

JOURNEY TO GLOBAL COMPETENCE: TEACHING THROUGH A SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS LENS

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Abstract

The term 'global competence' has gained prominence in the past 5 years, denoting the comprehensive capabilities essential for students to succeed in a diverse and interconnected world. Educators and scholars alike now increasingly acknowledge the significance of developing learners' global competence, viewing it as a vital component rather than a mere luxury in education. The study aims to investigate how teaching English through the lens of sustainable development goals (SDGs) can enhance students' language learning and global competence. It will commence with a literature review on global competence, exploring its values and significance in the field of education. Subsequently, it will delve into the concept of SDGs and their relevance in education, discussing how SDGs can serve as a valuable lens for teaching and learning. Furthermore, the research will explore practical approaches for language teachers to integrate and leverage SDGs in their teaching practices. This may include collaborative activities such as brainstorming, group presentations, poster making, as well as curation and reflection. Ultimately, the research is anticipated to provide valuable insights for language teachers, enabling them to effectively engage learners in their language learning process while simultaneously developing their global competence.

Keywords: *Global competence, SDGs, collaborative activities, learning effectiveness.*

1. Introduction

With the arrival of the 21st century, the world appears to be a tight-knit community, resembling a small village. As globalization and fierce global competition continue to gather momentum, the need for individuals with a global outlook and mindset has become paramount. It is crucial for individuals to seize opportunities for personal development and gain a competitive edge in the international arena. Given that talent development is inextricably intertwined with education, it is essential to prioritize the development of learners' international vision, global awareness, and cross-cultural communication skills. This shared objectivity among researchers and educators is shaping the future of education and global engagement. Global competence, a buzzword in recent years, has gained increasing attention, recognition, and exploration from professional institutions and education experts. It offers valuable perspectives for equipping the next generation with essential knowledge and skills in the era of VUCA (Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, and Ambiguous), enabling them to excel in global competition (Yacob, Yunus, & John, 2023). This aptitude transcends local, ethnic, and national boundaries, empowering individuals to adapt to the knowledge expansion and a diversified world. It serves as a vital attribute for 21st-century citizens and as a gateway to seamless integration into the evolving global landscape.

2. Understanding global competence

2.1. Defining global competence

In 1988, the American Council on International Educational Exchange (CIEE) released a report "Educating for Global Competence", which signified the sprout of a new concept that gained widespread attention and became a part of the development goals of higher education (CIEE, 1988). Notably, the initial publication did not offer a precise definition of the term, but its essence suggested a transformation in how higher education institutions approach global education (CIEE, 1993). Prior to this, higher education had primarily emphasized domestic success, focusing on imparting students with the necessary academic skills and knowledge. However, as the world became increasingly interconnected and global conflicts and challenges multiplied, it became apparent that a more holistic approach was required.

Consequently, students are encouraged to take international exchange programs and get involved in diversity and multiculturalism, cultivating a global perspective that would prepare their readiness for the complexity of today's world (CIEE, 1993).

The term 'globally competent learner' was introduced at a conference titled "Educating for the Global Community: A Framework for Community Colleges", co-hosted by the American Council on International Intercultural Education (ACIIE) and the Stanley Foundation in 1996. This learner is characterized by a profound understanding of the interconnectedness between human beings and the environment, a shared comprehension of historical and significant international events, and an embrace of multiple values and attitudes, appreciating and recognizing the positive impacts of global diversity (ACIIE & Stanley Foundation, 1996). The report indicated that community colleges should not view the development of global competence as mere "additives" but rather integrate it into their academic curricula. However, a debate emerged regarding whether community colleges could provide sufficient perspectives to define the concept of global competence, potentially constraining the popularity of this definition (Hunter, 2004).

Subsequently, the National Education Association (NEA) stated in its publication "Global Competence Is a 21st Century Imperative" that global competence has evolved from a privilege enjoyed by a select few to a fundamental necessity for all individuals in education, regardless of their age or level (NEA, 2010). Recognizing the significance of this shift, the U.S. Council of Chief State School Officials (CCSSO) EdSteps initiative, along with the Asia Society Partnership for Global Learning, established a Global Competence Task Force in 2011. The Task Force was given the mandate to refine the concept of global competence and develop the global competence matrix, ultimately proposing the concept as "the capacity and disposition to understand and act on issues of global significance" (Boix-Mansilla & Jackson, 2011, p.xiii). In light of this, teachers play a pivotal role in nurturing students' global competence in comprehending and engaging with global issues through global education. This involves cultivating curiosity about the world beyond their immediate surroundings, honing higher-order thinking skills, and encouraging proactive participation in addressing global challenges. By doing so, teachers can contribute to the shaping of a generation that is not only well-versed in global affairs but also actively involved in promoting positive global change.

The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has long been at the forefront of international education concepts, with its definition of global competence standing out as both impactful and encompassing. The OECD defines global competence as a multi-faceted construct, breaking down the macro domain into four key components, which are knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values (OECE/Asia Society, 2018). The adoption of the singular form of 'competence' is noteworthy as it implies both independent and interrelated relationships among these various elements. According to the OECD, global competence encompasses a broad array of abilities that allow individuals to navigate our hyper-connected world. In essence, globally competent individuals are the ones who can investigate local, global, and transnational cultural issues critically, understand and appreciate diverse perspectives and viewpoints, engage actively with and respect others, and assume responsibility for sustainability and social prosperity (OECE/Asia Society, 2018). The definition provided by the OECD acts as an invaluable framework for guiding education systems and policies, ensuring that they foster knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values needed for development and success in today's ever-changing world (OECE/Asia Society, 2018).

2.2. Its significance in today's interconnected world

The cultivation of global competence equips learners with a profound understanding of the interconnectedness and intricate nature of our global village, thereby fulfilling the demands of the 21st century. To accomplish this, a dynamic, interactive, and integrated approach is imperative in understanding and responding to global affairs and issues. It endows learners with the ability to understand and respect diverse viewpoints, think critically and tackle problems creatively, learn to live together harmoniously as global citizens, and effectively interact with heterogeneous groups of people and cultures. Additionally, it instills a global mindset, a sense of accountability for one's actions, respect for human dignity and cultural differences, as well as an appreciation for the values inherent in "the common good of humanity" (UNESCO, 2015; OECE/Asia Society, 2018). By smoothly and strategically integrating knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values into their educational objectives, higher education institutions may help students build their global competence. This approach encourages students to embrace multiculturalism, draw wisdom from various civilizations, boost cross-cultural interaction, and actively engage in global participation.

Global competence is a valuable means to enhance awareness of global citizenship and participation, a prerequisite for fostering sustainable development in education, a cornerstone for promoting humanistic education, and an important lever for realizing the blueprint of future education.

Global competence involves mobilizing and utilizing a range of transferable high-level abilities, including collaboration with others, cross-cultural communication skills, problem-solving abilities, critical thinking, and creative thinking (OECE/Asia Society, 2018). By nurturing these skills, we empower students to become active local and global citizens, effective communicators who bridge language barriers and culture disparities, creative problem solvers adept at navigating ambiguity and change, critical and versatile thinkers who embrace new opportunities, ideas, and ways of thinking, and open-minded life-long learners committed to a perpetual quest for knowledge. These attributes foster students' independent, intellectual, and resilient growth, bolster their competitiveness and adaptability in the international labor market, and enable effortless and effective interactions with distant regions, people, and ideas. Global competence also reflects a humanistic education, transcending utilitarianism and striving for a balance between individual and social needs, achieving a harmony of purpose and value.

3. Teaching through a Sustainable Development Goals lens

3.1. An overview of the Sustainable Development Goals

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, a collaborative agreement among 193 member states, was endorsed by the United Nations General Assembly at its 70th session in 2015. This initiative aims to address global development challenges across five dimensions—people, planet, prosperity, peace, and partnership—by the year 2030. The agenda includes a collection of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 targets, providing a comprehensive roadmap for local development and international cooperation worldwide, and outlining a blueprint for a prosperous and sustainable world. The SDGs, an integrated and indivisible collection of global goals prioritizing 'no one is left behind', indicate a heightened focus on personal development and human rights (UNESCO, 2016). The SDGs represent the first instance in human history where nations worldwide have agreed on a shared vision for the advancement of human civilization. While global and collaborative partnerships are essential in achieving these ambitious goals, individuals also play a pivotal role in contributing to this progress.

3.2. How the SDGs provide a lens for teaching global competence

The SDGs are a natural and authentic vehicle to bring global awareness to the classroom, fostering a deeper understanding of the interdependence of our world and the shared responsibility we all bear towards achieving sustainable development. By aligning the SDGs with learning objectives, students can connect with real-world issues, thereby making their learning experience more significant and meaningful. The SDGs offer a holistic framework that can integrate planetary sustainability into any programme, encouraging interdisciplinary and intercultural learning, inspiring critical and creative thinking, fostering an understanding of global challenges and the interconnectedness of society, economy, and environment, as well as enhancing social responsibility and concerted action.

3.3. Integrating the SDGs into teaching and learning practice

Integrating the SDGs into curriculum and classroom activities is crucial in developing a future generation that is both aware of and committed to sustainability. The SDGs provide a holistic roadmap to enlighten students about the intricate interplay between social, ecological, and economic aspects. By skillfully weaving the SDGs in teaching and learning scenarios, we not only further students' understanding of these complex issues but also inspire them to apply critical and creative thinking in devising solutions (Maley & Peachey, 2017). By making SDG-related activities and discussions an integral part of daily pedagogy, teachers can nurture a sustainability-oriented mindset, priming students to become engaged and responsible advocates for a more sustainable world. The following will illustrate how to strategically embed the SDGs into teaching and learning practices via a range of classroom activities, shifting the focus from teacher-led to learner-centered for optimal learning effectiveness.

3.3.1. Group presentation. When it comes to group presentation, the primary objective differs significantly from individual ones. Group presentations aim to alleviate pressure, bolster confidence, and mitigate jitters when students communicate in a second or foreign language. This collaborative approach allows students to share the responsibility and workload, creating a more supportive and less daunting environment. When the presentation topic is designated among 3 to 4 learners, the collective effort from each group member becomes paramount. Each individual brings their unique strengths and passions, and roles and duties can be allocated accordingly. While one member might take on the lead role during the presentation, it is vital to acknowledge that every member contributes and strives to ensure smooth transitions. Additionally, students may learn to appreciate each other's viewpoints and resolve any disagreements or challenges constructively in the process. As students engage in their tasks, teachers can circulate among the groups, providing guidance and feedback. They can monitor whether students can

craft engaging introductions, utilize their voices effectively, and articulate their ideas clearly. An effective group presentation requires teamwork and coordination, encouraging students to employ the target language to gather, synthesize, and present information in a cohesive manner. This further deepens their comprehension of how the SDGs are interrelated and how each goal supports global sustainability.

3.3.2. Brainstorming. This activity encourages students to map out thoughts and ideas organically with a group of 4 or 5 students, taking a closer look at one of the SDG challenges that resonates deeply with them. A mind map template may be distributed to facilitate the process. This will enable them to visually represent, organize, and compile their ideas, breaking down intricate issues into more manageable components. By participating in this activity, students are able to unleash their creativity, make meaningful associations, and effectively build an intuitive understanding of the chosen topic. This activity fosters collaborative learning, stimulating lively group discussions, critical thinking, and creative problem-solving techniques. Moreover, it establishes a non-threatening atmosphere where students feel free to share their opinions and ideas. This, in turn, encourages active participation in the brainstorming session, allowing everyone to contribute and feel valued.

3.3.3. Poster making. One powerful way to convey messages and inspire action is through a visually impactful poster. Organizing a poster-making competition not only enhances students' understanding and awareness of the 17 SDGs but also brings these global issues alive for them, making them relevant and meaningful in their daily lives. As part of this activity, students are encouraged to make vibrant and imaginative posters, allowing them the freedom to delve into a particular sub-theme within the broader context of the SDGs. The ideation process for this poster-making competition started with understanding different SDGs. Once they have settled on a specific topic, they can embark on the creative process of utilizing images, graphics, and text to convey their understanding of the goal and devise solutions to tackle the challenges. This practice not only fosters the development of visual communication skills but also ignites creativity and critical thinking among students. The finalized posters can serve as a powerful visual exhibition in the classroom, sparking further discussions and reflections among students. Additionally, these posters may be shared with a larger community to ensure the philosophy of the SDGs reaches a broader audience and has a maximum impact. By making these posters visible and accessible, we hope to inspire and motivate everyone to get involved and create positive change.

3.3.4. Curation & reflection. This can serve as a valuable extension to the in-class activities or as a stand-alone assignment for students to practice after class. Given the constraints of class time, it is beneficial to connect the 'ivory tower' and the reality world, inspiring students to pursue their SDG exploration with unwavering enthusiasm. First, students are given a specific SDG topic to delve into. Teachers may provide them with a variety of resources beforehand, including reading materials, infographics, and audio or video clips that are tailored to the topic. However, students are urged to search for alternative sources and perspectives beyond those provided materials. This exploration allows them to develop a deeper understanding of the SDG topic and its implications. Subsequently, students are asked to write reflections on their findings and thoughts, focusing on what they have learned about the topic, how it relates to their personal or local context, and how they might help to achieve it. To facilitate the sharing of ideas and perspectives, students are invited to post their sharing and reflections on an online platform like Padlet. This platform creates a virtual space where it can help students exchange ideas, spark discussions, and connect with peers. It is a vibrant hub of ideas and insights, where they can learn from each other and build upon each other's knowledge and experience. Finally, students are encouraged to read and comment on each other's reflections, creating a lively discussion forum where they can exchange ideas, pose questions, and build upon one another's insights. This collaborative learning experience not only improves their understanding of the SDGs but also cultivates a feeling of community and inclusion.

4. Conclusion

The development of global competence is a lifelong process that cannot be achieved overnight. Despite the challenges along the way, students may embrace the dynamic nature of globalization and persevere with determination and resilience as they progress through their life journey. The SDGs are invaluable avenues for developing global competence among students. These goals serve as a powerful lens, igniting aspiration, inspiration, cooperation, participation, exploration, and reflection in students' learning journeys and beyond. They offer students the opportunity to engage with diverse global contexts, take part in international sustainability dialogues, think outside the box, apply critical thinking to devise solutions to pressing issues, take immediate action, and make their voices heard. Incorporating these

SDG-related activities into English language classrooms not only enhances the language-learning environment, but also promotes them to speak more freely, voicing their concerns, opinions, and viable solutions. By encouraging active participation and commitment, these activities cultivate a sense of responsibility towards global sustainability, enabling students to become advocates for change and preparing them to become informed and reliable global citizens. However, as we introduce the SDGs in the classroom, it is crucial to acknowledge that their implementation may not be without challenges. Nevertheless, utilizing them as an educational framework is a commendable approach to ensure that they are imprinted in students' DNA and that students become enlightened, competent, and responsible global citizens.

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