

ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDUCATION FOR GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP IN VIETNAM'S INTERNATIONAL INTEGRATION: EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

VAI TRÒ CỦA GIÁO DỤC TIẾNG ANH TRONG VIỆC PHÁT TRIỂN CÔNG DÂN TOÀN CẦU Ở VIỆT NAM THỜI KỲ HỘI NHẬP QUỐC TẾ: HÀM Ý ĐỐI VỚI GIÁO DỤC ĐẠI HỌC

Nguyen Dang Nguyen Phuong*

The University of Danang - University of Foreign Language Studies, Vietnam

*Corresponding author: ndnphuong@ufl.udn.vn

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Abstract - In Vietnam's international integration, higher education must prepare graduates with global citizenship capacities. However, a significant research gap exists due to the conceptual fragmentation between Global Citizenship Education (GCE) and English Language Teaching (ELT), compounded by a skill-oriented environment and a disconnect between policy and pedagogical implementation. Adopting a conceptual synthesis approach, this paper proposes an integrated framework that aligns ELT with UNESCO's cognitive, socio-emotional, and behavioral dimensions. The framework's novel contribution lies in reconceptualizing the English classroom as a mediating pedagogical space where linguistic proficiency facilitates intercultural competence and ethical engagement. Furthermore, it provides practical value through a phased implementation model and illustrative scenarios, offering a robust pathway for universities to move beyond instrumental language training. This study establishes a theoretical basis for fostering globally engaged graduates within internationalized higher education contexts.

Key words - Global Citizenship Education; English language teaching; Intercultural communicative competence; higher education; Vietnam.

1. Introduction

Global Citizenship Education (GCE) has gained significant prominence in higher education as universities are increasingly expected to prepare learners for intercultural engagement, ethical responsibility, and active participation in a globalized world. Within this educational mission, English language education holds a unique role, acting as a shared medium for accessing global knowledge and communicating across cultural boundaries in academic, professional, and civic contexts. Consequently, English language classrooms serve not only as sites for linguistic development but also as potential spaces for cultivating globally oriented competencies.

Despite this potential, several critical research gaps persist within the Vietnamese context:

- *Conceptual Fragmentation*: GCE and English language education are often treated as separate domains, leading to a lack of integrated understanding.

- *Skill-Oriented Constraints*: The prevailing English Language Teaching (ELT) environment in Vietnam remains heavily exam- and skills-oriented, focusing

Tóm tắt - Trong bối cảnh hội nhập quốc tế của Việt Nam, giáo dục đại học cần chuẩn bị cho sinh viên năng lực công dân toàn cầu. Tuy nhiên, một khoảng trống nghiên cứu đáng kể đang tồn tại do sự phân mảnh khái niệm giữa giáo dục công dân toàn cầu (GCE) và giảng dạy tiếng Anh (ELT), cùng với môi trường đào tạo nặng về kỹ năng và sự thiếu kết nối giữa chính sách và thực thi sự phạm. Bằng cách sử dụng phương pháp tổng hợp khái niệm, bài viết đề xuất một khung tích hợp kết nối ELT với các chiều kích nhận thức, tâm lý-xã hội và hành vi của UNESCO. Đóng góp mới của khung này nằm ở việc tái định nghĩa lớp học tiếng Anh như một không gian sự phạm trung gian, nơi năng lực ngôn ngữ thúc đẩy sự hiểu biết liên văn hóa và trách nhiệm đạo đức. Hơn nữa, nghiên cứu mang lại giá trị thực tiễn thông qua mô hình triển khai theo giai đoạn và các kịch bản minh họa, cung cấp lộ trình cụ thể để các trường đại học vượt ra ngoài việc đào tạo ngôn ngữ công cụ đơn thuần. Nghiên cứu này xác lập cơ sở lý thuyết để đào tạo đội ngũ sinh viên tốt nghiệp có khả năng thích ứng và trách nhiệm trong bối cảnh giáo dục đại học quốc tế hóa.

Từ khóa - Giáo dục công dân toàn cầu; giảng dạy tiếng Anh; năng lực giao tiếp liên văn hoá; giáo dục đại học; Việt Nam.

primarily on linguistic competence and employability rather than broader civic or ethical dimensions.

- *Policy-Practice Disconnect*: National reforms often frame international integration through the lens of workforce competitiveness and economic development, giving less systematic attention to intercultural and ethical growth [1], [2].

- *Implementation Deficit*: There is a persistent gap between reform intentions and pedagogical implementation, as concrete pathways for translating broader educational goals into daily classroom practice remain insufficiently developed [3].

Many current reforms prioritize language outcomes without fully reconceptualizing how English education can contribute to social responsibility and global participation [2], [3]. As a result, a theoretically coherent framework connecting ELT with GCE in Vietnamese higher education remains underexplored.

This paper argues that such fragmentation constrains the educational potential of English pedagogy. To address these gaps, the study is guided by the following research questions:

(1) How can English language education be reconceptualized and integrated with Global Citizenship Education (GCE) dimensions within the context of internationalized higher education?

(2) What are the pedagogical and institutional implications of adopting an integrated global citizenship framework for English language education in Vietnamese universities?

Drawing on UNESCO's cognitive, socio-emotional, and behavioral dimensions as an organizing lens, this study proposes an integrative framework to align English language education with global citizenship development. In this view, English learning is reconceptualized as a vital pedagogical space for global citizenship formation. While intended as an analytical guide, the proposed framework requires further empirical validation in future research.

2. Conceptual Approach and Literature Synthesis Procedure

This paper adopts a conceptual synthesis approach to explore the integration of Global Citizenship Education (GCE) into English Language Teaching (ELT) within Vietnamese higher education. The research followed a systematic three-step procedure.

Step 1: Literature Search and Selection Strategy

The research began with a systematic search for foundational and contemporary scholarship across Scopus, Google Scholar, and UNESCO databases. To ensure theoretical relevance and quality, the selection focused on peer-reviewed studies and policy reports published between 2006 and 2025 that explicitly link language pedagogy with intercultural or global dimensions. Conversely, studies focusing solely on isolated linguistic structures or non-peer-reviewed commentaries were excluded. Primary search terms included "Global Citizenship Education," "English language teaching," "intercultural communicative competence," and "internationalization of higher education". This rigorous filtering process finalized 13 key sources for in-depth conceptual mapping, ranging from global theoretical frameworks to recent empirical studies in the Vietnamese context.

Step 2: Thematic Analysis and Synthesis

The selected literature underwent a process of conceptual comparison and thematic grouping to identify recurring patterns, theoretical gaps, and potential points of alignment. The analysis focused on three primary thematic pillars:

Educational Purposes: Examining the evolving goals of GCE within the broader mission of higher education.

Core Learner Capacities: Identifying the specific competencies—cognitive, socio-emotional, and behavioral—essential for global citizenship.

Pedagogical Orientations: Reviewing how ELT practices can shift from technical skill acquisition toward intercultural and socially engaged learning.

Step 3: Development of the Integrated Conceptual Framework

In the final stage, the insights derived from the thematic

synthesis were synthesized into a coherent conceptual lens.

Organizational Framework: The study utilized UNESCO's three-dimensional model (cognitive, socio-emotional, and behavioral) as the primary organizing structure for the proposed integration.

Conceptual Mapping: ELT practices and Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) were systematically mapped onto these dimensions to illustrate how language learning serves as a mediating pedagogical space.

The framework was then used to derive specific pedagogical and institutional implications tailored to the internationalizing landscape of Vietnamese higher education.

3. Theoretical Background

3.1. Global Citizenship Education in Higher Education: Conceptual Foundations and Tensions

3.1.1. Emergence and Evolution of Global Citizenship Education

Global citizenship reflects an individual's connection beyond the nation-state and their shared responsibility toward global challenges in an increasingly interconnected world. The emergence of Global Citizenship Education (GCE) represents a formal shift toward preparing learners for responsible engagement with transnational issues such as inequality and sustainability [4]. At the policy level, GCE gained significant recognition through the United Nations Global Education First Initiative in 2012 [5]. It was subsequently integrated into Goal 4, Target 4.7 of the 2015 Sustainable Development Goals, establishing global citizenship as a key educational priority worldwide [4], [6].

3.1.2. Core Dimensions of Global Citizenship Education

Global Citizenship Education (GCE) is a multidimensional concept, notably defined by UNESCO through three interconnected dimensions: cognitive, socio-emotional, and behavioral [6], [7].

The cognitive dimension emphasizes learners' understanding of global issues and critical awareness. The socio-emotional dimension highlights values such as empathy, respect for cultural diversity, and a sense of shared humanity, while the behavioral dimension concerns the ability to translate knowledge and attitudes into responsible civic and social engagement.

These dimensions are closely linked to intercultural competence as a key outcome of internationalization [8]. Although often summarized as "head, heart, and hand" [6], GCE is frequently implemented in fragmented ways, with limited integration across these dimensions and weak connections to language education in practice [4].

3.1.3. Conceptual Tensions and Fragmentation in Existing Research

Despite strong international frameworks, GCE implementation in higher education remains uneven due to inconsistent interpretations and fragmented pedagogical strategies [4]. Scholars describe GCE as a "floating signifier" that is applied in diverse, sometimes conflicting ways across different institutional contexts [9].

While frequently mentioned in policy documents, GCE often lacks clear educational purposes or coherent integration into curricula and classroom teaching [4]. This gap is further widened by limited teacher preparation, making actual practice difficult and inconsistent [9].

Another significant source of fragmentation is the weak connection between GCE and language education. Although language is central to global communication, English Language Teaching (ELT) continues to prioritize technical skills and exam results, giving limited attention to intercultural or civic dimensions [10], [11]. This mismatch constrains the potential of English education to contribute to global citizenship development, particularly in internationalized and multicultural learning environments where such capacities are essential [8], [12].

3.2. English Language Education and Global Competence

3.2.1. From Linguistic Proficiency to Global Competence

Traditional English Language Teaching (ELT) primarily focuses on grammatical knowledge and exam-oriented content, often neglecting opportunities for meaningful communication and critical engagement. Consequently, language learning is frequently reduced to a technical, test-based process rather than a space for reflection.

In today's interconnected world, linguistic proficiency alone is insufficient for effective global interaction. Baker and Fang [12] argue that while English competence is necessary, broader global competence is essential for navigating cultural and social boundaries. This perspective challenges the native-speaker ideal, shifting the focus toward negotiating meaning within multilingual and multicultural settings [10].

Global competence thus extends beyond technical skills to encompass intercultural awareness, empathy, and social responsibility. These orientations align with intercultural competence as a key outcome of internationalization in higher education. [8]. In Vietnam, while research highlights the importance of assessing intercultural competence among university students, integrating these dimensions into classroom practice remains a challenge [11],[13].

3.2.2. Intercultural Communicative Competence as a Bridging Concept

Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) serves as a vital conceptual bridge between language education and Global Citizenship Education (GCE). From this perspective, the language classroom is transformed into an educational space where learners interpret diverse viewpoints, negotiate meaning, and reflect on social realities [10].

This approach shifts language education beyond grammar and vocabulary toward intercultural awareness and ethical communication. ICC further facilitates the transition from mere cultural awareness to intercultural citizenship, linking communicative practices to broader social responsibility and civic engagement. [10]. Reconceptualizing English Language Teaching (ELT)

through ICC provides a foundation for global citizenship development, aligning with the strategic goals of internationalized higher education [8].

3.2.3. English Language Education in Internationalized Higher Education

In internationalized higher education, English is strategically positioned as an academic *lingua franca* that enables global participation and mobility [12]. However, evidence from Vietnam reveals a persistent gap between internationalization policies and actual classroom practices. Despite an increasing awareness of intercultural objectives, teaching remains largely teacher-centered and focused on linguistic accuracy or exam preparation [11]. Empirical observations suggest that intercultural integration often remains rhetorical rather than transformative due to structural and pedagogical constraints [3].

Consequently, English language education frequently continues to focus on technical academic skills, neglecting its broader citizenship-related responsibilities. While recent research underscores the importance of developing intercultural competence among Vietnamese university students [13], implementation in practice remains limited. Furthermore, since student mobility alone does not guarantee intercultural development, there is a growing focus on "internationalization at home" to integrate global dimensions into domestic curricula [4]. In this context, aligning ELT with global citizenship goals is a crucial consideration for Vietnamese higher education during internationalization

4. Reconceptualizing English Language Education for Global Citizenship

4.1. English Language Education as a Pathway to Global Citizenship

Based on the preceding discussion, this section argues that English language teaching (ELT) requires a fundamental shift beyond its traditional focus on linguistic proficiency and academic support. In today's climate of global interdependence, ELT should be viewed as an educational pathway that facilitates engagement with global knowledge, intercultural interaction, and various forms of citizenship. This transition does not diminish the importance of language proficiency; rather, it positions it as a foundational requirement instead of the sole educational objective.

As examined in Section 3, Global Citizenship Education (GCE), global competence, and Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) have frequently developed as parallel yet disconnected concepts in many academic settings. However, the English classroom can serve as a vital pedagogical space where these dimensions converge. Within this environment, learners are compelled to engage with diverse perspectives and negotiate meaning across cultural boundaries through active communication. Consequently, ELT functions as a mediating space that integrates cognitive understanding, socio-emotional awareness, and communicative practice—an orientation that aligns with established ICC perspectives in the field [10].

This shift further necessitates a change in learning orientation and educational focus. Instead of prioritizing mechanical accuracy and examination performance, ELT should be directed toward global engagement. This involves prioritizing the interpretation of diverse viewpoints and utilizing English for dialogue and critical reflection rather than mere information transfer [10], [12]. For instance, implementing intercultural discussion tasks or reflective communication activities can effectively bridge language learning with ethical and civic consciousness.

Crucially, this perspective does not suggest that ELT should replace GCE or assume responsibility for all civic outcomes. Instead, it underscores how language education can reinforce global citizenship by incrementally linking linguistic growth with intercultural reflection and global awareness. This conceptual alignment provides the necessary foundation for the integrated framework proposed in the following section.

4.2. An Integrated Conceptual Framework

To address the conceptual fragmentation identified earlier, this paper proposes an integrated framework that views English language education as a strategic pathway for global citizenship development in higher education. Rather than providing a prescriptive model, this framework serves as a conceptual lens designed to unify educational purposes, learner capacities, and pedagogical orientations. Specifically, it positions ELT as a mediating pedagogical space where UNESCO's global citizenship dimensions can be integrated with intercultural communicative competence, particularly within the context of Vietnam's internationalizing universities.

Building upon UNESCO's three-dimensional understanding of GCE, the framework reconceptualizes ELT as more than technical skills training. It is envisioned as a space where global citizenship capacities are cultivated over time, contributing not only to linguistic proficiency but also to an understanding of global issues, cultural diversity awareness, and engagement in an interconnected world [7], [10].

The framework operates across three interrelated dimensions:

- *Educational Purpose*: At this level, global citizenship is established as the central orientation of English language education. This shift moves beyond a focus on employability or academic performance, emphasizing the learner's ability to participate responsibly and reflectively in a globalized society. Consequently, English is treated as a mediating resource for global knowledge, intercultural dialogue, and civic awareness, aligning with intercultural communicative competence perspectives [10].

- *Core Capacities*: The framework identifies the essential competencies developed through classroom ELT practices, specifically linguistic competence, intercultural communicative competence, and global awareness. While linguistic proficiency remains a necessary foundation for international participation, its value is amplified when combined with intercultural communicative competence.

Together, these capacities empower learners to interpret diverse perspectives and interact ethically across cultural boundaries, fostering global awareness and critical reflection[8], [12].

- *Learning Orientation*: This dimension emphasizes reflective and dialogic learning processes sensitive to classroom realities. ELT informed by this perspective encourages students to transcend mechanical language use, instead engaging deeply with social issues and complex ideas through active communication.

Importantly, the framework does not suggest that ELT should substitute for GCE. Rather, it illustrates how language education can reinforce global citizenship aims through its standard teaching practices. By synchronizing educational purpose, core capacities, and learning orientation, the framework provides a robust basis for reconsidering the role of English education in internationalized higher education, particularly in contexts like Vietnam.

Table 1. Mapping English Language Education onto UNESCO's GCE Dimensions (Adapted from UNESCO, 2015)

<p>Cognitive Dimension</p> <p>GCE focus: Understanding global issues, systems, and interdependence</p> <p>Educational purpose in English language education: English learning can serve as a pathway for accessing global knowledge, perspectives, and international discourses.</p> <p>Key learner capacities developed: Global awareness and critical understanding of international contexts</p> <p>Illustrative ELT learning orientations/practices: Reading and discussing global topics (e.g., climate change, inequality), and engaging critically with international texts</p>
<p>Socio-emotional Dimension</p> <p>GCE focus: Empathy, respect for diversity, and intercultural sensitivity</p> <p>Core capacities in English language education: Intercultural communicative competence can be developed alongside linguistic competence, supporting learners' ethical reflection and openness toward others.</p> <p>Key learner capacities developed: Intercultural awareness, perspective-taking, and sensitivity to cultural diversity</p> <p>Illustrative ELT learning orientations/practices: Dialogue-based tasks, intercultural exchange activities, and reflective discussion of cultural viewpoints</p>
<p>Behavioral Dimension</p> <p>GCE focus: Responsible action, participation, and engagement in society</p> <p>Learning orientation in English language education: English learning may encourage reflective and dialogic engagement beyond mechanical language use, supporting civic-minded communication.</p> <p>Key learner capacities developed: Socially engaged language practices and responsible participation in intercultural contexts</p> <p>Illustrative ELT learning orientations/practices: Project-based learning, collaborative discussion of social issues, and using English for meaningful global dialogue</p>

Note. The purposes, capacities, and classroom practices above are illustrative rather than fixed one-to-one links, since one ELT activity may contribute to more than one GCE dimension.

5. Educational Implications for Higher Education in Vietnam

In the context of Vietnam's international integration, higher education is pivotal in equipping students with global competencies. English language teaching (ELT) is increasingly valued not only for academic communication but also as a catalyst for intercultural engagement. Based on the framework proposed in Section 4, several key implications for reorienting ELT in Vietnamese universities are outlined below:

- *Curricular Level:* ELT curricula should align more closely with global citizenship objectives. While current programs often prioritize linguistic accuracy and academic skills, there is a pressing need to integrate socio-cultural dimensions. ELT should be reimagined as a learning space where students develop global awareness and critical reflection on international issues. Importantly, incorporating these competencies does not necessitate a reduction in language standards; rather, global citizenship outcomes should be systematically woven into existing linguistic goals [13].

- *Institutional Level:* Universities must bridge the gap between high-level internationalization strategies and actual classroom practices. Despite the rise of English-medium instruction and student mobility programs, ELT is frequently relegated to a supporting role rather than being treated as a core strategic component. To reduce this fragmentation, institutional goals must be translated into pedagogical realities, moving away from teacher-centered approaches toward practices that embrace intercultural aims [11].

- *Teacher Development:* Effective implementation requires a shift in how educators perceive their role. Teachers should look beyond language content to understand the broader educational purposes of their practice. Professional development should emphasize pedagogical reflection and intercultural facilitation—training teachers to design tasks that encourage perspective-sharing, critical engagement with global themes, and an understanding of the social meanings of language.

In summary, Vietnam's internationalization efforts would benefit from a more coherent conceptual positioning of ELT. By synchronizing curricular goals, institutional strategies, and teaching orientations with the broader aims of global citizenship, English education can transcend its instrumental function and contribute meaningfully to the development of globally engaged graduates.

5.1. Practical Implementation: A Phased Integration Model

To bridge the gap between conceptual goals and classroom realities, the proposed framework can be operationalized through a Three-Phase Integration Model. This model allows educators to systematically embed Global Citizenship Education (GCE) into existing ELT syllabi without overwhelming the primary linguistic curriculum:

- *Phase 1: Conceptual Priming (Cognitive Focus):* Educators select global themes that align with existing textbook topics. For instance, a unit on "Travel" can be

expanded to include critical readings on "Sustainable Tourism" and "Cultural Preservation," prompting students to analyze global interdependencies.

- *Phase 2: Dialogic Interaction (Socio-emotional Focus):* This phase utilizes intercultural communication tasks where language proficiency serves as a tool for ethical reflection. Students engage in role-plays or perspective-taking exercises that require them to negotiate conflicting cultural values, fostering empathy and intercultural sensitivity.

- *Phase 3: Reflective Action (Behavioral Focus):* Students apply their linguistic and civic capacities through project-based learning. By designing social media campaigns or drafting formal proposals in English to address local and global issues, learners demonstrate socially engaged language use and responsible participation.

5.2. Illustrative Classroom Scenario: Sustainable Tourism

The following scenario, using a critical and place-based approach, demonstrates how an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) or General English lesson can be transformed into a dynamic pedagogical space for cultivating global citizenship competencies. The lesson transitions from understanding a global phenomenon to analyzing its concrete local manifestations and formulating an ethical, communitarian response.

Phase 1: Cognitive Priming (Global Context)

- *Activity:* Students read a text on "The Global Environmental and Socio-cultural Impacts of Tourism" or watch a short documentary from a source like National Geographic about the challenge of overtourism in World Heritage Sites.

- *GCE & ELT Goal:* Beyond comprehension of academic vocabulary (e.g., *sustainability, leakage, carrying capacity, authenticity*), the instructor facilitates a critical discussion on the notion of "ethical tourism." Students analyze why standard mass tourism often creates economic disparities and cultural commodification, introducing a critical global perspective.

Phase 2: Dialogic Interaction (Localizing the Issue)

- *Activity:* The class transitions to focusing on Vietnam. In groups, students review simplified data or case studies on local tourism impacts, such as plastic pollution in Ha Long Bay, rapid urbanization in Sa Pa, or the preservation challenges of cultural heritage in Hoi An. They utilize English to share personal observations or family experiences related to tourism development.

- *GCE & ELT Goal:* This phase develops learners' socio-emotional capacities by fostering connection and empathy. By utilizing language to bridge their personal lived realities with abstract global data, students move from "cultural awareness" towards a shared sense of responsibility and "intercultural citizenship".

Phase 3: Reflective Action (Formulating a Response)

- *Activity:* Working in groups, students develop a "Sustainable Tourism Development Proposal." Their task is to utilize English to propose practical, local-level solutions for a specific affected region in Vietnam. The

output is a collaborative group presentation or a drafted policy recommendation, such as a code of conduct for responsible travelers in a homestay network, a plan for promoting community-based ecotourism, or a proposal for a plastic-free initiative for local tour operators.

- GCE & ELT Goal: This final phase targets the behavioral dimension of GCE. Students utilize English not just for a grade, but as a meaningful medium for civic engagement and problem-solving, demonstrating their capacity for responsible participation in addressing global-local challenges.

6. Conclusion

This paper has conceptually examined the role of English language teaching in fostering global citizenship within Vietnam's international integration process. Drawing on literature regarding Global Citizenship Education (GCE), global competence, and intercultural communicative competence, it argues for a shift beyond a purely skill-oriented framing. Rather than being viewed merely as a tool for linguistic proficiency or academic support, English learning should be recognized as an educational pathway that mediates engagement with global knowledge, intercultural interaction, and emerging forms of citizenship, particularly in higher education.

By proposing an integrated conceptual framework, this study addresses the persistent separation between global citizenship and language education. It also tackles the misalignment often found between high-level internationalization goals and everyday classroom practices in Vietnamese universities. In such contexts, where higher education institutions are strategic actors in national agendas, English pedagogy is expected to contribute in a broader educational sense rather than just an instrumental one.

While this framework is conceptual and currently lacks empirical evidence, it offers a valuable basis for reconsidering the role of English within internationalized higher education. Specifically, it highlights the necessity of integrating intercultural competence and global engagement into the core of language learning. Future research should empirically investigate this framework to examine how such conceptual alignment can be effectively reflected in curriculum design, teaching practices, and student learning outcomes across diverse university contexts in Vietnam.

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