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Student perceptions of global citizenship education in the university curriculum

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ABSTRACT

Given the pressing global challenges facing society, it is imperative that students are well equipped to contribute to solving problems, in an informed, ethical and meaningful way. This is the basis of global citizenship education, which is rapidly emerging in Higher Education policy as an important pedagogical philosophy and set of graduate attributes. We examined UK undergraduate student perceptions of global citizenship education ($N = 202$). Only 12.87% of students had come across the term global citizenship education, but a content analysis of their definitions demonstrated that they showed generally accurate understanding of the term. A thematic analysis of open-ended responses identified three dominant themes related to student perspectives on the concept of global citizenship education, (1) perceived *importance* of global citizenship education, (2) challenges within the *conceptualisation* of global citizenship and (3) perceived challenges with the subject-level *implementation* of global citizenship education. Implications for Higher Education policy and practice are discussed.

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In recent years, global citizenship education (GCE) has become increasingly embedded into Higher Education (HE) policy and practice, in response to pressing global challenges and the need for graduates to respond to these challenges (Healey 2023; Wong et al. 2022). The definition of GCE is contested, with no universal agreement about what it comprises, and many frameworks and typologies have been developed to describe GCE approaches (Goren and Yemini 2017; Leite 2022; Pashby et al. 2020). The goal of GCE is to develop global citizens, promoting an understanding of the global interconnectedness of the modern world, with a concern for well-being beyond national boundaries (UNESCO 2014). As such, GCE constitutes both a pedagogical *principle,* and also aims to develop a set of distinct graduate attributes or graduate outcomes, developing individuals' abilities to act as responsible global citizens (Green 2012; Haigh and Clifford 2011; UNESCO 2014). Frequently, GCE includes globally oriented knowledge, skills and values, including human rights, sustainability, social justice and peace (Goren and Yemini 2017).

A major driver of the adoption of GCE is UNESCO's (2017) Sustainable Development Goal 4.7, which includes education for global citizenship. There has been broad critique of this approach, as there are no common agreements on the definition of GCE (Leite 2022) and no clear monitoring plan (Edwards et al. 2020). However, despite contentions with the definition and adoption of GCE, it is widely (and increasingly) embedded in accreditation standards in Higher Education. Therefore, within HE, GCE requires that university students and graduates are able to use their subject-specific knowledge and skills to contribute to the socially just, common good (see MacFarlane 2019). Therefore, a GCE promotes skills such as critical thinking and problem solving (de Andreotti 2014; Oxfam 1997). Coupled with disciplinary expertise, such skills allow university students and graduates to contribute to addressing global problems in a responsible, informed and ethical way (Horey et al. 2018; Martin and Pirbhai-Illich 2015). Integration of GCE in the curriculum can provide a space for students to reflect on their own values, beliefs and biases, and exchange ideas with students from diverse cultural backgrounds. GCE has also been proposed to help students to enhance their disciplinary knowledge, bolster civic engagement, and responds to calls for HE to meaningfully and responsibly engage with internationalisation agendas (Yemini 2015).

There have been useful case studies of how GCE can be effectively embedded in the curriculum in different subject disciplines (see reviews by; Estellés and Fischman 2021; Goren and Yemini 2017; Horey et al. 2018). In the literature, GCE is typically achieved through various forms of experiential learning, such

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as service-learning, study abroad programmes (e.g. Doerr, Puente, and Kamiyoshi 2020), active learning and internships (Ahmed and Mohammed 2022). For example, Hayden et al. (2020) outline an experiential teaching approach within an International Baccalaureate Diploma, which aimed to develop attributes aligned with global citizenship. Similarly, Boński et al. (2012) developed undergraduate students' sense of global citizenship in the humanities curriculum. However, while there are clear pedagogical benefits to GCE, it is important that students *recognise* efforts to integrate GCE in the curriculum, and can articulate its benefits, in order to realise its pedagogical and societal potential.

If students are not able to explicitly recognise and articulate their global citizenship skills and competences, this may reduce the impact of GCE. To date, while work has considered staff perceptions of GCE (Bosio, Gaudelli, and Torres 2023; Goren and Yemini 2017; Trede, Bowles, and Bridges 2013), there is a lack of empirical investigation into *student* perceptions of GCE, and its effectiveness in developing them as global citizens. There have been some empirical explorations of student perceptions of facets or attributes of global citizenship; for example, Chui and Leung (2014) explored Hong Kong's students' attitudes towards globalisation, Denson and Bowman (2011) studied students' perceptions of diversity experiences, and Hendershot and Sperandio (2009) explored perceptions of a global citizen identity. However, while these studies are useful starting points (see Horey et al. 2018 for a comprehensive review of the empirical evidence), no studies have asked students their perceptions of GCE.

It is important to centre student perceptions of GCE, to ensure that it is delivering the necessary skills to develop them as global citizens. There are four crucial steps to achieve this: (1) definitions and conceptualisations of global citizenship should be understood and appreciated by students, (2) students should be able to articulate their skills through the lens of global citizenship, (3) there should be a shared, common language between staff and students surrounding global citizenship and (4) educators and policymakers should understand whether there are problems with GCE approach, from a student perspective.

By understanding students' perceptions of global citizenship, and a GCE, educators can evaluate the suitability of the current conceptualisation of global citizenship and its implementation in GCE, and make necessary adjustments to better prepare students for the globalised world. Further, given that Higher Education institutions play a critical role in promoting a culture of global citizenship (Healey 2023; Wong et al. 2022), by investigating students' perceptions of GCE, educators can identify areas where they need to take action to create more inclusive, diverse and globally aware curricula (see Thomas and Banki 2021). This all requires an initial examination of how undergraduate students recognise and relate to the implementation of GCE in their local curriculum. Therefore, the present study aims to consider if and how students in Higher Education recognise, understand and value GCE, as well as distinct attributes that encompass global citizenship in the curriculum. In doing so, we provide the first empirical, cross-discipline investigation of student perceptions of GCE in the United Kingdom.

Conceptualisation of global citizenship

To assess students' understanding of, and attitudes towards, global citizenship, and the degree to which they were aware of experiencing GCE, we first developed a working definition of GCE and global citizenship. We defined GCE as 'an approach to teaching which aims to equip students with the skills, knowledge, and attitudes to critically consider problems from a global perspective, e.g. social injustice, human rights, and sustainability'. To elucidate this further, we created a list of six attributes that comprise the core facets of global citizenship (see Table 1). Development of this definition, and the corresponding six attributes, was informed by the literature on GCE, including existing models; for example, we adapted Reysen and Katzarska-Miller's (2013) model of global citizenship, which includes sustainability, social justice, diversity and responsibility. This was also informed by the Oxfam (1997) definition of global citizenship.

We were conscious of trying to create a definition that was suitably generic enough to be recognised regardless of discipline but also concrete enough that students could understand it. Our focus on 'skills, knowledge, and attitudes' aimed to (1) use words and phrases that undergraduate students may be familiar with, and (2) reconcile the different foci in the literature. For example, the Oxfam (1997) definition focuses more on *awareness* of global problems, whereas other definitions differentiate between global consciousness and global competencies (e.g. see Goren and Yemini 2017). We prioritised simple language that students would understand and specifically aimed to avoid language about competencies, which can have legal or statutory implications in HE.

After an initial draft of the attributes was developed, we recruited and consulted an expert board of eight academic advisors within our institution, who spanned across disciplines and services. This group of academics and educators, all with varied disciplinary expertise of GCE in HE, provided iterative feedback on our conceptualisation of global citizenship, which allowed us to expand and refine our attributes. For example, our initial framework of global citizenship education contained 'international perspectives'; following a discussion of global versus local citizenship

Table 1. Attributes of Global Citizenship and definitions provided to participants.

Attribute of Global Citizenship	Definition provided to participants
Intercultural perspectives	This refers to your ability to appreciate, consider and think about perspectives and opinions which go beyond your own local geographical and cultural context. For example, thinking about how the work you do in your degree is part of a broader, global issues
Ethics and responsibility	This skill centres around understanding the different ethical considerations related to your subject, and the impact of your subject on the wider world.
Social justice	This skill brings together aspects such as human rights, responsibility, fairness and equity. This may include understanding issues related to equality, diversity and inclusion.
Critical thinking	This skill is about making thoughtful, evidence-based, analytical judgements, arriving at a logical conclusion. This may involve taking multiple perspectives, weighing up different evidence, and creating clear arguments
Reflection	This is the process of actively thinking about your personal experiences and how this influences your studying, your understanding of the subject content, and wider world, in order to develop new insights and areas for improvement.
Sustainability	Sustainability is about making sure that what we do is able to be maintained over time. This includes everything from financial sustainability of organisations to impact on the planet and environmental sustainability.
Intercultural perspectives	This refers to your ability to appreciate, consider, and think about perspectives and opinions which go beyond your own local geographical and cultural context. For example, thinking about how the work you do in your degree is part of a broader, global issues
Ethics and responsibility	This skills centres around understanding the different ethical considerations related to your subject, and the impact of your subject on the wider world.

within the expert panel, we amended this to 'inter*cultural* perspectives'. This led to the finalised attributes, in Table 1.

Method

Participants

Participants were 202 undergraduate students in the UK (*female* = 99, *male* = 95, *non-binary* = 3, *prefer not to say* = 1), recruited on Prolific Academic, which is a paid online participant recruitment service, between January and February 2023. Any participant who self-identified as a student in the UK on the service was eligible to take part. 64 students in the sample were studying at Russell Group universities (the Russell Group comprises 24 prestigious world-class, research-intensive universities), the rest of the sample were studying at non-Russell Group universities. 59 students were in their first year of study, 57 in their second, 52 in their third, 29 in their fourth year and five were on industry placements or abroad. Most participants were averaging a 2:1 grade ($n = 84$), followed by a first class ($n = 64$), or 2:2 ($n = 27$). Four students averaged a third-class grade and 26 did not disclose their grades. The sample included students studying a range of degree subjects (see Table 2). 29.21% of students identified as coming from a disadvantaged background, including a minority ethnic or cultural group, and 15.84% identified as having a disability.

Table 2. Subject disciplines of the sample.

Subject	Percentage of total sample (%)
Health (including medicine, psychology, dentistry etc.)	24.43
English, History and Arts	10.41
Business, Economics and Marketing	10.41
Law, Politics and International Relations	10.41
Computer science	9.50
Mathematics and Engineering	8.14
Science (including Biomedical science, chemistry, physics, Geography, Environmental Science)	8.14
Other (e.g. Classics, Zoology)	5.88
Education	4.98
Did not say	4.07

Materials

To determine participants' familiarity and understanding of GCE, they were first asked if they have ever come across the term 'Global Citizenship' during their degree [yes/no] and were offered space to provide an example. Participants were then provided with a free text box where they could describe what they 'think a Global Citizenship education is'.

In order to identify the extent to which participants recognised global citizenship skills within their degree, they were presented with the six attributes that comprise global citizenship, with definitions (see Table 1). Participants were asked to rate the extent to which they had developed this skill so far in their degree? [1 = *not at all,* 5 = *entirely*] and were given a free text box to provide examples.

To explore whether GCE was valued by participants, after being provided with our definition of GCE, they were asked if it was clear [0 = *not at all clear*, 100 = *entirely clear*] and how valuable this approach was [0 = *not at all valuable*, 100 = *entirely valuable]*. Participants were asked to explain their answers in free text boxes, with prompt questions (e.g. 'Please explain your answer, in as much detail as you are able to give. For example, do you understand the definition fully? are there any aspects of this definition that are not particularly clear?'). Finally, participants were asked if there was anything else that they would like to tell the researchers about the global citizenship approach to education.

Analytical approach

To explore students' perception of GCE, we first classified their responses into three categories: (1)

participants who wrote 'I don't know' or provided no attempt at defining global citizenship, (2) participants who offered a definition that clearly differed from our conceptualisation of global citizenship, (3) participants whose definition was broadly aligned with our conceptualisation. We considered a participant's response to be aligned to our definitions when responses included reference to both the development of skills and knowledge, and the application of knowledge to solve global problems. Then, we broke down the second category into six sub-categories, which were created inductively through reading the text and discussing potential categories within the team. We then conducted chi-sq analysis to examine whether having heard of global citizenship impacted student's perceptions of what a GCE was. This mixed-methods approach allowed for a flexible and open-ended analysis.

We calculated mean ratings of development of the attributes, of the clarity of our definition of GC, and the value of a GCE education. We compared these, using t-tests, between those participants who had heard the term and those who had not. A critical value of $\alpha = 0.01$ was adopted to reduce the chance of type 2 error with multiple tests, and corrections were made where appropriate for the assumption of equal variances being violated.

Finally, we conducted a thematic analysis of participant's responses to the question 'Please explain your answer, in as much detail as you are able to give.' This involved several steps, following Braun and Clarke's (2019) guidelines. First, we familiarised ourselves with the data by reading through all responses multiple times to gain an overall understanding of the patterns and nuances within the participants' explanations. Next, we conducted an initial coding phase where we highlighted key phrases, words and concepts that frequently appeared in the responses. These codes were then reviewed and refined to identify themes, representing the core ideas expressed by participants.

One member of the team [*MP*] initially independently coded a sample of the responses and then discussed this with the rest of the team [PB and RH]. This process allowed us to refine our themes and ensure they accurately captured the students' perceptions. Themes were grouped under broader categories that reflected the different ways students conceptualised Global Citizenship Education (GCE), including barriers to understanding, perceived benefits, and the role of education in fostering global citizenship.

Table 3. Average response (on a scale of 1–5) for extent to which students have developed each global citizenship skill in their degree.

Attribute	Mean	Standard deviations
Critical thinking	3.93	1.05
Reflection	3.16	1.29
Ethics and responsibility	3.11	1.2
Social justice	2.82	1.32
Intercultural perspectives	2.82	1.11
Sustainability	2.17	1.25

Results

Perceptions of global citizenship

Only 26 participants (12.87%) reported that they had previously heard of global citizenship. Table 3 provides the analysis, sub-categories and indicative quotes. Most participants, including 19 of the 26 who had previously heard of global citizenship, provided a definition which was different to our conceptualisation, and the most common sub-category related to an understanding or appreciation of global issues. The second most common category was that of ensuring equal opportunities across the globe. A minority interpreted the term as relating technical aspects of the degree, such as study abroad or transferability of degree credits internationally. Participants who had previously heard of 'global citizenship' were more likely to describe it as an understanding or appreciation of global issues (13/26, Ch-sqi(6) = 15.5, $p = 0.017$).

Perceptions of global citizenship attributes

Participants generally reported good development of critical thinking and reflection skills in their degrees (Table 4). Critical thinking was the highest rated and sustainability the lowest. The only difference between those who had previously heard of the term, and those who had not was in sustainability (1.39 vs 1.17, t(198) = 4.32, $p < 0.001$).

Global citizenship education: definition

Students rated the clarity of our definition of GCE to be generally clear (*mean* = 82.5%) and the concept to be valuable (*mean* = 81.02%). Notably, those who had previously heard of the term rated the definition as clearer (87.8% vs 81.68%, t(49.09) = 2.59, $p = 0.006$) and valued it more (87.73% vs 79.96%, t(61.90) = 3.42, $p = 0.001$) than those who hadn't. We then conducted a thematic analysis of the textual responses to the final open-ended questions (i.e. the questions that asked participants their views on our definition of global citizenship education and space for additional comments). This analysis generated three dominant themes: (1) perceived importance of global citizenship education, (2) challenges within the conceptualisation of global citizenship and (3) perceived challenges with the subject-level implementation of global citizenship education.

Table 4. Content analysis results from the definitions of global citizenship education, with indicative quotes, *N* out of 202 participants and %.

Category	Sub-category	Indicative quote	*N* (%)
No definition provided	–	'I don't know'	25 (12.38%)
Definition that differed from our conceptualisation of global citizenship education	Understanding and appreciation of global issues	'I think it is understanding that we are not members of only a nation or country, but of the entire world, and thus we should learn to help each other regardless of place of origin.'	48 (23.76%)
	Opportunity to study abroad	'I think it offers opportunities to study abroad about learn about different countries and cultures.'	14 (6.93%)
	Education that considers multiple diverse opinions	'I see it as understanding that people are different and were raised in different contexts, so have different backgrounds, as well as feeling comfortable interacting with those people.'	29 (14.36%)
	Equal educational opportunities	'Ensuring that all individuals globally are entitled to education'	34 (16.83%)
	Transferability of educational	'A qualification that is standardised & recognised internationally'	12 (5.94%)
	Misc.	'someone who isn't from a country, but claims to be from everywhere.'	15 (7.43%)
Definition was aligned with our conceptualisation	–	'I think global citizenship education refers to learning which involves global issues from various perspectives, such as social and economic. It seeks to bring awareness of global issues and to teach relevant competencies to positively influence and participate in such issues.'	25 (12.38%)

Theme 1. Perceived importance of global citizenship education

The first theme we generated from the thematic analysis comprised responses where GCE was perceived as an important and valuable feature of HE teaching and learning. In the free text boxes, most participants reiterated that they found the definition clear and understood the function of GCE (e.g. 'I fully understand the definition because it is very clear on its purpose and aims'). Participants also stressed the importance of GCE, reflecting upon the need for HE to prepare students to confront global challenges; for example, one student explained that:

> [global citizenship education] is mandatory in these modern times because everyone in the world is on a global stage thanks to the internet. It is time that every person in every country started to see themselves as a global citizen rather than just a nation citizen.

Within this theme, some participants also commented on why they perceive global citizenship education to be important. For example, one participant summarised that '… it speaks to me on a personal level'. Other participants discussed their positive response to the concept: 'I cannot think of any negative aspects at all and would welcome this to be presented across other education settings.' In this sense, GCE was constructed to be a useful mechanism to help students to combat societal and social issues, particularly 'in the current social climate'; for example:

> I think it is very important to be aware of cultures outside your own, I believe a lot of people nowadays are very narrow-minded and forget there is a bigger world out there despite how easy it is to access information about it

Some participants also unpacked the facets of GCE that they viewed to be particularly important; for example, one student explained that 'I think it is incredibly important to consider difference and to encourage diversity and the acknowledgement of diversity.' Similarly, other participants explained how important the graduate attributes gained though GCE are to promote the personal meaningfulness of a HE experience; e.g. 'I feel that it is so important … that everyone leaves university a better, more rounded person as a result of their education.' In some cases, this was linked to employability concerns, and students perceived GCE to be useful for bolstering career prospects (e.g. 'just having academic knowledge does not mean you will excel in your job sector'). Further, beyond employability, participants also discussed the value of GCE for developing transferable skills that are useful later in life:

> It is important as people come to universities from very different backgrounds and that can sometimes cause difficulties. Being taught this course would help people who lack these skills develop them, helping not only in university setting but also later on in life.

Overall, this first theme captured the responses that were generally positive about the clarity of the definition and indeed the construct of global citizenship itself. As one participant summarised, GCE is 'teaching people that problems are not just to be solved locally' and instead considers the 'the global impact' of problems.

Theme 2. Challenges within the conceptualisation of global citizenship education

While our definition of GCE was considered to be clear, some participants provided more nuanced feedback discussing the wider issues of GCE. The second theme of our thematic analysis included responses

where participants discussed tensions or challenges with GCE. Specifically, some students identified tensions with the use of the term 'global', and thus related GCE with wider issues of neoliberalism and colonialism. Some students, for example, felt that GCE merely comprises a 'buzzword filled approach' with little substance. Others had more complex views on GCE. This included critical discussions of power in GCE; for example, one participant explained how it is challenging to determine one perspective as being truly 'global' and felt that this contained paradoxes:

> I think the term 'global perspective' contains some tensions. Who decides what counts as a global perspective? If we all live in different cultural experiences how can we have one uniform perspective?

Aligned with this, some participants also explicitly referred to the language in the definition as '*loaded*'; for example:

> Problem is definition itself is obscured by loaded words. Which globality, experience of south/north?

Similarly, other participants discussed the challenges of teaching for global citizenship, given the variability in perspectives and experiences of global citizenship attributes, specifically social justice; for example:

> The definition aims to give students a perspective that is broader than that of their own culture; an understanding that they (or their culture or country etc) is not the centre of the world. Concepts like rights and justice vary from person to person, culture to culture so this is harder to teach- what is fine in one culture is unacceptable in another. This may be a barrier to some learning/ teaching.

In this sense, participants often found some of the attributes within GCE to be value-laden. Other participants questioned the examples provided in the definition and called for more concrete rationale for selecting certain priorities of GCE:

> What is the basis for defining 'social injustice, human rights, and sustainability'? This is a question worth exploring, rather than simply uttering these nouns abstractly.

This concern about abstractness and lack of clarity was echoed by other participants (e.g. 'it sounds like virtue signalling without any substance'). Further, participants also discussed potential tensions concerning how 'global problems' are defined and prioritised. For example, some students highlighted the breadth of global problems that face different cultures and societies across the world and, therefore, identified challenges with identifying which are the most pressing problems that should be discussed and centred by GCE. For example, one participant explained how while the definition was clear, it could be useful to further articulate the term 'problems' because 'the definition does not give a clear idea of what a problem could be in this instance'. It was also acknowledged that perceptions of global problems will vary considerably by subject and by global context, in a way that might exacerbate concerns surrounding connotations with colonialism. For example:

> I understand the social injustice and human rights portions but sustainability isn't as clear when it comes to understandings of global citizenship, preserving natural environments is certainly a valid international concern but for global citizens, especially from western countries to emphasize this seems a little neocolonialist.

Taken together, this theme brings together participants' perceptions of the challenges of deciding the content of GCE, and the relationship that has with becoming a global citizen. Participants grappled with a wide range of issues, but mainly centred about the notion that defining and prioritising global 'problems' is a challenge. Further, participant's discussions surrounding the exclusionary or (neo)colonial associations with GCE demonstrate an attentiveness to the broader context in which pedagogical constructs sit, which is particularly pertinent for GCE.

Theme 3. Challenges with the subject-level implementation of global citizenship education

Furthermore, beyond grappling with the definition of GCE, some participants also highlighted the challenges with embedding GCE at the subject level in the curriculum, in a more practical sense. This theme captured participants who discussed concerns with how the goals or principles of GCE are integrated into Higher Education (e.g. 'It doesn't explain / how / it is done') This challenge appeared to be heightened when consideration was given to the implementation of GCE, rather than just the conceptualisation of it as a construct (e.g. 'I can't imagine how things like this would be taught'). For example, one participant summarised this feeling:

> I do not fully understand the definition as it is very broad. It does not say how all of those areas can be sensibly achieved for each individual degree area. As degree subjects are so broad and diverse, I think this definition is very open to criticism as it doesn't give the how or the why.

Further, participants in our sample also discussed the subject-specificity of GCE, which compounded the perception of challenges at the implementation level. For example, some participants considered how not all subjects may lend themselves well to addressing all global problems. Some participants in the sample noted that some subjects may not be as well equipped to tackle global issues compared with others:

> I understand this, however, I believe it would be difficult to choose which parts to teach students as

> obviously not every aspect of global problems can be addressed and discussed.

This was particularly complicated by the perceptions that degree subjects are broad, diverse, and that students do not necessarily have a strong understanding of what is taught across other subjects. This led, in some cases, to some students taking issue with the definition due to its lack of concreteness; for example:

> I think it's important to have an understanding of these things, but I do not necessarily think that it is something a university needs to focus on teaching - depending on the degree.

For some students, for example, there was a perception that development of global citizenship skills was at odds with subject-specific knowledge and content, and these two were constructed by a subset of participants as being in tension with one another. For example, one medical student explained how they perceive there too be 'too much' GCE in their degree:

> I think it depends on which degree you are studying, for example, although some teaching is valuable and appreciated, I believe there is too much of this content in the medical degree, and not enough clinical/scientific teaching.

There was also some discussion among participants regarding whether GCE should be situated within the core curricula, or developed in extracurricular spaces:

> Although the skills are valuable, they should be taught in context - I am not sure of the benefit … particularly when the university offer so many extra-curricular opportunities to learn about this independently.

This raises an important question regarding the extent to which GCE should (or indeed can) be implemented within teaching and learning for all subjects, or whether the principles of GCE are best embedded elsewhere in the university experience. Taken together, a concern for the subject-level applicability of GCE principles unified participant's responses in this theme. This highlights the importance of flexibility and subject responsiveness when translating the concept of GCE to implementation.

Discussion

Overall, the present study has investigated how students perceive GCE as a pedagogical approach in HE. This study is, to our knowledge, the first empirical study which centres students' perceptions of GCE, offering a crucial perspective on the existing discourse. The first part of this study confirmed that students generally do understand what a GCE is, although their definitions differ somewhat from conceptualisations in the academic literature. Further, only a small minority of students had come across the term explicitly in their studies. The next part of the study examined whether students developed GCE skills within their degrees, and the extent to which they understood and valued these skills. It found that students who had come across the term explicitly valued it more, but all students felt they developed these skills within their degree.

The final part of the study explored qualitative responses to GCE more broadly. In theme one, students broadly recognised the value and significance of GCE. Students perceived a GCE as a crucial component of their personal growth and academic development, as well as the development of society and the world. The second theme, however, highlighted the complexities associated with deciding the content of a GCE. Students recognised distinct challenges related to the diversity of perspectives, contexts, and values that shape GCE, which makes it difficult to arrive at a shared understanding of what it means to be a global citizen (as per Marshall 2015). Finally, in the third theme, students also identified the challenges associated with the implementation of GCE at the local or subject level. For example, students in this sample perceived challenges related to subject specificity of GCE, relevance to all students, and a general lack of integration of global citizenship concepts across the curriculum. Overall, these themes suggest that students recognise the importance of GCE but perceive challenges associated with defining and implementing it effectively.

When the term was explained to students, they valued GCE, and recognised the importance of these skills in equipping them to face the challenges of our highly interconnected, globalised world and acting as responsible citizens. However, students were also aware of the challenges around the term GCE, which can position privileged individuals, often from the Western world, as attempting to 'fix' the problems of less privileged societies, often without understanding the complexities and nuances of the context (see Cranney and Dunn 2011). This could be considered as a form of neo-colonialism, where Western ideologies and solutions are imposed on non-Western societies, undermining their autonomy and potential for self-determination. These reservations about GCE are reflected in the work of Goren and Yemini (2017), who observe that there is a gap between researchers' eagerness to use the term, contrasting with educators and policymaker's avoidance of it.

Paradoxically, the students in our sample displayed critical global citizenship skills by identifying the challenges with developing a clear conception of GCE. Our definition of GCE refers to 'skills, knowledge, and attitudes' to consider problems. Other definitions refer more to awareness of global problems and students' ability to understand their place in the world in a way that champions more of a unified and global perspective (e.g. Oxfam, 1997). Taking a co-creation

approach to GCE (Shultz 2010) may be an appropriate way of addressing these issues, helping to avoid the White saviour ideology that the participants identified. Similarly, some participants had issues specifically with the notion of 'sustainability' as a key global challenge, so a definition which features fewer specific examples of the kinds of global problems that students may be able to contribute to may also be useful. It may be useful here to refer to critical global citizenship, as per de Andreotti (2014) who contrasts critical global citizenship with 'soft' global citizenship education, as an approach to address some of these issues, acknowledging the importance of power, voice and difference in GCE. Centring this approach could help address student discomfort with the problematic aspects of a GCE.

Policy and practice implications

There are clear implications here for policy and practice. By understanding student perceptions of GCE, educators can promote more meaningful and appropriate engagement and active participation in global citizenship initiatives and strategies. As found by Goren and Yemini (2017), students sometimes find the term vague, and not relevant to their daily lives. It is therefore vital that as GCE becomes increasingly integrated in policy, including in student-facing materials (e.g. university websites; Wong et al. 2022), educators should be wary of using buzzwords and instead prioritise explaining the values and aims of a GCE to students. While some student definitions at least partially overlap with those of educators, disconnects in understanding between stakeholders (e.g. policymakers, educators and students) are problematic, especially when GCE becomes explicitly integrated into policy and teaching (Wong et al. 2022). Therefore, we suggest that educators and policymakers should reconsider the use of the term global citizenship. Indeed, our study demonstrates that students find the term 'global citizenship' potentially problematic. It may thus be useful to use different words when discussing this concept; for example, it may also be useful to instead frame conversations around '*critical* global citizenship', as per de Andreotti's suggestion (2014). Other more flexible terminology may also be appropriate.

The findings of this study may inform pedagogical interventions that aim to improve students' awareness and development of GCE. Some literature has considered this, in a range of different disciplines. Ahmed and Mohammed (2022), for example, provide a review of GCE education programmes across disciplines and geographical contexts. The review demonstrates how students' GCE can be successfully bolstered through interventions such as extra-curricular programmes, study abroad initiatives, modules that centre on cross-cultural knowledge, and student exchanges. Importantly, the review included interventions that were both within the curriculum (e.g. developing GCE through innovative and interactive pedagogies; White and McLean 2015) and outside of the core curriculum (e.g. in optional summer programmes; Myers 2010). Other researchers have also considered how GCE may be integrated within specific disciplines in a Higher Education context. For example, Pownall et al (2022) identify that global citizenship can be integrated in psychology undergraduate education through activities and assessment that highlight to students the real-world applicability of psychological theory. Similarly, a systematic review of GCE in HE, Massaro (2022) found a range of approaches were successful in cultivating global citizenship in students, including studying abroad and coursework. However, the review also emphases the importance of developing staff and student perceptions of GCE.

With this in mind, it is also important that efforts to integrate GCE in Higher Education are responsive to the concerns that students have raised about the neo-colonial nature of GCE. This may be achieved in practice by critically examining the historical and contemporary power dynamics embedded in GCE explicitly with students. This could involve, for example, discussions with students about the extent to which GCE may reflect Western-centric values and can perpetuate global inequalities. This could be achieved by sharing the diverse perspectives on GCE and highlighting the ongoing contentions within the pedagogical literature, to co-create an understanding of GCE with students. This may be useful in encouraging students to critically analyse how global citizenship, as a pedagogical aim, may be contextualised in, and uphold, power and privilege.

Conclusion

Overall, this study has demonstrated the value of exploring first-hand student perceptions of GCE in the undergraduate curriculum (see also, Hayden et al. 2020). By taking a qualitative approach, we have assessed how students perceive and value the construct of GCE, which has been crucially lacking from the pedagogical literature. This is important, because GCE is a complex and multifaceted concept that can be interpreted and understood in different ways. The term citizen itself is laden with notions of exclusion (Cranney and Dunn 2011). For example, our analysis showed how students recognise some of the challenges that come with embedding GCE across the curriculum owing to associations of global citizenship with colonialism and White saviourism. Such concerns largely reflect discussions in the academic literature about the limits of global citizenship education, particularly when conceptualised as a set of graduate

attributes (e.g. see Pais and Costa 2020; Watson, McIntosh, and Watson 2022). Together, our findings pose challenges for embedding GCE into teaching practice. As such, teaching needs to be flexible to enable students to bring their own perspectives to global issues. It is, therefore, important to understand how students interpret GCE, so that educators can tailor their teaching and learning approaches to better meet students' needs, expectations and lived experiences.

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