

EXPLOITING PROJECT-BASED LEARNING APPROACHES TO FOSTER GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION IN LOWER SECONDARY CIVIC EDUCATION

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Abstract. In the context of increasing global interdependence and social complexities, Global Citizenship Education (GCED) has emerged as an essential educational orientation aimed at equipping learners with knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values necessary to engage actively and responsibly with global issues. Given its intrinsic connection to the formation of civic consciousness and social responsibility, Civic Education provides a suitable context for the integration of GCED content and competencies. Using document analysis, this study explores the project-based learning approach as an effective pedagogical strategy for promoting global citizenship education at lower secondary level. The paper focuses on proposing a process for designing project-based learning activities for GCED in Civic Education, emphasizing the alignment between learning objectives, interdisciplinarity, student agency, and the practical relevance of learning activities.

Keywords: project-based learning, civic education, global citizenship education, lower secondary.

1. Introduction

In the context of accelerated globalization, individuals are no longer solely citizens of a single nation, but also global citizens bearing responsibilities and obligations toward global issues such as climate change, migration, cultural conflicts, inequality, and sustainable development. Accordingly, fostering the mindset and actions of global citizens has become a central goal of 21st-century education, a goal emphasized by UNESCO and other international educational organizations.

In Vietnam, the 2018 General Education Curriculum underscores the role of Civic Education in cultivating core values such as patriotism, compassion, diligence, honesty, and responsibility, while simultaneously highlighting the development of life skills and global citizenship competencies. Therefore, integrating Global Citizenship Education (GCED) into Civic Education at the lower secondary level is essential.

Numerous international and local studies have approached Civic Education through the lens of global citizenship, many of which emphasize project-based learning (PBL) as a viable pedagogical approach. UNESCO's 2015 publication *Global Citizenship Education: Topics and Learning Objectives* [1; 74] emphasizes the integration of GCED into various school subjects, including Civic Education. This document also advocates for learner-centered teaching methods to promote GCED such as project-based learning, group work, experiential learning, and service learning. In the book *Exploring Our Roles as Global Citizens* [2; 60], one of the learning activities,

entitled "Global change begins with me", requires students to design and implement an action-oriented research project addressing a global issue. The book also provides assessment tools for evaluating student project work with scoring rubrics for pre and post-project assessments.

Despite the absence of direct address of global citizenship education, previous studies have explored several aspects aligned with its goals, such as the development of critical thinking, problem-solving, and decision-making competencies [3]; the development of systems thinking and abstract thinking [4], [5]; computational thinking competency [6]; problem-solving and collaboration skills [7].

In the article "*Project-based learning for sustainability and altruism: implementation guides for primary and secondary educators*" [8], the group of authors provides primary and secondary education guides to implement project-based learning for sustainability, altruism, and human rights. Both implementation guides provide steps for school administrators and teachers to involve young people in altruistic actions in their community, emphasizing the development of a global moral identity and a life of service. Project topics are suggested for K12 education that align with the U.N. Sustainable Development Goals, the promotion of human rights and global citizenship. Notably, the authors proposes a five-step process for designing sustainability education projects at the lower secondary level, including Step 1: Expand teacher knowledge of PBL and SDGs; Step 2: Connect to the SDG Community; Step 3: Engage students; Step 4: Curriculum and lesson alignment; Step 5: Secure permits and permission for project implementation.

Directly addressing the role of project-based learning (PBL) in global citizenship education, the research team of Shea N. Kerkhoff, Hiller A. Spires, and Sharon J. Wright, in Chapter 18 titled '*Teaching Global Citizenship through Inquiry in a Rural Junior High School*' [9] from the book *Educating for Social Justice*, provide a detailed explanation of how a team of teachers at a rural junior high school supported students in developing critical citizenship, digital citizenship, and global citizenship competencies through a PBL-oriented project on global hunger. The authors also analyzed the successes and challenges experienced by teachers when implementing a project focused on global social justice in a rural context.

In Vietnam, Citizenship Education at the lower secondary level has been discussed by several scholars. Among them, Nguyen Duc Quang, in his article titled "*Civic Education Teaching Methods in General Education Schools: Current Practices and Proposed Solutions*" [10], highlights the contribution of PBL to the development of competencies such as collaboration, information search and processing, problem-solving, and critical and creative thinking. Some other authors have also addressed the application of PBL in teaching *Economic and Legal Education* at the high school level such as [11], [12]. However, these studies do not address the integration of global citizenship education content. Nguyen Thi Viet Ha (2020), in her article *Global citizenship education in lower secondary Civic Education under the new general education curriculum* [13], analyzes the objectives of GCED in Vietnam, its feasibility in lower secondary Civic Education, and suggests instructional strategies and organizational formats.

These studies collectively affirm the necessity of incorporating GCED into Civic Education and recognize project-based learning as a promising instructional approach. However, there remains a gap in the literature regarding the design process of project-based learning specifically aimed at fostering global citizenship within lower secondary Civic Education.

2. Content

2.1. Overview of Global Citizenship Education in Lower Secondary Civic Education

Global Citizenship Education (GCED) is a key educational orientation proposed and recommended by UNESCO. It aims to equip learners with necessary knowledge, skills, values,

and attitudes to actively engage with global issues and live responsibly in a multicultural, interconnected, and interdependent world. According to UNESCO (2015), GCED seeks to develop learners' cognitive understanding (e.g., awareness of local, national, and global interconnections; critical thinking and analytical skills); socio-emotional awareness and attitudes (e.g., a sense of shared responsibility, values grounded in human rights, empathy, solidarity, and respect for diversity); and behavioral competencies (e.g., ability and willingness to take informed, responsible, and effective action at local, national, and global levels for a more peaceful and sustainable world) [1]. Oxfam's guidance *Education for Global Citizenship: A Guide for Schools* [14] highlights the potential of Civic Education in supporting GCED, noting that the subject provides opportunities for students to explore issues of social justice, human rights, community cohesion and global independence; to challenge injustice, inequality, and discrimination through informed and responsible action; to explore diversity, identity and belonging; and to examine power and governance structures and the causes and consequences of unequal power relations.

In the Vietnamese context, the objectives of GCED have been outlined by Luong Viet Thai [15], including the following:

Knowledge: Understanding global issues such as environmental pollution, depletion of natural resources, poverty, epidemics, public health, democracy, social justice, gender equality, conflict and peace, and global peacebuilding; awareness of the interconnectedness and interdependence of issues and communities at local, national, and global levels; understanding cultural diversity among ethnic groups and nations.

Skills: Self-awareness regarding personality, emotions, desires, and values; recognizing one's role and position in the community at various levels (local, national, global); analyzing and critically evaluating global issues and multiple perspectives; communicating and collaborating in multicultural environments and with international peers; adapting to new, culturally and socially different environments; cooperating in solving practical problems and addressing community-based challenges for the benefit of society at all levels; resolving conflicts; using foreign languages in communication and learning; utilizing information technology, especially the Internet, for study and interaction.

Attitudes and values: Patriotism and love for one's family and homeland; compassion, empathy, solidarity, and care for others; respect for diversity and cultural differences; commitment to peace, democracy, social justice, gender equality, children's rights, and human rights; fair and equal treatment of all people; appreciation for the cultural values of different ethnicities and nations; pride in national cultural heritage while remaining open to learning from the cultural achievements of other countries; environmental awareness; and a sense of responsibility, proactivity, and readiness to engage in meaningful community activities.

In her article titled *Global Citizenship Education in Lower Secondary Citizenship Education (according to the New General Education Curriculum)*, author Nguyen Thi Viet Ha also addresses the potential for implementing global citizenship education through the subject of Citizenship Education. The author emphasizes:

“In the Citizenship Education curriculum at each grade level, among the ten thematic units, approximately four to six topics have the potential to fulfill the goals of global citizenship education. These goals are clearly articulated in the learning objectives of each topic, with most being identified in the matrix as demonstrating a high level of full integration. This indicates that Citizenship Education at the lower secondary level possesses significant advantages in achieving the objectives of global citizenship education in terms of knowledge, skills, competencies, and attitudes” [13; 82].

The goals of Civic Education 2018 at the lower secondary level in Vietnam are specified as fostering students' understanding of basic moral and legal standards, promoting pride in their family, homeland, and nation, and cultivating a sense of responsibility toward family, school,

society, work, and the environment. Additionally, the subject seeks to equip students with the ability to build and maintain harmonious relationships with others and to adapt to a rapidly changing society. These objectives align well with the broader goals of GCED. Moreover, the content of the Civic Education curriculum includes a variety of topics that lend themselves to GCED, such as thriftiness, pride in family and ancestral traditions, love for humanity, preservation of cultural heritage, and prevention of domestic violence. These themes offer rich opportunities to integrate global citizenship concepts into the classroom context.

2.2. The relevance of project-based learning for Global citizenship education in lower secondary Civic Education

Project-based learning (PBL) is an active teaching and learning approach in which students independently undertake complex, real-world tasks under the guidance of the teacher, with the goal of producing meaningful products. PBL is understood as a comprehensive instructional method in which, through the resolution of real-life problems (i.e., projects) aligned with curricular content, learners acquire knowledge and develop skills by integrating theory with practice and creating tangible outcomes [6].

Project-based Learning (PBL) demonstrates a high degree of suitability for implementing Global Citizenship Education (GCED) in the Civic Education (CE) subject at the lower secondary level. First and foremost, PBL contributes to the fulfillment of the core objectives of GCED, such as fostering global awareness, social responsibility, and community engagement. At the same time, it aligns with the competency-based goals and moral values emphasized in the Civic Education curriculum at this educational stage.

Secondly, through the design and implementation of learning projects that address pressing global issues such as environmental protection, pandemics, climate change, social inequality, human rights, and sustainable development, which are consistent with the content of multiple CE topics, PBL not only facilitates the integration of GCED themes into specific subject matter but also plays an active role in shaping the content of integrated, interdisciplinary topics. This approach bridges local and global knowledge, thereby enhancing the depth and relevance of Civic Education content. According to a city-level scientific report by Nguyen Manh Hai, which explores the current status of GCED in lower secondary schools in Hanoi, the research team surveyed 1,208 students and 258 school administrators and teachers across eight schools. The results showed that 41.5% of the respondents claimed that GCED-related content was most commonly integrated into subjects such as Civic Education, Experiential Activities, and Career Orientation [7; 61]. Furthermore, when evaluating GCED teaching methods, 60.9% of administrators and teachers reported using strategies such as group discussion, role-play, and project-based learning as the most frequently implemented [7; 71].

Finally, PBL plays a vital role in cultivating the core competencies necessary for students to become global citizens. These include critical thinking, collaboration and communication, problem-solving, community engagement, and responsible decision-making. Through engaging in authentic, real-world learning tasks, students gain not only a profound understanding of global issues but also essential skills and dispositions that prepare them to actively participate in addressing the shared challenges of humanity.

2.3. The process of designing project-based learning activities aimed at educating Global Citizens in Civic Education at the lower secondary level

Numerous studies have proposed processes for designing project-based learning (PBL) activities to serve various educational purposes, such as: developing students' competency to apply learned knowledge and skills; project-based teaching – from theory to practice; applying PBL in Civic Education; designing and organizing activities to foster students' problem-solving

and creative thinking skills in interdisciplinary themes. Building upon the insights and models from these works, the author proposes a process for designing project-based learning to promote global citizenship education (GCE) in Civic Education for lower secondary students as follows:

2.3.1. Step 1. Identifying the title and objectives of the project aimed at global citizenship education in Civic Education

To implement this step, teachers and students need to refer to the objectives and content of global citizenship education, and analyze the Civic Education curriculum as stipulated in the 2018 General Education Program, in order to identify topics in which GCE content can be effectively integrated. Some relevant topics that align with the goals of GCE include: environmental protection and climate change, gender equality, human rights, sustainable consumption, and citizens' responsibilities to the international community.

Based on this foundation, teachers and students should determine the objectives and GCE content to be integrated. Teachers can then guide students to choose and discuss an appropriate project title. This can be done by asking students directly about issues of their interest, or by providing a list of project ideas related to the intended content and asking students to choose the topic. The title of a PBL topic should be concise, explicit, and clear.

The following table presents a number of lesson topics suitable for GCE objectives in Civic Education, along with suggested project ideas:

Table 1. Proposed projects integrating Global Citizenship Education into the Civic Education Subject

No.	Grade	Lesson Topic	Learning Objectives	Global Citizenship Education Goals	Suggested Project-Based Learning activities
1	6	Saving	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Define the concept of saving and identify its concrete manifestations. - Recognize the importance and necessity of practicing saving in personal and community life. - Apply saving principles to daily study and activities. - Analyze and evaluate saving behaviors objectively. - Identify and critique wasteful behaviors. 	<p>Understand the risks of natural resource depletion and recognize the importance of rational and efficient use of essential resources such as energy and clean water for sustainable development.</p>	<p>Project: “Saving journeys – actions for the future” Students raise awareness of resource, financial, and energy saving through activities such as reducing electricity/water/plastic usage, creating smart spending plans, and designing school-wide saving models. Students are connected with international organizations to understand the global impact of saving and contribute to protecting resources for the future.</p>
2	7	Preservation of cultural heritage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Understand the concept and types of cultural heritage in Vietnam. 	<p>Respect national cultural values and global cultural</p>	<p>Project: “Heritage journeys – preserving and promoting culture”</p>

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Recognize the role and value of heritage in human life and societal development. - Be aware of legal regulations on citizens' rights and responsibilities in heritage protection. - Be aware of student responsibilities in cultural preservation. - Identify threats to heritage and propose prevention strategies. - Participate in heritage protection activities appropriate to their age. 	<p>excellence. Preserve national identity while appreciating human cultural values.</p> <p>Demonstrate openness to learning about diverse cultures worldwide.</p>	<p>Students explore and preserve local cultural heritage by researching, creating videos, or joining heritage protection campaigns. They also engage in international exchanges to share and learn about global heritage, enhancing awareness and responsibility in cultural preservation in a globalized context.</p>
3	8	Respect for ethnic diversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - List examples of ethnic and cultural diversity worldwide. - Understand the importance of respecting differences among nations and cultures. - Express respect for diversity through words and actions. - Condemn racism and cultural discrimination. 	<p>Develop understanding and appreciation of cultural richness and diversity among nations.</p>	<p>Project: “Cultural colors – connecting the world”</p> <p>Students learn about and show respect for cultural diversity by organizing cultural days, interacting with students from other countries, and creating media content about customs, clothing, languages, and arts worldwide.</p>

2.3.2. Step 2: Constructing a set of guiding questions

The set of guiding questions helps students apply thinking skills, understand the nature of the issue, and develop a system of knowledge, skills, and attitudes in alignment with the content of global citizenship education. When designing these questions, educators should guide learners to approach real-life issues, think critically about core concepts, and aim each question at addressing specific problems outlined in the learning plan.

Upon completing the project, students will produce a product that encodes the content they have learned. Therefore, in constructing the guiding questions, teachers should pose questions that steer students toward creating specific project outputs.

The guiding question set includes the following types:

Essential questions: these are open-ended, broad-scope questions that encourage exploration and inquiry. They focus on major, enduring concepts and require higher-order thinking skills. Essential questions are often interdisciplinary in nature and encapsulate the overarching ideas of the project. They extend beyond a single lesson or unit and are meaningful across various subject areas.

Lesson questions: these are open-ended questions closely related to the project or a specific lesson. They present engaging problems that stimulate students' curiosity and help address

concrete ideas and tasks. Lesson questions support the exploration of essential questions and direct students' learning toward the goals of the project.

Content questions: these questions have clearly defined correct answers and are directly linked to the acquisition of specific knowledge. They often relate to definitions or require recall of factual information (similar to traditional test questions). Content questions serve to reinforce foundational knowledge necessary for completing the project and addressing the broader questions.

2.3.3. Step 3: Developing reference resources

This step aims to help both teachers and students learn how to search for suitable resources to support the project. Throughout the implementation of the project, students must regularly consult documents and resources to solve real-world problems. A well-developed resource base provides reliable information for learning activities.

Reference resources may include websites, academic books, articles, newspapers, videos, and other media. Teachers must guide students in how to search for reliable sources. They are encouraged to look for materials that are directly relevant to the project content and are properly cited, accurate, and scholarly.

After verifying the academic reliability of student-proposed materials, teachers can incorporate them into the pool of resources for teaching and learning. Reference resources should be diverse in origin, including both domestic and international sources, to support the development of students' information literacy - a key skill in global citizenship education.

2.3.4. Step 4: Project planning and task assignment

After identifying the topic and learning objectives, the teacher divides the class into groups (each group consisting of 4–6 students) and assigns tasks to each group. The groups are assigned key responsibilities, suggested solutions, locations for project implementation, and expected outcomes upon project completion.

Under the guidance of the teacher, each student group develops an implementation plan before coming to class using various manners (individual members draft plans, then discuss via social media platforms such as Zalo, Facebook, etc.; or meet in person to work together). Groups are expected to discuss and propose a task map outlining the work to be done.

Students should evaluate the proposed solutions and clearly allocate tasks among members. The project plan should include: Tasks to be carried out; estimated time for completion; implementation location; required resources (materials, tools, budget, etc.); implementation procedures; main person in charge and collaborators; expected deliverables.

2.3.5. Step 5: Project implementation

Students carry out tasks according to the plans assigned. The teacher provides guidance for group members to regularly exchange ideas, engage in discussions, collect and analyze data, and propose solutions to address the identified problem.

The teacher should monitor the project's progress, remind students to voice their concerns when encountering difficulties, and offer support or advice as needed to ensure the timely implementation of the project.

It is essential that the teacher consistently provides timely feedback and encouragement to help students fulfill their group responsibilities. However, students should still be given space for individual creativity, as long as it remains within the framework and orientation of the lesson objectives.

2.3.6. Step 6: Product presentation and evaluation

Upon completion of the project, student groups present their products to the class or to an evaluation panel (which may include teachers, students from other classes, parents, and community representatives). Possible formats for presentation include: Communication video

clips; Exhibition posters; Multimedia presentations; School-based events (e.g., awareness campaigns, pledge-signing activities).

To foster students' communication and collaboration skills, and to optimize learning time throughout the project, teachers should guide and supervise the individual tasks within each group. This includes monitoring peer accountability, conducting cross-member and cross-group assessments, and consistently reminding students of their learning goals to promote greater ownership and responsibility toward completing assigned tasks.

Based on the activity content, the expected learning outcomes, and global citizenship education goals, teachers should develop evaluation criteria and assessment tools to monitor student progress from the project planning stage through to completion.

To evaluate the process effectively, teachers can design and implement tools such as: Observation checklists; Group assessment forms; Discussion evaluation forms; Field research activity evaluation sheets; Project content evaluation rubrics; Final reflection/evaluation reports; Self-assessment forms.

Teachers may also encourage students to co-design evaluation criteria and tools according to their group's specific tasks, and promote self-assessment and peer assessment among groups to enhance student engagement and critical thinking.

2.4. Illustrative example

Project Title: *Green Citizens – Take Action for the Environment*

Subject: Civic Education – Grade 8

Topic: Environmental protection and natural resource conservation

Duration: 6 weeks

Learning objectives: Recognize the necessity of protecting the environment and conserving natural resources; recognize that environmental pollution is a global issue; Identify some basic legal provisions on environmental and natural resource protection; and describe several necessary measures for protecting the environment and natural resources; Implement appropriate actions for environmental and resource protection suitable to students' age; Develop skills in cooperation, creativity, and communication; Foster a responsible attitude and proactive behavior towards environmental issues.

Guiding question development

Essential (Overarching) question: *What will happen if the environment is polluted and natural resources are depleted?*

Unit-level questions: *What role do the environment and natural resources play in human life?; What is the current environmental situation in your local area and around the world?; What is the cause of environmental pollution, degradation, and resource depletion?; What can children and young people do to help address environmental problems?; What actions have countries around the world taken to protect the environment?*

Content-specific questions: *What is the environment?; What types of natural resources exist?; What are the legal obligations of Vietnamese citizens regarding environmental protection stipulated by the law?*

Reference resource development

Teachers provide students with search keywords such as: *environmental protection actions, environmental protection ideas, eco-friendly products, recycling, waste sorting, etc.* Teachers may also suggest reliable search sources, including:

Websites: <https://moitruong.com.vn> - Environmental news and awareness in Vietnam; <https://baotainguyencoainmoitruong.vn> - Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment; <https://greenhub.org.vn> - GreenHub Vietnam: Environmental NGO; <https://wwf.org> – World

Wildlife Fund (global and Vietnam pages); <https://unep.org> – United Nations Environment Programme; <https://www.unicef.org/environment-and-climate-change>

Books and Journals: Environmental science textbooks (Grade 8+); Civic Education textbooks; Youth environmental action magazines.

Videos and Documentaries: National Geographic: Planet or Plastic?; TED-Ed videos on environmental topics; Short films and school campaigns on YouTube or educational platforms.

Textbooks and academic references: Ministry of Education and Training (2006). *Environmental Science*, Education Publishing House; Ministry of Education and Training (2010). *Human and the Environment*, Vietnam Education Publishing House; Assoc. Prof. Dr. Dinh Duc Truong, Dr. Nguyen Cong Thanh, Dr. Ngo Thanh Mai (2022). *Natural Resources and Environmental Management*, National Economics University Press; Prof. Dr. Le Hong Hanh & Assoc. Prof. Dr. Vu Thu Hanh (2019). *Environmental Law*, People's Public Security Publishing House.

Guiding students to develop a project plan and assign tasks

The teacher divides the class into groups and guides students in identifying the tasks and expected products of the project. In addition, teachers collaborate with students to develop a specific and detailed roadmap for implementing the project. The project plan is presented on the Padlet page via the provided link: https://padlet.com/thuha_gdct/greencitizens

Guiding students in designing project assessment tools

For this project, the teacher guides students in developing various project assessment forms, including: the individual self-assessment form, the peer group work evaluation form, the project product evaluation form, and the final project reflection form. Project assessment forms are also presented on the Padlet page via the provided link: https://padlet.com/thuha_gdct/greencitizens

3. Conclusion

Integrating global citizenship education (GCED) into Civic Education is an essential requirement in the context of international integration and globalization. Project-based learning (PBL) contributes to enabling students to explore global issues such as pandemics, the environment, poverty, children's rights, and cultural diversity through experiential activities that combine theory and practice. Moreover, PBL is an effective approach to achieve the goals of both GCED and Civic Education at the lower secondary level. It fosters students' action-oriented skills and social responsibility, while supporting the development of subject-specific competencies such as behavior regulation and the ability to engage in socio-economic activities. This article analyzes the relevance of designing GCED-focused projects within teaching the Civic Education subject at the lower secondary level and proposes a practical project design process that can be applied in real classroom settings. Future research is needed to evaluate the practical impacts of implementing these projects in specific school environments.

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