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Development of a Scale to Measure Attitudes toward Professional Values: An analysis of dimensionality using Rasch measurement

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to create and validate a scale of attitudes towards professional values. It corresponds to the phase of analysis of metric properties in an intentional sample of 1008 bachelor student's equivalent to 30.74% of the population of the Universidad Autonoma de Baja California. The sample of students represents six knowledge areas: Social and Business Sciences, Human and Education Sciences, Natural Sciences, Exact Sciences, Technology and Engineering, and Health Sciences. The scale was pilot tested with a group of 253 students that took the full 50-item scale. Based on the Rasch Methodology, twenty items were deleted from the original scale. From the final scale, the outcomes reported unidimensionality and goodness-of fit indexes assuming the Rating Scale Model (RSM). The results showed values close to 1 on both goodness fit indexes: INFIT MNSQ and OUTFIT MSNQ. Finally, the reliability for the total scale was found to be .85 Cronbach's alpha. The six subscales within the scale (responsibility, honesty, justice, respect, autonomy and professional competence) had moderate levels of internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha ranging .62 to .75). The findings have important implications for the accumulation of evidence of reliability and construct validity of an instrument for college students in the Mexican context.

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1. Introduction

The current scenario of education in Latin America faces important transformations and reconsideration of its structures and functions. Educational institutions are in constant process of transformation, the incorporation of people into the labor market and its relationship with production systems requires increasingly higher grades and greater competencies (Llisterri, Gligo, Homs & Ruiz-Deversa, 2014). In the case of Mexican universities, since recent years, academic spaces meet basic functions such as entailment, teaching, and research, which have sought professional training, promoting social development, and the transmission of university identity. However, it is important to consider whether the university has its mission oriented to ethical university training which incorporates, in a rigorous and systematic manner, meaningful learning situations of values and civic education.

The challenge of Higher Education Institutions (HEI), is to provide a model of well-rounded development which, along with technical and cognitive skills, considers in a planned way, the implementation of actions such as integrating ethical content and professional values to the university curriculum (Martínez, 2006), as well as the identification of the main components of professional ethics that influence more in the students' university education. Therefore, it is necessary for students to incorporate into their teaching-learning process, the competencies which give them the ability to permanently adapt to change, but at the same time, make them into committed citizens. In the last quarter of the twentieth century, as in the rest of the world, Latin America has experienced remarkable growth and diversification in the number of students entering college. In Mexico, the total population (estimated between ages 20 to 24) is 13,775,452 and 4,538,256 enrolled students, represented in 28.33% of the population (CEPAL, 2015). In this sense, the Latin American Tunning Project has proposed key elements for professional training: a) social responsibility and civic commitment, b) commitment to his social-cultural midst, and c) commitment to preserving the environment (Benetoiide, *et al.*, 2007).

Addressing the study of professional values as components of professional ethics directly oriented to define the construct value, which is not easy since there is no single, well-rounded, general theory on the subject; on the contrary, the category "value" is object of study of different disciplines and research areas which offer an integrated theoretical corpus (Schwartz & Bilsky, 1987; Oser, 1994, Rohan, 2000; Ojalvo, Kraftchenko, González, Castellanos, Viñas & Rojas, 2001; Aguirre y Lavigne, 2004; Fierro y Carbajal, 2005). In the professional context, the study of professional values is recognized as guiding principles of bioethics derivatives. Accordingly, Hirsch (2003) agrees with Beauchamp y Childress (2001) in going back to the proposed scheme in terms of the basic principles of professional ethics. The contributions of authors like Llanes (2001), Berumen (2001), Hortal (2002), Hirsch, (2003) and García (2006) propose the study of six core values throughout the formative university trajectory which are located in a dimension of lesser degree of generalizability than those of principles, and can be evaluated in university learning spaces, these being the pillars of professional practice, in which the following stand out: autonomy referring to respect for the client's rights and beliefs, and the ability to make decisions in professional practice, (Hortal 2002 & Hirsch 2003), responsibility, as an ethical value, has to do with fair or unfair consequences (Hirsch, 2003; García - López, 2006), professional competency, understood as the ability to apply professional knowledge, skills and attitudes for the development of their profession (Hortal 2002 & Hirsh 2003), honesty referred to as acting with the appropriate means to achieve the proposed goal (Berúmen, 2001; García - López, 2006), respect referred to as the tolerance of various styles of thought and dignity of people (Llanes & Berumen, 2001), and justice a value which articulates the promotion of equality and the fulfillment of solidarity (Berúmen, 2001; García-López, 2006).

Regarding the measurement of psychological attitudes, it has been found that throughout the years, in various studies conducted, various definitions of attitude have been proposed. Among the main contributions are those from Thurstone (1928); Fishbein & Ajzen, (1988) and Morales (2000). However, the authors coincide in considering that: 1) an attitude is a predisposition to respond to an object; attitude is persistent, which does not mean it is immutable; studies show that altering attitudes require strong pressure; 3) attitude produces consistency in behavioral manifestations; it is located as a latent variable since it gives rise to the consistency among its manifestations whether it is in verbal or sentimental form towards the object, or approach or avoidance, and 4) attitude is directional, it involves the formation of behavior routines in the form of consistency in the manifestations, and possesses a motivational feature. In the process of measuring attitudes, these are classified within the non-observational constructs or concepts,

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