

A STUDY OF THE EXISTENTIAL MEANING OF SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHERS IN RELATION TO THEIR GENDER AND WORK EXPERIENCE

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Abstract

The present study has tried to explore the existential meaning of secondary school teachers IN relation to their gender and years of experience. A representative sample of 150 teachers from the secondary schools of New Delhi was randomly selected. A tool developed by the researchers was used to assess the existential meaning of the secondary school teachers. The study revealed that there was no significant difference between existential meaning of secondary school male and female teachers. However, contrasting results were found out for teachers with work experience of less than 10 years and more than 10 years and the study showed that there was a significant difference between the existential meaning of these groups. Significant difference was also not found between the existential meaning of male secondary school teachers with less than 10 years and more than 10 years as their work experience. There was a significant difference in the existential meaning of female secondary school teachers with less than 10 years and above 10 years of work experience.

Keywords: Existential Meaning, Gender, Work Experience



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INTRODUCTION

Human beings are subject to biological, social, structural and cultural influences; however, within this context, human beings also engage in creating meaning as an integral part of their being. In existentialism, meaning is understood as the worth of life (Reker & Chamberlain 1999).

Existential meaning refers to attempts to understand how events in life fit into a larger context. It involves the process of creating and discovering meaning, which is facilitated by a sense of coherence and sense of purpose. It addresses the experience of meaning and asks questions about “What is worth living for?” “What is the purpose of life?” The will to meaning and search for meaning are core processes in existential meaning-making (Reker & Wong 1988).

Frankl (1963) emphasizes the motivational dimension of meaning. He asserts that the “will to meaning” is a significant and universal human motive. Humans are not merely biological, social, and psychological beings but also spiritual beings capable of transcending physical limitations through meaning and spirituality. Frustration of the will to meaning leads to an “existential vacuum” characterized by a sense of meaninglessness, boredom, apathy, or indifference.

Lieberman (1985) enquired specific aspects of existentialism and their relevant implications for an educational system. He held that the existentialistic aim of education is to ‘awaken awareness in the learner’ (existential awareness of himself as a simple subjectivity present in the world). Existentialist education assume the responsibility of awakening each individual to the intensity of his/her own selfhood (defining self as the phenomenon of the awareness of subjectivity). The self constitutes a choosing, free and responsible agent. Thus, such learning situation is needed in which the structure and significance of the self is meaningfully conveyed.

Loonstra et al. (2009) focused on the relationship between existential fulfillment and burnout among 504 secondary school teachers in the Netherlands. Existential fulfillment was made operational by means of the Existential Fulfillment Scale, which distinguished between three dimensions: self-acceptance, self-actualization, and self-transcendence. The results of the study showed that self-acceptance as well as self-actualization and self-transcendence were significantly and positively related to the professional efficacy dimension of burnout. They further explained that the teachers who accept themselves and their limitations to some extent do not lose much energy in creating situations in which they receive an amount of extra appreciation they required. Rather, they can concentrate themselves more fully on the job they have to do, and have therefore more chance to actualize themselves in the challenges of working with students and learning objectives.

Pezirkianidis et al. (2016) conducted a study to examine (a) the relationship among experiencing positive and negative emotions, meaning in life, depression, anxiety and stress and effects of the economic crisis, (b) the existence of significant gender and employment – unemployment differences on the aforementioned variables, (c) the predictive relationship among experiencing positive and negative emotions, meaning in life, depression, anxiety and stress and (d) the moderating role of the effects of the economic crisis

OBJECTIVES

- To compare the Existential Meaning of the male and female secondary school teachers.
- To compare the Existential Meaning of the secondary school teachers with less than 10 years and more than 10 years of work experience.
- To compare the Existential Meaning of the male secondary school teachers with less than 10 years and more than 10 years of work experience.
- To compare the Existential Meaning of female secondary school teachers with less than 10 years and more than 10 years of work experience.

HYPOTHESIS

- There is no significant difference between the Existential Meaning of the male and female secondary school teachers.
- There is no significant difference between the Existential Meaning of secondary school teachers with less than 10 years and more than 10 years of work experience.
- There is no significant difference between the Existential Meaning of the male secondary school teachers with less than 10 years and more than 10 years of work experience.
- There is no significant difference between the Existential Meaning of female secondary school teachers with less than 10 years and more than 10 years of work experience.

METHODOLOGY OF STUDY

The study was carried out to investigate existential meaning of secondary school teachers in relation to their gender and work experience.

Sample

A sample of 150 teachers, teaching in different secondary schools of Delhi was taken into account for the study.

Tool

A tool to measure existential meaning was developed by the researchers and used to collect the data. The tool consisted of 40 items based on four dimensions namely, Self Transcendence, Association, Self Actualization and Responsibility. The reliability of the test was calculated as 0.82 and validity as 0.71.

Statistical Techniques

t-test, Standard Deviation and Mean scores were used to analyze the data.

DELIMITATIONS

- The study was conducted only on the secondary school teachers.
- The area of study was limited to New Delhi (India) only.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Hypothesis 1

There is no significant difference between the Existential Meaning of the male and female secondary school teachers.

Table 1

Gender	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	t- value	Significance of Difference (.05 level of significance)
Male	72	154.31	19.39	1.21	N.S.
Female	78	158.39	20.96		

Table 1 reveals that the existential meaning is not based upon a teacher’s gender. The calculated t-value (1.21) is lesser than the critical value 1.660 (df: 148; at 0.05 level of significance). Hence, the difference is not significant (N.S.) and null hypothesis framed in this regard is accepted.

Hypothesis 2

There is no significant difference between the Existential Meaning of secondary school teachers with less than 10 years and more than 10 years of work experience.

Table 2

Secondary School Teachers with Work Experience (years)	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	t- value	Significance of Difference (.05 level of significance)
Less than 10	83	152.76	20.46	2.095	Significant
More than 10	67	159.63	19.32		

Table 2 reveals that there is a significant difference between the existential meaning of teachers with less than 10 and more than 10 years of experience. The calculated t-value (2.09) is higher than the critical value 1.660 (df: 148; at 0.05 level of significance). Hence, the

difference is significant at .05 level of significance and df 148 and null hypothesis framed in this regard is rejected.

Hypothesis 3

There is no significant difference between the Existential Meaning of the male secondary school teachers with less than 10 years and more than 10 years of work experience.

Table 3

Secondary School Teachers with Work Experience (years)	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	t- value	Significance of Difference (.05 level of significance)
Less than 10	31	154.51	19.27	1.24	N.S.
More than 10	41	160.18	19.88		

Table 3 reveals that the existential meaning of general male secondary school teachers, with service streams science and humanities, is not significantly different from each other. The calculated t-value stands at 1.24 which is lesser than the critical value 1.664 (df: 72; at 0.05 level of significance). Hence, the difference is not significant (N.S.) and null hypothesis framed in this regard is accepted.

Hypothesis 4

There is no significant difference between the Existential Meaning of female secondary school teachers with less than 10 years and more than 10 years of work experience.

Table 4

Secondary School Teachers with Work Experience (years)	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	t- value	Significance of Difference (.05 level of significance)
Less than 10	38	151.75	20.65	2.80	Significant
More than 10	40	164.70	20.12		

Table 4 reveals that the existential meaning of female secondary school teachers with work experience less than 10 years and more than 10 years is significantly different from each other. The calculated t-value stands at 2.80 which is lesser than the critical value 1.664 (df:

76; at 0.05 level of significance). Hence, the difference is significant and null hypothesis framed in this regard is rejected.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

- The existential meaning is not dependent upon teachers' gender.
- The existential meaning of a teacher is positively correlated to his/her work experience.
- Male teachers with work experience of less than 10 years possessed similar existential meaning as their counterparts with above 10 years of work experience.
- Female teachers with work experience of more than 10 years of teaching possessed higher existential meaning as compared to their lesser experienced counterparts.

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