



Article history:
Received 08 April 2026
Revised 12 September 2026
Accepted 19 September 2026
Initial Publication 21 September 2026
Final Publication 01 November 2026

International Journal of Education and Cognitive Sciences

Volume 7, Issue 6, pp 1-17



E-ISSN: 3041-8828

Explaining the Factors Influencing the Construction of National Identity in Iraqi School Environments

Riyadh. Mohammed Obaid Alkseerat¹, Davood. Tahmasebzadeh^{2*}, Ali. Imanzadeh³

¹ PhD Student, Department of Curriculum Planning, Faculty of Education and Psychology, University of Tabriz, Tabriz, Iran

² Professor, Department of Educational Sciences, Faculty of Education and Psychology, University of Tabriz, Tabriz, Iran

³ Associate Professor, Department of Educational Sciences, Faculty of Education and Psychology, University of Tabriz, Tabriz, Iran

* Corresponding author email address: d.tahmaseb@yahoo.com

Article Info

Article type:

Original Research

How to cite this article:

Mohammed Obaid Alkseerat, R., Tahmasebzadeh, D., & Imanzadeh, A. (2026). Explaining the Factors Influencing the Construction of National Identity in Iraqi School Environments. *International Journal of Education and Cognitive Sciences*, 7(6), 1-17.

<https://doi.org/10.61838/kman.ijecs.479>



© 2026 the authors. Published by Iranian Association for Intelligence and Talent Studies, Tehran, Iran. This is an open access article under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0) License.

ABSTRACT

Purpose: This study aimed to explain the factors influencing the construction of national identity in Iraqi school environments.

Methods and Materials: This qualitative study was conducted using an exploratory and interpretive approach. Participants consisted of 20 university faculty members, educational researchers, school administrators, and experts from Tehran who had relevant academic or professional experience in education, curriculum studies, sociology, cultural studies, political science, citizenship education, national identity, or the Iraqi sociocultural context. Participants were selected through purposive sampling with maximum variation, and sampling continued until informational saturation was achieved. Data were collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews lasting approximately 45–70 minutes. Interviews were recorded with participants' permission, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed using conventional qualitative content analysis. Meaning units were identified, condensed, coded, compared continuously, and organized into subcategories and broader conceptual categories. Credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability were enhanced through member checking, peer review of coding, maximum variation, systematic documentation of analytical decisions, and repeated comparison of interpretations with the original transcripts.

Findings: Qualitative analysis yielded six major categories influencing national identity construction in Iraqi school environments: educational and curricular factors, teacher-related factors, school cultural and organizational factors, sociocultural factors, political and institutional factors, and family, media, and community factors. Educational and curricular factors received the greatest analytical emphasis, particularly inclusive curriculum design, history and civic education, national symbols, cultural representation, and extracurricular citizenship activities. Sociocultural factors highlighted the importance of integrating ethnic, religious, linguistic, and regional diversity within a shared national framework. Political and institutional factors emphasized institutional trust, educational equality, policy coherence, and political neutrality. Teachers and school climate were identified as important mediators through fairness, inclusive pedagogy, participation, and respectful interaction. Family narratives, community discourse, and digital media were also found to reinforce or weaken school-based national identity formation.

Conclusion: National identity construction in Iraqi schools is a multidimensional and interactive process requiring coherence among curriculum, teacher practices, inclusive school culture, recognition of sociocultural diversity, institutional fairness, and the wider family, community, and media environment.

Keywords: National Identity, School Environment, Iraqi Schools, Citizenship Education, Curriculum, Cultural Diversity, Qualitative Research

1. Introduction

National identity is one of the central dimensions of collective life because it provides individuals with a sense of belonging to a political community, links personal and group experiences to a broader historical narrative, and establishes a symbolic framework through which citizens interpret their relationship with the state, society, culture, and other social groups. National identity is not a fixed or purely inherited attribute; rather, it is gradually constructed through socialization, education, cultural participation, historical memory, political experience, language, media exposure, family interaction, and institutional practices. During childhood and adolescence, this process becomes particularly significant because individuals increasingly develop the cognitive and emotional capacity to understand group membership, social boundaries, cultural differences, citizenship, and collective belonging. Research on adolescent identity emphasizes that identity formation is a developmental process shaped by the interaction between the individual and the social environment, and that adolescence represents a particularly sensitive period for the consolidation of personal and collective identifications (Kadhim, 2025). National identity therefore develops through both internal psychological processes and external social experiences, with young people continuously interpreting who they are, where they belong, and how their individual and subgroup identities relate to the larger national community. Recent studies have also demonstrated that national identification among adolescents is heterogeneous rather than uniform and that different subgroups may exhibit different patterns of national attachment depending on their social experiences and contextual conditions (Zhang & Wang, 2025). Understanding how national identity is constructed among school-age populations consequently requires attention not only to individual development but also to the institutional and cultural environments in which young people are socialized.

Schools occupy a particularly important position within this process because they represent one of the first formal institutions through which children and adolescents encounter organized representations of the nation. Through curricula, textbooks, history instruction, civic education, language policies, school ceremonies, symbols, classroom interactions, extracurricular programs, and relationships with teachers and peers, schools communicate explicit and implicit definitions of citizenship and national belonging.

Education can therefore contribute to the institutionalization of national identity by familiarizing students with shared history, collective values, national symbols, civic responsibilities, social norms, and conceptions of the common good (Mirzapour et al., 2019). The educational environment does not merely provide factual information about a country; it also creates daily experiences through which students learn how membership, equality, cooperation, difference, authority, and participation operate in practice. Studies examining the role of schools in the development of national and religious identity have similarly indicated that educational institutions can exert considerable influence on students' identity orientations by transmitting cultural and normative meanings alongside formal academic content (Farhadi & Zoghi, 2018). In this respect, the school functions simultaneously as an instructional organization, a cultural institution, a socialization environment, and a microcosm of the broader political community.

The curriculum constitutes one of the most visible mechanisms through which schools participate in national identity construction. What is included in or excluded from textbooks, how national history is narrated, which historical actors and social groups are represented, what forms of citizenship are emphasized, and how cultural diversity is framed can all influence students' perceptions of the nation. A curriculum designed to strengthen national identity should not be understood merely as a collection of patriotic symbols or historical facts; it requires the systematic integration of cognitive, affective, social, and civic dimensions of belonging. Research on the design of national identity curricula has emphasized the need to incorporate components such as historical knowledge, national values, cultural heritage, social responsibility, civic participation, and a sense of belonging into educational programs in a coherent manner (Mahdian et al., 2022). Similarly, content analysis of educational programs has shown that identity-related messages can be embedded in stories, visual representations, cultural references, historical narratives, and descriptions of national customs and symbols from the earliest stages of education (Karimi, 2022). These findings suggest that national identity is continuously communicated through both formal curricular objectives and more subtle educational representations that define who belongs to the national community and how that community is imagined.

At the same time, the influence of schools cannot be reduced to curriculum content alone. Teachers, administrators, peer groups, school norms, and institutional practices also play a decisive role in translating abstract

national values into everyday experiences. Students are likely to interpret principles such as equality, citizenship, respect, and national solidarity not only through what they read in textbooks but also through how they are treated in school, whether their cultural background is respected, whether school rules are applied fairly, and whether teachers encourage dialogue across differences. Research concerning the social identity of high school students has identified multiple interacting factors in the development of social belonging, including family relationships, peer interaction, school experiences, social participation, and cultural context (Ansari, 2023). These findings are important for national identity because national belonging constitutes a form of social identity that is similarly shaped through interaction with significant institutions and groups. The role of schools is therefore both symbolic and experiential: they define the nation through educational narratives while simultaneously allowing students to experience inclusion, exclusion, trust, participation, hierarchy, and social recognition.

The importance of the school environment becomes even greater in culturally diverse societies. In multicultural contexts, educational policy must negotiate the complex relationship between national cohesion and the recognition of linguistic, ethnic, religious, and cultural diversity. Comparative anthropological research on identity and school policy has demonstrated that schools in multicultural societies often become central arenas in which competing principles of integration, cultural recognition, citizenship, minority rights, and national unity are negotiated (Martynova, 2024). Policies that ignore diversity may produce alienation among students who do not see their communities represented within official narratives, whereas educational approaches that excessively fragment students along subgroup lines may weaken the development of shared civic belonging. This tension requires educational institutions to construct a model of national identity that permits multiple identities to coexist rather than treating national identity and subgroup identity as mutually exclusive. In this sense, a strong national identity may be most sustainable when students are able to recognize their ethnic, religious, linguistic, or regional identities while simultaneously understanding themselves as members of a broader national community.

This issue has particular significance in Iraq because Iraqi society is characterized by substantial ethnic, religious, linguistic, regional, and historical diversity. Arab, Kurdish, Turkmen, Assyrian, Yazidi, Sunni, Shi'a, Christian, and other communities contribute to the country's social fabric,

while historical conflicts, political changes, displacement, sectarian tensions, and regional differences have influenced the ways in which citizenship and national belonging are experienced. The construction of national identity in such a context cannot be separated from the representation of diversity, collective memory, political legitimacy, cultural heritage, and the relationship between local and national affiliations. Research concerning cultural identity in Iraq has shown that media, historical narratives, political transformations, and changing cultural institutions have played important roles in shaping Iraqi identity and public understandings of belonging (Al-Rawi, 2022). These influences make schools especially important because they may serve as spaces where younger generations encounter narratives that either bridge or reproduce existing social divisions.

The Iraqi context also illustrates how identity can be affected by broader cultural and spatial transformations. The discussion of identity loss in contemporary Iraqi architecture, particularly in Baghdad, has highlighted concerns about discontinuity between inherited cultural forms, collective memory, and contemporary expressions of Iraqi society (Malaika, 2013). Although architecture and schooling are distinct domains, both reflect a broader problem concerning how societies preserve and reconstruct shared identity amid rapid transformation. Schools, like urban spaces, communicate cultural meanings and establish links between past, present, and future. When educational environments fail to represent shared cultural heritage or are disconnected from students' social experiences, the symbolic foundations of national belonging may become weakened. Conversely, educational spaces that recognize collective heritage while accommodating social diversity can contribute to continuity and shared identification.

The interaction between schools and families is another critical component of national identity formation. Children do not enter educational institutions as culturally neutral individuals; they bring with them family narratives, religious traditions, political understandings, historical memories, linguistic practices, and attitudes toward other groups. Accordingly, the influence of the school may be reinforced or contradicted by the family environment. Research examining school-family interaction in national identity formation has demonstrated that cooperation between educational institutions and families can support adolescents' national identification by creating consistency between formal educational messages and the values transmitted through family socialization (Fedorenko et al.,

2020). Effective national identity development therefore requires communication between schools and families, particularly in societies where collective memory and group identity are strongly transmitted through intergenerational narratives. Where school and family messages conflict sharply, students may experience identity tension or may privilege one source of socialization over the other.

National and religious identities may also interact in complex ways. In some contexts, these forms of identity can reinforce one another, while in others they may become sources of competing affiliation. Empirical research among secondary school students has demonstrated meaningful relationships between religious identity, national identity, and psychosocial outcomes such as quality of life and psychological well-being (Asmari Bordeh Zard & Hallaji Sani, 2020). Such findings underscore the fact that national identity is not merely a political or ideological construct but may also be connected to psychological adjustment, social integration, and students' perceptions of belonging. For schools in a religiously diverse country such as Iraq, this creates a significant educational challenge: religious identity must be respected while national identity is constructed in a manner capable of encompassing different religious communities within a shared civic framework. A national identity model that privileges one religious or sectarian group at the expense of others risks transforming educational socialization into a mechanism of exclusion rather than integration.

Identity development in schools is additionally shaped by students' disciplinary, academic, and institutional experiences. Research on high school students' science identities has shown that identity can vary according to educational experiences, self-perceptions, participation, recognition, and students' sense of competence and belonging within particular domains (Chen et al., 2023). Although disciplinary identity differs conceptually from national identity, this research is relevant because it demonstrates that identity is strengthened when individuals experience recognition, meaningful participation, and alignment between personal experience and institutional expectations. These same mechanisms can operate in national identity construction. Students may be more likely to develop a positive sense of national belonging when schools recognize their backgrounds, provide meaningful opportunities for participation, and communicate that they are legitimate and valued members of the national community.

Teachers and school leaders are therefore central actors in mediating between educational policy and lived experience. Their professional identities, cultural adaptation, institutional values, and capacity to work across cultural differences can shape the climate through which students encounter broader social meanings. Research on Turkish school leaders working in culturally different African contexts has illustrated how educational professionals negotiate cultural adaptation, professional identity, and institutional challenges when operating across diverse cultural environments (Deniz, 2024). Although this research addresses professional rather than national identity, it highlights the importance of cultural competence and contextual sensitivity among educational leaders. In multicultural school systems, educators require the ability to manage difference constructively, avoid discriminatory practices, and create organizational environments in which diversity can coexist with institutional cohesion. These competencies are particularly relevant for Iraqi schools, where educational leaders may encounter students whose identities are shaped by different linguistic, regional, ethnic, religious, and political experiences.

The role of teachers is also significant because educational messages are never transmitted mechanically. Teachers interpret curricula, select examples, regulate classroom discussion, respond to sensitive issues, and model attitudes toward social groups and national institutions. As a result, the same formal curriculum may have different effects depending on how teachers enact it. Educational efforts to construct national identity therefore require not only suitable textbooks and policies but also teacher preparation that includes citizenship education, intercultural competence, conflict-sensitive pedagogy, and the ability to facilitate respectful dialogue. When teachers are perceived as fair and respectful, they can strengthen trust in the school as a shared institution. By contrast, discriminatory treatment, sectarian language, or overt political bias may weaken the legitimacy of national identity messages communicated through formal education.

The developmental characteristics of adolescence further increase the importance of these institutional experiences. Adolescents actively explore social roles, affiliations, values, friendships, and ideological positions, and their identity development is strongly influenced by peer relationships and social comparison. Research on maturity and identity crisis in adolescence has emphasized the importance of peer relations and friendship networks in shaping adolescents' identity experiences (Keshavarz et al.,

2018). Within the school environment, peers may reinforce national solidarity through cross-group friendships and collaborative activities, but they may also reproduce ethnic, sectarian, linguistic, or regional divisions encountered in the broader society. School organization can therefore influence whether peer interaction contributes to intergroup understanding or strengthens social boundaries. Cooperative learning, mixed-group activities, student councils, extracurricular projects, and collective problem-solving may provide opportunities for students to develop social relationships that transcend subgroup divisions.

In contemporary societies, identity construction is also increasingly influenced by digital media. Adolescents present themselves, interact with others, consume political and cultural narratives, and negotiate belonging through social media and other digital platforms. Research on digital self-presentation has shown that online environments have become important spaces for adolescent identity formation because young people actively construct and revise self-representations through digital interaction (Morales, 2025). This development has major implications for national identity education. Schools no longer possess a privileged position as the primary source of information about society, history, culture, or politics. Students may encounter competing national narratives, misinformation, polarized discourse, group-based propaganda, and transnational cultural influences online. At the same time, digital platforms can expose students to broader national communities, cultural heritage, civic initiatives, and narratives of cooperation. Consequently, any attempt to understand national identity construction in schools must recognize the interaction between formal education and digital socialization.

The importance of social context is further reinforced by research showing that identity-related outcomes are influenced by multiple systems rather than isolated variables. National identification among adolescents may vary according to family background, school experience, social relationships, cultural exposure, and broader political conditions (Zhang & Wang, 2025). Similarly, studies of education and identity repeatedly indicate that identity formation involves cumulative interaction between individual development and social institutions. This perspective is especially appropriate for Iraq, where national identity is shaped by the interaction of historical memory, political restructuring, cultural diversity, religious affiliation, regional experiences, educational policy, media narratives, and community relationships. The school should

therefore be analyzed not as an isolated institution but as one component within a broader identity ecosystem.

The complexity of identity formation also means that schools may contribute to national identity in ways that extend beyond direct instruction. Informal routines, commemorative ceremonies, spatial arrangements, teacher-student relationships, language practices, peer cultures, disciplinary systems, and institutional symbols can communicate implicit messages about who belongs and whose identity is recognized. Such processes are especially consequential when students belong to minority or historically marginalized groups. If students see their language, history, culture, and community represented positively, they may be more likely to perceive national identity as inclusive. If they encounter persistent absence, stereotyping, or exclusion, national identity may be interpreted as belonging to other groups rather than as a shared framework. For this reason, the construction of national identity in Iraqi schools requires attention to both visible curricular content and the hidden curriculum embedded in everyday school life.

Despite the growing literature on adolescent identity, educational socialization, curriculum, multicultural education, school-family interaction, and media influences, a significant need remains for an integrated explanation of the factors shaping national identity specifically within Iraqi school environments. Existing studies provide important insights into identity development during adolescence (Kadhim, 2025), social identity among students (Ansari, 2023), national identity curriculum design (Mahdian et al., 2022), the institutional role of education (Mirzapour et al., 2019), school and family cooperation (Fedorenko et al., 2020), multicultural school policy (Martynova, 2024), and the cultural and media dimensions of Iraqi identity (Al-Rawi, 2022); however, these strands of research are rarely combined into a comprehensive framework that explains how curricular, pedagogical, organizational, sociocultural, political, familial, and media-related factors interact within the Iraqi school context. The distinctive historical and cultural conditions of Iraq make such an integrated perspective particularly necessary. An explanatory qualitative approach can provide access to the experiences and interpretations of knowledgeable experts and can identify relationships among factors that may not be adequately captured through predetermined quantitative variables.

Accordingly, the aim of the present study was to explain the factors influencing the construction of national identity in Iraqi school environments.

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study Design and Participants

This study employed a qualitative research design with an exploratory and interpretive approach to identify and explain the factors influencing the construction of national identity in Iraqi school environments. A qualitative design was considered appropriate because national identity is a multidimensional social, cultural, educational, and psychological phenomenon whose formation in school settings is shaped by participants' interpretations, experiences, values, interactions, and perceptions of educational practices. Accordingly, the study sought to obtain an in-depth understanding of the mechanisms through which schools may contribute to the development, reinforcement, or transformation of national identity rather than to quantify predefined variables or test predetermined causal relationships. The study population consisted of university faculty members, educational researchers, school administrators, and experts in the fields of education, sociology, cultural studies, political science, curriculum studies, and national identity who were residing or professionally active in Tehran and possessed relevant knowledge or research experience concerning education, identity formation, citizenship education, or Iraqi social and educational contexts. Participants were selected using purposive sampling with a maximum-variation strategy to ensure that different disciplinary and professional perspectives were represented. Eligibility criteria included having at least a master's degree in a relevant discipline, a minimum of five years of professional, academic, managerial, or research experience related to education or identity studies, familiarity with the sociocultural and educational context of Iraq, and willingness to participate in an in-depth interview. Individuals who lacked sufficient experience in the subject area or who were unable to complete the interview process were excluded. Data collection continued until theoretical and informational saturation was achieved, meaning that additional interviews no longer generated substantively new concepts, categories, or relationships. Saturation was reached after 18 interviews; however, two additional interviews were conducted to verify the stability and completeness of the emerging categories. Consequently, the final sample consisted of 20 participants

from Tehran. Maximum variation was considered in terms of academic specialization, professional position, years of experience, and type of involvement in educational and identity-related issues so that the findings would reflect a broad range of expert perspectives on the construction of national identity within the school environment.

2.2. Data Collection Tools

Data were collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews designed specifically for the objectives of the study. The interview protocol was developed following an initial review of the conceptual literature on national identity, citizenship education, school culture, curriculum, socialization, cultural diversity, educational governance, and the role of educational institutions in identity formation. The protocol consisted primarily of open-ended questions that encouraged participants to describe their perceptions and professional experiences regarding the factors that shape national identity in schools. The main interview questions focused on participants' understanding of national identity in the Iraqi educational context; the role of formal curricula, textbooks, teachers, school administrators, peer relationships, school rituals, national symbols, language, history education, religious and ethnic diversity, family-school interaction, extracurricular activities, media, political and social conditions, and educational policies in shaping students' sense of national belonging; the major barriers to developing an inclusive national identity in Iraqi schools; and the institutional and educational mechanisms through which schools could strengthen shared national identification while respecting ethnic, religious, linguistic, and cultural diversity. Depending on participants' responses, probing questions such as "Could you explain this in more detail?", "What factors contribute to this situation?", "How does this process operate within the school environment?", and "Can you provide an example?" were used to clarify meanings and obtain deeper information. Before the main interviews, the interview guide was reviewed by three experts in qualitative educational research and identity studies to assess the relevance, clarity, comprehensiveness, and logical sequencing of the questions. Minor revisions were subsequently made to eliminate ambiguity and facilitate the natural progression of the interviews. Interviews were conducted individually in a quiet setting that ensured privacy and enabled participants to express their views freely. Each interview lasted approximately 45–70 minutes. With participants' permission, all interviews were

digitally recorded and subsequently transcribed verbatim. Field notes were also recorded during and immediately after each interview to document contextual information, significant observations, nonverbal cues when relevant, and preliminary analytical impressions. Data collection and preliminary analysis proceeded concurrently, allowing concepts identified in earlier interviews to be explored more thoroughly during subsequent interviews. To enhance the trustworthiness of the study, credibility was strengthened through prolonged engagement with the data, purposive selection of knowledgeable participants, member checking, and continuous comparison between interview data and emerging interpretations. Selected participants were provided with summaries of the researchers' interpretations to determine whether these interpretations accurately represented their intended meanings. Dependability was supported by maintaining systematic documentation of the research process, including interview procedures, coding decisions, category development, and analytical revisions. Confirmability was enhanced through the maintenance of an audit trail and repeated examination of interpretations against the original transcripts, while maximum variation among participants contributed to the transferability of the findings by incorporating diverse professional and disciplinary perspectives.

2.3. Data Analysis

The interview data were analyzed using conventional qualitative content analysis through an iterative process of transcription, immersion, coding, categorization, abstraction, and interpretation. Analysis began immediately after the first interviews and continued simultaneously with data collection. Initially, each recorded interview was transcribed verbatim, and the transcripts were read repeatedly to achieve immersion in the data and develop a comprehensive understanding of participants' perspectives. During the first stage of analysis, meaningful units consisting of words, sentences, or passages relevant to the construction of national identity in school environments were identified. Each meaning unit was condensed while preserving its essential meaning and was then assigned an initial conceptual code. Coding was conducted inductively so that the analytical concepts emerged primarily from participants' accounts rather than being imposed through a predetermined theoretical classification. Similar codes were continuously compared within and across interviews using the constant comparative method. Codes expressing closely

related meanings were subsequently grouped into preliminary subcategories, and the conceptual similarities and differences among these subcategories were examined carefully. Through repeated comparison and abstraction, related subcategories were integrated into broader categories representing major dimensions and mechanisms involved in the construction of national identity in the school environment. In the final analytical stage, relationships among the main categories were examined to develop an integrated interpretation of the individual, educational, cultural, social, institutional, and contextual factors contributing to national identity formation. Throughout the analysis, previously coded transcripts were repeatedly revisited whenever new concepts emerged to ensure consistency and to determine whether the new concepts were also present in earlier interviews. Analytical memos were maintained to document conceptual insights, relationships among categories, modifications to the coding framework, and decisions concerning the interpretation of the findings. To improve coding credibility, portions of the transcripts and corresponding codes were independently reviewed by another researcher experienced in qualitative methodology, and disagreements concerning the conceptual interpretation or placement of codes were resolved through discussion and re-examination of the original interview material. Negative or divergent cases were retained and examined rather than removed so that the resulting analytical framework reflected the complexity and diversity of participants' perspectives. The analysis continued until categories were conceptually well developed, adequately supported by the interview data, and no substantially new dimensions emerged from the final interviews. The resulting categories and subcategories provided the analytical foundation for explaining the factors influencing the construction of national identity in Iraqi school environments.

3. Findings and Results

The study included 20 participants who were selected purposefully from among university faculty members, educational researchers, school administrators, and experts with relevant academic or professional experience in education, curriculum studies, sociology, cultural studies, political science, citizenship education, and national identity. Of the participants, 12 were male and 8 were female. Their ages ranged from 34 to 59 years, with the majority being between 40 and 50 years of age. Regarding educational qualifications, 15 participants held doctoral

degrees and 5 held master's degrees. In terms of professional background, 7 participants were university faculty members in education, curriculum studies, sociology, or political science, 5 were educational researchers, 4 were school administrators or senior educational managers, and 4 were experts working in areas related to cultural policy, citizenship education, or identity studies. Participants' professional experience ranged from 7 to 29 years, with most having more than 10 years of experience. All participants had substantive familiarity with issues related to education, identity formation, citizenship, cultural diversity, or the Iraqi educational and sociocultural context. The heterogeneity of the participants in terms of disciplinary specialization and professional experience provided access to multiple perspectives on the factors involved in the construction of

national identity in Iraqi school environments. Analysis of the interview data generated a broad set of initial codes that were progressively condensed and organized into more abstract conceptual categories. The final analysis resulted in six main categories encompassing educational-curricular factors, teacher-related factors, school cultural and organizational factors, sociocultural factors, political-institutional factors, and family-media-community factors. These categories reflected the participants' shared understanding that national identity construction in schools is not determined by a single curricular or institutional variable but is produced through the interaction of formal instruction, school practices, social relationships, cultural representations, political conditions, and experiences of belonging.

Table 1

Main Categories and Subcategories Influencing the Construction of National Identity in Iraqi School Environments

Main category	Subcategories	Illustrative conceptual indicators
Educational and curricular factors	Nationally inclusive curriculum; history and civic education; representation of national symbols; balanced representation of ethnic and religious groups; language of instruction; extracurricular citizenship activities	Shared historical narratives, civic values, constitutional awareness, national symbols, inclusive textbook content, common cultural references
Teacher-related factors	Teachers' attitudes toward national identity; pedagogical practices; impartial treatment of students; teachers as identity role models; capacity for managing diversity	Inclusive classroom discourse, non-discriminatory behavior, promotion of common belonging, dialogue about diversity, avoidance of sectarian bias
School cultural and organizational factors	School climate; participatory school governance; ceremonies and national rituals; peer relations; school rules and norms; sense of safety and belonging	Fair treatment, student participation, national celebrations, collaborative activities, interpersonal trust, school attachment
Sociocultural factors	Ethnic and religious diversity; shared cultural heritage; local-national identity interaction; language diversity; social trust; collective memory	Arab, Kurdish, Turkmen and other identities, Sunni-Shia coexistence, common cultural heritage, plural identities, intergroup respect
Political and institutional factors	Educational policy coherence; political neutrality of schools; state legitimacy; equal access to education; decentralization and regional differences; post-conflict conditions	National education policies, prevention of politicization, institutional trust, distributive fairness, regional inequalities, conflict-related fragmentation
Family, media, and community factors	Family socialization; traditional and digital media; local community discourse; religious institutions; peer networks outside school; exposure to conflicting narratives	Parental attitudes, social media narratives, community-level identity discourses, religious messages, online polarization, family-school consistency

As shown in Table 1, the construction of national identity in Iraqi school environments was represented by six interrelated domains rather than by a single determinant. Educational and curricular factors formed one of the most prominent domains because participants repeatedly emphasized that students encounter official narratives of nationhood through textbooks, history courses, civic education, language instruction, school ceremonies, and extracurricular activities. Participants argued that curricula can strengthen national cohesion when they represent the country's different ethnic, religious, linguistic, and regional groups as legitimate components of a shared national community. Conversely, selective historical narratives, the

marginalization of minority groups, or an excessive emphasis on one cultural or political perspective were described as potentially weakening students' identification with the broader nation. Teacher-related factors constituted a second major category. Participants described teachers not merely as transmitters of curriculum but as daily models of citizenship whose language, classroom behavior, treatment of difference, and responses to politically or culturally sensitive issues shape students' perceptions of inclusion and belonging. The school cultural and organizational environment was likewise considered central because students' experience of fairness, participation, interpersonal trust, security, and recognition within the school could either

reinforce or contradict the values formally taught in textbooks. Sociocultural factors reflected the complex reality of Iraqi society, in which national identity develops alongside ethnic, religious, linguistic, tribal, regional, and local identities. Participants therefore emphasized that successful national identity construction should not require the erasure of subnational identities but should create a higher-order framework in which diverse identities are recognized within a common national belonging. Political and institutional factors were also repeatedly mentioned,

particularly the effects of politicization, institutional trust, regional inequality, educational policy inconsistency, and the legacy of political instability and conflict. Finally, participants stressed that students' identities are influenced beyond school by families, local communities, religious institutions, traditional media, and digital platforms. The findings therefore indicated that the effectiveness of schools in constructing national identity depends substantially on whether the messages transmitted by schools are reinforced or contradicted by the wider social environment.

Table 2

Frequency and Relative Emphasis of Main Categories in Participant Interviews

Main category	Number of participants referring to the category	Percentage of participants	Number of coded references	Relative analytical emphasis
Educational and curricular factors	20	100%	96	Very high
Teacher-related factors	19	95%	78	Very high
School cultural and organizational factors	18	90%	72	High
Sociocultural factors	20	100%	91	Very high
Political and institutional factors	19	95%	84	Very high
Family, media, and community factors	17	85%	63	High
Total coded references	—	—	484	—

Table 2 demonstrates the relative prominence of the six principal categories across the 20 interviews. Educational and curricular factors were mentioned by all 20 participants and generated 96 coded references, making this category the most frequently discussed domain in the dataset. Participants repeatedly returned to the content and organization of textbooks, history education, civic education, language policies, national narratives, and school-based activities when explaining how students develop an understanding of the nation. Sociocultural factors were also discussed by all participants and accounted for 91 coded references, indicating that participants regarded the management of ethnic, religious, linguistic, and regional diversity as inseparable from the construction of a common national identity. Political and institutional factors generated 84 references and were mentioned by 19 participants. These responses frequently concerned political polarization, the neutrality of educational institutions, the consistency of educational policy, perceived fairness of the state, and the effects of conflict and regional inequalities on national belonging. Teacher-related factors were mentioned by 19 participants and generated 78 coded references, reflecting

the importance attributed to teachers' attitudes, classroom interactions, pedagogical choices, and capacity to manage difference without reproducing sectarian or ethnic divisions. School cultural and organizational factors were reported by 18 participants and generated 72 references, showing that national identity was perceived as an experiential phenomenon shaped through students' everyday encounters with fairness, participation, discipline, safety, cooperation, and institutional belonging. Family, media, and community factors, although somewhat less frequently represented than the other categories, were still mentioned by 17 participants and produced 63 coded references. Participants particularly emphasized that digital media, family narratives, community-level political discourse, and religious or social networks could either reinforce inclusive national belonging or expose students to divisive interpretations of national history and group identity. Overall, the distribution of 484 coded references demonstrated that the participants conceptualized national identity construction as a multidimensional process in which educational content was particularly important but operated in continuous interaction with sociocultural and political conditions.

Table 3

Subcategories, Selected Initial Codes, and Interpretive Meaning of the Identified Factors

Main category	Subcategory	Selected initial codes derived from interviews	Interpretive meaning
Educational and curricular factors	Inclusive curriculum	Equal representation of groups; balanced historical narratives; avoidance of exclusion; recognition of cultural plurality	Students are more likely to identify with the nation when they see their own group represented as a legitimate part of the national story
Educational and curricular factors	Civic and history education	Knowledge of citizenship rights; responsibilities; constitutional principles; common historical experiences	Formal learning provides cognitive foundations for understanding national membership and shared citizenship
Educational and curricular factors	National symbols and practices	Flag, anthem, national days, public figures, shared cultural symbols	Repeated symbolic practices can create emotional attachment when perceived as inclusive rather than imposed
Teacher-related factors	Teacher as identity model	Respect for diversity; unbiased language; equal treatment; national responsibility	Teachers operationalize national values through everyday interpersonal conduct
Teacher-related factors	Dialogic pedagogy	Classroom discussion; critical reflection; listening to different perspectives; conflict-sensitive teaching	National identity is strengthened when students can discuss difference without fear or stigmatization
School cultural and organizational factors	Fair school climate	Equal rules; procedural justice; non-discrimination; safe participation	Experiences of fairness at school provide practical models of equitable citizenship
School cultural and organizational factors	Student participation	Student councils; collective decision-making; collaborative projects; school responsibilities	Participation creates a sense of agency and shared ownership of the educational community
Sociocultural factors	Recognition of diversity	Respect for ethnic, religious and linguistic groups; plural cultural identity; intergroup recognition	National identity becomes more inclusive when diversity is framed as part of the national whole
Sociocultural factors	Shared cultural heritage	Common traditions; literature; historical memory; collective achievements	Shared cultural references provide symbolic resources for national cohesion
Political and institutional factors	Institutional trust	Confidence in state institutions; equal educational opportunity; rule-based governance	Students' identification with the nation is affected by whether institutions are perceived as legitimate and fair
Political and institutional factors	Depoliticization of schools	Avoiding partisan pressure; limiting ideological polarization; neutral educational administration	Excessive politicization can convert schools from integrative institutions into arenas of group competition
Political and institutional factors	Post-conflict and regional conditions	War legacy; displacement; insecurity; regional inequality; fragmented governance	Structural instability can obstruct common identity formation by intensifying local or group-based identification
Family, media, and community factors	Family socialization	Parental narratives; family political attitudes; intergenerational memories; identity expectations	Family interpretations shape the meanings students assign to school-based national messages
Family, media, and community factors	Media influence	Social media polarization; online narratives; misinformation; national media content	Media can amplify either inclusive national discourse or divisive identity narratives
Family, media, and community factors	Community environment	Local leaders; religious institutions; neighborhood discourse; peer networks	The broader community can reinforce or weaken the identity messages promoted within schools

As illustrated in Table 3, the movement from initial codes to subcategories and broader interpretive meanings showed that participants understood national identity as simultaneously cognitive, emotional, relational, and institutional. At the cognitive level, participants emphasized that students require knowledge of national history, citizenship rights and duties, constitutional principles, geographical unity, cultural heritage, and the political meaning of belonging to Iraq. However, participants repeatedly indicated that knowledge alone was insufficient. Emotional attachment was described as developing through symbols, rituals, collective memories, school celebrations, narratives of common achievement, and meaningful experiences of belonging. These affective dimensions were considered particularly important because students may

formally understand citizenship while remaining psychologically distant from national institutions if they perceive exclusion, injustice, or unequal recognition. Relationally, participants stressed the significance of daily encounters among students from different backgrounds and between students and teachers. Codes such as equal treatment, respectful dialogue, collaborative activities, intergroup interaction, and non-discrimination demonstrated that national identity was partly constructed through interpersonal experiences in which students learn whether diversity can coexist with common membership. Institutionally, participants connected identity formation to students' perceptions of fairness, trust, and legitimacy. In this respect, schools were described as miniature representations of the wider political community. When school rules were

applied equally, students were allowed meaningful participation, and teachers acted impartially, the school communicated that common citizenship could be based on fairness and mutual recognition. When schools reproduced favoritism, politicization, exclusion, or sectarian distinctions, participants believed that formal messages about national unity lost credibility.

The educational and curricular dimension emerged as particularly extensive because participants viewed curriculum as the formal mechanism through which the state defines the national community and communicates its historical memory. Participants emphasized the importance of presenting national history in a manner that neither conceals conflict nor transforms historical differences into contemporary hostility. They suggested that history education should explain shared experiences while also representing the contribution of different communities to Iraq's social and cultural development. Participants also highlighted civic education as a mechanism for shifting national identity from a purely symbolic concept toward a practical understanding of citizenship based on rights, responsibilities, participation, respect for law, and acceptance of diversity. Language of instruction was another recurrent theme. Rather than treating linguistic differences solely as administrative challenges, participants considered language policy an identity issue because recognition or exclusion of a student's language may affect perceptions of cultural legitimacy. Accordingly, multilingual sensitivity within the broader framework of common citizenship was viewed as more constructive than linguistic homogenization.

Teacher-related findings revealed that the national identity messages communicated through official curricula may be substantially altered by the way teachers interpret and enact them. Participants explained that teachers can reinforce inclusive national identity by presenting multiple perspectives, avoiding derogatory references to ethnic or religious groups, treating all students equitably, and creating opportunities for respectful discussion. Conversely, a teacher who expresses partisan, sectarian, ethnic, or discriminatory attitudes may undermine the integrative aims of the curriculum regardless of the formal content of textbooks. Participants therefore conceptualized teacher competence in this area as extending beyond subject-matter expertise. It included intercultural sensitivity, conflict management skills, civic responsibility, pedagogical neutrality, and the capacity to facilitate discussion of politically sensitive topics without escalating polarization. Several coded statements also reflected the view that

students evaluate national values through the conduct of adults in authority. For this reason, participants considered teachers' everyday treatment of students an implicit form of civic education.

The school environment itself was similarly presented as an important site of identity construction. Participants stated that national belonging is strengthened when students experience the school as a fair, safe, participatory, and inclusive social institution. Student councils, collaborative projects, community service, group activities, national ceremonies, cultural programs, and opportunities for shared decision-making were repeatedly described as practical spaces in which students can experience collective membership. However, participants differentiated between meaningful participation and symbolic participation. Activities were considered identity-building only when students experienced genuine involvement and when ceremonies represented diverse groups rather than presenting national identity as a rigid or exclusionary ideology. Fair discipline and equal application of school regulations were also recurrent findings. Participants regarded procedural fairness as an important mechanism because students' perception of equal treatment in school can shape broader beliefs about equality within the national community.

The sociocultural findings demonstrated that participants did not conceptualize national identity as an alternative to ethnic, religious, tribal, linguistic, or regional identity. Instead, they generally described identity as layered and multidimensional. The principal concern was whether these different affiliations were interpreted as complementary to national belonging or as mutually exclusive categories. Participants stated that attempts to construct national identity through denial of diversity could generate resistance among students whose family or community identities were not adequately recognized. Consequently, an inclusive conception of nationhood was described as one that permits students to maintain specific cultural affiliations while identifying with Iraq as a shared political and historical community. Participants also highlighted shared literature, collective historical experiences, national achievements, cultural traditions, geography, and common social challenges as potential sources of integrative identity. At the same time, they emphasized that collective memory may function divisively when historical narratives are organized around victimization, blame, or group competition.

Political and institutional conditions formed another substantial dimension of the findings. Participants

repeatedly stated that schools cannot independently construct strong national identity if the wider institutional environment communicates inequality, exclusion, instability, or political fragmentation. Perceived fairness of public institutions, equal access to educational opportunities, consistency in educational policy, and confidence in state structures were frequently linked to students' willingness to identify with the national community. In addition, participants described the politicization of schools as a major challenge. Political pressure on educational content, partisan influence over school management, sectarian interpretation of curricula, or the use of school activities for ideological mobilization were considered capable of weakening students' trust in schools as shared national institutions. The legacy of conflict and displacement was also emphasized. Participants argued that students growing up in regions affected differently by conflict, insecurity, migration, or political instability may possess substantially different understandings of the nation. Therefore, the construction of national identity was seen as requiring sensitivity to regional experiences and the psychological and social consequences of prolonged instability.

The final category concerned the influence of family, media, and the wider community. Participants emphasized that the school is only one of several socialization institutions affecting students' identity. Family narratives regarding history, politics, religion, ethnicity, and intergroup relations were viewed as particularly influential because they often provide students with their earliest frameworks for interpreting national belonging. In some cases, school-based messages of national unity may align with family narratives, whereas in other cases students may encounter conflicting interpretations. Digital media was considered increasingly important because students are exposed to a large volume of identity-related content outside formal education. Participants referred to social media polarization, selective historical narratives, misinformation, politically motivated content, and group-based discourses as factors that may challenge the school's capacity to cultivate inclusive national identity. Conversely, digital media was also considered capable of strengthening national belonging when it highlights shared cultural achievements, intergroup cooperation, national history, civic participation, and constructive dialogue. Community leaders, religious institutions, neighborhood networks, and peer groups were similarly identified as mediating environments through which school messages are interpreted.

Taken together, the findings indicated that the construction of national identity in Iraqi school environments is best understood as a dynamic and multilayered process produced through interaction among six domains. The educational system provides formal narratives and structured learning experiences; teachers transform these narratives into daily pedagogical practices; school culture provides direct experiences of fairness, participation, and belonging; sociocultural conditions define the relationship between diversity and common identity; political and institutional conditions affect the credibility and legitimacy of national messages; and family, media, and community environments continuously reinforce, reinterpret, or challenge what students encounter at school. The findings therefore suggest that national identity construction cannot be effectively pursued through curriculum revision alone. Rather, it depends on coherence between curriculum, teacher practice, school climate, recognition of cultural diversity, institutional fairness, and the broader social environment in which students develop their understanding of themselves and their membership in the national community.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The present study aimed to explain the factors influencing the construction of national identity in Iraqi school environments. The qualitative analysis resulted in six main categories: educational and curricular factors, teacher-related factors, school cultural and organizational factors, sociocultural factors, political and institutional factors, and family, media, and community factors. Among these, educational and curricular factors received the greatest number of coded references, followed by sociocultural and political-institutional factors, indicating that participants understood national identity construction primarily as an educational process embedded within a broader social and political context. Teacher-related factors and school cultural and organizational conditions also emerged as highly influential, suggesting that national identity is not transmitted only through formal content but is reinforced or weakened through everyday relationships, school climate, participation, fairness, and institutional practices. Finally, family, media, and community factors demonstrated that students' national belonging develops across multiple socialization environments and cannot be understood solely through school-based processes. Taken together, these findings support a multidimensional interpretation of

national identity as a dynamic construct formed through the interaction of formal education, social relationships, cultural recognition, institutional legitimacy, and broader social narratives.

The first major finding concerned educational and curricular factors, including inclusive curriculum design, history and civic education, representation of national symbols, recognition of cultural diversity, language policy, and extracurricular citizenship activities. Participants emphasized that schools contribute to national identity by defining the national community through formal knowledge and symbolic representation. This finding is consistent with research demonstrating that education plays an important role in institutionalizing national identity among students by transmitting shared historical narratives, civic values, collective symbols, and cultural meanings (Mirzapour et al., 2019). It also corresponds with the findings of Mahdian et al., who emphasized that national identity should be systematically incorporated into curriculum design through cultural, historical, social, and civic components rather than treated as a peripheral educational theme (Mahdian et al., 2022). Similarly, the analysis of educational programs conducted by Karimi demonstrated that national identity can be transmitted through stories, symbols, cultural references, historical content, and representations of national heritage from early educational stages (Karimi, 2022). The present findings extend this literature by indicating that the effectiveness of curriculum depends not only on the presence of national content but also on the inclusiveness and balance of its representations. In the Iraqi context, where multiple ethnic, religious, linguistic, and regional identities coexist, curricula that privilege one group or one historical narrative may undermine rather than strengthen national identification. Therefore, the construction of national identity appears to require a curriculum capable of presenting national history as a shared but plural narrative in which different communities recognize themselves as legitimate participants.

The importance attributed to history and civic education is particularly understandable because these subjects directly shape students' cognitive understanding of citizenship, national continuity, public institutions, rights, duties, and collective memory. Participants repeatedly emphasized that national identity should not be reduced to patriotic symbols but should also involve knowledge of citizenship and a sense of responsibility toward the national community. This interpretation is compatible with research showing that social identity among high school students is influenced by

educational experiences, social participation, family relations, and broader cultural conditions (Ansari, 2023). National identity becomes more sustainable when students understand not only symbolic belonging but also their position as citizens with rights, responsibilities, and opportunities for participation. In this regard, the school functions as a major context for translating abstract national affiliation into practical civic understanding. The result also supports studies emphasizing the role of schools in simultaneously shaping religious, cultural, and national identity through educational content and daily school experiences (Farhadi & Zoghi, 2018). In Iraq, where political fragmentation and social divisions may influence students' perceptions of citizenship, civic education can therefore provide a common institutional language through which diverse groups understand membership in a shared political community.

The second major finding concerned teacher-related factors. Participants described teachers as identity mediators whose behavior, discourse, classroom management, treatment of diversity, and interpretation of curricular content can significantly influence students' national belonging. This finding is important because it shows that curriculum alone cannot produce national identity if the interpersonal environment of the classroom contradicts the principles communicated in formal educational materials. Teachers who demonstrate impartiality, respect, tolerance, and fairness may reinforce students' perception that the national community can accommodate diversity, whereas discriminatory or sectarian behavior can weaken trust and belonging. This interpretation is consistent with the broader literature on identity formation in educational contexts. Chen et al. showed that students' identities are shaped partly through recognition, participation, educational experiences, and perceptions of belonging within the school setting (Chen et al., 2023). Although their study focused on disciplinary science identity, the underlying mechanism of recognition is highly relevant to national identity: students are more likely to internalize an identity when significant institutional actors acknowledge them as legitimate members of the relevant community. The findings also correspond with research on educational leaders working across cultural environments, which indicates that professional practice in culturally diverse contexts requires adaptability, cultural sensitivity, and the capacity to negotiate difference (Deniz, 2024). For Iraqi teachers, these competencies may be particularly important because classrooms can include students whose family histories and communal identities differ substantially.

The third category, school cultural and organizational factors, demonstrated that national identity is also constructed experientially through school climate, participation, justice, ceremonies, rules, peer relations, and feelings of security and belonging. Participants emphasized that students learn about citizenship not only through lessons but also by observing how authority is exercised and how individuals are treated within the school. A fair and participatory school environment may therefore function as a practical model of national citizenship. This finding aligns with studies indicating that identity develops through interaction and through individuals' experience of recognition within institutional settings (Chen et al., 2023). It also complements research suggesting that schools play a broader socialization role in the formation of students' national identity beyond the transfer of formal knowledge (Farhadi & Zoghi, 2018; Mirzapour et al., 2019). The significance of peer relations also corresponds with findings on adolescence showing that friendship and peer networks are highly influential during the period in which young people experience identity exploration and identity-related uncertainty (Keshavarz et al., 2018). Cross-group friendships, collaborative activities, student councils, and shared projects may therefore contribute to national identity by creating direct experiences of cooperation across ethnic, religious, or linguistic boundaries.

The findings concerning sociocultural factors were among the most prominent in the study. Participants repeatedly argued that Iraqi national identity cannot be strengthened by eliminating or suppressing ethnic, religious, linguistic, tribal, or regional identities. Rather, national identity should provide an overarching framework capable of incorporating these identities within a shared sense of belonging. This finding is strongly consistent with international research on school policy in multicultural societies, which shows that education systems frequently face the challenge of balancing cultural recognition with social integration and national cohesion (Martynova, 2024). The present results suggest that recognition and national integration should not be interpreted as contradictory goals. On the contrary, students may develop stronger national attachment when their subgroup identities are respected and represented rather than treated as obstacles to national unity. The finding also resonates with Zhang and Wang's identification of heterogeneous patterns of national identity among adolescents, indicating that young people do not develop national identification uniformly and that contextual influences contribute to different trajectories of national

belonging (Zhang & Wang, 2025). In Iraq, these differences are likely to be especially important because historical, regional, cultural, and political experiences vary markedly across communities.

The relationship between national identity and religious identity was another important sociocultural issue. Participants emphasized that religious belonging should be accommodated within a broader framework of shared citizenship rather than positioned in competition with national identity. This interpretation is supported by research showing that national and religious identities can coexist and may be associated with broader psychosocial outcomes among adolescents (Asmari Bordeh Zard & Hallaji Sani, 2020). The implication is that identity construction in schools should not be organized around the replacement of one identity with another. Instead, educational environments should allow students to integrate multiple layers of identity. This is especially relevant in Iraq, where religious and sectarian affiliations may be socially significant. A school environment that frames different religious communities as legitimate components of the nation may contribute to a more inclusive form of national belonging than an educational model based on assimilation or symbolic dominance.

The importance of shared cultural heritage and collective memory also emerged clearly from the findings. Participants regarded national literature, historical experiences, common cultural traditions, public symbols, and collective achievements as important resources for national cohesion. At the same time, they warned that selective or conflict-centered historical narratives may reinforce division. This result is compatible with Al-Rawi's analysis of Iraqi cultural identity, which highlights the role of media, history, and cultural representation in shaping public understandings of identity (Al-Rawi, 2022). It also has conceptual similarities with concerns raised regarding the loss of cultural identity in contemporary Iraqi architecture, where disconnection from collective historical and cultural references has been interpreted as a broader problem of identity continuity (Malaika, 2013). In both cases, identity depends partly on the preservation and reinterpretation of common cultural references. Schools can therefore contribute to national identity by helping students engage critically with shared heritage while avoiding narratives that transform past conflict into present-day hostility.

The political and institutional category also emerged as highly significant. Participants connected national identity with institutional trust, equal access to education, political

neutrality of schools, policy consistency, regional equality, and the legacy of conflict. This finding indicates that educational efforts to strengthen national belonging may be ineffective if students simultaneously experience the state as unequal, unstable, discriminatory, or excessively politicized. National identity therefore appears to be partly dependent on the credibility of the institutions that claim to represent the nation. This interpretation is compatible with the broader understanding of national identity as a socially embedded construct influenced by contextual and institutional conditions (Zhang & Wang, 2025). It is also supported indirectly by research emphasizing that identity formation is not isolated from wider social environments but reflects developmental interaction with political, cultural, and institutional structures (Kadhim, 2025). In the Iraqi context, experiences of conflict, displacement, regional inequality, and political polarization may create different relationships with the national community, making institutional fairness particularly important for identity formation.

The finding concerning family, media, and community factors further demonstrates that school-based national identity formation takes place within a wider network of socialization. Participants emphasized that family narratives, religious institutions, neighborhood discourse, peer networks, television, and digital platforms can either reinforce or undermine messages communicated by schools. The importance of school-family interaction is consistent with Fedorenko et al., who showed that cooperation between families and schools can contribute to the formation of adolescents' national identity by increasing consistency across major socialization environments (Fedorenko et al., 2020). This is particularly relevant because family narratives often shape children's earliest interpretations of history, group membership, and political belonging. When family and school narratives are mutually reinforcing, national identity may develop more coherently. When they are contradictory, students may experience competing interpretations of belonging.

The media dimension of this category is equally important. Al-Rawi emphasized the historical and contemporary role of media in shaping cultural identity in Iraq (Al-Rawi, 2022). In the contemporary context, digital media have expanded the range and intensity of identity-related influences available to adolescents. Morales showed that digital self-presentation has become an important aspect of adolescent identity formation, as young people increasingly construct and negotiate identity through online interaction (Morales, 2025). This finding helps explain why

participants in the present study considered social media both an opportunity and a threat. Digital platforms can expose students to inclusive national narratives, cultural heritage, and civic participation, but they can also intensify misinformation, polarization, sectarian discourse, and selective historical representation. Consequently, schools can no longer approach national identity education without considering digital literacy and students' capacity to critically evaluate identity-related content encountered online.

Overall, the findings indicate that national identity construction in Iraqi schools is an ecological and multilayered process rather than a simple outcome of patriotic education. This interpretation is supported by the combined literature on adolescent development, curriculum, school socialization, multicultural policy, family interaction, cultural identity, and digital environments (Fedorenko et al., 2020; Kadhim, 2025; Martynova, 2024; Morales, 2025). The six categories identified in this study are interdependent: curriculum defines formal narratives, teachers interpret them, school culture provides practical experiences of belonging, sociocultural conditions shape the meaning of difference, political institutions influence legitimacy, and families and media continuously reinterpret national messages. The principal contribution of the study is therefore the integration of these factors into a comprehensive framework specifically applicable to the Iraqi school context. The results suggest that strengthening national identity requires coherence across educational, cultural, institutional, and social domains rather than isolated curricular interventions.

The present study had several limitations. First, the study was qualitative and relied on the perspectives of 20 experts and educational professionals from Tehran who were knowledgeable about educational, identity-related, and Iraqi sociocultural issues; therefore, the findings represent expert interpretations rather than direct accounts of Iraqi students, teachers, parents, or school administrators. Second, purposive sampling was used, which was appropriate for obtaining information-rich perspectives but limits statistical generalization. Third, data were collected through semi-structured interviews, and participants' responses may have been influenced by professional background, personal interpretations, or social desirability. Fourth, the study examined national identity construction at a conceptual and structural level and did not compare schools across Iraqi provinces, ethnic communities, religious groups, or educational levels. Finally, because national identity is

influenced by rapidly changing political, media, and social conditions, some of the identified mechanisms may evolve over time and should be interpreted in relation to the broader sociopolitical context.

Future research should examine the proposed framework using larger and more diverse samples drawn directly from Iraqi educational settings. Qualitative studies involving students, teachers, parents, principals, curriculum developers, and educational policymakers across different Iraqi provinces could clarify how the identified factors operate in everyday school life. Comparative studies could investigate differences between urban and rural schools, public and private schools, different educational stages, and regions characterized by different ethnic, linguistic, or religious compositions. Quantitative research could also develop and validate instruments based on the six categories identified in this study and test relationships among curriculum, school climate, teacher practices, institutional trust, family influence, media exposure, and national identity. Longitudinal studies would be particularly valuable for examining how national identity changes across adolescence and how school experiences contribute to these changes over time. Future research could additionally evaluate the effects of specific interventions such as inclusive history curricula, citizenship education programs, intercultural teacher training, digital literacy programs, and cross-group student activities.

In practice, educational policymakers and school authorities should approach national identity formation as a comprehensive school-wide responsibility rather than as a narrow component of history or civic education. Curricula should represent Iraq's ethnic, religious, linguistic, cultural, and regional diversity within a coherent narrative of shared citizenship, and textbook content should avoid exclusionary or polarizing representations. Teacher education programs should include intercultural competence, conflict-sensitive pedagogy, civic education, and strategies for facilitating respectful discussion of sensitive social and historical issues. Schools should strengthen participatory governance through student councils, collaborative projects, community service, national and cultural activities, and opportunities for meaningful student voice. Institutional fairness, non-discrimination, and equal treatment should be treated as central mechanisms of citizenship education. Schools should also establish stronger cooperation with families and local communities so that identity-related educational goals are communicated consistently, while digital literacy programs should equip students to critically evaluate polarizing or

misleading online content. Finally, national identity initiatives should be designed in a way that strengthens common belonging without requiring students to abandon legitimate ethnic, religious, linguistic, or regional identities.

Authors' Contributions

All authors significantly contributed to this study.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

Acknowledgments

We hereby thank all individuals for participating and cooperating us in this study.

Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

Funding

According to the authors, this article has no financial support.

Ethical Considerations

In this study, to observe ethical considerations, participants were informed about the goals and importance of the research before the start of the interview and participated in the research with informed consent.

References

- Al-Rawi, A. (2022). *Media and cultural identity in Iraq: Historical and contemporary perspectives*. Routledge.
- Ansari, F. (2023). Investigating the factors influencing the formation of social identity among high school students. 10th National Conference on Advances in Positive Psychology, Bandar Abbas.
- Asmari Bordeh Zard, Y., & Hallaji Sani, A. (2020). The Relationship of Religious and National Identity with Depression and Quality of Life in Lower Secondary Public School Students of Bukan. *Quarterly Journal of Educational Psychology*.
- Chen, S., Wei, B., & Zhang, H. (2023). Exploring high school students' disciplinary science identities and their differences.

- International Journal of Science and Mathematics Education*, 21(2), 377-394. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10763-022-10257-7>
- Deniz, Ü. (2024). The odyssey of Turkish school leaders in Africa: An expedition into professional identity, challenges, and cultural adaptations. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 103, 102090. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2024.102090>
- Farhadi, F., & Zoghi, K. (2018). The role of schools in the religious education and national identity of students.
- Fedorenko, S., Voronina, H., & Zhurba, K. (2020). School-family Interaction in Forming Adolescents' National Identity: the Ukrainian Pedagogical Experience. *Revista Romaneasca pentru Educatie Multidimensionala*, 12(4), 189-204. <https://doi.org/10.18662/rrem/12.4/341>
- Kadhim, N. J. (2025). Identity formation in adolescence: An Eriksonian approach to Arthur Golden's *Memoirs of a Geisha*. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 15(10), 3208-3215. <https://doi.org/10.17507/tpls.1510.07>
- Karimi, S. (2022). Qualitative content analysis of preschool children's programs with emphasis on national identity. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 18(63), 112-135.
- Keshavarz, M., Mirzaei, S., & Mohammadzani, I. (2018). Maturity and identity crisis in adolescence and its role in friendship. National Conference on the Identity of Children in Islamic Iran during the Preschool Period,
- Mahdian, R., Poushaneh, K., Rezazadeh, H. R., & Maleki, H. (2022). Designing a National Identity Curriculum Model for the Second Elementary Grade [Research Article]. *Iranian Journal of Educational Sociology*, 5(3), 128-141. <https://doi.org/10.61186/ijes.5.3.128>
- Malaika, M. J. (2013). *The Loss of Identity in Contemporary Iraqi Architecture: Baghdad City* The Second Engineering Conference of the Golden Jubilee of the College of Engineering,
- Martynova, M. (2024). Identity and school policy in the multicultural world: anthropological analysis of the international experience. *Вестник Антропологии*, 3, 119-134. <https://doi.org/10.33876/2311-0546/2024-3/119-134>
- Mirzapour, S., Zamani Moghaddam, A., & Jafari, P. (2019). The Role of Education in Institutionalizing Students' National Identity from the Perspective of School Staff. *National Studies Quarterly*, 20(3), 53-73. <https://www.sid.ir/paper/88990/en>
- Morales, L. (2025). Identifying the Role of Digital Self-Presentation in Adolescent Identity Formation. *Jayps*, 6(11), 1-8. <https://doi.org/10.61838/kman.jayps.479>
- Zhang, Z. H., & Wang, Y. (2025). Development of National Identity Among Chinese Adolescents: Identification of Subgroups and Influencing Factors. *Psychology in the Schools*, 62(10), 4053-4064. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.23594>