Peer Influence as a Predictor of Identity Formation among Secondary School Students in Ekiti State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The study examined the pattern of identity formation among secondary school students in Ekiti State. The relationship between peer influence and identity formation among the students and determined the predictive ability of peer influence on identity formation among the students in the State. These were with a view to providing information on the predictive ability of peer influence on identity formation among secondary school students. The study adopted the survey research design. The population comprised secondary school students in Ekiti State. The sample size consisted of 750 students who were selected using multistage sampling procedure. One senatorial district was selected from the three senatorial districts using simple random sampling technique. All five Local Government Areas (LGAs) were selected from the senatorial district. Five schools were selected from each of the LGA using simple random sampling technique. Thirty students were selected from Senior Secondary Class 2 (SS2) using purposive sampling technique. The students completed two questionnaires and they provided information on patterns of identity formation and peer influence. The results showed that (61.6%) of the students exhibited exploration pattern of identity formation, (22.8%) of the students exhibited commitment pattern of identity formation and (16.6%) of the students exhibited both exploration and commitment pattern of identity formation. The results also showed that peer influence predicted exploration pattern of identity formation (N=438, r=0.544, p<0.05), peer influence also predicted commitment pattern of identity formation (N=162, r=0.265, p<0.05).

Keywords: *Identity, Identity formation, Peer, Peer influence, Adolescence and secondary school student.*

Highlights of this paper
- The study examined the pattern of identity formation among secondary school students in Ekiti State.
- The relationship between peer influence and identity formation among the students and determined the predictive ability of peer influence on identity formation among the students in the State.

1. INTRODUCTION

Identity formation is an integral part of human existence. Every human being is distinguished by his or her identity beginning from the first form of identification (name) to other forms of identification (physical attributes, behaviour, values, religion, ethnicity, race, nationality, culture, profession, and so on). It is safe to say identity is a fulcrum of human existence. The formation of identity begins at a very early stage in life.

Immediately a child is enrolled in school, he begins to relate with his external environment, he begins to learn new characters, values, and roles that are eventually built upon until full adulthood is attained. An individual's identity could be focused on the past (what used to be true of one), the present (what is true of one now), or the future (the person one expects or wishes to become, the person one feels obligated to try to become, or the person one fears one may become).

Identity formation is a process that must be experienced by every growing child. Erikson (1968) was the first to establish identity formation as a major developmental task for adolescents. He stated that adolescents typically experience an identity crisis as they attempt to negotiate this task.

This crisis is characterized by a period of distress as young people explore and experiment with options before they determine their beliefs and values. Complete identity includes a clarification of one's morals, ethics, and standards, as well as a commitment to a future occupation. Many development theorists see identity development as a means for an individual to explain the present as a bridge from the past to the future.

Young people have a tendency to begin to search for a proper identity from a very early age. They begin to ask definite questions about their identity and what the future holds for them. Identity formation is a product of exploration and commitment.

As the individual grows older, the individual's extent of exploration and commitment across different life areas is investigated. This can be seen in the works of Marcia (1966). He postulated four identity statuses namely: foreclosure, identity diffusion, moratorium, and identity achievement.

The foreclosure status is when a commitment is made without exploring alternatives. Often these commitments are based on parental ideas and beliefs that are accepted without question.

As Marcia puts it, "the individual is about to become a Methodist, Republican farmer like his Methodist, Republican farmer father, with little or no thought in the matter, certainly cannot be said to have "achieved" an identity, in spite of his commitment.

Foreclosure represents a set of commitments enacted without prior exploration. It is associated with self-satisfaction and low levels of internalizing symptoms (Schwartz *et al.*, 2011).

Identity diffusion describes a stage in which the young ones are unable to face the necessity of identity development. They avoid exploring or making commitments by remaining in an amorphous state of identity diffusion, something which may produce social isolation. The least complex and mature of the four identity statuses, identity diffusion is the mark of those who have neither explored nor made commitments across life-defining areas. They may or may not have experienced an identity crisis, with some having little interest in such matters and others reporting repeated indecision.

Identity moratorium is the status of individuals who are in the midst of crisis, whose commitments are either absent or vaguely defined, but who are actively exploring alternatives. Marcia notes that moratoriums report experiencing more anxiety than do people in any other status.

Despite such anxiety, the postmodern trend has been for more people to spend more time in the status, a phenomenon Gail Sheehy termed Provisional Adulthood. Moratorium represents a state of active exploration with few commitments. It is associated with openness and curiosity (Luyckx *et al.*, 2006) but also with symptoms of anxiety, depression, and poor well-being (Schwartz *et al.*, 2009).

Identity achievement is the status in which individuals have successfully navigated the other status and have finally achieved an identity. They are said to undergone identity explorations and made commitments. Achievement therefore, represents a set of commitments enacted following a period of exploration. Achievement is associated with balanced thinking and mature interpersonal relationships (Krettenauer, 2005; Beyers and Seiffge-Krenke, 2010).

Apparent from the spate of social vices in public secondary schools in Ekiti State evident in indecent dressing, lateness to school, truancy, drug use, alcohol intake, illicit sex, disrespect for constituted authorities, and disregard for school rules and regulations, there is a serious gap in the formation of positive identity by adolescents. This trend may be linked to negative peer influence during the formative years.

This is not however conclusive, as positive peer influence also takes place in secondary schools where the activities of peer groups involve forming study groups, engaging in sporting activities together, taking part in club activities and so on. Adolescent behavior had been observed to be shaped by the amount of time spent with their peers away from parental supervision.

Peer influence is suspected to be a strong determinant of identity formation as it provides an opportunity to construct and reconstruct identities. Identity is an individual's self-definition that focuses on enduring characteristics of the self. According to Smith, *et al.* (2012) adolescent identities are the traits and characteristics, social relations, roles, and social group memberships that define who one is.

Peer influence is a social pressure on somebody to adopt a type of behavior, dress, or attitude accepted as part of a group. Peer influence is present among different age grades but it is more predominant among adolescents. Bankole and Ogunsakin (2015) stated that in general, peer groups or cliques have two to twelve members, with an average of five or six.

Peer groups provide a sense of security and they help adolescents to build a sense of identity. Peer influence describes the process by which people are shaped by the attitudes and behaviors of those around them. The period of adolescence mark the stage in life between childhood, where parents and carers are primarily relied upon, and adulthood, where adolescents become largely autonomous.

Steinberg and Monahan (2007) suggested that adolescence is the time when young people are most susceptible to peer influence, but also that it provides a great opportunity to practice the skills required to avoid influences that may be detrimental to them, and stay true to themselves.

1.1. Statement of the Problem

Many factors had been identified to militate against the formation of positive identities among secondary school students in Ekiti State. Among these factors could be poor parenting, lack of self-control, type of school, indiscipline in schools, etc. Despite available kinds of literatures, it has not been established which factor is most dominant in the search for identity by the students.

Identity formation had been observed to be a difficult process for secondary school students in Ekiti State due to the decreasing influence and role of parents, teachers and other family members in the affairs of the students. This may have led to identity formation related problems such as identity confusion (a state in which the individual is confused about his present and future self), delinquent behaviors, negative moral development, low self-esteem, lack of self-control, etc.

Furthermore, it was observed that adolescents engaged in social vices in the society ranging from loitering during school hours, truancy, bullying, examination malpractice, cultism, disrespect for constituted authorities, and many more. Many out of school students in the state engage in more unacceptable behaviors such as smoking, alcoholism, illicit sexual behaviors, teenage pregnancy, abortion, smoking, and drug use.

1.2. Objectives of the Study

The purpose of the study was to determine the relationship between peer influence and identity formation among secondary school students in Ekiti State.

The specific objectives of the study were to:

1. Examine the pattern of identity formation among secondary school students in Ekiti State.
2. Investigate the relationship between peer influence and identity formation among the students in the study area.
3. Determine the predictive ability of peer influence on identity formation among the students in the study area.

1.3. Research Question

The research question is:

1. What is the pattern of identity formation among secondary school students in Ekiti State?

1.4. Hypotheses

1. *There is no significant relationship between peer influence and secondary school students' identity formation.*
2. *There is no significant predictive ability of peer influence on secondary school students' identity formation.*

2. METHODOLOGY

The study adopted the a descriptive survey research design. The population of the study comprised all secondary school students in Ekiti State. According to Planning, Research, and Statistics Department, Ekiti State, Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, they are 187 public secondary schools and 164 registered private secondary schools in the state as at the beginning of the 2015/2016 academic session.

A sample size of 750 students was selected using a multistage sampling procedure. One senatorial district was selected using a simple random sampling technique; all the five Local Government Areas (LGAs) in the senatorial district were used. Five schools were selected from each of the LGAs using a simple random sampling technique and 30 students were selected from Senior Secondary Class 2 (SS2) using a purposive sampling technique.

Table-1. Gender and age distribution.

Variable	Level	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Sex	Male	475	66.8
	Female	236	33.2
	Total	711	100.0
Age	10-13years	55	7.7
	14-17years	565	79.5
	18-21years	91	12.8
	Total	711	100.0

Source: Ekiti state ministry of education, science and technology.

Table 1 provides the socio-demographic data of the population of the study. As seen in the table above, the number of male respondents is 475 which represents 66.8%, while 236 were females which represents 33.2% of the population of the study.

The table also reveals the age of the respondents. As seen above, 55 respondents aged between 10-13 years old represents 7.7%, 565 aged between 14-17 years old represents 79.5% and 91 respondents aged between 18-21years old represents 12.5% of the population of the study.

2.1. Research Instruments

The study adopted two research instruments namely Pattern of Identity Formation Questionnaire (PIFQ) and Peer Influence Questionnaire (PIQ). The first section of the instruments consisted of socio-demographic data of the respondents.

It sought for data such as name of school, age of the respondent and gender of the respondent. Each item on the second section was responded to on a 4-point Likert type rating scale, ranging from 'strongly agree' (4 points), 'agree' (3 points), 'disagree' (2 points) and 'strongly disagree' (1 point).

3. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Research Question: What is the pattern of identity formation among secondary school students in Ekiti State?

Items 1-8 of the pattern of identity formation questionnaire provided questions on exploration pattern while questions 9-15 provided questions on commitment pattern of identity formation and were further computed as a single measure of identity formation they measure.

The students whose scores were higher in exploration pattern of identity formation were adjudged as dominantly exhibiting exploration pattern of identity formation, while those with higher scores in commitment pattern of identity formation were adjudged as dominantly exhibiting commitment pattern of identity formation. However, those students with equal scores on both exploration and commitment patterns were adjudged as exhibiting both patterns of identity formation. This was subjected to descriptive statistics and the results are presented in.

Table-2. The Pattern of identity formation among secondary school students in Ekiti State.

Identity formation	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. deviation	Frequency (F)	Percentage (%)
Exploration	19.00	29.00	23.2397	2.48374	438	61.6
Commitment	20.00	26.00	21.6049	2.14782	162	22.8
*Both	18.00	19.00	18.4955	.50225	111	15.6
Total	34.00	51.00	39.1885	4.23745	711	100

*Both exploration and commitment pattern.

It was discovered that 61.6% of the students exhibited an exploration pattern of identity formation while 22.8% of the students exhibited a commitment pattern of identity formation. However, 15.6% of the students exhibited both exploration and commitment patterns of identity formation.

Given the Table 2 results, it can be concluded that there is an indication that the majority of the secondary school students in Ekiti State showed a preference for exploration patterns of identity formation.

3.1. Research Hypotheses

Research Hypothesis 1: There is no significant relationship between peer influence and the student's identity formation.

The results are presented in Table 3.

Table-3. Relationship between peer influence and the student's identity formation.

Identity formation/Peer influence	N	R	P-value
Exploration /Peer influence	438	0.544	0.000*
Commitment/Peer influence	162	0.265	0.001*

*Significant at 0.05 level.

Table 3 shows the relationship between peer influence and student identity formation (exploration and commitment patterns). As shown in Table 3, the correlation coefficient between peer influence and exploration identity formation is 0.544. This value is significant at the 0.05 probability level.

This revealed that there is a positive and significant relationship between peer influence and exploration patterns of identity formation.

Similarly, the result of the correlation coefficient revealed that peer influence and commitment pattern of identity formation has a positive and significant relationship (r = 0.265, p-value < 0.05). Hence, the stated null hypothesis is therefore rejected. Therefore, it was concluded that there is a significant relationship between peer influence and student identity formation (exploration and commitment patterns).

Research Hypothesis 2: There is no significant predictive ability of peer influence on students' identity formation.

To test this hypothesis, multiple regressions were conducted on peer influence and students' identity formation (exploration and commitment). The results are presented in Table 4.

Table-4. Predictive ability of peer influence on exploration pattern of identity formation.

R= 0.698 R²= 0.488 Adj R= 0.485 F= 207.0022*	Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients	t	p-value
	β	Std. error	Beta		
(Constant)	14.581	.459		31.792	.000
Peer influence	.078	.012	.260	6.353	.000

a. Dependent Variable: exploration pattern of identity formation.
b. *Significant at 0.05 level.

Table 4 shows that the combination of peer influence significantly predicted the exploration pattern of identity formation. Peer influence and exploration pattern of identity formation yielded a coefficient of multiple regression (R) of 0.698, a multiple correlation squared (R²) of 0.488, adjusted R of 0.485 with F-ratio of 207.0022 which is statistically significant at 0.05 level. This implies that the combination of the two independent variables is an adequate predictor of the exploration pattern of identity formation. These variables only accounted for 69.8% of the observed variance in students' identity formation.

Table-5. Predictive ability of peer influence on the commitment pattern of identity formation.

R= 0.332 R²= 0.110 Adj R= 0.099 F= 9.838*	Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients	t	p-value
	β	Std. error	Beta		
(Constant)	10.236	2.569		3.985	.000
Peer influence	0.091	0.047	0.162	1.928	.056

a. Dependent variable: commitment pattern of identity formation.
b. *Significant at 0.05 level.

Table 5 shows that the combination of peer influence and commitment pattern of identity formation significantly predicted the commitment pattern of identity formation.

Peer influence and commitment pattern of identity formation yielded a coefficient of multiple regression (R) of 0.332, a multiple correlation squared (R²) of 0.110, adjusted R of 0.099 with F-ratio of 9.838 which is statistically significant at 0.05 level. This implies that the combination of the two independent variables is an adequate predictor of the commitment pattern of identity formation. These variables only accounted for 33.2% of the observed variance in students' identity formation.

4. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The main objective of this study was to find the relationship between peer influence and identity formation and also to investigate the predictive ability of peer influence on identity formation among secondary school students in Ekiti State. The result of the research question (what is the pattern of identity formation among secondary school students in Ekiti State?) showed that the majority of secondary school students in Ekiti State exhibited an exploration pattern of identity formation while the minority of the population exhibited commitment pattern of identity formation.

Findings from the data analysis proved that secondary school students in Ekiti State showed more traces of exploration during the period of identity formation. This does not go to say secondary school students are not committed to lay down patterns especially from parents and teachers, it just goes to say more students explore (sorting through various potential alternatives) rather than commit (adherence to a laid down principle or pattern of behavior). Exploration indicates the extent to which secondary school students consider various options in relevant identity domains.

Commitment is the degree to which adolescents have made choices in important identity domains and are committed to those choices. Meeus *et al.* (2010) and Crocetti *et al.* (2008) earlier posited that identity is formed in a process of the continuous interplay between in-depth exploration, reconsideration, and commitment. They believed that individuals enter adolescence with a set of commitments that are of at least minimal strength in important ideological and interpersonal identity domains, and that adolescents do not begin the identity development process with a 'blank slate'.

They stated that individuals explore commitments in two ways during adolescence namely, through a reconsideration of commitments and in-depth exploration. Reconsideration is the process of comparing present commitments to alternative ones and deciding whether they need to be changed. In-depth exploration is a process of continuously monitoring present commitments, which serves the functions of making them more conscious and maintaining them.

There is also ample evidence from the results of the study that adolescents like to make choices for themselves on a variety of identity-related issues such as long term goals, career choices, friendship patterns, sexual orientation and behavior, religious identification, moral/value system, and group loyalties. This cannot be proved to be the

behavior of early adolescents (10-13 years) as they still have a strong connection to parental and familial values. But these traces of display of independence in decision making could be traced to middle adolescents (14-17 years) and it is very predominant among late adolescents (18-21 years).

This is in line with a study by Para (2008) who investigated the relationship among family, peer influence and the development of identity among adolescents. She was of the view that familial interactions influence the initial status of identity development. In the same vein, Para (2008) opined that friends influence important attitudes, behaviors and characteristics.

The study emphasizes this fact because the exploration pattern of identity formation includes secondary school students trying out things by themselves and trying things put out to them by members of their peer group or clique. Harter (2012) buttressed this when he stated that when adolescents shift their attention from parents to peers, peers become a core influence for their development.

Another finding of this study is that there was a significant relationship between peer influence and students identity formation among secondary school students in Ekiti State. According to the study, there is a positive and significant relationship between peer influence and exploration/commitment patterns of identity formation. On a general note, secondary school students are most prone to peer influence and it affects the pattern of identity formation they choose to adhere to.

This position is supported by the findings of Steinberg and Monahan (2007) that adolescence is a time when adolescents are most susceptible to peer influence, but also that it provides an opportunity to practice the skills required to avoid influences that may be detrimental to them, and stay true to themselves. In the same vein, Eke (2008) pointed out that at particularly hard times, when parents are busy trying to make out a living, there is hardly time for interaction with their children. In such a situation, secondary school students turn to their peers for lessons on rules and regulations which govern conduct in society. This is also in consonance with Para (2008) who stated that friends influence important attitudes, behaviors, and characteristics. For example, peers could influence an individuals' attitude towards studying or could encourage drug abuse. Peer influence has become so strong that all the students care about is conformity.

To buttress the fact that peers can also shape their identity by the association they keep, Bosma and Kunnen (2001) stated that adolescents may shape their attitudes around their friends' attributes. Just as a family can influence identity achievement by providing support through earlier challenges (i.e. trust, autonomy, and initiative) friends can affect ones' identity by helping an individual successfully negotiate developmental crises. The Peer group expands the network of friendship and provides more opportunities to explore more alternatives in the quest for identity or commit to the laid down patterns at home and in the schools.

The study also revealed that there was a significant predictive ability of peer influence on exploration/commitment patterns of identity formation of secondary school students in Ekiti State. The study showed that peer influence predicted identity formation among secondary school students.

5. CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDATIONS

The study concluded that peer influence was a predictor of identity formation among secondary school students in Ekiti State. The study also concluded that secondary school students exhibited an exploration pattern of identity formation more than the commitment pattern of identity formation and some students exhibited both patterns of identity formation.

Evolving from the results and conclusion of the study, the following recommendations have been put forward:

1. Knowledge of peer influence is important for everyone in society. It is recommended that parents, teachers, counselors and other education practitioners, as well as those in related professional training relating to secondary school students must be made to have an understanding of the issues surrounding negative peer influence. This will help in reducing peer pressure. This could help the formation of acceptable identity by students.

2. It is also recommended that teachers, parents, and guardians who are considered primary custodians of the adolescents should guide the adolescents as they search for identity through various forms of explorations.

3. It is also recommended that teachers,, parents and counselors should encourage positive peer relationships through the conscious guidance of the adolescents as they explore and commit to different behavioral patterns.

4. It is recommended that secondary school authorities set up functional counseling units and employ qualified counselors to man the counseling units in all schools in the state.

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