

# Global Citizenship and the Role of Education in the Twenty-First Century

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**Abstract:** This paper seeks to define concepts such as 'citizenship' and 'global citizenship' in a democracy and what it means to be 'a good citizen'. It also seeks to explain that every individual can be 'a good citizen' in different situations and scenarios. Of the many agents responsible for the development of an individual, education, together with the home environment and culture, play an important part. Education is also the key to liberty and freedom, while the media is the key to accessing a wealth of information and knowledge. While referring to different modern-day scenarios and the positive and negative effects of globalization, one hopes to create or contribute to a dialogue, an inward and an outward dialogue, in order to understand further the role of education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and the implications on active global democratic citizenship.

**Keywords:** Globalization, democracy, citizenship, good citizen, education

The international developments of the second half of the twentieth century brought about a sense of uncertainty. Change became more rapid and everything started to be seen as being in a fluid state. Traditional values and concepts faded from everyday life and new ones emerged that were more appropriate for the time. Citizens during the reconstruction period after the Second World War went into a fast mode of rebuilding. Development at times seemed excessive and, when combined with the surge of industrialization by the super powers or

the top industrialized countries, it saw the emergence of the US as the greatest contender in the competition for the wealth that existed or was being created. It was partly for this reason that the European Union was established, namely to safeguard the interests of the European countries. A result of this excessive development was and still is the unsustainable use of the environment and the continuous depletion of the earth's capacity.

Therefore, more than even before, according to Singh,<sup>1</sup> 'education must be visionary and future-oriented, in the face of stunning scientific and technological innovations and changes, unprecedented socio-economic challenges and opportunities, surprising socio-political reforms, and amazing cultural awakening'. Even traditional concepts receive a different interpretation. Indeed one can argue that there are different ways of defining 'democracy', 'citizen', or 'global citizenship'. First of all citizenship is not something that people learn to do spontaneously such as eating or sleeping. It is through the process of socialization from the cradle to the grave that people are prepared, if ready, willing, and able, to become good citizens. Citizens should be able to make informed choices and decisions and take action, individually and as part of a group. Citizenship is also about values.

Democracy is a system of governance that thrives when the people, the electorate, chooses it as their system of government; it is always given a different moulding depending on many aspects including the culture of the particular country where it is practised. Democracy is widely considered as the best system of government available, but at the same time one has to remember its fragility and defects that also undoubtedly exist. Furthermore, democracy is a system where people generally experience a 'feel good factor', where they are not only the beneficiaries but active agents of development and change. Citizens in a democracy have the right to decide the future of their country. Democracy also promotes community cohesion. At the same time it is very unfortunate that so many noble aims and objectives have failed,

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1 R.R. Singh, *Education for the Twenty-first Century: Asia-Pacific Perspectives* (Bangkok, 1991).

such as that where people were supposed to live in freedom and dignity, to exercise choice, and to pursue their life in the way they choose. One can refer to what is happening in Egypt, Libya, and Iraq, the latter after two military interventions by the world community and so many deaths of innocent citizens. Poverty, illiteracy, lack of access to resources and services, and increase or lack of community participation still survive, if not actually increasing. In some countries social, cultural, and political oppression still reign and gender equality is a far cry. Osler<sup>2</sup> argues that democracy is an on-going struggle, where race, gender, and other inequalities persist, although democracy and citizenship should encourage citizens to live together in a nation characterized by diversity.

The definition of 'education' has also changed in recent years. There is a greater emphasis on the economic aspect in societies as the measure of success or failure;<sup>3</sup> as Brown argues,

the idea of a knowledge economy [is a determining factor] where innovative ideas and technical expertise hold the key to the new global competitive challenge. ... The policy implications are to support innovation and entrepreneurship by producing more 'highly skilled workers' through education and training policy focused on life-long learning, in order to sustain a shift toward more high value-added activities.

Culture consists of different ingredients, including values, language, religion, politics, economy, literature, history, architecture, and the arts. Additionally agents of socialization in society, such as the family, the school, peer groups, work, and religion play key roles in supporting the individual to develop as a whole person. In this scenario holistic education that caters for all the needs of the individual to survive in a modern liberal democratic society has become a necessity. Unfortunately, in some countries change is very slow or else fails to happen because of certain

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2 A. Osler, 'Citizenship education and the Ajegbo report: re-imagining a cosmopolitan nation', *London Review of Education*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (March 2008), 22.

3 P. Brown, D. Ashton, H. Lauder, and G. Tholen, 'Towards a High Skilled, Low Waged Workforce: A Review of Global Trends' in *Education, Employment and the Labour Market*, *SKOPE Working Paper* (Cardiff, 2008), 4.

ideological restraints when, as Brown<sup>4</sup> argues. Western economies should promote change, innovation and productivity growth. Education should aim to promote a national, cultural, and global identity. It should also promote an evaluative skill which empowers citizens by raising their awareness of the effectiveness or shortcomings of policies that are implemented by their representatives; these may not always be in the best interest of the citizens themselves. This is testing democracy to its full potential and at the same time a means of ‘testing’ citizens as to whether they should be considered as democratic citizens or not.

On a different note Orr<sup>5</sup> argued that Western education has replaced ‘indigenous forms of education throughout the world and focuses on preparing students exclusively for an urban existence’. People are losing their vernacular knowledge, ‘the knowledge that people have of their places’, that is a loss of their cultural worth. The graduates of tomorrow will be trained, above all, to keep the wheels of the global economy turning. But the Western style of education is inadequate as it largely focuses on the creation of wealth whilst paying little, if any, attention to the preservation of cultures and values.

In the last quarter of the twentieth century, the concept of ‘globalization’ started to change from one which all governments had seen as a positive development that everyone aspired to be part of, to a development that was detrimental for some and gainful for others. The first wave globalization in the 1980s and 1990s involved companies creating borderless value chains that were focused on low-skilled, low-value work. It seems that if before there had been a choice whether one wanted to be part of a globalized world, now there is no choice. From a positive feeling that generated the economic development and trust even in politics, globalization became a problem and a source of dissent among countries. Chinnammai<sup>6</sup> argues that ‘some believe that this process [of globalization] is an invaluable opportunity for the people of the developing countries to raise their

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4 Ibid., 8.

5 David W. Orr, ‘Education for Globalisation (Modern Western Education System)’, *The Ecologist*, May–June 1999, Vol. 29, No. 13, 166.

6 S. Chinnammai, ‘Effects of Globalisation on Education and Culture’, ICDE International Conference, 19–23 November 2005, New Delhi.

skills and standards of education. Others fear that it is merely a modern version of cultural imperialism that will lead to the creation of a universal, untimely Western society.' Taking telecommunications as an example, it is arguably positive for those who have the infrastructure but detrimental for those who do not, as they are missing out.

Therefore, one may see education aiding the holistic development of the individual and contributing to the provision of the needs of the citizens. Still in a number of countries this is still not the case for different reasons, either owing to ideological reasons, or poverty, or lack of education or various other reasons that hinder the possibilities of citizens of the world from having the opportunity of having the same or similar life chances all over the world. This consideration brings us much closer to reality and should make us aware of the importance of referring to particular environments. A country might have a system of education which might be out-dated and does not fit the requirements needed at the time.

People think that they can control what happens around them. This was evident before the 2008 financial crisis. Initially a number of governments thought that they should not be worried because they were not directly involved in the crisis. But, as time passed, many governments across the globe found out that a snowball effect was created which got out of hand for certain countries. Five years on, this crisis is still with us and even the largest economies of the world have been affected. The EU bailed out countries in the red by pumping billions of euros into their economy. In the last part of the twentieth century, Held defined globalization as a 'multifaceted or differentiated social phenomenon. Understanding its dynamics and consequences therefore demands some knowledge of the differentiated patterns of interconnectedness in each of these domains'.<sup>7</sup>

This is only one example. Today one may have a feeling of helplessness, not only because of the things that affect one immediately like unemployment that are on the increase and are creating poverty

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7 D. Held, A. McGrew, D. Goldblatt, & J. Perraton, *Global Transformations, Politics, Economics and Culture* (London, 2000), 27–8.

where it never existed before. But other global realities, like health epidemics, such as Ebola, the spread of aids, drugs, global warming, drastic changes in oil prices, and increase in regional wars all have great destabilizing effects. In the too distant past it was not unheard of to hear one say that one should not be worried because these were not ‘our’ problems. On the contrary, these problems have a direct or indirect effect on citizens and discussing solutions is very different today. We refer to ways and means of control of the situation and of limiting damage, and not solutions. Eamonn Callan<sup>8</sup> thus problematizes the declining participation in politics. The proliferation of public apathy, if not antipathy, towards politics, has spurred liberal educationalists to advocate the development of programmes aimed at educating ‘active’ citizens. One may ask: how can education respond to the challenges of increasing poverty, unemployment, and exclusion and to those of intolerance and violence that affect all societies and are even to be found within schools themselves? ‘People can only contribute and benefit from globalization if they are endowed with knowledge, skills, and values and with the capabilities and rights needed to pursue their basic livelihoods.’<sup>9</sup>

Different citizens require rights but rights have obligations tied on to them. In every society, citizens argue in favour of social justice. This term or concept is frequently used but it seems that not everybody understands the responsibility that it entails. It is also something that is difficult to achieve. Many think that social justice can be achieved financially. Indeed it is important to refer to social justice by referring to an equitable distribution of the world’s wealth, but this seems to be an impossible task. Social justice can also be achieved by emphasizing gender and racial equality at the place of work and in society as a whole. Social justice can be achieved by creating inter-cultural and inter-faith dialogues to identify those issues that require change. Social justice also emphasizes the tolerance of citizens coming from different cultures,

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8 Eamonn Callan, *Creating Citizens: Political Education and Liberal Democracy: Political Education and Liberal Democracy* (Oxford, 1997), 131.

9 S. Bakhtiari, *Globalization and Education: Challenges and Opportunities* (Iran, 2004).

which might be achieved through a critical understanding of all the options available. Olssen *et al*<sup>10</sup> (2004) argue that ‘global governance ... is necessary for global survival, but such governance cannot be established and maintained without the support of strong nation-states. This has been clearly evidenced in the Iraq crisis of 2002–03, where the authority of the United Nations has been challenged [the same is happening now in 2014] both by Iraq, as an undemocratic ‘rogue state’ and also, paradoxically, by the USA and Britain, ostensibly democratic states that have been unwilling to concede to the majority view of the United Nations Security Council.

It has become very difficult for multi-cultural societies to dialogue amongst themselves to solve different problems, even in the same country. Many examples of disputes where lack of inter-faith and multi-cultural dialogue is felt are reported everyday in the media. It is very unfortunate that the intertwining of religion and politics is contributing to conflict and, in some cases, even hindering the existence of liberty and different types of freedom; Iraq is just one example. So many things are taken for granted, only to understand their importance when one is not given these types of freedoms that one may experience freely every day. Some of these freedoms are freedom of speech, association, belief, movement, and so many others. One usually takes such things for granted but the difference is felt when they are taken away. One of the challenges politicians and policy-makers experience in responding to this challenge is that they are not aware of, or able to gauge, the speed of change or its magnitude, as many of the forces at work are invisible to them. In this context Brown<sup>11</sup> argues that ‘the disjunction between education, jobs, and rewards has profound implications for our understanding of educational opportunity, justice, and social mobility. Gellner<sup>12</sup> affirms that ‘modern society is not mobile because it is egalitarian; it is egalitarian because it is mobile’.

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10 M. Olssen, J. Codd, & A. O’Neill, *Education Policy: Globalisation, Citizenship and Democracy* (London, 2004).

11 Brown *et al.*, 18.

12 E. Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford, 1983), 24–5.

Another important point with respect to global citizenship and the responsibility of every citizen is sustainable development. It appears that citizens are not doing the right thing with respect to the environment. The global environment is the responsibility of all of us. Peterson<sup>13</sup> affirms that ‘this is an issue of the common good, understood as what belongs to everyone by virtue of their common humanity’. The concept and term ‘sustainable development’ was coined in the eighties and since then a number of international conferences and even national and regional conferences have been organized aimed at creating awareness, not only about citizens’ responsibility but also focussing on the depletion of the Earth’s resources. It is very unfortunate that, most of the time, governments maximize these occasions for their own end, such as promoting themselves or their country whilst much-needed improvements take a longer time to come into force to control the continuous depletion of environmental resources. It is also a negative example for developing countries from developed ones. The former prefer to spend their limited national wealth on utilitarian matters rather than taking up the challenge to do something to safeguard the environment.

On the local level, one should also be prepared to participate as a democratic citizen in reducing the depletion of the Earth’s resources. This could also extend to doing something on the global level. One has to ask oneself: what are we leaving behind for our children? Are we giving them the same opportunities that we received from those who came before us? If not, what should be our aims and objectives in life? Many argue that most of the perceived (and real) wrongdoings in evidence today are the responsibility of governments; this may be true, but others argue that now that things have run out of hand, it is impossible to go back to acceptable levels of depletion. However, a global citizen should try his best to contribute to improving the environment. This concerns more than just the environment but it also has implications on our health and general well-being. It is about the air, the water, and

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13 A. Peterson, ‘Common good and citizenship education in England’, *Journal of Moral Education*, Vol. 40, No. 1 (March 2011), 21.



the food that we eat and fish caught from polluted oceans and seas. It is about something that has implications on citizens' lives whether they like it or not.

Another important issue that is contributing negatively is poverty that is on the increase. It is safe to say that poverty will always be with us in one form or another because there is little or no goodwill from all stakeholders to improve the situation. There is no doubt that the world resources are not distributed well. Again many think that this may not be their problem or that they cannot contribute to improving the situation. In actual fact poverty around the world is the problem of us all. Poverty and wars are some of the main reasons for acts of terrorism, abduction of important and wealthier and influential people and migration of so many refugees, on land and at sea. We cannot even imagine how many people die as they seek a better life where they hope to make a decent living and where they can raise a family in peace and prosperity. It is evident that more voluntary international and national organizations and volunteers and organisations are contributing funds and efforts, but it is very challenging to eradicate poverty completely.

One of the most effective ways of preparing citizens to assume their responsibilities in this scenario is to create awareness and to teach citizenship education, in this case global citizenship education. Schools should be encouraged to promote political literacy or critical analysis; otherwise there is the real danger that the lack of these skills will leave unchallenged the considerable inequalities in society and allow individual institutions to assert, perhaps misguidedly, that they are fulfilling their duty in promoting community cohesion. Citizenship is about making informed choices and decisions, and about taking action, individually and collectively. Education for citizenship should aim to develop capability for thoughtful and responsible participation in political, economic, social, and cultural life. Challenges do not exist only in authoritarian states; an unrestricted or illiberal democracy is more likely to become a tyranny of the majority of the representatives in which the rights of particular individuals or minorities are insecure. Furthermore, globalization in education brings rapid developments in technology and communications and this brings further changes within school systems across the world as ideas, values, and knowledge also change, while

students and teachers are required to shift from industrialization to an information-based society. ‘One of the difficulties politicians and policy-makers experience in responding to this challenge’, Brown<sup>14</sup> argues, ‘is that they are not aware of the speed of change, as many of the forces at work are invisible to them. ... National governments that fail to gain an accurate understanding of today’s global business, economic and social context, along with the challenges and opportunities that it poses are likely to pay a high political price.’

Therefore, when seeking to ask what type of education may be appropriate for the present and the future, one can affirm that there are different global scenarios where people feel they are well provided for with education, whilst others do not. Education increasingly needs to become a lifelong learning and training process for most and for those to whom it is available, developing transferrable skills and knowledge that can be applied to competitive markets where knowledge and information are being traded as a commodity. Apart from the responsibility of the governments in power to provide global education, it is the individual who should also seek to educate oneself to be able to develop and contribute in the longer term. Individuals become citizens when they practise civic virtue and good citizenship, enjoy but do not exploit their civil and political rights, contribute to and receive social and economic benefits, do not allow any sense of national identity to justify discrimination or stereotyping of others, experience senses of non-exclusive multiple citizenship, and, by their example, teach citizenship to others. Again one may emphasize that there is a difference between formal and non-formal or informal education. Unfortunately students may be exposed at school to values needed in everyday life but then they experience other scenarios at home environments, The values ‘learnt’ at school may be undone by the home environment. Furthermore, the state itself may not be providing citizens and future citizens with relevant education for the twenty-first century.

As was stated earlier, citizenship and global citizenship are not something one learns at birth but are developed as one is socialized into

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14 Brown *et al.*, 18.

this understanding and commitment throughout one's life and through the ongoing socialization process. There are, of course, shortcomings in the developing world but the last decade has shown that even developed countries can face shortcomings that turn the world as we know it around. The implementation of technology and communication is necessary to support the successful process of education and citizenship; to educate society both students and teachers need to be increasingly technologically literate. It is unfortunate that under the impact of globalizing market forces, there has been a general trend towards the reduction of per capita public funding to higher education, at a time when the system is still expanding at both the initial and the lifelong level. Peterson<sup>15</sup> believes that 'teachers of citizenship should not just be involved with helping students to see beyond their own self-interests in an instrumental sense, but should be concerned with the types of people that students are (and may become) and that they are cognizant of their obligations to others'.

All this places more responsibility on the individual to be better prepared to face the daily decisions that have to be taken by each and every one of us. The more developed and complicated society, the more responsible one needs to be and one cannot abdicate this responsibility or forfeit one's rights and duties. In this scenario, education becomes one of the most important factors to help citizens survive and thrive. It is important to teach students how to assume responsibility for their own learning and continued development. Change is so rapid that certain things change continuously. Concurrently, education should not become a means of westernizing the world, what is called cultural imperialism, but it should treat each unique culture and society with due respect, realizing that global education is about studying and respecting different cultures of the world using different approaches, ways of teaching, and different media. Education should focus on ways and means to create unity among people who are diverse in different ways in order to promote peace in multicultural societies.

In the process of creating global citizens global education makes us more conscious and respectful of the differences, and similarities,

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15 Peterson, 32.

in society. It aims to equip citizens with the knowledge, skills, understanding, and attitudes to live and contribute in a diverse community. At the same time citizens are prepared to understand what takes place in local, national, and global events (political, environmental, and others) and debate the repercussions and implications of such events. Citizens should then be able to prepare themselves for the effects of these repercussions in order to better manage the effects of globalization. Global education strengthens the sense of being part of a community where individual and collective rights and responsibilities are known, understood, and respected by all and create a feeling where one feels one should participate in common decisions and promoting a democratic feeling and social justice. Global education also creates citizens who are aware of global realities and acknowledge the need for continued human rights dialogue and cooperation. Chinnammai<sup>16</sup> concludes that ‘in the twenty-first century, education systems face the dual challenge of equipping students with the new knowledge, skills, and values needed to be competitive in a global market while at the same time at the tertiary level prepare graduates who are responsible adults, good citizens both of their country and of the world. Thus globalization challenges us to rethink not only how much education is needed but also its ultimate purpose.’ Additionally Brown<sup>17</sup> argues that ‘the one-dimensional view of education as a preparation for employment is not a reflection of labour market realities, but an attempt to maintain the idea that justice, efficiency and the good life can be achieved through the job market driven by economic growth. There has never been a time when alternative visions of education, economy and society have been more important.’

Cosmopolitan citizenship implies recognition of our common humanity and a sense of solidarity with others. One should be prepared to learn to learn from and with others. One should seek to respect and tolerate others, identify similarities and differences, and learn from them. The challenge is to accept shared responsibility for our

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16 Chinnammai, 5.

17 Brown *et al.*, 18.

common future and for solving our common problems. Processes of globalization and changing patterns of migration are having an impact on societies across the globe. There is no escaping this reality. We are faced with the challenge of the enormous problem to eradicate poverty and to seek solutions to climate change and immigration that place huge responsibility on citizens in discerning the best route to manage these problems, if not to solve them. Systems of education have a responsibility therefore to prepare students to face these challenges in order to be able to succeed in life and contribute to a better society and environment nationally and globally.