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Preface

Table of Contents

Table of Contents

Arts and Language

Ayşenur Ceren Asmaz, Tolga Şenol
A Research on Stanislav Libensky's Pure-Geometric Glass Sculptures in the Context of Light and Color Usage 9

Habibe Demir
An Examination of Güngör Dilmen's Drama Named "Canlı Maymun Lokantası" in the Context of Expressionism 19

Sema Önal
The İmportance of Philosophy in Linguistic Studies 29

Nur Gülümser İlker
Bohemian Lights and Severe Criticism against Reality 33

Murat Özdamar, Betül Bilge
The Interaction of the Design Studios with the Professional Life in Interior Architecture/Design 41

Gönül Reyhanoğlu
Sacredness of the Olive Tree For The Turkish Cypriots And The Ritual of Burning Olive Tree Leaves As Incensing To Be Protected From Evil Gaze 47

Çiğdem Sakici, Banu Bekci, Elif Ayan
Investigation Of Different Water Corridor Be Therapeutically 55

Murat Özdamar
Protecting During Re-Functioning in Interior Architecture: "Gazi Train Station" 61

Kazım Yildirim
Atatürk's Management Philosophy 69

Neşide Yıldırım
Virginia Satir's Family Education And Therapy Model 75

Zühal Özcan, Mehmet Tunçer
Urban Archaeology and Preservation Solutions to Prevent Destruction of Roman Period Remains beneath Old Ankara (Ulus), Turkey 83

Abdullah Bakir
The Strategic Importance Of Apollonia/Sozopolis City In Byzantyne Period And Its Conquest By The Seljuqs 93

Behset Karaca
Being A Yoruk In The Ottoman State 103

Burcu Tekin
Evaluating the Women Image in Juan Valera's Works 113

Mine Yazıcı
The Potentialities of Research in Translation Studies as Interdisciplinary 119

Reşat Yildiz
A Search for a Translation Method for Proverbs and Idioms as Cultural Language Elements: The Cases of Russian and Turkish 125

Business and Management

Yeter Aytül Dağlı Ekmekçi
A Value Chain Approach to Turkish Sports Sector 133

Betul Balikcioglu
The Influence of Need for Uniqueness and Fashion Innovativeness & Opinion Leadership on Buying Impulsiveness and Impulse Purchase Behavior 141

Yasemin Bozdağlıoğlu, Hatice Küçükkaya
Where are the Transition Economies in Income Inequality Path? 149

Fatma Çakir, Mesut Çakir, Semih Solak
The Effect of Using Mascot on Products and Services to Remind the Brand 155

Daghan Dogan, Senem Gol Beser
Classification and Comparison of Characteristics of Project Managers of a Government Research Center and Private Sector R&D Centers in Turkey..... 163

Murat Esen, Gönül Kaya Özbağ
A Scientometric Overview Of Corporate Social Responsibility (Csr) (1975-2016) 179

Umut Evlimoğlu, E.Yasemin Bozdağlıoğlu
With Evaluation of Performances of Selected Transition Economies Overall Transition Indicators . 191

Severin Hornung, Denise M. Rousseau
Revisioning Evidence-based Management: Developing Propositions Towards Rapprochement of Concept and Criticism 201

Yeliz İlgar
The Position Of Sports In Strategic Plans Of Local Governments 211

Selçuk Kendirli, Fazlı Irmak, Emrah Şahin
Global Financial Crisis and Working Capital: A Research in BIST Production Sector about Performance 221

Metin Reyhanoglu, Evren Kiran
The Relationship between Locus of Control and Organizational Cynicism in Term of Being Unionized 233
Pınar Başar
The Effect of Organizational Justice on The Organizational Commitment 243

Simay Kızılkaya
The Impact of Health Expenditures on Development: An Econometric Application on OECD Countries 261

Durdu Mehmet Biçkes, Celal Yılmaz, Mustafa Karaca
The Effects of Knowledge Management Practices on Organizational Performance: Mediating Role of Organizational Social Capital 271

Nuran H. Belet
Harmonization Of Work And Family Life And Its Impact On Women's Employment 281

Serkan Akçay
Evaluation of The Advances of Information Technologies on Advanced Levels on The Organization of Government Accounting Audit in Turkey 289

Umut Çil
Turkish Business System and Diversification 301

Oya Zincir
A Conceptual Framework Suggestion Based On Quadruple Helix Model To Increase Open Innovation Practices In Turkey 313

International Relations and Politics

Olga Brusylovska
International Consequences of Russian-Ukrainian Conflict 323

Baris Cagirkan, Gunal Bilek
A Cultural And An Ethnic Identity In Multicultural Societies: The Example Of Ahiska Turks 331

Nedret Çağlar
Women's Representation In Turkish Political Life – A Study Into The Ways Of Nomination Of Political Parties For General Elections Of 2015 339

Lucia Fortini
Rethinking Sociologically Global Conflicts..... 347

Yücel Bozdağlioğlu, Hikmet Mengüaslan
The Lonely Hegemon: the Rise and Fall of Turkey's Hegemonic Ambitions during AKP era..... 353

Selda Çağlar
An Assessment on the Mobbing Decisions of the Republic of Turkey Ombudsman Institution 363

A. Baran Dural
Portraits From The National Economic Policies Of The Union And Progress Party..... 373

Social Sciences

Rüştü Ilgar
Sustainable Ecotourism Possibilities in Çanakkale Area 383

Gazi Kısa
Developing a Likert-type Scale for Measuring Women's Attitude toward Sexist Men 395

Hatice Küçükkaya, Sedat Alataş
Quarter Of The World GDP: Inequality And Growth Analysis For Four Countries From Historical Perspective 403

Dilek Eroglu, Esra Acar
Rural Theaters In Turkey And Women's Possitions 411

Mensure Öztürk
Pınarhısar's of Ayan Proprietor Hadji Ali Agha The Bosphorus Minister 417

Durmus Ummet, Halil Eksi, Yakup Ozkapu, Fusun Eksi
The Existential Concerns Questionnaire (ECQ): A Study of Validity and Reliability 423

Augustine Oghanrandukun
Yorubic Osmosis: A primal African Civilisation in Osmotic Flow: The Yorubic Example 431

Mehtap Araci Kazici
Older Workers in Working Life: An Assessment of the Factors Affecting Their Performances, Employment Situations and Attitude Towards Them 437

Kamil Kaya, Semra (Yılmaz) Uz
The Sociological Analysis of the Tomb Visiting: The Case of Mawlana Tomb 445

Gülcan Güzel, Meral Uzunöz
Gender Inequality in Turkey: A Regional Analysis 455

The Existential Concerns Questionnaire (ECQ): A Study of Validity and Reliability*

Durmus Ummet, Halil Eksi, Yakup Ozkapu, Fusun Eksi

1. Introduction

The existential psychotherapy, which may be regarded new in the field of psychotherapy but whose roots date back to older times, has emerged as a product of phenomenology originating from Karl Jasppers, Kiergegard, Heidegger, Edmund Hussrerl. Major psychotherapy theorists such as Rolle May, Viktor Franklin, and Irvin Yalom have significantly contributed to the popularity of the movement. Existentialism claims "existence precedes essence", while Rolle May made it more meaningful by stating "man does not grow only with the programming of nature, but with his own contribution to growth" (Corey, 2008; Dökmen, 2000; Geçtan, 1990). The existentialist approach emerged as a reaction to the traditions which addressed man as an object, ignoring his uniqueness and authenticity. Existentialism is based on the principle that man can only exist and change in time which he is living in (now and here), and focuses on existence, meaningfulness, death, anxiety, finiteness and identification. (Bezirci, 1997, Corey, 2008, Yalom, 2001). Among these concepts the existentialist approach focuses on, the anxiety will be the subject which will be particularly emphasized in this research.

Existentialists regard the concept of anxiety as one of the most important situations concerning human nature. At the same time, they distinguish between neurotic anxiety and existential anxiety, which are the anxieties that ordinary people experience in their daily lives. According to existentialists, existential anxiety is a very basic and universal condition in human life and it is experienced in its pure state by very few people (Kıraç, 2007). Tillich (2014) describes the transition between pathological and existential anxiety as follows: Neurotic anxiety is the inability of a person to take responsibility for his or her existence. Pathological anxiety rests on self-esteem and defense on a limited, constant and unrealistic basis. Pathological anxiety displays unrealistic certainty in connection with meaninglessness. According to Yalom and Josselson (2008), existential anxiety is a form of normal anxiety. According to the existentialist perspective, the source of anxiety is the existence of human being itself. Yalom (2001) suggests four fundamental existential anxieties that cause anxiety: anxiety of meaninglessness, death, isolation and freedom. Meaningfulness anxiety arises when people question the meaning of life and why life exists. Death anxiety is experienced when a person is questioning whether he is a finite creature approaching death. Instead of addressing death, existentialists focus on death's making life meaningful. Isolation anxiety is the emotion that emanates from the isolation of man's from his self and others, and it forces the person to be with others. Finally, freedom anxiety is felt when one is responsible for his own life, independent of others. This may sometimes add meaning to one's life while it may also lead to anxiety (Göka, 2010; Karaca, 2000; May, 2013; Yalom, 2001; Yalom & Josselson, 2008).

According to existentialist approach, man is conscious of his own being, his actions, and what happens to him. Man is also a creature that can assume the responsibility of his own life and decisions (Geçtan, 1974). Every human being has the potential to develop and have a satisfying existence. However, people often encounter obstacles in reaching this. Existentialists claim that conflicts and hardships that life brought about, if they are accepted as they are rather than avoided or denied, shall strengthen man. (Yalom, 2001). If such an acceptance does not come into being, it naturally leads to the inevitability of the appearance of an anger towards the existence of one's self and also causes negative situations such as depression and anxiety. (Deniz, 2016; Sayar, 2000). Based on this, it is necessary not to ignore the expressions of the existentialist approach and to examine existential anxiety in this attempt to understand man and the causes of his behavior. When we examine the related literature in our country, we failed to find a scale that directly measures existential anxiety. However, I came across Existential Concern Scale which was developed by Yıkılmaz (2016) and is thought to be displaying similar dynamics. Valid and reliable measurement tools used in quantitative research

patterns are known as tools that help to get to know man. From this point of view, it is thought that the research tool developed in this research fills a void and can be used in the field of psychotherapy and counseling. The aim of the study was to investigate reliability and validity of the Turkish version of the Existential Concerns Questionnaire.

2. Method

Participants

For the Turkish version of the Existential Concerns Scale, a total of 389 volunteers were reached at different ages, as in the original development study. Participants' ages ranged from 19 to 50, with an average age of 27,99. 117 of the participants were male, 272 were females. In addition, 50 different people were reached for the criterion validity of the scale.

Data Collection Tools

The Existential Concerns Questionnaire (ECQ): In this study, the original form of scale on which the Turkish adaptation work was conducted was developed by Bruggen, Klooster, Westerhof, Kleine, Bohlmeijer and Glas (2017). In the scale development process, 465 people aged between 30-50 constituted the sample of the study. These people are at different ages, level of education, and of cultural structure (4% of Turks) and have different religious beliefs. In explanatory factor analysis conducted for validity analysis in the study, a structure consisting of 22 items and 3 sub-dimensions was obtained. When factor loads and structures are examined, it is seen that the scale has 3 sub-dimensions namely *General EA,* (variance explanation ratio=37.2%) *Death Anxiety,* (variance explanation rate=10.2%) *and Avoidance* (variance explanation rate=5.37%). These three sub-dimensions together account for 52.7% of the total variance. Then model fit indices for the 3 sub-dimensions of the scale were examined. The fit index values of the one-dimensional model are: x^2 = 1122.21, sd = 209, RMSEA =.106, NFI =.93, CFI =.942, and SRMR =.093. The fit index values of the three-dimensional model: x^2 = 530.97, sd = 206, RMSEA =.062, NFI =.977, CFI =.979, and SRMR =.077. The fit index values of Bifactor model are: x^2 = 379.98, sd = 187, RMSEA =.052, NFI =.985, CFI =.988, and SRMR =.063. The factor loads of the items changed between 42 and 80. The Cronbach's alpha values calculated for the reliability of the scale were calculated as 92 for the total. Cronbach alpha values of the sub-dimensions were not found in the original study.

The Existential Anxiety Scale (EAS): The scale developed by Yıkılmaz (2016) was used to test the validity of EAS. Exploratory factor analysis showed that the scale had 25 items and 4 factors, and that these factors accounted for 50.58% of the variance change. These factors are called Meaninglessness Anxiety (10 items), Death Anxiety (5 items), Isolation Anxiety (5 items) and Freedom Anxiety (5 items). As a result of the second level confirmatory factor analysis carried out in order to confirm the 4 factorial structure with 25 items, it was determined that the scale has a structure of two level factor. Moreover, when the acceptance cut-off points are taken into consideration, the fit indices of the measurement model is found to be sufficient. In the analyses conducted to test the reliability of the scale, the internal consistency coefficient of the ECS was found to be α = .85.. Internal consistency coefficient of the subscale of meaninglessness of the scale is α = .87,internal consistency coefficient of death subscale α = .79, internal consistency coefficient of insolation subscale α = .70 and the internal consistency coefficient of freedom subscale α = .71.

Process and Statistical Process

In the adaptation process of the scale, the following steps suggested by Brislin, Lonner, and Thorndike (1973) in scale adaptation were followed.

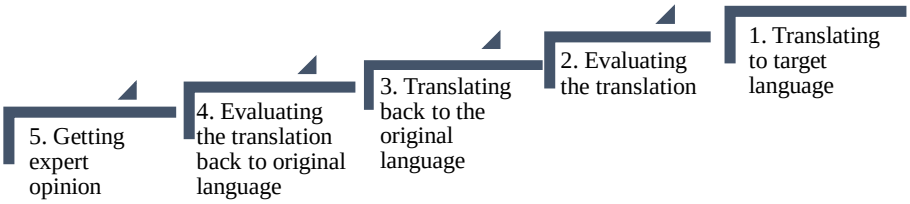

Figure 1. Scale Adaptation Steps

After obtaining the necessary permits from the researchers who conducted the original study of the scale, according to these steps, the scale was first translated into Turkish by the five experts who mastered the English language and whose mother tongues were Turkish. The translations made by five experts were assessed by a team of two, taking into account clarity, word choice, sentence structure and cultural appropriateness. As a result of some changes, the Turkish version of the scale was accepted. The final version of the scale was translated into the original language by two experts whose native languages were Turkish but who did not participate in the initial translation process. The two forms, both translated into Turkish and English, were again evaluated and finalized after a few changes to the translation. In order to determine the suitability of translations and structures of the scale items, as a final step, two experts, holding academic and linguistic proficiency in their fields, were consulted. As a result of the approval by the experts, the scale was finalized and decided to be used for the pilot study. The scale was piloted on 50 university students. In this process, students who filled the scale were asked to examine scale items in terms of their dimensions such as clarity and meaning. Taking the suggestions from the students into consideration, the scale was made ready for the actual application.

SPSS for Windows 22.0 and AMOS 20.0 package programs were used to analyze the statistical data obtained within the scope of the study. Cronbach alpha coefficients were used for internal consistency of scale, Existential Concerns Scale was used for criterion validity, expert opinions were taken into account for the validity of the scope and confirmatory factor analysis was used for construct validity.

3. Findings

Validity Analysis

Construct validity

Confirmatory Factor Analysis: Confirmatory Factor analysis (CFA) was used for Existential Concerns Scale. The use of CFA in adapting the original version of this scale to Turkish is important in terms of verifying that it is original. For this reason, it was not needed to use the Explicit Factor Analysis. The scale items and sub-dimensions were tested with CFA and the results were found as follows. The scale version consisting of 3 sub-dimensions of the scale was tested with CFA and it was understood to be appropriate for Turkish. According to these results; In the scale consisting of 22 items and 3 subscales (general EA, death anxiety, and avoidance), there are 13 items in the general EA subscale, 5 items in the death subscale, and 4 items in the avoidance subscale.

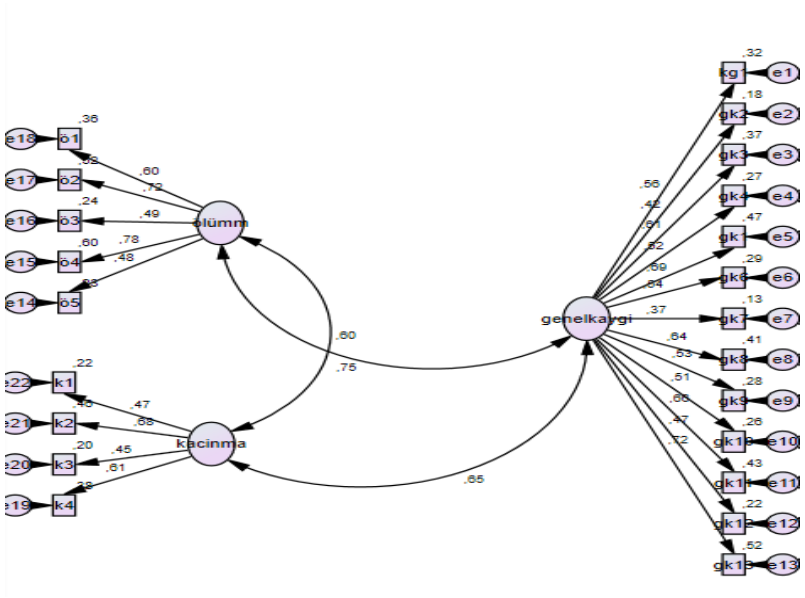

Figure 1. Existential concerns scale path diagram

Existential Concerns Scale was analyzed with CFA in its three sub-dimensions and 22 items; and acceptable fit indices were obtained (X2 / sd = 2.495, RMSEA = 0.062, S-RMR = 0.057, NNFI = 0.904, CFI = 0.902, GFI = 0.909, IF a = 0.904). Values considered suitable by Schermelleh-Engel, Moosbrugger & Müller (2003), and the fit indices of the study are listed in the table below.

Table 1. Comparison of Research Data with Standard Compliance Goodness Criteria

Compliance Measures	Good Compliance	Acceptable Compliance	Compliance Values Obtained in the Study
***X²*/ df**	0⩽c2⩽2df	2df⩽c2⩽3df	2,495
RMSEA	0⩽RMSEA⩽0.05	0.05⩽RMSEA⩽0.08	0062
SRM	0⩽SRMR⩽0.05	0.05⩽SRMR⩽0.10	0.057
GFI	0,90⩽GFI⩽1	0,95⩽GFI⩽1	0909
NNFI	0.95⩽NNFI⩽1.00	0.90⩽NNFI⩽0.97	0904
CFU	0.95⩽CFI⩽1.00	0.90⩽CFI⩽0.97	0902
IFI	0.90 <RFI <1:00	0.85 & lt; RFI & lt; 0.90	0904

Criterion Validity

To determine the validity of the scale, the Existential Concern Scale (ECS) was applied to 50 people with the Existential Anxiety Scale (EAS). The reason for the use of the Existential Concern Scale is that this scale also has the ability to measure similar states with existential theory. Relations between the subscales of Existential Anxiety Scale and Existential Concern Scale are given in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Relations between the Subscales of Existential Concern Scale and Existential Anxiety Scale

Factors	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. General EA	1						
2. Death Anxiety	,566***	1					
3. Avoidance	,479***	,503**	1				
4. Meaninglessness Anxiety	,512***	,551**	,329***	1			
5. Isolation Anxiety	,308***	,469***	,445***	,487**	1		
6. Death Anxiety	,351***	,806***	,422***	,309***	,386***	1	
7. Freedom Anxiety	,255***	,393***	,224***	,498***	,577***	,448***	1

As you can see in Table 2, *General Anxiety, Death Anxiety* and *Avoidance* subscale scores of the Existential Anxiety scale and *meaninglessness anxiety, isolation anxiety, death anxiety* and *freedom anxiety* scores of General Anxiety scale were found to be significantly related in a positive way.

Reliability

Reliability coefficients of Cronbach Alpha (α) were examined to calculate scale reliability. The results for the scale and each subscales are presented in the table below.

Table 3. Reliability Coefficient Table for Total and Subscales of Existential Concern Scale

Factor	Cronbach's alpha
1. General EA	,650
2. Death Anxiety	,794
3. Avoidance	,838
TOTAL	,811

The Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient for entire Existential Concern Scale was 811 and the Cronbach alpha reliability coefficients for general anxiety, death anxiety and avoidance subscales were found to be 650, 794, and 838, respectively. When these are considered, it is seen that all values have a value above the one specified by Büyüköztürk (2007) (>.60).

Test-retest reliability

Test-retest method was used to statistically test the temporal stability of the Turkish version of the Existential Concern Scale in terms of the quality it measures. With the test-retest reliability, the measurement tool is tested for stability at a specified time interval (Erkuş, 2005). In order to be able to see the test-retest reliability coefficient of the scale, the measurement tool was applied to 65 persons at intervals of 2 weeks. Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was calculated to test the stability between the scores each participant obtained from both tests. The findings showed that there was a high level of positive and significant relationship among the total score and subscale scores between the two applications of ECQ (Total r = 0.87, General AE r = 0.81, Death Anxiey r = 0.73, Avoidance r = 0.69, $p < .01$].

4. Discussion and Conclusion

This research is an adaptation and psychometric study of the *"Existential Concern Scale"* developed by Bruggen, Klooster, Westerhof, Kleine, Bohlmeijer and Glas (2017), aiming to reveal the level of anxiety

brought about by "existence". In this study, the factor structure of the "Existential Concern Scale" was dealt with DFA and the accuracy of the three factorial structure of the scale was verified as a result of the analysis. It was statistically obtained that this scale also provides the values considered as acceptable fit indices by Schermelleh-Engel et al. (2003) and Tabachnick & Fidell (2007) (X2 / sd = 2.495, p <.001, RMSEA=0.062, S-RMR=0.057, NNFI=0.904, CFI=0.902, GFI=0.909, NFI=0.91, IFI=0.904).. It was also determined that there were positive and significant correlations between subscales of both scales in the analyzes made to test the scale validity of EAS and ECS. This is accepted as one of the important criteria for the validity of the scale (Thorndike, 1997).

In the context of reliability analysis; the internal consistency coefficient obtained from the overall scale is ,811 and all the subscales is ,65. These values are reported as good acceptable values by Büyüköztürk (2015). The Pearson product moments correlation coefficients calculated by the test-retest reliability method of the Turkish version of Existential Anxiety Scale (BYÖ) applied at an interval of 2 weeks were found to be high and significant in a positive way. This high correlation score indicates that the scale is a stable measurement tool. As a result of these analyzes, EAQ adapted to Turkish is considered to be a valid and reliable measurement tool which can be used in the researches in the field.

It is thought that it is important to use this work in Turkish, which will help to measure existential concern, which is accepted as a requirement for the existence and to examine its relation to other variables. It is important for researchers to carry out various studies on different sampling structures in order to reduce the limitations of this scale adapted to Turkish and increase its usability.

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