



Navigating Cultural Landscapes: Identity Crises and Challenges among Yoruba Adolescents

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Abstract

This study investigated the pervasive issue of identity crises among Yoruba adolescents in the face of increasing exposure to diverse cultures. The research explored how cultural factors influence self-esteem, self-worth, personal identity, and relationship skills during this critical developmental period of Yoruba adolescents. Specifically, it examined the impact of social media and acculturation on Yoruba adolescents' understanding and construction of their own identities, which leads them to deviate from their traditional social identity. This study critically analysed established theoretical frameworks, including Social Identity Theory, Erikson's Identity Formation Theory, and Acculturation Theory, to provide a robust theoretical foundation. Employing a qualitative research methodology, the study conducted a content analysis of existing literature focusing on identity formation and crises among Yoruba adolescents. The findings revealed key cultural factors contributing to these crises and highlighted the specific challenges adolescents face as they navigate personal growth within a complex intercultural environment. Furthermore, the study identified culturally sensitive awareness schemes and practical strategies that can be implemented within schools, religious institutions, and communities to mitigate identity crises and foster positive identity development among Yoruba adolescents. These strategies aim to empower adolescents to navigate cultural complexities while maintaining a strong sense of self and connection to their cultural heritage.

Keywords: Identity Crises, Culture, Identity Formation, Yoruba Adolescents, Social Identity

1. Introduction

Identity, a cornerstone of individual and national strength, empowers citizens to understand their place in society and contribute meaningfully to its growth. A clear sense of self is crucial for positive interactions and fulfilling one's potential. Discovering this identity, rooted in cultural heritage and extending to societal roles and responsibilities, is a fundamental human endeavour.

Erikson (cited in Oniloha, 2018) defined identity as a continuous process of self-definition, a sense of being that evolves throughout life. This process involves aligning one's understanding of self with cultural and societal expectations, considering both the past and future. This definition highlights the importance of self-identity as a precursor to social identity, enabling individuals to consciously choose how they present themselves to the world.

Adolescence plays a pivotal role in identity formation, empowering individuals to navigate their cultural environment. Identity encompasses the ways in which individuals define their decisions, goals, and visions, establishing a sense of continuity between their past,

present, and future within a cultural context (Azorundu et al., 2023).

Identity crises arise when individuals struggle to define their sense of self and reconcile it with cultural norms. This state of confusion and uncertainty often occurs during adolescence and other developmental stages. Physical changes, emotional volatility, inappropriate sexual exposure, and societal perceptions can contribute to these conflicts and destabilisation, leading to identity crises (James, 2012; Azorundu et al., 2023).

Oniloha (2018) argued that an individual's evaluation of their identity is linked to past and present cultural contexts, potentially leading to a crisis of self-definition. A true sense of self is rooted in one's cultural background. Identity crises among adolescents have significant repercussions for Nigerian society. Fafunwa (1974) emphasized the connection between cultural history and identity, stating that cultural history is to a people what memory is to an individual. A lack of understanding and appreciation for one's cultural history can lead to a collective amnesia, hindering progress. Self-awareness is essential for informed decision-making. The challenges faced by Nigerians in integrating cultural values into national values contribute to identity crises, particularly among adolescents.

Understanding the role of identity in adolescent

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development is crucial, as disruptions and crises can impede the complete cycle of identity formation. Ofole (2017) noted that the transition from childhood to adulthood is a complex mental process requiring a search for identity. Adolescents experience dissonance as they attempt to reconcile their ideal self, real self, perceived self, and the perceptions of peers and society, all of which contribute to their personal and social identities. This cognitive dissonance can lead to emotional instability and behavioural issues, such as promiscuity, unconventional dress, poor communication skills, and a lack of respect for cultural norms (Ofole, 2017; Ofole & Okopi, 2012). A congruent identity promotes sound decision-making and culturally appropriate behaviour, while a destabilised identity can lead to irresponsibility, poor education, and susceptibility to negative societal influences.

Adolescents experiencing identity crises often appear confused and disoriented. They may struggle to understand who they are, where they are going, and where they belong. This can lead to social, academic, and personal withdrawal as adolescents attempt to conceal their struggles (Erikson, 1968; Ofole, 2017; Azorundu et al., 2023). Consequently, some adolescents may engage in socially inappropriate behaviours, such as fraud, risky sexual activity, drug abuse, self-harm, disrespect for social norms, and disengagement from education and national progress.

Azorundu et al. (2023) and Kroger have identified identity crises as a prevalent yet under-researched social issue in Nigeria, calling for increased attention. Parental neglect, often justified as a pursuit of basic needs, is a contributing factor. The mental well-being of children, particularly during the crucial adolescent stage, is often overlooked (Kroger, 2013).

Erikson (1995), in his work "Identity: Youth and Crisis," emphasised the inextricable link between identity and identity crises. He acknowledged the long-standing definitions of these concepts, yet noted the challenges in conceptualising and measuring them. He suggested that the term "identity crisis" evokes a range of emotions and anxieties, yet the crisis itself may not be as dire as it sounds. The term has become a common expression of a significant social phenomenon.

2. Methodology

This study employed content analysis to examine relevant literature and theoretical frameworks, aiming to clarify, gather, and interpret data related to identity crises among Nigerian adolescents and youth in the 21st century. A key objective was to highlight the limited research on the impact of acculturation and enculturation on identity status. Following Osunlana and Musa's (2023) approach, content analysis involved compiling and analysing similar texts and content from prior research, existing theories, and expert knowledge in parenting and developmental psychology. Relevant

research materials, including past literature, online resources, and hard copy research papers, were utilised.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1 Social Identity Theory

Developed by Tajfel and Turner (1979), Social Identity Theory focuses on intergroup conflict and is prominent in social psychology. It provides a framework for understanding social phenomena such as social identity, belief systems, prejudice, and stereotypes, revealing the dynamics of social membership, group affiliation, and social hierarchy.

Tajfel and Turner distinguished between social identity and personal identity. Social identity is defined by membership in a social entity, group, or category (e.g., gender, ethnicity), while personal identity refers to an individual's self-definition, encompassing internal and introspective qualities. Personal identity, which shapes individual differences, regulations, and behaviours, is typically observed by close acquaintances like family and friends (Hogg & Vaughan, 2014). Individuals can exhibit multiple identities as a combination of social and personal identities, influencing their interactions within diverse social groups.

Social Identity Theory rests on three key assumptions: (1) Individuals are inherently motivated to seek self-worth and positive self-concept. (2) Belonging to a specific social group or culture has both positive and negative implications for relationships, defining an individual's identity through group membership. (3) Individuals evaluate their in-group compared to out-groups, deriving a sense of worth from the in-group, particularly when it is perceived as superior, thus reinforcing social identity.

These assumptions highlight how identity crises can emerge when individuals struggle to define themselves, leading to internal destabilisation. The theory also underscores the role of social group belonging in shaping social identity. A child unfamiliar with their culture before exposure to external groups may struggle to define their cultural membership. As Fafunwa (1974) argued, an individual without knowledge of their past will experience a form of amnesia concerning their present and future.

Furthermore, the theory suggests that individuals who perceive their culture as superior to others are more likely to be committed to it. This perspective is relevant to understanding identity crises among Yoruba adolescents who may prioritise Western culture over their own. It sheds light on why some Yoruba adolescents may adopt Western cultural practices in dress, speech, demeanour, language, housing, and even literature, over Yoruba or broader African traditions.

3.2 Erikson's Identity Formation Theory

Erikson's theory centers on the question "Who am I?", encompassing growth, challenge, fear, doubt,

confusion, and maturation. His eight stages of psychosocial development outline both the positive and negative implications of human growth. The first four stages, involving challenges like mistrust, shame, doubt, guilt, and inferiority, are critical for understanding how these influence adolescent identity formation. The fifth stage (ages 13-18) focuses on the search for identity, including the potential for identity confusion and crises. Erikson posited that adolescents must define themselves within the context of their social world, navigating the internalisation of self and societal identity. The resolution of this question leads to a unified sense of self, feelings, intuition, and rationalisation (Erikson, 1979).

Erikson viewed identity crises not as a wholly negative event but as a necessary phase of identity formation, a process of self-actualization. He recognized that role confusion can hinder the development of a coherent sense of self. Identity crises, therefore, are not necessarily catastrophic but rather represent a transitional process (Kroger, 2003).

This theory illuminates the challenges adolescents face in defining themselves, a contemporary issue among Yoruba adolescents who may struggle to know their true selves amidst external social influences. Adolescents must overcome the understanding that the quest for self-definition is an internal journey, not dictated by external forces.

3.3 Acculturation Theory

Acculturation refers to the social and cultural changes that occur when two cultures interact. This interaction can result in one culture dominating the other, leading to the transformation of the dependent culture's values, norms, and lifestyle in mental, social, political, economic, religious, psychological, and cultural spheres. While both cultures are affected, the dominant culture exerts a greater influence.

Berry (2008) identified four acculturation strategies: Assimilation, Integration, Separation, and Marginalisation. Assimilation occurs when members of a culture are open to innovation and cultural transformation, readily embracing a new culture while neglecting their own. Integration involves a reciprocal exchange of cultural values, with individuals maintaining their traditional values while also adopting aspects of the new culture. Separation is characterized by rigid cultural boundaries and a rejection of interaction with the new culture, with a strong emphasis on preserving traditional values and beliefs. Marginalisation describes a situation where a culture struggles to maintain its traditional values while simultaneously seeking to adopt aspects of a new culture, resulting in a state of dilemma.

These acculturation strategies shed light on the role of identity crises and how different social groups approach cultural change. Adolescents raised in a marginalised cultural environment may experience

significant challenges in defining their identity, leading to confusion about who they are and their social identity. A separation environment, conversely, can foster a strong sense of belonging, facilitating self-discovery. Integration can provide individuals with a well-rounded understanding of their own culture before engaging with a new one, promoting growth and advancement. Assimilation, however, can lead to the abandonment of cultural heritage and historical context, potentially destabilising a social group's foundational identity (Fafunwa, 1987).

4. Conclusion

This study has highlighted the growing concern of identity crises among Yoruba adolescents, emphasising the need for further research in this area. The use of content analysis has provided a foundation for future studies, with the theories of social identity, Erikson's identity development, and acculturation underscoring the complexities of this issue. The observed behaviours of some young people, such as male ear piercing and female nose and tongue piercing, suggest a disconnect from culturally accepted norms and a potential manifestation of identity struggles. This research emphasises the profound influence of culture on identity crises among Yoruba adolescents. Understanding these cultural dynamics is crucial for developing effective support systems that empower adolescents to confidently navigate their identities. Future research should continue to explore this relationship, focusing on interventions that respect cultural heritage while addressing the challenges of modernity.

5. Recommendations

1. Counselling psychologists should educate adolescents on the importance of traditional culture in shaping their sense of self.
2. Counselling psychologists should help adolescents understand that answering the question "Who am I?" is a personal and internal process, not dictated by social pressures or media influence.
3. Counselling psychologists should raise public awareness about the crucial role of parents and guardians in guiding adolescent identity development.
4. Counselling psychologists should recognise that identity formation is not limited to adolescence, extending support to adults experiencing identity crises through appropriate therapeutic interventions.
5. Educational programmes should emphasise the importance of self-definition within a cultural context.

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