

## **Reimagining global citizenship education in an era of geopolitical fragmentation: new trends for internationalizing the curriculum in higher education**

Reimaginar la educación para la ciudadanía global en una era de fragmentación geopolítica: nuevas tendencias para internacionalizar el currículo en la educación superior

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**Resumen:** Este estudio examina la integración de temas geopolíticos en los currículos de educación superior y su relación con la educación para la ciudadanía global (ECG) en una era de fuerzas competitivas entre la globalización y la fragmentación geopolítica. A través de un enfoque cualitativo-descriptivo utilizando la metodología de revisión de alcance, la investigación analiza las tendencias actuales en la internacionalización curricular con un enfoque en el contenido geopolítico. Los hallazgos revelan tres ideas clave: las dimensiones geopolíticas proporcionan una base esencial para el desarrollo significativo de la ciudadanía global; la ECG efectiva requiere esfuerzos descolonizadores en el diseño curricular; y existe una tensión entre los marcos educativos críticos/transformadores y neoliberales. El estudio demuestra que las universidades deben examinar críticamente si sus esfuerzos de internacionalización se alinean con los ideales de la ciudadanía global en lugar de simplemente seguir las tendencias basadas en el mercado. Esta investigación aporta nuevos marcos teóricos que conectan los proyectos curriculares con orientación geopolítica con las iniciativas de ciudadanía global.

**Palabras clave:** educación para la ciudadanía global, geopolítica, internacionalización curricular, educación superior, descolonización.

**Abstract:** This study examines the integration of geopolitical topics in higher education curricula and their relationship to global citizenship education (GCE) in an era of competing forces between globalization and geopolitical fragmentation. Through a qualitative-descriptive approach using scoping review methodology, the research analyzes current trends in curriculum internationalization with a focus on geopolitical content. The findings reveal three key insights: geopolitical dimensions provide an essential foundation for meaningful global citizenship development; effective GCE requires decolonizing efforts in curriculum design; and there exists a tension between critical/transformative and neoliberal educational frameworks. The study demonstrates

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that universities must critically examine whether their internationalization efforts align with global citizenship ideals rather than merely following market-based trends. This research contributes new theoretical frameworks connecting curriculum projects with geopolitical orientation to global citizenship initiatives.

**Keywords:** global citizenship education, geopolitics, curriculum internationalization, higher education, decolonization.

## **Introduction**

Contemporary higher education scenario is subject to complex competing forces: globalization and geopolitical fragmentation, both pushing international cooperation with a new set of national interests and boundaries. This tension created a new array of perspectives for educators and institutions seeking to develop globally competent individuals. The COVID-19 and other escalating geopolitical phenomena have posed complementary challenges to the international education systems, changing mobility trends and reinforcing nationalist tendencies (Trần et al., 2023).

Despite these challenges or perhaps because of them, global citizenship education (GCE) has emerged as an increasingly important discipline in higher education. This approach aims to build epistemic aspects, cognitive competencies and ethical values in higher education students that become necessary to comprehend the contested and everchanging global environment (Yusof et al., 2019; Noh, 2018), where the internationalization of the curriculum process constitutes a key strategy to produce these global citizenship traits.

As obvious as this may seem, a critical gap exists understanding how geopolitics influence the quest of global citizenship through curricular efforts. Current research has explored international education widely, but there remains limited empirical evidence around the relationship between these two relevant aspects. This study addresses this gap by examining a group of studies that show experiences, analysis and practices related to geopolitical topics being integrated into the curricula and whether this can contribute to the global citizenship approach of universities.

By using a qualitative-descriptive approach and a scoping review methodology, this research identifies current trends in curriculum internationalization with a focus on geopolitical content. The findings will try to contribute to integrating new theoretical frameworks that connect curriculum projects with geopolitical orientation to global citizenship initiatives.

## **A challenging geopolitical scenario for education**

Contemporary geopolitical conditions present significant challenges for international education systems. The COVID-19 pandemic and escalating geopolitical tensions have introduced new complexities to this ecosystem. Trần et al. (2023) note that the pandemic disrupted mobility trends while amplifying existing tensions, compromising international education's effectiveness as these conditions exposed that nations prioritized domestic imperatives over global interests (Mok et al., 2021). Geopolitical factors substantially impact international academic cooperation experiences, particularly for those nations involved in conflicts. For instance, Chinese students at American institutions face challenges upon bilateral relations influencing their campus integration and educational decisions (Xie, 2023).

As nations compete for intellectual capital, competition for high-quality international students has intensified. Nguyen (2020) analyzes how state-subsidized educational initiatives frequently align with geopolitical objectives, reflecting a pattern where international education serves national interests. The resurgence of nationalist ideologies has prompted a reevaluation of immigration protocols and academic cooperation models. Fidler et al. (2022) identify, for example, political determinants increasingly govern international student migration patterns, with nations implementing strategic policies that align with their geopolitical agendas.

## **Higher education and geopolitics**

The relationship between tertiary education and geopolitical phenomena has grown recently in a globally integrated environment where academic institutions must adapt to evolving dynamics to develop special competencies and foster global citizenship (Myers & Rivero, 2020). Educational institutions function as entities embedded within and influenced by geopolitical variables that shape policy frameworks and collaboration relations.

Global competence constitutes an essential educational goal, encompassing cognitive and heuristic abilities to engage with global issues. Research by Pevneva et al. (2019) indicates that international competence represents both linguistic proficiency and intercultural communication capabilities. This competence gains relevance in an era of geopolitical tensions, as students need to critically evaluate broader socio-political narratives regarding national identity and power mechanisms (De Wit, 2024; Etherington, 2014).

The geopolitical context serves as a determinant for program reconfiguration and learning outcomes redesign. Belhoste and Dimitrova (2023) postulate that integrating critical geopolitical consciousness into curricula provides students with analytical tools necessary to comprehend global complexity and foster global citizenship development.

Educational institutions must reconsider integrating global competence models into curricula, understanding the implications of geopolitical tensions on student mobility, and developing programs with global significance.

### **The role of international curriculum in building global citizenship**

Integrating international components into higher education curricula is crucial for building global competence and fostering global citizenship education (Nanthawong, 2024; Aydın et al., 2019; Reysen et al., 2012). GCE has emerged as an important domain in higher education. This approach aims to equip students with epistemic elements, cognitive competencies, and axiological orientations necessary to comprehend and contribute to an increasingly diverse global landscape (Yusof et al., 2019; Noh, 2018).

Educational institutions are increasingly pursuing curricula that encompass local, national, and international perspectives (Nanthawong, 2024), as the implementation of new pedagogical approaches based on communication and collaboration is essential for successful GCE development. Research confirms that developing global citizenship-oriented curricula can enhance students' cross-cultural understanding and communication abilities while fostering social equity values (Aydın et al., 2019; Myers, 2016). For instance, Reynolds et al. (2019) argue that employing interdisciplinary methods and Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) strategies in collaborative teaching projects can promote deeper understanding and commitment to global citizenship. This trend toward curricular innovation highlights the critical need for well-trained educators who can effectively adopt and implement GCE frameworks (Reysen et al., 2012), as professional development for effective curriculum integration is particularly important, as many professors feel unprepared to implement GCE effectively (Rapoport, 2010).

The implementation of GCE should include an understanding of globalization's implications, which create new configurations of citizenship. Globalization pressures have catalyzed a more global perspective on higher education, challenging conventional frameworks and encouraging axiological understanding of human rights, sustainability, and social responsibilities (Kennedy, 2012). This deepened conception prepares students to become active participants in addressing global challenges in intercultural environments.

### **Problem, research question and objectives**

The integration of geopolitical topics in higher education curricula represents a critical yet understudied approach to prepare students for global citizenship in an increasingly interconnected world. Understanding how geopolitics shapes the development of global citizenship competencies would provide valuable insights for curriculum designers, policy makers, and educators seeking to foster globally minded graduates. Furthermore,

while existing research has explored international education broadly, there remains a gap in empirical studies examining the specific curriculum perspectives in which geopolitical topics enhance global citizenship traits.

Hence it is pertinent to analyze, *how does geopolitical topics are used in higher education curricula? Are these geopolitical topics linked to global citizenship education or aimed to contribute to any of the global citizenship traits?*

By studying the relationship between both concepts this research will try to contribute to new or improved theoretical frameworks connecting curricular projects with geopolitical orientation with global citizenship initiatives. The results could ultimately provide evidence-based practices and conceptual models for universities seeking to educate individuals capable of understanding and contributing actively to our complex global society.

The overall objectives of this study are:

1. To identify how geopolitical topics are integrated into higher education curricula in different institutions or programs.
2. Analyze the trends and projects based on building global citizenship in higher education through the internationalization of the curricula.

## **Methodology**

The present analysis will be conducted through a qualitative-descriptive approach, having the scoping review methodology as a tool to reflect on the connections between geopolitics and global citizenship in the frame of the university curriculum. This method offers a set of advantages that can help generate a broad understanding of a complex area. One of the main advantages of scoping reviews is the ability to map the breadth of existing literature on a topic, facilitating a clearer grasping of the different concepts and their scientific reach. Scoping reviews are also reliable for identifying gaps in literature and linking concepts, which are particularly valuable in fields characterized by rapid transformations or where there are still contested conceptualizations (Pham et al., 2014). This methodology allows researchers to summarize a wide scenario of existing literature without limitations of the narrow research questioning of systematic reviews (Peters et al., 2015).

## **Protocol design**

This scoping review will employ the methodological framework originally developed by Arksey and O'Malley (2005) and subsequently refined by Levac et al. (2010) and the Joanna Briggs Institute (Peters et al., 2020). This framework was selected for some methodological reasons. First, unlike systematic reviews that typically address very specific and defined questions, scoping reviews are particularly suitable for analyzing

wide research areas and identifying present and future knowledge gaps (Munn et al., 2018). This condition fits perfectly with the objective of this study, which is to broadly examine the relationship between geopolitical topics in the university curriculum and the promotion of global citizenship in higher education contexts.

The Arksey and O'Malley scoping review model provides a very structured but flexible approach through a five-stage general process: (1) identifying the research question; (2) identifying a set of relevant studies; (3) study selection; (4) charting the data; and (5) summarizing and reporting results. There were also included some complementary refinements added by Peters et al., (2020) which aim to strengthen the methodological rigor by providing specific guidance on search strategy development, study selection criteria, and data extraction procedures.

The reporting of the review will be held into the PRISMA-ScR (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses extension for Scoping Reviews) guidelines (Tricco et al., 2018). PRISMA-ScR was selected because it represents the current preferred standard for reporting of scoping reviews. This alignment to the PRISMA-ScR will enhance the reproducibility and methodological transparency of this review, addressing previous criticisms of scoping reviews as lacking sufficient methodological rigor (Pham et al., 2014).

### **Eligibility criteria**

Studies were identified based on inclusion and exclusion criteria to guarantee their relevance to the designed research question. Inclusion criteria encompass studies focused on undergraduate or graduate education that examine the integration of geopolitical topics in higher education curricula with some scope or orientation towards global citizenship. The review will include empirical studies, case studies, curriculum analyses, and reviews published in English, between the year 2010 and 2025. Publications must have been peer-reviewed and open access.

Studies will be excluded if they focus exclusively on elementary education, mention geopolitics or global citizenship only tangentially, or consist of opinion papers or editorials without substantial empirical or theoretical grounding. Additional exclusion criteria include studies focused solely on international education, projects such as international student mobility or language learning, those without curricular considerations, publications in other languages, or studies published before 2010.

### **Sources and search strategy**

The search for literature will be covered by three academic databases: ERIC (Education Resources Information Center), Web of Science and Scopus. These platforms were



selected for being globally recognized, including much of the cutting-edge educational studies available, and especially for its production in English.

The search strategy has been designed with a combination of key terms organized around three concepts: geopolitics, international curriculum and global citizenship. For geopolitics, search terms included "geopolitics" "international relations" "global politics" and "international politics." The international curriculum concept used terms such as "internationalization of higher education" "internationalization of the curriculum" and "global curriculum". The global citizenship concept incorporated terms like "global citizen" "global competence" "intercultural competence", "global awareness" and "global mindedness".

The selected "concepts or words" were combined using Boolean connectors (AND, OR) to create search strings suitable for each database's specific requirements. Initial research has been piloted and refined to ensure effective results of literature. A reference list of the main articles was hand-researched to double-check availability, compliance with the inclusion and exclusion criteria and to search for references included in those documents that might cover the requirements.

### **Selection of sources of evidence**

The selection process followed a two-stage approach. First, titles and abstracts of the primary list were screened by the researcher against the inclusion criteria. Conflicts were resolved through consultation with a second reviewer. Second, full texts of the studies that fulfilled with the criteria were assessed to effectively match the academic conditions and needs. Reasons for exclusion at the full-text stage were documented in a separate document. The selection process was organized in an Excel file using filters and will be documented using a PRISMA flow diagram as illustrated in Figure 1.

### **Data charting process**

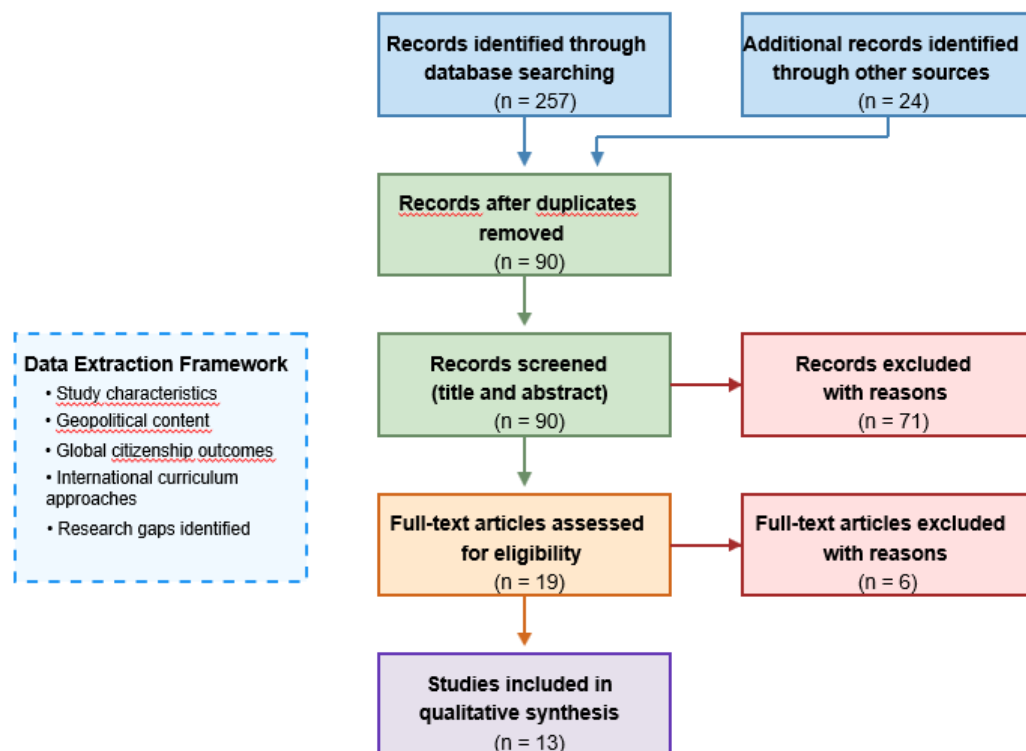
A standardized data extraction form will be developed and pilot-tested on a sample of included studies before full implementation. The data charting form will capture study characteristics (author(s), publication year, country of study, study design, methodology, sample size, participant characteristics, institutional context), curricular features (types of geopolitical topics included, mode of integration, disciplinary context), outcomes (reported global citizenship aims, skills, and/or attitudes), and pedagogical approaches (teaching methods, technologies or resources employed, theoretical frameworks, etc.)

### **Data analysis and synthesis**

The extracted data will be analyzed using a narrative synthesis approach with thematic analysis to identify patterns, trends, and gaps in literature. This will involve an iterative

process of coding and categorizing the data with the support of the ATLAS.ti software, which identified repeated themes, common concepts, common use of key words and language and potential relationships between geopolitical education and global citizenship outcomes. The analysis will particularly focus on identifying effective pedagogical approaches, challenges in implementation, and areas where further research is needed.

Figure 1. PRISMA-ScR Flow Diagram based on the Scoping Review methodology



## Results

In this section, the reader will find a summary of the selected studies and a high-level analysis of each one of them. A systematic mapping of the studies is presented in Table 1. In terms of topics, the most common ones identified in the reviewed studies are global citizenship education followed by geopolitics, internationalization of curriculum, and decolonization. Some of the less frequent topics include digital storytelling, sustainability awareness, multicultural education, entrepreneurialism, and COVID-19 implications. About the context-region mapping, the studies belong to diverse geographical areas, such as the United States, United Kingdom, India, Turkey, Canada, Finland, Australia, South Africa, Sweden, and the Netherlands.



In terms of theoretical frameworks, the most frequent approaches described across the reviewed studies are critical pedagogy and decolonial theory. The less frequently noted frameworks include assemblage theory, cosmopolitanism, Freirean critical consciousness, and feminist analysis. As can be seen in Table 1, the 13 reviewed studies had their particular focus, context-region, and theoretical underpinnings. In the following pages a detailed analysis of these studies will be provided, examining how they interconnect among the global citizenship education, the geopolitical perspectives in education and the internationalization of the curriculum process.

Table 1. Overview of the main features of the studies

|    | Title  | Author, year  | Keywords  | Topic  | Context-region                                    |
|----|--|---|---|--|---|
| 1  | Digital Storytelling as a Tool for Global Citizenship and Sustainability: Enhancing Cross-cultural Understanding in Education                                  | Swarnika Modi; Tanu Gupta; Mohammad Rahmatullah (2024)            | Digital storytelling, educational technology, global citizenship, education, sustainability awareness.                                      | Global Citizenship                               | India, Bangladesh                                 |
| 2  | Disciplinary Boundaries and Methodological Issues of Teaching Geopolitics in Turkey  | Cem Savaş (2024)  | Geopolitics, Political Science and International Relations (IR) Curricula, Teaching, Methodology, Turkey.                                   | Geopolitics                                      | Turkey  |
| 3  | Global competition, coloniality, and the geopolitics of knowledge in higher education  | Riyad A. Shahjahan; Clara Morgan (2016)                           | Coloniality; global competition; higher education; teaching and learning; OECD; quality assurance   | Geopolitics and Global Citizenship               | United States of America and United Arab Emirates |
| 4  | Conflations, possibilities, and foreclosures: Global citizenship education in a multicultural context  | Karen Pashby (2015)   | Citizenship education; multicultural/diversity education; critical theory; socio-political conditions; global education; global citizenship | Global citizenship                               | Canada  |
| 5  | International organizations (IOs), epistemic tools of influence, and the colonial geopolitics of knowledge production in higher education policy.              | Riyad A. Shahjahan (2016)   | OECD; World Bank; coloniality; epistemic activities; decoloniality  | International curriculum and Geopolitics         | United States of America                          |
| 6  | Reterritorializing the global knowledge economy: An analysis of geopolitical assemblages of higher education.  | Sami Moisio; Anni Kangas (2016)                                   | Entrepreneurialism, geopolitics, global engineer, higher education, knowledge-based economy, trans nationalization.                         | Geopolitics                                      | Finland   |
| 7  | Global citizenship education: mainstreaming the curriculum?  | Tasneem Ibrahim (2010)  | Curriculum; global issues, global citizenship; national curriculum.   | Global citizenship and international curriculum. | United Kingdom                                    |
| 8  | The new geo-politics of higher education   | Simon Marginson (2018)  | Higher education, geopolitics, global cooperation; national competition; social inequality.   | Geopolitics and international curriculum         | United Kingdom                                    |
| 9  | Global citizenship education at the crossroads: Globalization, global commons, common good, and critical consciousness   | Carlos Alberto Torres; Emiliano Bosio (2020)                      | Globalization; Global citizenship education; Teaching and learning; multiculturalism; Paulo Freire; Critical consciousness.                 | Global citizenship                               | United States of America and United Kingdom       |
| 10 | Preparing teachers for critical global and democratic practice: shifting inquiries into the teaching of democracy and global citizenship in teacher education. | Bryan Smith; Jia Ying Neoh; Ailie McDowall; Eun-Ji Amy Kim (2024) | Global citizenship; Teacher education; Teaching practice  | Global citizenship                               | Australia   |
| 11 | Curriculum Decolonization and Internationalization: A Critical Perspective from South Africa   | Savo Heleta; Samia Chasi (2024)                                   | Internationalization, decolonization, curriculum, higher education, Global North, Global South, South Africa                                | International curriculum and Global Citizenship  | South Africa                                      |
| 12 | The geopolitics of international higher education prior and during Covid-19: a decolonial feminist analysis  | Maria Vlachou; Madina Tlostanova (2023)                           | Academic migrants; coloniality of time; geopolitics; international higher education; Covid-19; decolonising HE.                             | Geopolitics                                      | Sweden  |
| 13 | The Moral and the Political in Global Citizenship: Appreciating Differences in Education   | Wiel Veugelaers (2016)  | Cosmopolitanism; global citizenship, social-political global citizenship; political affairs.  | Geopolitics and global citizenship               | Netherlands                                       |

## Specific analysis by study

Modi et al, (2024) make contributions to understanding how digital storytelling can promote global citizenship and sustainability awareness in universities. The authors explore this pedagogical tool to see if it enhances cross-cultural understanding and engages students with sustainability challenges, this is, building competencies to understand complex global challenges. Their discussion goes further with the traditional

educational paradigms by assessing learning experiences that build key competencies for global citizenship, including empathy, intercultural awareness, and environmental responsibility.

Savaş (2024), examines how colleges and universities balance three key challenges: creating global-minded courses, including political tensions between countries as a topic, and preparing students to be world citizens. The study provides empirical evidence about special programs and approaches that help students develop global competencies and parallelly addressing complex global political issues. The author includes diverse examples and studies about different institutions having successfully built pedagogical initiatives (teaching mainly) adapting to their different national and international political contexts.

Shahjahan & Morgan (2016) present a discussion about how the internationalization of the curriculum process is intimately related to fostering global citizenship, stressing that in fact global citizenship education is based on geopolitical complexities. The paper shows empirical evidence through case studies from universities that evidence curricular strategies to build intercultural competence, critical thinking related to global issues, and ethical engagement among higher education students. The document also examines how changes in geopolitics can reshape the universities' policies across internationalization and curriculum plans.

Pashby (2015) gives a critical discourse analysis of the intersection between multicultural education and the global citizenship education, which leads to discover ambiguities around this relationship. The author highlights that despite multiculturalism aims to foster cultural diversity and understanding, which are embedded elements of global citizenship, multicultural programs and projects usually tend to embrace neoliberal approaches based on economic utilities, constraining critical thinking, social responsibility and the impact on understanding global issues, such as intercultural awareness and geopolitical dynamics.

Shahjahan (2016) makes different considerations to the internationalization of the curriculum process with both empirical and theoretical approaches that link this topic with the global citizenship education theory. The author delivers a blended conceptual analysis and case studies focusing on the experiences of universities integrating international and geopolitical perspectives within their curricula, identifying pedagogical approaches, faculty experiences supporting this model and exploring some assessment mechanisms for students' learning experiences.

Moisio and Kangas (2016) use the assemblage theory to create an analysis of how higher education institutions are shaped by the global knowledge trends to transform universities into "sites of geopolitical assemblage" that respond to capitalist structures, "producing" subjects that are not really equipped with competencies inherent to the

global citizenship education model, but aligned with neoliberal agendas that aim for the corporatization of education. The analysis is built around approaches like the internationalization of the curriculum, global citizenship, and geopolitical implications, highlighting contested nature of these concepts in today's modern higher education context.

Ibrahim (2010) explores how global citizenship is integrated into the curriculum, especially when global challenges are included in teaching methodologies. His most relevant contribution is the empirical evidence on global citizenship education encompassing the concepts of interdependence, diversity, global issues and other related traits in many curricula. By assessing citizenship projects in textbooks, the author critiques that the concept of global citizenship should not be seen as a complementary topic, but it must be taken as a holistic approach, where NGO's and other institutions must cooperate to foster this type of education transversally.

Marginson (2018) focuses on the internationalization of higher education features with emphasis on its geopolitical implications to produce global citizenship. The main contribution is her analysis about the global exchange of knowledge, which involves academic mobility, intercultural approaches of teaching, foreign language proficiency or social tolerance training. The paper stresses that internationalization projects respond both to the cross-cultural needs of the curriculum and the political and market dynamics that shape higher education systems. This analysis highlights the importance of collaboration networks that can enhance individual and collective benefits to the national and international geopolitical context.

Torres and Bosio (2010) make an interesting contribution to the global citizenship education (GCE) approach by developing a comprehensive framework that integrates curriculum internationalization, global citizenship concepts, and geopolitical complexities. The analysis, grounded in Freire's critical pedagogy, argues that GCE must go beyond pragmatic approaches and reach a transformative model in which a critical consciousness could be built among university students. Their empirical contribution is the analysis of how students can develop critical awareness in the face of power hierarchies, advocating to a multicultural, geopolitical and collaborative vision of the world.

Smith et al., (2024) develop a framework for global citizenship education through the lens of the critical pedagogy theory, with special emphasis on geopolitical and democratic considerations, all of that in the frame of the internationalization of the curriculum process. One of the main contributions is to demonstrate how teacher education should promote critical consciousness considering historical narratives and contemporary geopolitical issues to facilitate significant civic engagement before and after graduation. The study summarizes that effective GCE needs an evaluation of the ideological

systems, advocating for a transformative approach for the internationalization of the curriculum process to ensure inclusivity and social justice.

Heleta and Chasi (2024) study the confrontations among the curriculum internationalization, decolonization and geopolitics in the frame of the post-apartheid scenario in South Africa. Their study focuses on the still current predominance of the Eurocentric higher education curricula in their country, marginalizing local education systems from the Global South. Through their critical discussion, the authors share empirical studies showing how the demand for ending this epistemological influence can allow them to evolve in models where geopolitics and curricula can create true connections. This study creates an interesting dialogue about global citizenship and the need for inclusive and coherent perspectives of the global south narratives.

Vlachou and Tlostanova (2023) offers a theoretical analysis employing a decolonial and feminist framework to examine the internationalization of higher education and its relationship with geopolitical power that influence academic migration. The core of this study is the critical examination of the institutional mechanisms used over international students and faculties during the COVID-19 pandemic, showing how institutions are shaped by geopolitical dynamics that are often materialized in the curricula, in the institutional plans and in the university legislation. The paper calls for a reconceptualization of the higher education frameworks to advocate for a new notion of global citizenship in which human rights, inclusion and inequalities become the basis of the international dimension of the curriculum and the university at large.

Veugelers (2016) research examines the relationship between the moral dimensions and global citizenship education within geopolitical contexts. The paper identifies three main global citizenship models: moral, open and socio-political, showing empirical evidence that educators in higher education tend to choose the moral approach, despite other orientations are also needed in several educational contexts. The study advocates creating a more comprehensive curriculum development initiative that includes the moral, geopolitical and social components, fostering education as a transformational process that can lead to a more democratic and global citizenship which can address world issues more accurately.

### **Global citizenship education (GCE) approaches found in the studies**

**Critical/Transformative Approaches:** Several studies emphasize critical pedagogy and transformative learning as essential to authentic GCE. Torres and Bosio (2020) ground their analysis in Freirean critical pedagogy, arguing that GCE must transcend pragmatic approaches to build critical consciousness among students. Similarly, Smith et al. (2024) develop a framework based on critical pedagogy theory with emphasis on democratic considerations.

Moral and Political Dimensions: Veugelers (2016) identifies three distinct models of global citizenship: moral, open, and socio-political. The research suggests that educators tend to favor moral approaches, though comprehensive GCE requires integration of all three dimensions.

Neoliberal vs. Critical GCE: There's a clear tension between market-oriented and critical approaches. Pashby (2015) highlights how multicultural programs often embrace neoliberal approaches based on individual and economic utilities, which constrains critical thinking and social responsibility. Moisio and Kangas (2016) critique how universities become "sites of geopolitical assemblage" that produce subjects aligned with neoliberal agendas rather than equipped with true global citizenship competencies.

### **Curriculum internationalization and decolonization**

Multiple studies examine how curriculum internationalization relates to GCE. Shahjahan & Morgan (2016) discuss how the internationalization process is intimately related to fostering global citizenship, while Shahjahan (2016) provides both empirical and theoretical approaches linking internationalization with GCE theory. Several studies adopt a decolonial lens to critique dominant educational paradigms. Heleta and Chasi (2024) study the confrontations among curriculum internationalization, decolonization, and geopolitics in post-apartheid South Africa, highlighting the persistent Eurocentric dominance in higher education curricula. Vlachou and Tlostanova (2023) employ a decolonial and feminist framework to examine internationalization and its relationship with geopolitical power dynamics.

### **Geopolitical dimensions of higher education**

Shahjahan (2016) examines how international organizations function as "epistemic tools of influence" within the colonial geopolitics of knowledge production. Marginson (2018) studies how world-class universities participate in the global exchange of knowledge within specific geopolitical contexts.: Savaş (2024) examines how institutions balance creating global-minded courses while navigating political tensions between countries. The study provides empirical evidence about programs that help students develop global competencies while addressing complex global political issues.

### **Types of studies**

Pashby (2015) employs critical discourse analysis to examine the intersection between multicultural education and GCE. Several researchers use case studies to provide empirical evidence. Shahjahan & Morgan (2016) present case studies from universities that demonstrate curricular strategies to build intercultural competence and critical thinking; Other studies develop conceptual frameworks, like Torres and Bosio (2020) who create a comprehensive framework integrating curriculum internationalization,



global citizenship concepts, and geopolitical complexities, meanwhile Ibrahim (2010) provides empirical evidence on how global citizenship is integrated into curricula by assessing citizenship projects in textbooks.

## **Discussion**

A significant contrast appears across multiple studies when it comes to examining the different global citizenship education approaches that go from neoliberal to critical/transformative ones. Torres and Bosio (2020) base their analysis in critical pedagogy arguing that GCE must transcend pragmatic models and build more transformative systems, which is also echoed by Smith et al., who develop a GCE based on a similar critical theory that relies on democratic considerations. In the same direction, some other studies agree that universities often adopt market-oriented approaches to internationalize their curriculum, which is highlighted by Pashby (2015) when she shows how multicultural projects in universities embrace neoliberal schemes based on economic utilities and aligns with corporate interest rather than in social ones. More specifically, Mosio and Kangas (2016) go deeper and assure that universities tend to become geopolitical assemblage sites that produce graduates with determined competencies that are not necessarily associated with the essence of global citizenship education.

These critical positions detonate a broader debate about the purpose of the international curriculum in the higher education context. As Shajahan (2016) demonstrates, international education-related institutions often seem to function as “epistemic tools of influence” to endure the colonial geopolitical model of the “North”, reinforcing capitalist, market-oriented educational models.

Another interesting reflection involves the need to decolonize the internationalization of the curriculum process in universities. Heleta and Chasi (2024) discuss the confrontations among curriculum internationalization, decolonization and geopolitical influence after the Apartheid process in their country, highlighting the persistent Eurocentric dominance in the curricula. Similarly, Vlachou and Tlostanova (2023) use a decolonial and feminist theoretical framework to make critical assumptions about the relationship between internationalization of the curriculum and global power dynamics. In the same ground, Shahjahan and Morgan (2016) further contribute to this discussion by demonstrating how internationalization shapes global citizenship through its embedded geopolitical complexities. This perfectly matches the postulates that Belhoste and Dimitrova (2023), Nanthawong, (2024) and Rapoport (2010) had on the importance of assessing the geopolitical landscape when trying to effectively implement GCE into the university curriculum.

The present review also presents some conceptual distinctions. Veugelers (2016) differentiate three types of GCE, being the moral dimension the most preferred



by educators, as Modi et al. (2024) and Ibrahim (2010) also demonstrate that the implementation of the GCE should be an eclectic approach including all perspectives and not just narrow it to a “common” orientation.

Overall, the studies include profuse mentions and relevant arguments of how significant geopolitical issues (political tensions, historical narratives, global issues) are when creating or redesigning pedagogical approaches that are grounded in the curriculum, or more specifically, when internationalizing the curriculum. It is also worth mentioning the variety of traits that are related to the global citizenship education model, but many if not all, agreed on the fact that these “capacities” or competencies have a special orientation towards a social, critical and intercultural vision to comprehend the global landscape.

The evidence presented herein indicates that meaningful global citizenship education, when viewed through a geopolitical lens, necessarily requires a delicate equilibrium between fostering critical consciousness of power asymmetries and developing pragmatic competencies for intercultural interaction. Simultaneously, such education must confront significant organizational barriers concerning decolonial praxis and institutional inertia. This multifaceted framework provides a compelling direction for universities and colleges attempting to develop internationalization of curriculum models that truly and substantially build global citizens with diverse epistemic and heuristic views.

## **Conclusion**

This scoping review has explored the theoretical and empirical relation of geopolitical topics into higher education international curricula and the global citizenship education (GCE). The analysis reveals key findings that have significant implications for theory, practice, and future research in international higher education.

First, the review demonstrates that geopolitical dimensions build an essential foundation for significant global citizenship development. Despite this argument, this relationship is frequently darkened by competing educational paradigms, particularly the confrontation between critical/transformative and capitalist/neoliberal frameworks. As universities are working continuously in rather complex international contexts, they must critically reexamine whether the internationalization of the curriculum efforts is growing aligned with the global citizenship competence ideals, and not just following the market-based trends.

Second, an effective global citizenship education requires some decolonizing efforts in the form of curriculum or internationalization plan. The dominance of hegemonic North-based perspectives could undermine the development of genuine and contextualized educational models, in which universities must defend their epistemological vision in

order to transcend colonial powers deeply embedded at both national and international systems.

Third, these findings have significant implications for educational practice. Universities should develop curricula that explicitly connect geopolitical understanding with global citizenship competencies, employing critical pedagogies that encourage students to examine power relations in international contexts. Faculty development programs should prepare educators to facilitate difficult conversations about global inequalities and geopolitical tensions.

Additionally, assessment mechanisms should evaluate not only students' knowledge of global issues but also their capacity for critical engagement with complex geopolitical realities. Several limitations of this review should be acknowledged. The focus on English-language publications may have excluded valuable perspectives from non-Anglophone contexts. Additionally, the rapidly evolving nature of geopolitical relations means that some findings may require reexamination considering current events.

Future research should explore several promising directions. Longitudinal studies examining how students' geopolitical awareness develops throughout their university education would provide valuable insights into effective pedagogical approaches. Comparative studies across different national contexts could illuminate how varying geopolitical positions influence global citizenship education. Research examining the experiences of marginalized groups within internationalization processes would address critical gaps in current understanding.

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