful to learn about the adolescent's abilities to plan his or her life project.

Keywords: Life project, Quality of life, Strategies, Adolescence, Evaluation.

Resumen

La importancia de un proyecto de vida radica en orientar las acciones a formas de vivir positivas, promoviendo la responsabilidad en la adolescencia. Por lo que, el objetivo fue diseñar y validar la Escala de Proyecto de Vida Adolescente (EPROVA). Participaron estudiantes de secundaria entre edades de 14 a 20 años, con una edad promedio de 16 años, 52.75% de género masculino, 46.94% femenino y 0.31% de otro género, del Colegio Nacional de Educación Técnica plantel Azcapotzalco, México. El muestreo fue de tipo no probabilístico por conveniencia. La escala se aplicó en línea a un total de 637 alumnos. Se realizó un Análisis Factorial Exploratorio y se calculó la consistencia interna mediante un análisis de Alfa de Cronbach. El AFE agrupó el instrumento en 5 factores con una varianza explicada de 47%, los cuales son, Autoexpresión (α = .89), Autodirección (α = .83), Autonomía (α = .62), Modos de empleo de tiempo (α = .68) y Herramientas externas (α = .77). Se concluye que el instrumento es válido y confiable en población adolescente de la Ciudad de México, por lo que, será útil para conocer las habilidades del adolescente para el planteamiento de proyecto de vida.

Palabras clave: Proyecto de vida, Calidad de vida, Estrategias, Adolescencia, Evaluación.

INTRODUCTION

At present, Mexico is considered one of the countries with the most problems related to adolescence, affecting approximately 20.8 million people between 15 and 24 years of age (Bazán-Riverón et al., 2019). It has been found that having a life project that contemplates aspirations and expectations, allows access to a better quality of life (Bazán-Riverón et al., 2019; Díaz-Garay et al., 2020).

The life project refers to the orientation and meaning that people give to their lives, taking into account sociocultural relations and interaction with others, serving as significant mediators, and its importance is highlighted, as it will help adolescents to make vital decisions in their lives in relation to the identification of their strengths and weaknesses as recognized by themselves (Diaz-Garay, 2020).

The creation of a life project starts with the adolescents' introspection to define what they wish to achieve based on their interests, so it is essential to self-evaluate and take into account the factors that will be involved in its creation (family, partner, friends, the information available to him or her). This will allow them to identify their strengths, weaknesses and opportunities (Díaz-Barriga, Vázquez-Negrete and Díaz-David, 2019; Díaz-Garay, et al 2020; Betancourth and Cerón, 2017; Pilozo-Loor and Zambrano-Montes, 2022). It is essential to contextualize the life project in relation to the stages of adolescence, since "the concept of the future depends on the phase through which it moves" (Merino, 1993). In adolescence, the most common questions are related to identity and life purposes, so it is necessary to harmonize the "I am" (of the present) and the "I want to be" (of the future), so that the generation of a life project is satisfactory (Betancourth and Cerón, 2017; Delgado, Vega and García, 2020). Thus, the life project is an active construction that encompasses various aspects and is considered as a long-term goal, in which adolescents visualize the lifestyle they wish to adopt in the future, in which they synthesize their motivations to establish concrete actions that bring them closer to this, granting the possibility that these actions are based on a prior analysis of the possible consequences (Betancourth and Cerón, 2017; Delgado, Vega and García, 2020; Tenorio and Montoya, 2020).

García-Yepes (2017, p 154) defines the Life Project as "a process that structures both the vital expectations and the strategies to achieve these objectives within the framework of a social context"; that is, for the construction of a life project, it is essential to make visible both the subject and the aspirations he/she has, as well as the environment and the possibilities offered to achieve these aspirations. Thus, this author defines the Life Project on the basis of three dimensions: self-esteem, future projection and relationship with the social and educational context, which, in turn, are made up of subcategories described below:

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The dimension of "Self-appreciation" is made up of two subcategories: Self-esteem, which is the attitude that confers security about one's own personality (Vargas, 2005) and Self-knowledge, which is the possibility of knowing one's own capabilities and transforming weaknesses into opportunities for improvement (D' Angelo, 2000; D' Angelo, 2003). The next dimension corresponds to "Future projection" and is made up of three categories: Vision, which is responsible for articulating the present with future projections, motivating the person and turning the purpose into action, so it marks the future direction having as a principle the commitment and motivation to achieve a goal through the overcoming of their capabilities (Vargas, 2005); Objectives, which are the vital goals of personal planning, that is, what the individual wants to be at a certain time in his life influenced by social, general and specific factors with which he interacts (D'Angelo, 1986, 2000; García-Yepes, 2017), and Strategies, which are actions that the subject is going to perform and are oriented towards the vital goals of personal planning, i.e., they are action plans that structure the particular and

general objectives, being fundamental to achieve these objectives and overcome difficulties in life (D'Angelo, 1986; García-Yepes, 2017). The last dimension is "Relationship with the social and educational context" and has four subcategories: Economic resources, which represent all the elements, means, factors from whose action the satisfaction of needs can be obtained and which can have an impact on the alternatives or actions that guide the projection of life (Casal *et al.*, 2006; Patiño, 1995); Context, is the environment in which people and their life histories develop considering the influence of family and interpersonal relationships, cultural references, economic conditions, labor, professional and social aspects (Casal *el at.,* 2006; Ruiz, 2012; Leiva, 2012); Alternative Life Project (ALP), which implies constant readjustments and reconstructions of aspirations and assessments of vital contexts respecting personal identity when making decisions (D' Angelo, 2003), and Educational System, which is defined as a set of procedures, decisions and actions coming from family, school and social coexistence that aim at building the human being that society itself desires, having an impact on the development of its own life project (Jiménez, 2019).

Thus, the importance of the life project lies in orienting actions to certain ways of living and promotes responsibility, i.e., taking charge of one's own decisions, autonomy, fostering attitudes of respect, ability to share, learning to admit differences, accepting possibilities and limitations (Betancourth*, et al.*, 2019). When there are no expectations or aspirations in relation to goals, the quality of life of the adolescent is diminished and does not allow the consolidation of a life project (García-Yepes, 2017; Tierno, 2018).

Previous research has been conducted on the Life Project and found that, in Brazil, Dellazzana-Zanon *et al.*, (2019) validated the Adolescent Life Project Scale (EPVA, from Spanish initials). The instrument consists of 42 items, which is answered through a five-point Likert-type scale, which range from "totally disagree" to "totally agree" and comprises five dimensions: a) Religiosity, b) Study, c) Positive aspirations, d) Material goods, e) Affective relationships. The instrument presents evidence of reliability through Cronbach's alpha greater than .70 in all factors. The Affective relationships dimension is related to projects to initiate, maintain or intensify affective relationships. This dimension

is composed of the subcategories: (a) forming a family, with or without children; (b) living with the family of origin, (c) dating and (d) projects that involve helping a relative. The Study dimension refers to plans for continuing studies. This dimension is composed of the subcategories: (a) finishing studies and (b) going to university. The Positive Aspirations dimension relates to projects related to the desire to improve oneself as a person over time. It includes projects that indicate the will to become a better person who makes, in some way, a difference in the lives of other people and in society. The Material Goods dimension refers to projects related to the acquisition of material goods and the desire to improve one's financial condition. The Religiosity dimension refers to projects of satisfaction with a personal connection to God or to something considered absolute.

The Meaning Life Questionnaire (MLQ) developed by (Steger et al., 2006); adapted to Spanish and for adolescents by Góngora and Castro (2011). The MLQ is composed of 9 items, which assess two dimensions: Presence (α= .78) and Search for meaning in life (α= .80). This scale uses a 7-point score, from 1 (absolutely false) to 7 (absolutely true) (Steger et al., 2006).

On the other hand, the Purpose in Life-10 (Purpose in Life-10-PIL-10), developed by García-Alandete *et al.* (2013), uses a scale of 7 response categories (1 to 7). The PIL-10 is composed of 2 subscales of five items each: Meaning and satisfaction, and Life goals. It has shown adequate reliability with coefficients α= ,81 for the Sense and Satisfaction subscale and of α= ,84 for the Life Goals subscale (α= ,71) (Garcia-Alandete et al., 2013).

Likewise, the Expectations for the Future in Adolescence Scale (EEFA, from its Spanish initials) developed by Sánchez-Sandoval and Verdugo (2016), which consists of 14 items with a Likert-type response format of five options: 1 "I am sure that it would not happen" to 5 "I am sure that it would happen". The EEFA has a factor structure based on 4 factors: Economic/labor expectations (α= .79); Academic expectations (α= .81); Personal well-being expectations (α= .65); Family expectations (α= .68). The EEFA has adequate psychometric properties, thus demonstrating its validity and reliability.

There is also the reduced version of the Questionnaire of Goals for Adolescents (CMA-R, from its Spanish initials) originally developed

by Sanz de Acedo Lizarraga *et al.* (2006) and adapted to the reduced version by López-Mora et al. (2017), which aims to detect goals pursued by adolescents. The instrument has 26 items with seven dimensions: a) Social recognition, b) Interpersonal, c) Sports, d) Emancipative, e) Educational, f) Sociopolitical, g) Personal commitment. and reliability through internal consistency ranging from .845 to .656.

For their part, Ramos and Chahuac (2019) adapted and translated the Life Project Assessment Scale for Adolescents into the Quechua language. The content validity was 0.874. On the other hand, moderate internal consistency was found (Cronbach's alpha 0.535). The factor analysis was 0.571. In a sample of adolescents aged 13 to 18 years. The Scale consists of 10 items divided into 4 factors: a) Goal planning (items 1, 2 and 3); b) Possibility of achievement (items 5 and 6); c) Availability of resources (items 7 and 8); d) Motivational strength (items 9 and 10). (Cari & Roca, 2017). The rating is scored from 0 to 4. Fluctuating the scores obtained between 0 to 40. In addition, the Life Project Evaluation Scale, created by Orfelinda García Camacho in Lima-Peru in 2002, is known.

Having reviewed the existing background on the attempt to measure scales that seek to explore the "life project", it is considered relevant to mention that its factorial structure, on some occasions, considers measuring constructs that are not necessarily close to the theoretical framework evidenced, nor did they consider consistent theoretical models such as the one proposed by García-Yepes (2013). Therefore, an instrumental gap is evidenced considering this theoretical sense.

Having mentioned these data concerning the theoretical and practical problems, the general objective of this study is to design and analyze the psychometric evidence of an instrument to evaluate the life project in high school students from Mexico City.

METHOD

Research Design

La presente investigación es de diseño instrumental, dado que se analizaron las propiedades psicométricas de un instrumento de medida psicológica (Ato *et al.*, 2013).

Sample

This study included a total of 637 students between 14 and 20 years of age, of which 52.75% were male, 46.94% were female and 0.31% were of another gender. All participants came from the Colegio Nacional de Educación Técnica (CONALEP, from its initials in Spanish) Azcapotzalco campus of the second, fourth and sixth school semesters. A non-probabilistic convenience sampling was used to select the sample.

Instruments

Adolescent Life Project Scale (EPROVA): Developed in this research through an exhaustive literature review from which 130 initial items were formulated. It sought to evaluate 9 dimensions (Self-esteem, Self-knowledge, Vision, Objectives, Strategies, Economic Resources, Context, Alternative Life Project, Educational System) with 6 response options (1=Totally Disagree/ 2=Disagree/ 3=Slightly Disagree/ 4=Slightly Agree/ 5=Agree/ 6=Totally Agree). Its objective is to measure the adolescents' perception of their life project.

Procedure

Information on the adolescent life project was collected and searched using databases (PsycInfo, Ovid, Elsevier, Scielo, Google Scholar), using "Life project", "Life project in adolescents", "Life project in adolescence" as keywords for the search, only in Spanish language. Based on the information collected, 130 reagents divided into 9 dimensions raised by García-Yepes (2017) were developed.

Subsequently, three experts on the subject were contacted for their review, which was based on the clarity and relevance of the reagent, as well as its ability to measure the aspects of the dimension. Based on the experts' evaluation, we refined the items, leaving us with 62 items that

were piloted with 9 male and female adolescents. After piloting, the instrument consisted of 61 items, which were integrated into an online application (Google Forms) for its application, to whose data only the researchers had access.

The coordinator of the Colegio Nacional de Educación Técnica (CONALEP) Plantel Azcapotzalco located in Mexico City was contacted and gave permission to carry out the study. The data collection was carried out in the computer area, where the students used the computers to answer the questions. This process lasted 3 days with groups of second, fourth and sixth school-semester students in the morning and afternoon shifts. Once this data collection process was completed, the statistical analysis continued.

Data analysis

To proceed with the analyses, an MS-Excel spreadsheet was used to perform the data entry. This information was exported to a statistical program, which allowed the descriptive analysis of the items (Bologna, 2013). To investigate the evidence of validity based on internal structure, the exploratory factor analysis using R Studio (Herrero, 2010) was taken into account. Finally, the evidence of the reliability was investigated with Cronbach's alpha coefficients using Pearson's matrices (Gadermann et al., 2012).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Content validity

To analyze the content validity of the Adolescent Life Project Scale (EPROVA), 3 expert judges were consulted to evaluate whether each item was comprehensible, pertinent and whether it evaluated the corresponding dimension. Sixty-one items were chosen to evaluate nine theoretically distributed dimensions, and evidence of adequate functioning was found.

Descriptive analysis of the items

In the descriptive analysis, the response frequencies of the items for the 6 options are evident, none of them higher than 80%, indicating that the participants answered the questions correctly and understood the questions. On the other hand, the items (20 reagents) with

kurtosis greater than +/- 3 were eliminated, since a high value evidences a high variation to a normal distribution, not being adequate for the realization of an exploratory factor analysis (Pérez & Medrano, 2010).

Exploratory factor analysis

The KMO index showed a value of .97 and Bartlett's test showed adequate significance (p = .000), which made it possible to perform an AFE. For the exploratory factor analysis, the maximum likelihood method with Varimax rotation was used because we wanted to ensure the differentiation of the dimensions, a polychoric matrix was used, because the scale uses polytomous items (Likert type) (Lloret-Segura et al., 2014). From the nine proposed factors, 5 factors were derived with Eigen values > 1, which explained 47% of the total variance. Forty-one items with factor loadings > .40 were selected and 14 were eliminated, because 4 had factor loadings < .40 and 10 had high loadings on two or more factors. The five factors are defined below:

Dimensión 1. Self- expression

The content of dimension 1 "Self-expression", composed of items 56, 48, 40, 41, 47, 54, 46 and 61, corresponds to the approach of D'Angelo (2003), who refers to true personal self-expression and authenticity, elements that are described as the possibility and willingness of the individual to express himself as he is, admitting his faults and failures, enabling personal improvement through the acceptance of the contribution of others. The expression of the authenticity of the self can be visualized in the concordance that the individual maintains between what he/she experiences, what he/she communicates and what he/she does.

Dimension 2. Self-direction

Dimension 2, comprising items 21, 3, 18, 1, 33, 7 and 25, was categorized in this way because it reflects in its statements what is understood by "Self-direction", as proposed by D'Angelo (1986), which considers of great importance the characteristics of a reflective-creative person, projection and personal realization, social, constructive, autonomous and developmental, which allows forming individuals prepared to effectively face changes and react to the unexpected.

Dimension 3. Autonomy

Dimension 3, comprising items 5, 4 and 38, is based on D'Angelo's (1986) Autonomy, which expresses the possibility of thinking about reality with one's own criteria, making decisions consistent with one's way of thinking, rectifying or modifying the general vision, expectations, aspirations, goals, plans and future actions, considering the elements required to achieve them.

Dimension 4. Modes of time use

The content of dimension 4 "Modes of time use", made up of items 27, 42, 12, 28 and 55, is related to D'Angelo's (2003) approach to "modes of time use", which refer to quantitative and qualitative characteristics of the global activity carried out by individuals. This analysis of the modes of time use encompasses the sets of activities that individuals carry out; the self-assigned nature of the activities, i.e., whether they are carried out and are felt to be their own or whether they are carried out as a result of obligation or imposition; and the valuational-social nature of certain activities, including not only the social value, but also the meaning that the person gives to these activities; thus making it possible for the study of these modes of use to appreciate the degree of balance or imbalance in terms of the use of current time and the expectations of future time use.

Dimension 5. External tools

Dimension 5, comprising items 14, 16, 10 and 22, was so called because it contains statements that correspond to what D'Angelo (1986) has described as the Social Situation of Development (SSD), which makes it possible to understand how the life project is formed based on the adolescent's "external position", where the possibilities or resources available to the individual are made visible, framed in a diverse, concrete and dynamic social context.

Table 1
Factor loadings and Cronbach's alpha by dimension

	Factor loading	Item-subscale correlation
Dimension 1: Self-expression	α = .89	
56. I feel satisfied when I look at myself in the mirror.	0.7	0.676
48. I take care of myself.	0.69	0.756
40. I feel physically healthy.	0.67	0.671
41. I recognize my strengths.	0.64	0.726
47. I feel that I can express myself freely in my environment.	0.6	0.698
54. I feel satisfied with the activities that I do on a daily basis.	0.5	0.632
46. I am a creative person.	0.43	0.594
61. I correct my mistakes.	0.41	0.574
Dimension 2: Self-direction	α = .83	
21. I have a Plan B in case I need it.	0.59	0.643
3. I usually plan my daily activities.	0.58	0.574
18. I consider myself a good manager.	0.55	0.547
1. I know my goals.	0.52	0.53

33. I prioritize activities.	0.49	0.599
7. I think of different alternative solutions to solve a problem.	0.49	0.62
25. I think about how to perform an activity before doing it.	0.41	0.617
Dimension 3: Autonomy	α = .62	
5. Me gustaría conocer otros países.	0.6	0.495
4. El dinero es importante en mi vida.	0.49	0.413
38. Mi pasado no definirá la persona en la que me quiero convertir.	0.48	0.386
Dimension 4: Modes of time use	α = .68	
27. I work hard to get good grades.	0.59	0.576
42. Going to school helps me get a good job.	0.56	0.247
12. Going to school is a waste of time.	0.5	0.398
28. I would rather go to school than work.	0.44	0.573
55. I consider saving money to be important.	0.43	0.499
Dimension 5: External tools	α = .77	
14. My teachers help me to be better.	0.53	0.533
16. I believe my environment provides me with opportunities.	0.49	0.699
10. The people I associate with are pleasant.	0.44	0.518
22. My environment will give me support when I need it.	0.4	0.58

Table 1 shows the reliability of the instrument, each dimension has a minimum internal consistency of .62 and a maximum of .89, as well as the factor loadings per item and the item-subscale correlations per factor.

With respect to the first dimension, "Self-Expression", obtaining high scores in this dimension suggests that the subject possesses the ability for personal improvement, through the acceptance of the opinion of others and the agreement of what the individual experiences, communicates and does.

With respect to the second dimension, "Self-direction", obtaining a high score in this dimension reflects that the person is reflective-creative and has the tools to deal effectively with changes and react to the unexpected.

Regarding the third dimension, "Autonomy", obtaining a high score expresses that the individual has his own criteria and is capable of making decisions consistent with his way of thinking, rectifying or modifying his general vision of life.

According to the fourth dimension, "Modes of time use", obtaining a high score reflects a balance in terms of how the young person uses his or her time now and the expectations he or she has regarding how to use his or her time in the future.

With respect to the fifth dimension, "Social situation of development", obtaining a high score reflects that the young person is aware of his or her possibilities or resources, which are framed in a diverse, concrete and dynamic social context.

The dimensions previously exposed, have also been found, partially in some other instruments; as is the case of The Adolescent Life Project Scale (EPVA) (Dellazzana-Zanon, 2019), made

up of 5 dimensions; Scale of Expectations for the Future in Adolescence (EEFA) (Sánchez-Sandoval & Verdugo, 2016), composed of 4 factors; and Life Project Evaluation Scale (Ramos & Chahuac, 2019), composed of 4 factors; which highlight personal skills, social resources and future projection, fundamental elements for the creation of a life project.

The study showed that the EPROVA scale has solid psychometric properties, constituting an adequate and consistent alternative for the evaluation of the perception of the Life Project in adolescents. The contribution of this scale responds to the need to create tools focused and specialized in the Mexican adolescent population, since during the present research there were few instruments found aimed at this population (Mexican adolescents) focused on the evaluation of the life project.

CONCLUSIONS

It has been observed that quality of life is related to the development of a life project, since this gives the individual orientation and meaning. Therefore, it is essential to develop a life project from adolescence, since at this stage the questioning of identity and life purposes begins (Bazán-Riverón et al., 2019; Díaz-Garay et al., 2020).

The Adolescent Life Project Scale (EPROVA) proved to be valid and reliable for assessing adolescents' perception of the development of their adolescent life project, by means of 27 items framed in 5 dimensions that evaluate Self-Expression, Self-Direction, Autonomy, Modes of time use and External tools.

It is important to point out that, being an instrument that evaluates perception, the answers given by the young people could have been influenced by various factors such as social desirability, since, being applied in a school context, the young people could have considered the scale as a test of performance that could have an impact on their grades.

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