AJEMATES
African Journal of Educational Management, Teaching and Entrepreneurship Studies
VOL.17 (2), January-April, 2026; https://ajemates.org

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT, PEER INFLUENCE, AND IDENTITY FORMATION AMONG EMERGING ADULTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION: A MODERATION ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

Identity formation is a central developmental task during emerging adulthood, particularly within the university context where individuals encounter complex academic, social, and personal transitions. This study examined the relationships among parental involvement, peer influence, and identity formation among university undergraduates, with a specific focus on the moderating role of parental involvement. A correlational survey research design was adopted, and data was collected from 394 undergraduates in Nigerian universities using standardized instruments measuring parental involvement, peer influence, and identity formation. Data were analyzed using Pearson correlation, independent samples t-test, analysis of variance (ANOVA), and moderation analysis. The findings revealed a significant positive relationship between parental involvement and identity formation, indicating that higher levels of parental support are associated with stronger identity development. In contrast, peer influence demonstrated a significant negative relationship with identity formation, suggesting that increased susceptibility to peer pressure may hinder identity clarity. The study also found no significant gender differences in identity formation, while age had a significant influence. Furthermore, parental involvement significantly moderates the relationship between peer influence and identity formation, highlighting its role in shaping how peer dynamics affect identity outcomes. These findings underscore the importance of adopting an integrative approach that considers both family and peer contexts in understanding identity development among undergraduates. The study contributes to the existing literature by providing empirical evidence from a non-Western context and offers practical implications for parents, educators, counsellors, and policymakers aiming to promote healthy psychosocial development among emerging adults.

Keywords: Identity Formation, Parental Involvement, Peer Influence, Emerging Adulthood, Undergraduates, Moderation Analysis, Nigeria

Introduction

The university years represent a pivotal phase in human development, during which individuals transition from adolescence to emerging adulthood (Sales et al.,2015). This period is often marked by significant cognitive, emotional, and social changes that shape how young people understand themselves and their place in the world (Mastorci et al.,2024). One of the most central developmental tasks of this stage is identity formation, which Erikson (1968) famously described as the resolution of the psychosocial crisis of identity versus role confusion (Mitchell et al.,2021). Identity formation refers to the process through which individuals explore, define, and internalize values, beliefs, and goals that provide coherence and direction in life (Crocetti et al.,2022). For undergraduates, this process is especially salient, as they are often confronted with academic demands, social pressures, and expectations regarding future careers and personal relationships (Bakker&Mostert,2024). Understanding the factors that influence identity formation in this population is thus an essential concern for psychology, education, and social science research (Bond et al.,2025).

Among the factors that have consistently been highlighted in identity development are parental involvement and peer influence. Parental involvement is widely understood as the extent to which parents remain emotionally, socially, and sometimes academically invested in their children's lives, even as they enter adulthood (Ma et al.,2026). While parental influence may decline in direct control as children grow older, research indicates that parental support, encouragement, and guidance continue to play a pivotal role in the psychosocial outcomes of young adults (Ye et al.,2025). Positive parental involvement provides emotional security, promotes autonomy, and models adaptive coping strategies that foster healthy identity development (Li & Guo,2025). Conversely, low or inconsistent parental involvement may leave students vulnerable to confusion, poor decision-making, and susceptibility to adverse external influences (Laursen&Veenstra,2021).

Alongside parental influence, peer influence has been recognized as a powerful determinant of undergraduate behavior and identity. Peers provide immediate social contexts that shape norms, values, and behaviors (Bishop,2023). During the undergraduate years,). Whileships and peer networks often become stronger sources of identification than the family, particularly as students seek independence from parental oversight (Mehrpour et al.,2024). While positive peer groups can encourage academic motivation, self-discovery, and personal growth, negative peer pressure can foster maladaptive behaviors, conformity, and a loss of identity (Laursen&Venstra,2021). The complex interplay between autonomy from parents and reliance on peers raises critical questions about how these two spheres of influence interact in shaping identity outcomes (Crespo-Lopez&Koning,2026).

Recent scholarship emphasizes that parental involvement does not simply act independently of peer influence; instead, it can serve as a moderating factor. In other words, the degree of parental involvement may strengthen or weaken the relationship between peer influence and identity formation. For example, students with strong parental support may be less negatively affected by adverse peer pressures, as they can draw upon stable values and emotional backing from their families (Zimmer-Gembeck et al.,2023). On the other hand, inadequate parental involvement may leave students highly susceptible to negative peer influence, potentially undermining their formation of identity (Yang et al.,2023). Investigating this moderating role is therefore crucial in understanding the holistic dynamics of identity development among undergraduates.

The African context, and Nigeria in particular, provides a unique backdrop for such an inquiry. Nigerian undergraduates face multifaceted challenges, including academic stress, economic uncertainties, and cultural expectations around family roles and responsibilities (Osiesi et al.,2026). Family ties in many African societies remain deeply significant, with parents expected to provide guidance and support well into adulthood (Odimegwu et al.,2020). At the same time, the influence of peers is amplified within university campuses, where students live in close social environments that encourage interaction, imitation, and conformity (Shin,2022). This dual influence of family and peer-based makes Nigerian undergraduates an ideal population for examining how identity is formed in contexts where tradition, modernity, and globalization intersect (Byl et al.,2023).

Empirical studies lend weight to these concerns. Research has shown significant correlations between parental involvement and positive identity outcomes such as self-esteem, resilience, and academic persistence (Mocho et al.,2025). Similarly, peer influence has been linked with behaviors that either enhance or undermine student adjustment, ranging from collaborative learning and mentorship to risky behaviors such as drug use and delinquency (Watts et al.,2024). However, the existing body of literature has paid relatively little attention to the potential interaction effects between these two variables, particularly in non-Western settings. By employing moderation analysis, this study aims to fill this gap and provide nuanced insights into how parental involvement can either buffer or amplify the effects of peer influence on identity formation.

Furthermore, the roles of gender and age in identity formation remain important to consider. Prior findings suggest that while both males and females undergo similar identity development processes, societal expectations may shape the domains in which identity is prioritized (Maehler&Hernandez-Torrano,2025). Likewise, identity exploration and commitment may vary across ages within the undergraduate population, reflecting differences in maturity, exposure, and readiness to assume adult roles (Bae et al.,2026). Investigating these factors

alongside parental and peer influences adds depth to the understanding of identity formation in this demographic.

In light of these considerations, this study focuses on exploring the relationships between parental involvement, peer influence, and identity formation among university undergraduates, with particular attention to the moderating role of parental involvement. By situating the research within the Nigerian higher education context, the study not only contributes to developmental psychology and educational literature but also offers practical implications for parents, educators, and policymakers concerned with fostering positive youth development. Ultimately, the findings are expected to deepen understanding of how social contexts interact to shape identity outcomes during one of the most formative periods of life.

Statement of the Problem

The current body of literature shows that identity formation is a central developmental task during emerging adulthood, particularly within university settings where individuals navigate complex academic, social, and personal transitions (Piotrowski et al.,2025). However, despite extensive research on the independent roles of family and peer contexts, there remains a critical gap in understanding how these social forces interact to shape identity outcomes among undergraduates (Jones et al.,2025). While parental involvement has been consistently associated with positive psychosocial development, including stronger identity clarity and emotional stability, peer influence has demonstrated both constructive and detrimental effects depending on its nature and intensity (Martinez et al.,2024). The coexistence of these influences creates a dynamic yet insufficiently explored interplay that may significantly determine identity trajectories (Avci et al.,2025).

In the Nigerian context, this problem is further compounded by sociocultural expectations that emphasize sustained parental guidance alongside increasing peer dependence within university environments (Alukagberie et al.,2023). Undergraduates often experience tension between traditional family values and contemporary peer norms, which may lead to confusion, identity diffusion, or maladaptive decision-making (Chandrasekara et al.,2024). Although prior studies have examined parental involvement and peer influence separately, limited empirical attention has been given to their combined or interactive effects, particularly through moderation analysis (Erkenbrack,2026). This lack of integrated understanding restricts the ability of researchers, educators, and counselors to design holistic interventions that address the realities of students' lived experiences.

Moreover, existing research has inadequately considered how demographic factors such as age and gender intersect with these social influences in shaping identity formation (Sirgy,2021). Without such insights, policies and counseling strategies may remain fragmented and less effective. Therefore, the problem this study addresses is the insufficient empirical understanding of how parental involvement moderates the

relationship between peer influence and identity formation among university undergraduates. Addressing this gap is essential for developing contextually relevant strategies that promote healthy identity development and psychosocial well-being among emerging adults in higher education.

Research Objectives

1. To determine the relationship between parental involvement and identity formation among university undergraduates.
2. To examine the relationship between peer influence and identity formation among university undergraduates.
3. To investigate whether there is a significant difference in identity formation between male and female university undergraduates.
4. To examine the influence of age on identity formation among university undergraduates.
5. To assess the level of identity formation among university undergraduates.
6. To investigate the moderating role of parental involvement in the relationship between peer influence and identity formation.

Research Questions

1. What is the level of identity formation among university undergraduates?
2. Does parental involvement moderate the relationship between peer influence and identity formation among university undergraduates?

Research Hypotheses

1. H_{01}: There is no significant relationship between parental involvement and identity formation among university undergraduates.
2. H_{02}: There is no significant relationship between peer influence and identity formation among university undergraduates.
3. H_{03}: There is no significant difference in identity formation between male and female university undergraduates.
4. H_{04}: There is no significant difference in identity formation among university undergraduates based on age.

Conceptual and theoretical framework

The conceptual framework of this study is anchored on three core constructs; parental involvement, peer influence, and identity formation; whose interactions explain developmental outcomes among university undergraduates (Shebani et al.,2026). Identity formation reflects the extent to which individuals achieve clarity, commitment, and coherence in their values, goals, and self-concept (Calderon-Villarreal et al.,2025). Parental involvement encompasses emotional support, guidance, communication, and monitoring provided by parents, even during emerging adulthood, while peer influence refers to the impact of friends and social networks on individuals' attitudes, behaviours, and decision-making (Gu et al.,2025). The framework assumes that parental involvement exerts a positive influence on identity formation, whereas peer

influence may exert either positive or negative effects depending on its nature (Ye et al.,2025). Importantly, the model introduces parental involvement as a moderating variable, proposing that it can buffer or amplify the effect of peer influence on identity formation, thereby shaping the overall developmental trajectory of undergraduates (Liu et al.,2024)

The theoretical foundation of this study is primarily grounded in Erikson's Psychosocial Theory, which posits that identity versus role confusion is the central developmental crisis of adolescence and emerging adulthood (Gross,2020). According to Erikson, successful resolution of this stage leads to the development of a stable and coherent identity, while failure results in confusion and uncertainty about one's role in society (Mitchell et al.,2021). This theory underscores the importance of social relationships in identity development, particularly interactions with significant others such as parents and peers (Stets&Huft,2026). Within this framework, parental involvement provides a secure base that fosters exploration and commitment, while peer interactions offer opportunities for social comparison, experimentation, and validation (Eker&Yildizli,2025). Thus, both parental and peer influences are critical in shaping identity outcomes, aligning with the conceptual model of the present study.

In addition, Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory provides a broader lens for understanding how multiple environmental systems interact to influence identity formation (Abass et al.,2025). This theory situates individuals within nested systems, particularly the microsystem, which includes immediate environments such as family and peers (Tong,2024). The interaction between these systems, referred to as the mesosystem, is especially relevant to this study, as it explains how parental involvement and peer influence jointly affect developmental outcomes (El Zaatiri&Maalouti,2020). By integrating this perspective, the study acknowledges that identity formation is not shaped by isolated factors but by the dynamic interplay of social contexts (Van Der Gaag et al.,2025). Together, Erikson's and Bronfenbrenner's theories offer a comprehensive framework that explains both the individual and environmental determinants of identity formation, thereby justifying the investigation of moderating effects within the undergraduate population.

Review of related literature

Empirical literature consistently identifies parental involvement as a critical determinant of positive identity development among emerging adults. Research demonstrates that sustained parental support expressed through open communication, emotional availability, and guidance facilitates both identity exploration and commitment, thereby fostering a coherent and stable sense of self (Piotrowski et al., 2025; Erkenbrack, 2026). Even within the university context, where autonomy and independence are expected to increase, parental influence remains salient in shaping students' value systems, decision-making processes, and psychosocial adjustment. For

instance, family engagement has been shown to enhance students' social-emotional development and academic functioning, both of which are closely tied to identity formation processes (Martinez-Yarza et al., 2024). Furthermore, adolescents and emerging adults who perceive their parents as supportive tend to report higher levels of self-esteem, resilience, and academic persistence, which collectively contribute to more consolidated identity outcomes (Jones et al., 2025). In contrast, limited or inconsistent parental involvement has been associated with identity confusion, reduced psychological well-being, and heightened susceptibility to external pressures, underscoring the foundational role of the family context in developmental trajectories.

Conversely, peer influence constitutes a powerful socializing mechanism that can either facilitate or hinder identity development, depending on its quality and direction. Positive peer relationships are associated with adaptive developmental outcomes, including enhanced self-confidence, social competence, and academic engagement, as they provide critical opportunities for social learning, feedback, and identity exploration (Jones et al., 2025). In addition, contemporary contexts such as digital and social media environments further amplify peer influence, shaping adolescents' identity construction through processes of comparison, validation, and self-presentation (Avci et al., 2025). However, peer influence also has a potentially detrimental dimension. Negative peer pressure, particularly when it promotes conformity to maladaptive norms, has been linked to risk-taking behaviours, substance use, and diminished clarity of self-concept. Empirical evidence suggests that an overreliance on peer approval may impede autonomous identity development, resulting in role confusion and unstable self-definition. This dual nature highlights the complexity of peer dynamics and reinforces the need to examine peer influence within broader ecological systems.

Despite extensive research examining parental involvement and peer influence as independent predictors of identity development, relatively limited attention has been paid to their interactive effects, particularly within non-Western and underrepresented contexts. Emerging evidence suggests that parental involvement may serve a protective or moderating function, buffering the negative effects of adverse peer influence while reinforcing the benefits of positive peer relationships (Chandrasekara et al., 2024). However, this moderating role remains underexplored among university undergraduates in African settings, where cultural norms often emphasize both strong familial interconnectedness and significant peer affiliation. Moreover, demographic variables such as age and gender have produced inconsistent findings across studies, indicating the necessity for context-specific investigations (Sirgy, 2021). Addressing these gaps requires integrative approaches that consider the combined and conditional effects of family and peer influences on identity formation. Such an approach is essential for advancing a more nuanced and

culturally responsive understanding of undergraduate identity development**.**

Methodology

This study adopted a correlational survey research design to examine the relationships among parental involvement, peer influence, and identity formation among university undergraduates. The design was considered appropriate because it enabled the investigation of associations among variables without manipulation, while also allowing for the testing of moderating effects and differences across demographic variables such as gender and age. Furthermore, the design supported the application of inferential statistical techniques to establish patterns of relationships among the study variables.

The study population comprised undergraduates enrolled in Nigerian universities, with emerging adults selected due to the centrality of identity formation during this developmental stage. Using a purposive sampling technique, a total of 394 students were recruited for the study. This sample size was deemed adequate for conducting correlation, regression, and moderation analyses, ensuring sufficient statistical power. The participants included 235 males (59.6%) and 159 females (40.4%), with ages ranging from 18 to 34 years (M = 23.14). The majority of respondents fell within the 22–25 age range, reflecting the typical age distribution of final-year undergraduates.

Data were collected using three standardized instruments: the Parental Involvement Scale, the Peer Influence Scale, and the Identity Formation Scale. The Parental Involvement Scale assessed students' perceptions of parental support, guidance, and emotional availability, including aspects such as monitoring, communication, and encouragement, and has demonstrated strong reliability with Cronbach's alpha values above 0.80. The Peer Influence Scale measured the extent to which students' attitudes, decisions, and behaviours were shaped by their peers, capturing both positive and negative influences, with reported reliability coefficients above 0.75. The Identity Formation Scale evaluated the degree of identity clarity and commitment, including self-concept, goal orientation, and role integration, and has shown internal consistency coefficients exceeding 0.78 in prior studies. All instruments were adapted to the Nigerian context to ensure cultural relevance and face validity. A pilot study was conducted with a small group of students outside the main sample to confirm the clarity, reliability, and appropriateness of the instruments.

Data collection was carried out through the administration of structured questionnaires during lecture breaks and at designated locations on campus. Participants were **informed** about the purpose of the study, assured of confidentiality, and provided informed consent prior to participation. The researcher, assisted by trained research assistants, supervised the data collection process to ensure accurate completion of the

questionnaires and a high response rate. Of the 410 questionnaires distributed, 394 were completed and returned, resulting in a response rate of 96%.

Data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics, including means, frequencies, and percentages, were used to summarize demographic characteristics and levels of identity formation. Inferential statistical techniques were employed to test the study hypotheses. Pearson Product–Moment Correlation was used to examine the relationships among parental involvement, peer influence, and identity formation. An independent samples t-test was conducted to assess gender differences in identity formation, while one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to examine age-related differences. In addition, moderation analysis was performed using interaction terms (Parental Involvement × Peer Influence) to determine the moderating effect of parental involvement on the relationship between peer influence and identity formation. A significance level of $p < .05$ was adopted for all statistical tests, and the results were presented in tables and interpreted in accordance with the research objectives and hypotheses.

Results

The data collected for the study were analysed using descriptive statistics, Pearson product-moment correlation, t-tests, ANOVA, and moderating analysis. The results are presented in the tables below.

Table 1: Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents N = 394
Mean Age: 23.14

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	235	59.6
Female	159	40.4
Age (years)		
18 years	1	0.3
19 years	4	1.0
20 years	32	8.1
21 years	29	7.4
22 years	60	15.2
23 years	119	30.2
24 years	73	18.5
25 years	43	10.9
26 years	21	5.3
27 years	4	1.0
28 years	6	1.5
34 years	2	0.5

Table 1 presents the socio-demographic information; the participants are not evenly distributed between males and females, with 235 males (59.6%) and 159 females (40.4%)

involved in the study. The participants' ages in the research range from 18 to 34 years. Most participants are in their twenties, aligning well with the expected age range of undergraduates, particularly those near completion of their studies. The highest frequency occurs at age 23, with 119 individuals, or 30.2% of the sample size. The second highest frequency is at age 24, with 73 respondents (18.5%), followed by age 22 with 60 respondents (15.2%). Other notable frequencies include age 25 (43 respondents or 10.9%), age 20 (32 respondents or 8.1%), and age 21 (29 respondents or 7.4%). In contrast, both ends of this age group are under-sampled. Only one participant (0.3%) was aged 18, and the numbers of participants aged 27 (4 participants, 1.0%), 28 (6 participants, 1.5%), and 34 (2 participants, 0.5%) are low. Overall, the statistics reflect a concentration of respondents aged between 22 and 25, suggesting that the population of this study predominantly consists of final-year undergraduates.

Test of Hypotheses

Hypothesis One: There is no significant relationship between parental involvement and identity formation among university undergraduates.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics and correlation between parental involvement and identity formation among university undergraduates.

Variables	N	Mean	SD	R	Sig
Parental involvement	394	47.36	5.782	.498*	.000
Identity formation	394	35.80	4.301		

Table 2 reveals the descriptive statistics and correlation between parental involvement and identity formation among university undergraduates. As shown, parental involvement is significantly correlated with identity formation ($r = .498$; $p < .05$). The evidence indicates that parental involvement is directly and positively related to identity formation. Those who score high in parental involvement score high in identity formation, and those who score low in parental involvement score low in identity formation. Hence, hypothesis one is rejected, which implies that there is a significant relationship between parental involvement and identity formation of university undergraduates.

Hypothesis Two: There is no significant relationship between peer influence and identity formation of university undergraduates

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African Journal of Educational Management, Teaching and Entrepreneurship Studies
VOL.17 (2), January-April, 2026; https://ajemates.org

Table 3: Descriptive statistics and correlation between peer influence and identity formation of university undergraduates

Variables	N	Mean	SD	R	Sig
Peer influence	394	43.54	6.600	-.449*	.000
Identity formation	394	35.80	4.301		

Table 3 reveals the descriptive statistics and correlation between parental involvement and identity formation among university undergraduates. As shown, parental involvement is significantly correlated with identity formation ($r = -.449$; $p < .05$). This finding indicates that peer influence is inversely significantly correlated with identity formation. This shows that the higher the peer influence, the lower the identity formation, and the lower the peer influence, the higher the identity formation. Hence, hypothesis two is rejected, which implies that there is a significant relationship between peer influence and identity formation of university undergraduates**.**

Hypothesis Three: There is no significant difference in the identity formation of university
male and female university undergraduates?

Table 4: T-test showing the significant difference in the level of identity formation among male and female university undergraduates

Variables	N	X	SD	T	df	P	Remark
Male	235	35.56	4.466	1.837	392	.176	NS
Female	159	36.16	4.031				

The result from Table 4 above indicates that the t-value is 1.837, with degrees of freedom (df) equal to 176, and a p-value greater than 0.05. Since $p > 0.05$, therefore, there is no significant difference in the identity formation as expressed by male and female university undergraduates. This result indicates that gender is not a factor affecting identity formation in this study, as the male mean score is significantly different from the female mean. Hence, hypothesis three is accepted, as there is no significant difference in the level of identity formation expressed by male and female university undergraduates.

Hypothesis Four: There is no significant difference in the identity formation among university undergraduates based on age

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Table 5: Analysis of Variance showing the significant difference in the identity formation of university undergraduates

Identity formation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	143.638	3	47.879	2.620	.050
Within Groups	7126.313	390	18.273		
Total	7269.952	393			

According to the analysis of variance in Table 5, there is a significant difference in the level of identity formation among university undergraduates based on age. The F-ratio (F (3, 393) = 2.620, P = P=.05) further affirms the significance of the finding. Hence, there is a significant difference in the level of identity formation among university undergraduates based on age.

Analysis of Research Questions

Research Question One: What is the level of identity formation among university undergraduates?

Table 6: Descriptive statistics showing the level of identity formation among university students

Level of identity formation	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Low	24	6.1
Average	179	45.4
High	191	48.5
Total	394	100

Table 6 shows the level of identity formation as expressed by the university undergraduates. Results indicate that the lowest number, 24, representing 6.1% of the respondents, scored low in the identity formation diagnostic measure administered to them; 179, representing 45.4%, scored average, while the highest, 191 respondents, representing 48.5%, scored high. The result indicates that a high percentage of university undergraduates used in this study have high identity formation.

Research Question Two: What is the moderating influence of parental involvement and peer influence on identity formation among university undergraduates?

Table 7: Moderating Analysis of Parental Involvement in the Relationship Between Peer influence and identity formation

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
	B	Std. Error	Beta	T	Sig.
Constant	38.221	8.943		4.274	.000
Parental Invol x Peer Infl	.011	.005	1.294	2.472	.014

Table 7 shows the moderating influence of parental involvement and peer influence on identity formation. The outcomes of the moderating analysis confirm that parental involvement significantly enhances the effect of peer influence on identity formation. However, the correlation between parental involvement and peer influence (PIxPEI) is also positive and significant ($B = 0.11$, $p < .05$). This indicates that parental involvement is a crucial moderating variable, making the effect of peer influence on identity formation more potent.

Discussions

This study examined the relationships among parental involvement, peer influence, and identity formation among university undergraduates, with particular emphasis on the moderating role of parental involvement. The findings provide important empirical insights into the social determinants of identity development within the context of emerging adulthood. The results revealed a significant positive relationship between parental involvement and identity formation, indicating that higher levels of perceived parental support are associated with stronger identity development among undergraduates. This finding is consistent with previous research, which emphasizes that parental involvement through emotional support, communication, and guidance facilitates identity exploration and commitment (Shuiab et al.,2021; Piotrowski et al., 2025; Erkenbrack, 2026). The outcome also aligns with theoretical assumptions derived from Erikson's psychosocial theory, which highlights the importance of supportive relationships in resolving identity versus role confusion (Mitchell et al., 2021; Iretor-Oscar et al.,2021; Adedoja et al.,2021). Furthermore, the finding corroborates empirical evidence suggesting that parental engagement enhances psychosocial adjustment, self-esteem, and resilience, all of which contribute to identity consolidation (Awoyemi et al.,2024;Martinez-Yarza et al., 2024; Jones et al., 2025). Within the Nigerian context, where familial bonds remain strong and culturally reinforced, parental involvement appears to play a sustained and influential role even during the university years.

In contrast, the study found a significant negative relationship between peer influence and identity formation, suggesting that increased susceptibility to peer influence is associated with lower levels of identity clarity. This finding supports earlier studies indicating that negative or excessive peer pressure can undermine autonomous decision-making and hinder identity development (Laursen & Veenstra, 2021; Watts et al., 2024; Adaramoye et al.,2024). While peers are important sources of social learning and support, the present result suggests that when peer influence becomes dominant particularly in ways that encourage conformity, it may lead to role confusion and unstable self-concept. This is further supported by research on social media and peer dynamics, which highlights how external validation and comparison can disrupt identity coherence (Balogun et al.,2024; Akanbi et al.,2024; Avci et al., 2025). Thus, the findings reinforce the dual

nature of peer influence, emphasizing that its impact on identity formation is contingent on its quality and direction.

Regarding gender differences, the study found no significant difference in identity formation between male and female undergraduates. This suggests that identity development processes may be relatively similar across genders within the university context. This finding aligns with previous research indicating that although males and females may differ in the domains of identity exploration, the overall process of identity formation does not significantly vary by gender (Olayiwola-Adedoja et al.,2024a;Maehler & Hernández-Torrano, 2025; Osiesi et al.,2025). It is possible that shared academic environments and similar developmental challenges contribute to comparable identity outcomes across genders in higher education settings.

However, age was found to significantly influence identity formation, indicating that identity development varies across different age groups within the undergraduate population. This finding is consistent with developmental literature, which posits that identity formation is a progressive process that evolves with maturity, experience, and exposure to diverse life situations (Olayiwola-Adedoja et al.,2024b; Okocha et al.,2025;Bae et al., 2026). Older students may exhibit greater identity clarity due to prolonged exploration and increased readiness to commit to personal and professional roles. This supports the notion that identity development continues throughout emerging adulthood rather than being confined to adolescence.

The descriptive findings further revealed that a substantial proportion of the participants demonstrated high levels of identity formation. This suggests that many undergraduates in the sample have achieved a relatively stable sense of self, likely influenced by both academic experiences and social interactions within the university environment. This aligns with the perspective that higher education serves as a critical context for identity development by providing opportunities for exploration, autonomy, and self-definition (Crocetti et al., 2022;Olayiwola-Adedoja et al.,2025a;Adaramoye et al.,2025a).

Most importantly, the moderation analysis indicated that parental involvement significantly moderates the relationship between peer influence and identity formation. Specifically, parental involvement was found to enhance the effect of peer influence on identity formation, suggesting that the presence of strong parental support can shape how peer dynamics impact identity outcomes. This finding supports ecological systems theory, which emphasizes the interaction between different social contexts (Bronfenbrenner) and highlights the mesosystem interplay between family and peer environments (Tong, 2024;Olayiwola-Adedoja 2025 et al.,2025c). It also aligns with empirical studies suggesting that parental support can buffer the negative effects of adverse peer influence while reinforcing positive peer

interactions (Zimmer-Gembeck et al., 2023; Yang et al., 2023; Olayiwola-Adedoja et al.,2025b).

However, the positive interaction term observed in this study suggests a more complex dynamic: rather than merely buffering negative peer effects, parental involvement may intensify the overall influence of peer relationships potentially by equipping students with the skills and confidence to engage more meaningfully with their peers. This interpretation is consistent with research indicating that effective parenting fosters autonomy and social competence, enabling individuals to navigate peer environments more constructively (Adaramoye et al.,2025b;Crespo-López & Koning, 2026).

Overall, the findings of this study underscore the importance of considering both independent and interactive effects of social influences on identity formation. While parental involvement provides a foundational support system that promotes positive identity development, peer influence represents a dynamic force that can either enhance or undermine this process. The interaction between these factors highlights the need for integrated approaches to understanding undergraduate development, particularly within culturally rich contexts such as Nigeria, where both family and peer systems play significant roles.

Conclusion

This study examined the relationships among parental involvement, peer influence, and identity formation among university undergraduates, with a particular focus on the moderating role of parental involvement. The findings provide compelling evidence that parental involvement remains a significant positive predictor of identity formation, even within the context of emerging adulthood where independence is emphasized. Conversely, peer influence was found to have a significant negative relationship with identity formation, suggesting that excessive or maladaptive peer pressure may hinder the development of a coherent sense of self. The study further revealed that gender does not significantly influence identity formation, while age plays a meaningful role, reflecting the progressive nature of identity development across the undergraduate years. Importantly, the moderation analysis demonstrated that parental involvement significantly interacts with peer influence in shaping identity outcomes, highlighting the dynamic interplay between family and peer contexts. Overall, the findings underscore the importance of adopting an integrated perspective in understanding identity development among emerging adults. By situating the study within the Nigerian higher education context, this research contributes to the existing literature and provides contextually relevant insights that can inform policy, practice, and future research aimed at promoting healthy psychosocial development among university students.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations are proposed to enhance

identity development among university undergraduates. First, parents should be encouraged to maintain consistent emotional support, open communication, and guidance throughout their children's university years, as parental involvement remains a critical determinant of positive identity outcomes. Universities and educational stakeholders should also develop structured parent–student engagement programs that foster constructive family involvement without undermining student autonomy. Secondly, institutional policies should promote positive peer interactions through mentorship programs, peer-led academic groups, and extracurricular activities that encourage healthy socialization and reduce the likelihood of negative peer pressure. Also, university administrators should integrate identity development initiatives into student support services, including workshops, seminars, and orientation programs that address self-awareness, decision-making, and resilience. Furthermore, policymakers should recognize the importance of family and peer systems in youth development and support interventions that strengthen these social structures. Finally, there is a need for culturally sensitive strategies that reflect the unique socio-cultural realities of Nigerian undergraduates, ensuring that interventions are both relevant and effective. Implementing these recommendations will contribute to fostering well-adjusted graduates with strong identities and improved psychosocial well-being.

Implications for Counselling

The findings of this study have important implications for counselling practice within higher education settings. Counsellors should recognize the significant role of parental involvement in shaping students' identity development and incorporate family-related dynamics into assessment and intervention processes. This may involve engaging students in reflective discussions about their relationships with parents, as well as facilitating family-inclusive counselling approaches where appropriate. Additionally, given the negative association between peer influence and identity formation, counsellors should help students develop critical thinking skills, assertiveness, and autonomy to resist maladaptive peer pressure. Psychoeducational programs focusing on peer influence, self-concept clarity, and decision-making can be particularly beneficial in this regard. Counsellors should also design group interventions that leverage positive peer interactions, creating supportive environments where students can explore their identities in constructive ways. Furthermore, age-related differences in identity formation suggest the need for developmental sensitivity in counselling approaches, tailoring interventions to students' level of maturity and readiness for identity exploration. Overall, counselling services should adopt a holistic and ecological perspective, addressing both family and peer systems as interconnected influences on student development. Such an approach will enhance the effectiveness of counselling interventions in promoting

healthy identity formation and psychosocial adjustment among undergraduates**.**

Limitations of the Study

Despite its contributions, this study is not without limitations. Firstly, the use of a correlational research design limits the ability to establish causal relationships among parental involvement, peer influence, and identity formation. While significant associations were identified, it cannot be conclusively determined whether these variables directly influence one another over time. Secondly, the reliance on self-report measures may introduce response bias, as participants may provide socially desirable answers or may not accurately recall or assess their experiences. Also, the study employed a purposive sampling technique within selected Nigerian universities, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other populations or cultural contexts. Additionally, the cross-sectional nature of the data does not capture the dynamic and evolving nature of identity development, which may change across different stages of emerging adulthood. Another limitation is the broad measurement of peer influence, which did not distinguish between positive and negative peer interactions in sufficient detail. Finally, although demographic variables such as age and gender were considered, other potentially relevant factors such as socioeconomic status, cultural background, and academic discipline—were not included in the analysis. These limitations should be taken into account when interpreting the findings and applying them to broader contexts.

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