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(IJMOE)**[www.gaexcellence.com/ijmoe](http://www.gaexcellence.com/ijmoe)**EDUCATION AS A MEDIUM FOR NATIONAL IDENTITY  
FORMATION AMONG STATELESS CHILDREN IN SABAH:  
A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**Suzanah Jumat<sup>1\*</sup>, Badariah Saibeh<sup>2</sup><sup>1</sup> Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Universiti Malaysia Sabah [ohashim75@gmail.com](mailto:ohashim75@gmail.com) <https://orcid.org/0009-0002-1502-3507><sup>2</sup> Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Universiti Malaysia Sabah [badariah\\_sh@ums.my](mailto:badariah_sh@ums.my) <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6423-7996>

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**Abstract:**

Education is widely recognised as a central mechanism for shaping national identity, particularly in plural societies such as Malaysia where social cohesion remains a key concern. However, prevailing frameworks of identity formation are largely anchored in formal education systems, thus overlooking the experiences of marginalised groups excluded from institutional structures. In Sabah, stateless children face restricted access to formal schooling, resulting not only in educational inequality but also limited participation in structured processes of national socialisation. These conditions indicate a conceptual gap in understanding how identity is formed outside formal institutional settings. This paper presents a conceptual framework that reconceptualises education as a multidimensional and socially embedded process occurring within alternative learning environments, including community-based learning centres, non-governmental educational initiatives, and informal education spaces such as the Children's Human Development Centre (PPKK) in Sabah. The framework integrates educational inputs, socialisation processes, individual experiences, and socio-cultural contexts as interacting dimensions that shape identity construction. Drawing on the nation-of-intent perspective, this paper conceptualises national identity as a socially constructed and continuously negotiated process rather than a fixed or inherited attribute. Within this framework, identity is understood as evolving through the interaction between structural conditions, educational experiences, and everyday social practice. The paper further discusses the conceptual implications and potential role of alternative education in supporting inclusive identity formation among stateless children.

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## Introduction

Malaysia is widely recognised as a plural society characterised by significant ethnic, cultural, and linguistic diversity, making the formation of a cohesive national identity a central concern within the national education system (Naidu & Rajanthiran, 2021; Uslim et al., 2022). In this context, education is not merely positioned as a mechanism for knowledge transmission, but rather as a strategic institutional medium that shapes shared values, fosters collective consciousness, and structures the meaning of national belonging among younger generations (Naidu & Rajanthiran, 2021; Abu Bakar, 2014; Mahadir et al., 2019). Historically, the Malaysian education system has undergone a gradual transformation from a fragmented colonial structure into a unified national framework designed to promote social integration and nation-building (Uslim et al., 2022; Rauf & Jabeen, 2021). In this regard, the evolution of the education system reflects its central role as a state instrument in shaping national identity within a diverse society.

However, this institutional emphasis on education as a unifying force presupposes universal access to formal schooling, an assumption that does not fully reflect the realities of marginalised populations (Pang et al., 2019; Loganathan et al., 2021; Mohd Hed et al., 2022). In Sabah, the presence of stateless children who lack legal documentation has resulted in systematic exclusion from formal education systems (Pang et al., 2019; Loganathan et al., 2021; Mohd Hed et al., 2022). This exclusion extends beyond limited access to schooling, as it also restricts participation in structured processes of national socialisation, including exposure to national curriculum, civic education, and institutional practices that reinforce identity formation (Pang et al., 2019; Saefudin et al., 2024; Loganathan et al., 2021). Consequently, the issue is not merely educational inequality but also the potential marginalisation of identity development among affected populations,

Despite this, existing discourse on national identity formation in Malaysia remains predominantly centred on formal education systems, with limited attention given to populations excluded from institutional schooling structures (Idris et al., 2012; Hussin, 2020; Abdullah et al., 2025). Existing studies largely examine how curriculum design, civic education, and institutional pedagogies contribute to identity formation within state-regulated educational environments (Salleh et al., 2021; Abang Muis et al., 2024; Naidu & Rajanthiran, 2021). However, limited scholarly attention has been directed toward understanding how national identity is constructed among stateless children who are systematically excluded from formal education systems in Sabah (Loganathan et al., 2021; Pang et al., 2019; Mohd Hed et al., 2022).

As a result, current frameworks remain insufficient in explaining how belonging and national attachment are negotiated among stateless children within alternative education contexts.

More specifically, previous studies on alternative education in Sabah have primarily focused on issues of educational access, legal exclusion, and learning continuity among undocumented and stateless populations (Pang et al., 2019; Loganathan et al., 2021; Nawi et al., 2024). While these studies provide important insights into educational marginalisation, they rarely examine how identity is socially constructed through everyday educational experiences, language practices, social interactions, and informal socialisation processes within alternative learning spaces such as PPKK. Although PPKK does not operate within formal national curriculum structures, elements such as the use of Malay language, structured routines, and social interactions are still present, creating conditions that may support identity formation through informal and experiential processes (Gamiring & Saibeh, 2022; Loganathan et al., 2021; Allerton, 2024). In this context, alternative education spaces function as meaningful sites where identity can be constructed despite the absence of formal institutional frameworks. NGO-supported learning initiatives, and informal schooling spaces such as PPKK that provide structured educational experiences for stateless and undocumented children outside the national education system.

This highlights a significant conceptual gap concerning the mechanisms through which national identity may emerge outside formal schooling structures. Therefore, this paper proposes a conceptual framework that reconceptualises education as a multidimensional and socially embedded process through which identity formation may occur among stateless children in Sabah.

## Literature Review

The relationship between education and national identity formation has been widely discussed within sociological and educational discourse, particularly in plural societies where identity is continuously constructed through institutional and social processes (Salleh et al., 2021; Abang Muis et al., 2024; Ebrahimi et al., 2024). Within mainstream education systems, national identity is typically structured through formal mechanisms such as curriculum design, pedagogical practices, and co-curricular activities, all of which function as instruments for transmitting shared values, national narratives, and civic responsibilities (Salleh et al., 2021; Abang Muis et al., 2024; Naidu & Rajanthiran, 2021). While this perspective emphasises the role of institutional structures, it often assumes a uniform process of identity formation across diverse social contexts.

The curriculum is frequently positioned as a central mechanism in shaping identity, as it determines the selection of historical narratives, cultural symbols, and language practices that are legitimised within the education system (Abang Muis et al., 2024; Khairul Adilah et al., 2025; Qian, 2021). Through repeated exposure, these elements contribute to the standardisation of identity, reinforcing a shared understanding of national belonging (Abang Muis et al., 2024; Salleh et al., 2021; Ebrahimi et al., 2024). However, such an approach may also limit the recognition of diverse identity experiences, particularly among individuals who do not fully participate in formal education systems (Loganathan et al., 2021; Nawi et al., 2024). In this regard, the curriculum operates both as a unifying instrument and a potential source of exclusion in the process of identity formation.

From a pedagogical standpoint, teacher-centred approaches have been criticised for restricting deeper engagement with identity-related values, as learning tends to prioritise memorisation over critical reflection (Tan et al., 2017; Yaacob & Toh, 2021; Nadia & Zurina, 2023). While such methods may facilitate cognitive understanding, they may not sufficiently support the internalisation of identity at an affective level (Tan et al., 2017; Ting & Zainol Abidin, 2023; Nadia & Zurina, 2023). In contrast, learner-centred and experiential approaches are often associated with stronger engagement, as they enable individuals to actively construct meaning through interaction, reflection, and participation (Nadia & Zurina, 2023; Ong & Ting, 2023).

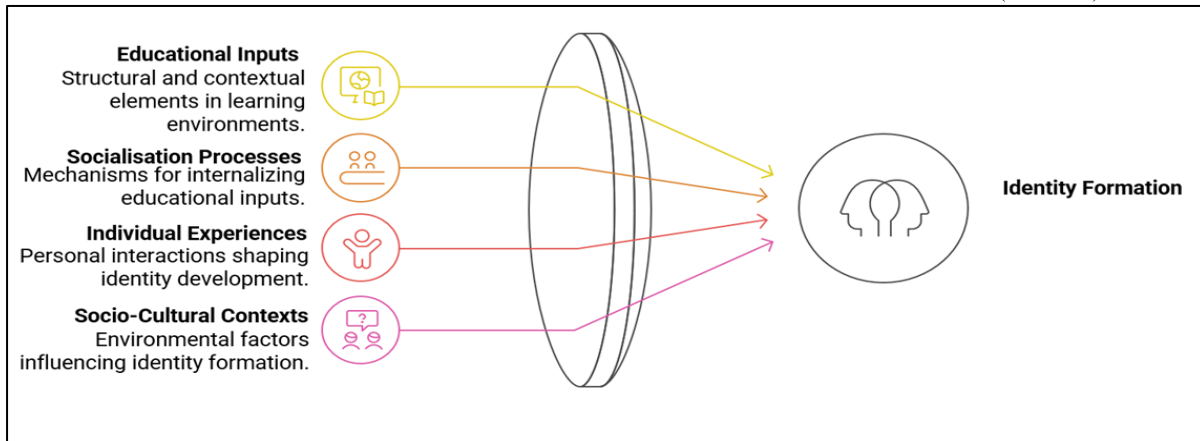
Despite these insights, existing literature remains largely confined to formal educational settings, with limited exploration of how identity formation occurs in alternative contexts (Loganathan et al., 2021; Pang et al., 2019; Nawi et al., 2024). This presents a conceptual limitation, as it overlooks the experiences of marginalised populations such as stateless children, whose educational pathways differ significantly from those assumed in mainstream models (Loganathan et al., 2021; Pang et al., 2019; Mohd Hed et al., 2022). In such contexts, the absence of formal curriculum structures challenges the applicability of traditional identity formation frameworks.

To address this limitation, the concept of nation-of-intent offers a more flexible theoretical perspective by emphasising identity as a socially constructed and evolving process shaped through interaction and lived experience (Mahadir et al., 2019; Liew & Hassan, 2021; Siti Nurbaya Mohd Nor, 2021). This perspective emphasises that national belonging may emerge through social practices, language use, and everyday interactions, particularly within marginalised educational settings.

Within the context of this study, the nation-of-intent perspective provides the theoretical basis for understanding identity formation as an ongoing social process rather than a fixed legal or ethnic status. The framework assumes that national identity may be gradually constructed through repeated exposure to language practices, institutional routines, interpersonal interactions, and shared social experiences within alternative learning environments. In this regard, the proposed conceptual framework positions educational inputs, socialisation processes, individual experiences, and socio-cultural contexts as interconnected dimensions through which identity is continuously negotiated and internalised among stateless children in Sabah.

## **Conceptual Framework**

This paper proposes a conceptual framework that positions education as a multidimensional process of national identity formation, integrating both structural and experiential dimensions within alternative learning environments. Rather than viewing identity formation as a direct outcome of formal instruction, this framework conceptualises it as the result of continuous interaction between multiple interrelated components, including educational inputs, socialisation processes, individual experiences, and broader socio-cultural contexts. Figure 1 presents the proposed conceptual framework, illustrating how these interconnected dimensions collectively contribute to the formation of national identity among stateless children in Sabah. The framework highlights that identity formation does not occur in isolation but emerges through layered and dynamic processes shaped by both internal and external influences.



**Figure 1: Conceptual Framework Of Education As A Medium For National Identity Formation Among Stateless Children In Sabah.**

As illustrated in Figure 1, educational inputs represent the structural and contextual elements embedded within the learning environment, including language use, institutional routines, and basic learning content. These inputs function as the foundational layer through which values, norms, and meanings are introduced to learners (Othman et al., 2021; Abdullah et al., 2025; Hussin, 2020). In alternative education settings such as Children’s Human Development Centre (*Pusat Pembangunan Kemanusiaan Kanak-Kanak*, PPKK), these elements may not be formally standardised, yet they continue to play a significant role in shaping learners’ exposure to national values (Gamiring & Saibeh, 2022; Pang et al., 2019; Loganathan et al., 2021).

Socialisation processes refer to the mechanisms through which educational inputs are internalised (Nadia & Khairuddin, 2023; Hussin, 2020; Othman et al., 2021). These processes occur through interactions within the learning environment, including teacher–student engagement, peer relationships, and participation in routine activities (Nadia & Khairuddin, 2023; Barone, 2004; Pang et al., 2019). Through these interactions, learners gradually construct meaning and develop an understanding of social expectations, reflecting the role of education as an interactive and socially embedded environment (Nadia & Khairuddin, 2023; Abdullah et al., 2025; Othman et al., 2021). In this sense, socialisation processes function as a foundational mechanism through which identity begins to take shape within educational settings.

In addition to structured interactions, individual experiences represent a critical dimension influencing identity development (Mahadir et al., 2019; Nadia & Zurina, 2023; Lundell et al., 2019). Personal encounters, emotional responses, and lived realities shape how learners interpret and respond to educational inputs (Nadia & Zurina, 2023; Lee, 2009; Mahadir et al., 2019). For stateless children, whose experiences are often shaped by marginalisation and exclusion, these factors may significantly influence their sense of belonging and attachment to the national context (Loganathan et al., 2021; Allerton, 2014; Torok & Ball, 2021). Consequently, individual experiences mediate how identity is perceived and internalised in contexts marked by structural vulnerability.

Furthermore, socio-cultural contexts function as broader environmental influences that shape identity formation (King, 2021; Khalidah Khalid Ali, 2022; Mahadir et al., 2019). Community norms, cultural practices, and social conditions interact with both educational inputs and individual experiences, contributing to the diversity of identity outcomes (Mahadir et al., 2019;

Lyu et al., 2024; Su, 2024). These contextual factors highlight that identity formation is not solely determined by educational structures but is also influenced by the surrounding social environment (Hussin, 2020; Radzlan et al., 2025; Abdullah et al., 2025). Thus, identity emerges as a socially situated construct shaped by continuous interaction with the broader environment.

The convergence of these components can be understood as a filtering and interpretative process, where multiple influences interact before contributing to identity formation (Nadia & Zurina, 2023; Su, 2024; Ang et al., 2017). This suggests that identity is not directly transmitted but is mediated through complex processes of interpretation, negotiation, and adaptation (Nadia & Zurina, 2023; Ang et al., 2017; Bing et al., 2021). In this regard, identity formation reflects an active process of meaning-making rather than passive acceptance of imposed structures.

Importantly, the framework conceptualises identity formation as a dynamic and iterative process rather than a fixed or linear progression (Ang et al., 2017; Nadia & Zurina, 2023; Su, 2024). The continuous interaction between educational inputs, socialisation processes, individual experiences, and socio-cultural contexts reflects the evolving nature of identity, which aligns with the theoretical perspective of nation-of-intent (Ang et al., 2017; King, 2021; Choubey & Sharma, 2024). Overall, identity formation is best understood as an ongoing and evolving process shaped by multiple interacting dimensions over time.

Overall, this conceptual framework provides a more inclusive and contextually grounded understanding of national identity formation by recognising the role of alternative education environments as meaningful spaces for identity development, particularly among marginalised populations such as stateless children in Sabah.

## **Methodology**

### ***Research Design***

This paper adopts a conceptual research approach supported by a qualitative methodological orientation to explore the role of education as a medium for national identity formation among stateless children in Sabah. The conceptual design allows for theoretical synthesis and critical interpretation of existing literature, while proposing a structured framework that can guide future empirical studies. This approach is particularly appropriate for examining identity formation, which involves complex and context-dependent social processes.

### ***Participants***

The proposed framework involves multiple stakeholders who play significant roles within the alternative education ecosystem (Loganathan et al., 2021; Saefudin et al., 2024; Cingir, 2025). These include teachers as primary facilitators of learning, officers from the National Security Council (*Majlis Keselamatan Negara*, MKN) who provide administrative oversight, parents as agents of family-based socialisation, and representatives from non-governmental organisations such as Bulan Sabit Merah Malaysia, which contribute to educational and welfare support (Loganathan et al., 2021; Abdullah et al., 2023; Musaiyadah Ahmadun & Nasuha Nurshid, 2024). The inclusion of these participants allows for a comprehensive understanding of identity formation from multiple perspectives (Loganathan et al., 2021; Mohd Ali et al., 2025; Retnam et al., 2024).

### ***Data Collection Instruments***

Data collection in this study is proposed to be conducted through semi-structured interviews in order to obtain in-depth insights into participants' experiences and perceptions (Esmaeil et al., 2024; Leow et al., 2022; Namoco et al., 2023). This approach enables the researcher to explore the subjective meanings constructed by participants within the educational context under study. In this regard, the flexibility of semi-structured interviews allows participants to elaborate their views in a more detailed and reflective manner. Consequently, this method is appropriate for examining complex social phenomena such as identity formation. The use of this approach underscores the importance of understanding participants' experiences in a contextualised and nuanced way.

In addition, non-structured observations are proposed to capture real-life interactions, classroom dynamics, and social practices within the PPKK setting (Dass & Ferguson, 2016; Mohammadi et al., 2020; Umar et al., 2022). This method allows the researcher to observe behaviours and interactions that may not be explicitly articulated during interviews. Within this context, observation provides direct and situational data that complement verbal accounts. Therefore, this approach strengthens the understanding of learning experiences in their natural setting. The inclusion of observation highlights the significance of everyday practices in shaping the phenomena under investigation.

Furthermore, document analysis of institutional materials and learning resources is incorporated to support data triangulation and enhance the validity of the study findings (Manjet & Phan, 2024; Mohammadi et al., 2020; Bostic et al., 2019). This process involves examining documents such as curricula, instructional modules, and supporting materials used within PPKK. In this respect, documents function as secondary data sources that reflect the formal structure of the educational system. Consequently, the integration of multiple data sources enables a more comprehensive interpretation of the research context. This approach emphasises that the credibility of findings is strengthened through systematic triangulation.

### ***Data Analysis***

Data analysis in this study is proposed to adopt a thematic analysis approach, involving systematic processes of coding, categorisation, and interpretation of qualitative data (Tun & Khairuddin, 2023; Kiger & Varpio, 2020; Xu & Zammit, 2020). This approach enables the researcher to organise complex data into meaningful units that reflect participants' experiences and perspectives. In this regard, thematic analysis provides a structured yet flexible framework for examining qualitative data. Consequently, it is particularly suitable for exploring socially constructed phenomena such as identity formation. The use of this method highlights the importance of systematic data organisation in qualitative inquiry.

The analytical process aims to identify recurring patterns and themes that explain how educational processes contribute to identity formation (Lochmiller, 2021; Naeem et al., 2023; Sarraf-Yazdi et al., 2021). Through iterative coding and comparison, the researcher is able to uncover underlying meanings embedded within participants' narratives. In this context, themes are not merely descriptive but serve as analytical constructs that capture broader social processes. Therefore, thematic analysis facilitates a deeper understanding of how educational experiences shape identity. This process underscores the interpretive nature of qualitative analysis in examining complex social realities.

The analysis is further guided by the conceptual framework to ensure alignment between theoretical constructs and empirical interpretation (Xu & Zammit, 2020; Sarraf-Yazdi et al., 2024; Roberts et al., 2019). In this respect, the framework functions as an analytical lens that informs the coding and theme development process. It ensures that the findings are not interpreted in isolation but are anchored within established theoretical perspectives. As a result, the integration of theory enhances the coherence and rigour of the analysis. This alignment demonstrates that qualitative analysis is both data-driven and theory-informed, contributing to a more robust interpretation of the research findings.

## Discussion

Within the Malaysian educational landscape, national identity formation has traditionally been conceptualised through formal institutional structures, where curriculum design, policy frameworks, and standardised pedagogical practices operate as primary mechanisms of socialisation (Brown, 2007; Abdullah et al., 2025; Ambya et al., 2025). These institutional arrangements are designed to ensure that shared values, national narratives, and civic responsibilities are systematically transmitted across diverse student populations (Brown, 2007; Pang et al., 2019; Saefudin et al., 2024). However, such a perspective assumes universal access to formal education, which may not adequately reflect contexts marked by legal exclusion and social marginalisation, particularly among stateless children in Sabah (Loganathan et al., 2021; Mohd Hed et al., 2022; Loo & Lagason, 2022). This limitation indicates a gap between policy assumptions and the lived realities of marginalised groups.

From a conceptual perspective, alternative education contexts can be understood as significant yet under-theorised spaces for identity construction (Saibeh, 2018; Gamiring & Saibeh, 2022; Cingir, 2025). In situations where access to formal schooling is restricted, institutions such as Pusat Pembangunan Kemanusiaan Kanak-Kanak function as alternative sites of socialisation that provide structured learning environments (Pang et al., 2019; Pang et al., 2016; Rahman et al., 2018). Although these institutions operate outside formal educational systems, they nevertheless facilitate processes through which identity formation may occur via non-institutionalised yet organised practices (Pang et al., 2019; Saefudin et al., 2024; Allerton, 2024). This condition suggests that alternative educational spaces also function as important sites of social belonging and identity negotiation.

Within such contexts, the absence of formal curriculum structures does not necessarily preclude the possibility of identity formation (Pang et al., 2019; Saefudin et al., 2024; Loganathan et al., 2021). Rather, identity can be understood as emerging through indirect and informal mechanisms embedded in everyday educational practices (Torok & Ball, 2021; Allerton, 2017; Pang et al., 2016). This perspective shifts the focus from formal institutional design to lived experiences within alternative learning environments. Consequently, identity formation is viewed as a continuous and socially mediated process rather than a purely structured outcome.

For example, the use of Malay language as a medium of communication may be interpreted not only as a functional linguistic practice but also as a symbolic connection to the broader national context (How et al., 2015; Chan Swee Heng & Tan, 2006; Phan et al., 2013). In this sense, language operates as both a communicative tool and a marker of social belonging. Through repeated use in daily interactions, it facilitates the internalisation of shared meanings associated with national identity. This highlights the role of language in mediating the relationship between individual experience and collective identity.

Similarly, institutional routines, including classroom organisation and behavioural expectations, contribute to the internalisation of social norms associated with national culture (Tun & Khairuddin, 2023; Pang et al., 2019; Ngui et al., 2017). These routine practices structure students' daily experiences and shape their understanding of acceptable behaviour within a broader social framework. Over time, such practices reinforce patterns of discipline, interaction, and participation that reflect national values. This suggests that identity formation occurs not only through explicit instruction but also through the repetition of everyday institutional practices.

From this perspective, identity formation within alternative education settings can be understood as inherently dynamic and context-dependent, shaped by multiple intersecting factors such as lived experiences, cultural backgrounds, and socio-structural conditions (Loganathan et al., 2021; Allerton, 2017; Torok & Ball, 2021). Unlike formal education systems that emphasise standardisation and uniformity, alternative learning environments tend to allow more flexible and negotiated forms of identity construction (Pang et al., 2019; Ngui et al., 2017; Allerton, 2024). This distinction highlights the importance of recognising variability in how identity is formed across different educational contexts. Consequently, identity should not be viewed as a fixed outcome, but as a process that evolves through continuous interaction between individuals and their environments.

In this regard, identity formation is not solely determined by institutional design, but emerges from the interplay between structural conditions and experiential processes (Saefudin et al., 2024; Allerton, 2020; Lee & Don, 2021). Structural factors such as legal status, access to education, and state policies shape the opportunities available to individuals, while experiential dimensions influence how these conditions are interpreted and internalised. Within the context of Sabah, these dynamics are particularly evident among stateless and undocumented children, whose educational experiences are shaped by both exclusion and adaptation. This interplay suggests that identity formation is both constrained and enabled by broader socio-political structures.

At the same time, cultural and transnational influences further complicate the process of identity construction in alternative education settings. Exposure to multiple cultural frameworks, language practices, and cross-border identities creates hybrid forms of belonging among learners. These conditions reflect the realities of transnational life, where individuals negotiate multiple identities simultaneously. As a result, identity formation becomes a layered and fluid process rather than a singular or uniform trajectory. This perspective underscores the need to examine identity formation as a multifaceted and evolving phenomenon within alternative education contexts.

Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that the absence of formal recognition, standardised curricula, and institutional legitimacy may constrain the extent to which national identity can be fully internalised within alternative education settings (Loganathan et al., 2021; Pang et al., 2019; Ismail & Samsudin, 2023). In such contexts, the lack of formal alignment with national education systems limits the structured transmission of civic values and national narratives. As a result, identity formation processes may not achieve the same level of coherence as those facilitated within formal schooling environments. This highlights the structural limitations inherent in non-formal educational provision.

Furthermore, without clear alignment with national education policies and broader institutional frameworks, identity formation may remain partial or fragmented, particularly in relation to civic participation and legal belonging (Allerton, 2017; Allerton, 2024; Ahmadun et al., 2025). Learners in these settings may develop a sense of cultural or social belonging, yet remain excluded from formal recognition within the nation-state. This disjuncture reflects the tension between lived identity and institutional validation. Consequently, identity formation in such contexts is often characterised by discontinuity and ambiguity.

These conditions underscore the structural constraints associated with educational exclusion and point to the need for a more inclusive conceptualisation of identity formation processes (Saibeh, 2018; Cingir, 2025; Haque et al., 2025). A broader framework is required to account for the diverse pathways through which identity is constructed beyond formal institutions. Such an approach recognises the role of alternative education as both a site of opportunity and limitation. It further emphasises the importance of integrating marginalised learners into more inclusive educational and policy frameworks.

Therefore, this paper argues for the need to reconceptualise educational approaches in a manner that bridges formal and alternative systems, ensuring that all individuals, regardless of legal or social status, have access to meaningful processes of identity formation. Such a reconceptualisation requires greater inclusivity in educational policy, recognition of alternative learning spaces, and integration of experiential learning processes into broader national frameworks. By doing so, education may function more effectively as a transformative medium for fostering a cohesive and inclusive national identity within diverse and complex social contexts.

This paper contributes theoretically by extending the nation-of-intent perspective into the context of alternative education and stateless populations, areas that remain underexplored within existing identity formation literature. The proposed framework expands conventional understandings of national identity by demonstrating that processes of belonging and social attachment may also emerge through informal educational experiences, everyday interactions, and community-based learning environments outside formal schooling systems. In terms of practical relevance, the framework provides conceptual guidance for policymakers, educational stakeholders, and non-governmental organisations in Malaysia to recognise alternative education spaces as important sites of social integration and identity development among marginalised children.

## **Conclusion**

This paper argues that education should not be narrowly understood as a formal institutional mechanism, but rather as a broader and dynamic process of socialisation that extends beyond conventional schooling structures. Within the Malaysian context, where national identity formation is predominantly anchored in formal education systems, this conceptual discussion highlights the limitations of such a perspective when applied to marginalised populations, particularly stateless children in Sabah who experience structural exclusion from mainstream education. By expanding the focus beyond formal institutions, education can be understood as a more inclusive process of social belonging among marginalised populations.

From a theoretical standpoint, the application of the *nation-of-intent* perspective enables a more nuanced understanding of national identity as a socially constructed and evolving process. This paper proposes that identity formation may emerge through the interaction between institutional elements and experiential dimensions, including language use, social practices, and everyday interactions within alternative learning environments. In this regard, alternative education settings such as PPKK may be conceptually positioned as meaningful spaces for identity development, despite operating outside formal educational frameworks.

In terms of implications, this paper highlights the need for more inclusive and context-responsive educational approaches that recognise the role of alternative learning spaces in fostering identity formation. Bridging the gap between formal and alternative education systems may enhance the capacity of education to function as a unifying force within diverse societies. Future research is therefore recommended to empirically examine the proposed conceptual framework in order to refine its theoretical constructs and extend its applicability across different educational contexts.

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