

PURPOSE IN LIFE IN ADOLESCENTS AFTER A LEARNING EXPERIENCE

El sentido vital de los adolescentes tras una experiencia de aprendizaje

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Abstract

Adolescents focused on *having* instead of *being* immerse themselves in dissatisfaction and a life full of emotional deficiencies and problem-solving skills, highlighting the need to enhance their sense of purpose and maturity for learning. Therefore, a competency-based learning experience is developed and applied, and the sense of purpose is measured before and after the application. This is an empirical and experimental study, where the objectives are: firstly, to verify the psychometric characteristics of the Purpose In Life (PIL) inventory, and secondly, to assess whether the intervention of a competency-based learning experience can increase the sense of purpose in adolescents. A longitudinal, quantitative, descriptive, and comparative research is conducted. The construct of sense of purpose is measured in 1068 applications of the inventory, and the characteristics of the adolescents are collected using an *ad hoc* questionnaire. The data were analyzed with Cronbach's Alpha, factor analysis, and the T-test were used. The results showed high reliability of the PIL inventory in adolescents, and its validity reveals four intervening factors in the life meaning of adolescents. The research highlights students' interest in the experience of competency-based learning, due to the increase in participation. Education in vital skills is intended to contribute to personal well-being and develop the self.

Keywords

Adolescent, Education, Moral values, Well-being, Skills, Lifelong learning.

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Resumen

Los adolescentes dirigidos al *tener* en lugar de al *ser*, se sumergen en la insatisfacción y en una vida llena de carencias afectivas y habilidades resolutivas, lo que pone de relieve la necesidad de aumentar su sentido vital y madurez para el aprendizaje. Por ello, se desarrolla y aplica una experiencia de aprendizaje competencial y se mide el sentido vital pre- y postaplicación. Es un estudio empírico y experimental, donde los objetivos son: comprobar las características psicométricas del inventario Purpose In Life (PIL) y valorar si la intervención de una experiencia de aprendizaje competencial puede aumentar el sentido vital en adolescentes. La investigación es longitudinal, cuantitativa, descriptiva y comparativa. Se mide el constructo “sentido vital” en 1068 aplicaciones del inventario y se recogen las características de los adolescentes con un cuestionario *ad hoc*. Los datos se analizaron con el alfa de Cronbach, el análisis factorial y la prueba T. Los resultados muestran la alta fiabilidad del inventario PIL en adolescentes y su validez revela cuatro factores intervinientes en el sentido vital de los adolescentes. La investigación pone de relieve el interés del alumnado en la experiencia de aprendizaje competencial por el aumento de participación. Se propone la educación en competencias vitales para contribuir al bienestar personal y desarrollar el ser.

Palabras clave

Adolescencia, educación, valores morales, bienestar, competencias, aprendizaje a lo largo de la vida.



Introduction

Contemporary adolescents frequently exhibit a perceived deficit in moral values and a lack of existential purpose, a phenomenon where “having” takes precedence over “being”—a trend driven by contemporary consumerism, shifting motivations, and a fragmentation of life goals (Merino *et al.*, 2021). Adolescence constitutes the critical developmental stage during which moral consciousness is fully consolidated and socio-emotional development assumes greater significance than in earlier periods. Consequently, achieving alignment between intra-psychic listening and moral consciousness is essential for holistic development and the cultivation of a meaningful life (Armas Arráez, 2015).

Historically, Piaget (1985) posited that adolescents construct morality through obedience and mutual respect, integrating foundational parental guidance. Expanding upon this, Frankl (2004) argued that existential development requires an additional dimension: the voice of transcendence. Accessing this transcendent dimension necessitates psychological maturity, while the practical application of internalized values demands both specific competencies and developmental readiness, thereby establishing maturity as a higher-order skill fostered during adolescence (Bernal Guerrero, 2003). Because maturity and cognitive learning are interdependent, their interaction enables subsequent self-directed development. Therefore, educational frameworks must promote compe-

tencies that foster concurrent academic and personal growth, equipping students to effectively navigate systemic societal challenges (Alonzo Rivera *et al.*, 2016).

Under this conceptual framework, learning requires robust moral development, psychological maturity, the cultivation of life skills, and the formulation of a sense of purpose within the educational ecology:

- Reyes *et al.* (2025) underscore the importance of implementing structured programs designed to foster purpose within educational institutions and pedagogical practices.
- Caro Beltrán and Correa Arias (2023) indicate that existential vacuum stems from a deficit in social bonding and community building, which subsequently hinders identity formation and self-expression; they argue that a supportive educational community can mitigate this vacuum by fostering a sense of purpose.
- Nakamura *et al.* (2022) suggest that existential purpose is more malleable during early developmental stages, given that interventions targeted at adult populations yield only modest effects.

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To address this identified need, an inclusive, holistic life skills intervention was designed and implemented, integrating digital technologies and creative methodologies. This competency-based educational experience aims to cultivate emotional intelligence, resilience, core values, moral consciousness, spirituality, and self-actualization, thereby driving intrinsic motivation and an enhanced sense of purpose. While the theoretical premises underlying this intervention are delineated in subsequent sections, presenting the operational mechanics of the experience itself falls outside the scope of this paper. Rather, the purpose of this study is threefold:

- To theoretically justify the psychological and developmental dimensions fostered by the intervention by systematically linking existential purpose to morality, values, self-actualization, emotional intelligence, spirituality, resilience, and life competencies (as analyzed in sections 2 through 5).
- To determine the empirical effect of this life skills experience on adolescents by evaluating variations in their sense of purpose. To operationalize the construct “sense of life,” the Purpose in Life (PIL) test (Crumbaugh & Maholick, 1969) was selected. This attitude scale is designed to quantify the degree to which an individual experiences existential meaning versus existential vacu-

um. While the PIL has been extensively validated across clinical settings (Armas Arráez, 2015; Armas Arráez *et al.*, 2017), university cohorts (Gallego Pérez & García Alandete, 2004; García Alandete *et al.*, 2011; Gottfried, 2019; Jonsén *et al.*, 2010; Magaña *et al.*, 2004; Noblejas, 2011; Porras & Noblejas, 2007; Risco, 2009; Valdivia Pareja, 2007), and youth vocational guidance programs (Cuny, 2007; Dewitz *et al.*, 2009), it lacks rigorous psychometric validation within non-clinical adolescent populations.

- To address this methodological gap by evaluating the psychometric quality of the instrument. Ensuring the technical suitability of measurement tools is a prerequisite for rigorous scientific inquiry to guarantee that the data yields an accurate approximation of the empirical reality under study. Consequently, this study analyzes the adolescents' sense of purpose longitudinally, comparing pre- and post-intervention scores.

Methodologically, this inquiry is structured as an empirical, quantitative study incorporating descriptive, comparative, correlational, and longitudinal experimental designs. The overarching research agenda encompasses two primary general objectives:

- To evaluate the psychometric properties of the PIL inventory within an adolescent sample, which entails two specific objectives: assessing its internal consistency (reliability) and verifying its construct validity.
- To evaluate the efficacy of the life skills intervention by statistically comparing pre- and post-test PIL scores.

Based on these objectives, the following research hypotheses are formulated:

- The PIL inventory demonstrates robust psychometric properties suitable for scientific research and accurately measures its target construct.
- Participation in the life skills intervention significantly modifies adolescents' documented sense of purpose, as evidenced by statistical variances between pre- and post-intervention scores (alongside its corresponding alternative hypothesis).

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows: first, the theoretical foundation is established, examining the intersections of moral consciousness, self-actualization, emotional intelligence, spirituality, re-

silience, and life competencies. Second, the empirical framework is presented, detailing the methodology, statistical results, and subsequent discussion to accept or reject the formulated hypotheses. Finally, the paper concludes with a summary of key contributions, pedagogical implications, and study limitations.

Moral Consciousness, Values, and Meaning in Life

Every existential situation necessitates the selection of a course of action; in this process, moral consciousness guides individual behavior toward ethical outcomes, wherein actions are executed or virtues are operationalized under the guidance of core values (Armas Arráez, 2015). From a humanistic perspective, attaining the “super-meaning” of life requires the progressive development of moral consciousness through a structured hierarchy of values (Frankl, 1988). Conversely, the positivist paradigm suggests that cultivating a meaningful life depends on the development of character strengths and the establishment of positive interpersonal relationships (Seligman, 2003). To differentiate these constructs, Sánchez (2014) notes that values undergo internalization, whereas virtues are progressively acquired through practice. Empirically, both values and virtues remain inextricably linked within the structural maturation of moral consciousness.

Values represent a critical, cross-cultural, and universal concern that transcends ethnic, religious, or racial boundaries (Hidalgo Hernández, 2005). Although individual beliefs heavily configure both moral frameworks and existential purpose (Ortega, 2020), the systemic need to cultivate moral consciousness has driven the emergence of moral pedagogy. This field encompasses personalized educational methodologies grounded in contextualized dialogue, designed to develop individuals of character capable of transforming both their immediate reality and themselves (Chacón Arteaga, 2014). Consequently, moral education requires behavioral internalization, adaptation to prosocial norms, autonomous development, and socio-emotional learning (Florentino Morillo, 2022).

The critical role of these dimensions is evident in specialized populations; for instance, institutionalized juvenile offenders in Argentina frequently exhibit a severely depleted sense of purpose in life. For this demographic, fostering moral consciousness and facilitating the formulation of an autonomous life plan are essential steps toward self-actualization, achieved through the activation of creative, experiential, and attitudinal values (Vecino, 2022).



To effectively educate for moral consciousness, instructional designs must utilize moral dilemmas as contextualized learning situations. These dilemmas should be derived from real-world scenarios, maintain structural simplicity, present binary outcomes with distinct moral implications, and require specific proposals for action (Rodero, 2025). Within innovative pedagogical practices, Morales and Camacho (2026) utilized multimedia tools—specifically video—to deepen student learning through a philosophical and pedagogical framework, encouraging ethical reflection driven by pedagogical action. Similarly, Cáceres (2025) deployed puppetry as an instructional medium to stimulate adolescent discourse and reflection regarding ethics and morality, thereby fostering critical thinking and moral awareness.

Synthesizing these findings, it is imperative to integrate moral value education into academic curricula so that students can apply these frameworks to real-world problem-solving and authentic learning contexts. This integration enables learners to construct a defined sense of purpose aligned with moral awareness, ultimately fostering the psychological maturity and self-actualization analyzed in the subsequent section.



Self-Actualization, Emotional Intelligence, and a Sense of Purpose

Self-actualization is achieved by fostering individual potential, which concurrently drives prosocial systemic change and promotes the pursuit of meaning across all life domains (Gómez del Campo *et al.*, 2011). In tandem, perceived self-efficacy requires the formulation of personal goals and positive achievement expectations (Sansinenea *et al.*, 2008). Empirically, a direct and significant relationship exists between self-efficacy and a positive sense of purpose, generating positive existential feedback loops that optimize subjective well-being and overall health (Morillo Ahumada, 2013; Armas Arráez & López Castedo, 2018). Consequently, contemporary educational paradigms require high-quality pedagogical processes characterized by positive interpersonal classroom dynamics. This necessitates instructional strategies grounded in care, the recognition of emotional complexity, the cultivation of prosocial skills, and the alignment of individual self-actualization demands with broader social expectations (Bernal Guerrero & König Bustamante, 2017).

Implicit in this framework is the development of emotional intelligence, which encompasses the accurate appraisal and regulation of one's

own emotions, intrinsic self-motivation, and the recognition of emotional states in others (Goleman, 1995)—constructs that theoretically map onto intra- and interpersonal intelligences (Gardner, 1993). Therefore, intervention programs focusing on life skills must systematically integrate emotional competencies, given that both existential fulfillment and academic learning are mediated by effective emotional regulation and intrinsic motivation. Personal interest is a prerequisite for internalizing knowledge, as intrinsic motivation drives the psychological flow of learning (Armas Arráez, 2019). This underscores the imperative of intrinsic motivation in all educational processes; regarding life skills specifically, cultivating emotional competence is essential for both cognitive learning (intrapersonal dimension) and adaptive life development (interpersonal dimension). This dual focus facilitates the transition from declarative knowledge to functional know-how while developing a moral consciousness that shifts individual orientation from “having” toward “being.”

Recent empirical evidence supports these interconnections within adolescents. On one hand, subjective life satisfaction correlates positively with emotional self-regulation, which subsequently functions as a foundational mechanism for psychological resilience (Frutos de Miguel, 2025). On the other hand, reorienting existential focus from materialistic consumerism (“having”) toward ontological depth (“being”) requires an openness to spirituality as a transformative ethical framework (Colorado, 2025). To explore these intersections further, the subsequent section delineates the explicit connections between existential purpose, spirituality, and resilience.

Spirituality, Resilience, and Meaning in Life

Educating in life skills extends beyond functional know-how; it entails equipping individuals with psychological resources, adaptive abilities, character strengths, and structured experiences to act responsibly throughout their lifespans. This process requires a humanistic pedagogical framework that infuses meaning into instructional design, given that the mere transmission of declarative knowledge does not cultivate competence; true competence necessitates the convergence of knowing, knowing how to act, and knowing how to be. Consequently, educational content, skills, attitudes, and values must be systematically oriented toward fostering both student “know-how” and ontological “being” (Armas Arráez, 2015; Sánchez Cabaco *et al.*, 2008; Martínez, 2010). The dimen-

sion of “being” encompasses critical intra- and interpersonal traits —such as empathy, self-esteem, social competence, frustration tolerance, and conflict-resolution skills— all of which are core components of emotional intelligence. Furthermore, it integrates goal-oriented intrinsic motivation, core values, spirituality, and resilience, which collectively drive prosocial success and holistic human development (Armas Arráez, 2015).

Within this framework, spirituality and resilience emerge as two pivotal dimensions intrinsically linked to existential meaning and the acquisition of life skills. In this regard, Arciniega González (2020) posits that a comprehensive framework for meaningful learning must explicitly address the teleological purpose of learning, the mechanics of learning through coexistence, and the diverse sources of knowledge within heterogeneous contexts, thereby promoting education oriented toward the common good. A substantial body of literature supports the mandate to foster these overarching life competencies (Sánchez Cabaco *et al.*, 2011; Farstad, 2004; Risco Lázaro & Sánchez Cabaco, 2010), personal and social skills (Goleman *et al.*, 2002; Noblejas, 2011), emotional competencies (Bisquerra Alzina, 2003; Bisquerra Alzina & Pérez Escoda, 2007; Faure *et al.*, 1972), and spiritual competencies, the latter of which transcend both traditional emotional intelligence and institutionalized religion (Fischman, 2017).

Spirituality functions as a powerful internal resource for constructing existential meaning and mitigating egocentrism in favor of universal benevolence and prosocial altruism (Vargas Herrera & Moya Marchant, 2018). By nurturing an understanding of universal interconnectedness, spirituality optimizes human interaction with both social peers and the broader environment. When operationalized as spiritual intelligence, this dimension is considered essential for fostering self-regulation, psychological resilience, and holistic well-being during the critical developmental stage of adolescence (Pacheco de Pauliz *et al.*, 2025).

Simultaneously, resilience is empirically linked to a defined sense of purpose in life. This intersection has been extensively verified within higher education cohorts (Smedema Malonda & Módenes, 2018) as well as within clinical populations, where a direct positive correlation between existential meaning and resilient coping mechanisms has been established (Armas Arráez *et al.*, 2017). Among adolescent samples, resilience significantly predicts subjective well-being (Omar, 2007); for instance, an empirical study involving 230 adolescents demonstrated a significant positive relationship between resilient adaptations and global life satisfaction (Casavilca & Solano, 2025). Mechanistically, Muñoz Betancourt



(2017) identifies creative coping strategies as a cognitive bridge connecting self-efficacy to resilience, ultimately enhancing the individual's sense of purpose. Under this view, adolescent happiness is conceptualized not as mere hedonic pleasure, but as eudaimonic fulfillment achieved through structured activities that catalyze internal development and experiential growth (Castro, 2026).

Synthesizing these theoretical and empirical insights, it is imperative to systematically foster spirituality and resilience through creative pedagogical resources. By enhancing self-efficacy and emotional self-regulation, these interventions enable adolescents to actively accept and resolve complex life situations through the practical application of life competencies.

Life Skills and Meaning in Life

The foundational premise of this inquiry posits that an individual's existential purpose is dynamic and subject to longitudinal modification; consequently, numerous studies have sought to optimize both life competencies and meaning within educational frameworks (Crumbaugh & Maholick, 1969; Noblejas, 2011). Incorporating a phenomenological approach within secondary education, Espinosa *et al.* (2016) evaluated an extracurricular life skills intervention involving high school students, demonstrating that the program successfully cultivated respect for diversity, self-directed learning driven by personal initiative, and active civic and ethical community engagement. Similarly, Salvino (2009) underscored the conceptualization of existential meaning as a structural framework for designing educational curricula rooted in attitudinal values.

The empirical literature documents diverse applications of purpose-centric interventions across student populations. Nationally and internationally, these programs have yielded significant insights:

- Following an empirical evaluation of 445 university students, Molasso (2006) argued that institutional policies must systematically integrate interventions that equip students with the cognitive and emotional tools necessary to cultivate existential clarity and subjective well-being.
- Barahona *et al.* (2013) operationalized a program grounded in “positive instructional cognition” with a sample of 110 secondary and higher education students, successfully promoting core life skills aligned with the competency-based mandates of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA).



- Utilizing a controlled experimental design with participants aged 17–18, Gottfried (2017) implemented a structured intervention to enhance existential meaning, evaluating outcomes via pre- and post-test administrations of the Purpose in Life (PIL) test. The findings revealed that the experimental group achieved a significantly higher sense of purpose and a greater capacity for personal achievement than the non-participating control group.
- Exploring the qualitative dimensions of this construct among young adults aged 20–24, Hernández *et al.* (2016) determined that the formulation of existential purpose is primarily driven by the convergence of professional development, autonomous personal growth, and prosocial interpersonal relationships.
- Berrocal (2019) evaluated the efficacy of the “Aprendo para la Vida” intervention utilizing an experimental framework with 48 secondary students; the post-intervention data confirmed a significant increase in the participants’ target life competencies.



From a curricular perspective, life skills must not be treated as isolated instructional blocks but should be integrated transversely across educational frameworks. This cross-curricular implementation facilitates an inclusive, humanistic, and integrative educational paradigm (Alegre, 2010). This approach aligns with the four classical pillars of education: learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together, and learning to be (Delors, 1996), which collectively nurture student talent, foster personal accountability, facilitate the construction of an autonomous life plan, and heighten awareness regarding universal human values (Bustos & Richmond, 2007). Expanding upon this model, Delors (2013) asserted that lifelong learning must remain anchored to these four pillars, emphasizing that a psycho-pedagogical policy shift is imperative to sustain competency development across all life stages.

The urgency of this approach is underscored by recent diagnostic data. A non-experimental inquiry conducted by Osorio (2021) revealed that 33% of surveyed adolescents experience profound difficulties in decision-making, express existential uncertainty regarding their future goals, question the inherent meaning of their objectives, and exhibit severe motivational deficits within academic tasks. This substantial prevalence of existential vacuum highlights the critical need for comprehensive empirical investigations regarding life purpose during adolescence as a prerequisite for effective life skill instruction.

Synthesizing this empirical background, it is evident that fostering life competencies and a structured sense of purpose within adolescents requires the systematic integration of moral awareness, value internalization, self-actualization, emotional intelligence, spirituality, and psychological resilience. Consequently, these interrelated dimensions established the conceptual and structural foundations for the competency-based learning experience evaluated empirically in the subsequent sections of this study.

Methodology

The following details the method, sample, instruments, procedures, and research phases used in this study.

Method

This study deployed an empirical, quantitative experimental design with a longitudinal and comparative approach. The operational mechanics involved the implementation of a competency-based learning situation as the independent variable to systematically evaluate its causal effect on the participants' documented sense of purpose, which served as the primary dependent variable. Longitudinal variations were captured by statistically comparing psychometric data generated prior to (pre-test) and following (post-test) the execution of the instructional unit.

In alignment with standard practices in behavioral and social science research, structured questionnaires were utilized for data elicitation. This measurement approach ensures that all respondents are exposed to identical items and standardized administration protocols, thereby minimizing procedural variance and ensuring that observed statistical variations are attributable to intra-individual differences rather than artifacts of the instruments or data collection processes (Fowler & Mangione, 1990).

Sample

The sample consists of 1,068 adolescent students aged 14 to 19, enrolled in different grade levels: the 3rd and 4th years of ESO and the 1st year of High School. The sample participants were recruited from two public high schools in two different municipalities in the Canary Islands (Spain)—one in San Cristóbal de la Laguna and the other in Santa Cruz de Tenerife— during two different administration periods of the questionnaire.



Initially, in the pre-implementation assessment of the learning experience, there were 518 participants, of whom: by age, 31.7% were 14 and 15 years old, 60.2% were 16 and 17 years old, and 8.1% were 18 and 19 years old; by gender, 43.6% were male and 56.4% were female. In the second phase, the post-unit assessment included 551 participants: by age, 27.2% were 14 and 15 years old, 62.4% were 16 and 17 years old, and 10.4% were between 18 and 19 years old; by gender, 39.7% were male and 60.3% were female. Participation in the life skills learning experience was voluntary and anonymous. All ethical procedures were followed when administering the instruments. There was an increase in participation throughout the implementation of the program or learning experience.

Instruments and Variables



The dependent variable is a sense of purpose, while the independent variable is the skills-based experience that brings about changes in the students; there are also descriptive variables for the sample of adolescents. Two questionnaires were selected because of their relevance to the research:

- An *ad hoc* questionnaire designed to collect descriptive information about the sample (gender, age, and grade level).
- The PIL inventory, an attitude scale that reveals the extent to which a person experiences meaning, purpose in life, and existential emptiness. Numerous studies confirm that it measures the attitudinal competence of life meaning with high reliability (Armas Arráez *et al.*, 2018; Caro Beltrán and Correa Arias, 2023; Noblejas, 2011). While there is considerable heterogeneity in the proposed factor structures for the PIL (García Alandete *et al.*, 2013), it has not been administered to the population of adolescent students selected for this study. Generally, it has been administered to college students (Caro Beltrán and Correa Arias, 2023; Fernández and Garzón, 2016; Jaramillo *et al.*, 2008; Risco, 2009). Moreno *et al.* (2020) examined the descriptive variables of secondary school students' sense of life purpose; however, they did not examine the factor structure of the PIL in that study. A study applying the PIL in a Thai context noted that it was appropriate for measuring adolescents aged 15 to 19 (Balthipa *et al.*, 2022). Therefore, it is necessary to study the factor structure in the Spanish middle and high school population and examine its fit with other data. The Spanish version of the PIL is used, consisting of 20 items on a 1-to-7 Likert-type

response scale, where 4 is the neutral point and 1 and 7 represent the extreme positions. It is administered in a group setting, and the completion time is approximately 30–40 minutes, as the participants are adolescents. The total score is obtained by summing the directly selected values, except for the reverse-scored items (2, 5, 7, 10, 14, 15, 17, 18, and 19). Therefore, a higher score corresponds to a greater sense of purpose in life.

Research Procedure and Phases

A circular model is employed in which the stages follow one another, generating and justifying the research decisions:

- In the first phase, questionnaires completed anonymously by the adolescents are administered to determine their initial sense of life prior to the implementation of the competency-based learning experience.
- In the second intervention phase, the competency-based learning experience is implemented, incorporating various methodological approaches: holistic, with a comprehensive focus; humanistic, as it explores students' needs and knowledge to transform them; behaviorist, as it aims to develop specific behaviors; and psychoanalytic, through the inclusion of guided symbolic activities. It is an open and flexible process that adapts to students' needs.
- In the third phase, the questionnaires from the first phase are administered again to obtain post-program results regarding the students' sense of purpose.
- The fourth and final phase consists of conducting the relevant statistical analyses described in the following subsection, followed by an analysis of the results to assess whether the objectives were met and to test the hypotheses, leading to the discussion and conclusions.



Data Analysis

Data analysis was performed using the SPSS v22 statistical software for Windows. After organizing the sample distribution based on the collected variables, the analysis was conducted in three distinct stages:



- Reliability was analyzed to ensure that the scale exhibits consistency, stability, and precision in the data, thereby enabling the prediction and inference of results. The reliability of the PIL was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, as it is one of the most widely recognized measures.
- Validity was examined because reliability alone is insufficient to support the legitimacy of the collected data; therefore, to ensure that an instrument measures what it claims to measure, it is necessary to consider validity (Bisquerra Alzina, 1987). Among the various approaches to validity, content validity and construct validity indicate that the instrument is suitable for measuring what it is intended to measure. Content validity prevents bias and erroneous inferences, while construct validity prevents the use of inappropriate variables that are not significant. The main component analysis procedure was used to relate the variables and reduce them to a smaller number of factors. This data analysis technique was used to identify homogeneous groups of variables from a large set of variables, reducing the dimensionality of the data to simplify its subsequent interpretation (Pardo and Ruíz, 2002) or to reduce the number of interrelated variables to a smaller number of independent factors (Corbetta, 2003). To do this, a factor analysis was performed using the principal components method, following the four characteristic phases: calculating the matrix capable of expressing the joint variability of all variables (commonalities); extracting the optimal number of factors (principal components); rotating the solution to facilitate interpretation; and estimating the subjects' scores on the new dimensions (based on interaction or conversion points) (Pardo and Ruíz, 2002).
- The t-test for independent samples was applied to determine whether there was a change in students' life skills following the implementation of the instructional unit or competency-based learning situation.

Results

First, a more reliable measure increases the likelihood of making a correct decision regarding the subjects of study—in this case, adolescents. Reliability was assessed as internal consistency using Cronbach's alpha,

where values above 0.75 indicate high reliability. The reliability of the scale, which exceeds this value regardless of when it was administered, is shown below:

Table 1
Reliability of the PIL Administered to Adolescents

Time of Questionnaire Administration	PIL Scale		
	Cronbach's alpha	Number of items	Sample size
Prior learning experience	0.833	20	518
Post-learning experience	0.871	20	550
Total	0.854	20	1068

To examine the construct validity of the PIL, a principal component analysis was used, and a multiple linear regression analysis was performed on the resulting components, where a new variable summarizes the scale into a single variable. First, the goodness-of-fit statistics for each analysis were calculated using Bartlett's sphericity test and the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy.

As shown in Table 2, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin index for the PIL is 0.937 (higher than the required threshold of 0.800), indicating suitability for a factor analysis of the variables. Furthermore, Bartlett's sphericity test indicates that the data fit an appropriate factorial model and that the variables can be reduced through factor analysis.

Table 2
Factor Suitability of the PIL Applied to Adolescents

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO)	0.937	
Bartlett's sphericity test	Chi-square	7,449.114
	G.l.	190
	Sig.	0.000

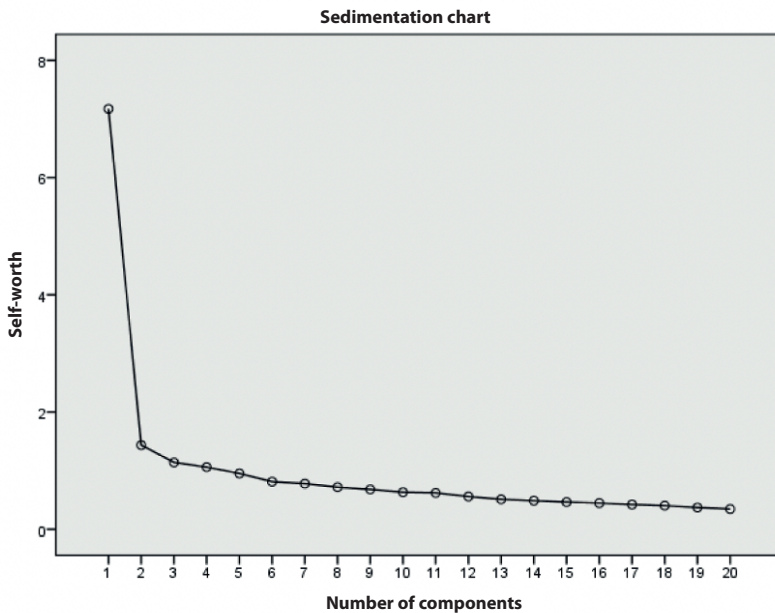
Furthermore, the communalities of the variables were calculated to determine the percentage of variance for each variable explained by the developed model. As shown in Table 3, based on the communality of the items, these are explained to an acceptable degree, as the values range from 0.24 to 0.66.

Table 3
Extraction method: principal component analysis (PCA)

PIL	Extraction
PIL 1	0.446
PIL 2	0.659
PIL 3	0.608
PIL 4	0.619
PIL 5	0.655
PIL 6	0.632
PIL 7	0.399
PIL 8	0.519
PIL 9	0.636
PIL 10	0.505
PIL 11	0.604
PIL 12	0.500
PIL 13	0.481
PIL 14	0.600
PIL 15	0.239
PIL 16	0.525
PIL 17	0.525
PIL 18	0.613
PIL 19	0.471
PIL 20	0.570

To extract the components, Kaiser's criterion was followed, where- by each component must have eigenvalues equal to or greater than 1. This is visually illustrated through the embedded scree plots. In Figure 1, the PIL scree plot shows a significantly higher weight for Component 1; there is a sharp difference compared to Component 2 and the rest of the inven- tory items, as these decrease gradually.

Figure 1
PIL Scatter Plot Applied to Adolescents



To interpret the data, it was decided to apply Varimax rotation to the factors, which ensures the absence of correlation among the components—a key consideration for constructing the variables that summarize the scales through multiple linear regression analysis.

As shown in Table 4, after applying Varimax rotation following the Kaiser method, four factors were obtained that explain 54.03% of the variance, ensuring that the factors are unrelated and provide distinct information. The first factor accounts for 20.74% of the variance; the second factor explains 14.27% of the variance; the third factor, 11.25% of the variance; and the fourth factor, which has the lowest weight, accounts for 7.77% of the variance.

Table 4

Total variance of the PIL applied to adolescents

Component	Initial eigenvalues			Rotated load sums of squares			Rotated load sums of squares		
	Total	Variance %	Cumulative %	Total	Variance %	Cumulative %	Total	Variance %	Cumulative %
1	7,172	35,861	35,861	7,172	35,861	35,861	4,148	20,742	20,742
2	1,436	7,178	43,039	1,436	7,178	43,039	2,854	14,272	35,015
3	1,140	5,699	48,738	1,140	5,699	48,738	2,250	11,248	46,262
4	1,059	5,295	54,033	1,059	5,295	54,033	1,554	7,770	54,033
5	0,952	4,759	58,791						
6	0,812	4,058	62,849						
7	0,779	3,894	66,743						
8	0,718	3,588	70,330						
9	0,680	3,398	73,729						
10	0,631	3,157	76,886						
11	0,620	3,101	79,987						
12	0,558	2,790	82,777						
13	0,510	2,550	85,327						
14	0,487	2,435	87,762						
15	0,463	2,314	90,076						
16	0,446	2,228	92,304						
17	0,421	2,106	94,410						
18	0,402	2,012	96,422						
19	0,371	1,854	98,276						
20	0,345	1,724	100,00						

Subsequently, using the Varimax rotation statistical procedure, summary variables were constructed for each scale, i.e., using the factors constructed for each scale, the total scores for each scale were estimated via multiple linear regression analysis. In this way, a summary variable was obtained for each scale, which facilitates the presentation of results and interpretation, yielding four factors.

The first factor accounts for the largest percentage of explained variance, at 20.74%. The set of items comprising this first factor in the rotated component matrix were items 11, 6, 16, 4, 9, 12, and 17. Table 5 shows the name of the resulting first factor, as well as the PIL items that comprise it along with their explicit content.

Table 5
Items included in Factor 1 of the PIL for adolescents

Items		Factor 1
11	I don't have any set goals in life —I have well-defined goals.	Capacity to live
6	If I could choose, I would rather not have been born —than to live a life exactly like this one a thousand times over.	
16	As for suicide, I've seriously considered it as a way out—I've never thought about it.	
4	My personal existence has no meaning—it has great meaning.	
9	My life is empty and hopeless—it's full of good and exciting things.	
12	When I consider the world in relation to my life, it completely baffles me—it has meaning for my life.	
17	I consider my ability to find meaning or purpose in my life to be very good—it is nonexistent.	

The second factor explains 14.27% of the variance and includes the items listed in Table 6, which were labeled “life purpose.” These items are distributed across different factors in other studies, which is why a label was chosen for this second factor based on the content of the items.

Table 6

Items included in Factor 2 of the PIL for adolescents

Items		Factor 2
3	When I think about my life, I often wonder why I exist—I always see a reason for why I’m here.	Life purpose
13	I’m irresponsible—yet very responsible.	
20	I haven’t discovered any purpose or meaning in my life—I have very clearly defined goals and a sense of purpose that satisfies me.	
8	I haven’t made any progress toward my life goals—I’ve made enough progress to be completely satisfied.	
7	If I didn’t work, I’d like to do some things that have interested me—just wander around for the rest of my life.	

The third factor in Table 7 explains 11.25% of the variance and includes items 2, 5, 10, 19, and 1; it was named “life motivation.”

Table 7

Text of the Items Included in Each Factor 3 of the PIL for Adolescents

Items		Factor 3
2	Life always seems exciting to me—completely routine.	Life motivation
5	Every day is constantly new—exactly the same.	
19	Tackling my daily tasks is a source of pleasure and satisfaction—a boring and painful experience.	
10	If I were to die today, I would consider my life to have been worthwhile—not worthwhile at all.	
1	I am usually completely bored—excited.	

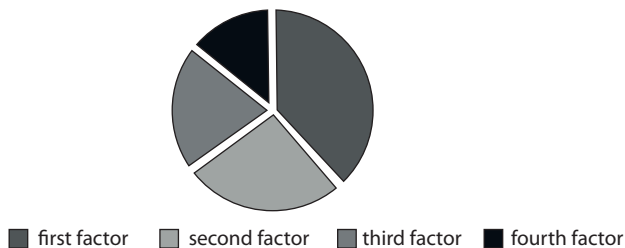
Finally, in Table 8, the fourth factor explains 7.77% of the variance and comprises items 14, 18, and 15; it was named “freedom to live.”

Table 8
Items included in Factor 4 of the PIL for adolescents

Items		Factor 4
18	My life is in my hands and under my control—or out of my hands and controlled by external factors.	Freedom to live
15	As for death, I am prepared and not afraid—I am not prepared and afraid of death.	
14	Regarding a person's freedom to make their own decisions, they are either completely free to choose or completely limited by their heredity and environment.	

In short, Tables 5, 6, 7, and 8 explain the composition of the factors, and the contents of the items that led to the identification of these factors in adolescents can be observed. Overall, Figure 2 shows the weight of the PIL factors applied to adolescents based on the percentage of variance explained, as previously observed in Table 2 using Varimax rotation.

Figure 2
Representation of the weights of the PIL factors in adolescents



Next, Table 9 provides a comprehensive overview of the four resulting factors and the items included in the PIL administered to the adolescent sample.

Table 9
Factors of the PIL administered to adolescents

Factors	Items Included
Capacity to Live	4, 6, 9, 11, 12, 16, 17
Life purpose	3, 7, 8, 13, 20
Life motivation	1, 2, 5, 10, 19
Freedom to live	14, 15, 18

Regarding the second general objective, the results indicated that the life skills program did not show significant differences. This result was skewed by the inclusion of 32 participants who did not complete the pre-program assessment, since participation in the program was voluntary and the questionnaire was anonymous; therefore, it was not possible to determine which participants had completed the entire program and which had joined after the program had begun and had not taken the pretest, which affected the result (Table 10).

Table 10
Impact of the Life Skills Program

Time of Questionnaire Administration		N	Mean	Standard deviation	Standard error
PIL	Pre-lesson unit	518	95.37	16.58**	0.73
	Post-teaching unit	550	94.93	18.47**	0.79
* $p < 0.1$ ** Significant differences in variances are assumed.					

Another possible explanation for the results is that the life skills program caused the subjects' responses to be more diverse from one another, since differences in variances were observed depending on when the instrument was administered. At the pre-life skills unit stage, deviations were centered around the mean and responses were more homogeneous, whereas at the post-unit stage, responses were more heterogeneous. In the post-unit phase, greater diversity was observed in the adolescents' responses to the PIL questionnaire.

Discussion

Regarding the first objective—the reliability and validity of the instruments—it should be noted that the reliability of the scale measuring PIL was studied by its authors, Crumbaugh and Maholick, using the split-half method, yielding a Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.81 and a Spearman-Brown correlation coefficient of 0.90. Subsequently, Crumbaugh (1969) obtained similar correlations (Pearson = 0.85 and Spearman-Brown = 0.92). In the Spanish population, the following studies stand out: Noblejas (2000), with a reliability coefficient of 0.88; Risco (2009), with 0.81; and Moreno (2013), who reported a reliability of 0.87 in university

populations. Armas Arráez (2015) achieved higher reliability results in a clinical population (Pearson = 0.90 and Spearman-Brown = 0.88).

The present study, using a sample of students aged 14 to 19 (in the 3rd and 4th years of secondary school and the 1st year of high school), obtained a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.83 in the pre-teaching unit or competency-based learning situation and 0.87 in the post-teaching unit or competency-based learning situation, with a total Cronbach's alpha of 0.85, which is consistent with previous research. Regarding validity, a statistical significance level of $p < 0.001$ (0.000) was observed, aligning with prior studies, while the heterogeneity of the factors postulated by the authors in their factor analysis was also noted. Four factors emerged from the adolescent sample:

- The first factor, labeled “capacity to live,” does not fully align structurally with previous studies; however, it remains similar. In Armas Arráez *et al.* (2018), five factors emerged that align with this one, termed “value of life.” A similar composition is found in Noblejas (2011), Jonsén *et al.* (2010), Magaña *et al.* (2004), Risco (2009), and García Alandete *et al.* (2013).
- The second factor, termed “life purpose,” was referred to as “capacity for meaning” in Armas Arráez (2015), with item 7 corresponding to this factor, as observed in the studies by García Alandete *et al.* (2013), Noblejas (2000), Jonsén *et al.* (2010), and Risco (2009).
- The third factor was identified as “life motivation.”
- The fourth factor was named “freedom to live,” a domain where establishing consensus has been difficult due to its heterogeneous distribution, although it bears similarities to the factor termed “freedom” by Caro Beltrán and Correa Arias (2023), which includes two of the identified items (14 and 18).

Regarding the second objective, variations in the meaning of life were observed following the implementation of the life skills program; however, the expected results were not fully achieved because some participants joined the program late and did not complete the pre-test. This late enrollment skewed the results, and due to the participants' anonymity, their questionnaires could not be removed from the sample, which constitutes a limitation of this study.

Even so, there is a positive takeaway: when discussing the life skills program, the students suggested new additions, indicating that the interest sparked in adolescents to acquire life skills was positively received. Furthermore, the students openly expressed verbally after the experience that



they perceived an increase in creative development, emotional intelligence in problem-solving, interpersonal skills, self-esteem and self-efficacy, sense of humor, resilience, generosity, and altruism, while also reporting greater well-being. Therefore, we consider that their life skills improved.

It is necessary to implement more skills-based programs, as other authors have indicated (Bisquerra Alzina, 2003; Bisquerra Alzina and Pérez Escoda, 2007; Faure *et al.*, 1972; Fischman, 2017; Farstad, 2004; Goleman *et al.*, 2002; Noblejas, 2011; Risco Lázaro and Sánchez Cabaco, 2010). The life skills program implemented in this study integrated personal, social, emotional, and spiritual skills so that knowledge can be transformed into being. At this critical stage in adolescents' lives, and given the current global situation, life skills are essential for coping with life's challenges and promoting well-being.

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Conclusions and Limitations

The theoretical framework has demonstrated how fostering a sense of purpose is closely related to the development of morality and values, self-actualization, emotional intelligence, spirituality, resilience, and life skills in adolescents.

In the empirical framework, the psychometric characteristics of the PIL inventory were evaluated in an adolescent sample. The reliability and validity of the PIL were found to be optimal, validating the hypothesis that the inventory possesses sufficient psychometric quality for research purposes within this demographic. Furthermore, the instrument demonstrated strong psychometric properties, confirming its high reliability and internal validity for use with adolescents.

The outcomes of the life skills learning experience intervention were evaluated by comparing PIL scores before and after its implementation. The hypothesis was partially validated, indicating that the life skills program does modify adolescents' sense of purpose; however, the anticipated substantial increase in purpose was not observed. This outcome may be attributed to the late inclusion of new participants during the implementation phase, which potentially skewed the final results.

Limitations and Future Directions

One limitation of this study was the late enrollment of some students in the competency-based learning experience, which skewed the results of the experiential program. Due to participant anonymity, these question-

naires could not be removed from the sample, leading to an inflation of the sample size in the post-intervention assessment and introducing a selection bias. Conversely, the interest sparked among the students is viewed as a positive outcome, as it generated positive word-of-mouth about the program and motivated subsequent enrollment in the competency-based learning experience focused on the meaning of life.

This study opens up several directions for future research:

- It is deemed necessary to publish the life skills program and learning experience so that it can be replicated by other educators and applied in future research.
- To eliminate bias in future evaluations of the program's impact on the sense of purpose, it is recommended to assign a unique identifier to each participant. This would allow researchers to track experimental attrition or late entries, ensuring that participants who join late can be excluded from the data analysis, thereby validating hypotheses using only data from those who completed the entire program.
- Utilizing the data collected via the *ad hoc* questionnaire, it is proposed to analyze how specific demographic and socioeconomic variables (such as gender, age, grade level, parents' educational level, family socioeconomic status, religion, and religious practice) relate to or influence the development of adolescents' sense of purpose.

From an academic and institutional perspective, it is proposed to integrate this life skills program across all educational levels, either as a cross-curricular component or as a standalone course starting in the first year of secondary school (age 12). This approach aims to develop vital life competencies and promote students' personal, social, and academic success, encouraging a shift from a mindset of "having" to "being"—a transformation that requires positive, human-centered learning for life.

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Author	Contributions
María Milagros Armas Arráez	This article was written entirely by the author; therefore, the content presented in this document is the sole responsibility of the author.

Statement on the Use of Artificial Intelligence

The author, María Milagros Armas Arráez, declares that the article titled “The Sense of Purpose Among Adolescents Following a Learning Experience” was not produced with the assistance of artificial intelligence (AI).

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