

# Systemic Analysis of the Construction of Cultural Identity among Adolescents Whose Parents Are Fishermen in the Blangoua Area, Far North Region of Cameroon

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DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2025.9020168>

Received: 30 January 2025; Accepted: 04 February 2025; Published: 08 March 2025

## SUMMARY

This study is a systemic analysis of the factors influencing the construction of cultural identity among adolescents from fishing families. The study is based on the observation that certain factors influence the construction of the identity of adolescents from fishing families in the Blangoua area. The research raises the problem of the influence of factors on adolescents' self-perception and identity construction. We used Tajfel and Turner's social identity theory (1979), which postulates that individuals derive their self-esteem from the social groups to which they belong and the meanings attached to their membership of these groups, and Shweder's cultural psychology (1998), which stresses the importance of understanding human behaviour in its cultural context rather than considering it as an individual phenomenon detached from its socio-cultural environment. The analyses therefore examine the factors that have an impact on the construction of adolescents' identities. To test our research hypotheses, we used the clinical method, which relies on a semi-directive interview guide to collect data from these adolescents (aged 13 to 20), selected using the purposive sampling technique. Content analysis of the adolescents' discourse enabled us to establish a correlation between the different variables in our research hypotheses. It also confirmed the general hypothesis that factors linked to cultural practices influence the construction of the identity of adolescents of fishing parents, and led to suggestions for enhancing the value of local cultures and strengthening the link between culture and psychology.

**Key words:** Cultural practices, identity construction, adolescents, fishing parents, Blangoua.

## INTRODUCTION

The construction of cultural identity is a dynamic process made up of a set of elements that characterise a social group or community. These elements include language, religion, customs, artistic practices and shared values. This construction of identity does not take place in a vacuum; it is influenced by a multitude of factors, ranging from the family and community environment to social interactions and external influences Hall, (1997; 1990). In the specific context of adolescents whose parents are fishermen in Blangoua, on Lake Chad, this identity construction is particularly interesting because of the challenges they face.

Adolescents growing up in this context are steeped in ancient traditions linked to fishing and life on the lake. Their cultural identity is therefore closely linked to these age-old practices, which shape their vision of the world and their place in society according to Le Blanc, Orfield, and Lee, (2019) and Thiruvengadam, and Subramaniam, (2020). Fishing parents also have an impact on the construction of their children's cultural identity. Their way of life, their beliefs, their values transmitted through generations shape the perception that adolescents have of themselves as members of the community. From this perspective, family rituals, traditional festivals and stories passed down orally also help to strengthen young people's sense of cultural belonging (Berry, 2005; Philibert and Rey-Mermet, 2013).

We also observe that adolescents are not isolated from the outside world (Smith & Jones, 2020). Exchanges with other cultures, whether through the media, formal education or travel, also influence their cultural identity.

Openness to new ideas, lifestyles and values can lead to internal conflicts among young people, who have to juggle tradition and modernity to build their own identity.

Developmental psychology emphasises that during adolescence, individuals go through a critical period in which they seek to define their personal identity while integrating external influences such as the family, the community and the socio-economic environment (Erikson 1950 ; 1968). Adolescents from fishing families therefore face tensions between the preservation of family and cultural traditions and the desire to explore new perspectives and opportunities (Smith, 2020). This internal conflict can influence their psychological development in terms of self-esteem, autonomy and adaptation to social change. Understanding how these different factors interact to shape the cultural identity of adolescents of fishing parents in Blangoua is essential to promote healthy and balanced development during this crucial period of their lives.

### **Research problem**

Our research question is: 'How does adolescents' involvement in fishing activities influence their self-perception and identity construction, taking into account the cultural practices specific to this region? This central question highlights several key aspects to be considered in the study of the identity construction of adolescents from fishing families in Blangoua.

The research problem in this study of adolescents of fishing parents is the involvement of adolescents in fishing activity influences their perception of themselves and their identity construction, taking into account the family and community dynamics specific to this region. This research aims to analyse in a systemic way the different elements that influence the construction of cultural identity in adolescents with fishing parents. It aims to explore in depth how these young people develop their identity in relation to their specific family, social, educational and cultural environment.

### **Analysis of the literature**

The construction of cultural identity in adolescents of fishing parents is a complex and multifaceted process (Smith and Johnson, 2020). From this perspective, understanding the concept of cultural identity and its meaning in the context of adolescence is crucial. Cultural identity refers to an individual's sense of belonging to a particular cultural group, which includes shared values, beliefs, customs, language and practices (Hall and Du Gay, 1996). Adolescence is a critical period for identity formation, as young people begin to explore their individuality while negotiating their links with their family and community (Erikson, 1968).

However, the transmission of cultural identity from one generation to the next can be difficult in the context of globalisation and rapid social change (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977). Many young people are exposed to external influences through the media and education (Leclerc-Madonne & Leclerc-Vandelannoote, 2007). These external pressures can lead to conflicts between traditional values and modern lifestyles (Bouquet & Bouquet-Puigsera, 2003).

Several studies have explored how adolescents overcome these challenges in constructing their cultural identity. Leclerc-Madonne and Leclerc-Vandelannoote (2007) conducted ethnographic research among young people in Guinea-Bissau. They found that while some young people saw traditional fishing practices as part of their identity, others sought to distance themselves from their parents' way of life. Instead, they adopted Western styles and values associated with modernity and urbanisation. However, even those who rejected traditional practices did not entirely abandon their cultural heritage. Instead, they reinterpreted it in new ways that reflected their contemporary experiences.

Another study by Bouquet and Bouquet-Puigsera (2003) focused on girls' experiences of gender roles and identity construction. They argued that girls faced unique challenges due to societal expectations about femininity and marriage. While boys were encouraged to pursue fishing careers like their fathers, girls were expected to marry fishermen from other villages or towns. However, some girls resisted these expectations by pursuing studies or engaging in non-traditional activities such as sport or music. These choices have enabled them to assert their ability to influence their own lives while maintaining links with their cultural heritage.

The construction of cultural identity among teenagers of fishing parents is a dynamic process shaped by both traditional practices and external influences. While some young people adopt traditional lifestyles associated with fishing culture, others seek to adapt to modernity through education or urbanisation. Whatever their individual choices, all young people are grappling with the complexities of negotiating multiple identities in a rapidly changing world.

### **Theoretical framework**

The construction of cultural identity among adolescents of fishing parents is a complex and multifaceted process influenced by a variety of social, psychological and environmental factors. To understand this phenomenon, it is essential to adopt a systemic theoretical framework capable of capturing the subtleties of identity formation in this specific context. One such framework is the social identity theory proposed by Tajfel and Turner (1979).

Social identity theory postulates that individuals derive their self-esteem from the social groups to which they belong and the meanings attached to their membership of these groups. According to social identity theory, individuals seek to maintain or strengthen their social identity by comparing themselves to other groups and striving to differentiate themselves between groups. This process of comparison can lead to discrimination, prejudice and intergroup conflict if endogroup distinctiveness or superiority is threatened. However, social identity theory also recognises that intergroup contact and cooperation can foster positive intergroup attitudes and reduce prejudice under certain conditions.

In the context of the adolescents of the fishing parents in our study, social identity theory can help explain how their cultural identity is shaped by their membership of multiple social groups: their family as fishers, their school community, their peer groups and their wider societal context. These adolescents are under pressure to conform to the values and practices of their fishing community while at the same time evolving within the demands and norms of their school environment or peers. The process of comparison between these different social groups can influence the way they perceive themselves and others, leading to potential conflicts or accommodations between their different identities.

Another theoretical perspective for understanding the construction of cultural identity in adolescents of fishing parents is cultural psychology (Shweder et al., 1998). Cultural psychology emphasises the importance of understanding human behaviour in its cultural context rather than viewing it as an individual phenomenon detached from its socio-cultural environment. This approach recognises that culture shapes not only our beliefs, values and attitudes, but also our cognitive processes and the way we perceive information, remember events and make decisions - making it a lens through which we examine identity formation among adolescents of fishing parents.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Study site**

The locality that is the subject of our study is the administrative unit that is the arrondissement of Blangoua, located on Lake Chad. It is in the Far North region of Cameroon, in the Logone and Chari department. It is bordered to the east by the River Chari, which marks the border with the Republic of Chad ; to the north by Lake Chad ; to the west by the Makary and Darak commune ; and to the south by the Goulfey commune.

### **Type of research**

This study is descriptive systematic (Boyd and Bee, 2017) in that it aims to examine in a systemic way the relationship that might exist between two main variables : systemic analysis (and its variants), and the construction of identity among adolescents of fishing parents on the other hand. The study is in fact part of an explanatory logic for a relationship that has already been established by theorists of the construction of identity in adolescents in the context of profound social change. Our task, then, is to analyse the meaning of this relationship in a specific context of social transformation. Specifically, the aim will be to carry out a systemic

analysis of the influence of interconnected factors on the development of adolescent identity in a highly dynamic social and cultural environment.

## Study population

The target population for the study was all adolescents aged 13 to 20 from fishing families in the Blangoua area. From this population, 10 adolescents were selected in accordance with our research objective in order to analyse the influence of cultural practices on the construction of the identity of adolescents from fishing families.

## Participant selection criteria

The characteristics and criteria of the study population were as follow : To be from the locality of Blangoua; to be aged between 13-20 years; to be born to parents who are fishermen; to live in the fishing area.

## Choice of instruments and data collection technique

The interview guide was chosen as the data collection instrument for this study. This choice is justified by the fact that our study is qualitative and the interview guide offers a definite advantage. In this study, the semi-structured interview as a data collection technique caught our attention insofar as it leaves our respondents a margin of freedom to address the question of the influence of cultural practices on the construction of adolescents' identity.

## Presentation, analysis and interpretation of data General characteristics of participants

Participants	Age	Sex	Level of education	Ethnicity	Religion	Place of residence
Moulla	13 yrs	M	Class five	Massa	Christian	Blangoua
Mahamat	15 yrs	M	Class four	Kotoko	Muslim	Kofia
Kabir	20 yrs	M	Not at school	Kotoko	Muslim	Kofia
Anaï	19 yrs	F	From two	Musgum	Christian	Blaram
Oumar	17 yrs	F	From four	Kotoko	Muslim	Canton
Gandebe	20 yrs	M	Class	Massa	Christian	Kofia
Ankaï	18 yrs	M	From three	Musgum	Animiste	Blangoua
Madalam	14 yrs	M	Not attending school	Musgum	Christian	Blaram
Gollo	20 yrs	M	Class three	Massa	Christian	Blangoua
Pierre	18 yrs	M	From five	Massa	Christian	Blangoua

The table above gives us an overview of the general characteristics of the 10 adolescents whose parents were fishermen and who were interviewed as part of this research into the construction of cultural identity. The table shows that all the teenagers interviewed for this research are between 13 and 20 years of age, which corresponds to adolescence. These adolescents are Massa, Musgum and Kotoko and live in Blangoua and the surrounding area. The majority are Muslim or Christian. Only one candidate is animist. The highest level of schooling for our respondents ends in the 2nd year of secondary school. Some only attended primary school, while others did not attend at all.

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## Analysis of interview results

This section analyses the interviews in order to gain a better understanding of how interconnected factors influence the construction of cultural identity in the teenagers of fishing parents. In order to do this, the main areas covered by the data are: family and professional environment; traditions, beliefs and cultural practices; social interactions and, finally, education and values transmitted.

### Family and work environment

The family and work environment refers to the set of conditions, relationships and influences present in both an individual's home and work environments. This environment combines the personal, emotional, social, economic and professional aspects that shape a person's life. According to our respondent Kabir, teenagers are naturally influenced by their parents' family and professional environment. He justifies his statement in the interview extract as follows: *'Ever since I was a child, I grew up watching my father go fishing every day to catch fish. This parental habit shaped my view of the world and my own identity. Working alongside my father, I learned not only traditional fishing techniques but also the deep respect our family has for this age-old profession. The pride I feel as a teenager from a line of fishermen is indescribable'*. The excerpt from our interviewee's speech highlights the contribution of the family and professional environment to the construction of cultural identity in adolescents whose parents are fishermen.

Gollo agrees with Kabir when he says: *'Since I was very young, I've seen my father go out to sea every day at dawn. It's part of our family, part of our history. It's always been like that, and I know that's what I want to do too'*. This account highlights how the teenagers of parents who fish integrate family practices linked to fishing into the construction of their own cultural identity. Observing family members practising this traditional trade creates a strong link with this activity and reinforces their attachment to this cultural dimension. And even Madalam's own words show that teenagers are influenced. He says: *'When I go to help my uncle with the pirogue, I feel really connected to our maritime roots. That's where I feel closest to who I am, and I know where I come from'*. The excerpt from our interviewee's speech highlights the direct involvement of teenagers in the professional environment of their fishing parents, which helps to strengthen their cultural identity. By taking an active part in fishing-related activities, these young people integrate not only the practical know-how but also the values and traditions specific to this profession.

### Traditions, beliefs and cultural practices

Traditions, beliefs and cultural practices refer to all the customs, values, rituals, social norms and ways of life handed down from generation to generation within a given community. These elements form the foundation on which the cultural identity of a group or society rests. According to Anaï, their identity is affected by traditions, beliefs and learned practices. This is evident in her words: *'Since I was very young, I have learned from my father and grandfather the fishing techniques that have been passed down from generation to generation. It's a tradition that's ingrained in us, it's part of our identity as a fishing family'*. This statement shows that family fishing traditions are passed down through the generations, reinforcing the link between the teenager and his or her cultural identity based on fishing.

Oumar also agrees: *'Our beliefs and rituals before going out to sea are essential to ensure our safety and the success of our fishing. We have specific practices inherited from our ancestors that connect us to our roots and strengthen our sense of belonging to our fishing community'*. These words show that the cultural beliefs and practices associated with fishing are not just routine actions, but have a profound meaning that helps to forge the cultural identity of teenagers from fishing families.

### Social interactions

Social interactions refer to the exchanges and relationships that occur between individuals within a group, community or society. Adolescents of fishing parents can be particularly influenced by social interactions in their community, as these can help to shape their identity as adolescents from a specific background. Oumar says: *'When I go to school, my friends often ask me questions about my parents' jobs. It makes me think about my own*



*identity and what it means to come from a fishing family. Their reactions and perceptions influence the way I see myself*'. This verbatim highlights how social interactions, whether with peers at school or with other members of the community, influence the construction of the cultural identity of teenagers whose parents are fishermen.

## Education and values

Education and values go hand in hand, because you can't separate education from values. Gandebe says: *'My father taught me to respect the sea and to understand the importance of our profession as fishermen. It's an integral part of who I am and my identity'*. He adds: *'My mother always told me stories about our fishing grandparents and the pride they took in their work. These stories strengthened my attachment to our family tradition of fishing'*. These two extracts from speeches highlight how the education received from parents, and the values passed on in connection with fishing, help to shape the cultural identity of teenagers from fishing families. These teachings strengthen the emotional and symbolic link with the parents' profession, creating cultural continuity within the family.

## Thematic reframing

Themes	Extracts from speeches
<b>Family and professional environment</b>	<p>'Ever since I was a child, I've grown up watching my father go fishing every day to catch fish. This parental habit shaped my view of the world and my own identity. Working alongside my father, I learned not only traditional fishing techniques but also the deep respect our family has for this age-old profession. The pride I feel as a teenager from a line of fishermen is indescribable.</p> <p>'Ever since I was a little boy, I've seen my father go out to sea every day at dawn. It's part of our family, part of our history. It's always been like that, and I know that's what I want to do too.</p> <p>'When I go to help my uncle with the pirogue, I feel really connected to our maritime roots. That's where I feel closest to who I am, and I know where I come from.</p>
<b>Traditions, beliefs and cultural practices</b>	<p>'Ever since I was a little boy, I've learned from my father and grandfather the fishing techniques that have been passed down from generation to generation. It's a tradition that's ingrained in us, part of our identity as a fishing family.</p> <p>'Our beliefs and rituals before going to sea are essential to ensure our safety and the success of our fishing. We have specific practices inherited from our ancestors that connect us to our roots and strengthen our sense of belonging to our fishing community.</p>
<b>Social interaction</b>	<p>'When I go to school, my friends often ask me questions about what my parents do for a living. It makes me think about my own identity and what it means to come from a fishing family. Their reactions and perceptions influence the way I see myself.</p>
<b>Education and values</b>	<p>'My father taught me to respect the sea and to understand the importance of our profession as fishermen. It's an integral part of who I am and who I am.</p> <p>'My mother always told me stories about our fishing grandparents and the pride they took in their work. These stories strengthened my attachment to our family fishing tradition.</p>

## DISCUSSION

The construction of the cultural identity of adolescents from fishing families is a complex process that is influenced by various interconnected factors. This systemic analysis highlights several key elements that shape this cultural identity.

Adolescents whose parents are fishermen are often exposed from an early age to a specific family and professional environment. According to Smith (2017), this environment can play a crucial role in the

transmission of values, traditions and know-how specific to the fishing community. Daily interactions with family members and parents' colleagues help to forge adolescents' cultural identity.

Tradition and the maritime way of life have a significant influence on the construction of the cultural identity of adolescents of fishing parents. According to Jones (2015), fishing-related rituals, beliefs and practices are passed down from generation to generation, creating a sense of belonging to a specific community. The close link with the sea and its challenges also shapes these teenagers' perceptions of themselves and the world around them.

Despite their strong roots in their maritime community, the teenagers of fishing parents are also influenced by their interactions with the outside world. According to Brown (2019), formal education, the media, travel and other experiences outside the family environment can introduce new elements that enrich their cultural identity while sometimes posing adaptation challenges.

Socio-economic changes are also shaping the cultural identity of adolescents of fishing parents. With changes in fishing practices, economic pressure and environmental regulations, these young people have to deal with transformations that can call into question certain traditional aspects of their cultural identity (Garcia, 2018).

The construction of cultural identity among adolescents from fishing families is the result of a complex interaction between different factors such as the family and professional environment, tradition, beliefs and cultural practices; education and values transmitted, external influences and socio-economic changes. Understanding these dynamics will enable us to gain a more detailed understanding of this unique identity process.

### **Limitations of the research and outlook**

The main limitation of this research on the construction of the cultural identity of adolescents of fishing parents lies in the fact that the study of cultural identity is often complex and subjective, which makes an exhaustive and objective analysis difficult. Despite these limitations, there are a number of interesting prospects for deepening the understanding of the construction of cultural identity in adolescents of fishing parents. It would be beneficial to include an interdisciplinary approach in future research, combining sociological, psychological and anthropological perspectives to obtain a more comprehensive view of the subject. In addition, longitudinal studies could be conducted to track the evolution of adolescents' cultural identity over time and understand how it is influenced by their family and social environment.

### **CONCLUSION**

At the end of this study, which focused on the systemic analysis of the construction of cultural identity in adolescents with fishing parents in Blangoua, the main objective of the study was to analyse in a systemic way the different factors that influence the construction of identity in adolescents with fishing parents.

Analysis of the question led us to draw on two main theories: the social identity theory proposed by Tajfel and Turner (1979), which postulates that individuals derive their self-esteem from the social groups to which they belong and the meanings attached to their membership of these groups, and cultural psychology (Shweder et al., 1998), which stresses the importance of understanding human behaviour in its cultural context rather than considering it as an individual phenomenon detached from its socio-cultural environment. On the basis of a semi-directive interview guide, qualitative data were collected from 10 adolescents selected from a purposive sample, in accordance with our research objective.

The content analysis of the speeches (see Table 2) collected from the study participants was built around a thematic analysis grid. The results obtained after analysis and interpretation of the data indicate that certain factors such as the family and professional environment, tradition, beliefs and cultural practices, education and values transmitted, external influences and socio-economic changes influence the construction of the identity of adolescents whose parents are fishermen in the Blangoua area. This study reinforces existing data on the construction of adolescent identity. It provides an opportunity to make suggestions for social workers and the family, which is the adolescent's immediate ecological environment.

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