

Beyond Borders: Investigating the Role of Global Competence Education in Fostering Empathy and Intercultural Understanding

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Abstract:

The expectations that have been set on today's education systems have been completely changed due to the speed of globalisation, transnational mobility and cultural interconnectedness. School and university no longer only have the responsibility of conveying information, but also teaching students how to engage in an ethical and empathetic manner with others from different cultures and countries. Global competence education has become a critical educational approach to foster a set of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that enable students to deal with cultural diversity and global interdependence (OECD, 2018; Boix Mansilla & Jackson, 2011). The purpose of this paper is to discuss the importance of Global competence education in developing students' understanding and empathy for intercultural. The research draws on interdisciplinary research from international studies, psychology and education to bring together theory and empirical findings to investigate the impact of global competence programmes on socio-emotional learning outcomes. The paper presents the results of a structured qualitative literature review, supported by illustrative case studies from the secondary and higher education settings, to analyse pedagogical strategies including experiential learning, intercultural dialogue, curriculum internationalisation and reflective practice. The results indicate that most effective global competence education can be achieved if it combines cognitive, behavioural and affective aspects of learning, rather than treating intercultural exposure as a separate experience from learning (Deardorff, 2006; Boix Mansilla & Wilson, 2020). However, difficulties with curricular constraints, teacher readiness, measuring empathy, and inequities in access to global learning opportunities hinder its transformative potential. The paper ends with recommendations for educators and policymakers to use evidence-based approaches, focusing on curriculum coherence, professional learning and institutional support. In general, the study suggests that global competence education is one of the most important avenues to foster empathy and intercultural understanding in an interdependent yet fragmented world.

1. Introduction

Globalization has significantly transformed social, economic and cultural environments and dramatically increased the interactions between peoples and communities that transcended national and cultural boundaries. The communication technologies have improved, migration has increased and there has been greater economic integration with other cultures, meaning that there is more contact between the different cultures than ever before. Consequently, there is growing pressure on education systems to equip learners with the skills needed to participate in national economies and to engage with diverse and multicultural societies and increasingly with global societies (Spring, 2015; Rizvi, 2009). The “changing expectations” have given a high priority to the issue of global competence education as a focal point of education. Global competence education is about the ability to understand global and intercultural issues, recognise and respect diverse perspectives, communicate across culture and take responsible action for the well-being of the collective (OECD, 2018). The current global competence frameworks differ from previous international or multicultural education, in which cultural awareness or simply factual knowledge was emphasized, since they focus on socio-emotional and ethical aspects of learning along with the cognitive aspects (Boix Mansilla & Jackson, 2011). This trend is driven by a realisation that knowledge is not enough to deal with without empathy, being reflexive and being open to cultural difference.

Empathy is a focus of this educational agenda. Empathy has been defined as the capacity to grasp and share the feelings of others and to understand the feelings and ideas of others, and is generally recognized as one of the prerequisites to an intercultural understanding that is meaningful (Davis, 1994; Hoffman, 2000). Empathy helps students to see beyond cultural literalism to the lived reality of an issue, social inequity, and a historical context in an educational environment. The lack of empathy may lead to intercultural interactions reinforcing stereotype or power dynamics, and not promoting understanding (Nussbaum, 2010). Although the concept of global competence in education is a widely accepted one in international policy documents and national education policies, its actual application is diverse and controversial. There are international organisations that have developed clear learning goals in relation to global citizenship and intercultural understanding, but the way education takes place often differs significantly between institutional as well as national contexts (UNESCO, 2017; Hunter et al., 2006). Global competence is taught in some contexts in ways that are disconnected from the rest of the curriculum, in some through short-term exchanges and in others in more systematic ways within curriculum design, pedagogy and assessment. This variation poses important questions on the way and the conditions under which global competence education is effective at promoting empathy and intercultural understanding.

The existing studies about global competence education are vast and scattered. The affective and relational aspects of learning are often overlooked or not given as much sustained attention in studies as compared to other outcomes like academic achievement, employability, etc. In addition, many empirical studies focus on specific programs or activities (e.g., study abroad or intercultural courses), but do not incorporate them into a larger theoretical context of empathy and intercultural development (Deardorff, 2006; Bennett, 1993). This situation leaves limited understanding of how global competence education impacts students' empathetic dispositions, and why. The aim of this paper is to bridge these gaps and to critically analyze the role of global competence education for the development of empathy and intercultural understanding. The study is not a description of programs and policies, but rather a synthesis of interdisciplinary literature that identifies some of the key pedagogical mechanisms and context that is conducive to SEL. In addition, illustrative case-studies are utilized to illustrate how global competence principles are implemented in practice in various educational contexts. There are three main contributions in the paper. First, it helps elucidate the conceptual connection between global competence, empathy and intercultural understanding. Second, it identifies pedagogical strategies that can help to foster empathy in global learning. Thirdly, it provides evidence-based recommendations for educators and policy-makers aiming to implement Global competence education equitably and in sustainable manner. In the next part, literature reviewing is conducted with the purpose of laying the theoretical groundwork for analyzing.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Conceptualizing Global Competence Education

Global competence education is defined as a multi-dimensional concept that includes knowledge, skills, attitudes and values which allow a person to respond to the global and intercultural challenges effectively. OECD (2018) describes global competence as the capacity to analyse local, global and intercultural topics, to grasp the perspectives of others, to communicate and interact respectfully with others, to take responsible action for sustainability and collective well-being. The definition emphasizes the interrelatedness of the cognitive, behavioural, and socio-emotional aspects of learning. Global competence is not a fixed body of knowledge and skills but a growing capacity developed through learning, living and thinking; and it is developed through education, experience and reflection (Deardorff, 2006). They claim that global competence education must be intentionally designed, and that it must link disciplinary knowledge with ethical reasoning and intercultural engagement in an effective manner (Boix Mansilla & Wilson, 2020). This perspective is not only to look at global competence as an add-on to the curriculum but to also see it as an educational orientation.

2.2 Historical Evolution of Global Competence in Education

The concept of global competence education goes back to post – World War II endeavours to foster international understanding and peace through education. The early effort in International Education focused on an emphasis on knowledge and exchange of cross cultures as ways to minimize conflict. As globalization accelerated and

global problems like climate change and migration arose, the area of these activities grew (Spring 2015). Global competence was started to be formally integrated in education policy in the early twenty first century via international frameworks and assessments. This institutionalization is expressed in the UNESCO global citizenship education agenda, as well as in the integration of global competence in international tests (UNESCO, 2017; OECD, 2018). The integration of policies into classroom practice, however, does not necessarily mean that it is implemented and applied in a meaningful way, especially if the teacher is not well-trained or has limited resources to use (Hunter et al., 2006).

2.3 Empathy as a Foundation for Intercultural Understanding

Empathy is generally accepted as one of the key elements of intercultural competence and global learning. Psychological studies reveal a difference between cognitive empathy (the ability to take the perspective of another person) and affective empathy (the ability to respond emotionally to what the other person is experiencing) (Davis, 1994). Both forms are vital for intercultural awareness - to understand cultural practices and respond to difference sensitively. Empathy, which is thought to be fostered as a natural result of exposure to diversity, can be developed through intentional pedagogical strategies, according to educational researchers (Hoffman, 2000). Narrative engagement, reflective writing, dialogic learning and experiential activities have been proven to improve students' empathetic capacities, especially when accompanied by the critical discussion of power, privilege and social context (Nussbaum, 2010).

2.4 Intercultural Understanding and Learning Processes

Intercultural understanding is the capacity to interpret, relate and adapt to the different cultural contexts. The process of moving from ethnocentric to more ethnorelative orientations toward intercultural competence can occur through experience and guided learning (Bennett, 1993). Hammer (2012) also states that intercultural development doesn't happen in a linear fashion and needs to be an ongoing process of engagement and reflection. Schools are a key context in which this process can take place. Intercultural interactions, when coupled with reflective teaching, can produce deeper understanding and decrease prejudice. On the other hand, inadequate experiences can promote stereotypes or cultural hierarchies, making it crucial to include deliberate instructional design (Andreotti, 2014).

2.5 Globalisation, Education, and Cultural Exchange

The opportunities for cultural exchange in the world brought about by digital communication, migration and international cooperation have increased. These developments have also led to the possibility of intercultural learning, but have also revealed power imbalances and inequalities in the global contexts (Rizvi, 2009). Global competence education aims to overcome such tensions by fostering critical reflection on global issues, not simply celebrating diversity. Studies have shown that inquiry-based learning and cross-cultural engagement can increase students' understanding of the interconnectedness of the world and their social responsibility (Banks, 2015). But access to these opportunities for learning is not equal, and the question of equity and inclusion in global learning is raised.

2.6 Integrating Global Competence into Curriculum and Pedagogy

Global competence education must have continuity in curriculum, pedagogy and assessment. Interdisciplinary curricula, problem-based learning, community engagement, and/or international partnerships are cited as effective strategies (Gay, 2018). The teacher's preparedness is always mentioned as an important condition; teachers need to be able to conduct difficult and even delicate intercultural dialogues. Evaluating affective outcomes (e.g., empathy) is difficult. Reflective journals, portfolios, and narrative evaluations are being increasingly suggested as methods for documenting the developmental learning process of students, as they are qualitative approaches (Deardorff, 2006).

3. Methodology

This study uses a qualitative structured integrative review method with illustrative case studies to explore the role of global competence education in building students' feelings of empathy and understanding of interculturalism.

This type of research is well suited for the integrative review, which can combine theory, empirical research, and policy in a variety of disciplines such as education, psychology, and international studies (Whittemore & Knafl, 2005). Empathy and intercultural learning are conceptual and affective phenomena, so a quantitative or experimental design will have the risk of simplifying complex educational processes.

3.1 Literature Selection and Data Sources

The literature review is based on peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, authoritative reports that have been published since 2000 primarily. Bibliographic databases like Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, and Google Scholar were used to find the relevant sources. The search terms used were global competence education, intercultural understanding, empathy in education, global citizenship education and intercultural pedagogy. Some other seminal publications before 2000 were added that offered initial theoretical frameworks, especially in terms of empathy and intercultural development (e.g., Bennett, 1993; Davis, 1994). Studies focused on educational interventions, curricula or pedagogical approaches that explicitly mentioned educational aspects related to global competence, empathy or intercultural learning were considered as inclusion criteria. Studies that focused on the socio-emotional/relational dimension but not economic/societal outcomes of global competence were excluded. This helped to ensure consistency with the main research question.

3.2 Analytical Framework

Analysis was conducted using an interpretive thematic synthesis approach which helped to identify common concepts and pedagogical mechanisms and contextual factors throughout the studies (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Themes were inductively identified and subsequently translated into existing international concepts of competences such as the OECD Model and intercultural competence theories (OECD, 2018; Deardorff, 2006). The concept, development and measurement of empathy in educational settings were particularly emphasized.

3.3 Case Study Selection and Purpose

The study also includes illustrative case studies from secondary and higher education institutions in various geographic regions based on literature review. The cases were chosen for three reasons: (1) they clearly fit the definition of global competence education; (2) they contained pedagogical approaches that were clearly aimed at developing empathy or intercultural understanding; and (3) evaluative evidence or reflective analysis was present. The case studies are not supposed to be "totalizing" or "statistically representative" but rather are intended: "To illustrate how theory becomes practice" (Yin, 2018, p. 20).

3.4 Methodological Limitations

This study is a qualitative integrative review, so it does not attempt to make causal inferences regarding the effects of global competence education on empathy. In addition, there is a possibility of publication bias as more beneficial results are published than harmful ones. This way of doing things, however, gives the study depth, conceptual clarity and analytical rigor suitable to the study of complex educational phenomena.

4. Case Studies

4.1 Global Competence Curriculum Integration in Secondary Education

Incorporation of global issues into SEL and other subject area curriculum is one example of global competence education in secondary schools. Those programmes that are linked to the OECD's Global Competence framework highlight learning from inquiry, in which students explore global issues, including migration, climate change and inequalities in society (OECD, 2018). The research suggests that when students approach these issues through multiple perspectives, they are more likely to have empathy for culturally diverse groups (Banks, 2015). In these curricula, the development of empathy is achieved through planned activities such as role-playing, debate and reflective writing. These teaching methods enable students to think about other people's experiences in their lives, not just about cultural differences. There is evidence that continuous interaction and not just single lessons are essential in order to obtain affective results (Boix Mansilla & Wilson, 2020).

4.2 Higher Education and Internationalised Learning Experiences

Internationalisation strategies like exchange programs, study-abroad, etc. have been employed in higher education institutions for the promotion of intercultural learning for a long time. But, recent studies indicate that simply being exposed to other cultures does not ensure that we will develop empathy or intercultural understanding (Deardorff, 2006). The results are more consistent and positive for programmes that integrate reflective pedagogy and guided intercultural dialogue. For instance, development of ethnocentric attitudes and perspective-taking have been found to be fostered through globally networked learning initiatives that involve students from various countries and enable them to engage in virtual collaboration with one another (Rizvi, 2009). These programs focus on co-constructing solutions and reflecting together to help students explore difference in sustained and meaningful ways. There are reports of this kind of work being intentionally designed and facilitated, leading to enhanced cognitive and affective empathy (Hammer, 2012).

4.3 Teacher Education and Professional Development Programs

Teacher education is an important lever to promote global competence education. Teacher education programs that include the integration of intercultural theory, reflective practice and experiential learning have been found to result in positive gains in teachers' empathetic attributes that in turn impact teaching practices (Gay, 2018). Teachers who have been trained in culturally responsive and global pedagogy are more likely to create inclusive classrooms that encourage students to be empathetic. Global competence professional development programs may include international field trips, community service and engagement with diverse cultures, and reflective seminars. Such experiences raise teachers' consciousness about their own cultural assumptions and their capacity to engage in sensitive intercultural discussions (UNESCO, 2017).

4.4 Community-Engaged and Experiential Learning Models

Educational models that engage in the community offer further understanding of how global competence education promotes empathy. Service-learning programs in which students work with culturally diverse and/or marginalised communities invite them to both address real world social problems and to consider power, privilege, and responsibility (Andreotti, 2014). These models take a more different approach to volunteerism, one that emphasizes reciprocity and critical reflection. Empirical research shows that community-engaged global learning leads students to a greater level of empathy and sophistication in understanding cultural complexity (Hoffman, 2000). But an ethically grounded and reflective facilitation of such programs is necessary to avoid stereotypes or a deficit view (Nussbaum, 2010).

4.5 Key Insights from Case Analysis

In all of these cases, there are a number of commonalities. First of all, development of empathy is more effective if global competence education has a cognitive dimension in combination with an emotional and reflective dimension. Secondly, guided facilitation and critical pedagogy are key to making intercultural encounters into learning experiences. Third, institutional commitment—including efforts to align curriculum and provide teachers with support—is an important factor in sustaining impact (Hunter et al., 2006).

5. Discussion

The results of the integrative review and illustrative case studies clearly indicate that, in well-designed and well-integrated global competence education, empathy and intercultural understanding are important factors. Global competence is not just a small or symbolic part of curricula, but it is a pedagogical approach that changes the way learners relate to knowledge, differences and social responsibility. This summary focuses on the underlying mechanisms, pedagogical conditions and structural challenges discussed in this discussion.

5.1 Global Competence as a Socio-Emotional Learning Framework

One of the major findings of this study is that the students' learning of global competence is most effectively understood as part of a socio-emotional learning framework as opposed to a strictly cognitive approach. Although early conceptions of global education emphasized cultural understanding and international consciousness,

contemporary global education systems make affective elements such as empathy, openness, and ethical responsibility a core part of the learning process (OECD, 2018; Boix Mansilla & Wilson, 2020). The case studies demonstrate that students' learning experiences, when they are emotionally and reflectively connected with world issues, will contribute to an increased intercultural understanding. Empathy serves as a linking mechanism in this process. It is not enough to be cognitively exposed to global issues before engaging in an empathetic way. Rather, empathy is fostered when students reflect on thoughts that have been influenced by various social, historical and cultural contexts (Davis, 1994; Hoffman, 2000). There is a consistent relationship between pedagogical strategies and positive affective outcomes in all cases, including narrative inquiry, dialogic learning, and reflective writing. The results of the research confirm the role of perspective taking and reflexivity as important developmental skills of intercultural competence (Bennett, 1993; Hammer, 2012).

5.2 Pedagogical Conditions for Fostering Empathy

The analysis has identified various pedagogical conditions that are crucial to achieve empathetic outcomes when implementing global competence education. First, it is important to have intentional instructional design. Programmes that clearly state empathy and intercultural understanding as learning outcomes are more likely to promote these than those that leave their development to chance due to contact with diversity (Deardorff, 2006). Second, Guided Reflection is a key element. Reflection serves as a bridge from experience to learning in various learning contexts. If there are no opportunities to engage with emotions, assumptions, and power dynamics, intercultural encounters can easily lead to perpetuation of stereotypes or shallow understandings of difference (Andreotti, 2014). The process of reflection enables learners to critically examine their own positionality and become more sophisticated in their own understanding of others. Thirdly, the competence and preparedness of the educators have a significant impact on the results. The teachers and facilitators act as mediators and become influential in the direction of intercultural learning in the classroom, with a positive or negative influence on the class atmosphere. Studies and research always suggest that culturally responsive and globally oriented teachers are better equipped to engage in empathetic relations and deal with sensitive discussions (Gay, 2018; Banks, 2015). This emphasizes the need to make professional development a critical component in global competence education.

5.3 Structural and Institutional Challenges

Although global competence education is promising, there are structural and institutional challenges to be noted globally. An issue that continues to be a problem is the overcrowding of the curriculum. The ability to embed global competence goals into already crowded curricula is challenging for educators, so they often end up with a piecemeal or superficial approach (Hunter et al., 2006). The impact of global learning on cultivating empathy is reduced when they see it as an extra to the curriculum rather than seen as an integrated element, across the disciplines. Challenge two is assessment. Empathy and intercultural understanding are multidimensional and developmental concepts and are difficult to standardise and measure. Qualitative tools such as reflective journals and portfolios can yield important information, but they are time consuming and could not have face validity in an accountability-oriented school system (Deardorff, 2006). This assessment deficit may lead to a lack of teacher motivation to focus on emotional outcomes. Access and equity are also key concerns. Study abroad or international exchange or other high impact global learning experiences are only offered to some students. While virtual and community versions offer viable alternatives, however, the lack of resources and institutional support remains a factor that affects the people who benefit from global competence education (Rizvi, 2009; UNESCO, 2017). Global competence programs need to be deliberately designed to avoid perpetuating inequalities if they are not addressed.

5.4 Implications for Policy and Practice

There are several implications of this study for policy and practice in education. World competence should be understood not only as a skill needed in the workplace but as a basic product of education that is related to social cohesion and democratic participation (Nussbaum, 2010) at the policy level. Policymakers should support curriculum frameworks that integrate global competence throughout the disciplines and grade levels, and not just in stand-alone courses. The continuous investment in teacher education and professional learning is of utmost

significance at the institutional level. Conceptual understanding and tools for educators to foster empathetic and intercultural learning. New ways of assessing development should also be encouraged in institutions as part of innovative assessment. Finally, community involvement and international collaborations can add to authenticity and relevance. These partnerships, when planned ethically and reflectively, provide learning opportunities outside of the classroom and can enrich learners' experience with knowledge of global and local issues (Andreotti, 2014).

6. Conclusion

This paper will explore how global competence education can help build empathy and intercultural awareness in students in a globalized world. An integrative review of interdisciplinary literature and illustrative case studies indicates that it has great potential to build socio-emotional competencies that are crucial for coping with cultural differences and interdependence in the global world. The results highlight the need to carefully plan pedagogical approaches to develop empathy, rather than it being a natural outcome of global exposure. The best way to foster global competence is to integrate cognitive learning of the issues with affective and reflective learning processes. Empathy and intercultural understanding are typically found to be best promoted through such strategies as narrative engagement, guided reflection, intercultural dialogue, and experiential learning. Concurrently, the research identifies issues that persist with curriculum integration, teachers' preparedness, assessment, and equity. The challenges indicate that global competence education is not just achieved by individual initiatives and symbolic commitments. Rather, a system-wide alignment of curriculum, pedagogy, assessment and institutional culture is needed. If not, promoting empathy and intercultural understanding can at best be superficial and disjointed.

The paper makes three contributions to the literature. First of all, it explains, in a conceptual way, how Global competence, Empathy and Intercultural understanding are connected and brings together the findings of education and psychology. Second, it highlights the situations for pedagogical support for affective learning outcomes. Third, it provides evidence-based recommendations for educators and policy makers for putting Global competence education into practice in meaningful and equitable ways. In the future, further studies should be conducted to explore the journey of empathy development over time in global competence areas. The role of assessment methods, which aim to combine rigour with sensitivity to developmental learning processes, also needs to be given greater attention. Last but not least, cross-cultural and cross-institutional studies would help to understand how global competence education could be transferred to various educational systems. Finally, global competence education is not just a reaction to globalisation, but a transformative education that equips students to navigate the complexities of a world with a moral compass, an ability to think like nations and an empathy for the world's people. Education systems can have a positive impact not only on the development of individuals, but also on the development of more inclusive and cohesive societies, by fostering empathy and intercultural understanding.

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