

National Identity Training in Belgian Primary Schools: An Investigation into Educational Content Based on a Survey of Teachers

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Abstract

One of the most important factors in maintaining a nation's unity and integrity is national identity. If national identity is defined as a sense of belonging to a country whose citizens share a common language, land, cultural heritage, customs, emotions, memories, political system, beliefs, symbols, national heroes, history, economics, art and literature, and even religion, then this sense of belonging can be a source of national solidarity and unity. Governments all over the world take advantage of educational content at different educational levels to promote a common national identity among children and adolescents in order to maintain the existence and integrity of their own country. Based on national identity elements in the formal education of primary schools in Belgium, this study aimed to analyze the answers of Belgian primary school teachers and principals to a 25-item questionnaire (sent to 3,140 primary schools in three languages of English, French, and Dutch). The results of analyzing the survey results based on national identity elements contained in the educational content of primary schools indicated that the Belgian primary school teachers and principals seek to build a common national identity based on the constituents of Belgian nationality, even if they do not admit it verbally. Also Belgian government demonstrates that not only is not indifferent to national identity but it adopts programs and strategies to consolidate the national identity and build a unified nation based on Belgian values. This study employed desk studies, qualitative content analysis, and field studies to analyze the data obtained from questionnaires and direct observations.

Keywords: National Identity; Primary School curricula; Belgian Government; Formal Education.

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1. Introduction

This study represents the culmination of an extensive review, analysis, and examination of Dutch, French, and English texts, comprising over a thousand pages of educational documents and textbooks utilized in primary schools across the regions of Wallonia and Flanders in Belgium. Two preeminent Belgian institutions, GO Prof and OUSG, are charged with formulating educational strategies and facilitating training initiatives for municipalities and cities. In concert with the Government-Approved Curriculum Development Institute, these bodies are also responsible for developing the curricula for primary education. Through a rigorous qualitative analysis methodologically reviewing all curricula and course topics in comprehensive detail to identify elements indicative of national identity, explicit and implicit signifiers of national identity were extracted from the educational texts and content.

The general education program mandated for all Belgian students aged 6-12 encompasses a breadth of subjects, including core language instruction, secondary language acquisition, mathematics, religious and moral thoughts, physical training, art (music, dance, etc.), life sciences, technological competencies (computer literacy, internet, etc.), global orientations, history and geography, social sciences, and finance. In this newly established nation replete with pluralistic viewpoints and contentious debates, the educational system dually respects regional flags existing alongside the Belgian national flag, providing instruction in their significance (Belien,2005:242). Complementing the Belgian national anthem, Flemish, Walloon, and German national anthems are incorporated into the curricula. Furthermore, Flemish monuments and memorials are accorded commensurate honor and importance as national sites of significance. Moreover, the educational priorities for Belgian educators and the populace extend beyond cultivating a distinct national identity, embracing a globalized perspective emphasizing respect for divergent opinions and thoughts, upholding the democratic political model's preeminence, and championing environmental preservation efforts.

However, central governments have always been concerned with maintaining territorial integrity and building a coherent and convergent identity to achieve national unity (Hajinaseri,2018:32; Deschouwer,2009), because what ensures the survival of any country is the theoretical unity and consensus of the people of that country. Based on the review of articles and

books about national identity, and a comparison of their elements in the Belgian context, components of teaching national identity to children in Belgium were extracted, and are as follows:

- Learning and respecting all three of the official languages of Belgium;
- Learning the geography and boundaries of Belgium and its position in the European Union;
- Understanding the contemporary and past history of the Belgian territory, and learning about holidays and religious and national occasions;
- Identifying and respecting national heroes, artists, and eminent scientific and artistic figures of Belgium;
- Respecting the national and regional flags and other regional flags;
- Learning the regional anthems as well as the national anthem of Belgium;
- Understanding Belgian national values, including economic and political liberalism, respect for democracy, civil and human rights education, respect for social laws and contracts, protection of the land and environment, respect for other cultures, acceptance of cultural pluralism, the necessity of respectful communication with people from any race or religion, respect for any sexual orientation, the importance of the Belgian economy and of buying Belgian goods or buying from Belgian stores, and nurturing responsible citizenship;
- Understanding the Belgian political system, including the Belgian king and royal family, parties, parliament, and the mechanism of representation; and
- Promoting the Christian religious identity as well as respecting other religions, sects, and moral schools of thought, and increasing tolerance and the acceptance of other religions and belief systems (Karimi and Fazeli, 2021:141).

This article aims to review the national identity elements in the formal education of primary schools in Belgium based on the results of a survey of Belgian primary school teachers and principals. The significance of studying national identity training in a country lies in the fact that any government needs a kind of collective unity and consensus among the nation to maintain and reproduce its power. This is something that can be realized only through training the citizens in the concept of national identity. Linguistic diversity, ethnic pluralism, the dominance of regional identities, the large number of immigrants, and exposure to globalization waves in a country like Belgium further necessitates collective unity and solidarity in order to maintain and

reproduce a kind of political power that does not lead to specific actions against the sovereignty of other countries. However, the preservation of the so-called "Belgian state" also depends on the encouragement of unity and solidarity among the Belgian people. Therefore, the national identity and solidarity of a nation can be promoted by creating a sense of belonging and empathy among its people. This sense of belonging and affection underpins the cohesive spirit of a nation. Emotion is the basis of any social order, even in modern societies; and it is something that has roots in emotional dependence, social gatherings, and the emotional relationships of societies (Dunning,1997:119). In an attempt to find this unifying sense of belonging and the collective emotion, which serves as a common spirit for the nation in Belgian primary schools, we reviewed the curricula and educational content of Belgian primary schools in 2020 and analyzed the answers to a questionnaire. We then concluded that the main elements of national identity are taught to Belgian children through courses such as History, Mother Language, Geography, Religious teachings, and courses containing social and anthropological concepts. Recent surveys show that French-speaking and Flemish-speaking students consider themselves more Belgian than Walloon or Flemish students (Nieuwenhuysse and Wils, 2015: 48). This might be the result of the education provided to children and adolescents at schools that is aimed at making them adopt or internalize a unified national identity (Cohen,1982:18;Taba,1962:10).

The main question here is how the national identity elements that are contained in the educational content and curricula of Belgian primary schools are taught to students. Accordingly, the research hypothesis indicates how Belgian primary education policymakers convey the main concepts of national identity to students. Analysis of the results of educational surveys and field studies of the political and sociological actions of the Belgian government demonstrate that not only is the Belgian government not indifferent to national identity but that it also adopt programs and policies to consolidate the sense of national identity and encourages Belgian national unity based on Belgian national values (Iqbal Dawar,2020:131).

This article consists of theoretical and survey sections. The first part, i.e. the theoretical part, aims to introduce the main elements of national identity and to briefly describe the history of Belgium and the status quo of national, ethnic, and regional identities in this country through desk studies. The

second part consisted of analyzing and identifying the signs of national identity in the educational content and textbooks for primary schools in order to understand how concepts pertaining to national identity are taught to children aged 6-12 years. Then, in addition to conducting a survey and field studies, the answers of Belgian teachers and educational staff to a 25-item questionnaire on teaching Belgian national identity in primary schools were analyzed. Based on the survey method, the audience was asked to directly report their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Since the author had lived in Belgium for a while, he/she could more closely observe and investigate the relevant issues. Moreover, having direct access to educational environments and being able to analyze educational documents in the original language enabled a careful and more accurate examination of the data.

2. Review and Qualitative Analysis of Educational Documents and Curricula of Belgian Primary Schools: (ein1, go1)

After a qualitative analysis and review of over a thousand pages of educational documents and curricula of Belgian primary schools, elements that constituted Belgian national identity were extracted. The following tables present the Belgian national identity elements contained in each primary school course.

2-1.Language (Mother Language and Second Language)¹²³⁴

Constituents of Belgian national identity contained in *Language*:

- Familiarity with the mother language and the other official languages of Belgium
- Respecting other cultures and languages, and impartially accepting the differences
- Understanding the historical background, and creating a sense of belonging to common cultural roots
- Familiarity with Belgian authors and celebrities, as well as texts related to Belgian culture and laws

1. COM (2003) 449: Promoting language learning and linguistic diversity: Action Plan 2004 - 2006; COM (1995) 590: White Paper Teaching and Learning

2. https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/eu-languages_en#:~:text=The%20EU%20has%2024%20official,Bulgarian

3. Barcelona European Council, 15-16 March 2002, Presidency Conclusions, Part I, 43.1

4. Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 on key competences for lifelong learning

2-2.Global Orientation¹

This course aims to teach students social skills (including economic training, political training, and environmental and cultural training), history, geography, and new technologies. Social skills are expected to develop the basic skills that enable children to function as socially responsible citizens based on Belgian national values. Another objective of these skills is to gradually create a correct image of Belgian society for children in a way that fosters their socially resilient and respectful behaviors.

Constituents of Belgian national identity contained in *Global Orientation*:

- Learning the national anthem of Belgium, national and regional flags, symbols and memorials, national and religious holidays, and symbols related to each region of Belgium, and using the national flag during the FIFA World Cup or other national events (The text of the Belgian national anthem: O dear country, O Belgium earth, Our heart to you, our hand to you, To you our blood, the herd of home, We swore to you, oh fatherland! So joyfully blossom in beautiful beauty, to which freedom educated Kich, and from now on Deime sons sing Law and King and freedom high! And from now on your sons sing Law and King and freedom high!)
- Learning geography and boundaries of Belgium and its position in the region (The European Union and other international organizations)
- Educating responsible and committed citizens based on Belgian values and norms
- Emphasizing the rule of law through the oversight of student councils on law enforcement
- Understanding the role of law enforcement agencies such as the police and court
- Understanding the Belgian political system, including the Belgian king and royal family, government, ministers, municipalities, parties, parliament, and members of parliament
- Teaching national values such as democracy, councils, and social empathy
- Recognizing and communicating with governmental institutions and understanding the effects of government decisions on people's lives
- Practical training in concepts such as democracy, democratic decision-making, elections, cooperation, participation, and parliament

1.Wereldorientatie

- Understanding the concept of equal rights and obligations for men and women, as one of Belgium's national values
- Understanding the differences between people and learning the ability to communicate effectively with others, regardless of their gender, ethnicity, race, language, and skin color
- Encouraging the recognition of the nature of democratic decision-making and accepting its outcomes
- Teaching the concept of poverty and its causes, and emphasizing that it is necessary to strive for justice and equality, even though Belgium is considered to be a wealthy country
- Encouraging entrepreneurship and economic prosperity
- Training in taxation and filling out income tax returns, and encouraging sincere commitment to paying taxes as a way of contributing to the balanced growth and development of Belgium
- Encouraging savings as a Belgian cultural value
- Encouraging economic activities and spending the proceeds for charity as a way to create more jobs and to empathize with people in need
- Familiarity with various aspects of shopping, and paying attention to the quality and environmental impacts of products as part of the Belgian lifestyle and culture
- Encouraging the purchase of Belgian products from Belgian stores in order to contribute to the national economy and as a part of Belgian national values
- Encouraging the understanding and acceptance of the differences in the worldview of individuals without judging them
- Encouraging participation in empathetic group activities and events
- Condemning racism
- Understanding the value of work, and taking responsibility for educating a civic-minded citizen
- Emphasizing the importance of learning to behave non-violently for settling conflicts and critical situations, which not only increases national empathy and unity but also helps to educate better civic behavior

2-3.History

Constituents of Belgian national identity contained in History: (exp, ost,peg,goz,ein2)

- Emphasizing the history of the students' surroundings and environment to foster a sense of belonging to their commonplace of residence and county
- Promoting the Belgian identity by comparing its national history with the history of other countries
- Understanding the historical chronology so as to become better aware of the present and to educate a more responsible and wiser citizenry
- Familiarity with the royal family and the history of Belgian kings to foster monarchic unity and empathy for constitutional monarchy
- Learning about the position of Belgium in different historical periods, especially pre-independence Belgium
- Emphasizing both the positive and negative aspects of Belgian history in order to create a true picture of Belgian history in the minds of children
- Visiting old galleries, museums, and historical monuments focus students' attention on the Belgian cultural heritage
- Naming places (e.g. streets, avenues, schools, etc.) after eminent Belgian religious and national figures
- Telling memorable and glorious historical tales to promote a sense of belonging to national history among students
- Encouraging the challenging of prejudices and stereotypes as an important Belgian value
- Encouraging children to critically and responsibly react to world events regardless of media judgments
- Familiarity with the issue of immigration and its causes and how to properly treat immigrants

2-4. Geography, Technology, etc.

Constituents of Belgian national identity contained in Geography, Technology, Physical Education, Mathematics, Biology, and Art: (ens,dat,dja)

- Paying attention to the land and the environment in which the students are living
- Learning different sources of energy and their advantages and disadvantages for the Belgian environment and the whole planet
- Learning and practicing waste recycling, as one of the values, norms, and laws of Belgium
- Paying attention to the initiatives of municipalities and regional governments regarding the protection and preservation of the environment

- in various regions in Belgium (increasing children's awareness of and sensitivity to the efficacy of the government's measures)
- Encouraging the Belgian lifestyle based on maintaining good health and regular exercise
 - Learning to work with new technologies, and increasing media literacy in order to educate responsible, civic-minded citizens
 - Understanding cultural diversity and alternative lifestyles around the world using a variety of mathematical methods and systems from other parts of the world
 - Encouraging the Belgian values of open-mindedness, critical thinking, and flexibility
 - Creating a sense of empathy with artists and culture by learning art and taking an interest in the works of artists
 - Encouraging the tolerance of contrary views, autonomy, independence, critical thinking, and respect for cultural plurality, all of which are important Belgian values
 - Educating students in the rules of traffic for cyclists and pedestrians, as part of the project of educating a responsible citizenry.

2-5.Philosophy

Constituents of Belgian national identity contained in Philosophical Insight (Focusing on Christianity(zill1&2,kul & kul1,god,bij, ort,aug)):

- Encouraging respect for the opinions and views of others, a desire to learn new things, and unprejudiced tolerance and acceptance of differences
- Encouraging having social concerns and taking critical and open attitudes towards international issues
- Understanding the qualitative pluralism resulting from cultural multiplicity in Belgium in order to achieve cultural richness and to learn how to deal with this diversity
- Encouraging peaceful coexistence with others
- Encouraging empathy with others to increase a collective sense of belonging and social solidarity
- Encouraging children to join religious groups and participate in church ceremonies to strengthen their sense of belonging to a community
- Fostering familiarity with other worldviews and religious beliefs in order to promote cultural pluralism

- Introducing Christian religious thinkers and scholars by naming schools or streets after them, and holding commemoration ceremonies for them to honor the Belgian cultural heritage, cultural heroes, and eminent figures
- Emphasizing the commonalities of religions based on the monotheistic personality of the Prophet Abraham as a way of promoting empathy and solidarity among children of different religions
- Describing the historical periods and cultural roots of Christianity in Belgium to create a sense of belonging to a common history

In other words, when an 18-year-old Belgian is asked what “I’m a Belgian” means, he/she should be able to name the following items based on what he/she has learned:

- I live with other Belgians in a specific geographical area all of whom share the same history
- I like the Flemish and French languages
- All three official languages in Belgium are our national languages
- I am proud of all Belgian celebrities¹, including war heroes, scientists, and artists
- I have an obligation to protect the territorial and environmental resources of Belgium
- I respect the religious beliefs and values of others
- I know and love Belgian religious holidays such as Christmas and Easter
- I am interested in celebrating the National Independence Day of Belgium
- I have to respect the rights of people of different races
- It is my pleasure to live in Belgium with other Belgians
- I feel good about having Belgian books² in my library (books with a Belgian author who is known to the Belgians)
- I like to visit all the cities of Belgium
- I like going to museums and visiting old Belgian artifacts
- I strive for the growth and development of Belgium because it is important to me
- I think the Belgian flag is beautiful
- I feel so good when I hear the Belgian national anthem that I want to sing along with it

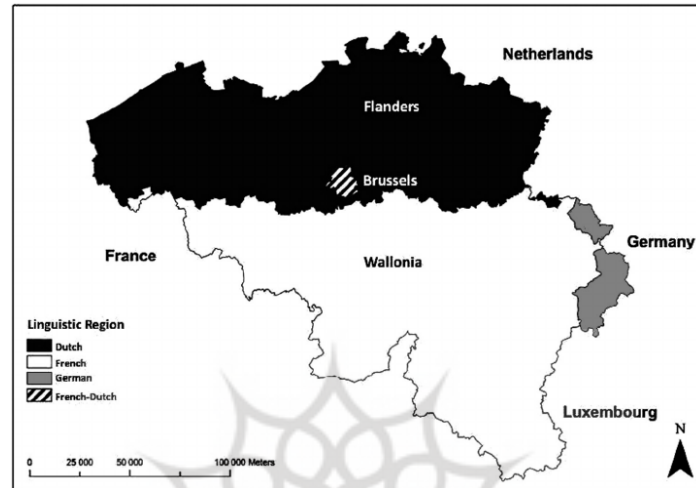
1. Such as Stroomae, Paul Van Haver, Selah Sue, Bavt August, and Maria Peeters

2. Such as Het Verdriet Van Belgie, Maigret, Suske en wiske, and Jeroen meus

- I want the Belgian national football team to beat all the rivals in football matches
- I love and follow the world championship cycling and football competitions (two favorite sports of most Belgians) (see: Hadian and karimi,2021,198).
- I like Belgian meals such as steak with French fries, meatball soup, and oysters with French Fries (Karimi and Fazeli,2021:148-149).

Unlike countries such as Iran, China, and Egypt that have a long and rich history and ancient traditions, Belgium is a country of about 15 million people with different languages from different ethnicities (Fig.1). This linguistic difference is the source of conflicts and disputes between regions. Moreover, the conflict of views and opinions between Flanders, Walloon, Brussels, the German-speaking community, and the central federal government inevitably necessitates a complex system of governance consisting of six parliaments and six governments that operate simultaneously. The different interpretations of the history in Flanders, Walloon, and the German-speaking region; a large number of immigrants from different countries, religions, and ethnicities; multiculturalism, and anything that might lead to unity and solidarity in other societies are all a source of strife and discord in the diverse and pluralistic society of Belgium. Nevertheless, the gradual emergence of new generations and modern nation-states over time has necessitated enhancing national unity and consensus, educating a nation committed to a convergent and united interpretation of the concept of “country”, and promoting a national identity that transcends ethnic, linguistic, and regional affiliations.

Figure (1): Map of Ethnicity and Linguistic Regions in Belgium



3. A survey of Educational Policies on the Concept of "National Identity" in Belgian Primary Schools:

Since any nation-state consists of a state and a nation, the educational policies developed by governments and implemented by teachers need to be evaluated. For this purpose, a questionnaire consisting of multiple-choice and descriptive items was prepared in three languages (English, Dutch, and French) and emailed to the study sample, including principals and teachers of Belgian primary schools. There is a large number of opponents to the concept of Belgian national identity and teaching it to children, especially in Flanders, even among teachers who are considered to be among the more educated strata of Belgian society. On the other hand, teachers are teaching the concepts developed by governments to help students better understand the concept of national identity and unity under the umbrella of the Belgian state. It can be generally concluded that national identity is a challenging and controversial issue in Belgium. The survey results indicate that teachers and principals believed that not only was the concept of national identity not taught to students in practice but also that Belgian multicultural society has nothing to do with the concept of national identity. Nevertheless, the primary school textbooks show that the concept of national identity is taught to children strongly and consciously, but tacitly. In line with global norms such as cultural pluralism, the superiority of democracy in the election of

rulers and representatives of the people, and specific economic and consumption patterns, Belgian national values have paralleled some aspects of the Belgian national identity with global identity but challenged some other aspects of the Belgian national identity, such as the flag, the national anthem, a common interpretation of the Belgian history, and language, due to the plurality and diversity of cultures and languages in this country. The following table describes the statistics associated with sending the questionnaire to teachers and principals.

Table (1): The Survey Statistics

Campaign	Recipients	Opens	Replies	Date
Belgische Nationale Identiteit Vragenlijst	<u>1,525</u>	<u>79(5.2 %)</u>	<u>8(0.5 %)</u>	9/21/2020
Belgische Nationale Identiteit Vragenlijst	<u>1,773</u>	<u>258(14.6 %)</u>	<u>16(0.9 %)</u>	9/17/2020
Éducation à l'identité Nationale Belge Questionnaire	<u>408</u>	<u>86(21.1 %)</u>	<u>7(1.7 %)</u>	9/15/2020
Belgische Nationale Identiteit Vragenlijst	<u>2,335</u>	<u>506(21.7 %)</u>	<u>31(1.3 %)</u>	9/13/2020
Questionnaire about Belgian Identity in Primary schools	<u>736</u>	<u>11(1.5 %)</u>	<u>0(0.0 %)</u>	9/10/2020
Questionnaire about Belgian Identity in Primary schools	<u>983</u>	<u>152(15.5 %)</u>	<u>4(0.4 %)</u>	9/10/2020
Questionnaire about Belgian Identity in Primary schools	<u>1,421</u>	<u>352(24.8 %)</u>	<u>11(0.8 %)</u>	9/9/2020

Here we analyze the results of 57 questionnaires filled out by teachers and principals of Belgian primary schools.

3-1. Do Belgians have an Independent National Identity alongside other Nations?

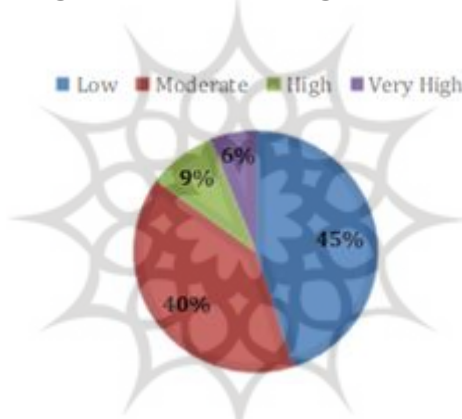
Yes (63%) No (37%). No, the Belgian identity is defined in unison with the global and European identities. Since most respondents answered "Yes" to this question, it can be concluded that they recognize and believe in the Belgian national identity despite all linguistic and ethnic differences. Defining an "other" versus the national, "us" is one of the elements of the national identity.

3-2.How Important is it to Belgians to Strengthen their National Identity?

Low (45%), Moderate (40%), High (9%), Very High (6%)

About half of the respondents agreed that the strengthening of Belgian national identity is not very important. This shows that either they are relatively satisfied with the current level of national identity or that they find it essentially meaningless to talk about national identity in a country like Belgium. However, the other half of the respondents believed that strengthening the Belgian national identity is moderately important, important, or very important.

Figure (2): Belgian’s Desire to strengthen their Nation Identity



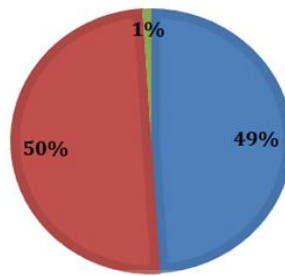
3-3. how is the Status of the Desirability of National Identity Education in the Belgian Education System?

Low (49%), Moderate (50%), High (1%), Very High (0%)

The answers to this question indicate that the vast majority of respondents believe that national identity education in Belgian primary schools is not in a desirable status. Even those who do not take the strengthening of the Belgian national identity to be very important are not satisfied with the status quo of national identity education in primary schools.

Figure (3): Desirability of National Identity Education in the Belgian Education System

■ Low ■ Moderate ■ High ■ Very High



3-4. Do the Curricula and Educational Techniques used in Belgian Primary Schools to Convey the Concept of National Identity to Students need to be Modified?

Yes (55%) No (45%)

The answers provided to this question demonstrate that 45% of the respondents do not believe in the strengthening of the Belgian national identity and were relatively satisfied with the status quo of national identity education in primary schools, and did not find it necessary to modify the curricula and educational techniques used to convey the concept of national identity to students. However, most respondents stated that the curricula and educational techniques used to convey the concept of national identity to students need to be modified.

3-5. Is there any Consistency between Strengthening the Belgian National Identity in Students and Encouraging them to treat non-Belgian Residents Living in Belgium fairly and intimately?

Yes (79%) No (21%)

Since one of the Belgian values that are seriously promoted is the tolerance of other opinions, ideas, and cultures, the respondents believed that strengthening Belgian national identity in students is in line with promoting intimate and fair treatment of non-Belgian residents living in Belgium. Moreover, as discussed earlier, the primary school curricula also teach non-Belgian citizens living in Belgium how to integrate into Belgian society and treat others through Citizenship Integration and Official Language courses.

3-6. How do you prioritize various elements of Belgian national identity (geography and borders, the national flag, the national anthem, language, the political system, customs, observance of the laws and norms of each region, respect for other cultures and religions, observance of citizenship rights, promoting a spirit of criticism and questioning, learning any of the official languages, purchase of Belgian products, learning how to fill out a tax return form, and commitment to paying taxes on time and honestly)?

From the perspective of the respondents, the most important elements of Belgian national identity were as follows: the political system, learning the mother language as well as other official languages, geography and borders, the national flag, the national anthem, respect for other cultures and religions, observance of the laws and norms of each region, contribution to the sense of national unity and social security, observance of citizenship rights, compliance with laws and standards, tolerance of opposing opinions and cooperation with others, purchase of Belgian products, promoting a spirit of criticism and questioning, learning how to fill out a tax return form, reading about the history and origin of Belgium, familiarity with Belgian heroes and celebrities as well as historic monuments, reading about the history of the Belgian kingdom, participation in social affairs and events, development of skills for unprejudiced listening, understanding the benefits of Belgium, promoting national unity, fighting against poverty and imbalanced wealth distribution, supporting the Belgian national football team, protecting freedom of speech, etc. Since all these items are also contained in the curriculum of primary schools, it is possible to teach them to primary school students. Therefore, learning these topics can strengthen the Belgian national identity of today's children and the future citizens of Belgium.

3-7. Which institutions have attempted more to strengthen national identity among children and adolescents in recent decades?

Education system and schools (31%) Family institution (69%)

About 70% of the respondents believed that the family institution was playing the main role in strengthening the national identity of children and adolescents. Nevertheless, the analysis of primary school curricula showed that children learn most of the skills they need to become really responsible and civically-minded Belgian citizens at school and from their teachers because Belgian children enter the educational system (kindergartens at the age of 2 or 3 years and then primary school at the age of 5 years). Although

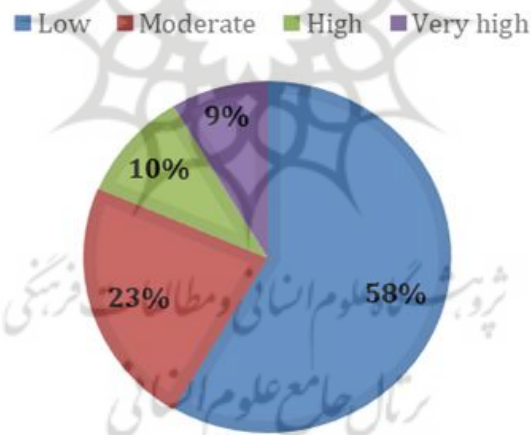
individuals begin to adopt attitudes towards political and identity issues in the family, formal education and what children learn from teachers and peers play a major role in building their identity and personality (Piaget, 1995).

3-8. How much do the linguistic and ethnic differences in Belgium hinder the formation of a single national identity?

Low (8%) Moderate (17%) High (47%) Very High (28%)

As expected, about half and 30% of the respondents believed that linguistic and ethnic differences in Belgium are important and very important barriers to the formation of a single national identity. Although learning English and Belgian languages is mandatory in today’s Belgian educational system, this will help reduce tensions and differences in future generations because Belgians can then communicate with each other and even accept intellectual and theoretical differences more easily.

Figure (4): Role of Linguistic and Ethnic differences in Belgium to Hinder the Formation of a Single National Identity



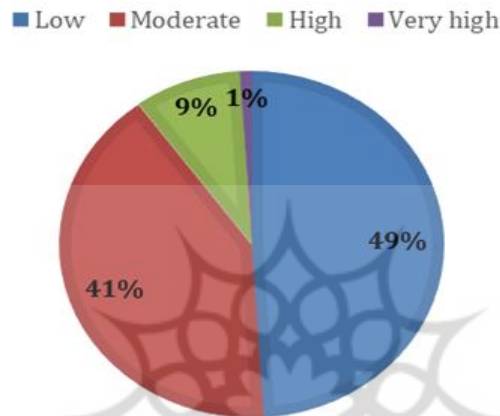
3-9. How Belgian Teachers are motivated to strengthen the National Identity of Students?

Low (49%) Moderate (41%) High (9%) Very High (1%)

Because of linguistic and ethnic differences in Belgium, teachers and the general public are not determined enough to reach a consensus on the concept of national identity. However, educational policymakers tacitly try to educate the responsible and civic-minded citizens of the future who respect Flemish and Wallonia values and norms under the umbrella of a

unified state-nation unit. This is actually the process of building national identity.

Figure (5): Motivation of Teachers to Strengthen the National Identity in Students.

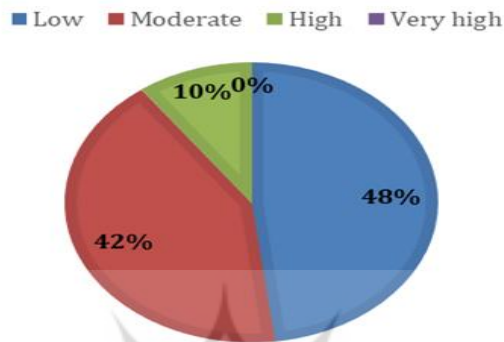


3-10. How Belgian Families are motivated to strengthen the National Identity of their Children?

Low (48%) Moderate (42%) High (10%) Very High (0%)

Linguistic and ethnic differences in Belgium have always been a barrier to the formation of a single national identity. Since the general public and parents of children also have linguistic and ethnic differences, they usually do not make much of a direct and conscious effort to build national identity in their children. However, educational policies, media, and programs aiming at strengthening the family institution all try to promote a unified social identity based on Belgian values, which is exactly the same thing as national identity.

Figure (6): Motivation of Families to Strengthen the National Identity in Children.



3-11. How do you assess the Future Trend of Strengthening National Identity among Belgian Students?

Descending (57%) Constant (30%) Ascending (13%)

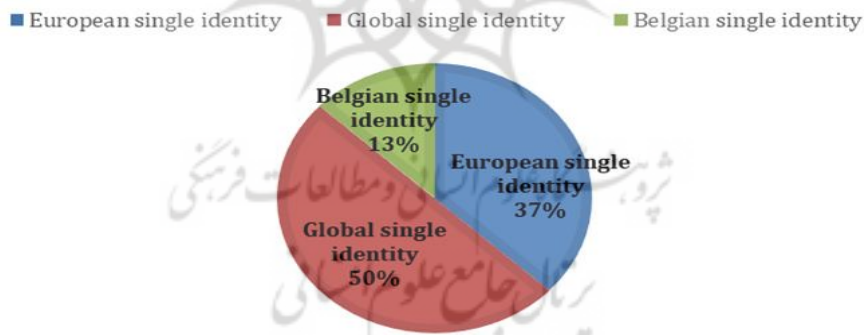
If the above question was asked as follows: “How do you predict the importance of emphasizing the significance of Belgian history, learning the geography of Belgium, learning the national and regional anthems of Belgium and respecting Belgian cultural monuments and ceremonies, accepting opposing views and cultural, ethnic, and linguistic differences, paying attention to the collective growth of individuals in Belgian society as well as balanced economic growth for all Belgians, learning the official languages of Belgium, and so on, to Belgian students in the future?”, the majority of respondents would probably choose “Ascending”. Although these are all constituent elements of Belgian national identity, they are not known as such among Belgian teachers and citizens because the existing linguistic and ethnic differences challenge these elements. Considering these differences and the cultural sensitivities of Belgians, the educational system tries to implicitly teach the elements of Belgian national identity to children under other guises.

3-12. Which aspect of Identity is more important to be strengthened in Students?

European single identity (37%) Global single identity (50%) Belgian single identity (13%)

Since the constituents of Belgian national identity are influenced by a global spirit derived from liberalism and cultural pluralism, teachers focus more on global aspects of identity. On the other hand, due to the presence of Belgium in the European Union and the legal similarities between member states to this political unit, and also the large number of European and non-European immigrants living in this country, the European single identity does not much allow for the formation of a different and specific identity among Belgians. However, any country in the world, with all its cultural and ethnic difference and diversity, has its own history, geography, borders, national anthem and flag, monuments, cultural values, and local customs. The Belgian education system also emphasizes these special and unique features of Belgium and tries to incorporate them into the curricula of its primary schools. Therefore, it can be stated that there is something called “Belgian national identity”, and federal and regional governments also seek to strengthen this national identity among Belgian primary school students, regardless of their mother language, ethnicity, cultural values, and religious beliefs.

Figure(7): Graph Presentation of Importance Index of Identity aspects from Teachers’ Perspectives.



3-13. Which of these two opposing propositions do you prefer, “strengthening Belgian national identity” or “tolerance of and social unity with immigrants of other nationalities in Belgium”?

The first one (25%) Second one (75%)

The problem with this question is the use of the term “opposing”, because “tolerance of and social unity with immigrants of other nationalities in Belgium” itself is one of the major Belgian values and also a sub-concept of Belgian national identity. If the concept of Belgian national identity is

restricted to those who are originally Belgian, it involves a very small number of Belgians in this region whose background is still a source of conflict. Some Flemish people believe that they are the only genuine Belgians, whereas some French-speaking people in this country believe the same thing. This is just the beginning of a 200-year-old controversial and tense historical and cultural debate. However, if the Belgian national identity is to be considered a source of solidarity and unity that induces the spirit of national identity for all citizens of Belgian ethnicity under the umbrella of a Belgian nation-state unit, then “tolerance of and social unity with immigrants of other nationalities in Belgium” can be viewed as a Belgian national value in itself.

3-14. Is it Possible to Teach the Concept of “Patriotism” in Schools?

Yes (38%) No (63%)

The review of the primary school curriculum as well as questions 6, 15, and 24 shows that the concept of Belgian national identity is comprehensively taught to children under titles such as social skills, Belgian history, geographical knowledge, political concepts, and divisions within the Belgian state, and Belgian values. However, the term “patriotism”, in particular, is not much known to Belgians because of linguistic and ethnic differences.

3-15. Do you try to teach special Belgian features, such as Belgian foods, patriotic songs, and Belgian arts, to children within cultural and extracurricular activities?

Yes (67%) No (33%)

In addition to formal education at school, students are encouraged to participate in cultural and extracurricular activities focusing on Belgian special features. This is another way used in Belgian schools to convey the concept of Belgian national identity to children.

3-16. Are the items such as the Belgian national flag, the Belgian national anthem, Belgian history, Belgian values, Belgian geography, familiarity with Belgian cities, Belgian football, and the favorite sports of Belgians used purposefully in your school to promote Belgian identity among children?

- These activities are performed purposefully to promote Belgian identity among students (23%)
- These activities are performed but not for promoting Belgian identity among students (77%)

Emphasis on the above-mentioned item can naturally promote Belgian identity among students, as 23% of the respondents believed they do.

3-17. Which Factor is the most Influential Barrier to the Formation of Belgian National Identity?

Ethnic diversity (12%), a large number of immigrants (4%), the lack of a strong central government to promote a unified national identity (43%), the insignificance of teaching the concept of national identity in schools (14%), the insignificance of the concept of national identity for Belgians (27%)

The respondents believed that ethnic diversity and the large number of immigrants living in Belgium are the least important barriers to the formation of a unified national identity, although these two factors may be seemingly enough to prevent the formation of a single national identity among a nation of fifteen million.

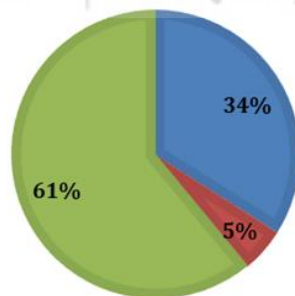
3-18. Which of the Multiple Belgian Identities do you Prefer to be Taught to Children in the Formal Education System?

Belgian national identity (34%), Flemish or Wallonia identities (5%), Global identity (61%)

Since “Flemish or Wallonia identities” obtained the lowest frequency, it can be said that regional and ethnic identities are not the most common type of identity in Belgium. A global single identity is also conceptually related to Belgian values. On the other hand, special Belgian features such as history, geography, the national anthem, the national flag, and nationalist economic education (e.g. encouraging the greater purchase of Belgian goods) are also taught to children at schools.

Figure (8): Preference of Identity to be taught to the Children by Teacher.

■ Belgian national identity ■ Flemish or Wallonia identities ■ Global identity



3-19. Which Courses do you find more effective in Promoting Belgian National Identity?

At Table (2), the overall given points to each course from teachers are shown.

Table (2): Importance of each Course to Promote Belgian Identity based on Teachers' Opinions.

Course	Points
History	243
Second Language	226
Geography	217
Anthropology and Sociology	207
Literature (Reading and Writing)	199
Social and Economic Life	183
Urban and Regional Laws	180
Taxation and Filling out Tax Return Forms	157
Religious Teachings	125

Learning Belgian history not only provides children with a common interpretation of their country but also familiarizes them with their historical heritage, old cultural customs, Belgian historic monuments and ceremonies, and the monarchical history (current king and previous ones) of their country. The second-ranked course is related to learning a second language, which allows people to communicate with their compatriots who have other ethnicities and languages. In a country like Belgium with cultural and ethnic differences, communication with others can be a starting point for strengthening mutual understanding and solidarity and, ultimately, achieving a unified national identity. The next course with the highest score is Geography. Learning the geography of Belgium not only increases students' knowledge of borders, cities and neighboring countries, natural resources, and the position of Belgium within Europe and the world but also motivates them to preserve and protect Belgium and its natural environment. Anthropology and sociology, which are taught to children under the title of Global Orientations, foster social, economic, political, and legal skills based on Belgian values. The next rank belongs to urban and regional laws as well as economic training, which is focused on earning money, savings, and taxes. Learning the mother language and literature obtained the next rank,

which indicates that the government and even teachers do not aim to strengthen regional identities based on regional languages. “Religious Teachings” was considered the least effective course in promoting the Belgian national identity. This can be attributed to a large number of religions and sects in Belgium. However, all of these religions and sects respect other religions, opinions, and worldviews.

3-20. How effective are the Belgian Government’s Policies in building a Belgian National Identity?

Low (70%) Moderate (30%) High (0%) Very High (0%)

Similar to the answer of most respondents to Question 17, the Belgian government policies for the development of national identity have been evaluated as being ineffective by most respondents. However, the term “government” does not make sense in a country like Belgium, and we should rightly talk about “governments”; a complex system of governance consisting of six parliaments and six governments that are operating simultaneously in a country of 15 million people is one of the challenges of achieving a unified and cohesive national identity.

3-21. How many Times a year do you usually take Students to Museums and Historical Sites?

Between 1 and 4 times (86%) More than 4 times (14%)

Visiting historical monuments and museums is one of the ways to promote national identity among children by strengthening common historical knowledge and creating a sense of belonging and attachment to the past.

3-22. Do you introduce Belgian national champions (e.g. Nobel laureates, sports heroes, etc.) to students?

Yes (82%) No (18%)

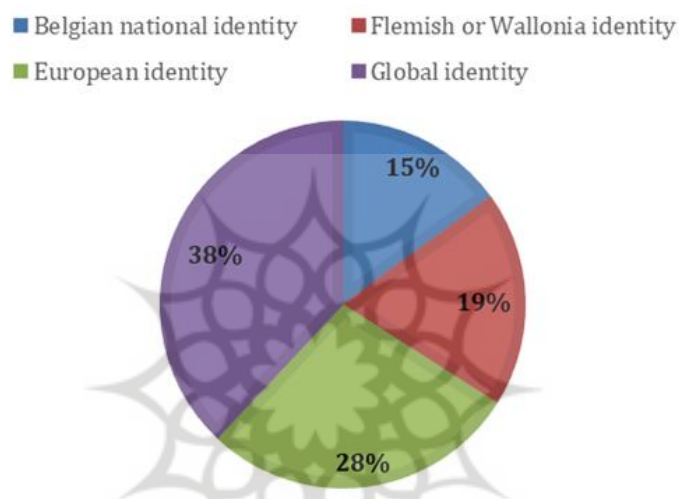
Familiarity with heroes, myths, celebrities, and eminent figures of a country can greatly promote a sense of national identity among children because children might feel a sense of belonging and attachment to these figures and also set them as their role models. This creates a common ground that leads to further solidarity and unity between children.

3-23. How will Future Generations living in Belgium define their Identity Compared to their Ancestors?

Belgian national identity (15%) Flemish or Wallonia identity (19%)
European identity (28%) Global identity (38%)

The answers to this question were very different. However, global identity ranked first, indicating the overlap of socio-political education about individual communication skills, human values, and political concepts, such as democracy and elections, with Belgian national values.

Figure (9): Graph Presentation of Question 23 related to Identity Definition in younger Generations.



3-24. How do you convey the Concept of “Belgian National Identity” to Students? (*Answer, - Analysis)

*Discussions on the various positive elements of Belgium throughout history (e.g. saxophone, roller board, works of art on the moon, and paintings) and Belgium's role in wars: a comparison between positive contributions (e.g. food and culture) and negative contributions (e.g. Congo colonization and FN Herstal arms production) and also previous and current wars; familiarity with Belgian eminent figures and Belgium’s regions and communities; encouragement of children to participate in municipal decisions (e.g. Young Voters Project); learning the complete history of Belgium’s evolution (from 1830 to the present) and the national anthem of Belgium; and involvement of children in events and occasions, such as celebrations for the end of World War II.

- Discussing the various positive and negative points of governmental policies or popular movements throughout the history of Belgium such as the invention of the saxophone, works of art, participation in wars, Congo colonization, and arms production creates a picture of Belgium as an

independent country in the minds of children, raises their self-confidence, and increases their sense of belonging to their country. Learning regional and urban divisions in Geography attracts students' attention to the geographical area of their country. Participation in socio-political events such as elections, familiarity with Belgian eminent figures, who can be the common role models and heroes of all Belgian children, emphasis on historical occasions and events, and respect for Belgian cultural customs and rituals are other components of building Belgian national identity.

* Although I do not teach national identity to children, I believe that being Belgian means "I am Belgian". Therefore, my "honor" of being a Belgian is inevitably manifested through specific language games and perspectives which I incorporate in-class activities.

- The phrase "I am Belgian" is actually all that comes from the teachings of national identity. When a teacher helps children to be Belgian in thought, behavior, and action and also how to be proud of being a Belgian, he/she is doing nothing but strengthening their national identity.

* It is difficult to answer this question because our society is going through a period in which we can no longer talk about or misinterpret the religious, political, ethnic, and origins of others, regardless of whether we have bothered anyone. It is possible to emphasize our culture as a basis, but sometimes I feel I should not behave in a way that my neighbor might misinterpret as an "attack". Moreover, our policies do not help and there is still only one Federal Democratic Party in Belgium and other parties are mainly divided into two groups. Another barrier to Belgian nationalism is cultural plurality in our country; any culture, religion, and ethnic group, with its own undeniable strengths and characteristics, seeks to find common ground with other cultures, religions, and ethnic groups. However, their conflicts and differences often turn into a challenge for their peaceful coexistence. That is why I believe that any activity under the title of "open attitude towards others" cannot be effective in strengthening Belgian national identity.

- Understanding the differences between humans and respecting the opinions and beliefs of others are among the Belgian national values. Emphasis on Belgian culture while respecting other cultures and beliefs is both a national value and a good instance of freedom of speech. One of the great challenges of the present era mentioned by the respondents is to find a boundary between self-censorship and expressing their views without

violating the cultural privacy of others. Another challenge discussed by the respondents is the lack of a strong central government alongside other regional governments that have fragmented power. Cultural plurality and a large number of immigrants from different ethnicities, languages, and nations living in Belgium are another barriers to nationalism in this country. Despite all commonalities that we may find between different cultures, the specific norms and characteristics of each of these cultures can cause unavoidable problems and challenges. This teacher stated that it is not appropriate to adopt the policy of “open attitudes towards others” in order to strengthen the Belgian national identity.

* Learning Belgian norms and values, teaching in Dutch while respecting other languages, and introducing Belgian heroes

- Learning Belgian norms and values and the mother language, in addition to English and other official languages are spoken in Belgium such as French and German, helps individuals to communicate with each other and gain a common understanding of each other’s views. Introducing Belgian heroes and eminent figures can provide children with appropriate role models, with whom they can have a sense of belonging and attachment, and can build a common national identity for them.

* We are all human beings; nationality does not matter; Belgian national identity has been updated

- Discussing the changes in the constituent elements of national identity (e.g. the emphasis on a single flag used to be a sign of national identity in the past, whereas respect for all regional flags of Belgium and the use of the Belgian national flag for international forums and foreign events is today considered a component of national identity. While having a Flemish flag at the entrance of a house does not mean independence and separatism, no Belgian uses a Flemish flag to support the Belgian national football team.

* The history of World War I and World War II, Belgium independence, and the Belgian Royal Family are also provided to students within a traditional course.

- Discussions about historical events such as Belgium independence, Belgium’s role in World War I and World War II, and the history of the Belgian Royal Family (introducing all kings and members of the royal family as well as their dates of birth and interests) are considered another factor that strengthens Belgian national identity.

* Through religious teachings, providing educational content in Dutch, and reading and writing

- Christian-specific teachings about tolerance of others underpin part of Belgian values that emphasize respect for the opinions of others and acceptance of differences¹, which was discussed in the analysis of primary school curriculum.

* This is not a priority in our school. Rather, we focus on developing a community of different cultures in which people can live with mutual understandings of each other.

- This itself is one of the Belgian national values.

* Focusing on Belgium as part of Europe, Belgium's glorious past during the wars, medieval and modern Belgian painters, and the Belgian national football team.

- The geographical and historical background of Belgium, milestones in the history of Belgium, Belgian eminent figures, and the Belgian national football team are very attractive to students and help strengthen Belgian national identity.

* Belgian identity is never the core subject of lessons. Instead, we sometimes mention "Belgian backgrounds" in some courses and we learn more about Belgium in Geography.

- Discussing the national and urban divisions and Belgium's position in the region and the world in Geography promotes the Belgian identity of children. Primary school students study Belgium, in particular, and get familiar with the details of their country and their living environment on maps.

* Since primary school students are still very small, we talk to them about things such as ordinary foods, Red Devils (the title of the Belgian national football team), Red Lions (the title of the Belgian national hockey team), and the national flag.

- Discussions about the favorite foods of Belgians, the Belgian national football team, and other favorite Belgian sports, such as hockey, hiking, and cycling, can promote Belgian national identity among students.

1. Christianity also recognizes the tolerance of and love for other nations and even believes that other nations should be invited to God through kind actions and not verbally: "And you have a good character among the nations. That they may glorify God on the Day of Judgment, just as they call you evil-doers." (The First Letter of Peter, 2/12).

4. Analysis of the Answers of Email Recipients:

A total of 47 emails were received in response to a survey request. By responding, “Our teachers expect to be addressed in Dutch because we are a Dutch language school”, some of the recipients refused to answer questions in English while emphasizing the importance of their native language. Here are the answers provided by two principals who refused to send the questionnaire to their teachers because they were severely opposed to teaching the subject of national identity in schools.

- “Reading your questions upset me a little. The results of our curriculum for primary school students are crystal clear. Based on the results, students know that Flanders is part of the Belgian Federal Community and that Belgium is part of the European Union, and they know each federal government has its own board where decisions are made; students know the famous symbols of Flanders (especially public holidays, emblems, flag, national anthem, and memorials). Based on the curriculum, students should be taught that major decisions are made by municipalities, provincial governors, the Flemish government, and the central government, Flanders is one of the federal communities in Belgium, Belgium is part of the European Union, and Flanders, Belgium, and the European Union have their own systems of governance and policymaking. It is not our job to teach or strengthen Belgian national identity; we live in Flanders and our education system is financially supported by the Flemish government. Therefore, there is no such thing as "Belgian education" for us.”

This dear principal both emphasizes the importance of learning internal divisions and of the delegation of authorities to regional governments and believes that children should learn being part of a larger whole. It is very important to make a distinction between concepts such as “national identity” and “extremist nationalism” for Belgians because the answers of respondents to this questionnaire show that many of them misunderstand or confuse these two concepts. Although regional governments and parliaments make decisions and adopt policies, including educational policies, children are also taught, quite independently, that all regions are part of a larger whole called "Belgium".

- “I cannot ask my teachers to fill out this questionnaire. This method is unclear and does not apply to elementary education. We are a school

in Flanders, so we try to achieve the objectives of the Flemish curriculum, regardless of the nationality of our students. However, we teach students the geography of surrounding regions, neighbors, and the whole country and then we go for Europe and the world. Our mission is to educate self-confident, balanced, and happy people for our world. Therefore, we try to develop the identities and talents of students. We teach students all things they need for their current and future life in a complex and evolving society. They are actually the architects of tomorrow's society. Schools are small communities and safe laboratories for children to test their knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Children can communicate with each other, adapt to social conditions, and participate in group activities. However, we are sorry that families sometimes serve as a break to this process; for instance, the girls who are not allowed to attend naval classes, the mothers who come to school in full hijab and only communicate with those who speak the same language as they do, etc. Unfortunately, we cannot fill out such a questionnaire, but we wish you success in your studies.”

The inculcation of educational values in the curriculum of all students, who are living under the laws and norms of a nation-state, can further promote a cohesive and unified identity among them. Although regional governments are responsible for many areas of legislation and services, Belgium as a country needs a general spirit of solidarity and unity to build and care for its social foundations. It depends on strengthening commonalities and other areas on which there is no or minimum disagreement, such as Belgium's geography and boundaries, the history of present-day Belgium and its monarchy over the past 200 years, Belgian's government and political system, regional and national songs, regional and national memorials and occasions, Belgian national values, and regional laws and norms. All these items are contained in the curricula of primary schools, and people can better understand these concepts through practices for elections and democracy (Coakley,2004:535).

5. Conclusion

An English questionnaire was initially developed to survey the educational staff of Belgian elementary schools. Since most of the respondents were not willing to fill out an English questionnaire, it was translated into two other official languages spoken in Belgium, i.e. French and Dutch. Since “national

identity” is considered a controversial issue in Belgium, different definitions of this concept were contained in the questionnaire. These measures significantly increased the number of respondents. It can hence be concluded that official languages are very important in Belgium and are considered to be elements of Belgium’s national identity, something which is contrary to the verbally expressed desire of teachers and principals for integration into global, international, and transnational identities. Another point is that national identity is a challenging issue for Belgian teachers and principals, and they are reluctant to talk about it. However, the questionnaire items referred both to signs directly related to national identity, such as the national flag, the national anthem, and the importance of national and common ceremonies and occasions; and indirect signs of national identity, such as the history and geography of Belgium, common national values, customs and culture, and learning economic models and socio-political concepts. It is interesting to note that although all of these components are incorporated in the primary school curriculum, Belgian teachers and principals sometimes believe that they do not care about teaching national identity in schools. Nevertheless, the emergence of new generations of Belgians, who will be trained with modern methods, globalization waves, and the growing importance of nation-states, can pave the way for achieving a common identity under the umbrella of a national government.

Despite ethnic, linguistic, and even political diversity and plurality, the government persists in efforts to infuse concepts and elements of national identity into educational content and curricula (Castells,2004:304), at times directly and often indirectly due to ethnic and linguistic tensions between the Flanders and Walloon regions. The analysis of questionnaires unveiled false and occasionally confounding definitions of national identity and extremist nationalism pervading the minds of most Belgians, attributable to regional, ethnic, and linguistic challenges within Belgium, coupled with the bitter memory of world wars catalyzed by extremist nationalism and racism (Hosseini Beheshti,2019). However, echoing the review of primary school curricula, similar articulations manifested when addressing the presentation of national identity elements. It can hence be posited that primary school teachers and principals are unconsciously imparting to children the core precepts of Belgian national identity; concepts encompassing Belgium's history, official languages, the national flag and anthem, geography, Belgian values (e.g., rule of law, democracy, and elections), Belgium's political

system, respect for divergent opinions and religions, freedom of expression, and Christianity. These concepts and elements are conveyed to children through the formal education system via scientific and recreational camps, celebrations, and cultural ceremonies. The analysis of educational and phenomenological surveys of political and sociological actions undertaken by the Belgian government also elucidates its active commitment to consolidating national identity through the adoption of comprehensive programs and strategic initiatives aimed at fostering a unified Belgian nationhood grounded in core Belgian values. The federal government, in cooperation with regional administrations, strives to implement novel educational policies designed to inculcate the next generation of Belgians, irrespective of ethnicity, language, and even nationality (including immigrants), with a sense of unity and solidarity under the rubric of a national government and nation-state. Teachers and principals, whether willingly or reluctantly, serve as the principal executors of this national objective, with curricula, scientific or recreational camps and visits, and binding directives and guidelines constituting the tools and roadmaps for achieving this aim. However, although these elements are intrinsically related to nationalism and national identity, they are typically conveyed to children under the guise of "life skills" rather than "national identity".

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