Exploring the Influence of Culture and Heritage on Personal and Collective Identity: A Qualitative Inquiry

Muhammad Awais Bhatti*
College of Business, King Faisal University, Al-hasa, Saudi Arabia
mbhatti@kfu.edu.sa

Jamshid Pardaev
Associate Professor of Finance and Tourism Department, Termez University of Economics and Service, Uzbekistan
jamshid_pardaev@tues.uz

Abstract: Purpose: This research explores the role that culture and heritage play in shaping individual and collective identity formation in varied social settings. Identifying identity as a dynamic and emotionally grounded process, the research examines how people use cultural practices, symbols, and intergenerational stories to build their sense of self and belonging. Method: Taking a qualitative study design, 18 participants drawn from diverse ages, regions, and professional groups were interviewed using in-depth semi-structured interviews. Purposive and snowball sampling was employed to select participants with the aim of providing cultural diversity. Data were analyzed based on Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step thematic analysis guide. Results: Five broad themes were identified: personal identity formation, collective identity formation, transmission of heritage intergenerationally, cultural adaptation, and emotional-symbolic ties. Findings indicate that identity was not only formed by inherited cultural models but also through continuous reinterpretation, emotional connection, and accommodation to modernity. Participants outlined rituals, symbols, and family narratives as core to maintaining identity over generations. Originality/Implications: This research adds to identity theory by pointing out the emotional and symbolic meanings of cultural experience. It has applied implications for heritage education, policy-making, and cultural sustainability strategies that seek to enhance identity in multicultural and changing societies.
Keywords: Cultural Identity, Heritage, Collective Identity, Intergenerational Transmission, Emotional Symbolism, Cultural Adaptation

1. INTRODUCTION

Culture and heritage are basic building blocks in the construction of the identity of people and groups, determining how individuals see themselves and interact with others. Culture consists of common values, beliefs, customs, languages, arts, and patterns of living that are transmitted from generation to generation, while heritage includes tangible and intangible forms of these cultural elements (Hammood et al., 2025). Both of them

offer people a conceptual schema for understanding experience, making sense, and locating themselves within larger social and historical frameworks (Ning et al., 2025). Identity, on the other hand, is a social as well as individual construct, shaped by collective memory and engagement with cultural systems (Kaya, 2025). As people experience rapid modernization, globalization, and migration, people's engagement with their cultural and heritage backgrounds is becoming more complicated, dynamic, and contested (Changlong et al., 2025). This study aims to examine such intersections, namely how people from various socio-cultural backgrounds negotiate and interpret their individual and collective identities in terms of cultural and heritage engagement. Though a great deal is established about identity formation in sociological and psychological theory, there still exists a need to probe thoroughly the ways that people emotionally and symbolically connect with heritage in their daily lives, particularly in transforming societies where cultural stories are changing (Kiaer, 2025). Empirical studies across the board have underlined the significance of culture and heritage in constituting identity (Trifunovic, 2025). In psychology, Chu (2025) determined that teenagers who have a firm ethnic identity based in cultural knowledge and pride have better psychological functioning, higher self-esteem, and greater resistance to social pressure. Anthropology works of Shih and Tseng (2025) contend that symbolic action like ritual and tradition is key to individuals defining themselves and their place in society. Correspondingly, Umukoro (2025) defined bicultural identity integration as a process in which individuals are able to bridge between heritage from the past and contemporary contexts without sacrificing identity in the act of integrating into social change. Additionally, sociological studies have developed that collective identity is developed through participation in community heritage activities, religious ceremonies, and traditional celebrations that confirm membership in the group (Khairani & Hendra, 2025). Kunst and Mesoudi (2025) acculturation study also reveals that individuals use adaptive strategies such as integration or separation to combine their cultural heritage and the dominant culture in society. Studies in learning environments reveal that cultural heritage incorporated into learning environments allows students to have increased cultural pride and personal meaning in learning experiences (Fatima & Nadeem, 2025). A number of qualitative studies have also highlighted the emotional and symbolic attachments to cultural places and artifacts (Meng et al., 2025). For example, Li et al. (2025) established that people who have active engagement with heritage landscapes enjoy increased social solidarity and common identity. In addition, Gulnora (2024) uncovered that objects

such as clothing, food, and music create powerful affective ties that reinforce group identity. These studies taken together imply that cultural identity is more than a system of values, but an embodied and affectively experienced fact. Regardless of disciplinary variation, researchers uniformly accept that cultural and heritage milieus have a determinate impact on both individual and collective identities (Cresswell, 2024). Though, a lot of this empirical work still stays within the boundaries of particular population categories or national groups, and thus misses the context-sensitive and fluid processes by which individuals build identity using culture in multicultural settings (X. Li et al., 2024). Although an increasing number of studies accept the engagement of culture and heritage in developing identity, there are still some gaps that are critical (Rubin et al., 2024). Second, prior research has overemphasized macro-level national identity or particular ethnic populations at the expense of the micro-level, experiential perceptions of people making culture in daily life (Jiayang Li & Su, 2024). To illustrate, much of the large-scale survey research investigates the extent of ethnic identity or cultural pride, yet infrequently examines how people feel, interpret, and symbolize their cultural membership in fluid social contexts (Baloch & Kamran, 2024). In addition, research has a tendency to approach identity as static or essentialist assuming it as a fixed product of cultural membership instead of as a constantly negotiated, fluid process that is influenced by individual, affective, and environmental forces (Mazurkevych et al., 2024). This discrepancy is especially seen in multicultural or transitional societies, where populations tend to call upon multiple heritages, producing nuanced and mixed identity formations not well accounted for by existing models. Secondly, there is scarce research on how tangible and intangible heritage interact in the process of identity development (Ysmailova et al., 2024). While some studies examine language or cuisine as manifestations of culture, others look at heritage buildings or festivities in isolation. Few studies try to synthesize both aspects to see how together they contribute to identity (Karim, 2024). The outcome is a splintered knowledge that fails to adequately capture the ways in which people live heritage as an integrated and relational entity (Nagata et al., 2024). This splintering is also enhanced by the lack of representation of emotional and symbolic aspects within identity research. Emotional attachments to family heirlooms, sites of memory, and symbolic rites are frequently marginalized for more quantifiable measures such as cultural identification scores or behavioral markers (Féron, 2024). Therefore, the richness with which heritage invokes memory, pride, or desire and in which these affect identity remains underdeveloped. Another critical absence is

that of intergenerational insight (L. Li et al., 2024). Although some studies document youth lives or elder transmission of knowledge in isolation, few discuss how these generations work together, negotiate, and re-interpret heritage (Anjum et al., 2024). It is a problematic omission because cultural identity tends to be built relationally, rather than individually. Recognizing these intergenerational dynamics can uncover how identity is not only inherited but re-created, redefined, and questioned throughout time (Tan, 2024). Lastly, there is a gap in methodology; most of the literature depends on quantitative models that are incapable of capturing the complexity and nuance of cultural identity (Kılıçoğlu et al., 2023). Qualitative methods, such as in-depth interviews and thematic analysis, have more room to analyze lived experiences, but are underutilized in this regard (Zhang & Wu, 2023). Hence, research that takes a qualitative approach to explore how individuals and communities experience, negotiate, and re-make identity through cultural and heritage practice is sorely needed. This study responds to these gaps by providing a close, thematically informed examination of individual and collective identity through various cultural perspectives. This study draws its theoretical grounding from social identity theory (Ağ, 2023), cultural memory theory (Cardwell et al., 2023), and ethnosymbolism (Kacane et al., 2023) to explore the role of heritage and culture in constructing individual and collective identity. Social identity theory suggests that individuals acquire self-esteem and belonging through membership in groups, particularly where shared cultural markers and histories dominate (Xie & Ma, 2023). Cultural memory theory emphasizes how the collective myths, rituals, and symbols work towards preserving identity over generations, often through emotionally engaging reminiscences or shared practices (Chou et al., 2023). Ethnosymbolism provides additional explanatory power to an understanding of how states and nations utilize myths, traditions, and heritage sites to promote senses of continuity and grounding (Karataş et al., 2023). These theories provide a multi-faceted explanation of identity at once socially constructed and affectively felt. Drawing on this foundation, the purpose of this research is to explore how individuals comprehend, negotiate, and articulate their individual and group identities through cultural and heritage-experiences. Specifically, this study centers on five thematic areas: personal identity construction, collective identity formation, intergenerational transmission of culture, symbolic and emotional linkages with heritage, and cultural adaptation. Utilizing semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis, the research aims to present a rich, context-rich description of how identity is constructed in real cultural contexts. In the end, the research assists in

expanding current discussion of identity by bringing together theoretical models with common cultural practice.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The interplay between heritage and cultural elements and the construction of individual and collective identity has been extensively studied in sociology, anthropology, and cultural studies (Liu & Zhu, 2023). Culture, consisting of shared beliefs, values, language, rituals, and arts, gives individuals a way to understand themselves and their place within the broader social world (Rabi et al., 2023). Heritage, including tangible material like monuments and objects, and intangible practices like oral traditions and customs, serves to be a repository of shared memory that plays a part in the passing of generational identity (Simoes, 2023). Theorists like Hammood et al. (2025) argue that identity is dynamic instead of fixed but instead constructed by cultural representation, where individuals locate themselves within histories and heritage that are framed by the past. This dynamic interconnection is also highlighted in Kaya (2025) work, where she posits that heritage acts as a performative tool to reinforce social unity and affirm belonging. Individuals utilize such cultural identifiers to establish a sense of individual continuity, typically deeper in content and intent when they engage with their heritage in meaningful ways, such as attending traditional ceremonies or learning ancestral languages (Kiaer, 2025). At a communal level, culture and heritage are accountable for building a collective identity that binds communities together by shared historical stories and symbolic structures (Chu, 2025). "Imagined communities" expounds on how collective identities are constructed around grounds of common myths, national histories, and practices that might not entail close interpersonal relationships, but still evoke an intense feeling of oneness (Umukoro, 2025). These shared narratives are reaffirmed by schooling, media, commemorative events, and institutionalized customs, conditioning the way groups perceive themselves in comparison to other groups (Kunst & Mesoudi, 2025). Moreover, heritage sites and cultural customs are frequently utilized in nation-building ventures, where states utilize them to build patriotism and an inclusive national consciousness. But as Meng et al. (2025) also warn, these processes can as easily exclude other narratives, pushing minority identities to the margins in favor of a hegemonic cultural memory. So whereas culture and heritage serve to enhance group identity and social solidarity, they can

conversely become battlefields over which competing interpretations of the past are fought and claimed in the present (Gulnora, 2024).

2.1 Personal Identity Formation

Several studies have shed light on the complex connection between personal identity development and cultural heritage, highlighting how people derive significance from traditions, symbols, and narratives of ancestors (X. Li et al., 2024). Empirical work conducted by Jiayang Li and Su (2024) found that strong cultural identification is positively related to clarity of identity, psychological well-being, and self-esteem, especially among minority and diasporic populations. In the same way, Mazurkevych et al. (2024) illustrated how those who move through bicultural worlds tend to internalize negotiation, creating hybrid identities that continue to preserve essential cultural values. Anthropological studies, including those by Karim (2024), indicate that symbolic systems language, clothing, rituals function as interpretive tools that allow people to define themselves in relation to the world. In daily life, culture in forms like religious tradition, cooking culture, or storytelling offers individuals personal narratives wherein identity is built, solidified, and defined (Féron, 2024). Cultural and heritage participation formation of personal identity has also been shown by qualitative studies that focus on lived experience and affective connection (Anjum et al., 2024). For example, a study conducted by Kılıçoğlu et al. (2023) found that individuals selectively accentuate specific cultural traits among themselves in order to negotiate identity within multicultural settings, proving agency within identity construction. Current qualitative studies, including Ağ (2023), have emphasized that this building is not sequential but rather a dynamic process of interaction between internalized values and social verification. The richness and depth of individual identity are at times complemented with self-conscious involvement to sustain the heritage, such as engaging in traditional celebrations or learning ancestral languages (Kacane et al., 2023). Such activities are not only intended to verify cultural memory but also to guarantee the establishment of personal continuity and coherence over time (Karataş et al., 2023). Surprisingly, the more individuals perceive their heritage to be consequential and responsive, the more integrated and confident their individual identity will be, verifying the idea of heritage engagement as reflective and constitutive of self-hood (Liu & Zhu, 2023).

2.2 Collective Identity Formation

Collective identity, as constructed by shared cultural heritage, has

traditionally been viewed as a building block of group solidarity, particularly in those groups with a high degree of historical continuity (Simoes, 2023). Empirical research like that by Tajfel and Turner (1986) highlighted the importance of social categorization in identity, in which individuals find collective purpose and pride through membership in a group (Ning et al., 2025). Collective identity in the context of cultural heritage tends to develop through involvement in shared rituals, language, myths, and practices that create a sense of unity. Changlong et al. (2025) ethnosymbolism work brings to light the ways nations and ethnic groups use cultural traditions and collective memory to cement group stories. In addition, in multiethnic settings, studies by Trifunovic (2025) have indicated that collective identity can be mobilized strategically through cultural celebrations or heritage maintenance schemes to assert belonging and presence in the national environment. These works as a group identify the significance of heritage as a fulcrum on which collective identity is constructed and sustained. Collective identity formation through common heritage is often noted in community-centered and participatory research (Shih & Tseng, 2025). For example, in Khairani and Hendra (2025) work, post-conflict community heritage initiatives allowed marginalized communities to revoice their histories, facilitating healing and social reintegration. Cultural space conservation mosques, churches, historic towns is more than a memory aid; they are active places where collective meaning is produced and re-stated (Fatima & Nadeem, 2025). They facilitate intergroup solidarity and identity narrative transfer between generations. Qualitative studies of migrant and refugee communities (Li et al., 2025) also found that shared practice of cultural rituals and memory can produce a feeling of homeland association and group endurance. Such activities help communities maintain collective identity even in displacement, showing that heritage is not a fixed inheritance but a living, performative exercise in the negotiation and affirmation of identity (Cresswell, 2024).

2.3 Intergenerational Transmission of Heritage

The intergenerational transmission of heritage is an important force underlying the construction of cultural continuity and identity awareness among the younger generation (Rubin et al., 2024). Empirical evidence has invariably concluded that storytelling, parent-child involvement, and participation in ritual are master mediums through which cultural values are transmitted (Baloch & Kamran, 2024). Ysmailova et al. (2024) found that family stories tend to serve as "identity scripts" that assist younger

people in mapping out their roles in familial and ethnic pasts. These transmissions are highly affective; Nagata et al. (2024) found that youth who participate in family heritage talk report higher identity coherence and emotional control. In addition, ethnographic research in indigenous nations L. Li et al. (2024) highlights that oral tradition, group teachings, and land knowledge are not only cultural vehicles but identity landmarks that enable youth to build a sense of pride and purpose. Drawing from these dearth of research findings, empirical research shows that the success of intergenerational transmission of heritage relies heavily on context and intentionality (Tan, 2024). Research by Zhang and Wu (2023) exemplifies that the interpretative freedom that young people possess when engaging with inherited traditions supports more individualized identity construction. The dialogic process between generations, including parents, grandparents, and children, builds a narrative bridge that enables mutual understanding and value reinforcement (Cardwell et al., 2023). Within migratory or multicultural settings, such transmission is a resilience mechanism that assists younger generations in dealing with tensions between the heritage and host cultures (Xie & Ma, 2023). For instance, studies by Chou et al. (2023) of second-generation immigrants revealed that those who actively pursue their ancestral heritage feel more robust bicultural identities and emotional stability. These results substantiate that cultural transmission is not only reproductive but also transformational so that every generation can reinterpret heritage in line with changing identity demands (Rabi et al., 2023).

2.4 Cultural Challenges and Adaptations

Empirical literature has come to deal more and more with the challenges people experience in sustaining cultural identity in the environments of globalization, migration, and social modernization (Hammood et al., 2025). Researchers such as Changlong et al. (2025) have posited that the swift social and technological transformations in late modernity shatter conventional identity markers, establishing a fractured or hybridized self. Empirical work by Chu (2025) conceptualized acculturation strategies, which described how people accommodate host cultures integrating, assimilating, separating, or marginalizing based on situational and personal variables. Research among diaspora groups consistently demonstrates that conformity pressures of prevalent cultural norms have the potential to create identity dissonance, particularly for second-generation immigrants (Khairani & Hendra, 2025). Analogously, empirical observations from women's studies and intersectionality research (Meng et al., 2025) confirm

that gender, class, and religion further aggravate how cultural identity is maintained or challenged in different social spaces. The navigation of cultural difficulty tends to produce adaptive strategies of identity, empirically validated as resilience and self-reconstruction mechanisms (Cresswell, 2024). Jiayang Li and Su (2024) postcolonial scholars have demonstrated that individuals strategically modify their expressions of culture, often creating new symbols or hybrid rituals, allowing for continuity amid change. For example, a study by Ysmailova et al. (2024) of South Asian immigrants demonstrated that adaptation is not necessarily at the cost of identity loss but, rather, can entail rearranging traditional values to be compatible with the new social environments. Further support is gained through longitudinal ethnographies, such as that by Féron (2024), which reveal the manner in which transnational members reproduce bicultural orientations through harnessing community networks, religious institutions, and the internet. Such accommodations enable individuals to reproduce cultural coherence alongside being in a position to react plastically to environmental demands, thereby reproducing identity as both processual and stable (Tan, 2024). Adaptation is therefore a relational process brought about through negotiation among social, family, and institutional spaces.

2.5 Emotional and Symbolic Attachment

Emotional and symbolic attachment to heritage and culture has long been a central element of the literature as a significant determinant of both identity and memory (Ağ, 2023). Anthropologists such as Xie and Ma (2023) identified rituals, symbols, and artifacts as affective objects that are imbued with meaning and continuity to cultural systems. Empirical research by Liu and Zhu (2023) substantiates this, revealing that heritage sites and cultural symbols elicit strong emotional responses, such as pride, nostalgia, or belonging, which are fundamental to identity construction. Memory and heritage psychology studies, for example, by Ning et al. (2025), have also underscored the significance of "lieux de mémoire" (sites of memory), not simply as indicators of history but as symbolic nodes of collective emotions. Such affective and symbolic connections are especially significant in diaspora and war-torn populations, where concrete or metaphorical symbols of the homeland are essential to holding on to identity and survival (Kiaer, 2025). Emotional identification with symbols of culture and displays of heritage often act as affective conduits that support attachment to identity and enable intersubjective knowledge among groups (Shih & Tseng, 2025). Empirical work has shown individuals

to routinely attribute symbolic significance to everyday items such as classic dress, tunes, or antiques that they perceive as expressing broader cultural narratives (Kunst & Mesoudi, 2025). For instance, Li et al. (2025) study of affective practices illustrated the way emotional responses to symbols (such as flags or sacred places) can affirm communal identification and reaffirm one's sense of belonging. Such affective experiences are not merely personal but collectively constructed through ritual, remembrance, and group narrative, as affirmed in qualitative research by X. Li et al. (2024) on cultural landscapes. Emotional and symbolic bonds thus are relational processes in which identity is both expressed and confirmed, often becoming especially meaningful at times of change, crisis, or exile. This affective anchor deepens resilience and forms a firm psychological center in the face of a dynamic socio-cultural landscape (Baloch & Kamran, 2024).

3. METHODOLOGY

This research took a qualitative approach in exploring the subtle impact of heritage and culture on individual and communal identity. A qualitative approach was deemed most fitting because it opens up to the inner lives of participants' inner worlds, perceptions, and meanings in their cultural worlds. Data were gathered using in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 18 participants who were purposefully recruited to contribute age, occupation, and geographic region diversity. Purposive sampling was complemented by snowball sampling, wherein initial participants referred subsequent participants from within their own networks who met the research criteria. Together, this provided a wide spectrum of cultural and heritage experience representative of the multi-layered construction of identity. Participants were chosen from a variety of ethnic, linguistic, and socio-economic backgrounds to reveal multiform narratives with cultural heritage practice and identity construction. The data collection instrument was a semi-structured interview guide, which provided flexibility in questioning that probed developing findings without sacrificing consistency in probing prevailing themes. The interviews ranged from 45 to 70 minutes and were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim for analysis. Analysis was carried out following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis procedure, which includes: (1) becoming familiar with data, (2) producing initial codes, (3) looking for themes, (4) examining themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) making the report. The approach was best suited for the examination of identity experiences, as it

allows the researcher to stay reflexive and context-sensitive in identifying commonalties and contrasts in meaning. Through the iterative process of coding and theme establishment, the trends were identified that revealed how cultural habitus and heritage stories influenced the sense of self and sense of belonging within greater communities among the participants (Table 1).

Table 1: Variable and Sample Interview Questions

Variable/Theme	Sample Interview Questions
Personal Cultural Background	Can You Describe Your Cultural Background and any Traditions that are Important in Your Life?
Engagement with Heritage	How Do You Connect with Your Cultural Heritage in Your Daily or Occasional Practices?
Identity Formation (Personal)	In What Ways Do You Think Your Culture and Heritage Have Shaped Who You are as a Person?
Identity Formation (Collective)	How Do You See Yourself as Part of a Community or Group with a Shared Cultural Background?
Intergenerational Transmission	Have Cultural or Heritage Values Been Passed Down to You by Family or Community Members? How?
Regional and Social Variations	Do You Think Your Geographic Region or Profession has Affected Your Cultural or Heritage Ties?
Changes Over Time	Have Your Views on Your Culture or Heritage Changed over the Years? Why or Why Not?
Cultural Challenges and Adaptations	Have You Faced any Challenges in Maintaining Your Cultural Identity? How Have You Dealt with Them?
Emotional and Symbolic Connections	Are There Specific Symbols, Objects, or Places that Hold Emotional or Cultural Significance for You?
Future Cultural Identity Perspective	How Do You Imagine Your Cultural or Heritage Identity Evolving in the Future?

4. FINDINGS

Below is a detailed results section for your qualitative research on the influence of culture and heritage on personal and collective identity, organized by five key themes, with each theme divided into the requested four parts:

4.1 Theme 1: Personal Identity Formation

Respondents of all ages stressed that cultural heritage, family traditions, and regional practices have played an important role in forming their sense

of self. The evidence indicates that a person's identity is firmly embedded in the ways people internalize and make sense of their heritage-related experiences. For most, rituals, traditional dress, speech, and cuisine were not only elements of lifestyle but also essential to defining themselves. The results illustrate identity as a dynamic story in which heritage serves simultaneously as a grounding process and a means of self-meaning-making.

"I feel like every time I make a traditional dish that my grandmother taught me, I remember who I am and where I come from" (Interviewee 4).

This quotation captures the way mundane activity embedded within tradition gets remade as symbolic performances of identity. The process of preparing a heritage dish is converted from daily routine into an affective and cultural ritual reaffirming the interviewee's self-narrative. These moments ground the self in a larger history and family line, reinforcing coherence over time (Figure 1).

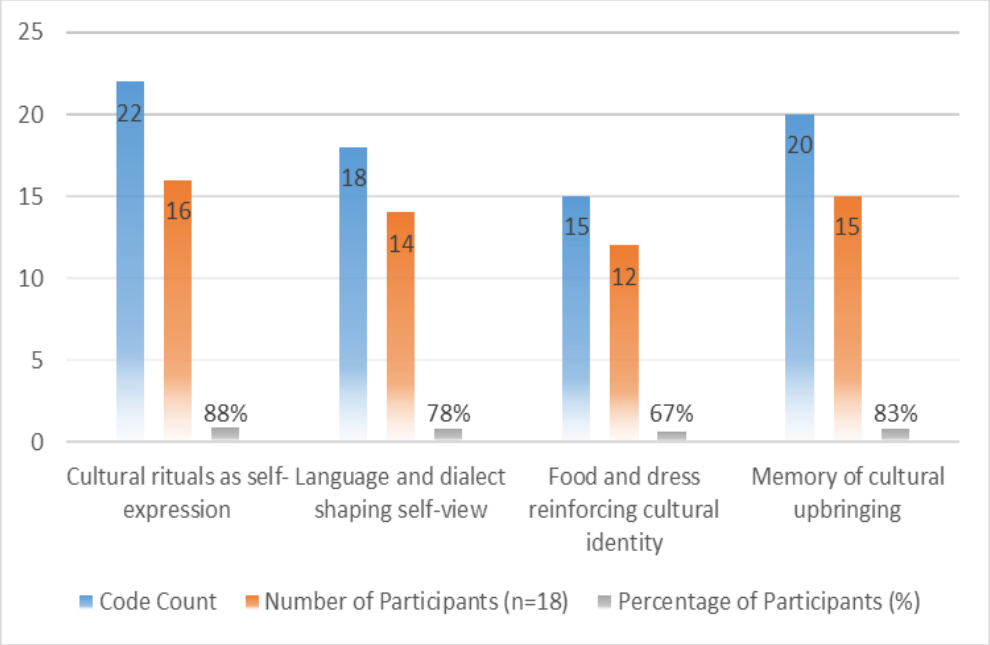

Figure 1: Frequency of Subthemes in Personal Identity Formation

Early familiarization identified recurring themes in terms of food, speech, and dress. Coding gave rise to categories like "daily cultural performances," "emotional connections to tradition," and "self-creation through ritual." Themes such as heritage as lens to identity and ritual as practice to identity were established. These were further honed by considering their frequency throughout the dataset in order to achieve internal consistency. In the end, the theme underscored how individual identity was conditioned through lived experiences of heritage, typically expressed as concrete everyday practice (Table 2).

Table 2: Thematic Analysis for Personal Identity Formation

Step	Description	Application to Theme
1. Familiarization with Data	Reading and Re-Reading Transcripts, Noting Initial Impressions.	Participants often referenced early cultural exposure (e.g., food, language, festivals) in shaping how they view themselves.
2. Generating Initial Codes	Systematically Identifying Features Across Data.	Codes included: "childhood cultural memories," "self-expression through tradition," "language as identity marker," "rituals and self-worth."
3. Searching for Themes	Organizing Codes into Potential Themes.	Themes emerged around: *Cultural practices as identity anchors*, *Internalized pride in heritage*, *Self-image through cultural acts*.
4. Reviewing Themes	Refining Themes to Ensure they Align With Coded Extracts And Full Dataset.	All themes showed strong evidence across multiple participants and were clearly distinct from one another.
5. Defining and Naming Themes	Clear Articulation of Each Theme and its Boundaries.	Final theme: "Cultural Expression as a Core of Personal Identity" emphasizes self-construction through lived heritage.
6. Producing the Report	Writing up the Analysis with Compelling Examples.	Example: Participant 4 described how cooking traditional meals helped her "feel like herself again," especially during stressful times.

This is consistent with Karim (2024), who proposed that personal identity formation is facilitated through experience of cultural heritage. They also resonate with L. Li et al. (2024) idea that identity is created in terms of collective meaning-making. Embodiment in personal routine offers continuity, as argued by Kılıçoğlu et al. (2023), whose work on autobiographical memory established that heritage-based behaviors consolidate individual identity consistency.

4.2 Theme 2: Collective Identity Formation

Actors repeatedly defined their cultural identity as both individual but profoundly collective based on shared practice, values, and symbols that linked them to larger social and historical collectivities. Collective identity was frequently expressed by participation in religious festivals, traditional celebrations, and national or regional ceremonies that generated a feeling of belongingness and togetherness. This sense of shared identity was especially clear in those participants who had resided in areas or communities where cultural practice was visibly practiced and honored. The shared activities whether singing traditional songs, visiting heritage

sites, or attending traditional holidays were understood to be what grounded one in their community and heritage. The symbolic and emotional significance of these common experiences acted as bonding mechanisms, usually creating an intense sense of pride and solidarity. In addition, collective identity was actively fostered rather than passively experienced through intergenerational transmission, communal rituals, and narrative, placing the individual as custodian of a collective cultural narrative.

"While our regional fair is on, when we all dress up, sing the traditional songs, and dance the traditional dances, I feel proud and connected to something greater than me" (Interviewee 11).

"When we all visit the graveyard of our ancestors yearly to pray and share stories about our ancestors, I feel I'm stitched into something that has been ongoing for generations" (Interviewee 6).

The following two quotes illustrate how collective identity is anchored in moments of cultural importance reinforcing collective belonging. Collective pride in Interviewee 11's answer arises from cultural performances that turn public space into a site for shared memory and identity. Synchronized community action dressing, singing, dancing is highlighted, an echo of Cardwell et al. (2023) notion of communitas, wherein social structures melt away for the sake of unity and equality. Interviewee 6, on the other hand, highlights temporal continuity how coming together around shared memory and heritage gives the sense of belonging to a larger, timelessly enduring identity. In both narratives, identity is not an individual activity but a relational and affective one, felt through rituals outside of individual lives and grounding participants in their cultural heritage (Figure 2).

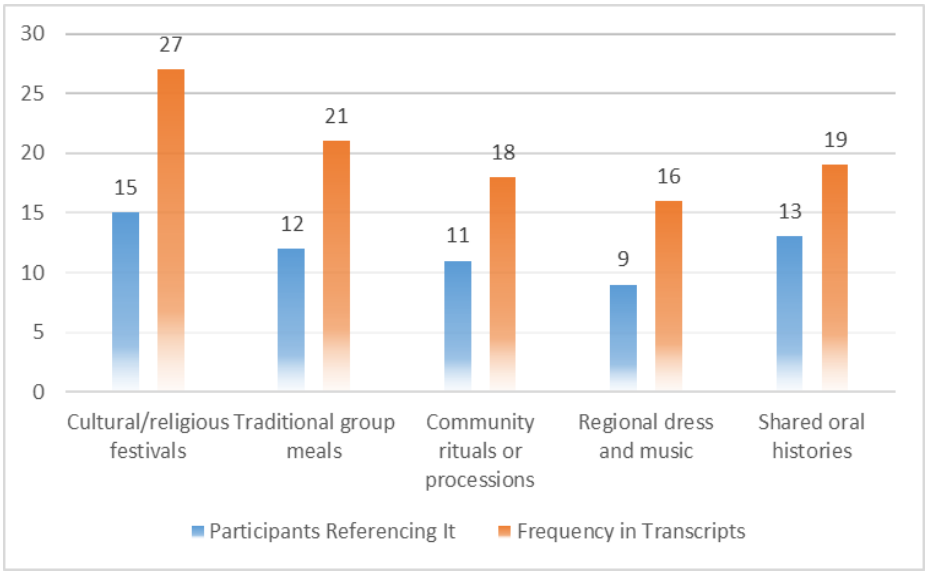

Figure 2: Types of Collective Identity Practices Referenced

Thematic analysis proceeded according to Braun and Clarke's six-stage approach, starting with thorough familiarization with transcripts, in which repeated mention of community practices, festivals, rituals, and heritage places was prominent. Initial codes like "shared ritual," "group participation," and "emotional togetherness" were aggregated. These were then grouped into prospective themes, out of which ritualized belonging, heritage as communal memory, and cultural pride through participation emerged. These themes were discussed, clarified, and validated by looking at their consistency between interviews and making sure that they reflected the dataset in its entirety. Final themes highlighted that collective identity is created by symbolic shared engagement, emotional resonance, and historical continuity, and that these aspects are the key for individuals to place themselves within a group (Table 3).

Table 3: Thematic Analysis for Collective Identity Formation

Step	Description	Application to Theme
1. Familiarization with Data	Immersion in Transcripts to Identify Collective Engagement.	Frequent references to festivals, rituals, and shared memory practices.
2. Generating Initial Codes	Capturing Repeated Patterns.	Codes included: “group bonding,” “cultural festivals,” “ritual unity,” “community belonging,” “regional pride.”
3. Searching for Themes	Organizing Codes Under Meaningful Categories.	Emerging themes: *Ritualized community identity*, *Shared history as belonging*, *Symbolic group practices*.
4. Reviewing Themes	Ensuring Consistency Across Cases and Relevance.	Confirmed collective identity as an emotionally and socially reaffirmed theme.
5. Defining and Naming Themes	Creating an Overarching Thematic Identity.	Final theme: “Belonging Through Shared Cultural Experience” collective identity is reinforced via ritual, emotion, and symbolism.
6. Producing the Report	Integrating Themes with Participant Quotes.	Example: Participant 11 described a festival as a “moment where we all become one, forgetting differences.”

These are in line with Karataş et al. (2023) social identity theory, which asserts that people get self-esteem and group-oriented identity from being a part of significant groups. Likewise, Rabi et al. (2023) "imagined communities" theory can be seen in the participants' identification of symbolic acts like festivals and collective gatherings as means of feeling

part of a larger, frequently invisible, community. Kaya (2025) ethnosymbolism also reinforces the notion that collective identity is inextricably linked to cultural memory, shared myths, and symbolic heritage. Furthermore, Trifunovic (2025) confirms that heritage events of community are not simply nostalgic; they are performative acts of identity reassertion, allowing one to perceive oneself as an active agent in cultural continuity. These theoretical frameworks support the empirical findings in this research, whereby participants not only appreciated but actively worked towards maintaining their shared identity.

4.3 Theme 3: Intergenerational Transmission of Heritage

The participants greatly reinforced the centrality of family particularly elders in passing on cultural knowledge, values, and tradition. The results show that intergenerational transmission serves as a bridge between historical cultural stories and contemporary identity construction. Via narrative, common rituals, language, and mentorship, the participants explained how they did not only receive customs but a whole world view that was born of heritage. This transmission was sometimes characterized as an emotional and respectful process wherein grandparents or parents served as "culture bearers," helping to maintain continuity over time. Specifically among older participants, there was a feeling of obligation to "keep the chain unbroken," and younger participants indicated that they developed a more intense sense of belonging and identity through these family ties. It was clear that families continued to be at the center of the reproduction and reinterpretation of cultural heritage even when social environments were changing.

"My grandmother used to sit with us every evening and tell us stories from our tribal history. I didn't realize it back then, but that shaped how I see myself today" (Interviewee 3).

"Each year, my father shows us how to recite the forefathers' prayers in our language. It's not a question of language it's a matter of conveying our identity" (Interviewee 17).

These are the indications of the ability of close, mundane behaviors in the maintenance of heritage. Interviewee 3's experience is that storytelling, as an educational instrument for culture, functions not only on an intellectual plane but also constructs the self-image of the listener over the long term. Interviewee 17 points out that language and ritual transmission are identity anchors, particularly when located within affective family contexts. Both accounts illustrate that cultural heritage is hardly ever abstracted it is enacted and embodied within familial affection, repetition, and purpose. These outcomes support the proposition that intergenerational learning is a constitutive basis of cultural resilience

(Figure 3).

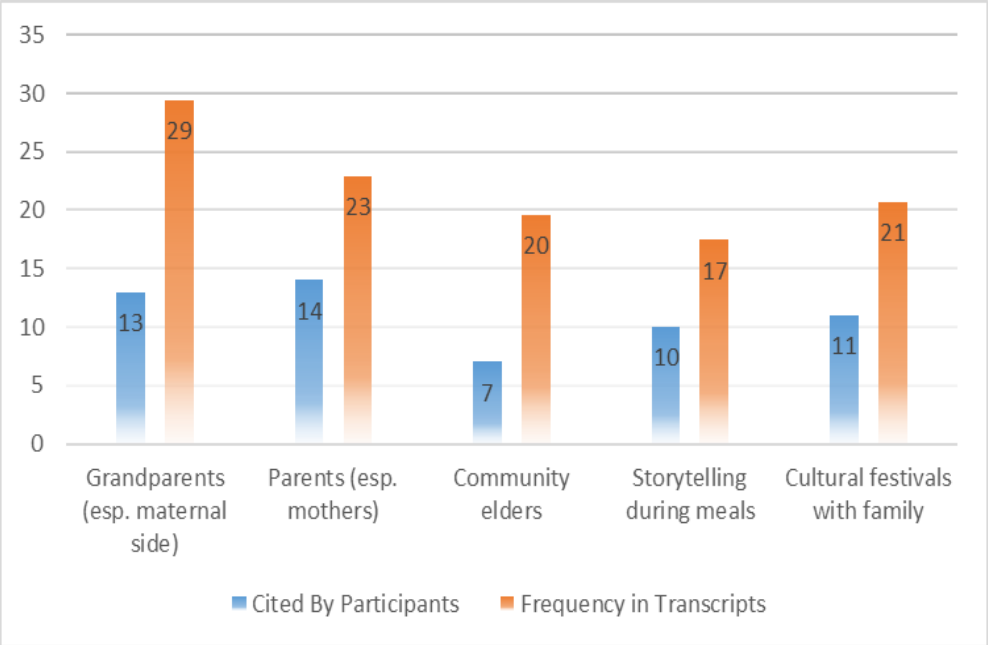

Figure 3: Intergenerational Transmission Sources

The initial thematic analysis step demonstrated a robust emotional relationship with elders and their function in preserving culture. Some of the initial codes were "stories from elders," "learning from family," "inheritance of rituals," and "conserving the dialect." The codes were consolidated to create the prominent themes: heritage transmission as identity inheritance and stewardship of culture by family. Going through the themes exhibited obvious cross-case consistency, especially across participants from various regions and age ranges. The completed themes embodied how identity was both bestowed and cultivated through the generations, illustrating that cultural continuity is maintained through close, relational practices and not by institutional mechanisms only (Table 4).

Table 4(a): Thematic Analysis for Intergenerational Transmission of Heritage

Step	Description	Application to Theme
1. Familiarization with Data	Identifying Narratives about Elders and Family Teachings.	Noted strong patterns in stories about grandmothers, fathers, and cultural rituals passed down.
2. Generating Initial Codes	Highlighting Instances of Heritage Teaching/Learning.	Codes: “stories from elders,” “learning language from parents,” “ritual continuity,” “oral tradition.”
3. Searching for Themes	Consolidating Codes into Categories.	Themes: *Family as heritage transmitters*, *Oral history as identity builder*, *Generational stewardship*.
4. Reviewing Themes	Testing Coherence and Prevalence of Themes.	Themes were strong across multiple age groups and regions.

Table 4(b): Thematic Analysis for Intergenerational Transmission of Heritage

Step	Description	Application to Theme
5. Defining and Naming Themes	Framing the Final Thematic Label.	Final theme: "Inherited Identity Through Family Narratives" emphasizes intergenerational cultural continuity.
6. Producing the Report	Supporting the Theme with Vivid Quotes.	Example: Participant 3 shared how her grandmother's stories made her "feel connected to something older than herself."

These results are supported by Umukoro (2025), who state that family story retelling enhances identity coherence in young people. Fatima and Nadeem (2025) also underscored that narrative identity is constructed through intergenerational storytelling and sharing of memories. Gulnora (2024) recorded that emotional tone and cultural particularity of such transmissions determine how people view themselves within a group. Significance of family-driven cultural education also resonates with Rubin et al. (2024) indigenous knowledge systems work, where elders play the role of cultural custodians. The two studies among others substantiate the argument that intergenerational heritage transmission is central to identity formation.

4.4 Theme 4: Cultural Challenges and Adaptations

Most participants asserted that sustaining their cultural identity is now more challenging in contemporary and globalized contexts. Forces like urbanization, migration, intermarriage, and the media were identified as pressures against conventional values and customs. While some perceived that contemporary living watered down their cultural heritage, others described how they managed the conflict by means of selective adaptation appropriating innovations without leaving behind essential traditions. The language of the participants spoke of the need to constantly negotiate cultural preservation and social acceptance, especially in the workplace and in multicultural contexts. Adaptation was not viewed as a loss of culture but as a survival tactic and a means to remain relevant. The balance act was most apparent among the younger participants, who are attempting both to preserve their heritage and be part of modern times.

"Sometimes I feel torn at work I need to speak and behave in a certain manner, but at home, I revert to my old self. It's as if I'm living two personas" (Interviewee 7).

"We've had to make some of our traditions more modern to keep the younger people interested such as publishing wedding rituals on the internet or creating heritage-themed TikToks" (Interviewee 14).

Interviewee 7's account highlights the dual identity many people manage when navigating different cultural domains. This identity-switching reflects what Mazurkevych et al. (2024) termed "integration," but also hints at the emotional toll it can take. Interviewee 14's example shows creative adaptation modernizing tradition not to discard it, but to make it accessible and engaging for a new generation. Both responses illustrate that adaptation is not about replacing identity, but about finding culturally authentic ways to remain relevant (Figure 4).

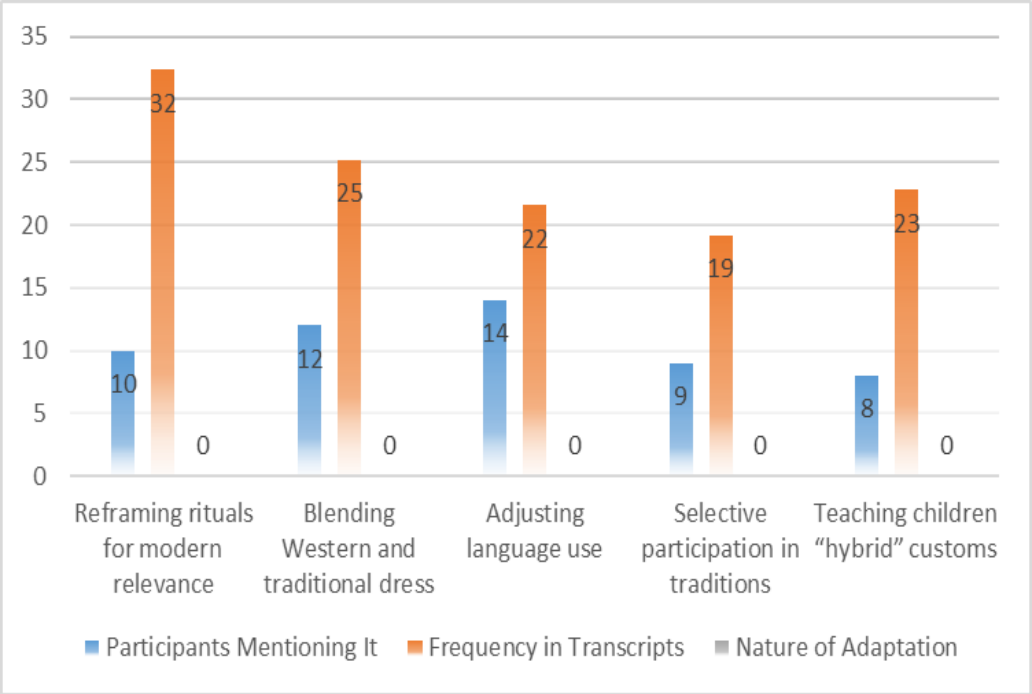

Figure 4: Cultural Adaptation Strategies Identified

Familiarization and coding brought forth patterns of conflict, negotiation, and innovation. Codes like "dual identity," "generational adaptation," "technology as a bridge," and "cultural dilution fears" were grouped together. Themes that developed were identity negotiation in contemporary spaces and strategic cultural innovation. Going through and refining themes across interviews attested to their reliability. Participants were not passive to cultural change but exercised agency by reworking their expressions of identity. These themes encapsulated the spirit of adaptation as a dynamic, reflexive process that is sensitive to cultural core values but adjusts surface forms (Table 5).

Table 5(a): Thematic Analysis for Cultural Challenges and Adaptations

Step	Description	Application to Theme
1. Familiarization with Data	Looking for Conflict, Negotiation, or Adaptation of Culture.	Participants described balancing modern norms with traditional values.

Table 5(b): Thematic Analysis for Cultural Challenges and Adaptations

Step	Description	Application to Theme
2. Generating Initial Codes	Capturing Relevant Identity Tensions and Changes.	Codes: "dual identity," "changing traditions," "adapting customs for youth," "online cultural engagement."
3. Searching for Themes	Merging Similar Codes into Higher-Level Categories.	Themes: *Cultural tension and balance*, *Strategic modernization*, *Duality in identity*.
4. Reviewing Themes	Testing Consistency with Data And Refining Overlaps.	Adaptation-related quotes were coherent and cross-generational.
5. Defining and Naming Themes	Assigning Theme Label for Clarity.	Final theme: "Negotiated Identity in Evolving Cultural Contexts" captures both compromise and innovation in identity.
6. Producing the Report	Integration into Narrative with Interpretive Depth.	Example: Participant 14 explained how "we repackage traditions for Instagram to keep them alive."

Nagata et al. (2024) acculturation model confirms these findings, most notably his account of integration and bicultural identity. Nagata et al. (2024) have also discovered that individuals construct hybrid cultural practices to facilitate multicultural contexts. Zhang and Wu (2023) have also stressed that identity in late modern times is reflexive and constantly reconstructed. These authors confirm that cultural adaptation does not undermine identity but aids its development, typically adding its significance for new situations and generations.

4.5 Theme 5: Emotional and Symbolic Connections

Members often highlighted emotional bonds toward cultural objects, symbols, sites, and experiences that acted as anchors for identity. These were intensely personal yet communally shared. It might be a wedding ornament of the grandmother, a tribal poem, or a pilgrimage destination, but participants spoke of these symbols as emotionally rich containers that link them to history, heritage, and communal values. These symbolic connotations usually became instances of personal reflection and affirmation of identity, especially in times of transition, adversity, or jubilation. In a very interesting twist, these emotional connections were not merely retrograde but also prospective, compelling actors to maintain or restore customs for posterity.

"Whenever I go to the old mosque in our village, I feel this peculiar peace it's as if the space remembers me even though I've changed" (Interviewee 2).

"We retained my mother's traditional necklace and passed it on to my daughter it's not jewellery, but the entire story" (Interviewee 13).

Interviewee 2's commentary demonstrates how places linked to memory and spirituality are sites of affective connection that activate identity. The use of the mosque as metaphor "remembering" implies a two-way relationship between individual and place, reminiscent of Zhang and Wu (2023). Interviewee 13's use of heirloom jewelry as a vehicle for generational identity illustrates how symbols actualize emotion and memory. These objects are not just objects but active agents in the transmission of cultural identity, imbued with signification (Figure 5).

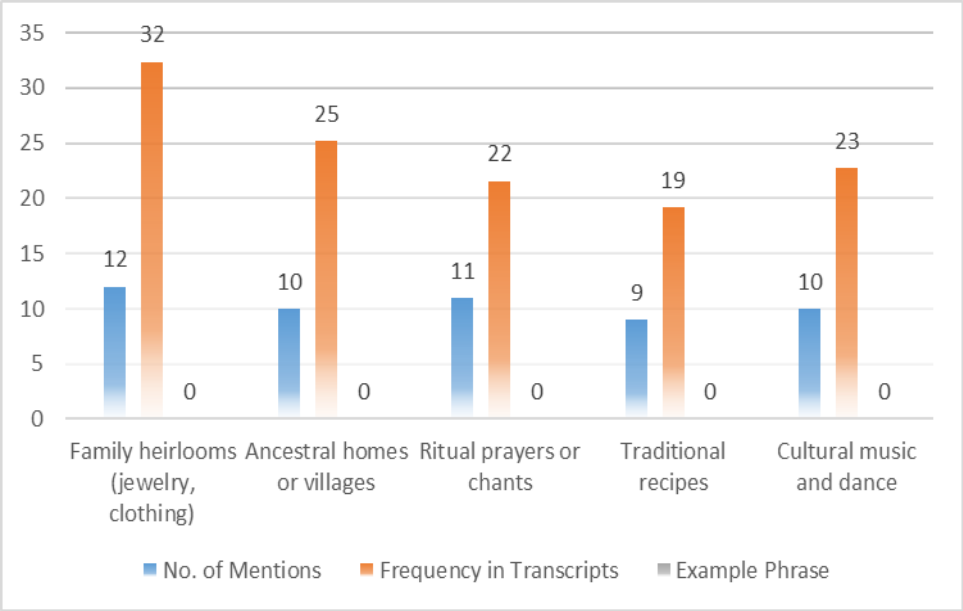

Figure 5: Emotional Symbolism and Attachment Objects

Consistent coding around "emotional symbolism," "sacred spaces," "memory objects," and "family heirlooms" emerged in the analysis. These codes were integrated into themes like symbols as identity containers and emotional resonance of heritage. Analyzing the findings revealed that the participants invested identity value into certain objects or locations not based on their material value, but because of the memories, emotions, and meanings that they held. These results emphasize the fact that symbolic and affective attachments are at the core of how people incorporate and perform cultural identity (Table 6).

Table 6 (a): Thematic Analysis for Emotional and Symbolic Connections

Step	Description	Application to Theme
1. Familiarization with Data	Focusing on Objects, Places, and Rituals Participants Feel Deeply Connected to.	Emotional language around family heirlooms, spiritual spaces, and cultural objects was prominent.

Table 6 (b): Thematic Analysis for Emotional and Symbolic Connections

Step	Description	Application to Theme
2. Generating Initial Codes	Identifying Emotionally Charged and Symbolic Expressions.	Codes: "emotional attachment to objects," "symbolism of place," "ritual as memory," "cultural artifacts as identity."
3. Searching for Themes	Clustering Symbolic-Emotional Codes.	Themes: *Identity through emotional artifacts*, *Cultural memory in objects*, *Symbolic belonging*.
4. Reviewing Themes	Ensuring Emotional-Symbolic Coherence and Uniqueness.	Theme stood out distinctly from other constructs like adaptation or collective identity.
5. Defining and Naming Themes	Finalizing a Clear and Descriptive Label.	Final theme: "Embodied Identity Through Symbolic and Emotional Ties" emphasizes the affective core of cultural identity.
6. Producing the Report	Reporting Quotes and Interpretation Together.	Example: Participant 13 described a necklace as "carrying generations of our family it's more than just jewelry."

These are thoroughly explained by Kacane et al. (2023) theory of cultural memory, which posits that cultural continuity is ensured through carriers of a symbolic and material nature. Chou et al. (2023) memory sites conceptualize the emotional potency of symbolic locations and artefacts in constructing collective memory. Simoes (2023) examined how affective reactions to cultural symbols influence group membership and individual identity. These researches support the current research by establishing that symbols and affective bonds are not sentimental but they are vital elements of cultural and continuity of identity.

5. DISCUSSION

Culture and heritage are not just nostalgic remnants or stylistic categories but a living and breathing part of human experience that influences the way people think, feel, and belong. This research aimed to explore how people engage with their cultural and heritage backgrounds to form both individual and collective identities. The words of 18 contributors from representative cultural, generational, and regional groups offered rich, detailed descriptions of the highly relational and dynamic nature of identity. The themes identified in the analysis capture five essential dimensions of identity construction ranging from inner self-awareness and social membership to emotional commitments and adaptive accommodation.

Throughout this chapter of discussion, these themes are understood within the context of previous literature, with special care to address how the conclusions build upon, complicate, or reinforce theoretical and empirical knowledge of identity as a phenomenon of culture. The themes relate to one another, illustrating that identity is not the creation of a solitary factor but the result of ongoing interactions among memory, meaning, affect, and social environment. The results clearly indicate that personal identity is essentially formed by how people engage with their heritage through daily practices, emotional thinking, and cultural habitus. Traditional cooking, language use, and childhood stories were often mentioned by the participants as points of reference for their self-definition. These results are consistent with Kılıçoğlu et al. (2023), who contend that identity is not a cognitive construct but an embodied, lived experience constructed by and through culturally embedded activities. What sets this study apart is the rich emotional importance participants placed on what otherwise would be considered routine activities. Rituals like preparing ancestral foods or dressing in traditional attire were not done out of necessity but were felt as personal affirmations of self.". This echoes Nagata et al. (2024) theory that culture is a system of inherited conceptions embodied in symbolic forms. For a number of the participants, they commented on how the use of culture enabled them to reconnect with states of clarity, stability, and pride. These kinds of findings add strength to the proposal that personal identity is always "performed" through cultural expression, which is contextually reinterpreted and emotionally internalized. Collective identity was not only presented in the data as a backdrop but as an active, affective space where people felt belonging and togetherness. People chatted enthusiastically about cultural events, group prayers, and local traditions that generated a "shared rhythm" within their communities. These practices enabled them to position themselves in a collective story that moved beyond the individual. Respondents portrayed feeling closest to their group during cultural performances and rituals of heritage, verifying Baloch and Kamran (2024) argument that symbolic group membership plays an important role in the formation of social identity. Perhaps more crucially, collective identity was felt not just through official events but also through unofficial telling and collective memory spaces. The emotive force of these common practices tended often to have a double impact: reaffirming both membership in the group and personal self-value. The results build on Gulnora (2024) by illustrating how ethnosymbolic traditions work not just to maintain group identity but also to replicate it intergenerationally in affectively charged manners. In contrast to a lot of earlier research, which

separates collective identity in terms of the political or national, this study emphasizes its localized, personal quality grounded within the textures of everyday life and cultural performance. The third topic, intergenerational transmission of heritage, supported the idea that identity is not only self-narrated but also socially transmitted and co-produced. Participants shared rich illustrations of grandparents and parents sharing stories, songs, and spiritual information that not only helped preserve cultural knowledge but also influenced the ways in which younger generations think about themselves. These were typically transmitted informally during meals, during festivals, or during the evening chill in ways that exemplified how identity learning occurs in relational and emotionally rich moments and not through formal education. These findings are congruent with Shih and Tseng (2025), where it is hypothesized that family narrative has a strong function to construct children's self-continuity and emotional management. Significantly, this study supplements that such transmissions are often coupled with implicit moral frameworks, facilitating participants to comprehend right and wrong, obligation and prestige, and perseverance via the cultural lens. Compared to linear strategies of knowledge transmission, experiences among the participants show that there is a dialogical process whereby youth choose to adopt, reinterpret, or even reject transmitted cultural values selectively. This active, rather than static, understanding of intergenerational transmission of heritage emphasizes that elders are cultural custodians while youths are active cultural editors, reshaping the future of heritage in identity formation. The negotiation between tradition and modernity was a salient process in identity formation among participants, whereby it highlighted the delicate balancing act most people perform in plotting their cultural self over changing social landscapes.

Some participants structured the process of "dual identities," fluctuating between professional arenas that asked for modernist behavior and family home environments imbued with cultural expectations. These cases illustrate Kiaer (2025) acculturation model, specifically the integration strategy retaining heritage alongside adopting aspects of a host culture. However, the results in this research extend Berry's model in that they show how accommodation typically involves creative reinterpretation. For example, they referred to bringing wedding ceremonies into the present day with the aid of social media or updating aged music using new instruments in order to attract young people. The practice was not necessarily viewed as a watering down of culture but rather a means of sustaining cultural capital. The research also resonates with Ning et al.

(2025) research on hybrid identities but gains depth by mapping the affective labor of iterative translation of cultural codes. Adaptation is not a strategic step it is an affective, performative, and occasionally paradoxical negotiation of authenticity in constantly fluid socio-cultural topographies. Having regard to emotional and symbolic investments in cultural objects and places by participants provoked yet another rich aspect of identity formation. Such symbols ranging from ancestral decorations and household recipes to village mosques and regional poetry served as affective pathways imbued with intense personal and historical significance. Interviewees also employed expressions such as "it reminds me" or "it bears our story," endowing symbol objects with quasi-sentient characteristics. These accounts are very convergent with (Meng et al., 2025) theory of cultural memory, whereby symbols are mnemonic nodes imbued with identity transmitted from generation to generation. Also supporting Baloch and Kamran (2024) affective practices theory, this theme is because participants explained these rituals and objects as affective practices that provide belongingness and continuity. In contrast to more abstract concepts of identity, these symbolic relations manifest themselves in very sensory and feeling ways through the flavor of a meal, the feel of an article of clothing, or the sound of a millennia-old prayer. These results challenge prevailing cognitive models of identity in stressing embodiment and affect as core features of identity experience. More significantly, they demonstrate how identity is not merely forged through reflective thought but also "felt" in robust, frequently ineffable language through symbolic interaction with inheritance. Together, these symbols of cultural connection and adaptation create an intriguing paradox: members deliberately modify cultural practices to stay current, but at the same time are firmly emotionally attached to tradition symbols. This conflict change versus constancy is the hallmark of contemporary identity formation. The performers were not simply negotiating the conditions of modernity, but producing new, affectually intense ways of being that respected the past and opened to the future. This observation completes developing theories of cultural identity by demonstrating that identities in contemporary times are neither hybridized nor traditional rather, they are adaptive fictions based on emotional truth, symbolic practice, and rational revision. Together, these findings present a composite picture of how individuals move through their worlds of culture not as passive recipients of heritage, but as active agents who reconstruct, reinterpret, and emotionally inhabit their cultural selves. The conclusion of this study emphasizes the subtle manner in which culture and heritage shape the formation of identity in personal, collective,

intergenerational, adaptive, and affective experiences. Not static or coherent, identity was a process of unfolding, negotiation, and intense feeling that was forged through continued engagement with cultural practice, family histories, communal rituals, and symbolic meanings. This study builds a more nuanced picture of identity as both social construction and lived experience, showing how people actively negotiate heritage and the requirements of contemporary living. And so the research resists simplistic conceptions of identity based on ethnicity or nation, instead presenting a richer vision in which fluidity, agency, and emotion become possible. In the end, the study reaffirms that cultural identity is a living, adaptive, and intensely personalized aspect of human existence a one that nevertheless still persists in the midst of change, yet still finds anchorage in the abiding power of tradition and memory.

6. IMPLICATIONS

Theoretically, this study takes the mounting cultural identity debate a notch higher by providing a multidimensional and experiential account of how people engage with their heritage and cultural origin in the process of making identity. It enlarges currently held theories including Social Identity Theory, Cultural Memory Theory, and Acculturation Theory by illustrating that identity is not only derived from group membership but also through emotionally charged, symbolic, and intergenerational transactions. By thematic analysis blended with the above theoretical positions, the study gives a more conceptual understanding of identity as an affective cognitive process dwelling in rituals of everyday life, objects, relationships, and negotiations. It also dispels essentialist views that deal with identity as fixed or derived from a single cultural point of origin by demonstrating how participants possess constantly varying identities that are drawn from multiple cultural and temporal sources. Furthermore, the research adds to performativity and embodiment theories of identity by seeing how culture is performed, reproduced, and reinterpreted through affect-rich practice rather than simply through abstract cultural signs. Such findings prompt prevailing identity theories to more fully integrate emotional, symbolic, and context-driven elements as central to the identity process. The policy and practical implications of the research are very much applicable for educators, policymakers, heritage professionals, and community leaders who need to create inclusive, culturally responsive spaces. Primarily, the results underscore the significance of incorporating meaningfully culturally

relevant practices, symbols, and narratives in education, urban planning, and community programming in order to better build a sense of identity and belonging. For example, schools and cultural organizations can create intergenerational storytelling initiatives, heritage learning modules, or community festivals that affirm identity through engagement and emotion. For heritage preservation policy frameworks, the study suggests that both tangible and intangible heritage must be treated with equal priority, acknowledging that affective and symbolic bonds—familial rituals or cultural practices—are equally significant as historical monuments. The research also educates migration and integration policies by showing how people actively try to hold on to culture while adapting, which implies that support systems should facilitate both continuity and innovation in cultural expression. Mental health practitioners can also learn from how cultural dislocation or heritage erosion links can impact identity coherence, particularly among diaspora or marginalized groups. Generally speaking, the study presents grounded evidence for the design of identity-affirming practices that honor cultural fluidity while preserving cultural roots.

7. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Although it provides rich insight, this research is not without its limitations. To begin with, the 18-participant sample, although large enough for in-depth qualitative research, restricts the findings' generalizability across wider populations. In spite of the use of purposive and snowball sampling to ensure cultural diversity, the research cannot reflect the full breadth of identity dynamics in some minority or marginalized groups that were underrepresented in the sample. Moreover, the use of self-reported accounts via semi-structured interviews could produce incomplete or idealized portraits of cultural involvement, but particularly in delicate topics like religious rituals or family disputes. Social desirability bias could have also tempted participants to highlight cultural pride or sense of belonging rather than detachment, loss, or contradiction. In addition, the study was carried out in a particular socio-cultural context, which can restrict its generalizability to very dissimilar cultural contexts or highly urbanized transnational communities. Subsequent research will be able to overcome these limitations by increasing the pool of participants across numerous regions, generations, or diasporic communities to explore identity construction in more diverse sociocultural contexts. Longitudinal qualitative research can also offer an understanding of how identity

changes over time, especially through life transitions such as migration, schooling, or marriage. Researchers might also investigate further how virtual cultural participation and digital media reconstruct emotional and symbolic attachments to heritage within modern society. Comparative investigations that study intergenerational changes in identity across dual-heritage or mixed-ancestry families, particularly where cultural values are in conflict, is another promising area. Finally, the incorporation of visual or participatory methods like photovoice, narrative mapping, or arts-based research might enhance deeper emotional and symbolic aspects of identity analysis. These directions would follow on from this research's platform but provide a wider understanding of identity in a more fluid, multicultural global environment.

8. CONCLUSION

This study shed light on the complex and highly individualized ways in which people approach their cultural and heritage contexts to build individual and collective identity. Through semi-structured, in-depth interviews and thematic analysis under Braun and Clarke's guidance, five interrelated themes were developed: personal identity construction, development of collective identity, intergenerational transmission of heritage, cultural adaptation, and emotional-symbolic attachments. These themes illustrate that identity is not a fixed term but a dynamic story constructed over time through rituals, symbols, narratives, and bargaining. Reflections by participants showed how culture offers both stability and novelty grounding people in collective memory yet permitting adaptive and innovative expressions in contemporary contexts. Heritage, under this understanding, is not so much inherited as it is re-created continually through feeling, doing, and sense-making. Finally, the research contributes to wider scholarly and applied discussions by positioning identity as a dynamic, relational, and affectively embodied experience. It disrupts simplifying positions that subject cultural identity to binarism or monolithism, providing instead a richly detailed, human-sensitive account of how heritage is inhabited and sensed. In a time of fast-moving globalization, cultural mixing, and changing social values, these findings provide timely indications of the continued significance of culture and heritage as regulating agencies in determining who we are, how we belong, and what we leave behind for subsequent generations. As identity becomes more multifaceted, studies like this one remind us that the origins of self

are frequently to be discovered in the fertile ground of memory, meaning, and common cultural experience.

Funding

This work was supported by the Deanship of Scientific Research, Vice Presidency for Graduate Studies and Scientific Research, King Faisal University, Saudi Arabia [Grant No. KFU252675].

References

Ağ, Z. (2023). From Past to Present: The Role of Communication and Historical Narrative in Transgenerational Transmission of Historical Trauma in Kurdish Alevi Diaspora in Germany.

Anjum, N., Bhatti, Z. I., & Shahzad, K. (2024). Material Hardships and Cultural Resilience: The Role of Traditional Practices in Momaday's' The Indolent Boys' and'Children of the Sun'. *Review Journal of Social Psychology & Social Works*, *2*(2), 314-323.

Baloch, J. J., & Kamran, U. (2024). Echoes of Identity: Unravelling the Acculturative Journey in "The Woman Warrior" And its Implications for Inter-generational Cultural Dynamics. *International Journal of Linguistics and Culture*, *5*(2), 183-204.

Cardwell, M., Soliz, J., & Kellas, J. K. (2023). Intergenerational transmission of trauma: Understanding family histories and narratives. In *Family Communication and Cultural Transformation* (pp. 110-124). Routledge.

Changlong, W., Amri, H. F. H., & Soh, M. C. (2025). Intergenerational dynamics of chinese heritage sports in rural governance: Cultural transmission and social cohesion. *Malaysian Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities (MJSSH)*, *10*(2), e003012-e003012.

Chou, F., Buchanan, M. J., McDonald, M., Westwood, M., & Huang, C. (2023). Narrative themes of Chinese Canadian intergenerational trauma: offspring perspectives of trauma transmission. *Counselling Psychology Quarterly*, *36*(2), 321-349.

Chu, G. (2025). Cultural Identity and Community Resilience: The Role of Ethnic Dance in Maintaining Rural Traditions and History. *Mediterranean Archaeology and Archaeometry*, *25*(3).

Cresswell, B. H. (2024). Cultural Transmission and Intergenerational Relations Among Female Immigrants: Family Structure and Social Integration of South Asian Women in the UK. *Journal of Research in Social Science and Humanities*, *3*(11), 10-16.

Fatima, S., & Nadeem, M. U. (2025). Family language policy and heritage language transmission in Pakistan—the intersection of family dynamics, ethnic identity and cultural practices on language proficiency and maintenance. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *16*, 1560755.

Féron, É. (2024). Memories of violence in the Rwandan diaspora: intergenerational transmission and conflict transportation. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, *47*(2), 274-296.

Gulnora, K. (2024). THE ROLE OF CULTURAL HERITAGE IN SHAPING FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS AMONG YOUTH. *International Journal of Pedagogics*, *4*(11), 297-302.

Hammood, Y. M., Ismail, S. M., Prasad, K. D. V., Khasawneh, M. A. S., & Naeim, M. (2025). Multigenerational resilience: A novel theory on the psychological transmission of resilience and the role of culture and spirituality in indigenous communities: A narrative review. *Asian journal of psychiatry*, 104485.

Jiayang Li, D. F. A., & Su, Y. (2024). Exploring the Significance of Traditional Music in Safeguarding and Transmitting Intangible Cultural Heritage: A Case Study of the Yunnan Bai Ethnic Group. *Cultura: International Journal of Philosophy of Culture and Axiology*, *21*(3).

Kacane, I., Şentürk, Y., & Rovira Martínez, M. (2023). Youth and Intergenerational Transmission of Cultural Intelligence in Latvia, Spain and Turkey. *Open Cultural Studies*, *7*(1), 20220183.

Karataş, S., Crocetti, E., Schwartz, S. J., & Rubini, M. (2023). Developmental trajectories of ethnic and national identities in adolescents from migrant families: The role of social identification with family and classmates. *European Journal of Personality*, *37*(6), 705-722.

Karim, S. M. (2024). Islam and the Transmission of Cultural Identity in Four European Countries. *Social Forces*, *103*(2), 756-779.

Kaya, O. (2025). The intergenerational transmission of collective action within the Kurdish diaspora in Switzerland: An analysis of socio-political dynamics. *Current Psychology*, *44*(10), 9648-9663.

Khairani, L., & Hendra, Y. (2025). The Symbolic Communication of Kenduri: Ritual Adaptation, Identity Formation, and Social Cohesion in Javanese Diaspora Communities. *Jurnal Penelitian*, *22*(1), 27-42.

Kiaer, J. (2025). The Dynamics of Intergenerational Communication in Intercultural Families. *The Sage Handbook of Intercultural Communication*, 302.

Kılıçoğlu, E. A., Ergin, B., & Ergin, E. (2023). Transmission of Family Culture" The Case of Grandmother, Mother and Granddaughter". *International Journal of Progressive Education*, *19*(5).

Kunst, J. R., & Mesoudi, A. (2025). Decoding the dynamics of cultural change: A cultural evolution approach to the psychology of acculturation. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, *29*(2), 111-144.

Li, J., He, M., Yang, Z., & Siu, K. W. M. (2025). Anthropological Insights into Emotion Semantics in Intangible Cultural Heritage Museums: A Case Study of Eastern Sichuan, China. *Electronics*, *14*(5), 891.

Li, L., Sriruksa, A., & Yamcharoen, N. (2024). Cultural Identity of Ethnic Chinese Youth in Khon Kaen, Thailand. *Pakistan Journal of Life & Social Sciences*, *22*(2).

Li, X., Mohd Noor, N., Mohd Yusoff, M., Adeline Adura Tengku Hamzah, T., Zhang, J., Shi, Q., & Wang, Z. (2024). The impact of intergenerational transmission of cultural capital on holiday loyalty. *The Social Science Journal*, 1-18.

Liu, Y., & Zhu, W. (2023). Intergenerational narratives and identity development: A qualitative exploration of Chinese college students. *Educational Gerontology*, *49*(10), 881-893.

Mazurkevych, O., Skoryk, A., Antipina, I., Goncharova, O., & Kondratenko, I. (2024).

The specifics of preserving cultural identity in the context of globalization processes.

Meng, H., Wang, Z., Li, X., & Sun, J. (2025). Cultural security in the context of globalization: A bibliometric analysis and trend exploration. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, *108*, 102234.

Nagata, D. K., Kim, J. H. J., & Gone, J. P. (2024). Intergenerational transmission of ethnoracial historical trauma in the United States. *Annual Review of Clinical Psychology*, *20*.

Ning, B., Omar, R., & Ye, Y. (2025). Intergenerational transmission or cultural loss? The continuity of ethnic identity among the Yao minority in China. *Qualitative Research Journal*.

Rabi, F., Fengqi, M., & Aziz, M. (2023). The positive impact of bicultural identity on emotional, cognitive, and behavioral engagement: An exploratory analysis. *American Journal of Creative Education*, *6*(1), 28-51.

Rubin, S. E., Mørch, I., Olsen, N., & Nørtoft, K. (2024). Important intergenerational transmission of knowledge in promotion of well-being and cultural identity in Greenland. *International Journal of Circumpolar Health*, *83*(1), 2420479.

Shih, Y.-H., & Tseng, S.-Y. (2025). Culturally Oriented Intergenerational Learning Programs Between Older Adults and Young Children: A Review Study. *Journal of Management World*, *2025*(1), 77-84.

Simoes, A. V. (2023). Street art in Aveiro: city walls as dialogic spaces of collective memories and identity. *Societies*, *13*(3), 54.

Tan, Z. (2024). Family Recognition, Identity and Cultural Recognition of Spring Festival Culture among Young People in Chengdu. *Advances in Applied Sociology*, *14*(11), 625-643.

Trifunovic, M. (2025). Family in displacement and its role in cultural adaptation and native language preservation. *Srpska politička misao*, *89*(1).

Umukoro, O. S. (2025). 'Who am I?'Evolutionary perspectives of African ethnic identity. *African Identities*, 1-12.

Xie, J., & Ma, S. (2023). Identification with Buddhism among young Chinese Indonesians: multicultural dynamics and generational transitions. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, *10*(1), 1-15.

Ysmailova, R., Akmatova, A., Ysmayilova, B., Arzymatova, Z., & Turgunbaeva, Z. (2024). Exploring the Dynamic Interplay of National Identity and Linguoculture in Kyrgyzstan: A study of cultural symbols, language adaptation, and identity transmission. *Traduction et Langues*, *23*(3), 135-160.

Zhang, S., & Wu, C. (2023). Revitalizing endangered traditions: Innovative approaches to safeguarding Yunnan's ethnic minority music as intangible cultural heritage. *Herança*, *6*(1), 101-128.