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The Attitude toward Death Education at School Questionnaire: Theoretical Framework and Psychometric Properties

Kwestionariusz Szkolnej Edukacji Tanatologicznej - założenia teoretyczne i właściwości psychometryczne

Abstract: This paper presents theoretical framework and psychometric properties of the Attitude toward Death Education at School Questionnaire (ADESQ): a brief instrument that allows to measure attitudes toward human-centered death education as an element of school education. The participants were 375 university students – education and teaching majors. Exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses confirmed a two-factor structure of the ADESQ, with two sub-scales: (1) Openness toward the presence of death education in a school and (2) Humanistic Basis of Death Education. Reliability of both sub-scales was acceptable ($\alpha = .90$ and $\alpha = .71$) and the scales correlated with attitudes towards death and human-centered school education. We posit that the ADESQ can be used to measure adult education participants' beliefs in

death education and its place in school education on primary and secondary school levels.

Keywords: death, death education, attitudes towards death, humanistic education, the Attitude toward Death Education at School Questionnaire.

Introduction

There is a need for intentional actions regarding death education (Binnebesel, 2013; Grzybowski, 2009) and introducing death education as part of school curricula (Czudek-Ślęczka, 2012a; Sielicka, 2015). This specific need is justified by changes in attitudes towards death taking place nowadays in Western civilization. They involve gradual disappearance of sociocultural mechanisms that have made it easier for people to come to terms with death – with its reality and inevitability. The new approach to death is called the forbidden death model (Ariés, 1991). It manifests itself in avoiding the topic of death and trivializing it: depriving death of its spiritual significance and perceiving it in terms of media entertainment. In addition, the forbidden death model has opposed traditional attitudes towards death: openness to death and its passive acceptance.

Here, we understand death education broadly, like all interventions – both formal and informal – aimed at developing a person's mature reception of the phenomenon of death. Therefore, death education allows for recognizing the reality and inevitability of death, understanding and accepting it as a constitutive element of life, as well as coping in confrontation with one's own and other people's death. What is more, death education may constitute a form of support given to others to live more fully and genuinely (Corr, Morgan & Wass, 1994; Grzybowski, 2009; Kim et al., 2016). In that sense, death education should be considered a particular form of human-centered education.

Teachers' attitudes are vital in incorporating death education into school curricula and its practical implementation (Czudek-Ślęczka, 2012a; Testoni & De Cataldo, 2014). Identifying this attitude is essential for rational educational activities targeted at teachers themselves and familiarizing them with death. A review of available research suggests the need to create a measure of teachers' attitudes towards the main aspects of death education; an instrument with good psychometric properties, based on a specific theoretical model. We did not find an instrument that meets these criteria (Bowie, 2000; Crase & Crase, 1979; Czudek-Ślęczka, 2012b; Dyregrov, Dyregrov & Idsoe,

2013; Jones, Hodges & Slate, 1995; Królica, 2012; McGovern & Barry, 2000; Pratt, Hare & Wright, 1987; Sielicka, 2015).

In this paper, we develop and present a new measure: The Attitude toward Death Education at School Questionnaire (ADESQ), which assesses teachers' attitudes towards human-centered death education as a component of elementary and secondary school education. It is based on the concept of human-centered death education, an adaptation of Hannelore Wass's model (1995, 2003, 2004). Although it is short, as it consists of only ten items, our initial results confirm that ADESQ is both valid and reliable. Unlike other measures, it allows for a relatively simple investigation of attitudes not only to the implementation of death education in school settings, but also to the humanistic basis of this education.

The Concept of Death Education

The way of understanding death education adopted in our study is conceptually consistent with the theory proposed by Wass (1995, 2003, 2004) – a strong advocate of death education for people of all ages, including parents, teachers, as well as school counselors and psychologists, but especially promoting the idea of death education for children. In line with Wass's perspective, a mature and accepting approach to death is achievable if teachers have appropriate knowledge, skills, and competencies to help children build it.

As Wass (2004) posits, recognizing personal mortality and coping in confrontation with death constitute the foundation of a meaningful and genuine life. Thus, the author believes that every person needs education for a mature reception of the phenomenon of death – not only professionals who enter into relations with dying or mourning people in their work. Wass thereby continues the idea proposed by Herman Feifel (1977) who indicated the philosophical basis for research on death and advocated the inclusion of a human-centered perspective in death education. This perspective is visible in two primary goals of death education, including imparting of information and students' personal development. Wass relates the concept of personal development to the humanistic category of self-understanding, associated in this case with understanding oneself and others in the context of death. By developing the ability to value oneself and the world, human-centered death education addresses well-being and the quality of life, the sense of its uniqueness and meaning, teaches respect for one's own life and that of others, as well as tolerance, empathy, and sensitivity.

Similarly to Dan Leviton (1977), Wass (2003) distinguishes two fundamental dimensions of human-centered death education: crisis intervention and developmental-preventive education. The crisis intervention is about support provided in crises associated with the experience of dying or bereavement and is widely recognized by the proposers of death education (Doka, 2015). Developmental-preventive education might seem more controversial, as it concerns forming a mature attitude towards one's own and other people's death before it becomes an element of actual lived experience. This dimension is sometimes called the pro-active approach (Holland, 1997) or non-crisis death education (Edgar & Howard-Hamilton, 1994). It is based on the conviction that a person can prepare oneself for encountering death and the inevitable losses in life. Pre-established realistic representations of death, constructive attitudes, and behaviors and coping skills help in a real confrontation with death (King-McKenzie, 2011). Talking about death with a person currently experiencing a loss is significantly hindered by strong emotions (Wells, 1995). Therefore, death education does not limit itself to interventions, but should also support people and serve as prevention (Bowie, 2000). This dimension's importance is also stressed in the context of a primary prevention strategy for self-harm and suicidal behaviors among children and young people (Jones et al., 1995).

Many researchers agree with Wass (2004) that death education should be present in school curricula, pointing out that death should be as evident as morality, patriotism, ecology, or human sexuality (King-McKenzie, 2011). Death education fits in with the general objectives of school education and supports students' development in all its dimensions: spiritual, moral, cultural, mental, and physical (Higgins, 1999). To shape mature, accepting attitudes towards death, death education should be involved in the school education process at its earliest stages: primary school (Bowie, 2000; Czudek-Ślęczka, 2012b; King-McKenzie, 2011) and even kindergarten (Królica, 2012; Pratt et al., 1987). Preparation of teachers, not only in terms of content but also in terms of interpersonal communication, is essential for its success so that they can adopt a pupil's perspective, introducing the subject of death with sensitivity and care, in a manner that is developmentally appropriate (Wass, 1984). The death education provided at school is understood as an activity supporting the family in this area and requiring cooperation between the two educational environments (Czudek-Ślęczka, 2012a; Holland, 2008).

The Research on Teachers' Attitudes towards Death Education

Many studies confirm that teachers support inclusion of children's death education programs (Dyregrov et al., 2013; McGovern & Barry, 2000). Simultaneously, some results suggest that this idea raises concerns and doubts among adult participants in school education. Teachers tend to see death education as crisis intervention rather than developmental-preventive education (Czudek-Ślęczka, 2012b; Engarhos, Talwar, Schleifer & Renaud, 2013; Królica, 2012; Sielicka, 2015). Moreover, they express the belief that death should not be discussed until a crisis, for instance, experiencing the loss of a loved one, occurs (Bowie, 2000; Mahon, Goldberg & Washington, 1999). At the same time, teachers express doubts about inclusion of death education in school curricula, especially at the primary school stage (Papadatou, Metallinou, Hatzichristou & Pavlidi, 2002) and in the form of isolated time units and subject blocks (as a form of isolated instruction, a period set aside for death education; see Crase & Crase, 1979). What is more, teachers feel uncomfortable talking to students about death (Czudek-Ślęczka, 2012b; McGovern & Barry, 2000). Their role as death educators must be supported by professionals (grief counselors, psychologists; see Case, Cheah & Liu, 2020; Dyregrov et al., 2013).

A review of available research on teachers' attitudes towards death education reveals that scholars use different measures, which makes it difficult to compare the results obtained. Moreover, none of the available instruments considers the humanistic perspective of death education, the importance of which was argued by both Feifel (1977) and Wass (2004). Simultaneously, many existing scales measure attitudes towards the interventional dimension of school death education, yet ignore its preventive and developmental aspects (Dyregrov et al., 2013; Jones et al., 1995; Mahon et al., 1999; Papadatou et al., 2002). Finally, many prior instruments consist of several dozen items, making it difficult to obtain an appropriate level of respondents' motivation to fill them (Worthington & Whittaker, 2006).

Purpose of the Study

The study presented below aimed at the initial validation of the ADESQ, notably by: (a) determining the construct validity of this measure using exploratory (EFA) and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), (b) assessing the convergent validity of the ADESQ through determining the relations between its sub-scales and the available measures of attitude towards death and human-centered education, and (c) by determining the internal consistency of the ADESQ's sub-scales.

Materials and Methods

Participants and Procedure

375 Polish students in the last year of undergraduate and final year of graduate studies participated in the study. They are potential future school counselors (education majors, 40.5%) and teachers (teaching majors, 59.5%) at primary and secondary school levels. A vast majority of them were women (95%), and their ages ranged from 20 to 50 ($M = 26$, $SD = 5.28$).

The studies involving human participants were reviewed and approved by Research Ethics Committee (No 117-2015/2016), The Maria Grzegorzewska University. Respondents were adults and the study was anonymous, so according to the provisions of the Research Ethics Committee, written consent to participate in the study is not required. It is assumed that respondents who complete the questionnaire give their consent to participate in the study.

Data collection was based on a convenience sampling procedure. The survey was conducted in 2017 during the classes for students of pedagogical and teaching faculties at one of Warsaw's universities (auditorium survey). The respondents completed questionnaires in the following order: 1. The Attitude toward Death Education at School Questionnaire, 2. The Forbidden Death Model Inventory, 3. The Death Anxiety and Fascination Scale, 4. The Rationality of Education Questionnaire. The average time to complete a set of questionnaires was forty minutes.

We acknowledge that a formal a priori power analysis did not precede our study. However, given that we synthesized latent variable approaches (exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses) and correlational analyses, we took a two-step procedure to decide on the necessary sample size. First, the classic recommendations from the literature (Nunnally, 1978) suggest a minimum sample size in factor analysis to equate the number of participants being ten times the number of the analyzed items, which would equal no less than 100 participants. To minimize the risk of unstable estimates, we decided to double this number, i.e., to obtain about 200 participants for our exploratory and 200 for confirmatory factor analyses (see the description of data analysis below), i.e., testing the construct validity of our instrument. Additionally, as our convergent and discriminant validity tests involved correlational analyses, we used G*Power (Faul et al., 2007) for sensitivity analysis, i.e., to estimate the smallest possible correlation we can detect. For a two-tailed test, with α set to .05 and power ($1-\beta$) to .80, our sample ($N = 375$) was found to be able to detect the effect size of $r = .14$, so a reasonably small association. Therefore, we conclude that this study was well-powered

to provide robust answers to our main research questions, i.e., studying construct, convergent, and discriminant validity of a newly constructed scale.

Materials

The Attitude toward Death Education at School Questionnaire (ADESQ)

The ADESQ is an instrument developed to measure attitudes towards human-centered death education as an element of school education. A deductive strategy was used to construct the questionnaire. The basis for the construction of the ADESQ was a theoretical model of death education, based on Wass's model (1995, 1997, 2003, 2004). After generating a pool of items, representative of the adopted theoretical construction of death education, we followed recommendations in literature (Worthington & Whittaker, 2006) by having three experts assess items' quality (e.g., content validity, clarity, understandability). Then, a pilot study was conducted on 80 students of pedagogical and teaching faculties. The obtained data were subjected to factor analysis. Based on this analysis, ten items were selected, which finally form the present version of the ADESQ used in the present study. The participants' task is to respond to them using a scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). The measure comprises items that theoretically constitute two factors. The first factor (six items) quantifies openness toward the presence and implementation of death education at school (e.g., „Schools should teach how to cope with suffering and death”). The second factor concerns the humanistic assumptions underlying death education, according to which coming to terms with one's mortality is a mark of human maturity. It consists of four items (e.g., „Building an open and accepting attitude towards death is an important task in human life”).

The Forbidden Death Model Inventory (FDMI)

The FDMI consists of 20 items and measures the degree to which the psychosocial aspects of the cultural model of death referred to as „forbidden death,” is present in participants' opinions (Zamarian, 2017). These psychosocial aspects of the forbidden death model concern trivialization of death and avoidance of experiencing its reality (Ariés, 1991). Participants' task is to respond to each item on a 6-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*). The FDMI consists of four sub-scales: (a) Demetaphysicization of Death, associated with depriving death of its spiritual significance (7 items, e.g., „Death is an outcome of biological laws – the aging of the organism, and religious explanations should not be sought for it”); (b) Trivialization of Death, associated with perceiving death in terms of media entertainment (3 items, e.g., „I like watching movies presenting bloody scenes of death – action or horror movies”); (c) Tabooization of Death, concerning avoidance

of the topic of death in conversations and thoughts (5 items, e.g., „It is inappropriate to raise the topic of death in an informal conversation”); and (d) Separation from the Experience of Death, manifesting itself in avoiding people, places, and situations that remind you about the reality and inevitability of death (5 items, e.g., „I shun the sight of a dead person’s body and avoid looking at a body in a coffin”). Internal consistency of all sub-scales used in the study was acceptable (see Table 1).

Table 1. Descriptive Characteristics and Reliability of the Sub-scales Used in the Study

Measure	Sub-scale	Descriptive statistics			Reliability
		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	POMP	α
FDMI	Demetaphysication of Death	3.38	1.19	.56	.82
	Trivialization of Death	3.45	1.28	.58	.65
	Tabooization of Death	2.82	1.05	.47	.66
	Separation from the Experience of Death	3.36	1.26	.56	.77
DAFS	Death Fascination	1.62	0.48	.41	.87
	Death Anxiety	2.70	0.58	.68	.83
REQ	Hermeneutics Rationality	5.66	0.82	.81	.85

Source: Authors’ research.

Note. Given that the maximum points possible to be obtained in subscales differed across instruments (for FDMI sub-scales the maximum is 6, for DAFS subscales this is 4 and for the hermeneutic rationality this is 7), we have added the percent of maximum possible score [POMP] to facilitate interpretability

The Death Anxiety and Fascination Scale (DAFS)

The DAFS consists of 23 items and measures general death anxiety and cognitive fascination with death (Żemojtel-Piotrowska & Piotrowski, 2009). Participants’ task is to respond to the items on a 4-pointscale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 4 (*strongly agree*). The DAFS consists of two sub-scales: Death Anxiety (9 items, e.g., „The prospect of my death is terrifying to me”) and Death Fascination (14 items, e.g., „I like to imagine the way I will die”). Reliability of both sub-scales was acceptable (Table 1).

The Rationality of Education Questionnaire (REQ)

The REQ makes it possible to reconstruct school education’s perceived rationality and consists of 46 items (Milerski & Karwowski, 2016). Participants’ task is to rate them on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from

1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). The REQ consists of four sub-scales: hermeneutics rationality (15 items, e.g., „Schools should develop the ability to reflect on oneself and the world”); negational rationality (10 items, e.g., „It is not worth learning, since everything can be found on the Internet”); emancipatory rationality (13 items, e.g., „Schools should educate conscious citizens”); and praxeological rationality (8 items, e.g., „Schools should teach specific abilities useful in life”). In our study, we used the hermeneutics rationality scale, which refers to understanding the meaning of school education in humanistic terms: acquiring self-understanding and the world, building authentic existence, and responsibly designing one’s own life. Its internal consistency was acceptable (see Table 1).

Data analysis

We used the exploratory (EFA) and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to determine the construct validity of ADESQ. Then we analyzed the associations between ADESQ subscales and the remaining measures of attitude toward death and human-centered education to assess the convergent validity of the ADESQ. Finally, we determined the internal consistency of the ADESQ’s sub-scales to analyze their reliability.

Results

We started testing construct validity of the ADESQ by examining its factor structure. We followed the best practices and recommendations (Worthington & Whitaker, 2006), so we divided our sample into two random sub-samples ($n = 194$ and $n = 181$). The first subsample was used for exploratory factor analysis (EFA), using oblique Oblimin rotation. The results were consistent with the expected two-factor structure (Table 2), and the pattern obtained was characterized by a clear structure, with almost complete lack of significant cross-loadings. We computed fit measures for the two-factor model: the goodness-of-fit measure: Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) and the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) – a measure of the lack of model fit. The obtained values (TLI = .949, RMSEA = .07) attest to the good fit of the two-factor model obtained in the exploratory factor analysis (Hooper, Coughlan, & Mullen, 2008; Hu & Bentler, 1999; Marsh, Hau, & Wen, 2004).

Table 2. Factor Loadings of ADESQ Items in Exploratory Factor Analysis with Two Factors

ADESQ Items	Factor 1 (Open- ness)	Factor 2 (Hu- manistic Basis)
7. A school counselor/teacher should familiarize students with death.	.88	-.01
3. Education/teaching study programs should include educational content that prepare future school counselors/teachers to familiarize students with death.	.79	.10
9. Death issues should be an important element of the school curriculum.	.84	-.07
2. Schools should teach how to cope with suffering and death.	.77	-.05
8. Death is not a school issue.	-.74	.09
10. Starting from childhood, a person should receive help in the understanding of the essence, universality, and inevitability of death.	.56	.22
4. A person should accept death as an intrinsic part of life.	.11	.67
5. Accepting the inevitability of death helps a person live a fuller and more genuine life.	.08	.66
1. Building an open and accepting attitude towards death is an important task in human life.	.16	.63
6. People are not capable of accepting death.	.16	-.46

Source: Authors' research.

Note. Bolded are items with loadings > |.40|

Next, we took a confirmatory approach on the second subsample and tested the scale's structure employing confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). Per theoretical assumptions adopted when developing the ADESQ, we tested the structure with two factors: (1) Openness to the Presence of Death Education, and (2) Humanistic Basis of Death Education. To assess the quality of the CFA model, we used two measures of goodness of fit: comparative fit index (CFI) and Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), as well as two measures indicating problems with model fit: root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) and standardized root mean square residual (SRMR). We performed the CFA in the jamovi statistical package (version 1.2.8.0, see the jamovi project 2020), using the FIML (Full Information Maximum Likelihood) estimator. The model fit was good: CFI = .959, TLI = .946, RMSEA = .077 (90% CI: .05, .10), SRMR = .06, thus attesting to ADESQ construct validity. The first factor referred to as the openness toward death education at school, is described by six items, with factor loadings ranging from .66 to .88. The average variance

extracted (AVE) for this factor achieved the value of .60, thus attesting its convergent validity. The second factor, referred to as the humanistic basis of death education, comprises four items, whose factor loadings range from .45 to .84. Also, in this factor, the AVE was appropriate (.65), thus allowing us to conclude that the measurement was characterized by convergent validity (see Figure 1). For both factors, there was one reverse-order item.

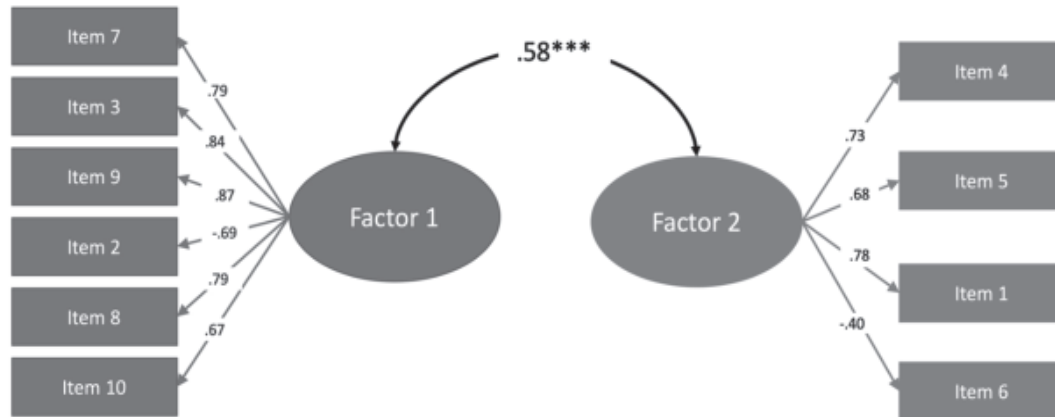


Figure 1. The two-factor confirmatory model with fit measures and factor loadings of individual items.

We analyzed the reliability of ADESQ sub-scales by assessing their internal consistency as provided by Cronbach's α , McDonald's ω and Guttman's λ . Cronbach's α should be considered a conservative measure of reliability, indicating the lowest reliability of the test (Raykov, 1998), recommended for assessing the reliability of scales with a multidimensional structure. The other two indices are usually considered slightly more liberal. Reliability of ADESQ sub-scales is acceptable or good. Factor 1 has high reliability ($\alpha = .90$, the same values were obtained for McDonald's ω and Guttman's λ). In contrast, Factor 2 has average reliability ($\alpha = .74$, for a comparison: McDonald's ω and Guttman's λ both = .74). Additionally, given that we used a latent variables approach, we calculated the composite reliability indices (H; Raykov, 1998). For both sub-scales, the reliability was good or very good: 1st factor H = .91, 2nd factor H = .79.

We explored the convergent and discriminant validity of the ADESQ by analyzing the pattern of correlations of its sub-scales with FDMI dimensions (Demetaphysication of Death, Trivialization of Death, Tabooization of Death, Separation from the Experience of Death), two DAFS sub-scales (Death Fascination and Death Anxiety), and the REQ Hermeneutics Rationality sub-scale (Table 3). We note that both the FDMI sub-scales and the DAFS sub-scales measure attitude towards death; thus, we expected their associations with ADESQ sub-scales, as attitude towards death relates to

attitudes towards death education. On the other hand, we also expected significant and positive links between the hermeneutics rationality and ADESQ sub-scales, as we posit that perceiving the meaning of school education in accordance with the humanistic category of self-understanding, reflective approach to yourself and the world should be related to the positive attitude towards human-centered death education. These predictions were associated with ADESQ's convergent validity. Simultaneously, we expected small-to-null links between ADESQ's openness sub-scale and FDMI scales (demystification of death, trivialization of death) – a demonstration of discriminant validity.

Table 3. Correlations of ADESQ Factors with Other Variables Included in the Study

Measure	Sub-scale	ADESQ (Death Education)	
		Openness	Humanistic Basis
FDMI	Demystification of Death	-.02	-.11*
	Trivialization of Death	-.11*	.08 ns.
	Tabooization of Death	-.30**	-.50**
	Separation from the Experience of Death	-.16**	-.39**
DAFS	Death Fascination	.13*	.17**
	Death Anxiety	-.18**	-.51**
REQ	Hermeneutic Rationality	.48**	.40**

Source: Authors' research.

Note. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

The correlations we found are consistent with the predictions and speak for ADESQ's convergent and discriminant validity. As predicted, openness toward the presence of death education in school and its humanistic basis were positively related to a tendency to perceive the meaning of education in terms of self-understanding (hermeneutics rationality) and a tendency to be cognitively fascinated with death. We also observed that openness toward school education in school and its humanistic basis are negatively linked with anxiety, tabooization, trivialization, and separation from death (see Table 3).

Discussion

Cultural expansion of attitudes involving avoidance and trivialization of death has several negative consequences for its mature reception (Wagner, 1995). Such attitudes form a serious educational challenge and require reflection on the need for human-centered death education and its place in school education. In the present paper, we presented theoretical framework

and psychometric properties of an instrument that can be used to measure teachers' attitudes towards death education: their openness toward death education in school and death education's humanistic basis.

Substantive multidimensionality of the measure established in the present study has practical implications; namely, in the case of the ADESQ, it is not advisable to use the general factor as a global measure of attitude towards human-centered death education, but, rather, relying on two related, yet conceptually distinct factors. The first factor, „openness toward death education”, concerns attitude towards death education as a vital element of school education: incorporation of death issues into school curricula, inclusion of death education objectives in school education, as well as proper preparation of school counselors and teachers for work in this area. The second factor, „humanistic basis”, relates to the assumptions present in humanistic philosophy and adopted by the founding fathers of death education (Feifel, 1977; Wass, 2004), according to which recognizing the reality and inevitability of death is a condition of genuine existence and a fundamental life task.

Apart from construct validity discussed above, the study also demonstrated acceptable reliability of both ADESQ sub-scales. The scores on both sub-scales were negatively correlated with an anxious and avoidant attitude towards death and positively correlated with death fascination. Thus, the more open the attitude towards death, the stronger the recognition of human-centered death education as an essential element of school education. These results correspond with data obtained by other researchers, indicating that personal attitudes and anxieties related to death differentiate attitudes toward the very presence of death education in school (Jones et al., 1995). Moreover, both ADESQ sub-scales were significantly and positively related to hermeneutics rationality. Thus, perceiving the goals of school education in terms of understanding one's life situation is accompanied by support for the humanistic assumptions of death education, according to which building an open, accepting attitude towards death is an important life task for a person and the need of including death issues in the process of school education does indeed exist. The correlations we found speak for theoretical legitimacy for the use of the ADESQ in research that considers adult education participants' beliefs in the school dimension of death education and its humanistic perspective, which is not taken into account by any previous measures.

Limitations and Future Directions

The findings of this study should be read in light of its limitations. We emphasize five of them that should be addressed in future studies. First, our survey covered prospective teachers and school counselors without professional experience. Therefore, we emphasize that their perception of death education is not necessarily consistent with the perception of experienced teachers and school counselors. Second, it is worth mentioning that our sample was composed primarily of women. Although it resembles the gender structure of the teaching profession in Poland and the feminization of the teaching profession in general, gender might likely differentiate attitudes toward death education. Third, convenience sampling applied in our study did not allow us to obtain a representative sample and to generalize our findings to the whole population of teachers. Fourth, the ADESQ measures support for quite generally framed humanistic-oriented death education as part of school education, the so-called ideological support. Ideological support refers to the general concept of death education, not to specific program content: the so-called operational support. High ideological support does not necessarily translate into operational support (Jones et al., 1995). Fifth, the questionnaire can be used to explore attitudes toward death education in Polish cultural conditions. However, its use in a different cultural context requires appropriate adaptation.

Further research examining attitudes towards death education may benefit from a questionnaire that would enable describing the significance attributed to human-centered death education in terms of all of its aspects included in the theoretical model of death education based on the conception proposed by Wass (2003, 2004) – not only the school aspect, but also prevention, intervention, and family aspects. This kind of instrument would make it possible to perform a more holistic, multidimensional measurement of attitude towards education for a mature reception of the death phenomenon and to go beyond the limitations of the research presented in this paper.

Conclusion

Although restricted to selected aspects of education for a mature reception of the phenomenon of death included in the theoretical model, the Attitude toward Death Education at School Questionnaire presented in this paper is a promising instrument for future research. The ADESQ could easily be applied to examine adult education participants (not only teachers but also school counselors or parents) to the general concept of death education as part of primary and secondary school education. In particular, the

ADESQ can be used in research to identify the level of ideological support and to obtain an orientation on the need for educational activities among respondents. Researchers (McGovern & Barry, 2000; Pratt et al., 1987) indicate that deepening the knowledge and experience of teachers and parents about death, dying, and mourning, and shaping positive attitudes towards death, helps to gain their support for school death education. A high level of ideological support may be a starting point for building operational support, namely by engaging respondents in the construction of the content of school death education programs (Jones et al., 1995). Moreover, given its length (only ten items), the ADESQ may facilitate obtaining an appropriate level of respondents' motivation to fill it and be successfully used in iterative research, assuming the use of other scales. Finally, the ADESQ considers the humanistic perspective of death education and fills the gap present in the previous literature.

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