



Identity Status of TESL Students in Malaysia

Farhana Wan Yunus, Melissa Malik, Azyyati Zakaria

Faculty of Education,
Universiti Teknologi MARA, Shah Alam 40200, Malaysia

farhana.wan.yunus@gmail.com

Abstract

Adolescence is a critical period for adolescents all over the world because this is the time they have to develop an identity. Students who wish to be teachers should not be unsure of their plans. A survey was conducted among future English teachers by using a set of questionnaire adapted from the EOMEIS-2 by Bennion & Adams (1986). The findings of this study are pertinent to the lecturers teaching pre-service English teachers so that they are aware of the identity status of their students. It is also to help them reach identity achievement for a better quality of life.

Keywords: Identity Status; Future Teachers; Gender; Quality of Life.

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1.0 Introduction

According to Marcia (1976), a person should achieve an identity during their adolescence. Erikson (1956) explained that identity achievement is a stepping stone to become happy and productive people. When adolescents reach identity achievement, they will have a better quality of life. By the age of 18 years old, adolescents should already have goals in life (Farhana et al., 2010). Marcia (1976) believed; there are four identity statuses that adolescents all over the world seems to be associated with which are identity achievement, identity moratorium, identity foreclosure and identity diffusion. Identity achievement is when an adolescent explored meaningful alternatives and made a commitment. Identity moratorium is when an adolescent explored meaningful alternatives, but made no commitment. Identity foreclosure is the status of an adolescent who has made a commitment, but no exploration. Identity diffusion is the status of an adolescent who has not explored alternatives and has not made a commitment towards an identity. Adams (1998) believed that individuals need a sense of belonging and uniqueness. The present study examines the identity status of future English teachers.

2.0 Literature Review

The world is expanding in terms of knowledge and information. Therefore, adolescents today must quickly understand their surrounding in order to be at par with the growing needs of the world for a better quality of life. The society's expectations of the adolescents can influence the adolescents' holistic development which then may characterize their identity development.

Identity is about knowing yourselves and having goals towards the future. Adolescents who are still searching for an identity will be seen like changing from one personality and attitude to another. Adolescents who have not found an identity will be easily influenced by their peers and surrounding. Adolescents who have found their identity will not be easily influenced by their peers and surrounding. This is because they already know themselves and know what they want in life.

Two crucial processes involved during identity formation are exploring and commitment. Each identity status has different criteria and effects to the adolescents. Adams (1998) said that adolescents who have explored their surrounding and have commitments are said to be identity achieved. Identity achieved adolescents are seen to have a high level of moral development and highly independent. They do not get stress out easily because they perform well even though a lot of pressures come their way (Farhana et al., 2010). According to Njus and Johnson (2008), identity achieved students have high cognitive ability, high sense of conscientious as well as has a favourable attitude towards adjustments.

Adolescents who are in the moratorium status seem to be more anxious than identity achieved and identity foreclosed adolescents (Bergh and Erling, 2005; Kellogg, 2009). Kellogg (2009) also said moratorium females like to daydream about their future. However, they do not know how to make the dreams into reality. Nevertheless, Graf, Mullis and Mullis (2008) found that adolescents in the identity moratorium status are more internally reflective and

more directed than other adolescents. Furthermore, Luyckx et al. (2005) indicated that moratorium status adolescents have a moderate level of openness. They also reacted badly to adjustment. Thus, moratorium adolescents have a low self-esteem and show high depressive symptoms (Luyckx et al., 2005).

Identity foreclosure is the result of parents' or other authority figures' strong influence over their decisions. According to Marcia (1976), this identity is unhealthy for adolescents as they do not get chances to explore options that can make up their own identity. Adolescents who are foreclosed are seen to have excellent behaviour and have a high level of commitment. However, these adolescents can be defensive because they are not open to different views and new ideas (Luyckx et al., 2005). Alternatively, foreclosed adolescents are the least anxious among all the other identity statuses (Bergh and Erling, 2005).

In accordance to Manzi et al. (2006), family bond has a large influence on how an adolescent handle identity transitions. Adolescents need their family to support them as well as help them make a choice about their identity. Adolescents who do not receive a healthy family relationship will likely be diffused. Identity diffused adolescents are reported to have a high level of anxiety, feeling of distress, as well as low level of satisfaction about their life. Phillips and Pittman (2007) discovered that adolescents in the identity diffusion status score lowest on self-esteem, educational expectations and optimism when compared to adolescents of other identity status. It was also found that diffused adolescents have a high level of hopelessness and delinquent attitudes. Bishop et al. (2005) discovered identity diffused adolescents were relatively the heaviest consumers of alcohol in comparison to the other adolescents of other status groups.

3.0 Methodology

Questionnaires regarding 'A Study on the Identity Status of Future English Teachers' were distributed to all semester two students who are studying Pre-degree Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) program at a public university in Selangor, Malaysia. The questionnaire was adapted from the EOMEIS-2 by Bennion & Adams (1986). The students' age ranges from 17 to 20 years old. A total of 118 Malaysian students (86 females, 32 males, M age = 18.66 years) who are doing their Pre-degree TESL Program completed the questionnaires.

The questionnaire was designed to study the identity status of future English teachers. The questionnaire was divided into two sections (Section A and Section B). Section A consisted of demographic data. Section B comprised of forty questions on identity status. A Likert scale with a four point system was used to measure responses on the questionnaire. Items were scored on the following keys: 1 – Strongly Disagree, 2 – Disagree, 3 – Agree, and 4- Strongly Agree.

Simple calculations like frequencies, percentages, and chi-square were carried out to look at the differences on the identity status of future English teachers. The female and male students' identity status were compared based on percentages. Chi-square tests of the association were used to see whether there is a significant association, if any, between the gender of the future English teachers and the identity status. Significance level was set at α

= 0.05.

4.0 Results and Discussions

Table 1 below explains the identity statuses of future English teachers in percentages. It was found that majority (55.1%) of the students are identity achieved. 39% of the students stated to be in the identity moratorium while 3.4% of the students claimed to have identity foreclosure. Minority of the students (2.5%) claimed to be in the identity diffusion status. The percentage of identity diffused future English teachers is extremely small which is good news.

Table 1: Identity statuses of the future English teachers

Diffusion	Achievement	Moratorium	Foreclosure
2.5 %	55.1 %	39 %	3.4 %

The result of the study explained that a majority of the students (55.1%) is identity achieved. However, the percentage 55.1% is not satisfactory. It is a disappointment that only 55.1% of the students are identity achieved while the rest are still not at the achievement level. The students are trained to be future English teachers. The students should have already made a decision before they enter the program that being an English teacher is what they want to do in the future. Forming identity achievement is extra essential for students who are studying to be teachers because, identity achieved teachers will be happy with their job. When they are happy, they will enjoy their life. Future teachers must have a high commitment level as being a teacher is a serious job. The university does not want to have students who join the program today and decided to drop out of the program later. Teachers need serious commitment and students who are trained to be teachers should be at the identity achievement status.

Alarming, 39% of the students claimed that they are in the identity moratorium stage. Moratorium identity status may not be dangerous to adolescents. However, it is quite a risky status for the future English teachers. This is because; these students were selected among the best during interviews prior to the pre-degree TESL program. The students should not have a low level of commitment as this can be dangerous when they become teachers. Effective teachers genuinely care, like, accept and value their students. It is believed that when teachers are true to themselves, they will show kindness to their students as well as enthusiastic to teach and encourage creativity in their students. If the students are still undecided about what they want to do in life, the students are at risk of being college dropouts or resigning from teaching or become awful teachers. Teachers who become teachers out of force are usually unhappy with their job. This can lead to poor classroom management and unsatisfactory teaching and learning for students. Thus, identity moratorium is not an ideal identity status for a future English teacher. The students must quickly make a decision about their future and be in the identity achievement status.

Table 2 below shows that more male (59.4%) than female (53.5%) are in the Identity Achievement status. However, it is shown that female students (39.5%) are higher in the Identity Moratorium than the male students (37.5%). Four point seven percent (4.7%) female

students but zero percent (0%) male students claimed to have Identity Foreclosure, which means, female students are higher in Identity Foreclosure than the male students. More male students (3.1%) than female students (2.3%) are in the Identity Diffusion status.

Table 2: Identity Status of Male and Female Future English teachers in Percentages

	Diffusion	Achievement	Moratorium	Foreclosure
Male	3.1 %	59.4 %	37.5 %	0 %
Female	2.3 %	53.5 %	39.5 %	4.7 %

Although Graf, Mullis, and Mullis (2008) found that female adolescents are more identity achieved than male adolescents, the findings of this current study on future English teachers are contradictory. This is because more male students claimed to be identity achieved than the female students. This could be because the students are still exploring their options. Therefore, they have not made a firm commitment towards an identity. Four point seven percent (4.7%) of the females claimed to be foreclosed while zero male students claimed to be foreclosed. This finding on foreclosure identity opposes the previous study because male student are found to be higher in foreclosure identity than their female counterpart in past studies. This could be because of different environment and culture issues. The finding also shows that 3.1% of the male students are identity diffused than the female students (2.3%). This finding corresponds with the previous studies that claimed male students are usually more diffused than the female students (Graf, Mullis and Mullis, 2008; Cakir and Aydin, 2005).

According to Table 3 below, 1.7152 obtained is smaller than the critical value (7.81). Therefore, the result indicated that, there is no association between gender of Future English teachers and the identity status (χ^2 (3, 118) = 1.7152, $p > 0.05$).

Table 3: Chi-Square of Future English teachers' Gender and Identity Status

df	α	Critical Value χ^2	χ^2
3	0.05	7.81	1.7152

According to the studies done by Graf, Mullis and Mullis (2008), Bergh and Erling (2005) and Archer (1989), male and female have differential identity status. However, the finding in this present study is different. In some of the previous studies, it was indicated that there are differences between male and female identity status while other studies indicated no differences between the genders. This could be due to differences in the research settings. Most of the studies mentioned were carried out in the school environment, whereas the present study was conducted in a public university. Besides that, the differences in geographical setting and culture of the students could also be the factors. Most of the studies were conducted in the United States of America, while this present study was done in Malaysia. In addition to that, the students' educational field could also be the factor towards the different findings. The present study only looks at future English teachers while other studies looked at students from mix background of educational field. The lack of gender differences in identity status is supported in the findings of some previous studies. Consequently, the issue of differential identity status between male and female is still unclear.

Further research is believed to be necessary.

5.0 Discussion

Hence, the result of the present study showed that most of the future English teachers are identity achieved which is admirable as this will give them a better quality of life. Nevertheless, the rate of the future English teachers that are in the moratorium identity status is quite high which is alarming. According to Erikson (1956), the adolescents have to know who they are and which direction they are going in life. He also believed that adolescents who are able to cope successfully with the conflicting identities will surface with a new sense of self. Adolescents who were not successful in resolving their identity crisis or who cannot find their identity will suffer identity confusion. This may result to a poor quality of life.

The nation does not want to produce teachers who are still unclear about their identity status. That is why future teachers should be identity achieved. Identity achievement teachers can communicate well with their students. Teachers have a strong influence on their students. That is why it is essential for future teachers to know themselves so that they will be committed to their studies and future occupation. When these students become teachers, they have to help their students to reach identity achievement. Thus, the teachers themselves have to reach identity achievement so that they can advise their students on identity achievement.

This study comes with several recommendations. Future research should do a thorough research to identify why some of the future English teachers are still not identity achieved. Choosing to be a teacher is a serious decision. They should have already know what they want to do in life and what their future goals are. An in-depth research is needed to find out the reason why some of the future English teachers are associated with identity moratorium. Apart from that, future research should also study the identity status on future teachers of other subjects too such as future math teachers or future art teachers. A pre and post study on the future English teachers' identity status should be made. Questionnaires should be distributed when the students first join the TESL Foundation program. The same questionnaire should be distributed again after the students have completed the TESL Foundation program. This way, the researcher can compare and contrast the findings of the future English teachers' identity status before and after the TESL Foundation program.

In conclusion, the findings of this study discovered that most future English teachers are in the identity achievement status while 39% of them are still in the moratorium identity status. Besides that, the study did not reveal any differences between male and female identity status even though findings of other studies have supported that there are differences between male and female in their identity status. It is hoped that all of the future English teachers will be identity achieved soon. This is necessary to avoid identity and role confusion later in their young adulthood years. Furthermore, when adolescents reach identity achievement, it will be a stepping stone towards a better quality of life. Thus, when students reach identity achievement, they will be better prepared to become teachers which will give a lot of benefits to everyone.

6.0 Conclusion

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