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Title: Beliefs about literature: Development and initial validation of the literature epistemology scale (LES)

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Strand of Work: Development of Assessments

Purpose and Questions Investigated, Assessments or Tools developed

Readers' beliefs about literature likely affect their comprehension and interpretation of literary works, yet there is little empirical research on the epistemology of literature. The goal of this multi-study was to develop a Literature Epistemology Scale (LES) for adolescents and to establish its content validity, factorial validity, criterion validity, and reliability. Study 1 constituted a pilot study that involved creating initial items for the LES and providing preliminary empirical data of psychometric properties of the LES. The purposes of Study 2 were to create the scale based on the patterns of findings in Study 1, test its factorial structure, and assess the factorial and criterion validity and reliability of the scale.

Research Context or Methodology

Study 1: Following a literature review, an initial pool of items was developed and submitted to a panel of experts for content validation. Next, a set of 25 items was pilot tested with a sample of 199 students enrolled in seventh, eighth, and ninth grade classrooms during a class period. The data was submitted to a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to obtain initial empirical data of psychometric properties of the LES.

Study 2: Using three emergent subscales and patterns of findings for the individual items in Study 1, new items were generated and added to the final items from Study 1 to increase reliability of each construct and factorial validity of the scale, resulting in a new pool of items to measure three subscales: (1) multiple meaning; (2) social functioning; and (3) multiple reading. Particularly, following content validation, a set of 29 items was pilot tested with 798 middle and high school students during a class period. In this study, we employed a split-half approach, stratified across gender and grade band. Sample 1 ($n = 399$) was used to test factorial structure of the scale, optimize its length by reducing the number of items that are redundant or may threaten the dimensionality of the scale, and assess its factorial validity and reliability; whereas Sample 2 ($n = 399$) was used to perform CFA and structural equation modeling (SEM) to confirm the factorial structure of a refined scale identified with Sample 1, and to further establish its factorial validity and criterion validity.

General statement of findings

In Study 1, we established a multidimensional framework for understanding students' epistemological approaches to literature by identifying potential constructs for the literary epistemology scale. A CFA suggested a three-factor structure for: multiple meanings, social functioning, and multiple reading.

In Study 2, we used a split-half approach to develop the LES based on three emergent subscales and patterns of findings for the individual items in Study 1. A CFA with Sample 1 suggested several modifications, resulting in a refined scale with reasonable factor structure and internal consistency that led to a scale of 18 items. A CFA with Sample 2 confirmed a 3-factor structure and reliability. Factorial validity was evidenced by establishing invariance across grade band and gender; and, criterion validity was shown by associations with relevant constructs.

Implications

The 18-item LES is suggested as a reasonable measure of epistemological beliefs about literary texts of middle and high school male and female students. By developing a literary epistemological scale, we hoped to fill a gap that currently exists in the research on readers' beliefs about literature. The LES can be used to measure middle and high school male and female students' epistemological beliefs about literary texts. Ultimately, this instrument can give teachers of English language arts an idea as to whether their students hold naïve or more expert views of the texts they read to maximize their positive impact on students through teaching practices. However, additional studies are required to establish further validity of the LES.

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