

# From Barriers to Outcomes: A Systematic Review of Global Citizenship Education in Higher Education Toward Sustainable Development Goals (2015–2025)

Husnul Fatihah<sup>1</sup>, Kokom Komalasari,<sup>2\*</sup> Rahmat Rahmat<sup>3</sup>, Dadang Sundawa<sup>4</sup>,  
Im Siti Masyitoh<sup>6</sup>, Asep Mahpudz<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1,2,3,4,5,6,7</sup>Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia

\*kokom@upi.edu

## ABSTRACT

*Global Citizenship Education (GCE) has become increasingly important in preparing young people with global awareness, intercultural empathy, ethical values, and critical thinking skills needed to address contemporary global challenges and contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This study aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the implementation of GCE in higher education through publications indexed in Scopus and Web of Science (WoS) from 2015 to 2025. The study employed a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method based on the PRISMA framework, including data searching, screening, eligibility assessment, and thematic synthesis. A total of 380 articles were identified, and 57 articles met the inclusion criteria for further analysis. The findings reveal that GCE research is still dominated by developed countries, while contributions from developing countries remain limited. Most studies adopted qualitative approaches and highlighted the positive impacts of GCE in promoting peace, tolerance, global solidarity, intercultural competence, and support for the SDGs. However, several challenges persist, including curriculum integration, cultural and ideological barriers, and limited educator capacity. The study recommends strengthening GCE curricula in higher education through approaches that integrate local and global perspectives to foster inclusive and sustainable global citizenship.*

**Keywords:** *Global Citizenship Education; Higher Education; Sustainable Development Goals; Global Competence; Systematic Literature Review*

## ABSTRAK

Pendidikan Kewarganegaraan Global (*Global Citizenship Education/ GCE*) menjadi semakin penting dalam mempersiapkan generasi muda agar memiliki kesadaran global, empati antarbudaya, nilai etis, dan keterampilan berpikir kritis yang dibutuhkan untuk menghadapi tantangan global kontemporer serta mendukung pencapaian *Sustainable Development Goals* (SDGs). Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk memberikan gambaran komprehensif mengenai implementasi GCE di pendidikan tinggi melalui publikasi yang terindeks Scopus dan Web of Science (WoS) pada periode 2015–2025. Penelitian menggunakan metode *Systematic Literature Review* (SLR) berbasis kerangka PRISMA yang meliputi tahap pencarian data, penyaringan, penilaian kelayakan, dan sintesis tematik. Sebanyak 380 artikel berhasil diidentifikasi dan 57 artikel memenuhi kriteria inklusi untuk dianalisis lebih lanjut. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kajian GCE masih didominasi oleh negara-negara maju, sementara kontribusi negara berkembang masih terbatas. Sebagian besar penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dan menyoroti dampak positif GCE dalam memperkuat perdamaian, toleransi, solidaritas global, kompetensi antarbudaya, serta dukungan terhadap pencapaian SDGs. Namun, implementasi GCE masih menghadapi berbagai tantangan, seperti integrasi kurikulum, hambatan budaya dan ideologi, serta keterbatasan kapasitas pendidik. Penelitian ini merekomendasikan penguatan kurikulum GCE di pendidikan tinggi melalui pendekatan yang mengintegrasikan perspektif lokal dan global guna membentuk warga negara global yang inklusif dan berkelanjutan.

**Kata kunci:** Pendidikan Kewarganegaraan Global; Pendidikan Tinggi; Sustainable Development Goals; Kompetensi Global; Systematic Literature Review

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## INTRODUCTION

Global Citizenship Education (GCE) has gained increasing attention as an educational response to contemporary global challenges, including climate change, migration, social inequality, political polarization, and rapid technological transformation. In an increasingly interconnected world, individuals are required not only to possess disciplinary knowledge and professional competencies but also to develop global awareness, intercultural understanding, ethical responsibility, and critical thinking skills. GCE aims to equip learners with the knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes necessary to participate actively in local and global communities while contributing to a more inclusive, peaceful, and sustainable society (Akçay et al., 2024; Helm et al., 2024; Rodríguez, 2018).

The growing importance of GCE is closely associated with the changing nature of citizenship in the twenty-first century. Traditional citizenship education primarily focused on national identity, civic obligations, and participation within the boundaries of nation-states (Jansma et al., 2023; McLeod, 2018). However, globalization, migration, and cultural diversity have transformed the concept of citizenship into a broader framework that emphasizes global interconnectedness, intercultural competence, and shared responsibility for addressing transnational issues. Consequently, citizenship is no longer understood solely as a legal or political status but also as a cultural, social, and ethical practice that extends beyond national borders.

A major milestone in this transformation was the emergence of Global Citizenship Education promoted by UNESCO. GCE emphasizes the role of education in developing globally responsible citizens who are capable of understanding global issues, respecting cultural diversity, and contributing to sustainable development (UNESCO, 2017). As a result, educational institutions around the world have increasingly integrated global perspectives into curricula, learning activities, and institutional policies. The integration of GCE is also considered essential for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 4.7, which highlights the importance of education for sustainable development, global citizenship, peace, and cultural diversity.

Alongside the development of GCE, research on citizenship and citizenship education has undergone significant transformation over the past two decades. Earlier studies largely emphasized national citizenship and social integration, whereas more recent scholarship has focused on global citizenship, cultural citizenship, and transnational participation. Cultural citizenship emerged as an important perspective for understanding how individuals and communities negotiate identity, belonging, and participation within increasingly multicultural societies (Akar, 2016; Ellis & Bhatia, 2019; Yúdice, 2019). Research has shown that cultural practices, social identities, and community engagement play a significant role in shaping contemporary forms of citizenship.

Recent studies also indicate a shift from traditional approaches toward holistic and interdisciplinary models of citizenship education. Citizenship is increasingly conceptualized as encompassing cognitive, socio-emotional, behavioral, intercultural, and digital dimensions (Beaman, 2023; Peart et al., 2020).

Accordingly, GCE has expanded beyond civic knowledge to include the development of empathy, intercultural competence, cultural intelligence, leadership, and social participation (Kadam et al., 2021; Mathews, 2016). These competencies are considered essential for preparing learners to engage effectively in culturally diverse and globally connected environments.

The rapid advancement of digital technology has further transformed the implementation of GCE. Online learning, virtual exchange programs, and digital civic participation have become important mechanisms for facilitating intercultural interaction and global engagement (de Wit, 2018; Helm et al., 2024; Putman & Byker, 2020). Particularly after the COVID-19 pandemic, digital learning environments have expanded opportunities for students to develop global competencies through cross-border collaboration and virtual communication. These developments highlight the growing relevance of digital citizenship and social-civic skills within GCE frameworks.

Current research on GCE is also characterized by increasing interdisciplinarity. Scholars have integrated perspectives from sociology, cultural psychology, migration studies, sustainability studies, and critical pedagogy to better understand the complexities of citizenship in contemporary societies. Studies have combined cultural psychology and migration theory to examine migrant experiences and identity formation (Ellis & Bhatia, 2019), while others have utilized social identity theory to explore active citizenship and civic participation (Mannarini & Salvatore, 2020). Research on sustainability and energy citizenship further demonstrates how environmental issues intersect with citizenship education and civic responsibility (Jansma et al., 2023).

Despite the growing body of literature, several important challenges and gaps remain. Existing studies have generally emphasized the conceptual foundations of GCE, intercultural competence, and global engagement while providing limited discussion on implementation mechanisms and practical challenges in higher education settings (Gaitán-Aguilar et al., 2024). Furthermore, some scholars have criticized GCE programs for focusing heavily on social reflection and international exposure without sufficiently examining long-term impacts, contextual relevance, and cultural diversity (Aktas et al., 2017).

Another limitation concerns the geographical and cultural concentration of existing research. Much of the literature is dominated by English-language publications and Western perspectives, particularly from North America and Europe (Hammond & Keating, 2017; Horey et al., 2018). Consequently, the experiences and perspectives of developing countries remain underrepresented. This imbalance restricts understanding of how GCE is interpreted, implemented, and adapted across different educational, political, and cultural contexts.

Furthermore, previous review studies have identified several major approaches to GCE in higher education, including intercultural competence, social identification with the global community, and community engagement (Gaitán-Aguilar et al., 2024). However, these studies have not comprehensively synthesized the trends, implementation barriers, educational mechanisms, and outcomes of GCE across diverse contexts. As a result, there remains a need for a systematic and

up-to-date review that maps the development of GCE research and identifies directions for future scholarship.

Addressing these gaps is particularly important given the increasing demand for higher education institutions to prepare students for global citizenship. Universities play a strategic role in cultivating globally competent graduates who can contribute to peacebuilding, social justice, intercultural understanding, and sustainable development. Understanding how GCE is implemented, what challenges it faces, and what outcomes it generates can provide valuable insights for policymakers, educators, and researchers seeking to strengthen global citizenship education.

Therefore, this study presents a systematic literature review of Global Citizenship Education research in higher education published between 2015 and 2025 and indexed in the Scopus and Web of Science (WoS) databases. By synthesizing findings from existing studies, this review aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of research trends, implementation challenges, educational mechanisms, and outcomes of GCE. Specifically, this study addresses the following research questions: (1) What are the trends in Global Citizenship Education research? (2) What factors hinder the effective implementation of GCE in higher education? (3) What mechanisms are implemented in GCE programs? (4) What outcomes are generated by Global Citizenship Education in higher education? and (5) What recommendations can be proposed for future research and practice?

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

This study employed a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) based on the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) framework (Moher, 2009). The PRISMA protocol was adopted to ensure transparency, rigor, and reproducibility throughout the review process. The review followed four systematic stages: identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and inclusion (Kitchenham, 2004). In addition, thematic analysis was applied to synthesize and interpret findings from the selected studies.

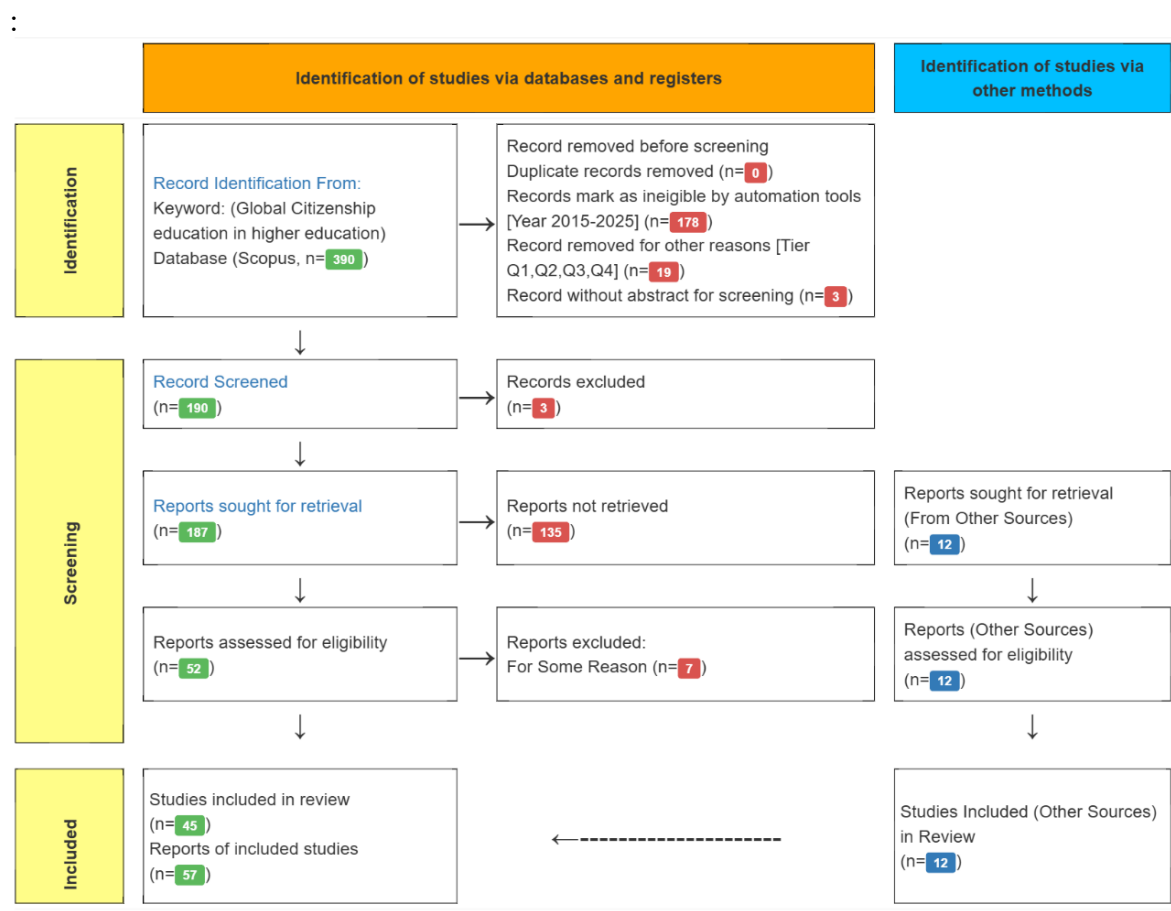
The SLR approach was selected because it enables researchers to systematically identify, evaluate, and synthesize evidence from existing studies to answer specific research questions (Page et al., 2021). Through this approach, the present study provides a comprehensive overview of Global Citizenship Education (GCE) research in higher education while identifying major trends, implementation challenges, educational mechanisms, outcomes, and future research directions.

The timeframe of 2015–2025 was deliberately selected for three reasons. First, 2015 marked the adoption of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which explicitly recognized education as a key instrument for promoting global citizenship and sustainable development (UNESCO, 2015). This milestone significantly accelerated scholarly attention toward GCE worldwide. Second, the selected period captures the evolution of GCE scholarship from predominantly conceptual and theoretical discussions toward more empirical and practice-oriented studies within higher education. Third, extending the review to 2025 allows the inclusion of post-pandemic research that introduced new forms of GCE

implementation, such as virtual exchange, online international learning, and digital citizenship education, which have become increasingly relevant in contemporary higher education settings.

**Data Collection**

Data collection was conducted on March 5, 2025, following PRISMA procedures. The review process involved searching, screening, eligibility assessment, and inclusion of relevant articles retrieved from Scopus and Web of Science (WoS). The search process was supported by the Watase Uake System (Wahyudi, 2024), which facilitated systematic article retrieval and management. The primary search keywords were “Global Citizenship Education” and “Global Citizenship Education in Higher Education.” These keywords were selected to ensure alignment with the objectives of the study and to capture publications specifically addressing GCE within higher education contexts. Scopus served as the primary database because of its extensive coverage of peer-reviewed international journals and rigorous indexing standards. The initial search yielded 390 articles from Scopus. Prior to screening, 3 articles were excluded due to missing abstracts, 19 articles were removed because they did not meet journal quality criteria (Q1-Q4 indexed journals), and 178 articles were excluded through automated filtering procedures. This process resulted in 190 articles eligible for further screening. Additionally, a supplementary search in the Web of Science database identified 12 relevant articles that met the inclusion criteria.



**Figure 1. PRISMA 2025 flow diagram for the systematic literature review (Moher et al., 2009).**

### Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

To minimize selection bias and ensure consistency throughout the review process, inclusion and exclusion criteria were established prior to data collection. Only peer-reviewed journal articles published in English between 2015 and 2025 were considered. English-language publications were selected because they represent the dominant medium of international academic communication in the field of Global Citizenship Education. Articles were restricted to those indexed in Scopus (Q1-Q4) and Web of Science to ensure scientific quality and credibility. Studies focusing on primary education, secondary education, vocational education, or non-formal educational settings were excluded because the present review specifically examines GCE implementation in higher education contexts. Furthermore, articles without accessible full texts or complete abstracts were excluded to ensure comprehensive quality assessment and thematic analysis.

**Table 1. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria**

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Inclusion</b>	<b>Exclusion</b>
Language	English	Non-English publications
Document type	Research articles, review articles	Conference papers, book chapters, editorials, letters
Publication period	2015–2025	Before 2015 or after 2025
Database	Scopus (Q1–Q4) and Web of Science	Sources outside Scopus and WoS
Topic relevance	Articles explicitly addressing GCE in higher education settings	Articles discussing GCE in K-12, non-formal, or vocational contexts
Accessibility	Full-text accessible	Abstract-only or inaccessible full-text articles
Abstract availability	Articles with complete abstract	Articles with missing or incomplete abstracts

### Data Analysis

Following the application of the inclusion and exclusion criteria, the screening process was conducted systematically. Of the 190 articles obtained from Scopus, 135 articles were excluded due to inaccessible full texts, while 7 articles were removed because they did not align with the research focus. Together with the 12 eligible articles identified through Web of Science, a final corpus of 57 articles was selected for analysis.

To enhance the reliability of the selection process, the eligibility of the 57 articles was independently reviewed by two peer reviewers. The reviewers reached full agreement regarding the eligibility of all selected studies, confirming their compliance with the established inclusion criteria. The resulting corpus constituted the final dataset for thematic analysis. Subsequently, thematic analysis was conducted to identify recurring themes, patterns, and relationships within the selected literature. The analysis was guided by the research questions and supported by the Watase Uake System (Wahyudi, 2024) to improve consistency and

accuracy during data management and coding. The extracted themes were categorized according to research trends, implementation challenges, educational mechanisms, outcomes, and future research recommendations.

**Table 2. Research Questions and Information Extracted**

<b>Research Question</b>	<b>Information to be extracted</b>
RQ1 What are the trends in global citizenship education research?	Research topic, Sitescore journal, Country
RQ2 What are the challenges of implementing GCE in higher education?	Challenges of implementing GCE from teacher understanding, educational facilities, cultural and ideological resistance, complexity and sensitivity of global issue
RQ3 What mechanisms are implemented in the GCE program?	Cultural citizenship and identity, Civic education and civic engagement, Organizational behavior and Dimensions of citizenship, Critical approach and sustainability, Multicultural education and marginalization, Integrated local and dlobal Dimensions
RQ4 how global citizenship education results in higher education?	Development of global competencies, Strengthening global awareness and international solidarity, Promotion of peace, tolerance, and diversity, Empowerment for social action and global justice, Contribution to the achievement of the sustainable development goals (SDGs)
RQ5 What are the recommendations for future research?	Recommendations for future research

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### RQ1. What Are the Trends in Global Citizenship Education Research?

A keyword analysis of the literature on Global Citizenship Education (GCE) in higher education reveals several dominant themes that characterize contemporary research trends. The most prominent themes are Cultural Citizenship (77 articles), Citizenship (51 articles), and Global Citizenship (21 articles), indicating sustained scholarly interest in cultural identity, civic participation, and global awareness within educational contexts. These themes are closely interconnected, as both cultural citizenship and global citizenship emphasize intercultural



studies such as Indarti and Peng (2024) and Eluère et al. (2025) have not yet accumulated citations, which is expected given their recent publication dates.

**Table 3 Sitescore journal**

<b>Ran k</b>	<b>Journal</b>	<b>Tier</b>	<b>First Author</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Cites</b>
1	Theory & Research in Social Education	Q1	Rodríguez	2018	83
2	Journal of Studies in International Education	Q1	Byker & Putman	2019	48
3	Sustainability	Q1	Al Halbusi et al.	2020	47
4	Int'l Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management	Q1	Kim et al.	2018	35
5	Journal of Studies in International Education	Q1	Cotton et al.	2019	25
6	Educational Technology Research and Development	Q1	Peart et al.	2020	22
7	Journal for Multicultural Education	Q1	Aydin & Cinkaya	2018	13
8	International Review for the Sociology of Sport	Q2	Ramon & Rojas-Torrijos	2021	20
9	Revista Complutense de Educación	Q2	Blanco-Cano & García-Martín	2021	17
10	Journal of Ambient Intelligence & Humanized Computing	Q3	Makri et al.	2020	13

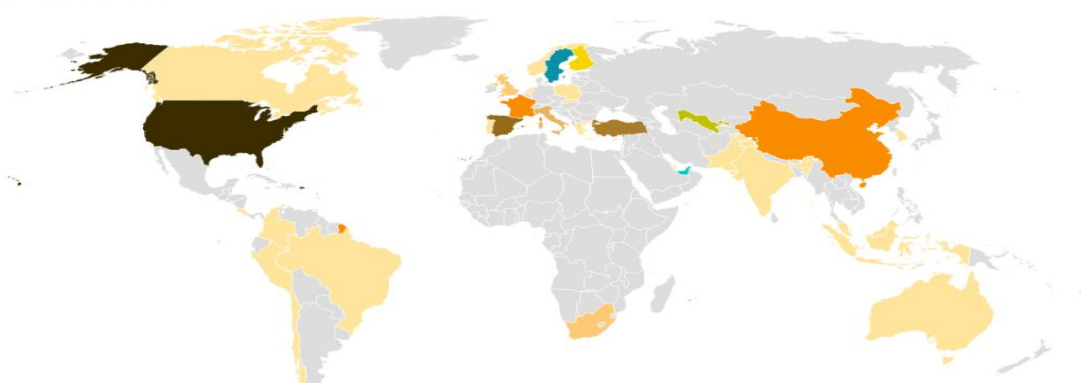
Table 3 presents the top ten journals by citation count from the 57 reviewed articles. A clear pattern emerges: the majority of high-impact GCE publications (60.7%, n=34) appear in Q1 journals, confirming that global citizenship education has secured legitimacy as a high-priority topic in premier academic outlets. Notably, the top three most-cited studies – Rodríguez (2018, 83 citations), Byker & Putman (2019, 48 citations), and Al Halbusi et al. (2020, 47 citations) – all originate from developed countries, reinforcing a structural imbalance in academic visibility. The near-absence of citations for recent 2024–2025 publications (e.g., Indarti & Peng, 2024; Eluère et al., 2025) is expected given their recency and does not reflect their scholarly quality. This citation landscape signals that while GCE is a growing field, the discourse continues to be shaped disproportionately by Western scholarship, a gap that future research must actively address.

Figure 3 maps this geographical distribution across the 57 reviewed articles, and the pattern it reveals is not merely a bibliometric observation it reflects a deeper epistemological issue: GCE frameworks, values, and pedagogical models are predominantly constructed from and validated within developed-country contexts. Research in developed countries demonstrates higher citations: United States (Rodríguez, 2018) and the United Kingdom (Cotton et al., 2019) reached 83 and 25 citations respectively, indicating substantial academic influence. Studies in the United Kingdom (Viola, 2021) and United States (Horey et al., 2018) frequently

discuss GCE implementation in higher education. Conversely, research in Pakistan (Siddiqui et al., 2024) and Indonesia (Indarti & Peng, 2024) has lower or zero citations, potentially reflecting limitations in global academic visibility. This creates a risk of what may be termed *epistemic asymmetry* a condition in which global citizenship principles are defined by the Global North and exported to the Global South without adequate contextual adaptation, effectively marginalizing locally grounded knowledge from the dominant GCE conversation.

This disparity may stem from strong academic networks in developed countries and their focus on globally relevant issues. Developing country research often addresses local contexts, such as hijab fashion in Indonesia (Indarti & Peng, 2024) or English language education in Pakistan (Siddiqui et al., 2024), which may be perceived as less universally appealing by international editorial gatekeepers. Yet this perception itself reflects a bias: local contexts are not peripheral to GCE – they are precisely where global citizenship values are tested, negotiated, and either embraced or resisted.

The modest but emerging contributions from countries such as Indonesia, Pakistan, and Kazakhstan (Yussupova et al., 2023) are therefore noteworthy. They reveal active efforts to localize GCE within unique cultural, religious, and political environments that Western frameworks rarely anticipate. Studies in India (Saxena & Sharma, 2022) similarly demonstrate how cultural contexts fundamentally shape the understanding and practice of global citizenship, offering theoretical correctives to universalist GCE models. Increasing the visibility of such research is not merely an equity concern but a scientific imperative: a field that excludes the majority of the world's students from its knowledge-production process cannot credibly claim global relevance. Bridging this gap requires deliberate editorial and funding strategies that elevate non-Western GCE scholarship to the same visibility as their Western counterparts. Overall, GCE remains relevant in addressing global challenges such as migration, climate change, and social inequality but only if its knowledge base becomes as genuinely global as its aspirations.



**Figure 3. GCE research countries**

## **RQ2 What are the challenges of implementing GCE in higher education?**

Analysis of previous research using the keyword Global Citizenship Education (GCE) in higher education with a focus on the question of how the challenges of implementing GCE in higher education using indicators of challenges from the curriculum, including teachers' understanding of GCE, secondly the challenges of cultural and ideological resistance, and thirdly the challenges of complexity and sensitivity of global issues.

The results indicate that the dominant challenge in implementing GCE is its integration into the curriculum. Forty-five studies discuss how the implementation of GCE is still constrained by its integration into the curriculum at both the university and school levels. The integration of GCE into the curriculum is also hindered by teachers' understanding of how to integrate GCE into the curriculum (Aydin et al., 2019; Günel & Pehlivan, 2016; Rapoport & Demir, 2022). Forty studies explain that the integration of GCE into the curriculum is also caused by teachers' understanding of GCE, which still needs attention. For example, research (Byker & Putman, 2019; Cotton et al., 2019) emphasizes the importance of overcoming curriculum barriers in the context of higher education, while other studies highlight the role of teachers' understanding in the implementation of GCE (Aydin et al., 2019; Aydin & Cinkaya, 2018). The distribution of citations shows that research focusing on curriculum challenges tends to have higher citations, such as the study by Byker and Putman (2018) with 48 citations and Cotton et al. (2018) with 25 citations. This indicates that curriculum issues in GCE receive significant attention from the academic community.

Other studies also indicate that GCE often faces implementation challenges due to Cultural and Ideological Resistance (Makri et al., 2020; Saxena & Sharma, 2022). This emphasizes that GCE needs to be adapted to local and global contexts and requires a holistic approach, especially in multicultural countries (Yussupova et al., 2023). The third challenge mentioned is the Complexity and Sensitivity of Global Issues, which requires high cultural intelligence (CQ) to address its complexity (L. Yang, 2024). Effective implementation of GCE requires students to have high levels of motivational and metacognitive CQ. Without this, students will find it difficult to understand other cultural contexts in depth, fail to critically reflect on complex global issues and tend to simplify or misinterpret global realities, which could exacerbate intercultural sensitivity.

**Table 4 The challenges of implementing GCE**

<b>Challenge Category</b>	<b>No. of Studies</b>	<b>Key Authors</b>
Curriculum Integration	24	Hammond & Keating, 2017; Cotton et al., 2019; Byker & Putman, 2019; Aktas et al., 2017;

		Coelho et al., 2022; Helm et al., 2024; among others
Cultural and Ideological Resistance	14	Makri et al., 2020; Saxena & Sharma, 2022; Beaman, 2023; Ellis & Bhatia, 2019; Zarycki et al., 2022; among others
Complexity and Sensitivity of Global Issues	1	Yang, 2024

Table 4 reveals a striking imbalance in how GCE challenges are distributed across the literature. Curriculum integration, identified in 24 studies, is by far the most documented barrier, reflecting ongoing structural difficulties in translating global citizenship values into formal academic content. The high citation counts of studies in this category particularly Putman & Byker (2020) with 48 citations and Cotton et al. (2019) with 25 citations confirm that this challenge resonates widely across the international academic community. Cultural and ideological resistance, documented in 14 studies, represents a subtler but equally critical barrier: GCE's universal aspirations often collide with locally entrenched values, political identities, and religious worldviews. The fact that the complexity and sensitivity of global issues is cited by only one study (Yang & Hong, 2024) does not mean this challenge is less significant rather, it suggests an understudied dimension that future research should prioritize, particularly in contexts where students face climate anxiety, geopolitical conflict, or forced migration.

### RQ3 What Mechanisms are Implemented in the GCE Program?

GCE implementation varies across social, cultural, and political contexts, incorporating several key mechanisms: cultural citizenship and identity, intercultural competence and cultural intelligence, civic education and engagement, organizational behavior, critical approaches to sustainability, multicultural education, and integrated local-global dimensions. Cultural Citizenship and Identity: Studies emphasize cultural citizenship as foundational to GCE (Leek, 2016; Mathews, 2016). Research examines cultural citizenship through racial boundaries in France, (Beaman, 2023), grassroots activism in Chile (Novoa, 2022), and diaspora contexts in India (Saxena & Sharma, 2022), highlighting that citizenship education encompasses cultural values and personal identities beyond formal rights.

Intercultural Competence and Cultural Intelligence: In an increasingly interconnected world, intercultural skills are increasingly important (Krutka & Carano, 2016) (Krutka & Carano, 2016). Studies in France (Eluère et al., 2025), Spain (Levine & León-Hermosilla, 2023), China (Y. Yang et al., 2024), and the United Arab Emirates (Kadam et al., 2021) emphasize intercultural competence and cultural intelligence in preparing students for multicultural environments. Civic Education and Engagement: Researchers highlight civic education's importance in developing active global citizens. Studies in the United States discuss civic education and non-cognitive skills (Hillygus & Holbein, 2023), while others emphasize cross-national civic education through virtual exchanges and transnational identities (Hahn, 2020;

Helm et al., 2024), expanding civic education from legal theory to practical engagement.

**Organizational Behavior:** Research links GCE to organizational contexts, including organizational citizenship behavior in Indonesia (Indarti & Peng, 2024) and South Korea (Bosio, 2023; Kim et al., 2018), and cultural dimensions in organizational contexts across countries (Baeza et al., 2023), demonstrating global citizenship values' workplace relevance. **Digital Integration:** Technology enhances GCE implementation through digital and social-citizenship skills in Spain (Guerrero Elecalde et al., 2024) and European countries (Peart et al., 2020), and international online platforms in Slovenia (Aškerc Zadavec, 2023), enabling wider access to global educational materials.

**Critical Awareness and Sustainability:** Studies link GCE to critical awareness and sustainable development, emphasizing SDGs in Cyprus (Akçay et al., 2024) and critical pedagogy in Japan (Bosio, 2023), encouraging students to address global issues and planetary sustainability. **Inclusivity and Social Justice:** Research promotes inclusivity by examining gender and disability representation in the United Kingdom (Ramon & Rojas-Torrijos, 2022) and Asian American history in the United States (Rodríguez, 2018), addressing social inequalities and creating inclusive spaces. **Local-Global Integration:** GCE bridges local contexts with global values, combining urban heritage management with cultural citizenship in Peru (Alexandrino Ocaña, 2023) and linking Sámi indigenous education with GCE in Nordic countries (Kortekangas, 2017), emphasizing local contexts in shaping global citizenship values.

**Table 5 The Mechanism of implementing GCE**

<b>Mechanism</b>	<b>No. of Studies</b>	<b>Key Authors</b>
Integrated Local and Global Dimensions	20	Aktas et al., 2017; Cotton et al., 2019; Horey et al., 2018; Helm et al., 2024; among others
Cultural Citizenship and Identity	11	Rodríguez, 2018; Beaman, 2023; Novoa, 2022; Saxena & Sharma, 2022; Yang et al., 2024
Civic Education and Civic Engagement	9	Hahn, 2020; Hillygus & Holbein, 2023; Helm et al., 2024; Makri et al., 2020
Intercultural Competence and Cultural Intelligence	9	Byker & Putman, 2019; Coelho et al., 2022; Kadam et al., 2021; Eluère et al., 2025
Organizational Behavior and Citizenship Dimensions	7	Al Halbusi et al., 2020; Baeza et al., 2023; Kim et al., 2018; Kadam et al., 2021

Critical Approach and Sustainability	4	Akçay et al., 2024; Bosio, 2023; Hammond & Keating, 2017
Multicultural Education and Marginalization	4	Aydin & Cinkaya, 2018; Ramon & Rojas-Torrijos, 2022; Byker & Marquardt, 2016

Table 5 demonstrates that GCE implementation is not monolithic but unfolds through a diverse constellation of mechanisms. The dominance of 'Integrated Local and Global Dimensions' (20 studies) signals a maturing understanding in the field: effective GCE cannot be delivered through universal templates alone, but must be rooted in local cultural realities. The near-equal frequency of 'Cultural Citizenship and Identity' (11 studies) and 'Civic Education and Engagement' (9 studies) reflects the dual function of GCE – simultaneously cultivating personal identity formation and fostering active public participation. Notably, 'Critical Approach and Sustainability' appears in only 4 studies, despite being directly aligned with the SDG framework. This underrepresentation is concerning given that sustainability literacy is increasingly considered a core competency for global citizenship. Institutions wishing to strengthen their GCE programs should consider whether their current approaches adequately embed critical and sustainability dimensions alongside the more commonly adopted intercultural competence frameworks.

#### **RQ4 What are the results of the Global Citizenship Education program?**

The subsequent analysis answers the research question of how the GCE program performed based on previous studies. The indicators of the GCE program's implementation in our study are Development of Global Competencies, Strengthening Global Awareness and International Solidarity, Promotion of Peace, Tolerance, and Diversity, Empowerment for Social Action and Global Justice, and Contribution to the Achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The analysis results show that the most dominant indicator is Development of Global Competencies, which appears in 30 studies, followed by Promotion of Peace, Tolerance, and Diversity (13 studies), Strengthening Global Awareness and International Solidarity (12 studies), and Empowerment for Social Action (7 studies). The distribution of citations in the "Development of Global Competencies" category is quite varied, with some studies such as (Byker & Putman, 2019) having 48 citations, (Cotton et al., 2019) with 25 citations, and (M. T. Peart et al., 2020) with 22 citations. This indicates that the topic of global competency development remains a focus in GCE research, particularly in the context of higher education and curriculum (Byker & Putman, 2019; Cotton et al., 2019).

The category "Promotion of Peace, Tolerance, and Diversity" also received significant attention, particularly in the context of multiculturalism and cross-cultural organizations, such as the study (Kadam et al., 2021) with 8 citations and (Al Halbusi et al., 2020) with 47 citations. This category is often

associated with efforts to promote values of peace and tolerance in diverse societies, which are relevant to current global challenges (Kadam et al., 2021). Meanwhile, the indicator “Strengthening Global Awareness and International Solidarity” appears more frequently in the context of migration and citizenship education, such as the study (Ellis & Bhatia, 2019) with 6 citations and (Zarycki et al., 2022) with 6 citations. This category emphasizes the importance of global awareness in addressing international issues (Ellis & Bhatia, 2019).

The implications of this trend indicate that GCE research remains focused on developing global competencies and citizenship values in various contexts, including higher education, multiculturalism, and migration. However, there is still room to explore aspects such as social empowerment and community involvement in global citizenship education, which have received relatively less attention. The challenge ahead is how to integrate GCE values into more inclusive and relevant curricula that align with both local and global contexts, while addressing cultural and ideological resistance that often act as barriers (Ellis & Bhatia, 2019; Kadam et al., 2021). Thus, this theme remains relevant for further development to address the increasingly complex global challenges.

**Table 6 The result of implementing GCE**

<b>GCE Outcome</b>	<b>No. of Studies</b>	<b>Key Authors</b>
Development of Global Competencies	24	Byker & Putman, 2019; Cotton et al., 2019; Coelho et al., 2022; Helm et al., 2024; Gaitán-Aguilar et al., 2024
Strengthening Global Awareness and International Solidarity	12	Rodríguez, 2018; Ellis & Bhatia, 2019; Zarycki et al., 2022; Beaman, 2023
Promotion of Peace, Tolerance, and Diversity	10	Kim et al., 2018; Kadam et al., 2021; Ramon & Rojas-Torrijos, 2022; Eluère et al., 2025
Empowerment for Social Action and Global Justice	9	Makri et al., 2020; Jansma et al., 2023; Hillygus & Holbein, 2023; Alexandrino Ocaña, 2023
Contribution to Achievement of SDGs	1	Akçay et al., 2024

Table 6 presents a revealing hierarchy of GCE outcomes in the reviewed literature. The overwhelming dominance of 'Development of Global Competencies' (24 studies) reflects the field's strong orientation toward individual capacity-building equipping students with intercultural, cognitive, and communicative skills for a globalized world. However, the steep decline toward 'Contribution to the Achievement of SDGs' (only 1 study) exposes a critical disconnect: GCE is widely promoted as a vehicle for sustainable development, yet empirical evidence linking GCE programs to measurable SDG outcomes remains almost entirely absent. This gap is not trivial. It suggests that GCE research has prioritized process outcomes (what students learn and feel) over structural outcomes (what changes in

the world as a result). For GCE to fulfill its transformative promise particularly in the context of Agenda 2030 future research must develop outcome frameworks that connect classroom learning to real-world social and environmental change, with particular attention to equity, inclusion, and the voices of marginalized communities.

### **RQ5 What are the recommendations for future research?**

Our previous analysis of trends in global citizenship education research, factors hindering the effective implementation of Global Citizenship Education in higher education, mechanisms applied in Global Citizenship Education programs, and how global citizenship education impacts higher education, among other things, revealed that cultural citizenship and intercultural competence are key themes that are widely explored, especially in the context of higher education and multicultural societies. Geographically, research in developed countries such as the United States and the United Kingdom has higher citations, while research in developing countries such as Indonesia and Pakistan is still underrepresented. A common pattern observed is a focus on integrating GCE into the education curriculum, increasing students' global awareness, and the role of technology in facilitating cross-cultural learning.

Therefore, we recommend that future research should include a more in-depth exploration of the implementation of GCE in developing countries, including aspects of social empowerment and community involvement in global citizenship education, which have received relatively little attention. the integration of digital technology in global learning, how to integrate GCE values into a more inclusive and relevant education curriculum in both local and global contexts (Kortekangas, 2017), addressing cultural and ideological resistance that often serves as a barrier, and longitudinal research to evaluate the impact of GCE on the formation of global identity and social participation. Thus, research in the field of GCE can continue to develop and make significant contributions in addressing the challenges of globalization and cultural diversity.

## **DISCUSSIONS**

The findings of this review demonstrate that Global Citizenship Education (GCE) has evolved into a dynamic and increasingly important field of research within higher education. The dominance of themes such as cultural citizenship, citizenship, and global citizenship indicates a growing recognition that citizenship education can no longer be confined to national boundaries. Instead, contemporary citizenship increasingly encompasses intercultural understanding, global awareness, social responsibility, and participation in addressing transnational challenges. This trend reflects broader global transformations driven by migration, globalization, digitalization, and increasing cultural diversity. The prominence of cultural citizenship within the reviewed studies further suggests that citizenship is not merely a legal or political status but also a process of identity formation, cultural participation, and belonging within diverse societies.

The review also reveals that higher education institutions occupy a strategic position in promoting GCE. The frequent appearance of themes such as higher education, multiculturalism, civic engagement, and intercultural competence indicates that universities are increasingly viewed as spaces for cultivating globally competent citizens. These findings support previous arguments that universities play a critical role in preparing students to navigate multicultural environments, engage with global issues, and contribute to sustainable development. Moreover, the increasing integration of digital technologies into GCE initiatives reflects changing educational practices in response to globalization and post-pandemic educational realities. Virtual exchanges, online international learning, and digital civic participation have expanded opportunities for intercultural engagement beyond traditional physical mobility programs.

Despite the increasing prominence of GCE, the findings indicate that substantial implementation challenges remain. Curriculum integration emerged as the most frequently reported obstacle across the reviewed studies. Many institutions continue to struggle with translating broad global citizenship ideals into specific learning outcomes, pedagogical strategies, and assessment frameworks. This challenge is further compounded by limitations in teachers' and lecturers' understanding of GCE concepts and implementation strategies. The findings suggest that successful GCE implementation requires not only curriculum reform but also systematic professional development opportunities that strengthen educators' conceptual and pedagogical capacities.

Another significant challenge concerns cultural and ideological resistance. While GCE promotes universal values such as tolerance, diversity, inclusion, and social justice, these values may be interpreted differently across cultural, political, and religious contexts. Several studies highlighted tensions between global citizenship discourses and locally embedded identities, traditions, and belief systems. Rather than viewing such tensions as barriers alone, these findings suggest the importance of contextualizing GCE within local realities. Effective GCE should therefore be understood as a dialogical process that negotiates relationships between local identities and global responsibilities rather than privileging one over the other.

The review further demonstrates that GCE is implemented through diverse mechanisms that reflect varying educational philosophies and contextual needs. The most dominant mechanism identified was the integration of local and global dimensions, suggesting that educators increasingly recognize the importance of connecting global issues with learners' everyday experiences. Cultural citizenship and identity-based approaches also appeared frequently, emphasizing the importance of helping students understand themselves as members of both local communities and a broader global society. Similarly, approaches emphasizing civic engagement, intercultural competence, and cultural intelligence highlight the growing recognition that global citizenship requires not only knowledge acquisition but also practical skills, attitudes, and dispositions.

Technology has also emerged as an important mechanism supporting GCE implementation. Digital platforms, online collaboration, and virtual exchange

initiatives enable students to interact with diverse perspectives and engage with global issues regardless of geographical constraints. This finding is particularly relevant in contemporary higher education contexts where digital connectivity increasingly shapes learning experiences. However, the growing reliance on digital technologies also raises questions regarding digital inequalities, accessibility, and the need for critical digital literacy as an integral component of global citizenship.

The outcomes of GCE identified in this review suggest that the development of global competencies remains the primary focus of existing research. Many studies reported improvements in intercultural competence, global awareness, critical thinking, communication skills, and understanding of complex global issues. These competencies are widely regarded as essential for navigating contemporary social, cultural, and professional environments. Beyond competency development, GCE was also associated with the promotion of peace, tolerance, diversity, and international solidarity. Such outcomes are particularly significant in a world increasingly characterized by political polarization, social fragmentation, and intercultural tensions.

Nevertheless, an important finding of this review is the limited attention given to structural and societal outcomes. Although GCE is frequently associated with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), only a small number of studies explicitly examined its contribution to sustainable development outcomes. This suggests that existing scholarship remains largely focused on individual-level changes rather than broader social transformation. As a result, empirical evidence demonstrating how GCE contributes to environmental sustainability, social justice, community empowerment, or policy change remains relatively scarce. This gap highlights the need for future research to move beyond measuring attitudes and competencies toward examining tangible societal impacts.

Another notable finding concerns the geographical distribution of GCE research. The literature continues to be dominated by studies conducted in developed countries, particularly the United States, the United Kingdom, and other Western contexts. While emerging contributions from countries such as Indonesia, Pakistan, Kazakhstan, and India are increasingly visible, their representation remains limited. This imbalance creates the risk of epistemic asymmetry, whereby dominant conceptualizations of global citizenship are largely shaped by Western experiences and subsequently applied to non-Western contexts. Expanding research from developing countries is therefore essential not only for promoting diversity in knowledge production but also for ensuring that GCE remains genuinely global in both theory and practice.

Overall, the findings indicate that GCE has become a significant educational response to contemporary global challenges, contributing to the development of globally competent, socially responsible, and culturally sensitive citizens. However, realizing the transformative potential of GCE requires addressing persistent barriers related to curriculum integration, educator preparedness, cultural resistance, and unequal global representation in knowledge production. Future research should therefore prioritize longitudinal investigations, broader geographical representation, stronger connections with the SDGs, and more robust

assessments of societal impact. Such efforts will strengthen the evidence base for GCE and support its continued contribution to building more inclusive, equitable, and sustainable societies.

## **CONCLUSION**

This systematic literature review demonstrates that Global Citizenship Education (GCE) has emerged as an increasingly important educational framework for addressing contemporary global challenges, including cultural diversity, migration, social inequality, and sustainable development. The findings reveal that GCE research in higher education is primarily centered on cultural citizenship, global citizenship, intercultural competence, and civic engagement, reflecting a growing recognition that citizenship extends beyond national boundaries toward broader forms of global responsibility. The review also shows that GCE contributes positively to the development of global competencies, intercultural understanding, peace, tolerance, international solidarity, and awareness of global issues. However, the literature remains dominated by studies conducted in developed countries, highlighting the need for greater scholarly contributions from developing regions to ensure a more inclusive and contextually diverse understanding of global citizenship.

Despite its growing relevance, the implementation of GCE continues to face several challenges. Curriculum integration remains the most frequently reported barrier, followed by limitations in educator preparedness, cultural and ideological resistance, and the increasing complexity of contemporary global issues. The findings further indicate that successful GCE implementation requires approaches that integrate local and global perspectives, promote intercultural dialogue, and strengthen learners' capacities to critically engage with global challenges. In addition, the review reveals that although GCE is frequently associated with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), empirical evidence directly linking GCE initiatives to measurable SDG outcomes remains limited.

The findings suggest several implications for policy, practice, and future research. Higher education institutions should strengthen the integration of GCE across disciplines through context-sensitive curricula that balance global perspectives with local realities. Governments, universities, and international organizations should invest in educator professional development, digital learning resources, and collaborative initiatives that support effective GCE implementation. Future research should prioritize underrepresented contexts in developing countries, examine the long-term impacts of GCE through longitudinal studies, and explore stronger connections between GCE outcomes and sustainable development goals. Expanding geographical representation and adopting interdisciplinary approaches will be essential for advancing a more inclusive, equitable, and globally relevant GCE scholarship.

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