



GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION IN THE 21ST CENTURY: COMPETENCIES, PEDAGOGIES, AND LEARNING OUTCOMES

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Abstract

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This study examines global citizenship education (GCED) in the twenty-first century by considering the relationships among competencies, pedagogical approaches, and learning outcomes. A qualitative narrative literature review was conducted using descriptive and interpretive analysis of relevant books, journal articles, and academic documents. The literature was identified, classified, and compared through three interrelated competency domains: cognitive, socio-emotional, and behavioral. The synthesis suggests that knowledge of global issues, empathy and respect for diversity, and participation in civic action are connected educational aims, but progress in one domain does not necessarily establish progress in the others. Dialogic, collaborative, project-based, and reflective pedagogies offer distinct opportunities to connect understanding, ethical judgment, and action, although reported outcomes depend on the settings and designs of individual studies. Recurring implementation barriers include teachers' conceptual preparedness, curriculum support, and educational resources. For primary education, GCED is best interpreted as a contextual approach that connects global concerns to children's local experiences, including relevant Pancasila values. The review offers a conceptual synthesis distinguishing intended competencies, teaching processes, and evidence of learning, without assuming uniform pedagogical effectiveness.

INTRODUCTION

Global citizenship education (GCED) is commonly presented as a response to an interconnected world, yet its educational purposes remain contested. Global interdependence can increase students' access to different perspectives while also exposing them to inequality, ecological risks, and conflicting public narratives. Learning to recognize global issues does not, by itself, establish a capacity to respond to them ethically or collectively. Recent scholarship therefore questions whether GCED should primarily develop transferable competencies, critical awareness of structural inequalities, or opportunities for civic action (Kim, 2021; Kester, 2023; Popa, 2025; Usmia, 2023). This tension matters for schools because curricular aspirations must ultimately be translated into age-appropriate learning experiences.

At the school level, GCED connects students' understanding of social justice, cultural diversity, sustainability, and human interdependence with their relationships and participation in everyday life. Its cognitive, socio-emotional, and behavioral domains offer a useful way to distinguish what learners know, how they relate to others, and what they do (Celume & Maoulida, 2022; Damiani & Fraillon, 2025). These domains are connected but should not be treated as interchangeable measures of

achievement. A student may explain an environmental problem without being prepared to negotiate differing interests or act with others. This distinction calls for closer attention to the alignment between intended competencies, learning activities, and observable outcomes (Chiba et al., 2021; Jerome et al., 2024).

Primary education provides an especially important context for translating broad ideals into concrete classroom relationships and experiences. Studies of primary schools have reported uneven enactment of global citizenship standards and teachers' understanding of their implementation (Lasten et al., 2023). Research on curriculum resources also indicates that access to materials does not automatically resolve decisions about which concepts, perspectives, and forms of participation are appropriate for children (Phillips et al., 2024). In the Indonesian context, global awareness is frequently discussed alongside Pendidikan Pancasila, civic responsibility, tolerance, and respect for diversity (Agustia et al., 2024; Cahya & Meliyani, 2025; Rizal, 2024; Sutrisno, 2023). These connections suggest the value of a contextual interpretation of GCED that builds on local ethical and social concerns without reducing global citizenship to national values alone.

Teachers are central to this translation because their beliefs about citizenship shape the questions they permit, the perspectives they introduce, and the actions they consider legitimate. Research among educators has identified conceptual differences concerning global citizenship, human rights, and critical engagement, as well as practical pressures associated with curriculum and professional learning (Ferguson & Brett, 2025; Aydin & Andrews, 2024; Kasa et al., 2023; Smith et al., 2024). A systematic review of teacher preparation similarly found difficulties in defining global citizenship competencies and matching them to pedagogical strategies (Díaz Méndez et al., 2023). The challenge is not limited to insufficient resources: a curriculum can include global themes while overlooking whose experiences are represented or which forms of action students can realistically undertake (Carroll, 2024; Waghid, 2023; Witt, 2023). Accordingly, teacher preparedness must be considered both pedagogically and conceptually.

Existing research provides several pathways for GCED teaching, although their aims and evidentiary bases differ. Dialogic learning allows participants to examine conflicting interpretations, and studies involving teacher candidates describe both its possibilities and the difficulty of discussing contentious issues across borders (Cohen et al., 2025). Critical moral pedagogy has been explored as a means of connecting ethical judgment and social justice in educational settings (Auh & Kim, 2024). Participatory projects and school-based citizenship activities may support civic engagement, but a broader review cautions that activity type, school ethos, and opportunities for reflection shape outcomes (Jerome et al., 2024). Technology-mediated and flipped learning provide additional

formats, although evidence from university settings should not be directly generalized to primary classrooms (Celume & Maoulida, 2022; Udvari & Vizi, 2023).

Recent reviews have expanded knowledge of GCED, but they also expose the fragmentation of the field. A systematic review identified a continuing need for research on non-university formal education and educational resources (Santamaría-Cárdaba et al., 2024). A scoping review of youth activism noted that opportunities for civic action can be resource-intensive and concentrated in relatively advantaged settings (Inguaggiato et al., 2025). Research on learning outcomes likewise suggests that knowledge, attitudes, intentions, and participation should be examined separately instead of being collapsed into a broad claim of impact (Ahmed & Mohammed, 2022; Chiba et al., 2021). Although studies address particular competencies, teaching approaches, and constraints, their implications are not always integrated into a clear account of how these elements relate across educational contexts.

This article therefore examines GCED in the twenty-first century through three connected questions: Which competencies are emphasized, what pedagogical approaches are discussed, and what learning outcomes and implementation constraints are reported? Using a qualitative narrative review, it synthesizes the cognitive, socio-emotional, and behavioral domains alongside approaches such as dialogue, collaboration, project-based learning, and reflection. Rather than estimating a pooled intervention effect, the review considers the conceptual fit between educational aims, teaching activities, and evidence of learning. Its contribution is an integrative account that differentiates intended outcomes from documented outcomes while keeping primary education and relevant local values within view. This distinction can inform curriculum planning and teacher reflection without implying that any single pedagogy guarantees global citizenship.

METHOD

Research design and source identification

This study employed a qualitative narrative literature review with descriptive and interpretive synthesis. The review considered published journal articles, books, and relevant academic documents addressing global citizenship education, twenty-first-century competencies, pedagogical approaches, and learning outcomes. Google Scholar was used as a literature-search platform. The review was directed toward comparing conceptual arguments and reported findings rather than estimating pooled effect sizes, enrolling participants, or testing an intervention. Accordingly, no participant sampling procedure, measurement instrument, or statistical reliability coefficient is applicable to this documentary study.

Organization and interpretive analysis

The analysis comprised identifying relevant publications, classifying their substantive concerns, comparing findings and arguments, and interpreting recurrent patterns. Literature was organized around three competency domains used for the synthesis: cognitive knowledge and understanding of global issues; socio-emotional dispositions such as empathy, identity, and respect for diversity; and behavioral participation in civic and global concerns. Pedagogical approaches, reported learning outcomes, and implementation barriers were considered in relation to these domains. The comparison focused on agreement, conceptual differences, educational context, and the limits of claims about effectiveness. The resulting synthesis is interpretive rather than a systematic review or statistical meta-analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Competency domains identified in the literature

The literature considered GCED in relation to cognitive, socio-emotional, and behavioral competencies. The cognitive domain concerned understanding global interdependence, justice, diversity, and sustainability; the socio-emotional domain addressed empathy, ethical concern, and recognition of difference; and the behavioral domain concerned deliberation, cooperation, and participation in collective issues. These categories are analytically useful because they distinguish knowledge, dispositions, and actions instead of treating global awareness as a single measurable outcome (Celume & Maoulida, 2022; Damiani & Fraillon, 2025). Studies of critical citizenship add that the content of these domains depends on how inequality, political disagreement, and representation are addressed (González-Valencia et al., 2022; Kester, 2023). The literature supports this tripartite organization, but does not establish that progress across all three domains occurs simultaneously.

Pedagogical approaches and intended learning outcomes

The pedagogies discussed in the literature included dialogue, collaborative inquiry, project-based activities, critical moral reflection, and technology-supported learning. Dialogic activity emphasizes the interpretation of diverse perspectives; collaboration and projects create opportunities to negotiate shared responses; and critical reflection asks learners to consider the ethical implications of social arrangements (Auh & Kim, 2024; Cohen et al., 2025; O'Flaherty et al., 2025). Studies of online learning, flipped instruction, and virtual or technology-assisted activities expand the range of possible instructional formats, although their participant groups and learning settings differ (Celume & Maoulida, 2022; Sanz-Prieto et al., 2026; Udvari & Vizi, 2023). The reported outcomes concern knowledge and awareness, communication and intercultural dispositions, and opportunities for civic

engagement. These outcomes should not be described as uniformly demonstrated effects because the reviewed literature differs in design, learner age, and measurement.

Barriers and contextual considerations

The literature identified limited conceptual understanding among educators, constraints in curriculum integration, and shortages of educational resources as recurring implementation problems (Mulyani et al., 2024; Rizal, 2024). Later international research provides related examples of variation in teachers’ interpretations, available curricular materials, and institutional support (Barry et al., 2025; Kasa et al., 2023; Phillips et al., 2024). For primary education, these barriers are particularly consequential because classroom activities must connect abstract global concerns with children’s experiences and capacities for participation (Lasten et al., 2023). Local ethical, cultural, and civic values, including Pancasila in the Indonesian context, can provide meaningful entry points, although they do not eliminate questions about competing perspectives or the inclusion of marginalized experiences (Agustia et al., 2024; Ulya, 2025).

Table 1. Conceptual alignment among competencies, pedagogies, and outcomes in the reviewed literature

Competency domain	Illustrative pedagogical emphasis	Learning evidence or intended outcome
Cognitive	Global issue inquiry, dialogue, and comparison of perspectives	Understanding of interdependence, inequality, and sustainability
Socio-emotional	Reflective conversation, intercultural collaboration, ethical deliberation	Empathy, appreciation of diversity, and critical self-reflection
Behavioral	Participatory projects, collective problem-solving, civic discussion	Engagement, cooperation, and context-appropriate civic action

Discussion

The synthesis suggests that the three GCED domains offer a coherent conceptual vocabulary, but their relationship is developmental rather than automatic. Understanding the causes of an issue may support informed judgment without producing empathy or civic participation on its own. This distinction aligns with research separating citizenship knowledge, attitudes, and action outcomes (Damiani & Fraillon, 2025; Jerome et al., 2024). It also corresponds with reviews that found variation in which learning outcomes are assessed and reported across programs (Ahmed & Mohammed, 2022; Chiba et al., 2021). A more defensible interpretation of GCED is therefore to regard cognitive, socio-emotional, and behavioral goals as related but distinguishable elements requiring purposeful pedagogical alignment. For primary teachers, this implies identifying what children are expected to understand, discuss, or do within a particular learning task rather than assuming that exposure to global topics meets every aim.

A second implication is that pedagogical labels provide insufficient evidence of educational quality without attention to the substance of classroom interaction. Dialogic learning can help learners encounter disagreement, but its contribution depends on whether competing perspectives are considered respectfully and critically rather than merely exchanged (Cohen et al., 2025). Critical moral approaches similarly emphasize ethical reflection and the conditions of justice, rather than treating tolerance as an unquestioned attitude (Auh & Kim, 2024; Kester, 2023). Classroom case studies show that teachers' values and the institutional environment mediate these practices (Barry et al., 2025; Palmer, 2025). Accordingly, the contribution of dialogue to GCED rests partly on the questions posed, the representation of different experiences, and the room granted for reasoned disagreement. In elementary classrooms, this requires deliberate scaffolding that does not presume adult-level political understanding.

Participatory and project-based learning provide another possible connection between knowledge and behavioral citizenship, but participation is not equivalent to a demonstrable social effect. A review of active citizenship education found that short or partial projects may support relevant outcomes even when a complete cycle of student-led action is impractical (Jerome et al., 2024). A scoping review of school-age activism nonetheless cautioned that opportunities for action may disproportionately reflect well-resourced settings and narrow forms of engagement (Inguaggiato et al., 2025). Studies of youth and critical citizenship also stress the significance of reciprocity, dialogue, and meaningful voice (González-Valencia et al., 2022; Kim & Kwon, 2023). These findings suggest that participation should be evaluated with reference to students' agency, the purposes of an activity, and what learners can actually influence. Small, contextually appropriate classroom or community initiatives may be educationally credible without being presented as solutions to global problems.

The relationship between local values and global citizenship is best understood as a question of interpretation rather than a choice between competing identities. Pancasila, moral education, tolerance, and respect for diversity are relevant to Indonesian civic learning (Agustia et al., 2024; Rizal, 2024; Ulya, 2025). International scholarship likewise documents the tension between universal aspirations and locally grounded educational traditions (Kasa et al., 2023; Palmer, 2025). Critical and decolonial approaches further warn that apparently inclusive curricula can overlook structural inequality or marginalize alternative knowledge traditions (Aguilar-Forero & Salazar, 2025; Esau & Jones, 2025; Waghid & Meda, 2025). A contextual GCED approach should therefore encourage learners to consider how local commitments inform responsibility toward people beyond immediate communities. This position allows culturally meaningful teaching while retaining space to examine the limitations of familiar assumptions.

Teacher capacity emerged as a condition linking the conceptual promise of GCED to feasible classroom practice. The synthesis identified preparedness, limited curricula, and resources as obstacles, and this concern is supported by research on teacher understanding and classroom enactment (Mulyani et al., 2024; Barry et al., 2025). Reviews of teacher preparation describe uneven definitions of global competencies and the need for dialogue, reflection, and action within professional learning (Díaz Méndez et al., 2023; Estellés & Fischman, 2021). Research with teacher educators additionally demonstrates how competing meanings of democratic practice and global citizenship affect pedagogical decisions (Smith et al., 2024; Waghid, 2023). Professional development must consequently address both practical design and critical conceptual reasoning. Providing teaching resources is useful, but it cannot substitute for teachers' capacity to judge which issues, perspectives, and forms of participation are educationally appropriate.

Digital and blended pedagogies widen potential access to intercultural interaction but also complicate how learning outcomes are attributed. Online global citizenship activities have been used to develop broad competencies, and flipped-classroom research reports positive findings in a university economics context (Celume & Maoulida, 2022; Udvari & Vizi, 2023). Work involving digital exchanges, virtual reality, and contemporary civic issues shows further possibilities for mediated interaction and inquiry (Bosio et al., 2024; Mellado-Moreno & Burgos, 2025; Sanz-Prieto et al., 2026; Loveridge et al., 2026). Nevertheless, differences in learner age, technological access, and task design prevent a direct assumption that these outcomes will transfer to primary schools. Research on elementary digital citizenship also documents the importance of teacher guidance and curriculum integration when learners participate in online environments (Alenezi & Alfaleh, 2024). For GCED, the key question is not whether a tool is innovative, but whether its use advances a defined cognitive, socio-emotional, or behavioral learning objective.

An important limitation of claims about GCED outcomes lies in the diversity of evidence used to evaluate them. Research may document student perceptions, teacher interpretations, classroom practices, civic intentions, or observed participation, each of which addresses a different level of inference (Chiba et al., 2021; Damiani & Fraillon, 2025). Reviews of formal and nonformal settings also caution that research coverage remains uneven across age groups, contexts, and educational resources (Santamaría-Cárdaba et al., 2024; Amin et al., 2026; Miranda, 2025). A reported increase in awareness should not be restated as demonstrated behavioral change, nor should findings among university students be treated as direct evidence for younger children. This article's narrative review approach is useful for conceptual comparison but does not establish effect sizes, causal relationships, or exhaustive coverage of the literature. Its contribution is to make those distinctions explicit so that pedagogical recommendations remain proportional to available evidence.

Taken together, the synthesis proposes an alignment perspective for interpreting GCED in primary education: an explicit competency goal should guide the choice of pedagogy, and assessment should reflect the specific kind of learning being claimed. Such alignment does not prescribe a fixed teaching sequence; teachers may begin with local examples, global dilemmas, collaborative tasks, or reflective discussion depending on the subject matter and learners' experiences. Recent work on curricula, relational perspectives, and complexity reinforces the importance of context and of resisting narrowly instrumental definitions of citizenship (Kim, 2021; Phillips et al., 2024; Schmid et al., 2026; Palmer, 2026). The practical implication is to design tasks that connect global issues with age-appropriate opportunities for inquiry, empathy, and participation, rather than equating thematic coverage with achievement. This synthesis connects the three competency domains by clarifying the conceptual bridge between competencies, pedagogical activity, and the kinds of outcomes that research can substantiate. The resulting framework remains an interpretive aid rather than a newly tested instructional model.

CONCLUSION

Global citizenship education in the twenty-first century brings together cognitive understanding of global issues, socio-emotional engagement with diversity, and behavioral participation in collective concerns. The narrative synthesis indicates that dialogic, collaborative, project-based, reflective, and technology-supported approaches can provide opportunities to develop these competencies, but their contributions depend on learner age, institutional context, instructional design, and the evidence used to assess outcomes. Teacher preparedness, curriculum support, and educational resources remain pertinent constraints. In primary education, GCED can be connected to children's local experiences and relevant Pancasila values while encouraging critical engagement with wider social and environmental responsibilities.

The central contribution of this article is a conceptual distinction among competency aims, pedagogical processes, and observable learning outcomes. Because the study is a narrative literature review, it cannot establish a pooled effect, the superiority of a particular pedagogy, or a causal impact on student behavior. Future classroom-based investigations may use the three-domain structure to specify learning objectives and examine how teaching practices are associated with separately assessed cognitive, socio-emotional, and behavioral outcomes.

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