

## Intercultural Competency in a Globalized World: Preparing Learners for Effective Global Citizenship

### Abstract

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### Abstract

In an increasingly interconnected world, fostering intercultural competency is essential for preparing learners to function effectively as global citizens. This study, titled *Intercultural Competency in a Globalized World: Preparing Learners for Effective Global Citizenship*, examined the relationship between two key intercultural competencies cultural awareness and empathy and learners' engagement in global citizenship activities. Guided by two null hypotheses, the study employed a survey correlational design to gather quantitative data from a stratified random sample of 280 participants across six geopolitical zones in Nigeria. Data were collected using a structured and validated questionnaire, and analyzed using Pearson's Product Moment Correlation. Findings revealed a strong, statistically significant positive relationship between cultural awareness and learners' levels of global citizenship ( $r = .654, p = .000$ ), indicating that culturally aware learners are more likely to exhibit global citizenship traits such as intercultural understanding, social responsibility, and collaborative global engagement. Similarly, results showed a moderately strong, statistically significant positive correlation between empathy and learners' engagement in global citizenship activities ( $r = .523, p = .000$ ), suggesting that learners with higher empathy are more inclined to participate meaningfully in global issues and intercultural collaboration. These findings align with existing literature and underscore the importance of integrating cultural awareness and empathy into educational practice. The study recommends curriculum reforms to promote intercultural learning, teacher training in global citizenship education, and the inclusion of experiential and reflective learning strategies. Such approaches are crucial for equipping learners with the competencies required to navigate global complexities and contribute to sustainable development, peace, and intercultural cooperation.

**Keywords:** Intercultural Competency, Cultural Awareness, Empathy, Global Citizenship, Multicultural Education, Higher Education, Nigeria.

### Introduction and background

In today's increasingly interconnected and multicultural world, the concept of global citizenship has gained paramount importance. Global citizenship encompasses the idea of individuals recognizing their responsibilities towards people, cultures, and the environment beyond their local or national boundaries (Oxfam, 2015). Intercultural competency, defined as the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds, serves as a crucial foundation for fostering this sense of global responsibility (Deardorff, 2006). As such, educational institutions are called to prepare learners not only with knowledge but also with the skills necessary to navigate cultural differences and engage as responsible global citizens.

The development of intercultural competencies is essential for learners to effectively engage with global challenges, including social justice, environmental sustainability, and human rights (UNESCO, 2018). Research suggests that fostering intercultural understanding can lead to enhanced empathy and

adaptability, key attributes that enable individuals to respond to the complexities of a globalized society (Hammer et al., 2003). However, despite the growing recognition of its significance, many educational systems still struggle to adequately integrate intercultural competency training into their curricula, leaving learners ill-equipped to face the challenges of a diverse world.

This article aims to explore the relationship between intercultural competency and global citizenship, highlighting how educational practices can better prepare learners for effective engagement in a global context. By investigating the components of intercultural competency—such as cultural awareness, empathy, adaptability, and communication skills—this study will provide insights into how these attributes influence learners' abilities to navigate cultural differences and contribute positively to global society.

In examining the impact of intercultural competencies on global citizenship, this research will not only underscore the importance of these skills but also offer practical recommendations for educators and policymakers to enhance the educational framework. Ultimately, fostering intercultural competency will empower learners to become proactive participants in shaping a more inclusive and equitable world.

### **Statement of the Problem**

In an increasingly interconnected world, individuals are frequently exposed to diverse cultural perspectives, beliefs, and practices, often within educational, professional, and social contexts. This cultural diversity, while enriching, also brings challenges in communication, collaboration, and mutual understanding. For learners, the ability to navigate these challenges effectively has become essential to thrive as global citizens. However, traditional educational models often lack a focused approach to cultivating intercultural competencies, leaving learners underprepared for the demands of global citizenship (Deardorff, 2006).

The gap in intercultural competency skills poses significant challenges to effective global engagement, as learners may struggle with cultural misunderstandings, biases, and inadequate adaptability. Consequently, they may face barriers in understanding global issues, collaborating with diverse teams, and participating in meaningful cross-cultural exchanges. Developing these competencies—encompassing cultural awareness, empathy, adaptability, and communication skills—is thus crucial for fostering a sense of global responsibility and community in learners (Bennett, 2013).

Therefore, this study seeks to address the urgent need for educational practices that equip learners with intercultural competencies to function as effective global citizens. By examining the current approaches to intercultural competency development and identifying potential strategies to enhance these skills, this study aims to bridge the gap between educational outcomes and the demands of a globalized world.

### **Literature Review**

cultural awareness and global citizenship Cultural awareness is increasingly recognized as a critical component of global citizenship. As the world becomes more interconnected, understanding and appreciating diverse cultures is essential for fostering effective communication, collaboration, and empathy among individuals from different backgrounds (Holliday, 2018). Cultural awareness involves recognizing one's own cultural biases and the values that influence perceptions and behaviors (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009). This awareness is not only about knowledge of different cultures but also about the ability to engage respectfully and thoughtfully with others (Bennett, 2013).

Global citizenship encompasses the idea of belonging to a worldwide community, which transcends national boundaries and encourages individuals to engage with global issues (Oxfam, 2015). It emphasizes the responsibilities individuals have toward one another and the planet, advocating for social justice, equity, and sustainability (UNESCO, 2014). Cultural awareness enhances global

citizenship by enabling individuals to appreciate cultural diversity and understand global interdependence (Merriam et al., 2007).

Research suggests that educational programs focused on cultural awareness can significantly enhance students' global citizenship skills. For instance, by integrating multicultural education into curricula, educators can cultivate students' critical thinking and empathy, which are essential for addressing global challenges (Banks, 2016). Additionally, experiential learning opportunities, such as study abroad programs, have been shown to promote cultural awareness and foster a deeper understanding of global issues among participants (Bhandari & Chow, 2017).

Moreover, the development of intercultural competencies is crucial for effective global citizenship. According to Deardorff (2006), intercultural competence involves the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in various cultural contexts. This competence is linked to cultural awareness, as individuals must first recognize and understand cultural differences to engage meaningfully in diverse settings.

cultural awareness is a foundational element of global citizenship. It equips individuals with the skills and knowledge necessary to navigate a complex world marked by diversity and interdependence. Continued research and practice in education can enhance cultural awareness, ultimately fostering more engaged and responsible global citizens.

### **Empathy among learners' and engagement in global citizenship activities**

Empathy is a critical component of global citizenship education, as it fosters understanding and connection among individuals from diverse backgrounds (Eisenberg & Miller, 1987). It involves the ability to recognize, understand, and respond to the feelings of others, which is essential for engaging meaningfully in global citizenship activities (Hojat, 2016). In the context of education, cultivating empathy among learners can enhance their willingness to participate in global citizenship initiatives, thereby promoting a more just and inclusive world (Falk & Dierking, 2012).

Research indicates that educational experiences designed to enhance empathy can significantly influence students' engagement in global citizenship activities. For instance, empathy-building interventions, such as role-playing and perspective-taking exercises, have been shown to increase students' willingness to engage in social justice and community service initiatives (Gonzalez et al., 2017). These activities help learners appreciate diverse perspectives and develop a sense of shared responsibility for global challenges (Hoffman, 2000).

Furthermore, empathy plays a crucial role in motivating learners to participate in global citizenship activities by fostering emotional connections to global issues. According to Oxfam (2015), when students can emotionally relate to the experiences of others, they are more likely to become active participants in initiatives that promote social justice, environmental sustainability, and humanitarian efforts. This emotional engagement not only enhances learners' commitment to global citizenship but also empowers them to take action in their communities (Schulz & de Lima, 2019).

In addition to direct educational interventions, the role of social context in fostering empathy cannot be overlooked. The classroom environment, peer interactions, and the influence of educators significantly impact learners' empathetic responses and their engagement in global citizenship (Friedman et al., 2020). Creating a supportive and inclusive learning environment that encourages open dialogue about global issues can enhance students' empathy and willingness to engage in related activities (Ramasubramanian & McMorris, 2020).

Empathy is a vital attribute that facilitates learners' engagement in global citizenship activities. By incorporating empathy-building strategies into educational practices and fostering supportive

environments, educators can enhance students' emotional connections to global issues and motivate them to participate actively in efforts aimed at promoting a more equitable world.

### **Research questions**

1. To what extent does cultural awareness influence learners' levels of global citizenship?
2. How does empathy among learners' correlate with their engagement in global citizenship activities?

### **Hypothesis (H0):**

1. There is no significant relationship between cultural awareness and learners' levels of global citizenship.
2. There is no significant correlation between empathy and learners' engagement in global citizenship activities.

### **Methodology**

A survey correlational design was considered effective for this study. The study proceeded by using a survey to collect quantitative data for measurable insights into specific intercultural competencies (e.g., cultural awareness and empathy). Quantitative results provided generalizability, making the study's conclusions more robust and applicable to real-world educational settings.

#### **Survey Development**

A structured survey was developed to measure the intercultural competencies of learners in various educational settings. The survey included validated scales assessing cultural awareness, empathy along with demographic questions.

#### **Sampling**

A stratified random sampling method was employed to select 280 participants from three higher education educational institutions in different geographical regions within Nigeria, one from each of the six geopolitical zones. This ensured a representative sample reflecting various cultural backgrounds and educational experiences.

#### **Data Collection**

Quantitative data were collected through the survey administered to participants both online and in person to explore their experiences and perceptions regarding intercultural competencies and global citizenship.

#### **Data Analysis**

Quantitative data were analysed using statistical methods, including descriptive statistics and correlation analyses, to examine relationships between intercultural competencies and indicators of global citizenship.

### **Results**

#### **Hypothesis one:**

There is no significant relationship between cultural awareness and learners' levels of global citizenship.

The statistical analysis presented in Table 1 explores the relationship between cultural awareness and learners' levels of global citizenship among a sample of 280 participants. The mean score for cultural awareness was 16.94 with a standard deviation of 1.63, while the mean score for learners' levels of

global citizenship was 33.91 with a standard deviation of 1.79. The Pearson's Product Moment Correlation coefficient (r) computed to determine the nature and strength of the relationship between these two variables yielded a correlation value of  $r = .654$ , with an associated p-value of .000.

This correlation coefficient indicates a strong positive relationship between cultural awareness and learners' levels of global citizenship, suggesting that as learners' cultural awareness increases, their global citizenship levels also tend to rise. The positive direction of the correlation implies that both variables move in the same direction higher cultural awareness is associated with greater global citizenship consciousness among the learners.

Furthermore, the obtained p-value (.000) is far below the conventional significance threshold of 0.05, meaning that this correlation is statistically significant. In other words, the observed relationship between cultural awareness and learners' global citizenship levels is unlikely to have occurred by chance, and there is sufficient evidence to reject the null hypothesis of no relationship.

However, it appears there may be a discrepancy in the textual statement, which asserts that "there is no significant relationship between cultural awareness and learners' levels of global citizenship." This statement contradicts the statistical evidence provided in the table. Based on the data particularly the high correlation coefficient ( $r = .654$ ) and the significant p-value ( $p = .000$ ) the appropriate conclusion should be that there is a statistically significant and strong positive relationship between cultural awareness and learners' levels of global citizenship.

Therefore, the correct interpretation of the findings is that cultural awareness plays a significant role in enhancing learners' global citizenship competencies, and fostering cultural understanding among learners could be a critical strategy in preparing them for effective global engagement and intercultural collaboration.

**TABLE 1:** Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Analysis of the relationship between cultural awareness and learners' levels of global citizenship. (N=280).

Variables	$\bar{x}$	SD	r-cal	p-value
Cultural awareness	16.94	1.63		
			.654**	.000
Learners' levels of global citizenship.	33.91	1.79		

\* Significant at .05 level,  $df = 278$

## Hypothesis two

There is no significant correlation between empathy and learners' engagement in global citizenship activities.

Hypothesis Two was tested using Pearson's Product Moment Correlation, and the results are presented in Table 2 based on data from a sample of 280 learners.

According to the table, the mean score for empathy was 16.8, with a standard deviation (SD) of 1.36, while the mean score for learners' levels of global citizenship engagement was 33.91, with a standard deviation of 1.79. The analysis yielded a correlation coefficient (r-cal) of .523, with a p-value of .000.

The correlation coefficient ( $r = .523$ ) indicates a moderate to strong positive relationship between empathy and learners' engagement in global citizenship activities. This means that as learners' empathy increases, so does their level of participation in global citizenship-related initiatives. In other words,

learners who are more empathetic who can understand and share the feelings of others tend to be more actively involved in actions and behaviors that reflect global responsibility, cultural respect, social justice, and cooperation beyond national boundaries.

Importantly, the p-value of .000 is well below the 0.05 threshold for statistical significance. This indicates that the observed correlation is not due to random chance and is statistically meaningful. Therefore, the null hypothesis — which states that there is no significant correlation between empathy and learners' global citizenship engagement — is rejected.

Based on the statistical evidence, it can be concluded that empathy has a significant and positive influence on learners' engagement in global citizenship activities. This finding emphasizes the role of emotional and social competencies in preparing learners to participate meaningfully in a globalized world. As such, educators and policymakers aiming to promote global citizenship education should consider incorporating strategies that cultivate empathy, such as storytelling, intercultural dialogue, service learning, and collaborative problem-solving around global issues.

**TABLE 2:** There is no significant relationship between empathy and learners' engagement in global citizenship activities. (N=280)

Variables	$\bar{x}$	SD	r-cal	p-value
empathy	16.8	1.36		
			.523**	.000
Learners' levels of global citizenship	33.91	1.79		

\* Significant at .05 level, df = 278

## Discussion of findings

### Relationship between cultural awareness and learners' levels of global citizenship.

The findings of the first hypothesis indicate a statistically significant and strong positive relationship between cultural awareness and learners' levels of global citizenship ( $r = .654$ ,  $p = .000$ ). This result implies that as students' cultural awareness increases, their engagement with and understanding of global citizenship also improves. In other words, learners who possess a heightened awareness of cultural differences and similarities are more likely to identify as global citizens and actively participate in global citizenship activities. This aligns with the conceptual framework that underscores cultural awareness as a foundational component of global citizenship education.

These findings are consistent with the existing body of literature, which emphasizes the integral role of cultural awareness in fostering global citizenship competencies. Holliday (2018) notes that cultural awareness is essential in today's interconnected world, as it promotes effective communication and empathetic engagement among individuals from diverse backgrounds. Moreover, cultural awareness, as defined by Spitzberg and Changnon (2009), includes the ability to recognize one's own cultural assumptions and engage respectfully with others — a capacity that is indispensable in navigating globalized societies.

The role of cultural awareness in global citizenship is also well-documented by Bennett (2013), who highlights that true intercultural competence extends beyond superficial knowledge of other cultures to include active, respectful, and meaningful interaction. This perspective is further supported by Oxfam

(2015), which defines global citizenship as an identity rooted in a sense of shared humanity and a commitment to justice and sustainability across cultural and national boundaries.

UNESCO (2014) likewise asserts that global citizenship involves responsibilities that transcend geographic and cultural lines, and that cultural awareness enhances these responsibilities by promoting tolerance, mutual respect, and cross-cultural understanding. Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner (2007) emphasize that awareness of cultural diversity and global interdependence strengthens individuals' capacity to act responsibly in a global context.

Furthermore, the study's findings corroborate empirical research showing that educational interventions aimed at increasing cultural awareness can enhance global citizenship skills. Banks (2016) advocates for the inclusion of multicultural education in school curricula to develop learners' critical thinking, empathy, and cultural competence. Similarly, Bhandari and Chow (2017) demonstrate that experiential learning experiences, such as study abroad programs, contribute significantly to students' cultural sensitivity and engagement with global issues.

In conclusion, the findings of this study are strongly aligned with the reviewed literature. They reinforce the argument that cultural awareness is a significant predictor of global citizenship among learners, and they provide empirical support for integrating culturally responsive pedagogies and intercultural experiences into education systems. Doing so may not only enhance students' personal development but also prepare them to address complex global challenges with empathy, respect, and informed action.

### **Correlation between empathy and learners' engagement in global citizenship activities.**

The findings related to Hypothesis Two reveal a statistically significant and moderately strong positive correlation between empathy and learners' engagement in global citizenship activities ( $r = .523$ ,  $p = .000$ ). This suggests that learners who exhibit higher levels of empathy are more likely to participate in activities that reflect global citizenship values, such as promoting social justice, respecting cultural diversity, and collaborating across borders to address global issues. In essence, empathy appears to play a critical role in motivating learners to become active and responsible members of a global community.

The statistical significance of the relationship, indicated by the p-value of .000, confirms that the correlation is not due to chance and supports the rejection of the null hypothesis. Therefore, it can be confidently concluded that empathy has a meaningful and positive influence on learners' participation in global citizenship initiatives. This finding reinforces the idea that emotional and interpersonal competencies are foundational to the development of global citizenship.

These results align closely with existing literature on the subject. According to Eisenberg and Miller (1987), empathy enhances prosocial behavior by fostering concern for others and motivating altruistic action. In the context of global citizenship, empathy enables individuals to relate to people from different cultures and backgrounds, thereby promoting inclusive and socially responsible behavior (Hojat, 2016). Falk and Dierking (2012) also assert that empathy contributes to a more compassionate worldview and plays a key role in civic and intercultural engagement, which are core tenets of global citizenship.

Moreover, research has shown that educational strategies aimed at developing empathy can significantly increase students' global awareness and active participation in global citizenship activities. For instance, Gonzalez et al. (2017) found that interventions such as role-playing and perspective-taking exercises enhanced students' willingness to engage in social justice, community service, and intercultural collaboration. These strategies allow learners to see the world from multiple perspectives and to internalize a sense of shared responsibility for global challenges (Hoffman, 2000).

In light of these findings, it becomes evident that empathy is not only an emotional response but also a cognitive and behavioral foundation for global citizenship. Its development within educational contexts

can serve as a powerful tool for nurturing socially conscious, ethically aware, and globally engaged learners. As such, educators and curriculum designers are encouraged to incorporate empathy-building practices — such as reflective discussions, community-based learning, and global collaboration projects into global citizenship education programs.

### **Conclusion:**

The findings of this study have revealed important insights into the relationships between cultural awareness, empathy, and learners' levels of engagement in global citizenship activities. The results demonstrate a strong and statistically significant positive relationship between cultural awareness and global citizenship suggesting that learners who are more culturally aware are more likely to exhibit the values, attitudes, and behaviors associated with global citizenship. Similarly, a moderately strong and statistically significant positive correlation was found between empathy and learners' engagement in global citizenship activities indicating that learners with higher levels of empathy are more inclined to participate in globally responsible actions.

These findings affirm the theoretical understanding that both cultural awareness and empathy are key predictors of global citizenship. As the world becomes increasingly interconnected, fostering these qualities among learners is essential for preparing them to navigate complex global challenges and to contribute meaningfully to sustainable development, peace, and intercultural cooperation.

### **Recommendations:**

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

**Integrate Cultural Awareness into Curriculum:** Educational institutions should deliberately infuse cultural awareness education into curricula at all levels. This can be achieved through multicultural education, global studies, comparative cultural content, and inclusive pedagogies that celebrate diversity and global interdependence.

**Promote Empathy through Pedagogical Practices:** Teachers should adopt instructional strategies that foster empathy, such as storytelling, role-playing, perspective-taking activities, and community service learning. These approaches help students connect emotionally with global issues and people from different cultural backgrounds.

**Encourage Intercultural Experiences:** Schools and higher education institutions should provide opportunities for intercultural interaction through student exchange programs, virtual global classrooms, and partnerships with schools in other countries. These experiences have been shown to enhance both cultural awareness and empathy.

**Provide Teacher Training on Global Citizenship Education:** Teachers should receive professional development on how to teach for global citizenship, with a focus on cultivating empathy, cultural competence, and critical global perspectives. Educators who are equipped with these skills can better guide students toward becoming responsible global citizens.

**Incorporate Reflective and Experiential Learning:** Learning environments should encourage reflective practices that allow students to examine their beliefs, values, and assumptions about others and the world. Experiential learning projects — such as volunteering, global problem-solving simulations, and intercultural dialogues — should also be prioritized.

**Develop Assessment Tools for Global Citizenship Competencies:** Schools and policymakers should create and implement tools to measure learners' growth in cultural awareness, empathy, and global citizenship engagement. These assessments can inform instructional practices and policy interventions.



By taking these steps, educational systems can more effectively nurture a generation of learners who are not only informed about global issues but also equipped with the emotional and cultural intelligence necessary for transformative global citizenship.

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