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A MEDIATION MODEL OF SOCIAL-ADJUSTMENT AMONG SCHOOL ADOLESCENTS IN NIGERIA: PREDICTIVE WEIGHTS OF PARENTAL EXPECTATIONS, SELF-ESTEEM, AND IDENTITY CRISIS

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Abstract

Adolescent social adjustment is influenced by various psychosocial factors, including self-esteem, parental expectations, and identity crisis. Given the scarcity of empirical research examining the relationships between these variables, this study aimed to explore how self-esteem and identity crisis influence social adjustment, both directly and indirectly, through parental expectations. Using a correlational research design, data was collected from a random sample of 374 Senior Secondary II (SSII) students in Ibadan North Local Government Area, Nigeria. Self-report questionnaires were administered to measure self-esteem, identity crisis, parental expectations, and social adjustment. The data were analyzed using the General Linear Model (GLM) mediation analysis in JAMOVI software to assess the direct and indirect effects of self-esteem and identity crisis on social adjustment, mediated by parental expectations. Descriptive statistics, including Pearson's correlation, were used to explore the relationships among the variables. The findings revealed significant positive correlations between social adjustment, parental expectations ($r = .819$, $p < .01$), and self-esteem ($r = .856$, $p < .01$), while identity crisis was negatively correlated with social adjustment ($r = -.705$, $p < .01$). Mediation analysis showed that self-esteem had a significant indirect effect on social adjustment through parental expectations ($\beta = 0.2513$, $p < .001$), while identity crisis also had a smaller but significant indirect effect ($\beta = 0.0866$, $p = .003$). The findings suggest that adolescents with higher self- esteem and fewer identity crises show better social adjustment, especially with positive parental support. Programs fostering self-esteem, identity development, and parental involvement are recommended to improve adolescent social outcomes.

Keywords: Self-esteem, Identity crisis, Social adjustment, Parental expectations and Adolescents

Introduction

Adolescence is a critical stage of human development that exists between childhood and adulthood, requiring continuous adaptation throughout the lifespan (Ayriza, & Izzaty, 2023). The transition from junior to senior secondary school often presents a significant challenge, as senior secondary school typically imposes more demanding and stressful requirements than junior school (Eccles et al., 2020). Many students may struggle with this dual transition, experiencing confusion, distraction, academic decline, or even dropout due to the difficulties encountered in their early years of senior school (Montemayor, 2022). To succeed during this phase of academic development, students must cope with and adjust to social and psychological demands, such as building and maintaining relationships with peers, family, and teachers, learning new skills in a more complex academic environment, and planning for their future educational goals (Chandra, 2021). Failure to achieve social adjustment can result in negative feedback from peers, family members, or educators (Beatson, et al., 2023). Social adjustment is conceptualized as the ability of students to adapt to the social demands within the school environment. It entails an individual's efforts to conform to societal values, standards, and needs to gain acceptance (Gallardo et al., 2016). Additionally, social adjustment requires students to navigate and internalize new norms and values introduced in the school setting (Gifford-Smith & Brownell, 2003). Students with low levels of social adjustment may experience loneliness, depression, emotional instability, and social rejection. These challenges can lead to serious consequences, such as suicidal thoughts, truancy, psychological withdrawal, memory loss, and academic failure. If students do not receive timely help, these negative outcomes can escalate (Harter, 2012). Previous research has indicated that new students are at a higher risk of dropping out during their second year of school (Ishitani, 2016).

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Similarly, Hernandez (2017) found that students who are not well integrated into the school environment may feel frustrated and underperform academically without adequate support. In the Nigerian context, students who frequently report failure, academic withdrawal, and antisocial behaviour may be suffering from social maladjustment (Amuwa, 2015; Adikwu, Oguche, Usman & Olabode, 2023). This issue is often overlooked, along with the significant impact of parental expectations, self-esteem, and identity crises on their coping abilities.

Parental expectation refers to the parents' beliefs about their children's future achievements, academic success, and prospects. These beliefs are based on the parents' evaluation of the children's academic abilities and the resources available to support them. Parental expectations are often measured by asking parents how far they expect their child to go in school or what grades they anticipate their child will get that year (Loughlin-Presnal & Bierman, 2017). Sometimes, researchers also use the students' perceptions of their parents' expectations as an indicator of the actual expectations (Fukuoka, 2017; Wang, et al., 2021). Students are usually aware of their parents' expectations, especially if their parents remind them frequently. Fukuoka (2017) found that when parents communicate their expectations to their students, it leads to better academic outcomes. Students who have parents with high expectations tend to keep their notes organized and tidy, because they know their parents will check them at home and contact their teachers for updates. In most cases, these students have no option but to devote themselves to their studies (Loughlin-Presnal & Bierman, 2017; Wang, et al., 2021). However, it may be unrealistic for parents to have high expectations for their children without being involved in their academic pursuits. Parents' expectations should be evident in their engagement. Previous studies have shown that when parents participate actively in their children's academic activities, such as visiting the class or helping with class projects, the children improve their behaviour and basic skills (Đurišić & Bunijevac, 2017; Yamamoto, et al., 2016). Jaiswal and Choudhuri (2017) examined different types of parental involvement, such as volunteering, home involvement, attending parental classes, school political involvement, talking to staff, and talking to teachers. They found that parental goals and educational aspirations positively affect student academic achievement, possibly because they enhance the children's self-motivation and self-evaluation standards.

Self-esteem is the individual's sense of his or her own value or worth, or the degree to which a person values, approves of, appreciates, prizes, or likes himself or herself. Self-esteem can also be seen as the set of attitudes and beliefs that a person has when facing the world (Abdel-Khalek, 2016). It includes beliefs about whether he or she can expect success or failure, how much effort he or she should exert, whether failing at a task will be painful, and whether he or she will become more competent as a result of challenging experiences (Lackner, 2015; Gürler, 2017). Adolescents with high self-esteem have self-love, courage, self-value, and determination. Their self-worth is reflected in their adjustment. They can seek help, relate, and cope with others' demands. Their adjustment may depend on how they perceive themselves in terms of worth, and their ability to get along and compete with their peers. Abtahi and Valladao (2022) argued that individuals with low self-esteem are prone to maladjustment and depression. This implies that social adjustment may be very difficult for individuals with low self-esteem, because they may view other students as superior and isolate themselves. This supports the finding of Harris Lucas and Orth (2020) that self-esteem is a key factor in social relationships, peer relationships, and adaptation to life events and behavioural problems.

Identity crisis is the failure to arrive at self-definition during adolescence stage. It's a confusion about one's strength and weakness. During this stage, adolescents are faced with physical growth, sexual maturity, and integrating ideas of themselves and about what others think of them (Schultz and Schultz, 2016). During this period, adolescents holds the onus to form their self-image and endure the task of resolving the crisis of their basic ego identity. Failure to resolve crisis of self-definition attracts emotional disturbance, anti-social behaviour and psychological withdrawal (Santrock, 2018) in the face of demands of human development and social learning. Adolescents' identity development plays a crucial role in their ability to adjust to the various demands of life, including academic, social, and familial expectations. A decline in identity crisis may indicate an early encounter with self-definition or ego identity, which in turn fosters better social and academic adjustment (Gholamrezaei, 2016). Adolescents who possess a clearer sense of self tend to navigate societal expectations more effectively, including those of parents and peers. They are better equipped to understand their uniqueness and establish fidelity in their social relationships, which aids in successful adaptation to life's demands. In contrast, adolescents who experience ongoing identity crises often struggle to reach a consensus about their own identity and survival strategies amidst competing demands. This unresolved identity can increase the likelihood of engaging in criminal or antisocial behaviour both within and outside of school settings.

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Given the complexity of factors such as self-esteem, identity, and parental expectations in influencing social adjustment, traditional mediation models may fall short in capturing the intricate relationships between these variables. This study uses the General Linear Model (GLM) mediation analysis, which offers several advantages over traditional mediation models. GLM allows for the simultaneous examination of multiple predictors and outcomes, accommodates continuous and categorical data, and provides a more robust analysis of both direct and indirect effects (Hayes, 2018). In contrast, traditional mediation models often rely on assumptions that can oversimplify the relationships between variables, particularly when they involve complex psychosocial constructs like identity and self-esteem (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). Therefore, the use of GLM mediation in this study ensures a more nuanced understanding of how self-esteem, identity, and parental expectations contribute to social adjustment, addressing the gaps in existing empirical research.

Purpose of the study

The general purpose of this study is to investigate parental expectation, self-esteem and identity crisis as predictors of social adjustment among secondary school adolescents in Ibadan North Local Government Area. Specifically, it intends to;

1. Find the relationship that exist between parental expectation, self-esteem, identity crisis and social adjustment
2. Examine the indirect effects of self-esteem and identity on social adjustment through parental expectations among adolescents.
3. Investigate the direct effects of self-esteem and identity on parental expectations and their subsequent impact on social adjustment.
4. **Assess** the direct relationship between self-esteem, identity, and social adjustment in adolescents.

Research Questions

1. What is the relationship existing between parental expectation, self-esteem, identity crisis and social adjustment?
2. How do self-esteem and identity indirectly affect social adjustment through parental expectations among adolescents?
3. What are the direct effects of self-esteem and identity on parental expectations, and how do these expectations mediate the influence on social adjustment among adolescents?
4. What are the direct effects of self-esteem and identity on social adjustment in adolescents?

Methodology

The correlational research design was used for this study to explore the relationships between self-esteem, parental expectations, identity, and social adjustment among senior secondary school students. This design allowed for examining associations between variables without manipulating the independent variables. The study population consisted of 1,560 students from 26 senior secondary schools in Ibadan North Local Government Area. A random sample of 374 students was selected using a stratified sampling technique, ensuring equal representation of male and female Senior Secondary II (SSII) students. This included 187 male students (50%) and 187 female students **(**50%)**.** Initially, 384 students were sampled, but 374 valid responses were used for analysis. A structured questionnaire was used for data collection, consisting of five sections. Section A captured demographic information (e.g., gender, age, religion). Section B employed the Social Adjustment Scale, adapted from Ryff's Psychological Wellbeing Scale (2004), with 15 items rated on a 6-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 6 = strongly agree). Reverse scoring was applied to certain items, and higher scores indicated greater social adjustment. The scale's internal consistency was confirmed, with reported reliability coefficients for subscales ranging from $\alpha = .83$ to $\alpha = .91$. Section C used the Parental Expectation Scale (PEXP), a 15-item instrument adapted from Leung and Shek (2011) to assess students' perceptions of parental expectations regarding academic performance and behaviour.

The scale demonstrated strong reliability ($\alpha = 0.76$) and construct validity, as previously established by Shek et al. (2006). A pilot study localized the scale for Nigerian use, yielding an internal consistency of $\alpha = 0.781$. Section D employed the Identity Distress Survey (Berman, Montgomery, & Kurtines, 2004), a 10-item diagnostic tool designed to measure distress associated with unresolved identity issues. Respondents rated their distress on a 5-point scale, covering aspects such as career choice, friendships, and values. Internal consistency was reported as $\alpha = 0.84$, and test-retest reliability was 0.82. The localized version for Nigerian students yielded an internal consistency of $\alpha = 0.80$. Section E used Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale (2008), a 10-item measure of global self-worth rated on a 4-

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point Likert scale (strongly agree to strongly disagree). The scale's internal consistency was reported as $\alpha = 0.74$. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (e.g., frequency counts, percentages) and inferential statistics, including Pearson's Product Moment Correlation and multiple linear regression analysis, with all hypotheses tested at the 0.05 level of significance. The analyses examined the relationships among self-esteem, parental expectations, identity, and social adjustment.

The mediation model examines the direct and indirect effects of **self-esteem (X1)** and **identity crisis (X2)** on **social adjustment (Y)**, with **parental expectations (M)** as the mediating variable.

Direct Effects:

1. **Self-esteem (X1) → Social Adjustment (Y)**
   - This models the direct effect of self-esteem on social adjustment.
   - Equation: $Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \epsilon$
2. **Identity Crisis (X2) → Social Adjustment (Y)**
   - This models the direct effect of identity crisis on social adjustment.
   - Equation: $Y = \beta_0 + \beta_2 X_2 + \epsilon$

Indirect Effects (Mediation through Parental Expectations):

1. **Self-esteem (X1) → Parental Expectations (M) → Social Adjustment (Y)**
   - The mediating effect of parental expectations on the relationship between self-esteem and social adjustment.
   - Equation 1: $M = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1 X1 + \epsilon_M$
   - Equation 2: $Y = \beta_0 + \beta_3 M + \beta_1 X1 + \epsilon_Y$
2. **Identity Crisis (X2) → Parental Expectations (M) → Social Adjustment (Y)**
   - The mediating effect of parental expectations on the relationship between identity crisis and social adjustment.
   - Equation 1: $M = \alpha_0 + \alpha_2 X2 + \epsilon_M$
   - Equation 2: $Y = \beta_0 + \beta_3 M + \beta_2 X2 + \epsilon_Y$

Results

Table 1: PPMC showing the relationship between parental expectancy, self-esteem, identity crisis and social adjustment

Variables	Mean	Std. Deviation	Social Adjustment	Parental Expectancy	Self Esteem	Identity Crisis
Social Adjustment	3.1357	1.06624	1.00			
Parental Expectancy	3.2807	1.03624	.819**	1.00		
Self Esteem	3.2426	1.03059	.856**	.770**	1.00	
Identity Crisis	3.2558	1.04540	-.705**	.721**	.874**	**1.00**

Table 1 reveals that there is significant positive relationship between two of the independent variables (parental expectation and self-esteem) and dependent variable (social adjustments). Social adjustment positively correlated with parental expectancy ($r = .819$, $p < 0.01$), self-esteem ($r = .856$, $p < 0.01$) but negatively correlated with identity crisis ($r = -.705$, $p < 0.01$). This indicates that adolescent's social adjustment is a function of high parental expectancy and self-esteem. While a reduction in identity crisis will enhance social adjustment among adolescents.

Research Question 2: How do self-esteem and identity influence social adjustment through parental expectations among adolescents?

The research question 2-4 was answered using GLM Mediation Model to estimate the direct and indirect effects Self-Esteem and Identity crisis on Social Adjustment Through Parental Expectations

Table 2: Direct and Indirect Effects of Self-Esteem and Identity on Social Adjustment Through Parental Expectations

Variables	Estimate	Standard Error (SE)	z-value	p-value	Standardized Effect Size (β)
Indirect Effect of Self-Esteem on Social	0.2600	0.0367	7.08	< .001	**0.2513**

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Adjustment					
Indirect Effect of Identity crisis on Social Adjustment	0.0883	0.0300	2.94	.003	**0.0866**
Direct Effect of Self-Esteem on Parental Expectations	0.5947	0.0676	8.80	< .001	**0.5915**
Direct Effect of Identity crisis on Parental Expectations	0.2020	0.0666	3.03	.002	**0.2038**
Direct Effect of Parental Expectations on Social Adjustment	0.4371	0.0366	11.94	< .001	**0.4248**
Direct Effect of Self-Esteem on Social Adjustment	0.7901	0.0526	15.03	< .001	**0.7637**
Direct Effect of Identity crisis on Social Adjustment	-0.2742	0.0477	-5.74	< .001	**-0.2688**

The results presented in Table 2 indicate that both self-esteem and identity crisis play significant roles in shaping social adjustment in adolescents through the mediating influence of parental expectations. The significant indirect effect of self-esteem on social adjustment (estimate = 0.2600, SE = 0.0367, z = 7.08, p < .001) suggests that adolescents with higher self-esteem are likely to have higher parental expectations, which in turn positively influence their social adjustment. The standardized effect size (β = 0.2513) suggests a moderate effect, supporting the idea that self-esteem serves as a foundational psychological resource that not only influences personal outcomes but also informs the way parents perceive and interact with their children.

Moreover, identity crisis, although often viewed as a challenge to adolescent development, appears to have a nuanced influence on social adjustment through parental expectations. The significant indirect effect (estimate = 0.0883, z = 2.94, p = .003) shows that even though identity crisis is traditionally seen as a negative developmental phenomenon, it can still foster parental concern and expectations, possibly triggering more structured guidance and support. The small but meaningful standardized effect size (β = 0.0866) reflects that while the impact of identity crisis on social adjustment is less pronounced than self-esteem, it still contributes positively by shaping parental expectations.

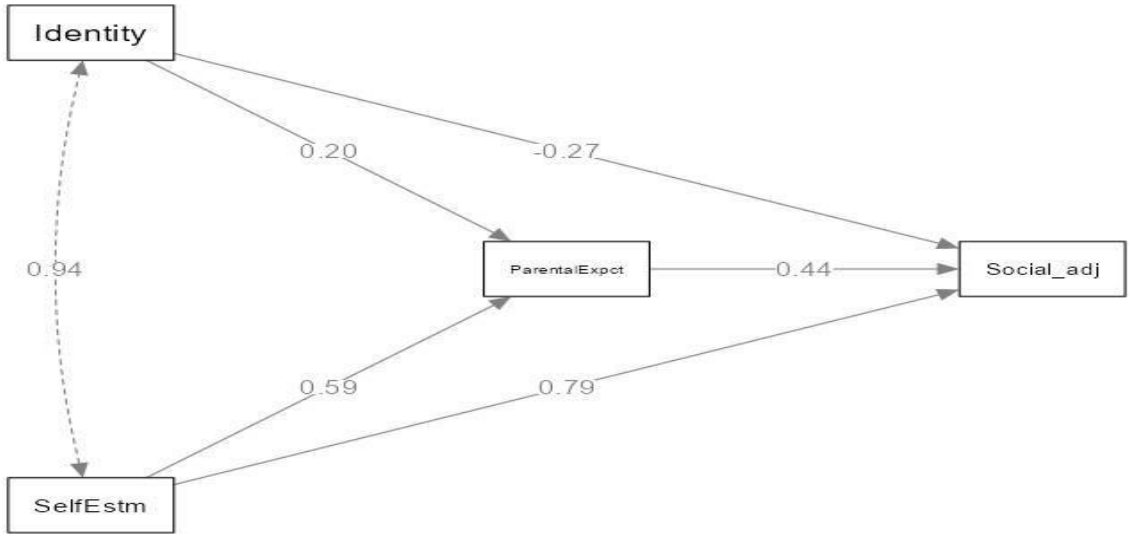


Fig. 1: Mediation Model of Direct and Indirect Effects of Self-Esteem and Identity on Social Adjustment Through Parental Expectations

Research Question 3: What are the direct effects of self-esteem and identity crisis on parental expectations, and how do these expectations subsequently influence social adjustment among adolescents?

The results in Table 2 illustrate significant relationships between self-esteem, identity crisis, parental expectations, and social adjustment, providing deeper insights into adolescent development through a theoretical lens. First, the strong positive effect of self-esteem on parental expectations (B = 0.5947, SE = 0.0676, z = 8.80, p < .001, β = 0.5915) suggests that adolescents with higher self-esteem tend to elicit higher expectations from their parents.

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Parental expectations, in turn, play a pivotal role in promoting social adjustment (B = 0.4371, SE = 0.0366, z = 11.94, p < .001, β = 0.4248). High parental expectations likely provide structured guidance, support, and motivation, which fosters better social adaptation and helps adolescents meet societal and peer demands. The significant relationship between identity crisis and parental expectations (estimate = 0.2020, SE = 0.0666, z = 3.03, p = .002, β = 0.2038) indicates that even identity-related struggles can positively influence parental expectations. Adolescents grappling with identity issues may prompt more attention and concern from parents, leading to higher expectations as parents seek to guide them through this turbulent period.

Research Question 4: What are the direct effects of self-esteem and identity crisis on social adjustment among adolescents?

Table 2 also reveals that self-esteem has a significant and substantial positive effect on social adjustment. The effect estimate was 0.7901, with a standard error of 0.0526, yielding a z-value of 15.03 and a p-value of less than .001. The standardized effect size was β = 0.7637, indicating a very strong positive impact. This suggests that higher levels of self-esteem directly lead to better social adjustment among adolescents.

In contrast, identity had a significant negative direct effect on social adjustment. The effect estimate was −0.2742, with a standard error of 0.0477, resulting in a z-value of −5.74 and a p-value of less than .001. The standardized effect size was β = −0.2688, indicating a moderate negative effect. This implies that a stronger sense of identity crisis, surprisingly, directly correlates with lower levels of social adjustment in this sample of adolescents. A stronger sense of identity crisis suggests greater internal conflict and confusion, which may impede social adjustment. Adolescents struggling with identity are likely experiencing uncertainty about their role in social structures, leading to difficulties in forming meaningful relationships or aligning their behavior with social norms. This negative relationship suggests that unresolved identity issues can have a direct detrimental impact on an adolescent's ability to adapt socially.

Discussion of Findings

The present study sought to examine the direct and indirect effects of self-esteem and identity crisis on social adjustment through parental expectations among adolescents. The findings revealed complex relationships between these variables, supported by empirical evidence as well as contrasting studies. From the first research question the result indicate significant positive relationships between social adjustment and two independent variables: parental expectations and self-esteem. while it was negatively correlated with identity crisis. The strong positive correlation between self-esteem and social adjustment aligns with previous studies that highlight self-esteem as a critical factor in adolescents' social functioning. For instance, Harter (2012) emphasized that adolescents with higher self-esteem are better equipped to manage social relationships, participate in group activities, and navigate peer pressure, all of which contribute to social adjustment. Similarly, Lee at al. (2022) found that adolescents with high self-esteem demonstrate greater social competence, less social anxiety, and more positive interactions with peers, further reinforcing the current study's results. The significant positive correlation between parental expectations and social adjustment also supports prior research. Studies by Wang and Sheikh-Khalil (2014) and Ahmad (2024) suggest that adolescents who perceive their parents as having high expectations tend to adjust better socially. High parental expectations may create a structured and supportive environment, where adolescents feel motivated to meet both academic and social standards, thereby improving their ability to adapt to social settings. On the other hand, the negative correlation between identity crisis and social adjustment (r = -.705, p < .01) contrasts with some previous literature. Traditional developmental theories, such as Erikson's psychosocial model, suggest that identity exploration is a normal and essential part of adolescence, contributing to social and personal growth (Schwartz & Pantin, 2006). However, the current findings suggest that identity crisis, when unresolved may disrupt social adjustment.

The results from the second research question indicated that self-esteem had a substantial direct positive effect on social adjustment (β = 0.7637). This finding is consistent with previous research, which has demonstrated that self- esteem plays a critical role in adolescents' ability to adapt socially (Rubin et al., 2015). High self-esteem is often associated with greater confidence, better interpersonal relationships, and overall enhanced social functioning (Mann et al., 2004). Similarly, Martínez et al. (2021) found that adolescents with high self-esteem were more likely to exhibit adaptive behaviours in social contexts, which further corroborates the current study's findings. However, contrasting evidence exists regarding the strength of this relationship. While self-esteem is positively related to social adjustment, some studies suggest that its influence may be moderated by other factors, such as peer acceptance or environmental conditions. For instance, Jiang (2020) argue that self-esteem alone may not be

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sufficient for social adjustment if adolescents are facing external stressors like bullying or family conflict. Thus, while the present study aligns with much of the literature, it is important to consider the broader context in which self-esteem functions.

The result from the third research question reveals that there was a significant negative direct effect of identity crisis on social adjustment (β = -0.2688) challenges traditional views on adolescent identity development. According to Erikson's (1968) psychosocial theory, adolescence is a critical period for resolving the "identity vs. role confusion" crisis, which is essential for healthy psychosocial development. Identity crisis, generally seen as a normative process, can lead to personal growth when adolescents explore and commit to their values, roles, and beliefs. However, the findings suggest that unresolved identity crises may actually inhibit social adjustment.
One possible explanation, as Schwartz and Pantin (2006) argue, is that certain forms of identity crisis, such as rigid or over-identified self-concepts, limit social flexibility. Adolescents with such rigid views may struggle to adapt to varying social demands, making social adjustment more difficult. This aligns with Côté and Schwartz's (2014) argument that identity exploration without commitment can result in social instability. Adolescents caught in this ongoing exploration may experience confusion or anxiety, which can undermine their social competence and reduce their ability to navigate complex social relationships. Contrasting research by Adams and Marshall (1996) suggests that identity crisis can support social adjustment when it results in identity achievement. Their study found that adolescents who successfully integrate multiple aspects of their self-concept into a coherent identity exhibit better social skills and lower social anxiety. This is consistent with Marcia's (1980) identity status theory, which posits that identity achievement provides a stable foundation for social interactions, as individuals become more secure in their societal roles. However, the current study's findings indicate that when adolescents remain entrenched in the crisis phase without achieving coherence, they may struggle with social adjustment.

The fourth research question investigated the indirect effects of self-esteem and identity on social adjustment through parental expectations. The findings revealed that self-esteem had a significant indirect effect on social adjustment via parental expectations (β = 0.2513). This result suggests that adolescents with higher self-esteem tend to perceive greater parental expectations, which subsequently enhances their social adjustment. This is consistent with previous research by Ahmad (2024), who found that adolescents with elevated self-esteem are more likely to perceive their parents as supportive and holding higher expectations, which fosters greater social competence. Similarly, Wang and Sheikh-Khalil (2014) identified that positive parental expectations serve as a mediating factor between self-esteem and social outcomes, further reinforcing the current study's findings. Parental expectations act as a conduit through which self-esteem positively influences social adaptation, as these expectations provide adolescents with a clear sense of direction and validation, reinforcing their social skills and adaptability. Conversely, the indirect effect of identity crisis on social adjustment through parental expectations, while significant, was smaller (β = 0.0866). This suggests that although identity crisis plays a role in shaping parental expectations, its influence on social adjustment is more intricate and less pronounced. Branje (2022) highlighted that adolescents' identity development is often influenced by parental expectations, but these expectations can be shaped by cultural norms and varying parenting styles. The complexity of this relationship may explain the smaller effect observed in the current study.

Recommendations

1. Identity crisis negatively impacts social adjustment, it also indirectly enhances social adjustment through parental expectations, suggesting a complex relationship between identity formation and social outcomes
2. The need for interventions that promote positive self-esteem, manage identity crises, and encourage supportive parental involvement to improve adolescents' social adaptability.
3. Future research should further explore these dynamics across different cultural contexts to enhance understanding and inform tailored intervention programs.

Conclusion

This study highlights the critical role of self-esteem, identity crisis, and parental expectations in shaping adolescents' social adjustment. The findings demonstrate that higher self-esteem positively influences social adjustment, both directly and indirectly through parental expectations, emphasizing the importance of fostering self-esteem in adolescents.

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