Introducing Global Citizenship in Language Teacher Education through the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals

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Introducing Global Citizenship in Language Teacher Education through the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals

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Abstract
The present chapter describes a pedagogical intervention administered in an undergraduate ESL teacher training program. The purpose of this pedagogical innovation was to train future language teachers to incorporate Global Citizenship related objectives into their future practice by using the United Nation’s Sustainability Development Goals (SDGs) as reference. Pre-service teachers (N = 10) taking part in this study participated in a three-phase training in which they were first introduced to the topic, then, asked to apply the discussed approach to the design of language learning materials, and finally, they completed a reflection task. The analysis of the last task provided valuable insights into the cognition of future language teachers. Overall, participants demonstrated very positive views of this approach after being exposed to training and to applied forms of Global Citizenship in language teaching. There was modest evidence of the evolution of attitudes from more negative towards more positive. Furthermore, participants highlighted the transformative potential of this approach. I conclude that the incorporation of the SDGs into teacher education can serve as a successful first step to enhance transformational Global Citizenship practices in the language classroom.

Keywords: global citizenship, language teacher education, sustainable development goals, language program administration.

Introduction
Two important aspects to take into account in the decision-making process when managing educational programs are related to internal and external accountability. First and foremost, a program should be committed to be true to its values and to fulfill its own mission. This may also include the moral obligation to educate responsible citizens that leave a mark in today’s society. Secondly, educational programs are accountable for transmitting the explicit values of the home institution—e.g., its mission (Ciller & Ortín, 2019; Yang, 2009). This means that programs are responsible for engaging with the identity of the institution in order to contribute to achieve outcomes at the institutional level. Educational institutions frequently address sustainability and the preparation of future responsible citizens in their mission. The present chapter reports on a pedagogical intervention in which both institutional-level objectives and the internal intention to
prepare future global citizens are weaved into an ESL teacher training program as a means to train pre-service teachers to introduce Global Citizenship in their language teaching practices.

Global Citizenship, Language Education and the Sustainable Development Goals

The notion of citizenship in education has suffered a thorough transformation that has accompanied the steady process of world globalization. The scope of citizenship has broadened, and it has gone from focusing on national identities to the adoption of more universal narratives related to world citizenship (Yemini, Goren & Maxwell, 2018). Global Citizenship Education (GCE) surged as a general educational view that aims at equipping citizens to face the challenges of a globally connected world and at engaging them in solving global issues in social, political, cultural, economic and environmental issues (Goren & Yemini, 2017, 2018; UNESCO, 2014; Yemini, 2018). At the theoretical level, the status of GCE is still not on solid ground. Despite being around for about three decades, there is still debate over what global citizenship means and, furthermore, there is no unified concept across countries/regions (see Rapoport, 2010 for a review; UNESCO, 2014). In practice, it has motivated the development of a large number of educational resources [see for example Compass and Compasito manuals (Council of Europe, 2009, 2012)], and empirical research. One of the most remarkable characteristics of GCE is that its application is not limited to the development of curricula specifically on global citizenship. It can also be applied to all areas of learning. This means that GCE objectives are above and beyond single subjects and they perform as a driving force for curriculum building and decision-making at the programmatic level.

It must come as no surprise, then, that GCE has also been explored in the field of language teaching. There are many reasons why language education might be an optimal scenario to incorporate GCE objectives. For example, it may be argued that language learning relies on and draws from learners’ experiences and daily lives, which allows for the introduction of critical pedagogies that target learners’ competences in central areas of global citizenship. Another important factor has to do with learners being exposed to a (new) target culture, which makes it essential to address intercultural competences in the language classroom. These (and other) reasons might be partially responsible for the fruitful partnership between GCE and language teaching. An increasing number of studies focus on the development of language learners as global citizens in various areas and under more concrete labels such as intercultural citizenship (Byram, 2008; Byram & Wagner, 2018, Porto, 2019a), human rights education (Yulita & Porto, 2017), or sustainable development (Ali, 2017; Canning, 2010; Prádanos, 2015; Zygmunt, 2016). Yet, the wider concept of Global Citizenship can be said to house all these different designations as they can all be linked to different categories of GCE types such as cultural, moral, and environmental global citizenships (Oxley & Morris, 2013). Thus, it appears that GCE in language education can encompass a myriad of topics that may or may not overlap at first sight, but all of which can contribute to learners’ preparedness to engage in global issues.

Overall, there are two key findings that support the implementation of GCE in language teaching. First, that it is possible to achieve GCE goals in the language classroom (Porto, 2018); and second, that it is possible to develop linguistic knowledge when incorporating GCE in language education (Porto, 2019b). It appears, then, that this partnership offers a promising impact both for citizenship and language education. However, this empirically-supported potential does not seem to be corresponded by actual in-class practices. Research has shown that, even though teachers seem to be favorably predisposed to integrate GCE objectives in their
language teaching (Oranje & Smith, 2018; Sercu et al., 2005), they rarely incorporate them, perhaps due to lack of training. This lack of training may also be behind their lack of confidence to address global citizenship goals in their classes (Rapoport, 2010). Oranje and Smith (2018) further suggest that exposure to GCE in an applied form might lead teachers to shift their beliefs and, consequently, consider GCE as a central part of their practices. Thus, it seems that training in implementing GCE in language education is not widely provided, which, in turn, might be causing teachers to refrain from using this approach. This is of paramount importance if we consider the role of teachers as decision-makers in the classroom and, ultimately, as promoters of change. The present study addresses this issue by incorporating GCE in language teacher education.

As previously stated, one of the drawbacks of Global Citizenship has to do with the lack of an agreed-upon unifying concept. From the standpoint of teachers and practitioners, the different views of GCE make it a blurry target that becomes hard to interpret. Especially when one attempts to translate these theoretical underpinnings into objectives and curricula. And even more so when one is an inexperienced or pre-service language teacher. Generally speaking, most GCE-centered resources are aimed at raising awareness among teachers or students. However, these do not provide direct practical contributions to curriculum building (such as the presentation of curricular objectives), which arguably makes the incorporation of GCE harder for teachers as they need to weave linguistic and GCE objectives together into lessons and curricular plans. Luckily, there are ways to provide concrete GCE-related objectives to language-education professionals that can guide their lesson and curricular practices. This is the case of the United Nation’s (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (UNESCO, 2017b). These 17 goals were introduced by the United Nations in the 2030 Agenda of Sustainable Development. They represent 17 areas to “secure a sustainable, peaceful, prosperous and equitable life on earth for everyone now and in the future” (UNESCO, 2017a, p. 6). The 17 SDGs can be found in Table 1. Together with the SDGs, the UN has also released a manual that includes learning objectives for each of the 17 SDGs in the Education for Sustainable Development Goals manual (UNESCO, 2017a), which breaks down each SDG into (1) cognitive learning objectives, (2) socio-emotional learning objectives, (3) behavioral learning objectives, (4) a list of suggested topics and (5) examples of learning approaches and methods.

### Table 1 HERE

The transparency of these goals together with the availability of their learning outcomes and other resources make them ideal for teachers as they provide concrete aims that can encourage practitioners to establish a successful teaching practice. The present study introduces the SDGs into an undergraduate ESL teacher training course in order to familiarize future language teachers with applied forms of GCE. The purpose of this pedagogical intervention is to provide tangible resources for language teachers to develop their confidence in the integration of GCE objectives so that they feel prepared to engage their own students in the larger discourse of sustainability.

### This Study

The curricular intervention described in this chapter was carried out at the University of Texas-Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV). Broadly speaking, it aims at training future ESL teachers to incorporate GCE-related outcomes into their lessons. More concretely, pre-service teachers are
encouraged to rely on the Sustainable Development Goals to design language learning materials and lessons. Besides the professional, ethical responsibility of the program to prepare its students to engage in solving local and global issues, this project was also motivated by two external facts. First, (i) that sustainable development is explicitly stated in the UTRGV’s mission statement, and second, (ii) that the institution adheres specifically to the UN’s SDGs. Thus, this project also contributes to ensure that the ESL program engages with the identity of the house institution and advances in the achievement of the UTRGV mission.

As expressed by Oranje and Smith (2018), introducing teachers to applied forms of GCE might be a first step to develop confident teachers that use global citizenship objectives as a pivotal element for their practice. In other words, greater awareness might lead to more engagement on the part of language teachers. We took that as a starting point to enhance the preparation of future ESL teachers and implemented the following project with the intention of training educators that can create an impact in their students, their community and the world. In addition, the design of the present study will help us to unveil the perceptions that pre-service language teachers have about this approach to language teaching.

Context and Implementation

The project was implemented in an “Introduction to ESL” course, a requisite for the undergraduate ESL teacher training minor program. A total of 10 students in this class participated in the present study. The course covers the basic principles of language learning and language teaching. The students in the course were either taking the course to complete the ESL minor or as an elective for their English or Education degrees. Most of the students in this class also sought to obtain the ESL teacher state certification. The course was divided into 13 modules, one of which was dedicated entirely to learning about GCE and its implementation in language education. The duration of the GCE module was one week. However, students were further engaged in the topic as they were asked to apply what they have learned about Global Citizenship in a final course assignment: the design of a lesson plan. The course was delivered in a hybrid format using a learning management system as support. In addition, it followed a flipped classroom delivery approach. Before the face-to-face meeting, students had to do their weekly reading and complete an online quiz on the reading on the course online platform. The purpose behind this delivery strategy was to leverage student participation and discussion during in-class time. After the in-person class was over, students were required to write a discussion board post following a specific prompt. Overall, the project was divided into three phases: a presentation phase, a creation phase and a reflection phase. These phases are summarized in Table 2 and detailed next.

TABLE 2 HERE

In the first phase, students were assigned to read Yulita and Porto (2017) at home and complete a simple online quiz in which they had to summarize the procedure and purpose of the article in two short paragraphs. This book chapter depicts a language learning project that addresses human rights violations and enhances awareness of democratic participation within the students’ own communities. This project can be said to fall under Sustainable Development Goal 10 (Reduced inequalities). For example, it can be said to address the following learning objectives within that goal:
Cognitive learning objective 4. The learner understands local, national and global processes that both promote and hinder equality.

Socio-emotional objective 5. The learner is able to maintain a vision of a just and equal world.

Behavioral learning objective 1. The learner is able to evaluate inequalities in their local environment in terms of quality and quantity.

Then, students met with the instructor in the face-to-face session and discussed the reading and what it represented for the teaching of language and citizenship. Next, the instructor introduced the SDGs and encouraged students to explore each of the goals in the UN webpage (UNESCO, 2017b). After that, students carried out an in-class project. The class was divided into pairs and each student pair was instructed to do the following: (1) select one local or global issue of their interest that fell under one of the 17 SDGs; (2) explain why this issue is important for the concepts of sustainability and global citizenship; (3) determine which linguistic features would be needed to successfully address that topic in a language classroom (would students need to have knowledge of the past tense, the conditional, etc.); (4) state the target population where such topic could be implemented (student types, proficiency levels, age, etc.); (5) develop an outline of how they would integrate this topic in a language classroom and explain how they would make sure students are engaged in such activities. They were given fifteen minutes to work on this assignment. Then, each pair shared their work with the class and the rest of the class weighed in with additional ideas and activities. As a final follow up activity for that module, students were asked to individually summarize their own project in their weekly discussion board post.

For the second phase, students worked in pairs (not necessarily the same pairs as the in-class activity) to develop a lesson plan as a final course project. This lesson plan had to adhere to the teaching principles discussed in class and had to include an input component, two controlled close-ended activities, two open production activities and one final project-type activity. In addition, the lesson plan also had to address one local or global SDG issue at any stage of the lesson plan and fulfill at least three of its learning objectives. As a clarification, students were informed that the SDG objectives did not necessarily have to be addressed in all the activities designed for that lesson plan. They could choose to integrate them in whichever task(s) they felt most appropriate. The lesson plan had to be accompanied by a narrative that explained it in a way that any teacher who wanted to adopt that lesson could understand the procedure for and the purpose of its implementation. Students received feedback on these assignments as part of the course procedure.

Finally, students engaged in a reflection phase in the final assignment of the course. This final assignment covered the second half of the course, and it was an untimed, open-book, take-home written reflection task that included five applied questions. This final reflection activity was originally part of the course before the implementation of the present project and was modified to include questions that relate to the study in this chapter. Two of the questions (Q3, Q4) addressed the incorporation of Global Citizenship into language teaching. The prompts of these questions are the following:
Q3. Many believe that integrating the UN’s 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in education will lead to a positive impact on the world as a whole. In your own words, develop on the potential of using the SDGs in language education. What are some positive and/or negative effects that this approach could bring to society at local and global levels if implemented in language teaching? How would you think students would react to this approach and why do you think so? Do you think it is possible to develop linguistic knowledge using this approach? Why/why not?

Q4. The implementation of SDGs in language education may, however, be challenging for language educators. How easy is it to design lesson plans that incorporate the SDGs? What difficulties do you anticipate if you were to address any topic related to the SDGs in your language class?

These prompts were designed to allow for both positive and negative views of the incorporation of SDGs in language teaching. It must be noted that the instructor supported critical thinking and discussion in this course. During the face-to-face meetings, students often disagreed with and offered counterarguments to the materials seen in class, and whole-class discussions followed—for example, students were encouraged to analyze and criticize different teaching methodologies and theoretical approaches. Thus, it was common practice in the course for students to express their own ideas and views, no matter how unfavorable these were. Students had one week to complete it and submit it to the course’s online platform.

The questions in this last assignment addressed pre-service teachers' perspectives on the potential of this approach, its effects on student engagement, its connection with language development and the difficulties that teachers may face in their practice should they seek to follow this approach. In other words, this assignment sought to unveil evidence of critical awareness on the part of participants as well as reservations they may have about the practical implementation. Critical awareness in this context can be defined as the expression of explicit connection between the implementation of the SDGs in the language classroom and social, political, or environmental changes.

In the next section, the results of the reflection phase are discussed. The analysis uses the written final assignment as a source of evidence for student’s perceptions and discourse. The method employed for the analysis was content analysis, as conceived by Cohen et al. (2007) and used in other (GCE) studies (Yulita & Porto, 2017). The qualitative data was coded by themes, summarized, and then, the main ideas and messages were reported along with illustrative examples.

Results from the Reflection Task

Overall, all participants displayed a positive and hopeful attitude towards an a priori conceptualization of the approach (SDGs integrated into language education). All of them referred to the transformative potential that this educational tandem may have at local and global levels, which suggests that participants were critically aware of the potential of this approach.

Participant 2. “As an example, imagine a student who is seeking higher academic education in the engineering field, but needs a new language in order to accomplish
his goal... [H]e could be inspired to do something related to those goals once he obtains his degree in engineering.”

Participant 3. “The benefit I see in studying these goals globally in a language classroom is that hopefully it opens the students’ eyes. Opens them in seeing that we as humans are more alike than not, that we only have one earth; we should always do our best to protect it.”

Participant 6: “It allows the student a little escape from routine classwork and a chance to change their communities.”

One of the participants even explicitly stated that the inclusion of the SDGs could act as a motivating force for students in language courses.

Participant 6: “I strongly believe students will react favorably to this approach because it will give them a reason (motivation) to complete the assignments. It also allows for a more intercultural education, because these are problems the whole world shares.”

When it comes to their reservations, none of the participants considered that this approach could bring any negative outcomes per se at the theoretical level. However, three participants showed concerns that have to do with the effectiveness of the practice. For example, Participant 8 brought up how politics and students’ own stances might lead to challenges in the classroom and beyond. Similarly, Participant 2 suggested that, if not addressed correctly and tactfully, delicate topics might alarm language students, or it may cause them to regard certain foreign countries as ‘inferior’ if one topic is presented as being exclusive to that part of the world.

Participant 8: “If the message is not presented in a manner that is tact and sensitive to the culture, region and government, there could be severe resistance and backlash. Some of the sustainability issues, such as women’s equality, may be met with severe opposition by some governments and societies. This is the real challenge: to make the message impactful enough that students retain the values of these goals, but not to the point where powerful entities feel threatened and thus retaliate against the lesson.”

Participant 2: “Locally, the goals could have negative impacts because if the students do not comprehend them fully, they could be overly alarmed and even scared. Globally, if the goals are not correctly applied it could cause the students to see other parts of the world as inferior or in a negative light.”

With regards to how this approach could influence their own practice, concerns related to the efficient design of materials emerged. Nine out of the ten participants in this study considered the designing of lessons that could efficiently capture language student’s attention as the major difficulty when implementing the SDGs in language education. Remember that all participants displayed a positive attitude towards the incorporation of the SDGs in language education. Yet, when it came to reflecting on their own practices, the majority of them appear to anticipate issues
related to material development and student motivation that may directly impact how this approach translates into their educational practices.

Participant 5: “The biggest problem though would be creating lessons that capture the attention of these UN Goals. If they were to specifically be used in a language class though, I do not feel they are too difficult.”

Participant 2: “I believe it would be hard but manageable to design lesson plans about the SDGs.”

Participant 8: “Language educators must conceal the goal within a language lesson. I believe depending on the cultural context it can be easy or incredibly difficult to convey a sustainability goal.”

When referring to the hows of this implementation, two participants believed that the SDGs should be incorporated gradually (some mention one or two SDGs per school year) and justified this by alluding to the complexity of this approach for teachers, and to students feeling “bombarded” with information if all SDGs are addressed at the same time. Furthermore, one participant argued that focusing on one SDG at a time would help students develop a connection to that specific topic. Another participant also mentioned that by introducing the SDGs, teachers might need to be prepared to have more interactive classes and that it might become a challenge if the teacher strives for a more ‘controlled’ class. This theme was somewhat mirrored in two other participants’ comments in which they refer to the need for more communicative tasks (discussions, task-based activities) if teachers wanted to incorporate SDGs in language teaching. Moreover, three participants also mentioned that this approach might lead students to further develop their research, critical thinking and communication skills. Three participants referred to the lack of teacher knowledge and preparation as a possible limitation for this approach. One suggested that some teachers might not realize that the SDGs can be integrated into the curriculum as transversal objectives (as opposed to SDGs being the focus of the curriculum) and that teachers’ knowledge about the SDGs might be poor. The three participants further indicated that teachers would need to receive training on this matter to be successful. These challenges are further observed in one of the students’ reflection about their own perspective before the course. This student provides an interesting account about the effects of the present project on the cognitions of teachers.

Participant 2: “In my own experience, when I first heard about this idea… I could not find any way in which you could combine language teaching with the SDGs. Although, after some meditation and hard brainstorming, I realized that students can actually learn a new language while learning about the current world’s and society’s needs. Not only would they be aware about these important topics, but they would be enriched by the diverse and unique vocabulary and topics that are within each SDG.”

Finally, with regards to the question on whether the incorporation of SDGs in language education can lead to language gains, all participants agreed that, from their own perspectives, students can develop their linguistic skills when taught using this approach.
All in all, the results demonstrate that pre-service teachers who participated in the present pedagogical intervention regarding the enhancement of SDGs in language education reflected critically on the potentials and drawbacks of this approach. The results provide modest evidence that not all teachers may regard this approach as plausible at first, but with increased exposure and training, they do develop a more positive stance. Another valuable finding that mirrors previous results from Oranje and Smith (2018) and Sercu et al. (2005) is that, at the theoretical level, participants in this study displayed a positive attitude towards this novel (for them) methodology. However, when it comes to its practical application, they demonstrated critical viewpoints about their own practices as well as about teacher preparedness.

Conclusion

The results of the present study suggest that training and exposing pre-service language teachers to applied forms of GCE can have a positive impact on the views of future teachers. It also unveiled the obstacles that this group of participants foresaw about the implementation of SDGs into language education. But, most importantly, participants demonstrated critical awareness of the potential that this GCE+language teaching partnership might have at local and global levels. In sum, it appears that there are benefits to the training of pre-service language teachers as indicated by Oranje and Smith (2018). Furthermore, by introducing this approach in the UTRGV ESL minor program, we contributed to the spread of the house institution’s mission, which can potentially enhance the education of future global citizens and, thus, make a difference in its community and beyond.

The present study represents a first step in working with the SDGs in language teacher education. Future studies could address the implementation of this approach in different social, linguistic, and language teaching contexts as well as obtaining data from different stakeholders. This would yield additional insights into how this practice could impact particular communities and local issues, which could be of interest to both researchers and practitioners.

References


Table 1. Sustainable Development Goals.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Goal 1</td>
<td>End poverty in all its forms everywhere.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Goal 2</td>
<td>End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal 3</td>
<td>Ensure healthy lives and promote wellbeing for all at all ages.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal 4</td>
<td>Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal 5</td>
<td>Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal 6</td>
<td>Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal 7</td>
<td>Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal 8</td>
<td>Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal 9</td>
<td>Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal 10</td>
<td>Reduce inequality within and among countries.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal 11</td>
<td>Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal 12</td>
<td>Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal 13</td>
<td>Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal 14</td>
<td>Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal 15</td>
<td>Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal 16</td>
<td>Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal 17</td>
<td>Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2. Summary of implementation phases and activities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phase 1</td>
<td>In-class discussion of assigned reading (Yulita &amp; Porto, 2017).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>The instructor provides an introduction to the SDGs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Students create an outline of how to integrate SDGs in the language classroom.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>In groups, students design a lesson plan that addresses at least one SDG issue.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Practice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 3</td>
<td>Students reflect on the pros and cons of the implementation of SDGs in both language education, and their future language teaching practice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflection</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
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