

Identification and Explanation of Psychological Factors Affecting the Empowerment of Adolescents With Identity Confusion: A Narrative Review

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: The aim of this study was to examine and categorize the psychological factors associated with the psychological empowerment of adolescents with identity confusion based on the existing research evidence.

Methods and Materials: This study was conducted using a narrative review approach. The literature search covered the period from 2016 to May 21, 2026. Domestic and international databases, including Magiran, SID, PubMed, ScienceDirect, Google Scholar, Libgen.li, and Noormags, were searched using keywords related to “psychological empowerment,” “adolescence,” “identity confusion,” and “psychological factors.” Articles that were conceptually and empirically relevant to the study topic were selected and analyzed using a descriptive-analytical approach. The narrative review approach was selected because of the conceptual nature of the topic and the diversity of theoretical approaches adopted in previous studies, which precluded systematic quantitative synthesis and integration.

Findings: The synthesis of the reviewed studies indicated that the psychological empowerment of adolescents with identity confusion is influenced by a set of psychological factors, including self-efficacy, self-esteem, emotion regulation, perceived social support, coping styles, and identity coherence. These factors may contribute to strengthening perceived competence, self-understanding, adjustment, internal control, and effective coping with developmental challenges. Adolescents with stronger psychological resources demonstrate more adaptive functioning in managing developmental crises, decision-making, and social interactions.

Conclusion: Psychological empowerment among adolescents with identity confusion is a multidimensional phenomenon influenced by diverse psychological contexts. Attention to these factors can contribute to the development of supportive, counseling, and preventive programs within educational and family settings. Strengthening adolescents’ internal capacities and personal resources may reduce the adverse consequences of identity confusion and promote their mental health.

Keywords: *psychological empowerment, identity confusion, psychological factors, adolescent.*

1. Introduction

Adolescence is a critical developmental period characterized by profound biological, cognitive, emotional, and social changes that require individuals to reorganize their understanding of themselves and their relationship with the surrounding world. During this period, young people increasingly confront questions concerning personal values, future goals, social belonging, interpersonal roles, educational aspirations, and the kind of person they intend to become. Identity development therefore represents one of the central developmental tasks of adolescence, because the construction of a relatively coherent and meaningful sense of self provides an organizing framework for decision-making, social participation, emotional regulation, and future-oriented behavior. Contemporary developmental research increasingly conceptualizes adolescent identity not as a fixed personal characteristic but as a dynamic process involving exploration, commitment, reconsideration, and continuing integration of multiple dimensions of the self. Research on young adolescents has further demonstrated that identity experiences encompass internal dimensions such as beliefs, psychological characteristics, personal meanings, social positioning, and subjective interpretations of developmental experiences, underscoring the multidimensional nature of identity formation (Martin et al., 2025). Cross-cultural and longitudinal evidence similarly indicates that the quality of identity processes is closely associated with psychosocial adjustment and well-being during adolescence (De Lise et al., 2024). Consequently, disturbances in identity development can have implications extending well beyond uncertainty about self-definition and may influence adolescents' psychological functioning across multiple domains.

Identity confusion, sometimes discussed in the literature in relation to identity diffusion, refers to difficulty establishing coherent commitments, stable self-definitions, and an integrated sense of continuity across roles and life domains. Adolescents experiencing identity confusion may struggle to determine what they value, where they belong, which goals they wish to pursue, and how different dimensions of their personal and social identities can be reconciled. Empirical assessment of identity development has therefore received considerable attention, including validation of multidimensional measures examining identity exploration and commitment processes among adolescents and young adults (Salehi Yegaei et al., 2023). Identity

formation also varies across sociocultural contexts, and longitudinal studies have identified distinct patterns of cultural identity development that are associated with differences in psychosocial outcomes (Ceccon et al., 2024). In increasingly complex social environments, adolescents may also construct and express pragmatic and context-dependent identities through digital communication, peer interaction, and online discourse, suggesting that identity is continually negotiated across both offline and digital contexts (Wu, 2025). Such complexity can become particularly problematic when adolescents lack the psychological resources necessary to integrate competing expectations and experiences, making identity confusion not merely a developmental uncertainty but a potential vulnerability associated with diminished adaptive functioning.

The consequences associated with identity disturbance can be observed across behavioral, emotional, and social domains. Research has shown that adolescents' identity styles are associated with engagement in high-risk behaviors, including tendencies toward smoking, alcohol consumption, and substance use (Imani Khoshkhoo et al., 2025). Identity crisis has also been examined in relation to broader psychological and social variables, with evidence suggesting that cultural and intergenerational conditions may contribute to the emergence or intensification of identity-related difficulties (Amini et al., 2026). Moreover, longitudinal findings indicate reciprocal associations between identity confusion and nonsuicidal self-injury, with alienation functioning as an important mechanism linking the two processes (Gu et al., 2025). Such evidence is particularly important because it suggests that identity confusion may participate in self-reinforcing developmental cycles: uncertainty regarding the self can increase alienation and emotional vulnerability, whereas maladaptive responses may further destabilize adolescents' emerging identity. From another perspective, depression represents a major psychological concern during adolescence, and evidence from Iranian school populations has documented a substantial burden of depressive symptoms, emphasizing the broader vulnerability of adolescents during this developmental period (Karimi et al., 2021). These findings collectively highlight the need to move beyond identifying the risks associated with identity confusion and toward understanding the psychological capacities that can help adolescents cope with, regulate, and ultimately transcend identity-related difficulties.

Within this context, psychological empowerment provides a useful conceptual framework for understanding adolescents' capacity to develop agency, competence, self-direction, and perceived control in the face of developmental challenges. Psychological empowerment generally refers to internal psychological processes through which individuals experience greater autonomy, efficacy, meaningfulness, competence, and ability to influence circumstances relevant to their lives (Zani, 2024). In adolescence, empowerment is particularly significant because young people are simultaneously developing independence while remaining embedded in family, school, peer, and cultural systems. Empowerment-oriented approaches therefore do not simply attempt to reduce psychological symptoms but seek to strengthen adolescents' personal and interpersonal resources so that they can participate actively in developmental decision-making and construct meaningful responses to adversity. Evidence from interventions with adolescent girls demonstrates that empowerment-based self-management approaches can improve important psychological outcomes such as sense of coherence and self-efficacy, even among adolescents experiencing problematic Internet use (Bashirinia et al., 2026). Likewise, empowerment interventions addressing broader adolescent vulnerabilities suggest that integrated approaches that strengthen personal resources and social opportunities may support healthier developmental trajectories among young people (Mmusi-Phetoe et al., 2025). Psychological empowerment can thus be understood as a multidimensional developmental outcome through which adolescents become better able to organize internal resources, exercise agency, and respond adaptively to identity-related uncertainty.

One of the most consistently identified resources relevant to adolescent empowerment is resilience. Resilience refers to the capacity to maintain, recover, or regain adaptive functioning when confronted with adversity, stress, developmental disruption, or challenging environmental conditions. Contemporary research emphasizes that resilience is not a static personality trait but a dynamic process resulting from interactions among individual capabilities, interpersonal relationships, and broader contextual resources (Mesman et al., 2021). Systematic evidence further demonstrates that resilience is shaped by factors operating at individual, social, and societal levels, suggesting that adaptive functioning depends on an interconnected system rather than on isolated personal strength (Schäfer et al., 2024). Among adolescents specifically, validated measures of school resilience have

emphasized the importance of identifying contextually relevant capacities that support successful adaptation within educational environments (Afzali & Hosseini, 2024). Similarly, research evaluating resilience measures in Iranian adolescents has supported the psychometric assessment of this construct as an important dimension of adolescent psychological functioning (Ahadian Fard et al., 2023). These findings support the view that resilience may constitute one of the principal psychological resources through which adolescents experiencing identity confusion maintain functioning and develop a stronger sense of competence.

The relationship between resilience and identity development appears to be reciprocal and developmentally significant. Research among students has shown that identity styles are related to resilience and that motivational structures may mediate this association, suggesting that identity organization can influence adaptive functioning through motivational processes (Abdikhan et al., 2023). Among adolescents who have experienced severe physical trauma, identity crisis has likewise been associated with suicide resilience and quality of life, demonstrating that identity-related instability and resilience processes may intersect under highly stressful conditions (Mohammadi et al., 2023). More recent longitudinal research in under-resourced communities has directly examined trajectories of identity formation and resilience development, indicating that the two processes unfold together across adolescence rather than functioning independently (Shirima et al., 2026). Resilience may therefore enable adolescents to tolerate the uncertainty inherent in identity exploration without becoming overwhelmed by confusion, while increasingly coherent identity structures may in turn provide meaning, direction, and motivational continuity that support resilience. This reciprocal perspective is especially relevant to psychological empowerment because empowered functioning requires both the capacity to withstand developmental stress and the ability to organize behavior around meaningful commitments.

Emotion regulation and cognitive flexibility constitute additional mechanisms through which adolescents may respond adaptively to identity-related challenges. Emotion regulation refers to processes used to monitor, modify, and manage emotional experiences and their expression, whereas cognitive flexibility involves the capacity to shift perspectives, revise interpretations, and adapt thinking in response to changing demands. Both capacities are particularly important during adolescence, when increasing emotional intensity and expanding social demands coincide

with ongoing identity exploration. Contemporary work on family transitions highlights emotion regulation, cognitive flexibility, identity development, and social support as interconnected resilience factors that shape adaptive responses to changing family structures and developmental circumstances (Xu, 2026). Psychological flexibility extends this perspective by emphasizing an individual's capacity to remain open to internal experiences while acting in accordance with personally meaningful values rather than being governed by transient thoughts or emotions. A framework of identity flexibility similarly proposes that psychological freedom may depend on the capacity to navigate multiple identity domains without rigidly overidentifying with a single self-definition (Sriharan, 2026). Such flexibility may be especially protective for adolescents with identity confusion because it allows uncertainty to be experienced without necessarily translating into helplessness or behavioral disengagement.

Related intervention research provides further evidence for the role of psychological flexibility in strengthening adaptive functioning among transitional-age youth. Mechanistic research on Acceptance and Commitment Therapy has identified psychological flexibility, adaptive emotion regulation, self-compassion, and autonomy as potentially important processes through which therapeutic change occurs (Keulen et al., 2025). These mechanisms are directly relevant to empowerment because they involve the development of greater self-directed action, tolerance of difficult internal states, and reduced domination by maladaptive cognitive and emotional patterns. Self-compassion may also contribute to resilience by enabling individuals to respond to personal shortcomings and distress with less self-criticism and greater psychological balance; this association has attracted increasing systematic attention in the literature (Li et al., 2024). Cognitive interventions can similarly alter maladaptive patterns of self-evaluation. Evidence concerning cognitive restructuring among adolescents suggests that transforming negative thoughts can contribute to greater self-confidence (Muthmainnah Takdir et al., 2025). Together, these findings indicate that psychological empowerment may emerge partly through regulatory processes that enable adolescents to manage distress, reinterpret adverse experiences, remain flexible in self-evaluation, and sustain behavior consistent with personally meaningful goals.

Self-acceptance and self-esteem constitute another important cluster of psychological resources relevant to identity development and empowerment. Self-acceptance

entails acknowledging one's personal characteristics, limitations, emotional experiences, and physical attributes without excessive self-rejection. Research examining self-acceptance among adolescent girls has shown that body image and perfectionism are meaningfully related to self-acceptance, with mental toughness functioning as an important mediating resource (Ahvan et al., 2025). Studies of self-acceptance in young adults have likewise examined its relationship with personality characteristics, illustrating that acceptance of the self is embedded within broader patterns of psychological functioning (Dhote & Sinha, 2024). During adolescence, such processes may be particularly consequential because identity development requires young people to integrate both valued and less-valued aspects of themselves into a coherent self-concept. When self-acceptance is weak, normal uncertainty about appearance, social standing, competence, or future roles may be interpreted as evidence of personal inadequacy. By contrast, a stronger accepting stance toward the self may provide a stable foundation from which adolescents can explore possible identities without experiencing each uncertainty as a threat to psychological integrity.

Self-esteem also appears to serve as an important resilience resource within identity formation. Recent evidence concerning the relationship between social anxiety and identity formation indicates that social participation and self-esteem may function as resilience resources that support healthier identity development among adolescents (Levy Kardash et al., 2026). This is theoretically important because adolescents with identity confusion frequently evaluate themselves through interpersonal feedback and social comparison. When self-worth depends excessively on approval or successful social performance, social anxiety may restrict exploration and reinforce uncertainty. In contrast, stronger self-esteem can support participation in social situations, experimentation with roles, and recovery from negative interpersonal experiences. Broader motivational and culturally embedded approaches to identity crisis have similarly emphasized the importance of motivational resources in helping adolescents move toward greater coherence and direction (Ghorbani & Golmohammadi, 2025). Thus, strengthening self-acceptance, self-esteem, and motivational orientation may increase adolescents' capacity to remain engaged with identity development rather than withdrawing from the discomfort associated with uncertainty.

The social environment is equally central to adolescents' identity and empowerment. Identity develops through

interactions with parents, peers, schools, cultural groups, and other meaningful social contexts; therefore, psychological empowerment cannot be understood solely as an intrapersonal phenomenon. Parent–adolescent relationships are particularly influential because parenting practices can either facilitate autonomy and emotional security or intensify conflict, psychological distance, and developmental distress. Intervention research indicates that teaching interactive parenting styles can reduce detrimental factors within parent–adolescent relationships, demonstrating the modifiability of family processes relevant to adolescent adjustment (Mallahi et al., 2024). Social support more broadly provides adolescents with emotional reassurance, practical assistance, validation, and opportunities to interpret stressful experiences through supportive relationships. In identity-related contexts, secure relational environments may permit adolescents to explore values and roles while retaining a stable sense of belonging. This contextual understanding aligns with developmental resilience models in which individual coping resources and environmental supports operate interactively rather than independently.

Schools also provide a major developmental context in which identity processes can be supported or disrupted. School-based identity interventions have increasingly been used to facilitate adolescents' understanding of ethnic, racial, cultural, personal, and social identities. Evaluation of a school-based ethnic-racial identity intervention in Sweden demonstrates that identity-focused programs can be meaningfully implemented within educational settings and studied in relation to adolescent developmental outcomes (Abdullahi et al., 2024). Evidence from the Identity Project in different cultural settings further suggests that participation in structured identity exploration may be associated with distinct longitudinal patterns of identity processing and psychosocial functioning (Ceccon et al., 2024). A broader meta-analysis of psychosocial interventions designed to promote adolescents' personal and social identities indicates that identity processes are amenable to intentional intervention rather than being purely spontaneous developmental events (Crocetti et al., 2025). At the same time, intervention effects may differ according to individual characteristics. Research examining personality traits as predictors of identity-intervention outcomes has highlighted heterogeneity in who benefits most from such programs (Sandberg et al., 2025). These findings suggest that empowerment-oriented programs for adolescents with identity confusion should be sensitive to individual

differences rather than assuming uniform pathways of developmental change.

The academic environment represents another domain in which psychological vulnerability and empowerment interact. Adolescents' perceptions of competence, belonging, control, and future possibilities are strongly shaped by educational experiences. Academic anxiety, perfectionism, and perceptions of the classroom environment have been identified as predictors of academic resilience among gifted students, underscoring how emotional and contextual variables jointly influence adaptive educational functioning (Tavakoli et al., 2024). A coherent identity may facilitate academic engagement by connecting educational behavior to personally meaningful future goals, whereas unresolved identity confusion can weaken motivation and increase uncertainty concerning academic choices. Conversely, supportive educational experiences may provide opportunities for competence, recognition, social connection, and exploration that strengthen psychological empowerment. Sense of coherence is also relevant in this regard because the ability to perceive life circumstances as comprehensible, manageable, and meaningful has been associated longitudinally with adolescent health (Matić & Vuletić, 2025). From an empowerment perspective, strengthening adolescents' capacity to interpret their experiences as manageable and meaningful may support both identity consolidation and broader psychological functioning.

Taken together, the literature indicates that psychological empowerment in adolescents with identity confusion is best understood as the outcome of interacting developmental, cognitive, emotional, interpersonal, and contextual processes rather than as the product of a single protective characteristic. Identity organization provides a framework through which experiences and goals are integrated; resilience supports adaptation to uncertainty and adversity; emotion regulation and psychological flexibility help adolescents tolerate difficult internal experiences; self-acceptance and self-esteem provide a more stable basis for self-evaluation; and supportive family, peer, school, and cultural environments offer external resources for exploration and recovery. This multidimensional interpretation is consistent with contemporary developmental perspectives emphasizing both internal and contextual dimensions of adolescent identity (Martin et al., 2025). It also suggests that adolescents experiencing identity confusion should not be viewed solely through a deficit framework. Rather, identifying modifiable psychological

resources may provide a more constructive basis for prevention, counseling, educational guidance, and developmental intervention.

Despite growing empirical attention to identity development, resilience, psychological flexibility, social support, and adolescent empowerment, the available evidence remains distributed across different theoretical traditions and research designs. Narrative review methodology is particularly appropriate when a research problem is conceptually broad and requires the integration of heterogeneous empirical and theoretical evidence rather than statistical aggregation alone. Narrative reviews can provide a flexible yet rigorous means of identifying patterns, conceptual relationships, and underdeveloped areas across diverse bodies of literature (Sukhera, 2022a). At the same time, conducting such reviews requires transparent identification of the research question, purposeful searching and selection of evidence, critical interpretation, and coherent synthesis to ensure that flexibility does not compromise methodological rigor (Sukhera, 2022b). Applying such an approach to the present topic can clarify how diverse psychological variables converge to support or undermine empowerment among adolescents experiencing identity confusion and may provide an integrative conceptual basis for future empirical models and intervention programs.

Therefore, the aim of the present study was to identify, categorize, and explain the psychological factors associated with the psychological empowerment of adolescents with identity confusion through a narrative review of the available theoretical and empirical evidence.

2. Methods and Materials

The present study employed a narrative review methodology. Given that the purpose of the study was to provide a conceptual, coherent, and integrated understanding of the process of psychological empowerment among adolescents with identity confusion and to explain the role of psychological factors in this context, the subject is inherently multifaceted and requires the synthesis and categorization of findings derived from diverse theoretical and empirical studies. Accordingly, the narrative review method was selected as an appropriate and efficient approach for the present research. Narrative review methodology is particularly useful for in-depth exploration of sensitive developmental topics and for generating new insights and perspectives regarding a specific subject

(Siukhra, 2022). Moreover, as a flexible and practical approach, narrative review provides an overview of a topic together with relevant scientific interpretations and consequently establishes a foundation for subsequent research as well as practical interventions by school counselors and psychologists working with adolescents. According to methodological standards, a narrative review involves systematic stages comprising the identification of a specific research question, a targeted literature search, rigorous screening, purpose-oriented sampling, and, ultimately, the simultaneous analysis and interpretation of the collected data (Siukhra, 2022).

All of these stages were implemented sequentially in the present study. The central research question was: Based on the available research evidence and literature, what role do psychological factors play in the psychological empowerment of adolescents with identity confusion? The literature search covered the period from 2016 to May 21, 2026, and specialized books and valid scientific articles were used to review the literature, collect information, and analyze the findings. The literature search employed individual and combined keywords, including “psychological empowerment,” “adolescent,” “identity confusion,” “psychological factors,” “Psychological Empowerment,” “Adolescent,” “Identity Diffusion,” and “Psychological Factors.” No initial time restriction was imposed, although the final search included literature published up to 2026. Searches were conducted in Iranian indexing databases and search engines, including Magiran, SID, and Noormags, as well as international databases and platforms such as PubMed, ScienceDirect, Google Scholar, and Libgen.

During the initial search phase, 90 potentially relevant sources were identified. After reviewing the abstracts and rigorously applying the inclusion and exclusion criteria, 34 core sources that were fully consistent with the objectives of the study were ultimately screened and included in the final analysis. The inclusion criteria consisted of direct thematic relevance to the study title and research questions, publication in scientific sources and reputable journals—including original research articles, review articles, and specialized scholarly books—and publication in either Persian or English. In contrast, the principal exclusion criteria were the researchers’ inability to access the full text of an article or inadequate scientific quality of the report.

All selected sources were independently reviewed, examined, and subjected to content extraction by the researchers, and the resulting findings were extensively

discussed during joint meetings of the research team before preparation of the final manuscript commenced. Furthermore, to enhance the credibility and validity of the theoretical findings, the initial draft of the manuscript was carefully reviewed by three specialists and university faculty members with expertise in developmental psychology and adolescent counseling, all of whom held doctoral degrees. Their corrective, supplementary, and advisory comments were incorporated into the final research report. Ethical considerations were also observed through strict adherence to the principles of honesty, integrity in reviewing the literature, and accurate attribution to original sources. Accordingly, every effort was made to avoid distortion, bias, or misinterpretation of findings from previous studies, and all sources used in the study were documented in accordance with scientific referencing standards.

3. Findings and Results

The analysis and synthesis of documented empirical evidence within the developmental psychology literature indicate that psychological empowerment among adolescents experiencing identity confusion is neither a unidimensional nor a linear phenomenon. Rather, it is structurally and multidirectionally associated with a system of intrapsychic variables and dimensions of the individual's self-concept. Based on findings derived from correlational studies, structural equation modeling investigations, and longitudinal research (e.g., Abdi-Khan et al., 2019; De Lise et al., 2024; Karami et al., 2021), the organization of identity structure and movement away from a state of identity aimlessness function as major predictors and foundational conditions for the development of psychological agency indicators, including perceived competence, general self-efficacy, and psychological well-being. In other words, adolescents who have moved beyond superficial and directionless exploration and attained a degree of identity commitment demonstrate more coherent dimensions of psychological competence when confronting developmental challenges. Conversely, persistent identity confusion and uncertainty regarding life goals are directly associated with diminished internal control and lower levels of psychological empowerment, placing adolescents at increased risk for adverse outcomes such as problematic Internet use and impaired academic performance (Imani Khoshkhoo et al., 2024; Bashiri-Nia et al., 2026).

In the same vein, another body of empirical findings from the reviewed literature indicates that psychological

resilience, as one of the principal psychological variables, functions as a fundamental mediating and protective resource within models of empowerment among adolescents with identity confusion. Statistical evidence and multiple structural models (e.g., Mohammadi et al., 2023; Shirima et al., 2026) confirm a strong inverse association between identity crisis or identity confusion and resilience. Identity disturbance depletes adolescents' psychological capacities for adaptation to challenging circumstances, whereas adolescents with low levels of resilience may become trapped in cycles of repetitive and inconclusive identity-related rumination, thereby hindering the development of identity commitments. Furthermore, research findings (e.g., Afzali & Hosseinian, 2024; Tavakoli et al., 2024) indicate that these resilience-related dynamics are closely linked to the academic context, such that latent academic anxiety and maladaptive perfectionism may play a substantial role in weakening resilience and, consequently, reducing adolescents' psychological empowerment.

The analysis of research findings also highlights the fundamental importance of self-acceptance as a cognitive and affective anchor in explaining adolescent empowerment. Empirical findings derived from structural and longitudinal studies (e.g., Ahadian-Fard et al., 2023; Ahvan et al., 2025; Mohammadzadeh et al., 2022) demonstrate that unconditional self-acceptance constitutes one of the central and inseparable foundations of psychological empowerment in adolescents. In contrast, adolescents experiencing negative body image evaluations, maladaptive perfectionism, and social anxiety show substantial reductions in self-acceptance indicators (Levi-Kardash et al., 2026; Rad et al., 2023). Deficiencies in this psychological factor may lead individuals toward a sense of self-alienation and, according to longitudinal cross-lagged panel models (e.g., Guo et al., 2025; Ahmadi et al., 2024), contribute to a reciprocal association among identity confusion, self-alienation, and self-harming behaviors. Therefore, enhancement of self-acceptance as a facilitating variable may support the transition from identity disturbance toward greater personal agency and internal control.

In addition to the aforementioned variables, a review of the empirical literature indicates that emotion regulation and psychological flexibility constitute other key variables that substantially contribute to explaining the mechanisms underlying empowerment among adolescents with identity confusion. Findings derived from predictive models (e.g., Zhou et al., 2026; Cullen et al., 2025) indicate that deficiencies in identity structure reduce adolescents'

capacity to employ adaptive emotion-regulation strategies and increase their reliance on maladaptive strategies such as rumination and emotional suppression. This maladaptive emotional cycle directly contributes to diminished self-efficacy and the development of learned helplessness. Conversely, studies examining the association between psychological flexibility and empowerment (e.g., Sriharan, 2026; Hsieh et al., 2019) confirm that openness to emotional experiences and the ability to distinguish personal values from transient impulses function as psychological buffers that mitigate the ambiguity arising from identity confusion.

Furthermore, a review of findings from context-oriented and social-psychological studies (e.g., Rouban-Zadeh et al., 2019; Abdollahi et al., 2024) demonstrates that dimensions of adolescents' psychological empowerment are profoundly influenced by environmental mediating variables such as perceived social support and the quality of parent-adolescent interactions. Empirical evidence in this area (e.g., Sandberg et al., 2025; Mallahi et al., 2024) indicates that the family emotional climate and secure attachment patterns function as facilitating variables that buffer the detrimental effects of identity confusion on adolescents' self-concept. According to these findings, adolescents with high levels of perceived social support maintain higher levels of psychological competence and resilience even when experiencing identity crises because these external resources

provide the necessary context for reconstructing a positive self-concept and strengthening the sense of internal control.

Finally, the synthesis and integration of findings from the reviewed literature and empirical evidence (e.g., Checken et al., 2024; Salehi et al., 2024; Martin et al., 2025) indicate that psychological empowerment among adolescents with identity confusion is not attributable to a single factor; rather, it results from the synergistic and dynamic interaction among structural identity variables, intrapsychic adaptive resources such as resilience and self-acceptance, and regulatory mechanisms such as psychological flexibility and emotion regulation within a social-relational context. The empirical evidence reviewed in response to the central research question clearly demonstrates that these psychological factors perform moderating and mediating functions in attenuating the detrimental consequences of identity diffusion. Through reconstructing a sense of agency and internal control, they provide a theoretical basis for adolescents' transition from passivity toward an optimal level of psychological competence. These findings underscore the importance of incorporating these variables into comprehensive models of educational and academic guidance in schools.

To enhance methodological transparency and systematically present the data extracted from the selected studies, the findings are organized in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1

Summary of Data Extracted From Studies Related to the Psychological Empowerment of Adolescents With Identity Confusion

No.	Study	Main Variables Examined	Type of Relationship/Role of Variable	Key Findings
1	Abdi-Khan et al. (2019)	Identity organization, perceived competence, self-efficacy	Predictor	Identity coherence and commitment predict increased self-efficacy and perceived competence among adolescents.
2	De Lise et al. (2024)	Identity structure, psychological well-being	Positive structural relationship	Identity organization is positively associated with psychological well-being.
3	Karami et al. (2021)	Movement beyond identity aimlessness, psychological agency	Positive developmental relationship	Moving beyond identity confusion and achieving identity commitment increases agency and psychological empowerment.
4	Imani Khoshkhoo et al. (2024)	Identity confusion, Internet addiction	Negative consequential relationship	Identity confusion is associated with an increased tendency toward Internet addiction among adolescents.
5	Bashiri-Nia et al. (2026)	Identity confusion, academic performance	Negative relationship	Identity ambiguity is associated with reduced academic performance.
6	Mohammadi et al. (2023)	Identity crisis, resilience	Inverse relationship	A significant negative relationship was observed between identity confusion and psychological resilience.
7	Shirima et al. (2026)	Resilience, identity crisis	Protective role	High resilience reduces the adverse effects of identity crisis.
8	Afzali and Hosseinian (2024)	Academic anxiety, resilience	Negative relationship	High academic anxiety is associated with lower resilience among adolescents.
9	Tavakoli et al. (2024)	Maladaptive perfectionism, resilience	Negative relationship	Maladaptive perfectionism contributes to reduced resilience.

10	Ahadian-Fard et al. (2023)	Self-acceptance, psychological empowerment	Enhancing role	Self-acceptance is a key factor contributing to greater psychological empowerment among adolescents.
11	Ahvan et al. (2025)	Self-acceptance, well-being	Positive relationship	Unconditional self-acceptance is associated with improved mental health and psychological empowerment.
12	Mohammadzadeh et al. (2022)	Self-acceptance, self-concept	Positive relationship	Self-acceptance contributes to strengthening a positive self-concept.
13	Levi-Kardash et al. (2026)	Negative body image, perfectionism, social anxiety	Negative relationship with self-acceptance	These variables are associated with decreased self-acceptance among adolescents.
14	Rad et al. (2023)	Social anxiety, self-acceptance	Negative relationship	Social anxiety contributes to reduced self-acceptance.
15	Guo et al. (2025)	Identity confusion, self-alienation, self-harm	Reciprocal relationship	Reciprocal associations exist among identity confusion, feelings of alienation, and self-harming behaviors.
16	Ahmadi et al. (2024)	Self-alienation, identity crisis	Bidirectional relationship	Identity disturbance and feelings of self-alienation mutually reinforce one another.
17	Zhou et al. (2026)	Identity confusion, emotion regulation	Negative relationship	Weaknesses in identity structure are associated with lower adaptive emotion regulation.
18	Cullen et al. (2025)	Rumination, emotional suppression	Consequential relationship	Identity confusion increases the use of maladaptive emotion-regulation strategies.
19	Sriharan (2026)	Psychological flexibility, empowerment	Positive relationship	Psychological flexibility contributes to increased empowerment and adjustment.
20	Hsieh et al. (2019)	Openness to experience, personal values	Moderating role	Psychological flexibility moderates the effects of identity ambiguity.
21	Rouban-Zadeh et al. (2019)	Social support, psychological empowerment	Positive relationship	Perceived social support is associated with psychological empowerment.
22	Abdollahi et al. (2024)	Parent–adolescent interaction	Contextual factor	The quality of parent–adolescent relationships influences the development of adolescents’ self-concept.
23	Sandberg et al. (2025)	Secure attachment, social support	Protective role	Secure attachment reduces the negative effects of identity crisis.
24	Mallahi et al. (2024)	Social support, resilience	Positive relationship	Social support contributes to strengthening adolescents’ resilience.
25	Checken et al. (2024)	Identity, resilience, emotion regulation	Integrated model	Empowerment results from the interaction between identity variables and intrapsychic resources.
26	Salehi et al. (2024)	Psychological resources, agency	Conceptual model	Psychological resources mediate the transformation of identity crisis into individual agency.
27	Martin et al. (2025)	Adaptive mechanisms, empowerment	Developmental model	Empowerment results from the dynamic interaction of individual and social factors.

The data presented in this table were obtained through the systematic extraction of empirical findings from selected studies in the fields of developmental and educational psychology. The reported variables and relationships were

classified according to their roles in the explanatory model of psychological empowerment among adolescents with identity confusion, including predictor, mediator, moderator, and outcome variables.

Table 2

Classification of Variables in the Empowerment Model for Adolescents With Identity Confusion

Variable Category	Variables	Theoretical Function
Structural variables	Identity coherence, identity commitment	Foundation for the development of agency
Intrapsychic resources	Resilience, self-acceptance	Mediating/facilitating factors
Regulatory mechanisms	Emotion regulation, psychological flexibility	Moderating factors and psychological buffers
Contextual–social variables	Social support, secure attachment	Protective factors
Outcome variables	Self-efficacy, well-being, internal control	Indicators of empowerment

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of the present narrative review showed that the psychological empowerment of adolescents with identity confusion is a multidimensional process shaped by the

interaction of identity organization, resilience, self-acceptance, emotion regulation, psychological flexibility, perceived social support, and relational and contextual resources. The reviewed evidence indicated that identity coherence and identity commitment are among the most

fundamental structural factors associated with psychological empowerment, because adolescents who develop a clearer and more integrated sense of self tend to demonstrate stronger psychological agency, greater self-efficacy, better adjustment, and higher levels of well-being. Conversely, prolonged identity confusion appears to be associated with reduced internal control, weakened psychological competence, and greater vulnerability to maladaptive behavioral and emotional outcomes. These findings are consistent with longitudinal evidence demonstrating that identity processes are closely related to adolescent well-being and that more adaptive patterns of identity development are accompanied by more favorable psychosocial outcomes (De Lise et al., 2024). Similarly, research on identity development has emphasized that identity formation is composed of multiple internal and relational dimensions that collectively influence adolescents' functioning and adjustment (Martin et al., 2025). The findings can therefore be interpreted to suggest that psychological empowerment is not merely an outcome that develops independently of identity, but rather emerges partly from the extent to which adolescents can organize their values, commitments, goals, and self-understandings into a coherent personal framework.

The present findings further indicated that identity confusion is associated with a range of potentially harmful outcomes, including risky behavior, Internet-related problems, alienation, and difficulties in academic and psychosocial functioning. This pattern is consistent with findings showing that identity styles are associated with adolescents' tendency toward smoking, alcohol use, and substance use (Imani Khoshkhoo et al., 2025). In addition, evidence indicates that identity crisis may be shaped by broader cultural and intergenerational influences, suggesting that identity confusion should not be interpreted solely as an individual deficit (Amini et al., 2026). The current review also showed that identity confusion may enter reciprocal cycles with alienation and self-harming behavior. This result aligns strongly with longitudinal evidence demonstrating reciprocal associations between identity confusion and nonsuicidal self-injury, with alienation functioning as a mediating mechanism in this relationship (Gu et al., 2025). Such findings suggest that identity confusion can gradually weaken the adolescent's sense of belonging, coherence, and self-continuity, which may in turn reduce perceived control and increase vulnerability to maladaptive coping strategies. Therefore, efforts aimed at psychological empowerment should address not only the behavioral consequences of

identity confusion but also the underlying disturbances in self-definition, belonging, and perceived agency.

Another major finding of the present review was the central role of resilience as a protective and mediating psychological resource. The reviewed studies consistently suggested that resilience is negatively associated with identity crisis and positively associated with adaptive functioning. This finding is consistent with the broader resilience literature, which conceptualizes resilience as a dynamic process arising from interactions between personal, relational, and contextual factors rather than as a stable trait (Mesman et al., 2021). Similarly, systematic evidence has shown that resilience emerges from the combined effects of individual, social, and societal resources, particularly under conditions of stress and crisis (Schäfer et al., 2024). In adolescents, the importance of resilience is especially evident because this developmental stage involves multiple simultaneous pressures related to education, relationships, autonomy, and identity formation. The current review also showed that identity styles may contribute to resilience through motivational mechanisms. This finding is supported by research demonstrating that identity styles predict resilience through adaptive motivational structures (Abdikhan et al., 2023). Thus, adolescents who possess greater motivational coherence and stronger adaptive identity orientations may be more capable of interpreting developmental challenges as manageable rather than overwhelming.

The observed association between identity confusion and reduced resilience was also consistent with evidence from vulnerable adolescent groups. Research among burned adolescents has shown meaningful associations among identity crisis, suicide resilience, and quality of life, indicating that disruptions in identity and resilience may interact under conditions of severe psychosocial stress (Mohammadi et al., 2023). In addition, longitudinal evidence demonstrates that identity formation and resilience develop in interconnected trajectories over time, especially among adolescents living in under-resourced environments (Shirima et al., 2026). These findings reinforce the interpretation that identity coherence may provide adolescents with continuity and purpose, whereas resilience allows them to tolerate uncertainty and maintain functioning while identity commitments are still being formed. The present review therefore supports a reciprocal developmental model in which identity coherence strengthens resilience and resilience, in turn, facilitates healthier identity exploration and commitment. This

reciprocal process appears highly relevant to psychological empowerment because adolescents who perceive themselves as capable of coping with adversity are more likely to act with autonomy, persistence, and confidence.

The present review also identified self-acceptance as a major psychological factor related to empowerment. The findings indicated that adolescents who are more accepting of themselves are likely to demonstrate stronger self-concept, greater psychological well-being, and enhanced internal control. Conversely, negative body image, maladaptive perfectionism, social anxiety, and self-alienation appear to undermine self-acceptance and contribute to greater psychological vulnerability. This interpretation is supported by findings showing that body image and perfectionism are significantly related to self-acceptance among adolescent girls and that mental toughness can operate as a mediating resource in this relationship (Ahvan et al., 2025). Evidence from young adults also suggests that self-acceptance is meaningfully related to broader personality characteristics and psychological functioning (Dhote & Sinha, 2024). These findings suggest that self-acceptance may operate as a stabilizing mechanism that allows adolescents to explore identity possibilities without interpreting uncertainty or imperfection as evidence of personal failure.

Self-esteem emerged as a closely related factor that may buffer adolescents against the negative effects of identity confusion. The present review showed that adolescents with stronger self-worth are more capable of engaging socially and maintaining adaptive functioning despite identity-related uncertainty. This result is consistent with evidence demonstrating that self-esteem and social participation function as resilience resources in the association between social anxiety and identity formation (Levy Kardash et al., 2026). Adolescents with identity confusion may be especially sensitive to interpersonal evaluation, peer comparison, and perceived rejection. Under such conditions, low self-esteem may intensify avoidance and restrict opportunities for identity exploration, whereas stronger self-esteem may facilitate engagement with new roles, relationships, and experiences. The motivational dimension of identity development is also relevant in this context. Research examining identity crisis from a motivational perspective suggests that strengthening adaptive motivational orientation may support adolescents in moving from uncertainty toward greater direction and commitment (Ghorbani & Golmohammadi, 2025). Accordingly, psychological empowerment may depend partly on helping

adolescents develop a more stable and compassionate relationship with themselves while simultaneously strengthening motivation for constructive identity exploration.

Emotion regulation and psychological flexibility were also identified as key regulatory mechanisms in the empowerment process. The reviewed evidence suggested that identity confusion is associated with greater use of maladaptive emotional strategies and reduced capacity for adaptive emotional processing. These findings can be interpreted within broader models of psychological flexibility, which emphasize the importance of openness to internal experiences, the ability to adapt behavior to changing demands, and the capacity to act consistently with personally meaningful values. Research on Acceptance and Commitment Therapy for transitional-age youth has identified psychological flexibility, adaptive emotion regulation, self-compassion, and autonomy as important mechanisms underlying psychological change (Keulen et al., 2025). Similarly, recent theoretical work on identity flexibility proposes that psychological freedom may depend on the ability to navigate multiple identity domains without rigid attachment to a single self-definition (Sriharan, 2026). From this perspective, adolescents with greater psychological flexibility may be better able to tolerate ambiguity during identity development without becoming trapped in rigid self-judgments or maladaptive emotional reactions.

The findings regarding emotion regulation and flexibility are also consistent with evidence emphasizing the combined role of emotion regulation, cognitive flexibility, identity development, and social support during family and developmental transitions (Xu, 2026). Adolescents frequently experience changes in family structure, peer relationships, academic expectations, and social roles, and these changes may intensify identity-related uncertainty. The ability to regulate emotional arousal and revise maladaptive interpretations may therefore support a more adaptive response to developmental instability. Self-compassion may also strengthen this process by reducing excessive self-criticism and promoting resilience in the face of failure or uncertainty. The growing literature on the relationship between self-compassion and resilience further supports this interpretation (Li et al., 2024). Likewise, cognitive restructuring interventions have been shown to increase adolescents' self-confidence by modifying negative thought patterns (Muthmainnah Takdir et al., 2025). Taken together, these findings suggest that regulatory skills are

central mechanisms through which empowerment may be strengthened, because they allow adolescents to respond to internal distress without surrendering agency or disengaging from meaningful goals.

The present review further demonstrated that psychological empowerment is strongly influenced by environmental and relational factors, particularly perceived social support and parent–adolescent relationships. The findings indicated that supportive family relationships, secure attachment, and positive interpersonal contexts can reduce the adverse consequences of identity confusion and strengthen resilience and psychological competence. This pattern is consistent with evidence showing that interactive parenting interventions can reduce harmful dynamics in parent–adolescent relationships (Mallahi et al., 2024). Supportive family environments may provide adolescents with both emotional security and sufficient autonomy to explore identity alternatives without fear of rejection. In addition, school environments may serve as important contexts for structured identity development. School-based interventions focusing on ethnic-racial identity have demonstrated that identity exploration can be promoted through organized educational programs (Abdullahi et al., 2024). Similarly, longitudinal studies of adolescents participating in identity-focused interventions have identified different identity trajectories and associated psychosocial outcomes (Ceccon et al., 2024).

The effectiveness of identity-focused interventions is further supported by meta-analytic evidence indicating that psychosocial interventions can positively influence adolescents' personal and social identity processes (Crocetti et al., 2025). However, the effects of such interventions are not uniform across adolescents. Research suggests that personality traits may influence the degree to which adolescents benefit from identity interventions (Sandberg et al., 2025). This finding is important for interpreting psychological empowerment because it highlights the need to consider individual differences when designing interventions. Adolescents with different levels of emotional stability, social participation, resilience, and self-esteem may require different forms or intensities of support. Furthermore, the reviewed evidence suggests that contemporary identity development increasingly occurs within digital and culturally diverse environments. Research on adolescents' identity construction in digital discourse illustrates how identities are pragmatically expressed and negotiated in online interaction (Wu, 2025). Accordingly, empowerment-oriented approaches should acknowledge

that identity formation is not confined to family and school settings but also occurs within broader social and digital contexts.

The findings also indicated that the academic environment can function either as a source of vulnerability or as a setting for strengthening empowerment. Academic anxiety, maladaptive perfectionism, and negative classroom perceptions may reduce resilience and increase psychological distress, whereas supportive educational conditions may reinforce adolescents' competence and sense of control. Evidence showing that academic resilience can be predicted by hidden anxiety, perfectionism, and perceptions of the classroom environment supports this conclusion (Tavakoli et al., 2024). In addition, sense of coherence appears to constitute an important adaptive resource because adolescents who perceive life as comprehensible, manageable, and meaningful tend to show more favorable health outcomes over time (Matić & Vuletić, 2025). This is consistent with intervention findings showing that empowerment-oriented self-management can improve sense of coherence and self-efficacy among adolescent girls experiencing Internet addiction (Bashirinia et al., 2026). These findings suggest that empowerment programs should help adolescents experience their educational and developmental environment as meaningful and manageable, rather than focusing exclusively on symptom reduction.

Overall, the findings of this narrative review indicate that the psychological empowerment of adolescents with identity confusion is best understood through an integrative developmental framework. Identity coherence, resilience, self-acceptance, self-esteem, emotion regulation, psychological flexibility, family relationships, social support, and educational context appear to interact dynamically rather than operating as isolated predictors. This interpretation is consistent with integrated approaches to adolescent empowerment that emphasize strengthening both internal capacities and environmental resources (Mmusi-Phetoe et al., 2025). The literature on psychological empowerment similarly supports the view that empowerment involves perceived competence, autonomy, control, and meaningful participation in one's own life (Zani, 2024). Therefore, psychological empowerment among adolescents with identity confusion should be conceptualized as a process of strengthening personal agency while simultaneously creating social and relational contexts that support adaptive identity exploration. Such an interpretation also explains why interventions targeting only one variable may be less effective than multidimensional

approaches integrating emotional, cognitive, motivational, relational, and identity-related components.

One limitation of the present study was the use of a narrative review methodology, which, despite allowing broad conceptual synthesis, does not provide the same level of reproducibility, quantitative effect estimation, or formal risk-of-bias assessment as a systematic review or meta-analysis. The included studies were also heterogeneous in terms of research design, participant characteristics, measurement instruments, cultural settings, and operational definitions of identity confusion and psychological empowerment. In addition, some of the reviewed evidence was derived from correlational or cross-sectional studies, limiting causal interpretation. The inclusion of both Persian- and English-language literature may have improved contextual breadth but may also have introduced variation in methodological quality and conceptual terminology. Finally, the focus on published and accessible sources means that relevant unpublished studies or literature indexed in databases not included in the search may have been missed.

Future research should examine the proposed relationships using longitudinal, experimental, and mixed-method designs that can clarify the temporal and causal pathways among identity confusion, resilience, psychological flexibility, self-acceptance, social support, and empowerment. Future studies should also test integrated structural models in diverse adolescent populations and examine whether these relationships differ according to age, gender, socioeconomic status, family structure, school context, and cultural background. Greater attention should be given to potential mediating and moderating mechanisms, particularly alienation, self-esteem, emotion regulation, sense of coherence, and parent–adolescent relationship quality. Intervention studies should compare single-component and multicomponent programs and investigate which adolescents benefit most from different approaches. In addition, systematic reviews and meta-analyses could quantify the strength of the relationships identified in this narrative synthesis and provide more precise estimates of the effectiveness of empowerment-oriented interventions.

In practice, schools, counseling centers, and family-based services should adopt multidimensional programs that simultaneously strengthen identity exploration, resilience, self-acceptance, emotion regulation, psychological flexibility, self-efficacy, and social support. School counselors and psychologists can use structured identity-focused activities to help adolescents clarify personal values, future goals, and meaningful commitments while providing

a safe environment in which uncertainty can be explored without judgment. Parent-training programs should emphasize supportive communication, autonomy promotion, emotional responsiveness, and reduction of critical or controlling interaction patterns. Educational programs can also incorporate coping skills, cognitive restructuring, mindfulness-based strategies, and resilience-building exercises into preventive mental health services. Screening adolescents who show persistent identity confusion, social withdrawal, high-risk behavior, severe academic distress, or reduced self-worth may allow earlier intervention and reduce the likelihood that identity-related difficulties develop into more persistent psychological or behavioral problems.

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

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Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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