

Global Citizenship Education through Transformative Learning in Adult Education in Terms of Intersectionality and Equity

Fayz Shoirra

mrs.shoirra.shukhrat@gmail.com

Abstract: This study investigates the integration of Global Citizenship Education (GCE) through the lens of transformative learning theory in adult education. As the world becomes increasingly interconnected, GCE plays a crucial role in fostering global awareness, intercultural competence, and ethical responsibility. However, its implementation—particularly in adult education—remains underexplored. This research explores how transformative learning, characterized by critical reflection, self-awareness, and experiential learning, can effectively support GCE among adult learners. Drawing on the theoretical foundations of Mezirow and Freire, the study examines how adults reshape their frames of reference through reflective and participatory engagement with global issues. Emphasis is placed on the development of 21st-century competencies such as critical thinking, collaboration, and ethical decision-making. The research highlights the importance of lifelong learning and the inclusion of marginalized voices in GCE programming. Ultimately, the study aims to inform educators and policymakers on creating inclusive, action-oriented curricula that advance the goals of UNESCO's Sustainable Development Goal 4.7: education for sustainable development and global citizenship.

Keywords: Transformative language, equity, intersectionality, intertextuality, social justice, postpositivism, global citizenship education.



This is an open-access article under the [CC-BY 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/) license

Introduction

This research topic primarily investigates the integration of global citizenship education (GCE) through transformative learning theory in adult education. It is organized into three sections. The first one is the cultivation of global awareness, which means that people are familiar with global issues, challenges, outcomes and solutions. The cultivation of global awareness encourages individuals to understand and engage with pressing international matters, fostering a sense of responsibility and interconnectedness. This foundational knowledge is essential for promoting informed action and advocacy in an increasingly globalized world. The second is intercultural competence, which covers realms like nations' beliefs, values, customs, and stereotypes. The last one is a sense of responsibility towards global issues, which involves several psychological procedures, such as being aware of challenges, researching them, engaging in self-reflection,

creating solutions, and implementing them. Through these processes, the sense of responsibility comes automatically without distractions.

Truly speaking, sometimes people, especially those who live in developing and undeveloped countries, haven't determined the main meaning of GCE and its importance in their social lives. GCE is an educational approach whose purpose is to teach or inform people of all ages about the earth, countries, humanity, animals, and space and navigate them by acquainting them with the necessary approaches, values, skills, and attitudes that positively impact the world. For instance, I took part in a UNESCO-sponsored educational camp in the mountainous region of Tashkent in 2004. It was a seven-day educational training camp with foreign volunteers from Paris and New York. The curriculum covered topics like AIDS, poverty, "UN's Millennium Development Goals 2015", and the main task of this camp: to prepare future leaders for the country where they were. The above-given topics are literally hardly found in state educational organizations' curricula. Therefore, UNESCO under the UN worked out the GCE programme for earth civilians in hopes that it helps preserve the earth and its lives. UNESCO (2015) says that GCE supports three main areas: cognitive (learning about global issues and how local, national, and global systems are connected); socio-emotional (building values, attitudes, and social skills that allow people to interact with others in a respectful and peaceful way); and behavioral (encouraging people to act responsibly and ethically in the face of global problems like poverty, inequality, climate change, and conflict).

Despite the GCE development, its curriculum is gradually renovated. As time changes, new issues arise, leading to challenges that require innovative approaches for operation and utilization. Therefore, I have chosen the theory of transformative learning, which specifically aligns with the GCE frameworks. Generally, transformative learning theory is based on the process where people's self-reflection comes through challenges by using critical thinking; moreover, the self-study process plays an inevitable role in the reflection procedure. It should be noted that the theory mostly works in adult education, where learners often bring established worldviews shaped by personal, cultural, and societal experiences independently.

Transformative learning, according to Mezirow (1991–1996) and Cranton (1994–1996), is the process of changing a frame of reference. As adults, we've built a coherent set of experiences, including beliefs, values, feelings, and learnt behaviors that shape our lives. Structures of assumptions that help us make sense of our experiences are called frames of reference. Their actions selectively shape and define our thoughts, feelings, perceptions, and expectations. Our "course of action" was decided by them. We move automatically from one mental or behavioral activity to another once the task is complete. We often ignore ideas that don't fit with what we already think, calling them crazy, pointless, unimportant, weird, or wrong. Transformative learners move towards a frame of reference that is more open, critical, self-reflective, and experience-integrative when the conditions allow it. So, Paulo Freire's idea of transformative learning focuses on conscientisation, or growing critical consciousness. According to Freire, education is a form of freedom because it makes people aware of unfair social situations and gives them the power to make things better. Freire's model emphasizes dialogue, praxis, and collective liberation (Freire, 1970), rather than just changing individuals. Freire focuses on the social and political aspects of learning that lead to group action for justice, while Mezirow focuses on how reflection can change the way we think about ourselves. Their ideas work well together to build a strong base for transformative learning in global citizenship education.

Adult education plays an important role in developing GCE by empowering individuals with the knowledge and 21st-century 4 "Cs" skills (creativity, critical thinking, collaboration and communicating) and ethical awareness, especially when engaged with global issues. There are many differences between GCE and state-regulated education; for example, the main one is focusing only on children and youth, or another one is the subject-orientated process. But adult

education reaches diverse populations while including lifelong learners and marginalized groups, making it a powerful tool for fostering global awareness across all stages of life. It provides a platform to reflect on these complex issues and to develop **intercultural competence, social responsibility, and collective problem-solving abilities.**

Certainly, I cannot totally pretend that GCE is perfect in all terms, but for now it is a practical and ethical tool for representing how well adults can be aware of global issues. A significant purpose of my study is to investigate and explore the effect of new approaches and theories, create innovative, workable curricula, find out the balance of social justice in certain communities and develop the core idea of transformative leadership. I'm going to explore how **transformative learning** approaches can be effectively utilized within **adult education** to promote **GCE**. It aims to examine the ways in which adult learners develop critical global awareness, intercultural competence, and a sense of ethical responsibility toward global issues when engaged in reflective, participatory, and action-orientated learning experiences. The findings of this research topic are expected to inform educators, curriculum developers, and policymakers on how to design more effective and inclusive adult education programmes that support lifelong learning and contribute to the realization of **UN Sustainable Development Goal 4.7**, which emphasizes education for sustainable development and global citizenship.

Contextualization of the Topic

Historical Context

The historical, political, and social changes of the 20th century, especially the end of World War II, and the development of human rights standards, have had a huge impact on the growth of GCE. These events changed the way people around the world thought about democracy, justice, and the point of school.

From an intersectional point of view, the years after World War II show how identities that overlapped, like race, class, gender, and country, affected who could get an education, have power, and be represented. As colonial powers fell apart, countries that had been colonized demanded educational methods that took into account the many forms of oppression their people had to deal with. Critical pedagogies, like Paulo Freire's, came about in reaction to both unequal education and the need for lessons that respected the real-life experiences of disadvantaged groups. GCE continues to be shaped by these battles by putting an emphasis on justice, cultural recognition, and inclusion in global education stories.

Ethics is one of the vital part of how GCE came to be as a training requirement. Moving away from authoritarian ways of teaching and towards a more human-centered, participatory, and transformative approach shows a stronger moral dedication to professionalism, justice, critique and caring for the world. GCE requires from learners not only understand global problems but also to act with moral courage and self-reflection.

It is especially important to think about equity in adult education, where learners often come from poor or non-traditional families. In the past, adult education was mostly about practical literacy and economic productivity, with politics and society being less important. With the help of critical theory, adult education started moving towards goals that let people be free, realizing that everyone needs equal access to formal education in order to fully participate in society and make changes.

So, the history of GCE shows a larger shift in how we think about knowledge: from set, structured systems of education to models that are dynamic, inclusive, and focused on justice. As time passes, it has changed because of a dedication to moral thought, fairness, and understanding the various identities and life experiences of learners around the world.

Sociocultural Context

GCE works in a world that is changing because of things like rising multiculturalism, global migration, digital connectivity, and shared global disasters like climate change and pandemics. Traditional school systems are being challenged by these changes, which call for teaching methods that are open to everyone, critical, and focused on justice.

Intersectionality helps us see that people experience the world changing around them in very different ways depending on their race, class, gender, country, language, and immigration status. Adult learners have a lot of different and complicated life situations that were often shaped by being left out and marginalized. If the GCE doesn't take these intersections into account, it could make inequality worse by supporting a "universal" global identity that might be based on Western norms instead of the realities of students from the Global South or communities that have been historically oppressed.

The idea of intertextuality shows how the discussion of global citizenship is built on top of many overlapping texts, like the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, UNESCO's frameworks, and national education policies. Each of these texts gives the idea its own meaning and values.

In order to be ethical, the GCE framework needs to ask whose opinions and experiences are valid in global education. Ethics in this case isn't just about teaching values like tolerance and understanding; it's also about dealing with things like privilege, exploitation, and structural injustice. As an example, an ethical method would question global stories that make issues like migration and climate change seem less political. Instead, it would show how these issues are affected by power imbalances.

For adult education to be fair in a social setting, it must not only give people access to learning, but also to voice and control. Many adults who are already on the outside have been consistently kept out of formal education or have had to deal with lessons that don't match their lives. GCE can help fix this by promoting inclusive, interactive, and learner-centred teaching methods that let all students see themselves as agents of global change. In short, GCE's sociocultural setting is formed by many complex global forces. However, it must be put into action with a strong dedication to intersectionality, ethical engagement, fairness in access and results, building knowledge through dialogue, and the pursuit of social justice.

Sociopolitical Context

In the world of GCE, there are conflicts between nationalism and globalism, changes in education policy, and different ideas about which global problems should be emphasized. Seeing these changes through the lens of critical theory shows how complicated it is to use GCE in adult education.

Sociopolitical power structures are not felt the same way by everyone, according to the intersectionality viewpoint. Some traits, like immigration status, socioeconomic class, race, and language, may have different effects on students depending on the policies that support global education. For instance, in some countries, immigrants or refugees may face policies that keep them out of adult education or make them look like risks to national identity. To fix these systemic mistakes, GCE needs to take down barriers and make sure that all learners, especially those who have been previously left out, are included in politics and culture.

We can think about how GCE is constructed or reinterpreted in policy papers, global frameworks (like SDG 4.7), political speeches, and media coverage by using intertextuality. These books often have ideologies that aren't directly stated. For example, "soft" GCE might stress volunteering and appreciating other cultures while avoiding more serious criticism of global capitalism, imperialism, or structural inequality. For a more transformative knowledge of global

responsibility, teachers need to read between the lines and put official stories next to grassroots, post-colonial, and counter-hegemonic texts.

It is morally wrong for GCE to use education as a way to make global citizens who are ready to work and follow the rules. Instead, curriculum and teaching should be based on ethics, which encourages sharing the truth, having critical communication, and taking moral action when injustice happens. The ethical GCE asks who has their views heard, whose suffering is recognized, and who gains from the way the world's economies and governments are set up..

The sociopolitical issue in terms of fairness is to make sure that adult education gives everyone equal chances to be involved in their communities and the world, not just the wealthy. Many policy efforts don't reach out to under-represented groups or use a "one-size-fits-all" approach that doesn't take into account differences in language, culture, and location. GCE that is based on equity tries to change the distribution of power, influence, and resources in both learning spaces and policymaking spaces.

Postpositivism questions the idea that political information is neutral or available to everyone. It pushes teachers and students to think critically about common stories and consider different points of view and truths that apply to the situation. This view says that adult learners are not just passive recipients of world knowledge set by the government. Instead, they are involved in making political meaning. When it comes to postpositivist GCE, reflexivity is very important, especially in highly charged situations where truth is contested and power is not shared fairly.

Power, ideology, and different ideas of what it means to be a citizen shape the social situation of GCE. In order to be critically informed, a strategy needs to include things like intersectionality, intertextual critique, ethical praxis, policy that focusses on equity, postpositivist epistemology, and a strong dedication to social justice.

Theoretical Connections

Looking at how intersectionality, intertextuality, ethics, equity, postpositivism, and social justice are connected to transformative learning and GCE makes the theoretical framework for GCE much stronger. These different points of view help us think about not only what is being taught, but also how, to whom, and for what reason.

Theory of Transformative Learning (Jack Mezirow)

Mezirow's theory is based on changing perspectives through critical reflection. This makes it a good starting point for adult learners whose worldviews are different because of their culture, gender, class, and other life events. This theory can be expanded from an intersectional point of view to include the idea that not all learners change or experience it in the same way. Power and identity dynamics affect who can think on themselves and whose "truths" are accepted. When intersectionality is added, radical learning looks at more than just the individual and takes into account the larger forces that shape how meaning is made.

Critical Pedagogy (Paulo Freire)

Freire's teaching philosophy is based on conscientisation, which means becoming more aware of one's social situation by talking to others and thinking about it. This way of thinking is naturally in line with social justice because it sees education as a political act that aims to free people instead of integrating them. Freire's focus on ethics is clear in his demand that teachers treat learners as co-creators of knowledge, not as empty vessels.

Putting Together Through Theoretical Lenses

Intersectionality	It looks at how race, gender, class, and other social identities affect people's ability to learn life-changing things and take part in global activities.
Intertextuality	It encourages deeper conversations across fields, cultures, and stories, making sure that GCE doesn't rely on a single viewpoint or main conversation.
Ethical Paradigms	They tell us that information is never neutral. Teachers must choose carefully what information to focus on and how to help students learn.
Equity	Voices that aren't heard must be included on purpose, and structural barriers in school systems must be recognized.
Postpositivism	It recognizes that there are more than two realities and questions the idea that curriculum, study, and assessment are objective.
Social Justice	It means that GCE must go beyond awareness to action, giving students the tools they need to challenge and change unfair structures.

Literature review

The academic literature on GCE in adult education is really large, but it shows both big steps forward and big gaps, especially when looking at it through critical views like postpositivism, intersectionality, equity, and ethics. This review brings together important research experiences and points of view that help us understand how GCE and transformative learning can work together, especially in adult education. It also uses intertextual and social justice frameworks to question common stories.

GCE in Settings for Adult Education

GCE in adult learning settings is often seen as a reaction to issues like migration, environmental crises, and the growing connection between people around the world (UNESCO, 2015). Studies (Schugurensky, 2006; Bourn, 2015), for example, say that adult learners are especially good for transformative GCE because of their life experiences and existing views. But most of the research articles still focusses on formal, Western education systems and doesn't talk much about non-Western, indigenous, or informal models of adult education. This gap shows that we need to pay more attention to how adult learners' traits (like race, immigration status, and socioeconomic class) affect their ability to access and use GCE.

How Well Transformative Learning Methods Work

Mezirow (1991) and Cranton, (2006) mentioned that transformative learning makes people question what they think they know about social justice and how the world works. O'Sullivan (1999), for example, talks about the global and environmental parts of transformative learning,

which is in line with GCE's goals. Some critics, such as Brookfield (2012) and Tisdell (2003), say that transformative learning needs to be based on political, ethical and culturally responsive teaching where learners should not make learning less political. They argue that it should instead accept postpositivist pluralism, which says that learners' views are shaped by their social situations. (Here I mean that consequences should be interpreted observing their live background.)

Research on Building Intercultural Competence

A key part of GCE is intercultural competence, which is studied a lot in language learning, cross-cultural training, and adult learning. In line with transformative learning, Deardorff (2006) and Bennett (1993) present models that see international development as a process- and iteration-based growth. Some people have said that most of these models are flawed because they are based on Western individualist ideas about growth and don't take into account collectivist, indigenous, or communal ways of knowing. Literature based on intersectionality shows that a person's social position has a big impact on how well they can interact with people from other cultures. Power imbalances must be addressed directly in order for learning to be fair and real (Banks, 2008).

Gaps

1. There aren't enough non-Western and global south views on GCE and radical learning.
2. Less researches have been done on community-based and informal settings for adult education, but these are places where a lot of social change happens.
3. Not many studies look at how GCE can deal with racism, sexism, and xenophobia in a way that goes beyond making ethical arguments.
4. Researchers usually look at results (what people learn) instead of ethical method, learner empowerment, or long-term civic engagement. (Unfortunately, results are more crucial than process, for example, in my community.)

Because of these holes, we need more postpositivist, and equity-driven research methods.

Research Questions

1. How does transformative learning in adult education help people learn how to be good global citizens through intersectionality lens?

This question looks at how learners' multiple identities (race, gender, class, ability, and migration status) affect how they interact with GCE and how transformative education adapts to these differences.

2. What consequences do intertextual factors have on how adult learners understand global issues in GCE? How do these texts support or challenge general stories?

This makes it possible to look at how different texts—such as course materials, culture texts, digital texts, and real-life experiences—shape and change students' global views. It also creates space for critical discussion and reflection.

3. How can GCE in adult education be developed and used in a way that is ethical and promotes fairness and equality in all learning environments?

This looks at the moral duties of schools and teachers when creating lessons, with a focus on including everyone, showing diversity, and creating safe places to learn.

4. Why is transformative GCE important for adult learners? How can it help them become more critical thinking and promote social justice?

This is about going from being aware to taking action, and it looks at how students can be given the tools to question structural injustice and become ethical change agents.

Conclusion

In a world that changes and connects rapidly GCE is becoming an important way to give adult learners the knowledge, skills, and sense of moral duty they need to deal with global issues in an important way. This research work has looked at how transformative learning, which is based on critical thinking, communication, collaboration and creativity can be used as a good basis for teaching GCE to adults. Adults can question their beliefs, change their worldviews (in terms GCE only), and help making the world a more fair and sustainable place to live by developing global awareness, intercultural competence, and a sense of social duty through transformative learning.

Adding important ideas like intertextuality, ethics, postpositivism, social justice, and intersectionality makes the GCE structure even better. These lenses force teachers and policy makers to think about who has more power, who has a voice, and how power relationships affect the learning process. This makes GCE more open, interactive, and life-changing, especially for adult learners whose identities are often complicated, varied, and historically increased to the edges. The main purpose of this research work is not only to highlight for GCE to be used in adult education, but also to encourage the creation of lessons that help learners become thoughtful, globally-minded individuals. Citizens like these are able to think critically about their local and global situations, work to improve understanding between cultures, and act morally to make the world more fair. In order to reach the goal set out in SDG 4.7, the combination of transformative learning and GCE has the huge potential to change the way we think about education as something that lasts a lifetime and is about freedom and justice.

References

1. Diatta, J. D. (2020). Manual for developing intercultural competencies: Story circles. *Journal of International Students*, 10(4), 1117–1119. <https://doi.org/10.32674/jis.v10i4.2729>
2. Fischman, G. E., & Gandin, L. A. (2016). The pedagogical and ethical legacy of a “successful” educational reform: The Citizen School Project. *Springer Science Business Media Dordrecht and UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11125-016-9365-0>
3. Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. Herder and Herder.
4. Holliday, A., & MacDonald, M. N. (2020). Researching the intercultural: Intersubjectivity and the problem with postpositivism. *Applied Linguistics*, 41(5), 621–639. <https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/amz006>
5. Kroth, M., & Cranton, P. (2006). Transformation through educational experiences. In P. Cranton (Ed.), *Understanding and promoting transformative learning: A guide for educators of adults* (2nd ed., pp. 115–138). Jossey-Bass.
6. Mezirow, J. (1997). Transformative learning: Theory to practice. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 1997(74), 5–12. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ace.7401>
7. Minow, M. (2021). Equality vs. equity. *American Journal of Law and Equality*, 1(1), 1–23. https://doi.org/10.1162/ajle_a_00019
8. O’Sullivan, E. (1999). *Transformative learning: Educational vision for the 21st century*. Zed Books.
9. Shapiro, J. P., & Stefkovich, J. A. (2022). *Ethical leadership and decision making in education: Applying theoretical perspectives to complex dilemmas* (5th ed.). Routledge. <https://lcn.loc.gov/2021025939>

10. Shields, C. M. (2010). Transformative leadership: Working for equity in diverse contexts. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 46(4), 558–589. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X10375609>
11. Shields, C. M., & Hesbol, K. A. (2020). Transformative leadership approaches to inclusion, equity, and social justice. *Journal of School Leadership*, 30(1), 3–22. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1052684619873343>
12. UNESCO. (n.d.). *Indicator 4.7.1 - Extent to which (i) global citizenship education and (ii) education for sustainable development are mainstreamed*. <https://indicators.report/targets/4-7/>