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## Professional development perspectives on Global Citizenship Education in Ghana

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### ABSTRACT

**Background:** Increasingly incorporated into curricula worldwide, Global Citizenship Education (GCE) is a complex and evolving area of education. As the significance of GCE in the classroom grows, so does the need for insight into professional development for GCE educators. Given that many approaches to GCE have typically stemmed from ‘global North’ contexts, it is particularly important to research this area from ‘global South’ perspectives. This paper contributes by reporting on a study conducted in an initial teacher education setting in Ghana.

**Purpose:** The study aimed to investigate prospective teachers’ viewpoints on GCE. It sought to explore aspects including how pre-service teachers understood the orientation, meaning and relevance of GCE teaching and their views on the debates surrounding GCE’s underlying approaches and values.

**Methods:** Participants were 16 pre-service teachers who had taken GCE courses during their degree programmes at a university in Ghana. Data were collected through three focus group discussions and analysed qualitatively.

**Findings:** In-depth analysis of the rich data suggested that participants had generally positive perceptions about GCE, whilst observing challenges and tension in the relationships between local, national and global issues. Whereas some were of the opinion that GCE had a neocolonial orientation, focusing on Western elements over other cultures, others expressed the view that GCE content could be reoriented to address local issues as well. Although participants felt that greater practical experience could strengthen their learning, they believed they had obtained adequate skills in terms of content and theory for the teaching of GCE.

**Conclusion:** The study draws attention to the need for educators to be supported from an early stage and throughout their career journeys with professional development in GCE that invites exploration, critical thinking and challenge.

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## Introduction

Whilst Global Citizenship Education (GCE) has been defined and operationalised in many different ways (Goren and Yemini 2017), key aims include ‘helping learners become responsible and active global citizens’<sup>1</sup> and empowering ‘learners to assume active roles to face and resolve global challenges and to become proactive contributors to a more peaceful, tolerant, inclusive and secure world’.<sup>2</sup> This requires education focused on aspects including social responsibility, critical awareness, and civic commitment (Reysen and Katzarska-Miller 2013; Stoner et al. 2019). Recent decades have seen burgeoning interest in research into the notion of citizenship education in a global context (Banks 2012) and, notably, conceptualisations of citizenship education that seek to ‘challenge a nationalist version of citizenship education by proposing “education for cosmopolitan citizenship”’ (Osler and Starkey 2018, 32). Long regarded as a developmentally complex curricular area (Davies, Evans, and Reid 2005), GCE is an emerging, evolving field of enquiry that draws attention to knowledge and skills for progress and sustainable development (Goren and Yemini 2017). GCE is regarded as an increasingly important concept in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (UN 2015) and one that is significant in all phases of education, including in higher education (Jorgenson and Shultz 2012).

It has been observed that global citizenship ‘is a concept that is both understood in multiple (and often contradictory) ways’ (Oxley and Morris 2013, 319). Given the complexity of its meaning (Backer 2017; Mannion et al. 2011; Sant et al. 2021), it is hardly surprising that the concept and content of GCE continues to be a matter of intense discussion and debate, not least in the context of the tensions and contradictions in contemporary Western democracies (Marshall 2011). This notwithstanding, it is widely held that greater awareness of global perspectives through GCE may offer a way to face, from a local position, problems of a global order, such as inequalities and social injustice (Abowitz and Harnish 2006; Pashby 2015; Richardson 2008). In divided societies and war-torn countries throughout the world, it is suggested that GCE could, potentially, play a part in helping support citizens to manage conflict and ultimately rebuild society long-term. Educationally, this assumes a conceptualisation of GCE which shapes a whole-system approach. For example, in curriculum design, inclusive practices (Bickmore, Kaderi, and Guerra-Sua 2017; Hanna 2016) could help to form a basis for creating a citizenship that builds peace at local, national, and global levels, although it must be borne in mind that this does not necessarily or automatically happen (Hilker 2011; Murphy 2010; Russell and Quaynor 2017).

As the significance of GCE within educational curricula worldwide grows, so too does the need for educators who have the skills to facilitate the teaching and learning of GCE within the classroom. This gives rise to many significant research and practice questions in relation to initial teacher education and teachers’ professional development in GCE. Given that many approaches to GCE have typically stemmed from ‘global North’<sup>3</sup> contexts, it is particularly important to research this area from ‘global South’ perspectives. This paper offers a contribution to the field by reporting on a study conducted in an initial teacher education setting in Ghana, which sought to investigate prospective teachers’ viewpoints on GCE. However, before presenting further details of our study, we situate our work

within research in GCE and teacher education, and give a brief overview of GCE and teacher education in Ghana.

## Background

### *GCE and teacher education*

The scope of this article does not allow for comprehensive exploration of GCE's development and role within teacher education; rather, the points below are included for their relevance in helping to contextualise the current study and the research approach we adopted. The intensifying focus on GCE means that higher education institutions (HEIs) are tasked with supporting and enabling students to become global citizens equipped with the skills to help them thrive in a progressively interdependent world (Boni and Calbuig 2015; Hanson 2010). Educational curricula must ensure that students learn not only from their own context, but also about the globalised world (Ayebare, Onen, and Baine 2019). UNESCO (2014) draws attention to the need for ongoing capacity-building to support educators to deliver GCE, and for quality in continuous professional development in this area. In terms of teacher training and education, it follows that higher education settings have a significant part to play in developing the GCE skills of future teachers.

It must be acknowledged that, in some senses, teacher education already contributes to the promotion of an active, participatory role in solving problems and challenges on an international scale (Carr, Pluim, and Howard 2014; Rapoport 2013). For instance, it must not be overlooked that educators in areas such as foreign language teaching often play a part in building an awareness of the values of GCE among their students by 'adopting content that addresses global issues; by focusing on cross-cultural comparisons in order to develop students' intercultural competence; and by training students in communication skills that are essential for democratic dialogue' (Hosack 2011, 129). According to Garii (2000), prospective teachers should be willing to challenge the conditions caused by harmful effects of globalisation and not underestimate world problems. Along these lines, there is a need for higher education environments that give students opportunities to participate in active discussions in class and, thus, develop critical thinking skills so that they better understand the complexities associated with global citizenship (Gallavan 2008).

Although valuable progress has been made on the development of professional learning and the training of educators in GCE, the observations apparent in Ersoy (2013) still merit attention almost a decade on. That study pointed out that university teachers had insufficient knowledge and experience to conduct global citizenship training for students studying education. Accordingly, some studies have indicated the need for additional or complementary training (Balistreri et al. 2012; Guo 2014), as well as suggesting the updating of university curricula designs (Goren and Yemini 2017; Quaynor 2015; Russell and Quaynor 2017) – for example, with the inclusion of GCE as a pillar of teacher identity and professional development (Balbağ and Türkcan 2017; Levine 2010). Such professional learning is necessary to help future teachers to build inclusive and democratic schools that value different ideas and opinions (Henck 2018). By integrating GCE into curricula, teachers may be provided with essential tools to train the next generation of world citizens (Howe 2013).

In considering the development, content and approaches of GCE itself, it is crucial to recognise that Western theoretical frameworks of citizenship education have dominated and have been described as generally hegemonic in citizenship education research in the 'global South' (Andreotti 2006, 2015; Costa 2021; Howard et al. 2018). Although approaches that focus on how GCE is conceptualised from non-Western perspectives also exist (Swanson 2015; Sharma 2020), it is noteworthy that, in their meta-review of typologies of Global Citizenship Education, Pashby et al. (2020, 144) argue that 'despite considerable diversity of GCE orientations, ... GCE typologies remain largely framed by a limited range of possibilities'. Further, in Pashby and da Costa (2021, 383), the authors point to studies that 'share a concern that GCE risks reinforcing Western concepts of modernity, especially by creating a 'developed' 'us' and an 'undeveloped' 'them'.

In a pluralistic society, conflicts are frequent and logical (Lo 2017) precisely because antagonistic and hegemonic positions are disputed in the process of developing democratic policies (Laclau 2007; Mouffe 2005). Hence, some would argue that topics that are deemed controversial can, in fact, be used in an interesting and appropriate way to approach GCE through teaching and learning activities in the classroom (Sant, Santisteban, and Pagès 2013; Deuchar 2009). For instance, through the use of 'structured academic controversy' (Sant et al. 2021, 229), students can be encouraged to discuss a controversial issue and then asked to prepare and present their arguments and listen to those of others. In this context, the students can come together after the presentations and attempt to reach a rational and pragmatic consensus on the issue (Avery, Levy, and Simmons 2013; Lo 2017). Learning relevant teaching strategies as part of professional development is an example of how educators can be supported to create and facilitate such classroom opportunities for their own students, so that they can explore difficult topics within GCE.

### *GCE and teacher education in Ghana*

In terms of its development, GCE in Ghana seems to be at a further stage of progression relative to the development of GCE in some other African countries. Although an in-depth account of its development lies outside the scope of the current article, some key points are briefly noted below. Historically, although Ghana's colonial school system had initially proven ineffective in the face of economic, social, and political changes in the country, the Ghanaian society subsequently educated young people on civic values through the use of narratives and moral dilemmas (McWilliam and Kwamena-Poh 1975). After independence was achieved, the Nkrumah Ideological Institute was created in 1961, promoting the exercise of freedom as a form of civic education. In 1993, the National Commission for Civic Education was created with the purpose of promoting democratic and constitutional values in the Ghanaian population (Groth 2006).

In the school curriculum, whilst originally only basic subjects such as English and mathematics were taught, social subjects including history, economics and geography were later introduced into Ghanaian schools (Kankam 2015). In 2007, a new subject called Citizenship Education was introduced among 4th to 6th year primary school pupils (approximate student ages: 4<sup>th</sup> year – 9-10 yrs; 5<sup>th</sup> year – 10-11 yrs; 6<sup>th</sup> year – 11-12 yrs). The latest curriculum reform of 2019 includes subjects such as 'Cultural identity and global citizenship and our world and our people' for kindergarten pupils (Parejo,

Magaña-Salamanca, and Cortón-Heras 2021). GCE is evident in a higher education context, too. For example, the University of Ghana has several programmes which provide courses on education for global citizenship. The Department of Adult Education offers elective subjects such as 'Citizenship Education and Governance' and 'Introduction to Conflict Resolution'. In addition, within the 'Bachelor of Arts in education programme' (all specialisations), there are courses such as 'Development Education in the Era of Globalisation', 'Education for Sustainable Development' and 'African Indigenous Education' (University of Ghana 2015).

In relation to research on GCE, recent studies on the subject within the Ghanaian setting are limited (Angyagre and Quainoo 2019; Howard et al. 2018). This notwithstanding, it is noteworthy that there is more research in the related area of Education for Citizenship (EC). Both GCE and EC have similar theoretical orientations (Quaynor 2012, 2015) and teachers from various levels of education for citizenship often share common perspectives on the central aspects (Kankam 2015). As explained in more detail below, our exploratory research drew on some of the tenets, underpinning ideas and theoretical orientation adopted by GCE research in Ghana. Postcolonial theories make clear that research on democratic citizenship or GCE must take into consideration the concrete meaning that, in specific contexts, is given to the concepts used when addressing these issues, such as the very concept of 'citizenship'. Thus, this implies paying attention to the interactions between local, national, and global issues and, in general, to the context of the society in which the research is conducted as well as the contemporary conflicts that it faces (Quaynor 2012, 2015). In accordance with this fundamentally critical perspective, it is necessary to investigate the transference of values through GCE and the types of power relations and privileges that are conveyed: i.e. values which can make what is, in reality, neocolonial logic appear as if it were universal (Howard et al. 2018).

### **Purpose**

Within this landscape of GCE development, our research interest centred on the perceptions of prospective teachers who would potentially be involved in the teaching of GCE in Ghana. To this end, we sought to explore the views of pre-service teachers who had taken courses on GCE during their Bachelor's degree programmes at a university in Ghana. Specifically, we aimed to investigate aspects including how the pre-service teachers understood the orientation, meaning and relevance of the teaching of GCE in Ghana; what views they held on the importance of GCE for pre-service teachers; and their views on the debates about GCE's underlying approaches and values.

### **Method**

For the purposes of this exploratory research, a qualitative study involving focus group discussions was conducted. The focus group discussion was selected as an appropriate methodological approach for this investigatory study, in which we aimed to gather information and examine the opinions of people who had shared a common experience. By collecting data through focus groups, it is possible for researchers to obtain a considerable amount of data and ideas, even with sparse resources. Through the analysis of interactions between participants in the group, researchers can identify the

participants' various viewpoints and perspectives on some of the aspects of the topic under investigation (Stewart, Shamdasani, and Rook 2007).

### *Ethical considerations*

In order to carry out the study, ethical approval was obtained from the ethics committee in the relevant research setting. Once ethical clearance was granted, participants completed university-approved consent forms. These contained general information about the research (purpose, duration, description of the procedures/methods, etc.), benefits/risks of the study, confidentiality, compensation, their freedom to withdraw from the study, and contact details for additional information. Since the focus group discussions were conducted via a video conferencing platform, approximately \$10 was given to each participant to cover their data expenses. Participants were assured of anonymity and, accordingly, all original names and personal details were removed from the data to ensure complete de-identification of participants and the research setting, as well as other people and locations referred to in the reporting of the study.

### *Data collection*

A total of three focus group discussions were conducted. Participants were 16 recent graduates (males and females between 18 and 21 years) of a college of education at a university in Ghana. The participants were all pre-service teachers who had taken courses in GCE during their Bachelor's degree programmes.<sup>4</sup> The participants had completed their courses less than one year before taking part in the study and had been engaged by the university as teaching assistants for their national service programme in their respective departments. All 16 participants were, therefore, national service personnel, who were recruited for the current study through purposeful selection.

A total of three focus group discussions was conducted. The discussions were held in English since it is the official language of Ghanaians, and it was the preferred language of the participants. Groups one and two had five participants each, whereas group three was composed of six participants. The focus group discussions were held on different days during April and May in 2021. Given the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic during that period of time, the focus group discussions were conducted online, via a video conferencing platform. All authors took part in the three focus groups along with a qualified member of the academic staff of the college of education. Each session lasted approximately one hour and 40 minutes.

The focus group discussions revolved around questions on five core themes posed by one of the researchers, who acted as the facilitator for all three discussions: a) participants' understanding of the orientation, meaning and relevance of the teaching of GCE at the different educational levels in Ghana; b) participants' views on the importance of GCE for pre-service teachers; c) participants' evaluation of the knowledge, skills, attitudes and/or values covered in the syllabus of the Bachelor of Arts programme in the research setting; d) participants' perspectives on the knowledge and techniques they had acquired to teach the subject; and e) participants' views on the debates about GCE's underlying approach and values. The researchers elaborated from a structured guide with general questions on these themes. The same guide was used across the focus groups to ensure

consistency. Some of the questions posed were: *What does Global Citizenship Education mean to you? What is the importance of GCE for primary and secondary students? Some people say that GCE is an instrument of neocolonialism or Westernisation. Could you please discuss this? Do you feel able to educate your future students for Global Citizenship at school?* Each of the themes was discussed for approximately 20 minutes. The data were recorded and then transcribed with the assistance of a software programme, and thoroughly reviewed by a research assistant as well as the authors.

### **Data analysis**

We conducted a thematic analysis of the transcribed data. A qualitative analysis software programme was used to support our categorisation of the information in a systematic way so that we could identify possible relationships between the categories. The codification of data took into account the emerging concepts and categories from the discussions and was guided by the study's research objectives and the underpinning theoretical approach. Additionally, we found it helpful to consider the data in relation to classifications including the key elements in Oxfam's curriculum for global citizenship (Oxfam Development Education Programme 2015), which were: Knowledge and understanding; Skills; and Values and attitudes. The researchers discussed and elaborated the codes together, in order to arrive at a consensus before applying them. They also reviewed each other's codifications of the contents.

### **Findings and discussion**

Through our in-depth qualitative analysis of the focus group data, it was possible to gain insight into the focus group participants' perceptions of GCE. The analysis enabled us to identify three main themes that emerged from the data: (1) the benefits of GCE in the 'global South'; (2) the functions and methods of teaching GCE; and (3) the disciplinary background of GCE in the 'global South'. These themes will be explored in the following subsections. Where relevant to illuminate meaning, anonymised quotations from the focus group data are presented.

#### ***Participants' perspectives on the benefits of GCE in the 'global South'***

It was evident from our analysis that participants considered that there was a range of potential benefits associated with students' study of GCE. They discussed the significance and relevance of GCE in the 'global South' from a multimodal and critical perspective. In terms of definitions of GCE, their descriptions, in general, suggested that GCE was widely thought of as a form of permanent civic learning, involving the active participation of students in projects addressing local and global problems related to social, political, economic, health or environmental issues faced by societies. As one participant explained:

Global Citizenship Education simply has to do with how I understand and how I'm aware of the wider world and my place in it and how I'm able to cooperate and work with others to make the world more sustainable and ... umm ... engaging with each and every one ... so that at the end of the day, issues pertaining to global issues such as socioeconomic and environmental issues can be addressed.

Further, this participant reflected that implicit in educating students for the future was the need to understand the importance of social justice:

Global Citizenship Education, due to the projects that they find themselves involved in, help them to better ... how do we call it ... umm ... gain the skills needed to be able to overcome challenging issues pertaining to such, say, umm, social injustice and ignorance, among others.

Participants additionally mentioned the role that GCE can play in providing students with knowledge about human rights: for example, the right to a fair trial. In other words, it not only empowers one to learn the rights and obligations of an informed citizen, but it also enables individuals to defend their rights and those of others. In relation to living in a pluralistic society, one participant noted that GCE could help students understand the importance and value of diversity, not only in Ghana or Africa, but in the world as a whole. According to another participant, GCE may promote an understanding of:

How people are able to survive in the societies in which they live, different geographical locations with different climates, with different opportunities, with different settings and all. So, in all, that humans rely on what their environment provides for them for their survival.

Notably, some participants commented on the possibilities within GCE for students to explore global problems. They discussed how it can enable students' understanding of international connectivity and, consequently, support an awareness that the problems affecting one country can subsequently become problems of other countries.

Within the focus group discussions, there was recognition that GCE seeks to make students understand that they are responsible for their actions at the local and global levels. Further, there was acknowledgement that GCE aims to encourage students to participate in local and global civic actions and enable them to work with others, in order to make the world a more sustainable and liveable place. For instance, one participant commented on this in relation to the role of the teacher in the context of the pandemic:

So, as teachers, we are supposed to engage students either in groups or alone on how to think critically and be able to solve issues. So, I was citing an example. We can even use this Covid situation. ... measures that we can put in place to make sure that citizens of Ghana are ... umm ... are adhering to the Covid protocols. So, students can work in groups and bring up solutions and ideas on how to ... on how to solve this issue.

Overall, it was clear that the participants felt that it was vital for teachers of GCE to provide an example for students, promoting equality or sustainability, through responsibility and social commitment. The following comment underscores the sense that part of a teachers' role was regarded as to encourage students to make the connection between immediate action and the wider consequences: in this case, in relation to the environment:

To change their attitude towards ... umm ... something like littering the environment or starting fires or any of the negative things that we do to our physical environment. (...). The effects our actions might have on the environment ... so that, we will be able to teach our students that ... dropping litter on the floor might have a very serious effect on the environment in about 10, 15, 20 years.

The findings discussed above, though specific to the Ghanaian context of the current study, resonate in interesting ways with previous studies on GCE from many different contexts. For instance, GCE has often been described as a set of knowledge, skills, values

and attitudes necessary to help promote tolerance, equity, and peace in the world, transcending any individual context. This is a sense that came through strongly in our analysis of the focus group participants' understandings of what GCE involves. Equally, in our study, it was evident that participants did not regard GCE as something that could be learned by chance. Rather, participants felt that GCE needs to be an explicit process in which these capabilities are acquired through educational experience, conscious engagement, critical reflection and informed implementation (Stoner et al. 2019; Westheimer 2020). Specifically, as Kankam (2015) pointed out in a study which was also conducted in Ghana, GCE can enable participation in public affairs in ways not limited to local involvement or action. In line with this, participants in our study pointed out, on several occasions, the significance of supporting students through GCE to be aware of the world as an interconnected place, emphasising the need to be concerned about economic and environmental problems, as well as global conflicts. These perceptions chime with other research including Ayebare, Onen, and Baine (2019), and Baysali and Tanrisevenii (2020). Further, in alignment with Hanna (2016) and Kyeonghan (2017), it is essential to acknowledge the participants' perceptions that, ultimately, GCE has an individual dimension, involving the awakening of one's critical awareness and a change of attitude towards local and global problems.

### *Participants' perspectives on the functions and methods of teaching GCE*

In the focus group discussions, participants discussed what they regarded to be the purposes and aims of GCE, whilst considering, too, the methods of teaching it. It became evident that cultural learning and sharing was crucial in the discussion of purpose. For instance, participants reflected that when someone in a particular context talks about a specific problem, they could use their experiences and culture to explain what they were trying to put across – thereby enabling others to understand more about their culture and subsequently, learn to appreciate it. Further, it was felt that a purpose of GCE was to allow students to understand and recognise the value of gender equality, and of children's education. As one participant explained, 'So, looking at the aim of Global Citizenship Education, one of the aims is that it helps in empowering people to be active promoters of inclusiveness'.

According to our analysis, participants emphasised the relevance of citizenship education in the 'global South' and their beliefs that teaching and learning of GCE should take place throughout the entire compulsory stages of the educational system, starting from the primary level. The quotation below aptly illustrates one participant's rationale for this:

I think Global Citizenship Education is important and should be taught in primary and secondary schools because at a tender age [...] primary school, students will then learn to appreciate diverse cultures. It will also reduce ... umm ... stigmatisation and naming and shaming in the sense that, when we get to know about other cultures through learning with them and know what their curricula and everything contains, we will learn to appreciate the way they behave.

This idea strikes a chord more generally with discussions elsewhere (e.g. Van Werven et al. 2021) and it must be noted here, as mentioned earlier, that Ghana has already introduced citizenship education in schools (Arnot 2003). In addition, there is awareness among

teacher educators in Ghana (Kankam 2015) that schools are expected to educate the new generation in a modern form of citizenship appropriate to a globalised economy that is compatible with traditional, political and civic cultures and communities. As a consequence, in Ghana, GCE is taken into consideration during the training and education of future teachers at the university level, in line with numerous studies and research that advocate its inclusion in the educational system (Balbağ and Türkcan 2017; Baysali and Tanrisevenii 2020; Schattle 2005). As evident in the quotation below from one participant, the general view from the focus groups was that the training in the GCE courses was considered to be sufficient as a means of preparing prospective teachers for their future careers:

I believe that the training and then the methodologies ... that I've obtained over the period ... umm ... has equipped me enough to instil the concept of Global Citizenship Education in my future students looking at the fact that currently, I can do some research, I can also collaborate with my colleagues and other people to perform a task, I am able to put myself in a position where I can identify problems in other vicinities or localities and then also do my possible best to find solutions to them.

In addition, there was noteworthy discussion in the focus groups around the methods for teaching GCE. Our analysis of the focus group data showed that participants tended to agree that active, student-centred methodologies should be employed. In these kinds of methods, the teacher becomes an enabler and facilitator of learning, as was evident from the explanation of one participant:

The teacher allows students to go look for their own information and then the function of the teacher will just be to shape that information and direct it into the right ... umm ... the right way it should go.

Participants considered that the most suitable teaching methods for GCE involve problem-based and cooperative learning. This connects with Brunell (2013) and Adarlo (2020), suggesting that experiential learning can awaken the interest of students in global topics, develop global civic skills and help prepare global citizens. It was widely accepted that GCE needed to be carried out within the framework of a process of continuous and permanent learning over time. One focus group participant put it in the following way, thereby underscoring the wider relationships between teaching and learning, and the notion of teacher as learner:

So as teachers we are constant learners. So, we ... as new methods are coming up, have to adapt them and also learn to make sure that we are also adding to development around us.

### *Disciplinary background of GCE in the 'global South'*

During the focus groups, participants discussed their views on how far they felt that the GCE courses they had taken supported their preparation to teach GCE. They tended to agree that they had received sufficient theoretical education to undertake the task of teaching GCE, whilst pointing out that the process of teaching involves both formal and informal dimensions (see further Li 2017). Some participants reflected that the skills they acquired could have been bolstered if the practical dimension of the courses was strengthened. As one commented:

So even with the theory we have gathered, I think that it's going to help us teach our future students and it's going to help them understand. But if we could have it more of a practical way, it would be far better than the theoretical aspect.

Such observations align with similar reflections seen in previous research conducted in different contexts. Indeed, several studies (e.g. Balbağ and Türkcan 2017; Başarrı 2017; Çermik, Çalışoğlu, and Tahiroğlu 2016; Ersoy 2013) have noted limited professional experience or practical development within GCE in a university context.

In our study, the analysis suggested that the participants had generally positive views about GCE. This notwithstanding, they noted that GCE may come with considerations or risks that need to be acknowledged. They pointed out, for example, that there may be tension between the local and the global aspects. For example, there could be a danger that students may inadvertently overlook local problems (i.e. those of their community or their country), while concentrating on global problems or those of other countries. One participant expressed this thought in the following way:

One disadvantage of Global Citizenship Education is that ... umm ... people have that mindset, or it is possible, or there is the high tendency that, the student would have that mindset that, they shouldn't focus on the problems or issues that are currently ongoing in their community, but rather, focus on the issues that are going on in other communities or other countries or in the world at large. So, there's a possibility that students would neglect their home issues and then rather focus on the international issues.

These notions are intricately linked to one of the main challenges about GCE: tensions may emerge between global, national, and local issues and there may be dislocation in the sense of simultaneously belonging to these different communities of citizens (Quanyor 2012; Mesa 2019). These tensions may lead to the contention that GCE could represent an instrument of neocolonialism, a new form of cultural colonisation, or a process of Westernisation. Significantly, this issue was one of the most debated aspects among the participants in the focus group discussions. The following arguments that were made during the focus group discussions are examples of the differing views:

I don't agree that GCE is an instrument of neocolonialism because no doubt, the majority of the world was colonised by the West. But we also have ... umm ... some aspects of us that haven't been touched. Some aspects of ... umm ... us that we still ... umm ... we still teach, we still live by. For example, in the African Indigenous Education course, we saw that a lot of our curriculum is being influenced by the West, but there are still some parts of our curriculum that are still ... umm ... grounded in African morals, African values, African virtues.

I think it's true because when you look at our curriculum, most of the things in our curriculum in a way, have to do with something about the Western culture. So, we do not really dwell on our local culture when it comes to the curriculum design and instruction. We tend to use that of the Westerners and so, if ... umm ... they argue that GCE is an instrument for Westernisation, I think it is in a way. You should however ... umm ... we ... we as individuals also tend to appreciate more of their culture.

It must be recognised that participants argued that it was not necessarily GCE itself which was a tool or instrument of neocolonization or Westernisation. Crucially, it all depended on the orientation that was given to it. In other words, it depended on the relationships that were established between the local, national, and global levels. The participant quotation below is illustrative of this observation:

(...) it can be true, but there is ... we can find ways of regulating the programme or the Global Citizenship Education such that the focus wouldn't be purely or solely on things happening around the world, but we can ... in as much as we are focusing on the global events or the global occurrences, we can include what is happening in our very own country, Ghana. So, we can start from Ghana, okay?

Overall, there was no overriding consensus among the participants of the focus group discussions regarding the possible neocolonial or Western orientation of GCE. Nonetheless, the participants' discussions clearly suggest the idea, theorised by Quanyor (2012), that the most critical issue is a sense of balance between the local, national, and global dimensions that affect people's lives. This implies being committed to the local and the global at the same time; that is, carrying out an exercise of global-local or 'glocal' citizenship (Mesa 2019, 21). This balance is key not only in Ghana, but in every country where the teaching and learning of GCE is being developed. In this regard, the participants in the focus groups pointed out a possible imbalance between Western countries and African countries. As one participant noted:

the rate at ... the, umm, how do I ... the, umm, ratio at which we study about the cultures of other countries or maybe, umm, especially countries in the West, might not be the same way they study our culture. So, they might not understand some of the things we do here, whereas we, umm, study a lot about them. We study about their curricula, their culture, umm, a lot of things about them when they don't learn a lot about us. So, that might be a disadvantage of Global Citizenship Education. We're all not studying about each other at the same pace.

### *Limitations and future research*

As with all exploratory research, this qualitative study has some limitations which must be acknowledged. Generalisation is not intended from our small-scale investigation. The research reported here focused on the analysis of focus group data from one specific group of pre-service teachers: recent graduates who had taken courses on GCE during their bachelor's degree programmes at one particular university in Ghana. In the future, it might be interesting to carry out similar research studies involving focus groups with participants from other teacher training institutions in Ghana. In addition, it should be remembered that the study was carried out during the pandemic, which meant that the focus group discussions were held virtually rather than in a shared physical setting. In online interaction, as well as the potential for participants to experience technical difficulties, there is the possibility that participants might not exchange their views with the same dynamism which could be in evidence when participants are sharing a physical space in a focus group setting. Moreover, when interpreting the findings, possible pragmatic aspects of data collection and analysis should be borne in mind, such as the design and composition of the focus groups (i.e. the presence in the groups of the researchers and member of the academic staff), and researchers potentially being less aware of the non-verbal language of their participants in the virtual setting.

### **Conclusion**

As a key aim of GCE is to help people worldwide learn how to live together in a complex world, it is increasingly regarded as a crucial concept which has significance in all phases and stages of education. This growing focus on GCE in curricula has implications for the

professional development of teachers. Higher education settings have a significant role to play in supporting prospective educators to develop the skills necessary for the teaching of GCE. Given the complexity of GCE's meaning, the discussions and debates around the concept and content of GCE must not be overlooked. As many approaches to GCE have been dominated by 'global North' perspectives, it is particularly important to research this area from 'global South' perspectives. The study reported here offers a contribution by providing insight into the perceptions of pre-service teachers in Ghana who had taken courses on GCE during their bachelor's degree programmes. Through in-depth analysis, we were able to better understand how the pre-service teachers conceptualised the orientation, meaning and relevance of the teaching of GCE in Ghana; the opinions they held on the importance of GCE for pre-service teachers; and their views on the debates about GCE's underlying approach and values. As GCE continues to evolve, the study highlights the need for GCE educators worldwide to be supported throughout their careers by professional development opportunities in GCE that invite exploration, critical thinking and challenge.

## Notes

1. <https://www.un.org/en/academic-impact/page/global-citizenship-education#: :text=The%20primary%20aim%20of%20Global,responsible%20and%20active%20global%20citizens.>
2. <https://www.un.org/en/academic-impact/page/global-citizenship-education#: :text=The%20primary%20aim%20of%20Global,responsible%20and%20active%20global%20citizens.>
3. In line with much GCE scholarship, quotation marks are used to reflect that 'global North' and 'global South' are contested terms that have limitations and shortcomings (see further Pashby and da Costa 2021).
4. Their Bachelor's degree programme was their teacher training, as students undertake content courses and pedagogic courses. At the end of four years, students graduate as professional teachers in their subject areas. After the Bachelor's degree programme, students take licensure exams to become licenced teachers; only professional teachers are mandated to take the licensure exams.

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