

A comparative study of the Indonesia-Malaysia border regions

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Article Info

Article History

Submitted:

21 November 2025

Revised:

11 December 2025

Accepted:

20 January 2026

Keywords

border communities, education, nationalism, cultural identity, Indonesia–Malaysia border, social integration.

Abstract

This study aims to investigate the socio-cultural, economic, and educational aspects of border communities between Indonesia and Malaysia, with a focus on the Malay and Dayak ethnic groups in Paloh (Sambas Regency) and Jagoi Babang (Bengkayang Regency). Persistent disparities in welfare, educational quality, and national integration in Indonesia's border regions have weakened nationalism and increased socio-economic dependence on Malaysia. On the border, civic education plays a crucial role in strengthening Indonesian nationalism, despite the community's economic dependence on Malaysia. Through flag ceremonies, character education, and the integration of local wisdom into the curriculum, schools function as the final bastion of nationalism, safeguarding the national identity of the younger generation in the face of economic inequality and transnational influences. Using a qualitative approach that integrates ethnographic and etnopedagogic methods, data were collected through participatory observation, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. The findings indicate that Indonesian border communities experience a dual identity, marked by both symbolic loyalty to Indonesia and pragmatic attachment to Sarawak, Malaysia. Economic disparities between the two countries, especially in access to infrastructure, education, and labour markets, have heightened social dependency and eroded Indonesia's national identity. However, the integration of local wisdom and etnopedagogic practices in education in both countries has proven effective in strengthening cultural resilience, social cohesion, and national consciousness among students. Cultural rituals such as Gawai Dayak serve as transnational spaces of solidarity that both connect and differentiate the two nations.

Article Link: <https://journal.uny.ac.id/index.php/civics/article/view/91234>



Introduction

The Indonesia-Malaysia border region represents a distinctive social space inhabited by communities with diverse cultural, economic, and social backgrounds. As noted by Dewantara et al. (2023), border areas are among the most complex social, cultural, and political environments. Borders encompass interrelated processes involving space, time, population, economy, culture, and individual behaviour (Lundén & Zalamans, 2002). People living in border regions tend to share affinities with Malaysian communities through trade, language, and social networks. Consequently, their daily lives reflect complex dynamics between national loyalty and the practical needs of everyday life.

In line with Siregar & Nugroho (2023), the operation of the *Pos Lintas Batas Negara* (PLBN) has significantly improved local economic indicators. The PLBN functions not only as a facility for immigration, security, and customs but also as a catalyst for the economic and social advancement of border communities. Cross-border integration serves as a strategic means of reinforcing a nation's geopolitical standing (Van Houtum & Ernste, 2001) and the frontline areas of a country's borders, reflected in its defence and security, thereby providing a representative picture of the nation (Dewantara, 2024).

Furthermore, the development of border infrastructure constitutes a key national effort to assert state presence and sovereignty in peripheral regions while simultaneously enhancing the welfare of border residents. Drawing on European experiences, Jańczak (2018) emphasises that cross-border cooperation plays a vital and often compelling role for local authorities (Murtagh, 2005; Sohn et al., 2009). Furthermore, Anderson (1991) and Ernest (1983) argue that territorial boundaries and citizens are essential components in shaping the identity and legitimacy of a nation-state. Therefore, the establishment of PLBNs should be understood not merely as economic development projects but as embodiments of the nation-state ideology that affirm Indonesia's sovereignty, strengthen territorial identity, and foster a more profound sense of nationalism among border communities.

The ideology of the nation-state holds that every person belongs to a sovereign nation with clearly defined borders. In this view, the world is seen as divided into separate nations, each with its own borders and citizens (Anderson, 1991; Ernest, 1983). Borders play a vital role in connecting neighbouring states and promoting their interaction and cooperation (Sevastianov et al., 2015).

Therefore, borders should be seen not only as geographic boundaries but also as dynamic spaces where identity, economic interests, and political power converge. Cultural differences between the Malay and Dayak communities are some of the most noticeable aspects of social life along the Indonesia-Malaysia border. Malaysia's middle-income population reflects a multicultural heritage with Malays (50.4%), Chinese (23.7%), indigenous peoples (11.0%), Indians (7.1%), and other ethnic groups (7.8%) (Jabatan Perangkaan Malaysia, 2011). The Malay population in Malaysia tends to emphasise Islamic identity and Malay traditional customs, which closely resemble the cultural patterns of border communities in the Sambas region.

In contrast, the Dayak community in Jagoi Babang continues to uphold its traditional belief systems, rituals, and community ties, which are rooted in ancestral and land-based values (Kwirinus & Saeng, 2023). This local wisdom encompasses cultural, economic, communicative, and ecological dimensions that have evolved organically and been transmitted through *adat* traditions and ancestral teachings (Limba et al., 2023). Such cultural orientations extend beyond mere traditional variation because they shape solidarity networks, systems of customary leadership, and how communities negotiate with modernisation. These dynamics suggest that border regions serve as both sites of cultural convergence and spaces of



differentiation. Significant economic disparities exist between the Malay communities of Malaysia and the Dayak populations residing along the border, particularly in terms of livelihoods and market access. Sitohang et al. (2025) observed that cross-border activities in Kalimantan are constrained by limited regional development, a condition that fosters mutual dependence and sustained cross-border engagement.

Similarly, Elyta & Sahide (2021) recommend enhanced cooperation between Indonesia and Malaysia to develop creative industries through socio-economic partnerships and the establishment of a Border Trade Agreement. On the Indonesian side, Malay communities are more actively engaged in cross-border trade, the service sector, and other economic activities linked to Malaysia's markets. In contrast, the Dayak communities remain primarily dependent on agrarian livelihoods, including ladang (fields), plantations, and forests, which form the economic and ecological ties connecting both countries.

Every day, cross-border economic practices influence local experiences and shape the lived realities of borderland societies (Sarjono & Rudiati, 2022). These conditions produce disparities in living standards and degrees of integration into global markets, as cross-border trade facilitates faster access to modern goods and consumer products. Consistent with theories of territorial construction, border regions can be understood as socially and politically constructed spaces (Keating, 1997; Newman, 2003; Paasi & Metzger, 2018). Borders are characterised by historical, geographical, and economic features that are often employed to essentialize the meaning of a given cross-border area (Pupier, 2020). In the current context, the economic, cultural, and political resources concentrated in border regions serve as primary factors attracting migrants from around the world (Dorfman et al., 2022).

Labour market outcomes such as wage disparities, working conditions, and access to economic opportunities are not solely determined by market mechanisms. They are also shaped by government regulations and the influence of collective organisations that defend the interests of specific groups (Holmlund, 2014). In Malaysia, average wages are significantly higher than those in Indonesia. However, as shown by Okterano et al. (2024), Indonesian migrant workers in Malaysia earn relatively higher wages but still experience unequal treatment compared to local workers. These inequalities manifest in lower pay, longer working hours, and limited access to workplace facilities, thereby creating a dualistic labour market structure. (Rai, 2024) emphasises the importance of addressing historical injustices faced by Indonesian migrants in Malaysia. The existing wage and working condition disparities illustrate patterns of economic domination and social marginalisation against migrant groups. Sternsdorff-Cisterna (2015) argues that government decisions often result in uneven benefits, where certain groups gain advantages over others. Comparable situations occur in Central Asia, where ethnic tensions, competition for resources, and geopolitical interests have led to cross-border inequalities and conflicts (Klimov et al., 2024).

The socio-political dynamics of border regions illustrate how variations in leadership styles, political participation, and state-society relations impact regional stability. Such differences frequently generate tensions that may escalate into border disputes. Buranelli (2021) explains, these disputes are not purely geographical in nature but are deeply intertwined with issues of legitimacy and political authority in border governance. Broich et al. (2013) found substantial lowland loss in both Indonesia (19.8%) and Malaysia (14.4%). When environmental governance and local leadership fail to align with national or community interests, social, economic, and political tensions may emerge. Arifin et al. (2024) highlight that managing socio-cultural relations and networks contributes to sustainable border development by promoting economic equity and ensuring continued cross-border interaction and local sovereignty. Each nation retains the right to cooperate to advance its interests, including with neighbouring states (Sitohang et al., 2025).

Integration, however, cannot be separated from local dynamics rooted in complex layers of culture and history. Additionally, competition around regional cross-border projects often

involves struggles among elites to control access to transnational capital at different levels of governance (Karim, 2020). Development access in border regions remains highly uneven. This disparity presents serious challenges for governments striving to achieve national welfare and integration. Political decentralisation has introduced new dynamics, enabling local governments to express discontent toward central authorities by contesting national power within Indonesia's legal framework (Wangke, 2018).

Malaysia, much like Indonesia, is characterised by its multiethnic, multiracial, multireligious, and multicultural composition (Bin Jamil, 2022). Prior studies, such as those by Broich et al. (2013), have compared environmental impacts, land-based economic pressures, and the need for cross-border governance. Their research identified significant differences in highland regions, with Malaysia experiencing greater land loss (2.95 percent) compared to Indonesia (0.25 percent) and showing larger clusters of environmental degradation. However, their analysis did not explore socio-cultural, educational, or identity-related aspects among the Malay and Dayak communities living along the border. A second study by Wahyudi et al. (2024) examined Indonesia–Malaysia border management, focusing on the implementation of soft border policies, local governance practices, and bilateral cooperation for economic development. Their findings indicate that both countries have flexible border arrangements that facilitate movement and promote socio-cultural integration, as well as cross-border economic activities.

However, the study's limitation is that it mainly focuses on state policies and cooperation mechanisms, without exploring the experiences of local communities affected by these policies or the unique social and economic structures of different ethnic groups, such as the Malays and Dayaks. Building on the gaps from earlier research, this study introduces a new ethnographic and ethnopedagogical approach to examine the socio-cultural, economic, and educational aspects of border communities between Indonesia and Malaysia. Aside from environmental and policy issues, it also examines identity development, local values, and educational practices in both areas. The goal is to offer a fresh perspective on national policy, local culture, and the enduring strength of national identity in Indonesia's and Malaysia's border regions.

Method

This study used a qualitative design that combined two main approaches: ethnography and ethnopedagogy. The ethnopedagogical approach is highly relevant because it draws on the values, cultural practices, and local wisdom of the Jagoi Babang and Temajuk communities as sources of civic education that strengthen national identity. In this way, the sense of nationhood is not only taught formally, but is also lived and experienced in the everyday lives of border communities.

The ethnopedagogical approach offered culturally grounded experiences related to participants' local contexts (Sakti et al., 2024). Combining these two approaches was essential because border regions are complex social spaces where cultural, economic, and educational factors intertwine to shape the identities of communities and younger generations in both countries. A qualitative method was chosen because it enables the exploration of meaning without being limited by numerical data. The research was carried out along the Indonesia–Malaysia border in West Kalimantan Province, specifically in Paloh District, Sambas Regency, and Jagoi Babang District, Bengkayang Regency. The first location represents coastal Malay communities with strong economic and social ties to Malaysia, while the second features inland Dayak communities that focus on customary and cultural traditions. These sites were purposefully selected because they reflect contrasting cultural, economic, and educational contexts identified in previous research.

The research procedure followed four systematic stages: (1) a preliminary phase that involved determining the research focus, conducting literature reviews on transnationalism,

nationalism, and locally based education, and obtaining permissions at the village and school levels; (2) field exploration through initial observations to understand Malay and Dayak social life, cross-border economic activities, educational infrastructure, and customary practices; (3) main data collection through participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis; and (4) data analysis and verification through reduction, categorization, and conceptual interpretation.

Research participants were identified through purposive sampling, targeting individuals who best understood the realities of border life. In Paloh, 12 informants participated, including community leaders, village officials, local residents, and military personnel stationed at the border. In Jagoi Babang, four participants were involved, comprising the principal, teachers, students from SMA Negeri 1 Jagoi Babang, and residents engaged in educational activities. Data were collected through naturalistic and participatory observation, allowing the researcher to directly witness cross-border interactions, including the use of Malaysian ringgit, the trade of basic goods from Malaysia, and community participation in religious and customary ceremonies.

Observations in Jagoi Babang also included school activities such as flag ceremonies, locally contextualised learning, and extracurricular programs promoting nationalism. Semi-structured interviews averaged forty-five minutes in duration. Documentary analysis encompassed school curricula, educational policy documents, village archives, photographs of community activities, and field notes on the economic structures of border societies as highlighted in comparative studies of the Malay and Dayak communities.

Data were analysed using a descriptive qualitative approach following the interactive model of Miles and Huberman. To ensure data validity, triangulation was employed through both source triangulation, which compared perspectives of community members, teachers, and customary leaders, and methodological triangulation, which combined observation, interviews, and documentation. Member checking was conducted by confirming interpretations with informants to ensure meaning accuracy and reduce error bias. By combining ethnographic and ethnopedagogical perspectives, this study offers a comprehensive understanding of how social, cultural, and educational structures in the Indonesia–Malaysia border regions shape the formation of national consciousness and civic identity. The ethnographic approach facilitates contextual understanding of cross-border phenomena such as dual loyalties and economic dependency, while the ethnopedagogical approach highlights the transformative potential of *kearifan lokal* (local wisdom)-based education as a means of preserving identity and strengthening nationalism within transnational dynamics.

Results and Discussion

Socio-Cultural Dynamics and Identity in Border Regions

Communities along Indonesia's border share strong social, economic, and kinship ties with residents of neighbouring Malaysia. In Malaysia, the population is primarily composed of Malaysians of Chinese, Indian, and Malay descent (Tehseen et al., 2023). Cross-national marriages between Indonesians and Malaysians further enhance the socio-cultural diversity of both countries. Additionally, collaborative social events and sporting activities are frequently organised between the two sides. These interactions have led to a dual identity where residents continue to see themselves as Indonesians while also maintaining deep social and cultural connections to Sarawak. Lenartowicz & Roth (2001) noted that Malaysia encompasses a variety of subcultures representing multiple ethnic groups, and this diversity has played a significant role in shaping Malaysia's modern development path (Prim et al., 2017; Tian et al., 2018).

Furthermore, cross-border interactions between Indonesia and Malaysia demonstrate cultural transnationalism, in which the meaning of national borders becomes flexible due to long-standing socio-cultural ties. In line with Broekhuizen et al. (2017), Shane (1993) and Zhu et al. (2018), national culture strongly influences innovative practices within each country.

Malaysian society has successfully preserved its distinct ethnic identities (Tehseen et al., 2023), a pattern that has endured for over fifty years (Fontaine & Richardson, 2005). These dynamics suggest a mutually reinforcing cultural relationship in which both national and ethnic identities remain strong, while cross-border interactions promote adaptable, innovative forms of socio-cultural change.

The shared cultural traditions and local wisdom of communities in Indonesia and Malaysia are exemplified in the Gawai festival, which is jointly recognised and celebrated with the people of Sarawak, Malaysia. Both sides coordinate dates and rituals together and even conduct mutual visits without formal border permits during the three-day celebration. Malaysian communities place great importance on politeness and appropriateness in communication as a way of honouring diversity, a vital value in a multicultural society (Ramli, 2013). This tradition serves as a symbol of transnational solidarity, strengthening the sense of *serumpun* (shared heritage) while also challenging formal political borders. As Evers (2016) notes, Indonesia and Malaysia are connected through diverse and intertwined cultural relationships that are part of the wider Nusantara cultural space. Within the Indonesia–Malaysia border regions, natural law and *adat* (customary law) often take precedence over government-imposed legal systems, as described in Batas (Maharam, 2024).

The Nusantara or Malay World constitutes a multicultural realm encompassing border communities whose expressions of cultural identity and self-awareness transcend the abstract limits of nationalism (Maharam, 2024). Nevertheless, globalisation and Malaysia's dominant modern culture have gradually displaced local values, particularly among younger generations increasingly influenced by Malaysian media and lifestyles. Malaysia is a multiethnic nation composed of Malays or Bumiputera (69.3 percent), Chinese (22.8 percent), Indians (6.9 percent), and others (1.0 percent) (OSM, 2019).

The socio-cultural and identity dynamics of Sarawak serve as both a cultural and economic hub for border communities in West Kalimantan. Consistent with Murtagh (2005) and Sohn et al. (2009), the border functions as a competitive socio-cultural zone. Identity in the borderlands reveals multiple layers of complexity. On one hand, residents continue to raise the *Merah Putih* (Indonesian national flag) and take part in official national ceremonies. On the other hand, their daily social, economic, and cultural lives remain deeply connected to Sarawak. This duality demonstrates a process of identity hybridisation, creating borderlanders who navigate life between two nations and two systems of values.

Portes (2024) links this phenomenon to the concept of social capital, which encompasses networks, trust, and norms built among individuals and groups. Since the 1980s, social capital has been a key focus for sociologists, economists, political scientists, and policymakers. Understanding how border cultures challenge strict ideas of national boundaries is therefore essential (Noor, 2017). Communities on both sides of the border are predominantly Malay and Dayak, sharing common languages, customs, and religions. This cultural proximity strengthens social solidarity and reinforces their shared sense of *serumpun* identity, where individuals perceive themselves as one community despite holding different nationalities.

Thambusamy & Elier (2013) found that Malaysian society grants each ethnic group the freedom to use its own language in education and to practice its traditions and faith, even though Islam and the Malay language are recognised as the official religion and national language, respectively. The state border transforms identities once rooted in language and culture into formal identities defined by citizenship, thereby shaping perceptions of “us” and “them” (Bala, 2002). Social practices such as *gotong royong*, customary rituals, and cross-border communication persist across generations, demonstrating the continuity of traditional Malay–Dayak culture that transcends national borders. In Malaysia, despite religious and ideological diversity, the principle of respectful and polite communication remains a moral foundation for coexistence in a multicultural society (Ramli, 2013).

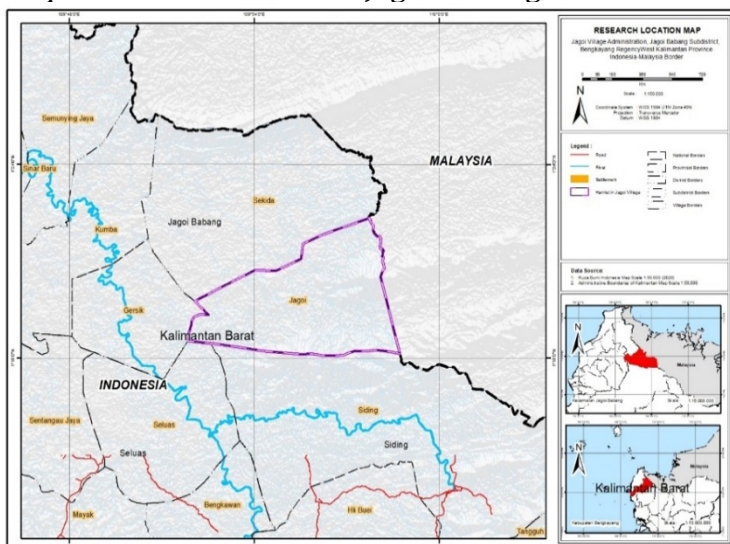
In line with Arifin et al. (2024), local wisdom promotes sustainability through empowerment, participation, and collaborative efforts. Many residents of Camar Bulan in Sambas have expressed a preference for Malaysian citizenship, citing better economic opportunities and greater access to public services. Scott (2020) highlighted that Indonesia's border infrastructure projects serve as state mechanisms to simplify territorial management, thereby reinforcing legitimacy and control over these regions. Ultimately, borderland communities operate within a dynamic socio-cultural environment where fluid cultural practices coexist with an understanding of territorial sovereignty inseparable from daily life (Maharam, 2024).

The phenomenon of declining nationalism, or erosion of national identity, signifies a gradual loss of pride in the Indonesian identity. Younger generations are increasingly adopting Malaysian lifestyles and modern symbols, such as consumer products, language, and entertainment media, which are progressively shaping new identities influenced by Malaysian culture. Tang & Chua (2012) explain that Malaysia's comprehensive economic development strategy aims to bridge the relationship between savings and growth, channelling resources into productive sectors. Cross-border trade has stimulated the growth of local entrepreneurship and small-scale community enterprises (Wu, 2016).

These conditions indirectly influence Indonesian border communities that are socially and economically connected with cross-border activities. Indonesia remains active on the global stage (Misra et al., 2024; Pham & Nugroho, 2022). Social networks and processes go beyond national borders (Levitt & Schiller, 2004), exposing border communities, especially youth, to Malaysia's economic and cultural influences through consumer goods, language, and media. In this context, borderland identity is shaped by two value systems: symbolic loyalty to Indonesia and pragmatic attachment to Sarawak. This situation reflects a non-military transnational threat: the erosion of national identity caused by unequal socio-economic exchanges across borders. In Malaysia, schools also face social tension resulting from limited interaction and a lack of understanding of religious and cultural diversity (Jamaluddin, 2011).

Figure 1.

Map of the Border Area in Jagoi Babang, Indonesia-Malaysia



Source: Processed by the authors using data from the Geospatial Information Agency (Badan Informasi Geospasial) and OpenStreetMap (2025) with the assistance of QGIS.

In the economic realm, Ramadhan et al. (2025) emphasise the importance of enhancing the quality of national education to create a workforce capable of contributing to economic growth. Communities in Jagoi Babang (Bengkayang Regency) and Sarawak (East Malaysia) share a similar cultural and social heritage, especially reflected in the Gawai Dayak festival. Thambusamy & Elier (2013) observe that Malaysia's moral framework is rooted in diverse

religions, traditions, and cultural practices, all of which align with universal values. The Gawai ritual acts as a space for social interaction that transcends political borders, as residents from both sides visit each other freely without formal permission. This interaction has fostered a border community united by cultural solidarity and transnational identity. Although individuals still identify as Indonesians, their social and cultural lives increasingly align with those of Sarawakians. Balakrishnan (2010) found that Malays are constitutionally defined as Muslims from birth and are required to undertake Islamic education in schools, while non-Muslims take moral instruction. The following image shows the border map of Jagoi Babang between Indonesia and Malaysia.

In Malaysia, Islamic knowledge and *kearifan lokal* (local wisdom) have been integrated into modern social work practice (Hatta et al., 2021). Family bonds between Jagoi Babang and Sarawak residents are strengthened through intermarriage, family visits, and shared traditional events. As Turcato et al. (2024) observed, Indonesia's cultural diversity facilitates cross-border interactions, as people frequently participate in life-cycle ceremonies such as births, weddings, and funerals across both territories without regard for national borders. This pattern reflects the development of a borderland identity rooted in shared Dayak and Malay ethnicity rather than official citizenship. Abu Bakar et al. (2018) also argue that common cultural traits among Malaysia's ethnic groups encourage active and dynamic interethnic exchange.

In Indonesia, education is increasingly aligned with local cultural values to promote community development (Ramadhan, Firmansyah, et al., 2023). Schools in Jagoi Babang have begun integrating local cultural values into the curriculum as part of etnopedagogy, though implementation remains limited. (Imran et al., 2025) state that Malaysia-Indonesia education models based on local wisdom should adopt innovative methods to promote stronger social cohesion. The socio-cultural dynamics described earlier are clearly reflected in the physical landscape of the Jagoi Babang border area, where daily interactions between Indonesian and Malaysian communities take place openly. The following image illustrates the border condition that reflects this transnational cultural closeness.

Figure 2.

The Indonesia-Malaysia Border Condition in Jagoi Babang



Residents of Jagoi Babang live within two overlapping cultural spaces: Indonesia, in official terms, and Sarawak, in social and economic reality. Their daily lives reveal a dual identity, where Indonesian national symbols, such as the Merah Putih flag and school ceremonies, are still respected, while their social, linguistic, and economic practices are deeply rooted in Sarawak. This suggests that borders between countries do not eliminate cultural ties but instead create new transnational social spaces that foster hybrid identities.

In schools, activities such as flag ceremonies, Gawai celebrations, and regional language lessons outside regular class hours serve as strategies to preserve local cultural identity. Collaboration between schools and local communities is essential to maintaining Dayak and Malay values as the foundation of socio-cultural identity amid the growing influence of Malaysian modernity. Ramadhan et al. (2025) identified ongoing challenges in Indonesia's education and labour systems, especially in responding to increasing global competition.

Economic Inequality, Development, and the Challenge of National

In the border area of Sambas Regency, especially in Camar Bulan Village, communities face deep-rooted structural and geographical inequalities that make them more dependent on Malaysia than on Indonesia. Elyta & Sahide (2021) emphasise the importance of developing creative industries in border regions to enhance bilateral cooperation between the two countries. Inequality persists due to limited access to basic infrastructure, including roads, electricity, telecommunications, and public services.

Figure 3.

The Border Condition in Camar Bulan Village, Temajuk, Indonesia



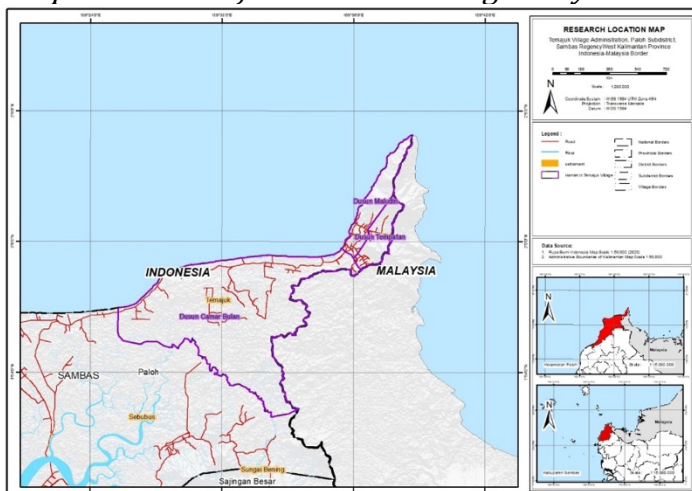
Source: Researcher's documentation, 2025.

In Temajuk, reaching the regency capital remains difficult, as Indonesian mobile networks do not cover many areas, and electricity is available for only limited hours. Suparmi et al. (2018) note that district-level inequality is a major challenge to social welfare, including disparities in health infrastructure, service access, and outcomes. In many border areas, Malaysian television signals and internet access are more easily available than those of Indonesia, symbolising Malaysia's cultural and communicative dominance. Economically, residents rely heavily on imported Malaysian goods, such as rice, sugar, cooking oil, LPG, and milk, which are cheaper and more readily available than local alternatives. Due to limited government subsidies, Indonesian products remain less competitive. The border map of Indonesia in the Temajuk area, which directly borders Malaysia, is shown in the following 4.

Borderless interactions, such as trade exchanges using currency. As a result, the Malaysian Ringgit circulates widely in local markets, gradually replacing the Rupiah as the primary medium of exchange. This shows Malaysia's ability to extend its economic influence into Indonesian border areas, while Indonesia's presence in meeting citizens' basic needs remains limited. Maji et al. (2017) note that Malaysia is the second-largest oil and gas producer in Southeast Asia and the twenty-sixth worldwide. Consequently, this inequality not only manifests physically but also impacts citizens' psychology and sense of national identity. Many residents see Malaysia as more attentive to its citizens' welfare than Indonesia, which creates a trust crisis toward the Indonesian government and a shift in national orientation where people feel safer and more prosperous under Malaysia's socio-economic influence. Some people even prefer Malaysian citizenship for better access to goods and public services. The disparity in

basic services and development is a major source of vulnerability to the national identity of the Jagoi Babang community vis-à-vis Malaysia.

Figure 4.
Map of the Temajuk Area Bordering Malaysia



Source: Processed by the authors using data from the Geospatial Information Agency (Badan Informasi Geospasial) and OpenStreetMap (2025) with the assistance of QGIS.

At the border, the 600-ringgit spending quota has remained unchanged since 1968, and the community perceives this as an injustice, as they also have faster access to healthcare in Malaysia. Such inequality undermines community nationalism when civic education fails to function effectively. The Temajuk community faces similar challenges, including frustration with the promised PLBN (State Border Crossing Post), which has yet to materialise. Another issue concerns unfair land compensation, where one hectare receives only Rp 15 million, leaving residents feeling betrayed by the Indonesian state. As a result, a sense of second-class citizenship, or marginal citizenship, has emerged, as the state's presence is not perceived as strong. The roles of Pancasila and civic education reinforce unity and national identity among border communities by transforming injustice into opportunities for civic engagement. Community members discuss their rights to basic services, and the younger generation dares to criticise policies in a constitutional manner. Criticising the spending quota, for example, is an expression of critical nationalism that demands justice.

In both Temajuk and Jagoi Babang, national awareness is cultivated through everyday practices, particularly the decision to remain in their homeland despite more attractive economic opportunities in Malaysia. This reflects a strong sense of place attachment that underpins Pancasila-based social cohesion. In these communities, spanning both countries, people have shown they can live harmoniously without conflict despite religious differences. The practice of *gawai*, Malay customs, and cross-border kinship ties serve as sources of solidarity between Indonesia and Malaysia. The harmony among border communities is deeply rooted in the region's socio-cultural order (Azwar et al., 2024).

Economic inequality in border regions thus makes communities vulnerable to transnational influences. Communities dependent on Malaysia's economy are increasingly exposed to social and ideological infiltration, eroding national identity and weakening integration. This finding reinforces the idea that transnationalism is not limited to trade or migration but also involves challenges to solidarity and national loyalty. The border transforms identities once based on shared language and culture into formal citizenship-based identities, creating the binary perception of "us" and "them" (Bala, 2002). National development efforts are still not enough to make the state visibly present in frontier areas. Uneven development, poor infrastructure, and weak regulation of cross-border activity continue to fuel disparities. Border residents thus face a dilemma: citizens of Indonesia by law, yet socio-economically

embedded in Malaysia's system. Illegal migration across the border further highlights this imbalance (Maharam, 2024).

The Jagoi Babang border area reveals an even sharper economic gap when compared with Sarawak in East Malaysia, where infrastructure and living standards are far more advanced. Residents of Jagoi Babang have limited access to quality education, healthcare, and economic opportunities, while communities across the border in Sarawak enjoy better and more stable public services. This imbalance fosters cross-border economic dependence, as Jagoi Babang residents prefer to trade in Sarawak, where prices for staple goods such as rice, sugar, LPG, and daily necessities are lower, and supplies are more reliable. The Malaysian Ringgit circulates widely in local markets, replacing the Rupiah in everyday transactions. This disparity extends beyond economics, exposing the lag in Indonesia's educational infrastructure. In Malaysia, professional categories are distinguished between those with formal qualifications and "functional alternative social workers" who perform similar roles without formal academic backgrounds (Hatta et al., 2021).

In contrast, Indonesia's limited educational quality continues to hinder community development. Schools in border regions often lack adequate facilities, including classrooms, laboratories, libraries, and digital infrastructure. Roads leading to schools remain unpaved, and limited internet connectivity disrupts the learning process. Malaysia, however, maintains teacher quality through structured initiatives including the Integrated Assessment for Education Service Officers, Continuous Professional Development, Malaysian Teacher Standards, and the "Be a Malaysian Teacher" program (KPM, 2017).

In Indonesia, teacher development is constrained by limited resources and training opportunities, leading to frequent interruptions in teaching. Ramadhan, Imran, et al. (2023) emphasise the crucial importance of social competence among teachers as a cornerstone of educational success. The continuing inequality between the two nations' border regions reflects a systemic developmental divide that undermines both national cohesion and identity. As Suriyanisa, Syamsuri, et al. (2024) note, education remains the key pathway to enhanced skills and academic advancement. Many border residents perceive Malaysia as more responsive to community needs than Indonesia. The findings reveal a shift in social orientation and economic identification, as communities feel more secure operating within Malaysia's stable and rewarding economy. Without improvements in welfare and infrastructure, this dependence risks accelerating the erosion of nationalism and weakening citizens' connection to Indonesia. Education plays a crucial role in maintaining national unity and integration. Thus, serious attention must be given to border education systems, as they shape the next generation's national identity.

Suriyanisa, Ramadhan, et al. (2024) emphasise collective unity in pursuing shared goals, noting that schools serve as the final bastion of nationalism through flag ceremonies and ethnoprismatic-based learning that elevates local cultural values. A properly ordered society, according to Aminuyati et al. (2022), reflects a shared social aspiration. Yet, the effectiveness of such education remains hindered by limited facilities, human resources, and top-down policies that neglect local contexts. Therefore, economic inequality and delayed development in border regions have emerged as real threats to national integration. The growing dependence of border communities on Malaysia reflects not only disparities in welfare but also the diminished visibility of the Indonesian state and the fading of national symbols in frontier zones. Strengthening nationalism and implementing welfare-oriented development are thus urgent strategic imperatives to safeguard national unity in areas along the Indonesia-Malaysia border, such as Camar Bulan.

The inequalities in economic and developmental progress not only deepen dependency on Sarawak but also test the resilience of Indonesia's national integration. Enhancing education, basic infrastructure, and community economic empowerment remains essential to narrow these gaps while strengthening patriotism and self-reliance among citizens living at the nation's

edge. The economic interdependence of Jagoi Babang and Temajuk is evident in residents' habit of purchasing basic necessities in Teluk Melano, where prices are lower, and quality is higher. Cross-border transactions are flexible, with both ringgit and rupiah being mutually accepted, while many residents work in Malaysia during the day and return to Indonesia every evening for family and community life. This situation demonstrates that economic interdependence does not weaken national bonds, as home, land, and village remain central to identity.

Social relations are nurtured through cross-border Malay kinship and interfaith harmony in Jagoi, thereby strengthening solidarity and everyday cohesion. Inequality in public services has sparked regular criticism, particularly regarding the unchanged spending quota since 1968, the unfulfilled promise of the Temajuk PLBN, and the perceived unfairness of land compensation. This disappointment does not lead to rejection of Indonesia; rather, it becomes an expression of critical nationalism, where residents demand equal treatment and fairness as citizens. In this context, Pancasila-based Civic Education plays a crucial role in fostering the awareness that national identity is rooted in a sense of belonging to the homeland, social justice, and multiculturalism. Contextual programs such as local tradition investigation projects, village youth forums, and cross-border collaborations can turn Pancasila into a guide for action rather than mere memorisation, enabling the younger generation to understand their citizenship rights and to actively participate in border development.

Conclusion

Communities along the Indonesia-Malaysia border inhabit a distinctive transnational social space where national boundaries do not restrict cultural or social practices. Borderland identities are shaped through kinship networks, cross-border economic interactions, and the preservation of *kearifan lokal* (local wisdom) amid the forces of modernisation. From a socio-cultural perspective, hybridisation of identity has emerged between the Malay and Dayak populations. Shared traditions such as the Gawai Dayak festival, cross-border social interactions, and intermarriage foster strong cultural solidarity and reinforce a sense of *serumpun*, or shared ethnic kinship. However, this process has also been accompanied by a gradual decline in nationalism, particularly among younger generations who are increasingly influenced by Malaysian media and cultural trends. The national identity of border residents is becoming intertwined with Sarawak, as their daily lives are socially and economically integrated across the border.

In terms of economic and development indicators, the study reveals significant disparities between Indonesia's and Malaysia's border regions. Limited infrastructure, inadequate public services, and restricted access to education and healthcare have led border communities to depend heavily on Malaysian goods, currency, and economic systems. This structural inequality creates economic dependency that undermines national integration and generates what can be described as a form of "non-military transnationalism," referring to the erosion of national identity due to socio-economic domination by a neighbouring state. In education, the ethnopedagogical approach plays a pivotal role in strengthening national identity and local cultural heritage. Schools in Jagoi Babang, for example, have made efforts to integrate local cultural values into the learning process through ceremonial events, cultural celebrations, and regional language education. Nevertheless, these initiatives are constrained by limited facilities, insufficient teacher training, and educational policies that often fail to reflect local realities.

Etnopedagogi has proven to be an effective strategy for reinforcing students' character development and national consciousness in border contexts. This study recognises its limitation in geographical scope, as it examines only two representative areas, Paloh and Jagoi Babang, and therefore may not fully reflect the diversity of conditions across the entire Indonesia-Malaysia border. Future research should investigate the roles of youth, diaspora, and digital connectivity in shaping new cross-border identities. This study contributes to a

deeper understanding of borderland identity and transnationalism from the perspectives of educational sociology and cultural anthropology.

The findings provide a valuable foundation for policymakers in developing inclusive border development strategies, particularly in education, the creative economy, and socio-cultural programs, while incorporating local wisdom and the lived realities of border communities. The Indonesian government needs to accelerate infrastructure development, improve education quality, and strengthen the local economy in border areas to reduce community dependence on Malaysia and significantly strengthen nationalism. Furthermore, strengthening education grounded in ethnopedagogy and local wisdom requires continuous development through contextual, participatory, and sustainable policies to maintain the cultural identity and national awareness of the younger generation in border areas.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to the Research and Community Service Institute (LPPM) of Tanjungpura University, the village officials of Jagoi Babang, Bengkayang Regency, and the village officials of Temajuk, Sambas Regency, on the Indonesia-Malaysia border, for granting permission for field data collection.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Funding Statement

This project was funded by the Directorate of Research and Community Service, Ministry of Higher Education, Science, and Technology (Kemendiktisaintek) of Indonesia, through the Fundamental Research scheme under funding number 115/C3/DT.05.00/PL/2025; 7888/UN22.10/ PT.01.03/2025.

Ethics Approval

This study entitled “*A Comparative Study of the Indonesia–Malaysia Border Regions*” was conducted in accordance with established ethical standards for social science research. Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant institutional ethics committee prior to data collection. All participants were informed about the purpose of the research and their voluntary participation. Informed consent was obtained from each participant, and confidentiality as well as anonymity of personal information were strictly maintained throughout the research process. The study ensured that no harm, coercion, or misuse of data occurred during the research activities. All procedures complied with ethical guidelines for research involving human participants.

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