THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN NATIONAL IDENTITY AND GEOGRAPHICAL KNOWLEDGE IN ENGLISH CHILDREN

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the relationship between English children's geographical knowledge of the United Kingdom and their sense of national identity. 101 English children aged between 5 and 11 years old, and their parents, participated in the study. The children's geographical knowledge was assessed using a series of tasks designed to measure landmark and configurational knowledge, and their sense of national identity was assessed using a relative subjective importance task and a self-categorisation task. Parental patriotism was assessed using a parental questionnaire. It was found that the children's geographical knowledge increased with age, and that the boys had higher levels of geographical knowledge than the girls. The children's age and gender identities were more important to them than their national identities at all ages. However, the British identity did become more important with age, while the English identity exhibited a U-shaped relationship with age. It was found that the children's geographical knowledge was correlated with their feelings of Englishness and Britishness when age was partialled out. Parental patriotism was also positively correlated with the subjective importance of the children's British and English identities when age was partialled out. However, parental patriotism was not correlated with the children's geographical knowledge.

AIMS OF THE STUDY

- To investigate age-related differences in English children’s geographical knowledge of the United Kingdom
- To investigate age-related differences in English children’s sense of national identity
- To investigate whether there is a relationship between English children’s geographical knowledge of the UK and their sense of national identity
- To investigate whether there is a relationship between parental patriotism and children’s sense of national identity

PARTICIPANTS

101 children aged between 5 years 4 months and 11 years 1 month participated in the study. All the children lived in the county of Berkshire in England, were born in England, and held British nationality.

For the purposes of the study, the children were divided into three age groups as follows:

School years	Sex	N	Mean age in months	Age range in months
1 and 2	male	16	74.7	64-85
	female	14	74.2	66-84
3 and 4	male	16	98.8	88-111
	female	21	100.4	91-110
5 and 6	male	16	121.1	107-133
	female	18	120.8	112-133

METHOD

Each child was interviewed individually. Each interview lasted approximately 25 minutes, and contained the following sections:

1. The relative subjective importance task
A set of 12 cards was used. These cards contained the following terms which could be used to describe the children: *"5 years old"*, *"6 years old"*, *"7 years old"*, *"8 years old"*, *"9 years old"*, *"10 years old"*, *"11 years old"*, *"boy"*, *"girl"*, *"British"*, *"English"* and *"European"*. The five cards which correctly described the individual child being interviewed (i.e. those cards describing that child's actual age and gender, together with the *"British"*, *"English"* and *"European"* cards), were laid out in front of the child in a random order. The child was told that these were all words which could be used to describe them; the child was then asked *"If you had to choose just one of these cards because it was the most important to you, which one would you choose?"* That card was removed from the set, and the child was then asked to choose the next most important card. The process was repeated until all the cards had been selected. Each card was given a rank score between 1 and 5; a score of 1 was given to the card which was most important to the child, and a score of 5 was given to the least important card.

2. The self-categorisation task
There were two parts to this task. In one part, the following three cards were laid out in front of the child: *"Very English"*, *"Little bit English"*, *"Not at all English"*. The child was asked to select the card which best described him or her. In the other part of the task, the following three cards were laid out in front of the child: *"Very British"*, *"Little bit British"*, *"Not at all British"*. The child was asked to select the card which best described him or her. The two parts of the task were administered in a counterbalanced order across successive children. Scores of 1 to 3 were assigned, where 1 = *very English/British* and 3 = *not at all English/British.*

3. The measures of geographical knowledge
The following tasks were used to assess the children's landmark and configurational geographical knowledge. Landmark knowledge is the knowledge that certain specific spatio-geographic locations exist; configurational knowledge is knowledge of the spatial relationships which exist between different landmarks in terms of the direction and distance between them.

3a. Naming the countries in the UK (landmark knowledge)
The child was asked to name the countries in the UK. A mark was given for each country named (out of England, Scotland, Wales and N. Ireland), and the marks were summed to yield a score between 0 and 4.

3b. Physical arrangement task (configurational knowledge)
The child was given five pieces of rectangular card which represented the five countries making up the UK and S. Ireland. The child was asked to arrange them so that the countries "are in the correct place as on a weather map". In order to not provide any orientation cues, each card was labelled with its name along all four edges, and the size of each card was roughly proportional to the size of the country that it represented. Scoring the child's arrangement involved awarding the child a point for each country's location (with respect to each other country), for each country's orientation, and for whether it correctly had a border with each other country or whether it correctly had a space left between it and the other country (to represent water). This scoring was applied to all possible pairs of countries, and an overall score was obtained by summing the three scores. The scores could range between 0 and 25. An example of a high scoring arrangement is shown in Figure 1.

3c. Naming countries on a map of the British Isles (configurational knowledge)
The child was then shown a map of the British Isles without legends or labelling but in which each country was shown in a different colour. The child was asked to name each country (out of England, Scotland, Wales and N. Ireland). A point was given for each country on the map which was correctly named, the total score ranging between 0 and 4.

3d. Naming water and island features on a map of the British Isles (configurational knowledge)
A transparency showing the Rivers Thames, Trent and Severn was then laid on top of the map, and the child was asked to name the area of water indicated by the interviewer. The interviewer then pointed (in a random order) to: the North Sea, the Irish Sea, the English Channel, and the Rivers Thames, Trent and Severn. If the child failed to name a feature correctly, the interviewer instead said the name and asked the child to locate it. One point was awarded for each water feature correctly located on the map, and the points were summed to yield a total water score ranging between 0 and 6.

The transparency was then removed, and the child was asked, using a similar procedure, to identify six islands or groups of islands on the map. These were: Anglesey, Isle of Wight, Isle of Man, the Shetlands, the Orkneys, and the Hebrides. Again, if the child failed to name a feature correctly, the interviewer instead said the name and asked the child to locate it. One point was awarded for each island feature correctly located on the map, and the points were summed to yield a total island score ranging between 0 and 6.

3e. Knowledge of cities (landmark knowledge)
The child was then given a printed list of 13 cities, 8 in the UK (2 per country) and 5 distractor cities, and they were asked to tick those cities in the list they thought were in the UK. One point was awarded for each correctly ticked city and for each non-UK city left unticked, and these points were then totalled.

The child was next asked to name the capital cities of the four countries within the UK. A mark was given for each capital city correctly named, and the marks totalled.

3f. Knowledge of cities (configurational knowledge)
For this task, the children were once again given the map of the British Isles on which each country was shown in a different colour. They were also given 12 cards which had the names of UK cities printed on them (3 cities from each country). The child had to place each city name on the correct country on the map. The score on this task was the total number of cities located in the correct country.

A transparency of England divided into the North, the Midlands, the South East and the South West was then put on the map, and there was a brief discussion concerning the division of England into separate regions. The children were given 12 further cards with the names of English cities printed on them (3 cities from each region). The child had to place each city name on the correct region on the map. The score on this task was the total number of cities located in the correct region.

4. The parental questionnaire
A questionnaire which measures patriotism in adults was sent to the parents of the children; the parents of 89 children returned the questionnaire. The instructions on the questionnaire asked both the mother and the father to fill in the patriotism section independently of each other. Of the 89 children who returned a questionnaire, 62 had a return from both parents, 25 had a return only from the mother, and 2 had a return only from the father. In the questionnaire, each parent was asked to respond to the following 5 statements, using a 5 point Likert scale ranging from “strongly agree” (score = 1) to “strongly disagree” (score = 5):
I love my country
I am not proud to be British (reverse scoring)
In a sense, I am emotionally attached to my country and emotionally affected by its actions
When I see the Union Jack flying I feel great
The fact that I am British is not an important part of my identity (reverse scoring)
Scores for individual questions were summed to yield a total patriotism score for each parent. These total scores ranged from 5 to 25, with 5 being the most patriotic and 25 the least patriotic.

RESULTS

1. The relative subjective importance task
The mean rankings of the five identities in each of the three age groups, as measured by the relative subjective importance task, were as follows:

Identity	Mean rank	Kruskal-Wallis
AGE IDENTITY Years 1 and 2 Years 3 and 4 Years 5 and 6	 1.67 2.30 2.56	 χ^2 (2)=11.08 p<0.005
GENDER IDENTITY Years 1 and 2 Years 3 and 4 Years 5 and 6	 2.47 2.27 1.91	 not significant
ENGLISH IDENTITY Years 1 and 2 Years 3 and 4 Years 5 and 6	 3.03 2.49 3.15	 χ^2 (2)= 6.49 p<0.05
BRITISH IDENTITY Years 1 and 2 Years 3 and 4 Years 5 and 6	 3.80 3.84 2.91	 χ^2 (2)=14.98 p<0.001
EUROPEAN IDENTITY Years 1 and 2 Years 3 and 4 Years 5 and 6	 4.03 4.11 4.47	 not significant

Thus, the children's British identity became more important to them in Years 5 and 6, while their English identity exhibited a U-shaped relationship with age, first becoming more important but then becoming less important with age. The children's age and gender identities were more important to them than their national identities at all ages.

2. The self-categorisation task

The mean scores in the self-categorisation task, broken down by age, were as follows:

Identity	Mean score	Kruskal-Wallis
DEGREE OF ENGLISHNESS Years 1 and 2 Years 3 and 4 Years 5 and 6	 1.37 1.03 1.24	 χ^2 (2)= 8.55 p<0.05
DEGREE OF BRITISHNESS Years 1 and 2 Years 3 and 4 Years 5 and 6	 1.69 1.43 1.18	 χ^2 (2)= 7.92 p<0.05

Thus, the children felt more British with age. However, as in the relative subjective importance task, their sense of Englishness exhibited a U-shaped relationship with age, first increasing and then decreasing with age.

The mean rankings of the English and British identities in the relative subjective importance task and the mean scores obtained in the self-categorisation task for Englishness and Britishness respectively were then correlated to see if there was convergence in the data from the two tasks. Using Kendall's tau b with age partialled out, significant correlations were found between the two measures of Englishness (τ=0.16, $p<0.01$) and between the two measures of Britishness (τ= 0.16, $p<0.01$). Thus, the two tasks yielded comparable results.

3. The children's geographical knowledge

Scores from all tasks relating to landmark knowledge were converted to z-scores and summed to give a total landmark knowledge score. Similarly, scores from all tasks relating to configurational knowledge were converted to z-scores and summed to give a total configurational knowledge score. In addition, a total geographical knowledge score was obtained by standardising and summing the landmark knowledge and configurational knowledge total scores. These three scores were then analysed using 3 (age) x 2 (sex) ANOVAs. The results obtained were as follows:

Mean total landmark knowledge scores:

School year	Male	Female	Total
1 and 2	-1.8	-2.4	-2.1
3 and 4	0.1	-0.2	-0.1
5 and 6	2.7	1.2	1.9
Total	0.3	-0.3	

School year: $F(2,95) = 41.5$, $p < 0.001$
Scheffe test: all school years significantly different from each other
Sex: $F(1,95) = 5.3$, $p < 0.05$

Mean total configurational knowledge scores:

School year	Male	Female	Total
1 and 2	-3.8	-4.1	-4.0
3 and 4	-0.4	0.3	-0.0
5 and 6	5.5	2.0	3.6
Total	0.3	-0.2	

School year: $F(2,93) = 40.1$, $p < 0.001$
Scheffe test: all school years significantly different from each other
School year x Sex: $F(2,93) = 3.6$, $p < 0.05$
Post hoc t-tests: sex difference present only in School Year 5 and 6

Mean total geographical knowledge scores:

School year	Male	Female	Total
1 and 2	-1.6	-2.0	-1.8
3 and 4	-0.1	0.0	0.0
5 and 6	2.4	0.9	1.6
Total	0.2	-0.2	

School year: $F(2,93) = 53.2$, $p < 0.001$
Scheffe test: all school years significantly different from each other
Sex: $F(1,93) = 5.2$, $p < 0.05$

4. The parental questionnaire

A reliability analysis was carried out on the scores for the five items in the patriotism questionnaire. Internal consistency was found to be acceptable, with Cronbach's alpha for the maternal questionnaires being 0.68 (N = 87) and for the paternal questionnaires 0.79 (N = 63). The sum of the maternal and paternal scores on each item for each individual child was also calculated; this combined patriotism score also had good internal reliability, with Cronbach's alpha being 0.77 (N = 61).

5. The relationships between the variables

The total landmark knowledge scores, the total configurational knowledge scores, and the total geographical knowledge scores were correlated with the national identity scores obtained in the relative subjective importance task and the self-categorisation task, using Kendall's tau b, partialling out age. All three geographical knowledge scores were found to be significantly correlated with both the degree of Englishness and the degree of Britishness as assessed in the self-categorisation task:

	Total landmark knowledge	Total configurational knowledge	Total geographical knowledge
Degree of Englishness	τ= -0.19 p<0.005 N=101	τ= -0.12 p<0.05 N=99	τ= -0.19 p<0.005 N=99
Degree of Britishness	τ= -0.32 p<0.005 N=100	τ= -0.14 p<0.025 N=98	τ= -0.26 p<0.005 N=98

Thus, the more English and the more British a child considers himself or herself to be, the higher that child's level of national geographical knowledge. A significant correlation was also found between the importance of being British as measured in the relative subjective importance task and the total landmark knowledge scores (τ= -0.13, p<0.05, N=101) with age partialled out. There were no other significant correlations between geographical knowledge scores and national identity scores from the relative subjective importance task.

The parental patriotism scores were also correlated with the children's identity scores and with the children geographical knowledge scores, again using Kendall's tau b with age partialled out. There were no significant correlations between the parental patriotism scores and the geographical knowledge scores. There were also no significant correlations between the parental patriotism scores and the identity scores obtained in the self-categorisation task. However, there were some significant correlations between parental patriotism and the importance of being English and the importance of being British as measured in the relative subjective importance task:

	Importance of being English	Importance of being British
Combined parental patriotism score	τ=0.19, p<0.05, N=61	τ=0.17, p<0.05, N=61
Maternal patriotism score	not significant	not significant
Paternal patriotism score	not significant	τ=0.18, p<0.05, N=63

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS

- The children's geographical knowledge increased with age
- The boys had higher levels of geographical knowledge than the girls
- The children's age and gender identities were more important to them than their national identities at all ages
- British national identity became more important with age, while English national identity first became more important but then less important as a function of age
- The children's geographical knowledge of the UK was correlated with their feelings of Englishness and Britishness
- Parental patriotism was also positively correlated with the subjective importance of the children's British and English identities
- Parental patriotism was not correlated with the children's geographical knowledge