

Navigating '*Ke-Indonesia-an*' in diaspora: Transnational habitus and the construction of national values among migrant children in Sabah, Malaysia, and Semarang, Indonesia

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Abstract

This study examines the social construction and habituation of Indonesian national identity (*ke-Indonesia-an*) among early adolescents in two contrasting environments: Semarang, Indonesia, and Sabah, Malaysia. Using a comparative ethnographic design, data were collected through semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and documentary analysis involving 22 participants: 10 students (aged 13–15), 8 parents or guardians, and 4 teachers across three field sites: junior secondary schools in Semarang, Community Learning Centers (CLC) in Sabah, and non-CLC migrant households in Sabah. The analysis integrates Berger and Luckmann's (1966) social constructionism, Bourdieu's (1990) habitus and field theory, and Sayad's (1999) transnational habitus framework. Findings reveal that in Semarang, *ke-Indonesia-an* is reinforced through coherent institutional mechanisms, producing what Billig (1995) terms "banal nationalism." In contrast, migrant children in Sabah navigate a fragmented identity process shaped by assimilation pressures, legal precarity, and social stigma, yet sustain "performative nationalism" through CLC education, familial oral histories, and digital media. A critical finding is that family habitus, classified as either aspirational or survival-oriented, serves as the decisive mediating mechanism in the internalisation of national values. The role of public history transmission, particularly through CLC history instruction by Guru Bina and parental oral narratives, emerges as a significant yet undertheorised mechanism in diaspora identity formation. The study contributes to transnational citizenship education, sociology of education, and public history scholarship by demonstrating that national identity formation cannot be reduced to formal schooling alone, and that policy must attend to the family as the primary site of historical memory transmission in transnational contexts.

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Introduction

Labour migration has become a defining feature of contemporary Indonesian society, evolving into a complex transnational reality (Rajamuddin et al., 2025). Among the most



significant yet often overlooked aspects of this migration is parents accompanying children to host countries (Sieczka, 2025). Children who migrate alongside their parents, particularly to Sabah, Malaysia, face profound social and cultural adjustments that extend well beyond physical relocation (Vilimaitytė, 2025). These children exist in a "liminal space," where they must navigate unfamiliar cultural landscapes and potential social marginalisation while paradoxically maintaining an ontological connection to an Indonesian identity they may experience only through family narratives (Haque, 2025). At the same time, children who remain in the "centre" represented by cities like Semarang are not immune to identity challenges. Rapid social changes driven by globalisation, digital media, and the "banalization" of national symbols in daily life continuously reshape how young Indonesians internalise their heritage. In Semarang, Indonesian values are transmitted within a relatively stable institutional framework, yet they face the invisible pressure of global cultural homogenization (Siswanto et al., 2025).

The concept of *ke-Indonesia-an*, understood as a dynamic composite of values, norms, and cultural practices, sits at the centre of Indonesia's national education agenda. Values such as *gotong royong* (cooperation), *kebhinekaan* (unity in diversity), and *cinta tanah air* (patriotism) are formally enshrined in the national curriculum. However, a significant research gap exists: most studies focus strictly on formal school curricula, overlooking the "lived habituation" that occurs in the intersection of family routines and community life, especially across different geographical and social boundaries (Purnomo & Kurniawan, 2025).

National identity is not a natural or fixed attribute of individuals; it is a socially constructed reality produced and reproduced through ongoing interactions, institutional practices, and cultural narratives. According to Berger and Luckmann's (1966) foundational work, *The Social Construction of Reality*, social reality is constructed through three dialectical moments: (1) Externalisation: individuals project their inner life into the social world, (2) Objectification: these projections become taken-for-granted social facts, (3) Internalisation: individuals absorb the objectified social world as their own subjective reality (Hanita & Arifin, 2025). In the context of children's national identity formation, objectification is particularly significant (Widodo et al., 2025). Institutional mechanisms, including schooling, national rituals, and community practices, objectify values and norms associated with national identity, such as loyalty, solidarity, and shared historical memory (Loo, 2025). Children then internalise these as "natural" and self-evident features of social reality (Wang et al., 2022). For Indonesian children in the diaspora, however, competing social realities complicate the process of objectification (Allred et al., 2022). Living in a host country with different cultural norms and social institutions creates a "clash of objectifications," in which Indonesian national identity must be maintained against the grain of the host environment.

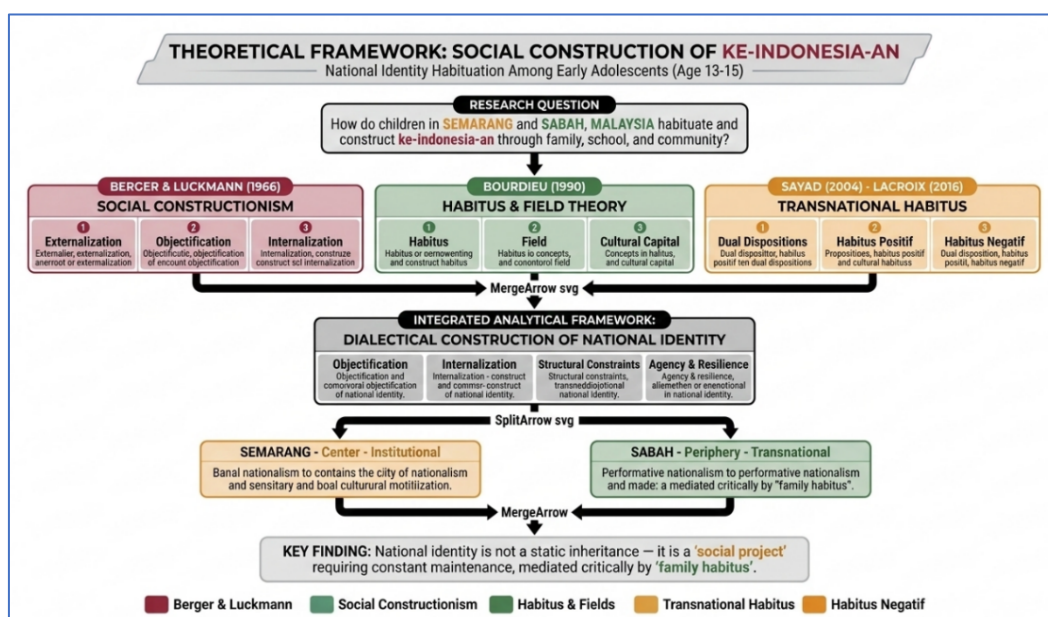
Pierre Bourdieu's (1990) concept of habitus refers to the system of durable, transposable dispositions that individuals acquire through social experience and that unconsciously guide their perceptions and actions (Jin et al., 2025). Crucially, habitus is shaped by the social field, the structured space of positions and relations in which individuals are situated (Cortés Saavedra, 2022). Scholars in transnational migration studies have extended this to develop the notion of transnational habitus: a set of dual dispositions formed at the intersection of the society of origin and the host society (Graziano, 2025). For migrant children in Sabah, transnational habitus manifests as tension between Indonesian values transmitted within the domestic sphere and Malaysian cultural norms encountered in the public sphere (Anderson-Levitt, 2012).

This study further bifurcates this concept into *habitus positif* and *habitus negatif* (Radogna, 2022). Children growing up in conditions of economic precarity and social marginalisation may develop *habitus negatif* dispositions oriented towards survival and short-term pragmatism that may hinder the internalisation of long-term national values (Akifeva et al., 2024). Conversely, families that maintain strong educational aspirations and cultural

practices cultivate a *habitus positif*, which functions as a resilient mechanism for reproducing *ke-Indonesia-an* across borders.

Figure 1.

Integrated Theoretical Framework for the Social Construction of Ke-Indonesia-an



Source: Author's analysis based on field data.

The integrated theoretical framework for this study, as illustrated in Figure 1, establishes a multidimensional approach to understanding the social construction of *ke-Indonesia-an* among early adolescents. The analytical trajectory begins with the central research question, which interrogates the mechanisms through which children in the contrasting environments of Semarang and Sabah, Malaysia, habituate and construct their national identity across the primary social fields of family, school, and community. This inquiry is systematically deconstructed through three foundational theoretical pillars: Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann's social constructionism, Pierre Bourdieu's habitus and field theory, and transnational migration scholarship associated with Abdelmalek Sayad (1999) and Thomas Lacroix (2014). By synthesising these perspectives, the study examines the dialectical moments of externalisation, objectification, and internalisation while simultaneously accounting for the embodied dispositions and cultural capital that shape an individual's sense of belonging.

These theoretical lenses merge into an integrated analytical framework titled the "Dialectical Construction of National Identity," which balances institutionalised values with the nuances of personal absorption and individual resilience. This framework acknowledges that while national identity is objectified through formal structures, its internalisation is constantly mediated by structural constraints and the agency of the subjects involved. When applied to the specific field sites, the framework highlights a sharp divergence between the "Center/Institutional" context of Semarang, where nationalism is often "banal" and unreflective due to cohesive state support and the "Periphery/Transnational" context of Sabah, where national identity becomes "performative" and must be intentionally defended against the pressures of an external host environment.

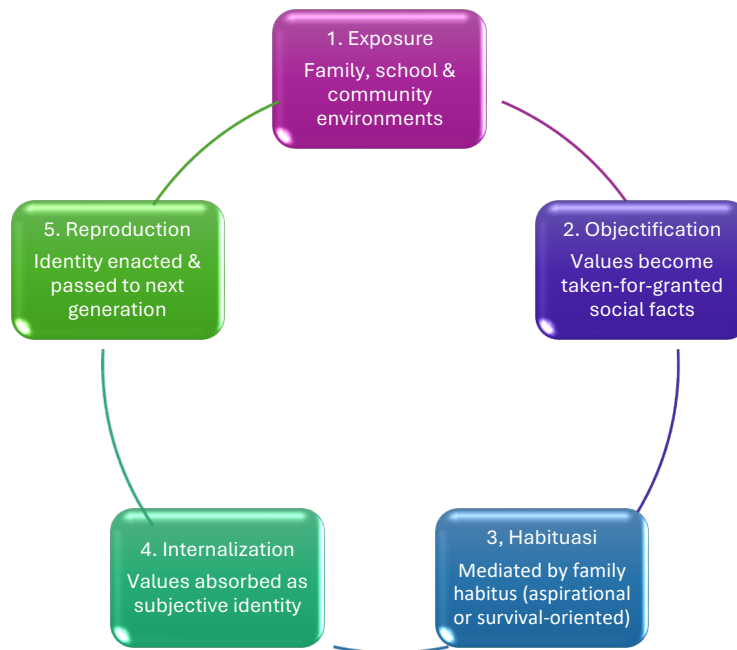
Ultimately, the synthesis presented in this diagram leads to the study's key finding: national identity is not a static inheritance but a dynamic "social project" that requires constant maintenance. This project is critically mediated by the family habitus, which acts as the final arbiter in determining whether objectified national values are successfully transformed into durable subjective dispositions. By positioning the family at the heart of this transnational negotiation, the framework provides a robust basis for analysing the resilience of *ke-Indonesia-an*.

an across borders and the varying degrees of identity success or fragmentation among migrant children.

Complementing this structural view, Figure 2 details the cyclical process of *ke-Indonesia-an* formation as it unfolds within the adolescents' immediate social world. This cycle begins with initial exposure in primary environments and moves through the objectification of values into taken-for-granted facts, a phase that is critically moderated by the family's positive or negative habitus. The eventual internalisation of these values as a subjective identity reproduces national character, which is then enacted and passed on to the next generation. Together, these figures provide a comprehensive roadmap for the empirical analysis that follows, highlighting why family habitus remains the decisive arbiter in the success of citizenship education across borders.

Figure 2.

Process of Ke-Indonesia-an Formation



Source: Author's analysis based on field data.

Recent literature on citizenship education has recognised the need to address the experiences of children who live and learn across national borders (Saefudin, 2024). Traditional models of citizenship education, designed for cohesive national school systems, often fail to address the identity needs of diaspora children who lack access to formal national institutions (Rothwell et al., 2022). In the Indonesian context, Community Learning Centres (CLC) in Sabah represent a critical institutional response, providing education to migrant children who are often undocumented. However, as previous research notes, CLCs face significant resource constraints that limit their capacity for consistent citizenship training. This study contributes to the current discourse by providing comparative empirical evidence from two contrasting field sites and by foregrounding the mediating role of family habitus, a factor frequently neglected in institutional-centric analyses of citizenship education.

This study addresses this gap by comparing the habituation and social construction of *ke-Indonesia-an* among early adolescents (aged 13–15 years) in two contrasting environments: Semarang, as a representative urban Indonesian setting with strong institutional support, and Sabah, Malaysia, as a site of Indonesian diaspora where identity is often a site of negotiation and resilience. Drawing on Peter L. Berger's social constructionism and Pierre Bourdieu's theory of habitus, this research seeks to uncover how national identity is not merely "taught," but "lived" and "constructed" in the face of differing social pressures. The research questions guiding this study are: (1) How do children in the institutionalised setting of Semarang and the

transnational setting of Sabah habituate and construct *ke-Indonesia-an* values in their daily lives? (2) To what extent do family, school, and community dynamics facilitate the objectification of these values in contrasting social fields? (3) What are the specific structural and cultural constraints facing children in both locations in internalising a coherent Indonesian national identity?

Method

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative research design, drawing on ethnographic methods to develop thick descriptions of the social processes through which *ke-Indonesia-an* is constructed and habituated across two distinct field sites. The qualitative approach suits the research questions, which concern interpretive processes, meaning-making, and social practice rather than the statistical distribution of measurable variables (de Moll et al., 2024). By prioritising the "native's point of view," this ethnographic lens captures the subtle nuances of identity that quantitative measures often overlook (Radogna, 2022). The study adopts a comparative case study logic, treating Semarang and Sabah as two cases that share key features (Indonesian children aged 13–15; family-centred socialisation) while differing in critical contextual dimensions (national location, legal status, cultural environment). This design enables the identification of both context-specific and generalisable mechanisms of national identity formation, offering a unique "mirrored" perspective on how the same national values are negotiated in contrasting geopolitical spaces.

Participants and Field Sites

Participants were purposively selected to represent the diversity of family backgrounds within each field site, ensuring that the data reflect a wide spectrum of socio-economic realities. A total of 22 participants were involved across both field sites, comprising 10 students aged 13–15, 8 parents or guardians, and 4 teachers, selected to provide both institutional and familial perspectives on identity transmission. The four teachers interviewed in Sabah include two Guru Bina (professionally certified Indonesian teachers dispatched by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology of Indonesia) and two Guru Pamong (locally recruited teachers employed by the plantation corporations). In Semarang, participants included children and parents from three family types: working-class or labour families (*keluarga buruh*), civil servant families (*keluarga pegawai negeri*), and entrepreneurial families (*keluarga wiraswasta*). This selection allows for an analysis of how different levels of "state-proximity" influence identity transmission. While three family types are examined within Semarang to capture the full institutional range of identity transmission mechanisms, the cross-site comparative analysis focuses specifically on working-class (*buruh*) families, as this is the only socioeconomic category represented among participants in Sabah, thereby ensuring analytical comparability across field sites. In Sabah, participants included children of Indonesian migrant workers employed primarily in palm oil plantations, along with their parents or guardians, including both children enrolled in Community Learning Centres (CLC) and children without access to any formal education. This distinction is crucial for understanding the role of institutional absence in identity formation. Data collection was conducted over approximately three months: six weeks in Semarang (August–September 2024) and six weeks in Sabah (October–November 2024), with follow-up digital communication over the subsequent month for clarification and preliminary member checking.

To protect confidentiality, particularly for participants in Sabah, whose legal status may be precarious and whose participation may involve potential risks, we replaced all names with pseudonyms and altered identifying details where necessary, in accordance with strict international ethical standards for research involving vulnerable populations. Among participants in Sabah, legal status varied significantly: CLC-enrolled children hold a Nomor

Induk Siswa Nasional (NISN) as registered Indonesian students, while participants from non-CLC households ranged from families holding valid Indonesian passports to those who are entirely undocumented, lacking formal identification from either the Indonesian or Malaysian state. This variation in legal status is analytically significant, as it directly shapes the degree of institutional access available to children and the structural constraints on their identity formation.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection involved three complementary methods to achieve methodological triangulation: in-depth semi-structured interviews with children and their parents or guardians; participant observation in family homes, school settings, and community spaces; and documentary data collection, including school materials and community artefacts. These diverse sources provide a holistic view of the "lived reality" of the participants. Data analysis followed the qualitative framework developed by Spradley (1980), including domain analysis, taxonomic analysis, and componential analysis, to systematically uncover the cultural themes embedded in participants' narratives (Arias Cubas et al., 2023). The study employed triangulation, specifically source triangulation across interviews, observations, and documents, to ensure the accuracy and credibility of findings (Kitchin et al., 2022). We wrote analytical memos throughout fieldwork and analysis to maintain reflexive awareness of the researchers' positionality, acknowledging that their Indonesian background inherently interacts with the data gathered in these transnational settings. This positionality operated differently across field sites. In Semarang, shared national identity facilitated rapport and enabled nuanced interpretation of civic rituals and family practices. In Sabah, however, our institutional affiliation with an Indonesian university may have carried ambiguous connotations of state authority for undocumented families. To mitigate this, we explicitly and repeatedly clarified our independence from any government body and the entirely voluntary nature of participation, and we actively sought disconfirming evidence to guard against interpretive bias towards affirming rather than critically examining national identity formation.

Results and Discussion

In Semarang, the objectification of *ke-Indonesia-an* operates through a layered set of social environments: the family, the school, and the broader community. Data reveal that children from different family backgrounds undergo objectification through distinct but overlapping pathways. This layered process produces a taken-for-granted sense of being Indonesian, in which national identity operates as the unreflective backdrop of daily social life (Döbler, 2022).

This domestic setting is characterised by a coherent institutional support system, in which the messages received in formal schools, neighbourhood communities, and domestic family routines operate in a synchronised, mutually reinforcing manner. In this field, the objectification pathway is relatively uncontested because the symbolic markers of national identity, such as the Indonesian language, national history, and civic symbols, are omnipresent and normalised in the adolescents' daily geography (Tan & Liu, 2022). Values are not merely taught as abstract concepts but practised through tangible, rhythmic social activities; for instance, regular participation in flag-raising ceremonies (*upacara bendera*) and community-based cooperation (*gotong royong*) naturalises the state's presence in the child's consciousness.

Furthermore, the data show that while this process produces a unified national identity, its internal mechanisms differ across family backgrounds. The study categorised these into three distinct family types: working-class (*buruh*), civil servant (*pegawai negeri*), and entrepreneurial (*wiraswasta*) families. In civil servant families, the objectification is often explicit and institutionalised, whereas in working-class families, it is embedded in the informal logic of neighbourhood solidarity. However, despite this strong institutional infrastructure, the

study identified a significant constraint in the Semarang context: the pervasive influence of globalisation and modernisation. These external forces create competing frames of reference, particularly through digital media, which slowly erode the salience of traditional national markers. Thus, while objectification in Semarang remains dominant, it faces a modern challenge: national identity must compete with global consumerist identities to remain relevant to early adolescents.

Working-Class

Families, Children from working-class families most commonly encounter the value of *gotong royong* through direct participation in neighbourhood cooperative activities. Strikingly, this participation occurs without explicit parental instruction or formal educational framing: children join collective cleaning efforts, mutual assistance during family events, or neighbourhood watch activities as a matter of course. One adolescent participant in Semarang noted, "*Saya tidak pernah disuruh secara khusus, tapi kalau tetangga sedang kerja bakti, malu rasanya kalau hanya diam di rumah*" (I was never specifically told to, but if the neighbors are working together, it feels shameful just to stay home). The unreflective, habitual character of this participation is itself evidence of successful objectification: *gotong royong* has become part of the taken-for-granted social reality of these children, ingrained through what Bourdieu describes as the "logic of practice."

Civil Servant Families: In civil servant families

Objectification tends to follow a more formal and institutionalised pathway. Children regularly participate in flag-raising ceremonies (*upacara bendera*), national holiday commemorations, and family discussions about civic duty. Values such as discipline, *cinta tanah air*; and *persatuan* are woven into family routines and expected behavioural norms, so children come to understand national identity as both a personal commitment and a civic obligation. Here, the "cultural capital" of the parents is often tied to their roles within the state apparatus and is directly transmitted to the children as a "nationalist habitus."

Entrepreneurial Families

Children from entrepreneurial families develop objectified dispositions towards *kebhinekaan* through their exposure to culturally diverse social networks within the family business environment. Regular interaction with individuals from different ethnic, religious, and regional backgrounds cultivates an inclusive social orientation that becomes naturalised over time. For these children, cultural diversity is experienced not as a source of conflict but as a normal feature of social life. Their habitus is one of "pragmatic pluralism," where diversity is seen as a functional asset in a globalised economy.

The Role of Formal Schooling Across All Family Backgrounds

Schools play a significant institutional role in reinforcing the objectification of national values. Through the formal curriculum, extracurricular activities, and the informal norms of school life, values such as *gotong royong*, *toleransi*, and *patriotisme* are institutionalised as collective expectations. Collaborative project work, community service activities, and school ceremonies all serve as vehicles through which national values are enacted and, thereby, further objectified. The school acts as a "site of symbolic violence" in the Bourdieusian sense, but in a positive way, by standardising the diverse family habitus into a unified national identity.

Objectification of *Ke-Indonesia-an* in Sabah

In Sabah, the objectification of *ke-Indonesia-an* occurs in a qualitatively different context shaped by physical distance from Indonesia, cultural immersion in a Malaysian environment, and the precarious legal and economic circumstances of migrant families. Despite these

challenges, three key mechanisms sustain the objectification of Indonesian national identity, functioning collectively as a deliberate cultural counterforce against total assimilation into the Malaysian social environment.

First, the Indonesian migrant community in Sabah constitutes a social environment where Indonesian language, customs, and norms are actively maintained through an intergenerational temporal pattern. Without physical state borders, the migrant household serves as the primary site for transmitting historical memory across generations. This generational pattern of identity formation relies heavily on parental oral narratives and family histories, which transfer national values from older migrants to their children, who were born or raised in the diaspora. Community gatherings, interfamily solidarity networks, and informal cultural practices provide children with ongoing exposure to markers of Indonesian identity. Second, Community Learning Centers (CLC) serve as formal institutional sites for the transmission of Indonesian national values, constructing identity through distinct weekly and seasonal temporal rhythms. While the formal curriculum provides a continuous seasonal structure for identity development, specific civic rituals-such as the weekly flag-raising ceremony (*upacara bendera*) and annual Independence Day commemorations-serve as physical temporal anchors that make the abstract concept of Indonesia tangible for diaspora children. Bahasa Indonesia as the medium of instruction and the study of Indonesian history and civic values all contribute to the objectification of *ke-Indonesia-an* in the diaspora. In the absence of state-sanctioned territory, the CLC becomes a "symbolic territory" where the Indonesian state is performed.

Figure 3.

The physical field site: CLC 26, Ladang Kimanis, Sabah, Malaysia. Top left: the CLC building within the plantation compound. Top right: worker housing rows along the plantation road. Bottom: the entrance to Kimanis Estate, the palm oil plantation within which CLC 26 is located. Photographs taken by the research team during fieldwork, October–November 2024



Source: Author's field documentation, 2024.

Third, digital media and virtual communities play an increasingly significant role in sustaining a daily temporal pattern of digital consumption. Beyond formal schooling and family narratives, early adolescents in Sabah engage daily with Indonesian cultural content through

platforms like YouTube and social media, creating a consistent routine that bridges the physical distance to the homeland and supplements limited formal educational resources. As one student in Sabah remarked, "*Di sekolah (CLC) saya belajar sejarah Indonesia, tapi di YouTube saya melihat betapa kerennya Jakarta. Saya merasa tetap orang Indonesia meskipun lahir di sini*" (At school I learn history, but on YouTube I see how cool Jakarta is. I feel like an Indonesian even though I was born here). This "digital habitus" bridges the physical gap between the diaspora and the homeland.

Unlike the cohesive, uncontested pathway observed in Semarang, the objectification process in Sabah follows a transnational, contested pathway. Sabah's social field is characterised by fragmented institutional support, with responsibility for identity transmission shifting heavily from the state to informal community networks and digital spheres (Jatmika, 2022). Adolescents in this study must constantly negotiate their identity against a competing cultural environment that exerts strong pressure toward Malaysian assimilation, particularly through daily exposure to local dialects and cultural norms.

Furthermore, the data reveal that legal precarity acts as a structural barrier, often limiting children's institutional access and forcing their expression of *ke-Indonesia-an* into a more private, defensive mode (Tamring et al., 2026). This precariousness, coupled with the social stigma often attached to migrant status, creates significant identity confusion. In this context, the objectification of Indonesian values is not a "taken-for-granted" reality as it is in Semarang, but rather a conscious and often difficult act of maintaining a connection to a distant homeland while surviving in a host environment that may perceive them as "others." Consequently, the constraints in Sabah are not just modern global influences, but acute socio-legal realities that require strong family and community resilience to overcome.

The Mediating Role of Family Habitus

A critical finding of this study is the mediating role of family habitus in determining the extent to which the objectification of *ke-Indonesia-an* values translates into genuine internalisation. Data from Sabah reveal two contrasting habitus configurations within migrant families that significantly shape the child's "sense of place."

In families characterised by a negative habitus, the difficult social and economic circumstances of migration have generated dispositions oriented towards day-to-day survival rather than long-term aspirations. In one observed household, a single-parent family in which the mother works as a palm oil plantation labourer, the absence of structured family routines, limited parental involvement in children's education, and the presence of social behaviours associated with economic despair effectively impeded the habituation of national values. The mother's lack of clarity about her children's future, including her failure to regularise their citizenship documentation, reflects and reinforces a habitus disconnected from national identity formation. Identity, in this context, is a luxury that survival cannot afford. This pattern was not confined to a single household. Across the non-CLC families interviewed in Sabah, most parents described comparable exhaustion and time poverty that structurally limited their capacity for sustained cultural narration, suggesting that survival-oriented habitus is a systemic outcome of the plantation labour regime rather than an individual circumstance.

In contrast, families characterised by a *habitus positif*, even when facing comparable material hardships, demonstrate a stronger capacity to transmit *ke-Indonesia-an* values. Parents in these families invest time in sharing stories about Indonesia, discussing the importance of education, and expressing aspirations for their children to achieve social mobility. These interactions create a family habitus oriented towards the future and towards Indonesia as a meaningful reference point for identity and aspiration. The home becomes a sanctuary of "Indonesian-ness" that protects the child from the stigmas found in the external field.

Figure 4.

Research activities and participants at CLC 26, Ladang Kimanis. Top: classroom observation and participant interaction sessions conducted by the research team. Bottom: students of CLC 26 in Indonesian national school uniforms (putih-merah), photographed in front of the CLC building. Faces of minor participants have been blurred in accordance with research ethics protocol.



Source: Author's field documentation, 2024.

This divergence emphasises that family habitus acts as the primary "evaluative filter" through which external institutional objectifications are either accepted or rejected. In Semarang's domestic field, family habitus tends to be more homogeneous because of stable social structures. However, in Sabah's transnational field, family habitus becomes the ultimate site of cultural resilience or identity fragmentation. While the school (CLC) provides *objective* symbols of the nation, domestic interactions provide subjective meaning.

Without a supportive family habitus, the national values taught in schools remain "alien" objectifications that fail to be internalised as a personal disposition. Conversely, a positive habitus allows children to convert their parents' stories and aspirations into symbolic capital, enabling them to maintain a coherent sense of *ke-Indonesia-an* even when their legal and social status in the host country is precarious. This finding suggests that citizenship education for migrant children cannot succeed through institutional efforts alone; it must be supported by family environments that foster belonging and future possibility.

Constraints on Habituation

Children in both Semarang and Sabah face constraints on the habituation of *ke-Indonesia-an*, though their nature and severity differ significantly. In Semarang, the primary constraints stem from economic pressures and the pervasive influence of globalisation: working-class families have limited time and energy to engage in deliberate value transmission, while the rapid proliferation of global media creates competing frames of reference that may erode the salience of Indonesian national identity. This "identity thinning" is a byproduct of urban modernity.

In Sabah, constraints are more acute and multidimensional. The cultural dominance of the Malaysian environment creates constant pressure towards assimilation. Children immersed in Bahasa Malaysia, exposed to Malaysian educational content, and integrated into Malaysian peer

networks may experience significant identity confusion. Additionally, the social stigma associated with migrant status, including experiences of discrimination and social exclusion, can undermine children's willingness to identify publicly with their Indonesian heritage. The absence of formal documentation further marginalises these children, limiting their institutional access and reinforcing their social precarity. This creates a "fragmented habitus," where children feel like strangers in their host country and foreigners in their homeland.

Table 1.

Comparison of National Identity Habituation in Semarang and Sabah

Dimension of Comparison	Semarang, Indonesia	Sabah, Malaysia
Primary Habitus Type	<i>Institutionalised Habitus</i> : Deeply rooted in state-sanctioned environments.	<i>Transnational Habitus</i> : Negotiated within a cross-border, migrant field.
Objectification Channels	Coherent; through family, formal schools, and local communities.	Fragmented through families, CLCs, and digital media platforms.
Role of Family	Reinforcing state narratives through daily routines and civic duties.	A "symbolic sanctuary" for maintaining identity amidst cultural distance.
Educational Influence	High; standardized curriculum and regular national rituals (Upacara).	Moderate; constrained by resources and limited institutional access.
Main Constraints	Global cultural homogenization and "identity thinning" brought about by modernity.	Social stigma, legal precarity, and pressure to assimilate to the host culture.
Identity Outcome	Banal Nationalism: Identity is taken for granted and unreflective.	Performative Nationalism: Identity is a conscious effort of resistance.

The findings of this study illuminate the complex, multi-layered processes through which Indonesian national identity is constructed among children in contrasting social environments. By comparing the "center" (Semarang) and the "periphery" (Sabah), this research provides a nuanced understanding of how *ke-Indonesia-an* is not a static inheritance but a dynamic, negotiated reality. Several key themes emerge from this comparative analysis, offering significant contributions to the fields of sociology of education and transnational studies.

First, the study confirms the centrality of the social environment, family, school, and community, in the objectification of national values, as predicted by Berger and Luckmann's social constructionist framework (Saefudin et al., 2023). However, it extends this framework by demonstrating that the same objectifying mechanisms operate differently across social contexts (Cheema, 2023). In Semarang, the institutional infrastructure of formal schooling, community life, and family routines provides a relatively coherent and reinforcing set of channels for value transmission. Here, the objectification of values like *gotong royong* is so seamless that it becomes "banal nationalism," an identity so pervasive that it is no longer consciously questioned. In Sabah, by contrast, these channels are fragmented, underfunded, and operating against the grain of the dominant cultural environment. In the diaspora, national identity cannot be "banal"; it must be "performative" and "intentional." The findings suggest that when the state is physically absent, the community must work twice as hard to construct a "symbolic state" through rituals and language to prevent identity erosion (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; see also Berger & Luckmann, 2023).

Second, the study foregrounds the critical mediating role of family habitus, a dimension of national identity formation that has received insufficient attention in the citizenship education literature (Purwasih et al., 2023). The contrast between habitus positive and habitus negative in Sabah demonstrates that the objectification of national values at the community or institutional level does not automatically translate into internalisation at the individual level. The family remains the primary site of habitus formation, acting as a filter that either amplifies

or dampens institutional messages (Hyde, 2022). While Bourdieu often emphasises the reproduction of social inequality, this study shows that habitus can also be a site of "cultural resilience." Families with habitus positive effectively transform their limited cultural capital into a powerful sense of belonging, proving that economic precarity does not always lead to identity fragmentation. This finding challenges the institutional bias evident in existing citizenship education research (Allerton, 2023), which often assumes that schools are the only significant actors in forming citizens. This bias is further compounded by the tendency to study diaspora children in isolation from the political economy of labour migration that structures their lives—a tendency critiqued by (Li, 2016) in the context of Indonesia's oil palm labour regime, and paralleled in (Arceo & Peters, 2025) analysis of undocumented migrant workers in Sabah's plantation economy. The temporal dimensions of adolescent identity formation across mobile contexts in island Southeast Asia, as theorised by (Allerton, 2025), further underscore the need for approaches that account for the discordant temporalities experienced by children navigating multiple, often incompatible social fields simultaneously.

Third, the findings raise important questions about the adequacy of current policy responses to the educational and identity needs of Indonesian children in the diaspora. The reliance on Community Learning Centers (CLCs) as the primary institutional mechanism is understandable given the legal complexities of migrant children's situation, but CLCs currently operate with insufficient resources to fulfil their potential as sites of citizenship education. The "liminal" status of these children, being neither fully integrated into Malaysia nor physically present in Indonesia, requires a specialised pedagogical approach. A more robust policy response would require greater investment in these institutions, better coordination between Indonesian diplomatic missions and CLC operators, and the development of curriculum materials designed specifically for children in transnational contexts. Education for these children should not merely replicate the domestic curriculum but should address their unique position as "transnational citizens" who may eventually return to Indonesia or remain as a permanent diaspora.

Finally, the study highlights the growing importance of digital media as a channel for national identity transmission in the diaspora. In an era of "techno-nationalism," the internet acts as a "digital umbilical cord" connecting children in Sabah to their homeland (S. Berger, 2022). While this channel carries significant potential to bridge the geographical gap, it also carries risks, including exposure to divisive political content and the possibility of a superficial, consumption-oriented form of national identification that lacks the depth of embodied cultural practice. Digital *ke-Indonesia-an* may foster pride, but it cannot fully replace the lived, face-to-face experience of *gotong royong* in places like Semarang. This suggests that while technology can support identity, it must be balanced with physical community engagement to ensure a holistic internalisation of national values.

In conclusion, the habituation of *ke-Indonesia-an* is a dialectical process between structural opportunities and individual agency. Whether in the heart of Java or the plantations of Sabah, identity construction remains a vital project of social "becoming." Future research should further explore the long-term identity trajectories of these children as they enter adulthood and navigate the complexities of the global labour market.

Conclusion

This study has examined the habituation and social construction of *ke-Indonesia-an* among early adolescent children in Semarang and Sabah, integrating Berger's social constructionism and Bourdieu's habitus theory into a cohesive analytical framework. The findings reveal both the remarkable resilience of Indonesian national identity in contexts of migration and displacement and the significant challenges children face in sustaining this identity when institutional support is limited and family habitus is shaped by social and economic precarity. By juxtaposing the stable institutional environment of Semarang with the precarious transnational field of Sabah, this research underscores that national identity is not

a static biological inheritance, but a "social project" that requires constant maintenance through symbolic and material practices. It should further be noted that the 'Reproduction' stage depicted in Figure 2 represents a theoretical projection informed by the logic of habitus theory rather than an empirically documented outcome; the cross-sectional design of this study does not permit longitudinal claims about intergenerational identity transmission, and future research employing longitudinal methods is needed to verify this stage empirically.

The comparative perspective adopted here offers several substantive contributions to the literature on social science education and citizenship education. First, it demonstrates the vital importance of attending to transnational contexts in citizenship education research. In an increasingly mobile world, the "nation-state" can no longer be studied solely within its geographic borders; Indonesia's "imagined community" extends into the plantations of Sabah, requiring a new sociology of education that accounts for cross-border identity formation. Second, this study highlights the urgent need to take family habitus seriously as a mediating variable in national identity formation. The findings suggest that while schools (like CLCs) provide the "formal grammar" of citizenship, it is the family habitus, whether positive or negative, that determines if that grammar is ever spoken in daily life. This moves the discourse beyond institutional-centrism and towards a more holistic understanding of how children become "nationally oriented" subjects.

Furthermore, this research illuminates the potential, as well as the critical limits, of digital media as a supplement to embodied cultural practice and institutional education. In the diaspora, digital platforms serve as surrogates for the state, yet they cannot fully replicate the "lived habituation" of participating in a local *gotong royong* activity or a physical school ceremony. This tension between the "virtual" and the "embodied" suggests that 21st-century citizenship education must integrate digital literacy with real-world community engagement.

Ensuring that Indonesian children in the diaspora have access to meaningful citizenship education requires a paradigm shift: not only providing formal schooling but also cultivating family environments that support aspirational, nationally connected habitus. This, in turn, requires comprehensive social support programmes that address the underlying material and psychosocial conditions of migrant families. Education cannot be divorced from learners' social realities; without addressing parental precarity, children's identity formation remains fragile.

Future research should extend this comparative framework to other sites of the Indonesian diaspora, such as Europe, the Middle East, and other parts of Southeast Asia, to further test the universality of these mechanisms. Additionally, longitudinal studies are needed to examine the long-term trajectories of children's national identity into adulthood, particularly as they navigate the labour markets of their host or home countries. Finally, scholars should continue to explore the specific, granular role of digital media, including algorithms and social media echoes, in both supporting and complicating the construction of *ke-Indonesia-an* in transnational contexts. Ultimately, the quest to maintain a sense of "Indonesian-ness" across borders attests to the enduring power of cultural identity in a globalised world.

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Disclosure Statement

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Ethics Approval

This study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki. Because the research involved children as participants, parents or legal guardians provided informed consent, and child participants provided assent. The Research Ethics Committee approved the study under Number 43.26.3/UN37/PPK.03/2024.

Consent to Participate

The researchers obtained informed consent from all individual participants before their involvement in the study. Participants were fully informed of the research purpose and voluntarily agreed to participate. All data collected were anonymised and used solely for research purposes.

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