THE INTERACTION OF EXTRAVERSION AND NEUROTICISM IN PREDICTING SELF-IDENTITY CRISIS AMONG ADOLESCENTS IN SOUTHEAST NIGERIA: THE MODERATING ROLE OF SOCIAL SUPPORT

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ABSTRACT: This study investigated extraversion, neuroticism, and social support as predictors of adolescent identity crisis, guided by Erikson's (1968) identity development theory. Erikson's model highlights adolescence as a critical phase for resolving identity versus role confusion, where personal traits and external support shape self-perception. The participants included 216 high school seniors aged 14 to 19 (M = 16.94) from 12 Community Secondary Schools in southeastern Nigeria. Five hypotheses were tested, with a focus on whether extraversion, neuroticism, and social support predict identity crises. Hypothesis 1 posited that extraversion would not significantly predict identity crisis, whereas Hypothesis 3 suggested that social support would be a strong predictor. Hypothesis 4 proposed that social support would moderate the relationship between extraversion and identity crisis. Using the Self-Identity Crisis Questionnaire (SICQ), the Big Five Personality Inventory, and the multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS), the results revealed that extraversion (b = .11, t = 1.49, p = .136) and neuroticism (b = .11, t = 1.57, p = .117) did not predict identity crises. However, social support significantly predicted identity crisis (b = .11, t = 1.49, p = .136). Social support did not moderate the extraversion–identity crisis relationship (b = .01, t = 1.184, p = .23), but it did moderate the effect of neuroticism. In line with Erikson's theory, the findings emphasize the crucial role of social support in adolescent identity formation. This suggests that fostering supportive environments can reduce identity crises, especially for adolescents with neurotic tendencies, helping them navigate this critical developmental stage.

Keywords: Extraversion; Neuroticism; Social support; Adolescents; Identity Crisis

INTRODUCTION

Research on adolescence has increasingly taken a relational focus (Collins & Steinberg, 2006). While early studies emphasized parent–adolescent relationships, contemporary research now considers these relationships in the context of other significant relationships, such as how parents influence peer interactions. Extending attachment theory beyond infancy has fostered research on adolescents' relationships with parents, peers, and romantic partners (Rohner et al., 2020).

Adolescence, a phase marked by rapid physical, cognitive, and social changes, has motivated researchers to explore this critical developmental stage (Abreu & Kaiser, 2016). It is a transitional period where childhood ends and autonomy begins, requiring adolescents to make meaningful life choices that can shape their future. Adolescents experience evolving relationships and roles, notably with parents and peers, during this time. The adolescent phase is also characterized by identity formation and liberation from parental dependence. Theorists such as Erikson (1968) and Marcia (1993) described adolescence as a vulnerable period marked by developmental crises, whereas Kegan (1982) emphasized the importance of social interactions in shaping identity.

Although many adolescents transition successfully, some encounter difficulties, including conflicts with peers and adults, involvement in crime, or psychological issues. While researchers once viewed adolescence as a time of "storm and stress" (Bloss, 2012; Hall, 1904), more recent studies challenge this view. Wigfield and Eccles (2014) describe adolescence as a "quiet distress" period during which changes in friendships, family relationships, and school environments influence identity formation. Strong relationships predict better well-being and social adjustment. Cognitive and social changes in adolescence must be considered when studying identity crises.

Erikson (1968) defined identity as a consistent sense of self that integrates one's perceptions of self and others' views. Identity formation, according to Erikson, involves the coordination of these perceptions to create a coherent sense of self. Failure to achieve this coherence results in identity confusion or crisis. Pals (2015) suggested that successful identity formation leads to feelings of self-worth and competence, whereas failure results in loneliness and anxiety. Glasser (1965) added that identity is shaped by love, kindness, responsibility, and purpose. In Erikson's view, identity formation is a lifelong process influenced by experiences that foster self-awareness and distinguish the self from others. Failure to form a stable identity leads to role confusion and psychological imbalance (Erikson, 1980). Identity development is a crucial challenge during adolescence, and unresolved identity crises can result in confusion, anxiety, and difficulty in navigating life roles such as education or careers. Adolescents may struggle to answer fundamental questions about who they are. If these questions remain unanswered, they risk adopting negative identities or engaging in antisocial behaviours such as delinquency or substance abuse. Therefore, achieving a coherent identity is crucial for success in family, society, and personal development.

Personality traits such as extraversion and neuroticism can affect identity crisis. Extraversion, characterized by energy, sociability, and assertiveness, may influence how adolescents interact with others and form their identities. Neuroticism, involving negative emotional states, may hinder identity development by focusing on unpleasant thoughts and feelings. Research suggests that self-reflection and open communication with close others during adolescence help individuals express and process their thoughts and feelings, aiding in identity formation (Hatano et al., 2016). However, the overwhelming amount of information that teens encounter can complicate this process, sometimes leading to delays in identity formation (Klimstra et al., 2013). Environmental factors such as social and psychological support are also crucial for identity development. Social support, including care and guidance from family, peers, and the community, gives adolescents a sense of belonging and security during this transitional phase. Masten and Motti-Stefanidi (2020) emphasized that an individual's environment significantly influences identity formation, with family and peer relationships playing a central role. Close relationships with family provide a foundation of

values and beliefs that shape identity, whereas peers offer diverse perspectives and opportunities for self-exploration (Chatterton et al., 2020). Adolescents who struggle with identity diffusion, or the inability to form a cohesive identity, are more likely to experience emotional difficulties or psychopathology (Taylor et al., 2017).

The present study

While research has long established that adolescents develop personality traits that shape their preferences and future decisions, there remains a significant gap in understanding how these traits influence the resolution of identity crises during this crucial developmental period. For instance, adolescents often develop strong inclinations toward specific fields, such as science or the arts, on the basis of their emerging preferences. These inclinations, in turn, guide their long-term decisions. However, some adolescents struggle with identifying their unique strengths, leading to what Erikson (1968) termed an "identity crisis"—a failure to establish a coherent sense of self, which can negatively affect future decision-making and perception. Social cognitive theory explains how past experiences and environmental factors shape behaviour. This theory considers that individual experiences influence expectations, shaping whether an individual engages in specific behaviours. However, despite adolescents' support from family and friends, many remain uncertain about their identity until they undergo significant personal discovery. This ambiguity suggests that there is still much to learn about how adolescents resolve their identity crises, particularly their personality traits and social support structures.

Crucially, the role of personality traits such as extraversion and neuroticism in this process still needs to be explored. The literature does not sufficiently explain how these traits impact the resolution of identity crises, especially within the Nigerian context. Additionally, while social support is recognized as a critical factor in adolescent development, its moderating influence on the relationship between personality traits and identity crisis remains unclear. Therefore, this study seeks to fill these gaps by investigating how personality traits, specifically extraversion and neuroticism, affect identity crisis resolution and how social support may moderate these relationships. To the best of our knowledge, no study has directly examined these factors in Nigerian adolescents, underscoring the importance of this research. The findings contribute to the literature, providing valuable insights for counsellors, clinicians, and service providers working with adolescents facing identity crises.

Hypothesis 1: *Extraversion, as a personality trait, independently predicts self-identity crisis in adolescents.*

Extraversion is a personality trait associated with sociability, assertiveness, and high levels of positive emotionality. Research has shown that extroverted individuals are more likely to seek out social interactions, which can serve as a platform for exploring and solidifying their sense of self. Erikson's (1968) theory of psychosocial development suggests that adolescence is a critical period for identity formation, where individuals must navigate social roles and personal values. Given that extroverted adolescents are more inclined to engage with their social environments, they may either resolve identity crises more effectively through social interactions or, conversely, face crises if they fail to align their social persona with their true selves. Thus, it is reasonable to hypothesize that extraversion independently influences how adolescents experience and resolve identity crises.

Hypothesis 2: *Neuroticism, as a personality trait, independently predicts self-identity crisis in adolescents.*

Neuroticism, characterized by emotional instability, anxiety, and a tendency toward negative emotions, has been consistently linked to difficulties in managing stress and crises. Adolescents high in neuroticism may be more prone to identify crises because of their heightened sensitivity to perceived failures or ambiguity about their roles and future. According to Erikson (1968), failure to resolve identity crises leads to confusion and a weaker sense of self, which is exacerbated in individuals with neurotic tendencies. Furthermore, neuroticism has been found to impair decision-making and self-efficacy, which are crucial for identity formation. Therefore, neuroticism is likely to predict unresolved identity crises during adolescence.

Hypothesis 3: *Social support moderates the relationship between extraversion and self-identity crisis in adolescents.*

Social cognitive theory posits that individuals are influenced by their social environment, which helps shape their behaviours, beliefs, and self-concepts (Bandura, 1986). Extraverted adolescents often derive significant reinforcement from their social interactions. However, the effectiveness of these interactions in resolving identity crises may depend on the quality and availability of social support. Adolescents with robust social support systems are likely to receive guidance, validation, and emotional resources that help them navigate identity challenges more successfully. As such, social support may amplify the positive effects of extraversion by providing extraverted adolescents with the emotional and cognitive resources necessary for resolving identity crises. These findings suggest that social support is a moderating factor that enhances the relationship between extraversion and identity crisis resolution.

Hypothesis 4: *Social support significantly predicts a self-identity crisis in adolescents.*

Social support has been widely recognized as a protective factor in adolescent development, particularly in mitigating stress and fostering resilience. Adolescents with robust social networks, including family, friends, and mentors, are better equipped to cope with identity-related challenges. Erikson (1968) emphasized that the social context plays a pivotal role in identity formation, where adolescents rely on significant others to help define and validate their emerging sense of self. Thus, consistent, reliable social support is expected to significantly reduce the likelihood of experiencing an unresolved identity crisis, as it provides the necessary emotional and psychological resources for identity exploration and commitment.

Hypothesis 5: *Social support moderates the relationship between neuroticism and the self-identity crisis in adolescents.*

Neurotic individuals, who are predisposed to anxiety, self-doubt, and emotional instability, may struggle more with identity crises. However, the availability of social support could buffer the adverse effects of neuroticism by providing reassurance, encouragement, and stability during periods of self-doubt or confusion. According to social cognitive theory, environmental factors such as social support can help mitigate the impact of negative personality traits on behaviour and outcomes. By providing a stable, supportive environment,

social networks can moderate the extent to which neuroticism exacerbates identity crises, offering the emotional and psychological resources necessary to reduce the impact of neurotic tendencies on self-identity resolution.

In summary, these hypotheses are justified on the basis of the integration of Erikson's (1968) psychosocial development theory, which emphasizes the importance of identity formation during adolescence, and Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory, which highlights the role of social interactions and support in shaping behaviour. The hypotheses also draw from established research linking personality traits such as extraversion and neuroticism to identify-related outcomes. By examining the moderating role of social support, this study aims to provide novel insights into how adolescents' personality traits and social environments interact to resolve identity crises, a gap that remains underexplored, particularly in the Nigerian context. This research contributes to theoretical knowledge and practical applications in adolescent counselling and mental health services.

METHOD

Participants

In this study, 216 senior secondary school students from 12 community secondary schools in Southeast Nigeria were drawn to participate. The participants were from the SS1 and SS2 classes and were aged between 14 and 19 years, with a mean age of 16.94 years (SD = 2.74). A stratified random sampling method was employed to ensure a representative sample across different educational zones in Enugu State. The state is divided into six educational zones: Agbani, Awgu, Enugu, Nsukka, Obollo-Afor, and Udi, which contain a total of 313 public secondary schools and a student population of 156,800 (Post-Primary, 2018). Two public community secondary schools were randomly selected from each zone, totaling 12 schools. These schools included CSS Agbani and CSS Obe (Agbani zone), CSS et al. (Udi zone), CSS et al. (Nsukka zone), CSS Obollo-Afor and CSS Obollo-Etiti (Obollo-Afor zone), CSS Ihe and CSS Agbudu (Awgu zone), and CSS Ugwogo Nike and CSS Ugwuaji (Enugu zone). From each school, 20 students were selected via simple random sampling. Ten students were chosen from each senior class (SS1 and SS2), comprising five boys and five girls, ensuring gender balance across the sample.

Justification for the sampling method, participants and sample size

Stratified random sampling was used to ensure that the sample was representative of the diverse educational zones in Enugu State. This method minimizes sampling bias by ensuring that each educational zone contributes equally to the study, reflecting the broader population (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Using stratification enhances the generalizability of the findings across the entire state (Daniel, 2012). The study focused on SS1 and SS2 students aged 14--19 years because these students are at a critical stage in their secondary education and are likely to provide relevant insights for the research objectives (Santrock, 2020). The age range also captures the developmental period of adolescence, which is relevant for studying various educational and psychological phenomena in this demographic (Steinberg, 2017).

Additionally, the balanced selection of male and female participants ensures gender representation in the findings. A total sample size of 216 participants was chosen to provide

sufficient students from each zone for reliable statistical analysis. This size allows for adequate population representation while balancing feasibility and logistical constraints. Moreover, having a large enough sample helps achieve more precise and generalizable results (Fink, 2019).

Instruments

Self-Identity crisis questionnaire (SICQ): Self-identity crisis refers to the relative importance that individuals place on various identity attributes or characteristics when forming their identity in Adolescence, as measured by scores on the 13-item self-identity crisis questionnaire developed by the researcher for this study. The items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) not sure, (4) agree, and (5) strongly agree, and the initial draft of the questionnaire included 16 items. After content and face validation, the items remained unchanged when two academic staff members in the Department of Psychology, Enugu State University of Science and Technology, and one academic staff member in the Department of Psychology, Alex Ekwueme Federal University Ndufu-Alike, were used. The item analysis of the questionnaire, which used 100 pilot participants from Coal Camp Secondary School, Enugu, yielded an alpha coefficient of .70. Items 4, 11 and 15 were removed because they fell below .30 total item correlation, leaving the questionnaire with only 13 items for the study (see Appendix). For the present study, a sample of 100 adolescents drawn via simple random sampling from Coal Camp Secondary School, Enugu, a two-week interval of test-retest reliability check on the self-identity crisis questionnaire yielded a correlation coefficient of .96, which was significant at the .01 level of probability (see Appendix). Some of the items on the scale are "I feel I have not discovered my talents, I feel I have no social status, I feel I am not known with any skill, "I feel I do not know what society expects from me. The higher the participant's score on the scale is, the greater his or her identity crisis. However, the scale has a norm score of 29.55, meaning that participants younger than 29 years have better self-identity than those between 30 and 65 years.

Extensive Five Personality Inventory: This is a 44-item personality scale developed by John, Donahue and Kentle (1991). It measures five dimensions of personality, neuroticism and extraversion among the subscales**.** Neuroticism refers to the degree of emotional instability and impulse control. It is measured by scores of items 27 to 34 on John, Donahue and Kentle's (1991) 44-item extensive five inventory validated by Umeh (2004) and revalidated by Chikwendu (2018). Extraversion refers to a tendency to be sociable as measured by scores on items 1 to 8 on John, Donahue and Kentle's (1991) 44-item extensive five inventory validated in Nigeria by Umeh (2004) and revalidated by Chikwendu (2018). Scoring: Direct scoring was used for all the items. The values of the numbers shaded in each item are added to obtain the adolescent's score in each subscale. For example, for items 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12, the numbers shaded are 3, 1, 4, 2, 3, 2, and 5, respectively, and the score for the seven items is $3+1+4+2+3+2+5 = 12$. The subscales were scored separately. John et al. (1991) provided the original psychometric properties for American samples, whereas Umeh (2004) provided the properties for Nigerian samples, which were revalidated by Chikwendu (2018). Reliability: The coefficients of reliability provided by John et al. (1991) are a Cronbach's alpha of .80 and a 3-month test-retest value of .85. Validity: The Big Five inventory has convergent validity coefficients of .75 and .85, with the five prominent instruments authored by Costa & McCrae (1992) and Goldberg (1992), respectively. The divergent validity coefficients Umeh (2004) obtained with the University Maladjustment Scale (Kleinmmuntz,

1961) are extraversion .05, agreeableness .13, conscientiousness .11, neuroticism .39, and openness .24.

Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support: The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS; Zimet et al., 1988) is a 12-item scale rated on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from (1) very strongly disagree to (7) very strongly agree. It measures social support from three sources—family, friends, and a particular person—and is measured on three subscales—FA (family), F.R. (friends), and SO (significant other)—each with four items. The total social support score is the sum of the scores from the 12 items. The higher the sum of the 12 items is, the greater the level of social support. The MSPSS does not take much time, and since it does not require advanced reading skills, it is suitable for many populations of different ages and educational levels (Zimet et al., 1988). In their initial study with university students, Zimet and colleagues reported a Cronbach alpha level of .88 for the scale. They also checked the test-retest reliability of the scale and reported this value as .85 (Zimet et al., 1988). In a later study, Canty-Mitchell and Zimet (2000) reported the Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient for the 12 items as .93 and for the Family, Friends, and Significant Other subscales as .91, .89, and .91, respectively. They also checked for the construct validity of the MSPSS by its correlation with the Adolescent Family Caring Scale (AFCS). These correlations were .76 for the Family subscale, .33 for the Friends subscale, and .48 for the Significant Other subscale (Canty-Mitchell & Zimet, 2000). Using a sample of 100 adolescents drawn via simple random sampling from Coal Camp Secondary School, Enugu, a two-week interval test-retest reliability check on the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support yielded a correlation coefficient of .70, which was significant at the .01 probability level.

Procedure

The introduction to the research and the subsequent data collection in various schools were facilitated by research assistants, taking into account the geographical distribution of the schools. Consequently, six research assistants were recruited and trained to assist in data collection. Out of approximately 313 secondary schools in Enugu State, 12 community secondary schools were randomly selected for the study (two schools from each of the six educational zones). An exception was the Coal Camp Secondary School, which was utilized for the pilot study. To ensure randomness in school selection, a balloting method was employed, where pieces of paper with school names were folded and placed in a black bag. Each research assistant drew two schools from the designated educational zones.

Upon approval from the school management, the students were first grouped according to their classes: Senior Secondary (SS) 1 and SS 2. The SS 3 students were unavailable at the time because of ongoing national examinations. A simple random sampling technique was applied to select students within the grouped classes. This involved presenting students with blue and white pieces of paper, where those who picked blue were chosen to participate in the study and received questionnaires. From each school, ten students (5 boys and five girls) were randomly selected from the senior classes, resulting in 20 students per school and a total sample size of 240 students from the 12 schools. The research assistants closely monitored the questionnaire completion process to ensure accuracy. Of the 240 questionnaires distributed, 216 were correctly filled out and returned.

Ethical considerations

Several ethical considerations were acknowledged in the process of ensuring the integrity of the study and the protection of participants' rights:

1. **Ethical Approval:** Before this study was conducted, the ethics review board of the Department of Psychology, Enugu State University of Science and Technology, approved it, mainly because the research involved minors. Approval ensures that the study adheres to established ethical guidelines for treating participants, especially in educational settings.
2. **Informed Consent:** Obtaining consent from both the school authorities and the students was the first step. The students were fully informed about the nature of the study, their role, and their right to withdraw at any time without consequences. Approval from the school management indicates institutional consent, which was obtained initially.
3. **Confidentiality and Privacy:** The identities of the students participating in the study were protected, ensuring that their responses remained confidential. All personal information collected was handled with care, and we anonymized the data where necessary to prevent the identification of individual participants.
4. **Voluntary participation:** We also ensured that the students' participation in the study was entirely voluntary. The random selection process using coloured paper was clearly explained, emphasizing that those who did not wish to participate were not obligated to do so. There was no coercion or pressure to participate.
5. **Non-Discrimination and Fairness:** We gave boys and girls equal opportunities to participate, promoting gender equity and, thus, the use of random sampling in selecting schools and students. We ensured that no particular school or student had an undue advantage or disadvantage in being drawn for the study.
6. **Minimizing Harm:** Care was taken to ensure that participants did not suffer harm, whether physical, emotional, or psychological, as a result of their involvement in this study.

Design and Statistics

This study used a cross-sectional design. The study involved two independent variables, extraversion and neuroticism; one dependent variable, identity crisis; and a moderating variable, social support, which necessitated moderated hierarchical regression analysis to explain their variation concurrently. Instead of ordinary regression analysis, the PROCESS module is currently applied in tests of moderation analysis in organizational psychology and management sciences research (e.g., Brienza & Bobocel, 2017; Muqadas et al., 2017) because of its superior value and ease of use. The statistics applied in this study were SPSS Process Macro 3 to test the hypotheses and determine the moderation, direction, and strength of the relationships among the study variables.

RESULTS

Table 1: Correlation Matrix and Descriptive Statistics (216)

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Age	16.90	2.43	1	-.06	.27**	-.07	-.14**	-.04	.03
Gender				1	-.17**	.06	.21**	.04	.16**
Class					1	.08	.01	.07	-.10*
Extraversion	25.46	5.24				1	.34**	.25**	.11*
Neuroticism	24.41	5.92					1	.22**	.14**
Social support	65.52	10.95						1	-.18**
Self-identity	29.67	8.97							1

*$p < .05$, **$p < .01$; Gender=('0'-male, '1'-female); class=('0'-SS1 students, '1'-SS2 students)

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics and correlations for the study variables. Among the demographic variables (age, gender, and class), gender (female) was significantly related to self-identity compared with male sex. Additionally, classes (SS1 students) were more related to self-identity than were SS2 students ($r = -.10$, $p < .05$). Extraversion was positively related to self-identity ($r = .11$, $p < .05$). Neuroticism was positively related to self-identity ($r = .14$, $p < .001$). Social support was negatively related to self-identity ($r = -.18$, $p < .001$).

Table 2: Summary of Process Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Self-identity

	B	SE	T	p	LLCI	ULCI
Age	.383	.181	2.111	.035	.026	.739
Gender	-.299	.784	-.381	.703	-1.839	1.241
Class	-.671	.632	-1.062	.289	-1.913	.571
Extraversion	.109	.073	1.492	.136	-.035	.253
Social support	-.134	.042	-3.201	.001	-.217	-.052
Int_1	.008	.007	1.184	.237	-.005	.021

Gender = ('0'-male, '1'-female); class = ('0'-SS1, '1'-SS2); Int_1 = Extraversion X Social support

Table 2 shows the regression results for extraversion and self-identity. Extraversion was not found to be a significant predictor of self-identity ($b = .11$, $t(198) = 1.49$, $p = .136$, 95% CI [-.04, .26], Cohen's $d = 0.14$), indicating a small effect size that lacks practical significance. In contrast, social support emerged as a significant negative predictor of self-identity ($b = -.13$, $t(198) = -3.20$, $p = .001$, 95% CI [-.20, -.06], Cohen's $d = 0.30$), suggesting a moderate effect size that has practical relevance. Furthermore, social support did not have a significant moderating effect on the relationship between extraversion and self-identity ($b = .01$, $t(198) = 1.184$, $p = .237$, 95% CI [-.005, .021]), with an effect size of Cohen's $d = 0.10$, indicating a negligible impact.

Table 3: Summary of Process Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Self-identity

	Coeff	se	T	p	LLCI	ULCI
Age	.389	.180	2.163	.031	.036	.742
Gender	-.620	.788	-.787	.432	-2.169	.928
Class	-.603	.620	-.974	.331	-1.821	.615
Neuroticism	.110	.070	1.570	.117	-.028	.247
Social support	-.126	.041	-3.080	.002	-.206	-.046
Int_2	.014	.007	2.118	.035	.001	.027

Gender = ('0'-male, '1'-female); class=('0'-SS1, '1'-SS2); Int_2 = Neuroticism X Social support

Table 3 shows the regression results examining the relationship between neuroticism and self-identity. Neuroticism was found to be a nonsignificant predictor of self-identity (b = .11, t = 1.57, p = .117), indicating that it has no substantial effect on self-identity. The effect size for neuroticism, as measured by Cohen's d, was negligible (d = 0.09), suggesting minimal practical significance. In contrast, social support emerged as a significant negative predictor of self-identity (b = -.13, t = -3.08, p = .002), with a moderate effect size (d = 0.34), highlighting a meaningful impact. The 95% confidence interval for the effect of social support on self-identity ranged from -0.21--0.05, further emphasizing the practical relevance of this finding. Additionally, social support significantly moderated the relationship between neuroticism and self-identity (b = .014, t = 2.118, p = .035), with a confidence interval of (0.001, 0.027). This suggests that the impact of neuroticism on self-identity varies depending on the level of social support, with a small to moderate effect size (d = 0.25).
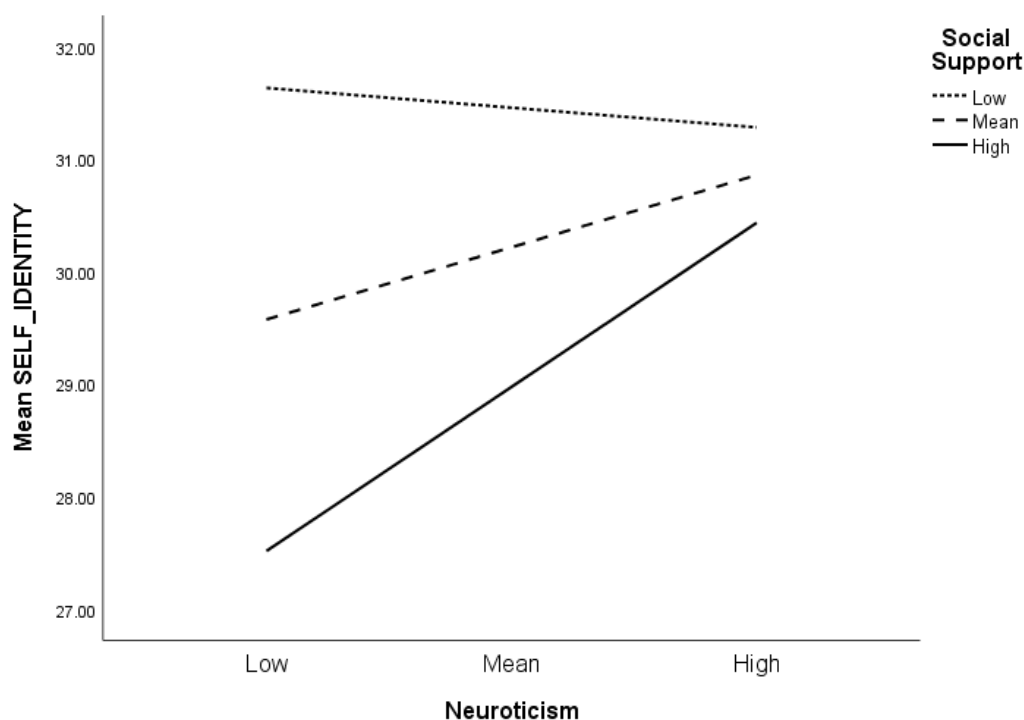

Figure 2: Graph showing the moderation effect of social support for neuroticism.

Summary of findings

1. Extraversion was not a significant predictor of self-identity.
2. Neuroticism was not a significant predictor of self-identity.
3. Social support was a significant negative predictor of self-identity.
4. Social support did not moderate the relationship between extraversion and self-identity.
5. Social support moderated the relationship between neuroticism and self-identity

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that extraversion does not significantly predict self-identity among adolescents, leading to the acceptance of Hypothesis one. This result contrasts with those of previous research (e.g., Wu, 2006; Lounsbury et al., 2007; Hirschi, 2011), which demonstrated significant links between the Big Five personality traits and self-identity. Similarly, studies on educational identity have identified personality traits as predictors of identity processes (Klimstra et al., 2012). For example, Koole et al. (2001) reported that extraversion was negatively correlated with cooperation in social dilemmas, suggesting that while extraverts may have high visibility and assertiveness in social settings, these traits do not necessarily translate into coherent self-identity. One possible explanation for the current findings is that extroverted individuals express their identity more naturally, reducing the likelihood of experiencing identity crises. Conversely, neuroticism also did not significantly predict self-identity, which is inconsistent with earlier studies indicating a positive relationship between personality traits and identity crisis (e.g., Lounsbury et al., 2007). High neuroticism is often associated with anxiety and decision-making difficulties (Norris et al., 2007; Reynaud et al., 2012). However, in the Nigerian context, other factors, such as gender identity, familial support, and parenting styles, may overshadow the impacts of neuroticism on identity, suggesting a complex interplay of variables influencing adolescent development.

This study highlights the importance of social support as a significant predictor of self-identity crises among adolescents, which aligns with Gallagher et al. (2002) and Devi and Jyotsana (2016). This underscores the need for robust support systems, particularly in Nigerian communities where extended family networks often play a crucial role in adolescent development. Interestingly, the findings revealed that social support did not moderate the relationship between extraversion and identity crises, indicating that personality traits may influence identity crises independently of social support. Furthermore, demographic factors such as gender and school class emerged as significant predictors of identity crises. This challenges previous findings that locality and gender are not significant determinants (Mishra & Khatun, 2015), suggesting that more nuanced cultural factors may be at play in Nigeria, where traditional gender roles and educational experiences can shape identity formation.

Implications of the Findings

The study's results indicate that extraversion and neuroticism do not significantly predict adolescent self-identity crises. Moreover, social support plays a critical role in moderating the relationship between neuroticism and identity crises. These findings have important implications for child-rearing practices, educational approaches, and mental health initiatives in Southeast Nigeria, where cultural values and social structures may influence identity formation and development. In Southeast Nigeria, family dynamics and cultural expectations

often shape adolescent development. The finding that extraversion does not predict identity crises suggests that parents and caregivers should focus on nurturing self-awareness and personal responsibility rather than solely encouraging extroverted behaviours. This could involve creating environments where adolescents can explore their interests and talents through community engagements or extracurricular activities. Parents should encourage adolescents to engage in reflective practices, helping them understand their strengths and identities more deeply. Furthermore, given that extraversion is linked to more extraordinary identity achievement, parents might consider strategies to foster collaborative and communicative environments that allow adolescents to express themselves without pressure to conform to extroverted norms. This can help promote a sense of belonging and identity development within the cultural context of Southeast Nigeria, where communal values are significant.

The results imply that educational systems in Southeast Nigeria should integrate social-emotional learning into curricula. Schools can provide support systems that enhance social interactions and peer relationships, which are critical for identity development. Educators should be trained to recognize signs of neuroticism and offer appropriate support. Establishing mentorship programs can also be beneficial, providing adolescents with role models that can guide them through identity exploration and reinforce the importance of social support. Moreover, fostering an inclusive school environment where all personality types are valued can help mitigate the adverse effects of neuroticism. By emphasizing teamwork and cooperation over competition, educators can reduce pressure on neurotic students, allowing them to thrive socially and academically.

Given the significant role of social support in moderating the effects of neuroticism on identity crises, mental health services in Southeast Nigeria should prioritize the establishment of robust support systems for adolescents. This can include training community members and parents in recognizing and addressing mental health issues, thereby reducing the stigma around seeking help. Support groups can be created to provide a safe space for adolescents to share their experiences and challenges related to identity formation. Community health initiatives should focus on enhancing family dynamics and communication. Workshops to improve parenting skills can help families provide the emotional support that adolescents need during their formative years. Additionally, collaboration with local religious and community organizations can help spread awareness about the importance of emotional and social support in adolescent development.

The study's findings could be interpreted within Southeast Nigerian culture, which highly values communal ties and family structures. The results suggest that while individual personality traits such as extraversion and neuroticism play a role, the overarching influence of social support cannot be overstated. Family support, peer relationships, and community engagement are crucial in shaping self-identity among adolescents. Educational and mental health programs should consider cultural values, integrating local beliefs and practices that resonate with the community. Tailoring interventions to reflect the cultural context can enhance their effectiveness, ensuring that they are relevant and acceptable to the adolescents and families they aim to serve.

Limitations of the study

One major limitation of the study is the small sample size. The researcher was not able to sample more participants for the study. This was because of the ongoing National Examination involving all the SS3 students across the Federation at the time of data collection. Thus, SS3 data were unavailable for the study, limiting the amount of coverage proposed and the generalizability of the results. The study also needed more time and resources. The possibility that some of the respondents may need to be more sincere with their responses may have affected the results of the study. Again, difficulty was experienced in obtaining absolute cooperation from the respondents; some were lacking in completing the questionnaires, which may be why some copies of the instrument were not returned.

Summary and Conclusion

This study investigated extraversion and neuroticism as predictors of identity crisis and examined the moderating role of perceived social support. The results of the study show that extraversion did not predict identity crisis. This means that extroverts tend to demonstrate identity naturally. This result is understandable considering that extraverted people possess high group visibility, like to talk, are more dominant in social settings and assert themselves. The results show that neuroticism did not significantly predict identity crisis. This means that neurotic adolescents are not significantly prone to suffering identity crises. There could be other variables that might have guaranteed the lack of significance, as demonstrated in other studies. However, the results showed that social support independently predicted the self-identification crisis and moderated the relationship between neuroticism and the self-identity crisis. Finally, the results also show that social support did not moderate the relationship between extraversion and identity crisis. This is an indication that extraversion relates to identify crisis independently of social support. The results of the study imply that proper attention should be given to children at the early stages of development to guide them through opportunities that will develop their outlook, worldview and self-identity development for optimal functioning at the adolescent and adult levels.

Finally, the implications of this study underscore the need for a multifaceted approach to adolescent development in Southeast Nigeria. By prioritizing social support, enhancing educational strategies, and fostering positive family dynamics, stakeholders can significantly impact identity formation and mitigate identity crises among adolescents. Addressing the nuances of personality traits within the rich cultural tapestry of Southeast Nigeria will be essential in supporting the next generation's mental health and self-identity development.

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