

Reflections on Discourse of Global Citizenship Education: Inductive Lessons from the South Korean Context

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Research Overview

Just as the construction of a house is distinct from its blueprints (Burke, 1941), a fundamental schism exists between the academic research and educational practice of Global Citizenship Education (GCED). This disparity has led to critiques that GCED scholarship, despite instrumentalising practitioners' experiences as valuable resources, has failed to secure substantial contributions to, or practical efficacy within, the field (Dispa, Vloeberghs & Skenderija, 2025). Consequently, practitioners continue to face persistent challenges independent of academic achievements.

To narrow this research–practice gap, the Center for GCED and Research at Chungnam National University directly managed and operated a GCED program for high school students over the past three years. Adopting the role of embedded practitioners, the researchers conducted the planning, curriculum design, and instruction, and subsequently received systematic evaluation from the participants.

Based on the researchers' direct engagement in GCED practice, this study profoundly reflects on the process through which diverse GCED discourses debated in theory (e.g., Neoliberal, Nationalist, Cosmopolitan, Postcolonial, World Justice discourses) are reconciled and operationalised within the specific educational context of South Korea. Building upon this reflection, the study concludes by presenting the patterns of coexistence and the pragmatic strategies employed in the field, which enable theoretically contradictory discourses to function simultaneously. This scholarly reflection is significant as it not only contributes to bridging the existing GCED gap between academia and practice but also establishes the

responsibility of academic research to move beyond merely drawing upon practitioners' experiences toward making a cyclical contribution to practice.

Research Methods

The study employed collaborative autoethnography as its primary methodology. Data encompassing program planning, pre-meetings, lecture notes, student applications, and evaluations were systematically collected. Furthermore, the researchers' dialogues and reflections before and after program execution were recorded and analysed. The analysis involved continuous collaborative reflection within the research team, a process that enhanced the study's trustworthiness and ensured the validity and accuracy of the qualitative data interpretation.

Results and Discussion

Theoretically contradictory discourses of Global Citizenship Education (GCED) were adopted and operationalised according to the specific stage and thematic focus of the programme implementation. Initially, the programme's financial basis and the students' motivation to participate were partly rooted in neoliberal logic. Specifically, the programme was executed under the local Office of Education's 'One-Class' policy, which was introduced in alignment with the implementation of the High School Credit System (고교학점제), thereby enabling high school students to utilise intellectual support from universities. For the participating high school students, this served the pragmatic purpose of exploring prospective majors and attending relevant subject lectures as preparation for university entrance examinations (대입). Consequently, within the South Korean educational context, the GCED programme in this study exhibited characteristics of Neoliberal discourse or the competency-based approach, by leveraging the university's 'human resources' and providing students with experiences advantageous for university admission.

Conversely, the Neoliberal discourse was not substantially highlighted during the actual preparation and operation of the programme. Instead, Moral discourse and Postcolonial discourse were more salient. The researchers agreed that the snacks and beverages provided during the programme should be consistent with GCED content, leading to efforts to offer

refreshments that minimised waste while promoting cultural diversity. The specific lectures covered detailed GCED themes, including global citizenship, peace, sustainable development, human rights, cultural diversity, and gender inequality, all employing student-centred pedagogical methods.

This process revealed discursive differences between the researchers (acting as instructors) and the students regarding each theme. For example, on the topic of cultural diversity, students exhibited a National Discourse, viewing culture from a Korean perspective, whereas the instructor (researcher) attempted to practice a Postcolonial Discourse. Similarly, for the topic of gender equality, while the instructor (researcher) intended the direction to be a Postcolonial discourse, exploring the power relations and structures surrounding gender, the students' actual activities were conducted at the level of Moral discourse, not disturbing each other at personal level. Furthermore, the 'Joint Declaration drafting' activity executed in the concluding phase of the programme demonstrated an emphasis on World Justice discourse (Gaudelli, 2009).

The multiplicity of discourses within the GCED programme's practice functioned as a limitation, in that it failed to ensure consistent programme operation or demonstrate a distinct GCED orientation. However, the GCED discourses, which appeared contradictory in theory, served a crucial purpose in practice by creating opportunities for learners with differing views to encounter each other and share ideas. This finding suggests that, akin to the comprehensive and often ambiguous definition of global citizenship education, the diverse discourses present in practice can be utilised as a strategy to invite a wide range of learners into the deliberative forum.

Keywords

Global Citizenship Education, Collaborative Autoethnography, Embedded Practitioner, Korean Education

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