

Investigation of Students' National Identity at Primary and Secondary Schools in Northwest Chinese Minority Areas

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Abstract: Advances in globalization have rapidly altered people's lifestyles and ideas, which has directly affected the national identities of ethnic groups in multiethnic nations, particularly in minority areas. This paper investigates how the national identity of students in Northwest Chinese minority areas. By investigating the situation of students' national identity at primary and middle schools, this study found that students' national identity is unbalanced, national awareness and cultural identity are higher than political identity, and political identity is low and must be strengthened. Furthermore, influenced by gender, school grade, ethnicity, and school type and location, the national identity of students in these areas was diverse and had various characteristics.

1. Introduction

The problem of national identity is related to the major practical problems of multiethnic countries. This has profoundly affected the unity and stability of multiethnic countries^[1]. National identity is the critical link that confirms people's national ownership and national consciousness, and holds the citizens and the own country together. Therefore, it is also related to the existence and development of a country^[2] and includes a complex psychological structure system that can be divided into cognitive and emotional components. The cognitive components are the knowledge and opinions of citizens of a country about their own country and population; the emotional components are the emotions and evaluations of citizens about their own country and population^[3].

Relevant research mainly focuses on the field of adolescent social and development psychology. In the early 1950s, the Swiss psychologists Piaget and Weil studied the national identity of young children between the ages of 4 and 15 years, but did not receive much attention at the time. It was not until the 1960s and 1970s that the study of youth national identity caught the attention of the academic community, and numerous scholars and related research emerged, such as Jahowa^[4]^[5] and Tajfel et al.^[6]^[7]. In the 1990s, research on the national identity of young people instigated a new climax in academia. Domestic research is mainly focused on the definition of national identity^[8]^[9], such as Lin Zhen^[10]. From the personal and national dimensions of the subject of national identity, the expert^[11] defined it using the functional and content dimensions; another example is Ma^[12]. National identity is summarized as a dual structure at the cultural level and political levels. In addition, numerous studies have focused on studying the importance of national identity, the relationship between national identity, and other academic concepts^[13]^[14]. Research has also focused on influencing factors as well as national identity cultivation strategies. However, from a comprehensive point of view, empirical research results of foreign-related research are rarely introduced, and empirical studies on national identity in China are rarer^[12]. As a result, empirical research on the national identity of primary and secondary school students in China has not met the demands of the current era or social development. Therefore, this paper investigates the status of the national identity of primary and middle school students in Northwest ethnic areas, analyses the causes for it, and provides a reference for the search for strategies to improve the national identity of primary and middle school students.

2. Methods

2.1 Questionnaire Research

2.1.1 Research Subjects

Using a convenience sampling method, primary schools, junior high schools, and high schools in both rural areas and towns were selected from 35 counties (cities, districts) and townships in the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region, Qinghai Province, and Gansu Province in China's Northwest minority areas. In 82 schools (of three types: Han, ethnic, and merged schools), a total of 20,000 questionnaires were distributed, and 18,618 were recovered, with a recovery rate of 93.09%.

2.1.2 Research Instruments

With reference to relevant literature and the related content in China's Students' Development Key Competencies, the research team members conducted several discussions and an analysis and compiled the Questionnaire on the National Identity of Primary and Secondary School Students. The questionnaire had 12 aspects, which are described as follows: students' understanding of the history of China, maintaining ethnic unity, social stability, national unity, love for the motherland, recognition of national identity, a sense of belonging to the motherland, consciously safeguarding national dignity and interests, students' emotions and beliefs on the Chinese Communist Party, socialist core values, socialism with Chinese characteristics, students' efforts for the Chinese dream, students' understanding and attitudes toward the Chinese civilization, extraordinary Chinese traditional culture, and advanced socialist culture. These aspects were then summarized into the three major dimensions of national identity (national awareness), political identity, and cultural identity of primary and secondary school students. Accordingly, the pretest questionnaire was designed.

2.2 Interview Survey and Observation

At the same time that the questionnaires were issued and collected, interviews and symposiums were also conducted for the in-depth investigation of the national identity of primary and middle school in Northwest minority areas. In addition, relevant courses and educational activities were observed, and the investigators participated in the collection of first-hand data.

2.3 Reliability and Validity of the Questionnaire

2.3.1 Questionnaire Reliability

This study used Cronbach's alpha to test the reliability of the questionnaire, which was to verify the internal consistency of the questionnaire as a research tool. Test results showed that the overall Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the questionnaire was 0.833, and the coefficients of the three components were as follows: 0.832 for national awareness, 0.843 for political identity, and 0.855 for cultural identity. From this range (0.832 to 0.855), the team concluded that the internal consistency of the questionnaire was relatively good.

2.3.2 Questionnaire Validity

The first aspect is content validity. After completing the preliminary draft of the questionnaire, relevant experts were invited to proofread and review it. Following the principle of proximity, 60 teachers and 120 students were selected for a small-scale presurvey in six schools in the Gannan Autonomous Prefecture of Gansu Province. The students filled out the questionnaire and were then interviewed (including open interviews and semistructured interviews) to ensure that the statements of the questionnaire, ease or difficulty, and amount of information, were accepted and understood by the subjects. Each item of the questionnaire, based on the information obtained as well as the experts' revised opinions and prediction results, was re-evaluated, and the operability of each definition was strengthened to further select and merge the items with high correlation. Subsequently, the questionnaire was revised again according to the Cronbach's coefficient and

eventually became the quantitative research tool of this survey.

The second aspect is structural validity. This study used factor analysis to test the construct validity of the questionnaire. The verification results showed that the coefficients of the three components and the questionnaire's overall value were between 0.843 and 0.867, indicating that the components of the questionnaire were highly related to the overall questionnaire.

3. Result and Discussion

Overall, the national awareness and cultural identity of the students in primary and secondary schools of Northwest minority areas were relatively high. However, their political identity was low and their political consciousness was weak, which must be strengthened and improved urgently.

3.1 Overview of the students' National Identity in Northwest Chinese Minority Areas

Based on this survey, statistics on the national identity of the students were collected, including their national awareness, political identity, and cultural identity; Table 1 presents the results. Overall, students with the highest national identity accounted for a larger proportion. By contrast, fewer students had higher cultural identity (cultural confidence) and even fewer students had high political identity.

Table 1 Overall Level Of the Development of students' National Identity

Dimensions	Items	M	SD
National awareness	22	4.73	0.35
Political identity	6	2.81	0.38
Culture identity	5	4.53	0.49
Total number	33	4.35	0.29

Table 1 shows that the total mean value of the students' national identity was 4.35, which is higher than the average of 3. As for the three dimensions of national consciousness, political identity, and cultural identity, the average values were 4.73, 2.81, and 4.53, respectively. The value of political identity was significantly lower, which indicated that the national identity of the students was extremely uneven.

3.2 Analysis of the National Identity of Students of Different Genders

To explore the influence of gender on the national identity of students in the primary and middle schools of Chinese Northwest minority areas, this study separately conducted independent sample *t*-tests on the three dimensions of national identity of male and female students in primary and secondary schools. Table 2 presents the results.

Table 2 Students' National Identity by Gender

Dimensions	M(M/SD)	F(M/SD)	t	p
National awareness	4.72/0.37	4.74/0.33	4.19	0.000
Political identity	2.81/0.38	2.81/0.38	0.50	0.62
Cultural identity	4.52/0.50	4.55/0.49	3.81	0.000
Total number	4.34/0.30	4.36/0.27	4.53	0.000

Table 2 shows that in terms of the overall level of the students' national identity, extremely significant differences existed between the genders ($p = 0.000$, $p < 0.001$); as for the different dimensions, significant differences existed in national consciousness ($p = 0.000$, $p < 0.001$) and cultural identity ($p = 0.000$, $p < 0.001$), whereas the differences in political identity ($p = 0.62$, $p > 0.05$) were nonsignificant.

3.3 Analysis of the Differences in students' National Identity in Different Stages

To ascertain the extent of the impact of school stages on the formation of students' national identity, this study used the school segment as an independent variable to conduct a one-way analysis of variance for the students' national identity in different ethnic groups; Table 3 presents

the data.

Table 3 Students' National Identity At Different Stages

Dimensions	Primary schools (M/SD)	Junior schools (M/SD)	Highschools (M/SD)	F	P
National awareness	4.68/0.43	4.70/0.36	4.81/0.21	282.84	0.000
Political identity	3.04/0.30	2.77/0.35	2.63/0.36	2360.18	0.000
Cultural identity	4.60/0.59	4.52/0.46	4.48/0.41	98.49	0.000
Total number	4.37/0.36	4.32/0.28	4.37/0.18	62.90	0.000

From this data, we observed extremely significant differences in students' national identity at different school stages ($p = 0.000$, $p < 0.001$); that is, national consciousness ($p = 0.000$, $p < 0.001$), political identity ($p = 0.000$, $p < 0.001$), and cultural identity ($p = 0.000$, $p < 0.001$) also reflected significant differences.

3.4 Analysis of the Differences in National Identity of Students from Different Ethnic Groups

To explore the influence of national identity on the national identity of primary and middle school students, this study separately conducted an independent sample t -test on the three dimensions of national identity of ethnic minority and Han primary and middle school students. Table 4 presents the data.

Table 4 Students' National Identity Across Different Ethnicities

Dimensions	Minority Chinese (M/SD)	Han Chinese (M/SD)	T	P
National awareness	4.72/0.37	4.75/0.31	7.25	0.000
Political identity	2.81/0.38	2.81/0.38	0.65	0.52
Cultural identity	4.50/0.51	4.59/0.45	12.82	0.000
Total number	4.34/0.30	4.38/0.26	9.10	0.000

Table 4 shows that, in general, the national identity of the primary and secondary school students of different ethnicities presents significant differences ($p = 0.000$, $p < 0.001$). From different perspectives, significant differences were also observed in national consciousness ($p = 0.000$, $p < 0.001$) and cultural identity ($p = 0.000$, $p < 0.001$), whereas the differences in the dimensions of political identity ($p = 0.52$, $p > 0.05$) were nonsignificant.

3.5 Analysis of the Differences in National Identity of Students from Different Regions

To determine the impact of the regions on students' national identity in primary and secondary schools, from the levels of the three dimensions, this study conducted an independent sample t -test to investigate the national identity of the city students (including city students in prefecture- and county-level cities) and rural students (including township-level schools and students from small villages). Table 5 presents the results.

Table 5 Regional Differences In students' National Identity

Dimensions	Students cities(M/SD)	Students from rural areas (M/SD)	T	P
National awareness	4.79/0.30	4.65/0.39	28.03	0.000
Political identity	2.83/0.38	2.78/0.38	8.61	0.000
Cultural identity	4.59/0.45	4.46/0.53	18.14	0.000
Total number	4.40/0.26	4.28/0.31	29.84	0.000

Table 5 shows that overall, the national identity of primary and middle school students in different regions was significantly different ($p = 0.000$, $p < 0.001$). From a different dimension, significant differences also existed in national consciousness ($p = 0.000$, $p < 0.001$), political identity ($p = 0.000$, $p < 0.001$), and cultural identity ($p = 0.000$, $p < 0.001$). Notably, the average scores of city students in national consciousness, political identity, and cultural identity were higher than those of rural students.

3.6 Analysis of Differences in students' National Identity in Different Types of School

Certain differences existed in students' national identity in different types of schools in minority areas. To explore these differences, this study conducted a single factor test and mean comparison analysis of the national identity of students from minority schools, Han schools, and merged schools. Table 6 presents the statistics.

Table 6 Students' National Identity in Different School Types

Dimensions	Han schools (M/SD)	Minority schools(M/SD)	Merged schools(M/SD)	F	P
National awareness	4.85/0.25	4.63/0.41	4.75/0.31	476.39	0.000
Political identity	2.70/0.37	2.80/0.38	2.85/0.37	182.35	0.000
Cultural identity	4.61/0.40	4.47/0.55	4.55/0.48	89.07	0.000
Total number	4.42/0.21	4.27/0.33	4.38/0.26	373.02	0.000

The results in Table 6 show that from the overall situation, a significant difference existed in national identity between students in different types of school ($p = 0.000$, $p < 0.001$). For the different dimensions, extremely significant differences existed in national consciousness ($p = 0.000$, $p < 0.001$), political identity ($p = 0.000$, $p < 0.001$), and cultural identity ($p = 0.000$, $p < 0.001$).

4. Conclusion

By investigating and analyzing the status quo of the national identity of primary and middle school students in Northwest minority areas, the following conclusions can be drawn:

The students' awareness and cultural identity (cultural confidence) were superior, their national identity had significant differences between genders, and there existed significant differences in the school stages of the students in the Northwest minority areas. In terms of national consciousness and cultural identity, significant differences existed between Han and minority students. However, the differences in political identity were nonsignificant. Besides, the average scores of the city students in the three dimensions (national consciousness, political identity, and cultural identity) were significantly higher than those of the students from rural areas. In addition, the national identity level of the students had significant differences in terms of school type.

As to the pedagogical implications of the results of the present study, the significant differences found between the students point to the different countermeasures, such as building a national identity education support system, improving the language system and standard of life, and teaching the core values of socialism and Chinese culture. The comparison of the results of the present study and those of the previous study^[3] suggested that students' national identity can be cultivated.

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