


Development of a Premarital Education Package Based on Transactional Analysis Theory

Fahimeh. Rahmati¹, Sayed Esmaeil. Mosavi^{2*}, Zahra. Yousefi³

¹ Ph.D Student, Department of Counseling, Isfahan (Khorasgan) Branch, Islamic Azad University, Isfahan, Iran

² Assistant Professor, Department of Counseling, Khomeinishahr Branch, Islamic Azad University, Khomeinishahr/Isfahan, Iran

³ Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology, Isfahan Branch (Khorasgan), Islamic Azad University, Isfahan, Iran

* Corresponding author email address: es.mosavi@iaukhsh.ac.ir

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The aim of the present study was to develop a premarital education package based on Transactional Analysis theory.

Methods and Materials: The scope of this research encompassed all texts related to the psychological theory of Transactional Analysis. The selection of texts was purposefully done from Eric Berne's theoretical works within the timeframe of 1990 to 2024. The criterion for the number of texts was based on the principle of data saturation. The method of data collection involved line-by-line examination of texts, guided by questions relevant to the components suitable for premarital counseling in this theory. The data obtained from the text reviews were analyzed using the conventional content analysis method by Hsieh and Shannon (2005).

Findings: The results of the content analysis indicated that in Eric Berne's theory, 1) the ego states (Adult, Parent, and Child), life script (characteristics of the life script, elements of the life script, and four life positions), and transactions (complementary transactions, crossed transactions, ulterior transactions, and games) are appropriate for alignment with premarital education. Subsequently, these concepts were integrated theoretically using the method by Yousefi and Golparvar (2023), and ultimately, the premarital education package was designed and prepared.

Conclusion: Overall, considering the process of deriving this education, it can be said that it is content-valid and can be evaluated at the level of designing an educational package and conducting experimental reviews on marriage-related constructs.

Keywords: Premarital education, Transactional Analysis, Eric Berne, package development

1. Introduction

One of the significant life events is marriage, and forming a family and raising virtuous individuals is an unparalleled and universal value. However, in recent years, particularly in the last twenty years in Iran, this social institution has become difficult to establish and, once established, hard to maintain. Many individual goals, such as financial and educational growth, have replaced family formation, and long-term relationships have given way to weak and temporary ones (Mohammadi et al., 2021; Raki et al., 2023). The age of marriage has increased, and many unmarried men and women, who have missed the opportunity for effective selection, report satisfaction with life achievements such as academic and career advancement, home and car ownership, travel, and recreation. However, behind this psychological defense mechanism lies a hidden sorrow from the lack of a family, as studies indicate (Jokar et al., 2023; Jokar et al., 2022), along with missed opportunities and experiences such as becoming a parent and having deep and lasting love as a life meaning (Mokhtari et al., 2022).

These phenomena and psychological sufferings endured by single individuals or the issues experienced by some married individuals have led family authorities, including psychologists and family counselors, to seek methods for preventing divorce and fostering better and more stable marriages. Consequently, marriage counseling is considered one of the important and dynamic branches of counseling. Not only are many individuals trained annually for this profession, but also many benefit from it as clients. However, both counselors and clients often express dissatisfaction, noting that these methods are sometimes insufficient for thorough understanding or preparing individuals for difficult life experiences (Karami & Yousefi, 2023).

Various models for marriage have been introduced so far. Understanding both parties, their compatibility and ability to interact, and assessing their interaction and commitment post-marriage are three essential functions of premarital counseling (Kavehei et al., 2022). Considering these three essential functions, different models for marriage counseling have been introduced, encouraging couples to discuss financial issues, communication, beliefs and values, roles in marriage, affection and sexual matters, desire for children, decision-making, handling anger, and spending time together (Raki et al., 2023; Rostami et al., 2020; Waisbord, 2020). For example, Navabifar et al. (2020; 2021) extracted

and examined the effectiveness of a marriage counseling model based on Enneagram typology (Navabifar et al., 2020; Navabifar et al., 2021); Khanbani et al. (2022) introduced a premarital counseling model titled Successful Marriage (Khanbani et al., 2022); Jokar et al. (2022) developed a comprehensive successful marriage model based on the modification of delayed marriage experiences in men (Jokar et al., 2022); Kavehei Sedehi et al. (2020) introduced an expert-centered marriage counseling model; Jokar et al. (2022) extracted a reality-centered premarital counseling model based on family therapy theory (Kavehei et al., 2022); Mokhtari et al. (2021) introduced schema-based premarital counseling and timely marriage counseling models (Mokhtari et al., 2022). Each of these models has focused on some psychological constructs in premarital counseling based on their theoretical or cultural context.

Many couples and family therapy models highlight communication skills as a crucial factor in maintaining relationships and marriages, playing a significant role in both preventing and resolving family conflicts (Becvar et al., 2023; Bradbury & Bodenmann, 2020; Hall & Watter, 2023; Shariatzadeh Jonidi et al., 2021). These skills help individuals form better and more satisfying interactions, facilitating mutual support and togetherness; under these skills, individuals can share their needs and respond to each other's needs, leading to enjoyment, happiness, unity, forgiveness, talking, listening, and problem-solving between partners (Waisbord, 2020). Although these skills are learnable, their maintenance and survival depend on resolving intrapersonal issues that may originate in the first five years of life (Mitchell et al., 2020). It seems that addressing these fundamental problems is a prerequisite for or should at least be concurrent with developing communication skills. One effective theory in this area is Transactional Analysis, which aims to correct exchange patterns in interpersonal communications through self-awareness and understanding personality. This theory posits three ego states: Parent, Adult, and Child, which are active or inactive in daily life communications (Colledge, 2002; Rahmati et al., 2024). In this method, individuals learn that these three personality structures feel, think, and behave, and that childhood experiences significantly influence these three dimensions of personality. Based on these dimensions' function, we form a specific life script. If these three personality dimensions function correctly and in balance, communication exchanges with others will be better. In this method, individuals first learn to analyze personality structures and then become familiar with analyzing

exchanges within the personality (Berne, 1996). This perspective, encompassing both self-awareness and exchange correction, seems to provide a good conceptual framework for premarital counseling as it includes the foundations of effective and sustainable communication.

Various studies on marriage have been conducted so far. For instance, Khanbani, Golparvar, and Aghaei (2022a, 2022b) introduced a premarital counseling model titled Successful Marriage (Khanbani et al., 2022); Rostami et al. (2019) studied premarital damages (Rostami et al., 2020); Abbasi (2019) demonstrated the effectiveness of the Personal Awareness Program on individual choices in marriage (Abbasi, 2019); Kavehei Sedehi et al. (2021) showed the effectiveness of expert-centered premarital education on correcting the ideal image of a spouse and perfectionism (Kavehei Sedehi et al., 2020); Mokhtari et al. (2022) showed the effectiveness of schema-based premarital education on schema mindsets and marriage inclination in single girls (Mokhtari et al., 2022); Navabifar et al. (2021) extracted and examined the effectiveness of a marriage counseling model based on Enneagram typology (Navabifar et al., 2021). Although each model emphasizes specific aspects, there is a need for an educational counseling model that addresses the fundamental bases of establishing a good relationship while focusing on communication skills.

Accordingly, this study aimed to analyze the qualitative content of this theory and develop a marriage education package based on it. Developing such an educational package can cover some existing gaps in this field, enrich marriage counseling texts, and enhance the process and content of premarital education, providing useful tools for specialists. Such research efforts can also be promising in preventing divorce. Therefore, this study aimed to answer the question: What content and process constitute the premarital education package based on Eric Berne's theory?

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study Design and Participants

To achieve this educational package, Eric Berne's theory was considered, and content analysis was conducted using the conventional design method (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). This design is used when related theories and research texts on the subject of study are available (Selvi, 2019). All codes and concepts were directly extracted from the texts, and then the method by Yousefi and Golparvar (2023) was used to develop the package, which was subsequently content-validated.

The research environment for this study included texts related to Eric Berne's Transactional Analysis theory. The selection of texts continued until data saturation was achieved, which occurred after five to six sources; however, the selection was increased to ten texts. These texts were reviewed from 1990 to 2024.

Inclusion Criteria:

- Selection of primary texts.
- Texts related to the last forty years due to the theory's classic nature.
- Texts directly related to Eric Berne's theory.

Exclusion Criteria:

- Texts without a credible publisher.
- Secondary sources.
- Student dissertations.

It should be noted that, according to reviews conducted in available databases, no published article in Persian on the topic was found until the time of writing this article.

2.2. Data Collection Tools

To gather data, guide questions and thorough text analysis were used. Guide questions focused the researcher on theoretical and practical concepts of Eric Berne's Transactional Analysis theory, with important key phrases and terms noted. After identifying sources for analysis, these sources were studied line by line, content reviewed, and coded, with results reviewed by the advisor and consultant. At this stage, data coherence and consistency in meaning were examined, while clear and distinct differences in content were identified. In the next phase, sources were meticulously reviewed and reanalyzed by the advisor and consultant, with resulting concepts revisited.

2.3. Data Analysis

Data were simultaneously collected and analyzed, involving reciprocal interaction between known and unknown aspects, with repeated back-and-forth between data and analysis, which is fundamental to achieving validity and reliability. This study also incorporated the following reliability measures based on Rose and Johnson (2022):

Utility: This criterion indicates that the findings of the qualitative study are useful and enlightening for the research in question. Given the study's goal of developing a premarital education package based on Eric Berne's Transactional Analysis, it can inform marriage counselors, researchers, and families to improve premarital counseling delivery.

Contextual Integrity: This criterion ensures that the studied phenomenon is examined considering the context. The present study aimed to comprehensively describe all dimensions to complete the context under review.

Researcher's Position: This criterion implies that the researcher should avoid unconscious influence on text interpretation by understanding their position. In this study, the researcher attempted to avoid bias in selecting subjects, analyzing, and interpreting interviews. Moreover, another expert assisted in the analyses to avoid unconscious influences on interpretations and analyses.

Reporting Style: This criterion involves presenting qualitative reports in an easily understandable manner for specialists and users. In this study, qualitative reports were transformed into tables and charts for better comprehension.

Triangulation of Researchers: This criterion involves multiple individuals coding and analyzing the data. In this study, coding and data analysis were conducted by the researcher, the advisor, and a qualitative research coding expert (Rose & Johnson, 2020).

In summary, for data analysis, the first section utilized the conventional content analysis method by Hsieh and Shannon (2005), with the following steps:

All conceptual units from the selected texts were extracted.

The texts were reviewed line by line, and conceptual units were extracted as initial codes.

To ensure the consistency of coding and categorization with the texts, the extracted concepts were pre-reviewed by the supervisor and consultant.

The validity and reliability of the coding were conducted by all research team members except the student (experts). Paragraphs extracted from the texts, along with coding, were reviewed by the supervisor, consultant, and a qualitative analysis expert.

3. Findings and Results

Finally, conclusions based on the coding and concepts were validated by the supervisor, consultant, and qualitative expert. This method is applicable when theories and research texts related to the subject are available, and all codes and categories were directly extracted from the texts.

Table 1

Content Analysis of Theoretical Texts Based on Eric Berne's Theory According to Hsieh and Shannon (2005)

Initial Coding	Sub-concepts	Main Concepts	Dimensions
Lovable Child	Adapted Child	Child Ego State	Ego States
Focus on Pleasing Others			
Desire to be Liked			
Resistance and Hostility in Conflict			
Creative	Free Child		
Spontaneous			
Pleasure-Seeking			
Childlike Emotions	Psychological State in Child Ego		
Childlike Thoughts			
Childlike Behaviors			
Decision Making Based on Current Conditions	Integrated Without Dimensions	Adult Ego State	
Compromising			
Listener			
Respectful			
Competent			
Healthy Social Interactions	Psychological State in Adult Ego		
Emotions in Response to Here and Now			
Thoughts in Response to Here and Now			
Behaviors in Response to Here and Now			
Opposition to Anger and Rage	Critical and Controlling Parent	Parent Ego State	
Blaming and Punishing			
Soothing	Nurturing Parent		
Safe			
Loving			
Copied Emotions from Parents	Psychological State in Parent Ego		
Copied Thoughts from Parents			

Copied Behaviors from Parents			
Pathways Created in Childhood	Unconscious	Characteristics of Life Script	Life Script
Life Script Reinforced by Parents	Reinforcer of Life Script		
Adult Searches for Evidence for Beliefs	Consolidation of Life Script		
Parental Implicit Messages About Our Fate	End of Life Script	Elements of Life Script	
Individual's Belief in Life Outcome			
Parental Prohibitions for Life	Commands or Inhibitions		
Parental Encouragements for Life			
Formed Before Age Six	Modeling		
Clarifies Behavioral Paths			
Unpredictability	Impulsive Inner Voice		
Equivalent to Freud's Id			
Removing Unhelpful Life Elements	Anti-Life Script		
Ability to Create Trust at Work, Home, and Life	I'm OK, You're OK	Four Life Positions	
Ability to Create Mutual Respect			
Showing Negative Emotions	I'm Not OK, You're Not OK		
Cynicism Towards Others and Feeling Rejected			
Angry and Aggressive Towards Others	I'm OK, You're Not OK		
Self-Superiority and Viewing Others as Inferior			
Ignoring and Undervaluing Oneself	I'm Not OK, You're OK		
Feelings of Worthlessness, Seeking Approval			
Messages Answered by Sender's Ego State	Parallel Communications	Complete Transactions	Transaction Dimensions
Communication Can Be Healthy or Unhealthy			
Sender-Child, Receiver-Nurturing Parent			
Healthy Relationship is Adult to Adult			
Messages are Parallel			
Response from Unexpected Ego State	Characteristics of Relationships	Crossed Transactions	
Attempts to Subdue and Harm the Receiver			
Each Tries to Strengthen Own Position and Weaken Opponent			
Belittling	Dominant Discourse in Relationship		
Critical			
Entitled			
Apparent and Underlying Hidden Message	Characteristics of Relationships	Ulterior Transactions	
Outward Transactions Between Two Ego States	Respectful Communication	Dominant Discourse in Relationship	
Warning Language			
Acceptable Transactions with Hidden Motives	Nature of Games	Games	
Each Family Has Unique Game Pattern			
Unhealthy Behaviors			
Physiological Outcome	Results of Games		
Social Outcome			
Existential Outcome	Results of Games		
Karpman Triangle	Types of Games		
Life Games			
Couples Games			
Sexual Games			
Party Games			
Good Games			
Funeral Games			

As shown in Table 1, the content analysis of texts related to Eric Berne's theory revealed that this concept encompasses three dimensions: 1) Ego structure (Adult, Parent, and Child), life script (characteristics of life script, elements of life script, and four life positions), and transactions (complete transactions, crossed transactions, ulterior transactions, and games).

In the second section, the six-step method by Yousefi and Golparvar (2023) was used for package development, as follows:

Step 1: Review and repeatedly examine the main and sub-concepts derived from the content analysis of texts related to marriage from the Transactional Analysis theory, which can be used for educating young people planning to marry. Two

main concepts were selected for training: analysis of ego structure, life script, and analysis of transactions.

Step 2: Focus on what needs to be taught for these two concepts, paying attention to all sub-concepts.

Step 3: Align these strategies with the concepts of premarital counseling and education according to Kavehei and colleagues (2021), which include self-awareness, mutual understanding, attention to interaction and commitment abilities, and compatibility based on selected dimensions from the Transactional Analysis theory.

Step 4: Determine the number of sessions and the time required for each topic, prioritizing educational topics by the research team.

Step 5: Develop and prepare the educational package content based on APA guidelines (behavioral definitions, goal setting, strategies, and techniques for each session) under the supervision of the advisors.

Summary of Steps to Step 5 is presented in [Table 2](#).

Table 2

Sessions of Premarital Education Based on Berne's Theory

Session	Objectives	Content and Assignment
First	Understanding the important role of personality in couple interactions and the role of interactions in family stability	Clients learn the importance of personality in forming relationships, identify risk and facilitating factors in interpersonal relationships, and become familiar with overt and covert communication. Assignment: Complete the worksheet monitoring personality traits that facilitate interpersonal relationships.
Second	Familiarity with personality structures in the three dimensions of Child, Parent, and Adult	Clients become familiar with Child, Parent, and Adult structures, recognizing the verbal, physical, and psychological signs of each, and understand the importance of balance between personality dimensions. Assignment: Complete the self-awareness worksheet based on personality dimensions.
Third	Familiarity with personality structures in interpersonal transactions	Clients become familiar with complementary, crossed, and hidden transactions in communication and learn how to create complementary interactions between personality structures and their impact on relationship stability. Assignment: Complete the worksheet for identifying complementary relationships.
Fourth	Understanding the four life positions and their role in interpersonal relationships, including games and pastimes	Clients learn about the four life positions (I'm OK, You're OK; I'm Not OK, You're Not OK; I'm OK, You're Not OK; I'm Not OK, You're OK), understand their impact, and learn how to change their position to the best state. They also become familiar with different types of communicative games and their risks. Assignment: Complete the worksheet monitoring games and life positions.
Fifth	Understanding the role of what has been learned so far in spouse selection, with an emphasis on the Child Ego state	Clients learn about the role of the Child ego state in life and choices, particularly in spouse selection, recognize the destructive role of the Child ego in emotional reasoning for marriage, and understand its optimal role in adding zest to married life. Assignment: Complete the worksheet monitoring the Child ego state in spouse selection.
Sixth	Understanding the role of the Parent Ego state in spouse selection	Clients learn the role and importance of parental teachings in choices, especially spouse selection, and learn how to utilize parental do's and don'ts in spouse selection. Assignment: Complete the worksheet monitoring the Parent ego state in spouse selection.
Seventh	Understanding the role of the Adult Ego state in optimal selection during marriage	Clients learn the role and importance of the Adult ego in creating balance between personality structures, and its role in optimal spouse selection and marriage stability. Assignment: Complete the worksheet monitoring the Adult ego state in spouse selection.
Eighth	Understanding the role of life positions in the stability or instability of relationships, including marriage	Clients learn about the role of life positions in forming correct, friendly, and stable relationships, and learn how to manage other life positions that interfere with healthy relationships. Assignment: Complete the worksheet monitoring life positions in couple relationships.

As shown in [Table 2](#), the educational content includes eight sessions focusing on three main axes: analysis of ego structure, life script, and analysis of transactions.

Step 6: In this stage, the process and content of the educational package were validated by marriage counselors. For validation, the method of agreement among evaluators was used. The educational package, along with the content and process evaluation form, was provided to experts in adolescent counseling at the university, who were asked to review the package in terms of goals, techniques, and time allocation. After completing the evaluation form, the CVR (Content Validity Ratio) was calculated, resulting in a CVR

of 0.90, indicating a high level of agreement among evaluators.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

This study aimed to develop a premarital educational package based on Transactional Analysis theory, using Hsieh and Shannon's (2005) content analysis method, followed by Yousefi and Golparvar's (2023) method for package development. The qualitative section results indicated that such an educational package should focus on three dimensions: analysis of ego structure, life script, and analysis of transactions, and align with premarital counseling structures, including self-awareness, mutual

understanding, interaction ability, and commitment post-marriage. The content validity demonstrated that these educational elements were valid.

Various studies have been conducted on marriage education and counseling models. For example, Rostami et al. (2020) showed the effectiveness of the SYMBIS premarital counseling method (Rostami et al., 2020); Jafarian and Lebafi (2018) indicated that economic thinking in spouse selection was a damaging factor in Isfahan (Jafarian & Labafi, 2018); Heidardokht Nazari, Yousefi, and Neshat Doost (2015) found a relationship between personality traits and pre-marriage fears (Heidardokht Nazari et al., 2015). Mokhtari et al. (2022) aimed to correct constructs hindering timely marriage among girls (Mokhtari et al., 2022), while Jokar et al. (2022) explored delayed marriage in educated men and timely marriage (Jokar et al., 2022). Khanbani et al. (2022) introduced the successful marriage counseling model (Khanbani et al., 2022); Kavehei Sedehi et al. (2022) presented expert-centered premarital counseling components (Kavehei Sedehi et al., 2020). However, no published research had addressed premarital counseling based on Transactional Analysis theory to compare the results' alignment or deviation.

In explaining the findings of this package, it can be said that research has long shown that the ability to establish and maintain communication is a cornerstone of successful marriage and family stability. The goal of communication is to send appropriate, mature, and contextually relevant messages, requiring strong intrapsychic foundations (Berne, 1996) such as secure attachment style, developed defense mechanisms, or healthy progression through psychosexual development stages. Without suitable conditions in childhood (Colledge, 2002), adult communication becomes entangled with past issues, unmet needs, and past introjections, preventing healthy communication, especially in marital relationships. Transactional Analysis by Eric Berne (1995) is a suitable theory that aims to correct communication methods through self-awareness and understanding transactions. This theory simplifies the understanding of dominant personality structures and how they engage in daily communication exchanges. The personality structures are divided into Child, Parent, and Adult, each with its own thoughts, feelings, behaviors, and body language that enter everyday relationships. These relationships are healthy if similar dimensions of both parties engage or if Adult-to-Adult transactions occur. Two types of unhealthy relationships, crossed and ulterior transactions, can lead to wrong interpersonal relationships, initiating

conflicts and marital disputes, and directing couples towards psychological games (Rahmati et al., 2024).

Additionally, according to Eric Berne's theory, individuals have a life script formed in the first five years of life, encompassing four life positions that reflect one's attitude towards the world, others, and oneself. Although the life script forms in early childhood, it can be changed. Thus, this theory not only has an optimistic view of human potential but also teaches individuals how to activate their adult ego in relationships and balance their ego states after understanding the ego structures and types of transactions and life scripts.

The precise method of developing this package, based on qualitative research followed by a structured package development, has helped ensure its validity in the view of researchers and educators in the field of marriage counseling.

5. Limitations & Suggestions

This study has limitations, such as the lack of objective evaluation tools for self-awareness and spouse understanding, and the conditions under which a marriage should be annulled. These topics can be addressed in future research. Since the training derived from this model was validated in an experimental study, the details of which are not presented here, it is recommended that counselors and educators in this field delve into this model and consider its axes and techniques.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed in this article. This research is derived from a doctoral dissertation in counseling

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