



Integrating pre-vocational education to promote identity development in adolescents: An exploration of Erikson's theory

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Abstract

This present study is about the relationship between Erikson's Identity vs. Role Confusion stage and pre-vocational education at the middle school level, specifically evaluating how pre-vocational programmes can support identity development among adolescents. The Identity vs. Role Confusion stage, which lasts from 12 to 18 years of age, is marked by an examination of one's own identity and role. According to research, pre-vocational education which instils practical skills and career-oriented learning is essential for promoting the development of identities because it gives adolescents the chance to experiment with different roles, interests, and skills. According to the literature, students who participate in skill-based learning gain a better understanding of who they are since these experiences give them important information about their interests, strengths, and potential career paths. Psychological development focusing on identity development shows that pre-vocational programmes that integrate Indigenous crafts like crafting and weaving can strengthen cultural pride and identity. Among the psychological theories that affect development in the adolescence period, Erikson's framework is particularly applicable to guiding pre-vocational education, as it addresses both the social importance of occupational exploration and the psychological need for self-definition. This review emphasises how pre-vocational education can meet the psychological needs of middle-stage students by including culturally relevant and practical skills. Such integration provides a comprehensive strategy that promotes cultural connectedness and self-assurance, which reduces uncertainty about roles and improves the development of adolescent identities. Overall, pre-vocational education proves to be an essential means of fostering identity development throughout this important stage of adolescence.

Keywords: Identity vs Role confusion, Psychological theory, Pre-vocational

1. Introduction: Understanding adolescence

The crucial period of human development known as adolescence, which usually lasts from the ages of 12 to 18, marks the transition from childhood to adulthood. Significant changes in a person's physical, mental, emotional, and social makeup occur during this time, influencing their identity and potential for the future. As the biological transition towards adulthood begins, puberty triggers fast growth and the emergence of secondary sexual traits. Adolescents start to exhibit advanced reasoning, problem-solving abilities, and abstract thought, which is indicative of important stages in brain development (Steinberg, 2014) ^[10].

This stage of emotional development entails increased self-awareness and identity exploration. Emotional intensity is generally higher in adolescents, which can present both growth possibilities and emotional regulation issues (Erikson, 1968) ^[4]. Social interactions change with family, friends, and the community at large, with peer influence being particularly noticeable. These social dynamics have the power to influence attitudes and behaviours, creating pressure to fit in while also encouraging a sense of belonging.

The psychosocial development theory by Erik Erikson

According to Erik Erikson's psychosocial theory of development, people go through eight phases over their

lifetimes, each of which is marked by a unique conflict that needs to be resolved for psychological development to proceed normally. The goal of the first stage, Trust vs. Mistrust (0–1 year), is for babies to learn to trust their carers to meet their requirements, whereas mistrust results from failure. In the second stage, Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt (1–3 years), toddlers use exploration to gain confidence and independence. Children begin expressing themselves through play and social interactions in the third stage, Initiative vs. Guilt (3–5 years), which can lead to ambition or, if unsuccessful, emotions of guilt. In the fourth stage, Industry vs. Inferiority (6–12 years), the focus is on gaining competence and skills and failure results in emotions of inferiority. Adolescence is characterised by the fifth stage, Identity vs. Role Confusion (12–18 years), during which time people explore and develop their unique identities and unresolved conflicts cause people to become confused about their roles and life paths. Developing close relationships is the goal of the sixth stage, Intimacy vs. Isolation (19–40 years), where failure results in loneliness and success creates emotional ties. People in the seventh stage, Generativity vs. Stagnation (40–65 years), try to make a difference in society through their jobs, families, or communities but if this goal is not met, they stagnate. Finally, the eighth stage, Integrity vs. Despair (65+ years), involves reflecting on life's accomplishments, with success bringing a sense of wisdom and

fulfilment, while failure may lead to regret and despair. These stages illustrate Erikson's belief in the lifelong process of growth, where each conflict builds upon the resolution of previous stages (Erikson, 1968) ^[4].

The foundation for comprehending human development throughout life is Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial development. According to the theory, people must overcome a psychological crisis in each of the eight stages to build a healthy personality. Erikson draws attention to the Identity vs. Role Confusion period of adolescence, which typically lasts from 12 to 18 years of age. At this stage, adolescents are dealing with their sense of self, values, and aspirations while juggling the expectations of their families, friends, and society. Following Erikson's stages of development, adolescents mark a pivotal period where individuals navigate the conflict of *Identity vs. Role Confusion*. Adolescents, typically spanning the ages of 12 to 18 years, explore their sense of self, values, and goals while grappling with the expectations of society, peers, and family (Erikson, 1968) ^[4].

The concept of identity involves a coherent understanding of who one is and how one fits into the social world. When this stage is completed, a strong sense of identity is created, which promotes stability and confidence in maturity. Adolescents who experience role confusion, on the other hand, struggle to balance their feelings of identity with external expectations, which results in confusion, insecurity, and a confused sense of identity. Role confusion could hinder personal growth by making it harder to make judgements on one's relationships, job, and life objectives (Marcia, 1980) ^[7].

Adolescence, according to Erikson, is a "moratorium" period—a time for exploration free from immediate responsibilities (Erikson, 1968) ^[4]. To develop a solid identity, people might experiment with various roles, beliefs, and interpersonal interactions during this time. To reduce the possibility of long-term role confusion and promote healthy identity development, educators, parents, and legislators must have a thorough understanding of this period in order to build environments that support and encourage enquiry.

Pre-vocational education

Pre-vocational education refers to school programmes that introduce students to practical skills and knowledge, preparing them for skilled trades or manual careers by fostering basic abilities and career preferences.

Pre-vocational education is a crucial first step in preparing students for the shift to general education or occupational courses by giving them the abilities, information, and attitudes they need. Introduced at the middle or secondary school level, it tries to give students an overall understanding of the working world while cultivating applicable and practical abilities that may be used in a variety of jobs (UNESCO, 2005) ^[16]. This type of education focuses on instilling basic employability skills, such as problem-solving, teamwork, communication, and time management. It also introduces students to specific trade-related skills or crafts, often reflecting the cultural and economic contexts of the community. Pre-vocational programs are designed to expose students to the demands and

opportunities of different industries, preparing them to make informed decisions about their career paths or future education. Pre-vocational education is especially vital in developing countries and rural areas, where it can align with local industries and indigenous practices, promoting sustainable livelihoods and preserving cultural heritage. By blending theoretical knowledge with practical application, it bridges the gap between education and employment, laying a strong groundwork for lifelong learning and adaptability in a rapidly changing world.

In order to make education more accessible and relevant to the 21st century, the National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) emphasizes the importance of integrating pre-vocational education into the school curriculum, particularly at the middle school stage, to equip students with practical skills and promote holistic development. NEP 2020 recognizes that hands-on skill development fosters creativity, critical thinking, and self-reliance among students, preparing them for future careers while enhancing their connection to cultural and local knowledge systems (NEP, 2020). By introducing vocational exposure early on, students can explore their interests, strengths, and potential career paths, aligning with Erik Erikson's fifth stage of psychosocial development—*Identity vs. Role Confusion* (12–18 years). Pre-vocational education provides adolescents with opportunities to explore different roles, engage in practical learning experiences, and develop skills that reflect their interests and cultural identity. This process of skill acquisition and self-exploration helps students resolve the conflict of role confusion, fostering confidence, direction, and a coherent sense of identity. By combining pre-vocational education with Erikson's theoretical framework, NEP 2020 creates a pathway for adolescents to bridge the gap between personal aspirations, cultural heritage, and future employability.

The goal of the present study is to examine how pre-vocational education supports adolescents' identity development, as explained by Erikson's theory of psychosocial development.

Raskin (1985) ^[9] linked identity and vocational development, criticizing traditional theories for focusing on static traits instead of ongoing career growth. Emphasizing self-concept development, Raskin highlights occupation's role in identity formation and suggests unclear identity can stem from career choice difficulties. Albion and Fogarty (2002) ^[11] validated the Career Decision-Making Difficulties Questionnaire CDDQ, showing a similar structure for adolescents and adults. Adults reported fewer internal and interpersonal conflicts in career decision-making compared to adolescents. Babarovic and Sverko (2016) ^[2] in their study found that Croatian high school students showed growing career maturity and concern, with younger students struggling more with decision-making, underscoring the need for career education. Chavez (2016) ^[3] examined how psychosocial development affects adolescents' occupational identity, drawing on Erikson's stages. It finds that factors important for healthy psychosocial development predict occupational identity status in adolescence. Tkachuk and Lutsenko (2019) ^[14] showed in their research that psychosocial assistance for children who have experienced crisis events aims

to support their productivity, preserve their individuality, and foster positive interactions with themselves, others, and the world within an educational environment. Suryadi et.al (2021) ^[11] highlighted the significant role of adolescent-parent career congruence and guidance counsellors in shaping students' career orientation, emphasizing the importance of vocational education. In their article, Syazila *et al.* (2021) found that career maturity and decision-making self-efficacy predict career adaptability in Agricultural Science students, highlighting the importance of building career competency, goal-setting, and planning skills. Tayfur et.al (2021) ^[15] found that adolescent behavioural and peer problems were linked to being NEET (not in education, employment, or training) in young adulthood. Psychosocial factors like prosocial skills, substance use, self-evaluations, aspirations, and physical activity had mixed or unclear effects. Giatman et.al (2023) ^[5] in their study, they identified five key themes in vocational education's role in career development: job characteristics, career maturity, opportunity analysis, decision-making skills, and vocational development, based on a review of relevant literature. Shafqat *et al.* (2023) ^[12] found that career counselling improved adolescents' decision-making and reduced indecision, with females showing stronger skills in decision-making than males. Solberg *et al* (2023) ^[13] in their review highlighted the importance of vocational identity, supportive school environments, and physical activity in promoting positive mental health in VET students. It emphasizes the role of VET teachers in creating a supportive psychosocial learning environment to enhance student well-being.

2. Objectives of the study

- To study how pre-vocational education supports identity exploration and commitment in adolescents, based on Erikson's theory of Identity vs. Role Confusion.
- To explore how pre-vocational education enhances career decision-making and reduces role confusion in adolescents.

3. Methodology of the study

The present study is particularly qualitative in nature. The researcher adopted thematic analysis to explore how pre-vocational education can promote identity development in adolescents, specifically through the lens of Erikson's theory. Thematic analysis was chosen as it allows for a detailed exploration of patterns and themes within qualitative data, providing insights into how pre-vocational education influences identity formation. The researcher included more than 20 studies related to that area focusing on the themes presented above. Then the researcher analysed the content obtained from the study. The major findings of the review are presented below.

4. Findings of the study

a) Pre-vocational education and identity exploration

- By providing adolescents with the opportunity to explore various career alternatives, pre-vocational education plays an important part in bridging the gap between vocational

development and identity formation. This helps shape adolescents' self-concept and sense of identity (Raskin, 1985) ^[9].

- Adolescent occupational identity creation is largely dependent on healthy psychosocial development. Giving adolescents job exploration guidance will help them create a stronger sense of self and purpose, which will benefit their overall growth (Chavez, 2016) ^[3].
- Adolescents often experience more internal tensions while choosing a career since they are unsure of their future, which can have a negative impact on their sense of self. When they are attempting to determine their identity and career goals as they move from childhood to adolescents, this internal conflict is very noticeable (Raskin, 1985, Albion & Fogarty, 2002) ^[9, 1].
- The necessity for specific career education that tackles these developmental obstacles is highlighted by the fact that adolescents have little exposure to other job fields and are still learning about their skills and interests (Babarovic & Sverko, 2016) ^[2].

b) Pre-vocational education and career decision-making

- Career guidance and parental support play a crucial role in shaping adolescents' career choices. When adolescents receive clear direction from trusted figures in their lives, it helps them make more informed decisions and reduces the anxiety and uncertainty often associated with career planning (Suryadi *et al.*, 2021) ^[11].
- Career counselling has been shown to significantly improve adolescents' decision-making skills by providing them with the tools to better understand their interests, strengths, and weaknesses. This guidance also helps them overcome indecision, with female students in particular showing stronger decision-making skills when provided with adequate counselling and support (Shafqat *et al.*, 2023) ^[12].
- Career maturity and decision-making self-efficacy are important predictors of how adaptable adolescents are when it comes to making career-related decisions. The more mature and self-assured they are in their career choices, the more likely they are to handle challenges and changes in their vocational paths successfully (Rahim *et al.*, 2021) ^[8].
- Adolescents who struggle with behavioural and psychosocial issues, such as low self-esteem or lack of social support, are more likely to face difficulties in education and employment later in life. This highlights the importance of addressing these issues early through career education and psychosocial support programs (Tayfur *et al.*, 2021) ^[15].

c) Psychosocial support and positive development

- Psychosocial support is essential for helping adolescents maintain their productivity and individuality, especially after experiencing crisis events. This type of support fosters positive social interactions and self-reflection, which contribute to building a stable identity and emotional resilience (Tkachuk & Lutsenko, 2019) ^[14].

- Vocational education provides an environment where students can not only develop career-specific skills but also life skills such as problem-solving, time management, and emotional regulation. These skills are crucial for personal development and help students cope with future challenges, promoting long-term well-being and success in their personal and professional lives (Giatman *et al.*, 2023) ^[5].

d) Impact of vocational education on role confusion

- One of the key benefits of pre-vocational education is its ability to help adolescents explore different career paths and reduce feelings of role confusion. Through career exploration activities, students can identify their strengths, preferences, and values, which helps clarify their career goals and reduces uncertainty about their future roles in society (Raskin, 1985) ^[9].
- Early exposure to vocational education allows adolescents to better understand their own interests and aptitudes, which helps them make more informed decisions about their career paths. This early exploration is particularly helpful in reducing role confusion during adolescence, a period marked by uncertainty and exploration of personal identity (Babarovic & Sverko, 2016) ^[2].
- Adolescents who have a clearer sense of their vocational identity tend to be more confident in their future career choices. This sense of certainty can significantly reduce feelings of confusion, anxiety, and self-doubt, promoting a stronger sense of self and a clearer direction for the future (Solberg *et al.*, 2023) ^[13].

e) Career decision-making challenges

- Adolescents face several challenges when making career decisions, including internal conflicts such as fear of failure, a lack of confidence, and uncertainty about their future. These challenges can prevent them from making decisions or pursuing certain career paths, which can hinder their development of a stable vocational identity (Albion & Fogarty, 2002) ^[1].
- External pressures, such as family expectations, peer influence, and societal norms, can also complicate the career decision-making process. Adolescents often feel torn between following their interests and meeting external expectations, which can lead to confusion and difficulty in making career choices (Suryadi *et al.*, 2021) ^[11].
- The absence of adequate career guidance and education can leave adolescents feeling lost and uncertain about their career future. Without proper support, they may struggle to navigate the complex process of career decision-making, leading to role confusion and delayed career development (Shafqat *et al.*, 2023) ^[12].

f) Psychosocial factors in career development

- Psychosocial factors such as self-esteem, self-efficacy, and the availability of supportive social networks play a significant role in adolescents' career decisions. Adolescents with strong self-esteem and confidence in

their abilities are more likely to make informed, confident career choices (Syazila *et al.*, 2021).

- Positive interactions with peers, family, and mentors can enhance career maturity and decision-making skills. Having a strong support system helps adolescents feel more confident in their career choices and fosters a sense of security in their ability to navigate the future (Tayfur *et al.*, 2021) ^[15].
- Adolescents with higher levels of career maturity and decision-making self-efficacy are better equipped to handle challenges and changes in their career paths. They are more adaptable and resilient when faced with setbacks, and they are more likely to succeed in achieving their long-term career goals (Syazila *et al.*, 2021).

g) Long-term impact of vocational education

- Vocational education has long-term benefits that extend beyond job-specific skills. It helps adolescents in developing life skills that are crucial for personal growth and success. These skills, such as time management, resilience, and problem-solving, are essential for coping with the challenges of adulthood and navigating career transitions (Giatman *et al.*, 2023) ^[5].
- By encouraging career exploration and providing structured support, vocational education plays a key role in preparing adolescents for adulthood. It helps them build a strong vocational identity and a clear sense of purpose, which is crucial for a successful transition into the workforce (Solberg *et al.*, 2023) ^[13].
- Adolescents who are exposed to vocational education early on are more likely to experience successful career transitions later in life. They are less likely to experience role confusion or career indecision, as their vocational identity is more developed, giving them a clearer direction for their future (Babarovic & Sverko, 2016) ^[2].

h) Role of teachers in career decision-making

- Teachers in vocational education institutions play a crucial role in supporting adolescents' career decisions by creating a positive, supportive environment. They provide guidance and mentorship, helping students explore different career options and set realistic goals (Solberg *et al.*, 2023) ^[13].
- Effective vocational educators not only teach specific career skills but also encourage students to reflect on their interests and abilities. This helps students develop a clearer sense of their vocational identity, which is essential for making informed career decisions (Giatman *et al.*, 2023) ^[5].

i) Supportive environments and career adaptability

- The study shows that a supportive educational environment is the key to helping adolescents become adaptable in their career decisions. This environment fosters trust, open communication, and a sense of belonging, all contributing to developing a strong vocational identity and career maturity (Solberg *et al.*, 2023) ^[13].

- Programs that integrate academic learning and vocational skills help students explore various career paths, allowing them to adapt to changing job markets and career opportunities. This adaptability is essential for long-term success and career satisfaction (Giatman *et al.*, 2023) [5].

5. Discussion

One of the key findings from the studies found in the review of literature is that pre-vocational education helps reduce role confusion by guiding adolescents in their career choices. The exploration of pre-vocational education in promoting identity development among adolescents, especially through the lens of Erikson's "Identity vs. Role Confusion" stage, reveals the significant role that vocational education plays in shaping adolescents' understanding of themselves and their future roles in society. The studies show that pre-vocational education offers a structured and supportive framework that allows adolescents to explore different career paths, helping them gain a clearer sense of their strengths, interests, and values. By offering early career exploration, vocational education can provide a vital opportunity for adolescents to form a more cohesive sense of identity, which can reduce the confusion and uncertainty that often accompany this developmental stage.

For many adolescents, career decision-making can be a major source of confusion. Pre-vocational education, therefore, addresses this challenge by providing students with structured opportunities to explore different careers and industries. This process of exploration allows adolescents to better understand their interests, aptitudes, and values, which are all key components of a well-formed identity. Rather than being forced to make decisions based on external pressures or limited knowledge, students in vocational programs are given the space to reflect on their strengths and passions, ultimately guiding them toward careers that align with their evolving sense of self. This not only helps reduce role confusion but also fosters a sense of purpose and direction that can extend beyond the classroom into other areas of their lives.

Psychosocial factors, such as self-esteem, self-efficacy, and social support, play a significant role in career decision-making. The review highlighted that adolescents who feel supported, whether through career counselling, teacher mentorship, or positive family interactions, are more likely to experience career maturity. Vocational education can help in building these psychosocial factors by offering a safe space for students to explore their interests and receive guidance from mentors and educators. By helping students develop career maturity and decision-making self-efficacy, vocational education can promote positive identity formation. Adolescents who have a clear sense of self and confidence in their abilities are more likely to make decisions that are aligned with their values, leading to a more cohesive and authentic sense of identity.

The findings also indicate that vocational education not only aids in career decision-making but also contributes to the development of life skills that are essential for long-term success. Skills are fostered through pre-vocational education, equipping adolescents with the tools to navigate both personal

and professional challenges. These skills, which are integral to career adaptability, help students cope with the uncertainties and challenges they will face in their future careers. By preparing students for both the practical and emotional aspects of career development, vocational education ensures that they are ready for the complex demands of the working world.

Another important finding is the role of teachers in fostering a supportive environment for vocational education. Teachers are central to helping students navigate the process of career decision-making. A teacher's guidance, encouragement, and the creation of a positive, inclusive classroom atmosphere can significantly enhance a student's confidence in their career choices. When students feel supported by their teachers, they are more likely to explore career options confidently and make decisions that align with their aspirations. This supportive environment not only promotes career development but also encourages students to explore and affirm their identity, helping them move from a state of confusion to one of clarity. The integration of psychosocial support into pre-vocational education is crucial, especially for adolescents who have experienced crisis events. Adolescents undergoing significant life challenges, such as trauma or loss, often struggle with self-esteem and identity confusion. Psychosocial support within vocational education can help them regain a sense of self-worth and rebuild their self-concept. By fostering positive interactions and providing opportunities for self-reflection, vocational education offers a therapeutic space for students to process their experiences and develop resilience. This is particularly important in helping students overcome the barriers to career decision-making that might arise from personal crises.

Integrating pre-vocational education with a focus on career exploration and psychosocial support is an effective way to promote identity development in adolescents. Through the exploration of various career options, the development of key life skills, and the support of mentors and educators, vocational education can provide adolescents with the tools they need to form a strong, positive identity.

6. Conclusion

By addressing both career and psychosocial development, pre-vocational education, hands-on skills in pre-vocational education can play a significant role in helping adolescents develop a strong sense of identity by providing them with tangible experiences and the opportunity to connect their abilities with real-world outcomes. Practical skills such as carpentry, weaving, basketry and sewing can allow adolescents to explore their interests and talents, helping them recognize their strengths and build confidence in their abilities. These hands-on activities can promote problem-solving, as students learn to address challenges and think critically to complete tasks. The process of mastering these skills can foster competence and autonomy which are the key components of Erikson's theory of identity development, as adolescents begin to see themselves as capable and effective in the world. These hands-on skills such as weaving and basketry are powerful tools in helping adolescents develop their identity by

connecting them to cultural heritage and practical craftsmanship. Weaving involves the creation of textiles using various materials like yarn, thread, or natural fibres, requiring patience, attention to detail, and creativity. As adolescents learn to weave, they can gain a sense of accomplishment and mastery over a traditional craft that can reflect their cultural values and individual creativity. Weaving can also help in building fine motor skills, focus, and problem-solving abilities, as students must plan, organize, and execute intricate designs, fostering a sense of pride in their work.

Basketry, the craft of making baskets from natural materials such as bamboo or reeds, offers similar benefits. Adolescents involved in basketry can develop a strong connection to nature and resourcefulness, learning how to utilize available materials effectively. Like weaving, basketry requires creativity and attention to detail helping adolescents express themselves through their designs. The physical act of weaving or crafting baskets can also foster patience, as these skills take time to develop and perfect. Both weaving and basketry can enhance an adolescent's sense of identity by giving them a tangible connection to their culture, allowing them to create items that hold personal or communal significance. These crafts, while practical, also encourage self-expression, confidence, and a deeper understanding of the value of craftsmanship, contributing to a stronger and more stable sense of self.

Incorporating pre-vocational education into adolescent education can help them on their path to identity coherence, giving them a feeling of direction and community while preparing them for meaningful engagement in society. It can encourage adolescents to view themselves as capable people who make valuable contributions to their communities and the wider world. Therefore, this approach can foster not only personal growth but can also improve societal and cultural harmony.

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