

## **Global issues and English as global language**

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### **Abstract**

This article paints an optimistic picture of the role we second language teachers can play not only in improving our students' language proficiency but also in infusing global education into our classes as we join with our students to address global concerns, such as peace, prosperity, environmental protection, and human rights.

In this article, we two authors propose an optimistic view of the future of this planet. We propose that as our tiny globe spins round the sun. The means by which we have been attempting this lies in the infusion of global education into the second language curriculum. First, we describe what global education entails and provide a list of some organizations of second language teachers who include global education in their teaching. Second, we go into depth on two major areas of global education: peace education and environmental education. Third, we discuss four questions that second language teachers frequently ask about the inclusion of global education in their teaching.

**Key words:** global education, Global issues, environmental education, global language, pedagogy.

## **Introduction**

In the last decade, tertiary institutions have attempted to design different methods to meet the demands of globalisation as it relates to teaching and learning. Several educators concur that there is a need to develop pedagogy that prepares students to become global citizens in a world marked by diversity, interdependence and cross-cultural interactions. This new teaching/learning paradigm of global education fosters understanding of the multifaceted nature of 21st-Century life, individual and collective growth and success in a globalised space.

Global education develops students' awareness of the world, understanding of economic systems, literature, cultures and technological advancements. Content is designed for knowledge acquisition as well as to develop core values of integrity, civic responsibility, an understanding of human freedom, and of how the 21st Century will change human life.

The linguistic context means that graduates will be better prepared for world citizenship through solid programmes that equip them to exhibit high levels of competence in English language, since English continues to be in a second-language position for many students. These students need to regard writing and speaking in English as an indispensable intellectual activity that can enable them to participate in debates about the issues, ambiguities and complexities.

English language must be rigorously taught, drawing on foreign-language teaching strategies to allow students to practice it in a wide range of contexts. The Macedonian graduate who will inevitably become a citizen of a world that extends beyond the R. Macedonia region needs to develop proficiency in languages that are increasingly important in the global economy. The teaching of foreign languages has mainly been promoted for their personal, cognitive and general academic benefit, including enhancing reading abilities, promoting problem-solving abilities, and the ability to hypothesize. However, not enough

is being done to signal the potential to help students discover societies outside of their own.

In the Macedonia, university graduates are expected to play central roles in the social, economic and political development of their respective countries. The unique characteristics tend to hinder the emergence of vibrant and active graduates. There is a need then for change and development using approaches shaped by concepts of global education, so that these institutions do not merely become microcosms of their local societies.

One important way in which foreign languages can be used as instruments of global education in is to align foreign-language/course-learning outcomes with university strategic planning, since more universities are developing strategic plans that reveal their desire to engage in internationalization. This will aid the agenda of preparing students who understand and can live and work in different parts of the globe and understand how different societies function.

Too often, global education is thought of as bringing bad news into the classroom, as something that leaves students feeling depressed. No doubt, there is much happening in the world to be sad about, but at the same time, there is much happening to be happy about. Some all-too-familiar examples of the bad news include wars, poverty, racism, endangered species and deforestation, discrimination against women and those of different sexual orientation, injustice, and apathy in the face of all these problems. On the bright side, we can see in the news and in our own lives examples of peace returning to war-ravaged lands, sustainable development helping to lift people from poverty, people of different races living, working, and learning together harmoniously, protection of endangered species and establishment of protected forests, people working to overcome discrimination and standing up against injustice, and all of this happening because people do care and believe that they can make a difference.

### **Global citizenship**

Global citizenship involves understanding political rights and responsibilities. Foreign-language teaching can aid in this regard by expanding the course content beyond linguistic components to include issues such as climate change, HIV/AIDS, civil wars and how these affect people across the world. Reading experiences in foreign languages and activities such as dialogue production can also be used to inform students about global events and to expand their perspective.

Mention must be made of the Macedonian association of language teachers, which has developed a course called “global “issues in language Education”. In this course, students are given an opportunity to research and discuss the severity of many global issues and how they affect human beings. This is a commendable effort to make language learning serve the purpose of raising the awareness of citizens, who need to understand the world in which they live while improving their ability to express themselves in a foreign tongue.

### **Cultural empathy**

The university graduate must understand that the world is characterized by diversity and difference. Problems such as cultural prejudices, racism, classism and sexism can be explored in foreign-language classrooms. This kind of exposure can aid in the development of cultural empathy and an understanding of the inter-connections among people.

Foreign-language classes can be used to challenge students to engage with public matters. Citizenship involves understanding the public sphere. Students need to be presented with different languages to be able to discuss policies in the public domain. This can be encouraged through cultural links such as email correspondence with other persons living in countries of the target language. Guest lectures by native speakers involved in policymaking can also be done, as well as discussion sessions designed to help students learn

about different types of policies and policymaking. This will not only help students to develop an awareness of world citizenship and its broad expanse, but also to appreciate policy issues on both the local and global levels.

University students who are being prepared for global citizenship must be able to operate in a global business environment. The offerings in foreign-language courses in English must include courses that will equip students with the language of business, marketing, economics and banking, enabling them to secure jobs and engage in important discourse on business-related matters in different world economies. Awareness of cultural practices, social customs and ethical practices across linguistic borders will facilitate integration and enhance success of business-related activities.

Finally, foreign-language teaching (FLT) has a multifaceted role to play in preparing students to be citizens of the world. Apart from equipping students with communicative competence in its different forms - linguistic, strategic and discourse - FLT also has a political agenda to fulfill. A radical transformation in the content of, English or any foreign-language programme can have an impact on the values and knowledge that students need to understand: tolerance for all people, human rights and ways of responding to international events and crises. A global education approach to teaching foreign languages will integrate critical policies into curriculum content and help students develop their social and personal responsibilities at both local and global levels.

### **Questions about integrating global education in second language teaching**

A range of questions arise when second language teachers and materials developers attempt to integrate global education. Below, we address four of these questions:

1. Should every lesson be a global issues lesson?
2. Can we teach language at the same time we teach global issues?

3. How can we get enough knowledge about global issues to include them in our teaching?

4. How can we get materials for global education?

Question 1 - Should every lesson be a global issues lesson?

Infusing global education into second language teaching does not mean every lesson, every reading passage; every group discussion should be about some global concern. What is being advocated is that global education be a regular and consistent part of the curriculum, not just something that is thrown in once or twice a year.

Question 2 - Can we teach language at the same time we teach global issues?

"As language teachers we are the most fortunate of teachers--all subjects are ours. Whatever [the students] want to communicate about, whatever they want to read about, is our subject matter", Wilga Rivers (1976, p. 96). Indeed, the communicative approach, the dominant one in second language instruction, emphasizes that languages are best learned by using them to communicate meaning, rather than by focusing on explicit learning of grammar and vocabulary. Global education provides a wealth of content and themes for students and teachers to choose from.

Question 3 - How can we get enough knowledge about global issues to include them in our teaching?

As mentioned in the United Nation's environmental education objectives, knowledge is important. However, in a learner-centered education paradigm, the teacher is no longer seen as the key source of knowledge for students. Instead of being "Sages on stages", we are now "Guides on the side", facilitating learning, helping students discover how they can be independent learners. We are not afraid to say to students, "I don't know. Why don't you find out and teach me and the rest of the class?" or "I don't know. How can we find out together?" In addition to gaining knowledge from and with our students,

another place to turn is to teachers in other subjects. The increasing popularity of cross-curricular projects offers an excellent way for teachers of different subjects to learn from each other as they guide student learning.

#### 4. How can we get materials for global education?

While some second language course books already contain lessons or parts of lessons related to global education and other ready-made materials can be obtained (see the two appendices for references), these may not be well-suited to our students' immediate needs and interests, or may be too expensive. For materials to be as fresh as today's headlines and closely connected to students' lives, they should be developed at a local or national level. Also, teachers can collaborate with to create and share materials

### **Summary**

Global education represents another case in which educators may need to accept delayed gratification. We need to remember the saying, "One generation plants tree, the next generation gets the shade". We cannot solve global problems in a few years. Indeed, they may very well get worse before they get better; all the more reason to keep trying, to keep thinking about the shade to come.

In education, we often do not see the fruits of our efforts until many years later, if at all. We need to have faith that what we are doing will sooner or later help our students become more aware, resourceful, and caring citizens of their country and the world.

In this article, we have presented some ideas about how we second language teachers can do our share to educate students in a holistic way by helping them become better citizens at the same time that they become more proficient in a new language. Implementing these ideas is more difficult than just sticking to the textbook, but our heartfelt experience with our own students tells us that teaching via global issues can be deeply rewarding and satisfying. No doubt, many of you already incorporate global education into your teaching.

## References

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