CZU: 37.035:323.17 **https://doi.org/10.59295/sum9(189)2025_12**

CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHILDREN'S NATIONAL IDENTITY

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The article highlights the complexity of the process of forming national identity in children in the Republic of Moldova, in a context marked by multiple economic, cultural and identity crises. National identity is presented as a fragile subject, often disputed both in the political space and in the academic and media environment, and identity dynamics generate ambivalent social effects: it can stimulate cohesion and solidarity, but also fragmentation and interethnic tensions. The process of identity formation in children has an ambivalent character: it can contribute to the strengthening of collective belonging and solidarity, but it can also generate fragmentation or ethnic tensions, with an impact on long-term social development. The role of education is highlighted as the main framework for transmitting and strengthening identity. The school, the family and the community are considered central agents of socialization, capable of transmitting values, traditions, language and cultural landmarks. At the same time, globalization, migration and digitalization are disruptive factors, which can dilute the links with the local cultural heritage, but which can be positively exploited through an appropriate pedagogical approach.
Keywords: *national identity, children, development, education.*

PROVOCĂRI ACTUALE PRIVIND DEZVOLTAREA IDENTITĂȚII NAȚIONALE LA COPII

Articolul evidențiază complexitatea procesului de formare a identității naționale la copii în Republica Moldova, într-un context marcat de crize multiple, economice, culturale și identitare. Identitatea națională este prezentată ca un subiect fragil, deseori disputat atât în spațiul politic, cât și în mediul academic și mediatic, iar dinamica identitară generează efecte sociale ambivalente: poate stimula coeziunea și solidaritatea, dar și fragmentarea și tensiunile interetnice. Procesul de formare identitară la copii are un caracter ambivalent: poate contribui la consolidarea apartenenței și solidarității colective, dar poate genera și fragmentări sau tensiuni etnice, cu impact asupra dezvoltării sociale pe termen lung. Rolul educației este reliefat ca principal cadru de transmitere și consolidare a identității. Școala, familia și comunitatea sunt considerați agenți centrali ai socializării, capabili să transmită valori, tradiții, limbă și repere culturale. În același timp, globalizarea, migrația și digitalizarea constituie factori perturbatori, care pot dilua legăturile cu patrimoniul cultural autohton, dar care pot fi valorificați pozitiv printr-o abordare pedagogică adecvată.
Cuvinte cheie: *identitate națională, copii, dezvoltare, educație.*

Introduction

In contemporary postmodern society, multiple forms of crisis have emerged: health, food, military, but also cultural, educational, and more recently, identity. The Republic of Moldova is among the states where the issue of national identity continues to be a sensitive area marked by vulnerabilities, generating persistent controversies both in the political environment and in the academic, literary and media space. Within the security theory, the traditional reference concept is that of "nation-state", but in the case of the Republic of Moldova the legitimacy of state existence is frequently subject to questioning. The dynamics of identity processes produce various social effects, with an impact that is difficult to predict: they can contribute to strengthening social cohesion, but they can also emphasize fragmentation and internal tensions, generating the risk of ethnic conflicts. Such manifestations can negatively influence, in the long term, the trajectory of the country's economic and social development.

Context

In order to be recognized and valued by other ethnicities, national identity must first be understood and assumed by the members of that community. This process is possible through education, through a system-

atic approach knowing the constituent elements of national identity: history, language, religious beliefs, folklore and popular traditions, as well as by familiarizing oneself with the personalities who have marked the cultural and artistic evolution [1].

A relevant aspect in this context is the fact that the process of denationalization of the Bessarabian Romanians, carried out during the Soviet regime, took place mainly through the school and the educational system. Research has shown that people with a lower level of education were able to retain their identity to a greater extent than those integrated into institutionalized training mechanisms. In this regard, the professor V. Pâslaru, in the preface of his work *Education and Identity*, justifiably emphasizes that “what has been diminished or even destroyed through education, only through education can be reanimated” [8, p.42-43]. The statement marks the working hypothesis of his interdisciplinary research, located at the intersection of pedagogy with philosophy, linguistics, psychology and aesthetics. The volume examines in depth the multiple facets of the identity crisis that contemporary Bessarabian Romanians are going through and proposes education as the main framework of intervention. According to the author, the analysis of the problems of education and education, as major problems of the people, must contribute to diminishing and, over time, to overcoming the crises of identity and belonging that affect the collective consciousness [ibid].

In the view of the Education Code of the Republic of Moldova, the state policy in the field of education is oriented towards achieving the ideal and training objectives, which implies the development of national consciousness and identity, the promotion of universal values and the support of the aspirations of European integration of society [4]. *Law no. 152/2014*: establishes the aims of education and orients the state policy towards the realization of the educational ideal, the formation of national consciousness/identity and the promotion of general-human values, in connection with the aspirations of European integration. This is the legal framework that legitimizes the inclusion of identity objectives in the educational offer of the educational institution.

Education 2030 Strategy: correlates the education system with socio-economic development, with a focus on democratic values, civic participation and social cohesion, prerequisites for civic identity and national belonging among children [5].

The National Development Strategy “European Moldova 2030” provides macro context for European convergence and common values, and from the perspective of children’s identity, it calls for a balance between national cultural heritage and European orientation [3].

The updated version (2025) of the *Reference Framework of the National Curriculum* explicitly states that the National Curriculum reflects the socio-cultural values of the Moldovan society, includes the direction of intercultural education and the integration of national minorities, together with European values, key elements for the formation of personal, civic and national identity in children. It emphasizes the principle of child-centeredness and the holistic approach, favorable to the construction of identity from the first years of schooling [9].

In a multiethnic social context, the development of children’s national identity implies their formation in the spirit of knowledge of their own cultural heritage, cultivation of respect for folk traditions and active involvement in their perpetuation. Such a goal can be achieved through the adequate training of teachers in the preschool and pre-university system, whose mission is to capitalize on the resources of ethno-pedagogy in the educational process [7]. In the educational formation of children, the role of the family remains decisive, since the transmission of traditions and cultural models ensures the continuity of fundamental values for the national identity. The traditional educational ideal is based on general-human values such as diligence, solidarity, friendship, respect and aesthetic awareness, and these are embodied through traditional folklore and cultural expression [1].

The formation of national identity in children depends on the interaction between biological and cultural factors, each of which has an important contribution in shaping personality traits. At the same time, education requires an approach that combines the sociocentric perspective, oriented towards the integration of the child into the community and the assumption of collective values, with the child-centered perspective, which emphasizes the individualization of the educational process. The combination of these directions facilitates the personal development of the child and his active participation in the cultural and social life of the national community [13, p.41].

The profound democratic transformations that society is going through, together with the need to integrate it into the contemporary global space, are closely correlated with the process of spiritual renewal, supported by the progress of science and the modernization of the educational system. In this context, the personality is called upon to adapt to the dynamics of current requirements, which implies achieving a high level of performance and efficiency in his complex activities. In order to respond to these demands, the individual must form and express a diverse set of values, which will shape him as a bearer of culture, a responsible citizen and the author of his own personality [1].

The family environment represents a framework with an important role in the child's education, in the processes of self-formation and in the transmission of values between generations, being configured by historical experience. Its impact on the child's development results from the continuous interaction of internal and external factors, which, from the first years of life, shape the contour of the personality. The universal elements of childhood, shared on a global scale, are reinterpreted in each community and take on ethnic specificity; subsequently, they are integrated into the wider cultural heritage and are reflected in folkloric creations and ethnographic materials with a formative function, supporting the shaping of national identity from childhood [11].

The theoretical analysis highlights the fact that the national identity of children is the result of a unidirectional influence, which is shaped by a complex interaction between biological, social and cultural factors, which act simultaneously and mutually enhance each other in the development process. This interdependence is reflected in early socialization, where the family transmits the first landmarks of language, values and traditions, the school reinforces these acquisitions through curricular contents and formal learning experiences, and the community offers them a framework for practice and social recognition. At the same time, the media, the digital environment and socio-cultural mobility phenomena exert additional pressure on the child, shaping the way he perceives and integrates the national cultural heritage. In order to synthetically capture these mechanisms and highlight the relationships between socialization agents and external influences, it is necessary to represent them in a conceptual model that illustrates the main dimensions involved in the formation of national identity in children, Fig.1.

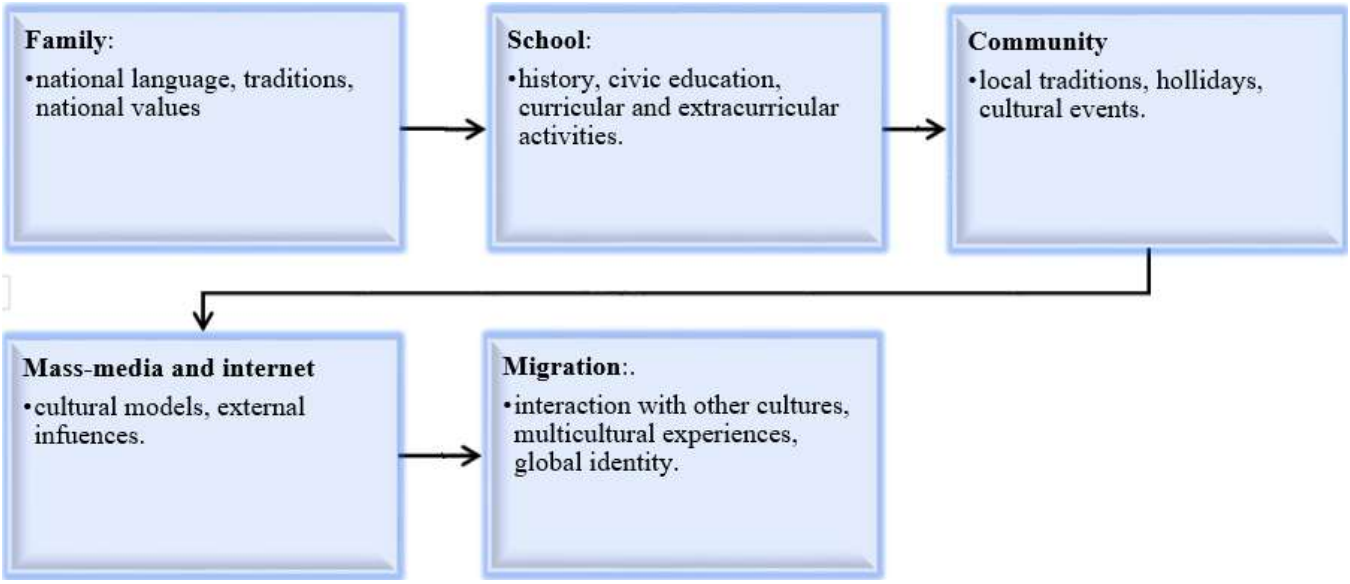


Figure 1. Main factors of the formation of national identity in children

In the analysis of the process of constitution of national identity in children, a series of difficulties specific to the contemporary world are outlined, determined by the interaction between globalization, migration, digitalization and ethnic diversity. These social realities act simultaneously, influencing the way in which the young generation perceives and internalizes the values of the national community.

In the face of such challenges, the literature proposes educational solutions meant to provide a balance between openness to universality and the affirmation of the local cultural heritage.

Starting from these premises, the synthesis below captures the main directions of action identified in the profile studies, highlighting the correspondence between the disruptive factors of identity and the pedagogical response strategies.

Table 1. Contemporary challenges and educational solutions regarding the development of national identity in children

Contemporary challenges	Recommended educational solutions
Cultural and digital globalization	Integration of national values into the curriculum; patriotic and global education; school projects with a national theme; policies for cultural heritage.
Migration and multiculturalism	Intercultural inclusion and bilingual education programs; the involvement of the diaspora in school life; activities of tolerance and intercultural respect.
Digitalization and media influence	Media literacy and digital citizenship; critical teaching of online content; digital platforms for national identity.
Multiethnic and linguistic context	Intercultural education and inclusion; adapted curriculum and textbooks; community dialogue and social cohesion projects.

Economic and cultural globalization, amplified by international media and social media, exposes children to a “global village” where cultural values and symbols tend to be standardized. This interconnectedness risks blurring national identities, replacing the interest in local traditions with the idealization of foreign models. Easy access to external content, such as cartoons, music or video games, often diminishes the concern for Romanian folklore and literature. The national strategy draws attention to this tension: globalization and the technologization of education often exceed the capacity of the national system to capitalize on them effectively. Schools are thus challenged to find a balance between the benefits of connectivity, rapid access to information and intercultural openness, and maintaining pride in the local cultural heritage [5].

The high external migration of the Republic of Moldova directly influences the development of children, staying at home with one or both parents who have been working, losing family cultural landmarks, while others are born and grow up in the diaspora, where they risk gradually losing their language and connection with national traditions. An IOM study (2017) shows that more than 40,000 Moldovan children in over 30 countries do not speak their mother tongue, and their belonging to the culture of origin is eroding in the absence of deliberate cultural education [14]. Likewise, the children left at home face crises of belonging, the responsibility of transmitting values falling to the extended family and the school. The return of migrant families entails difficulties in school and cultural reintegration, while the current context adds additional challenges through the presence of refugees or children from heterogeneous cultural backgrounds. Overall, migration fragments the link between generations and identity, which requires specific educational and psychosocial measures to maintain cultural continuity [ibid].

Digitalization and new technologies are profoundly transforming the way children learn, providing quick access to information and interactive educational resources. Video platforms or apps can support the transmission of traditional stories and the mother tongue, but excessive exposure to screens reduces focus and attention to local content, sometimes affecting understanding of history and the national language. OECD studies draw attention to the risk that passive use of the digital environment slows down language development in children. At the same time, the online environment promotes globalized values and models, which can diminish interest in indigenous cultures [6]. That’s why the school has a mission to cultivate critical digital skills, teaching children to select relevant sources and use technology to discover their own culture (e.g. documentary films or educational platforms about Moldova). National strategic documents recognize this tension and recommend adapting the curriculum through modern digital methods, but also by strengthening cultural awareness. Overall, digitalization brings both opportunities and challenges, requiring a balance between global and local resources [5].

Multicultural environment and ethnic diversity is present in the Republic of Moldova because there is a multiethnic society, in which most of the citizens declare themselves Moldovans/Romanians, but large communities of Russians, Ukrainians, Gagauzians, Bulgarians and others coexist. In public schools, official teaching language is Romanian, but the legislative framework and principles of education emphasize mutual respect, tolerance and the preservation of the traditions of each ethnic group [12]. The Education Code (art. 10) guarantees the right of the child to communicate in the mother tongue of minorities, as well as to study at least two foreign languages [4], and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child affirms the right of every child to his or her own culture and language [2]. In practice, this is reflected in the teaching of the Gagauzian, Bulgarian or Russian language and history in schools with a specific profile, but also in subjects such as Civic Education or the optional "Culture of Good Neighborliness", which promotes mechanisms of peaceful coexistence and tolerance [12], However, political tensions and persistent stereotypes can generate mistrust between groups, which is why intercultural educational projects try to turn diversity into a learning resource. Overall, national identity must be cultivated in an inclusive framework that affirms the majority culture, but respects and supports the identity of each minority.

Conclusion

The formation of national identity in children's development in the Republic of Moldova is an objective assumed by the legal frameworks and the national curriculum. According to the legislation, the purpose of the school includes the development of a strong national consciousness, but also respect for minority identities, and the development of national identity must be seen as part of an education for democratic citizenship: students must be proud of the culture and history of their own people, but at the same time respectful towards others, where a cohesive and open society can be built, in which new generations feel the responsibility to preserve and enrich their national heritage. Current research and policies in the Republic of Moldova provide a solid framework for this approach, but it remains the responsibility of all those involved in education (authorities, teachers, families, society, etc.) to put into practice innovative solutions that ensure the identity continuity of each child in the 21st century.

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Presented: 30.09.2025