




Research Paper

Lived experience of junior high school students regarding satisfying basic psychological needs in the classroom: A phenomenological study

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Abstract

Aim: The present research aimed to investigate the lived experiences of junior high school students regarding the basic psychological needs in the classroom through a qualitative phenomenological approach. The research population comprised all students from public junior high schools in Kermanshah in the academic year 2020-2019. Purposive sampling was used to select the participants from all districts in Kermanshah city. Semi-structured interviews continued until data saturation with 18 students (9 girls and 9 boys). The obtained data were analyzed using the seven-step strategic method of Colaizzi. The data were validated through member check. Finally, 33 subthemes and five main themes emerged from the data. The need for communication was higher in female students, and the need for autonomy was more important for boys. The results of this research can raise the awareness of teachers regarding students' knowledge and create the need for a more dynamic and richer classroom.

Keywords: *Lived experiences, Basic psychological needs, Phenomenology.*

Introduction

Addressing educational and mental health issues of students in any society will help develop individuals who can manage and lead their society in future. Among these, basic psychological needs are of special importance (Firoozabadi & Moltafet, 2017). According to the theory of self-determination, if the basic psychological needs of learners are met in the educational environment, the skills related to their academic performance will also improve (Ryan & Desi, 2020). Accordingly, the need for autonomy, as the first of the three main psychological needs, refers to the individual's desire and will to do things (Roka & Gagne, 2008). The need for competence as the second need originates from pursuing and striving to overcome optimal challenges (Assor et al. 2005). The third basic psychological need is communication. Humans need to establish relationships with others in order to fulfill their needs (Meunier et al. 2011). A lived experience is defined as an immediate and present experience of something, or an experience that establishes unity and identity between the world and the known, or between the experiencer and the experienced. To understand an individual's lived experience, we must understand the person (Khojnejad, 2013). Satisfying the basic psychological needs of students can lead to the depth, durability and effectiveness of learning, which greatly impact students' education. To the best of our knowledge and based on the review of literature, no studies in Iran have investigated the lived experiences of students regarding basic psychological needs through a phenomenological approach. Therefore, the present research can contribute to enriching the existing knowledge. The main concern of the researcher is to explore what the basic psychological needs of students are and how they interpret satisfying or not satisfying such needs. Also, this research aims to answer the question of what students' lived experience of satisfying basic psychological needs is.

Method

The current qualitative study used Husserlian phenomenology. The target population of the research comprised all the boy and girl students of public junior high schools in Kermanshah city in the academic year of 2019-2020. Purposive sampling was used to select the participants from all educational districts in Kermanshah city (districts 1, 2, and 3) if they were willing to participate. After conducting semi-structured interviews with 18 students (9 girls and 9 boys), theoretical data saturation was achieved. Interviews lasted

40-60 minutes on average. In this study, data analysis was done using the Colaizzi method. Accordingly, the research findings were returned to the participants, who confirmed that our findings represented their experiences of satisfying basic psychological needs in the classroom. Furthermore, in order to validate the research, the emerged themes were shown to six university professors familiar with qualitative research, who confirmed the results.

All the participants were briefed on the importance and objectives of the study, and gave consent to participate and to record the interviews. They were also informed that they were free to withdraw from the interview anytime. During the interview, the privacy of the participants was respected, and they were assured that their personal details were confidential, and that the recorded file would be deleted after finalizing the analysis.

Results

Analysis of the interviews led to 237 basic codes, which were merged into 33 subthemes: the type of classroom layout, using appropriate educational aids and giving examples, using certain resources and not using several mandatory resources, the students' activity in the class and the use of group discussion method, assigning homework according to the students' ability, presenting challenging and practical materials, students' participation in the education process and determining educational goals, receiving feedback from the teacher, the ability to communicate with classmates, compatibility in the classroom, stability in friendships, the possibility of sharing feelings and emotions, feeling popular in the class, doing things in a group, having relative knowledge of each student, calling students by their first names, expressing personal experiences in the classroom by the teacher, teacher's neat appearance in the classroom, not emphasizing on competition too much, teacher's sharing personal feelings and emotions, teacher's empathy with students, observing justice and non-discrimination, teacher's attention to training students, students' acquisition of new skills or knowledge, engaging the students in the teaching process, having successful experiences in the classroom, experiencing having a key role or specific responsibility in the classroom, freedom of speech in the classroom and having the right to express opinions, having the right to freely choose between different options in the class, doing homework and solving problems willingly and freedom of choice in the manner of doing them, having permission to go out of the class to do things, freedom to choose groupmates, freedom to choose the class and place to sit in the class. These subthemes are divided into five main themes including appropriateness of the teacher's teaching method, finding friends and the quality of communication in the class, teacher's behavioral characteristics, a person's positive perception of their ability and feeling

empowered and useful in the class, having a sense of independence and freedom of action. Then, each of these themes was related to the basic psychological needs mentioned.

Discussion and conclusion

The results of studying students' lived experiences of satisfying basic psychological needs showed that satisfying all three basic psychological needs in the classroom is really important. Among the three basic psychological needs, the need for communication is more important among female students. This finding is in line with that of Martin (2002). Regarding the need for autonomy, the analysis of the interviews showed that this need was higher in male students. This finding is in line with that of Olfson et al. (2018). The need for competence revealed not much difference between girls and boys, and it was high in both sexes. This finding is in line with that of Zhen et al. (2017). The results of this research can raise the awareness and understanding of teachers and trainers regarding the recognition of students' needs and create a more dynamic and richer class. The present research had some limitations. Since this study investigated students' lived experiences regarding satisfying basic psychological needs with a qualitative phenomenological approach, and so far no research has addressed a similar issue, it was not possible to compare this research with similar research in terms of methodology and subject. Therefore, the researchers suggest that the subject of the research be examined at different educational levels and ages. As such, it is possible to compare them with one another. It is also suggested to enrich the classroom environment by holding courses and workshops for teachers to train them regarding ways to satisfy the basic psychological needs of students.

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