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The Study of the Process and Nature of Career Identity Formation in Adolescent Girls for Developing an Awareness and Preparedness Model

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ABSTRACT

Objective: Adolescence is a critical period; the identity formed during this time impacts all major life decisions, including career decision-making. This study aimed to assess the effectiveness of an awareness and preparedness model for career decision-making among 11th-grade high school girls in Khorramabad.

Methods and Materials: This research was conducted using a sequential exploratory mixed-method design. The study population included 11th-grade female students from Behesht Aein School in Khorramabad during the 2021-2022 academic year. In the qualitative phase, 20 adolescents were selected through purposive sampling, and semi-structured interviews were conducted. The data were then analyzed using conventional qualitative content analysis, and a career decision-making awareness model was developed based on the findings. Then, 30 adolescents were selected through simple random sampling and randomly assigned to experimental and control groups of 15 each. Data were collected using the Dielas Career Identity Questionnaire (1981) and the Betz and Taylor Career Decision-Making Questionnaire (1996). The experimental group received twelve 1.5-hour sessions of the career decision-making awareness model. Data were analyzed using multivariate covariance analysis in SPSS version 25.

Findings: In the qualitative results, three main categories emerged: "the process of self-concept discovery," "facilitating factors in the development of career self-concept," and "contextual factors in job selection." In the quantitative results, there was a significant difference between the pre-test (3.87) and post-test (4.8) scores of career identity in the experimental group (P=0.001, η 2=0.388, f=17.091). There was also a significant difference in career decision-making scores between the pre-test (2.96) and post-test (3.72) in adolescent girls before and after the career decision-making awareness model (P=0.001, η 2=0.893, f=25.327).

Conclusion: The awareness model intervention, designed considering the context, environment, and teachings relevant to 11th-grade high school girls, led to increased career identity formation and career decision-making readiness. School counselors can utilize this intervention to assist in career identity formation and enhance career decision-making readiness among adolescents.

Keywords: Adolescents, Career Identity Formation, Career Decision-Making.

1. Introduction

dentity is a broad concept encompassing both intrapsychic and interpersonal aspects. It can be approximately defined as the "unity of existence" or "balance or interaction between what is perceived as self and what is perceived as other." Identity allows an individual to move with a sense of continuity and purpose toward expressing their goals and values in life (Kunnen, 2013). The growth and development of identity during adolescence occur through systematic maturation and stability. Life events and daily experiences are fundamental mechanisms in identity development. A cohesive and distinct identity is closely related to effective functioning in various domains. Constructive and quality family relationships and friendships are facilitators in identity formation (Branje, 2022). Career identity is considered a primary domain of overall identity. This relationship was first proposed by Erikson (1968) (Sica et al., 2023). Career identity encompasses complex connections involving both individual and collective components (Batool & Ghayas, 2020). The issue of achieving a firm career identity is central to adolescents' social lives. Choosing a path to a specific profession clarifies and strengthens an adolescent's identity. Possessing a definitive career identity, or a clear and stable picture of one's goals, interests, personality, and personal abilities, aids in appropriate career decision-making and confidence in personal abilities related to career decisions (Villacís et al., 2023). A study highlights the influential role of career guidance and education in career decision-making, arguing that, given significant societal changes such as rapid technological development, changing communications, an unstable job market, and even changes in family structure, career guidance plays a crucial role in the career decisionmaking process. Career guidance education should function both preventively and developmentally, by providing information and guidance, and therapeutically (Vasoula & Loucia, 2020).

Today's adolescents face numerous cognitive crises due to rapid and unpredictable transformations, leading to many challenges and difficulties in achieving identity formation and career identity. Additionally, the absence of a model to facilitate the process of career identity formation is a significant gap. An appropriate career decision-making awareness model can assist adolescents in identity formation and effective career decision-making. Understanding oneself, including one's abilities, strengths, and weaknesses, can aid in effective identity formation, allowing adolescents to make more precise and suitable choices in crucial years ahead, such as education and career. Focusing on effective and practical education in self-awareness, recognizing personal characteristics and abilities, and aiding adolescents in recognizing their career identity can equip them with effective tools for career decision-making. This can also prevent the emergence of ineffective and dissatisfied adults disappointed by inappropriate jobs and potential psychological harm (Mareş et al., 2022). Dissatisfaction and mismatch with major life tasks, such as occupation and education, lead to severe frustration and psychological harm in other areas of personal and social life. Given that previous research has primarily focused on job commitment, job satisfaction, and confused career identity, while these topics are important and require research, there has been less focus on career identity formation and developing a model for appropriate career decision-making. Therefore, this research is necessary to help adolescents achieve career identity and develop a model for conscious job selection and effective career decision-making, considering that prevention is much less costly and requires less energy and time.

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study Design and Participants

This research employed a sequential exploratory mixedmethod design. In the sequential exploratory strategy, qualitative data were collected and analyzed first, followed by quantitative data collection and analysis based on the results of the first stage. For identifying the components needed to develop the educational program, conventional qualitative content analysis was used, and to determine the effectiveness of the developed model, a quasi-experimental method with a pre-test and post-test control group design was utilized. The statistical population included all 11thgrade female students in Khorramabad. In the qualitative section, purposeful sampling was used, involving 20 11thgrade girls studying in 2022. The exact number of



JAYPS

participants in the qualitative section was determined by two criteria: the continuation of semi-structured interviews until data saturation and sufficiency, meaning that the sample size reflected the range of participants and sites constituting the community, ensuring that others outside the sample had an equal chance to share the experiences of those within the research. Saturation was reached when the interviewer received repetitive information with no new data emerging. The researcher identified various responses and recorded repetitions during interviews, continuing sampling until no new information or themes emerged, reaching the point of theoretical saturation.

In the quantitative section, simple random sampling was used. Among the schools that showed willingness to cooperate, Behesht Aein School in Khorramabad was selected based on the available time for implementing the career decision-making awareness model. In the second sampling stage, to select appropriate samples for experimental and control groups, 30 out of 60 adolescents were chosen through simple random sampling and randomly assigned to experimental and control groups of 15 each. Sample size in the quantitative research depends on the research method, with 15 participants per group being sufficient for experimental design. Inclusion criteria were consent to participate, absence of psychological disorders (based on self-report and researcher interview), and being a 11th-grade student. Exclusion criteria included incomplete participation in sessions or lack of cooperation.

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Semi-Structured Interview

In the qualitative section, a semi-structured interview was used, with a protocol including predetermined questions, allowing the researcher to ask new questions during the study if needed. In this study, interview questions focused on the nature and process of career identity formation and conscious career decision-making among adolescents.

2.2.2. Career Identity

Designed based on Marcia's model to determine career identity status, this questionnaire, developed by Dielas and Jerning in 1981, consists of seven items, each with five statements. Respondents choose one statement per item, with a total of 35 statements. Each choice indicates a type of identity, and by counting the selected statements for each identity type, the individual's career identity is determined. Dielas (1981) reported reliability coefficients of 0.91 and Webdemus (1993) reported 0.89. In Iran, Feizi (1995), Hosseini (1996), and Hosseini Tabatabai (1997) reported reliability coefficients of 0.77, 0.80, and 0.71, respectively (Heydarnia et al., 2018).

2.2.3. Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy

This questionnaire, based on Crites' (1978) model of career maturity and developed by Betz et al. (1996), evaluates self-efficacy beliefs related to career decision-making tasks. It contains 25 questions, with scores ranging from 25 to 144. The questionnaire assesses five competencies: self-assessment, job information, goal setting, planning, and problem-solving, using a 5-point Likert scale from no confidence to full confidence. Betz et al. (1996, as cited in Karimi, 2008) reported a Cronbach's alpha of 0.92, and Karimi (2008) reported 0.92 in Iran. Bavi et al. (2009) found a Cronbach's alpha of 0.93. Content validity was confirmed by several professors and previous research (Heydarnia et al., 2018).

2.3. Data analysis

Phase One (Qualitative): The qualitative phase involved 11th-grade girls studying in Khorramabad during the 2021-2022 academic year. Purposeful sampling was used, with theoretical saturation reached after interviewing 20 participants. Semi-structured interviews were conducted, allowing respondents to freely answer predetermined questions aligned with research objectives. Interviews were stopped upon reaching theoretical saturation. Questions included perspectives on jobs, the impact of job choice on life, and how personal abilities aid in job selection and decision-making. Interview questions were designed based on previous research and aimed at developing a career decision-making awareness model, with experts reviewing the questions for bias. Interviews were conducted in a counseling center for security, each lasting 45-60 minutes, totaling 1100 minutes. Participants were assured of confidentiality, voluntary participation, and data usage solely for research, with interview recordings deleted postgraduation and publication. Participants' reviews ensured data accuracy, with member checking and trustworthiness measures such as triangulation, close engagement, and clear process documentation. Written consent for interviews and recording, confidentiality, and voluntary participation was obtained. Recorded interviews were transcribed and deleted after analysis. Grounded theory, a qualitative research



JAYPS

method aiming to describe social processes and develop theory, was used for data analysis, involving open, axial, and selective coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Key factors in career identity formation were identified and presented in Table 1.

Phase Two (Development of the Career Decision-Making Awareness Model): Based on qualitative findings and existing research, a career decision-making awareness model was developed, emphasizing practical exercises and techniques over theoretical concepts. The model consisted of twelve group sessions, summarized in Table 2.

Phase Three (Quantitative-Qualitative): This phase involved connecting qualitative and quantitative data, with the developed model applied in a quasi-experimental pre-test post-test control group design. The study population included 11th-grade girls in Khorramabad during 2022. Simple random sampling selected 30 participants from 60, divided into experimental and control groups. The focus was on themes from the qualitative phase, such as self-discovery, career self-concept development, and job selection. The twelve-session career decision-making awareness model was reviewed and approved by university experts. The Dielas Career Identity Questionnaire and Betz and Taylor Career Decision-Making Questionnaire were used for evaluation. The program was implemented for the experimental group, with post-tests administered to both groups. Ethical considerations included confidentiality, voluntary participation, and post-study workshops for the control group. Data were analyzed using descriptive (frequency, mean, standard deviation, skewness) and inferential statistics (univariate covariance analysis) in SPSS version 25. Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Levene's tests confirmed data normality and homogeneity, respectively,

with multivariate covariance analysis used for final data analysis.

3. Findings and Results

Qualitative Phase: In the qualitative phase, after extracting categories using conventional qualitative content analysis, the themes were identified and reported in Table 1. Based on Table 1 and the extracted categories, along with reviewing the texts and materials related to career identity, Table 2 was developed.

Quantitative Phase: Participants in this study were 30 eleventh-grade adolescent girls. Table 3 examines the mean and standard deviation of the variables of career decisionmaking and career identity. Based on the findings, the mean variables of career identity and career decision-making for the experimental group in the pre-test were (3.87 and 2.96) respectively. After implementing the career decisionmaking awareness model and conducting the post-test, the scores for the experimental group in career identity and career decision-making variables increased to (4.80 and 3.72) respectively. To examine the effect of the career decision-making awareness model on career identity and career decision-making, multivariate covariance analysis was used. The results of multivariate covariance analysis showed a significant difference between the experimental and control groups in career identity (5.47 and 4.13) and career decision-making (4.10 and 3.33). Based on eta squared, it can be said that the effect of the career decisionmaking awareness model was 38% for career identity and 89% for career decision-making, indicating the impact of the group career decision-making awareness intervention.

Table 1

Core Codes and Selective Codes of the Qualitative Research Section

Main Categories	Sub-Categories
Self-discovery Process	Discovering talents, strengths, weaknesses, mental potentials, personality recognition
Facilitating Factors in the Development of Career Self-Concept	Personal self-actualization, career self-actualization, social self-actualization, economic empowerment, suitable job
Contextual Factors in Job Selection	Role of family, personal job criteria, job role models, job mythology, humanitarian job criteria, job knowledge

From the semi-structured interview data analyzed using the grounded theory method, after the coding process, 204 open codes, 16 axial codes, and 3 selective codes (selfdiscovery process, facilitating factors in career self-concept development, contextual factors in job selection) were extracted from the participants' perspectives. The selective code of self-discovery process includes (discovering talents, strengths, weaknesses, mental potentials, personality recognition), facilitating factors in career self-concept development include (personal and career self-actualization, job-personality compatibility, economic empowerment, social self-actualization), and contextual factors in job



selection from the adolescents' perspectives include (role of family, personal job criteria, job role models, humanitarian job criteria, job knowledge, job mythology). The obtained selective codes are interrelated and help to understand the nature of adolescents' career identity formation, illustrating the nature and process of career identity formation among adolescents.

Table 2

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Description of Sessions in the Career Decision-Making Awareness Model

Session	Session Topic	Session Content				
1	Introduction and Preliminary Explanations	Getting acquainted, building a good relationship with group members through eye contact and active listening, empathy, trust-building, introducing group members to each other, explaining group rules, clarifying ambiguities, understanding the training process, and administering the pre-test.				
2	Preliminary Self-Knowledge	Understanding changes during adolescence, explaining physical, emotional, and cognitive changes, self-knowledge exercises and practical implementations, relationship between self-knowledge and self-confidence in discovering abilities and talents, examining preferred jobs and criteria for job selection.				
3	Self-Knowledge and Identity Discovery Based on Choice Theory	Presenting fundamental concepts of choice theory, examining individual needs, administering needs tests, and self-knowledge based on choice theory.				
4	Self-Knowledge and Identity Discovery Based on the Big Five Personality Traits Theory	Presenting concepts of the Big Five personality traits theory and self-knowledge based on it.				
5	Self-Knowledge and Identity Discovery Based on Holland's Theory	Presenting concepts of Holland's theory, examining each adolescent's personality codes, and self-knowledge based on them.				
6	Self-Knowledge and Identity Discovery Based on Enneagram Theory	Presenting concepts of Enneagram theory, examining personality codes, and adolescent self-knowledge.				
7	Self-Knowledge and Identity Discovery Based on Time Perspective Theory	Presenting concepts of time perspective theory and adolescent self-knowledge.				
8	Self-Knowledge and Identity Discovery Based on Career Anchors Theory	Presenting concepts of career anchors theory, self-knowledge, and identity discovery for adolescents.				
9	Decision-Making Skills and Job Knowledge	Examining the effects of job dissatisfaction on mental health and individual life quality, understanding decision-making skills and decision-making stages from theorists' perspectives, understanding job identification resources, job site visits, and discussions with job owners.				
10	Identity Re-Creation	Redefining adolescents' identity and rediscovering oneself based on the concepts presented in previous sessions, strengthening family relationships, assertiveness training, expressing job decisions to family, building resilience in job selection until achieving the desired outcome.				
11	Job-Personality Matching	Interviewing each adolescent, reviewing their preferred job list, assessing and examining job- personality fit for effective career decision-making based on Parsons' perspective.				
12	Post-Test	Summarizing, addressing issues, and administering the post-test.				

Table 2 provides a 12-session educational description. The researcher, based on the qualitative phase findings, reviewed studies and literature on the nature and process of career identity formation among adolescents, gathering various resources around concepts extracted from the qualitative interviews (Phase One). In developing the model and selecting content, emphasis was placed on using practical exercises and techniques while avoiding excessive theoretical concepts. The career decision-making awareness model was designed as a short-term group training program consisting of twelve sessions.

In the next phase, all study participants were eleventhgrade students in experimental and mathematical fields. The number of children varied up to four, and birth order ranged from first to third child. Parental occupations and education levels also varied up to a master's degree.

Table 3

Results of Descriptive Analysis for Control and Experimental Groups

Group	Variables	Frequency	Mean	Standard Deviation
Experimental	Career Identity	15	5.47	1.356
	Career Decision-Making	15	4.10	0.366
Control	Career Identity	15	4.13	1.995
	Career Decision-Making	15	3.33	0.551



According to the data in Table 3, the descriptive analysis results for the control and experimental groups for career identity show that the mean for the control group was 4.13,

and for the experimental group, it was 5.47. For career decision-making, the mean for the control group was 3.33, and for the experimental group, it was 4.10.

Table 4

Results of Univariate Covariance Analysis for Career Decision-Making Variable

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	Degrees of Freedom	Mean Squares	F	Significance Level	Eta Squared	Power
Constant (Career Identity)	30.932	1	30.932	17.091	0.001	0.388	1
Error	48.865	27	1.810				
Constant (Career Decision- Making)	8.540	1	8.540	25.327	0.001	0.893	1
Error	1.023	27	0.038				

Table 4 shows that considering the pre-test scores of career identity as a control variable, the difference between the performance of the experimental and control groups in this variable is significant at the 0.001 level, meaning that there is a significant difference in the dependent variable of career identity between the experimental and control groups. The research intervention (career decision-making awareness and preparedness model) had an increasing effect on the career identity of the experimental group compared to the control group. Additionally, considering eta squared, it can be said that 38% of the changes in this variable are due to the research intervention. Similarly, considering the pretest scores of career decision-making as a control variable, the difference between the performance of the experimental and control groups in this variable is significant at the 0.001 level. This indicates a significant difference in the dependent variable of career decision-making between the experimental and control groups. The research intervention (career decision-making awareness and preparedness model) had an increasing effect on the career decision-making of the experimental group compared to the control group, and considering eta squared, it can be said that 89% of the changes in this variable are due to the research intervention.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The present study aimed to examine the challenges of career identity formation among adolescents, develop and validate an appropriate and facilitating approach for career identity formation and conscious decision-making among adolescents, and provide suggestions for aligning job interests with individual abilities for conscious job selection based on understanding career identity. The findings of this study, regarding the nature and process of career identity formation and the factors influencing it, are related to various dimensions such as self-discovery, facilitating factors in career self-concept transformation, and contextual factors in job selection. Therefore, to have a more significant impact, all these dimensions should be considered in assessments and training for the growth and enhancement of this phenomenon. The results show that the selected content used in the career decision-making awareness model effectively impacted each dimension of career identity and career decision-making.

In the discussion of career identity, the results align with the research by Batool and Ghayas (2020), who emphasized the role of self-knowledge and exploration in forming career identity (Batool & Ghayas, 2020). Additionally, Kunnen (2013) examined the effects of career choice guidance on career identity development, showing that career guidance significantly increased participants' knowledge about personality and career identity (Kunnen, 2013). From this perspective, In domestic and international studies on career identity, training has focused more on self-knowledge education and using a single theory in career identity formation (Heydarnia et al., 2018; Mareş et al., 2022). However, this study utilized multiple theories in developing the model to expand self-knowledge, providing different perspectives on self-knowledge, which can influence adolescents' career identity formation.

In the discussion of career decision-making, the findings align with other research, indicating that the educational model effectively increased the career decision-making component. Vasoula and Loucia (2020) highlighted the influential role of career guidance and education in career decision-making, arguing that significant societal changes, such as rapid technological development, changing communications, unstable job markets, and even changes in family structure, make career guidance crucial in the career



decision-making process. They suggest that career guidance education should function preventively and therapeutically, providing information and guidance (Vasoula & Loucia, 2020).

The preventive role of career decision-making education and its impact on society and families is undeniable. In another similar study, Udaya et al. (2020) pointed to the role of insufficient information, lack of preparedness, and inconsistent information in career decisions, highlighting the importance of providing information and education in career decision-making (Udayar et al., 2020). In today's society, increasing demand for career counseling indicates that preparing and deciding on future jobs without practical education has become a stressful and confusing issue (Lee, 2005).

The results of domestic and international studies on career decision-making emphasize the influential role of education. However, this study sought to provide a more comprehensive package than previous research by focusing on self-discovery, in-depth exploration of self, and career identity formation for adolescents, along with education on job identification resources, job-personality fit, decisionmaking skills, assertiveness, and resilience in decisionmaking. Therefore, this study highlights the importance of addressing career identity formation and career decisionmaking among adolescents, indicating that the career decision-making awareness model is effective in enhancing career identity and career decision-making. The results confirm the necessity of practical education in developing career identity and decision-making.

Adolescence is crucial for career identity formation and its impact on an individual's life. Therefore, special attention to this period and the challenges and obstacles in career identity formation for adolescents is necessary.

5. Limitations & Suggestions

Limitations of the study include the limited statistical population and working solely with adolescent girls. Based on the findings, it is suggested that future research examines the impact of the career decision-making awareness model on adolescent boys and compares it with adolescent girls, as well as its impact on tenth and twelfth-grade students.

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Declaration

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

Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethics Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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Authors' Contributions

All authors contributed equally.

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