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## Gender Differences on the Identity Status of the Malaysian Preparatory Students

### DIFFERENCES ENTRE LES SEXES SUR LE STATUT D'IDENTITE DES ETUDIANTS MALAISIENS DANS LES PROGRAMMES PREPARATOIRES

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**Abstract:** The number of students who wishes to change their major is increasing everyday. There are quite a number of students who are still unsure about their future plans even though they have enrolled in a university program. A reason may be that the students are still in conflict about their own identity. Students who are doing their preparatory program should already develop their own identity, which is identity achievement. A survey aimed to study gender differences on the identity status among the preparatory students was conducted. A questionnaire regarding the students' identity status was used to collect the data. A Likert scale with a four point system was used to measure responses on the questionnaire which consisted of the students' view of their own choice of major, friendship, recreational activities, dating style and political believes. The findings of this study are important to the lecturers teaching the preparatory programs so that they are aware of their students' sense of identity as well as help them reach identity achievement.

**Keywords:** Achievement; adolescent; diffusion; foreclosure; identity status; moratorium

**Résumé:** Le nombre d'étudiants qui souhaitent changer leur spécialité augmente tous les jours. Il y a un certain nombre d'élèves qui n'ont toujours pas de plans sur leur future, même s'ils se sont inscrits dans un programme universitaire. Sans doute une

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raison est que les étudiants sont toujours en conflit avec leur propre identité. Les étudiants qui font leur programme préparatoire devraient déjà développer leur propre identité. Une enquête visant à étudier les différences entre les sexes sur le statut d'identité parmi les élèves dans les programmes préparatoires a été effectuée. Un questionnaire concernant l'état d'identité des étudiants a été utilisé pour collecter les données. Une échelle de Likert a été utilisée pour mesurer les réponses dans le questionnaire, qui demande les avis des étudiants sur leur choix de la spécialité, de l'amitié, des activités récréatives, du style de dating et des préférences politiques. Les résultats de cette étude sont importantes pour les enseignants des programmes préparatoires afin qu'ils soient au courant de la perception des élèves sur leur identité. Ainsi ils peuvent les aider à construire leur identité.

**Mots-clés:** realisation; adolescent; diffusion, forclusion; statut d'identité; moratoire

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Having a true identity is very important for all human beings in order to function properly. Psychologists believed that people should already have a sense of identity by the age of eighteen. Some psychologists even suggested that adolescents should have an identity intact in themselves before the end of secondary school. Since preparatory students who are doing their foundation for their bachelor's degree are passed that age, it is expected of them to already form an identity.

However, it has been said that the adolescence years are the most difficult and challenging for adolescents to find an identity. These are the years adolescents will get into conflicts and from there, countless problems emerge (Berk, 2006). One of the problems that seem to be a concern to many adults is the fact that some adolescents seem to have conflicts about their own identity.

According to Romano (2004), adolescence years are when a person undergoes a dramatic change where they are expected to form an identity of their own. The adolescence need to figure out who they are as well as think about what they want to do with their life.

Marcia (1976) believed that there are four statuses of identity which are Identity achievement, identity moratorium, identity foreclosure, and identity diffusion. Identity achievement is when an adolescent explored meaningful alternatives and made a commitment whereas identity moratorium is when an adolescent explored meaningful alternatives but made no commitment. Identity foreclosure is the status of an adolescent who has made a commitment, but no exploration. Lastly, identity diffusion is the status of an adolescent who has neither explores nor made a commitment towards an identity (Santrock, 2007; Santrock, 2008; Arnett, 2009). Realizing that, this research is interested in looking at the preparatory students' identity status and how male and female students differ.

Identity achieved adolescents are said to perform very well under stress. They also have a high level of moral development and have a high level of independence. Apart from that, identity achieved adolescents are found to be more creative as well as more rational than the other adolescents in other statuses (Everall et al., 2005; Bergh et al., 2005). Krettenauer (2005) pointed out that, adolescents who are in the identity achievement and identity moratorium status are more advance in cognitive development than adolescents in the other identity statuses. In theory, it has been assumed that identity achievement increases with age. Therefore, only a small number of adolescents in the late years should be in the identity diffusion status (Graf et. al., 2008; Bergh et al., 2005).

Krettenauer (2005) pointed out that it is essential for adolescents to be in the identity moratorium status first before they are sure of who they what to be. This is because adolescents get to explore many options in life before settling for a goal directed identity. According to Krettenauer (2005), identity status is associated with cognitive development. In his study, he found out that adolescents who are in the

identity achievement and identity moratorium status are more advance in cognitive development than adolescents who are foreclosed and diffused. This statement is also supported by Njus et al., (2008) who found that adolescents who are in the moratorium status have a higher cognition than the adolescents in the foreclosure and diffusion status.

According to Bergh et al., (2005) identity foreclosure adolescents are the least anxious among all the other identity statuses. They are also well behaved and have a high level of commitment. However, these adolescents are not flexible and can be defensive. Luyckx et al. (2005) said that identity foreclosure adolescents are low on openness. They are not open to new ideas and different views. On the other hand, these adolescents are more conscientious than the adolescents in the moratorium and diffusion status. In accordance to Njus et al., (2008), identity foreclosed adolescents seem to have a lower self-concept than the adolescents who have achieved their identity. Njus et al., (2008) also said that foreclosed adolescents have a lower cognitive ability than the adolescents in the identity achievement and moratorium status. Identity foreclosed adolescents like to rely on other people's advices and decisions about their life.

Bergh et al. (2005) said that identity diffused adolescents have a 'playboy/playgirl' attitude about life, or in other words, they are very carefree. These adolescents are comfortable with ad-hoc adjustments rather than stable changes when it comes to life circumstances (Krettenauer, 2005). In accordance to Njus et al., (2008), identity diffused adolescents have a low level of cognitive ability. They prefer not to engage in effortful and complex thoughts like self-reflect, acquiring and decision making. It is inferred that these adolescents are not bothered to think on information thoroughly. They prefer to have other people make decisions for them or 'just go with the flow'. Some of the adolescents who are classified under the identity diffusion status are said to be in social isolation and they can also be very unhappy most of the times (Krettenauer, 2005). Phillips and Pittman (2007) said that adolescents who perceived themselves as diffused have low level of psychological well-being in comparison to adolescents who perceived themselves in the identity achievement, moratorium and foreclosure status.

The objectives of this study are to determine the identity statuses of preparatory students according to gender as well as to establish whether there is a significant association, if any, between gender of preparatory students and the identity status.

## **2. MATERIAL AND METHODS**

### **2.1 Population**

The population of this study is the preparatory students of a public university in Selangor, Malaysia. These students are doing their preparation courses so that they can study overseas, particularly in United Kingdom, United States of America, Australia and New Zealand for their Bachelors Degree. After the students have completed their preparatory courses, they will depart to their destinations to study a Bachelors Degree in their chosen field.

### **2.2 Sampling**

Questionnaires regarding 'Gender Differences in Identity Status of Preparatory Students' that was adapted from Bennion & Adams (1986) EOMEIS-2 was used to collect the data. The questionnaire was distributed to five classes which were randomly selected. The students' age ranges from 18 to 19 years old. A total of 100 Malaysian students (54 females, 46 males,  $M$  age = 18.7 years) who are doing their preparatory programs completed the questionnaires.

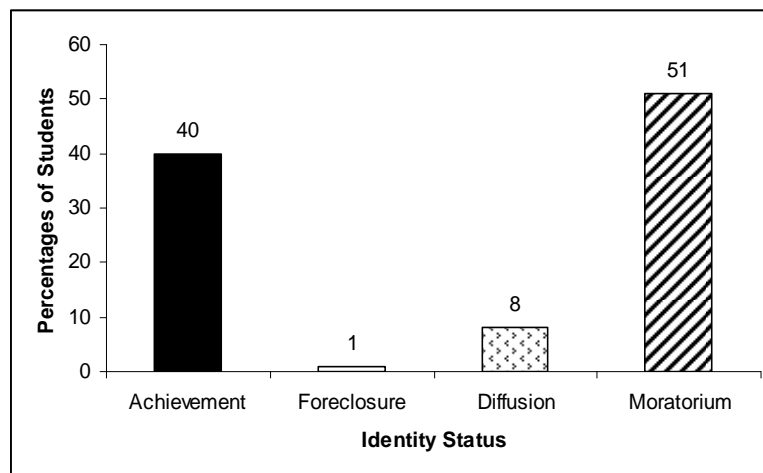
### 2.3 Data Analysis

This study used quantitative analysis. The minimum point for the statements is 1 and maximum is 4 (4 = Strongly Disagree, 3 = Disagree, 2 = Agree and 1 = Strongly Agree). Simple calculations like frequencies and percentages as well as chi-square were carried out to look at the gender differences on the identity status of the preparatory students.

The identity statuses of female students and male students were compared based on percentages. This way, it gave a clear view which identity status was most associated with the female preparatory students and which identity status was most associated with the male preparatory students. Chi-square tests of association are used. Hypotheses were postulated and then tested to see whether there is a significant association, if any, between the gender of the preparatory students and the identity status. Significance level was set at  $\alpha = 0.05$ .

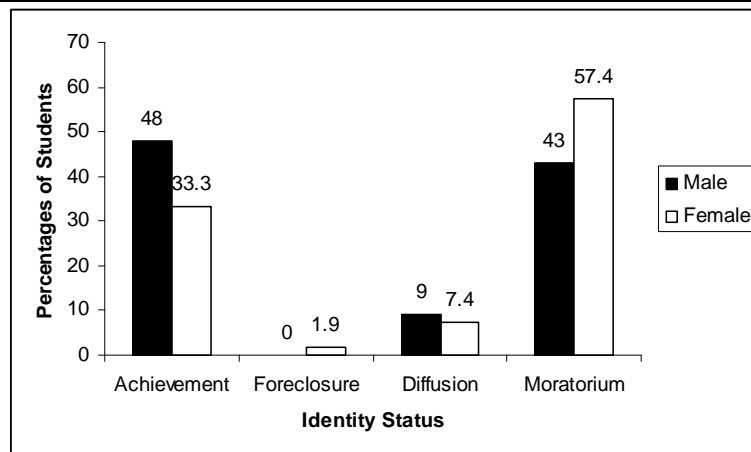
## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Figure 1 below shows the Identity Status of the preparatory students. The result has shown that majority of the preparatory students' identity status is the Identity Moratorium which is fifty-one percent of the whole student sample. Only forty percent of the preparatory students were found to be already in the Identity Achievement. Eight percent of the students claimed to be in the Identity Diffusion whereas one percent of the students are in the Identity Foreclosure.



**Figure 1: Identity Status of Preparatory Students**

Figure 2 has shown that more male (48%) than female (33.3%) students are in the Identity Achievement status. However, it is shown that female students, which marked fifty seven point four percent, are higher in the Identity Moratorium than the male students which marked forty three percent only. One point nine percent female students but zero percent male students claimed to have Identity Foreclosure, which means, female students are higher in Identity Foreclosure than the male students. For the Identity Diffusion, male students arrived at nine percent which is slightly higher than the female students who reached seven point four.



**Figure 2: Identity Status of Male and Female Students**

Table 1 below shows that 19.15 obtained is greater than the critical value (7.81). Therefore,  $H_0$  is rejected and  $H_1$  is retained. There is an association between gender of preparatory students and the identity status ( $\chi^2(3,100) = 19.15, p < 0.05$ ). Results do show that male scored highest in identity achievement status while female scored highest on the moratorium identity status. Thus, this proves that there is significant association between gender and identity status.

**Table 1: Chi-Square of Preparatory Students' Gender and Identity Status**

df	$\alpha$	Critical Value $\chi^2$	$\chi^2$
3	0.05	7.81	19.15

According to Marcia (1976), identity achievement can be reached when an adolescent has done a high level of exploring and have a high level of commitment. Through several studies, it was found that high achiever students are associated with identity achievement. The preparatory students are high achievers. Due to their excellent academic performances, these students were awarded scholarships to study overseas by the government. Since the students have a high level of academic achievement, it is expected that their identity status is identity achievement. However, it is not the case here. This could be because the students are still exploring themselves before finally making a commitment. Several researches have pointed out that the moratorium identity status is the platform to become identity achieved. Moratorium identity status is associated with high level of exploring but low level of commitment. To get to the identity achievement level, one must go through the moratorium identity status first.

While moratorium identity status may not be dangerous to other adolescents, it is seen to be quite a risky status for the preparatory students to be in since they are sponsored by the government to study overseas. The government is spending a lot of money for these students' education. Thus, these students cannot be in a situation where they are still unsure of what they want to study and who they are. Most importantly, these students should not have a low level of commitment as this can be dangerous when they are overseas. If these students are still undecided about what they want to do in life, these students are at risk of being college drop outs or jumping from one course to another. Thus, identity moratorium is not an ideal identity status for the preparatory students.

Another factor that led the students to be in the moratorium status is probably because these students did not have the chance to explore their options when they were younger. Thus, this delays their process of reaching identity achievement. In studies by Cakir et al. (2005), it was found that more American

adolescents are identity-achieved than Asian Indian adolescents. This could be due to the fact that American adolescents have a higher chance of exploring themselves than Asian Indian adolescents.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, organizing self-awareness classes for the preparatory students and seminars for their parents can help the preparatory students to see that identity moratorium status is not a way of life for them to adapt at this age and hopefully they will become an identity achieved individuals.

Some suggestions that can be done to make the preparatory students see the importance of being an identity achieved person:-

Firstly, universities that are educating preparatory students should add a 'self-awareness' subject to the program. This subject will be like an informal psychology class. The students will be taught by the lecturers the importance of making decisions and being committed to those decisions. They will also be taught about the self so that they are more aware of who they are and their purpose in life. This way, when the students have learned the art of decision making from the self-awareness class, they will see that the moratorium identity status is not a way of life. In addition to that, the students will be likely to have a stronger or higher self-esteem and self-confidence for the betterment of their well-being.

Apart from the lecturers, parents are also important figures in the adolescents' life. Parenting styles of the parents are important in building up the adolescents' identity. The universities that are educating preparatory students should do several seminars or talks for the parents. The topic of this seminars or talks should revolve around giving positive feedbacks, supports, encouragements and motivations to the preparatory students. This is to ensure that parents understand that their adolescents need them to build a healthy identity. Parents need to be active figures in the students' life.

Hence, by implementing self-awareness classes in the preparatory program and holding seminars to the parents, the students will be better prepared to do their bachelor degree overseas which will give a lot of benefits to the students, parents, universities, country and the whole world at large.

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