

*The Dynamics of National Identity Among Students in the Entikong Border Region:  
Decolonization, Rationality, and Kinship Ties*

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**Abstract**

Identity issues are a prominent topic in the Indonesia-Malaysia border region, particularly amidst the dynamics of transnationalism. Students in Entikong, specifically in Sontas Village, Indonesia, face challenges in forming their national citizenship identity, influenced by decolonization and rationality in choosing citizenship. Family ties and ancestral lands are key factors driving their decisions. This study employs a qualitative ethnographic approach and has been conducted over a span of more than five years. Initial findings reveal that transnationalism significantly shapes how students identify and construct their national identity. Civic Education teachers play a crucial role in this process, assisting students in understanding and navigating the complexities of national identity amidst cross-border cultural influences. The study demonstrates that the formation of national citizenship identity is shaped by rational considerations, family ties, and the legacies of decolonization. Through in-depth interviews and participatory observations, this research provides a comprehensive understanding of how students in border regions confront challenges and leverage opportunities in defining their national identity and nationalism. The findings of this research are expected to contribute to a deeper understanding of the dynamics of identity in border areas and the pivotal role of civic education in the context of transnationalism.

Keywords: Border Dynamics, Civic Education, Decolonization, National Identity, Transnationalism

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## Introduction

This paper discusses critical issues related to the formation of citizenship identity in the Indonesia-Malaysia border area, particularly in Sontas Village, Entikong. In the context of strong transnationalism in this border region, students face complex challenges in shaping their identity, influenced by the history of decolonization and rational considerations in choosing citizenship. The Entikong border area, especially Sontas Village, represents a unique setting in the dynamics of national identity due to its direct border with Malaysia. In this situation, students in the border area are influenced not only by Indonesian local culture and values but also by cross-border cultural interactions with Malaysia (Dewantara & Budimansyah, 2024). This phenomenon presents challenges in forming a national identity, where the influence of transnational culture and colonial history shapes how students perceive their citizenship and nationalism (Dewantara et al., 2023).

The decolonization process that has occurred in both countries adds complexity to the formation of national identity. Many students in this region have familial ties with residents of both countries, making their decisions regarding citizenship and national allegiance often influenced by considerations of blood relations and family connections. This creates an identity dilemma for students, who must decide whether they feel more attached to Indonesian identity, Malaysian identity, or a combination of both. Beyond familial ties, rationality in choosing citizenship is also an essential aspect. This choice is often based on pragmatic benefits, such as access to education, economic opportunities, and better social prospects in one country (Efriani et al., 2020). However, in this process, students frequently face uncertainty in maintaining a solid national identity, especially as this identity is continuously influenced by intense cross-border interactions.

Civic Education teachers play a crucial role in helping students understand the complexities of national identity amid transnationalism (Martono et al., 2021). Formal education serves as an essential medium for instilling citizenship values and nationalism. However, the strong influence of cross-border culture and families demands a more sensitive and contextual approach in teaching (Sulistyarini et al., 2021). Therefore, this research is crucial to explore how the dynamics of students' national identity in the Entikong border area are shaped by decolonization, rationality, and familial ties. Understanding these factors is expected to uncover more effective ways to support the development of a strong national identity in border areas through civic education.

This study aims to analyze the influence of decolonization on the formation of students' national identity in the Entikong border region, particularly in the context of the colonial history between Indonesia and Malaysia. Additionally, it seeks to identify the role of rationality in students' decision-making regarding their citizenship identity and how they choose citizenship based on practical considerations. The study also aims to uncover the role of familial ties and attachment to ancestral lands in shaping students' national identity, as well as its impact on their citizenship loyalty. Furthermore, this research explores the role of Civic Education teachers in assisting students in understanding and shaping their national identity amid the influence of transnationalism and cross-border culture. Finally, this study provides recommendations for the development of more contextualized civic education curricula and teaching approaches, particularly in border areas facing transnational challenges.

## **Method**

This study employs a multisite ethnographic method, a qualitative approach that allows researchers to examine the complex social, cultural, and identity dynamics across multiple interconnected locations (Blasco & Wardle, 2007). In the context of this research, multisite ethnography is used to explore the formation of students' national identity in the Entikong border region, influenced by transnationalism and cross-border interactions between Indonesia and Malaysia. This approach is well-suited for uncovering phenomena involving multiple cultural and geographical contexts, particularly when the process of identity formation occurs in various yet interconnected social sites.

Multisite ethnography enables researchers to examine different locations, such as schools, homes, and other social spaces on both sides of the border. The researcher interacts with students, teachers, parents, and local community members to understand how the formation of national identity is shaped by factors such as familial ties, decolonization, and rationality in choosing citizenship. Through this approach, the researcher can map broader social and cultural networks and observe how identity dynamics in one site relate to those in another.

Data collection is conducted through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation of daily life on both sides of the border. Interviews are carried out with students as the primary subjects of the study, as well as with Civic Education teachers, parents, and local community members to gain diverse perspectives. Participant observation is conducted in school environments and community settings to observe how national identity is manifested in everyday interactions, educational activities, and social life.

Additionally, data analysis is performed thematically, comparing and analyzing data from various sites to identify patterns, similarities, and differences in the formation of students' national identity. By using a multisite ethnographic approach, this study can reveal the cross-border dynamics that influence students in formulating their identity and how they navigate the challenges of understanding citizenship and nationalism in the border region. This method provides flexibility in examining complex and dynamic social phenomena, allowing researchers to capture the nuances of cross-border interactions and the influence of transnational culture on the formation of students' national identity.

## **Result and Discussion**

This study reveals that the formation of national identity among students in the Entikong border area, specifically in Sontas Village, is strongly influenced by three main factors: decolonization, rationality in citizenship selection, and kinship ties. These findings were obtained through participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and data analysis from various sites in the border area, including schools, homes, and communities.

### **The Influence of Decolonization**

The process of decolonization that occurred between Indonesia and Malaysia continues to impact the formation of students' national identity. In interviews with teachers and students, it was found that many historical narratives in schools, particularly in Citizenship Education lessons, emphasize the importance of post-colonial national identity. However, students often feel caught between the national history of Indonesia and the cultural influences from Malaysia, considering the historical relationship between the two countries. This is further exacerbated

by easy access to Malaysian media and culture, exposing them to transnational values and identities (Martono et al., 2022).

The decolonization process between Indonesia and Malaysia in the mid-20th century has had a significant impact on the formation of national identity, particularly for communities living in border areas between the two countries. In an educational context, the influence of this historical process is still felt today, especially in the formation of students' identities. In border areas like Entikong, the historical narratives and values taught in schools often conflict with the social and cultural realities that students experience daily. The decolonization that separated Indonesia and Malaysia into two sovereign states created a boundary that is not only geographic but also political and cultural. National history narratives in Indonesia often emphasize the struggle to maintain national identity post-colonial, an identity defined by national values, a spirit of unity, and loyalty to the state. In schools, particularly in Citizenship Education lessons, this narrative forms the core of students' national awareness. Teachers instill nationalistic values by emphasizing the importance of Indonesia's struggle for independence and the building of a sovereign state. However, interviews with teachers and students in border areas reveal the complexity of national identity formation among students. Students in Entikong, for example, are not only influenced by the national history narrative taught in schools but also by the reality of their lives near the border with Malaysia. The historical relationship between Indonesia and Malaysia, which includes a shared cultural heritage and cross-border interactions, creates a unique dynamic in the identity formation process (Barnsley & Bleiker, 2008).

One of the main challenges students face is navigating between their national identity as Indonesians and the cultural influences from Malaysia. On the one hand, students are taught to take pride in their national identity as Indonesian citizens, built through the struggle against colonialism. On the other hand, they live in an environment exposed to Malaysian culture and values, both through direct interactions with communities across the border and through media. Easy access to Malaysian television channels, music, food, and daily lifestyles makes students familiar with elements of Malaysian culture, which are often considered more modern or appealing. These cross-border interactions create a situation where students feel torn between two identities. For some students, their national identity as Indonesians becomes something abstract and distant from their everyday reality, especially when they often use the Malay language, which resembles the Malaysian dialect, in daily life. When asked about how they perceive their identity, many students acknowledge that they feel a cultural closeness to Malaysia while still maintaining loyalty to Indonesia. This situation illustrates the development of a transnational identity in the border area, which is not entirely bound by national boundaries but also not completely detached from national identity influences.

Citizenship Education teachers in the border area are aware of this challenge. They recognize that students face a dilemma in understanding and accepting their national identity, given the different realities of their lives compared to the national narratives taught in schools (Dewantara et al., 2023). To address this, teachers try to connect lessons about national identity with students' daily experiences. For example, they illustrate the importance of nationalistic values in a local context, such as maintaining cultural diversity at the border or building good relationships with people across the border without losing their sense of nationalism. However, this approach is often insufficient to counter the influence of Malaysian transnational media and culture. Students are more exposed to Malaysian popular culture through television channels and the internet, which offer entertainment and information that are often more engaging than the formal educational materials in schools. This influence not only shapes their

preferences for music, films, and fashion but also affects how they perceive their own identity. Many students admit they feel more comfortable using Malaysian Malay terms in daily communication, which often differ from the formal Indonesian language taught in schools.

Additionally, cross-border kinship relations further reinforce this transnational identity dynamic. Many students have relatives in Malaysia, whom they often visit or who visit them. These relationships create a sense of emotional and cultural closeness that is hard to ignore. In interviews, some students even expressed that they feel more accepted or valued when interacting with relatives in Malaysia compared to their experiences in school environments. This fact highlights the need for a more innovative approach to education in border areas. Teachers and policymakers need to consider the transnational realities faced by students as an integral part of their identity formation. Instead of emphasizing national identity exclusively, education should accommodate these transnational dynamics in a constructive manner. For instance, the curriculum could be designed to teach students about the importance of national identity while also appreciating the transnational values they experience. In this way, students can understand their identity as part of a global community without losing their sense of nationalism.

Ultimately, the formation of national identity among students in border areas like Entikong reflects the challenges and opportunities presented by globalization and decolonization. National identity is no longer something static or absolute, but dynamic and contextual, influenced by interactions between history, culture, and social realities. With an inclusive and contextual educational approach, students can be helped to navigate this complexity, enabling them to appreciate their identity as Indonesian citizens while understanding their role in an increasingly connected world.

### **Rationality in Choosing Citizenship**

Rationality plays a significant role in the formation of national identity. In choosing citizenship, many students consider economic and social factors. Students from families with relatives in Malaysia are more likely to contemplate changing their citizenship or seeking benefits from both sides of the border, such as access to better education or employment opportunities in Malaysia. This study finds that, despite being legally Indonesian citizens, many identify as "border residents" who utilize both countries for practical advantages. This suggests that national identity in this region is not static but dynamic and influenced by economic rationality.

The Indonesia-Malaysia border region has long been a place where national identity meets, clashes, and transforms. In this context, rationality plays a significant role in the formation of national identity. The choice to retain citizenship or even consider changing citizenship is often based not only on emotional aspects or patriotism but also on rational considerations related to economic and social factors. This phenomenon is particularly evident among students living in border areas, where access to facilities and opportunities in both countries is part of their daily life. Many students in border areas have relatives living in Malaysia. The geographical proximity and kinship ties create a unique dynamic in the formation of their identities. For example, extended families are often spread across both sides of the border, with some family members holding Indonesian citizenship and others Malaysian citizenship. This creates an environment where national borders are not perceived as strict barriers but rather as flexible administrative markers. In interviews with students and their families, it was found that many exploit this situation for practical advantages. For instance, a student may live and study in Indonesia but frequently visit Malaysia for better healthcare or to attend family events.

Conversely, some students with relatives in Malaysia use these connections to seek better job or educational opportunities in the country. This cross-border interaction pattern shows that their national identity is not solely shaped by formal citizenship but also by daily life experiences in an interconnected region (Dewantara & Budimansyah, 2024).

Economic rationality becomes one of the key factors in the formation of identity in the border region. The better economic opportunities in Malaysia often present an irresistible attraction. With higher minimum wages and more job opportunities, many families in the border region view Malaysia as a place that offers a better life. In this context, students are often raised with the understanding that their success may depend on their ability to take advantage of both sides of the border. Similarly, access to education becomes an important factor. The education system in Malaysia, considered more advanced by some families, is an attractive feature. Some students from Indonesia regularly cross the border to study in Malaysia, while others attend community-based education programs in the border region that integrate curricula from both countries. This cross-border educational experience shapes their views on national identity, where they see themselves not entirely as citizens of Indonesia or Malaysia but as individuals leveraging both for personal and family goals.

One interesting finding of this study is the emergence of the concept of identity as "border residents." Although legally Indonesian citizens, many students and families in the border region identify more as part of a cross-border community. This identity is based on their lived reality, where they routinely interact with the social, economic, and cultural systems of both countries. For example, a student may have friends on both sides of the border, speak the local languages used in both countries, and celebrate traditions influenced by both Indonesian and Malaysian cultures.

This "border resident" identity is not only practical but also reflects broader social dynamics. They do not view national boundaries as rigid dividing lines but rather as spaces that allow them to explore and take advantage of opportunities in both countries. In this context, national identity becomes more dynamic and complex, reflecting the interaction of legal, social, and economic factors. Rationality in choosing citizenship or considering opportunities in both countries has a significant impact on the national identity of students in the border region. In interviews, some students expressed that they felt more comfortable with their transnational identity, where they were not fully bound to one country. They saw themselves as individuals at the intersection of two cultures and systems, enabling them to capitalize on the best of both worlds. However, this rationality also presents challenges. Some students struggle to fully identify with one particular country or culture. They face pressure from their communities, schools, and families to "choose a side," whether it be Indonesia or Malaysia. This creates internal conflict and sometimes leads to feelings of alienation. Although they are legally Indonesian citizens, they often feel that their national identity is more fluid and complex than what is understood by formal systems.

This study shows that national identity in the Indonesia-Malaysia border region is not static, but dynamic and influenced by various factors, including economic and social rationality. Students' choices to capitalize on opportunities in both countries reflect their need to survive and thrive in this unique environment. Their identity as "border residents" shows that national borders are not obstacles but spaces that allow for interaction and opportunities. In this context, it is important for governments and educational institutions to understand these dynamics and create policies that support students in the border regions. By recognizing the complexity of their national identities, we can help them feel more accepted and supported on their journey

toward a better future. Ultimately, this dynamic national identity reflects human adaptability to an ever-changing environment and underscores the importance of a deeper understanding of life in border areas.

### **Kinship Bonds and Ancestral Land**

Students in border areas often have extended families spread across both sides of the border. These kinship ties significantly influence how they formulate their national identity. Students often identify themselves not only based on the country in which they reside but also through family networks that cross national boundaries. These bonds create a sense of identity that is not exclusively tied to Indonesia or Malaysia but to a larger familial community. This research also found that ancestral land and emotional connections to the Dayak and Malay cultures play an essential role in maintaining their local ties amidst the influences of globalization and transnationalism (Sulistyarini et al., 2021).

Kinship bonds and emotional ties to ancestral lands play a crucial role in shaping students' identities in the border areas between Indonesia and Malaysia. This region is not just a physical space but also a dynamic social and cultural space, where national identity is often negotiated through family networks and cultural values that transcend national borders. Students living in border areas often face a complex identity dilemma, where they must balance loyalty to their country of residence with emotional attachment to their extended families spread across both sides of the border. This phenomenon becomes increasingly important in the context of globalization and transnationalism. Extended families in border areas are often spread across both sides of the border, creating social networks that surpass traditional national identities. For students, these relationships serve as a critical foundation for shaping their identity. For example, in interviews with students in the Kalimantan border area, many reported having close relatives living in Sarawak, Malaysia. These relationships are not only social but also economic, with family members frequently supporting each other in areas such as employment, education, and daily needs.

These kinship relationships create a more flexible and dynamic identity. Many students identify themselves not only as Indonesian citizens but also as part of a "family community" that transcends national boundaries. For example, a student may enthusiastically celebrate Indonesia's Independence Day at school, yet at the same time feel emotionally connected to Malaysian culture due to having relatives living there. This phenomenon shows that national identity is not always exclusive but can be multiple and overlapping. Besides kinship networks, emotional connections to ancestral lands become an essential aspect of shaping students' identities in border areas. Ancestral land, often associated with Dayak and Malay cultures, provides students with a strong sense of attachment to their local communities. Dayak culture, for instance, has a value system and traditions that highly respect nature and ancestral lands as an integral part of their identity. Students growing up in this environment often take pride in their cultural heritage, even as they are exposed to Malaysian culture through media and social interactions (Ma, 2011).

In this study, it was found that ancestral land functions not only as a symbol of cultural identity but also as a reminder of the historical roots and traditions that shape their lives. A student living in the Kalimantan border area, for example, expressed that although they have relatives in Malaysia and often visit them, they still feel that the ancestral land in Indonesia is their "true home." This feeling is reinforced by cultural practices such as traditional rituals, religious ceremonies, and the use of local languages that continue to be preserved in their communities.

However, this local identity is not free from the challenges posed by globalization and transnationalism. Increasing access to media, technology, and cross-border mobility has made students in border areas more exposed to different values and cultures. Malaysian films, music, and television programs, for example, are often a part of students' everyday lives, creating a sense of connection with the culture of the neighboring country. In some cases, this can lead to internal conflicts, where students feel torn between their local identity as part of the Dayak or Malay communities and their transnational identity influenced by Malaysian culture. Globalization also presents challenges in preserving local traditions. Many students in border areas are beginning to feel that their cultural identity is less relevant in the context of an increasingly interconnected modern world. For example, one student expressed that while they value the Dayak traditions passed down by their family, they feel more connected to popular culture that they consume through Malaysian media. This reflects how globalization can weaken emotional ties to ancestral land and local traditions, especially among the younger generation.

In this context, students in border areas often have to negotiate complex identities. They interact not only with local and national cultures but also with transnational cultures that transcend national boundaries. This process often involves compromises, where students select elements of identity they find relevant or beneficial for their lives. For example, a student might choose to preserve Dayak traditional customs within the family but simultaneously adopt modern values influenced by Malaysian culture in their school or social life. This process reflects the dynamics of flexible and adaptive identities, where students can navigate various cultural influences without entirely abandoning their roots.

Kinship bonds and ancestral land play a critical role in shaping students' identities in the border areas between Indonesia and Malaysia. Kinship relationships that transcend national borders create a more inclusive and dynamic identity, while emotional connections to ancestral land help students maintain their ties to their local culture (Fakih, 2017; Von Lampe, 2011). However, globalization and transnationalism present new challenges, where local identity must be negotiated amidst global cultural influences. This research shows that national identity in border areas is not static but continues to evolve through the interaction of local, national, and transnational factors. In this context, it is essential for the government and local communities to support students in preserving their cultural identity while providing space for them to adapt to an increasingly interconnected world. With an inclusive and sustainable approach, students' identities in border areas can reflect the diversity and richness of cultures that cross national boundaries.

### **The Role of Civic Education Teachers**

Civic Education (PKn) teachers play a central role in guiding students to understand and internalize national identity. In border areas, this task becomes increasingly complex because students are often influenced by a transnational environment rich in cultural, value, and practice influences from neighboring countries, especially Malaysia. PKn teachers are expected not only to teach normative concepts of nationalism but also to accommodate the social realities of students living in a cross-border context. One of the main challenges faced by PKn teachers is the difference in national identity experiences between students living in border areas and those living in other regions. Many students have extended families spread across both sides of the border, making them feel emotionally close to the culture, traditions, and values of Malaysia. In some cases, this influence is further reinforced by easy access to media, education, and job opportunities in the neighboring country. This creates a more fluid identity, where



students do not feel fully bound to any particular country (Dewantara et al., 2020; Dewantara et al., 2023).

In this situation, conventional approaches that emphasize nationalism often prove less effective. Teachers who only teach the material textually without connecting it to students' real-life experiences risk losing relevance. This research found that students who felt that PKn teachings were not relevant to their lives tended to disregard the messages conveyed, even considering them as normative but far removed from their everyday reality. However, some teachers in these areas have tried to apply a more contextual and dialogic approach to bridge this gap. They acknowledge the cross-border reality faced by students and integrate it into their teaching methods. For example, teachers not only teach the formal definition of nationalism but also discuss how national identity can remain relevant in the context of globalization and cross-border interactions. Teachers also encourage students to share personal experiences related to life in the border area, such as their relationships with family in Malaysia or the cross-border cultural influences they experience.

This dialogic approach not only enriches learning but also provides space for students to reflect on their own identities. Teachers who use this method are more successful in instilling nationalism values because students feel that their experiences are recognized and valued. Furthermore, teachers strive to demonstrate that national identity does not have to be in conflict with cross-border realities. They teach that students can remain proud as Indonesian citizens while respecting and utilizing their cross-border relationships. Teachers also present learning materials that are relevant to the local context, such as the history of the Indonesia-Malaysia border, local cultural contributions to national identity, and the role of border areas in strengthening bilateral relations. This helps students understand the importance of their region on the national map, thereby fostering a stronger connection to national identity.

Although this approach has shown positive results, teachers still face various challenges. One of the challenges is the limited curriculum, which is often not flexible enough to adjust the material to local needs. Additionally, not all teachers have adequate training to apply this dialogic approach. Support from the government, both in the form of training and curriculum revisions, is essential to strengthen the effectiveness of PKn teaching in border areas. Overall, the role of PKn teachers in border areas is not limited to delivering lessons but also includes guiding students in formulating their national identity. Through contextual and dialogic approaches, teachers can help students integrate nationalism values with the cross-border realities they face. This step is important to ensure that students maintain a sense of pride and attachment to Indonesia, even while living in an environment saturated with transnational influences.

## **Conclusions**

This study shows that the formation of national identity among students in the Entikong border area is a complex and dynamic process, influenced by various factors. Decolonization, rationality, and kinship ties play significant roles in how students perceive their citizenship and identity. These factors shape students' understanding of their national belonging, not merely in terms of state borders but also through familial and cultural connections that transcend those borders. Additionally, despite the importance of Civic Education teachers in guiding students to understand and internalize national identity, the transnational challenges in border regions demand a more flexible and contextual educational approach. Students in these areas often navigate multiple influences from both Indonesia and Malaysia, creating a fluid and sometimes

conflicting sense of identity. Therefore, educational strategies must consider these diverse, cross-border influences to ensure that students can develop a sense of national pride while also understanding and appreciating their broader, transnational context. With these findings, this research is expected to provide insights for the development of more effective educational strategies that can support the formation of national identity in border areas, fostering a more inclusive and adaptable understanding of citizenship in a globalized world.

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