



Cultivating National Belonging: A Civic Education Framework for Secondary Education in Somalia

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Abstract

This study examines the critical role of civic education in fostering national belonging in conflict-affected Somalia. The research advocates for the implementation of structured civic education programs to address deep-seated identity-based divisions and promote the shared values essential for long-term reconciliation and social cohesion. A significant gap exists in the current educational model, which lacks a systematic focus on building a unified national identity in the post-conflict context. Drawing on foundational educational theories, this study proposes an integrated pedagogical framework. It emphasizes student-centered, participatory teaching methods designed to develop responsible citizens, promote intergroup dialogue, and actively construct a cohesive Somali identity. Key policy recommendations include dedicated curriculum reform, specialized teacher training in conflict-sensitive pedagogy, and the institutionalization of experiential learning activities.

Keywords: Civic Education, National Belonging, Reconciliation, Somalia, Secondary Education, Pedagogical Framework

Introduction

The Somali landscape has been marked by prolonged conflict and the collapse of state structures following the 1991 overthrow of the Siad Barre regime. The ensuing civil war exacerbated inter-clan cleavages, severely undermining the development of a common national consciousness (Hashi & Barasa, 2023). While efforts have been made toward political stabilization, clan loyalties often continue to take precedence over a shared Somali identity, presenting a fundamental obstacle to reconciliation and collective progress.

In this context, civic education is increasingly recognized as a vital instrument for nurturing social cohesion and a sense of shared destiny in post-conflict societies (Quaynor, 2012). For Somalia, implementing systematic civic education initiatives holds the potential to enhance public understanding of democratic citizenship, mutual respect, and peaceful conflict

resolution. By bridging societal divides through dialogue and fostering a culture of inclusive participation, these educational programs can play an instrumental role in mending the social fabric and strengthening a unified national identity.

Problem Statement

Despite ongoing efforts toward national rebuilding, weak national identity and deep-seated clan divisions continue to complicate reconciliation and the establishment of lasting social cohesion in Somalia. Many Somalis, particularly the youth, lack a strong, unifying civic identity that transcends sub-national affiliations. A critical factor exacerbating this challenge is the absence of widespread, targeted civic awareness programs within the formal education system designed to cultivate a sense of shared belonging and common purpose. Without an engaged citizenry educated in the principles of unity, tolerance, and collective responsibility, efforts to foster national healing and democratic participation remain fragmented and ineffective. This study seeks to address this gap by developing a pedagogical framework for leveraging civic education to build national belonging in Somali secondary schools.

Study Value

The significance of this study is multifaceted. Firstly, by proposing a National Belonging Framework integrated into civic education, it directly contributes to peacebuilding and reconciliation efforts, promoting tolerance and non-violent conflict resolution to mitigate the risk of renewed instability. Secondly, it aims to strengthen Somalia's social foundation by nurturing an informed citizenry united by a shared civic identity, which is essential for sustainable democratic development. Academically, it addresses a gap in context-specific models for civic education in fragile states. The findings will provide valuable, evidence-based insights for Somali policymakers, educators, and curriculum developers, guiding the design of effective civic education initiatives that can bridge societal divides and foster a cohesive national future.

Literature Review

Conceptual Foundations of Civic Education

Civic education refers to the systematic instruction designed to equip individuals with the knowledge, skills, and values necessary for meaningful participation in civic life, focusing on governance, rights, responsibilities, and democratic processes (Wang, 2016). Its importance in post-conflict settings like Somalia is paramount for several reasons: it Promotes National Identity and Social Cohesion by inculcating a common sense of belonging and shared values, which is necessary to reverse social fragmentation and increase tolerance among diverse groups (Thelma, 2024). It serves in the Prevention of Violence by integrating character education to defend against aggressive behavior and instill attitudes that promote peaceful conflict resolution, a vital need in post-conflict contexts (Nuridin, 2017). Furthermore, it Empowers and Holds Leaders Accountable by creating an informed citizenry capable of engaging with and critiquing government processes, thereby fostering transparency and good governance (Hoon, 2013). Finally, it provides Policy Guidelines,

offering empirical evidence to inform policymakers on best practices for fostering participatory citizenship in complex sociopolitical environments (Jama et al., 2020).

Theoretical Frameworks for National Belonging

Social Identity Theory (SIT) provides a crucial lens for understanding how national belonging is formed. SIT posits that an individual's self-concept is shaped in part by their group memberships. In educational settings, this theory highlights how schools can be leveraged to support positive identity formation through purposeful social engagement (Abrams et al., 2018). Participatory educational practices can help students co-create a sense of shared national belonging while respecting diverse sub-identities, scaffolding them to be responsive agents of positive social change (Masinga & Dumont, 2018). SIT thus offers a framework for creating inclusive learning environments that foster national cohesion.

Civic Education Theories

The role of civic education in fostering national belonging and reconciliation is supported by key theories:

Social Cohesion Theory posits that civic education can bridge societal divides by imparting a shared identity and common purpose. Studies show that adolescents involved in civic activities develop awareness that underpins social cohesion in adulthood (Parker et al., 2010). By fostering interaction and acknowledging shared struggles across different groups, civic education can enhance unity (Zembylas, 2012).

Democratic Peace Theory highlights the correlation between an informed citizenry and societal stability. Societies that promote civic engagement tend to experience less internal strife. Civic education fosters the political participation essential for sustaining peaceful democratic practices (Weinschenk & Dawes, 2021).

Conflict Transformation Theory views education as an instrument for reconciliation, designed not only to impart knowledge but also to initiate dialogue, foster healing, and promote cooperative interactions (Rafferty, 2020). Civic education can transform conflict-supporting narratives and encourage collective reconciliation activities (Bar-Tal et al., 2014).

Civic Education's Role in Cultivating National Belonging

National belonging is a fundamental condition where citizens share a sense of harmony and common purpose within political and geographical boundaries, essential for democratic governance and conflict resolution (Begić, 2024). In ideologically fragmented societies, fostering this cohesion is critical for socio-political stabilization (Fatimah et al., 2024).

Civic education is pivotal in cultivating this shared national identity. It fosters a collective sense of belonging and commitment to the nation's values and aspirations (Yuen & Mok, 2014). It enhances students' understanding of social responsibilities and encourages active participation in democratic processes, thereby strengthening civic engagement (Lenzi et al.,

2014). As a cornerstone for social cohesion, it promotes tolerance, mutual respect, and inclusivity among diverse groups, which are indispensable for social harmony (Salleh et al., 2021). It also reinforces the unifying power of shared history and heritage, enabling citizens to appreciate their common past and cultural legacy (Salleh et al., 2021). Furthermore, it instills a sense of civic responsibility, empowering individuals to equips learners with conflict resolution skills to navigate disputes constructively (Thelma, 2024). Lastly, by promoting cultural appreciation, it bridges divides and fosters intercultural understanding, strengthening national unity (Sobry & Fattah, 2023).

Models of Civic Education Implementation

Two prominent models are relevant for Somalia:

The **Participatory Model** emphasizes active citizen involvement and experiential learning through activities like group discussions, community projects, and service learning. This approach fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility, making civic principles concrete (Ulfah et al., 2019).

The **Values-Based Model** focuses on inculcating core values such as tolerance, respect, justice, and equality. It uses reflection, dialogue, and the exploration of historical injustices to foster empathy and understanding, forming a foundation for a more equitable and unified society (Kurnia, 2019).

Secondary Civic Education in Somalia

Currently, civic education in Somali secondary schools is not taught as a separate subject but is integrated into history textbooks, covering basic elements of citizenship, rights, and responsibilities (Ministry of Education, 2016). However, critical post-conflict themes such as national belonging and reconciliation are not given systematic or prioritized attention. There is a compelling need for structural reform to update the national curriculum with a dedicated, context-relevant civic education course that addresses these fundamental challenges (OHirsi, 2024).

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research design based on an interpretive paradigm, aiming to construct a context-specific model for fostering national belonging through civic education in Somalia. The objective is to develop an evidence-based pedagogical framework grounded in scholarly analysis and educational theory. Data was collected through a Systematic Qualitative Narrative Synthesis, a rigorous method for locating, evaluating, and thematically synthesizing qualitative evidence to develop new conceptual models. A comprehensive search was conducted across academic databases using structured keywords related to Somalia/fragile states, civic education, national identity, reconciliation, and pedagogy.

The analysis followed a structured procedure to identify core components and success factors from the literature, synthesizing insights from Social Identity Theory, Civic

Education Theories, and relevant pedagogical models. These elements were then integrated to form the coherent National Belonging Framework for Somali Secondary Civic Education, illustrated in the table below.

Findings

Proposed Pedagogical Framework for National Belonging

The study's central finding is the proposed National Belonging Framework, detailed in Table 1. This framework translates theoretical insights into a structured, thematic guide for curriculum and pedagogical development in Somali secondary schools. It is organized around seven interconnected pillars, each with specific educational objectives and aligned participatory activities.

Table 1. Thematic Framework for Enhancing National Belonging in Somalia

Theme	Description	Teaching and Learning Activities
Shared National Identity	Fosters a collective sense of belonging and commitment to the nation's values and aspirations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - National History Projects (research on Somali independence, key historical figures). - Flag & Anthem Discussions (exploring the meaning behind national symbols). - Debates on National Unity (e.g., "How can Somalia stay united despite regional differences?").
Democratic Values & Participation	Improves understanding of social responsibilities and encourages active participation in democratic processes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mock Elections (student council voting simulations). - Guest Speakers (local leaders discussing governance and civic duty). - Debates on civic issues relevant to Somali youth.
Social Cohesion & Dialogue	Encourages tolerance, mutual respect, and inclusivity as a foundation for national unity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Inter-Clan Dialogue Sessions (structured, facilitated discussions). - Community Service Projects (mixed-clan group activities).

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Role-Playing (simulating conflict resolution between fictional groups).
History and Heritage	Highlights the unifying power of shared history and cultural heritage.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Storytelling Workshops (elders sharing stories of pre-conflict Somali society). - Cultural Exhibitions (showcasing traditional dance, poetry, and artifacts from all regions). - Research on Ancient Somali Kingdoms and trade networks.
Civic Responsibilities	Empowers individuals to contribute meaningfully to societal progress by fostering a sense of duty.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Neighborhood Clean-Up Campaigns (student-led). - Awareness Drives (on issues like public health or education). - Youth Leadership Programs.
Conflict Resolution	Equips learners with mediation and dispute-resolution skills to maintain social stability.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Peer Mediation Training (students as conflict mediators). - Case Studies on Peacebuilding (analyzing local/global reconciliation efforts). - Negotiation Role-Plays (simulating disputes over resources).
Cultural Appreciation	Encourages intercultural understanding to bridge societal divides and strengthen unity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cultural Exchange Days (students present different regional traditions). - Poetry/Art Competitions with themes of unity. - Pen-Pal Programs (connecting students from different regions).

The framework of table 1 presents a holistic, pedagogy-driven approach to moving beyond clan-based identities toward a shared Somali citizenship. The development of a Shared

National Identity is foundational, achieved through activities that connect students to common symbols and a collective history, aligning with Social Identity Theory. Democratic Values are rendered practical through participation, moving from abstract concepts to lived experience. Social Cohesion is actively built through mandated dialogue and collaborative service, applying principles of the Participatory Model.

Engaging with a unifying History and Heritage counters divisive narratives by providing a shared point of reference, a key aspect of Conflict Transformation. Learning Civic Responsibilities and Conflict Resolution provides the practical tools for maintaining peace and engaging constructively in society. Finally, Cultural Appreciation, rooted in the Values-Based Model, ensures that national unity is built on a foundation of mutual respect for Somalia's rich internal diversity, preventing a coercive or assimilationist form of nationalism.

Conclusion

This study underscores the vital role of a strategically designed civic education curriculum in cultivating national belonging in post-conflict Somalia. By synthesizing key educational and social theories, it provides a conceptual foundation for programs that can reduce identity-based divisions, promote democratic ideals, and foster long-term reconciliation. The current integration of civic education within other subjects in Somali secondary schools lacks a systematic, pedagogy-focused approach to building a unified national identity. In response, this study proposes a comprehensive, activity-based National Belonging Framework. This framework provides a clear, actionable plan for curriculum development and classroom practice, centered on themes of shared identity, social cohesion, democratic participation, and conflict resolution, tailored to the Somali context.

Recommendations

To effectively implement this framework and foster national belonging, the following actions are critical:

-Curriculum Reform: The Ministry of Education should revise the national curriculum to establish **Civic Education and National Belonging** as a standalone, compulsory subject in secondary schools. This new syllabus must be explicitly designed around the seven thematic pillars of the proposed framework, with detailed lesson plans for the suggested activities.

-Teacher Training and Resources: Develop and execute a nationwide teacher training program on **conflict-sensitive pedagogy** and the delivery of the new national belonging curriculum. This must be supported by providing detailed teacher guides, lesson plans, and student resources that contextualize the framework for Somali classrooms.

-Promote Experiential and Participatory Learning: Move beyond rote learning. Actively support the implementation of the framework's recommended activities—such as inter-clan youth forums, community service projects, and cultural exchanges—by providing schools with guidelines and forging partnerships with civil society organizations to facilitate these programs.

-Strengthen Assessment and Evaluation: Institute robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. This includes periodic assessments of student attitudes toward national identity and social cohesion, as well as systematic evaluation of teacher training effectiveness. Regularly gather feedback from educators, students, and community leaders to allow for the continuous refinement and improvement of the curriculum and its delivery.

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Conflict of Interest

I declare that there are no conflicts of interest—financial, personal, or professional—that could have influenced the conduct, findings, or conclusions of this study. This research was carried out, analyzed, and finalized with complete academic independence and integrity, free from external pressures or competing interests.

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