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Teachers' Lived Experiences of Family Factors Influencing the Formation of Social Identity among Secondary School Students in Iraq

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: This study aimed to identify teachers' lived experiences regarding family factors influencing the formation of social identity in secondary school students in Iraq.

Methods and Materials: In the first part of the research, a phenomenological approach using Colaizzi's seven-step method was applied. The research environment for the first phase consisted of social studies teachers, who were selected through purposive sampling based on criteria. The instrument used was semi-structured in-depth interviews. The interviews continued until theoretical saturation was reached, with a total of 26 participants. Initial coding led to the identification of 28 primary concept codes, categorized under demographic factors, cognitive knowledge of family, and behavioral knowledge of family. In the second phase of the study, to validate the conceptual model from the qualitative section, a descriptive correlational research method was employed. The statistical population for this phase comprised all social studies teachers at the secondary school level employed in public education in Iraq, totaling 1,200 teachers. From this group, 290 teachers were selected using the table of Krejcie and Morgan (1970) and a convenience sampling method. The instrument used in this phase was a researcher-made questionnaire derived from the qualitative section of the study, consisting of 28 items on a five-point Likert scale.

Findings: The content validity of the instrument was confirmed by several experts, and its face validity was confirmed by a number of respondents. The reliability of the questionnaire was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient, which yielded a value of 0.990. The validation of the proposed model and data analysis using structural equation modeling in Amos and SPSS software showed that the model of family factors influencing the formation of social identity in secondary school students fit well.

Conclusion: In conclusion, family factors play a pivotal role in shaping adolescents' social identity, with emotional support, autonomy, and parenting style significantly influencing their identity development and overall social health.

Keywords: Teachers, Family Factors, Social Identity, Students.

1. Introduction

Identity has had distinct characteristics in three historical periods: pre-modern, modern, and post-modern. In the pre-modern world, each individual inherited the identity of their ancestors, and identity was considered an inherited trait. During this period, a person's thoughts were confined within a certain framework, and their way of life was predetermined (Appachu & Singh, 2024; O'Reilly et al., 2024). Social relationships in pre-modern societies were limited to tribal relationships, and each person played a singular role in society. During this time, the individual had a singular, unified self, or "being," and this identity was largely unalterable. In the modern world, which began with the Enlightenment era, identity faced its first crisis. Society and the laws governing it expanded, human needs increased, and individuals, in order to meet these needs, required more social interactions with others (Borbour & Tajik Esmaili, 2022; Mühlemann et al., 2021; Shayesteh Shojaei & Pourzamani, 2022). The small tribal community no longer determined one's identity. In modern society, each individual adopts multiple roles, such as kinship, citizenship, translator, thinker, artist, and so on (Canto & Vallejo-Martín, 2021; Esmaeilshad et al., 2021; Mackay et al., 2021). It was during this period that scholars concluded that studying an individual's identity without considering their relationships in specific times and places was futile. This period marked a turning point when individuals confronted the question: "Who am I?" or "Who could I be?" They believed they possessed a false identity, but beneath all the roles they assumed, there was a real self, which they confronted in private moments. The post-modern world today is far more complex than the modern world. Individuals now face desires and needs that were previously alien to them, and postmodernism, from the day that post-structuralism fragmented and de-centered human themes, has undergone various transformations in the conventional notion of identity (Appachu & Singh, 2024; Kim et al., 2018; Laffan, 2020; Rani & Samuel, 2019).

In today's world, identity is no longer inherited but rather acquired, resulting from social interaction and living with others. All perspectives are focused on the process through which identity is constructed. Based on these thoughts, today two theories and perspectives on identity exist: one is "traditional identity," which attributes factors like class, race, religion, and gender to the formation of a cohesive and specific identity, and the other is "constructed identity," which focuses on the structure of identity and asserts that

each identity forms through a specific process, and that both psychological and sociological factors must be considered when studying it (Anazonwu et al., 2018; Bahadorikhosroshahi & Bargi, 2018; Borbour & Tajik Esmaili, 2022; Peng et al., 2022; Shayesteh Shojaei & Pourzamani, 2022). Among the various readings of identity, social identity is one type. Social identity is part of self-concept, arising from membership in a group. In this sense, social categories, such as large groups like nations or small groups like clubs, provide members with a sense of who they are. Social identities not only describe appropriate behavior and social class membership but also prescribe these behaviors (Karimi, 2016; Prati et al., 2015). The increasing interest of society and academic disciplines in identity issues today is accompanied by the challenges of the modern world, such as social, economic, political, environmental, and other factors, which impact the structure, content, dynamics, and balance of various forms of identity. According to Martzenoskaya (2016), the current stage of cultural and societal development is characterized by changeability, uncertainty, and fluidity, and therefore, it is essential to determine their impact on the identity of younger generations. Researching the factors influencing identity and conducting studies on social identity in adolescents and young adults is of particular importance because this group is highly influenced by modern social transformations, and their social identity coincides with their age-related identity crisis (Laffan, 2020).

Social identity refers to a state in which individuals seek information that can help resolve their social identity crisis, determine their place in the world, and be perceived as part of society. In such a state, individuals search for the purpose and meaning of their lives and seek self-help through this process (Turner & Reynolds, 2010). The development of social identity represents a cognitive style, the ability to reflect and think, and the use of intellectual capacities to resolve various life situations and problems. Accordingly, the cognitive psychological view of identity regards it as a cognitive system that includes personal subsystems (physical, intellectual, and moral traits) and social subsystems (race, nationality, gender), with those who play a role in regulating behavior focusing on the changeability of identity. In fact, identity is an internal transition and a correlation between individual and social identities (Appachu & Singh, 2024; Cornelissen et al., 2007; Javadi Yeganeh & Azizi, 2008).

The significance of social identity in educational organizations lies in the fact that a lack of awareness of

social identities can lead to misunderstandings, missed opportunities, and a lack of communication because educators may fail to engage students as complete individuals with unique and diverse experiences in educational issues. Conversely, teachers who recognize and embrace the diversity of their students are more likely to adopt appropriate teaching methods, foster higher levels of creativity among their students, and increase their engagement (Appachu & Singh, 2024; O'Reilly et al., 2024; Su, 2023). Therefore, understanding the factors influencing the formation of students' social identities is a crucial element for making correct educational decisions in classrooms, where each student, with their diverse identities, forms the social community of the classroom, influences it, and is influenced by it. Moreover, changes in the contemporary world have transformed symbolic frameworks, with knowledge, skills, beliefs, values, ethics, traditions, and moral and religious rules constantly questioned and doubted by students (Bahadorikhosroshahi & Bargi, 2018; Canto & Vallejo-Martín, 2021; Esmailishad et al., 2021; Faqih et al., 2018; Javadi Yeganeh & Azizi, 2008; Kim et al., 2018; Rabbani et al., 2010). This issue is especially important among social studies teachers due to the close and growing connection of this subject area with identity-related discussions. Given the above, the present study seeks to answer the question: What are the lived experiences of social studies teachers regarding the family factors influencing the formation of social identity among secondary school students in Iraq, and what model can be proposed based on this?

2. Methods and Materials

Given that the researcher in this study aimed to explore the lived experiences of social studies teachers regarding family factors influencing the formation of social identity among secondary school students in Iraq, the research tradition was qualitative, based on a phenomenological approach derived from Husserl's phenomenological tradition. This approach was chosen to delve into the lived experiences of teachers in the domain of family factors affecting the formation of social identity. It is worth mentioning that in the data analysis section of this study, a descriptive phenomenological approach based on Colaizzi's seven-step method was utilized, which aligns with Husserl's phenomenological tradition. The sampling method in the qualitative section of this study was purposive sampling

based on specific criteria. Accordingly, the selected teachers were those who had taught social studies, had long-term teaching experience in the field of social sciences, and held a master's degree or higher. The instrument used in the qualitative section was a semi-structured interview.

In this study, credibility and confirmability were ensured through two methods. The first method involved returning the interview transcripts to the participants to confirm the accuracy of their statements after the interviews had been transcribed. In addition, any points of ambiguity were discussed with the participants, and these ambiguities were resolved. The second method involved verifying the results and the emerging model. After the final coding was done and the phenomenological model emerged, this model was presented to some of the teachers for validation to ensure the authenticity of the research's final findings. In this stage, the process of model development was explained to them, and the model itself was described. Ultimately, the teachers approved the overall model and its corresponding codes. In the quantitative section, the research method was descriptive-correlational, with the instrument used being a researcher-made questionnaire derived from the first phase of the study. The statistical population consisted of all social studies teachers at the secondary school level in Iraq, and the sampling method was convenience sampling.

3. Findings and Results

As shown in the output of the software, the main model of confirmatory factor analysis is presented in Figure 1, which illustrates the relationships between the observed variables (items) and the latent variables (family factors) with the standardized coefficients (factor loadings) for each question.

As seen in Figure 1, all the factor loadings of the dimensions of the questionnaire are above 0.30 and have been confirmed. Factor loadings represent the correlations between variables and factors. If these correlations exceed 0.60 (regardless of whether they are positive or negative), they are considered high factor loadings, and if they exceed 0.30, they are considered relatively high. Factor loadings lower than 0.30 can be disregarded. The primary question that arises is whether this model is a suitable model. To answer this question, the chi-square statistic and other model fit indices must be examined. Table 1 presents the model fit indices for the second-order confirmatory factor analysis of the family factors construct.

Table 1

Fit Indices for the Confirmatory Factor Analysis Model of the Main Construct of Family Factors Affecting Social Identity

Index Name	Standard Index Value	Index Value in the Proposed Model	Conclusion
χ^2/df	Less than 5	1.052	Model fit is acceptable
IFI	Equal to or greater than 0.90	0.974	Model fit is acceptable
NFI	Equal to or greater than 0.90	0.963	Model fit is acceptable
TLI	Equal to or greater than 0.90	0.920	Model fit is acceptable
CFI	Equal to or greater than 0.90	0.944	Model fit is acceptable
RMSEA	Less than 0.10	0.052	Model fit is acceptable

In Amos 23 software, five indices (NFI, RFI, IFI, GFI, CFI) are reported based on the comparison of the chi-square statistic of the model with the chi-square statistic of the baseline model. All of these indices range from zero to one, and the closer they are to one, the more acceptable the model is considered.

One general index for considering free parameters in the model fit calculation is the normalized or relative chi-square,

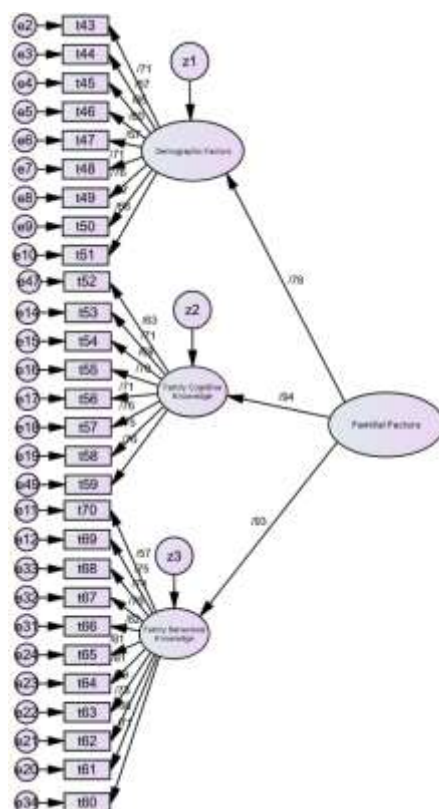
which is calculated by dividing the chi-square value by the degrees of freedom of the model. Values between 2 and 3 are typically considered acceptable for this index, though perspectives may vary. Schumacher and Lomax (2010) consider values between 1 and 5, Karmainzer and McIver (1981) consider values between 2 and 3, Ullman (2001) considers values between 1 and 2, and Kline (2005) considers values between 1 and 3 as acceptable.

Table 2

Subcategories and Concepts Related to the Main Category of Family Factors

Primary Concepts	Questions	Conceptual Expression
Demographic Factors	Question 1	Parental Education
	Question 2	Family Economic Status
	Question 3	Number of Children
	Question 4	Family Social Status
	Question 5	Type of Media Used in the Family
	Question 6	Type of Family Consumables
	Question 7	Parents' Occupation
	Question 8	Family Structure
	Question 9	Access to Welfare Facilities
Family Cognitive Knowledge	Question 10	Knowledge of Sexual Education in Adolescence
	Question 11	Teaching Responsibility to Adolescents
	Question 12	Teaching Self-Assertion
	Question 13	Knowledge of Adolescent Development
	Question 14	Knowledge of Proper Communication with Peers
	Question 15	Teaching Tolerance
	Question 16	Family Management Style
	Question 17	Teaching Internalization of Values
Family Behavioral Knowledge	Question 18	No Discrimination Between Children
	Question 19	Turning External Control to Internal Control
	Question 20	Expressing Love and Affection Instead of Strictness
	Question 21	Seeking Advice from Adolescents
	Question 22	Teaching Self-Expression
	Question 23	Parental Expectations
	Question 24	Granting Freedom to Children
	Question 25	Granting Emotional Independence
	Question 26	Quality of Parent-Adolescent Relationship
	Question 27	Family Member Interaction
	Question 28	Presence of Healthy Family Relationships

Second-Order Confirmatory Factor Analysis Model of the Main Family Factors



statistical power of the analysis is 1.00, indicating a very high likelihood of detecting a true effect. Other results further show that, after removing the effect of the pre-test, the post-test mean scores for academic adjustment in the three groups changed. Specifically, the stress management group increased from 115.10 to 115.15, the communication skills training group increased from 113.35 to 114.41, and the control group decreased from 98.25 to 97.13. Overall, the mean academic adjustment scores in the experimental groups were higher than those in the control group ($p \leq 0.000$).

Relationships Between Concepts and Subcategories in the Main Category of Family Factors

Primary Concepts	Factor Loading	Significance Level	Questions	Factor Loading	Significance Level	Conclusion
Demographic Factors	0.78	0.001	Question 1	0.71	0.001	Suitable
			Question 2	0.67	0.001	Suitable
			Question 3	0.65	0.001	Suitable
			Question 4	0.60	0.001	Suitable
			Question 5	0.57	0.001	Suitable
			Question 6	0.71	0.001	Suitable
			Question 7	0.76	0.001	Suitable
			Question 8	0.77	0.001	Suitable
			Question 9	0.66	0.001	Suitable

Family Cognitive Knowledge	0.94	0.001	Question 10	0.63	0.001	Suitable
			Question 11	0.71	0.001	Suitable
			Question 12	0.69	0.001	Suitable
			Question 13	0.70	0.001	Suitable
			Question 14	0.71	0.001	Suitable
			Question 15	0.76	0.001	Suitable
			Question 16	0.75	0.001	Suitable
			Question 17	0.76	0.001	Suitable
Family Behavioral Knowledge	0.93	0.001	Question 18	0.71	0.001	Suitable
			Question 19	0.68	0.001	Suitable
			Question 20	0.73	0.001	Suitable
			Question 21	0.59	0.001	Suitable
			Question 22	0.81	0.001	Suitable
			Question 23	0.81	0.001	Suitable
			Question 24	0.82	0.001	Suitable
			Question 25	0.76	0.001	Suitable
			Question 26	0.74	0.001	Suitable
			Question 27	0.75	0.001	Suitable
			Question 28	0.57	0.001	Suitable

4. Discussion and Conclusion

One of the significant factors in shaping the social identity of students is family factors, which encompass demographic factors, family cognitive knowledge, and family behavioral knowledge. In explaining this finding and under the family factors as one of the influential elements in shaping social identity, it can be said that a substantial portion of identity is formed during childhood and adolescence within the family. For individuals to acquire an independent identity during adolescence, they must have undergone a proper childhood alongside their family, so that entering adolescence is less likely to be accompanied by harm. A teenager will feel a sense of competence, self-esteem, confidence, and worthiness only if they have received such feelings from their family during childhood. If this does not occur, entering adolescence will be fraught with difficulties. The manner in which parents interact with their children plays a critical role in the formation of the identity system and, despite some changes, generally follows a fixed pattern. If parents provide emotional support and the freedom to explore and inquire for their children, the adolescent will have a healthier self-concept, and the family will serve as a safe haven for them. However, in families where emotional relationships are not healthy and cohesion and stability are lacking, children are more likely to experience an identity crisis and struggle with constructing an existential theory about themselves. In fact, the absence of a proper emotional environment within the family contributes to instability and the emergence and spread of deviant behaviors.

Supporting this notion, Steer argues that emotional states among family members, if unrecognized and suppressed, can destroy the roots of family welfare and erode self-esteem, problem-solving abilities, and ultimately, the adolescents' capacity to acquire an identity. On the other hand, social health refers to an individual's ability to interact effectively with others and society to form fulfilling personal relationships and fulfill social roles. Social health is measured by five indices, which may vary among individuals depending on various factors. These indices include: cohesion, acceptance, participation, adaptability, and social flourishing. Thus, an adolescent, alongside their parents, learns the relationships they should have with society and others (social identity). Social support is also assessed in two dimensions: functional and structural. The functional dimension itself has three indices: emotional support, material support, and informational or instrumental support. The structural dimension is evaluated through indices such as membership in communities, personal social networks, and strong ties.

The primary factor influencing the socialization and social health of adolescents is the family. Therefore, the family is the main conduit for transferring knowledge, values, roles, and habits from one generation to the next. The family shapes the adolescent's personality through their behaviors and social patterns, instilling thought processes and practical methods that later become habitual. Adolescents, in addition to physical growth, require social and psychological development. If a favorable environment is provided (educational tools, appropriate play materials, green spaces, and collective educational activities with peers), social and psychological growth occurs effectively.

A person raised in an environment with cultural and social poverty may even experience intellectual retardation, and the time and space for their talents to develop may not be available. In such a case, social identity also faces stagnation. Moreover, if the family serves as a secure base from which adolescents can confidently venture into the broader world, identity development is strengthened.

Adolescents who feel attached to their parents but are simultaneously free to express their opinions, whose parents treat them with kindness and reason, and who do not impose their views, usually develop close relationships with their parents and acquire a harmonious identity. Conversely, parents who constantly fight and whose household is filled with tension and stress struggle to maintain effective communication with their adolescents, who gradually face difficulties in achieving familial-social and even individual identity, leading to feelings of inadequacy and diminished self-confidence. In families where emotional support and affection are lacking, verbal communication between parents and even between parents and children is often absent, causing distress for children and adolescents. In families with insecure environments and high levels of parental conflict, children encounter identity crises. Studies examining the relationship between identity development and parenting styles have shown that democratic parents, who encourage their adolescents to participate in family decision-making, foster a successful identity. Authoritarian parents, who control adolescent behavior without allowing them to express themselves, cultivate a prescriptive identity. Finally, permissive parents, who offer few guidelines and leave decision-making entirely to their adolescents, create a confused identity in them. Therefore, controlling parents, whether excessively supportive or overly strict, intentionally or unintentionally harm their adolescents and complicate their path to identity development.

Parents must bear in mind that their children have individual differences and distinct personality traits. Additionally, the personal traits of girls and boys differ. Therefore, parents should avoid applying a uniform method when interacting with different personalities. Parenting style can play a pivotal role in shaping the personality and identity formation of adolescents. One of the goals of adolescents is to be accepted as independent adults. This acceptance is achieved through a process known as separation-individuation, wherein the parent-adolescent bond is maintained while simultaneously changing. In other words, an adolescent becomes independent from their parents while still remaining connected to them. Adolescents seek to

establish different relationships with their parents while continuing affection and trust. One common complaint from adolescents is that parents treat them like children. Most adolescents pressure their parents for adult freedoms and privileges. They want to make decisions for themselves and manage their lives without constant parental direction. However, parents wish to grant autonomy gradually, while teaching adolescents to use it responsibly. Providing reasonable freedom and privileges in various matters is essential for the adolescent's personal growth and identity formation. Parents must distinguish between loving their children for what they do (unconditional parenting) and loving them for who they are. Conditional parenting means that children must behave in ways deemed acceptable by their parents to receive love and affection. Unconditional parenting means that the parents' love is not contingent upon how the children behave or whether they are successful.

Adolescents need to be loved for who they are, even if their behavior is not always accepted. When this need is met, adolescents can accept themselves as worthy individuals, even when they do things imperfectly. Once this basic need is fulfilled, they are ready to accept (and assist) others. Otherwise, they constantly seek external validation, which can lead to depression, low self-esteem, and identity crises. In addition to the aforementioned discussions, the changes in family roles, rules, levels of control, and discipline must be cohesive and stable. However, achieving cohesion does not mean encasing the family in a plethora of rights, duties, and responsibilities. The challenges the family faces cannot always be guided by a general rule, and in some cases, flexibility and adaptability are required. Flexibility means that if family members fail to fulfill their duties and obligations, they can manage the situation with some flexibility and still reach a result similar to what would have been achieved under ideal conditions. Adolescents raised in rigid, fanatical, and inflexible families, where family commitments are defensively applied, and any disagreement is perceived as a threat, face difficulties in identity formation. The members of these families often fear rejection from those to whom they are emotionally attached, which leads to dependent and submissive adolescents. Therefore, family factors are crucial in shaping social identity.

Authors' Contributions

All authors significantly contributed to this study.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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Ethical Considerations

In this study, to observe ethical considerations, participants were informed about the goals and importance of the research before the start of the interview and participated in the research with informed consent.

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