

Identity-Resilience Profiles and Adjustment Difficulties Among University Students: A Variable-Centered and Person-Centered Analysis

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Abstract

University adjustment is not merely an academic issue; it is also a developmental process shaped by identity formation and coping capacity. In the present study, the variable-centered and person-centered perspectives of ego identity status, psychological adjustment difficulties, and resilience were explored in university students. A sample of 200 university students was taken using a cross-sectional survey design. Ego identity status, resilience, and adjustment difficulties were assessed. Reliability analysis, descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, hierarchical regression analysis, cluster analysis, and analysis of variance were used to analyze the data. In conjunction, using a correlation analysis revealed that all ego identity status dimensions were significant and correlated with adjustment problems, with the highest correlation being for the dimension of identity diffusion. Demographic variables accounted for 6.8% of the variance in adjustment problems in hierarchical regression. Identity status dimensions accounted for an additional 11.5% of the variance, and resilience accounted for an additional 1.7%. Identity diffusion and resilience were the significant predictors of adjustment difficulties in the final model. Three identity-resilience profiles were identified through cluster analysis: a low–low profile, an identity-intensive-higher resilience profile, and an average-lower identity salience profile. The profiles varied considerably in terms of adjustment problems, with the identity-intensive–higher resilience profile reporting the highest adjustment problems. The findings suggest that adjustment difficulties among university students are shaped not only by isolated levels of resilience or identity development but also by the configuration of identity-status tendencies and coping capacity. The study highlights identity diffusion as a key developmental risk factor and supports the value of person-centered analysis for identifying students who may be psychologically vulnerable during university life.

Keywords: Ego Identity Status; Identity Diffusion; Resilience; Adjustment Difficulties; University Students; Cluster Analysis; Person-Centered Approach.

Introduction

Beyond a shift in educational setting, the move to university is a developmental time that involves young people in making new demands on them, both academically and socially, as well as in making new interpersonal demands and choices about their future. While the transition to university is often depicted as a growth opportunity, an experience of autonomy and self-development, it can also involve adjusting to the demands, strains, and uncertainties that arise in the college context that require students to draw upon their psychological resources, which are often insufficient (Gao et al., 2024; Jillani et al., 2023; Mastrokoukou et al., 2024). Adjustment is not only academic, but also includes emotional, interpersonal, institutional, and

functional aspects of the student's life (Baker & Siryk, 1986; Credé & Niehorster, 2012; Jillani et al., 2023). Recent work suggests that a substantial proportion of students experience difficulties across academic, emotional, interpersonal, and campus-related domains, indicating that university adjustment should be understood as a multidimensional psychological process rather than a narrow academic outcome (Gao et al., 2024; Jillani et al., 2023). Despite the evidence that students face academic, financial, relational, and emotional challenges that may impact their psychological functioning, university adjustment is still an important but relatively under-explored area in the Pakistani context (Jillani et al., 2023).

One of the key advantages of the developmental frame of reference is its ability to explain why some students might experience adjustment problems in college. During emerging adulthood, a time in which individuals are expected to clarify values, consolidate goals, establish autonomy, and develop a coherent sense of self, it is recognized that it is a time of transition (Arnett, 2000; Branje, 2022; Crocetti et al., 2023; Erikson, 1968). According to Erikson's psychosocial theory, identity development is an important developmental task that an individual tries to accomplish to give meaning to their lives over time and across situations (Erikson, 1968). Identity development is therefore not a side issue in student life; it is a central psychological process that is integral to the organization of experiences, the interpretation of challenges, and decisions of who they are and who they intend to be (Branje, 2022; Crocetti et al., 2023). Contemporary identity research has further emphasized that identity develops within relational and social contexts, including family, peers, educational institutions, and broader cultural environments (Branje, 2022; Crocetti et al., 2023). Therefore, adjustment difficulties among university students may be not only a response to the immediate academic challenges, but also a response to the developmental challenge of building and sustaining a unified identity in transition to the university.

Marcia's identity-status model further developed Erikson's theory as he proposed that identity development involved two main processes: exploration and commitment (Marcia, 1966). Based on these processes, four identity statuses have been identified: achievement, moratorium, foreclosure, and diffusion. Identity achievement is a relatively stable identity after exploration and commitment; moratorium is active exploration without commitment; foreclosure is commitment without adequate exploration, and diffusion is a lack of clear exploration and stability in commitment (Marcia, 1966, 1980). These identity statuses are not simply a descriptive classification but are considered to reflect various modes of dealing with developmental uncertainty, choice, and definition. More recent models of identity-process have refined these notions and make a distinction between three levels: commitment, in-depth exploration, and reconsideration/commitment, thereby suggesting that identity is a dynamic process and that commitments are formed, evaluated, and adjusted over time (Crocetti et al., 2008; Crocetti et al., 2023; Meeus, 2011). The present study builds on the identity-status tradition, but the broader literature is relevant as it has shown that identity development is not a one-time achievement, but a process of self-organization, particularly during educational and relational transitions (Branje, 2022; Crocetti et al., 2023).

Among the identity statuses, identity diffusion is especially relevant to psychological adjustment. Diffusion reflects difficulty in establishing clear commitments, direction, and self-definition, and it may leave students less able to organize their academic and social experiences into a coherent sense of purpose (Marcia, 1966; Potterton et al., 2022). Theoretical and empirical work suggests that identity confusion or diffusion may be associated with emotional distress because uncertainty about the self can undermine agency, goal-directed behavior, and adaptive coping (Berzonsky & Kuk, 2022; Crocetti et al., 2023; Potterton et al., 2022). In their systematic review and meta-analysis, Potterton et al. (2022) reported evidence from longitudinal studies suggesting bidirectional associations between identity synthesis/confusion and symptoms of depression, anxiety, and eating-related difficulties during adolescence and emerging adulthood. Although the meta-analytic evidence was mixed and the authors cautioned that stronger longitudinal research is needed, the narrative synthesis supported the view that high identity confusion and low identity synthesis often co-occur with greater social-emotional difficulties (Potterton et al., 2022). This is theoretically consistent with the

idea that identity difficulties may operate both as a vulnerability factor for distress and as a consequence of distress when emotional difficulties interfere with exploration and commitment (Klimstra & Denissen, 2017; Potterton et al., 2022).

Evidence from college-student research further supports the relevance of identity for adjustment. Berzonsky and Kuk (2022) found that identity-processing styles were meaningfully associated with college adaptation, including depressive symptoms, loneliness, and adjustment. In particular, a diffuse-avoidant identity style was linked with a maladaptive pattern, whereas more structured or self-regulated identity styles were associated with better adaptation. Their findings are important because they suggest that identity-related difficulties may influence adjustment not only through abstract self-concept processes but also through students' agency, self-regulation, and capacity to manage transition-related demands (Berzonsky & Kuk, 2022). Similarly, contemporary research on identity development emphasizes that uncertainty, reconsideration, or diffusion may become especially salient during periods of role transition, such as entry into university, when students must revise previous self-understandings and construct new academic, interpersonal, and future-oriented identities (Branje, 2022; Crocetti et al., 2023; Gao et al., 2024).

While identity provides students with a sense of continuity and direction, resilience reflects the capacity to adapt, recover, and maintain functioning in the face of stress and adversity (Connor & Davidson, 2003; Gao et al., 2024; Mastrokouskou et al., 2024). Resilience has been defined as an individual resource and as a process that involves individual abilities, relationships, and opportunities in the environment (Gao et al., 2024; Perry et al., 2023). In universities, resilience can contribute to students' emotional regulation, coping with academic pressure, asking for help, and maintaining motivation during difficulties (Gao et al., 2024; Mastrokouskou et al., 2024). Research has consistently shown that resilience is correlated with positive well-being, decreased psychological distress and adjustment in university students (Gao et al., 2024; Jillani et al., 2023; Mastrokouskou et al., 2024; Yıldırım et al., 2022). For example, Yıldırım et al. (2022) found that resilience negatively predicted psychological maladjustment and positively predicted life satisfaction among undergraduate students after controlling for demographic factors. Likewise, Mastrokouskou et al. (2024) concluded that the transition to university was negatively correlated with resilience, depression, anxiety, and emotion regulation difficulties.

Adjustment difficulties in the current study are operationalized by the Brief Adjustment Scale-6 (BASE-6), which assesses psychological adjustment problems (emotional distress and functional interference) (Cruz et al., 2020; Yıldırım et al., 2022). This distinction is important because a high score on the BASE-6 does not mean good adjustment; it means more psychological maladjustment or difficulties with adjustment. Yıldırım et al. (2022) administered the BASE-6 to undergraduates and indicated that higher scores indicated higher psychological adjustment problems. Their results offer empirical evidence in support of the consideration of resilience as a predictor of lower adjustment difficulties in student samples (Yıldırım et al., 2022). In the present study, the term adjustment difficulties is thus defined as an emotional and functional construct of psychological strain, and not a positive adaptation term.

Although there is deep resonance with both identity and resilience, there is a considerable amount of existing literature which has looked at these concepts individually. The predictors of mental health and adaptation have been examined in terms of commitment, exploration, diffusion, and identity styles in identity research, while coping with academic and emotional stressors has been explored in students' resilience research. But there could be a psychological interdependence between identity and resilience. A coherent identity may help students to have goals, values, and a sense of direction, while resilience may help students to cope with setbacks and maintain functioning when there are challenges to identity-relevant goals. On the other hand, when students do not have a sense of self-structure to make meaning of demands and access coping resources, it can intensify adjustment problems and issues. Recent studies have begun to examine identity and resilience together, suggesting that self-identity and psychological resilience are both important for college adjustment and may operate through linked developmental and adaptive pathways

(Yang & Gao, 2025; Gao et al., 2024). In this growing body of literature, the importance of studying identity status and resilience together, not separately, as predictors is highlighted.

Another shortcoming of many previous studies is that they use only variable-centered models. Although variable-centered analyses provide estimation of average associations between identity, resilience, and adjustment difficulties, they do not fully capture how these psychological features are combined within individuals (Gao et al., 2024; Kökçam et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2023). Person-centered approaches, including cluster analysis and latent profile analysis, are increasingly used to identify subgroups of students who share similar configurations of psychological resources and vulnerabilities (Gao et al., 2024; Kökçam et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2023). This is important because students can be high or low on one factor and high or low on another, and might even have a pattern, such as low identity development coupled with high resilience, or high identity development coupled with high distress. For instance, Gao et al. (2024) discovered four resilience profiles of first-year college students, with well-resilient students having the best college adjustment, and students with lower resilience resources having the worst. Kökçam et al. (2022) also showed that university students were measurable and could be meaningfully classified into the stress profiles differing in terms of their stress resistance and emotional intelligence. These results endorse the use of person-centered analysis to uncover heterogeneity which is not apparent in regression-based approaches. Thus, the present study combines the variable-centered and person-centered perspectives to investigate the relationship between EIS, resilience and adjustment problems in university students. First, bivariate relationships between identity status dimensions, resilience and adjustment problems are explored. Second, it examines whether dimensions of identity and resilience predict adjustment problems while controlling for demographic characteristics. Third, it employs cluster analysis to identify naturally occurring identity–resilience profiles and explore differences in adjustment difficulties among the identified profiles. This combined approach allows the study to address both “which variables matter?” and “which student profiles are most vulnerable?” This integration aligns with recent calls for more complex models of identity, resilience, and adjustment that account for both typical associations and person-specific configurations (Crocetti et al., 2023; Gao et al., 2024; Potterton et al., 2022).

Based on Eriksonian and neo-Eriksonian identity theory, resilience theory, and recent student-adjustment literature, the study was guided by the following expectations. First, identity-status dimensions, resilience, and adjustment difficulties were expected to be significantly associated. Second, identity diffusion was expected to emerge as the most conceptually relevant identity-status predictor of adjustment difficulties because diffusion reflects uncertainty, weak commitment, and lack of coherent self-direction. Third, resilience was expected to explain additional variance in adjustment difficulties beyond demographic characteristics and identity-status dimensions. Finally, distinct identity–resilience profiles were expected to differ significantly in adjustment difficulties, supporting the value of a person-centered approach to understanding psychological adjustment among university students.

Method

Research Design

The present study used a quantitative, cross-sectional research design to examine the relationship between ego identity status, resilience, and psychological adjustment difficulties among university students. A cross-sectional design was appropriate because the study aimed to assess students’ identity-status characteristics, perceived resilience, and adjustment-related difficulties at a single point in time. The study included both variable-centered and person-centered analyses. The variable-centered analysis examined whether identity-status dimensions and resilience predicted adjustment difficulties, whereas the person-centered analysis identified naturally occurring identity–resilience profiles and compared these profiles on adjustment difficulties.

Participants

It involved 200 university students from public and private universities. Convenience sampling was used to select participants. Inclusion criteria included voluntary participation by university students. Students who did not qualify for this study were not included. There were 69 boys and 131 girls. The age of the participants was from 18 to 30 years. The majority of participants were at the bachelor's level, and a higher percentage came from public-sector institutions. Demographic information was collected regarding age, gender, academic program, year of study, field of study, type of institution, residence, and family system.

Measures

Ego Identity Status

Ego identity status was measured using the Objective Measure of Ego Identity Status. The measure is based on Marcia's identity-status framework, which conceptualizes ego identity development in terms of four identity statuses: achievement, moratorium, foreclosure, and diffusion (Marcia, 1966). The objective assessment of ego identity status was developed to provide a self-report method for measuring these identity-status dimensions (Adams et al., 1979). In the present study, the scale consisted of 20 items measuring four dimensions of ego identity status: identity achievement, identity moratorium, identity foreclosure, and identity diffusion. Each subscale contained five items. Participants responded using a 5-point Likert-type response format. Higher scores indicated greater endorsement of the respective identity-status dimension. The four subscale scores were used as the main indicators of ego identity status in the primary analyses. A total ego identity status score was also computed for descriptive and correlational purposes, but the subscales were retained for regression and cluster analyses because they provided a more conceptually specific representation of identity-status patterns. In the present sample, the identity-status subscales demonstrated acceptable to good internal consistency. Cronbach's alpha values were .75 for achievement, .73 for moratorium, .83 for foreclosure, and .78 for diffusion. The total ego identity status scale showed excellent internal consistency, $\alpha = .93$.

Resilience

Resilience was assessed using the 10-item Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale. The original Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale was developed to assess the ability to cope with adversity, adapt to stress, and recover from difficult experiences (Connor & Davidson, 2003). The 10-item version was later validated as a brief measure of resilience and has been widely used in psychological research (Campbell-Sills & Stein, 2007). In the present dataset, items were coded from 1 to 5, with higher scores indicating greater resilience. Total scores were calculated by summing all 10 items, producing a possible score range of 10 to 50. The scale demonstrated good internal consistency in the present sample, $\alpha = .88$.

Adjustment Difficulties

Brief Adjustment Scale-6 was used to assess adjustment problems. The BASE-6 was created as a short psychological adjustment instrument for use in measurement-based care (Cruz et al., 2020). The scale consists of six items covering emotional distress and functional interference such as irritability, anxiety, depressed mood, and how emotional distress interferes with self-perception, relations, work, and school functioning. All participants answered on a scale of 1 (not at all) to 7 (extremely) on each item. The scores were added together for each child on the six items for a total score. Scores were higher for more emotional distress and psychological adjustment problems. The internal consistency of the present sample was good for the BASE-6, $\alpha = .88$.

Procedure

Data were collected following approval from the appropriate departmental research review process. They

were recruited in university contexts and by using online data collection approaches. Participants were explained the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and the ability to withdraw at any time without penalty before they filled out the questionnaires. They also knew their answers would be confidential and that their answers would be used only for research. Once informed consent was obtained, participants filled out the demographic information form and the study questionnaires. The questionnaires took about 15–20 minutes to fill out. Responses were checked for completeness and then coded into SPSS for statistical analysis.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical standards for psychological research were adhered to in this study. All participants were asked to consent to participation before data collection. Data were collected with informed consent, and participation was voluntary. The participants were told that they could withdraw from the study at any time. No personally identifying information was gathered, ensuring confidentiality and anonymity. The data were only used for academic and research purposes and were kept in a secure manner.

Data Analysis

IBM SPSS Statistics was used for data analysis. Preliminary analyses comprised screening for missing data, descriptive statistics, and internal consistency of measures in the study, as determined by Cronbach's alpha. Bivariate relationships between resilience, adjustment difficulties, total ego identity status, and the four dimensions of identity status were examined using Pearson correlation analysis. Hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine whether identity-status dimensions and resilience predicted adjustment difficulties after controlling for demographic characteristics. In the first block, age, gender, type of institution, residence, and family system were entered as control variables. In the second block, the four identity-status dimensions, achievement, moratorium, foreclosure, and diffusion, were entered. In the third block, resilience was entered to determine whether it explained additional variance in adjustment difficulties beyond demographics and identity-status dimensions. Multicollinearity was assessed using tolerance and variance inflation factor values. To provide a person-centered understanding of the data, cluster analysis was also conducted. Scores for identity achievement, moratorium, foreclosure, diffusion, and resilience were first standardized. A hierarchical cluster analysis using Ward's method and squared Euclidean distance was conducted to explore the appropriate number of clusters. Inspection of the agglomeration schedule supported testing a three-cluster solution. A K-means cluster analysis was then performed using the standardized identity-status and resilience scores. Final cluster centers were examined to label the resulting identity–resilience profiles. Finally, a one-way analysis of variance was conducted to determine whether the identity–resilience profiles differed in adjustment difficulties. Because Levene's test indicated unequal variances, Games-Howell post-hoc comparisons were used to examine pairwise differences between profiles. Eta squared was calculated as an effect size for the profile differences in adjustment difficulties.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics and Internal Consistency of Study Variables

Variable	No. of items	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Cronbach's α
Resilience	10	32.40	7.71	.88
Adjustment difficulties	6	22.00	8.00	.88
Total ego identity status	20	63.13	15.07	.93
Identity achievement	5	16.26	3.82	.75
Identity moratorium	5	15.95	4.03	.73
Identity foreclosure	5	15.55	4.46	.83

Variable	No. of items	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Cronbach's α
Identity diffusion	5	15.37	4.18	.78

Note. $N = 200$. Resilience was measured using the Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale-10. In the present dataset, CD-RISC-10 items were coded from 1 to 5, producing a possible total score range of 10–50. Adjustment difficulties were measured using the Brief Adjustment Scale-6; higher scores indicate greater emotional distress and psychological adjustment difficulties. Ego identity status was measured using a Marcia-based objective measure of ego identity status.

Descriptive statistics and internal consistency coefficients are presented in Table 1. Cronbach's alpha values ranged from .73 to .93, indicating acceptable to excellent internal consistency across the study measures. The mean resilience score was 32.40 ($SD = 7.71$), while the mean adjustment difficulties score was 22.00 ($SD = 8.00$). Among the ego identity-status dimensions, the highest mean score was observed for identity achievement ($M = 16.26$, $SD = 3.82$), followed by moratorium ($M = 15.95$, $SD = 4.03$), foreclosure ($M = 15.55$, $SD = 4.46$), and diffusion ($M = 15.37$, $SD = 4.18$).

Table 2

Pearson Correlations Among Resilience, Adjustment Difficulties, and Ego Identity Status Dimensions

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Resilience	—						
2. Adjustment difficulties	.28**	—					
3. Total ego identity status	.46**	.36**	—				
4. Identity achievement	.45**	.30**	.90**	—			
5. Identity moratorium	.45**	.30**	.93**	.80**	—		
6. Identity foreclosure	.38**	.33**	.91**	.74**	.78**	—	
7. Identity diffusion	.39**	.39**	.92**	.76**	.80**	.78**	—

Note. $N = 200$. Adjustment difficulties were measured using the Brief Adjustment Scale-6; higher scores indicate greater emotional distress and psychological adjustment difficulties. $p < .01$.

Pearson correlation analysis showed that adjustment difficulties were significantly and positively associated with resilience, $r = .28$, $p < .001$, and total ego identity status, $r = .36$, $p < .001$. Among the identity-status dimensions, identity diffusion showed the strongest association with adjustment difficulties, $r = .39$, $p < .001$, followed by foreclosure, $r = .33$, $p < .001$, achievement, $r = .30$, $p < .001$, and moratorium, $r = .30$, $p < .001$. The identity-status subscales were strongly intercorrelated, with correlations ranging from $r = .74$ to $r = .80$. Total ego identity status was also highly correlated with all four subscales, indicating that the total score and subscales should not be entered together in the same regression model.

Table 3

Hierarchical Regression Predicting Adjustment Difficulties

Predictor	Model 1 β	Model 2 β	Model 3 β	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	95% CI for <i>B</i>	<i>p</i>	VIF
Age	.098	.073	.060	0.56	0.64	[−0.70, 1.81]	.382	1.11
Gender	−.165*	−.102	−.082	−1.38	1.17	[−3.69, 0.94]	.242	1.16
Type of institution	.124	.090	.096	1.65	1.19	[−0.70, 3.99]	.168	1.13
Residence	.013	.042	.035	0.65	1.22	[−1.75, 3.05]	.592	1.03

Predictor	Model 1 β	Model 2 β	Model 3 β	B	$SE\ B$	95% CI for B	p	VIF
Family system	.067	.040	.044	0.71	1.13	[-1.51, 2.94]	.528	1.14
Identity achievement	—	.006	-.027	-0.06	0.25	[-0.56, 0.44]	.822	3.43
Identity moratorium	—	-.087	-.121	-0.24	0.26	[-0.76, 0.28]	.361	4.15
Identity foreclosure	—	.103	.099	0.18	0.21	[-0.24, 0.60]	.403	3.33
Identity diffusion	—	.330**	.330**	0.63	0.24	[0.16, 1.10]	.009	3.71
Resilience	—	—	.151*	0.16	0.08	[0.003, 0.31]	.045	1.33

Note. Dependent variable = adjustment difficulties measured by the Brief Adjustment Scale-6. Higher scores indicate greater emotional distress and psychological adjustment difficulties. Model 1: $R^2 = .068$, adjusted $R^2 = .044$, $F(5, 194) = 2.81$, $p = .018$. Model 2: $R^2 = .182$, adjusted $R^2 = .144$, $\Delta R^2 = .115$, $\Delta F(4, 190) = 6.66$, $p < .001$. Model 3: $R^2 = .199$, adjusted $R^2 = .157$, $\Delta R^2 = .017$, $\Delta F(1, 189) = 4.06$, $p = .045$; final model $F(10, 189) = 4.71$, $p < .001$. VIF = variance inflation factor. $p < .05$. $p < .01$.

Hierarchical regression analysis was conducted to examine whether ego identity-status dimensions and resilience predicted adjustment difficulties after controlling for demographic characteristics. In Model 1, age, gender, type of institution, residence, and family system explained 6.8% of the variance in adjustment difficulties, $F(5, 194) = 2.81$, $p = .018$. In Model 2, the addition of identity achievement, moratorium, foreclosure, and diffusion significantly improved the model, $\Delta R^2 = .115$, $\Delta F(4, 190) = 6.66$, $p < .001$. In Model 3, resilience added a small but significant amount of explained variance, $\Delta R^2 = .017$, $\Delta F(1, 189) = 4.06$, $p = .045$. The final model was significant, $F(10, 189) = 4.71$, $p < .001$, explaining 19.9% of the variance in adjustment difficulties. In the final model, identity diffusion emerged as the strongest significant predictor, $\beta = .330$, $p = .009$. Resilience also significantly predicted adjustment difficulties, $\beta = .151$, $p = .045$. Because the direction of this association was positive, this finding was interpreted cautiously and examined further in relation to the profile analysis. Because the direction of this association was positive, this finding was interpreted cautiously and examined further in relation to the profile analysis.

Table 4
Final Cluster Centers for Identity–Resilience Profiles

Variable	Cluster 1: Low identity–low resilience	Cluster 2: Identity–Cluster 3: Average resilience–lower identity salience
Resilience	-1.58	0.01
Identity achievement	-1.91	-0.24
Identity moratorium	-1.79	-0.29
Identity foreclosure	-1.74	-0.34
Identity diffusion	-1.62	-0.39
n	20	101
%	10.0	50.5

Note. Values are standardized final cluster centers from K-means cluster analysis. Positive values indicate scores above the sample mean, whereas negative values indicate scores below the sample mean. The K-means descriptive ANOVA indicated that the clusters differed across all clustering variables: resilience,

$F(2, 197) = 43.74, p < .001$; identity achievement, $F(2, 197) = 178.77, p < .001$; identity moratorium, $F(2, 197) = 168.58, p < .001$; identity foreclosure, $F(2, 197) = 194.98, p < .001$; and identity diffusion, $F(2, 197) = 197.13, p < .001$. These F values are interpreted descriptively because the variables were used to create the clusters.

A K-means cluster analysis was conducted using standardized scores for resilience and the four-ego identity-status dimensions. A three-cluster solution was retained because it produced conceptually interpretable and reasonably sized profiles. Cluster 1 included 20 participants (10.0%) and was characterized by substantially below-average scores on resilience and all identity-status dimensions; therefore, it was labelled the low identity–low resilience profile. Cluster 2 included 79 participants (39.5%) and showed above-average scores on resilience and all identity-status dimensions, including both achievement and diffusion. Because this profile reflected elevated endorsement across multiple identity-status dimensions rather than a purely adaptive pattern, it was labelled the identity-intensive–higher resilience profile. Cluster 3 included 101 participants (50.5%) and was close to the sample mean on resilience, with slightly below-average scores across the identity-status dimensions; therefore, it was labelled the average resilience–lower identity salience profile.

Table 5

Adjustment Difficulties Across Identity–Resilience Profiles

Identity–resilience profile	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	95% CI	Games-Howell post hoc comparisons
Cluster 1: Low identity–low resilience	20	16.50	8.08	[12.72, 20.28]	1 < 2***; 1 = 3
Cluster 2: Identity-intensive–higher resilience	79	25.33	8.38	[23.45, 27.21]	2 > 1***; 2 > 3***
Cluster 3: Average resilience–lower identity salience	101	20.49	6.55	[19.19, 21.78]	3 < 2***; 3 = 1

Note. Adjustment difficulties were measured using the Brief Adjustment Scale-6; higher scores indicate greater emotional distress and psychological adjustment difficulties. Levene’s test was significant, $F(2, 197) = 3.31, p = .039$; therefore, Games-Howell post hoc comparisons were interpreted. The overall ANOVA was significant, $F(2, 197) = 15.32, p < .001, \eta^2 = .13$. Games-Howell comparisons showed that Cluster 2 reported significantly higher adjustment difficulties than Cluster 1, mean difference = 8.83, $SE = 2.04, p < .001$, 95% CI [3.81, 13.85], and Cluster 3, mean difference = 4.84, $SE = 1.15, p < .001$, 95% CI [2.13, 7.56]. Cluster 1 and Cluster 3 did not differ significantly, mean difference = 3.99, $SE = 1.92, p = .116$, 95% CI [–0.81, 8.78].

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to examine whether adjustment difficulties differed across the three identity–resilience profiles. Levene’s test indicated that the homogeneity of variance assumption was violated, $F(2, 197) = 3.31, p = .039$; therefore, Games-Howell post hoc comparisons were interpreted. The results showed a significant difference in adjustment difficulties across profiles, $F(2, 197) = 15.32, p < .001, \eta^2 = .13$. The identity-intensive–higher resilience profile reported the highest adjustment difficulties ($M = 25.33, SD = 8.38$), followed by the average resilience–lower identity salience profile ($M = 20.49, SD = 6.55$), whereas the low identity–low resilience profile reported the lowest adjustment difficulties ($M = 16.50, SD = 8.08$). Games-Howell comparisons showed that the identity-intensive–higher resilience profile had significantly higher adjustment difficulties than both the low identity–low resilience profile, mean difference = 8.83, $p < .001$, and the average resilience–lower identity salience profile, mean difference = 4.84, $p < .001$. The difference between the low identity–low resilience profile and the average resilience–lower identity salience profile was not statistically significant, mean difference = 3.99, $p = .116$. Overall, the

profile analysis suggests that students with elevated scores across identity-status dimensions, including diffusion and moratorium, reported the greatest adjustment difficulties despite also showing above-average resilience. Additional chi-square analyses showed that profile membership was significantly associated with gender, $\chi^2(2, N = 200) = 12.34, p = .002$, Cramer's $V = .25$, but not with type of institution, residence, or family system.

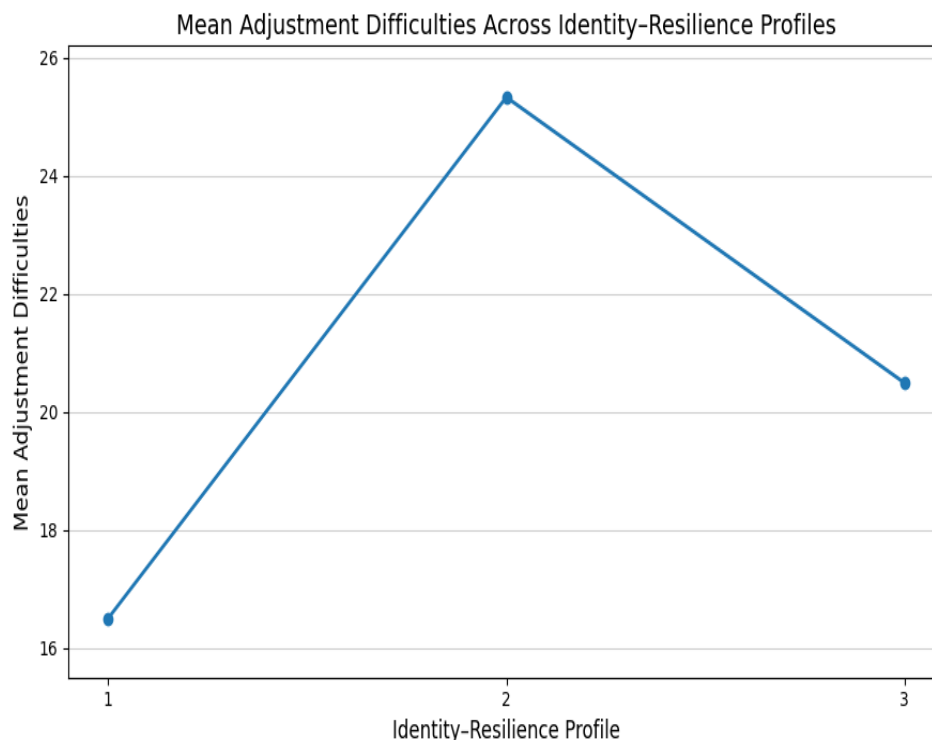


Figure 1: Mean Adjustment Difficulties Across Identity-Resilience Profiles

Note. Cluster 1 = low identity-low resilience profile; Cluster 2 = identity-intensive-higher resilience profile; Cluster 3 = average resilience-lower identity salience profile. Adjustment difficulties were measured using the Brief Adjustment Scale-6, with higher scores indicating greater emotional distress and psychological adjustment difficulties.

Discussion

The present research took a variable-centered approach as well as a person-centered approach to exploring the relationship between the three variables: Ego Identity Status, Resilience, and Adjustment Difficulties among university students. In conclusion, the results suggest that it is not only resilience, but also the interaction of identity-status dimensions and resilience as a whole that explains the difficulties in students' adjustment. This aligns with developmental theories that claim that university is an identity-relevant developmental context in which young adults negotiate goals, commitments, autonomy, relationships, and direction for their future (Branje, 2022; Crocetti et al., 2023). The results of the correlations indicated that the dimensions of identity status were all positively related to adjustment difficulties. Identity diffusion was significantly related to adjustment difficulties, with the students reporting higher levels of identity diffusion also reporting higher levels of adjustment difficulties. The pattern is theoretically consistent. Identity diffusion is a state of weak commitment, uncertainty, and lack of direction, thus limiting students' ability to structure their school and social life into a coherent identity (Marcia, 1966, 1980). The results also align with past research showing that identity confusion/diffusion is associated with poorer psychological

functioning, depressive/anxiety symptoms, and more social-emotional problems in adolescence and young adulthood (Berzonsky & Kuk, 2022; Potterton et al., 2022). These results, in this aspect, support the notion that identity diffusion is not only a developmental delay, but can also be a psychological liability when students are faced with decisions, role transitions, and academic stress.

This pattern was confirmed by the hierarchical regression analysis. In addition, the dimensions of identity status accounted for substantial unique variance in adjustment problems after the influence of age, gender, institution type, place of residence, and family system was taken into account. But only one of the four dimensions of identity, namely identity diffusion, was a significant unique predictor. This is a significant finding, as it implies that the maladaptive aspect of identity development is most important for adjustment problems, and not identity status as a whole. At the bivariate level, achievement, moratorium, and foreclosure were associated with adjustment problems; however, when all four identity dimensions were included together, these effects were limited to bivariate relationships. This may be partly because of the strong intercorrelations among the identity-status subscales in the present data. More substantively, it is suggested that the most psychologically resonating risk factor was a lack of coherence, direction, and stable commitment, which was picked up by diffusion. This interpretation aligns with the contemporary identity theory, which suggests that the certainty and commitment to identity are more likely to be protective, while the feelings of identity confusion and reconsideration are more likely to be linked to distress (Crocetti et al., 2023; Potterton et al., 2022).

A more complex finding emerged for resilience. In contrast to the typical finding that resilience is negatively correlated with adjustment problems, resilience was found to be positively correlated with adjustment problems and was a positive, small but significant predictor in the final regression model. The result has to be taken with a pinch of salt. It does not necessarily mean that resilience is harmful. Rather, it may indicate that in this sample, resilience was reported by students who were actively facing stress, strain, or adjustment demands. Resilience scales often capture perceived capacity to cope with adversity; therefore, students experiencing higher pressure may also endorse resilience-related items because they are actively trying to manage difficulties. Similar interpretations have been suggested in person-centered resilience research, where resilience may not always operate as a simple linear protective factor but may vary depending on context, stress exposure, and the configuration of other psychological resources (Gao et al., 2024; Kökçam et al., 2022; Perry et al., 2023). Thus, the present finding suggests that resilience should not be interpreted in isolation from the developmental and emotional context in which it is expressed.

The cluster analysis offered a clearer explanation of this unexpected pattern. Three identity–resilience profiles were identified. The first profile was characterized by low resilience and low scores across identity-status dimensions and reported the lowest adjustment difficulties. The second profile showed elevated scores across resilience and all identity-status dimensions and reported the highest adjustment difficulties. The third profile showed average resilience with comparatively lower identity-status scores and reported moderate adjustment difficulties. The one-way ANOVA confirmed that the profiles differed significantly in adjustment difficulties, with a medium-to-large effect. Post-hoc comparisons showed that the elevated identity–resilience profile reported significantly greater adjustment difficulties than both the low identity–low resilience profile and the average/lower identity profile. The second profile is particularly important for interpretation. At first glance, high resilience might be expected to mark better adjustment. This profile was not, however, a “high resilience” profile; it was also high on each of the identity status dimensions: diffusion, moratorium, foreclosure, and achievement. This indicates an identity-intensive or identity-conflicted profile, not just an adaptive profile. Students in this group may have a high level of concern with identity issues but may also be in the stage of uncertainty, conflicting demands, or an identity dilemma. Co-occurrence of high achievement and high diffusion is theoretically significant in this dataset because it might reflect endorsement of more than one identity-status tendency and therefore may not represent the pattern of identity achieved. Thus, they show increased adjustment problems which could be attributed to

identity complexity, internal conflict, or greater developmental salience, rather than to failure of resilience. The high resilience score in this profile may therefore indicate coping instead of low risk for psychological well-being during the developmental stress.

This individualistic discovery further enhances the contribution of the study. Results based on variables indicated that diffusion was the most significant factor, while the results from the cluster analysis suggested that there could be a configuration of identity and resilience that would create risk. A student with a resilient identity profile (high diffusion and moratorium) can also experience adjustment problems. This aligns with the recent thoughts on uncovering psychological heterogeneity that may not be captured in regression models (Gao et al., 2024; Kökçam et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2023). It also aligns with identity-profile research showing that developmental profiles characterized by confusion, instability, or unresolved exploration tend to show poorer adjustment than profiles marked by coherent commitment and identity synthesis (Hatano et al., 2022; Tseng & Chen, 2024).

The results of the study hold implications for university counselling and services for students. Students experiencing stress or adjustment issues may require more than just stress management or resilience-building interventions. They may also require assistance in setting goals, developing self-awareness, making significant commitments, and coping with and overcoming identity-related uncertainty. Resilience-focused interventions may fail to acknowledge the sources of distress that stem from identity. On the other hand, identity-related support can contribute to students' utilization of the factors of resilience by providing them with direction in coping. This is particularly important in university environments, where students make choices about their academic trajectory, career aspirations, relationships, family expectations, and future.

There are also some limitations to the study. One, the cross-sectional design does not allow causal conclusions. Statistically, identity diffusion and resilience became significant predictors of adjustment difficulties; however, the direction of influence cannot be confirmed. There may be a temporal relationship between identity difficulty and identity diffusion, or identity difficulty may lead to identity diffusion, or identity diffusion may lead to identity difficulty. Second, shared-method variance could be enhanced due to the use of self-report measures. Third, the factor structure of the 20-item OMEIS version in the present study was highly intercorrelated, indicating the need for further investigation of the factor structure in future studies. Fourth, the cluster solution should be viewed in an exploratory and sample-specific manner. These profiles should be repeated with larger and more diverse student samples, ideally by latent profile analysis, in future studies. Future research should investigate whether resilience is different in the low stress and high stress environments and whether resilience is reported more strongly in students coping with adjustment demands in either cross-sectional or longitudinal designs.

Overall, the study is a valuable contribution that brings together three constructs, identity status, resilience, and adjustment difficulties in one model, despite some limitations. Results indicate that identity diffusion is a key predictor of adjustment problems, with the possibility that students' resilience is situated in different ways based on their overall identity profile. The person-centered findings also suggest that whilst students with high levels of identity status patterns may also have high resilience, there can be significant adjustment issues. The study in general underscores the importance of conceptualizing adjustment as a gradual process that is influenced by students' self-definition and coping ability, and not just a result of academic stress or resilience.

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