

Global Citizenship Education in Primary Schools: A Strategy for Developing Globally Competitive 21st-Century Learners

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Abstract

This study aims to examine and analyze the role of strengthening Global Citizenship Education (GCE) in primary school education as a strategic approach to developing a globally competitive generation in the 21st century. The study employs a literature review method by collecting, analyzing, and synthesizing relevant scholarly publications from both national and international journals. The findings reveal that GCE plays a significant role in equipping students with the cognitive, socio-emotional, and behavioral competencies required to become responsible and active global citizens. The integration of GCE principles into the primary school curriculum, particularly through Indonesia's Merdeka Curriculum and the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5), contributes to reinforcing students' national identity while fostering a broader global perspective. However, several challenges remain, including limited teacher competence in implementing GCE, insufficient availability of contextually relevant learning resources, and disparities in educational infrastructure across regions. Therefore, this study recommends enhancing teacher professional development, strengthening GCE-oriented curriculum implementation, and fostering greater collaboration among schools, government institutions, and international stakeholders. These efforts are essential to preparing future generations who are globally competent, socially responsible, and capable of addressing the complex challenges of an increasingly interconnected world.

Keywords: Global Citizenship Education; Primary School Education; 21st-Century Learning; Merdeka Curriculum; Globally Competitive Generation.

INTRODUCTION

The 21st century has been characterized by rapid and complex transformations driven by globalization, technological advancements, and increasing interconnectedness among nations. The emergence of global challenges such as climate change, pandemics, social inequality, poverty, migration, and international conflicts has significantly reshaped the way individuals interact, learn, and participate in society. In this context, education is no longer limited to developing students' academic abilities but is also expected to prepare them to become responsible global citizens who possess the knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes necessary to contribute positively to an increasingly interconnected world. Educational institutions are therefore required to equip learners with competencies that enable them to navigate global issues while maintaining their cultural identity and social responsibility.

As societies become more interconnected through digital technologies and global communication networks, the demand for globally competent citizens continues to increase. Students are expected to understand global interdependence, respect cultural

diversity, engage in collaborative problem-solving, and demonstrate empathy toward people from different backgrounds. These competencies are considered essential for preparing future generations to thrive in an era characterized by uncertainty, rapid technological innovation, and complex social challenges. Consequently, educational systems worldwide have begun to emphasize the development of global citizenship as a key objective of contemporary education.

Global Citizenship Education (GCE) has emerged as one of the most significant educational responses to these challenges. According to UNESCO, GCE aims to empower learners to assume active roles in addressing and resolving global challenges and to contribute to a more peaceful, tolerant, inclusive, secure, and sustainable world. GCE promotes the development of cognitive, socio-emotional, and behavioral competencies that enable learners to critically analyze global issues, appreciate cultural diversity, uphold human rights, and engage in responsible actions at local, national, and global levels. Through GCE, students are encouraged to develop a sense of belonging to a broader human community while recognizing their responsibilities as members of society.

The importance of GCE has gained increasing attention in educational research and policy discussions. Scholars argue that GCE provides a framework for preparing students to address contemporary global challenges while fostering democratic values, intercultural understanding, and social justice. Usmi and Samsuri (2022) emphasize that GCE is an essential component that should be integrated into Citizenship Education curricula in the 21st century because students require global perspectives and competencies to respond effectively to the opportunities and challenges of modern society. Furthermore, GCE supports the development of critical thinking, communication skills, collaboration, and ethical decision-making, which are recognized as fundamental competencies for 21st-century learners.

In the Indonesian context, the relevance of GCE has become increasingly apparent with the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum introduced in 2022. This curriculum emphasizes student-centered learning, character development, and competency-based education. One of its key components is the Pancasila Student Profile, which seeks to cultivate learners who are faithful, independent, collaborative, creative, critical thinkers, and globally diverse. These dimensions closely align with the principles of Global Citizenship Education, particularly in promoting intercultural understanding, global awareness, environmental responsibility, and social participation. As a result, the Merdeka Curriculum provides a strategic opportunity for integrating GCE values into educational practices at various levels of schooling.

The Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (Projek Penguatan Profil Pelajar Pancasila/P5) further supports the implementation of GCE by encouraging students to engage in authentic learning experiences related to sustainability, diversity, social justice, and community engagement. Through project-based learning activities, students are given opportunities to explore real-world issues, collaborate with peers, and develop practical solutions to societal challenges. Such experiences contribute to the cultivation of global competencies while simultaneously reinforcing national identity and local cultural values. This balance between global awareness and national identity is particularly important in ensuring that students remain rooted in their cultural heritage while actively participating in the global community.

Despite its potential benefits, the implementation of GCE in Indonesian primary schools faces several challenges. One major obstacle is the limited understanding and capacity of teachers to integrate global citizenship concepts into classroom instruction. Many teachers have not received adequate professional development related to global

citizenship competencies, intercultural education, or global issues. Additionally, there remains a shortage of contextualized learning resources that effectively connect global themes with local realities. Disparities in educational infrastructure and access to technology across regions further complicate the implementation of GCE, particularly in rural and underdeveloped areas. These challenges indicate the need for comprehensive support from policymakers, educational institutions, and stakeholders to ensure the successful integration of GCE into primary education.

Primary school education plays a crucial role in shaping students' character, attitudes, values, and ways of thinking. Early childhood and primary education are considered critical periods for developing social awareness, empathy, tolerance, and respect for diversity. Introducing GCE principles at this stage can provide a strong foundation for lifelong learning and responsible citizenship. By fostering global competencies from an early age, primary schools can help prepare students to become adaptive, innovative, and socially responsible individuals capable of competing and collaborating in the global arena.

Moreover, strengthening GCE in primary schools contributes to achieving broader educational goals, including the development of sustainable societies and the promotion of peace and social cohesion. As global challenges become increasingly complex, future generations will require not only academic excellence but also the capacity to engage in cross-cultural dialogue, understand multiple perspectives, and participate in collective efforts to address global issues. Therefore, integrating GCE into primary education represents a strategic investment in human capital development and national competitiveness in the 21st century.

Based on these considerations, this study aims to examine and analyze the strengthening of Global Citizenship Education in primary school education as a strategy for developing globally competitive 21st-century learners in Indonesia. Through a literature review approach, this study synthesizes findings from relevant national and international scholarly publications to identify the opportunities, challenges, and strategic directions for implementing GCE in primary education. The findings are expected to contribute to the ongoing discourse on educational reform and provide recommendations for enhancing the integration of global citizenship values within the Indonesian educational system.

METHOD

This study employed a literature review approach to examine and analyze the strengthening of Global Citizenship Education (GCE) in primary school education. The selection of this method was based on the consideration that a literature review provides a comprehensive and evidence-based understanding of a particular topic through the collection, examination, and synthesis of existing scholarly studies (Mongkau & Pangkey, 2024). Through this approach, the study sought to map the research landscape of GCE in primary schools, including its conceptual foundations, emerging implementation practices, and the challenges encountered in educational settings. The literature sources consisted of peer-reviewed national and international journal articles, conference proceedings, and policy documents published by authoritative institutions such as UNESCO and the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology of the Republic of Indonesia. These sources were selected based on their relevance to the research topic to ensure the depth and validity of the analysis. The literature search was conducted through several academic databases, including Google Scholar, Garuda (Garba Rujukan Digital), and Scopus, using keywords such as Global Citizenship Education, global

citizenship, GCE implementation in primary schools, Merdeka Curriculum, and students' global competencies. All identified sources were carefully reviewed to understand their content, context, and key findings, which were subsequently analyzed using a qualitative approach to identify recurring themes, relationships among findings, and research gaps that remain underexplored. The results of this synthesis were then presented descriptively and analytically in the discussion section.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. The Concept and Urgency of Global Citizenship Education (GCE)

Global Citizenship Education (GCE) is an educational approach that seeks to broaden students' knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes, enabling them to participate effectively in an increasingly interconnected global society. Walangadi et al. (2020) emphasized that the values that should be developed in students as global citizens include responsibility, global competence, and engagement in global citizenship, all of which constitute the fundamental dimensions of globally oriented citizenship education.

GCE encompasses three interrelated dimensions of competence: (1) the cognitive dimension, which includes understanding global issues, international systems, and interdependence among nations; (2) the socio-emotional dimension, which involves empathy, a sense of responsibility, and a sense of belonging to a global community; and (3) the behavioral dimension, which is reflected in active participation and concrete actions in addressing global challenges (Mulyani et al., 2024). These dimensions provide the foundation for developing individuals who are not only intellectually capable but also socially aware and committed to global justice and sustainability.

The urgency of GCE has increased significantly alongside the rapid expansion of globalization and information technology, which have blurred traditional national boundaries. Rizal (2024) argued that global citizenship education has become an essential component of Pancasila and Citizenship Education in the 21st century, as young people are expected not only to understand local and national issues but also to respond effectively to transnational challenges. In the Indonesian context, GCE aligns closely with the principles of Pancasila, which emphasize unity, humanity, and social justice.

2. GCE in the Primary School Curriculum in Indonesia

Primary education represents the most fundamental stage for shaping students' character, values, and ways of thinking. Walangadi et al. (2020), in their study conducted at SDN 6 Telaga in Gorontalo Regency, found that Citizenship Education serves as a strategic platform for nurturing students as global citizens. At this educational level, values such as social responsibility, global competence, and active participation in global citizenship can be systematically introduced and cultivated.

In Indonesia, the Merdeka Curriculum, which has been widely implemented since 2022, provides greater flexibility for schools to integrate GCE values into teaching and learning processes. One of its primary instruments is the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5), which encourages meaningful and contextual project-based learning experiences. Sutrisno et al. (2023) found that GCE strongly aligns with the objectives of the Pancasila Student Profile, particularly in the dimensions of global diversity, collaboration, and critical reasoning.

Argiarta et al. (2025) highlighted that Indonesian primary schools face a unique challenge in implementing global education: balancing local needs with international perspectives. One proposed solution is the development of learning materials that integrate global issues into students' local contexts, making learning more relevant and

accessible. This approach is commonly referred to as the “glocal approach,” which combines global and local perspectives simultaneously.

Similarly, Sadiyah et al. (2024), in their study of global diversity values embedded in Indonesian language textbooks for primary schools, emphasized that understanding and appreciating global diversity can empower students to become positive agents of change who contribute to building a more inclusive, equitable, and harmonious society. Integrating global perspectives into the primary school curriculum can help students develop global mindsets, critical thinking skills, problem-solving abilities, and socio-emotional competencies.

Furthermore, Kamal et al. (2025) found that the successful implementation of globally oriented citizenship education largely depends on teachers’ understanding and internalization of GCE principles. Teachers with a strong understanding of GCE tend to be more innovative in integrating global citizenship values into various subjects and extracurricular activities.

3. Strategies for Strengthening GCE in Primary Schools

Based on the literature review, several strategies can be implemented to strengthen GCE in primary education. First, cross-curricular integration is essential. GCE does not necessarily need to be taught as a separate subject but can be integrated into existing subjects such as Social Studies, Citizenship Education, Indonesian Language, and Science. Mongkau and Pangkey (2024) demonstrated that the Merdeka Curriculum supports the development of students’ potential and skills to strengthen character formation and prepare learners with competencies required for global competition, including GCE-related values.

Second, Project-Based Learning (PjBL) provides an effective approach for engaging students in solving real-world global issues. Through projects focusing on themes such as environmental sustainability, cultural diversity, and human rights, students not only acquire knowledge but also develop collaboration, communication, and critical-thinking skills. Astuti (2024) emphasized that the 6C competencies—collaboration, communication, critical thinking, creativity, character, and citizenship—are highly relevant to the competencies promoted by GCE.

Third, the utilization of digital technology can serve as a bridge connecting primary school students with the wider world. Digital platforms can facilitate virtual student exchanges, intercultural discussions, and international collaborative projects, thereby fostering students’ global awareness and intercultural competence. Mulyani et al. (2024) identified technology integration as one of the key strategies for overcoming challenges in GCE implementation.

Fourth, value- and character-based approaches are crucial in strengthening GCE. Values such as tolerance, empathy, social responsibility, and environmental awareness can be cultivated through daily school activities. School culture programs, flag ceremonies, and the commemoration of international observance days can serve as effective means of promoting global awareness among students.

Fifth, international partnerships and networking should be encouraged. Primary schools can establish collaborations with schools abroad, international organizations, and global communities to broaden students’ perspectives. Coma-Roselló et al. (2022) demonstrated that social innovation projects involving cross-community partnerships significantly enhanced students’ critical-thinking abilities and global citizenship awareness. Similarly, Starkey (2022) argued that increasing global interconnectedness requires educational systems capable of preparing students to communicate and collaborate across cultures.

4. Challenges in Implementing GCE in Primary Schools

Despite its growing importance, the implementation of GCE in Indonesian primary schools continues to face several challenges that require systematic attention. The first challenge concerns teachers' competence and understanding of GCE. Teachers play a central role in implementing global citizenship education; however, many primary school teachers still lack adequate knowledge of GCE concepts and pedagogical strategies. Mulyani et al. (2024) identified the preparation of professional educators with global perspectives and strong identities as a critical factor for successful GCE implementation in Indonesia. Likewise, Usmi and Samsuri (2022) noted that GCE competencies remain relatively uncommon in classroom practice due to insufficient teacher training and a lack of contextualized learning resources.

The second challenge is the absence of explicit policies regulating GCE. Usmi and Samsuri (2022) argued that Indonesia's citizenship education curriculum does not formally establish global citizenship competencies as a specific policy objective. Consequently, GCE implementation tends to be fragmented and uneven across schools and regions.

The third challenge relates to disparities in infrastructure and educational resources. As an archipelagic nation with diverse geographical conditions, Indonesia faces substantial difficulties in ensuring equitable access to quality education. Schools located in remote and underdeveloped regions often experience limited access to technology and learning resources that support GCE implementation. Anggraini and Hudaidah (2021) emphasized that educational reforms aimed at addressing 21st-century challenges must take into account the diverse contexts and conditions across Indonesia.

The fourth challenge involves potential tensions between national identity and global identity. Within the Indonesian educational context, concerns have emerged that poorly designed GCE initiatives could weaken national values and Pancasila principles. Starkey (2022) identified the tension between nationalism and cosmopolitanism as one of the major global challenges associated with GCE. Therefore, GCE implementation in Indonesia should be designed to strengthen, rather than diminish, students' national identity.

5. GCE as a Strategy for Developing Globally Competitive Learners

In the context of 21st-century global competition, competitive generations are not solely defined by high levels of academic achievement but also by their global literacy, intercultural competence, critical-thinking abilities, and commitment to humanitarian values. GCE plays a strategic role in cultivating these attributes from the primary education level.

Pare and Sihotang (2023), in their study on holistic education for developing 21st-century skills, argued that holistic approaches integrating cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains are highly effective in shaping resilient and competitive individuals. GCE aligns with this approach by emphasizing not only knowledge acquisition but also attitude formation and responsible action.

Mongkau and Pangkey (2024) identified that one of the objectives of the Merdeka Curriculum is to develop a globally competitive "Golden Generation," and strengthening 21st-century skills among primary school students is a key pathway toward achieving this goal. GCE serves as an essential component of this effort by equipping students with competencies required in the global era, including intercultural communication, international collaboration, and understanding of global issues.

A comparative study conducted by Gunawan et al. (2024) on primary school mathematics curricula in Indonesia and Australia revealed that countries that perform

successfully in global competition are those whose curricula prepare students to think globally from an early age. This finding reinforces the argument that integrating GCE into primary education constitutes a vital long-term investment for national development.

Walangadi et al. (2020) found that the values of social responsibility, global competence, and active engagement in global citizenship fostered through Citizenship Education at the primary school level effectively prepare students to interact harmoniously within global communities while simultaneously strengthening their national identity. Given Indonesia's rich cultural diversity, GCE also functions as a form of multicultural education that promotes domestic social cohesion while preparing younger generations to participate actively in the international arena.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the literature review, it can be concluded that Global Citizenship Education (GCE) is a highly relevant and essential educational approach for primary school education in the 21st century, as it equips students with the cognitive, socio-emotional, and behavioral competencies required to become responsible global citizens. In the Indonesian context, GCE is strongly aligned with the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum and the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5), whose values correspond closely to the core dimensions of global citizenship. The integration of GCE into primary education can be achieved through various strategies, including cross-curricular integration, project-based learning, the utilization of digital technologies, value- and character-based approaches, and international partnerships. However, the implementation of GCE in primary schools continues to face several challenges, such as limited teacher competence, the absence of explicit policies governing GCE, disparities in educational infrastructure across regions, and potential tensions between national and global identities. These challenges require comprehensive and systematic responses from policymakers, educational institutions, and other stakeholders. Overall, strengthening GCE at the primary school level represents an effective and strategic effort to develop globally competitive learners, as the values and competencies associated with global citizenship established from an early age provide a strong foundation for students' future educational, social, and professional development in an increasingly interconnected world.

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