

Global Citizenship Education: Opportunities and Challenges for Primary Schools

This article shares insights from Global Village research and its application to Global Citizenship Education (GCE) in primary schools. Global Village is the strategic partnership for GCE in primary schools in Ireland between Irish Aid at the Department of Foreign Affairs and a consortium of four partners: Dublin City University (DCU), Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO), Irish Primary Principals' Network (IPPN), and Trócaire.



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GCE is an active and creative educational process to increase awareness and understanding of the world, develop critical thinking skills, support learners to make connections between their lives and international social justice issues, and foster collective action for justice and change. Global Village draws on existing research, and undertakes new research, to shape its programme for primary schools.

Research carried out by Maria Barry and colleagues at DCU (Barry, Mallon, et al., 2023), on behalf of Global Village, surveyed primary school teachers in Ireland on their GCE-related needs, values, attitudes, and practices. Answers from 288 teachers, deputy principals, and principals revealed that most had never attended a professional development course in GCE. A correlation was identified between higher teacher self-assessment of pedagogical skills and the amount of time likely to be spent teaching GCE per week.

Participants' ratings of their knowledge, confidence, and pedagogical skills in GCE (averaging 3.20–3.61 out of 5) were significantly lower than their rating of its perceived importance (averaging 4.49–4.66). This suggests that 'any issues related to the teaching of GCE may not be explained by teachers' indifference', but rather 'it appears as though teachers do not feel as though their ability to teach the subject matches its importance' (ibid., p.16).

This article shares insights from recent research by Global Village and its application to Global Citizenship Education in primary schools. This form of education is an active and creative process to increase understanding of the world, develop critical thinking skills, support learners to make connections between their lives and international social justice issues, and foster collective action for justice and change.

The most prevalent features of participants' descriptions of GCE were global issues, diversity, and a cosmopolitan outlook with strong connections to the idea of a global community. Sustainability-related concepts, including climate change, were not prevalent, and 'there was a significant absence of explicit references to rights' (ibid., p.18).

For Global Village and others working at primary level, these findings suggest both an opportunity to harness teachers' recognition of the importance of GCE, and a challenge in tackling their self-identified gaps in GCE knowledge and confidence. Global Village is responding by offering a suite of professional development opportunities to foster teachers' knowledge, confidence, and pedagogical skills in GCE. This includes staff workshops, a community of practice, outdoor education events, an annual TeachMeet, an annual School Leadership Symposium, and an accredited summer course. These offerings emphasise the rights framework underpinning GCE and the strong connections between GCE and education for sustainable development.

For the full research report and more information on Global Village, visit www.globalvillageschools.ie. There you can also find the 2023 scoping study of current practices and future possibilities for Global Citizenship Education in early childhood education (Barry, Farrell, et al., 2023).

REFERENCES

- Barry, M., Mallon, B., Bourke, A., Usher, J., and Daly, A. (2023) *Teachers and Global Citizenship Education: Values, Attitudes and Practices – A Research Report on a National Survey of Irish Primary Teachers and Global Citizenship Education*. Global Village. <https://globalvillageschools.ie/teaching-resource/needs-analysis-by-dcu/>.
- Barry, M., Farrell, T., Mallon, B., and Daly, A. (2023) *Global Citizenship Education in Early Childhood Education: A Research Report on a Scoping Study of Current Practices and Future Possibilities*. Global Village. <https://globalvillageschools.ie/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/TRO23001-GCE-in-ECE-report-ONLINE.pdf>.