

IDENTITY EXPLORATION AND ACHIEVEMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT: This research delves into the development of identity among university students, emphasizing the importance of a structured approach in fostering academic and social growth. The higher education system aims to cultivate students who are not only adept in their fields but also capable of critical thinking and self-expression. However, the process of identity formation in students necessitates guidance, support, and comprehension. Incorporating insights from educational philosophy, this study explores the role of universities in imparting both formal and tacit knowledge. It underscores the need for students to adapt to modern societal changes while preserving their individuality. The absence of effective identity development often leads to a lack of compatibility between students and their academic environments.

To address these issues, the research employs a conceptual framework to assess the journey of identity development among university students. By examining the factors that influence this process, such as academic support, social integration, and self-identity, this study aims to provide valuable insights for educators and institutions seeking to enhance the overall educational experience.

Keywords: Identity development, Higher education, University students, Academic support
Social integration

INTRODUCTION

Goals and ideals arising from the higher education system philosophy creation speak of “what should be”. These goals direct educational and research activities with a mostly balanced look to the future. Meanwhile, “university professors prefer that the student be active and have the possibility of questioning, criticism and rejection and try for the development of their scientific and social character” (Moaedfar, 2010). However, students should be able to slowly grow their identity and intellectual independence alongside earning skills and mastery of the textbooks. “This requires being capable of planning, implementation and supervising their efforts by a conventional approach” (Bersonsky, 2000, p. 86). In this sense, the student should strive to develop his academic and social identity, but as a person, who has not yet been determined, requires a proper understanding of the process, support, and guidance, along with identity processing. On the other hand, the university is not merely a formal knowledge provider. “University transfers a tacit knowledge as well as a formal knowledge, and a student entering the

university, must pass a resocialization and adapt him-self to urbanization, industrialization, and the modern media through that process. Unfortunately, these functions are not performed properly” (Fazeli, 2007, p. 16). If the ‘compatibility’ not necessarily, ‘compromise’ is a sign of identity, perhaps this incompatibility is due to the student not having achieved self-identity, in other words, perhaps the students’ identity process, as well as how it has processed, produced and recovered is uncertain. Therefore, the presence of an organized knowledge, as the device to ponder, probably improves function in this context. This research aims to examine the Development of Identity among university students using a conceptual framework .

An Overview of The Different Perspectives and Approaches in the Field of Identity

Study of identity processing, with different approaches and perspectives, leads to different theories on the subject. In general, theories can be classified into various categories of bio-evolutionary, psychoanalysis, cognitive, social learning, and contextual. The Bio-evolutionary theory mainly emphasizes on the development and maturation of identity processing. In this approach, the maturation is the precursor to perfection in biological growth changes. The most important theorists of this are Gesell and Hall. Psychoanalytic theorists have identified two basic models for identity processing. Freud, the founder of psychoanalysis, raised the motivational identity development pattern based on the psychosexual theory; while, Erikson stated the organizational model based on the theory of psychosocial identity processing. The cognitive theory considers the growth as the outcome of cognitive development and finds cognition as an element of moral development, a sense of the meaningfulness of life. Piaget and Kohlberg are experts of this approach . Bandura's social learning theory examined identity processing in the form of peers influence, benchmarking and different experiences based on research evidence. Contextual- cultural theory examines growth based on cultural and subcultural factors. Accordingly, generally, in psychological approach, some psychoanalytic, bio and cognitive development theorists have identified, internal factors affecting the development of identity, while social and contextual- cultural theorists often focused on the influence of external and environmental factors on identity processing .

However, identity has a heterogeneous nature. This prevents the identity from having a comprehensive definition. There are contradictions in identity in two ways: “the first of these features is that identity is the outcome of a static component and a dynamic element at the same time. On the one hand, referring to the identity shows the presence of a continuous passive and historical self, the identity is constantly subjected to redefinition and reproduction. Other diversity concerns multiple identities. Often people from different social groups are not necessarily related to a particular identity and can have accepted multiple identities such as ethnic identity, religious identity, linguistic identity, national identity, gender identity and professional identity. Therefore, “Entering university is a major life transition faced by adolescents. This transition period may be accompanied by considerable personal stress as student leaving the security of a familiar home environment attempt to deal with new demands and more rigorous academic challenges (Chickering, 1969; cited in Berzonsky, 2000, p. 81). Freud was one of the theorists that paid special attention to the issue of identity. “Freud in 1933 believed that three main elements constitute the human personality: the unconscious instincts and desires, self, and superego” (Cheng, 2004, p. 5). Freud finds the unconscious as an individual’s main psychological aspect. However, until

1950, despite some studies, experiments and theoretical insights about the Self, there was no comprehensive theory on the issue of identity and personal identity that could link an individual's dynamic characteristics and social complexities with social structures. Foote (1951) raised the concept of commitment. He poses the question of how people should create general policies for their activities or maintain them. He argued in response that performance without identity, without motive, without stimulant is a hollow and vain behaviour, while the full commitment of the individual to its identity is essential for an active self. He proposed, active self is essential because individuals are perpetuating personal routes and, of course, must keep perseverance. "Becker in (1960) explains why people engage in consistence lines of activity overtime and across situations. He distinguished the `processes, which he called *side bets*. The committed person, by invoking side bets, has acted in such a way as to involve other interests of his, originally extraneous to the action he is engaged in, directly in that action" (Becker 1960, p. 3). "Stryker (1968, 1980) discussed commitment as a part of formally developed identity theory concerning the reciprocal relationships between the self and social structure, and their mutual influence on behaviour. According to Stryker, commitment refers to the strength of one's relationship to others while in a particular role identity: Commitment is measured by the 'costs' of giving up meaningful relations to others should alternative courses of action be pursued" (Stryker, 1968, p. 560; cited in Burke, 1991, p. 241). In fact, Stryker believes "commitment refers to the relationship, which as a way to serve and communicate with others, is based on choice, in a way that the changes in the selection pattern requires a change in the pattern of relations with others"(Hajiyani, 2009, p. 127). In the other hand, Hajiyani in his research has mentioned the theory of interaction and (Mead, 1934) was also among the theorists who believed in social interaction between humans and the environment, which means that identity processes and grows in the context of a variety of institutions and social contexts such as family, peer group, educational environments, job environments and religious context at the same time creative human, makes a personal and social action in a way that he desires. Thus, Mead thought that the nature and content of the self and how it takes place occurs in a social context" (Hajiyani, 2009, pp. 105-113).

This theory does not merely focus on structural factors, but he emphasizes on the conscious, proactive ability to organize, regulate and order its identity. Mead, in explaining this point states: "the man beside incentives and signals from the environment, must have something inside that makes his identity, so that he can refer to it to consult and ask for help" (Abdullahi, 2010. p. 25). Also, the main character of 'self' is dynamicity and thus, it never become a structure. "In his opinion Self has two sides, agent (I) that is the individual identity and represents the ingenuity and passive (Me) that is an organized collection of ostentatious opinions of others and crystallization of values, social rules, and social control system" (Hajiyani, 2009, p. 106). Thus, the identity has a static fixed element and another variable and the dynamic element at the same time. The views of the scientists increased our understanding of identity-based on the symbolic interaction that focuses on the bilateral and dynamic relationship between social structure and identity processing. Eriksson did not know the identity as static. Furthermore, Part of the reason for this is that each psychologist has his own unique view of what drives a person's development. Freud's psychosexual theory emphasizes on the importance of basic needs and biological forces, while Erikson's psychosocial theory is based upon social and environmental factors. Erikson also expands his theory into

adulthood, while Freud's theory ends at an earlier period. "Erikson emphasized on the role of culture and society and the conflicts that can take place within the ego itself, whereas Freud emphasized on the conflict between the Id and the superego. Erikson extends on Freudian thoughts by focusing on the adaptive and creative characteristic of the ego, and expanding the notion of the stages of personality development to include the entire lifespan. However, instead of focusing on sexual development (like Freud), he was interested in how children socialize and how this affects their sense of self" (McLeod, 2008). Erikson was also among the first researchers who studied the course of adolescence to youth. Erikson says: "The people at every stage of their growth must solve crises and conflicts successfully, to be ready for the next step; also, they must maintain mental health" (Farahani, 2009, p. 38). This means people face conflicts as a turning point at any stage of the growth process which can lead to a positive mental quality associated with success or to failing. During this period, there is potential for personal growth and also the possibility of failure. He also believed that 'self-identity' in all its abstractions, is the awareness of 'self-being'. In fact, he believed that this self-being is awareness and insight of man to his own identity, "an unconscious effort to continue the personal characteristics of an on-going process to integrate self through internal solidarity and social ideals and group identity" (Adams, 1998, p. 4). He also believes an individual when making important commitments at the entrance to adulthood and creating a more flexible self is waiting for a kind of psycho-social interruption, and this interruption, as a critical stage, brings the 'crisis'. Subsequent research showed that "the identity of a person after going through adolescence and young adulthood varies, especially for those who enter university; the same thing is true for identity processing styles" (Ross, 2002, p. 216). Then, Marcia set four different modes of identity that describe different ways of identity processing based on the theory of Erikson. These models include: foreclosure, identity diffusion, moratorium, and identity achievement, accordingly, those involved in foreclosure are more stable than those involved in the suspension and interruption modes in their commitments and goals (Berzonsky, 2000).

Studies also show that students involved in foreclosure have excellent performance in the field of scientific and research activities and are aware of their responsibilities while they are committed too. they are warm-hearted, with high confidence and active individuals with adaptive interpersonal communication skills than those with confused identity concerning social communication (ibid.), young people who are in a state of identity diffusion, yet failed to take a clear decision for their life; because before acceptance and commitment in achieving their values and beliefs, they are still involved in choosing between alternatives. Identity diffusion is more common among college students, it causes them to reconsider and change their attitudes. "identity diffusion leads to uncertainty associated with the values, ideals, and beliefs that are reflected without the commitment, in the experience of the crisis, because those with this mode of identity are involved in the exploration of options for professional and personal identity" (Was, 2009, p. 631) . In addition, youths who established identity sooner without experienced any crisis, are in a state of the moratorium. They are committed to a certain worldview that is not the outcome of the explorations but is gained from parents or influential people in their life. They also have a low level of cognitive ability. "People with an identity diffusion are less frank and honest and narrowminded regarding new ideas from different perspectives" (Farahana, 2010, p. 3). Adams also believes in Erikson theory

basis, identity, and its growth takes place in the context of the social environment and via socialization. He believes people need a sense of unity and a sense of belonging at the same time. Thus, he believes that an individual peace and collective security is created in the light of both the 'individual' and 'social function' that an individual applies, where the individual and others important gain meaning and importance. Here, "a function of socialization emphasizes on the needs and processes related to personalization, individuality, integration and differentiation. While the social function of socialization emphasizes on needs and processes that facilitate dependence, communication, and alliances" (Adams, 1998, p. 4). Adams believes: "college campuses setting that provide a variety of experiences can facilitate identity processing, especially for new entries that entered into a trans processing process" (Morgul, 2007, p. 1). Tajfel and Turner in 1979 developed social identity theory and came to the conclusion that the person does not only have a personal 'self' but a multiple 'selves' consistent with the group membership cycles. Different social contexts may stimulate a person on the basis of 'selves' concerning personal, familial, national, think, feel, and act aspects. He believes that "personal identity reflects elements of their defining that link with personality traits and physical characteristics of individual" (Tajfel, 1978, pp. 27 – 60). In the theory 'self' dynamically reacts to 'context', i.e., people change to identify when the context changes. Studies and research on preceding studies regardless of reaching a broad perspective and a clear awareness of the results, but studied students identity from one perspective. Therefore, the role of factors such as University as an institution encompassing the student performance in one of the most decisive stages of growth and identity development are overlooked. It is essential to note that universities and institutions of higher education as in the subsystems of large social systems are necessarily in mutual interaction with external factors. "Such issues were first studied by comparative education scholars including Sadler in 1902.

He proposed the term "national characters" that affect social systems. Then, this approach was approved by other scholars, including, "Kandle in 1945" (Aghazadeh, 2005, p. 109), "Sadler in 1900 and Hans in 1985" (Cui, 1996, p. 152-153). Therefore, "the main ingredients that make up the national character are, economic, political, socio-cultural, religious, historical and geographical factors that encompass all social systems such as education systems, and also affected by the results and outputs of educational systems, including achievements and outputs of universities and higher education institutions" (Aghazadeh, 2005, pp. 110-113). Interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary perspective obtained from the combined expertise and perceivable by a set of knowledge can solve the complexities of student's identity and their identity processes with a more comprehensive response. Hence, it is necessary to professionals gain a fuller understanding of the university students who deal with the problems, needs experiences o process their identity and develop them in this regard. Hence, the sophomores of each university build or rebuild on their identity through educational and research programs, type of activity, communications, setting, culture and the academic community in general. Some programs and the university administration are more subject to the effects that play a more decisive role in shaping the identity of students, which include scientific and research programs, sports programs, cultural programs; consultations; Association and student organizations, and extracurricular.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What are the dimensions and characteristics of students' identity?
- What are the internal system (University) useful components in the students' identity processing ?
- What are the External system (environmental) effective components in the students' identity processing ?
- What model can be provided for university students' identity processing?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study method is developmental in term of goal with qualitative research data. First, four effector factors on identity processing among students were identified referring to literature. Then the researcher interviewed 24 teachers, scholars, and researchers active in the field of identity about the identified components through semi-structured interviews. Interviews were conducted in-person, focus groups and on the telephone. Before the interview, a questionnaire including questions that were extracted from theoretical research background handed over, then data were analysed after organizing, and sorting, using content analysis and the six factors influencing university student identity were verified and prioritized based on the importance and impact of these components on identity processing. Also, Grounded Theory was operated to provide a conceptual model of the students' identity processing .

Data Analysis Method

In this study content analysis was used as a method of study after studying theories, documents, and interviews. The aim of the study was the study and understanding of the overt and covert content of communications in a systematic manner. Also, grounded theory was used, along with data analysis gave the research objective, i.e., to infer and developed a conceptual model to determine the factors that influence students' identity processing that is an exploration, interpretation and conceptual is achieved through induction. Consequently, a theory and conceptual model were inferred along with data analysis. This model has developed students' identity construction and reconstruction based on the affecting factors .

Research Findings

The findings based on research questions are as follows:

The first question: What are the dimensions and characteristics of students' identity?

To answer the first question, using the results of theoretical basis and research documents in Iran and the world, it turns out that students have various identity bases. The origin of this view is the theory of Marcia. The bases that make up the different aspects of identity are Flexible, Independent and Committed Identity, Flexible, Independent and Semi Committed Identity, NonFlexible, Non-Independent and Committed Identity, and Diffusion and Non-Committed Identity. Each of these identifies bases features are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: The basic pattern of the university student’s identity status

<p>Flexible, Independent and Committed Identity conscientiousness conscious compatibility flexibility self-reflection review various aspects of their identity trying to understand conscious decision-making Self-strong commitment understand other views</p>	<p>Flexible, Independent and Semi Committed Identity Hesitation in accepting responsibility conditional compatibility flexibility self discovery change in views high need to explore the cognitive complexity decision making in the self-commitment try to understand other views</p>
<p>Non-Flexible, Non-Independent and Committed Identity dependent conscientiousness compatibility inflexibility distorted reality low tolerance to unclear issues guide ability decision aversion dependent commitment accepting certain views (dictated)</p>	<p>Diffusion and Non-Committed Identity poor responsibilities confusion avoidance distorted reality self - retardation limited self- cognitions abnormal decision-making strategies non- compliance (instability) intolerance</p>

The second question: What are the internal system (University) effective components in the students' identity processing?

First, effector factors on identity in college students were identified on based on theoretical backgrounds and literature. Then 24 teachers, administrators and experts of identity interviewed through semi-structured interviews about the factors and academic and elite views were criticized based on the content analysis and the effective factors on the process of identitybuilding among students were scored as follows:

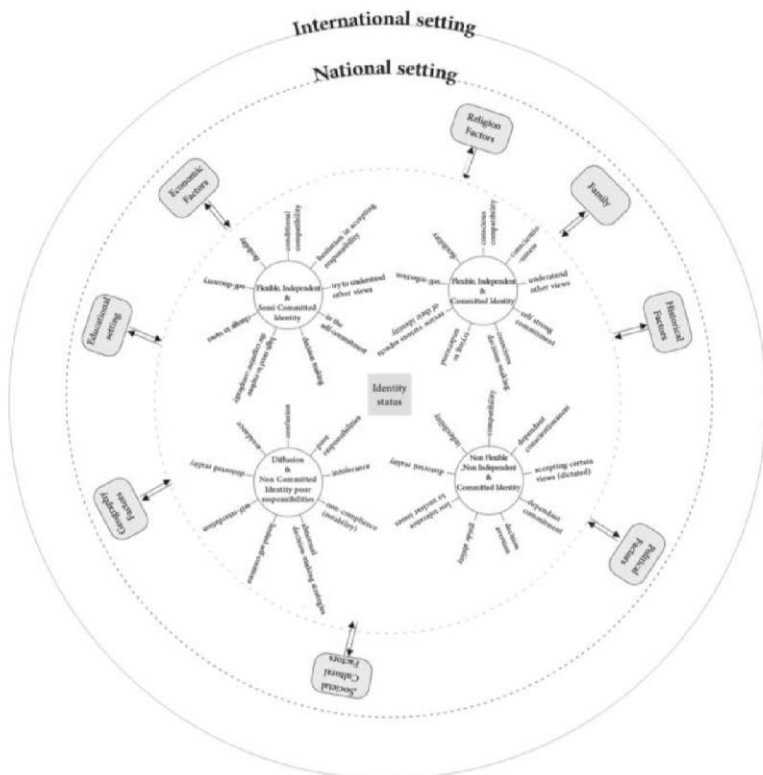
- Counselling programs of university in the first place with a score of 93%
- Training and research in the second place with a score of 83%
- Literary and cultural programs of University in the third place with a score of 80%
- Sports programs in the fourth place with a score of 78%
- Associations and student organizations in fifth place with a score of 75%
- -Extracurricular academic programs in the sixth place with a score of 72%

The third question: What are the external system (environmental) effective components in the students' identity processing?

These factors, outside the university system, under the national environment and the global environment encompass the identity and influence thoughts, beliefs, value system, and a total commitment and total identity processing and development of students. These factors at the national level include political, economic, socio-cultural, religious, geographical, family, educational settings and historical events and at the international level include organizations, and international relations, as well. The origin of the factors is comparative education

experts and researchers views, institutional interaction school and Tajfel social identity theory that were extracted with library research and the content analysis of documents, texts, literature . The fourth question: What model can be provided for university students' identity processing ? This model considers identity as a psycho-social category with different status under the influence of Internal system (University) factors including scientific research programs, sports programs, cultural programs, counselling programs, associations and student organizations and extracurricular system as well as external factors including the national and the global environment issues such as political factors, socio-cultural, economic, religious, geographic, historical, family, and educational environments at the national level as well as organizations, and global relations. The factors encompass students and the four status of their identity and affect the student's identity processing, construction, reconstruction, transformation, consolidation, and development of a context, texture, and social environment (Internal and External the system). This model is presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Effector Internal and External Factors on Identity



CONCLUSION

The aim of this study is to present a conceptual model to determine University students identity processing. The current paper seeks to answer four questions: 1) What are the dimensions and characteristics of students' identity?;

2) What is the Internal system (University) effective elements in the students' identity processing?; 3) What are the external system (environmental) effective components in the students' identity processing? And 4) what model can be provided for university students' identity processing? The methods used in this study is qualitative, and first library sources and documents were used to examine theories about the identity and the identity processing, including Erikson (1968) psychological theory, “Foote in 1951, Stryker in 1968 & 1980 and Becker in 1960 based on theory of identity and commitment” (Burke, 1991, pp. 239-251). “Marcia on the four students' identity bases” (Marcia, 1980, pp. 159-187). The theory of Adams (1998) and the process of socialization and human development through individual functioning and social functioning by Berzonsky (2000) and identity processing styles, symbolic interaction theory and Mead perspective (1986-1900) and Tajfel theory of personal identity and social identity (1979), were used to determine the size and components of students' identity processing.

Four identity bases were identified through a careful study of theories in the field of identity, especially student's identity, and its processing that include:

- Flexible, Independent and Committed Identity with the components such as conscientiousness, conscious compatibility, flexibility and self-reflection.
- Flexible, Independent and Semi Committed Identity with the components such as hesitation in accepting responsibility, conditional compatibility, flexibility and self-discovery.
- Non-Flexible, Non-Independent and Committed Identity with the components such as dependent conscientiousness, compatibility, inflexibility and distorted reality
- Diffusion and Non-Committed Identity with the components such as poor responsibilities, confusion, avoidance and distorted reality
- Then, Internal effector factors on identity (University) were obtained evaluating the documents, the theoretical backgrounds and the literature and sample of twenty-four teachers, administrators and experts in the field of higher education were interviewed using semi-structured interviews. Data were analysed after organizing, sorting and coding. The results confirmed all six factors influence on university student identity. The programs were ranked regarding the impact of the processing, growth, and change of the identity of the student so that consulting programs, research, and educational programs, literary-cultural programs, sports programs, associations and student organizations, academic and extracurricular programs were ranked in order of priority. The program strengthening the axles based on student needs and regarding interacting with the student identified and determined to promote the impact of the program on improving students' identity .

Recognized four bases of identity among youth entering university were taken into account to design conceptual model. The dimensions in addition to Internal factors encompass external factors interact with them during the lifetime including political factors, socio-cultural factors, economic factors, religious factors, geography factors and historical factors. These external factors include outside the university system, as well as students and universities in the fall and affect their performance. These components were determined and extracted based on Mead (1939), Tajfel (1979), Khoi (1981) and Adams (1998). Entering university and academic community is

challenging for many students because they face with changes in many cultural, political and social norms; this requires a method of university management with the motivation to help students process self-acquired and developed identity. Because, they learn commitment, responsibility, and self-commitment as well as understanding about themselves and the world in light of management practices and providing students with opportunities to process their identity, along with the academic knowledge, intellect, artistic and athletic experience.

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