

Interpreting and Organising National-Identity Education: Reported and Documented Policy Enactment in a Sarawak Secondary School

Lila Anak Intai, Abdul Talib Hashim

Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris

Email: lilaintai@gmail.com

DOI Link: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARPED/v15-i3/29010>

Published Online: 28 September 2026

Abstract

National curricula articulate common civic purposes, but policy presence alone does not explain how educators interpret a mandate or how policy-relevant meanings become visible in school arrangements. This article examines national-identity education in a large multicultural day secondary school in southern Sarawak, Malaysia. It reports a focused secondary analysis of five complete semi-structured interviews with three teachers and two senior administrators, examined alongside a documentary evidence record drawn from six source categories reported in the parent study. The parent study's interviews and document review were conducted between November 2025 and April 2026; the doctoral researcher completed the focused reanalysis during manuscript preparation from May to September 2026. Reflexive thematic analysis generated three themes organised around meaning selection, reported pedagogical translation and documented organisational provision. The documentary record is treated as evidence of authorised or recorded provision rather than observed implementation. Drawing on existing inscription scholarship, the article uses *organisational inscription* as a bounded analytical descriptor for policy-relevant formulations recorded in locally authoritative artefacts. By separating participant accounts, documentary provision and outcomes, the study offers a context-sensitive explanation of how national-identity education was interpreted and recorded in a Sarawak school.

Keywords: Curriculum, National Identity, Policy Enactment, Sarawak, Teacher Agency

Introduction

National curricula do more than specify subject knowledge. They communicate authorised accounts of public history, a common language, civic values and desirable forms of citizenship. In culturally plural societies, schools are expected to cultivate a shared civic orientation while recognising the cultural affiliations that educators and learners bring to school. National identity in education therefore involves membership, participation, responsibility and recognition across differences, as well as attachment to national symbols (Banks, 2008). Understanding this educational role requires attention to how curricular purposes are interpreted in particular school settings.

Comparative research illustrates why curricular intentions and identity outcomes need to be examined separately. In Taiwan, exposure to History education designed to strengthen a particular identification was associated with more complex and non-exclusive patterns of identification (Hong & Lyu, 2025). In an Indonesian–Malaysian border community, teachers interpreted national identity through locally situated social relations rather than transmitting a uniform script (Dewantara et al., 2023). These studies direct attention to the relationship between formal expectations, educators’ interpretations and local conditions. They also caution against treating curriculum content or educator intention as direct evidence of student identity.

In Malaysia, this relationship is particularly relevant to a national education system serving culturally and linguistically diverse communities. The *Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013–2025* identified national identity as one of six student aspirations and associated it with shared history, diversity, the principles of the Rukun Negara and the ability to live and work with people from different backgrounds (Ministry of Education Malaysia [MOE], 2013). History, Bahasa Melayu, co-curricular activities, assemblies and commemorative programmes provide settings in which these purposes may be pursued. The Form Four History curriculum, for example, connects historical knowledge with citizenship values and an appreciation of nation-building (MOE, 2018). Bahasa Melayu also serves as a shared resource for nation-building in a multilingual society (Muslim & Rosadi, 2021). These provisions establish broad civic purposes, but educators must interpret how to give them practical expression.

Malaysian scholarship provides an important foundation for examining this interpretive work. Brown (2007) shows how educational arrangements have been shaped by political projects of citizenship and ethnic accommodation. Research in multicultural schools cautions against inferring integration from the formal existence of common curricula or shared activities (Nordin et al., 2013). More recent work examines the challenges of citizenship education and the relationship between co-curricular participation and national integration (Ahmad & Abdullah, 2022; Kaspin et al., 2024). Malaysian youth accounts also suggest that segregative, interactive and critical pedagogical experiences may reinforce or loosen ethnic boundaries in different ways (Mohd Tajuddin et al., 2024). Together, these studies establish the importance of educational provision and experience, while leaving room for closer examination of how teachers and administrators interpret and organise a national-identity mandate within the same school.

This question is particularly relevant in Sarawak, where national educational purposes intersect with diverse ethnic and regional affiliations. Its population includes multiple Indigenous communities alongside Malay, Chinese and other groups, while ethnic categories and regional identification are historically and socially produced rather than fixed (Abdullah, 2006; Ostwald & Subhan, 2021). Recent research also documents diverse interpretations of what it means to be Sarawakian (Jerome & Ting, 2026). A national-identity mandate therefore enters a setting in which ethnic, regional and national identifications may overlap. Examining a school in this setting can clarify how educators understand shared civic purposes in relation to cultural diversity, provided that the role of context is demonstrated through evidence

The specific research problem concerns the relationship between educators’ interpretations of national identity and the ways in which related priorities are recorded in school

arrangements. A shared civic vocabulary across interviews and documents may indicate correspondence, but it does not establish how participants translate that vocabulary into professional choices or whether recorded provision is implemented. A closer account is therefore needed of the interpretive and organisational work described by differently positioned educators, together with a clear statement of what the documentary record can substantiate.

To address this problem, the article examines the accounts of teachers and senior administrators alongside a documentary evidence record from the same multicultural secondary school in southern Sarawak. Teachers describe how they interpret curricular language and translate it into subject emphases, participation arrangements and professional conduct. Administrators describe school-wide planning, while the documentary record identifies formal priorities, schedules and rules. Reading these sources together allows the analysis to examine similarities and differences across professional roles and types of evidence. Claims remain limited to participants' accounts and the provision recorded in the parent study's documentary findings.

Accordingly, the study asks: How do participating teachers and senior administrators describe the interpretation and organisation of national-identity education, and what related provisions are recorded in curriculum and school documents? This question focuses the analysis on how a broad national mandate is understood and represented in one school, while keeping student identity outcomes outside the scope of the available evidence.

The study's novelty lies in examining teachers' and administrators' accounts alongside a clearly delimited documentary record from the same Sarawak school. It contributes to the sociology of education and policy-enactment research by distinguishing professional meaning selection, reported pedagogical translation and recorded organisational provision as related forms of policy work. This distinction clarifies how a national mandate becomes locally intelligible and visible in institutional records, while keeping claims about implementation and student identity separate from the evidence available.

Literature Review

National Identity as a Curriculum Mandate in a Plural Society

National identity is commonly represented in education through historical narratives, citizenship education, a national language, symbols and collective routines. These elements provide an authorised vocabulary of nationhood and make the nation available for classroom study and public performance. In a diverse society, however, common belonging must be negotiated alongside cultural recognition. Banks (2008) argues that citizenship education should enable participation in a shared political community while recognising group identities and unequal experiences. This position cautions against equating national identity with cultural sameness.

Malaysia institutionalises this tension through a national system serving culturally and linguistically diverse communities. The Education Blueprint linked national identity to common principles, history, diversity and cooperation (MOE, 2013). History offers narratives of national development, while Bahasa Melayu carries both curricular and national-language functions. Co-curricular programmes and formal routines extend the range of school settings

in which related purposes are expressed. These formal provisions identify what schools are authorised to pursue; they do not show how educators make the provisions intelligible in particular settings.

Existing Malaysian scholarship illustrates the problem. Brown (2007) provides a macro-level account of education, ethnicity and citizenship. Nordin et al. (2013) examine integration in multicultural schools, while Ahmad and Abdullah (2022) analyse the challenges and possibilities of citizenship education. Kaspin et al. (2024) examine co-curricular activity and national integration during the exceptional conditions of the Movement Control Order. Such studies illuminate policy purposes, participation and social patterns, but they do not closely trace the interpretive and organisational work performed by teachers and administrators within the same school.

Recent Bornean evidence sharpens this gap. A survey of 367 History teachers in Sabah reported high levels of self-reported practice related to patriotism and a significant difference between History-specialist and non-specialist teachers (Hamid et al., 2021). Although the survey offered a broad overview, its design could not explain how teachers interpreted national purposes or how their accounts related to school-level organisational artefacts. The present study addresses this process at the level of a single case while avoiding the inference that reported provision produced a particular student identity.

Policy Enactment and Differentiated Educator Work

Policy-enactment scholarship provides a useful vocabulary for studying the movement from formal expectation to situated action. Linear implementation accounts may imply that a stable policy text travels downwards to compliant implementers. Spillane et al. (2002), by contrast, show that implementation involves cognition and sense-making: practitioners understand new demands through existing knowledge, beliefs, routines and social relations. Policy meaning is therefore selected and reconstructed rather than transferred intact.

Ball et al. (2012) extend this argument by distinguishing enactment from straightforward implementation. Schools interpret policy texts and translate them into talk, practices, artefacts, roles and routines. Enactment is shaped by context, including the school's history, student composition, professional culture, resources and external conditions (Braun et al., 2011). Actors also occupy different positions in policy work, including interpretation, translation, coordination and support (Ball et al., 2011). This framework is relevant to national identity because concepts such as unity, patriotism, diversity and citizenship are normatively dense. They cannot be converted into one technical procedure without professional judgement.

Teachers are central to this judgement. Ross (2024) describes teacher interpretation as a window into curriculum potential: official materials contain possibilities that teachers notice, connect, prioritise or leave unrealised. Research on multicultural citizenship education likewise shows teachers adapting civic pedagogy through dialogue, current issues, critical reflection and students' experiences (Lash, 2021). In a national-identity curriculum, relevant decisions include how historical narratives are framed, how the national language is connected to civic participation, how diverse contributions are represented and how participation is organised. Teachers are therefore policy actors, although their agency remains

bounded by prescribed content, assessment expectations, time and the social context of the classroom.

School administrators perform related but different work. They shape which priorities receive organisational visibility, how programmes are scheduled, how responsibilities are distributed and which institutional artefacts record them. Coburn (2005) shows that school leaders influence teacher sense-making by directing attention, mediating policy messages and creating conditions for professional interaction. Administrative work may therefore support or constrain pedagogical translation. Yet the existence of a calendar, management statement or participation rule cannot establish that it was enacted consistently. Documentary inscription and implementation must remain analytically distinct.

The language of *inscription* already has a place in research on policy and socio-material artefacts. Silseth et al. (2023), for example, examine curriculum formulations as inscriptions that can be invoked and mobilised in classroom interaction. Building on this established scholarship, the present article uses *organisational inscription* more narrowly to describe policy-relevant formulations as they are recorded across locally authoritative school artefacts. Its unit of analysis is the recorded formulation rather than the document as a whole. Empirical indicators include normative direction, participation and access rules, scheduled events and prescribed ritual sequences. This usage identifies documentary visibility and durability; it does not establish who authored a formulation, why it was selected, whether it became institutionalised or how it was enacted.

This distinction also clarifies the relationship between evidence sources. Interviews can reveal how participants describe purposes, choices and constraints, but they remain accounts. Documents can establish authorised content and planned provision, but not what occurred or how it was experienced. Observation may support claims about practice, and learner data may support claims about reception, but neither belongs to the focused corpus of this article. A defensible analysis must therefore specify what each source can and cannot show.

Research Gap and Analytical Focus

Three gaps guide the study. First, much research on national unity in Malaysia analyses policy, attitudes, curriculum content or programme participation; less is known about the meaning-making that connects a broad identity mandate with educator-reported professional choices. Second, teachers' and administrators' roles are often examined separately. This obscures both their distinct tasks and the possibility that apparent alignment across roles may reflect shared policy language rather than verified coordination. Third, school-level qualitative evidence from Sarawak remains limited despite the region's distinctive social and historical context.

The study responds by reading adult interviews alongside a bounded record of curriculum and school-document evidence. It treats policy enactment as a question of interpretation and organisation and distinguishes four categories of claim: policy presence, educator-reported translation, documented organisational provision and independently evidenced outcomes. Its conceptual contribution is a context-specific application of organisational inscription to the relationship between professional accounts and formal school records. The analysis draws on

an established concept and does not introduce a new theory of inscription. Evidence of outcomes remains outside the scope of this article.

Methodology

Research Design and Analytical Boundary

This article presents a focused secondary analysis nested within a broader interpretivist qualitative single-case study of national-identity formation through the national curriculum. The school was treated as a bounded case because the phenomenon was examined within its natural institutional and cultural setting (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Yin, 2018). The parent study involved 15 purposively selected participants—10 students, three teachers and two senior administrators—and fieldwork conducted from October 2025 to April 2026. The interview corpus for this article comprised all five complete semi-structured adult interview transcripts because the article asks specifically about educator interpretation and formal school provision. The documentary component is a bounded evidence record drawn from six source categories reported in the findings of the parent study; it is not presented as six individually authenticated source files or as a fresh source-level reanalysis of the original documents.

Student interviews, the student focus group and observation records were excluded from this article. Student data address lived interpretation and belonging, while observation could support claims about performed practice. The present analysis is therefore restricted to reported professional work and thesis-recorded documentary provision.

This focused reporting also separates the article from other outputs arising from the parent case study. It addresses a research question about adult accounts and documentary provision, uses policy enactment as an interpretive framework and defines evidence boundaries specific to this article. No student-centred theme, conceptual model, figure, table or central quotation from the related student analysis is reproduced here.

Setting and Participants

The case was a large national day secondary school in southern Sarawak with both day and boarding students. At the time of the study, the school served approximately 1,400–1,600 students from transition classes through Form Six and employed just over 200 teachers. Its community included Malay, Chinese, Iban and Bidayuh students together with smaller Indigenous and other minority groups, producing a linguistically and religiously plural setting. The parent-study record places the school in the Kuching–Serian area but does not provide an official urban, semi-urban, rural or interior classification; the article therefore does not infer a classification. These characteristics made the site information-rich for examining national-identity education within the Malaysian national curriculum. The school's name, district, exact enrolment and detailed demographic distribution are withheld because their combination could permit deductive identification.

The five adults were not recruited as a separate sample for this article; they formed the complete adult segment of the broader purposive case sample. Criterion-based selection emphasised direct involvement in curriculum or school programmes, substantial professional experience and information-rich pedagogical or administrative roles (Patton, 2015). Two teachers taught Form Four History, one taught Form Four Bahasa Melayu and all held co-

curricular advisory responsibilities related to national principles. The administrators held curriculum/administration and student-affairs portfolios. Their specific roles and extensive experience support the information power of the sample, while the bounded corpus is intended for analytical depth rather than population representation (Malterud et al., 2016).

Table 1

Protected profiles of the adult participants

Code	Position and academic responsibility	Qualification	Experience at the school	Relevant curricular or co-curricular responsibility
T1	Form Four History teacher	Master's degree	More than 20 years	History curriculum and national-principles advisory work
T2	Form Four History teacher	Master's degree	More than 20 years	History curriculum and national-principles advisory work
T3	Form Four Bahasa Melayu teacher	Master's degree	More than 20 years	Bahasa Melayu curriculum and national-principles advisory work
A1	Senior administrator for administration and curriculum	Bachelor's degree	More than 30 years	Academic administration and curriculum planning
A2	Senior administrator for student affairs	Bachelor's degree	10–19 years	Student discipline, welfare and co-curricular administration

Note. Publication codes T1–T3 and A1–A2 replace the parent-study codes G1–G3 and PT1–PT2, respectively. The teacher profiles were reconstructed from the participant table derived from 2025 school records, and the administrator profiles from the corresponding administrator table. Ethnicity, religion, exact tenure and named clubs are withheld to reduce the risk of deductive identification.

Data Sources

Adult interviews were conducted between November 2025 and April 2026. Each adult contributed a complete semi-structured individual interview lasting approximately 45–60 minutes. The parent study design allowed for follow-up interviews when clarification was required, but the focused corpus comprised the five complete primary adult transcripts.

Interviews took place in a private setting agreed upon with each participant, were audio-recorded with written consent and transcribed verbatim. Questions explored meanings of national identity, interpretations of curriculum expectations, reported teaching or programme choices, participation across ethnic groups and contextual considerations. The doctoral researcher served as the primary research instrument.

The parent-study document review took place between November 2025 and April 2026. Its findings reported six source categories: two national curriculum or syllabus sources (D1–D2) and four internal school-document categories (D3–D6). These are categories, not a verified

count of six individual files. The focused analysis used the documentary findings and page references preserved in the thesis as a contextual evidence record. It did not return to the original D2–D6 files; consequently, the article does not claim source-level replication or infer document authorship, intention or enactment. Table 2 identifies the metadata that were preserved and confines each documentary claim to authorised or recorded provision. The parent-study work plan also listed reports spanning 2022–2025, but those reports cannot be assigned reliably to D2–D6 and are not used to fill the metadata gaps.

Table 2

Thesis-recorded documentary evidence, traceability and analytical limits

Code and source category	Metadata preserved in the parent study	Traceable thesis locator and reported content	Bounded analytical use
D1. <i>Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Menengah: Dokumen Standard Kurikulum dan Pentaksiran Sejarah Tingkatan 4</i>	National curriculum; 2018; Curriculum Development Division, Ministry of Education Malaysia	Section 4.4.2.1, pp. 331–333: nation formation, Federal Constitution, Rukun Negara, citizenship, unity and civic responsibility	Authorised curriculum content
D2. <i>Huraian Sukatan Pelajaran Bahasa Melayu</i>	Title and curriculum status preserved; form level, edition, year, issuing body and source pages not recorded	Section 4.4.2.1, pp. 331–333: national-language skills, correct language use, respect, cooperation and unity	Thesis-reported authorised syllabus content
D3. <i>Buku Pengurusan Sekolah</i>	Anonymised internal source category reviewed in 2025–2026; document year, version and source pages not recorded	Section 4.4.3.1, p. 336: vision and mission; “fostering unity,” “forming the Malaysian nation” and Rukun Negara	Thesis-reported institutional direction
D4. <i>Dokumen Kokurikulum</i>	Anonymised internal source category reviewed in 2025–2026; component, year, version and source pages not recorded	Section 4.4.3.4, pp. 337–338: “compulsory participation,” “all students” and “without exception”	Thesis-reported participation and access rule

Code and source category	Metadata preserved in the parent study	Traceable thesis locator and reported content	Bounded analytical use
D5. <i>Takwim Tahunan Sekolah</i>	Anonymised internal source category reviewed in 2025–2026; year, version and source pages not recorded	Section 4.4.3.2, pp. 336–337: National Day, Gawai Dayak, traditional attire and cultural performances; Section 4.4.2.2, p. 334 also reports Malaysia Day and RIMUP	Thesis-reported scheduled provision
D6. <i>Atur Cara Perhimpunan Rasmi</i>	Anonymised internal source category reviewed in 2025–2026; date, version and source pages not recorded	Section 4.4.3.3, p. 337: Negaraku and Rukun Negara; Section 4.4.2.2, p. 334 also reports an administrator address and programme announcements	Thesis-reported civic-ritual sequence

Note. Page numbers refer to the numbered thesis pages, not pages within the source documents. D3–D6 are anonymised source categories. Because the original D2–D6 files were not re-examined for this article, these entries provide contextual documentary evidence rather than source-level document analysis.

Reflexive Thematic Analysis

The parent study used reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) as developed by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2019). Analysis was data-led, recursive and interpretive: transcripts were read repeatedly and coded line by line; reflexive memos were maintained; related codes were assembled into candidate themes; and themes were reviewed against the dataset before being defined and named. Theoretical perspectives were used after inductive theme development rather than as predetermined codebooks.

The doctoral researcher conducted the focused secondary analysis during manuscript preparation from May to September 2026. Consistent with RTA, the three themes reported below represent patterns of shared meaning organised around a central concept. They are not sequential stages, topic summaries or frequency categories. Theme 1 is organised around the professional selection of shared civic meanings from a broad mandate. Theme 2 centres on the translation of those meanings into reported pedagogical and participation choices. Theme 3 centres on the stabilisation of policy-relevant formulations in locally authoritative documentary records.

The analysis proceeded in five recursive analytical steps. First, all three teacher and both administrator transcripts were retained, while student interviews, the focus group and observation records were excluded from the working corpus. Second, adult data were reorganised in a source-by-question matrix containing participant code, role, extract, initial interpretation and the claim that the evidence could support. Third, the transcripts were re-read and coded for definitions of the mandate, professional choices, constraints and representations of school-level provision. The thesis-recorded documentary evidence was coded separately for authorised content, institutional direction, scheduling, participation

rules and civic routine. Fourth, themes were developed through within-role and cross-role comparison. Convergence referred to a related meaning across accounts; elaboration to a distinct pedagogical or organisational dimension; and divergence to an account that complicated the emerging interpretation. Fifth, scholarship on policy enactment and inscription provided a sensitising lens after the themes had been developed.

Trustworthiness was supported through contextual description, comparison across roles, reflexive memoing and an audit trail linking extracts, codes, candidate themes and final interpretation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Nowell et al., 2017). Reflexive dialogue with the supervisor and academic peers challenged the adequacy and boundaries of interpretations rather than seeking one objectively correct thematic solution. The doctoral researcher's professional background in education provided contextual familiarity but could also normalise official assumptions about schooling and unity. Reflexive field notes were used to identify those assumptions. The analysis also treated administrators' positions of authority and the official desirability of national unity as conditions that could encourage favourable accounts.

All five complete adult transcripts were included in the focused secondary analysis. Direct quotations were selected for analytical clarity and traceability rather than numerical balance. No T3 extract was selected for the final themes; Table 3 therefore does not present T3 as direct evidentiary support. This asymmetry limits cross-teacher comparison and is retained as a reporting limitation. Publication codes T1–T3 and A1–A2 replace the parent-study codes G1–G3 and PT1–PT2.

The interview extracts used in this article were originally recorded and transcribed in Malay. The bilingual doctoral researcher translated the selected extracts into English during manuscript preparation and checked each translation line by line against the Malay source. Translation prioritised semantic equivalence; minor syntactic adjustments were made only for intelligible English, and no substantive meaning was added. No independent back-translation was undertaken, which is acknowledged as a procedural limitation.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was granted by the Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris Human Research Ethics Committee (Reference 2025-0897-01). Permissions were also obtained from the Educational Planning and Research Division of the Ministry of Education Malaysia, the Sarawak State Education Department and the participating school. Adult participants received oral and written information about the study, including the intended use of interview material in the thesis and scholarly publications, and provided written informed consent. Audio-recording required consent; participation was voluntary and withdrawal was permitted without penalty. Pseudonyms and reporting codes were used, and the research materials were stored securely.

Results

The focused secondary analysis generated three themes: framing the mandate through shared civic reference points within diversity; rendering values actionable through reported pedagogical judgement and participation design; and recording priorities through official

direction, schedules and access rules. Table 3 states the central organising concept, direct interview evidence, documentary record and claim boundary for each theme.

Table 3

RTA themes, central organising concepts and evidence boundaries

Theme and central organising concept	Direct interview evidence	Thesis-recorded documentary evidence	Claim boundary
Theme 1. Framing the mandate: professional selection of shared civic meanings	T1 and A1	D1 History curriculum; D2 Bahasa Melayu syllabus	Participant interpretation of authorised purposes
Theme 2. Rendering values actionable: translation into pedagogical and participation choices	T1 and T2	D1 and D2 as curricular context; D4 as an organisational rule	Reported professional judgement and constraint
Theme 3. Recording organisational provision: stabilisation of policy-relevant formulations in local records	A1 and A2	D3 management source; D4 co-curricular source; D5 calendar; D6 assembly programme	Recorded provision, without inferred authorship, implementation or outcome

Note. T3's complete transcript formed part of the focused corpus, but no T3 extract was selected as a direct exemplar for the final themes. The table therefore does not count T3 as supporting evidence. The distribution of quotations indicates the limits of the evidence presented and should not be read as a measure of how frequently participants expressed a theme.

Theme 1 Framing the Mandate Through Shared Civic Reference Points

The central organising concept of Theme 1 is professional meaning selection: participants made a broad national-identity mandate intelligible by foregrounding particular civic reference points. T1 emphasised the social conditions of collective life:

National identity is the identity of the country that reflects the well-being of people living in a society of diverse ethnic and cultural groups, thereby safeguarding the nation's peace. (T1)

A1 approached the same mandate from an institutional position and named the common civic reference points through which it became recognisable:

It is a symbol that unites people of different ethnic groups, based on the main pillars enshrined in the Rukun Negara ... one language, Malay as the official language ... the national anthem, Negaraku ... [and] the formation of the Malaysian nation. (A1)

The two accounts overlap around unity, but they do different interpretive work. T1 begins with the quality of social relations across cultural difference, whereas A1 makes the mandate administratively legible by naming recognised civic symbols, language and principles. The distinction matters because a national-identity mandate does not arrive as one operational instruction. Teachers and administrators selected emphases consistent with their professional roles.

T1 further located this mandate within the formative responsibility of schooling: National identity is important because school is where the younger generation is formed. Students need to understand the importance of unity, respect diversity and appreciate national values from their school years. (T1)

D1 and D2 provided an authorised repertoire for these interpretations. The thesis record links D1 with nation formation, the Federal Constitution, Rukun Negara, citizenship, unity and civic responsibility, and D2 with national-language use, respect, cooperation and unity (parent study, Section 4.4.2.1, pp. 331–333). The evidence converged around common reference points while differing in emphasis: the curriculum record specified authorised content, A1 articulated institutional symbols, and T1 placed relational conduct within the purpose of schooling. The theme concerns how these participants selected meaning; it does not imply that every adult account was identical.

Theme 2 Rendering Values Actionable Through Pedagogical Judgement

The central organising concept of Theme 2 is pedagogical translation: teachers described turning broad civic values into decisions about interaction, contribution and professional conduct. T1 connected relational aims with the deliberate organisation of classroom participation:

If we do not arrange mixed groups, students do tend to sit with members of their own ethnic group. (T1)

This account challenges the assumption that a shared curriculum automatically produces interaction across ethnic groups. The tendency described by T1 illustrates a practical constraint: mixed-group participation required a deliberate decision by the teacher and did not necessarily arise from the school's multicultural composition. T1 described the response directly:

I always encourage students from different ethnic groups to cooperate in classroom activities. (T1)

T2 described a related but distinct form of participation in which cultural knowledge became a shared resource:

Students from different ethnic groups each contributed their ideas in creating the dance pattern. (T2)

The comparison between T1 and T2 moves the analysis beyond a generic claim that teachers promoted cooperation. T1 described deciding who worked together in response to an anticipated grouping tendency; T2 described contributions from different ethnic groups within a common creative task. Participation design thus involved both access to interaction and the organisation of meaningful contribution.

T2 also identified a pressure that lay partly beyond classroom organisation: Social media greatly influences how students view their identities. (T2)

This account complicates a school-centred explanation. It suggests that teachers' participation choices operate within a wider interpretive environment rather than controlling how students understand identity. The theme therefore combines reported professional agency with an explicit limit to that agency.

Professional stance added a further dimension. T1 described openness, fairness and respect towards students regardless of background as part of the example teachers set in everyday interactions. The thesis record for D1 and D2 supplied curricular reference points for unity, civic responsibility, language and respect, while D4 recorded a school-level rule that co-curricular participation applied to all students. These sources performed different evidentiary roles: curriculum records authorised values, teachers described pedagogical judgement, and the co-curricular record formalised access.

Theme 3 Recording Organisational Provision in Local Artefacts

The central organising concept of Theme 3 is documentary stabilisation: policy-relevant formulations were preserved in local records as normative direction, access rules, scheduled programmes and ritual sequences. A1's emphasis on the Rukun Negara, Malay and Negaraku identified common institutional reference points. A2 shifted attention from symbols to access:

All students participate in clubs and associations without a focus on any particular ethnic group. (A2)

The administrator accounts supplied two organisational concerns—shared civic reference points and inclusive access—which could be considered alongside the parent study's documentary record. D3 recorded unity, the “formation of the Malaysian nation” and the Rukun Negara within official school direction (parent study, Section 4.4.3.1, p. 336). D4 recorded “compulsory participation,” “all students” and “without exception” (Section 4.4.3.4, pp. 337–338), giving documentary form to an access principle corresponding to A2's account. D5 recorded National Day, Malaysia Day and the Student Integration Plan for Unity (*Rancangan Integrasi Murid untuk Perpaduan*, RIMUP) alongside Gawai Dayak, traditional attire and cultural performances (Sections 4.4.2.2 and 4.4.3.2, pp. 334, 336–337). D6 recorded a formal assembly sequence including Negaraku, the Rukun Negara, an administrator's address and programme announcements (Sections 4.4.2.2 and 4.4.3.3, pp. 334, 337). Read comparatively, D3 stated normative direction, D4 formalised access, D5 scheduled national and locally salient programmes, and D6 sequenced civic ritual.

Drawing on existing inscription scholarship, the article uses *organisational inscription* as a bounded descriptor for the presence of policy-relevant formulations in locally authoritative artefacts. The unit of analysis is the recorded formulation, and the empirical indicators are normative direction, access rules, scheduled provision and prescribed ritual sequences. This differs from implementation, which concerns performed practice; formalisation, which concerns the conferral of official status; institutionalisation, which implies durable incorporation into organisational norms; and policy artefacts, which name the material objects themselves. Because the production of D3–D6 was not observed and the source files

were not reanalysed for this article, the evidence supports a claim about recorded provision, not administrator intention, authorship, active orchestration or institutional effect.

Discussion

The findings explain how a national-identity mandate was made intelligible in one multicultural Sarawak school and how related formulations appeared in its documentary record. The three themes identify differentiated policy work: participants selected civic meanings from a normatively dense mandate; teachers described translating them through professional conduct and participation design; and local records preserved related priorities through official direction, schedules and access rules. These themes are not stages in a linear model.

This interpretation accords with enactment scholarship. Policy texts do not move intact from government to school; actors reconstruct them through situated sense-making (Spillane et al., 2002) and translate them into talk, artefacts, roles and routines (Ball et al., 2011, 2012). In this case, the D1–D2 record contained several possible emphases, while educator accounts foregrounded civic responsibility, respect and cooperation. Meaning selection was therefore part of reported policy work.

Pedagogical Translation as Professional Judgement

Teachers reported translating the mandate through three interdependent choices: what civic meaning to foreground in subject content, how to embody fairness in professional conduct and how to structure opportunities for cooperation. These accounts are consistent with cognitive explanations of how practitioners mediate policy through what they notice and how they connect new expectations with prior knowledge and professional sense-making (Coburn, 2001; Spillane et al., 2002). This interpretation also aligns with Ross's (2024) concept of curriculum potential: the practical possibilities of formal materials depend partly on what teachers recognise and activate.

The participation dimension adds a relational aspect to translation. Malaysian youth accounts show that pedagogical form can reinforce or loosen ethnic boundaries (Mohd Tajuddin et al., 2024), while citizenship-education research illustrates the importance of dialogue and participatory design (Evagorou et al., 2023; Lash, 2021). The comparison between T1 and T2 shows why the form of a reported choice matters: a general value such as cooperation becomes actionable through decisions about group composition, tasks and whose knowledge is included. T2's concern about social media adds an important counterweight by locating part of identity interpretation beyond teachers' immediate pedagogical control.

Professional modelling also broadens enactment beyond explicit lesson content. Fairness and respect were described as ways in which civic commitments became visible through authority relations. These accounts do not establish how students interpreted the example teachers sought to set. Hong and Lyu's (2025) evidence of complex identity responses reinforces the need to separate educator purpose from learner outcome. The present finding is therefore about professional judgement, not successful identity formation.

Organisational Inscription and Its Limits

Policy-enactment research recognises local texts, schedules, roles and routines as part of how schools translate policy (Ball et al., 2011, 2012). Inscription research similarly shows how policy formulations materialise in artefacts and may be mobilised in interaction (Silseth et al., 2023). The present use of *organisational inscription* applies this scholarship to the relationship among school-level documentary records. The concept describes how policy-relevant formulations are distributed across management statements, access rules, calendars and assembly sequences in this particular setting.

This descriptor identifies an analytical level between policy interpretation and performed practice. Its indicators are documentary: a normative direction is stated, an access rule is formalised, an event is scheduled or a ritual sequence is prescribed. These indicators can make a policy priority visible and retrievable. They do not by themselves demonstrate who selected the wording, whether staff attended to it, whether the provision endured as an institutional norm or whether learners experienced it as intended.

Coburn's (2005) account of leadership and sense-making suggests why such inscriptions may matter: local texts can make some priorities more available for professional attention. In this case, A1's civic references and A2's inclusive-access account corresponded with different documentary functions. Because the production and use of the source artefacts were not observed, this correspondence is interpretive rather than proof of administrative coordination. The contribution is therefore a bounded account of how policy-relevant meanings were distributed across a small set of school records.

Distributed Policy Work and the Sarawak Context

Teacher accounts and the documentary record displayed correspondence around unity, respectful participation and shared civic reference points. The sources differed in their emphasis: teachers concentrated on group composition, contribution and professional stance, while administrators and records concentrated on common reference points, access, scheduling and routine. Shared language connected the two arenas, but the available evidence does not establish direct co-planning between them.

The Sarawak setting adds a contextual insight. Research treats Sarawakian ethnic and regional identifications as historically produced and internally diverse (Abdullah, 2006; Jerome & Ting, 2026; Ostwald & Subhan, 2021). The large school brought Malay, Chinese, Iban, Bidayuh and other communities into a shared national institution. In the calendar record, national events appeared alongside Gawai Dayak and other locally salient cultural items. Their co-presence shows that national and regional-cultural references occupied the same documented programme rather than appearing as mutually exclusive categories.

This configuration gives the Sarawak setting an empirical role in the analysis. The interpretation remains limited to the co-presence of national and regional-cultural references in the documentary record. Explaining why events were selected and how they were experienced would require records of planning, observation of practice and data from learners.

The study contributes to the sociology of education and policy-enactment research by clarifying the relationship among institutional expectations, professional interpretations and formal school records. Bringing these sources together within one case makes it possible to identify related forms of policy work without treating them as equivalent evidence. Policy texts establish authorised purposes; educator accounts describe interpretation and reported translation; and the documentary record identifies formal priorities and scheduled provision. Claims about implementation or student identity require additional evidence. These distinctions support a more precise analysis of how schools interpret and organise national-identity education in culturally plural settings.

Implications for Policy and Practice

Curriculum guidance on national identity should address interpretation as well as content. Broad values are necessary, but teachers need opportunities to examine how historical narratives, national-language practice, civic responsibility and cultural diversity can be connected without reducing identity to ceremony or sameness. Professional learning should make space for locally grounded examples, dialogic pedagogy and critical reflection on participation design.

School leaders should review the connection between formal artefacts and professional practice. Calendars, management statements and participation rules can establish visibility and access, but joint planning and implementation records are needed to show how these provisions are used. Structured dialogue among History and Bahasa Melayu teachers, co-curricular coordinators and senior administrators could identify where civic purposes are reinforced, duplicated or left disconnected.

Monitoring should distinguish provision from enactment and outcomes. Counting events or checking documents may establish whether provision is recorded, but it cannot establish the quality of participation or how students interpret it. Evaluation designs should therefore combine artefact review with authorised observation, implementation records and separate evidence concerning learner interpretation.

National consistency need not require identical school-level expression. The co-presence of national and locally salient items in this case suggests space for context-responsive provision, provided that common civic purposes remain explicit and local relevance is not assumed to be inherently inclusive. Policy guidance can support bounded discretion while requiring schools to document their rationale and evaluate participation.

Limitations and Future Research

This was a focused analysis of five adult interviews and a documentary evidence record drawn from six source categories in one large national secondary school. The participants occupied relevant roles and had substantial experience, but the findings are not statistically representative of Sarawak or Malaysia. Because national unity is an official educational priority, professional and institutional desirability may have shaped interview accounts.

The exclusion of observation imposes an evidential boundary. Teacher accounts support interpretations of reported pedagogical judgement, while the documentary record supports

only authorised or recorded provision. The analysis cannot assess implementation consistency, participation quality, formal coordination or identity outcomes.

The original D2–D6 files were not re-examined for this article, and the parent-study record did not preserve complete metadata on their year, version, issuing unit or source pages. Table 2 therefore supports traceability to the thesis record rather than item-level replication. The interview evidence is also unevenly distributed: T1 is represented most strongly, T2, A1 and A2 are represented more narrowly, and no T3 quotation was selected. The themes should consequently be read as an interpretive account of the adult interview corpus, not as evidence that all participants expressed every meaning. Quotations were translated by the bilingual doctoral researcher and checked against the Malay source; the absence of independent back-translation remains a procedural limitation.

Future work should compare urban, semi-urban, rural and interior schools in Sarawak and other Malaysian regions. Multi-site studies could investigate how school histories, Indigenous and other community relationships, language practices, professional cultures and material resources shape enactment. Longitudinal research combining authorised observation, planning conversations, programme records and student accounts could examine when documented provision becomes enacted practice and how learners accept, negotiate or contest its meanings.

Conclusion

National-identity education in this Sarawak case involved differentiated forms of reported and documented policy work. Participants selected shared civic meanings from a broad mandate. Teachers described translating those meanings through professional conduct and participation design, while local records preserved related priorities through official direction, schedules and access rules.

Drawing on established inscription scholarship, the article uses *organisational inscription* as a bounded descriptor for policy-relevant formulations recorded in locally authoritative artefacts. It differentiates policy presence, educator-reported translation, recorded organisational provision and independently evidenced outcomes. National and locally salient cultural references were co-present in the school's documentary record, illustrating one context-specific form through which a national mandate became organisationally visible. Future research must examine how such inscriptions are produced, mobilised and experienced in practice.

Acknowledgements

The authors acknowledge the Ministry of Education Malaysia, the Sarawak State Education Department, the participating school and the educators who supported the doctoral research. This article derives from the first author's doctoral research conducted under the supervision of the second author.

Conflict of Interest

No conflict of interest is declared.

Data Availability

Raw interview transcripts, audio recordings and internal school documents are not publicly available because the small single-school case presents a risk of deductive identification and the materials are covered by restrictions relating to participant confidentiality and institutional access.

Transparency about Related Outputs

This manuscript draws on the adult interview and documentary subset of a broader doctoral case study. A related manuscript from the same parent study addresses student experience using a different research question, analytical corpus, thematic focus and conceptual framing. The present manuscript does not reproduce that manuscript's student data, conceptual model, figures, tables or central quotations.

References

- Abdullah, A. R. (2006). Ethnicity and ethnic identity in Sarawak. *Akademika*, 67, 47–74. <https://ejournals.ukm.my/akademika/article/viewFile/3014/1923>
- Ahmad, A., & Abdullah, N. A. T. (2022). Citizenship education: Challenges and possibilities in Malaysia. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 12(6), 1109–1129. <https://doi.org/10.6007/IJARBS/v12-i6/14058>
- Ball, S. J., Maguire, M., & Braun, A. (2012). *How schools do policy: Policy enactments in secondary schools*. London, England: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203153185>
- Ball, S. J., Maguire, M., Braun, A., & Hoskins, K. (2011). Policy actors: Doing policy work in schools. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 32(4), 625–639. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01596306.2011.601565>
- Banks, J. A. (2008). Diversity, group identity, and citizenship education in a global age. *Educational Researcher*, 37(3), 129–139. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X08317501>
- Braun, A., Ball, S. J., Maguire, M., & Hoskins, K. (2011). Taking context seriously: Towards explaining policy enactments in the secondary school. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 32(4), 585–596. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01596306.2011.601555>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2019). Reflecting on reflexive thematic analysis. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*, 11(4), 589–597. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2159676X.2019.1628806>
- Brown, G. K. (2007). Making ethnic citizens: The politics and practice of education in Malaysia. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 27(3), 318–330. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2006.12.002>
- Coburn, C. E. (2001). Collective sensemaking about reading: How teachers mediate reading policy in their professional communities. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 23(2), 145–170. <https://doi.org/10.3102/01623737023002145>
- Coburn, C. E. (2005). Shaping teacher sensemaking: School leaders and the enactment of reading policy. *Educational Policy*, 19(3), 476–509. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0895904805276143>
- Dewantara, J. A., Sulistyarini, Prasetyo, W. H., Efriani, Riyanti, D., Afandi, & Ulfah, M. (2023). School teachers, national identity and an Indonesian–Malaysian border community: A

- case study in Entikong. *Issues in Educational Research*, 33(2), 510–528.
<https://www.iier.org.au/iier33/dewantara.html>
- Evagorou, M., Vrikki, M., & Papanastasiou, E. (2023). Students' and teachers' voice on the outcomes of a citizenship education curriculum. *Citizenship, Social and Economics Education*, 22(2), 100–117. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14788047231193917>
- Hamid, J. A., Esa, M. S., Ationg, R., Othman, I. W., Adam, S. D. S., Tamring, B. A. M., & Hajimin, M. N. H. (2021). Penerapan patriotisme dalam kalangan guru-guru Sejarah sekolah menengah di Sabah. *International Journal of Law, Government and Communication*, 6(23), 42–56. <https://doi.org/10.35631/IJLGC.623003>
- Hong, J. J., & Lyu, Y. (2025). Not always a panacea: History education and identity-building in Taiwan. *Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization*, 229, Article 106837. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jebo.2024.106837>
- Jerome, C., & Ting, S.-H. (2026). Oohhaa! Kamek orang Sarawak: A glimpse into Sarawakians' diverse perspectives on what it means to be Sarawakian. *Kajian Malaysia*, 44(1), 1–26. <https://doi.org/10.21315/km2026.44.1.1>
- Kaspin, K. G., Hamzah, I. S., Abdullah, M. S., Marzuki, M., & Razali, N. A. (2024). Co-curriculum activities and national integration during the Movement Control Order in Malaysia. *Jurnal Ilmiah Peuradeun*, 12(2), 593–612. <https://doi.org/10.26811/peuradeun.v12i2.1003>
- Lash, C. L. (2021). Multicultural citizenship education as resistance: Student political development in an anti-immigrant national climate. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 105, Article 103405. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2021.103405>
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Newbury Park, CA: SAGE.
- Malterud, K., Siersma, V. D., & Guassora, A. D. (2016). Sample size in qualitative interview studies: Guided by information power. *Qualitative Health Research*, 26(13), 1753–1760. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732315617444>
- Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2016). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation* (4th ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Ministry of Education Malaysia. (2013). *Malaysia education blueprint 2013–2025: Preschool to post-secondary education*. Putrajaya, Malaysia: Author. <https://www.moe.gov.my/en/dasarmenu/pelan-pembangunan-pendidikan-2013-2025>
- Ministry of Education Malaysia. (2018). *Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Menengah: Dokumen Standard Kurikulum dan Pentaksiran Sejarah Tingkatan 4*. Putrajaya, Malaysia: Curriculum Development Division.
- Mohd Tajuddin, F., Aboo Talib @ Khalid, K., & Amir Hamzah, S. (2024). The pedagogical approaches to shift ethnic boundaries: Exploring pedagogical experiences of Malaysian youths in school and university. *Asian Journal of University Education*, 20(2), 512–523. <https://doi.org/10.24191/ajue.v20i2.27406>
- Muslim, N., & Rosadi, O. (2021). Peranan bahasa dalam pembinaan negara bangsa di Malaysia dan Indonesia. *International Journal of the Malay World and Civilisation*, 9(2), 79–89. <https://doi.org/10.17576/jatma-2021-0902-08>
- Nordin, A. B., Alias, N., & Siraj, S. (2013). National integration in multicultural school setting in Malaysia. *Malaysian Online Journal of Educational Sciences*, 1(1), 20–29.
- Nowell, L. S., Norris, J. M., White, D. E., & Moules, N. J. (2017). Thematic analysis: Striving to meet the trustworthiness criteria. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 16, 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406917733847>

- Ostwald, K., & Subhan, M. S. (2021). Regional identity formation in Malaysia: Primacy of the political center and its essentialized ethnic identities. *Asian Politics & Policy*, 13(1), 37–55. <https://doi.org/10.1111/aspp.12565>
- Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods: Integrating theory and practice* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Ross, E. (2024). Teachers' interpretation of curriculum as a window into 'curriculum potential'. *The Curriculum Journal*, 35(1), 38–55. <https://doi.org/10.1002/curj.239>
- Silseth, K., Hontvedt, M., & Mäkitalo, Å. (2023). Teachers' enactment of policy in classrooms: Making students accountable through inscriptions from the curriculum in classroom interactions. *European Journal of Psychology of Education*, 38(2), 881–902. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10212-022-00610-3>
- Spillane, J. P., Reiser, B. J., & Reimer, T. (2002). Policy implementation and cognition: Reframing and refocusing implementation research. *Review of Educational Research*, 72(3), 387–431. <https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543072003387>
- Yin, R. K. (2018). *Case study research and applications: Design and methods* (6th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.