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Introductory Paper: Global Citizenship Under Negotiation Published: 30/09/2026

GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP UNDER NEGOTIATION: BRIDGING BORDERS AND EMPOWERING DIALOGUE

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Abstract: This introductory paper to the special issue "Building Bridges across Borders by Empowering Global Citizenship" presents global citizenship as an important teaching goal and a complex social idea. It draws on theories of intercultural communication, frameworks for global citizenship education, and approaches to sustainability in teaching. The paper argues that citizenship in the 21st century cannot be simplified to ideals of empathy or universal belonging. Instead, it develops as a process of negotiation across cultural, institutional, and geopolitical boundaries. The paper lays out the issue's main concepts by highlighting three key areas: (1) intercultural competence as both a personal skill and a way of relating to others; (2) educational innovation in environments shaped by digital change and generational gaps; and (3) sustainability and climate justice as global issues that need local educational solutions. Contributions to the issue show how global citizenship is practiced in various settings, including Algerian higher education classrooms, Indian literary narratives, climate diplomacy in Barbados, and the experiences of international students in Poland. Throughout these contexts, the issue finds common tensions: the balance between local connections and global belonging; the struggle to combine innovation with established practices; and the danger of turning empowerment into mere symbolic inclusion. By bringing these contributions together, the paper places the special issue in the broader discussions about global citizenship education, intercultural dialogue, and sustainable development. It argues that insights from different disciplines and perspectives from the Global South are essential for rethinking citizenship in a divided world.

Keywords: 21st century, global citizenship, Global South, intercultural communication, sustainability.

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1. Introduction: Global Citizenship as Negotiation and Praxis

The title of this special issue, "*Building Bridges across Borders by Empowering Global Citizenship,*" is deliberately ambitious. It signals both a normative aspiration and a critical challenge: how can citizenship be enacted across cultural, linguistic, and geopolitical divides in ways that are empowering rather than tokenistic? To speak of "bridges" is to acknowledge the persistence of boundaries, differences, and inequalities; to speak of "empowerment" is to foreground agency, responsibility, and the capacity to act. As Hall (1996) reminds us, identity and belonging are always productions rather than essences, continuously negotiated within discourse and power relations. This issue begins from the premise that global citizenship is not a settled condition but a dynamic process of negotiation, shaped by education, discourse, and institutional practice.

Three contemporary developments make this negotiation particularly urgent. First, the intensification of digital transformation has reconfigured how knowledge, identity, and belonging are produced and circulated. Generation Z learners, often described as "digital natives" (Prensky, 2011), embody new cognitive and communicative patterns that challenge traditional pedagogies and unsettle established hierarchies of authority. Second, the consolidation of global citizenship education (GCE) frameworks, especially through UNESCO (2015) and Barrett (2018), has foregrounded intercultural competence and sustainability as core educational priorities. Yet these frameworks remain contested, oscillating between "soft" universalist ideals of empathy (Oxfam, 2015) and "critical" approaches attentive to inequality, complicity, and power (Andreotti, 2006, 2014). Third, the resurgence of global crises (climate change, forced migration, and geopolitical conflict) has reinvested citizenship with ethical urgency, demanding both local accountability and transnational solidarity (Dobson, 2003; Stevenson & Dryzek, 2014).

This special issue responds to these conditions by assembling contributions that explore global citizenship across diverse contexts. From Algerian classrooms experimenting with sustainability pedagogy, to Indian fiction dramatizing identity exertion, to climate diplomacy in Barbados reframing responsibility, to international student adjustment in Poland, the papers collectively demonstrate that global citizenship is not a singular construct but a field of negotiation. Their heterogeneity is epistemologically motivated: no single discipline, methodology, or geography can adequately capture the complexity of citizenship in the twenty-first century. Instead, the issue insists on pluralism, interdisciplinarity, and the inclusion of Global South perspectives as epistemologically necessary rather than supplementary (Mignolo, 2000; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018).

At the heart of these contributions lies a set of cross-cutting tensions. The dialectic between local rootedness and global belonging challenges simplistic notions of cosmopolitan identity (Appadurai, 1996). The tension between pedagogical innovation and institutional inertia highlights the difficulty of translating reformist aspirations into classroom practice (Azzi & Mebarki, 2025). The risk of reducing empowerment to tokenistic inclusion underscores the need for critical vigilance in both policy and pedagogy (Oxley & Morris, 2013). The interplay between continuity and innovation raises questions about how traditional cultural practices can coexist with twenty-first-century competencies (Wiek et al., 2011). These tensions are not obstacles to global citizenship but constitutive of it: they reveal the negotiations through which citizenship is enacted, contested, and transformed.

By foregrounding these debates, the introduction positions the special issue within international scholarship on global citizenship education, intercultural dialogue, and sustainable development. It asserts that interdisciplinary approaches and Global South perspectives are not merely desirable but indispensable for rethinking citizenship in a

fractured world. The contributions gathered here demonstrate that global citizenship is best understood not as a universal ideal but as a situated practice; a practice that emerges through discourse, pedagogy, and cultural negotiation. In this sense, the issue does not simply describe bridges across borders; it exemplifies the intellectual and pedagogical labor required to build them.

2. Theoretical Coordinates: Rethinking Global Citizenship

To situate the contributions of this special issue, it is necessary to clarify the theoretical coordinates that frame global citizenship as both a pedagogical project and a contested sociocultural construct. Global citizenship is not a fixed identity but a dynamic practice shaped by intercultural communication, educational frameworks, sustainability pedagogy, postcolonial critique, and media ecologies. Each of these traditions provides conceptual tools for analyzing how citizenship is negotiated across borders, institutions, and technologies. By weaving together insights from these frameworks, this section establishes the intellectual scaffolding for the issue and highlights the epistemological plurality required to understand citizenship in the twenty-first century.

2.1.Intercultural Communication and Competence

Intercultural communication theory provides one of the most enduring foundations for global citizenship. Byram's (1997) model of intercultural communicative competence emphasizes attitudes of openness and curiosity, knowledge of social practices, and skills of interpretation and interaction. Deardorff (2006) extends this into a process-oriented framework, highlighting adaptability and empathy as outcomes of intercultural engagement. Ting-Toomey (1999) situates competence within identity negotiation, while Hofstede (2001) underscores the role of cultural dimensions in shaping communication styles. More recent scholarship (Szczepaniak-Kozak et al., 2022; Barrett, 2018) stresses that competence is relational, shaped by institutional responsiveness as much as individual capability. In this issue, one of the papers shows how intercultural competence mediates international student adjustment in Poland, while Bouherar and Salem (2025) demonstrate its pedagogical significance in Algerian EFL classrooms.

2.2.Global Citizenship Education

Frameworks Global citizenship education (GCE) has been promoted by UNESCO (2015, 2020), Oxfam (2015), and Barrett (2018) as a framework for cultivating civic awareness, empathy, and responsibility. Yet scholars caution against uncritical adoption. Andreotti (2006, 2014) distinguishes between "soft" GCE, which emphasizes empathy and charity, and "critical" GCE, which foregrounds complicity, historical responsibility, and structural inequality. Oxley and Morris (2013) provide a typology that differentiates cosmopolitan approaches from advocacy-oriented ones, while Pashby and Costa (2021) highlight the contested meanings of GCE across contexts. In Algeria, Khaldi (2021) and Kheladi (2019) show how rigid curricula limit the integration of GCE into literature teaching, while Salem (2021) documents teachers' reliance on "soft" views of tolerance. Contributions in this issue demonstrate both the potential and fragility of embedding GCE in higher education.

2.3.Sustainability Pedagogy and SDGs

Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) extends GCE by linking citizenship to ecological responsibility and global justice. Wiek et al. (2011) identify five key competencies (systems thinking, anticipatory competence, normative competence, strategic competence, and collaboration) as essential for sustainability education. UNESCO (2014, 2017) emphasizes the transformative role of ESD in cultivating agency and lifelong learning. Saiful

(2025) and Cebrián et al. (2021) argue that sustainability pedagogy requires innovative approaches such as project-based learning, multimodality, and experiential engagement. In Algerian contexts, Bouherar and Salem (2025) show how SDG-based tasks foster both language learning and civic awareness, while Mendoza et al. (2024) and Buck et al. (2024) provide comparative evidence from international EFL classrooms. These contributions highlight the intersection of sustainability and citizenship, demonstrating how learners can move from global awareness to glocal action.

2.4.Postcolonial and Decolonial Thought

Postcolonial theory provides a critical lens for interrogating the asymmetries embedded in global citizenship discourse. Hall (1996) conceptualizes identity as "production," Bhabha (1994) theorizes hybridity and the "third space," and Spivak (1988) raises the question of whether the subaltern can speak. Said (1978) critiques Orientalist representations, while Ashcroft (2001) and Mbembe (2023) extend postcolonial debates into contemporary globalization. Decolonial perspectives, articulated by Mignolo (2000) and Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018), emphasize epistemic freedom and the need to provincialize Eurocentric frameworks. In this issue, analyses of Indian fiction and climate diplomacy in Barbados exemplify how Global South perspectives reconfigure global citizenship as a justice-oriented and structurally transformative practice.

2.5.Media Literacy and Algorithmic Culture

Finally, global citizenship must be situated within the technological infrastructures that mediate cultural meaning. Buckingham (2003) and Kellner & Share (2007) argue that media literacy is central to democratic participation, while Jenkins (2006) highlights participatory culture as a site of civic engagement. Gillespie (2014) and Bucher (2018) extend this into platform studies, showing how algorithms curate visibility and marginality. Striphas (2015) introduces the notion of "algorithmic culture," emphasizing how digital systems shape collective memory and civic discourse. In Algerian classrooms, the generational divide between digital natives and digital immigrants is documented, while Viberg et al. (2023) and Halisdemir (2024) explore the pedagogical implications of AI integration. These perspectives remind us that global citizenship is inseparable from the media ecologies through which it is enacted.

3. Thematic Axes

3.1.Pedagogy, Skills, and Sustainability

Pedagogy and sustainability converge in the discourse of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), which UNESCO (2014, 2017) frames as transformative learning that equips students with agency and responsibility. Wiek, Withycombe, and Redman (2011) identify five competencies: systems thinking, anticipatory, normative, strategic, and collaborative as foundational for sustainability pedagogy. These competencies align with the broader agenda of global citizenship education (UNESCO, 2015; Barrett, 2018), which emphasizes civic responsibility and intercultural awareness. The integration of SDGs into classroom practice exemplifies how pedagogy becomes a vehicle for cultivating both local accountability and global consciousness.

The literature on 21st-century skills further strengthens this axis, situating sustainability within a broader framework of critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and digital literacy (Trilling & Fadel, 2009; Voogt & Roblin, 2012). Scholars argue that these skills are not merely technical but civic, enabling learners to participate meaningfully in global challenges (Saiful, 2025; Cebrián et al., 2021). The blending of sustainability themes with innovative pedagogical approaches (such as multimodality, project-based learning, and

AI-assisted differentiation) reflects the shift from transmissive to transformative education (Buck et al., 2024; Viberg et al., 2023). This pedagogical reorientation positions learners as co-creators of knowledge and agents of change.

Grounding this axis in theory reveals that sustainability pedagogy and 21st-century skills are mutually reinforcing. Critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970; Giroux, 2011) insists that education must interrogate power and foster agency, while ESD frameworks emphasize competencies for navigating complexity. Together, they suggest that global citizenship education is not about abstract ideals but about equipping learners with operational skills to act responsibly in interconnected worlds. This axis thus embodies the pedagogical labor of bridging global frameworks with local realities, ensuring that sustainability and citizenship are enacted through practice rather than rhetoric.

3.2.Identity, Inequalities, and Belonging

The negotiation of identity and belonging is central to global citizenship, and postcolonial theory provides the critical lens for understanding this axis. Hall (1996) conceptualizes identity as a production, always in process, while Bhabha (1994) theorizes hybridity and the "third space" as sites of negotiation. Spivak (1988) raises the question of whether the subaltern can speak, foregrounding the silences and exclusions embedded in representation. These frameworks highlight that global citizenship is not a neutral construct but one shaped by inequalities and contested narratives of belonging.

Literary and cultural studies extend these insights by dramatizing identity exertion and resistance. Said's (1978) critique of Orientalism underscores how global discourses reproduce hierarchies, while Mbembe (2023) calls for decolonial futures that provincialize Eurocentric frameworks. In educational contexts, Oxley and Morris (2013) distinguish between cosmopolitan and advocacy-oriented citizenship, showing how identity and belonging are framed differently across pedagogies. The discourse of climate diplomacy (Dobson, 2003; Stevenson & Dryzek, 2014) further illustrates how inequalities shape global responsibility, with Global South leaders reframing citizenship as justice-oriented rather than universalist.

This axis demonstrates that identity and inequalities are inseparable from global citizenship. Belonging is negotiated through literature, discourse, and pedagogy, but always within structures of power. Critical global citizenship education (Andreotti, 2006, 2014; Pashby & Costa., 2021) insists that empowerment must interrogate complicity and inequality rather than rely on empathy alone. By grounding this axis in postcolonial and critical frameworks, we see that global citizenship is enacted through contestation, resistance, and rearticulation: a practice of belonging that is always political.

3.3.Media and Technology in Global Citizenship

Media and technology are now inseparable from global citizenship, as they mediate identity, visibility, and participation. Buckingham (2003) and Kellner & Share (2007) argue that media literacy is central to democratic engagement, while Jenkins (2006) highlights participatory culture as a site of civic practice. Gillespie (2014) and Bucher (2018) extend this into platform studies, showing how algorithms curate what is seen and unseen, thereby shaping civic discourse. Striphas (2015) introduces the notion of "algorithmic culture," emphasizing how digital infrastructures embed power into everyday practices of citizenship.

The rise of AI in education intensifies these dynamics, raising questions about agency, equity, and pedagogy. Viberg et al. (2023) and Halisdemir (2024) document how AI-driven tools reshape teaching practices, while Prensky (2011) distinguishes between digital natives and digital immigrants, highlighting generational divides in technological fluency. These frameworks suggest that technology is not neutral but is deeply implicated in shaping who

participates, how knowledge is produced, and which identities are legitimized in global citizenship discourse.

Grounding this axis in media and technology theory reveals that global citizenship is increasingly enacted through digital infrastructures. Critical media literacy insists on interrogating power in representation, while algorithmic culture studies highlight the hidden architectures of visibility. Together, they show that citizenship in the digital age is not only about intercultural dialogue but also about navigating technological systems that structure participation. This axis thus underscores the need for pedagogies that cultivate both digital literacy and critical awareness of media ecologies.

3.4.Intercultural Communication and Literary Pedagogy

Intercultural communication theory provides the foundation for understanding how global citizenship is enacted in academic and literary contexts. Byram (1997) emphasizes attitudes of openness and curiosity, while Deardorff (2006) highlights adaptability and empathy as outcomes of intercultural engagement. Ting-Toomey (1999) situates competence within identity negotiation, showing how communication across cultures requires reflexivity and relational awareness. These frameworks underscore that intercultural competence is not a static skill but a dynamic practice of negotiation.

Literature pedagogy extends intercultural communication by dramatizing cultural encounters and fostering empathy. Kramsch (1993) argues that literature in language education provides symbolic resources for negotiating identity, while Porto and Zembylas (2022) highlights its role in cultivating intercultural awareness. In Algerian higher education, Khaldi (2021) and Kheladi (2019) document how literature courses can embed civic values and global perspectives, though often constrained by rigid curricula. These insights show that literature is not merely aesthetic but pedagogical, shaping how learners imagine citizenship and belonging.

Grounding this axis in intercultural and literary frameworks reveals that global citizenship is cultivated through both dialogue and narrative. Intercultural competence equips learners with communicative tools, while literature pedagogy provides symbolic spaces for imagining global belonging. Together, they demonstrate that citizenship is enacted not only through policy and pedagogy but also through cultural narratives that shape identity and empathy. This axis thus highlights the dual role of communication and literature in fostering critical, reflective, and situated forms of global citizenship.

4. Keynote Highlights

This special issue emerges from the theme of the Second International "Going Global" Online Conference: Building Bridges across Borders by Empowering Global Citizenship, which convened scholars and practitioners to interrogate the meaning and practice of global citizenship in higher education. Central to the conference were three keynote addresses that framed the intellectual agenda: Michael BYRAM (Durham University / University of Sofia) on the ethical responsibilities of teachers in fostering intercultural citizenship; Nadia IDRI (University of Béjaïa) on Algeria's digital transformation strategy and the role of artificial intelligence in advancing SDG-4; and Eric HAGLEY (Griffith University) on the cultivation of intercultural presence through Virtual Exchange (VE). Together, these keynotes provided conceptual anchors that shaped the debates of the conference and offered theoretical scaffolding for the contributions gathered in this issue.

First, Byram's keynote on Global and Intercultural Citizenship foregrounded the ethical responsibilities of higher education teachers in cultivating civic engagement. Drawing on the Council of Europe's Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture

(Council of Europe, 2018), he emphasized that intercultural citizenship requires not only linguistic and cultural competence but also values such as human dignity, democracy, and cultural diversity. His example of arts-based pedagogy during COVID illustrated "pedagogies of discomfort" (Porto, Golubeva, & Byram, 2023), where students confronted trauma and transformed reflection into civic action. Byram's intervention situates global citizenship within ethics, insisting that teachers must navigate the tension between fostering critical inquiry and avoiding indoctrination (Byram, Porto, & Wagner, 2021).

Second, Idri's keynote "AI for All: Advancing SDG-4" highlighted Algeria's Digital Transformation Strategy 2030 as a model for the Global South. Grounded in human development theory (Sen, 1999; Nussbaum, 2011), digital transformation frameworks (Vial, 2019), and education for sustainable development (UNESCO, 2017; Leicht et al., 2018), she argued that artificial intelligence can enhance equity, access, and quality assurance in higher education. By linking AI to SDG-4 targets (quality, access, skills, equity, and citizenship), Idri demonstrated how inclusive digital strategies can transform universities into drivers of sustainability and social justice. Her keynote underscored the ethical imperative of embedding AI within governance structures that prioritize inclusion and responsibility.

Third, Hagley's keynote "Global Citizenship and Intercultural Presence in Virtual Exchanges" presented the IVEProject, a large-scale initiative connecting over 60,000 students across 32 countries. His framework of "intercultural presence" extends the Community of Inquiry model (Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 1999) by adding a dimension of cultural co-presence. Hagley demonstrated how virtual exchange fosters agency, autonomy, and intercultural identity (Ahearn, 2001; Little & Erickson, 2015), positioning VE as a cornerstone for global citizenship education in contexts where mobility is limited. His emphasis on digital intercultural competence resonates with Kellner and Share's (2007) call for critical media literacy, showing that technology can democratize access to intercultural learning while cultivating empathy and collaboration.

Together, the keynote speakers provided conceptual scaffolding for the thematic axes of this issue. Byram situates pedagogy within ethics and values, Idri frames digital transformation as a pathway to sustainability and equity, and Hagley demonstrates how intercultural presence can be cultivated through VE. Their contributions collectively highlight that global citizenship is enacted through ethics, technology, and intercultural dialogue. By foregrounding values, sustainability, and presence, the keynotes anchor the issue in both theory and practice, ensuring that the conference is not only a collection of papers but also a platform for thought leadership that bridges pedagogy, identity, and innovation.

5. Cross-Cutting Tensions in Global Citizenship

5.1.Local vs Global Belonging

One of the most persistent tensions in global citizenship is the dialectic between local rootedness and global belonging. Appadurai (1996) describes this as the interplay of homogenization and heterogenization, where global flows encounter local practices. International student adjustment in small-city Poland illustrates how belonging is negotiated in contexts with limited institutional support, while Algerian classrooms (Bouherar & Salem, 2025) show how global frameworks such as the SDGs are reinterpreted through local pedagogical realities. These cases confirm that global citizenship is not a universal identity but a situated practice, shaped by the friction between cosmopolitan ideals and local attachments (Oxley & Morris, 2013; Pashby & Costa, 2021).

5.2.Pedagogical Innovation vs Institutional Inertia

A second tension concerns the difficulty of translating reformist aspirations into classroom practice. While UNESCO (2015, 2017) and Barrett (2018) advocate learner-centered approaches that cultivate intercultural competence and sustainability skills, Algerian higher education continues to struggle with overcrowded classrooms, rigid curricula, and examination-oriented assessment (Azzi & Mebarki, 2025; Khaldi, 2021). One of the papers highlights how Generation Z learners demand interactive, technology-driven pedagogy, yet veteran teachers often rely on traditional lecturing. This reflects Wiek et al.'s (2011) observation that sustainability competencies require systemic change rather than isolated innovation. The tension between innovation and inertia underscores the need for institutional transformation to support pedagogical creativity.

5.3.Empowerment vs Tokenism

Finally, empowerment in global citizenship education risks being reduced to tokenistic gestures. Andreotti (2006, 2014) warns against "soft" GCE that emphasizes empathy without addressing structural inequality. Contributions in this issue highlight this risk: literature courses that gesture toward empathy but lack curricular scaffolding, or climate diplomacy that invokes solidarity while reproducing financial asymmetries. As Spivak (1988) reminds us, representation can silence as much as it empowers. Ensuring that empowerment is substantive requires embedding critical perspectives that interrogate power relations, complicity, and historical responsibility (Said, 1978; Mbembe, 2023). Without this vigilance, global citizenship risks becoming symbolic rather than transformative.

6. Conclusion and Editorial Positioning

This special issue contributes to international debates on global citizenship education, intercultural dialogue, and sustainability pedagogy by foregrounding perspectives from Algeria, India, Poland, and Barbados. As UNESCO (2015, 2017, 2020) and Barrett (2018) emphasize, global citizenship is increasingly framed as a priority in higher education. Yet, as Andreotti (2006, 2014) and Pashby and Costa (2021) caution, these frameworks risk reproducing Eurocentric assumptions unless contextualized through diverse epistemologies. By integrating Global South perspectives, this issue asserts that citizenship must be understood as a situated practice, negotiated across cultural, institutional, and geopolitical boundaries.

The originality of this issue lies in its interdisciplinary scope and its insistence on epistemological plurality. Contributions range from empirical studies of Algerian classrooms (Bouherar & Salem, 2025), to literary analyses of Indian fiction, to discourse analyses of climate diplomacy, and exploratory studies of international student adjustment. Together, they demonstrate that global citizenship is not a singular construct but a contested field shaped by pedagogy, identity, sustainability, and discourse. This aligns with Hall's (1996) view of identity as production, Bhabha's (1994) notion of hybridity, and Mbembe's (2023) call for decolonial futures.

Looking forward, the issue invites scholars to deepen research on how global citizenship is enacted in underexplored contexts. Future work should examine the intersection of digital transformation and citizenship (Prensky, 2011; Jenkins, 2006; Striphas, 2015), the integration of sustainability competencies into curricula (Wiek et al., 2011; Cebrián et al., 2021), and the role of intercultural competence in shaping belonging (Byram, 1997; Deardorff, 2006). By situating these inquiries within diverse cultural and institutional settings, scholars can ensure that global citizenship education remains critical, inclusive, and transformative. In

this sense, the issue does not merely describe bridges across borders; it exemplifies the intellectual and pedagogical labor required to build them.

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