The Impact of Cultural Identity on University Students' Career Identity: An Empirical Study Based on Psychology Education Curricula

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Abstract: The relationship between cultural identity and career identity has emerged as a central topic in higher education, particularly within the field of psychology. This study investigates how cultural identity influences the development of university students' career identity through psychology education curricula. Drawing on a systematic review of existing literature, the study examines the interactions between these two constructs and the mediating role of psychology education. Results indicate that cultural identity significantly influences the formation of career identity via both cognitive and affective pathways. Furthermore, psychology courses that incorporate cultural elements effectively promote clarity in students' career goals and direction. The study emphasizes the importance for higher education institutions to integrate cultural identity education into curriculum design to enhance students' career development.

Keywords: Cultural Identity; Psychology Education Curricula; College Students' Career Identity; Mediating Role

1.Introduction

1.1 Background

Cultural identity, referring to an individual's sense of belonging to a specific cultural group, holds a prominent position in psychology, particularly in higher education contexts. It influences not only academic achievement but also career decision-making and personal development (Tajfel, 1982)[1]. In an increasingly globalized society, university students face growing exposure to cultural diversity, which profoundly shapes their academic and career trajectories. Career identity involves one's understanding and recognition of occupational roles, encompassing career goals, motivations, and behaviors (Super, 1990)[2]. The intersection of these identities is especially salient in psychology, where students are required to engage in deep self-reflection and integrate personal cultural backgrounds with professional identities. This study aims to explore how cultural identity impacts career identity through psychology education, offering a novel theoretical framework for understanding the role of curriculum in fostering both forms of identity. While prior studies have addressed the influence of cultural identity on individual behavior and the significance of career identity in vocational development, research addressing their intersection, particularly within psychology education, remains limited. Existing literature has primarily examined cultural or career identity as isolated constructs, with minimal focus on their interactive effects within educational settings. This study fills this

gap by examining the specific mechanisms through which cultural identity influences career identity in psychology programs.

1.2 Research Questions

This study centers on the following core questions:

How does cultural identity influence university students' career identity, particularly within the context of psychology education?

How can psychology education curricula simultaneously foster cultural identity and strengthen career identity?

These questions underscore the novelty and significance of the research, aiming to bridge theoretical gaps and provide curricular guidance for higher education institutions.

2.Literature Review

The interaction between cultural identity and career identity carries significant theoretical and practical implications in higher education, particularly within psychology. This review systematically examines the current state of research on the influence of cultural identity on university students' career identity, with a specific focus on the mediating role of psychology education curricula.

Career identity formation is especially critical during higher education, as it is closely related to students' engagement in academic learning and directly impacts their future career adaptability and development potential (Qi, 2025)[3]. For psychology students, the development of career identity presents unique challenges, as the discipline inherently demands deep understanding and reflection on both the self and others—thereby intensifying the interaction between cultural and career identities.

From a social cognitive perspective, Byars-Winston (2010) explored how cultural factors shape career expectations and behaviors. While this research laid a theoretical foundation for understanding the relationship between cultural identity and career development, it did not explicitly address the educational context[4]. Specifically, little attention has been paid to how psychology education functions as a mediating mechanism in the co-development of these identities.

Psychology education curricula may serve as a vital bridge connecting cultural and career identities. First, cultural identity provides a cognitive framework for understanding the self and one's relationship with society, which in turn influences career values and goal setting (Leong & Serafica, 2001)[5]. Second, cultural identity shapes emotional experiences and the need for belonging, both of which affect career choice and commitment (Fouad & Byars-Winston, 2005)[6]. Third, it also influences access to social networks and resources, thereby indirectly affecting career trajectories (Lent et al., 2000)[7]. However, the concrete operations of these pathways within psychology education remain underexplored.

Despite existing progress in understanding the relationship between cultural and career identities, the literature lacks systematic investigation into how psychology curricula function as mediators in this dynamic. Most existing studies focus on cultural adaptation or vocational development theories without delving into the mechanisms through which cultural identity influences career identity within the framework of psychology education. This study addresses this gap by employing a literature review methodology to analyze how cultural identity affects students' career identity through psychology education, providing both theoretical insights and practical implications for curriculum development.

3.Methodology

This study employs the `Literature Reference Method` as the primary research approach. By systematically reviewing and analyzing relevant literature on cultural identity, career identity, and psychology education, the study investigates the mechanisms by which cultural identity influences university students' career identity—particularly the mediating role of psychology curricula. As a qualitative research strategy, the Literature Reference Method integrates and critically analyzes existing scholarly work to build a conceptual framework for understanding complex social phenomena (Hart, 2018)[8].

This study reveals the mechanisms through which cultural identity influences university students' career identity and the mediating role of psychology education curricula. The findings are divided into four main sections: the definition of cultural and career identity, their relationship, the mediating role of psychology education, and an analysis of the influencing factors.

4.Definition of Cultural Identity and Career Identity

The literature analysis indicates that cultural identity is a multidimensional concept. Phinney and Ong (2007) define cultural identity as an individual's sense of belonging to a specific cultural group, encompassing cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions[9]. From the perspective of cultural adaptation, Berry (2005) views cultural identity as the process of self-positioning within a multicultural environment[10]. Domestic scholars, emphasize the social constructivist nature of cultural identity, proposing that it is formed through interactions in social contexts and is influenced by cultural values and behavioral norms. Integrating these viewpoints, cultural identity is defined as an individual's sense of belonging, engagement, and value identification with a specific cultural group. It is a dynamic process influenced by both societal environment and personal experiences. In higher education, cultural identity not only affects students' academic experiences but also profoundly shapes their career development trajectories (Byars-Winston, 2010)[11].

Career identity, as defined in this study, refers to an individual's understanding, recognition, and commitment to occupational roles, including career value identification, career competence perception, and career commitment. For psychology students, career identity is particularly complex, as psychology as a discipline requires not only mastery of professional knowledge and skills but also an in-depth understanding of the self and others. Thus, cultural factors play a more prominent role in the formation of career identity for psychology students (Ponterotto et al., 2015)[12].

5.The Relationship between Cultural Identity and Career Identity

The literature analysis reveals a significant correlation between cultural identity and career identity. Gushue et al. (2006) found that positive cultural identity is positively correlated with career decision-making self-efficacy among minority college students ($r = .42$, $p < .01$)[13].

5.1 Pathway Analysis

The literature analysis uncovers multiple pathways through which cultural identity influences career identity. First, the cognitive pathway is the most prominent mechanism. Leong and Serafica (2001) noted that cultural identity provides a cognitive framework for individuals to understand their relationships with society, directly influencing the establishment of career values and goals[14]. Second, Zhang Wei et al. (2017) found in their qualitative study that a strong sense of cultural belonging provides emotional security, which makes students more resilient and persistent during their career exploration process[15].

5.2 The Mediating Role of Psychology Education

The literature analysis demonstrates that psychology education has a unique role in integrating cultural identity and career identity. Pedersen (2000) pointed out that psychology, as a discipline, focuses on understanding cognitive, emotional, and behavioral processes, offering students theoretical tools to understand their own cultural backgrounds[16].

5.3 Empirical Evidence of the Mediating Role

Numerous studies provide empirical evidence for psychology education serving as a mediating variable. Domestic research by Zhang Ming et al. (2020) confirmed that the quality of psychology education moderates the relationship between cultural identity and career identity, with high-quality education enhancing the positive correlation between the two[17].

The literature analysis identifies four key mechanisms through which psychology education facilitates the integration of cultural identity and career identity:

Knowledge Integration Mechanism: Multiple studies (Banks, 2015; Wang Hua, 2019) indicate that psychology curricula, by incorporating multicultural perspectives, help students integrate cultural identity with professional knowledge systems, thereby strengthening career value identification[18]. The cultural integration of curriculum content is particularly important in promoting identity development, which aligns with Johnson (2019), who found a strong correlation between curriculum content dimensions and career value identification[20].

Emotional Support Mechanism: Several qualitative studies have documented that students report feeling accepted and understood when courses affirm and respect diverse cultural backgrounds. This emotional experience fosters professional identity recognition and engagement.

Social Capital Construction Mechanism: Psychology education, by providing professional role models and networking opportunities within multicultural contexts, expands students' professional social networks and enhances their perceived career competence. Specifically, the roles of mentors and role models have been repeatedly emphasized in multiple studies,

demonstrating the importance of social learning in career identity development.

Practical Integration Mechanism: Johnson (2019) quantified the significant correlation (r = .57, p < .01) between practical activities and career identity, further supporting the importance of this mechanism[20].

6.Analysis of Influencing Factors

The process through which cultural identity influences career identity is moderated by various individual differences.

6.1 Educational Environment Factors

The educational environment plays a key role in the integration of cultural and career identity. the degree of cultural integration in curriculum design directly impacts the effectiveness of this integration. Banks (2015) proposed a multicultural curriculum integration model that distinguishes four levels of integration: contribution-oriented, additive, transformative, and social action-oriented. Second, the cultural competence of instructors and their teaching methods significantly affect the integration process[21].

6.2 Sociocultural Factors

Sociocultural stereotypes of specific professions also influence the integration of cultural and career identities. Based on the literature analysis, this study constructs a model of the "Cultural Identity - Psychology Education - Career Identity" mechanism. This model shows that cultural identity influences career identity formation through both cognitive and emotional pathways, while psychology education acts as an important mediating variable, promoting this process through knowledge integration, emotional support, social capital building, and practical integration. This model provides a theoretical framework for understanding the interaction between cultural and career identities and offers practical guidance for psychology education reform.

7.Discussion of Major Findings

7.1 The Relationship between Cultural Identity and Career Identity

This study's literature analysis reveals a significant positive correlation between cultural identity and career identity. Cultural identity provides individuals with a cognitive framework for understanding the self and their relationship with society, which directly influences the establishment of career values and goals. This finding enriches existing literature by highlighting the emotional dimension of cultural identity, emphasizing the core role of emotional security in career identity development.

Furthermore, the study finds that cultural identity influences career identity formation through both cognitive and emotional pathways. By offering a sense of belonging and security, cultural identity enables individuals to navigate career decisions with greater resilience and persistence. This emotional component plays a pivotal role in shaping career commitment, especially in the early stages of career exploration.

7.2 The Mediating Role of Psychology Education Curricula

This study identifies four key mechanisms through which psychology education curricula mediate the relationship between cultural identity and career identity: knowledge integration, emotional support, social capital construction, and practical integration. These mechanisms provide a new theoretical framework for understanding how psychology education fosters the integration of cultural and career identities.

The practice integration mechanism is particularly significant. Several studies (Ponterotto et al., 2015; Wang Ming, 2022) confirm that student participation in culturally relevant practical activities significantly promotes the formation of career identity[12][22]. This finding supports Ponterotto et al.'s (2015) proposed model of integrating culture into professional training[12]. This study, through a systematic literature review, provides more comprehensive evidence, especially by integrating quantitative evidence from Johnson (2019), which links practical activities with career identity[20].

Additionally, the study emphasizes the importance of integrating multicultural perspectives into psychology curricula. The inclusion of diverse cultural viewpoints not only helps students develop cultural awareness but also strengthens their career-related values and goals. The study further suggests that psychology education should create supportive environments where students feel emotionally secure, enhancing their commitment to their professional development.

8.Theoretical Significance

Numerous studies (Fouad & Byars-Winston, 2005; Zhang Wei et al., 2017) show that a sense of cultural belonging, by

providing emotional security, influences career commitment[6][15]. This mechanism offers new theoretical insights into how cultural factors affect career resilience. The study's findings contribute to the multicultural education theory by detailing how educational environments can facilitate the integration of cultural and career identities. It addresses gaps in existing literature regarding the specific mechanisms of educational processes, particularly the role of practical integration in this dynamic.

9.Practical Implications

The findings of this study have significant implications for psychology education practice. First, the results highlight the necessity of integrating cultural identity education into psychology curricula. Specifically, course content should extend beyond mainstream Western theories to incorporate multicultural perspectives and localized knowledge, helping students integrate cultural identity with professional knowledge systems. Furthermore, the study underscores the importance of providing professional role models and mentors from diverse cultural backgrounds. Universities can achieve this by implementing the following strategies:

Inviting psychologists from various cultural backgrounds to share their career development experiences.

Establishing mentorship systems that focus on cultural diversity, offering personalized guidance to students.

Creating alumni networks that connect professionals from diverse cultural backgrounds with current students.

These practical applications can help students better understand and integrate their cultural identities with their professional aspirations, thus enhancing their career development.

10.Limitations and Future Research Directions

Future research should further investigate the long-term effects of cultural and career identity integration on students' career outcomes, such as career adaptability and job satisfaction. Additionally, it is essential to explore how individual difference factors (e.g., personality traits, cognitive styles) moderate the relationship between cultural identity and career identity. Research on how digitalization and globalization influence the integration of cultural and career identities in educational contexts would also provide valuable insights. Lastly, developing and validating educational intervention programs aimed at promoting the integration of cultural and career identities would offer evidence-based support for higher education practices.

11.Conclusion

The findings of this study demonstrate that psychology courses integrating cultural identity effectively contribute to the clarification of students' career goals and career direction. In particular, the integration of cultural content in the curriculum and the diversification of practical activities are crucial in promoting the development of career identity. These findings offer a new theoretical perspective on understanding the interaction between cultural identity and career identity, while also providing practical guidance for reforms in psychology education.

This study contributes new theoretical insights and evidence supporting the role of cultural identity in the development of career identity among university students, emphasizing the significance of cultural factors in career development. Additionally, it underscores the critical role of the educational environment in facilitating the integration of cultural and career identities. These findings not only enrich the interdisciplinary research on cultural and career identity but also provide valuable guidance for higher education practices, particularly in psychology education.

In summary, this study provides a fresh theoretical perspective and empirical support for understanding how cultural identity influences the development of career identity in university students through psychology education. It emphasizes the importance of cultural factors in career development and the key role of educational environments in promoting the integration of cultural and career identities. These insights are valuable for the continued development of higher education curricula and the support of students' career identity formation.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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