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Identity-Based Motivation (IBM) Among University Students

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Abstract

Identity-based motivation (IBM) is one of the key psychological factors influencing individuals' behavior toward achieving their personal and professional goals. This concept suggests that people are more likely to be motivated to pursue goals when they possess a strong sense of identity that aligns with those goals. The present study aims to explore the following: The level of identity-based motivation among university students. Statistically significant differences in personal striving according to the variables of gender (male/female) and academic major (scientific/humanities). To achieve the study's objectives, the researcher developed a scale based on Oyserman's (2007) theory of identity-based motivation. The scale consists of 24 items distributed across three domains: dynamic construction, action readiness, and difficulty interpretation. The psychometric properties of the scale (validity and reliability) were verified: face validity and construct validity were confirmed, and reliability was assessed using the test–retest method and Cronbach's alpha. The test–retest reliability coefficient was (0.81), and Cronbach's alpha was (0.83). The scale was applied to a sample of 400 students male and female, from scientific and humanities disciplines at Dhi Qar University for the academic year 2024–2025. The data were analyzed using appropriate statistical tools such as one-sample t-test, Pearson's correlation coefficient, and the independent samples t-test, through SPSS software. The results revealed: The university student sample exhibited a clear presence of identity-based motivation. There were no statistically significant differences in identity-based motivation according to gender or academic major.

Introduction

Research Problem

Despite the increasing interest in the role of identity in shaping academic behavior, gaps remain regarding how personal conflict stemming from discrepancies between academic identity and other identities (e.g., familial, cultural, or professional) affects students' motivation to achieve. Some students may feel that university demands conflict with their self-perceptions, potentially lowering their academic motivation. Conversely, this discrepancy may serve as a motivational force, prompting greater effort to affirm the self and achieve success (Kaplan & Garner, 2017, pp. 2036–2051).

The development of identity is influenced by the educational contexts in which students are embedded. How students interpret academic difficulties depends on the extent to which these challenges align with their personal or group identity. When students perceive academic engagement as congruent with their identity, they are likely to interpret difficulties as signs of task importance, enhancing persistence and motivation. Conversely, a lack of alignment may lead them to view difficulties as irrelevant, resulting in disengagement or perceived incompetence (Oyserman & Dawson, 2021, pp. 184–210).

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Tsugawa's (2019) study found that the Identity-Based Motivation Cognitive Framework (IBMCF) did not effectively fit all engineering graduate students, but was more applicable to doctoral students. The study also emphasized that PhD students in engineering benefit from student-centered programs that support their future professional goals and foster the development of a strong professional identity (Tsugawa, 2019, pp. 1–9).

Research Significance

University education represents a critical stage in developing students' perceptions, motivations, and cognitive beliefs. It demands that students accomplish various academic tasks requiring effort, motivation, and perseverance to achieve their goals and establish an independent identity founded on meaningful internal motives. Identity-based motivation supports students in attaining their goals, including psychological stability (Al-Lami, 2023, p.5).

William James (1890) emphasized that the self encompasses motivation, drive, tendencies, and inclinations toward both study and work, and that social contexts are crucial to the individual. The self is thus flexible, and identity-based motivation is rooted in this early psychological conceptualization of the self (Oyserman & Destin, 2010, p.1001).

Identity-based motivation refers to the motivational drive arising from an individual's sense of belonging to a particular group or identity be it national, ethnic, religious, occupational, or otherwise. Motivation represents the desire or aversion and the internal and external conditions that move an individual to restore disrupted balance. It reflects the psychological aspect of need and can increase students' academic perseverance and engagement, particularly in rigorous environments like graduate school (Uskul, 2008, p.330).

The study by Fisher et al. (2017) focuses on the relationship between social class and identity-based motivation. It investigates how socioeconomic contexts influence self-identity and motivational goals. Findings confirm that identity-based motivation is significantly affected by social class, and that enhancing identity and offering support can increase individuals' chances of success regardless of their social circumstances (Fisher et al., 2017, p.61).

Identity-based motivation (IBM) reflects the influence of both personal and social identity on individual behavior and motivation. Behaviors aligned with perceived identity feel "natural" and are thus easier to commit to. Challenges are interpreted not as signs of failure, but as affirmations of identity. As a result, identity shapes behavioral priorities. Oyserman and Destin (2010) discussed IBM's practical implications for intervention design across education, health, and employment, noting that interventions aligned with identity are more effective and produce sustainable outcomes. Strategies can be developed to motivate individuals by linking goals to identity-consistent behaviors (Oyserman & Destin, 2010, pp.1001–1003).

The current study's significance can be summarized as follows:

1. It examines a key societal group university students who represent the core of future development.

2. It provides a scientific investigation into identity-based motivation and its importance for helping students realize their identities and potential.

3. Academically, the study contributes to the growing body of knowledge on identity-based motivation.

4. It offers validated measurement tools that can support future research on identity-based

motivation.

Research Objectives

1. To explore the level of identity-based motivation among university students.

2. To identify statistically significant differences in identity-based motivation according to gender (male/female) and academic major (scientific/humanities).

Research Boundaries

This study is limited to university students in Dhi Qar Province, categorized by gender (male/female) and academic major (scientific/humanities) for the academic year 2024–2025.

Definition of Terms

Identity-Based Motivation (IBM): Defined by Daphna Oyserman (2007) as the motivation and determination individuals experience when their actions and goals are consistent with their sense of identity. People are more inclined to pursue goals and engage in activities that align with their personal values and identities (Oyserman, 2007, p.432). IBM includes three key domains:

- **Dynamic Construction:** Identity is dynamically formed based on context and experience.
- **Action Readiness:** Identity guides behavior, and individuals are prepared to act in alignment with their identity.
- **Difficulty Interpretation:** Challenges are interpreted as signs of task importance when aligned with identity, making effort meaningful (Oyserman & Destin, 2010, p.1003).
- **Theoretical Definition:** The researcher adopts Oyserman's definition of IBM, based on her theory.
- **Operational Definition:** The total score obtained by the respondent on the Identity-Based Motivation Scale used in this study.

Theoretical Framework

The concept of *identity-based motivation* (IBM) has gained significant attention in recent years, as it offers a comprehensive psychological explanation for individuals' behavior, especially in academic and professional settings. The theory of identity-based motivation was developed by **Daphna Oyserman** (2007) to explain how people's perceptions of their social and personal identities shape their goals and influence their readiness to act toward achieving those goals.

According to Oyserman, identity is not a fixed construct but is **dynamically constructed**, context-dependent, and influenced by moment-to-moment cues. Thus, IBM posits that individuals are more likely to engage in behaviors that are congruent with their identities, and they are more motivated to persist when they view a particular behavior as identity-consistent (Oyserman & Destin, 2010, p. 1002).

The theory is based on three core principles:

Dynamic Construction

Identity is not static; rather, it is context-sensitive and changes depending on the situation and available cues. At any given moment, certain aspects of identity become salient, which in turn

influences behavior. For example, a student who identifies as a “future engineer” may feel more compelled to engage in difficult math tasks because that identity is currently activated.

Action Readiness

Once an identity is activated, it prepares the individual for identity-consistent actions. That is, individuals feel that actions aligned with their identity are the "right" and "natural" things to do. For instance, a student who sees academic success as part of their self-concept is more likely to study diligently.

Difficulty Interpretation

Identity-based motivation also affects how people interpret difficulties and challenges. When individuals face obstacles, they tend to interpret them differently based on whether the activity aligns with their identity. If the activity is identity-congruent, difficulties are seen as signs of importance and as challenges worth overcoming. Conversely, if the task is not identity-relevant, difficulties may lead to disengagement or feelings of incompetence (Oyserman, 2007, p. 433).

IBM theory provides a lens through which we can understand why some students persevere in the face of adversity, while others may withdraw. It emphasizes that motivation is not solely about internal traits like willpower or personality, but also about **how individuals see themselves in relation to their goals**.

Supporting Theories

Several psychological theories support the principles of IBM, including:

- **Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985):**

This theory emphasizes the importance of autonomy, competence, and relatedness in fostering motivation. When individuals internalize goals as part of their identity, they are more intrinsically motivated to achieve them similar to IBM’s emphasis on identity-congruent motivation.

- **Possible Selves Theory (Markus & Nurius, 1986):**

This theory focuses on how individuals’ visions of their future selves (e.g., “a successful graduate” or “a respected professional”) guide current behavior. IBM builds on this by arguing that these future-oriented self-concepts can motivate behavior when they are perceived as attainable and identity-relevant.

- **Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986):**

This theory explores how group membership shapes self-concept and behavior. IBM incorporates this idea by suggesting that people act in ways consistent with group norms when those norms become part of their identity.

- **Goal Theory:**

Goals are more likely to be pursued and achieved when they are framed as identity-relevant. For instance, rather than viewing academic success as a means to an end (e.g., getting a job), IBM emphasizes seeing success as part of who one *is*.

Applications of IBM in Educational Contexts

Identity-based motivation has significant implications for **education**, especially among

university students who are navigating complex identity development processes. Students often face the challenge of integrating academic goals with other aspects of their identity (cultural, familial, personal). IBM can:

- Help educators design **identity-congruent interventions**, such as affirmations or role models that reflect students' backgrounds and aspirations.
- Encourage students to link **long-term goals** (e.g., graduating, finding a career) with their present identity, enhancing motivation.
- Improve **academic engagement**, especially among underrepresented or disadvantaged groups, by fostering a sense of belonging and identity alignment with academic achievement.

Research has shown that when students view school success as part of "who they are," they are more likely to persist, work hard, and overcome challenges. Oyserman and her colleagues have implemented several successful school-based interventions that increase academic performance by activating identity-based motivation.

Previous Studies

A number of empirical studies have examined the concept of identity-based motivation and its impact on various psychological and educational outcomes. These studies offer strong support for the theory's assumptions and demonstrate its practical relevance in real-world settings.

Oyserman, Bybee, & Terry (2006) conducted one of the foundational studies on IBM by implementing a school-based intervention with low-income middle school students in the United States. The intervention aimed to help students connect their academic efforts with future-oriented identities (e.g., "college student," "successful adult"). The results showed significant improvements in students' grades, attendance, and behavior. The researchers concluded that activating identity-based motivation led students to see academic effort as meaningful and consistent with their self-concept.

Destin & Oyserman (2009) explored how socioeconomic background affects students' interpretation of school success. Their findings revealed that students from low-income families who saw academic success as identity-congruent (i.e., consistent with their self-image and future goals) were more motivated and performed better academically. This study highlighted the role of IBM in narrowing the achievement gap between students of different socioeconomic backgrounds.

Oyserman & Lewis (2017) conducted a meta-analysis of several IBM interventions and found that identity-based interventions significantly improved academic outcomes, especially when they included activities that linked current schoolwork with future identity (such as imagining oneself in a future profession). The meta-analysis emphasized that even brief, low-cost interventions could produce long-lasting motivational effects.

El-Hamamsy (2019) applied IBM theory in an Egyptian university context and found that students who reported a stronger connection between their academic tasks and their future identity demonstrated higher levels of persistence, academic confidence, and satisfaction with their studies. The study also noted that gender and field of study could moderate the strength of identity-based motivation.

In addition to academic performance, IBM has been linked to other important variables such as **resilience**, **goal commitment**, and **time management**. For instance, a study by **Shahbaz &**

Mahmood (2020) in Pakistan examined how identity salience influenced university students' ability to overcome obstacles. The findings indicated that those with high identity congruence regarding academic goals exhibited greater resilience and were more likely to continue pursuing their goals even when faced with setbacks.

Overall, these studies confirm that **identity-based motivation is a powerful psychological mechanism** that can shape not only academic outcomes but also broader aspects of personal development. They also underscore the importance of considering cultural and contextual factors when applying the theory in different educational settings.

Research Methodology and Procedures

The methodology used in the current research is the **Descriptive Research** method.

• Research Population:

The research population consists of students from the University of Dhi Qar, totaling **15,321** male and female students.

• Research Sample:

The researcher selected the sample using the **stratified random sampling** method, and its size reached **400** male and female students.

• Research Instrument:

Identity-Based Motivation Scale

Description of the Scale:

After reviewing the literature and previous related studies and due to the lack of a suitable instrument that measures identity-based motivation among university students, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, the researcher constructed the scale based on the **Identity-Based Motivation Theory by Oyserman (2007)**. The researcher formulated **24 items** for the scale, placing in front of each item **five response options**, ranging from: (Always applies to me – Applies to me – Sometimes applies to me – Does not apply to me – Never applies to me), with **five weights**: (1, 2, 3, 4, 5).

• Statistical Analysis of the Items:

Discriminatory Power:

The researcher extracted the discriminatory power of the scale items using the **extreme groups comparison method**, by applying the **two extreme samples approach**. The responses of each individual in the sample were scored and then arranged in descending order from the highest to the lowest total score. Then, **27%** of the questionnaires with the highest scores (called the upper group), totaling **108** students, and **27%** of the questionnaires with the lowest scores (called the lower group), also totaling **108** students, were selected.

Using the **independent samples t-test**, it was found that **all items were statistically significant in a positive direction**, as the calculated **t-value** was greater than the tabulated value of **1.96** at a significance level of **0.05** and a degree of freedom of **214**. **Table (1)** illustrates this.

No.	Upper	Upper Group	Lower	Lower Group	Calculated t-

	Group Mean	Std. Dev.	Group Mean	Std. Dev.	Value*
1	3.0370	1.34599	2.1481	1.15859	5.201
2	4.3796	1.00203	3.7778	1.14658	4.108
3	2.8148	1.60693	1.9907	1.15601	4.326
4	3.7315	1.14064	2.6481	1.20214	6.794
5	4.3148	0.94373	3.5648	1.12966	5.295
6	4.7222	0.54401	3.5926	1.06812	9.794
7	3.5741	1.12909	2.6667	1.23045	5.647
8	4.4444	0.75298	3.7778	0.99844	5.540
9	4.1574	1.14518	2.5926	1.30446	9.369
10	4.6944	0.63332	3.7315	1.07309	8.031
11	4.1019	1.21471	2.8519	1.25165	7.448
12	4.6852	0.71888	3.7037	1.06129	7.957
13	4.3981	0.87477	3.3796	1.25093	6.934
14	3.9722	1.21869	2.8981	1.28208	6.310
15	3.5556	1.33489	2.5463	1.17914	5.889
16	3.7963	1.15814	3.0093	1.29337	4.711
17	4.7130	0.62728	3.4444	1.13840	10.142
18	4.8333	0.44301	3.3889	1.17476	11.956
19	4.3611	0.86962	2.9815	1.14371	9.979
20	4.0093	1.24176	2.8981	1.14337	6.841
21	4.5556	0.75298	3.3704	1.09025	9.296
22	2.7778	1.32787	2.2963	1.09595	2.906
23	4.6667	0.73624	3.2963	1.23998	9.875

Table (1)

Independent Samples t-Test to Determine the Discriminatory Power of the Identity-Based Motivation Scale Items

Internal Consistency of the Items:

Correlation of each item with the total scale score:

To find the correlational relationship between the score of each item and the total score of the scale, using Pearson's correlation coefficient, it was found that the correlation coefficients of all scale items were statistically significant at the significance level (0.05) with degrees of freedom (398), meaning that they are greater than the tabulated value of (0.098). Table (2) illustrates this.

Item No.	Item-Total Correlation Coefficient	Item No.	Item-Total Correlation Coefficient	Item No.	Item-Total Correlation Coefficient
1	0.353	9	0.453	17	0.484
2	0.287	10	0.424	18	0.403
3	0.304	11	0.382	19	0.483
4	0.365	12	0.402	20	0.347
5	0.304	13	0.438	21	0.452

6	0.486	14	0.306	22	0.359
7	0.263	15	0.322	23	0.471
8	0.265	16	0.275		

Table (2)

Pearson Correlation Coefficient to determine the relationship between the item score and the total scale score

Correlation of the items with the domain to which they belong: For the purpose of verifying this procedure and knowing the correlational relationship between the items and the domain they belong to, the researcher used Pearson's correlation coefficient. It was found that all correlation coefficients are statistically significant, meaning valid, because the calculated values are greater than the tabulated value of (0.098) at the significance level (0.05) and degrees of freedom (398). Table (3) illustrates this.

Domain No.	**Domain**	**Number of Items**	**Item Numbers**	**Correlation Coefficients of Items with the Total Score**
1	Dynamic Construction	8	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8	0.472, 0.489, 0.491, 0.438, 0.500, 0.495, 0.471, 0.462
2	Readiness to Work	7	9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15	0.523, 0.445, 0.433, 0.479, 0.456, 0.475, 0.475
3	Difficulty Interpretation	8	16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23	0.513, 0.594, 0.639, 0.594, 0.578, 0.473, 0.436, 0.587

Table (3)

Pearson Correlation Coefficient to determine the relationship between the item scores and the domain they belong to

3- Internal Correlation Matrix (Correlation of Domains with the Total Scale Score): For verifying this procedure, the researcher used Pearson's correlation coefficient and found that all correlations are positive and significant. Table (4) illustrates this.

Domain	**1: Identity-Based Motivation**	**2: Dynamic Construction**	**3: Readiness to Work**	**4: Difficulty Interpretation**
1. Identity-Based Motivation	1	0.761	0.465	0.421
2. Dynamic Construction	0.761	1	0.790	0.463
3. Readiness to Work	0.465	0.790	1	0.809
4. Difficulty Interpretation	0.421	0.463	0.809	1

Table (4)

Internal Correlation Matrix for the Identity-Based Motivation Scale

Psychometric Properties of the Scale:

1- **Validity Indicators**

Face Validity:

This type of validity for the Identity-Based Motivation scale was achieved by presenting the scale to a group of experts numbering (14) experts and taking their opinions regarding the suitability of the items and instructions of the scale. Based on the experts' opinions and suggestions, some of the items were modified.

Construct Validity:

This type of validity was verified through the following indicators:

1- Correlation of each item with the total scale score, as previously indicated in Table (2).
2- Correlation of items with the domain they belong to, as previously shown in Table (3).
3- Internal correlation matrix, as previously indicated in Table (4).
4- Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

The researcher used CFA to confirm the domains that constitute the Identity-Based Motivation scale as presented in the model. The researcher verified the quality of the model used in constructing the scale by extracting results and assuming the fit between the covariance matrix of the 23 scale items included in the analysis and the hypothetical model matrix. Table (5) summarizes the above indicators, and Figure (1) shows the theoretical structure of the Identity-Based Motivation scale as presented in the AMOS program.

Indicator	**Value**	**Cutoff Criteria**
Ratio of Chi-square value to degrees of freedom	2.757	Less than 5
Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA)	0.065	Between 0.05 – 0.08
Comparative Fit Index (CFI)	0.880	Between 0 – 1
Goodness of Fit Index (GFI)	0.911	Between 0 – 1
Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index (AGFI)	0.923	Between 0 – 1
Hoelter Index (HOELTER)	201	200

Table (5)

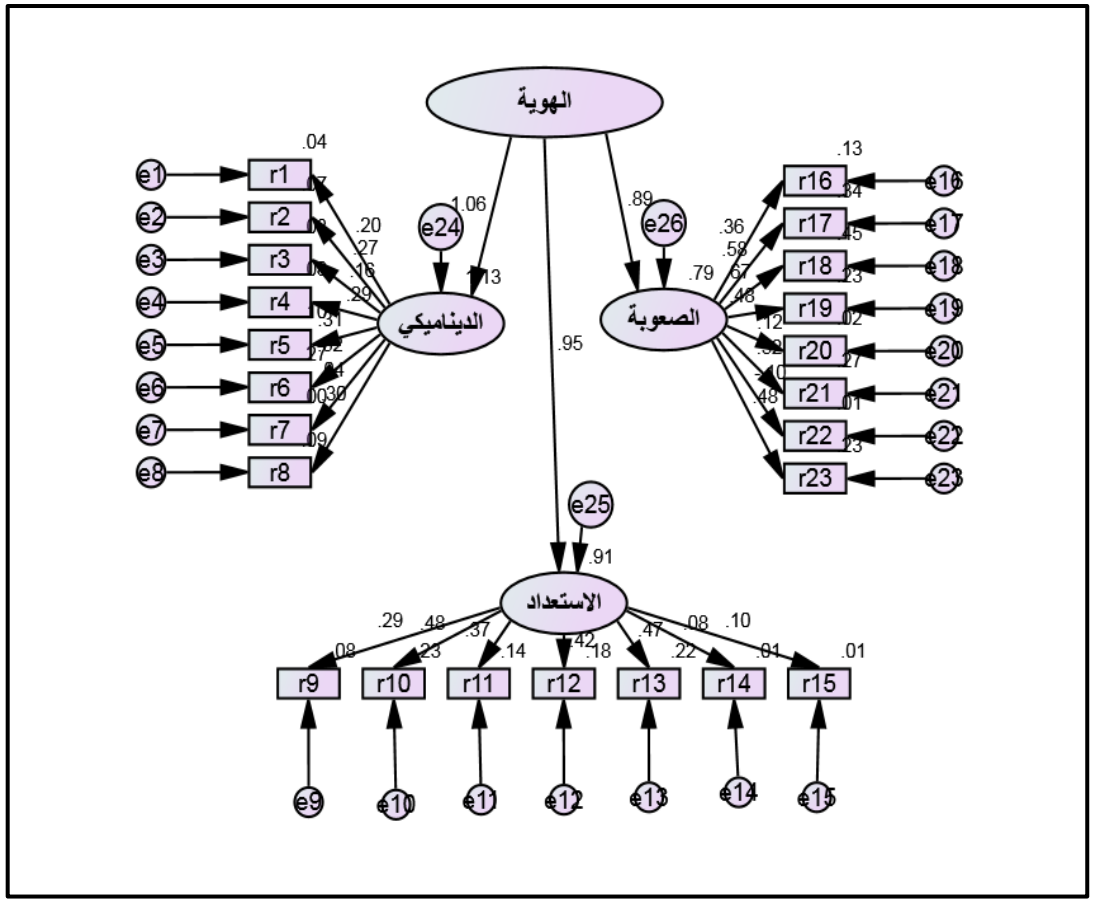

Figure (1)
(Theoretical Structure of the Identity-Based Motivation Scale as shown in AMOS)

Reliability Indicators:

The researcher extracted reliability indicators using both the test-retest method and Cronbach's alpha for the Identity-Based Motivation scale. The reliability coefficient via test-retest was (0.81) and Cronbach's alpha was (0.83).

Final Version of the Identity-Based Motivation Scale:

The final scale consists of 23 items, and the response alternatives are: (Always applies to me, Applies to me, Sometimes applies to me, Does not apply to me, Never applies to me).

Presentation and Discussion of Results

First Objective: Identifying Identity-Based Motivation among University Students

To achieve this objective, the final version of the Identity-Based Motivation scale was applied to the research sample of (400) students. Results showed that the mean score of the sample members was (82.520) with a standard deviation of (9.010), while the hypothetical mean was (69). To determine the significance of the difference between the calculated mean and the hypothetical mean, the researcher used the one-sample t-test. It was found that there is a

statistically significant difference, as the calculated t-value was (30.011), which is greater than the tabulated t-value (1.96) at the significance level (0.05) and degrees of freedom (399). This indicates that university students possess identity-based motivation. Table (6) illustrates this.

Variable	**Sample Size**	**Mean**	**Standard Deviation**	**Hypothetical Mean**	**Calculated t**	**Tabulated t**	**Degrees of Freedom**	**Significance Level (0.05)**
Identity-Based Motivation	400	82.520	9.010	69	30.011	1.96	399	Significant

Table (6)

One-Sample t-Test for Identifying Identity-Based Motivation among University Students

Third Objective: Statistically Significant Differences in Identity-Based Motivation Among University Students According to the Variables of Gender (Male – Female) and Academic Specialization (Scientific – Humanities).

To achieve this objective, the researcher extracted the means and standard deviations according to the demographic variables used in the study. Table (7) illustrates this:

Gender	**Specialization**	**N**	**Mean**	**Standard Deviation**
Male	Scientific	94	82.7128	9.34480
	Humanities	80	83.4375	8.27662
	Total	174	83.0460	8.85191
Female	Scientific	106	81.6226	9.35384
	Humanities	120	82.5500	8.94225
	Total	226	82.1150	9.12895
Total	Scientific	200	82.1350	9.34201
	Humanities	200	82.9050	8.67191
	Total Sample	400	82.5200	9.01014

Table (7)

Means and Standard Deviations of Identity-Based Motivation According to Gender and Specialization

To identify the differences in identity-based motivation according to the two variables (gender and specialization), the researcher used a two-way ANOVA analysis. Table (24) shows the results:

Source of Variation	**Sum of Squares**	**df**	**Mean Square**	**F Ratio***	**Significance (0.05)**
Gender	95.610	1	95.610	1.175	Not significant
Specialization	66.725	1	66.725	0.820	Not significant
Gender *	1.004	1	1.004	0.012	Not significant

Specialization					
Error	32235.538	396	81.403		
Total	32391.840	396			

Table (24)

Two-Way ANOVA Analysis to Identify Differences According to Gender and Specialization in Identity-Based Motivation

Gender: The calculated F-value for gender was (1.175), which is less than the tabulated F-value of (3.84) at the significance level (0.05) and degrees of freedom (1, 396), indicating that there are no statistically significant differences in identity-based motivation according to gender (male – female).

Specialization: The calculated F-value for specialization was (0.820), which is less than the tabulated F-value of (3.84) at the significance level (0.05) and degrees of freedom (1, 396), indicating no statistically significant differences in identity-based motivation according to specialization (scientific – humanities).

Interaction between Gender and Specialization: The calculated F-value for the interaction effect was (0.012), which is less than the tabulated F-value of (3.84) at the significance level (0.05) and degrees of freedom (1, 396), indicating no statistically significant differences in identity-based motivation due to the interaction between gender and specialization.

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