

Content and Cultural Validity of Scales Within the Korean Context

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In this issue of the *Korean Journal of Child Studies*, a review of theoretical adequacy and psychological measurement issues of the scales used by members of our academic society has been published. Many researchers, including myself as the author of this editorial, have had the opportunity to think about what they have overlooked regarding scale development and use.

The term *development* in scale development literally means *pioneering*. In other words, scale development refers to the process of researchers generating new items and developing a new measure different from the existing ones. There are a variety of ways to generate items for a scale. However, in order to develop a good scale with academic significance, it is necessary to include the process of property and construct analyses of a variable through a deep examination of previous research. In the first step of scale development, researchers have to fully consider the attributes of the variables, the factor structures that should be defined for a variable, and the sub-factors that should be assumed, before they determine the contents of the items that should be listed.

The item generation procedure often includes conducting in-depth or focus group interviews and administering open-ended survey questions. Sorting tasks, which require people to classify items into similar

categories, can also be used, and discussing the suitability and appropriateness of each item with other scholars is a good way to support content validity. Many scholars have collaborated for a long time to make good scales. For example, numerous studies to continuously revise intelligence tests have been carried out for nearly 112 years since the development of the first intelligence test in 1905.

However, if we construct a scale with only the items of existing scales, modify the items without sufficient theoretical review, and conduct factor analysis with the same items, it cannot be termed scale development. Rather, it would be called a study to examine the validity of a scale.

The use of existing items is possible when developing a scale, but the source of the items and theoretical background need to be clarified. In particular, when translating and using research scales developed by foreign scholars, cultural/ecological validity as well as content validity need to be considered. Many researchers carry out translation and back-translation procedures, and analyze the cultural equivalence between the original scale and a translated version of the scale using the item response models. This is an important prerequisite for conducting cross-cultural studies.

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However, cultural validity is not equal to cultural equivalence. A long time ago, I discussed the decline in the preference for sons in Asian culture with an American friend who had given birth to a son. I felt the cultural difference deeply when she said, “I think that it is harder to raise a son than a daughter, because boys are heavier and more powerful. I need a lot of help from my family. ... So, a mother-in-law provides more support and encouragement to the daughter-in-law when she has given birth to a son.”

In a similar way, I often realize cultural differences in the interpretation of a phenomenon when I converse with foreign researchers. Although I have used the translated versions of many scales, I was often required to acknowledge the need to define a variable in a completely different way within the Korean context. It may be useful to conduct a phenomenological or ethnographic study in order to find out the properties of self-esteem Korean children and adolescents possess, the items that can best represent the parenting attitude of Korean parents, and so on.

It is important to support the validity of the content and interpretation of a scale in both quantitative and qualitative studies. Surely, many researchers have tested the cultural equivalence and verified the validity and reliability of the translated versions of scales. However, rather than merely verifying cross-cultural validity through an examination of whether the translated items are applicable to Koreans, there should be an effort to establish new theoretical frameworks to explain phenomena from our own sociocultural perspective.

The quality and validity of research scales are determined not by the results of the statistical analyses, but also by in-depth discussions of the validity of the items from the item creation phase. I hope that researchers involved in scale development studies take this into account and make more efforts to generate valid items.

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of the Korean Journal of Child Studies.

Conflict of Interest

No potential conflict of interest relevant to this editorial was reported.

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