

Global Citizenship elements in Malaysian Primary School Curriculum towards Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

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ABSTRACT

Global Citizenship (GC) is still a new concept in Malaysian education scenario, and existing research shows that a critical approach to teaching and learning about global issues is largely absent within Malaysian school settings. Thus, the purpose of this study is to explore the GC elements, embedded in the Malaysian education curriculum within the UNESCO framework. This paper will discuss the result of document analysis done on Malaysian primary school core subjects, which used critical discourse analysis to analyze the relevant parts of the curriculum within the core subjects. The analysis revealed that GC is taught across the curriculum in Malaysia, which aims to increase students' knowledge, skills and behavior towards sustainability. GCE was presented in the curriculum as a multidisciplinary topic which follows through the values, aims and tasks of the core subjects. This study provides a clear starting point for future research of GC and its implementation and impacts in Malaysian education system, and hope to open the eyes and minds of the policy makers in Malaysia, the importance of GC which has a crucial role to play in tackling injustices and making the world a more just and sustainable place.

Key words : Global Citizenship (GC), Primary School, Sustainability, Malaysia

Introduction

On September 25, 2015, the United Nations (UN) launched seventeen global goals called Sustainable

Development Goals (SDGs). SDGs aim to eradicate poverty, preserve the earth and ensure universal well-being is enjoyed by all (Ali *et al.*, 2017; Bur and Razman, 2017; Khairil *et al.*, 2017). One of the seven-

teen globally listed goals is “Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4): Ensure Inclusive and Equitable Quality Education and Promote Lifelong Learning Opportunities for All”, which is a global, education-focused goal. SDG4, also known as Education 2030 is a new education agenda replacing “Education for All Goals”. In line with the fast-moving and increasingly challenging world development, the education sector needs to be aware of changes and current issues in the borderless world scenario (Zakaria and Halim, 2009; Ali *et al.*, 2020). The education toward Global Citizenship is oriented towards human rights, social justice and environmental sustainability at local, regional and global levels. The goal of GCE is to empower students to engage, play an active role internally and internationally in order to face global challenges and thus contribute to a more equitable, peaceful and sustainable world (Basir-Cyio *et al.*, 2019; Golar *et al.*, 2019; Arham *et al.*, 2018). Global citizenship education does not necessarily have to be taught as a separate subject as it is an education that promotes the core values of global citizenship that is no discrimination, respecting diversity and unity of human beings. Thus, the way it is implemented is diverse. It can be implemented across curricula through existing subjects or as co-curriculum activities and the way they are delivered is independent and based on teachers’ creativity. The approach being implemented across curricula can also be considered as a way to train student to gain knowledge indirectly, through positive communication between teacher and students which according to Khairil *et al.* (2017, 2018) communication strategy is very vital in order to achieve peace and justice which is an agenda of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Syafrinaldi *et al.*, 2016; Shomary *et al.*, 2016; Rushy *et al.*, 2016) and also an important element in GCE. Thus, the effective communication strategy which is across curricula can be a method in educating and training the young generations towards peace and justice.

Many researchers agree that education can influence the development of global citizenship either in the school environment or in the curriculum used because local and global cultures applied in the curriculum can affect a person’s exposure with global citizen (Blake *et al.*, 2015). By the 21st century, today’s society faces many citizenship challenges. Issues about identity, moral values, culture, ethnicity, religion, and concepts regarding rights, responsibilities, and contributions are challenged in

their traditional sense and will be analyzed, discussed and debated from a global perspective (Zahabioun *et al.*, 2013). Zakaria and Halim (2009) and Zakaria (2011) stated that raising the understanding of the younger generation on the importance of this matter can help them begin a complex decision-making process regarding planning, delivering and maintaining a sustainable community, and through this understanding they are more likely to participate. Thus, awareness among school-children should be a future investment for sustainable communities.

In addition, the educational goals need to be parallel and support the call of educating global citizens who can see and identify themselves not merely as local and regional people, but also as a human being bound to all humanity with concern for the global relationship and mutual understanding (Jefferess, 2002; Zakaria *et al.*, 2012). Therefore, Global Citizenship should be part of the curriculum so that they can find answers and guidance on the concept of citizenship. GC is key to realizing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the 2030 agenda. Its importance was affirmed in 2012, with the Global Education First Initiative (GEFI) placing it as one of the three priority axes with which to reach the global goals. In the World Education Forum (WEF) 2015, the Incheon Declaration proclaims GC as an important area within the Post-2015 education agenda and confirmed the responsibility of the global society to promote GC as stated in Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 4.7). Sustainability practice in education, aim to enable all people around the world to meet their basic needs and improve their quality of life without affecting the quality of life for future generations (Razman *et al.*, 2014; Zakaria, 2011; WCED, 1987).

Education has an important role in building the community’s ability to be sustainable (Samsurijan *et al.*, 2014; Zakaria, 2014). Educating students in schools as a global citizen through sustainability in education, is the foundation for students to gain the opportunity to learn and engage with issues related to climate change, social justice, dependency, health, wellbeing, biodiversity, and other issues that must be dealt with globally (Razman *et al.*, 2012; Razman *et al.*, 2015; Rauf *et al.*, 2017). Awareness on Global Sustainability from social, economic and environmental aspects needs to be improved so students can apply relevant knowledge, skills, and values to become an effective global player. The con-

tent of the Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2025 is in line with the SDG 4 declaration and the national curriculum aspirations to ensure that future generations can contribute to sustainable economic, social and environmental development. This blueprint contains five system aspirations, six student aspirations, eleven shifts of transformation and six types of stakeholders that lead by Ministry of Education Malaysia to implement the quality education for all Malaysians. One of the student aspirations is to enhance bilingual proficiency for all students especially in national language, *Bahasa Malaysia* and international language of communication, English. The Ministry will also initiate students to learn additional language to understand the other cultural in the diversity world.

Currently, in Malaysia, there is no special subject that teaches Global Citizenship. Even though, previously there were subjects such as Civics and Citizenship Education, which address issues like GC in education, but this subject did not address global issues and the scope of study generally more to enhance the national identity among students. Moreover, this subject was no longer being taught in Malaysian schools (Balakrishnan, 2004). Thus, this paper will explain what are the sustainability elements which address global issues, which are part of GC, that are embedded, indirectly (across the curriculum) in Malaysian primary school core subjects.

Methods

According to Bowen (2009), document analysis is a systematic process for reviewing or evaluating documents, thus, to explore the Malaysian primary school curricula, in identifying the elements of GCE, document analysis using a critical perspective was used. In order to analyze national understandings and educational practice of GCE, document analysis using qualitative content analysis and thematic analysis was employed. Based on a qualitative research approach, the study first examines the discourse of international organizations, such as UNESCO, in order to better understand efforts to promote GCE and its implications for teaching and learning. The qualitative research is a content analysis conducted on documents enacted by the Ministry of Education Malaysia (MOE) to identify the elements of citizenship in the Malaysian primary school curricula. In this content analysis method, the study focuses on the documents used in the edu-

cation system in Malaysia especially at the primary level. Among the documents used are the Primary School Standard Curriculum (KSSR). The Ministry of Education Malaysia (MOE) has compiled 16 subjects under the Primary School Standard Curriculum (KSSR) but for the purpose of this study, researchers only choose 6 core subjects that are generally studied by all Year One to Year Six students in the primary level. The subjects are Malay Language, English Language, Science, History, Islamic Education and Moral Education. The list of analyzed texts for global citizenship education in Malaysian Primary School Curricula are as stated in the Table 1 below;

Malaysia Education Blueprint is the comprehensive plan for a rapid and sustainable transformation of Malaysian education system through to 2025. It is the plan where all matter pertaining to education development in Malaysia are referred to. Meanwhile the Primary School Standards-Based Curriculum for all the subjects taught in Malaysia primary school which were used in this research were developed by CDC, MOE. In the analysis process, each type of data was coded in accordance with the GCED themes as stated by Walker (2006).

Each of these subjects' contents was examined to determine which of the subject contains elements of GCE including titles, explanations, words and any form of information that has the same meaning as the elements of global citizenship. The data was then compiled to enable researchers to obtain findings in the form of tables. Specifically, the part of the aim and objectives of the subject was examined as these sections are an important part and can explain the entire contents of the syllabus of the subject. After reviewing each aim and objective of each subject, the researcher mark (/) at the element of global citizenship that meets the content of the aim and objectives of the subject. This process was implemented to help the researchers made a comprehensive conclusion on the element of global citizenship that had been practiced in Malaysian education system.

Results and Discussion

This study was conducted to identify the GC elements contained in the core subjects currently being used in the Malaysian education system, focusing on the primary school syllabus. Thus, to apply GC elements and to suit its concept suitable for Malay-

sia background, a clear definition of GC was thoroughly searched. Many scholars came out with their own definitions and suggestions to reflect on the globalized and diversified societies which defines citizenship as the global agenda. Thus, to be align with global agenda and the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG), this research has been using UNESCO definition of global citizenship as the standard. According to UNESCO (2014), the concept of citizenship has been broadened over time, due to the increasing interdependency and interconnectedness between countries. It defined global citizenship as *“a sense of belonging to the global community and common humanity, with its presumed members experiencing solidarity and collective identity among themselves and collective responsibility at the global level”* (UNESCO 2014).

UNESCO has also pointed out the importance of global citizenship in the SDG, where global citizenship education and education for sustainable development (ESD) are mentioned as the global indicator for SDG 4.7. Meanwhile, Morais and Odgen (2011) propose three overarching dimensions of global citizenship, which are social responsibility, global competence, and global civic engagement, which also combined the importance of local and global involvement (Morais and Odgen 2011). As a suggestion for implementation of the GCE initiative, Walker (2006), in line with those produced with UNESCO (2014), came out with a basic guideline, which include seven elements: (1) Ability to handle fast changes in all walks of life; (2) Become an active citizen, keeping abreast to a broad political life; (3)

Maintain and promote human rights; (4) Bringing closer local communities to a wider world; (5) Learning multiple languages; (6) Know how to assess the impact on daily life based on scientific progress; (7) Be able to use new technologies of communication.

According to the Curriculum Development Division (CDD) of Ministry of Education Malaysia (MOE), there are no specific formal ‘global curriculum’ or syllabus that covers global citizenship being taught in Malaysian school (CDD, 2015). Nevertheless, CDD (2015) has developed and published a guidebook for teachers as a manual to incorporate GCE in their teaching and learning process across the curriculum. The Global Citizenship Elements suggested in the manual, aimed to enhance the sense of belonging to society and humanity that emphasizes social, cultural, economic and political aspects. Align with UNESCO’s own concept, the GCE elements were also based on three learning domains, cognitive, socio-emotional and behavioral which support the goal of Global Sustainability to produce sustainable thinking students. Thus, for Malaysia which do not offer GCE as a subject, the integration of Global Citizenship and sustainability elements in the teaching and learning process are being implemented through indirect approaches, since the ‘Direct Approaches’ must explicitly state the GCE elements in its content standards and learning standards. The ‘Indirect approach’ (across the curricula) are being implemented in subjects in which the GCE element is not explicitly stated in content standard but are highlighted as the learning

Table 1. Documents Analyzed for GC Elements

	Title	Year
1	Malaysia Education Blueprint	
2	Global Sustainability Implementation Guide’ (Panduan Pelaksanaan Kelestarian Global)	2016
3	Primary School Standards-Based Curriculum for Malay Language Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Rendah untuk Bahasa Malaysia	2011 Revision 2017
4	Primary School Standards-Based Curriculum for English Language Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Rendah untuk Bahasa Inggeris	2011 Revision 2017
5	Primary School Standards-Based Curriculum for Science Education Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Rendah untuk Pendidikan Sains	2011 Revision 2017
6	Primary School Standards-Based Curriculum for History Education Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Rendah untuk Pendidikan Sejarah	2011 Revision 2017
7	Primary School Standards-Based Curriculum for Islamic Education Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Rendah untuk Pendidikan Agama Islam	2011 Revision 2017
8	Primary School Standards-Based Curriculum for Moral Education Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Rendah untuk Pendidikan Moral	2011 Revision 2017

topics. Based on the manual, Global Citizenship elements in the curriculum can be divided into four themes; (1) Community system and life; (2) Local and global issues and their relationships with the community; (3) Advances in science and technology; (4) Ethical lives.

These themes are then divided into learning topics which contains GC elements. The topics listed in the manual are divided into various topics ranging from local issue starting from identity and role model, up to global agenda such as peace and conflict resolution. The topics focus on issues related to social, economic and environmental matter, as stated in Table 2. The school curriculum or any manual for GC manual or guidelines, could not work to produce a global citizen by solely conveying information, but needs to be formulated more towards understanding, so that students will be

more tolerant and able to identify which ones are right and wrong in complex global issues. According to Aminrad *et al.* (2011) there is a strong relationship between environmental awareness and attitude of students, thus, the curriculum should create not only a facts-content syllabus only but also elements that could build a positive attitude among students towards the environment. As stated above, there is no standard formal curriculum for GCE, thus, this document analysis of the primary school syllabus will be based according to Walker (2006) and UNESCO (2014) definitions (as stated above). Based on Table 3, each subject contains the GCE elements. Of the 6 subjects, 3 subjects have the largest number of elements, namely Malay Language, History and Islamic Education, which have 4 elements of CGED. Science subjects had the least number of GCE elements with only one element. The elements

Table 2. Global Citizenship Contents

Topic			
1	Community System and Life	Identity	Identity, role and role-model Recognize nature, culture, beliefs and values
		Community	Human civilization
		Politic & Economy	Citizenship Culture The structure and civilization of the country Nations and country delimitation Exchange of money Economic gap Access to justice
2	Local and Global Issues and Their Relationships with the Community	Gender Equality	Equal access to opportunities
		Health	Physical, psychology and social health Healthy lifestyle Disease
		Beliefs and Values	Believe in God Manners and morals
		Human Migration	Migration Poverty and discrimination
3	Advances in Science and Technology	The Impact of Technological Advances	Climate changes Natural disaster Nuclear energy and weapons Digital life, virtual environment and information age Evolution of technological advances
		Human Adjustment to Environmental Requirements	Share the limited resources with other people and other living things Opportunities, consequences and responsibilities
4	Ethical life	Rights and Responsibilities	Human rights
		Peace and conflict resolution	Address and act critically in addressing global issues Actions that can be taken individually and in groups

Source: CDD (2015)

of 'Being an active citizen' and 'Bringing closer local communities to a wider world' are the most frequent element found in the overall 6 subjects.

Malay Language is one of the subjects that contain the highest number of GCED elements. The elements are "Being an active citizen, keeping abreast to a broad political life", "Bringing closer local communities to a wider world", "Learning multiple languages", and "Capable of using new communication technologies". This is because the objectives of this subject are clearly enacted to enable students to speak in their language and communicate to meet their own needs, acquire knowledge, skills, information, values and ideas as well as social relationships in daily life (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013). In addition, these subjects also emphasize the aspect of language proficiency to facilitate students to use the correct language system in speech, reading, and writing as well as appreciating and practicing good moral values, positive attitude, patriotic spirit, and citizenship through language activities that are the main pillar of GCED.

Besides Malay Language, History education also obtained the highest number of elements compared to other subjects. Among the elements that exist in this subject are "Having the ability to deal with rapid changes in all walks of life", "Becoming an active citizen, keeping abreast to a broad political life", "Defending and promoting human rights" and "Bringing closer local communities to a wider world". GCED elements in these subjects are also assessed base on the objectives mentioned in the History education curricula content, which is to understand human behavior, cause and effect, the uniqueness of the country's history, and the glory of

the country to produce a patriotic citizen and uphold democracy in this country (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013). In addition to that, the objective of the History education is also to understand the process of building human civilization and explaining past and present culture, which indirectly are related to the GCED elements. The History education also aims to introduce and instill among the students, the nation's heritage as part of the world community which is also one of GCED agenda.

The Islamic Education similarly contained the highest CGED elements, with the goal of producing students to be knowledgeable, eminent and skillful Muslims based on the teachings of Al-Quran and As-Sunnah, while at the same time contributing to the effort in enhancing the nation development and progress. It coincides with the GCED agenda that implements the values of togetherness and mutual respect among people regardless of race, religion and nationality. Among the elements embedded in Islamic Education subjects are "Having the ability to deal with rapid changes in all walks of life", "Being an active citizen, keeping abreast to a broad political life", "Maintaining and promoting human rights" and "Bringing closer the local community to a wider world".

Just like in the Malay language education, English Language education also set goals and objectives for students to use English as the device to communicate and connect with global community. It is parallel to the GCED elements contained in the subject, which are "Bringing closer local communities to a wider world", "Learning multiple languages", and "Capable of using new communication technologies". Most of the materials and infor-

Table 3. Distribution of the Global Citizenship Education Elements in the Primary School Standard Curriculum (KSSR)

Subjects /GCED Elements	ML	EL	SE	HE	IE	ME	Total
Can handle fast changes in all walks of life				/	/		2
Become an active citizen, keeping abreast to broad political life	/			/	/	/	4
Maintain and promote human rights				/	/	/	3
Bringing closer local communities to a wider world	/	/		/	/		4
Learning multiple languages	/	/					2
Know how to assess the impact on daily life based on scientific progress			/				1
Be able to use new communication technology	/	/					2
Total	4	3	1	4	4	2	18

*ML – Malay Language, EL – English Language, SE – Science Education, HE – History Education, IE – Islamic Education, ME – Moral Education.

mation on global issues are also being embedded in the English Language teaching and learning processes. Thus, the language education subjects (Malay and English Language) are reconsidered as the foundation for students to be educate and train in the effort to understand, talked, debate, discuss and participate in issues that occur globally.

For Moral Education, initially it is expected to get the same number of elements as in the Islamic Education, since both are focusing on similar issues which revolves around moral values. However, based on the document analysis, there are many differences between these two subjects. The difference that were found, was that Moral education emphasized on the formation of values limited to local values and only addressing the scope of the surrounding community, while in the Islamic Education scope, it is more diverse, and the issues taught are universally related. Among the GCED elements in this subject are "Being an active citizen, keeping abreast to broad political life" and "*Maintaining and promoting human rights*". Science education has special elements in accordance with the aims and objectives of the subject towards applying science to life. Science education is an important subject and it has very significant role in shaping the minds of future generations (Ministry of Education Malaysia 2013). Unfortunately, based on the document analysis of the subject's objectives, only one element of GCED, "*Knowing how to assess the impact on daily life based on scientific progress*", are present in the content. This result contradict to the aspiration in becoming a developed country which aspire for the community to become a science and technology literate community. Science education at the primary level are the most basic foundation needed to be able to produce human capital that could compete in the advance technology globally. The pronounced role of science education adaptation to the taught educational curriculum in primary schools must be emphasized and stressed. Such educational strategies enable students to be scientifically and technologically literate citizens and shape their thinking and behaviour towards the importance of sustainable development (Zakaria, 2011). The emphasis for mastering science knowledge as the crucial agenda, can be linked as the reason for these findings, since Malaysia is a developing country, aspiring to become a developed nation hoping to produce citizens that can contribute towards the sustainable technology (Kanapathy *et al.*, 2019).

Conclusion

Of the six core subjects assessed, each subject contains CGED elements with 3 subjects getting the highest number of elements (4 elements) namely Malay Language, History and Islamic Education. The most common element in KSSR subjects is "Being an active citizen" and "Bringing closer local communities to a wider world". Based on the content analysis, it was discovered that emphasize on the awareness of global issues are less compared to local issues. Only 4 subjects emphasized the elements, which are Malay language, English, History, and Islamic Education. This is because in the History education, the global issues were those that are associated with the history of the country being colonized by several countries. For Language education subjects, they directly consist the elements of GCED, which is language. Language is the tools for communication not only among people of the same race or country, but it is also the tools that can provide the 'bridge' among people from different race, countries or origins. Languages kills if not properly nurtured might lead to problems due to the loss of mutual respect, understanding and appreciation among the world's citizens. Although the role they play might differ, but both languages analyzed in this paper, has their own function. English Language education can be identified as the global tool for communication mediums with other people around the world, and, Malay Language education, is identified as the subject that could encouraged students to introduce their Malay culture and traditions to the world. Meanwhile, as for Islamic Education, it applied the universal approach which also taught the values in life and as the preparation to be a good citizen locally and globally. Even though GCED elements are not the focus stressed in the core subjects of the primary school curricula, language subjects and also Islamic and Moral Education have played the role in emphasizing the noble values to be practiced and applied in everyday life, which is also part of the GCED elements. Therefore, the education curriculum developer needs to produce a curriculum that provides the platform for teachers and students to deeply explore local and global issues and thus generate their self-positive reflection. The inter-dependency among us, who are the citizen of the world, urged the need to incorporate GCED visions that promotes critical understanding and respect for human rights and shared responsi-

bilities. This could also empower students as the human capital, to navigate the country in the future, towards supporting the sustainable agenda which are being promoted globally. To ensure that future generations contribute to sustainable economic, cultural, social and environmental development, education is one of the factors that play an important role. Through the school curriculum, the integration of knowledge, skills, and values need to be enhanced and committedly reinforced to create a citizen with a sustainable sense of thought, noble values and positive attitudes in sustaining everyday life, thus prospering the families, communities, nations and the world for the sake of the nation's heritage in the present and future .

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