

Promoting Global Citizenship Education

in Arab universities

A regional outlook



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What is Global Citizenship Education?

Global Citizenship Education (GCED) is an educational approach that nurtures respect and solidarity in learners in order to cultivate a sense of belonging and common humanity and to help them become responsible and active global citizens who play a part in building inclusive, peaceful and sustainable societies. GCED, combined with Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), is covered in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development under Target 4.7 of Sustainable Development Goal 4.

What are the learning outcomes of GCED?

GCED aims at developing specific knowledge, skills, values and attitudes in three domains of learning: **cognitive** (knowledge and thinking skills necessary to better understand the world and its complexities); **socio-emotional** (values, attitudes and social skills that enable learners to develop affectively, psychosocially and physically, and that enable them to live together with others respectfully and peacefully); and **behavioural** (conduct, performance, practical application and engagement).



Cognitive

- Knowledge and understanding of local, national and global issues
- Knowledge and understanding of the interconnectedness and interdependency of different countries and populations
- Skills for critical thinking and analysis



Socio-emotional

- Sense of belonging to a common humanity, sharing values and responsibilities, based on human rights
- Attitudes of empathy, solidarity and respect for differences and diversity



Behavioural

- Act effectively and responsibly at local, national and global levels for a more peaceful and sustainable world
- Motivation and willingness to take necessary actions

Why is GCED relevant for university students?

GCED allows learners to contribute to the advancement of societies in a more peaceful and sustainable way. But the *transferable skills* developed in the three domains of learning listed above also allow young people to better integrate into the labour market, where skills such as efficiently working with others, understanding complex issues and situations, being able to work in a multicultural environment, and being empathetic and results-oriented, are increasingly required.

GCED is a lifelong process and needs to be mainstreamed at all ages. Everyone can play a role in promoting its values, including family and friends, educational institutions, the media, and many other mechanisms.

Why is it important for universities

to actively promote GCED?

Universities are prominent actors in mainstreaming GCED values. They are usually the institutions in charge of training future teachers, curricula- and textbook developers, and education policy-makers, who need to have the knowledge and skills to promote GCED throughout their careers. In addition, universities also have the ability to reach out to large numbers of young people who are at a critical age and are developing their sense of who they are, what role they want to play in their communities, and how they can take concrete action to change things and build better societies.



Do universities in the Arab region promote GCED?

Regional analysis

To better understand the situation of GCED in Arab universities, UNESCO commissioned a study to analyse:

1. If GCED is enshrined in their policies, visions, missions, values, objectives, and strategic goals and plans;
2. If students perceive that their universities are developing the learning outcomes of GCED.

The study, carried out by UNESCO in 2021, analysed the strategic documents and plans of 34 universities from 17 countries in the Arab region. A survey was also administered to 336 students, primarily in Oman but also including students at several other universities in the Arab region.

Results



All the Arab universities analysed in the survey explicitly address the cognitive domain of GCED in their policies, visions, missions, values, objectives, and strategic goals and plans.

The documents analysed during the study show that all the universities recognize the value of helping learners acquire knowledge and understanding of local, national and global issues. However, although the core topics of GCED are present in the strategic documents of all the universities, developing skills for critical thinking and analysis is not emphasized to the same degree.



Most Arab universities acknowledge the attributes of the socio-emotional domain of GCED to enable students to interact effectively with others locally, nationally and globally. However, the degree to which this domain is emphasized differs across institutions.

The documents analysed in the study show that many Arab universities explicitly aim to cultivate and manage identities, relationships, and feelings of belongingness, within a human rights-based approach. Many are also explicitly committed to helping students develop attitudes of empathy, solidarity, and respect for differences and diversity.



The behavioural domain of GCED is addressed by most Arab universities, with a view to engaging students in developing the world at local, national, and global levels in various fields of knowledge.

Most higher education institutions in the Arab world declare in their vision, mission and objectives that they aim to prepare students to participate effectively and responsibly in socio-economic growth at different levels. They are also concerned with preparing students to take responsible and ethical actions to serve the community.



Arab students perceive that they are sufficiently able to interact and work effectively in a global context, and that they are informed of global issues.

The Arab students in the survey believe they have good intercultural communication skills and can adapt their communication styles when engaged in international and cross-cultural encounters. They also claim to be interested in and informed about global issues and events. This shows their openness to the world and curiosity about local, regional and international topics.



Students are concerned about social justice and disparities, but they lack the required skills to identify them.

The students surveyed show some concerns related to social justice and disparities, altruism and empathy, and global interconnectedness. However, their responses show that, although most students have a perception of injustice, they need more guidance to be fully able to identify the causes of injustice and disparities. Indeed, in some cases, they believe that these injustices are inevitable. One possible interpretation is that, even though there is an institutional commitment to GCED, the focus on global citizenship may not translate into concrete and effective practices due to challenges, possibly including a lack of capacities and instruments.



Arab students express a sufficient commitment to engage in activities related to global citizenship topics.

Students are committed to some forms of global civic action, such as consumer activism and voluntary involvement in organizations working to address international issues. However, they are less likely to commit to publicly expressing their opinions.

Table. Percentage of inclusion of GCED learning domains and outcomes in Arab universities' strategic documents & plans

Learning domain	Learning outcome	Percentage (%)
Cognitive 	• Knowledge and understanding of local, national and global issues	100
	• Knowledge and understandings of interconnectedness and interdependence of different countries and populations	100
	• Develop skills for critical thinking and analysis	88
Socio-emotional 	• Belonging to a common humanity and sharing values and responsibilities based on human rights	82
	• Develop attitudes of empathy, solidarity and respect for differences and diversity	79
Behavioural 	• Act effectively and responsibly at local, national and global levels	85
	• Develop motivation and willingness to take necessary actions	85

Recommendations

- ▼ **Promote university and student activities that help advance GCED's behavioural and socio-emotional domains of learning.** This can be done in particular through university support for, and involvement in, activities that foster students' direct participation in local, national and international social initiatives and topics.
- ▼ **Include GCED as a key component of curricula in faculties of education and teachers colleges for pre-service training.** This should enable future teachers to teach and instil GCED elements across different subjects, e.g. literature, history, etc.
- ▼ **Focus on experiential activities and learning by doing.**
- ▼ **Increase activities aimed at stimulating critical thinking, including Media and Information Literacy (MIL),** to create responsible digital citizens who know how to obtain, interpret and understand information, especially online.
- ▼ **Include GCED objectives in assessment,** i.e. by including elements that can make students demonstrate their critical thinking, creative thinking and problem-solving skills. Assessment should ensure that students are able to work collaboratively with partners from different fields and different cultures to achieve outcomes without any prejudices or misconceptions.
- ▼ **Encourage international exchanges and programmes** so that students and teachers are in contact with multicultural environments and people with diverse backgrounds.

Stay in touch

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