

Democracy in the Post-Truth Crisis:

The Role of Global Citizenship Education

Part I Democracy at risk in the
post-truth era

Part II Global citizenship education
responses to the post-truth crisis

Part III Pathways forward: Advancing
a democratic and peaceful culture

 **APCEIU**
Asia-Pacific Centre of
Education for
International Understanding
Centre
Under the auspices
of UNESCO


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Mahatma Gandhi Institute of
Education for Peace and
Sustainable Development

Asia-Pacific Centre of Education for International Understanding under the auspices of UNESCO

(08289) 120 Saemal-ro, Guro-gu, Seoul, Republic of Korea
Phone: +82-2-774-3956
www.unescoapceiu.org



UNESCO Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Education for Peace and Sustainable Development

(110001) ICSSR Building, First Floor, 35 Ferozshah Road, New Delhi, India
Phone: +91-11-23072356-60
<https://mgiep.unesco.org>



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Forewords

Message from the Director of APCEIU

Democracy is in retreat, with growing evidence of declining civic trust in democratic institutions and values across the world. Social media algorithms are constantly reinforcing confirmation biases and polarization, devastating the public sphere of dialogue which is crucial for a democracy. Democracy is inherently fragile, but it is particularly alarming to see that today it is attacked and threatened by various actors and trends, including the infringement of academic freedom and the denial of scientific knowledge.



In this context, the Asia–Pacific Centre of Education for International Understanding (APCEIU) invited a group of educators, experts and practitioners to join the 10th International Conference on Global Citizenship Education (GCED), held in Seoul, Republic of Korea, on 27–28 August 2025. Under the theme of “Democracy in the Post–Truth Crisis: The Role of GCED”, the Conference explored how GCED can make contributions in countering attacks and threats to democracy.

This publication is a collection of presentations and interventions delivered at the Conference and edited by the authors thereafter. The submission has been entirely voluntary, and I sincerely appreciate the speakers and panelists who generously accepted our invitation and made valuable contributions to this volume.

The compendium is organized into three parts. Part 1 examines the political, social and technological challenges that threaten democratic values and processes today. Part 2 showcases concrete examples of how GCED is being implemented to address these challenges. These include (1) youth–led actions for strengthening democratic literacy, (2) educators’ strategies for countering post–truth narratives and (3) institutional and educational initiatives for promoting peace and citizenship. Part 3 highlights the steps needed to rebuild trust, foster democratic resilience, and promote a culture of peace across local, national, and global contexts.

I hope this publication will illuminate the transformative power of education and will serve as a valuable resource for those seeking to foster democratic dialogue and promote meaningful change—both locally and globally—as ethically responsible and engaged citizens.

Hyun Mook Lim

Director, APCEIU

Message from the Director of UNESCO MGIEP

In an era increasingly shaped by misinformation and disinformation, we find ourselves navigating “post-truth” scenarios where citizens are influenced by digital consumption of distorted and fragmented information. At such a time, global citizenship education (GCED) emerges as a cornerstone for strengthening democratic spaces nurturing informed and empathetic communities.



Building on these ideas, the Asia-Pacific Centre of Education for International Understanding (APCEIU), in collaboration with UNESCO Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Education for Peace and Sustainable Development (UNESCO MGIEP), and the Ministries of Education and Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Korea hosted the 10th International Conference on GCED in Seoul, Republic of Korea. Together, we reimagined education for peace and global citizenship in the digital age.

Through engaging dialogues with educators, scholars, practitioners, and youth leaders from across the globe, we explored how education must evolve to become a transformative tool and enabler for peace and democracy in today’s rapidly changing world.

UNESCO MGIEP pioneers digital pedagogies to impart social and emotional learning (SEL) skills and competencies: empathy, compassion, mindfulness, and critical thinking. The GCED Conference was a platform to re-align our work with UNESCO’s revised Recommendation on Education for Peace, Human Rights and Sustainable Development, and to reimagine innovative approaches to teaching and learning.

As we navigate the interconnected world in a digital age, our common humanity and shared journey are guided by an unwavering commitment to education for peace. The GCED Conference illuminated a powerful message: In the post-truth world, the cultivation of digital citizenship and SEL competencies is essential to promote peaceful, resilient, and inclusive communities. These are the skills that empower individuals to rise above division and hate to become compassionate, kind and empathetic.

Obijfor Aginam
Director, UNESCO MGIEP

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- Jeong–han Kang (Professor, Department of Sociology, Yonsei University)
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- Miki Sugimura (Chairholder, UNESCO Chair on Education for Human Dignity, Peace and Sustainability at Sophia University)
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- Samsoo Sa–U (Assistant Professor, Prince of Songkla University)
- Soong Hee Han (Professor, Department of Education, Seoul National University)
- Tanya Wendt Samu (Senior Lecturer, Faculty of Arts and Education, University of Auckland)
- W. Andy Knight (Distinguished University Professor, Department of Political Science, University of Alberta)

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01

PART

Democracy at risk in the post-truth era

Soong Hee Han

Jeong-han Kang

Kelechi Kalu

Diya Banerjee

Democracy in action: Citizens' power and learnings amid political turmoil



Soong Hee Han

Professor, Department of Education, Seoul National University

Soong Hee Han is a Professor of Education and Lifelong Learning at the Department of Education, Seoul National University, Republic of Korea. His academic works focus primarily on popular education and critical adult education, learning societies and learning ecosystems, as well as global and comparative studies in citizenship education. His recent research focuses on the institutionalization of lifelong learning systems on a global scale, particularly from a post-humanist perspective. He was President of the Korean Society for the Study of Lifelong Education and Editor-in-Chief of the *Asia Pacific Education Review*.

Introduction

Since the establishment of the Provisional Government in 1919, Korean democracy has never stood still. It has grown stronger by resisting colonial rule, wrestling with the distortions caused by left-right ideological conflicts and enduring the restless drive for economic growth and material success. Each struggle has elevated the meaning of democracy for Korea.

The first watershed event was the April 1960 Student Revolution. With the passion of students and intellectuals in the 1960s and 1970s, their protest grew into a labour movement. Then came May 1980, when the people of Gwangju rose against the military rule in pursuit of their freedom. Their sacrifice led to the great June Struggle of 1987, when ordinary citizens filled the streets and demanded the establishment of a new constitution—the very one that underpins South Korea’s democracy today. That moment was not

only about changing laws—it was about citizens claiming their right to democratically elect their government.

The Korean citizens did not stop there. In 2008, 2016 and 2024, candlelight protests lit up public squares in Korea. Twice, those candles burned brightly enough to bring down presidents. If the 1986 generation laid the foundation for the 1987 Constitution, then today’s ‘candlelight generation’—the generation of K-pop light sticks and smartphones—has shown the world how to defend democracy with that very constitution, overturning an illegally implemented martial law not with violence, but through lawful action with unity and courage.

The Nobel Prize-winning writer Han Kang (2024) once asked: ‘Can the past help the present? Can the dead save the living?’ In December 2024, the answer was yes. It was the spirit of June 1987 and



the memory of the blood spilled on that occasion that came to our aid. That sacrifice saved us. That history gave us the strength to end martial law without spilling a single drop of blood in 2024.

This is why democracy is more than a system of rules. It is a long struggle. Moreover, it is also a long lesson—a process of learning, step by step, generation by generation. Korean democracy is not a fixed machine that runs automatically, based on a constitution that has been written once and for all. It is alive. It grows through its citizens' fighting, stumbling, remembering and learning. It is reshaped with every clash and hardship and with every new generation that rises to defend it.

That is the true power of our democracy. And once again, in December 2024, the world saw it shine.

The rise and fall of the martial law of 3 December 2024

On the night of 3 December 2024, the President—who had sworn to uphold the constitution—summoned the military and suspended the fundamental rights of Korean citizens, even though the nation was not in a state of emergency.

Just an hour after the declaration of martial law, Proclamation No. 1 was issued. Its orders were as follows:

- All political activity is banned: Meetings of the National Assembly, local councils, or political parties, and gatherings or demonstrations, cannot be conducted.
- All press and publications are placed under martial law control.
- Strikes, slowdowns and rallies that could cause social unrest are prohibited.

- Anyone who violates these orders may be arrested, detained and searched without a warrant.

However, the constitution was clear: even under martial law, the authority of the legislature—the National Assembly—must be preserved. If martial law is used to shut down the Assembly and block it from voting to lift that law, then that is clearly unconstitutional and unlawful.

Soldiers were dispatched to the National Assembly immediately, and they attempted to forcibly remove the lawmakers from the premises. However, this attempt did not last. Around 1 a.m. all 190 members of the Assembly unanimously voted to end martial law. That single resolution stripped martial law of its legitimacy. This was made possible by the 1987 Constitution and the subsequent revisions to martial law.

After the Constitutional Court passed the order removing the President from office, the National Assembly made several attempts to carry out the impeachment. On 14 December 2024, the second impeachment resolution was passed, and immediately after its approval, the articles of impeachment were sent to the Court. This marked the official start of President Yoon Suk-yeol's impeachment trial.

The months leading up to April 2025 were long and tense. The nation was divided, shaken by debates and demonstrations between those who supported the impeachment and those who opposed it.

On 4 April 2025, at 11:22 a.m., 123 days after the resolution was passed, the Constitutional Court read its final decision aloud: "The respondent, President Yoon Suk-yeol, is hereby removed from office."

The decline of democracy is a global issue

The fall of democracy is not unique to Korea. On a global scale, the *World Democracy Report*, released by the Democracy and Diversity Research Institute in Gothenburg, Sweden, presents compelling evidence of creeping authoritarianism over the past twenty-five years (V-Dem Institute, 2025). Across the world, democracy is in retreat, and the number of countries classified as 'democratic' has returned to levels seen before 1996. In the past twenty years, the number of countries with declining election quality has more than doubled, and the number of countries where press freedom is slipping has increased more than sixfold (V-Dem Institute, 2025).

The legacies of early twentieth-century fascism under Hitler and Mussolini, and the rise of authoritarian regimes in the Soviet Union and China, have not faded. In the past decade, since 2014, the world has witnessed a resurgence of extreme right-wing movements in Europe, the rise of Trumpism and worrying authoritarian trends in countries such as Korea and India.

In many instances in South Korean history, public opinion and extra-parliamentary activism have often complemented legal and institutional mechanisms. For decades, citizen knowledge and activism have protected democratic values. Modern Korean history is a record of continuous democratic action and learning, with citizens expanding their civic capacity through education and engagement. In many ways, the 1987 constitutional framework emerged from this fervent culture of democratic learning. In June 1987, citizens would carve out time from their lunch breaks to attend lectures on progressive politics. Conversations on anti-dictatorship struggles and the pursuit of democracy became a

regular part of everyday life.

However, this system is fragile. The moment citizen voices waver, democracy can quickly falter. Today, along with the growing political apathy of the younger generation, the rise of extreme-right conspiracy theories, colour-coded politics, violence and the flood of baseless rhetoric are testing the quality and maturity of the democracy our society has built. The truth about political literacy, once hidden, is now resurfacing.

Korean democracy as a long-term 'learning' revolution

The nature of Korean democracy is constantly changing. Although South Korea was declared a democratic country in 1948, it continued to undergo a process of democratization in the decades since. Unlike in Europe, where democracy emerged as a result of long historical processes as well as upheavals that often took the form of revolutions, democracy in Korea arrived suddenly. The lawmakers who drafted the constitution worked quickly to establish a democratic political order and implement institutional frameworks.

Of course, Korea's democracy did not immediately start functioning effectively. Through every major and minor revolution and movement, institutions matured, new forms of citizenship emerged, and democracy was gradually redefined through the contradictions and conflicts of each era. The April 1960 Student Revolution, the Gwangju Democratization Movement of May 1980, the candlelight revolutions of 2002 and 2008, the Gwanghwamun protests of 2016-17 and the most recent events of December 2024 are all milestones in this long process. Through these upheavals, citizens began to recognize themselves as political actors. Koreans gradually began to transform into democratic

individuals who were part of a collective.

Through this process, the country's understanding of parliamentary democracy, universal suffrage, and values such as citizen participation, equality, accountability, transparency, political tolerance, freedom and human rights were learned through daily and once-in-a-lifetime experiences.

Schools played a crucial role in furthering each generation's understanding. Korean education became a global success story, with enrollment rates rising sharply at all levels. By the 1980s, high school enrollment had already surpassed 90 per cent (Ministry of Education, n.d.). Through twelve years of formal schooling, citizens gained a thorough understanding of Korean democracy and civic capacity. The difference in political literacy between those who had received formal education and those who had not was immense.

However, democracy is not a concept that exists only in textbooks. Various forces shaping post-liberation Korean society—the legacies of Japanese colonial rule, the Red Complex¹⁾, regionalism and class conflicts—have continuously threatened democracy, presenting challenges to it in political debates and other domains. In this context, people's understanding of democracy in Korea, shaped by their experiences of conflict, went beyond formal schooling, as they had learned of the need to defend it through lived historical experiences, civic participation, relationships and real-life situations.

Since 1919, modern Korean history can be seen as a long-term form of revolutionary learning, and the recent 'Revolution of Light' in 2024–25 represents its current manifestation. Professor Seon-Wook Kim describes this in the magazine *SangSaeng*,

published by the Asia-Pacific Centre of Education for International Understanding:

While not involving a complete revolutionary overhaul often associated with the destruction of an old regime, Korea's political transformation involved significant societal struggles and challenges to authoritarian power. These efforts ultimately led to the internalization and practical application of the democratic constitution, thereby solidifying the understanding of democracy over a period nearing 80 years (Kim, 2025, p. 13).

'Into the new world'²⁾—the city square as a classroom

Since the 1980s, the citizens of Korea have gathered in city squares to hold candles, wave light sticks, and climb onto stages to debate, returning home with new knowledge and a sense of solidarity.

In 2002, following the tragic death of two young girls, Hyo-soon and Mi-seon, who were crushed by a US military armoured vehicle in Yangju, Gyeonggi Province, citizens filled city squares with candles. In December that year, when the perpetrators were acquitted, public outrage spread nationwide.

The movement demanding President Park Geun-hye's resignation began in October 2016 and continued for several months thereafter. Citizens paradoxically witnessed moments of solidarity and hope.

On 14 December 2024, when the National Assembly approved President Yoon Suk-yeol's impeachment motion, a street festival erupted outside the parliament as citizens, longing for accountability, celebrated the occasion. In those moments, warmth and camaraderie were visible

everywhere. Light sticks, pre-paid snacks, foil blankets and banners with creatively written messages filled the winter squares. If the generation before 1987 articulated their longing for democracy with candles and songs, the generation post-1987 expressed it through K-pop and light sticks.

After martial law was declared on 3 December 2024, citizens occupied squares across the country for 123 days until the Constitutional Court issued its judgment, removing President Yoon Suk-yeol from office. The four winter months until the verdict was delivered were gruelling. People often joked, 'Martial law is only for spring.' Large or small gatherings occurred almost every other day. On Saturdays, when major protests were held, citizens would arrive as early as 4 a.m. or 5 a.m.

During this period, a certain 'grammar of the square' evolved.

When a speaker took the stage, they introduced their identity – for example, being LGBTIQ+ or having a disability. They discussed issues related to that identity that require attention. Over time, the grammar shifted. They began to draw attention to issues unrelated to their identity. For instance, 'I am LGBTIQ+, but I care about disability access. Please care about disability access too.'

While bridging the gap between citizens' voices and policymakers and institutions is essential, the square does not exist only to mobilize to enact sweeping change.

Just as the 2008 and 2016 protests were different, so too were the 2016 and 2024 protests. Every step forward, every experience

of such intense solidarity, leaves lasting memories.

The square evolved, and citizen participation itself was a learning process.

Our democracy is resilient. Democracy cannot defend itself; it needs democrats. Many citizens did not remain silent but gathered in the squares, and combined with the Constitutional Court, they protected democracy. Yet at the same time, our democratic republic remains fragile. A single irrational decision could collapse the entire system in an instant, and recovery took enormous time and sacrifice. This shows that our democracy's defense system is insufficient.

On the night of the 'Battle of Namtaeryeong' in December 2024, a woman wearing a short skirt took the microphone. She had been attending an Otaku party in Hongdae when she came upon the news and joined the protesters in Namtaeryeong. Social media posts about a procession of farmers and their tractors being blocked at Namtaeryeong had gone viral, reaching over a million views within minutes. Thousands of young people rushed to the hill in just a couple of hours, carrying light sticks. There, the 'Into the New World' was alive—full of hospitality, support, tears and cheers. The hands of farmers driving tractors met the hands of young people holding light sticks on the cold winter asphalt.

Women from Gen Z gathered in front of the National Assembly, waving their sticks. Farmers in their sixties and seventies sang folk songs, and the younger generation responded with 'Romantic Cat' and 'Into the New World'. A queue of protesters lined up to speak on stage. Everyone at

Namtaeryeong was both an audience member and a speaker. One participant said, ‘farmers, women and youth taught each other through their stories. It felt like a 28-hour school’ (SisaIN Editorial Department, 2025).

The next morning, temperatures dropped to minus 10 °C—the winter solstice, the longest night of the year. By 16:00 hours, the farmers were allowed to enter Seoul with their tractors, and the crowd cheered, ‘The farmers won!’ and ‘We won!’. From 12:00 hours on 21 December to 16:00 hours on 22 December—a total of 28 hours—this moment was called the ‘Miracle of Namtaeryeong’.

Democratic citizenship from the socio-material dimension

Yet, after the fierce struggles and moments of solidarity that carried on through the cold winter, the world did not change all that much. Even after a new government was installed through fresh elections, the world seemed to return quickly to its previous order. Conservatism was swiftly replaced with progressivism, and while the ruling bloc slightly changed its colour, it remained, nonetheless, constituted by political elites. Jin-Woo Lee, a philosopher and emeritus professor at the Korea Advanced Institute of Science and Technology, puts it this way:

The problem arises when politically elected elites, instead of representing the people, expand their own interests and power. Though chosen through democratic institutions, they possess formidable authority to exploit the political system for themselves. With this power, they can manipulate, manage, and even control the demands and desires of the masses. While democratic institutions still appear to function on the surface, politics and government

increasingly fall into the hands of privileged elites. Colin Crouch calls this phenomenon ‘Post-Democracy.’ How, then, can we ensure that the voices of ordinary people are heard and reflected in political decision-making? (Lee, 2021)

Political elites often avoid open dialogue by labelling their critics as ‘anti-state’ forces. They discredit opponents by stripping away their legitimacy, smearing them as corrupt, and blocking their access to state institutions. At the same time, they protect their own power by keeping benefits and opportunities within closed networks of loyal allies. Indeed, our institutions are still democratic, but representative democracy produces a specific political class that, through their cartels, academic cliques and mafia-like ties, creates a structure of exclusion that alienates the masses.

Although ruling and opposition parties appear to compete for political power on the surface, when their sense of responsibility for the common good wanes, both sides ultimately become members of a political class preoccupied with expanding their own power and interests. Politics becomes factional strife, and factional strife degenerates into a struggle for spoils.

Yet, this too is part of the democratic process. Democracy is not a flawless system; even if its principles appear pristine, in practice, it is deeply imperfect. Democratic institutions do not automatically manifest a democratic society. The mere recovery of democracy does not mean that the world instantly recovers as well.

Modern democracy is representative democracy, which, in the end, only transforms the arbitrary

rules of certain groups into the 'rule of law'. Those who make the law remain part of the political elite. At times, they draw their allies into the centre of power, grant them special pardons and draw a sharp line separating themselves from the people.

Of course, the point here is not to suggest that democracy is inherently flawed or bad, nor that we should resign ourselves to living with its imperfections. Rather, the crucial point is that when we learn about democracy, we must not treat it as a pure principle, an abstract value, or a lofty ideal—and it must not be taught in such terms either. Democracy exists within the messy textures of a social order; it is the mode of operation of the socio-material systems in which we live. Democracy refers to any institutional or social practices through which democratic principles are enacted. Its principles cannot be separated from the body of practice, just as the mind cannot be separated from the body.

Thus, to teach democracy, one must not examine its principles in isolation but must instead teach it as a concept fundamentally embedded in the full context of a society—its history, events and institutions. Indeed, it could even be expressed in this way: unless I participate in those contexts, histories, events and assemblages through lived experience, I can never truly learn how democracy operates through them. Democracy is not an ideal. Values such as participation, freedom, human rights and equality cannot be realized in some abstract space. Nor are the citizens who participate in it abstract or homogeneous beings. They are heterogeneous; they have hybrid existences with different statuses, values, contexts and starting points. Citizenship is a real concept that reflects contextual and situational relations shaped by social ties, labour market relations, material

conditions, ideological and religious frameworks and the social-material contexts of the power structures in which each of us is entangled.

Learning democracy as an assemblage

We must teach democracy in its entirety, with all its imperfections and complexities. The task is not to decide whether to teach liberal democracy or social democracy, but to open public debate about the various power relations that democracy is entangled with. Moreover, 'citizenship'—which might be regarded as the 'subject matter' of democratic learning—must never be treated as an isolated subject of study. (This is not to say, of course, that democracy should never be taught as a separate subject in the curriculum.) It cannot be reduced to a set of competencies related to democratic values. Every political, economic, cultural, educational and ecological dimension in which the people are recognized as sovereign constitutes part of what might be called the 'body of democracy'. The principles or spirit of democracy cannot be dissected and extracted without considering the whole body.

Up until now, we have framed democracy as a 'subject', something that teachers can teach in classrooms. This approach describes democracy in terms of individual citizens who, as active subjects, participate in it, and citizenship as the aggregate of these individuals forming a social body. Put differently, a democratic society is understood as one created by a gathering of well-educated citizens. This way of thinking about democratic education absorbs, wholesale, the philosophical, social, political and economic perspectives that have shaped modern civil society. The social contract theory, Descartes' rationalism and similar frameworks originated from the view that society is built upon rational, autonomous individuals—

‘indivisible’ social atoms—who enter into contracts with one another. Education for citizenship was thus conceived as the process of forming students into indivisible individual subjects.

I refer to this as ‘modernism in society and education’. Modern society’s schooling was designed precisely with this perspective in mind—that schools should cultivate responsible and autonomous citizens of the future one by one. This approach was highly effective. Democratic education in Korea has achieved considerable success since the 1960s. In fact, the reason so many citizens poured into Yeouido during the 3 December martial law crisis, or sustained their candlelight vigil at public squares for 123 days, was because it resembled the democracy they had learned about.

However, the limitations of this approach are clear. Democracy is more complex than we think. Shaped by Cartesian dualism—which elevates the spirit while subordinating the flesh—democracy has been treated as the pure soul, while messy social structures are treated as its body. Students, therefore, are expected to extract its principles unsullied by examples contaminated by real life.

However, such a democracy does not exist. For democracy is not an abstract principle; it is the lived configuration of socio-material assemblages and their hybrid functionalities. We must not learn democratic citizenship as a list of ten principles. We must learn the materiality, relationality, hybridity, contingency and dynamism of democracy itself. Economic equality is as important as political equality, and equality itself encompasses many different dimensions in different contexts. Moreover, actual examples of its realization are scarce, and importing and transplanting them can be difficult, because every

society is assembled differently and is constantly evolving.

Methodologically, democratic citizenship can never be the subject of individual learning. One must participate in and experience the community. One must be part of social systems where honour and humiliation, domination and subjugation, endurance and resistance are collectively enacted and experienced in relation to each other.

At the gatherings before the National Assembly in Yeouido, the people felt something burning within them. Yet this intensity differed greatly depending on one’s role, status or position in society. Can there truly be a common subject matter or knowledge in such a case?

One may acquire a capacity for empathy through communication with others, but one’s empathy can never be identical to anyone else’s. How, then, can traditional pedagogy possibly account for this kind of learning?

Against this backdrop, framing democratic education as a combination of knowledge, attitude and behaviour seems absurd. Such distinctions never existed in the first place. It is more accurate to put it this way: we are assigned certain actions within situations or social processes. These activities are heterogeneous from the outset, consisting of contingent and fleeting moments that often conflict with one another. They are marked by unpredictability and dispersal.

Democracy is like a living organism that survives in such conditions, constantly changing in form. Democratic learning must never impose *the learning of sameness*. Instead, it ought to be considered as the process of continually producing

differences through lived experiences. There is no textbook suited to such heterogeneous and complex learning. Nor are there teachers who can truly instruct it. It is only by feeling the pulse of our

living history that we can, however faintly, understand it. That is why learning about the 3 December martial law crisis took place at the public squares; the events themselves became the teacher.

Note. Most excerpts in italics presented in this text, where no separate author is indicated, are taken from SisalN Editorial Department (2025).

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- 1) “Red complex” in the South Korean context refers to a durable, society-wide anti-communist reflex that formed under Cold War division and the trauma of the Korean War. More than a policy stance, it became a political culture: communism (and often any left-leaning dissent) was cast as existential threat, legitimating surveillance, censorship, loyalty tests, and the broad use of security laws. In everyday life it shaped schooling, media frames, and electoral rhetoric, normalizing guilt-by-association and stigmatizing unions, student movements, or progressive intellectuals as “pro-North.”
 - 2) This is the official title of the K-pop group ‘Girls Generation’ that became protest anthems.

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**Democracy in the Post-Truth Crisis:
The Role of Global Citizenship Education**

The road to building an authentic identity in the age of AI



Jeong-han Kang

Professor, Department of Sociology, Yonsei University

Jeong-han Kang holds a Ph.D. in Sociology from the University of Chicago in the United States and is currently a Professor of Sociology at Yonsei University, Seoul, Republic of Korea. His recent research focuses on computational social science and the relationship between digital transformation and social good. He also leads the Yonsei Online Data Analysis Lab, whose motto is 'to contribute to social innovations with little harm to society'. His studies have been published in journals such as *Social Policy & Administration*, *Journal of Informetrics*, *Journal of Mathematical Sociology*, *Sociological Methods & Research* and *Administrative Science Quarterly*.

A paradox in digital society

The digital transformation of society has created a paradox: scientists and policymakers are making evidence-based decisions more rigorously than before, whereas civic engagement suffers from the lack of shared evidence and conflicts arising from the post-truth era. If this paradoxical coexistence continues, in the long run, the discovery and application of evidence may be used not to enlighten us, but to protect—or even reinforce—our narrow values and beliefs. In order to prevent social science from merely reproducing a post-truth society, social scientists must attempt to answer what counts as scientific evidence in civic education and how such evidence can be pursued scientifically. Further, citizens must be able to engage with each other based on such evidence. This article begins by identifying this problem: What kind of evidence can overcome the post-truth era, and based on such evidence, in what direction should democratic civic education proceed?

Three factors that create a post-truth society

This article does not focus on articulating the factors that create the post-truth crisis of democracy. However, summarizing these causes systematically can help overcome or, at the very least, circumvent the crisis.

The first cause lies at the psychological level. Human beings are susceptible to confirmation bias: we tend to selectively accept information that confirms our current beliefs and critically review what disconfirms them (Rollwage et al., 2020). Algorithms that learn user behaviours and customize information accordingly tend to provide users with information that confirms their beliefs (Sun et al., 2020).

The second cause lies at the relational level. One's

belief is reinforced by the echo-chamber effect (Cinelli et al., 2021), which means that people with similar beliefs tend to gravitate towards and interact more closely with each other, forming a homogeneous belief system within their circle.

The third factor lies at the societal level. One's belief system—confirmed by psychological bias and strengthened by echo-chamber networking—is eventually ossified into social identities that drive our civic activities and decisions, including voting. Identity politics often intensifies social conflicts and can deteriorate democracy such that it turns into authoritarianism (Bonomi et al., 2021).

It is noteworthy that all these factors tend to be salient in social media and digital platforms.

Requirements for scientific truth

Evidence requires both patterns and narratives

We often assume that objective observation can lead us to scientific truth. However, sociologist Howard Becker (2017) made it clear that scientific evidence cannot be equated with data itself, demonstrating with rich examples that a social scientist's theoretical perspective inevitably shapes their interpretation of data. For instance, the classification of ethnicity or race is primarily the result of social struggles or compromises. Today, the demographic category of 'Latino' is widely and naturally accepted in the United States. However, this category was, in fact, a politically constructed identity created in the 1970s by Mexican, Puerto Rican and Cuban immigrant groups with starkly different backgrounds.

If we acknowledge that our pursuit of scientific evidence cannot be separated from our perspectives, then the truth itself cannot be separated from

them as well. This is because the truth is not a simple aggregation of individual facts but is constituted by synthesizing and interpreting data as evidence. Recently, Yuval Noah Harari (2024) endorsed this view, warning that it is naïve to believe that collecting more information will lead us to the truth. He argues that the greater the amount of information, the greater the need for the order that organizes it. He contends that the more citizens come to believe in a particular order as the truth, the greater the danger that democracy will be undermined, and authoritarian power will rise.

Let us apply Becker and Harari’s perspective on the truth to contemporary society, where digital data abounds. The implicit assumption that the truth can be constituted either by data itself or by statistical patterns extracted from it may ultimately foster a post-truth society. If data accumulated on digital platforms are the traces of our words and behaviours, then they must also embody our thoughts, emotions and motivations for action. Hence, such data contains the perspectives through which members of society view the world. If the evidence we extract from such data is to genuinely help us understand each other, then it must properly recover these motivations and perspectives —what Catherine Riessman (2003) called ‘narrative’. When such recovery fails, evidence based solely on statistical patterns fails to resonate with us and loses its legitimacy as a representation of the truth.

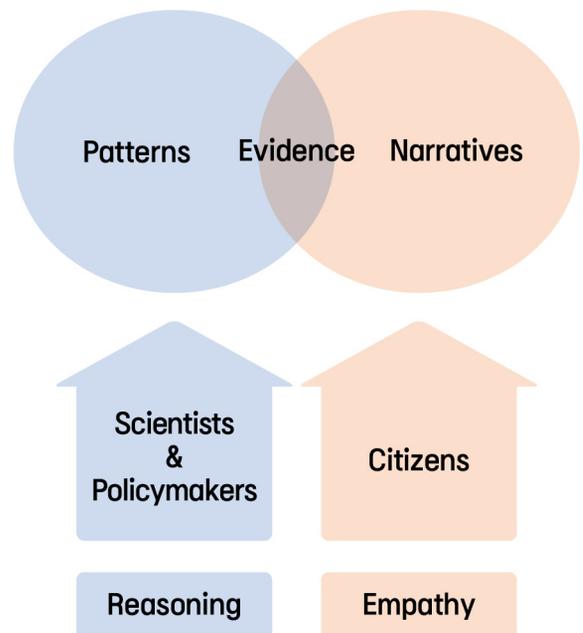
Restoring narrative means more than reconstructing the stories hidden within data. Narrative entails restoring the perspectives of the individual actors embedded in these stories, thereby enabling us to empathize with their positions and situations. It is precisely when statistical tendencies are combined with narrative that evidence can be accepted in our

lives as the truth.

Searching for truth requires both reasoning and empathy

Returning to the paradox in digital society, we can now reframe the paradox with the two elements of evidence. Figure 1 illustrates how elite decision-makers, such as scientists and policymakers, focus on a different aspect of evidence compared to citizens. The elites tend to reduce evidence to fixed patterns in data discovered by reasoning. On the other hand, citizens are moved by empathetic narratives when they make value judgements on occasions such as elections. If elites do not perceive the gap between their view of evidence and everyday civic engagement, the search for scientific evidence will not help citizens to effectively overcome the post-truth crisis of democracy.

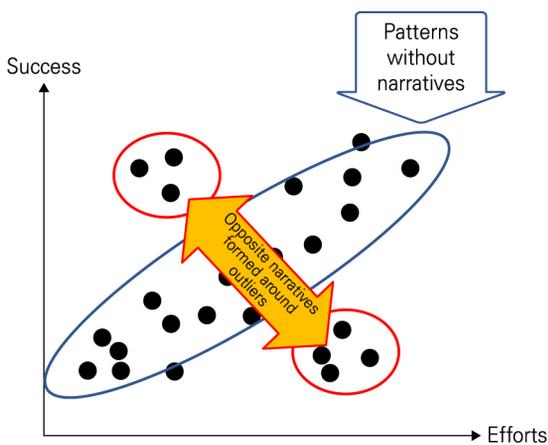
Figure 1. Two elements of evidence corresponding to two cognitive processes



Note. Adapted from Kang & Song (2023).

Figure 2 provides a hypothetical scenario for the sharp gap between statistical patterns and narratives. Let us suppose that effort and success are each quantified and observed, and their relationship is visualized through quantitative analysis on a scatter plot. In Figure 2, the dominant statistical pattern follows an upward trend—that is, the more effort one makes, the greater their success. If one believes that this statistical tendency alone constitutes sufficient evidence, then the proposition ‘effort leads to success’ can be regarded as the truth. Perhaps it is so self-evident that no specific narrative is needed to support it.

Figure 2. Hypothetical patterns and narratives from data on the correlation of effort and success



Note. Adapted from Kang & Song (2023).

On the other hand, in an era overflowing with data, one can also collect only cases of outliers. If enough points accumulate in the northwest area of the figure—cases of success without effort—then data on such cases will also be amassed, and narratives can be constructed accordingly. Moreover, when people read or watch such narratives on social media and YouTube and are repeatedly exposed to the same stories through algorithmic recommendations,

the proposition that success can be achieved without effort may gain persuasive power among a wider audience.

Now, imagine the development of narratives for the opposite kind of outliers. Suppose that points in the southeast area of the figure—cases in which effort does not lead to success—begin to accumulate, and a narrative legitimizing these cases gains validity within a particular group. If the two narratives around the two opposite outliers come to be accepted as the truth through confirmation bias, and if some figures embodying each narrative gain social visibility, then conflicts between the two groups gradually emerge as a salient phenomenon in society. Even members of society who observe these conflicts from a neutral position may no longer believe that the relationship between effort and success is proportional. Instead, society is increasingly polarized between those who succeed without any effort and those who fail despite their best efforts. In other words, the relationship between effort and success is reinterpreted not as an upward, proportional one, but as a downward, inverse one, where post-truth group conflicts—shaped and reinforced by biased narratives—may ultimately self-constitute as the truth.

Considering this changing process of truth, the proliferation of narrow beliefs in the post-truth era should not be seen as a temporary confusion that will soon be dispelled by scientific evidence. Instead, if such beliefs are sustained, they could eventually persuade public opinion and become valid truths. If they ultimately guide society in a better direction, they may be recognized as pioneering outliers or as the power of narrative that managed to resist prevailing conventions. However, the self-fulfilling realization of opposing

narratives examined here points less toward such progress and more toward the danger of society becoming divided into two camps, falling into what James Hunter (1996) called a ‘culture war’.

More effort is required to restore narratives

To establish a guide for accumulating evidence that is both scientific and capable of strengthening democracy, the types of information are classified according to the combination of statistical patterns and narrative in Table 1. First, information without either statistical patterns or narrative is no different from raw data itself; in this case, we remain in a state of ignorance with no knowledge about the data (Cell 1). Information containing only narratives that are not supported by statistical patterns can be described as rumours, with fake news being a representative example (Cell 2). Meanwhile, information extracted as statistical patterns from data without an accompanying narrative represents the typical state of data mining (Cell 3). Given this classification, efforts to discover genuine evidence (Cell 4) can be categorized into two types: verifying whether statistical patterns support a rumour (that is, moving from 2 to 4) and recovering narratives from a data-mining state (that is, moving from 3 to 4).

Table 1. Typology of Information by Pattern and Narrative

		Narrative	
		Absence	Presence
Pattern	Absence	(1) Ignorance	(2) Rumour
	Presence	(3) Data mining	(4) Evidence

Note. Adapted from Kang & Song (2023).

Verifying whether statistical patterns support a rumour is exemplified by fact-checking, a method

widely used to determine the truth. What this article emphasizes, however, is another kind of effort—namely, the recovery of narratives from a state of data mining. In today’s context, where evidence is often implicitly equated with data itself, attempts to uncover the narratives hidden behind extracted patterns remain relatively weak. Without these narratives, empathy is not likely to be activated, and evidence loses much of its capacity to influence citizens’ value judgements.

Authenticity in relation to artificial intelligence

If ‘post-truth’ was the word of the year in 2016 by Oxford University Press, Merriam-Webster chose ‘authentic’ as the word of the year seven years later in 2023. Meanwhile, generative artificial intelligence has developed and gained popularity at an exponential rate. Generative artificial intelligence (AI) generates human-like content that is often indistinguishable from ‘authentic’ content. If the truth was the first to come under threat, authenticity is, unfortunately, on the same course. At the same time, maintaining and improving authenticity can be a solution to restore and protect the truth, since authentic human narratives can help guide generative AI in generating empathetic narratives in the right way.

This article does not intend to define authenticity in a scientifically rigorous manner. Instead, it aims to stimulate readers to consider what it means to be authentic in the age of AI by proposing the key conditions for building authentic identities in tandem with the development of AI. Before proposing them, let us be clear that building authenticity does not necessarily imply resisting AI. We can build authenticity in alignment with the advancement of AI. Further, authenticity should not be confused with frankness. One can only be

authentic with oneself, not with others. An ‘authentic’ judgement of fellow citizens cannot stand. We can never persuade the opposing side by passing authentic judgements on their experiences. What we can do, however, is move them through the authentic revelation of our own narratives.

Dual AI: Inspecting algorithms in step with AI

Algorithm inspection is a necessary condition for democracy in a digital society. Democracy cannot be sustained without diversity, and all citizens, in one way or another, should be algorithm inspectors who monitor and report digital technologies that harm diversity and mistreat any minority group. Human bias is reflected in AI, which may facilitate discriminatory decisions by generating and disseminating fabricated information. As long as AI learns from human data and human beings express biases and prejudices in the digital world, we cannot eliminate those biases. Therefore, AI needs to continually learn from human inspections to mitigate these biases. Otherwise, AI may deepen the post-truth nature of our society by learning and implementing human vulnerabilities at the three levels reviewed earlier: confirmation bias, the echo-chamber effect and ossified identity politics.

Generative AI can deepen the problem of AI-generated bias because it generates narratives. Biased storytelling can reinforce public prejudice against a social group when the narrative is presented in an empathetic yet misguided manner. Further, a social minority group—if underrepresented in digital data—is more subject to biased empathy because AI does not have enough data regarding the experiences of these minorities from their own perspective.

It has always been an issue whether digital data are representative of the population. In the age of

generative AI, we need to reframe this issue in terms of narratives. What truly matters in the end is not statistical representation but the narratives that represent a group. We need to inspect whether the authentic narratives of all socially meaningful groups are represented in digital data.

‘Garbage in, garbage out’ is a simple but the most appropriate answer for the cause of AI-generated bias. If we feed high-quality data for machine learning, then we will need to inspect algorithms to a lesser degree. In terms of narratives, citizens need to feed authentic data to digital platforms and prompt windows for chatting with generative AI. In this context, what does authentic data mean? As mentioned above, this article does not intend to define it in general academic terms. Rather, reiterating some practical guidelines is helpful: one can be authentic only when telling one’s own stories. Further, one cannot authentically judge others’ narratives. These judgements, if expressed negatively, can spiral into hate speech online.

Authentic spirituality beyond snobs and slop

Since its development, computer-mediated communication has generated digital content that hinders authentic human interaction. The first notable case emerged on social media. Many users are sensitive to the judgement they receive on their posts and intend to look happier, richer and more popular. Consuming these snobbish self-representations often leads others to experience a sense of relative deprivation and prevents them from posting about their life authentically (Yan et al., 2025). Further, snobbish content circulating on social media prevents algorithms from learning about users’ authentic narratives.

Without solving the problem of snobs, we are faced with a new problem of slop. Figure 3 depicts

'Shrimp Jesus', an example of visual slop generated unintentionally by AI in Facebook as a form of engagement hacking (DiPlacido, 2024). However, this slop was not forgotten. Instead, it was posted and circulated on Facebook, attracting many upvotes. Suppose that algorithms learn that slop can attract upvotes, and as a result, AI becomes more likely to generate slop. If we are eventually tired of slop, we may be able to teach algorithms by negative human feedback, such as downvotes and unfollows. However, it is unclear whether we will become aware of the increasing amount of slop on the internet or become accustomed to it as a new form of culture. This issue is analogous to the conundrum of environmental conservation. We have already become considerably insensitive to environmental problems, despite their intensity. The same insensitivity can unfold in digital environments where slop can accumulate quickly.

Figure 3. Shrimp Jesus image generated by AI



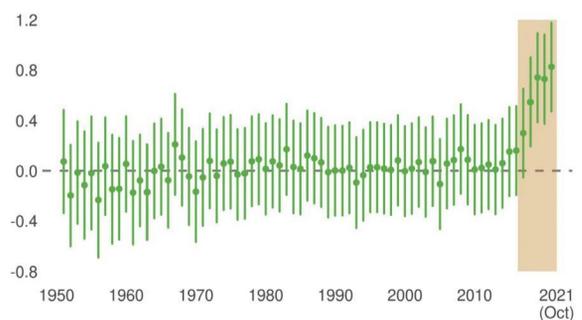
Note. This image was generated by APCEIU using ChatGPT and was inspired by DiPlacido (2024).

As AI continues to transform our civilization, what kind of spirituality will emerge? Clearly, our spirituality will be affected by the constant flow of

digital content, since it does not accurately reflect the authentic human experience. This issue is fundamentally related to democracy in practice because our spirituality will affect our civic engagement. If our spirituality becomes less authentic, it will become more difficult to disseminate the truth among citizens, and democracy will be at higher risk.

We do not yet have clarity on how human culture is being polluted by AI slop. However, 'machine culture' in general does exist, with notable examples (Brinkmann et al., 2023). Figure 4 illustrates the extent to which human decisions by professional Go players resemble a high-performing algorithm. Human decisions began to emulate algorithmic decisions after March 2016, when AlphaGo, a computer Go programme developed by an AI research company called DeepMind, defeated the best-known human player, Se-dol Lee. Lee retired from professional Go three years later, confessing that the game was no longer the same, and it had stopped motivating him (Jang, 2024). Lee's match with AlphaGo had altered the spirit of the game to such an extent that some senior players reported it had changed the nature of the game itself, and they were unable to accept this 'new' Go as an authentic form of the game.

Figure 4. Decision quality of human go players evaluated by an algorithm



Note. Brinkmann et al. (2023).

Authentic AI in relation to agents

A person typically has multiple online identities, including email accounts, social media accounts and messenger accounts, among others. Few of us can live without these identities. No one, however, would agree that the sum of one's digital identities constitutes their authentic identity—our real identity in society is much more complex, deeper and richer. The gap between one's real identity and digital identity, however, is decreasing since the introduction of generative AI agents into our lives.

An agent decides for its principal. We are encouraging more decisions to be made by AI agents, where we have multiple agents for various tasks, such as Agent₁ for work, Agent₂ for shopping, Agent₃ for emotional support, among others. If one has a collection of highly performing AI agents, one may allow those agents to communicate with each other and reach a decision on one's behalf, even when one cannot clarify the task or goal. At this stage, the total sum of one's AI agents begins to constitute an agentic AI on one's behalf: an

independent entity that plans, responds to new information and makes decisions independently. One may ask, 'Are the decisions made by my agentic AI actually being taken by me?' To answer this question, one must have a strong sense of one's authentic identity. Otherwise, we may lose ourselves in the process of delegating an increasing number of tasks to AI.

The call for authentic narratives—and, more fundamentally, an authentic self—does not necessarily imply resisting the development of AI. Eventually, our identity, culture and authenticity will evolve with the development of AI. At a minimum, we need to provide our AI agents with our authentic narratives if we want satisfactory decision-making. Ideally, we can better understand the decisions of fellow citizens by empathizing with their narratives provided by their AI agents. Such empathetic communication via AI agents can help restore the truth and support sustainable democracy on a global scale.

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**Democracy in the Post-Truth Crisis:
The Role of Global Citizenship Education**

Post-truth ‘crisis’ and its impact on democratic practice



Kelechi Kalu

Professor, Department of Political Science, University of California, Riverside

Kelechi Kalu earned a Ph.D. (1997) in International Studies from the University of Denver in the United States. He is currently a Professor of Political Science at the University of California, Riverside. He was the Founding Vice Provost of International Affairs at the University of California, Riverside, from 2015 to 2020. From 2008 to 2015, he was a Professor of African Politics, Director of the Center for African Studies, and the Associate Provost for Global Strategies and International Affairs at the Ohio State University. While at Ohio State University, Kalu was a Faculty Affiliate at the Mershon Center for International Security Studies. From 2011 to 2012, he was a Korea Foundation Visiting Scholar at the Graduate School of International Studies and the Institute for Development and Human Security at Ewha Womans University, Republic of Korea. He was a Mellon Research Fellow from 1994 to 1995 at Connecticut College, and a recipient of grants from the Ford Foundation and the Connecticut State Department. He was also previously a Professor of Political Science at the University of Northern Colorado. His research and teaching interests include international politics, African political economy and North American–African relations.

Epistemic crisis and democratic theory

The world, particularly the Western region, is experiencing a period of ideological struggle between truth and misinformation, which is leading to distrust in institutions, governance and democracy. Recent research has redefined post-truth as an epistemic crisis rather than just an information problem (Edenberg & Hannon, 2021). Elizabeth Anderson (2021, p. 47) argues that modern political discourse operates through ‘epistemic bubbles’ and ‘echo chambers’ that systematically exclude or dismiss alternative viewpoints. Anderson’s argument builds on C. Thi Nguyen’s (2020) distinction between epistemic bubble environments, where relevant information is omitted, and echo chambers, where dissenting opinions are actively undermined through systematic distrust. As a result, many engaged individuals, especially in the public sphere, find themselves watching one television channel, reading one newspaper (if they read at all) and confined to their ideological echo chambers on Facebook, Truth Social, X (formerly Twitter) and

TikTok. The implications for democratic theory are significant. As Simone Chambers (2021, p. 153) notes, contemporary normative democratic theory has shifted from discussing democratic principles to defending democracy itself. This change reflects the recognition that traditional assumptions about rational debate based on shared facts no longer hold in post-truth environments (van Waarden, 2025). Of course, the idea that there was a time when democratic practice was based on rational discussion is simply a theoretical claim that lacks substantial evidence from actual practice in advanced democracies—especially given the age of information and communication technology-driven globalization.

Post-truth as a structural response to uncertainty

Rodrigo Chacón’s (2018) analysis of post-truth politics in digital media offers vital insights into post-truth as a response to systemic uncertainty caused by globalization. Instead of viewing



post-truth politics as just irrational, Chacón's framework regards it as a way to cope with a perceived loss of control over increasingly complex global systems. Post-truth stories of national greatness appear specifically when traditional ideas of identity and sovereignty seem threatened by transnational forces that are beyond the control of democratic institutions. While this view challenges dominant approaches that view post-truth as a pathological deviation from routine democratic discourse, it is essential to acknowledge that economic elites control technology firms and the algorithms that help organize the masses into different ideological echo chambers, thereby supporting the competitive politics of national elites. Consequently, there are no guarantees that the victors in the political competition among the elites will result in a positive outcome for the general population. Instead, it suggests that the post-truth condition reflects the elite's digital media manipulation and structural adaptation to the 'objective unknowability' of global political-economic systems (Chacón, 2018, p. 12), whose actual results consistently favour economic elites, even as the masses vote for ideological causes and unfulfilled economic promises.

Economic and cultural drivers of backlash

The reasons for the global economic and cultural drivers of anti-immigration backlash, especially in industrialized countries, are clear to most social scientists. However, these are not explained in ways that make sense to the broader public, who are inclined to buy into populist arguments from their leaders. The analysis of the 2016 United States presidential election reveals that globalization-related attitudes were significant predictors of voters switching to Trump, even when controlling for demographic and economic factors. Dani Rodrik identifies four distinct channels through which

globalization fuels populism, each with significant implications for post-truth politics (2021). Rodrik's four distinct channels are: (1) economic dislocation creating anti-elite sentiment; (2) cultural divisions amplified by globalization; (3) political entrepreneurs adopting populist strategies; and (4) mainstream parties shifting toward nationalism (Rodrik, 2021, pp.142-145).

His framework differentiates between demand-side effects (economic dislocation fueling anti-elite sentiment and cultural divisions intensified by globalization) and supply-side effects (political entrepreneurs adopting populist strategies and mainstream parties shifting toward nationalism). Crucially, Rodrik (2021) emphasizes that economic grievances alone are insufficient—cultural and identity factors are equally important in channelling discontent into populist movements.

Italo Colantone et al.'s comprehensive analysis of the 'globalization backlash' across twenty-three advanced democracies confirms this multi-causal pattern (Colantone et al., 2021, "Documenting the backlash" section, para. 1). Using newly assembled data spanning from 1980 to 2019, they document systematic shifts toward protectionist and isolationist positions. These shifts were driven by what Colantone et al. (2021, "The globalization backlash" section, para. 1) term 'co-morbidity' effects, where trade exposure, technological change, immigration, fiscal austerity and cultural concerns compound to generate political backlash. In short, researchers and scholars often find themselves in their academic echo chambers, and many struggle to translate their research into digestible insights for those most affected by the findings. As a result, when informed public intellectuals, researchers and journalists fail to provide necessary and clear explanations to the

masses—especially in the public square—the gap is filled with voices of leaders who exploit the cultural, economic, and emotional distress of the public to gain power without much regard for truth.

Anderson (2021) provides crucial insights into how populist politics creates epistemic pathologies that facilitate the post-truth discourse. Anderson says that populist movements generate epistemic bubbles through two main mechanisms: (a) spreading biased group norms for information processing that systematically exclude inconvenient evidence, and (b) replacing empirically focused policy discussions with identity-driven discourse centred on group status competition. Anderson (2021, p. 47) explains the ‘asymmetrical distribution’ of epistemic bubbles among political groups, with right-wing populist movements being especially vulnerable to post-truth discourse. The framework suggests that social epistemology should become ‘more social’ by modelling cognitive bias as a phenomenon that functions collectively through group norms rather than individual psychology. The question is, beyond using advanced modelling techniques, how are these findings communicated to those most affected—the masses? Clearly, if academics do not engage the public with facts and knowledge, it becomes easy for autocrats—who manipulate people’s emotions to gain power—to turn their attention against those academics whose perceived ideological positions can provide a counter-narrative with facts. Moreover, since many economic elites often rise into political power unchecked—using anti-elite rhetoric that targets intellectuals, journalists and other ideological opponents to control how information and knowledge are created and shared in society—they are often able to push people into systemic ‘shelters’ that suppress individual identity while emphasizing group identity.

Digital media, filter bubbles and communicative capitalism

To a significant extent, current scholarship responds to the systemic structure that encompasses various ideological ‘shelters’, or perspectives. For example, recent scholarship has shifted beyond individual-level explanations of misinformation susceptibility toward systemic analyses of how digital media platforms are being used to shape information environments. However, such ideological ‘shelters’ and media platforms tend to be aligned with the values of individuals with a low-complexity mindset who question any fact that does not support their perceived sources of economic and cultural challenges. In this regard, the concept of ‘communicative capitalism’ influences our understanding of how political communicators use market logic to undermine democratic epistemic infrastructures (Dean, 2014, pp. 65–66).

Political communication scholars are increasingly recognizing that the core problem is not simply that digital media is contributing to an epistemic crisis, but that ‘communicative capitalism’ has altered the production and distribution of knowledge to subordinate democratic values and maximize profits (Chambers, 2005, p. 53). This calls for examining how market logic influences both academic research and its subject matter, creating what some scholars term ‘epistemic inequalities’ that systematically disadvantage certain groups in accessing reliable information and, in fact, viable access to knowledge, such as the current dismantling of diversity, equity and inclusion policies in US higher education and employment.

Platform power and structural transformation

Beyond curated communicative capitalism, analysts examining the structural transformation of how information is produced and accessed have

increasingly highlighted how digital platforms exercise unprecedented control over information flows through algorithmic curation and content moderation policies. For example, unlike traditional broadcasters, modern digital media platforms primarily govern digital infrastructure, and rather than creating content, this governance role gives them immense power over ‘the dynamics of information flow’ (Lorenz–Spreen et al., 2023, p. 75). Consequently, Philipp Lorenz–Spreen and others (2023, pp. 83–84) argue that this ‘structural transformation of the public sphere’ creates conditions where ‘everybody can be a potential author spontaneously producing content’. However, current platforms fail to create information ecosystems that support rational decision–making in politics. The result is an information environment that appears democratic because all are welcome but actually favours those who use economic resources and technical skills to dominate it. In today’s digital information landscape, often marked by a post–truth crisis and fake news, extremist networks compete with grassroots democratic movements. In such an environment, extremist networks have the upper hand in the struggle for control over information generation and dissemination. This suggests that those who gain control of state power often do so with the backing of economic and technological elites. The subsequent increase in public distrust toward government agencies and workers has become a prerequisite for far–right groups to use state power to weaken the ability of government institutions to enforce legal barriers that hold firms accountable for actions that violate workers’ rights. Thus, in many cases, increased public distrust in government institutions enables far–right groups to remove barriers to monopoly. Thus, economic elites who have risen to political power, especially since 2016, have typically

questioned judicial decisions and dismissed data and facts that do not support their views as ‘fake news’, a term that analysts often refer to as ‘post–truth’.

Arguably, the practice of manufacturing ‘truth’ dates back to human encounters with different communities that are distinct from their own. This fact is apparent amid current anxieties about post–truths. For example, recent analysis expands post–truth research into legal epistemology by exploring how post–truth politics weaken the role of legal facts in democratic societies. Studies of countries including the US, Brazil, Hungary and the United Kingdom, by Lorenz–Spreen et al. (2023) and van Waarden (2025), show that legal systems in polarized democracies become more vulnerable to ‘epistemic fragmentation’, where multiple conflicting narratives replace a shared understanding of legal facts and norms. Both Lorenz–Spreen et al. (2023) and van Waarden (2025) highlight the rise of several troubling mechanisms, including judicial politicization, the manipulation of evidence, the delegitimization of expertise and algorithmic media systems that distort public perceptions of legal outcomes. Collectively, these forces are undermining public trust in established legal institutions and challenging the courts’ ability to serve as neutral, evidence–based arbiters. This officially sanctioned and manufactured crisis of fragmented, rather than shared, norms and values often fuel polarization, pitting citizens against each other and supporting elites who promote a perceived universal truth—especially if that ‘truth’ aligns with their economic interests.

Liberal democracy is both reasoned truth and post–truth

Although democracy has never been an uncontested governance system, it may now be in danger

because the debate over how to best maintain power among ruling elites in Western societies remains unresolved. Further, for many less industrialized and postcolonial nations, especially in Africa and much of South Asia, liberal democracy is often just a concept where the masses continue to be oppressed under authoritarian economic and political systems. As I have argued, democracy is at risk because, instead of harnessing the transformative power of popular will to improve the lives of society's most vulnerable, conservatives, liberals and socialists focus on electoral politics as the primary tool for leadership change (Kalu, 2023). Citizens often vote with the belief that a new and transformative leader will solve all societal problems. Since the end of the Cold War, especially across the Global South, people have voted with that expectation, despite acknowledged political, economic and identity differences. However, non-measurable factors such as emotional attachment to place and the desire for a life without fear—a motivation for many voters—are often absent from empirical studies of democracy. This is why recent data showing citizen apathy and decreased civic engagement are seen as reflecting a 'post-truth' era, which I argue is not the case. Based on Western theories of democratic governance and scholarly reliance on empirical measures rather than qualitative improvements in people's lived experiences, we can conclude that, as an idea, democracy is not backsliding but rather progressing slowly across industrialized nations and inching forward in several states in the Global South.

Cultural, normative and epistemological issues

It is likely that if scholars, especially from Western academia, pay closer attention to the root causes

of democratic discontent in non-Western societies, they might still find traces of post-truth in how liberal democracies have failed to serve the masses. For example, Viktor Valgarðsson et al.'s (2025) findings show that trust in government institutions is declining across many Western and non-Western countries. On the other hand, trust in the police and civil service remains steady, making this an important study. However, the research questions, concepts, tools and empirical indicators used to measure and explain democratic practice are mainly designed to analyse citizens' behaviour in Western societies. When designing such studies, these tools may produce different results if the lived experiences of citizens in the Global South—most of whom are wary of police and corruption-ridden civil servants—are taken into account. In Africa, scholars such as Claude Ake have argued that understandings of and research on democracy in Africa should be rooted in African cultural contexts, emphasizing local economic rights, communal values, and social justice (Ake, 1996). Suppose ideas of democracy in African states remain tied to liberal and individualistic assumptions from the Global North. In that case, scholars will continue to misrecognize how democratic legitimacy is established in societies that prioritize collective well-being, communal discussion and the role of local authorities.

Generally, liberal democratic ideology remains appealing, especially to formerly marginalized or colonized groups seeking genuine freedom and liberty. In practice, the idea that all humans are inherently good, that cooperation surpasses conflict, and that coordinating interests through institutions and systems of governance should lead to peace and stability, both at home and abroad, often remains elusive for various groups in both developed and developing countries.

Worldwide, it is evident that democratic theory and practice are at a crossroads, as they balance liberal democracy and free market principles. At this intersection—and on the opposite side of the political liberal spectrum—lie the harmful effects of neoliberal economic policies that weaken the masses' ability to access usable political rights and democratic processes. Further, differences in skills and educational levels do not fully account for these shortcomings. For instance, in countries where citizens have the power to organize and hold leaders accountable through voting, frustration among marginalized groups can stem from job losses and persistent poverty that supposedly ended with industrialization. Therefore, in their quest for political, economic and social stability and meaning, many, especially in industrialized Western societies, are turning back to the 'good old days' when monarchs and autocrats claimed to have the power to ensure economic stability, even if political access and democratic processes were limited.

In *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Thomas Kuhn (1970, p. 2) challenged the prevailing idea in normal science that progress was made through the 'development-by-accumulation' of scientific data and replicated studies. He argued that complacency within the scientific community was disrupted by the discovery of anomalies that could either help resolve existing problems or puzzles or not. Moreover, progress in empirical science can reveal anomalies that are difficult to explain using current paradigms. According to Kuhn, when existing paradigms fail to provide adequate answers, empirical science can undergo a revolution due to progress that, in turn, could prompt a re-examination of research methods, leading to the emergence of new paradigms. Analytically, the anomaly seen in contemporary electoral politics

indicates that people's well-being has not noticeably improved. Therefore, the minor revolt by the masses through ballots in several Western countries, including the US, has led to political repression and violence in Romania, Georgia, Germany, France and elsewhere. Like politics, empirical science exists within a community of specialists whose institutional structures and rules support its processes of governance and social interaction. Political scientists assume that all political behaviour is purposeful and centred around citizens' collective action, regardless of the system of governance. Additionally, political interactions and their outcomes often clarify individual preferences, which are protected by institutional rules and procedures. While most people follow these institutional norms, autocratic-minded political elites can also exploit them to rise to power and weaken democratic practices. In response, many far-right groups in today's politics favour leaders whose statements and policies reflect a return to, or at least an imitation of, the monarchical order of governance or, at worst, a form of democratic—autocratic rule.

Given these factors, the preference for authoritarian leaders in many countries since 2016 is not surprising. After all, humans have mostly lived under authoritarian systems of governance. The belief that some people have the 'divine right' to rule others was widely accepted alongside dogmatic religious beliefs and practices in a world where citizens were still learning about and adapting to their environment. Then and now, people who claimed to possess the ability to solve complex problems—such as diseases, massive unemployment, high inflation and insecurity—were often seen as possessing inexplicable socio-economic and spiritual powers. These perceptions led to the importance of churches,

priests and the belief that living a religious life means being able to speak and hear god's voice and secure a passage to heaven. Consequently, the belief in the divine rights of kings and queens persists among different religious groups across various societies. This belief system provides straightforward explanations for human suffering in everyday life, helping to maintain order and stability in society.

The need for order, stability and the rule of a strong leader was clearly expressed by Thomas Hobbes. Witnessing the brutal execution of King Charles I in 1649, Hobbes (1651/1909) argued that sovereign state power is essential to prevent conflicts over power and maintain stability in his book, *The Leviathan*, possibly a post-truth text. For Hobbes, authority was not personal—it was justified and necessary for the interest of the governed. Additionally, he stated that the state provides stability and order, enabling individuals to pursue their self-interest, which is both inherent in human nature and in the natural world. This is a view shared by contemporary radical conservatives/autocrats such as Vladimir Putin, Viktor Orbán and Donald Trump.

In order to reach a consensus within a political and ideological group, it is the political and economic elites who hold the power, space, voice and authority to deny facts and truths, thereby maintaining control over economic and political decisions in society. Powerful elites aim to alter the progressive, enduring impact of inclusive politics by denying their blind spots. They also seek to fragment groups whose unity can challenge elitist 'truth' claims. In this sense, the 'post-truth era' is accompanied by an implicit nostalgia for a non-existent 'truth era' of democracy. Further, these elites attempt to erase long-standing

struggles for recognition by marginalized groups such as women and racial minorities.

The idea of a 'post-truth era' also fails to recognize that, as a political system, 'democracy has never been solely about truth' (Farkas & Schou, 2023, p. 7). For example, the platform Truth Social is not about truth. It is a political space that serves the vested interests of political and economic elites. As reported by the Financial Post on 1 August 2025, President Trump posted on Truth Social that India's economy was a 'dead economy' (Financial Post, August 1, 2025). The president's post was a reaction to the Indian government's refusal to kowtow to the US on tariff negotiations that essentially aimed to transfer wealth from the politically and economically vulnerable to the wealthy. The concept of a 'dead economy' lacks evidentiary support and therefore could be considered either fake news or a valid assertion. However, who should we believe—a person holding the most powerful office in the world, a journalist, or an academic?

Where do we go from here?

From Hannah Arendt to Johan Farkas, despite significant progress in studying post-truth, current research still faces several limitations. First, even as the resentment orchestrated by elites appears in digital media's echo chambers, most studies remain correlational because they rely on experimental designs that attempt to simulate democratic processes. Second, without multi/interdisciplinary and longitudinal approaches, research on post-truth remains 'highly fragmented' (Lorenz-Spreen et al., 2023, p. 83). It fails to sufficiently integrate factors such as schooling, family, associations, religion, race and economic status. These factors have both short- and long-term effects on individual attitudes and

perceptions towards fake news (van Waarden, 2025). Third, there is a growing acknowledgement that the assumption underlying much of the discourse on post-truth—that democracy previously operated on shared truths—represents ‘a nostalgic myth rather than reality’ (van Waarden, 2025), which is troubling. As I have argued earlier, democracy has always been about contested politics based on resources and power, from enslavement, colonization and decolonization; it has never been about shared values and ideals. Therefore, since democracy has always involved competing worldviews and contested truths, post-truth is more an intensification of—rather than a fundamental shift from—liberal democratic politics. As a result, we should discard the term ‘post-truth’ and call it what it is: a lie. The term ‘post-truth’ encompasses information that lacks verifiable facts or justified opinions, and by creating false equivalencies, it destroys any foundation for contesting facts. This doesn’t mean that there is no hope for democracy as a foundation for inclusive politics based on competing ideas, but as a civilization, we are not there yet.

Research priorities and methodological innovation

Combating the so-called era of post-truth and fake news requires fortifying critical thinking abilities of the masses through both formal schooling and debates among public intellectuals and journalists in public spaces. In academia, there is a vital need for more causal evidence using innovative methods that connect tracking data on news exposure with behavioural data from social media. However, unless efforts are made to embed critical thinking education and knowledge throughout the curriculum—a long-term endeavour—humility will be essential to how scholars

interpret their research findings as a basis for public policy. Additionally, understanding and making sense of sources of fake news, lies and their effects on the body politic requires innovative research designs that will objectively consider digital media influences across ‘multiple and interdependent measures of political behavior’, including family, religion, race, socio-economic status and education, rather than isolated variables (Lorenz-Spreen et al., 2023, p. 85).

Furthermore, paying attention to research that considers how epistemic labour is divided in contemporary societies will enable moving beyond using individuals’ understanding of society to measure how knowledge is distributed among local social networks, institutions and regions. In particular, such shifts in perspective about the extent to which rural areas have access to alternative news and information will aid in comprehensively assessing the impact of digital media consumption on political behaviour. In summary, it is necessary to develop new research that deliberately focuses on epistemic inequalities and their connection to broader social and economic disparities.

Existing scholarships demonstrate that post-truth is a complex phenomenon that cannot be simply reduced to misinformation or irrationality. Instead, post-truth politics results from the convergence of digital media changes, globalization-related uncertainty, declining trust in institutions and the rise of populist movements that exploit long-standing epistemic fragmentation for political gain.

The most important finding is that post-truth is not just a problem of individual false beliefs; rather, it is a systemic challenge to democratic

governance. Digital media platforms, globalization pressures and populist political strategies have worked together to create current information environments that consistently weaken the epistemic foundations essential for democratic deliberation.

However, the good news is that ongoing research on post-truth and fake news also points to potential strategies to address these issues. These include improving judicial independence, incorporating media literacy into civic education, strengthening procedural safeguards against manipulation and promoting international cooperation to fight disinformation campaigns. Instead of focusing only on individual education or fact-checking efforts, approaches that view post-truth as a major structural element of modern democracy and emphasize the need to reform public

institutions to serve everyone are promising places to start. Therefore, it is sensible for scholars to highlight that post-truth is a deliberate lie used for socio-political and economic reasons to distract the public from the elite's failure to solve safety, public health and socio-economic challenges.

Ultimately, current research highlights the importance of interdisciplinary approaches that combine insights from political science, communication studies, epistemology and sociology to understand post-truth. Only through intentional use of such integrated analyses can scholars and practitioners work towards what is possibly 'one of the most important global tasks of the present' (Lorenz-Spreen et al., 2023, p. 85): educating the public to become active advocates for popular sovereignty within democratic politics as the solution to post-truth and fake news.

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**Democracy in the Post-Truth Crisis:
The Role of Global Citizenship Education**

Caught in the scroll: Elevating public health information when falsehoods strike



Diya Banerjee

Head of Social Media and Audio–Visual, World Health Organization (WHO)

Diya Banerjee is Head of Social Media and Audio–Visual at WHO, where she shapes the organization’s digital voice on global health issues. With over two decades of experience across journalism, multilateral organizations and policy communications, she brings a distinctive blend of storytelling and strategic digital advocacy to the public health space. Before joining WHO, she led high–impact campaigns at the International Labour Organization and the United Nations Development Programme, following a career in journalism that covered a wide range of socio–political issues. She has also worked with environmental think tanks and produced an award–winning documentary on medical clowning titled *The Hope Doctors*. She holds master’s degrees from University College London, United Kingdom, and Jamia Millia Islamia, India, and is a Charles Wallace Fellow and Goethe Arts Management grantee. She currently lives in Geneva.

Introduction

In today's world, users do not just read public health information: they scroll, swipe and share it across vast social media landscapes. A typical user can now scroll through nearly 300 feet of content daily, the height of the Statue of Liberty (Robertson et al., 2024, p. 5). The way we interact with the flow of information is shaping and curating our digital environment. Algorithms then analyse our engagement patterns, further churning similar content types and controlling what we see next. Messages that evoke strong emotions are often amplified, gaining traction and visibility as engagement frequently drives the content's reach.

The COVID-19 pandemic created a perfect storm for misinformation and disinformation to spread. First, it sparked fear, uncertainty and concern about the virus. Second, it occurred at a time in our history when people could access, create and share information—including misinformation and disinformation—widely and rapidly on social media, mobile networks and the internet (Abed et al., 2024). This explosion of misinformation during the pandemic underscored the importance of clear and effective science communication. At the World Health Organization (WHO), we prioritized communication through our digital channels.

Our outreach efforts included hosting live Q&A sessions on social media, sharing real-time updates, conducting frequent press conferences, tracking myths, creating myth-buster graphics and more (WHO, 2020; n.d). Throughout the COVID-19 crisis, WHO also partnered with technology firms such as Google and the Wikimedia Foundation, as well as social media platforms such as Meta and TikTok, to ensure that the public could readily access accurate

information. By strategically elevating its digital presence, WHO (n.d.) rapidly disseminated trustworthy updates and timely guidance to vast audiences across the globe. During the COVID-19 pandemic's emergency phase in 2020, WHO's social media following experienced phenomenal growth—Facebook followers increased by almost 647%, X (formerly Twitter) by 74%, Instagram by 287%, LinkedIn by 106%, Snapchat and TikTok by 100% and so on.

Changing media habits and landscape

Social media enables real-time engagement with audiences worldwide. It is vital to incorporate social media awareness and skills into communication strategies, while emphasizing qualities such as relatability, humility, warmth and empathy when communicating during a crisis.

As harmful health misinformation proliferates, acting rapidly has become crucial in countering falsehoods. Further, with the rising trend of synthetic media and social media platforms shifting away from quality control and content moderation, the onus of fact-checking is increasingly falling on users.

Platforms have introduced features like Community Notes on X, Meta and TikTok, making them primary vetting tools coming with both advantages and disadvantages. High-quality community notes still need to rely on professional fact-checkers; in their absence, the notes are inconsistent and insufficient to help set the record straight (Borenstein et al., 2025).

Moreover, there has also been a seismic shift in news and content consumption patterns. In the 2025 edition of the *Digital News Report* (Newman, 2025), it is worth noting that legacy media no

longer holds the turf when it comes to retaining a captive audience. News consumption habits of users today include subscribing to podcasters, creators and TikTokers who are gaining popularity with their commentary and storytelling.

The *Global Social Media Statistics* report claims that ‘the world spends 14½ billion hours consuming content on social platforms each day, which is the equivalent of close to 1.7 million years of human existence’ (DataReportal, 2025).

Institutions must move beyond viewing social media as merely a space for casual entertainment and instead recognize its increasing influence and impact. They must actively integrate it as a core element of their communications strategy. Moreover, institutions must invest in the right skill sets and resources that help with analysing algorithmic data, staying on top of trends and tailoring and producing content that meets the audience’s expectations. Furthermore, investing in digital fluency is essential to reach—and remain relevant to—audiences who instinctively turn to a diverse array of sources for health content, including creators, commentators, wellness advocates, journalists and beyond.

The COVID-19 crisis also provided valuable learnings into the complexity of our information landscape and the expectations of audiences. During this time, WHO’s social media efforts played a key role in delivering trusted scientific information that was not only timely and accurate but also tailored to the unique dynamics of each platform. The content was designed to be informative and user-friendly, helping the public find clarity, value and connection. A small team at WHO, comprising digital officers and emergency and risk communication experts, worked tirelessly

with our scientists to keep the channels updated with evolving information about this unknown pathogen. Going a step further, scientists also took on the role of expert broadcasters and spokespeople to relay information and counter the infodemic.

Social listening tools became instrumental in tracking the spread and patterns of both misinformation (inaccurate information) and disinformation (deliberate falsehoods). These tools, although more commonly used by the private sector for marketing insights, can also support public health intelligence gathering. For frontline communicators, they enable a granular understanding of digital conversation bubbles and information flows. Additionally, when social listening is combined with offline intelligence gathering tactics such as conducting surveys, participatory community discussions and data collected from crisis hotlines, our awareness of the landscape is further sharpened. Both online and offline strategies empower organizations to respond effectively to public health challenges (White et al., 2024a).

Public health institutions, such as WHO, are rigorously implementing social listening and media monitoring strategies to understand the volume and underlying drivers of narratives circulating in communities. These insights often inform our strategies for addressing widespread misinformation, filling information gaps and guiding the overall infodemic response (White et al., 2024b).

Monitoring also helps in pursuing targeted outreach, crafting localized messages, selecting the most effective channels and optimizing the timing and frequency of messages for maximum impact (White et al., 2024c).

Influencing your feeds: Expert versus a savvy content creator

Social media is now increasingly driven by the attention economy. Competing voices and clickbait storylines often determine the virality of a particular content. Nuance, accuracy and rigour are often neglected as they do not fit the current algorithmic model.

'An individual's health literacy is defined as the ability to find, understand, appraise, and use information and services to make health-related decisions [that] correlates (sic) with health outcomes' (Chidambaram et al., 2024). The fourth annual *Edelman Trust Barometer Special Report: Trust and Health* highlights how the diverse voices on health circulating online have reshaped public understanding (Edelman, 2025). Alongside doctors, even friends and family are now seen as trusted sources of health information. The report highlights that legitimacy in health care today extends beyond academic training and credentials—people also value personal experiences and helpful prior advice. In the survey, those in age between 18 and 34 the younger generation, who are more susceptible to being influenced by those without medical credentials, say that they have regretted health decisions made based on misinformation.

Our information environment, thus, presents some key challenges:

- Information overload: Excessive information on digital channels can compromise the judgement of online audiences when it comes to deciphering which health information is credible and which is not.
- Algorithmic bias: Social media algorithms often favour engagement (likes, shares and comments).

This incentivizes the spread of sensational content over carefully vetted information.

- Complex and poor information environment: Online spaces are increasingly getting cluttered with low-quality information.

There is a need for a more intentional and transparent algorithmic design—one that can cater to individual needs while also curbing the spread of misinformation across political, social and health domains (Rodrigues et al., 2024). Divisive behaviours and rising polarization, coupled with weak technological guardrails, have caused certain networks to become hotbeds for mis- and disinformation. This has also led to users being clustered into echo chambers, resulting in limited dialogue and a narrowing of perspectives on complex issues. Algorithms tend to exacerbate this divide. By serving personalized content—that is, more of what the person already sees—they reinforce confirmation bias and create silos around shared narratives.

However, all is not lost. Scientists are still valued on the trust scale. A survey conducted in 68 countries between November 2022 and August 2023, found that 75% of respondents trust scientific methods as the best way to determine truth. It also revealed a moderate correlation between trust in scientific methods and trust in scientists themselves. The survey emphasized that most people generally trust scientists except in instances when they feel their values and sentiments are not taken into consideration (Cologna et al., 2025). It also recommended that scientists engage more with society, communicate with the public about science and be involved in policymaking.

The adverse consequence of increasing polarization is that the public, seeking clarity in a crisis, tends to

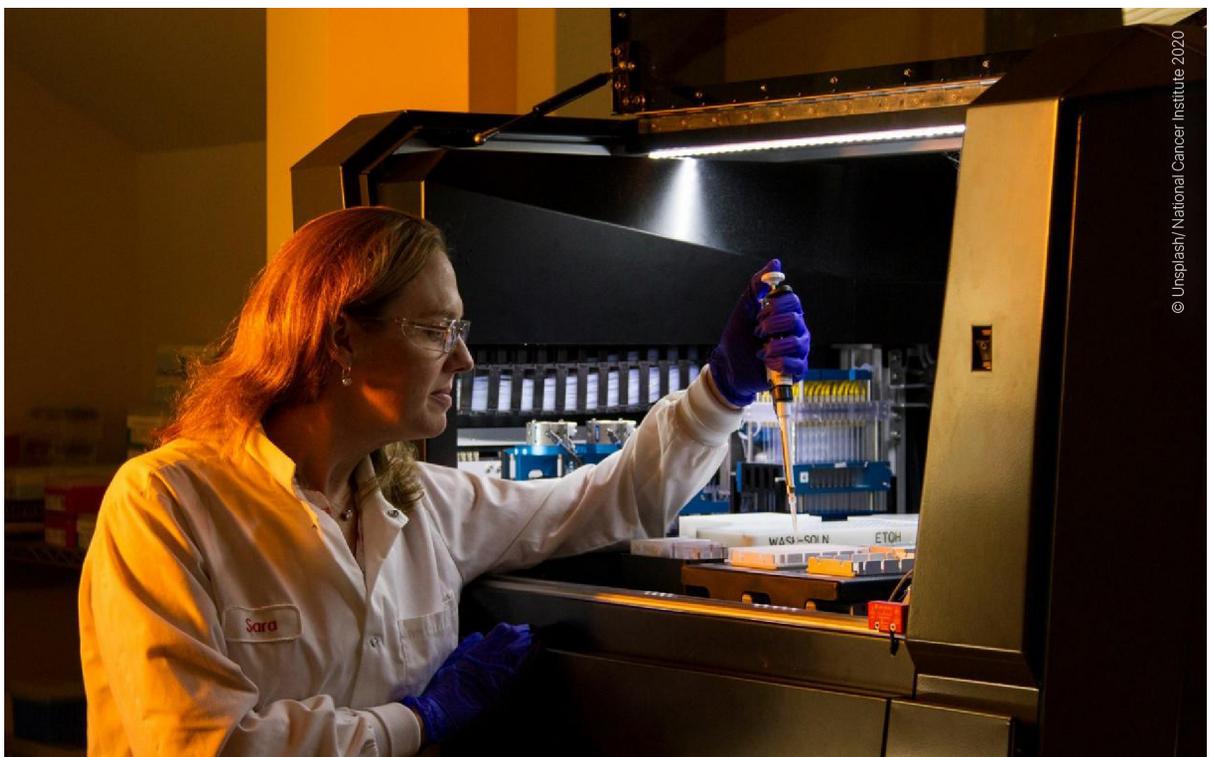
lean towards the belief that there are alternative narratives (Larson & Bersoff, 2025). It is in this vacuum that profit-driven lobbies and unreliable voices thrive, offering unscientific and harmful health advice.

Faced with politicization and polarization of our feeds, science communication requires a reckoning. Done sincerely, this can bring radical clarity while emphasizing that science is continuously evolving. At every point during a crisis, openly communicating with the public about what information is known and unknown—while creating space for thoughtful and nuanced discussion—is vital. Additionally, science and health communication strategies should be grounded in the local context and circumstances so that they resonate with the community (Vosoughi et al., 2018).

The age-old call to action to ‘follow the science’ is now seen to have an alienating rather than

empowering effect (Carroll, 2025). It suggests that those who nurture scepticism or hold alternative views are unscientific and, on the periphery, and therefore ‘wrong’. This presents another barrier for science communicators—to bring science out of its ivory tower and make it accessible to everyone, such as a friend, a family member, a cousin or a local shop owner, in ways that feel clear and comprehensible. Also, by asserting scientific uncertainty as certainty, we risk damaging public trust. ‘Communicating science as rigid, top-down rules rather than nuanced guidance sows confusion and skepticism’ (Carroll, 2025).

To bring science into the public square, scientists must switch gears to become communicators. This also involves participating actively in online discourse. However, such participation comes with risks like attacks, threats, doxing and even hate speech.



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Not every scientist is trained to navigate toxic online environments or to see value in digital debates, which often fall outside their core research goals. However, building confidence in online communication is becoming increasingly important in today's post-truth era.

Social media platforms also need to step up and ensure safe online spaces by curbing threats, including suspending accounts of offenders. When platforms fail to check these serious transgressions and trust and safety are compromised, self-censorship is a probable outcome. We witnessed this when Elon Musk took over Twitter and rebranded it as X. In the process, many features to protect users were systematically dismantled. Verified check marks became a revenue model, fake accounts began to emerge, X stopped showing media headlines for links posted on the site (Taylor, 2023) and right-wing influencers started to dominate the space. Moreover, the platform experienced a rise in unfiltered ads/promotional content, spam and poor-quality information (Spring, 2024). In early 2025, many scientists began abandoning X for BlueSky after experiencing constant attacks, trolling and conspiracy theories (Vainilavičius, 2025). Responding to growing requests from journalists to establish a presence on competing platforms such as X, WHO officially joined BlueSky in November 2024.

The evolution of science communication demands more than passive dissemination; today, it calls for strategically engaging with voices that are trusted by the audiences we need to reach.

WHO's social media team collaborates with medical influencers and other online allies to translate our fact sheets, guidelines and advocacy into dynamic and accessible messages, bringing clarity directly into cluttered digital spaces. Nowadays, audiences

rarely seek out slow, deliberate research or rigorous web browsing for answers. Instead, social channels are essential to their information diets, shaping discourse and ideas in real time.

However, this ease of information access comes at a price. Social media is also thronged with opportunistic actors who peddle misinformation and profit from selling miracle cures or wellness trends, often amassing loyal followings through the algorithm-driven visibility.

The contest over scientific truth—that is, whose science is 'legitimate'—now unfolds as a battle for attention in the digital arena that is saturated with trending audio, memes and remixes. Communicators must not only adapt to new-age formats but also assertively defend rigour and reliability, ensuring that well-founded, evidence-based information stands out in the feed and stops the endless scroll.

Let's take the example of the tobacco industry. The industry's classic deceptive tactics are rooted in savvy marketing. It recruits celebrities, digital marketers, influencers, health professionals, private foundations, think tanks, activists, trade associations and lobbyists to promote their agenda, creating doubt about the harms of their products while amplifying narratives that support their business interests (WHO, 2025a; 2025b). E-cigarettes—often packaged as trendy and appealing alternatives to traditional cigarettes—are aggressively marketed, and their health risks are underplayed.

However, these tactics can also be used for the greater good. WHO is experimenting with influencer marketing and mobilizing credible and trusted voices to counter health misinformation and raise awareness about the dangers of e-cigarettes.

Recently, WHO launched an anti-vaping campaign, partnering with medical influencers and community advocates to reach millions through its social channels. The campaign underlined the serious health consequences of vaping and addressed the widespread misconception among young people that e-cigarettes are harmless and non-addictive.

Empowering digital information users: Media literacy

The responsibility of institutions to equip audiences with media literacy is another step forward. To build effective defences against online manipulative tactics, it is important to understand five standard techniques:

- (i) using emotionally manipulative rhetoric to evoke outrage, anger, or other strong emotions,
- (ii) the use of incoherent or mutually exclusive arguments,
- (iii) presenting false dichotomies or dilemmas,
- (iv) scapegoating individuals or groups, and
- (v) engaging in ad hominem attacks (Roozenbeek et al., 2022, p. 2)

Attraction to high-arousal negative information is likely rooted in deep evolutionary origins, as paying attention to threatening information is a survival technique (Rathje & Van Bavel, 2025). Pre-bunking techniques enable better coping mechanisms to misinformation than constantly debunking or fact-checking. Building psychological defences to poor information has been shown to have a greater impact in terms of discerning between fact and fiction. This approach is usually grounded in 'inoculation theory'. This theory has two vital components. First, issuing a forewarning to alert consumers about an impending attack on their attitudes, and second, exposing them to a weakened dose of misinformation that contains a pre-emptive refutation (or pre-bunk) of the

anticipated misleading arguments or persuasion techniques (Roozenbeek et al., 2022, p. 1).

In 2020, the United Nations launched the #PledgeToPause campaign to combat the overflow of misinformation during the pandemic (UN News, 2020). This campaign tested specific inoculation theory tactics, one of which was influencing users to reflect/pause before sharing posts (Share Verified, n.d.). The campaign utilized micro-influencers and local community leaders to spread the message of verifying information before sharing it, checking sources and constantly referring to credible health information sites.

Another lesson from the COVID-19 pandemic was that debunking techniques can be effective during moments when misinformation is rampant in a particular context. However, in the long term, it has limitations in changing strongly held beliefs. This means that public health institutions must go beyond fact-checking regularly and truly connect with the communities they serve. Ignoring the concerns of those experiencing genuine fear, worry or hesitancy is ineffective and can prove detrimental. Instead, outreach efforts are most impactful when they acknowledge and respect lived experiences, invite dialogue and build connection and trust.

Working with communities and those with lived experiences was key to the success of our mpox (formerly known as monkeypox) outbreak risk communication in 2022. In May 2022, WHO witnessed the start of an mpox outbreak in twelve countries that were not endemic to the mpox virus. The outbreak in many regions mainly affected some communities of gay, bisexual and other men who have sex with men. By mid-May 2022, the situation had evolved rapidly, and on 23 July 2022,

it was declared a public health emergency of international concern (WHO, 2022a; 2022b; 2022c). While six regions reported cases, most were found in Europe and the United Kingdom. WHO curated the campaign by listening to the affected communities, ensuring that the information was timely, transparent and clear, community- and country- specific, coherent and authentic. We created social media products that our offices across the globe could use for concerted outreach and amplification, including combating any form of misinformation (WHO African Region, 2022).

WHO's social media content also experiments with humour and satire as powerful narrative tools to cultivate a sense of enhanced understanding of complex health topics/advocacy messages. In January 2025, the *Plot Twist* series was launched: short-format vertical videos that use Gen Z vernacular to debunk common conspiracy theories targeting WHO and various health issues (WHO, 2025a). Although the series initially focused on debunking, it is now evolving to offer educational content that utilizes pre-bunking tactics and empowers viewers to recognize mis- and disinformation.

WHO's communications department has also formed an informal health integrity alliance of practitioners, academia, civil society actors and media persons to share best practices and approaches to tackling common pain points around mis- and disinformation.

Conclusion

Effective communication in this post-truth era demands a dynamic, ever-evolving toolkit. Strategies that once succeed may lose their potency as platforms and audiences' needs evolve, media ownership takes new forms, and competing agendas seep into people's information environ-

ments. Moreover, schools, universities, civil society, local leaders, NGOs and allied organizations all have a stake in advancing critical thinking and digital fluency. A cross-sectoral, multipronged approach to cleaning our complex digital environment is imperative.

Governance of technology is fundamental to restoring trust and safety online. Media companies powered by rapid corporate gains must be held accountable when their algorithms negatively distort user judgement and spread harmful or untrue information. Stricter content removal, labelling, addressing complaints and maintaining data transparency, integrity and quality are just a few ways in which our digital world can be better protected and prioritized. In fact, platforms can also collaborate to develop online safety skills to empower users, particularly vulnerable and marginalized groups (UNESCO, 2023). We saw this collaboration during the COVID-19 pandemic, when platforms such as Google, Meta and TikTok actively worked with WHO to curb online misinformation, ensuring populations stayed safe and well-informed.

Independent regulators and international organizations also serve as strong partners in ensuring that our digital ecosystems remain positive, progressive and grounded in the values of free speech, empowering users and promoting human rights and social cohesion.

Public health thrives not just in clinics and communities, but also in our digital spaces. When these spaces are compromised, it triggers a chain reaction: misinformation spreads, scientific progress is misunderstood, and trust in institutions mandated to protect and serve people begins to erode gradually. We must join forces to push back against this tide, championing science, solutions and solidarity.

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**Democracy in the Post-Truth Crisis:
The Role of Global Citizenship Education**

02

PART

Global citizenship education responses to the post-truth crisis

Section 1

Youth-led actions for strengthening democratic literacy

Nominmaa Ulziibat

David Akwara

Hyunjoong Kim

Salma Noorfitria Ningrum

Tanya Wendt Samu

Why listening might be the most radical thing we do



Nominmaa Ulziibat

Founder and Lead, Check Check Project

Nominmaa Ulziibat is a social entrepreneur and passionate global activist dedicated to bridging the skills gap between privileged and underprivileged youth through transformative global citizenship education (GCED). Since 2019, her work has reached over 80,000 young people, delivering innovative programmes in media literacy and personal development to prepare them for the demands of Society 5.0. Her efforts have earned national and international recognition. As an UNLEASH Talent, she presented a scalable solution for equipping African youth with essential GCED skills to high-level stakeholders and global partners. She continues to champion inclusive, future-ready education that enables young people to secure meaningful work and become active, responsible global citizens.

Introduction

Globally, misinformation has become an urgent threat to democracy and social trust. According to the World Economic Forum (2018), misinformation ranks among the top global risks in terms of likelihood and impact. In developing countries, including Mongolia, this challenge is compounded by limited access to reliable information sources and inadequate media and information literacy (MIL) education. The stakes are particularly high for youth, who consume news primarily through social media, often without the tools to assess content critically (Pew Research Center, 2022). Against this backdrop, listening as a practice of understanding, empathy and co-creation takes on radical significance.

From silenced dreams to collective voices

At ten years old, society dismissed my dreams of becoming more than what was prescribed to me. The cultural script for girls in my community emphasized domestic roles over professional or intellectual ambitions. However, when I began listening to my peers, I realized that I was not alone—other girls felt equally constrained. What began as a small circle of mutual support, called *Super Girls*, quickly expanded from five members to forty. In one month, our collective grades improved dramatically, and the class with the lowest expectations from teachers became the top-performing class in the school.

After forming *Super Girls*, our afternoons often stretched into informal gatherings after class. We worked side by side on homework, exchanged knowledge and encouraged one another in our studies. Just as important, we created space to speak openly about our struggles—sharing advice, laughter and empathy. Over time, these gatherings went beyond academic collaboration;

they became safe spaces where listening was mutual, every voice was valued and hope was continually renewed.

This experience highlighted the transformative power of dialogue and mutual recognition. As Paolo Freire (1970) argued in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, dialogue enables liberation by creating spaces where silenced voices can be heard and validated. Our small group confirmed that systemic change begins with attentive listening, not top-down instruction.

The case of *Super Girls* also echoes Albert Bandura's (1997) social learning theory: by observing peers who dared to resist prescribed roles, members found the courage to reimagine their own futures. Listening was not only an act of empathy but also a catalyst for collective agency.

Listening as a development tool

That early experience with *Super Girls* lit a fire in me that has never faded. Over the past eight years, I have devoted my work to unlocking the potential of marginalized young people by helping them build the critical skills, confidence and connections needed to dismantle the barriers that hold them back. Repeatedly, I came to realize that the most powerful resource available to us was not technology, money, or even policies—it was dialogue. Dialogue is a mindset that shapes how we approach others. Dialogue is a method that allows us to co-create solutions. Dialogue is a way of truly seeing one another in our full humanity.

Through this journey, I learned that dialogue is not an accessory to development work. When young people are invited to speak and are genuinely listened to, they begin to recognize their own worth and capabilities. In turn, this recognition

Figure 1. Social initiatives empowering marginalized youth through dialogue

Unlocking the potential of marginalized young people to break down barriers.



40,000 NUMBER OF INFLUENCED PEOPLE

Note. Image from the author’s presentation, “Why listening might be the most radical thing we do”, presented at the 10th International Conference on Global Citizenship Education (Ulziibat, 2025).

fosters their resilience, agency and the courage to dream beyond imposed limitations. Scholars have observed that in community development, listening is not passive reception but active co-construction (Brownell, 2012; Gearhart & Bodie, 2011). My experience confirms this: real transformation begins not when we instruct youth, but when we listen to them and invite them to shape the path forward.

Listening also strengthens equity-centered approaches. Equity differs from equality in that it recognizes unequal starting points and provides tailored support to bridge those gaps. By listening deeply, practitioners can uncover hidden barriers—whether technological, cultural or psychological—that prevent participation and engagement.

Confronting misinformation through listening

Misinformation is one of the most pressing global challenges today. In Mongolia, as in many countries, youth—particularly those from rural and marginalized backgrounds—are disproportionately vulnerable. Limited access to credible information and inadequate digital literacy amplify their exposure to manipulation. To design meaningful interventions, my team and I first listened to

young Mongolians. Through a survey of nearly 1,000 young people across different regions of Mongolia, we found that:

- Many admitted they could not tell real news from fake news.
- A significant number reported having no access to educational resources that might help them develop critical skills.
- Others described feeling excluded altogether from the digital era, watching opportunities pass them by.

Hearing these voices was both inspiring and overwhelming. Every account carried weight, yet each revealed distinct needs, challenges and aspirations. Some young people urgently wanted practical skills for verifying information online, while others longed for access to even the most basic digital tools. Taken together, the stories painted a vivid picture of inequality in the digital landscape: that it is not simply a gap in knowledge, but a gap in opportunity, access and representation.

This diversity of need raised difficult questions: Whose voice should come first? How should we prioritize limited resources without silencing others? Moreover, how could we avoid designing programmes that serve only the most visible or privileged groups, leaving the most marginalized even further behind? These questions reminded me that responding to misinformation is not only about skills or content: it is about justice.

The principle that guided me was equity. Unlike equality, which treats everyone the same, equity begins with the recognition that people start from different positions. An urban student with a smartphone and high-speed internet does not face the same barriers as a rural student who studies

by candlelight with limited connectivity. A young person fluent in English has different opportunities than one who has never had access to multilingual resources. Treating these young people ‘equally’ by giving them identical materials would, in fact, deepen the divide. Equity demands that we listen to where each young person is starting from and design solutions that meet them there.

In practice, this meant crafting layered interventions: accessible entry points for those entirely new to MIL, deeper skill-building for those ready to advance and leadership opportunities for those positioned to guide others. It meant rethinking success not in terms of achieving the largest targets quickly, but in ensuring that no group was left out simply because their needs were more complex or less visible.

Equity in practice: The Check Check Project

The insights gained from listening to young people became the foundation for designing a youth-led initiative we later called *Check Check*. The name itself reflects both the process of verifying information and the spirit of peer-to-peer accountability. It was built not as a top-down programme, but as a collaborative movement shaped by young people, for young people. Its guiding principle was equity: ensuring that every participant—regardless of geography, background or resources—had access to meaningful opportunities to strengthen their MIL.

Media and information literacy manual

The first milestone of the project was the creation of Mongolia’s first youth-friendly digital manual on MIL and GCED. Prior to its release, existing resources consisted primarily of translations of lengthy international reports, such as those produced by UNESCO and Deutsche Welle, often

exceeding 200 pages of dense theory and technical language. These materials, while valuable, were inaccessible to many young people who struggled to apply them to daily life.

Figure 2. Check Check Project’s manual on media literacy and global citizenship education



Note. Images from “Check Check Project: Mobilizing Mongolian Youth” (Check Check Project, 2021, p. 20)

To close this gap, my team conducted market research to understand the unique needs of Mongolian youth. The findings were clear: they wanted a practical, personalized guide that offered actionable advice rather than abstract theory. As university students with little professional experience, we initially felt unprepared to create such a resource. Nevertheless, this lack of a rigid academic background turned out to be an asset—it allowed us to think creatively, work flexibly and design content directly informed by the realities of young people’s lives. This resulted in the *Manual on Media Literacy and Global Citizenship Education* (Check Check Project, 2021). While we did consult experts for guidance, the manual was ultimately shaped by the voices of youth themselves.

Its reception confirmed our approach: the manual’s accessible style and innovative design were widely celebrated, and more than 3,000

individuals have since read it and now actively use it to navigate social media safely. For many, it marked their first encounter with MIL and GCED in a form they could immediately understand and apply.

Youth ambassadors programme

Recognizing that sustainable impact required more than individual knowledge, we launched a training-of-trainers model. Twenty-five young leaders from all twenty-one provinces of Mongolia were selected to participate in a national programme that combined skill-building, dialogue and mentorship.

Over the course of a month, participants underwent intensive training that included Asia-Pacific Centre of Education for International Understanding’s (APCEIU) online GCED course, expert-led sessions and peer-to-peer dialogue. The programme emphasized not only individual capacity-building but also collective responsibility. Ambassadors returned to their home communities equipped with the skills and confidence to share what they had learned. Through their local initiatives, they reached more than 1,000 individuals, extending the project’s impact far beyond the initial cohort (Check Check Project, 2023b).

Figure 3. Youth Ambassadors Programme



CHECK CHECK PROJECT Sponsored by APCEIU

Note. Check Check Project’s website (n.d.).

Check Check Youth Club

Recognizing the importance of sustained engagement, we established the *Check Check Youth Club* during the project’s expansion. This club became a platform for young people interested in spearheading media literacy and GCED initiatives. Beginning with twenty committed members, it provided ongoing opportunities for skill development, collaboration and leadership. Today, the club continues to expand, welcoming new members who are passionate about promoting media literacy not only in Mongolia but globally. Currently, there are five active members. Its existence reflects the project’s commitment to sustainability and long-term youth leadership.

Comic book

Another innovative component was the creation of

Figure 4. Sample pages from the comic book in Korean, English and Mongolian



Note. “Check Check (comic)” (Check Check Project, 2023a)

a four-chapter comic book available in Mongolian, English and Korean. While the manual offered depth, the comic book was designed for accessibility and fun, particularly for younger audiences. It portrayed everyday scenarios in which misinformation could influence decisions, illustrating the importance of critical thinking in the digital era.

By using relatable characters and storytelling, the comic book demystified MIL, resonating with youth. Over 10,000 people used it, and to our surprise, it quickly became a favourite not only as a literacy tool but also as a resource for practising foreign languages—students began reading it in Mongolian, English and Korean. This reinforced the idea that learning can be most potent when it is playful, participatory and rooted in lived realities.

Digital platform and website

To connect Mongolian youth with global perspectives, the project also launched a website featuring stories and insights from international leaders working in media literacy and GCED. The platform not only served as an archive of knowledge but also as inspiration for young people considering their own community initiatives. As of 2025, the site has reached over 2,000 users, creating a digital bridge between local action and global movements.

Impact and recognition

Taken together, the components of *Check Check* have directly and indirectly reached approximately 60,000 individuals. This widespread reach has not only increased awareness of MIL and GCED but also empowered youth to apply this knowledge in their daily lives.

The ripples of *Check Check* extended far beyond the initial participants. For instance, one ambassador

initiated a project to donate computers to rural schools, but these were not just empty devices. Each computer was pre-loaded with our *Media and Information Manual*, ensuring that students could immediately access practical resources for learning and critical engagement. Today, more than a hundred rural students are actively using these manuals on their own devices, gaining the skills to navigate the digital world with confidence.

Table 1. Components of the Check Check Project

Component	Reach	Key outcomes
Manual	3,000 readers	First Mongolian youth-friendly resource; practical & innovative
Youth Ambassadors Programme	25 ambassadors; 1,000+ reached	Expanded GCED & MIL through peer-led initiatives
Comic book	10,000+ distributed	Available in 3 languages; fun, relatable, widely adopted
Youth Club	20 initial members, growing	Sustained youth leadership & long-term engagement
Website	2,000+ visitors	Connected local action with global stories & networks

Beyond numbers, the qualitative impact has been profound. Participants have grown into confident leaders who listen attentively, collaborate effectively and take initiative in their communities. Rural youth, previously excluded from information access, have emerged as trainers and mentors, demonstrating that empowerment spreads when young people are given tools, opportunities and trust.

The project has also cultivated a culture of dialogue and agency. Youth are beginning to see themselves not merely as consumers of information, but as

creators of knowledge and drivers of solutions. By fostering spaces for active listening, co-creation and peer support, *Check Check* has instilled confidence, critical thinking and leadership skills that extend far beyond the programme.

Finally, the initiative has received international recognition as a ‘Best Practice’ by APCEIU, validating its innovative approach and impact. This acknowledgement highlights the project’s success in combining equity, youth leadership and practical solutions to address misinformation and promote GCED.

Figure 5. Cover page of EIU Best Practices No. 63



Note. APCEIU (2023)

In essence, *Check Check* demonstrated that listening, empowerment and youth-driven design can transform not only knowledge levels but

also self-perception, agency and community engagement. The project has created a new generation of informed, proactive and socially responsible young leaders who continue to influence their communities positively.

Comparative perspectives

Similar youth media literacy initiatives exist worldwide, offering valuable insights and lessons for Mongolia. In Finland, where media literacy is systematically integrated into the national curriculum, students are trained from early childhood to critically evaluate sources, understand bias and practise responsible information consumption (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2019). This institutional approach ensures that media literacy becomes a foundational skill rather than an optional competency.

In contrast, Mongolia lacks such formalized structures, highlighting the importance of grassroots initiatives such as *Check Check*. By listening to young people and tailoring interventions to their needs, the project fills a critical gap, providing access to practical skills and fostering leadership in the post-truth era.

Similarly, in the Philippines, student-led fact-checking groups such as FactRakers, which journalism students run at the University of the Philippines, demonstrate the effectiveness of peer-to-peer learning in addressing misinformation (FactRakers, n.d.). These initiatives show that empowering youth to take an active role guided by their lived experiences strengthens engagement and sustainability.

Comparative perspectives underscore a universal principle: while institutional support and cultural context vary, the practice of listening to local

realities is fundamental to designing effective MIL programmes that genuinely resonate with young people.

Lessons learned

The implementation of the *Check Check* project has yielded a series of practical and conceptual lessons for youth empowerment, MIL and GCED. First and foremost, listening is not merely a preliminary step but continuous practice. Engaging with youth, understanding their lived realities and incorporating their perspectives into every project component—from manuals to comic books to leadership programmes—was essential for designing interventions that addressed real barriers, such as limited digital access, language diversity and feelings of exclusion.

Second, equity-centred approaches are crucial. Treating all youth ‘equally’ often risks reinforcing existing disparities. Rural students, for instance, face infrastructural and resource constraints absent in urban contexts. By listening to individual circumstances, we designed layered interventions: entry-level materials for beginners, advanced manuals for those ready to deepen skills and leadership programmes for youth positioned to influence peers. This ensured that no group was left behind.

Third, peer-to-peer engagement amplifies impact. Programmes such as the Youth Ambassador Programme and the Youth Club created opportunities for youth to learn from and motivate one another. Observing peers overcome challenges and achieve goals inspired confidence and cultivated a sense of collective agency.

Fourth, creativity in resource design enhances accessibility. Innovative tools, such as comic

books, multilingual manuals and interactive digital resources, made complex topics such as media literacy and global citizenship approachable and engaging. Learning became participatory, enjoyable and effective.

Finally, the project revealed the transformative power of empowerment beyond skill acquisition. Participants evolved into confident leaders, mentors and advocates, reshaping how they saw themselves and their communities. Rural youth who had previously felt invisible became trainers; participants embraced responsibility for their peers; dialogue became embedded as a core cultural practice. These lessons demonstrate that co-created, equity-focused interventions can foster both knowledge and agency.

Implications for policy and practice

The success of *Check Check* offers several implications for policy and practice in Mongolia and beyond:

1. Integrate MIL and GCED into formal curricula: The Finnish model demonstrates the benefits of early, systematic media literacy education. Policymakers in Mongolia can develop national curricula that embed MIL and GCED at multiple educational levels, ensuring foundational competencies for all students.
2. Support youth-led initiatives: Programmes designed and led by the youth themselves yield stronger engagement and sustainability. Encouraging youth participation in the design, delivery and evaluation of educational interventions ensures relevance and accountability.
3. Prioritize equity in programme design: Educational policies must recognize diverse starting points and provide tailored resour-

ces for marginalized or under-resourced communities. Equity-focused funding, mentorship programmes and infrastructure support can bridge digital and knowledge divides.

4. Foster multi-model learning tools: Creative, accessible resources—comic books, manuals, digital platforms can complement traditional pedagogy, especially in contexts where literacy, language or technological challenges exist.

By adopting these strategies, policymakers and practitioners can ensure that interventions are not only informative but also empowering, participatory and sustainable.

Conclusion: An invitation to listen

Listening is both radical and transformative. Through the journey from *Super Girls* to *Check Check*, it became clear that meaningful change begins with attentiveness: listening deeply to the experiences, needs and aspirations of young people. The *Check Check* project demonstrated that dialogue, co-creation and equity-focused

interventions can produce measurable impact: enhancing MIL, empowering youth and cultivating leadership across Mongolia.

Participants evolved from passive consumers of information into confident creators of knowledge and drivers of social change. The project's ripple effects—donated computers, trained ambassadors, engaged rural youth and multilingual resources—illustrate how youth-led initiatives rooted in listening and equity can transform individual lives and communities.

Comparative perspectives reinforce that while resources, policies and contexts vary, the universal foundation for success is listening. When young people are heard, empowered and trusted, they become agents of knowledge, empowerment and sustainable change. In an era of misinformation, inequity and digital complexity, listening is not passive—it is radical, necessary and transformative. To truly bridge divides, we must listen not to reply, but to understand.

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Stories anchored by facts: Youth dialogue in the post-truth era



David Akwara

Creative Director, The Rise Collective / David Akwara Films

David Akwara is a Global storyteller and award-winning filmmaker recognized worldwide for his impactful work, which blends creativity, culture and social change. His films explore themes such as economic development, cultural preservation and education, often highlighting underrepresented narratives. His acclaimed documentary series, *The Rise: A Journey to Africa's Financial Independence* (Released date: March 2022), examines the transformative potential of the African Single Market under the African Continental Free Trade Area Agreement. Beyond filmmaking, he contributes to global discourse as a panel speaker, offering insights on the economy, education, arts and culture, and youth inclusion. He has spoken at major international forums, including the 2023 United Nations Economic and Social Council's Youth Forum in New York (2023), the United Nations Human Rights Africa Regional Seminar (2022), the inaugural African Continental Free Trade Area Youth Symposium (2023), the African Peer Review Mechanism's third Youth Symposium (2022), and summits such as the African Change-makers Leadership Summit (2021), Women Lead Forum across Africa (2022, 2023, 2024), the Envision Democracy Summit in Zambia (2021), the 2024 African Philanthropy Assembly and UNESCO's Talking Across Generations on Education dialogue series (2024).

My story

Have you met a child who struggles to understand how to listen? That was me!

I was born in a small community called Kolokolo in Delta, Nigeria. Where I grew up, we did not settle disputes through dialogue. We did not sit down to truly understand one another. Instead, we practised what I call ‘listening to respond’. We carried this impatience into our relationships, workplaces and communities—and with impatience came divisiveness.

For years, I operated with this mindset without being aware of it or reflecting on it. However, as I travelled beyond Kolokolo, I began to unlearn many things. I discovered that dialogue is not only about speaking my truth but also about making

space for someone else’s truth. This revelation changed my life and my work.

Today, we live in what many call the ‘post-truth’ era, an age where misinformation spreads faster than verified facts—where emotion often outweighs evidence. The challenge of our times lies not just in addressing the spread of lies, but also the erosion of trust. If dialogue is to heal divides, it must be anchored in facts. And if facts are to inspire action, they must be told through stories.

Facts must lead the story: that youth are the antidote to misinformation, and that the future of democracy will be authored in both digital and community spaces. Drawing on my personal journey of filmmaking practice and youth-centred

Figure 1. My childhood community, Kolokolo, Delta, Nigeria, April 2025



Note. Photo owned by the author (personal collection, 2025)

advocacy, in this account, I explore how storytelling, dialogue and media literacy can help bridge the post-truth divide.

My turning point

The first turning point in my journey occurred when I left Kolokolo and began to interact with communities beyond my own. I realized how much I had to relearn—and unlearn. The practice of listening with empathy was transformative.

Figure 2. Meeting IMAHKÜS Nzingah Okofu (Mama One Africa) in Rwanda as a filmmaker, October 2022



Note. Photo owned by the author (personal collection, 2022)

I began to see that impatience breeds division, while dialogue cultivates understanding. This was not merely a personal revelation. It became the foundation of my professional work as a filmmaker

and youth dialogue advocate. I began to ask: how do we use dialogue not only to bridge divides but to counter the growing tide of misinformation and mistrust?

The power of storytelling anchored in facts

As a filmmaker, I know that it is not just facts that move people—it is stories. However, in the post-truth era, stories untethered from facts can mislead, divide and harm. The solution is not to abandon storytelling, but to anchor it in verifiable evidence.

Figure 3. Filming the documentary *One Belle*, June 2024

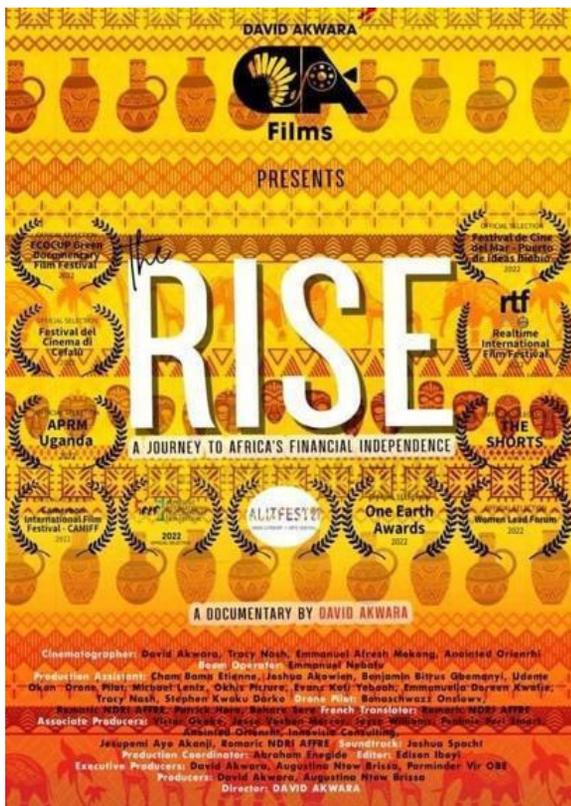


Note. Photo owned by the author (personal collection, 2024)

My example: The Rise

The Rise, a documentary I created on Africa’s vision for trade within the continent, is an example of fact-based storytelling. To make this film, I did not start by picking up my camera. I began by conducting research online, studying available data and verifying the facts. I travelled to countries involved in the project, interviewed stakeholders and personally verified information on the ground. This commitment to accuracy ensured that the story was not only compelling but also credible.

Figure 4. A poster for *The Rise*



Note. Image courtesy by the author (2022)

Since its release in March 2022, *The Rise* has been screened at venues worldwide. What excites me most is not the screenings themselves, but the conversations that follow. I have seen young people who were previously misinformed about African trade walk out with clarity, hope and determination to participate in building their continent's future (The Rise Collective, 2024a). This is the power of combining storytelling and dialogue with facts.

Storytelling as a trust-building tool

Across history, societies have relied on stories to transmit values, knowledge and a sense of identity. Stories make abstract issues personal and humanize statistics. However, in today's era of disinformation, trust is fragile. According to the Edelman *Trust Barometer* survey report, more

than half of respondents said that they no longer trust the media or governments to provide them with accurate information (2021). This erosion of trust highlights the importance of prioritizing transparency and fact-checking when telling stories. When audiences see evidence woven into the narrative, they not only connect with it emotionally but also trust it more deeply.

Case study: How *The Rise* bridged the knowledge gap about trade

When I created *The Rise*, a documentary on Africa's vision for intra-African trade, my approach was rooted in both storytelling and fact-based research. I began with deep desk research, analysing data and policy documents, and validated my findings through field reporting across African countries.

The documentary did not simply present trade statistics: it humanized them. By telling the stories of entrepreneurs, policymakers and everyday citizens who stood to benefit from continental trade, *The Rise* made a technical subject relatable and compelling to a wide variety of audiences.

The impact was significant. Screened at over 107 venues worldwide, the film opened spaces for dialogue among youth, academics and policymakers (The Rise Collective, 2022; The Rise Collective, 2024b). More importantly, it challenged prevalent misinformation about the African Continental Free Trade Area Agreement (African Union Commission, n.d.)—especially scepticism about its feasibility—by grounding its narrative in verified facts, while maintaining its emotional appeal.

Through *The Rise*, I demonstrated how storytelling can bridge knowledge gaps by transforming complex policy issues into accessible narratives,

sparking meaningful dialogue and motivating people to take action. This demonstrates that in the post-truth era, stories anchored in facts can shift perspectives and build trust in collective futures.

Why facts must lead the story

The reality we face today is stark: disinformation wins because it tells a story people want to believe. However, the solution is not simply to tell a ‘better’ story. It is to tell a story that is better because it is accurate, verifiable, transparent and empathetic.

In this sense, facts must lead the story. Storytelling is the vehicle, but truth is the compass. Without accuracy, we risk reinforcing the very misinformation we aim to counter. With it, we can inspire trust and action.

However, here is the challenge: fact-based dialogue is not an innate quality. It is a skill that must be taught and practised. That is why I advocate for a bottom-up approach to implement this:

- Teach the power of dialogue in primary schools;
- Equip young people to verify information before sharing it;
- Practice dialogue in youth clubs;
- Model dialogue in family conversations and conflict resolution; and
- Reinforce dialogue in creative spaces and community gatherings.

The bottom-up approach in practice

In Africa, I collaborated with numerous organizations to screen *The Rise*. After each screening, we organized small dialogue circles where young people shared the misinformation they had encountered about African trade and how the film changed their perspective. This practice demonstrated how

bottom-up dialogue works: it does not simply deliver information, but creates a space for young people to process, question and verify information together. In this way, conducting fact-based dialogue becomes not just a skill but also forms part of a society’s culture.

Youth as the antidote

My generation has been called the generation of ‘digital natives’. However, in the post-truth era, we must also be ‘fact natives’—critical thinkers who can navigate misinformation with discernment.

Youth are not just victims of misinformation: we are also the antidote. By creating intentional content grounded in truth and empathy—whether through videos or blogs, at community events or in family discussions—young people can shift narratives from divisiveness to understanding.

UNESCO, for example, offers free training¹⁾ to strengthen media literacy among young people, helping them to verify, question and analyse information. These opportunities are tools we must pick up and pass on to others.

However, media literacy must go beyond technical skills. It must be taught in ways that rival how lies are spread: with speed, emotion, precision and empathy. If falsehoods spread like wildfire, then the truth must spread like light—quickly, illuminating wherever it shines.

Case study: Mongolian youth digital clubs

In Mongolia, youth leaders established dialogue clubs in all twenty-one provinces across the country in collaboration with development agencies such as the United Nations Children’s Fund and UNESCO (UNESCO, 2025). They used comics and digital manuals to combat misinformation around

elections and public health (Meedan, 2024). The process of co-creating stories, verifying sources and sharing them in peer-to-peer spaces demonstrated how youth-led storytelling can build resilience and restore trust. Young people were not just participants: they were change-makers producing verified narratives to counter false ones.

Call to action: Spreading the truth like lies

The vaccine against misinformation is media literacy, but its success depends on how it is delivered. We must teach people about the truth in the same way that lies tend to spread:

- With speed, so that it keeps up with viral misinformation;
- With emotion, so that it resonates with the human experience;
- With precision, so that it withstands scrutiny; and
- Above all, with empathy, so that it heals divides instead of deepening them.

Building global coalitions for truth

Since disinformation does not respect borders, we must think and act globally. From COVID-19 conspiracy theories in Europe to election disinformation in Africa, the same patterns tend to repeat themselves everywhere. By learning from each other's models, we can build global coalitions to fight misinformation together. The antidote to division is shared learning and solidarity.

Youth-led innovations

Young people must experiment with creative solutions:

- TikTok campaigns that fact-check viral claims with humour;
- Podcasts where students interview experts and translate research into simple language;
- Community radio shows that debunk rumours in local dialects; and
- Grassroots storytelling projects that amplify marginalized voices with verified facts.

The future of democracy will not be written in parliaments alone. It will be co-authored in WhatsApp groups, TikTok videos, YouTube documentaries, family dinners and community gatherings. These are the new public squares where truth must prevail.

Conclusion

How do we bridge the post-truth divide?

- Through stories anchored in facts;
- Through dialogue grounded in evidence; and
- Through the youth who choose empathy over ego and truth over noise.

I began my journey in Kolokolo, where we listened only to respond, never to understand. Today, I realize that dialogue is not about impatience, but about presence; it is not about speaking louder but about listening more deeply. The child who once carried divisiveness within him has learned that if they are rooted in the truth, stories can heal.

That is how we rise.

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**Democracy in the Post-Truth Crisis:
The Role of Global Citizenship Education**

Knowledge for change: Revealing truths, fostering dialogue



Hyunjoong Kim

Editor and Content Manager, *Stanford Social Innovation Review* (Korean Edition)

Hyunjoong Kim is the Editor and Content Manager of the *Stanford Social Innovation Review* (Korean Edition). He believes in the power of knowledge as a tool to catalyse social change and works to bridge academic insights with the lived realities of marginalized communities. Before joining *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, he led participatory research and digital archiving projects that gathered the stories of people with lived experience of homelessness and explored supportive housing models that enable them to live with dignity in the community. He also designed strategies for measuring and communicating social impact. Now, he produces and shares knowledge for social innovation by uncovering underrepresented social issues and innovative responses across diverse fields. His work aims to make this knowledge accessible and actionable—through publications, learning communities and global partnerships—to foster more sophisticated understandings of social problems and better solutions, ultimately contributing to a more inclusive society.

A gaze toward the invisible

When I was a child, I used to walk through an old neighbourhood on my way to school. Few people lived there; the area was awaiting redevelopment. Among the narrow alleys lay derelict houses, debris of unknown origin and scattered refuse. The place felt like an abandoned island amid high-rise apartment blocks. After the rain, a damp plastic smell rose from the wet lanes, and broken signboards creaked in the wind.

Twice a day, in the early morning and the afternoon, I encountered the same scene: an older person pushing a handcart and collecting trash from every alley. With a slight frame, this older person hauled a cart as large as their body, bending and straightening to pick up wastepaper. They earned a living by selling discarded paper and appliances. Nearly every school day, I passed this person, wondering about the life they had lived and their current circumstances, yet never speaking to them. Their presence felt as unfamiliar to me as the neighbourhood itself.

There were truths one could encounter only in that neighbourhood—truths that would soon vanish. Had I not walked that route, I might never have seen those scenes or encountered questions about another person's life. Looking back, I realize I was drawn to such hidden truths. My teachers and parents told me to avoid that path, but I wanted to look more closely at its strangeness.

At the time, I admired those who uncovered the truth and created change—people who resisted the pressure to conceal reality and acted for justice. Their stories inspired me, yet I never believed they could become my own. I was an introverted, ordinary boy who lacked the courage even to speak to that older adult, and I didn't see in

myself the decisiveness or leadership that such figures seemed to embody.

Time passed, and the neighbourhood disappeared. Towering apartment buildings rose in its place, and I finished school. Even as I entered high school and then university, my curiosity about hidden truths did not fade. Whenever possible, I sought to understand social phenomena I had not yet encountered. As a political science student, I began to view society through a structural lens, and I worked as an editor for the university magazine.

Reporting on social issues on and off campus and interviewing those who suffered because of them, I came to see that truths are not only neglected but sometimes hidden or distorted for particular ends. I learned that there are stories that statistics do not tell and words the media does not capture. Throughout my college years, I was drawn to a career that would confront such truths. For me, facing the truth meant focusing my efforts on addressing social problems. Among the many possible paths, I was especially drawn to social innovation and began my professional life in that field.

Encountering living truths

After graduation, I joined Cdot, a social innovation organization that connects innovators in Korea and abroad and catalyses social change. Over two and a half years, I met many people living with the realities of social problems. I focused on issues that received little public attention and on the voices of those directly affected, believing they held vital clues to change.

The project I devoted the most time to was the *Participatory Narrative and Digital Archiving Study on Supportive Housing*. We analysed the life

histories of fifteen people in need of supportive housing and recorded ten of their stories on video. My colleagues and I examined their entire lives from childhood to the present, tracing crises and their impact, and identifying forms of assistance that they had sought but had not received at crucial moments.

These crises were deeply intertwined with experiences of pain. Asking people to revisit stories they might prefer to avoid and listening with care were not easy. Their words often stayed with me long after the interviews ended. People experiencing homelessness, individuals with alcohol use disorder, LGBTQ+ individuals and older adults shared stories that initially felt like descriptions of a different world from mine. Before this project, I had never met people with such identities. Many had been isolated in residential facilities with restricted freedom or in places largely invisible to the public. I came to understand that this invisibility was no accident; patterns of exclusion and marginalization systematically generated it.

Yet their stories were not only about darkness. They revealed their individuality, preferences, and, above all, their vision of a good life. I realized that the ordinary things I value—favourite snacks, the shop I frequent, a desired possession—were also present in their lives. We explored the societal conditions necessary for such aspirations to emerge and endure.

We focused primarily on housing and its many effects on a person's life. Housing proved to be a foundation for health and safety, for building relationships with neighbours, and for pursuing one's chosen way of life. In a system that provides housing only when specific criteria are met, even to those who are already vulnerable, we argued for

a Housing First—oriented supportive housing model. Recording and sharing these narratives widely, with consent, was a core aim of the project alongside research. Ultimately, this work became, for me, the practice of confronting, revealing and disseminating marginalized truths.

From problems to dialogue

Another central part of my work at Cdot was creating spaces for dialogue. We brought together people directly affected by social problems and relevant stakeholders to discuss those issues. We also convened social innovators experimenting with solutions. Topics ranged from housing rights to education, environmental challenges and regional depopulation. At times, we invited citizens and young people who wished to learn and contribute to solutions.

The ultimate goal of establishing these spaces for dialogue was to move beyond visible symptoms, define problems through systems thinking and seek pathways to resolution through solidarity and collaboration. Such conversations also invited more people into collective action. Through this process, I learned that understanding the structures, cultures and mental models underlying social phenomena requires more than existing data and analysis. It requires the living knowledge of people who experience the problems and the insights of diverse actors who care about them and are willing to work toward solutions.

I came to understand that the perspectives of those directly affected, alongside those of stakeholders, are essential to defining problems and discovering solutions. When we center these perspectives, we finally encounter the human being beyond the numbers and words.

Problem-solving knowledge

My experience at Cdot taught me that knowledge can do more than illuminate problems; it can directly contribute to solving them. This realization led me to join the Korean edition of the *Stanford Social Innovation Review* (SSIR).

SSIR is a solutions-journalism publication that distills insights generated through diverse practices in social innovation. It takes a comprehensive view of domains such as philanthropy, international development cooperation and impact investing, supporting leaders and practitioners as they refine their efforts to drive change. In Korea, the *SSIR Korean Edition* has been published since 2018, co-creating and disseminating knowledge in close collaboration with practitioners on the ground.

In my role, I work to amplify the voices of those striving to address social problems and to help their experiences spark further experimentation.

Beyond translating and transmitting ideas from abroad, I aim to situate them in local contexts and articulate them in the language of Korean society.

Through this work, my conviction that knowledge can drive change has deepened. A single article can offer new insight, give someone the courage to act and connect with different people who might not otherwise meet. Yet I also face a persistent reality—we still lack sufficient knowledge of this kind. Much of what circulates is produced by a small number of experts and institutions. Their role is essential, but to address problems with precision and breadth, we need more diverse producers of knowledge, especially those who directly experience social issues and the living wisdom born from their experience. Their perspectives are too often pushed to the margins.

To expand the possibility of change, their role—and the role of problem-solvers who work closely



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with them—must grow. My team and I believe that knowledge is not created only at desks; it already exists where problems occur. It resides in the experiences of people who confront social issues daily and of those who experiment continuously to address them. Our role is to surface that knowledge, help structure it into shareable insights, and ensure it circulates widely.

Accordingly, we focus not only on producing and publishing knowledge but also on building knowledge communities where knowledge is alive and practically applied. These communities are not one-way channels of information but spaces where people with different experiences and perspectives learn together through dialogue.

We interact with our readers in various ways. Through our quarterly magazine, we reach over 500 individuals and organizations, and through our website, newsletter and social media channels. In particular, our online platforms play a key role in increasing accessibility to knowledge and enabling our team to engage more closely with readers on a wide range of topics. Offline, we regularly host educational programmes, workshops and conferences where participants can learn together about social innovation. Curating articles and tailoring explanations to fit the diverse experiences of each new group of participants requires significant time and effort. Still, we've found that people are increasingly recognizing the value and role of knowledge in driving social change. Through this work, I've seen how knowledge can initiate entirely new conversations and spark meaningful collaboration. Knowledge, in this sense, is not merely information; it is a catalyst for collective action and social change.

Youth, dialogue and the future

The responsibility for solving social problems does not rest solely with long-tenured professionals or established leaders. Young people already experience a wide array of challenges and seek to become agents of solutions. In recent years, Korean society has increasingly recognized the immense potential of young people as key actors in solving social problems. Simultaneously, many young people have emerged across various fields, pursuing social impact. Alongside this trend, a number of educational initiatives have emerged to help young people better understand and engage with social issues, many of them initiated and run by nonprofit organizations like Root Impact. Programmes such as *Impact Basecamp* and *Impact Career Y* exemplify this approach, adopting design thinking methodologies that define problems and generate solutions through empathy, and emphasizing hands-on execution.

This approach has provided many young people with valuable opportunities to understand problems from a field-based perspective and to experience the process of addressing them firsthand. However, while these programmes highlight the experiences of those directly affected and promote rapid, iterative action, they tend to place relatively less emphasis on systems thinking—viewing problems holistically—and on the role of learning that enables such comprehensive perspectives.

The Korean edition of *SSIR* is published by Hanyang University, one of Korea's leading universities. While *SSIR* primarily targets leaders and practitioners in the field of social innovation—making it less dependent on the specific context in which it operates—our team has set a new mission shaped by our unique environment. That mission is to empower young people at the university to lead

future social change and to strengthen the social innovation capabilities that society will increasingly demand. We believe that learning plays a crucial role in developing such capabilities, and we are taking a variety of actions to make that possible.

We organize reading groups and seminars in which we study *SSIR* articles together, reflect on personal experiences and discuss social problems and potential solutions. This publication's knowledge not only explains social issues from the field's perspective but also covers real-world efforts to address them, giving it a distinct character from the knowledge students encounter in the classroom.

Figure 1. Organization of a reading seminar



Note. Photo courtesy of Hanyang SSIR Korea Center

Students learn about social innovation through the deep knowledge and field-based experiences shared in the publication. They not only visit the sites they have read about but also turn everyday spaces like their campus into fields of action, where they design and carry out their own projects. In this way, social innovation becomes more than an abstract concept—it is experienced as a concrete practice.

Beyond gaining understanding through knowledge, it is equally important to put social innovation into

action through collaboration. For students, experiencing a healthy team environment is just as valuable as achieving meaningful outcomes. By learning to work together with empathy and mutual understanding rather than competition, and by navigating uncharted paths side by side, they discover the joy and strength of working as a team.

We hope that the learning we gain does not remain with us but continues to spread outward. To that end, we make various efforts to share what we have learned. These transformative learning experiences are turned into seminars and diverse forms of content, inspiring more students and sparking the beginnings of new change.

Students often tell me that these experiences have broadened their perspectives on society. Through collaborative learning, they come to understand one another more deeply and recognize that we must work together for change. This recognition is not merely individual; it is a moment of forming an ‘us’, a community. Knowledge thus marks personal turning points while simultaneously building relationships and fostering solidarity. For young leaders of social change, accurately understanding phenomena and cultivating a sense of community through cooperative study are vital.

In Korea, access to information is no longer the main issue. The real challenge lies in thinking critically and learning from the vast amount of information available. I believe that many of the problems we face in this post-truth era stem from a lack of learning. Recognizing that what we know and believe is not the entirety of the truth and cultivating the ability to critically and thoughtfully analyse the information we are given, will become increasingly essential.

Learning, in many ways, is inefficient and demands considerable patience and effort. Meanwhile, today's world is changing rapidly, and uncertainty continues to rise. In this environment, where learning itself is under constant pressure, intentionally designing meaningful and positive learning experiences is vital.

Navigating the post-truth era

We now live in a post-truth era, a time when the very notion of truth is increasingly under siege. Facts are no longer accepted at face value; instead, they are questioned, manipulated or drowned out by competing narratives. Misinformation is spreading at unprecedented speed, fueled by digital platforms and algorithms designed to reward sensationalism over accuracy. In this noisy, fragmented information landscape, it has become more complex than ever to engage in thoughtful discourse, let alone build collective solutions to the urgent problems we face.

The consequences are visible all around us. Public health crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, were not only battles against a virus but also against waves of conspiracy theories and false information about vaccines and treatments. Climate change, one of the defining challenges of our era, continues to be undermined by denial and disinformation campaigns that stall progress and polarize communities. Even in our local neighbourhoods, rumours and unverified claims can spark mistrust, conflict and division. When truth becomes obscured or distorted in these ways, our capacity to address social problems is fundamentally weakened.

To navigate this difficult era, we must cultivate good dialogue—dialogue that brings people together across differences, builds mutual understanding

and opens pathways toward action. However, good dialogue cannot emerge from a foundation of confusion or mistrust. It must begin with good knowledge.

Figure 2. A space for dialogue and information sharing with university students



Note. Photo courtesy of Hanyang SSIR Korea Center

Good knowledge is not a mere catalogue of facts, neatly arranged on a shelf or stored in a database. Facts, on their own, can be fragmented, disconnected from the human realities they are meant to represent. Good knowledge is something deeper and more dynamic: it is the living truth found in the stories of those who directly experience social problems, and in the accumulated practices of people and organizations who dedicate themselves to solving them. It is built not only through research and analysis but also through listening, empathy and reflection.

Consider, for example, a community facing housing insecurity. Statistics might tell us how many people are homeless or at risk of eviction. Still, they do not capture the full texture of their lives—the daily struggles, the systemic barriers, the resilience and creativity that emerge in response to their housing insecurity. When we listen to the voices of those who live in this reality and learn from the practitioners who work alongside them, we gain

knowledge that is richer, more nuanced and ultimately more useful for creating meaningful solutions.

I believe the process of learning together from such knowledge—connecting experiences and engaging in dialogue—is itself a form of dialogue. When we come together in this way, we do more than exchange information. We create spaces where people can share their perspectives, challenge one another's assumptions and build relationships of trust. In that process, we broaden our horizons, deepen our understanding of the world and gain collective strength to act.

This kind of learning is not always easy. It requires patience, humility and a willingness to be uncomfortable. In a world that prizes speed and efficiency, genuine learning can seem slow or even inefficient. Yet it is precisely this deliberate, reflective process that allows us to resist the pull of simplistic answers and grapple with the complex, interconnected nature of today's social challenges.

Young people will play a vital role in this journey. They are uniquely positioned to challenge inherited assumptions and to question the frameworks that previous generations have taken for granted. With their creativity and energy, they can propose new questions and experiment with untried paths. Across campuses, communities and global networks, young leaders are already

showing what is possible: launching innovative projects to tackle inequality, mobilizing their peers to address climate change and building bridges across cultural and political divides.

Their work gives me hope. At a time when many of us feel powerless or overwhelmed by the scale of the problems we face, young people remind us that change is still possible. They are not merely future leaders—they are already our leaders today. Their voices, ideas and actions are essential for creating a society that values truth, justice and inclusion.

My commitment is to walk alongside them on this journey. I will continue to create meaningful knowledge with young people, draw on their insights and experiences and expand the spaces where dialogue can flourish. These spaces are more than just places to talk; they are incubators of action where ideas can be tested, relationships built and new possibilities imagined.

In doing so, I believe we can begin to move beyond the fragmentation of the post-truth era. Together, we can take our first steps toward solving the pressing social problems before us, not by imposing ready-made solutions, but by cultivating shared understanding and collective will. The road ahead will not be easy, but with knowledge as our foundation and dialogue as our guide, I believe we can shape a future where truth is not obscured but illuminated, and where our common humanity is the starting point for lasting change.

Digital citizenship education as the operational arm of global citizenship education through media and information literacy: The case of Indonesia



Salma Noorfitria Ningrum

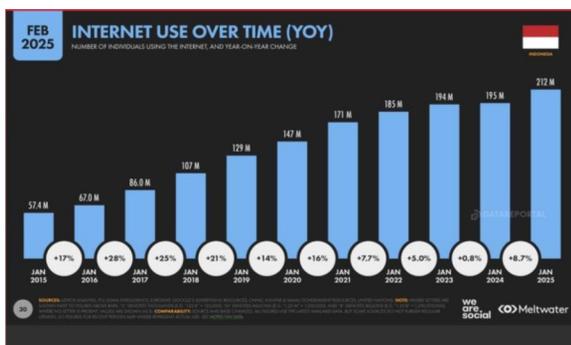
Co-founder¹⁾ of Media and Information Literacy (MIL) Lab Indonesia

Salma Noorfitria Ningrum is the Co-founder and Vice President of the MIL Lab Indonesia, a youth-led initiative that promotes media and information literacy to rebuild digital trust and foster civic engagement among Indonesian youth by using creative approaches. She leads community-based programmes that translate global citizenship education into practical tools for critical thinking, empathy and ethical digital participation. She is the global champion of the UNESCO Youth Hackathon 2024, a grantee of the UNESCO Global Youth Grant Scheme 2025 and a fully-funded awardee of the Temasek Foundation–National University of Singapore’s Leadership Enrichment and Regional Networking Programme in Singapore. With a background in Public Administration, she has represented youth voices at various international forums on education, youth leadership and digital citizenship. Her work reflects a strong commitment to empowering young people as responsible, ethical and informed actors in today’s complex digital landscape.

Introduction

Digital spaces are no longer peripheral to civic and political life. They have become constitutive environments in which young people acquire civic literacies, negotiate identity formations, exercise collective agency, and contest hegemonic meaning-making processes. Scholars working on the mediatization of society and the emergence of networked publics argue that digital platforms are not merely channels for communication but socio-technical infrastructures that shape how participation, knowledge and civic imaginaries are produced and legitimized (boyd, 2014). Within this global context, the capacities of formal and informal socializing institutions to cultivate critical, ethical and participatory digital citizenship have become pivotal to democratic resilience, social cohesion and human security (UNESCO, 2024).

Figure 1. Internet use over time in Indonesia (2015–25)



Note. Image from “Digital 2025 Global Overview Report” (We Are Social Indonesia, 2025)

In Indonesia, the intensification of digital connectivity has reconfigured the conditions of civic participation and reshaped the modalities through which publics engage in deliberation, contestation and collective meaning-making. As reflected in Figure 2, the rapid expansion of internet access has widened opportunity structures for civic expression, public engagement and communicative action within networked

spheres. This transformation is consistent with scholarship on platformization, which emphasizes that the design and governance of platforms actively structure participation, visibility, credibility and affective engagements in the public sphere (van Dijck, Poell & de Waal, 2018). Indonesia’s digital transformation, therefore, generates both democratic opportunities and profound vulnerabilities that require a context-responsive reimagining of digital citizenship education.

Indonesia is estimated to have over two hundred million internet users, representing roughly three-quarters of the population, with young people constituting one of the most socially and politically active demographic groups online (Kemp, 2025). Social media and private messaging applications now function as primary information ecosystems, whose underlying architectures, including algorithmic engagement logics, virality dynamics and content moderation practices shape how facts, rumours and emotions propagate. These structural affordances intersect with Indonesia’s linguistic and cultural heterogeneity to produce differentiated patterns of online harm. Communities using distinctive local languages, cultural idioms or informal networks experience misinformation, rumour cascades and targeted harassment in ways that are highly localized rather than uniform national phenomena (Kemp, 2025). Empirical studies have captured the speed and societal consequences of mis- and disinformation within Indonesian networked publics, particularly through platforms such as WhatsApp that convert rumour into real-world harm when users lack critical filtering skills and collective verification norms (Ajengrastri, 2019; Rehmawan et al., 2024). Parallel research highlights the gendered dimensions of online harm, with young women and public-facing actors disproportionately bearing psychological and civic burdens from online gender-

based violence, which suppresses participation, narrows representation and erodes trust in digital publics (Wirawan et al., 2022; Rehmawan et al., 2024). Taken together, misinformation dynamics and gendered harm create a dual challenge for digital citizenship education.

This evidence demonstrates that digital citizenship education must extend beyond the transfer of discrete technical skills. It must cultivate resilient norms, affective capacities and community-based infrastructures that prevent harm, enable recovery, and sustain civic voice. Active, participatory, and experiential pedagogies including game-based learning, role-play and co-creation have been shown to strengthen verification practices, ethical engagement and empathy in low-stakes environments (UNESCO, 2013). At the same time, Indonesia's sociocultural diversity necessitates flexible frameworks that allow for contextual adaptation and localization. The urgency for context-responsive digital citizenship education is therefore rooted in demographic scale, platform affordances, sociocultural heterogeneity and the documented real-world consequences of online harm. This raises a critical question for educators and policymakers regarding how pedagogical interventions can meaningfully bridge skills, norms and community support systems in ways that reflect Indonesia's complex digital realities.

MIL Lab Indonesia's approach and core principles for digital citizenship education design

MIL Lab Indonesia's practitioner—reflections at the Tenth International Conference on Global Citizenship Education (GCED) highlight a practice-oriented approach that foregrounds three interrelated pillars: youth-centered co-design, practical and localized interventions and the explicit integration of MIL, DCE and GCED.

Figure 2. Offline public discussions and MILBoard launch



Note. Photo from internal documentation (MIL Lab Indonesia, 2025b)

Figure 3. Group photo at offline public discussions and MILBoard launch



Note. Photo from internal documentation (MIL Lab Indonesia, 2025a)

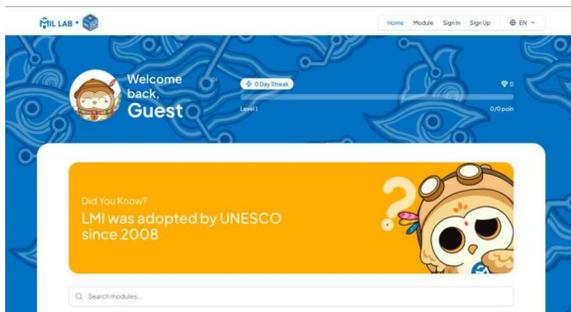
The first pillar—youth-centred co-design—repositions young people as collaborators and co-creators rather than passive recipients of predetermined curricula. This orientation recognizes that youth possess platform fluency, contextual knowledge and the ability to influence their peers. Since adult designers often lack this ability, engaging youth in design processes can maximize the cultural resonance and uptake of pedagogical digital tools. MIL Lab Indonesia's co-design labs reveal how locally derived scenarios, language variants and platform heuristics can be translated into activities that mirror learners' lived digital practices.

Figure 4. Prototype of the board game of MILBoard



Note. Image from internal documentation (MIL Lab Indonesia, 2025c)

Figure 5. Website application of MILBoard



Note. Website image (MIL Lab Indonesia, 2025d)

The second pillar—practical and localized interventions—advocates pedagogical tools that concretize abstract competencies into embodied practice. MIL Lab Indonesia’s flagship board game, *MILBoard*, exemplifies this translation. In its offline format, MILBoard translates key digital citizenship skills such as fact-checking, data protection and empathetic dialogue into a gamified snake-and-ladder board game. The set includes 28 challenge cards (14 situational and 14 question cards) and 5 erasable cards, which are reusable blank cards that allow players to design

their own Media and Information Literacy (MIL) scenarios and questions. This participatory element enables learners to personalize the content and reflect on their real-life digital experiences. Complementing the physical game, the online version of MILBoard from its web application (millabindonesia.com) extends the learning experience into digital spaces through a website application featuring interactive modules, gamified interfaces, quizzes and leaderboards, enabling students to explore MIL concepts collaboratively and at their own pace. MIL Lab Indonesia believes that gamified and peer-facilitated exercises increase learner confidence to intervene constructively in chat groups and social media, supporting the claim that experiential methods yield durable changes in digital behaviour (Roozenbeek & van der Linden, 2019).

The third pillar involves the deliberate integration of MIL, DCE and GCED so that digital skills are recognized as civic competencies that can advance peace, inclusion and pluralism. Rather than considering digital literacy solely within the technical domain, MIL Lab Indonesia frames it as an extension of civic education where verification skills, privacy practices and norms of respectful dialogue become concrete expressions of GCED values. Practically, this integrated framing shapes curriculum material, teacher training modules and campaign messaging to emphasize empathy, justice and collective responsibility alongside verification protocols.

From these pillars, we may derive three core design principles that should guide policy and curricular development in Indonesia:

1. A prevention-oriented posture: Prioritize pre-emptive capacities in DCE, so learners can navigate risky streams before harm occurs.
2. Youth partnerships: Co-design processes

with young people to increase acceptability, relevance and the capacity to surface platform-specific heuristics that adult designers may overlook.

3. Localization: Ensure pedagogical materials are adaptable to linguistic and cultural differences across Indonesian provinces, allowing teachers, religious educators and community leaders to embed DCE within locally meaningful practices.

Teachers occupy a central role in this ecosystem as facilitators of enquiry, norm entrepreneurs and mentors who can scaffold reflective practice. In the future, MIL Lab Indonesia aspires to develop a teacher-training model that emphasizes facilitating ethical enquiry and production, rather than expecting teachers to develop expertise in every emerging platform. Practical support—short, modular lesson plans, role-play scenarios derived from *MILBoard* activities and peer-to-peer coaching where trained youth facilitators support teachers—can help reduce teacher anxiety about technology while amplifying student voice. International frameworks similarly emphasize this facilitative role for DCE educators, advocating pedagogies that prioritize dialogue, enquiry, and meaning making over prescriptive regulation.

Gender-sensitive design and safeguarding are integral to any credible DCE programme. Given the gendered patterns of online violence, DCE must pair skill-building with accessible reporting channels, psychosocial support and community accountability mechanisms. Evidence indicates that combining skill development with reporting and support yields a greater protective effect than literacy programmes alone (Rehmawan et al., 2024; Wirawan et al., 2022). MIL Lab Indonesia's workshops operationalize these insights by

incorporating safe-space facilitation, establishing reporting protocols in collaboration with local NGOs and training teachers and youth facilitators to recognize, document and escalate incidents in ways that respect survivors' autonomy and rights.

Finally, DCE strategies must extend beyond school boundaries. Because misinformation often spreads through private messaging networks and community forums, integrated approaches that mobilize community outreach, local media partnerships and peer-led campaigns are necessary complements to classroom work. MIL Lab Indonesia's national campaign, designed and led by youth teams, aims to convert peer networks into corrective infrastructures by encouraging verification norms and empathetic correction rather than punitive denunciation. Preliminary qualitative monitoring has indicated a reduction in the forwarding of viral falsehoods within participating WhatsApp clusters, along with an increased willingness among participants to verify posts rigorously (Bowles et al., 2023).

Implementation roadmap, policy levers, monitoring and models for scaling

Translating promising pedagogical interventions into sustainable national practice requires a multi-track implementation strategy that addresses institutionalization, resource allocation and accountability. MIL Lab Indonesia's proposed three-track roadmap includes: (a) embedding MIL-based DCE modules into the national curriculum and teacher-training standards; (b) funding and expanding youth-led co-design centers to localize content and incubate peer education; and (c) creating interoperable reporting and support systems linking schools, civil society and local authorities for a timely, rights-respecting response. Each track responds to specific structural barriers: curricular embedding fosters sustainability

and coherence; youth centers ensure continuous relevance, localization and innovation; and interoperable systems ensure that prevention is matched by effective remediation and survivor support.

Policy levers currently under discussion in Indonesia, such as proposals for minimum age requirements for social media registration and enhanced platform accountability, offer potential openings for systemic reform (Reuters, 2025). However, they also carry risks if implemented without parallel educational investments. Regulatory measures that shift the burden of protection to platforms or that emphasize content removal without transparent due process can suppress legitimate expression and disproportionately affect marginalized groups. Consequently, UNESCO (2013) recommends that regulatory proposals be calibrated with mandatory teacher professional development in DCE and funding streams for youth-led labs, as well as incentives for platforms to develop transparent, community-oriented safety features rather than opaque takedown mechanisms. Such a blended approach seeks to preserve rights while enhancing protective capacities.

Monitoring, evaluation and impact measurement are essential in discerning whether DCE fosters dispositional change rather than mere compliance. We recommend a mixed-methods evaluation framework that incorporates quantitative classroom outcome measures (pre- and post-assessments of verification skills) and behavioural indicators (changes in propensity to forward misinformation). Additionally, we recommend qualitative participatory feedback from youth and teachers on cultural fit, perceived agency and affective outcomes. Because digital citizenship encompasses identity and norms as well as technical skills, measurement must capture affective constructs, such as empathy,

willingness to engage respectfully online and perceived civic efficacy, alongside discrete competencies. Participatory evaluation modalities, in which youth co-produce indicators and interpret findings, align with the youth-partnership principles and enhance the local legitimacy of assessment practices.

Models for replication and scaling draw directly from MIL Lab Indonesia's documented practices. The *MILBoard* game and accompanying teacher modules provide replicable pedagogical packages that convert abstract competencies into classroom activities. Co-design laboratories such as MIL Lab Indonesia's national co-design labs (which surface locally specific language variants and platform heuristics) have been used to translate those findings into locally adapted classroom activities and campaign materials. International examples such as the UNESCO Youth Hackathon illustrate how youth innovation, when combined with mentorship and institutional pathways, can be rapidly scaled, provided that absorptive institutions exist to incorporate tested innovations (UNESCO, 2025). Thus, scaling requires not only disseminating tools but also building institutional pathways—such as teacher-training systems, curriculum authorities, funding mechanisms and platform partnerships—that can absorb, validate and sustain grassroots innovations.

Recommendations

Building on the preceding analysis, three priority recommendations are proposed to operationalize DCE as a key component of GCED in Indonesia.

1. Integrate MIL-based DCE modules into national curriculum frameworks and formal pre-service and in-service teacher training standards. Curriculum integration secures its

sustainability and signals state commitment. However, it must be designed as modular, adaptable content that teachers can tailor to local linguistic and cultural contexts.

2. Institutionalize and fund youth-led co-design centers that localize content, incubate peer education models and function as regional hubs to translate innovations into classroom-ready material. These centers should receive multi-year funding and formal recognition within local education ecosystems to ensure continuity and scale.
3. Develop an interoperable reporting and community support ecosystem linking schools, civil society, local authorities and platforms. This ecosystem must be rights-respecting, transparent, and designed to preserve privacy while enabling rapid responses to acute harms. Platform collaboration should incentivize transparent safety features, community-informed moderation protocols and capacity-building support for local civil society, rather than implementing opaque content removal practices.

Complementary to these recommendations, we propose an evaluative agenda: fund mixed-methods research to measure technical, behavioural and affective outcomes and mandate participatory monitoring mechanisms that include youth and teachers as co-evaluators. Collectively, these recommendations align prevention, pedagogy, policy and measurement to produce a coherent national strategy for DCE that operationalizes GCED values in everyday digital life.

Conclusion

Digital citizenship education is not merely an adjunct to classroom instruction. It is the everyday practice through which the aspirational values of GCED—empathy, justice, pluralism and peace—can be realized in Indonesia’s digitally mediated public sphere. The convergence of Indonesia’s extensive internet use, platform-specific dynamics of misinformation and rumour propagation and the documented gendered harm of online violence creates both urgency and a clear mandate for pedagogically robust DCE. MIL Lab Indonesia’s practice-oriented approach—youth-centred and co-designed, locally tailored, experiential interventions, such as the *MILBoard* game, and integrating MIL with GCED—demonstrates viable pathways for transforming abstract competencies into civic dispositions and everyday behaviours.

Scaling these practices requires coordinated policy and programmatic action: curriculum embedding, sustained funding for youth co-design centers and establishment of interoperable reporting systems. Regulatory reforms in the policy sphere should be paired with educational investments to avoid merely transferring protective burdens to platforms or producing unintended constraints on civic expression. Ultimately, DCE must be preventive, participatory and contextually adaptive—designed with young people, mediated by teachers and sustained by institutions that value local knowledge and offer a rights-respecting response. When these elements cohere, DCE will function as a practical bridge between digital realities and the normative commitments of GCED, strengthening democratic participation, rebuilding trust and fostering more peaceful and inclusive digital publics in Indonesia.

1) The other Co-Founders of the MIL Lab Indonesia are Muhammad Rafi Aurelian Rizkiyansyah, Dien Fitriani Azzahra, Muhammad Faishal Adly Nelwan and Dwiky Ahmad Megananta.

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Climate action and global citizenship education ‘the Pacific way’: Multi-layered learning journeys



Tanya Wendt Samu

Senior Lecturer, Faculty of Arts and Education, University of Auckland

Tanya Wendt Samu is a senior lecturer in the Faculty of Arts and Education, Waipapa Taumata Rau, University of Auckland in Aotearoa, New Zealand. She has three decades of experience in teacher education, social studies and social sciences curriculum development and research focusing on Pasifika (Pacific) education. She recently collaborated with APCEIU to develop a framework informed by Pacific ways of knowing, being and doing. Samu strives to locate and connect global education and learning that is contextualized for the realities of a sub-region that covers one-third of the planet's surface: the Pacific, also known as Oceania, the Moana and the Blue Pacific Continent.

Introduction

I situate myself first as a senior lecturer at Waipapa Taumata Rau (University of Auckland), in Aotearoa (New Zealand). My areas of expertise include teacher education and Pasifika (Pacific) education. I also situate myself in this presentation as a senior Samoan/Maori woman actively involved in community-based organizations serving Pacific women and families, in addition to the socio-cultural roles and responsibilities I hold within my own family. The concept of *whaea* captures the essence of this role. In *te reo* Maori (the Maori language), *whaea* literally means 'mother' or 'aunt'. It is a term of respect and can be used for one's own mother or aunt. It is also used conceptually to denote a (female) teacher, or even an unfamiliar senior woman in the community. Underlying these applications of the term *whaea* is the notion of kinship and close connection. Both my positions (as a university academic and *whaea*) have informed my perspective on the topic of this paper I, therefore, position myself as a *whaea*-educator-academic of the Pacific. This is my justification for taking a storied approach to the two inter-connected journeys that this paper explores.

Learning from Pacific Islands Students Fighting Climate Change's journey

In 2019, twenty-seven students in an environmental law class at the University of the South Pacific, a public research university with campuses in twelve Pacific Island countries, were feeling disheartened by the impasse that various Pacific governments seemed to be at in terms of progressing climate change. They decided to persuade the leaders within the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) to take the issue of climate change to the International Court of Justice (ICJ). In their words, this campaign was about 'transforming our frustrations into purpose and a dream for justice

into a global movement of solidarity' (PISFCC, n.d., History made at the highest court section). The students eventually named themselves the Pacific Islands Students Fighting Climate Change or PISFCC.

The early days of this new and unique campaign saw collaborations with grassroots communities to amplify the students' initiatives and outreach efforts. In August 2022, the PIF endorsed the PISFCC's aim. This endorsement enabled them to take the proposal to the United Nations, where it was unanimously adopted in March 2023. This was the green light to proceed to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in August 2023. Following the required processes, the PISFCC gathered and submitted written comments in August 2024. The oral hearings took place in person between 2 and 13 December the same year.

The president of the PISFCC, Cynthia Houniuihi, summarized the overarching goal that led to the culmination of its journey to the ICJ:

Climate action for the Pacific is non-negotiable, and we see naming and shaming as not progressive in this critical decade. Instead, our focus is on advocating for forward-looking solutions to accelerate climate action. One way of achieving this is to take climate change to the world's highest court—the International Court of Justice (Houniuihi, n.d., Our Team section)

Learnings along the way

The PISFCC's journey from a small classroom in their regional university to an international court is a powerful example of situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Situated learning occurs through an intentional, social process within authentic

activities, contexts and cultures. Learners gradually acquire knowledge and skills by participating in and engaging with real-world problems and collaborating with experts, eventually becoming experts themselves.

However, this campaign did not only contribute to PISFCC’s learning. The campaign provided multiple opportunities for learning (and teaching) about climate change and action, as well as sustainability and peace, to others in different Pacific Island nations, the Pacific Region and beyond.

Examples of ways in which this was done include:

- YouTube video clips, such as *The World is an Island – PISFCC ICJ Campaign Launch* (PISFCC, n.d., ‘What Is an ICJAO’ page) and *Civil Society Organization Alliance Official Launch* (Civil Society Organization Alliance, 2024);
- Production and online publication of *Youth Climate Justice Handbook: Summary for Policymakers* (PISFCC, n.d., ‘ICJAO Campaign’ page); and

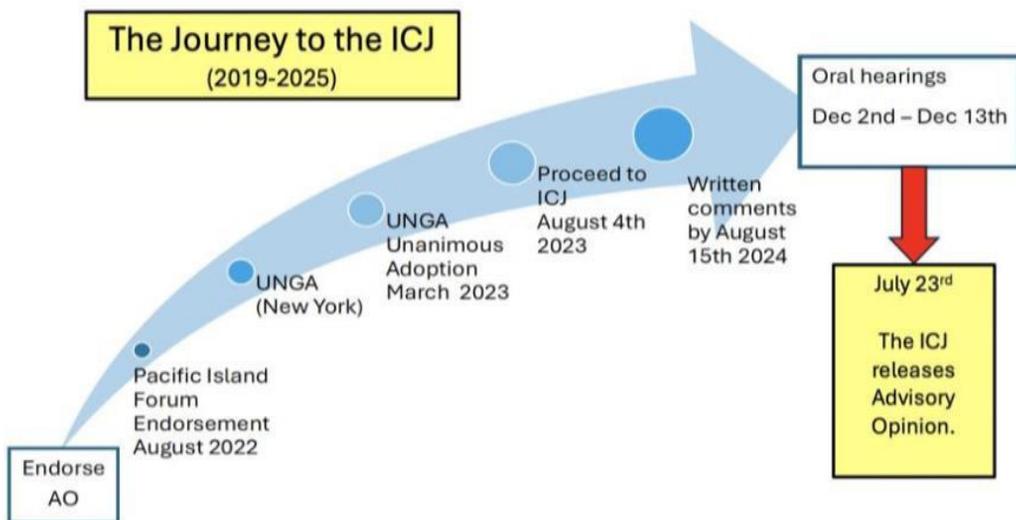
- Formation of the Alliance for a Climate Justice Advisory Opinion (ACJAO), inclusive of organizations such as Oxfam, Greenpeace, Amnesty International and Civil Society organizations from the Pacific and across the world (PISFCC, n.d., ‘Alliance’ page).

The campaign had a multi-layered ripple effect across time and space, linking the past, present and future in terms of its scope and impact.

I am also an example of this impact. After hearing about the successful ICJ judgement, I turned to PISFCC’s official website, seeking more information. The website is a comprehensive, multimedia resource that is engaging and educational. The content piqued my curiosity (and imagination) as an academic with a special interest in understanding how Pacific ways of knowing, doing and being can enrich teaching and learning.

Different stages of the PISFCC campaign (Figure 1) arguably provide evidence of situated learning. For example, consider the formation of the ICJAO

Figure 1. PISFCC’s journey to the International Court of Justice



Note. Timeline created by the author using details from PISFCC (n.d.)

Alliance mentioned earlier. The PISFCC was established in 2019 as a class of twenty seven undergraduate students majoring in environmental law. It grew to over 100 members, located in different Pacific nations. By 2021, the Vanuatu government stepped up to formally lead the campaign into international arenas, and by 2022, the ICJAO Alliance (of international and Pacific organizations) was fully activated. The establishment of such a strategic framework of support with a strong internal architecture requires strong relational and strategic planning skills. One can only imagine the exponential learning trajectories (in strategic planning, networking and communication) of the PISFCC members during the first three years of the campaign, as presented in Figure 1.

I also argue that PISFCC leadership and members were involved in situated learning carried out in a distinctively 'Pacific way' (Crocombe, 1976; PIFS, 2022, p. 9). The PISFCC leadership brought with them culturally embodied values, principles and a deep commitment to serve the Pacific Region. This is evident in PISFCC YouTube video clips, such as 'One people, one ocean, one journey,' where PISFCC leaders deliver brief yet impactful statements about their cause (PISFCC, n.d., Voyage section). Another example, and one that made a deep impression on me, is the acknowledgement that PISFCC president Cynthia Hauniuhi gave, in her opening speech at the oral hearings before the ICJ to nuclear bomb testing survivor and activist Lijon Eknilang of Rongelap atoll, Marshall Islands (PISFCC, December 2024, Cynthia's statement section). In the early stages of preparing the Advisory Opinion (AO), the PISFCC discovered that in 1995, an Advisory Opinion on the legality of the threat or use of nuclear weapons in the Pacific and the wider world was brought before the International Court of Justice (ICJ). Lijon provided witness

testimony in the oral hearings before the ICJ, drawing on her own experiences of the devastation and sickness that followed nuclear testing by the United States in 1954 on Bikini atoll. Her home, Rongelap atoll, was downwind from Bikini atoll (Clark & Sann, 1996; Eknilang, 2003).

The PISFCC recognized this earlier AO campaign as legacy, bringing Lijon Eknilang and others like her back into contemporary remembrance. This is an example of 'the Pacific Way'. In doing so, the law students also protected these early activists and their work from being erased by social amnesia (Jacoby, 1975).

My *whaea* perspective was activated when I went through the PISFCC website, reading briefs and watching video clips. When I learned about Lijon and the anti-nuclear campaign, my heart was touched by the actions of these young people. On the international stage, far from their Pacific home, they respected and honoured the past and those who had gone before them. Cynthia Hauniuhi honoured Lijon and described her as a mother from the Marshall Islands, although Lijon never had biological children of her own. She was eight years old when she innocently played in 'the snow' of nuclear fallout. She used stories based on her personal experience and that of her people, of birth defects, illnesses, long-term damage across generations and her personal loss via seven miscarriages, in her activism because as she stated, 'I plead with you to do what you can, to not allow the suffering we Marshallese have experienced to be repeated in any other community in the world' (Eknilang, 2003, p.321). As I reflected deeply on the PISFCC's efforts, my heart filled with *māfana*. In the Tongan language, *māfana* refers to the feelings of appreciation, warmth and joy that result from witnessing a beautiful, meaningful performance.

Embodying Pacific values

The PISFCC members demonstrate a strong regional identity (the Pacific region) in addition to their respective national affiliations (Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Fiji, Tonga, and so forth). Such a regional identity reflects an existing social and cultural cohesion that is strengthened through their campaign, which—borrowing words from the Pacific Community—is underpinned by ‘...a spirit of solidarity, relationality, and connectedness’ (Pacific Community, 2022, p. 14).

According to its website, The Pacific Community (or SPC) is ‘the principal scientific and technical organization in the Pacific region, proudly supporting development since 1947. We are an international development organization owned and governed by our 27 country and territory members (The Pacific Community, n.d.).’ It released its *Pacific Regional Culture Strategy 2022–2032* in 2022. This strategy is underpinned by ‘Pacific cultural philosophies and a shared values platform which emphasizes the importance of relationships and interdependence’

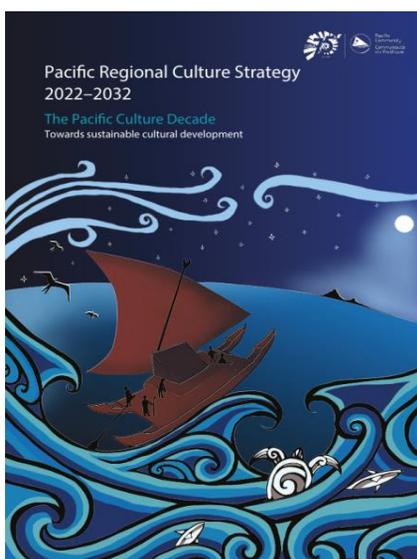
(Pacific Community, 2022, p. 27). Several proverbs from around the Pacific region are provided and explained on page 28 to offer insight into shared Pacific values. I have selected one (refer to Figure 2) that I consider to be reflective of PISFCC’s approach.

The PIF is a Pacific regional organization founded in 1971 and is made up of eighteen member countries and territories that work together on ‘...pressing issues and challenges, and foster collaboration in the pursuit of shared goals (Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, n.d., para 1).’ The PIF released its *2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent* in 2022. The PIF report identifies and describes nine Pacific values (2022, p. 7). Of these, three resonated strongly with me in relation to the actions of the PISFCC (see Figure 3).

Connecting the journey of Pacific Islands Students Fighting Climate Change’s to sustainable development goals

Target 4.7 under Sustainable Development Goal 4 aims to ensure that all learners acquire the

Figure 2. Pacific values and the Pacific Community



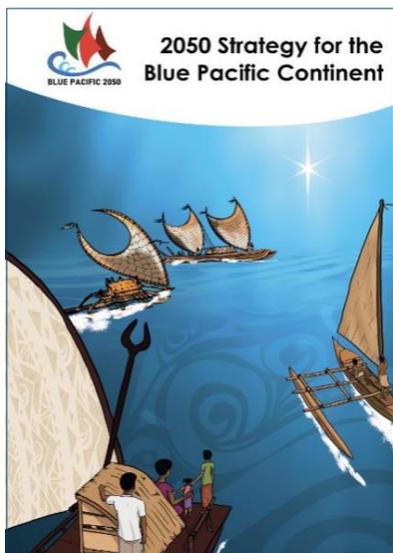
“

Fiji: *Solesolevaki* means to come together as a community and working together as a family towards the common good for collective wellbeing and prosperity. Solesolevaki is a process that emphasises social relations, reciprocity and interdependence in working towards a common goal and social cohesion

”

Note. Cover page of the *Pacific Regional Culture strategy 2022–2032* (Pacific Community, 2022) and a direct quote (p.28)

Figure 3. Pacific values and the Pacific Islands Forum



We recognise *regional cooperation and our shared commitment* to work together, as an important platform for achieving the greatest benefits for our people.

We treasure the *diversity and heritage* of the Pacific and seek an inclusive future in which our faiths, cultural values, and traditional knowledge are respected, honoured and protected.

We strive for effective, *open and honest relationships* and *inclusive and enduring partnerships*—based on mutual accountability and respect—with each other, within our sub–regions, within our region and beyond.



Note. Cover page of the *2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent* (Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, 2022) and a direct quote (p. 7)

knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development and live sustainable lifestyles by 2030 (United Nations, n.d.). This includes educating people in areas such as global citizenship, human rights, gender equality, peace and non–violence, and cultural diversity, thereby fostering values and attitudes for a more just, inclusive and sustainable future.

How has the PISFCC journey contributed to SDG 4 and Target 4.7? I selected three examples from across the PISFCC website to support my argument.

- The PISFCC Campaign Brief, entitled ‘Briefing Document: An International Court of Justice Advisory Opinion on Climate Change’, was published in 2022. The PISFCC states that ‘Our core campaign remains convincing the governments of the world to seek an Advisory Opinion from the International Court of Justice.’ Then they go on to state that ‘We are also committed to **educating and activating** all Pacific youth to become

aware and take action to help prevent and fight against climate change’ (PISFCC, n.d., ‘Campaign resources’ page; emphasis added);

- The People’s Petition was a significant outcome of the organized event called the People’s Assembly, held on December 3–5, 2024. 18 witness statements were curated, from ‘across every continent... individuals who stand as representatives for communities that have contributed almost nothing to the climate crisis yet face its harshest and most unjust consequences’. These witness statements ‘place **human rights** at the heart of its advisory opinion’ (PISFCC, n.d., ‘People’s Petition’ page; emphasis added); and
- The PISFCC Videos—A collection of informative, educational videos accessible to a range of audiences. It consists of a series of five videos including ‘The World is an Island’ featuring PISFCC members; an animated video entitled ‘Power of the People’, and a music video entitled ‘The islands are calling.’ The longest video is almost 7 minutes

long; the others are about 3 minutes in length. (PISFCC, n.d., 'Videos' page; emphasis added). The videos celebrate **cultural diversity** and promote Pacific **values and attitudes** (refer to Figure 3) as unifying and empowering.

The PISFCC website is an engaging and comprehensive record of the overall campaign, the ICJ outcome, the media response, and more. It serves as an illuminating Pacific example of youth-led climate action and justice, as well as peace education and global citizenship education.¹⁾

Conclusion

Change and transformation come from processes (including educational ones) that build capacity and nurture the community's collective identity,

enabling people to author their own powerful story of change. The multiple cross-generational opportunities for learning (and teaching) that the PISFCC's campaign provided (and continues to provide) for people across time and space are arguably a powerful change story.

I believe that the journeys shared in this paper serve as a powerful reminder that the Pacific Region's strength lies in unity. The stories about the PISFCC weave together culture, spirituality, international and environmental law, history and activism. The Pacific Region continues to demonstrate leadership—particularly through its youth—in building a sustainable future and protecting our lands, waters and heritage for generations to come.

1) An additional resource that educators should be aware of is a documentary film following three PISFCC leaders. Titled *YUMI: The Whole World: A Documentary about Bringing the World's Biggest Problem to the Highest Court in the World*, it is available at <https://yumi-documentary.org/>

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02

PART

Global citizenship education responses to the post-truth crisis

Section 2

Educators' strategies for countering post-truth narratives

Chutidej Samret

Bum Chul Park

Samsoo Sa-U

Jasmine B.-Y. Sim

Takaaki Fujiwara

Charu Saini

Rebuilding trust through history education



Chutidej Samret

Teacher, Bangpakok Witthayakhom School

Chutidej Samret is a teacher at Bangpakok Witthayakhom School in Bangkok, Thailand. He was part of the Organizing Committee for the development of *Promoting Intercultural Dialogue and a Culture of Peace in South-East Asia through Shared Histories*, a manual integrating historical empathy into the curriculum, learning models and teaching methods. He was also a guest speaker on the topic of 'Building democratic citizenship through Thai history' (Samret, 2018). He is currently a member of the Committee for APCEIU's 'Global Citizenship Education Curriculum Development and Integration' project from 2024 to 2026. His research interests are focused on intangible cultural heritage in classrooms, as well as its intersection with politics and education.

Introduction

History teaching in Thailand faces significant challenges across political, social and cultural dimensions. Over time, history has been used as a political tool to serve specific ideologies, which have had a long-term impact on society. Furthermore, Thai pedagogy remains trapped in traditional teaching methods. Consequently, history education in Thailand has failed to produce students with critical thinking skills.

A close examination of the national history curriculum reveals a primary focus on historical knowledge rather than on the processes or competencies of historical enquiry. The learning outcomes of this curriculum often produce compliant students who do not question the established narrative and are expected to feel a sense of national pride. As a result, students lack the necessary qualifications to become global citizens and are unable to adapt to the rapid changes in the world.

Based on this analysis, I propose two key issues regarding historical education in the Thai context: the dominance of royal-nationalist history in Thai schools and the prevailing reliance on rote memorization.

Royal-nationalist history in Thai schools

This modern narrative recounts a nation's struggle for independence, led by its monarch. It conceives of 'the king as the leader of the nation-state' (Winichakul, 1997). This royal-nationalist framework has shaped the country's historical content as a national narrative in a systemic and multifaceted way, embedding it in educational policy, maintaining it through curriculum content, and amplifying it through media and cultural dissemination (Jory, 2003). One study found that such versions of history have been relentlessly repeated through

government-issued textbooks, the national curriculum and teachers in classrooms, perpetuating the discriminatory mythology that Thai people should be recognized only by their subjecthood and not as citizens (Sripokangkul, 2020).

Drawing upon the insights of Thongchai Winichakul (2004), let us assume that Thai history is a crystallization of Thailand's knowledge of its neighbours over time. Further, this history continues to inform and influence Thai experiences with these countries today, rendering them meaningful in specific ways. 'History' here refers particularly to the source narrative of Thai history, which is rooted in the perceptions of its neighbours by the Siamese overlord. However, it has been formulated into modern historical consciousness since the early twentieth century in the light of the painful Franco-Siamese conflict of 1893.

The concept of "royalist-nationalist history (prawatisat baep rachachatniyom)" serves as the master narrative dominating historical thought in Thailand, leaving minimal room for alternative perspectives. This history is rooted in the evolution from a traditional Siamese system of overlordship to a modern nation-state framework. Thai history's master narrative centers on portraying the monarchy as the guardian and defender of national sovereignty. Strategically developed by Bangkok's aristocracy and nobility, particularly figures like Prince Damrong during the late absolute monarchy, this narrative casts the kings as heroic figures who protect Siam's independence from foreign threats, thereby reinforcing the monarchy's central role in the national identity.

The narrative's depiction of Siam's neighbours acknowledges that pre-modern relationships were predicated on feudal tribute and overlordship

among otherwise autonomous polities, such as Lao and Cambodian regions, rather than fixed territorial boundaries as understood today. However, the master narrative retroactively overlays modern concepts of national territorial sovereignty onto this system, legitimizing the historical dominance of the Siamese court over its neighbours.

The Franco–Siamese conflict (Pak Nam Crisis) of 1893 is crucial as the origin of modern royalist–nationalist historiography. Following 1893, the new historical discourse emphasized defending Siam’s independence from Western powers, particularly France. The official narrative frames this episode as Siam’s territorial loss and victimization. Yet, critics like Thongchai Winichakul provocatively reconceptualize it as a struggle between the “big wolf” (France) and the “small wolf” (Siam) over the “lambs” (Lao and Cambodian territories), highlighting Siam’s active expansionist ambitions masked by the official victim narrative. This royalist–nationalist narrative was solidified and disseminated through the compulsory education system after the 1932 coup, securing its dominance as Thailand’s foundational historical consciousness.

This restructured master narrative not only affirms the centrality of the monarchy but also serves as an ideological straitjacket, limiting critical historical reinterpretation and perpetuating a version of history that aligns with political power structures and national identity.

Rote memorization of history

Students are often required to learn more than just the heroic deeds of monarchs; they are also expected to memorize their names, birth years, periods of reign, key events during their rule and other specific details. Their knowledge is then assessed through tests that measure their ability

to recall these facts, often neglecting the broader historical context and the changes that occurred over time. This rote-learning approach overlooks the vital role of history in cultivating active citizenship, contributing to students’ disinterest in the subject. This has a significantly detrimental effect on both historical education and the development of a democratic society.

Figure 1. A Thai history textbook officially authorized for use in schools across Thailand



Note. Adapted from “แกะรอยประวัติศาสตร์ ‘ลืม’ ของบทเรียน หนังสือ-บทประวัติศาสตร์ที่หายาก (Tracing the ‘Forgotten’ History: Student Detectives and Apprentice Historians)” (Thai Civil Rights and Investigative Journalism, 2023)

The role of historical empathy in advancing the core values of global citizenship education

Around the world, many countries have increasingly focused on incorporating the skill of historical empathy to foster mutual understanding and create a historical dialogue between the past, present and future. Unfortunately, this crucial skill is notably absent from Thailand’s historical education curriculum. This is a significant concern, as historical empathy is the ability to enter the foreign world of the past, enabling students to transcend the boundaries of presentism by developing rich understandings of the past from multiple viewpoints, particularly those of the historical agent. It builds historical thinking capacities and helps students become more reflexive and critical thinkers. The process of historical

empathy also makes space for a range of feelings, emotions and connections alongside historical enquiry. In doing so, historical empathy prioritizes (a) the ability to think historically, and (b) preparing young students to become responsible, caring citizens.

Case studies from Thai classrooms and their applications

The instructional design was inspired by my participation in the development of the manual titled *Promoting Intercultural Dialogue and a Culture of Peace in South-East Asia through Shared Histories*.¹⁾ This project—a collaboration between UNESCO, the Asia-Pacific Centre of Education for International Understanding, the Government of South Korea and the Ministry of Education, Thailand—integrated historical empathy into the curriculum, learning models and teaching methods. The manual aims to forge social and cultural connections among people in the region, fostering greater empathy through mutual interaction. This, in turn, can lead to a deeper

shared understanding and, ultimately, to lasting peace in the region. My purpose in using this manual for history instruction was to focus on helping students understand their own origins and providing a path forward for them as individuals, as members of local communities, as a nation and as part of a larger sub-regional group in the Asian continent.

Bringing intangible cultural heritage into the classroom

The project emphasizes the creation of new perspectives on history and proposes new approaches to teaching the subject. The goal is to avoid linking the concept of the nation-state in the past with that of the present. Instead, the focus is on highlighting the similarities among people from different regions and fostering knowledge, mutual understanding and respect for one another. Further, this manual, *Promoting Intercultural Dialogue and a Culture of Peace in South-East Asia through Share Histories*, aims to raise awareness about the importance of Thailand’s living heritage through both formal and non-formal education. It also strives to engage countries in the South-East Asian (SEA) region in safeguarding their living heritage, while fostering mutual understanding and global citizenship. It helps students understand historical contexts, changes and developments by using historical methods to cultivate historical empathy in the classroom.

Figure 2. Two history education manuals



Note. Reprinted from “Promoting Intercultural Dialogue and a Culture of Peace in South-East Asia through Shared Histories” (Left) and “Bringing Intangible Cultural Heritage into the Classroom” (Right) (Bureau of Academic Affairs and Educational Standards, 2023; 2024)

Activities, tasks and projects that elicit empathy

Museum-based learning is a powerful tool for supporting historical empathy, as museums can serve as rich, interactive classrooms that deepen students’ understanding of history, culture and art. To investigate how archaeology could be embedded into museum-based experiences to

engage students in learning about SEA's ancient history, I utilized an inquiry-based approach. I designed learning activities under the theme of 'How did we get here? The transformation of culture in our land' to provide students with an opportunity to handle and study artefacts (See Figure 3).

Figure 3. Students critically analysing primary historical sources at a museum



Note. Photo taken by the author (personal collection, 2024)

This approach helped students demonstrate historical empathy and a contextual understanding of SEA. A variety of inputs contributed to the success of the lesson, enabling students to reflect on the role of cultural heritage in shaping identity, community and global citizenship.

Elements of the process of fostering historical empathy

To cultivate historical empathy in students, I have applied the processes outlined by Sara Karn (2023) in her article, *Historical Empathy: A Cognitive-Affective Theory for History Education in Canada*:

...historical empathy can support the development of understandings, skills and dispositions related to the curriculum and life

beyond the classroom. Students can develop historical thinking competencies and consider various connections among perspectives in the past and present. In the process, they may also develop the skills and dispositions required to become caring and open-minded citizens who are willing to effect change in the present. (p. 86)

Evidence and contextualization

In this phase of learning, students are afforded a unique opportunity to consider the pivotal role of evidence in developing historical empathy. This is followed by a discussion on the importance of contextualization. As students conduct their analysis, teachers play a crucial role by providing strategic guidance for interpreting historical texts. They pose thought-provoking questions that help foster an empathetic engagement with historical figures in students.

Through the process of transforming sources into evidence, students learn to account for different and, at times, conflicting perspectives. This is a foundational skill for historical enquiry that also holds significant applications in the contemporary context. The pre-visit phase, where students engage in a preliminary dialogue with primary and secondary sources, is designed to stimulate their curiosity (See Figure 4).

This initial interaction encourages students to critically question historical evidence, taking into account all the dimensions of its context. Subsequently, they are able to synthesize the connections between multiple pieces of evidence. The teacher's role is to curate these learning experiences for students before their on-site visit to the museum.

Figure 4. A pre-visit activity encouraging students to engage in dialogue with historical evidence



Note. Photo taken by the author (personal collection, 2023)

Informed historical imagination

After students have thoroughly considered evidence and its contextualization, they will inevitably encounter interpretative gaps in historical sources. This is where the role of imagination becomes crucial in filling these gaps. Guided by critical thinking, students can use their own imagination to create a cohesive narrative when historical evidence appears to be incomplete. This process requires them to ensure their imaginative interpretations align with their knowledge of the historical context of the period. Further, this approach enables them to expand their understanding of SEA history, as they are encouraged to think beyond the available fragments of information. This method of enquiry strengthens their ability to construct a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the past. By encouraging students to engage with their imagination, educators can help them develop a deeper capacity for historical empathy and hone their historical thinking skills.



Figure 5. Students listen to diverse historical perspectives for future analysis



Note. Photo taken by the author (personal collection, 2023)

Historical perspectives

At this stage, students are given the opportunity to interpret history from multiple viewpoints using available evidence, and they may also consider existing interpretations by historians (See Figure 5). However, the key objective of this phase is to help students avoid presentism—that is, judging the past through the lens of modern values and ideas.

Students strive to identify diverse perspectives within historical enquiry to address the core

question of the activity: ‘How did we get here?’ By examining historical viewpoints, they can recognize and understand various interpretations of the past. This is essential if we want students to develop historical thinking skills and become citizens who can empathize with different viewpoints.

Naturally, teachers must carefully consider whether the evidence provided for student analysis offers a sufficiently broad range of perspectives. In the classroom, teachers can facilitate activities such as debates and discussions to promote perspective-taking, including third-person writing tasks. This preparatory work, done before the on-site museum visit, allows students to test and evaluate their own perspectives.

Ethical judgements

In this phase, students synthesize their knowledge from the three preceding stages to analyse the factors that influenced the decisions of historical actors. The teacher’s role is to stimulate students’ historical thinking, enabling them to make meaningful connections between the past, present and future. Educators must guide students in a

Figure 6. Students collaboratively design their desired future society by using historical data



Note. Photo taken by the author (personal collection, 2024)

careful and diligent examination of various sources of evidence. This process of ethical judgement not only aims to understand past ethical decisions but also to consider the enduring impact of those choices on the present and future. Students must be given opportunities to engage with historical ethical dilemmas and to reflect on their outcomes as responsible citizens.

Caring

In the fifth and final phase, teachers prompt students to reflect on their own emotions and feelings toward the people, events, behaviours and actions of the past. Following their museum visit, students demonstrate an internal shift, showing genuine curiosity about their immediate surroundings and an ability to connect the past with how their current society came to be. They can empathize with people of a similar age, even those living across borders, and develop a sense of shared experience through their direct engagement with primary historical sources at the museum. This process highlights that emotional engagement is not antithetical to historical methods; rather, it actively fosters students’ historical thinking and cultivates their capacity for ethical judgement. Ultimately, students who have participated in these learning activities are inspired to seek positive change within themselves and in society, striving to build a better community for the future (See Figure 6).

Transforming students: The impact of historical empathy on civic engagement

Historical empathy is a transformative approach to teaching history that integrates both analytical and emotional perspectives. By engaging students with historical evidence, guiding them through contextual interpretation, and encouraging imaginative and ethical reflection, this method

fosters a deeper understanding of the past. At the same time, it helps students become more empathetic, thoughtful citizens who are prepared to participate constructively in a democratic society. Through carefully designed activities, students build skills and dispositions that continue to shape their engagement with civic life well beyond the classroom.

There are two key learning outcomes of this approach to historical education. These outcomes can impact the civic engagement of students, who are also the country's future citizens.

- Building the critical skills and qualities of a global citizen: Developing the capacity for historical thinking helps students develop their critical thinking skills, historical awareness and logical reasoning—all of which are crucial qualities of a global citizen. Historical thinking can be applied not only in history and social studies but also in other subjects to foster students' sense of global citizenship;
- Fostering more caring, open-minded citizens who are willing to actively work towards building

a better society: This approach helps students understand power dynamics and develop empathy for oppressed peoples. It helps students develop the qualities of active citizens who are determined to create a more just society and to effect real change in the future by learning from the lessons of the past. By allowing students to connect with the emotions and experiences of people in the past, historical empathy fosters a sense of shared humanity and compassion. This emotional engagement can motivate students to become more caring individuals who are inspired to work for positive change in their own communities and society.

This approach to teaching history challenges traditional, nationalistic narratives by encouraging students to transcend the limits of presentism and consider multiple perspectives. It helps students avoid linking nation-state concepts of the past with those of the present, and instead emphasizes the similarities among diverse peoples. Ultimately, historical empathy can support decolonization and promote intercultural dialogue and a culture of peace in SEA countries.

1) See the UNESCO Shared Histories of Southeast Asia manual at <https://sharedhistories.asia/>

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**Democracy in the Post-Truth Crisis:
The Role of Global Citizenship Education**

Strengthening democratic citizenship education through youth-based activities within a community



Bum Chul Park

Teacher, Kyungmoon High School

Bum Chul Park has been teaching history for twenty years at a private high school for boys in Seoul, Republic of Korea. He connects the school—a space for student life and knowledge—with the community through global citizenship education. For example, the area where his school is located was a significant center during the Korean War. A refugee community has also settled there to escape the Ethiopian civil war. Bum Chul is helping young people lead activities that transform the memories of such war-torn areas into those of peace. Ultimately, through these social participation activities, he tries to practise world peace.

Young people's political participation in the Republic of Korea

Since the establishment of the Republic of Korea in 1948, only citizens aged 21 and above could vote. However, as educational opportunities gradually expanded and the level of public consciousness significantly improved, the right to vote was extended to those aged 19 and older. However, children and teenagers were not given the right to vote. Due to the efforts of many youth groups and citizens, the Public Official Election Act was revised in 2019 to grant voting rights to high school seniors who had reached their 18th birthdays. Since then, there have been many changes in youth suffrage. As of 2022, the age to run for parliamentary and local elections has been reduced

Figure 1. A teacher who voted in a school uniform to show solidarity with the movement for youth suffrage



Note. Photo owned by the author (personal collection, 2018)

from 25 to 18, allowing teenagers to run for general and local elections. In 2022, teenagers aged 18 and 19 years stood for the local council elections in Gyeonggi Province and Gyeongju City (Jeon, 2022; Choi, 2022).

However, while those aged 16 and above may join political parties and those aged 18 and above may stand for elections, young people are still excluded from voting in elections on education-based issues, such as the superintendent elections. These are issues that directly affect the youth. Not being able to vote on them leaves their voices unrepresented.

Meanwhile, various social issues such as gender discrimination, discrimination against migrants, workplace inequalities and hatred of LGBTIQ+ people are increasingly evident in the classroom. For some young men in particular, these dynamics have manifested as growing gender conflicts in the classroom, including misogyny. Male students have also voiced their discontent with the compulsory military service requirement. Since only male students are required to serve, this has contributed to the rise of misogyny.

According to a KBS current affairs programme aired in 2025, online hate comments related to women ranked highest among all categories of hateful remarks in online communities (KBS Current Affairs, 2025). This phenomenon can also be observed in classroom settings. Korean classrooms are no longer free from hate. When female teachers follow the official curriculum for sex education, some male students have reportedly labeled them as feminists or as being biased toward women.

As a result of former President Yoon Suk-yeol

illegally enforcing martial law, the Republic of Korea held a snap presidential election on 3 June 2025, only three years into his five-year term. In this election, voters were influenced, to some extent, by structural contradictions such as employment challenges on one hand and unstable housing prices on the other.

At the same time, teachers who educate young people about democratic citizenship and universal suffrage are restricted from exercising their fundamental political rights due to their obligation to maintain political neutrality. For example, teachers are prohibited from joining political parties or sponsoring political funds and cannot participate in election campaigns. Among the thirty-eight OECD member countries, Korea is the only one that does not fully recognize the political citizenship of teachers and public officials. In contrast, university professors have called for the “guarantee of basic political rights,” arguing that they should be allowed to engage in political activities and run for election (Jo, 2025).

Tackling classroom issues through community social activities

Kyungmoon High School, a private high school for boys established in Seoul in 1980, has sought to address these classroom issues—including expressions of hatred—by encouraging the youth to participate in community-linked social activities for several years. Owing to its continued efforts to foster a safe and peaceful school environment through democratic and global civic education that connects the school with local communities, the school was awarded the Park Jongcheol Scholarship by the community in 2025.

Park Jongcheol was a 23-year-old college student at Seoul National University who was tortured to

death by the police in 1987 for participating in the democratization movement. The nationwide protests that began with his death lit the fuse for the democratization uprising on 10 June 1987. ‘On the occasion of martyr Park Jongcheol’s birthday on April 1, 2025, I present this scholarship. We hope that students at Kyungmoon High School will remember and practice the importance of democracy and human rights in the community that martyr Park Jongcheol dreamed of.’, said Father Park Dong-ho, chairperson of the Park Jongcheol Memorial Foundation, who awarded the scholarship to Kibitzer, a student democratic citizenship practice club at Kyungmoon High School.

Figure 2. Kyungmoon High School’s kibitzer club being awarded the Park Jongcheol Scholarship on 1 April 2025



Note. Photo taken by the author (personal collection, 2025)

After receiving the scholarship, the club members began contemplating how to use the scholarship fund. Using it to finance snacks and transportation expenses incurred during club activities throughout

the year felt too trivial compared to the gravity of martyr Park Jongcheol's dream for democracy and a better world. After much deliberation, the Kibitzer Club decided to utilize the scholarship to conduct peace education activities and reflect on instances of state violence in the history of the democratization process in the Republic of Korea. These activities would aim to promote the spirit of the April 1948 Jeju Uprising, the May 1980 Gwangju Democratization Movement and the June 1987 Democratic Uprising, continuing the legacy of martyr Park Jongcheol.

April 1948 Jeju Uprising

As its first project, the club decided to display a banner at the seventy-seventh anniversary of the April 1948 Jeju Uprising with the help of the Commemorative Project Committee at the Jeju Uprising Peace Park.

Figure 3. Students at Kyungmoon High School displaying banners during the April 1948 Jeju national memorial ceremony on 3 April 2025



Note. Photo taken by the author (personal collection, 2025)

The April 1948 Jeju Uprising refers to the massacre of civilians that occurred on Jeju Island between 1947 and 1954 during armed conflicts and suppression operations between the South Korean Workers' Party (Namrodang) and government

forces. After the Second World War, Korea was liberated from Japanese imperialism. Still, the peninsula was divided by the US military government in the south and the Soviet military administration in the north. Amid ongoing conflicts between socialist and right-wing forces, clashes erupted during the independence movement commemoration on 1 March 1947. Following an armed uprising by the South Korean Workers' Party on 3 April 1948, government suppression operations resulted in the massacre of approximately 30,000 Jeju residents. This incident remained a taboo subject for decades until it was re-examined in the 1990s. It was only during the early 2000s, under the administrations of Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun, that the government enacted special legislation, established a Truth Commission, issued official apologies and provided compensation to victims.

When high school students hoisted a banner commemorating the April 1948 Jeju Uprising in Seoul, Jeju civil society showed their support by featuring the ceremony in their local newspaper. In response, club members also engaged in peace activities in solidarity with Jeju residents by visiting the Seoul National Cemetery. There, they researched the life records of those buried during the April 1948 Jeju Uprising and conducted activities to commemorate General Kim Ik-yeol (1921–88), who attempted to resolve the conflict peacefully.

Furthermore, following the midterm examinations, students visited the Seoul National Cemetery on Teachers' Day, 15 May 2025, accompanied by residents familiar with the May 1980 Gwangju Democratization Movement. They conducted volunteer activities and explored the movement's significance.

May 1980 Gwangju Democratization Movement and the June 1987 Democratic Uprising

The May 1980 Gwangju Democratization Movement was an uprising led by the citizens of Gwangju from Jeolla Province from 18 to 27 May 1980, demanding the resignation of Chun Doo-hwan's new military forces and the establishment of a democratic government following the 12 December 1979 military coup. As popular resistance spread nationwide, Chun Doo-hwan's forces expanded emergency martial law across the country. They used military force to brutally suppress the democratization movement, particularly targeting citizens in Gwangju.

On 14 June 2025—the second edition of the June 1987 Democratic Festival—students wore red t-shirts and jeans at the Park Jongcheol Memorial Center in Gwanak-gu, Seoul and staged a die-in¹⁾ in front of Park Jongcheol's statue.

The significance of this attire was to commemorate Alan Kurdi, a refugee child who died while fleeing the Syrian civil war in 2015. This activity was planned to call for solidarity with those

Figure 4. Student visit to the Park Jongcheol Memorial Centre on 14 June 2025, commemorating the June 1987 Democratic Uprising



Note. Photo taken by the author (personal collection, 2025)

suffering from war around the world and to demand participation from global citizens against the most violent act committed by humanity.

The activities planned for 2025 culminated on 3 November 2025, the ninety-sixth anniversary of the Gwangju Student Independence Movement. These include the 'Youth with a Flower' project, a collaborative initiative between students and the Gwanak Residents' Association.

The project also aims to install a sculpture containing the contents of a letter written by the late Lee Woo-geun, a 17-year-old school soldier who fought in the Korean War in 1950. The project commenced on 3 November 2022 and remains ongoing. The sculpture was completed on 3 November 2023 through the collaborative efforts of Kyungmoon High School students and local residents, who raised funds through small

Figure 5. Youth with a flower: Social engagement activities against war



Note. Photo taken by the author (personal collection, 2025)

Figure 6. Lee Woo-geun's *Sculpture of Peace*



Note. Photo taken by the author (personal collection, 2025)

donations and crowdfunding. It is currently being stored at Kyungmoon High School and is awaiting

approval for installation beside the Student Soldier Memorial Monument in Heukseok-dong.

When young people directly engage with current social issues in their communities and participate in problem-solving activities such as petitioning alongside residents, their awareness and sensitivity as democratic citizens grow, preparing them to become global citizens in the future. It is hoped that such activities, which allow them to experience and practice democracy as members of the community, will be further expanded.

1) A die-in is a form of non-violent civil disobedience where protesters feign death by lying down in a public space to draw attention to a grievance.

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**Democracy in the Post-Truth Crisis:
The Role of Global Citizenship Education**

A reflective narrative of faith-integrated pedagogies for global citizenship education in Thailand's Deep South



Samsoo Sa-U

Assistant Professor, Prince of Songkhla University

Samsoo Sa-U is an Assistant Professor at Prince of Songkhla University, Pattani Campus, in Thailand. He specializes in Islamic Educational Administration and Multicultural Education. His work bridges Islamic values with global competencies by developing inclusive pedagogical tools, such as the Hikmah, FITRAH (Faith–Identity–Tolerance–Resilience–Acceptance–Healing) and Taruf models, to promote peaceful coexistence, civic engagement and ethical leadership. He actively applies the community philosophical inquiry practice to cultivate critical thinking and counter Islamophobia through dialogue and reflective learning. He also leads the Inclusive City initiative in southern Thailand, empowering youth through digital citizenship, empathy and intercultural collaboration. Currently, he is researching fostering Muslim global citizenship in Islamic private schools. He has been invited to lead workshops promoting global citizenship education among educators and school leaders in Thailand's southernmost provinces. His contributions aim to nurture socially responsible Muslim citizens rooted in faith and committed to justice in a pluralistic world.

Introduction

Post-truth and democracy

In recent years, the term ‘post-truth’ has become emblematic of a global crisis in democracy. It describes a condition in which ‘objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief’ (Suiter, 2016, p. 25). Fuelled by digital media, algorithmic echo chambers and politicized narratives, the post-truth era has eroded public trust in institutions and weakened the foundations of democratic dialogue (Lewandowsky, Ecker, & Cook, 2017). When citizens can no longer agree on fundamental truths, societies risk sliding into polarization and authoritarianism.

Education is widely recognized as a critical response to this crisis. However, it is not enough for schools to transmit factual knowledge. As Gert Biesta (2011) argues, education must also cultivate ‘subjectification’ —the ability of learners to think critically, resist manipulation and act as responsible democratic agents. In post-truth contexts, democratic learning requires students to critically evaluate information, engage with diverse perspectives and participate in deliberations even amid profound disagreement.

The Southern Thailand context

These challenges take on urgency in Thailand’s Deep South, a region comprising the provinces of Pattani, Yala, Narathiwat and four districts of Songkhla. Predominantly Malay Muslim, the region was formally incorporated into Siam (later Thailand) under the Anglo-Siamese Treaty of 1909. Since then, its history has been marked by securitization and marginalization. Martial law, emergency decrees and special security measures have been in place for decades, shaping everyday life and undermining democratic freedoms (Liow, 2016).

This long-standing legacy of securitization has had a profound impact on education. Schools often prioritize assimilationist curricula that marginalize the Malay language, Islamic identity and local histories. Muslim youth frequently report cultural suppression, stereotyping and invisibility within the national narrative. In effect, education has become a site for epistemic injustice, where certain identities and histories are silenced.

In the post-truth era, these dynamics are compounded by misinformation (Barton, 2019), by global Islamophobia and the stigmatization of Muslim communities as ‘dangerous’ or ‘backward’. For young people in the Deep South, identity and citizenship are shaped by both local security discourses and flows of global disinformation. The result is what can be described as ‘dual alienation’ —a sense of exclusion from both the national and global communities.

Global citizenship education as a response

In recent years, global citizenship education (GCED) has emerged as an international framework for fostering peace, inclusion and sustainability (UNESCO, 2015, 2018). It emphasizes three domains of learning: cognitive (knowledge of global issues), socio-emotional (empathy and solidarity) and behavioural (civic action). GCED is widely promoted as an antidote to polarization and post-truth misinformation.

However, critics caution that GCED often carries Eurocentric and secular biases (Andreotti, 2011; Pashby, 2015). By privileging Western liberal values and neglecting religious worldviews, it risks alienating learners in non-Western and faith-based contexts. In Muslim societies, this can produce resistance or disengagement if GCED is perceived as an externally imposed concept rather than one

rooted in the local context.

Towards faith-integrated global citizenship education

In my work, I have developed a faith-integrated approach to GCED that draws on Islamic principles while aligning with global democratic goals (i-GCED). Over several years of practice, this approach has evolved into what I call the ‘Love–Live–Life–Learn (4L)’ model, grounded in Qur’anic and Prophetic teachings. The model emphasizes four interconnected dimensions: ‘Love’ (mercy and solidarity), ‘Live’ (justice and service), ‘Life’ (dignity and spiritual growth) and ‘Learn’ (knowledge and wisdom). Through this framework, I seek to reframe global citizenship not as a voluntary civic choice but as a religious obligation (*farḍ*) rooted in the ethic of stewardship (*khilāfah*). This reframing has enabled educators and learners in Thailand’s Deep South to view GCED as consistent with, rather than opposed to, their faith identity, making democratic learning more legitimate and transformative in a Muslim minority context.

Aim and reflective focus

This paper reflects on my experience of implementing the i-GCED framework in Thailand’s Deep South. It explores the challenges faced by Muslim minority educators and learners in the post-truth era and how faith-integrated pedagogies can empower democratic and inclusive classrooms, as well as the

lessons that this context offers to the global GCED discourse. Rather than presenting detached findings, the paper shares reflective narratives—stories of doubt, struggle and fragile hope—to examine how education can sustain the imagination of democracy under the weight of martial law.

The post-truth era and democratic learning

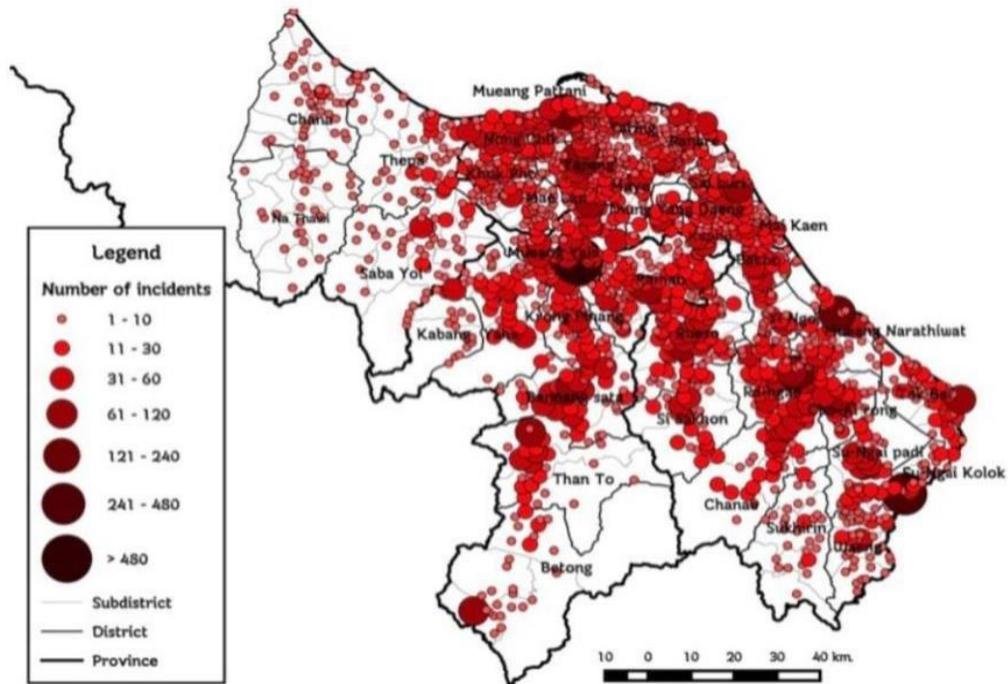
The post-truth condition is marked by misinformation, erosion of shared truths and weakening of democratic institutions (Suiter, 2016; Lewandowsky, Ecker, & Cook, 2017). Social media accelerates the spread of polarized narratives, resulting in epistemic fragmentation (Mihailidis & Viotty, 2017). Education stands at the forefront of democratic resilience, fostering citizens’ critical understanding, ethical reasoning and dialogical competence to navigate a media landscape of misinformation (Barton, 2019). John Dewey (1916) envisioned schools as laboratories of democracy, while Biesta (2011) emphasized the role of education in forming subjects who can question and participate.

In Southern Thailand, post-truth intersects with securitization. Martial law, combined with state-controlled historical narratives, erodes trust in democratic institutions. Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2014) refers to this as ‘epistemicide’, which is the destruction of marginalized knowledge systems. For Malay Muslim learners, the challenge

Table 1. Love–Live–Life–Learn (4L) model of faith-integrated GCED

4L	Key focus	GCED dimension	Islamic principle
LOVE	Compassion; empathy	Anti-prejudice thinking; interfaith dialogue	<i>Rahmah</i> (Mercy); <i>Ukhuwwah</i> (Brotherhood)
LIVE	Civic engagement; resilience	Ethical living; social justice; local activism	<i>‘Adl</i> (Justice); <i>Amanah</i> (Trust)
LIFE	Spiritual dignity; well-being	Personal growth; identity development	<i>Fitrah</i> (Innate nature); <i>Karāmah</i> (Dignity)
LEARN	Lifelong learning; global literacy	Critical thinking; media literacy; global awareness	<i>‘Ilm</i> (Knowledge); <i>Ijtihad</i> (Reasoning)

Figure 1. Incidents of violence in Thailand’s Deep South (2004–2017)



Note. Reproduced from Center for Conflict Studies and Cultural Diversity (2019). Used with permission

lies not only in confronting global misinformation but also in reclaiming erased local truths.

Global citizenship education

GCED is a key policy agenda under Sustainable Development Goal 4.7 (UNESCO, 2015), which focuses on cultivating knowledge of global issues, fostering empathy for diversity and enabling civic action (2018). Scholars argue that it provides tools to counter post-truth polarization (Oxley & Morris, 2013).

However, critiques of GCED abound. Vanessa Andreotti (2011) has highlighted GCED’s Eurocentric bias; Karen Pashby (2015) has pointed out the gap between lofty policy and weak classroom implementation; Nuraan Davids and Yusef Waghid (2020) have noted the neglect of religious worldviews. In Muslim contexts, secular models of GCED can alienate learners.

Islamic traditions offer alternative resources. Qur’anic values such as *rahmah* (mercy), *‘adl* (justice) and *khilāfah* (stewardship) align with civic responsibility (Halstead, 2004). The i-GCED framework builds on these Qur’anic values, articulating GCED as a religious obligation, making it more legitimate and resonant in Muslim minority contexts.

Innovative pedagogies in conflict contexts

In societies shaped by conflict and contested identities, conventional approaches to education are rarely sufficient. Learners require pedagogies that not only transmit knowledge but also cultivate resilience, empathy and democratic dispositions in the face of fear and division. Scholars have long argued that innovative pedagogies can open such possibilities, especially when grounded in real-life experiences, historical recognition and dialogical reasoning.

One important strand is experiential learning, articulated by David Kolb as a cyclical process of concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization and active experimentation (1984). In conflict-affected settings, experiential learning enables students to encounter diversity in embodied and relational ways rather than through abstract concepts. Janet Eyler and Dwight Giles (1999) emphasize that learning tied to lived community engagement deepens understanding and nurtures civic responsibility. In my own practice, I designed and facilitated the KAWAN City Trail in southern Thailand as an application of this approach. By walking through multicultural neighbourhoods, entering mosques, temples and shrines and listening to local stories, students discovered forms of pluralism that textbooks rarely conveyed. They began to see their city as a shared heritage, thereby challenging stereotypes and divisions reinforced by securitization.

Another critical approach is historical dialogue, which acknowledges painful pasts as a pathway to reconciliation. Daniel Bar-Tal and Gemma Bennink (2004) argue that reconciliation remains superficial unless suppressed narratives of violence and injustice are addressed. In my own practice, I initiated the Historical Dialogue Project (2024) in southern Thailand to create safe, though fragile, spaces where students and community members could share silenced histories of disappearances and state violence. For many participants, it was the first time they had heard such memories expressed in public. The act of remembering became not only a way of reclaiming dignity but also a form of resistance against the enforced amnesia of martial law, giving students a deeper appreciation of truth-telling as a democratic practice.

A third approach is philosophical enquiry, rooted in Matthew Lipman's (2009) model of communities of enquiry. This pedagogy invites learners to engage in reasoned, dialogical exploration of questions that matter to them. Laurance Splitter and Ann Sharp (1995) highlight that philosophical enquiry develops habits of deliberation essential for democratic life. In my own practice, I facilitated dialogue circles in southern Thailand, adapting this method to confront stereotypes and Islamophobia. Students debated questions such as, 'Why are Muslims often portrayed as dangerous?', and in doing so, they not only deconstructed misinformation but also practised respectful listening and collaborative reasoning.

What unites these pedagogies—experiential learning, historical dialogue and philosophical enquiry—is their shared orientation toward lived experience, recognizing multiple perspectives and cultivating agency. In my work, when these approaches were integrated with Islamic values, they gained additional legitimacy in the eyes of Muslim learners. Concepts such as *rahmah* (mercy), *'adl* (justice) and *ta'aruf* (mutual recognition) provided the ethical anchors that connected local faith traditions with global democratic goals. I observed how faith-informed pedagogies can nurture resilience and sustain hope, even under the pressures of securitization and the distortions of misinformation.

In this sense, education becomes more than instruction; it becomes an act of civic imagination. It allows students to walk through their city with new eyes, to remember their past with dignity and to deliberate their future with critical hope. Together, these pedagogies embody the spirit of GCED while adapting it to the fragile realities of conflict-affected Muslim minority contexts.

Table 2. Summary of i-GCED initiatives (2020–2025): Participants, challenges and contexts

Project	Year	Participants	Identified problem
FITRAH programme	2020	LGBTIQ+ Muslim Youth	Homophobia and social exclusion
Taaruf programme	2021	Muslim students in public schools	Lack of cultural sensitivity and interfaith understanding
Inclusive citizenship	2021	First-year students in general education courses on citizenship and civic consciousness	Limited active citizenship awareness
KAWAN City Trail: Media, Information and Digital Literacy (MIDL) for Inclusive Cities	2022	Muslim student in Islamic schools	Cultural sensitivity and community inclusion
KAWAN model (Knowledge–attitude–working together–analysis–networking)	2022	First-year students in general education (3 integrated subjects)	Limited cultural sensitivity and pluralism awareness
Community of philosophical enquiry (CoPE) for encountering Islamophobia	2023	Third-year students in Islamic Studies, Prince of Songkla University (PSU)	Lack of critical thinking and safe dialogue on Islamophobia (Hikmah ¹) curriculum)
Historical dialogue project	2024	Students, educators and community members involved in collaborative research	Reconciliation of historical conflict and contested narratives (Peace education)
i-GCED school	2025	Islamic school administrators	Lack of school-level strategic frameworks for fostering global citizenship

Methodology: Reflective narrative and researcher positionality

This study employs a reflective narrative methodology (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Chang, 2008), drawing on my lived experience as both an educator and a researcher. Between 2020 and 2025, I co-designed and facilitated a series of initiatives under the i-GCED framework, encompassing the Faith–Identity–Tolerance–Resilience–Acceptance–Healing (FITRAH) programme to the i-GCED Schools initiative, which are summarized in Table 2. These projects serve as the primary reflective archive, supported by journals, project documentation, participant narratives and relevant scholarships. The analysis follows a reflective spiral (Visser, 2010), moving between description, questioning and interpretation. As a Muslim educator living under martial law alongside my students, my positionality inevitably shapes the reflections; rather than

seeking neutrality, I embrace my identity as a lens for understanding both the fragility and resilience of democratic education in securitized spaces.

Reflective findings: Teaching under martial law

Every day, schools in Pattani begin with the same routine: military checkpoints. Soldiers stand by the road with rifles, randomly checking identification, sometimes detaining young men for questioning. For many of my students, this is not a rare occurrence but part of their everyday life. They arrive in class already carrying the anxiety of being seen as suspects before citizens.

In this atmosphere, teaching democracy is an uphill battle. One day, during a civic education lesson, I asked my students what ‘democracy’ meant to them. A boy raised his hand and said quietly, ‘Teacher,

democracy is about freedom. But if we really have democracy, why do soldiers need to check on us every day?’ Another added, ‘We learn about rights in books, but outside, we feel we have none.’

These moments reveal a stark contradiction. On paper, civic education emphasizes rights, participation and dialogue. In practice, students live under a regime of exception where martial law normalizes surveillance, restrictions and fear. Their democratic imagination is fractured: they know its ideals but doubt its possibilities in their lives.

The result is a form of cognitive dissonance. Students may memorize definitions of democracy for examinations, but their lived experience can undermine trust in those concepts. This aligns with Santos’ notion of ‘epistemicide’—the destruction not only of local knowledge but of the very possibility of believing in democratic knowledge (2014). When rights are consistently denied, the truth of democracy itself feels hollow.

Some students expressed resignation—‘That is just how life is here.’ Others responded with skepticism, asking whether democracy is a myth created by the majority. However, I also observed subtle forms of resistance. A few students engaged in critical questioning, linking martial law to broader patterns of injustice. In reflective journals, one student wrote: ‘Democracy is possible, but not here, not now. Maybe in the future.’

From a pedagogical perspective, this creates both a challenge and an opportunity. The challenge is obvious: civic education risks being dismissed as empty rhetoric when it ignores lived realities. However, the opportunity lies in acknowledging students’ doubts as valid and using them as entry points for critical reflection. By validating their

experiences, educators can begin to rebuild democratic learning from the ground up, even within conditions of securitization.

Thus, teaching under martial law results in a paradoxical outcome: students are simultaneously aware of democracy and disillusioned by it. Their questioning demonstrates both the fragility of democratic ideals under martial law and the potential for ‘critical consciousness’ (*conscientização*) (Freire, 1968/1970) to emerge when education validates lived truth.

Episode 1: Seeds of hope in the FITRAH programme (2020)

The FITRAH programme began as an attempt to create safe spaces for Muslim LGBTIQ+ youth who often feel doubly excluded—marginalized in wider Thai society and misunderstood within their own religious communities. During the first workshop, students sat in silence, avoiding eye contact. Their hesitancy reflected years of carrying stigma.

When we reframed dignity (*karāmah*) as a Qur’anic value, something shifted. A young participant whispered, ‘For the first time, I feel Islam is on my side.’ Another wrote in her reflections, ‘I used to hide. Now I know Allah created me with purpose. I can serve my community.’

The result was a restoration of personal dignity. Students began to see that their faith and the notion of citizenship were not in conflict with each other. They experienced what Biesta (2011) called ‘subjectification’—becoming someone who speaks and acts, rather than merely someone who is spoken about.

However, these observations were not expressed without a sense of fragility. One participant

admitted, 'This is the only space I feel safe. Outside, nothing has changed.' This highlighted the contrast between participants feeling empowered within the workshop, even as they continued to experience social exclusion outside of it. The programme thus revealed both the potential of faith-integrated GCED to affirm marginalized voices and the limitations imposed by broader cultural and political contexts.

Episode 2: Walking with KAWAN (2022)

The KAWAN (Knowledge–Attitude–Working together –Analysis–Networking) City Trail invited students to walk through multicultural neighbourhoods, visiting mosques, temples, Chinese shrines and heritage streets. For many, it was their first time entering non-Muslim spaces. One student remarked, 'I always thought this temple was forbidden, but now I see it is part of our city.'

The result was embodied pluralism. Students not only heard about diversity; they experienced it through sight, sound and conversation. They connected stories of coexistence to their own identities, developing empathy for neighbours they once would have seen as distant.

However, the trail unfolded under the watchful eye of military patrols. At one stop, students paused as a truck of soldiers passed by. A participant asked, 'If we walk freely, why do they still watch us?' This comment revealed how securitization infiltrates even the educational spaces of inclusion.

Kolb's (1984) experiential learning cycle was visible—students experienced, reflected, conceptualized and began to act differently in how they spoke about 'the other'. However, the paradox remained: pluralism was embraced in learning yet constrained by a political environment of surveillance.

Episode 3: Speaking truth in historical dialogue (2024)

The Historical Dialogue Project invited students and community members to share stories of conflict, state violence and resistance. The atmosphere was heavy with unspoken memories. A mother recounted her son's disappearance. Students wept, realizing that this pain was part of their community history.

The result was a profound recognition: 'We were always told to forget,' one student said, but now we know remembering is resistance'. Truth-telling created a sense of collective identity and solidarity. Bar-Tal and Bennink (2004) argued that reconciliation requires acknowledging multiple narratives. Here, education became a site for counter-memory against the state's narratives of silence.

However, fragility surfaced immediately. After the session, some participants asked nervously, 'Is it safe to say these things outside?' Under martial law, truth is precarious. Students gained awareness but also a renewed sense of fear. The project demonstrated that historical dialogue can empower 'critical consciousness' (*conscientização*) (Freire, 1970), but it also intensifies the risks associated with seeking the truth in securitized contexts.

Episode 4: i-GCED schools (2025)

By 2025, the i-GCED framework was piloted in whole-school practices. Teachers integrated GCED into lessons, framed civic responsibility as an Islamic duty and created safe dialogue spaces.

One teacher reflected, 'When I teach democracy through Islam, students listen differently. They see it as part of their faith, not an outside idea.' A student echoed this sentiment, stating, 'I used to

think democracy was not for Muslims. Now I see it is also our responsibility.’

The result was greater legitimacy and resonance. Linking GCED with Qur’anic values reduced skepticism and helped students embrace civic participation as both a global and religious duty. Schools became micro-democracies—spaces where dialogue, inclusion and responsibility were modelled, even if the broader political environment remained authoritarian.

However, fragility persisted here as well. Teachers admitted their fears. ‘We can do this in class’, they said, ‘but what if authorities think we are being political?’ This reflects the structural constraint of working under martial law: institutionalizing i-GCED creates new hope, but its sustainability depends on broader political reform.

Impact of i-GCED initiatives

Across all five reflective episodes, three interwoven patterns emerge that characterize the outcomes of the i-GCED initiatives in southern Thailand: the restoration of dignity, the emergence of a ‘critical consciousness’ (*conscientização*) (Freire, 1970) and a newfound fragility under martial law. These themes not only capture the lived experiences of learners and teachers but also indicate the paradoxes of practising democratic education in securitized contexts.

Restoration of dignity

Perhaps the most immediate and visible impact of i-GCED was the restoration of student dignity. In a region where Muslim learners are often viewed suspiciously, education that affirmed their faith and identity became a radical act of validation. When LGBTIQ+ youth in the FITRAH programme realized that Islam could be framed as a source of

inclusion, and when students in the i-GCED schools heard teachers describe democracy as part of *khilāfah* (stewardship), they felt recognized rather than erased.

This restoration of dignity is significant because dignity is the foundation of democratic participation. As Halstead (2004) notes, Islamic education is not only about transmitting knowledge but also about affirming *karāmah* (human dignity) as a God-given right. By linking civic responsibility to Qur’anic values, students experienced education not as an imposition of foreign ideas but as an affirmation of who they already were. This pattern suggests that without identity recognition, GCED risks alienation; with it, learners begin to see themselves as legitimate global citizens.

Emergence of ‘critical consciousness’

A second cross-cutting result was the emergence of ‘critical consciousness’ (*conscientização*) (Freire, 1970). Across initiatives, students questioned dominant narratives: ‘Why are Muslims portrayed as dangerous?’, ‘Why does martial law persist if democracy is promised?’, ‘Why are certain histories silenced?’ These questions revealed that students were becoming aware of structural inequalities and epistemic injustices.

This shift is more than intellectual curiosity—it is the beginning of democratic agency. As Biesta (2011) argues, education must move beyond socialization into subjectification, where learners develop the capacity to interrupt, question and act. For example, in the Historical Dialogue project, students realized that remembering silenced stories was itself an act of resistance. In the KAWAN City Trail, they discovered that coexistence had always been part of their city, challenging state narratives of divisiveness.

Through such reflections, learners began to view democracy and justice not as distant myths but as contested ideals worth reclaiming. They became active interpreters of their social reality, embodying Dewey's (1916) vision of schools as laboratories of democracy.

Fragility under martial law

Despite this progress, every episode was also marked by fragility. Under martial law, progress is easily overshadowed by fear and surveillance. Students who felt empowered in workshops confessed that they could not express the same views outside of the workshops. Teachers creating dialogue spaces worried about being accused of political disloyalty. Families telling painful truths asked if it was safe to remember them in a public space.

This fragility highlights the structural limits of educational reform under authoritarian conditions. Education can cultivate dispositions, but without structural change, its impact is constrained. This echoes Santos' (2014) notion of 'epistemicide'—even when counter-narratives emerge, they remain vulnerable to being silenced by dominant powers.

Nevertheless, fragility does not negate value. Instead, it underscores the resilience required to sustain hope in the face of uncertainty. The very act of creating micro-democracies in classrooms becomes meaningful, even if fragile, because it keeps alive the idea of alternative futures.

i-GCED as a seed of resilience

Taken together, these findings suggest that i-GCED functions less as a direct solution to martial law and more as a seed of resilience. Its value lies not in immediately transforming structures of power, but in cultivating dispositions, affirming dignity and nurturing democratic imagination.

Students who experience inclusion may carry that memory into adulthood. Teachers who practice dialogue may continue to model it even under constraints. Communities that share silenced histories may keep alive a counter-memory that resists erasure. In this sense, i-GCED sustains what Paulo Freire (1968/1970) called 'hopeful praxis'—small acts of education that prepare the soil for broader democratic change.

Thus, these cross-cutting results indicate the duality of i-GCED—it is both fragile and powerful. Fragile because its gains are precarious under martial law, but powerful because it nurtures resilience, criticality and dignity that can outlast the present moment. It ensures that when opportunities for reform emerge, there will already be a generation prepared to imagine and claim democracy.

Discussion: Between doubt and hope

Reflecting on these initiatives, I hold two emotions in conflict with each other: doubt and hope.

My doubt arises from the enduring reality of martial law. Each silenced story, each self-censoring teacher and each military checkpoint is a reminder of the limits of education under securitization. Democracy in such a context feels contradictory—taught in class but denied in practice.

However, hope emerges in classroom encounters: a youth reclaiming their dignity in the FITRAH programme, students discovering coexistence in KAWAN and families remembering together in Historical Dialogue. These moments are fragile, yet powerful. They reveal that even in contexts of repression, education can plant seeds of transformation.

Three key reflections stand out:

1. Democracy must begin with dignity. When students feel their faith and identity affirmed, they are more open to democratic ideals. i-GCED achieves this by rooting GCED in Islamic values;
2. Critical consciousness is democracy's lifeblood. Across projects, learners questioned stereotypes, security narratives and historical silences. This echoes Freire's (1968/1970) concept of 'critical consciousness' (*conscientização*)—becoming aware of oppression and imagining alternatives; and
3. Fragility is not failure. Although achievements remain precarious under martial law, their fragility demonstrates resilience. Even small acts of dialogue and recognition resist the dominant narrative of securitization.

Thus, i-GCED does not resolve my doubts but reframes them. Education may not dismantle martial law, but it sustains the possibility of democracy through dignity, consciousness and within fragile spaces of dialogue.

Conclusion: Walking with fragile seeds of resilience and imagination

The question that has guided my work is simple yet

daunting: Can education restore democracy in the Deep South? My reflection is clear: education cannot abolish martial law, nor rewrite the structural histories of securitization. However, education can play a vital role: it can help keep democracy from disappearing entirely.

The i-GCED framework of Love, Live, Life and Learn creates fragile yet meaningful micro-democracies in schools. These spaces affirm dignity, nurture dialogue and cultivate dispositions for justice. They are fragile, indeed, but they are also seeds—seeds of resilience and imagination. Thus, i-GCED is not the restoration of democracy; it is the preparation for democracy's return. It keeps alive the civic imagination, ensuring that when structural change becomes possible, a generation will be ready to embrace it.

As Freire (1968/1970) said, 'We make the road by walking'. In Thailand's Deep South, our walk is slow, heavy and uncertain. However, each step—a restored sense of dignity, a critical question, a remembered story—is part of that road. In holding doubt and hope together, I realize that this is the role of reflective practice: not to erase contradictions, but to accompany communities as they live with fragility and continue to plant the fragile seeds of democracy.

1) *Hikmah* is an Arabic term meaning "wisdom".

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**Democracy in the Post-Truth Crisis:
The Role of Global Citizenship Education**

Educators as citizen leaders in a post-truth world



Jasmine B.-Y. Sim

Associate Professor, National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University

Jasmine B.-Y. Sim is Head of the Policy, Curriculum and Leadership Department at the National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. She holds a Ph.D. from the University of Sydney, a Master of Education from Harvard University and a B.A. (Honours) from Victoria University of Wellington. An established scholar in civics and citizenship education, her work also engages with educational leadership and curriculum thinking. Her research examines how citizenship is taught, learned and lived, through comparative perspectives. She has received several competitive research grants from both Singaporean and international agencies to investigate civic and citizenship education. A widely respected academic, she was awarded the World Cultural Council Special Recognition Award in 2013 and the Cambridge Journal of Education Best Paper Award. She has delivered keynote addresses at major international conferences and served as Regional Editor for *Citizenship Teaching and Learning*. She also sits on the editorial boards of several leading education journals including the *Journal of Moral Education*.

Introduction

This paper, *Educators as citizen leaders in a post-truth world*, is a work in progress. It invites us to rethink what it means to be an educator in the post-truth world. The present conditions are marked by the spread of misinformation, entrenched disinformation and the erosion of shared truths. These have unsettled the foundations of democratic life. In such a climate, teachers cannot remain confined to the narrow roles of being knowledge transmitters or curriculum implementers. Their task is larger, more urgent and moral. Teachers must be reimagined as citizen leaders who nurture civic agency, cultivate critical discernment and take moral responsibility for shaping both their students and the communities they inhabit.

For this purpose, I have conceptualized the know-do-lead arc to articulate what it means for educators to be citizen leaders. It is introduced here not simply as a pedagogical tool, but more urgently as a civic and moral proposition for education in today's precarious times. To 'know' is to interpret civic life contextually and relationally, through dialogue, reflection and ethical awareness of self and community. To 'do' is to enact civic agency through diverse and collaborative public work. To 'lead' is to cultivate civic capacity and leadership in others by fostering trust, reciprocity and shared responsibility. Taken together, these dimensions articulate a conception of educators as citizen leaders who, in responding to the challenges of post-truth, are positioned to co-create the shared realities necessary for democratic life. Thus, the arc serves as a practical expression of citizen leadership. 'Citizen leader' is both an identity and a role that imagines an educator as someone who assumes civic responsibility for nurturing agency, discernment and

shared responsibility. On the other hand, the know-do-lead framework describes how that identity and role are enacted in practice.

The paper is organized into four parts. It begins with this introduction, followed by an overview of the concept of post-truth and an examination of what is at stake for citizenship when truth itself becomes fragile. It then develops the proposition that teachers must be recognized as citizen leaders, drawing on key theoretical perspectives to substantiate this claim. The fourth part elaborates on the know-do-lead arc, showing how the dispositions and practices of knowing, doing and leading give living form to the concept of citizen leadership. The paper concludes by reflecting on citizen leadership in the post-truth context, showing how it intersects with and embodies global citizenship education, with schools as key sites where these practices take root.

Post-truth and its implications

In 2016, Oxford University Press named 'post-truth' as the word of the year. Post-truth is an adjective defined as 'relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief' (Oxford University Press, n.d.). In such an environment, the line between fact and fiction is blurred, as facts are deliberately manufactured, and political and social actors openly disregard evidence (Sami, 2024). While the term itself is recent, the tendency it describes is not. At the tenth International Conference on Global Citizenship Education, Kelechi Kalu (2025) argued that throughout history, those in power have often responded to inconvenient truths by reframing the narrative in ways that undermine evidence-based facts. Similarly, more than 400 years ago, Sir Francis

Bacon (1620/2000), the father of empiricism, observed in his work, *Novum Organum*, that people are inclined to believe what they prefer to be true—a bias of human understanding that has endured across the centuries.

This tendency came into sharp global focus in 2016, in the context of Brexit and the election of Donald Trump, which were marked by campaigns that sidelined factual accuracy in favour of emotive and often false claims to sway voters (Oxford University Press, n.d.). It is not surprising, then, that post-truth is frequently coupled with politics, such that the phrase ‘post-truth politics’ has become an entrenched expression today, highlighting a political culture whereby appeals to belief and emotion eclipse commitment to fact. As Cian O’Callaghan (2020) observed, the issue is not that society has moved beyond truth, but that truth itself has become irrelevant to politics and policy. While interpretations of the term remain contested, post-truth politics is now widely recognized and has come to define the zeitgeist of our times.

What is most striking about post-truth politics is the lack of concern over being caught in the act of lying (O’Callaghan, 2020). This results in a climate where truth is not merely under assault but where uncertainty about what and who to believe has become a pervasive feature of everyday life (Kruglanski, 2018). Most critically, this condition undermines democratic life itself, eroding citizens’ capacity for informed political judgement and destabilizing the very foundations of reasoned deliberation (Sami, 2024).

To be sure, democracy has never been without its problems. As Francis Collins (2025) reminded us at the conference, it remains entangled with the

legacies of colonialism, slavery and empire. However, I contend that post-truth introduces a qualitatively new threat, one that cannot be reduced to what Kalu (2025) argued as ‘a purposeful lie for socio-political and economic reasons’ at the conference. Post-truth operates as a systemic condition sustained by digital technologies. The danger lies not in the mere presence of falsehood but in the unprecedented speed, scale and reach with which misinformation and disinformation now circulate, amplified by social media platforms that reinforce ideologically aligned echo chambers.

The implications are profound. Citizens struggle to agree on fundamental facts, consensus becomes elusive, and politics descends into polarization, dysfunction and tribalism. Indeed, as Diya Banerjee (2025) argued at the conference, the threat extends beyond politics, as post-truth endangers lives by fuelling rapid health misinformation on a large scale and creating a public health crisis that undermines trust in science and leaves communities vulnerable.

What is at stake for citizenship, then, is the very possibility of a shared civic life. This idea resonates with John Dewey’s (1916/2001) conception of democracy as ‘more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience’ (p. 91). For Dewey, democracy is not reducible to institutions, elections or majority rule, but is fundamentally a way of living that fosters communication and discussion among citizens. Ideally, these discussions result in intellectual collective action directed towards social intelligence and collaborative intelligence (D’Urso, 1978; Woodly, 2022).

Beliefs about what is true are typically shared

within a community, whether cultural, national or professional, and together they form a shared reality. Shared reality enables societies to make sense of the world collectively and provides a moral compass for living together (Higgins, 2019). When it fractures, the very foundation of common life unravels. As citizens become entrenched in their own versions of reality, trust narrows to tribes defined by ideology, ethnicity or religion and society becomes sick. Consequently, the collective action that sustains what Dewey (1916/2001) called a 'mode of associated living' begins to erode (p. 91). The space for compromise shrinks, and social cohesion risks collapse as communities are divided along ideological lines (Sami, 2024).

Educators as citizen leaders: Conceptual framing

Democratic living, as Walter Parker (2003) maintains, is not natural but a social construct. He argues that 'there can be no democracy without its builders, caretakers and change agents' (p. xvii); in other words, its citizens. Educators, I contend, must be citizens, and yet more than citizens. They must step forward as citizen leaders and take up the task of rebuilding the shared realities on which democracy depends, re-anchoring public life amid the fractured zeitgeist of post-truth. The concept of the citizen leader combines the responsibilities of both citizenship and leadership to rebuild trust, co-create reality and renew democracy itself.

This paper advances the argument that educators must be understood and formed as citizen leaders to confront the challenges of post-truth. Drawing on Parker's (2003) conception of citizenship as public and deliberative, Harry Boyte's (2005) account of civic agency and public work and Gerri Perreault's (1997) framing of the citizen leader, I contend that teachers are not simply transmitters

of knowledge but co-creators of democratic life. As citizen leaders, they should be called on to cultivate civic agency, foster discernment and nurture shared responsibility, enabling communities to rebuild trust and sustain the shared realities upon which democracy depends.

Conception of the citizen: Polites

I draw on Parker's (2003) conception of citizenship because it is grounded in a strong vision of democracy, one sustained by diversity, deliberation and the hard work of living together. For Parker, citizenship is not a retreat into private life but a public practice in which people of different races, cultures, religions and perspectives engage with one another as equals. Diversity is viewed not as a problem to be managed but as a resource for democratic life, and disagreement is recognized as a necessary condition for growth (Banks, 2008). This conception exposes the inadequacy of 'thin' democracy, which reduces citizenship to periodic voting, and it challenges the prejudices and inequities—such as racism, intolerance, sexism and classism—that continue to deny access to democratic participation (Barber, 1984). In the fractured conditions of post-truth, Parker's vision acquires urgency because democracy depends on citizens who can deliberate across differences and sustain the foundation of common life.

It may seem odd to propose that educators must first and foremost be citizens, for are we not already? However, what is often neglected is the public dimension of this identity. Parker (2003) invites us to recover the ancient Greek distinction between the *idiotes* (the private individual) and the *polites* (a political actor or citizen). The *idiotes* is the private individual, absorbed in self-interest and indifferent to the common good, in contrast to the *polites*, the public actor or citizen whose

identity is defined by public life. No pun intended, but *idiotes* is literally the idiot. In ancient Greece, it was considered a term of reproach for those who ignored civic life to pursue only private concerns. Thus, *idiotes* does not mean what we understand today as stupid or mentally deficient. Its root, *idios*, gives us 'idiom' and 'idiosyncratic', meaning 'private, separate, self-centred—selfish' (p. 2).

The idiot fails to grasp that their self-sufficiency depends entirely on the community. As Aristotle (1958) wrote, 'individuals are so many parts, all equally, depending on the whole, which alone can bring self-sufficiency' (p. 6). In this sense, the idiot is immature in the most basic way: 'an idiot has not yet met the challenge of "puberty", the transition to public life' (Parker, 2003, p. 3).

Where the *idiotes* retreats into private life, the *polites* creates the public. Unlike the *idiotes*, absorbed in private concerns and indifferent to the common good, the *polites* is the public citizen whose very identity is defined by engagement with everyday life. To be a citizen does not merely mean holding a legal status, but sustaining public life itself, balancing private liberties with civic responsibility. The *polites* walks to the public square, listening as well as speaking, deliberating across differences, and deciding with others how common life should be lived. In doing so, citizens not only participate in public life, but they bring it into being, for publics emerge through such acts of communication and deliberation.

To live as a citizen is therefore to embrace interdependence. This is what Martin Luther King Jr. (1964) called an 'inescapable network of mutuality' (p. 77) and what Thich Nhat Hanh (1988) described as 'inter-being... you cannot just be by yourself alone. You have to inter-be with

every other thing' (p. 4). In this light, Parker (2003) observed that 'anyone's injustice is everyone's injustice, "ethnic cleansing" is *self*-destructive, genocide is suicide, and generosity is *self*-serving (p. 8). To be a citizen, then, is 'to lead the unavoidably, connected, and engaged life', one sustained by the continual return to public life, by recreating it repeatedly, by keeping its promise alive and by nurturing hope in what remains unseen. This, Parker concluded, 'is the public work of public citizens, this is the struggle' (pp. 11–12).

Parker's (2003) conception of the *polites* emphasizes that being a citizen inherently means living publicly, engaging in active and participative practices aimed at the common good. Citizenship is realized through deliberating, deciding and acting with others. It is never passive; rather, it is sustained through the ongoing participation, struggle and continual effort of citizens to recreate public life. The significance of these practices lies in the co-creation of shared reality, as it is only by acting together across differences that citizens can sustain the foundations of common life, which are at risk of fracture under post-truth conditions.

Productive public work and civic agency

If Parker highlights the public and active nature of citizenship, Boyte expands on what citizens do together to sustain democracy. He conceives of citizenship as productive public work, 'work with public meanings, public conditions, and public outcomes' (Boyte, 2005, p. 56), and later as the 'self-organized efforts by a mix of people who solve common problems and create things... of lasting civic value' (Boyte, 2011, p. 633). Public work, he argues, 'is a normative, democratizing ideal of citizenship generalized from communal labours of making and tending the commons, with roots in diverse cultures' (Boyte, 2011, p. 632).

The emphasis on ‘productive public work’ critiques democracy as ‘a spectator sport’ (Boyte & Breuer, 1992), insisting that democracy must be created rather than consumed. Unlike volunteerism or charity, public work is not about providing services to others but about co-producing public goods through collaborative effort. Grounded in the ordinary, everyday practices of citizens, public work redefines the citizen’s role, moving it from that of a client or spectator to a producer. This is civic agency, understood as people’s capacities ‘to work collectively across differences to build and sustain a democratic life together’ (Boyte, 2011, p. 632). Through such work, citizens co-create and renew the commons, that is, the shared resources on which democratic life depends. Civic agency thus positions citizens as *co-creators* of civic life—not only as deliberators or decision-makers—highlighting both the cumulative impact of diverse contributions and the pride that comes from seeing the ‘democratic way of life taking shape in the here and now’ (Boyte, 2005, p. 186).

The significance of Boyte’s (2011) conception of public work lies in its insistence on engagement across differences. Citizens, often beginning from their own self-interests, learn through public work to collaborate across race, culture, class, religion and ideology, gradually broadening their horizons toward ‘standing for the whole’ (p. 647). Through this practice, they solve problems, advance justice and create public entities ‘with those with whom they may disagree, or whom they may even dislike’ (p. 647).

In post-truth conditions, where echo chambers confine people within narrow certainties and erode shared reality, public work points in the opposite direction. It anchors democratic life in addressing fundamental problems of importance to commu-

nities in the immediacy of ‘the here and now’ (Boyte, 2005, p. 186), what Joseph Schwab (1969) called the practical problems that demand situated judgement, deliberation and collaborative resolution. Importantly, it treats conflict not as a failure of democracy but as a generative resource that can be harnessed for learning and collective problem-solving. As Boyte observed, initiatives such as Public Achievement¹⁾ exemplify this dynamic: young people from diverse backgrounds gather in schools and neighbourhoods to deliberate, negotiate and act on issues of immediate concern, thereby enacting democracy in practice and co-creating shared realities grounded in their lived experience.

The citizen leader

The concept of citizenship as public work emphasizes the shared responsibility of diverse citizens to sustain democracy through collaborative and productive action. However, sustaining a democratic way of life requires more than participation; it requires citizens to take on leadership roles. This can be defined by citizens who take initiative, enable others, broaden participation and guide communities in co-creating shared realities.

It is in this context that Perreault (1997) introduces the notion of the citizen leader, framing leadership as an egalitarian relationship grounded in an inclusive philosophy. Such leadership is deeply educational. It cultivates the ‘habit of true citizenship’ in teachers, students and community members alike, enabling them ‘to see each other as “fellow citizens”’ (p. 154), ‘rather than givers and receivers (or *clients*)’ (p. 152). Leadership, in this sense, does not rely on command or hierarchy but represents a civic practice aimed at fostering agency and empowering others. Characteristically,

a citizen leader embodies the commitments of active citizenship and cultivates the conditions for others to join in renewing and sustaining democratic life as well.

Although Perreault (1997) uses terms such as 'lead' and 'leading', I contend these terms are better expressed as 'leadering'. 'Leadering' emphasizes the verb-like, participatory essence of leadership: engaging with people, sense-making and co-creating solutions and adapting to context rather than simply holding a title or authority (Wilson, 2023). It frames leadership as action and interaction, foregrounding process and practice ('doing') over static traits or structural status ('having' or 'being'). Because citizenship presupposes equality among citizens, conventional leadership vocabulary risks reintroducing hierarchy. Instead, 'leadering' marks leadership as an ongoing, egalitarian practice of reflection, responsiveness and shared responsibility. It positions citizen leaders as those who engage across differences and enable others to exercise agency, as well as co-create solutions for collective aims. This reframing deepens Perreault's insight by situating the citizen leader not as one who directs from above, but as one who leads alongside others to sustain and renew democracy.

The citizen leader, thus, approaches community challenges not through charity or even traditional service learning, but through 'constructive change efforts to help shape a common future' (Perreault, 1997, p. 152). Charity, which emphasizes 'doing for', often entrenches a giver-receiver power relationship. Service-learning advances reciprocal learning and broader awareness, and yet it can remain limited to reflection and the academic sphere. By contrast, citizen leadership emphasizes 'doing with, thereby recentring action around

shared citizenship, inclusive participation and explicitly educational leadership development.

A key difference between Boyte's (2005) conception of public work and Perreault's (1997) conception of the citizen leader lies in orientation. While public work focuses on sustaining common life through collaborative effort, the citizen leader approach intensifies this focus by emphasizing constructive change with the purpose of shaping a common future. The citizen leader does not stop at meeting immediate needs or raising awareness. Instead, they engage others in transformative co-creation aimed at renewing democratic life.

Central to the citizen leader approach is the practice of reciprocal learning, whereby every participant is both a teacher and a learner, exchanging insights and perspectives as they collectively define problems, set goals and co-create solutions within their communities. This practice reflects the egalitarian premise that democracy flourishes only when those directly affected by it are actively engaged in shaping decisions and solving problems. As Frances Moore Lappe and Paul Martin DuBois (1994) emphasized, 'effective decision-making depends on the ingenuity and experiences of those who are directly affected' (p. 17). In this sense, reciprocal learning is not merely a pedagogical strategy but a democratic imperative: it dissolves the traditional divides between 'servers' and 'served' by positioning everyone as fellow citizens whose voices carry equal weight in the deliberative process.

At the same time, the citizen leader approach emphasizes the importance of education, specifically for leadership development. Structured training and reflective practice are woven into service projects, equipping participants with the concepts,

skills and tools necessary to engage in democratic decision-making (Perreault, 1997). In this way, citizen leadership moves beyond passive helpfulness toward constructive change, nurturing effective agents of democracy who are prepared to shape the future together.

Perreault's (1997) notion of the citizen leader extends the trajectory from Parker's (2003) active citizen and Boyte's (2005) public worker, which I reinterpret as 'leadering'—an ongoing, relational process of enabling others, cultivating agency and sustaining public life through co-creation. Citizen leaders are not defined by their positional authority but by their capacity to act with others, broadening participation and guiding communities in the renewal of their shared realities. This conception provides the foundation for the know-do-lead arc, which translates these commitments into a practical framework for educators navigating the fractured conditions of our post-truth democracy.

Know-do-lead arc

Know

Educating citizen leaders begins with knowing. Knowing is not the accumulation of facts or the possession of information. More importantly, it is the capacity to interpret civic life as it is lived, in its contextual and relational aspects. This builds on the conception of citizenship as a public practice, one that entails deliberating, deciding and acting with others across differences (Parker, 2003). To interpret civic life contextually is to recognize that civic questions are always situated in specific kinds of histories, cultures and conditions that shape both problems and possibilities (Freire, 1970; Apple, 1979). To interpret civic life relationally is to recognize that it is sustained through inter-

dependence, dialogue, and the ways people encounter and respond to one another across their differences (Hanh, 1988; Habermas, 1996; Boyte, 2005, 2011).

Knowing, then, is inseparable from lived experience. It requires the dispositions of discernment, empathy and openness, as well as the skills of listening, reasoning and reciprocity. Only by interpreting civic life as both lived and shared does knowledge become civic wisdom. For educators, this means shaping classrooms as spaces where students learn not only about democracy as a concept, but also as a way of life, by encountering diverse perspectives, practising listening and reasoning and recognizing that knowledge is lived and shared. To teach for knowing is to cultivate discernment, empathy and reciprocity—the dispositions and skills that transform knowledge into civic wisdom.

Do

If knowing grounds the work of democracy, doing so enacts it. To do is to enact civic agency through public work. It is the collaborative effort of diverse people to co-create entities of lasting civic value by addressing problems that matter in the immediacy of community life, while also forging a common future together. Doing is praxis, where knowledge and action are joined in practice, making democracy a lived concept rather than an abstract one (Dewey, 1916/2001; Arendt, 1958). It is at once mitigative and transformative, meeting everyday needs even as it cultivates the conditions for long-term renewal (Perreault, 1997; Boyte, 2005, 2011). Unlike volunteerism or service, which offers help from the outside, public work is a co-creation from within, where differences in race, culture, class or ideology are negotiated into productive collaboration (Boyte, 2005, 2011).

In this way, citizens become producers rather than spectators of democracy, generating a shared reality that is empirically grounded and collectively sustained. This is a necessary counter to the echo chambers of post-truth (Boyte & Breuer, 1992). For educators, to 'do' is to model and guide such praxis in schools, creating classrooms where students address immediate concerns even as they act toward transformation, experiencing democracy as lived practice.

Lead

If 'knowing' grounds the work of democracy and 'doing' enacts it, then 'leading' carries these practices forward. Leadership here is not commanding, but rather 'leadering', a participatory process of engaging, co-creating solutions and adapting to context (Perreault, 1997; Wilson, 2023). It emphasizes action and interaction, that is, the 'doing' of leadership rather than 'having' it or 'being' one. The citizen leader goes beyond being an active citizen. While the active citizen sustains democracy through responsible participation in public life, the citizen leader renews it by enabling others, broadening participation and co-creating shared realities across differences (Parker, 2003). 'Leadering' is, therefore, egalitarian and reciprocal, cultivating shared responsibility and collective empowerment as citizens work together for constructive change and a common future.

For educators, to lead in this sense is to create conditions where students discover their own capacity to contribute, to convene and to co-create shared realities, thereby preparing them not only to participate in but also to renew democratic life. 'Leadering' is both educational and civic (Boyte, 2005), as it enables educators to develop and renew the democratic capacities of

the next generation by empowering others to take the lead.

Synthesizing the know-do-lead arc

In sum, the know-do-lead arc serves as a unified, reflexive praxis for transforming educators as citizen leaders in the post-truth world. 'Know' involves critical sense-making that situates information within ethical, historical and communal frames, cultivating discernment and shared meaning rather than the mere accumulation of data. 'Do' converts such discernment into collaborative public work that enacts civic agency with others to address concrete problems and (re)make everyday life. 'Lead'—better conceived as 'leadering'—widens participation and builds others' capacity by fostering trust, reciprocity and shared responsibility, thereby sustaining ongoing cycles of knowing and doing across differences.

I use the word 'arc' to describe the know-do-lead framework. The word 'arc' suggests developmental progression, a movement of growth and a story-like trajectory of becoming. It is at once iterative and cumulative. Using the word 'arc' allows the concept of the know-do-lead framework to begin with 'know', understood as critical sense-making that situates information within ethical, historical and communal contexts. It moves to 'do', where judgement is enacted through collaborative public work that tests and refines what is known. It culminates in 'lead' (conceived as 'leadering'), where teachers enable others, widen participation and build the trust, routines and shared responsibility that make civic agency durable. The sequence then loops: leading/ 'leadering' creates new conditions for knowing and doing, and therefore, growth becomes iterative and cumulative. Pedagogies that stop at knowing—or treat doing as technique without leading/

'leadering'—cannot address systemic fracture.

When teachers assume the role of citizen leaders, the know–do–lead arc serves as a civic method that co-creates shared realities in the present while also building future capacity. It is a single framework rather than three domains, grounded in public and deliberative citizenship, animated by productive civic work and fulfilled in reciprocal and transformative leading/'leadering'. In this way, educators can renew democratic life and challenge post-truth through critical sense-making, collaborative action and cultivating the knowledge and agency of others.

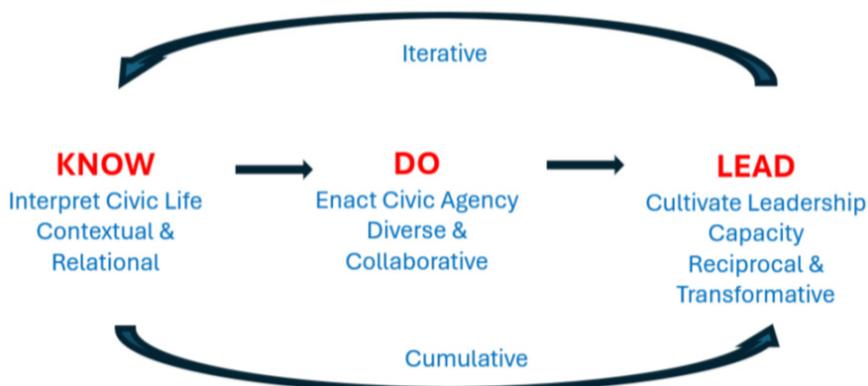
Conclusion

T. S. Eliot's (2001) incisive questions frame the problem before us: 'Where is the Life we have lost in living? Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge? Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?' (p. 39). They capture the civic unraveling that defines our post-truth world. Information abounds, yet knowledge is scarce; knowledge accumulates, yet wisdom has receded. Ultimately, life is crowded with activity but often

lacking in meaning. It is saturated by the endless scrolling of social media feeds, the forwarding of unverified claims and the compulsive liking and sharing of fragments torn from their original context. In a world where facts circulate quickly, public judgement is weakening, our shared reality is fracturing and echo chambers are hardening, it is not just our civic life that is at risk. When truth loses public significance, deliberations break down, and democratic life is unsettled.

Educators must step forward as citizen leaders. The know–do–lead arc offers a practical approach. To 'know' is the critical skill of making sense of information in such a way that it provides ethical, historical and communal context to citizens, so that their judgements are well-grounded and publicly defensible. To 'do' is to transform this judgement into collaborative public work on real problems, where claims are tested in action with people who see differently. To 'lead' is to enable others, widen participation and build the trust, routines and shared responsibility that make agency durable. Co-creation runs through all three domains – echo chambers are interrupted by

Figure 1. Educators as citizen leaders: A know–do–lead arc



Note. Adapted from a presentation slide titled "Know. Do. Lead. Educators as Citizen Leaders in a Post-Truth World," presented by the author at the 10th International Conference on Global Citizenship Education, 2025.

replacing like-minded confirmation with accountable talk and projects which engage diverse groups of citizens.

Read alongside GCED, the citizen leader and the know-do-lead arc operationalize GCED's aims in situated practice: cultivating critical consciousness, empathy, intercultural understanding and active participation through contextual knowing, collaborative public work and enabling others to co-create the common good (UNESCO, 2023). Both frameworks prioritize participatory and ethical engagement that fosters democratic habits, inclusive dialogue, shared problem-solving and a regard for diversity, thereby preparing learners to act as responsible, empowered citizens in an interdependent world.

This is complex work, and progress will be uneven. The framework is not a panacea for platform

domination or polarization, yet beginnings matter. Schools are the right place to start because they gather diverse young people around common tasks, and teachers can make enquiry, deliberation and public work the everyday grammar of learning. In doing so, classrooms become places where knowledge is unearthed from information and wisdom from knowledge, and truth regains public significance through practice. Ultimately, this is why schooling matters: it is where the habits of democracy take root. Parker (2003) reminds us:

...the diversity that schools contain makes extraordinarily fertile soil for democratic education. Schooling is the first sustained public experience for children, and it affords a rich opportunity to nurture public virtue—for example, kindness and tolerance and the disposition and skills to dialogue across differences (p. xviii)

1) Public Achievement is an international civic empowerment and learning initiative launched in 1990 by Project Public Life (later renamed the Center for Democracy and Citizenship) at Augsburg College. Its goal is to educate young people to become powerful civic and political actors—to think and act as citizens who co-create their worlds—and to deepen democratic education and democratic societies.

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**Democracy in the Post-Truth Crisis:
The Role of Global Citizenship Education**

The contemporary significance of *Hyotan-jima Issues*: Global citizenship education in the post-truth era



Takaaki Fujiwara

Emeritus Professor, Doshisha Women's College of Liberal Arts

Takaaki Fujiwara is Emeritus Professor at Doshisha Women's College of Liberal Arts, Japan, and is the former President of the Japan Association for International Education. His research themes include citizenship education, global education, international education and social studies education. His significant publications include *A Study on the Curriculum of Global Education* (2016), *Challenges to Overseas Experiential Learning at Universities* (2017; co-edited), *Teachers and Human Rights Education* (2018; co-translated), *Creating an SDGs Curriculum* (2019; co-edited), *Rethinking International Education* (2021; edited by Japan International Education Society) and *The Hyotan-jima Issues: A Study Issue for Japan's Multicultural Society* (2021).

Introduction

Since the mid-2010s, global political landscapes have been reshaped by phenomena that collectively define the ‘post-truth era’. When Oxford University Press (n.d.) designated ‘post-truth’ as the ‘Word of the Year’ in 2016, it signalled a new stage in public discourse, characterized by the diminishing role of objective facts and the heightened influence of emotions and personal beliefs.

The Brexit referendum in the United Kingdom and the United States presidential election in 2016 are often cited as pivotal events that exposed the power of misinformation and the susceptibility of electorates to emotional manipulation. The rise of social media platforms, including Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, TikTok and X (formerly Twitter), have transformed the nature of information dissemination.

These platforms empower individuals to act as producers and consumers of content, bypassing traditional journalistic gatekeeping. While democratizing communication, they also facilitate the rapid spread of fake news, conspiracy theories and emotionally charged content that can reinforce biases and polarize communities.

The post-truth context

Defining the post-truth era

According to Oxford University Press (n.d.), post-truth refers to ‘circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief.’ This definition underscores a fundamental shift in the epistemological basis of public discourse—from fact-based reasoning to affect-driven persuasion.

The post-truth condition is not merely a matter of

misinformation; it involves deeper structural and psychological processes that prioritize emotional narratives, often at the expense of empirical accuracy. Post-truth politics takes advantage of human cognitive biases, the fragmentation of media and the erosion of trust in institutions.

Mechanisms of the post-truth environment

Three key mechanisms perpetuate the post-truth condition:

1. **Algorithmic prioritization:** Social media algorithms are designed to maximize user engagement, often by promoting content with high click-through rates regardless of its accuracy. This monetization of attention—the so-called attention economy—creates incentives for sensationalism and outrage.
2. **Filter bubbles:** The concept of the filter bubble describes how algorithmic curation limits individuals’ exposure to diverse viewpoints, reinforcing pre-existing beliefs and narrowing intellectual horizons.
3. **Echo chambers:** Within echo chambers, individuals interact predominantly with other like-minded individuals, amplifying confirmation bias and fostering ideological insularity. This phenomenon, sometimes described metaphorically as a ‘rabbit hole’ or a ‘frog in a well’, exacerbates polarization and distrust.

Why emotions spread faster than facts

In his book, *The Science of Fake News*, Kazutoshi Sasahara (2021) identified the political, social and individual-level factors that make emotionally charged misinformation more virulent than factual reporting. Politically, misinformation serves as a tool for electoral manipulation, propaganda and geopolitical interference. Socially, it exploits

structural inequalities, xenophobia and intergroup tensions. Individually, cognitive biases—such as the tendency to seek information that confirms one’s beliefs—combine with the dopamine rewards of online recognition to encourage users to create and share sensational content.

The digital ecosystem and risks to global citizenship

The contemporary digital ecosystem connects producers, intermediaries and consumers through complex and often opaque networks of economic and political interests. Within this ecosystem, truth competes with half-truths, misinformation and outright fabrications (Figure 1).

Global citizenship, as a sense of belonging to a broader community and common humanity, becomes particularly vulnerable in this environment. When individuals retreat into echo chambers and filter bubbles, they risk adopting a narrow worldview that undermines empathy and solidarity.

UNESCO’s (2015) GCED framework offers a three-dimensional approach to countering these risks (p. 15):

1. Cognitive: evaluating information critically and understanding objective facts
2. Socio-emotional: recognizing biases and empathizing with diverse perspectives
3. Behavioural: acting responsibly when disseminating and consuming information

The *Hyotan-jima Issues* simulation game operationalizes these three dimensions using a cyclical learning process.

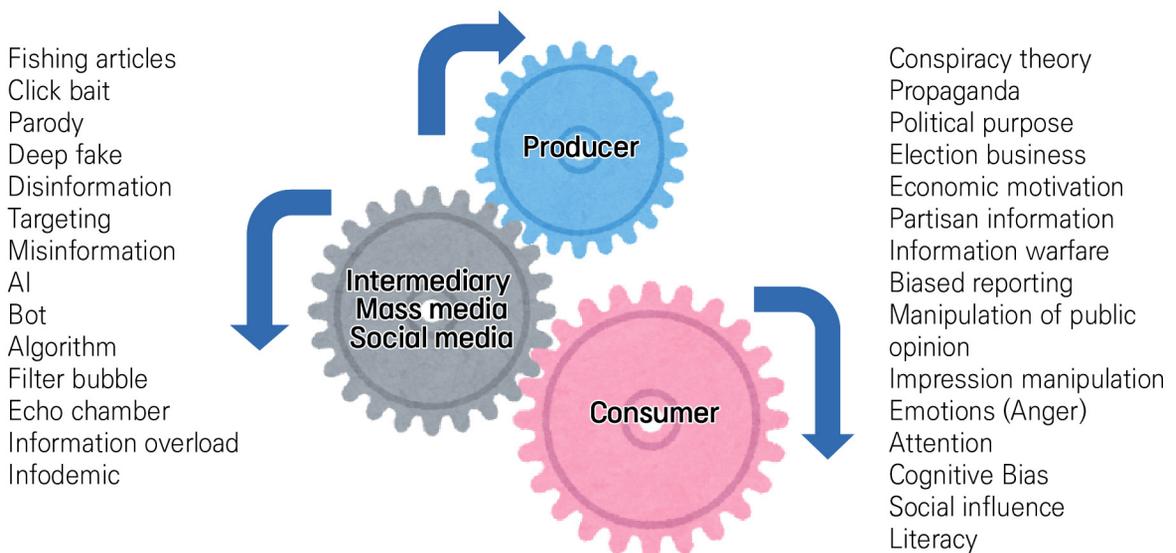
The Hyotan-jima Issues simulation game

Concept and origin

Hyotan-jima Issues is a simulation-based educational game designed to engage learners in structured role-play around fictional scenarios involving immigration, ethnic relations and multicultural

Figure 1. The digital ecosystem at a glance

A network has been created in which information producers consumers and intermediary make gears and are connected by various interests in the Post-truth era (Figure below).



Note. Image from “The science of fake news (DOJIN-Bunko 3)” (Sasahara, 2021, p. 189)

inclusion. The setting is a gourd-shaped island (Hyotan-jima)¹⁾ that is inhabited by three cultural groups: the native Hyotan people, the industrious immigrant Kachi-kochi people and the laid-back immigrant Paradise people (see Figure 2).

The simulation game draws inspiration from a Japanese puppet drama that was popular in the mid-twentieth century and reimagines it as a tool to explore contemporary social issues. The author developed the game in 2021 to facilitate classroom discussions that bridge cognitive and socio-emotional learning.

Pedagogical design

Learners are assigned to one of four ideological positions:

1. Assimilationists: advocating cultural homogeneity
2. Anti-assimilationists: defending minority traditions and autonomy

3. Universalists: prioritizing equality, liberty and human rights
4. Multiculturalists: promoting intercultural dialogue and social inclusion

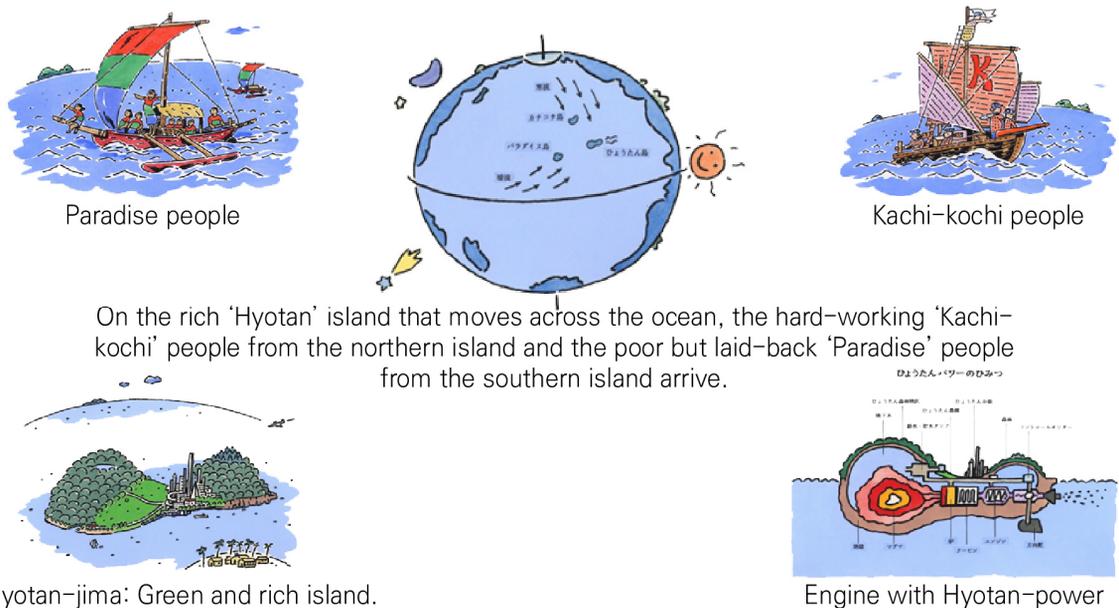
Role-play immerses participants in a charged discussion, after which they engage in fact-checking exercises to identify misinformation and objective truths.

Case studies from *Hyotan-jima Issues*

Cross-cultural communication

The first scenario centres on greeting customs across the three groups. Learners role-play greeting exchanges—bowing, handshakes and verbal salutations—and then reflect on their comfort or discomfort. This simple exercise raises profound questions about cultural norms; symbolic boundaries and the subtle emotions associated with inclusion and exclusion (Figure 3).

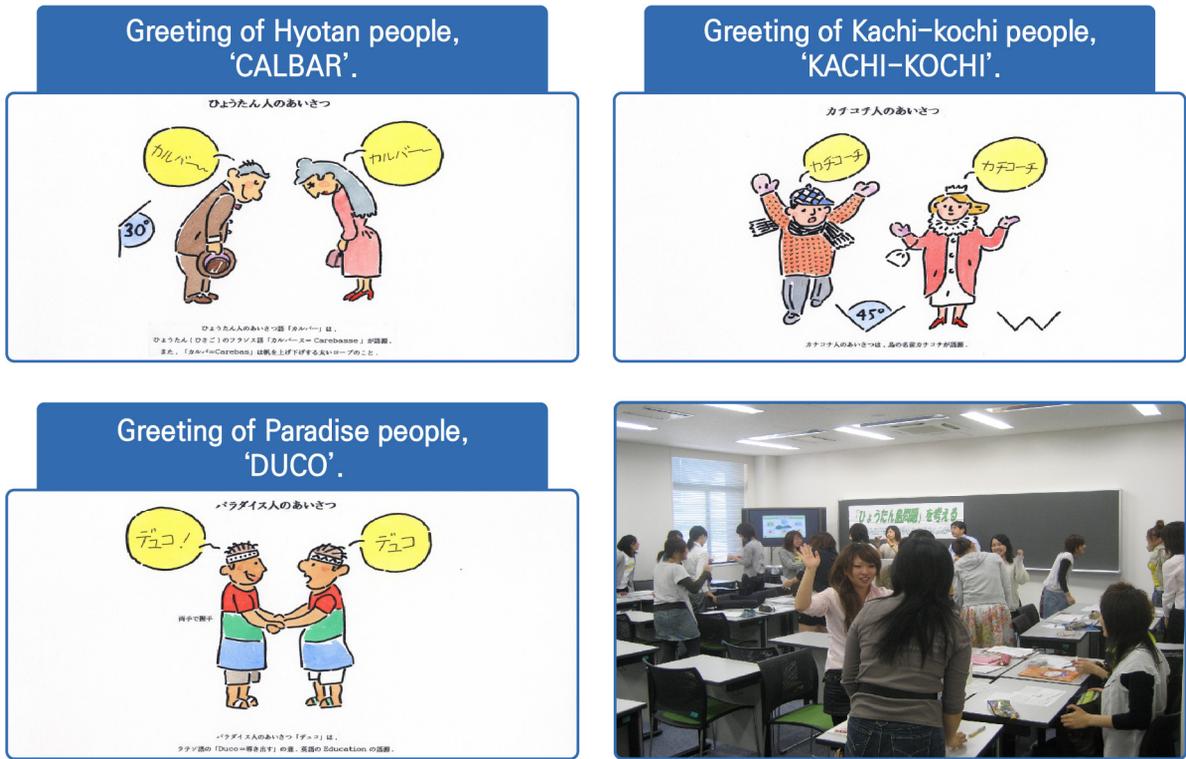
Figure 2. The three island stories in Hyotan-jima



On the rich 'Hyotan' island that moves across the ocean, the hard-working 'Kachi-kochi' people from the northern island and the poor but laid-back 'Paradise' people from the southern island arrive.

Note. Image from "Simulation material 'Hyotan-jima Issues': Learning issues in a multicultural society of Japan" (Fujiwara, 2021)

Figure 3. Exchange of greetings by role-playing



Note. Image from “Simulation material ‘Hyotan-jima Issues’: Learning issues in a multicultural society of Japan” (Fujiwara, 2021)

Cultural events and inclusion

In the ‘Hyotan carnival’ scenario, tensions arise when Kachi-kochi immigrants choose not to participate in the island’s traditional festival due to work schedules and cultural differences. Role-play among stakeholders—including cultural preservationists, immigrant associations and labour representatives—highlights the structural inequalities that shape their participation in civic life.

Educational equity

The ‘education in trouble’ scenario examines proposals for separate schools for Paradise children. Debates address language barriers, cultural preservation and the risks of segregation. A ranking activity helps the learners prioritize inclusive policies over exclusionary ones, encouraging critical

reflection on the tension between equity and diversity (Figure 4).

Spatial segregation

In the ‘little paradise’ scenario, learners examine how the residential clustering of the Paradise people leads to economic and social challenges. They explore solutions ranging from integration initiatives to targeted welfare policies, drawing parallels to real-world examples of ethnic enclaves in Japan and beyond.

Environmental commons

The ‘power in danger’ scenario focuses on the overuse of the island’s natural resources. Here, the concept of the commons becomes a metaphor for shared responsibilities in an interconnected

Figure 4. ‘Hyotan education is in trouble’: Discussion on role–playing



- ① Chairman of the “Hyotan” Education Authority
- ② Representative of the “Paradise” School Construction Movement Council
- ③ “Hyotan” School teacher
- ④ Representative of the “Kachi–kochi” Business Federation
 - Moderator or coordinator

Note. Image from “Simulation material ‘Hyotan–jima Issues’: Learning issues in a multicultural society of Japan” (Fujiwara, 2021)

world, linking environmental sustainability to intercultural cooperation.

Learning outcomes

Socio-emotional competence

Through role–playing, learners experience empathy, respect and tolerance firsthand. They also confront their own biases, recognizing how emotional responses can both enrich and distort public dialogue.

Cognitive development

Following the simulation, learners are asked to reflect on the situation by fact–checking media stories about immigrants, identifying biases in reporting and distinguishing between subjective

perspectives and objective truths. These exercises build the foundation for robust media literacy.

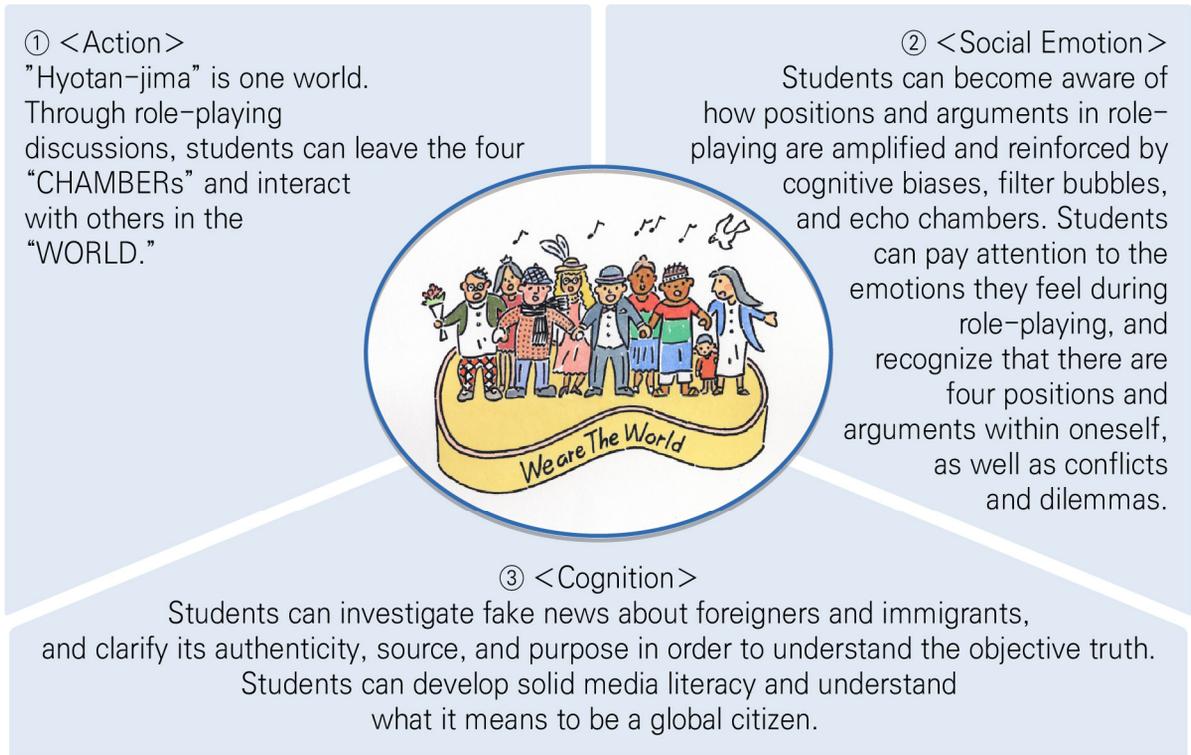
Behavioural transformation

Learners develop the skills for constructive dialogue, collaborative problem solving and civic engagement. These are essential capacities for active global citizenship (Figure 5).

Discussion

Hyotan–jima Issues provides a replicable model for integrating the cognitive, socio-emotional and behavioural dimensions of GCED in a post-truth context. Combining fictional scenarios with realistic social dynamics allows learners to engage deeply without being distracted by the emotional turmoil that real–world controversies can provoke.

Figure 5. Learning process of “Hyotan-jima Issues”: Action→Social Emotion→Cognition



Note. Image from “Simulation material ‘Hyotan-jima Issues’: Learning issues in a multicultural society of Japan” (Fujiwara, 2021)

Nevertheless, its success depends on skilled facilitation. Educators must guide learners through emotional tensions, ensure their factual grounding and connect fictional insights to real-world implications. Future research can investigate the long-term impact of such simulations on learners’ attitudes and behaviour, especially in diverse cultural settings.

Conclusion

In an era where the truth is contested and emotions dominate public discourse, education for

global citizenship must address both the head and the heart. *Hyotan-jima Issues* demonstrates how simulation-based learning can foster empathy, critical thinking and intercultural competence while equipping learners to navigate misinformation and cognitive bias.

By bridging socio-emotional engagement with cognitive rigour, it offers a path toward more inclusive, deliberative and sustainable societies.

1) The fruit of the gourd has been popularly used as a container for water and Japanese sake in Japan. It is the modern version of a plastic bottle.

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From clicks to empathy: Promoting respect for others through social and emotional learning in the post-truth era



Charu Saini

Associate National Project Officer, UNESCO MGIEP

Charu Saini is a passionate education professional with a Ph.D. in Education and a double postgraduate degree in Education and Mathematics. She has extensive experience in educational research, curriculum development and policy implementation. Before joining UNESCO MGIEP, she served as a Senior Consultant at the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT), India, where she contributed to the development of the national curriculum framework and policy initiatives, including teacher capacity-building and stakeholder engagement. At UNESCO MGIEP, she is leading a research initiative to develop and validate a comprehensive framework for digital citizenship education within the context of teacher education. Her work demonstrates a deep and sustained commitment to advancing the principles of global citizenship education, with particular emphasis on integrating equity, critical thinking and digital pedagogies to cultivate inclusive, informed and empathetic learners. She is particularly committed to designing research that informs policy and strengthens inclusive, future-ready education systems.

Introduction

The digital revolution has transformed the concept of citizenship. Global citizenship education (GCED) can no longer be considered in isolation; it must be imagined in the context of digital transformation (Swarts, 2020; UNESCO, 2022). A report by DataReportal (2025) found that over 65% of the global population engages with social media, indicating that social media platforms have emerged as primary venues for expression, connection, participation and collaboration. However, the increase in the use of digital technologies has 'raised cybersecurity concerns, risks associated with automation, and fueled a global infodemic rooted in mis-, dis-, and mal-information, violent ideologies, hate speech, prejudice, bias, division and confusion' (UNESCO, 2022, p. 3). The post-truth era is characterized by emotions and beliefs that frequently supersede objective facts in public discourse. This cultural shift has been exacerbated by social media, which amplifies emotive content and prioritizes engagement over truthfulness (Essien, 2024). Johan Farkas and Jannick Schou (2023) have argued that the implications of this digitally driven post-truth environment have fundamentally challenged the very foundations of democratic societies. Algorithms amplify confirmation bias and polarization, eroding trust. These patterns are increasingly visible worldwide (UNESCO, 2024).

UNESCO's vision of a peaceful, just and inclusive world is rooted in education for sustainable development (ESD) and GCED. GCED offers a robust framework for addressing the crisis prevalent in the post-truth era. GCED highlights the importance of critical thinking, human rights and respect for diversity (UNESCO, 2015). Social and emotional learning (SEL), with its focus on self-awareness, self-discipline, self-motivation,

empathy, relationship skills and responsible decision-making (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2020), complements the approach needed to achieve the overarching goal of GCED. Integrating SEL with GCED has the potential to enhance responsible, ethical online engagement, shifting it from a reactive to a critical-thinking, compassionate approach.

A wide range of theories and frameworks from various disciplines informed the identification and selection of themes that underpin the developed model and its application in the workshop. The principal areas are outlined below.

Democracy in the post-truth era

The post-truth era is marked by a shift from evidence-based reasoning to belief-driven engagement. According to the International Telecommunication Union (2024), approximately 68% of the global population uses the internet, which expands opportunities for online engagement but also poses risks in the creation and spread of misinformation and disinformation. According to research, false news/narratives proliferate more quickly and extensively than factual corrections (Vosoughi et al., 2018). Social media algorithms that aim to increase engagement often make this issue worse by creating echo chambers and filter bubbles that reinforce preconceived notions (Pariser, 2011).

Global citizenship education

As envisioned by UNESCO (2013), the overarching goal of GCED is to increase individuals' ability to work toward a more sustainable and peaceful world. This is in line with the Sustainable Development Goal 4.7, which asks for education that fosters respect for cultural diversity, human rights, gender equality and global citizenship. The role of GCED in

the post-truth era has increased, as there is a need to foster civic virtues and critical consciousness in addition to imparting factual knowledge.

Social and emotional learning

SEL consists of five core competencies: self-awareness (recognizing emotions, thoughts and values), self-management (regulating emotions and behaviours), social awareness (empathizing with and understanding others), relationship skills (forming and maintaining positive relationships) and responsible decision-making (making ethical and constructive choices) (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2020).

A report by UNESCO MGIEP (2020) highlighted that SEL can build resilience and lessen bullying. Within the digital landscape, SEL has the potential to foster the growth of mindful interactions and reduce impulsive sharing and hostile responses.

Digital identity

Digital identity encompasses the data, behaviours, and representations that define an individual's presence in online environments. It reflects both deliberate self-presentation and accidental data traces and is developed through interactions on social media and other digital platforms, as well as through digital footprints (Belk, 2013). Since digital identity affects personal agency, online reputation, and susceptibility to abuse, understanding it is essential to promote responsible digital citizenship. This awareness also supports strategies for digital well-being and moral engagement in virtual environments.

Digital citizenship education

The rapid digital transformation of society has reshaped the ways people interact, acquire knowledge, work and engage in social activities.

According to a report published by UNICEF (2019), one in three youth worldwide has been a victim of cyberbullying. With the constant development and increasing use of digital technologies, literacy alone is not enough; digital spaces also require empathy and a strong ethical foundation. Within this landscape, Digital Citizenship Education (DCE) has become a key component of the broader objectives of ESD and GCED.

DCE extends GCED into digital contexts, emphasizing online ethics, digital literacy and responsible engagement. UNESCO (2022) conceptualizes DCE as a framework that 'integrates GCED, media and information literacy, and digital literacy components to enhance learners' capacities to decode and deconstruct hate speech and mis-, dis-, and mal-information, while fostering ethical foundations, including empathy, to discourage both the creation and sharing of such content' (p. 9).

Mechanisms of misinformation

Zhou and Shen (2024) noted that cognitive biases, particularly confirmation bias and motivated reasoning, play a critical role in the dissemination of misinformation and disinformation. These findings are corroborated by additional research showing that increased emotionality increases the likelihood of accepting misleading information, i.e., individuals who rely more on emotion than logic are more vulnerable to fake news (Martel et al., 2020).

Confirmation bias 'is the tendency to seek, interpret, and remember evidence in ways that favor existing beliefs or expectations' (as cited by Zhou & Shen, 2024, p. 5). Motivated reasoning can be considered as a cognitive process in which individuals selectively gather, interpret, and evaluate information in a way that aligns with their

pre-existing beliefs, values, or desired conclusions, often disregarding contradictory evidence (Kunda, 1990).

By fostering reflection, emotional regulation and perspective-taking, SEL can help reduce vulnerability to false information. These abilities reduce impulsive sharing and improve critical evaluation of information by teaching people to think things through, control emotionally charged content and consider different points of view (Gidalevich & Mirkin, 2024; Nakajima Suzuki & Inaba, 2025).

Framework

Although media and information literacy is widely acknowledged as a critical twenty-first-century skill for navigating today's digital landscape, SEL provides complementary competencies for their practical application. Therefore, it is imperative to explore models that blend media and information literacy with SEL. The workshop titled 'From Clicks to Empathy: Promoting Respect for Others through Social and Emotional Learning in the Post-Truth Era' exemplifies such an approach.

The model designed for this workshop draws from constructivist theories Kolb (1984) and John Dewey's (1916) conceptualization of democracy as

a participatory way of life. By extending the common assumption of these theories that view learners as active agents in the digital space, we believe learners are active social agents who can influence the digital environment through agency, identity, and critical thinking.

The model comprises three key activities designed to build essential media and information literacy skills and SEL competencies:

- **Fact-checking:** This activity promotes critical thinking skills by providing participants with tools to question information sources, verify facts and identify misinformation, enhancing their media and information literacy skills.
- **Digital identity mapping:** By promoting introspection about one's digital footprint, roles, strengths and risks/vulnerabilities, this exercise provides opportunities for self-awareness.
- **Empathy mapping:** This activity promotes empathy and emotional intelligence by allowing participants to engage with and understand varied perspectives in online spaces.

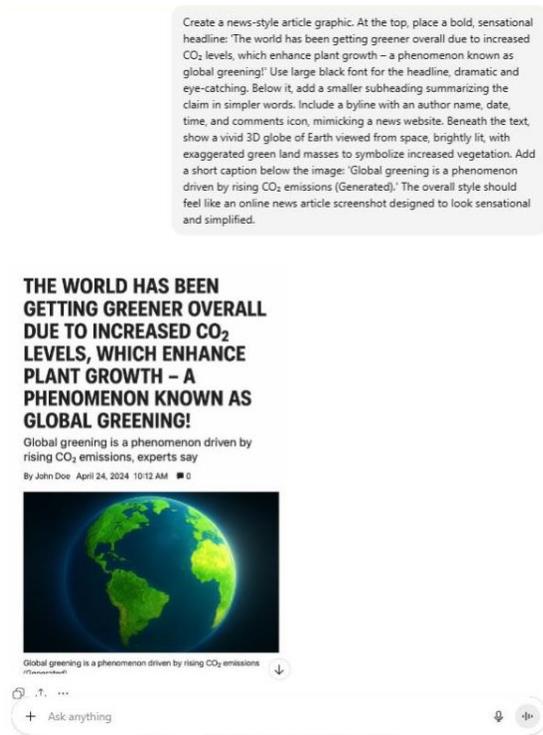
Pedagogical approach and workshop flow

The workshop followed an experiential learning approach. It was designed for heterogeneous

Table 1. Overview of workshop activity 1: Fact-checking

Activity 1: Fact-checking	
Objective	To enable participants to understand the criteria for evaluating online information/news.
Process	Participants were presented with a news item (see Figure 1) and asked to scrutinize its content and details. They were then asked to classify the news as either factual or false. Following this, they were asked to identify and share the key criteria they used to evaluate the news item's credibility. This led to a discussion on their reasoning processes and existing verification strategies.
Skills and competencies targeted	Critical thinking: Questioning and analysing the credibility of information and articulating the reason behind their judgement Media and information literacy: Applying fact-checking principles to digital content Digital citizenship: Participating responsibly in the digital space

Figure 1. Screenshot of a news item shared with workshop participants



Note. Image generated using ChatGPT by the author.

participants, including policymakers and professionals in the field of education, international/

regional/national organizations and civil society organizations, GCED experts, leaders, and practitioners, educators, youth, parents and individuals interested in GCED, as well as representatives from the private sector. The ninety minute workshop employed interactive approaches that exposed participants to the emotional and cognitive challenges of navigating the digital landscape, characterized by the proliferation of misinformation and disinformation, as well as rising incidence of online hate speech.

Conclusion

In the post-truth era defined by challenges of climate change, decreasing faith in democratic institutions, spread of misinformation and disinformation, and rise in incidence of online violence and hate speeches, the role of DCE is becoming increasingly important. The workshop titled ‘From Clicks to Empathy: Promoting Respect for Others through Social and Emotional Learning in the Post-Truth Era’ showcased conscious strategies and tools that can foster informed, empathetic, and responsible behaviour among citizens.

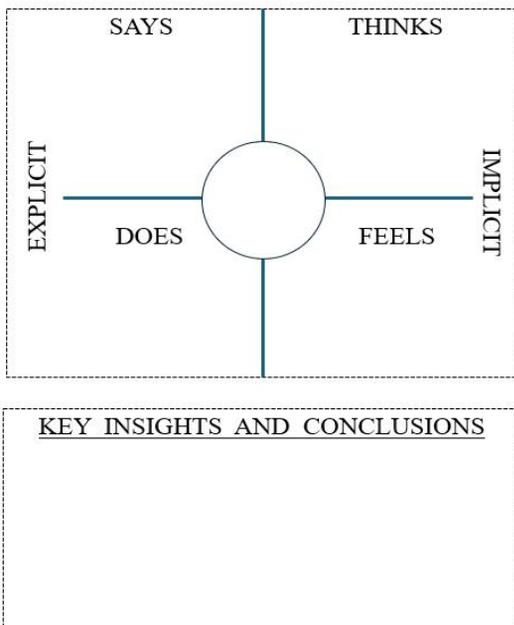
Table 2. Overview of workshop activity 2: Digital identity

Activity 2: Digital identity	
Objectives	To enable the participants to create self-awareness regarding their online presence and digital footprints. To identify potential strengths and risks/vulnerabilities associated with engagement on online platforms.
Processes	Participants were introduced to the concepts of digital identity and digital footprints. They were then asked to map their digital identity by listing the social media platforms they use and the specific purposes for which these platforms are utilized. In addition, participants identified the strengths and potential risks or challenges associated with their use of these platforms. Following this exercise, they presented their digital identity maps and reflected on their insights using guiding questions such as: <i>Do your strengths (“superpowers”) outweigh your challenges, or vice versa?</i> <i>What aspects of your digital identity did you notice that you had not considered before?</i>
Skills and competencies targeted	Critical thinking: Reflecting on one’s own digital presence and digital footprints Self-awareness: Being aware of the potential strengths and challenges in digital engagement

Table 3. Overview of workshop activity 3: Empathy mapping

Activity 3: Empathy mapping	
Objectives	<p>To enable participants to identify and understand the emotional needs of individuals experiencing online bullying.</p> <p>To provide participants with a tool that can help them develop perspective-taking in digital interactions.</p> <p>To help participants understand the key elements of respectful behaviour in online spaces.</p>
Processes	<p>In the empathy mapping activity, participants were presented with a case study on online bullying. The scenario depicted a college student who, experiencing heightened academic pressure and associated stress, shared a post on a social media platform to express her struggles. Rather than receiving empathy or support, two of her friends responded with dismissive and unsympathetic comments, intensifying her emotional distress.</p> <p>Participants were then introduced to the concept of empathy maps. Empathy maps are a robust tool in design thinking to systematically collect, organize, and analyse information to cultivate a comprehensive understanding of the target audience. It is a visual tool (see Figure 2) that organizes information into four quadrants: Says, Does, Thinks and Feels. This framework allows users to distinguish the explicit (what is said or done) and implicit (what is thought or felt) aspects of data. By mapping these elements, practitioners can identify patterns, extract key insights and draw meaningful conclusions from data. Following this exercise, they presented their digital identity maps and reflected on their insights using guiding questions such as:</p> <p><i>What are the explicit and implicit points you identified?</i></p> <p><i>What are the key insights? Did you notice your own assumptions?</i></p>
Skills and competencies targeted	<p>Critical thinking: Reflecting on someone’s thoughts, reactions and/or biases shared online.</p> <p>Empathy in digital dialogue: Understanding the feelings of others in digital contexts.</p> <p>Social awareness: Recognizing the impact of online messages on emotional well-being.</p> <p>Digital citizenship: Developing an understanding of being respectful and compassionate on digital platforms.</p>

Figure 2. Empathy map



Note. Adapted from Henry Ford Learning Institute (n.d.)

The three activities—fact-checking, empathy mapping for online interactions and creating digital identity maps—can collectively be mapped to the critical skills listed in UNESCO’s framework for DCE.

The fact-checking activity allowed participants to evaluate the credibility of online information/news. This allows individuals to act responsibly and make informed judgements that are aligned with DCE’s emphasis on critical enquiry and media and information literacy. The digital identity exercise enabled participants to map their online presence and digital footprints, and to identify the strengths and risks or vulnerabilities associated with social media use. This exercise reinforced the values of digital citizenship, including responsible and ethical participation on digital platforms. The

empathy mapping exercise enabled participants to develop perspective-taking skills, recognize the implicit and explicit dimensions of digital interactions and reflect on the impact of their words and actions online. This nurtures empathy, compassion and respect—core to fostering a safe

and inclusive digital culture.

Collectively, these activities prompted participants to reflect critically, question, challenge and rethink their own and others' digital behaviours, consistent with UNESCO's overarching goals for DCE.

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**Democracy in the Post-Truth Crisis:
The Role of Global Citizenship Education**

02

PART

Global citizenship education responses to the post-truth crisis

Section 3

Institutional and educational initiatives for promoting peace and citizenship

Bert J. Tuga

Hugo M. Fernandes

Revitalizing teaching and learning of global citizenship education in the Philippines



Bert J. Tuga

President, Philippine Normal University

Bert J. Tuga is the eleventh President of the Philippine Normal University's National Center for Teacher Education in the Philippines. He has held significant roles, including Vice President for Finance and Administration and University Relations and Advancement. He earned his Ph.D. in Curriculum and Instruction from the Philippine Normal University and participated in the 'PhD Sandwich Program' at the Ohio State University. He has also completed an online certificate programme in Leadership and Management offered by the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania. Under his leadership, the Global Citizenship Education Cooperation Centre (GCC) was established in the Philippines, with the Philippine Normal University as its national base, in partnership with APCEIU. As a committed GCED advocate, he continues to serve as a consultant and resource person for various citizenship education projects in both national and international settings.

Introduction

In today's interconnected and interdependent world, education systems are tasked not only with preparing students for national citizenship but also for global citizenship. Global citizenship education (GCED) has thus emerged as a transformative approach that empowers learners to assume active roles in addressing global challenges, fostering peace, and contributing to sustainable development. It promotes values such as human rights, cultural diversity, environmental stewardship and civic responsibility. Under the leadership of the Asia-Pacific Centre of Education for International Understanding (APCEIU), the Global Citizenship Education Cooperation Centres (GCCs) were established in 2021 to support teacher education institutions (TEIs) in contextualizing and institutionalizing GCED. By 2022, the Philippine Normal University (PNU)—the country's

National Center for Teacher Education—was designated as host of the GCC–Philippines (APCEIU, 2022), affirming its pivotal role in advancing GCED across the nation.

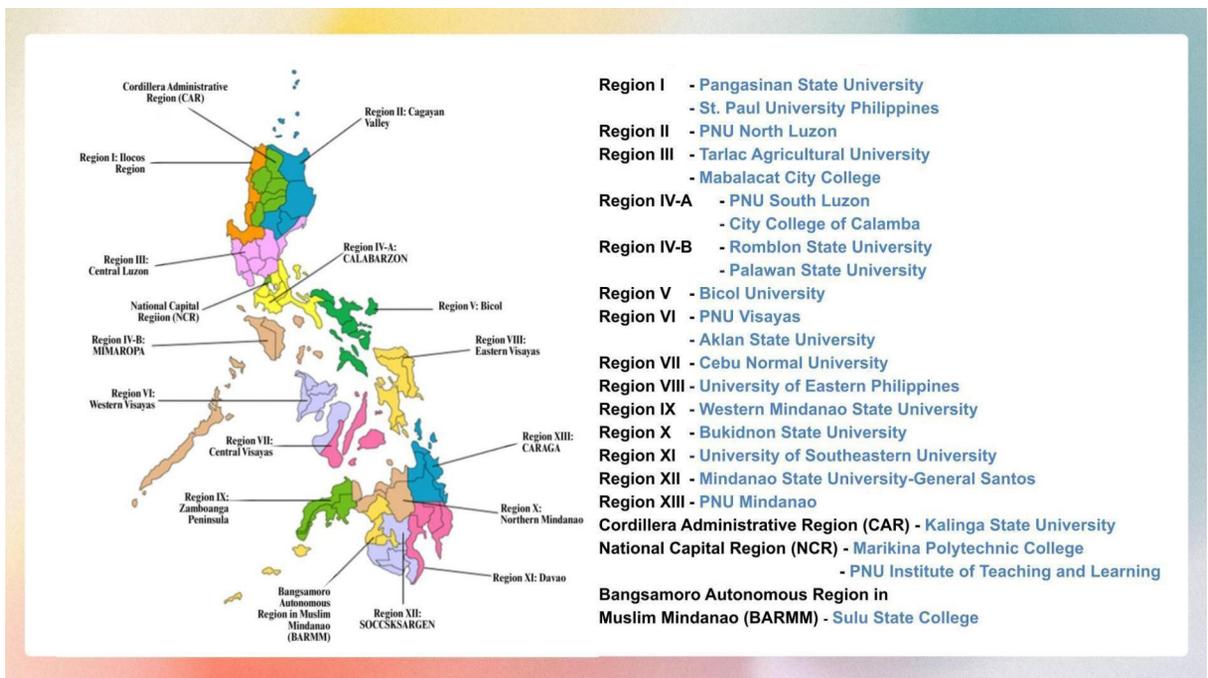
What is Global Citizenship Education Cooperation Centre–Philippines?

GCC–Philippines is a landmark partnership between PNU and APCEIU, launched in 2022.

On the left, the Philippine map indicates the regional divisions, while on the right, the list identifies the higher education institutions designated as hubs. These include:

- Region 1: Pangasinan State University
- Region 2: St. Paul University Philippines, PNU North Luzon
- Region 3: Tarlac Agricultural University, Mabalacat

Figure 1. GCC Regional Hubs (Batch 1 & 2)



Note. The image above shows a map of the GCC regional hubs (batch 1 and 2) across the country. Each hub corresponds to a state/private university, college or institute strategically located in the regions to serve as centres for collaboration and development (Tuga, 2025).

City College

- Region 4A: PNU South Luzon, City College of Calamba
- Region 4B: Romblon State University, Palawan State University
- Region 5: Bicol University
- Region 6: PNU Visayas, Aklan State University
- Region 7: Cebu Normal University
- Region 8: University of Eastern Philippines
- Region 9: Western Mindanao State University
- Region 10: Bukidnon State University
- Region 11: University of Southeastern Philippines
- Region 12: Mindanao State University–General Santos
- Region 13: PNU Mindanao
- Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR): Kalinga State University
- National Capital Region (NCR): Marikina Polytechnic College, PNU Institute of Teaching and Learning
- Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM): Sulu State College

This network of regional hubs reflects the nationwide collaboration of universities and colleges, led by PNU, to strengthen education and training across all regions of the Philippines.

Purpose and impact

GCCs were envisioned as more than administrative hubs; they are incubators of transformative educational change. They aim to bridge the gap between global educational principles and local contexts, ensuring that GCED resonates with learners, teachers, and communities. Their core impact is realized through four interrelated functions:

1. Translating GCED principles into culturally relevant curricula: GCCs recognize that global values must be localized to be meaningful.

They develop lesson exemplars, contextualized learning modules and teaching resources that align with learners' realities while promoting international understanding.

2. Empowering educators as change agents: Teachers are at the heart of GCED implementation. GCCs conduct capacity-building programmes that promote participatory, learner-centric pedagogies, enabling teachers to guide learners in critical reflection, empathy and active citizenship.
3. Creating safe and inclusive learning environments: By fostering dialogue, intercultural exchange and a respect for diversity, GCCs nurture environments where learners feel empowered to engage with different perspectives and challenge prejudices.
4. Linking learning to action: Classroom knowledge must be translated into practice. GCCs promote school- and community-based projects where learners confront real-world issues, from climate change to human rights advocacy, thereby cultivating responsible, action-oriented global citizens.

Through these functions, GCCs serve as catalysts of systemic educational transformation, rooted in the vision of education as a driver for peace and sustainable development.

Global citizenship education initiatives by Philippine Normal University

As the host of GCC Philippines, PNU has pioneered various initiatives to mainstream GCED across different levels of the education system.

Curriculum integration

In partnership with the Department of Education and APCEIU, PNU developed GCED-infused K–12 lessons. These lessons, designed for various grade

levels, emphasize critical thinking, intercultural awareness and ethical responsibility. For instance, lesson modules cover environmental sustainability, human rights and global interdependence, ensuring that students understand the link between local realities and global challenges.

Capacity building

PNU has conducted nationwide teacher training programmes to enable teachers to integrate GCED principles into their pedagogy. Teachers are trained to shift from rote instruction to participatory, student-driven approaches. By 2024, PNU had trained 103 teachers. In 2025, this number increased to 125, spanning both elementary and higher education institutions.

Research and advocacy

PNU leads GCED-related research and produces policy recommendations to support the systemic integration of GCED into national education frameworks. Through research projects, PNU documents effective strategies, assesses challenges and influences policies that embed GCED in the Philippine educational agenda.

Key projects

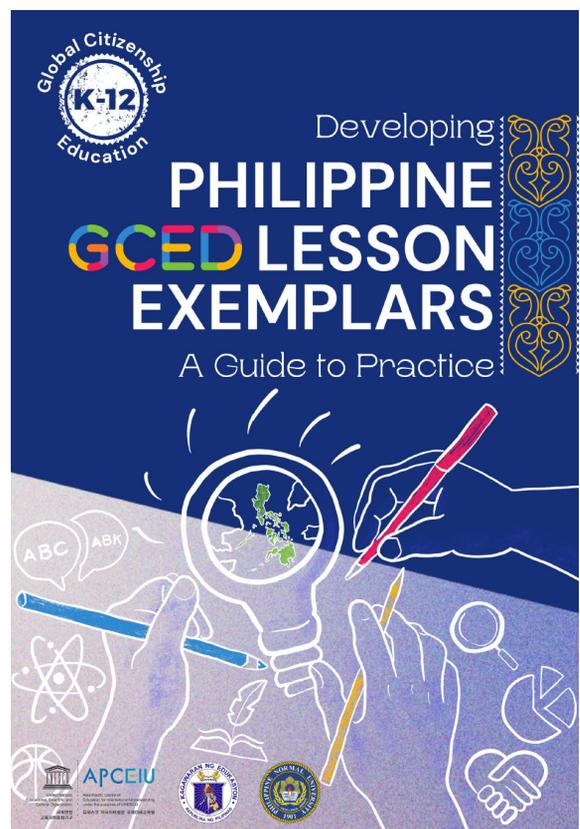
Global citizenship education online training courses

These courses target both elementary and higher education teachers. The completion rates underscore teachers' strong commitment. In 2024, fifty-five teachers from elementary education and forty-eight from higher education were trained. In 2025, 102 and twenty-three teachers from elementary education and higher education, respectively, were trained. These courses enhance teachers' knowledge of GCED frameworks, teaching strategies and practical applications.

Philippine global citizenship education lesson exemplars

A compilation of online sample lessons provides educators with ready-to-use, adaptable instructional materials. The exemplars contextualize GCED themes such as identity, environment, human rights and peace, allowing teachers to seamlessly integrate global perspectives into their subjects.

Figure 2. Cover page of the publication *Developing Philippine GCED Lesson Exemplars: A Guide to Practice*



Note. From APCEIU & PNU (2021)

Paghabi Publications

Philippine Normal University (APCEIU et al., 2024a) documents narratives and practices from diverse institutions. The word *paghabi* (to weave) symbolizes the interlacing of individual and institutional contributions into a collective tapestry

of experiences that showcase how GCED is practised in Philippine classrooms and communities.

Figure 3. Cover pages of *Paghabi* publications



Note. From (APCEIU et al., 2024b, 2025)

In addition to these projects, other significant initiatives include the GCED Youth Network, the Philippine GCED Networks and Teach for Peace, all of which collectively advance the goals of GCED through sustained programmes and collaborative efforts.

Best practices

Project MENTOR (Bicol University)

Project MENTOR (Motivate, Engage, Nurture, Team-up, Organize and Reflect) seeks to enhance teachers' competencies in resource development. It involves developing validated GCED instructional resources for elementary and secondary schools, compiling them into a toolkit and disseminating the toolkit to local institutions. Teachers are guided through resource creation, validation and publication processes, ensuring both quality and relevance.

The objectives of the initiative are to enhance teachers' competencies in developing GCED instructional resources, to create such resources for both elementary and secondary levels, and to validate the materials produced by teachers. In

Figure 4. Scenes from Project MENTOR in 2022



Note. From Bicol University – GCC Regional Hub for Region 5

addition, the project aims to publish a compendium of locally developed GCED instructional resources as a toolkit and to disseminate these materials to various schools.

In terms of actual practice and innovation, Project MENTOR was implemented as a GCED scale-up initiative in the Bicol region. It provided sustained mentoring and capacity building for teachers by combining formal and informal mentoring approaches. Among its key activities were the ‘Workshop-cum-Mentoring on Developing and Validating Contextualized GCED Instructional Resources for Basic Education’ held on 10 and 24 September 2022, and one-on-one mentoring sessions titled *Paratukdo na Oragon sa GCED* (competent teacher in GCED), conducted in December 2022. The project also facilitated asynchronous consultations with teachers from September to December 2022 to support the development of GCED lessons. Central to this mentoring programme was the emphasis on personal, reciprocal mentor-mentee relationships, which fostered professional growth and strengthened advocacy for GCED in classrooms, schools, and communities.

TEACH-GCED Initiative (Kalinga State University)

Initially integrated into Social Sciences (*Araling Panlipunan*), this initiative equips teachers and students with knowledge, tools and methodologies to address global challenges. It emphasizes intercultural competence, civic engagement and contextualized applications. Activities include workshops on international issues, partnerships with local offices of the Department of Education (DepEd) and follow-up mentorship programmes.

The initiative seeks to provide teachers with the knowledge, tools and methodologies needed to integrate GCED principles into classroom instruction while enhancing students’ understanding of global issues such as environmental sustainability, human rights and intercultural understanding. It also aims to foster active citizenship and community engagement among both students and teachers, build a network of educators dedicated to shaping the next generation of global citizens and expand the integration of GCED beyond *Araling Panlipunan* to other subjects such as Mathematics and Science.

In practice, the TEACH-GCED initiative was launched at Balawag National High School with sixty participants, composed of faculty, students

Figure 5. Scenes from TEACH-GCED initiative in 2023



Note. From Kalinga State University – GCC Regional Hub for Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR)

and Kalinga State University staff. Interactive sessions and workshops were conducted, featuring topics such as *Introduction to GCED and Frameworks* by Dr Pinky Gas-ib, *Cultural Understanding and Intercultural Competence* by Ms Rachele Uday and *Active Citizenship and Community Engagement* by Ms Glycel Osia. Collaboration with the Education Department of Tabuk City was also established to ensure the contextualized and sustainable integration of GCED in the curriculum. To sustain its impact, follow-up workshops and mentorship programmes were planned to support teachers' continuing professional development. Further, students were encouraged to connect local actions with global implications through discussions and engagement with real-world issues such as climate change, human rights and social justice.

Integrating global citizenship education into music, arts and English (Philippine Normal University– Faculty of General Education and Experiential Learning)

By using international folk songs such as *Zum Gali Gali* (Israel), *Nabiya* (South Korea) and *Song of Snowy Mt. Fuji* (Japan), pre-service teachers at PNU integrated GCED themes into their creative

instruction. The lessons highlight values such as unity, perseverance, environmental responsibility and peace. These performances, complete with cultural costumes, allow students to internalize these values through practice, dialogue and reflection.

The specific objectives of the initiative are to develop students' awareness and deepen their appreciation of the music of other cultures, discover cultures of different nations through their folk songs, strengthen pre-service teachers' skills in teaching songs using Rote and Ward methods—which emphasize learning by ear and combining it with music reading and notation; engage field study students in the implementation of GCED at the Faculty of General Education and Experiential Learning; and stage a final performance that showcases the musical talents of learners.

In practice and through innovation, the programme integrated GCED themes—Myself, My Environment, My Country, My Universe, and My World—into the Institute of Teaching and Learning's curriculum. It also introduced international folk songs aligned with specific GCED

Figure 6. Scenes from the PNU-CTL FGEEL programme integrating GCED into music, arts and English in 2024



Note. From Philippine Normal University – Center for Teaching and Learning, Faculty of General Education and Experiential Learning (PNU-CTL FGEEL)

themes, such as *Zum Gali Gali* (Israel, Grade 3), which emphasizes unity, hard work and perseverance; *Nabiya* (South Korea, Grade 4), which highlights environmental practices and behaviours; *Hsiao/Bamboo Flute* (China, Grade 5), which promotes peace and harmony; *Song of Snowy Mt. Fuji* (Japan, Grade 6), which encourages environmental appreciation; *Burung Kakak Tua* (Indonesia, Grade 7), which integrates ecological appreciation and cultural tradition; and *Aeyaya Balano Sakkal* (India, Grade 10), which instills responsibility and collective action. To further strengthen musical learning and intercultural understanding, the Rote and Ward methods were applied in teaching songs. Pre-service teachers actively engaged in lesson delivery, cultural discussions, rehearsals and staging performances. The programme culminated in a performance event in which learners wore cultural costumes and presented songs, followed by teacher evaluation and reflection.

Other best practices across Philippine higher education institutions

The GCC Philippines has gathered best practices from institutions across the country, highlighting the diversity and creativity of GCED integration.

Marikina Polytechnic College

The institution has embedded GCED principles into technical and vocational education, recognizing the importance of preparing learners not only with employable skills but also with civic responsibility and ethical awareness. By contextualizing GCED within vocational subjects, students are encouraged to see their future professions as avenues for nation-building, sustainability and community service. Their initiatives also foster values such as cooperation, accountability and inclusivity in workplace settings.

Romblon State University

Situated in a province dependent on marine resources, Romblon State University created GCED initiatives focused on local ecological concerns, particularly marine conservation. By linking GCED with pressing environmental issues, the university fostered a sense of global responsibility anchored in local realities. Students participated in coastal clean-up drives, marine biodiversity research and awareness campaigns, thereby addressing both community needs and global sustainability goals.

University of Eastern Philippines

University of Eastern Philippines promotes civic engagement through service-learning projects that integrate GCED principles into student activities. These projects often involve working with rural communities on issues such as literacy, environmental protection and social justice. By applying classroom knowledge to real-world problems, students cultivate empathy, leadership and a strong sense of global interdependence. These activities not only improve community conditions but also nurture socially responsive graduates who are aware of their roles as both national and global citizens.

Bukidnon State University

With its diverse student population, including indigenous learners, Bukidnon State University expanded its GCED outreach in Mindanao through intercultural dialogue initiatives, peacebuilding programmes and inclusion campaigns. Activities include workshops that bridge cultural differences, promote respect for indigenous traditions and encourage peaceful coexistence among diverse groups. These efforts highlight the power of GCED to mitigate conflict, celebrate diversity and advance peace in a region historically affected by socio-political challenges.

These practices collectively illustrate how GCED principles can be tailored to different institutional strengths, local contexts and learner needs. By weaving global perspectives into vocational training, environmental stewardship, service-learning and intercultural dialogue, Philippine higher education institutions demonstrate the adaptability and transformative potential of GCED across regions and disciplines.

Discussion

The collective experiences of PNU and its partner institutions reveal not only the adaptability of GCED across diverse contexts but also its transformative potential in shaping learners, educators and communities. From local schools in Luzon to rural communities in the Visayas and intercultural settings in Mindanao, the application of GCED has revealed strengths and ongoing challenges.

Cultural appreciation and intercultural understanding

GCED practices highlight the role of music, arts and traditions in fostering mutual respect among learners. Initiatives such as the use of international folk songs in classrooms demonstrate how culture serves as both a medium and a message for global citizenship. Students are not only exposed to cultural expressions from other nations but are also encouraged to reflect on their own cultural identities. By engaging in intercultural exchanges, they develop empathy and learn to navigate diversity respectfully—skills essential in multicultural societies like the Philippines.

Peace and human rights education

Many of the documented practices explicitly engage students with themes of justice, equity and peace. Activities such as workshops on intercultural competence, civic engagement and dialogue-based

learning equip learners with the cognitive and socio-emotional tools needed to participate in democratic processes and advocate for human rights. In Mindanao, for example, programmes that bring together students from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds highlight the value of GCED in conflict-sensitive areas, where peacebuilding is both a necessity and an educational responsibility.

Sustainability and environmental responsibility

Environmental education has emerged as a natural entry point for GCED, particularly in institutions situated in ecologically sensitive areas. Initiatives like those of Romblon State University, with its focus on marine conservation, demonstrate how global sustainability goals can be grounded in local ecological realities. Learners are not just passive recipients of environmental knowledge but active participants in conservation efforts, linking their immediate communities to global movements against climate change and ecological degradation. These practices demonstrate how GCED can align seamlessly with the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Goals 13 (climate action) and 15 (life on land).

Civic engagement and learner agency

A defining feature of GCED is its emphasis on transforming learners into active citizens who can bridge knowledge and action. Service-learning projects, advocacy campaigns and community-based initiatives, such as those at the University of Eastern Philippines, demonstrate how students apply classroom lessons to real-world challenges. This bridging of theory and practice fosters not only a sense of social responsibility but also empowerment, as students realize their potential to influence change at both the local and global levels. Civic engagement thus becomes a core

outcome of GCED, positioning education as a pathway to active and ethical citizenship.

Despite these successes, several challenges persist. Sustaining GCED programmes requires consistent resources, strong institutional commitment and enabling policies at both national and local levels. Teachers often face competing workload demands, making it challenging to implement GCED approaches consistently without additional support. Further, the scarcity of localized instructional resources, especially those tailored to rural, indigenous or marginalized communities, limits the inclusivity and relevance of GCED in specific contexts.

Nevertheless, the opportunities for GCED in the Philippines remain considerable. By scaling successful models and documenting learnings, institutions can share practices adaptable across regions. Strengthening inter-institutional collaborations, such as those fostered by the GCC-Philippines network, can pool resources, amplify impact and foster collaboration. Leveraging digital technologies can expand GCED's reach to teachers and learners in remote areas, enabling online training, resource-sharing and intercultural

dialogue. Finally, embedding GCED into national education policies will ensure its long-term sustainability, aligning the country's educational system with UNESCO's vision of fostering global citizens for a peaceful and sustainable world.

Conclusion

Revitalizing GCED through the GCC-Philippines demonstrates how global educational frameworks can be meaningfully localized. Through its leadership, PNU has guided the integration of GCED into curricula, teacher training and community-based initiatives. Partner institutions across Luzon, the Visayas and Mindanao contribute by weaving their unique practices into a national tapestry of educational innovation.

Moving forward, the Philippines must continue to sustain and expand these initiatives. With strong policy backing, dedicated educators and active learners, GCED can become deeply embedded in the nation's education system. This will not only prepare Filipino learners to thrive in a globalized world but also position the Philippines as a leading contributor to UNESCO's vision of building a just, peaceful and sustainable future for all.

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**Democracy in the Post-Truth Crisis:
The Role of Global Citizenship Education**

Reclaiming the collective narrative of peace in Timor-Leste



Hugo M. Fernandes

Executive Director, Centro Nacional Chega! I.P

Hugo M. Fernandes is the Executive Director of Centro Nacional Chega! I.P. From 2008 to 2017, he was the Director of Public Policy and Institutional Strengthening and Team Leader of Support for Good Public Policy Programme at the Asia Foundation in Timor-Leste. From 2002 to 2005, he served as the Coordinator of the Truth Seeking Unit and Co-Managing Editor of Timor-Leste Reception, Truth and Reconciliation Commission's report, *Chega! – Enough*. From 2005 to 2008, he was the Research Team Leader and Co-editor for Timor-Leste and Indonesia Truth and Friendship Commission's report, *Pre Memoriam ad Spem (From Memory to Hopes)*. He is the Co-founder of the Southeast Asian Journalists Union and served as its Co-chair from 2013 to 2017. He is a founding member of Timor Lorosa'e Journalists Association, established in 1999. He was the former Commissioner of the Timor-Leste Press Council from 2016 to 2021. In 2020, he co-founded the Kdadalak Institute for Public Policy. In 2025, he was nominated by members of Timor-Leste's Memory of the World as Chairperson until 2028. He holds a B.Sc. in Forestry from Gadjah Mada University in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, a diploma in International Journalism and a Master's in Public Policy from Cardiff University, United Kingdom.

Introduction

Timor-Leste, a nation shaped by its colonial and occupation history, is on a path toward reconciliation and development. However, its collective narrative of peace remains fragmented due to historical trauma, socio-economic challenges and political instability. By incorporating historical memory, cultural identity, community reconciliation and addressing psychological and structural challenges, Timor-Leste can foster national unity and sustainable development. This paper includes key recommendations and case studies that highlight the importance of inclusive, grassroots-led peacebuilding strategies.

Timor-Leste stands as a testament to the resilience of a people who have endured centuries of colonial rule and decades of violent occupation. Gaining independence in 2002, the nation has made significant strides in rebuilding its institutions and infrastructure. However, the legacy of conflict and division continues to influence its collective consciousness.

Background: A nation's struggle

Timor-Leste's history is marked by colonialism and conflict. Portuguese colonization lasted for over 400 years, leaving behind a legacy of underdevelopment. In 1975, following a brief period of independence, Indonesia invaded and occupied Timor-Leste, leading to twenty-four years of brutal conflict.

The 1999 referendum, in which 78% of Timorese voted for independence, was followed by widespread violence, destruction and displacement. The scars of the occupation and the subsequent humanitarian crisis remain vivid in the national consciousness.

The need for a collective narrative: Vision and policy

The diverse experiences of Timorese people during Portuguese colonial rule, the civil war and internal conflict due to ideological divergence, the Indonesian occupation, and the independence struggle have resulted in fragmented memories. Regional, ethnic and generational differences further complicate the process of building a unified national identity. Addressing these divisions is essential for fostering trust and solidarity. Efforts to unite the Timorese people and build collective peace are highlighted below:

National Convergence 1986

Frente Revolucionária para a Independência de Timor-Leste (FRETILIN) and União Democrática Timorense (UDT) established the National Convergence in March 1986. It was a coalition that sought to unite the national resistance against the Indonesian occupation. It aimed to overcome divisions among resistance groups and factions, recognizing that unity was crucial to achieving independence. Today, the initiative seeks to unite Timor-Leste after decades of conflict and division.

Reconciliation before Timor-Leste's independence

The reconciliation initiative among the Timorese began with the UN Secretary-General's efforts through the All Inter East Timorese Dialogue (AIETD) from 1995 to 1997. All Timorese parties came together to find concrete solutions to the unstable political environment at the time. Another initiative was the Dare Dialogue, sponsored by Bishop Carlos Filipe Belo, leader of the Catholic Church of Timor-Leste. The first dialogue took place in Dare—a municipality in Timor-Leste's capital city, Dili—and Jakarta in early 1999, where Timorese leaders discussed issues of human rights, reconciliation and justice.

In 1998, the Timorese Resistance leaders from FRETILIN, UDT and Timorese who considered as nationalists gathered in Peniche, Portugal, and issued the *Magna Carta*, which united Timor-Leste's nationalists and formed the Conselho Nacional de Resistência de Timor-Leste (National Council of Resistance of Timor-Leste, CNRT). Before it was dissolved in 2001, the CNRT decided to start nation-building by looking to the past and initiating the reconciliation processes. Under the leadership of Xanana Gusmao, nationalist leaders jointly declared the following statement at the establishment ceremony of the CNRT's *Magna Carta* in 1998:

In an independent Timor-Leste, children and youth must represent our hope for the future. The protection and promotion of their rights must always come first. Their education must be based on instilling love and respect for life, peace, justice and equality so that a new world can be built on the ruins of war (CAVR, 2005)

This statement was made in 1998, a time when Timor-Leste's status as an independent nation was uncertain. Incidentally, in the same year, the Indonesian New Order Military Regime collapsed, and a year later, President Habibie declared the implementation of a referendum for the people of Timor-Leste.

By 2001, all the movement's leaders had returned, gathered in independent Timor-Leste and decided to dissolve the CNRT. They also recommended establishing a Reconciliation Commission. The leaders laid the primary foundation of reconciliation in the following statement:

Reconciliation is a process which acknowledges past mistakes including regret and forgiveness as

a product of a path inherent in the process of achieving justice; it is also a process which must involve the People of Timor-Leste so that the cycle of accusation, denial and counter-accusation can be broken. This process must not be seen only as a conflict resolution or mere political tool which aims at pacification and reintegration of individuals or groups in the context of their acceptance of independence and sovereignty of Timor-Leste, but, above all, must be seen as a process where truth must be the outcome (CAVR, 2005)

Comissão de Acolhimento, Verdade e Reconciliação (The Constitution of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste) included the Principle of Reconciliation under Article 162. In addition to this, there are several special Articles in the Constitution to ensure peace, such as:

1. Article 11: Responsibility of the state to aid victims of political conflict
2. Article 59: Education that aims to respect human rights and democratic values
3. Article 60: To respect and promote the cultural identity and traditions of Timor-Leste

Importance of reclaiming peace narratives

Based on the historical events mentioned above, after independence in 1999, the Timorese people believe that shared memory can:

- Serve as a foundation for national unity and social cohesion
- Promote healing and reconciliation by acknowledging past wounds
- Inspire a shared vision for the future, rooted in justice, equality and development

In 2001, the United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor established the Commission

for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation in East Timor (CAVR). Its final report, entitled *Chega!*, recorded the collective memories of the Timorese regarding the conflict, the occupation regime, the history of the struggle for independence, the human rights violations that occurred and their recommendations for the future. Before the final report was submitted to President Xanana Gusmao in September 2005, the Timor-Leste and Indonesian governments signed the *Terms of Reference* to establish the Commission of Truth and Friendship (CTF). In 2008, this bilateral commission submitted its *Per Memoriam Ad Spem* report, where it recorded that in 1999, the military, police, civilian government and militias of the Indonesian National Armed Forces committed crimes against humanity in Timor-Leste. Timor-Leste freedom fighters also committed several human rights violations. Both countries agreed to assume institutional responsibility for the violations and undertook that this outcome would not obstruct the ongoing legal process.

These two transitional justice mechanisms have enabled individuals, communities and the state to construct a collective historical narrative that can recognize and honour community participation in the peacebuilding process and pave the way for reconciliation. The collective narratives stem from each person's testimony about themselves, others, places and events. Personal identity, national identity, personal experiences and suffering in all its forms can influence our perception of history and create diverse narratives. Thus, history or memory is not a linear process of events; instead, their interpretation and expression convey more than the facts.

To learn from the past and prevent similar events in the future, the two commissions made approxi-

mately 230 recommendations. Unfortunately, after 2008, there was no official state policy to follow up on the recommendations. In 2016, Prime Minister Rui Maria de Araujo, who succeeded Prime Minister Xanana, decided to audit the recommendations of both commissions. By the end of 2016, the audit team reported that only 5% of the total recommendations had been officially implemented by the Timor-Leste government. The team then proposed that the Timor-Leste government establish a Memory Institution to support its implementation of the recommendations of the two commissions.

Strategies for reclaiming peace narratives

In the last years since its inception, Centro Nacional Chega!P (CNC) has developed and implemented the following strategies to ensure the balance of narratives.

Building a shared narrative in Timor-Leste

In July 2017, after ten years, the Timor-Leste government decided to establish CNC with the following mandate:

1. Implement and monitor the implementation of the recommendations of the two commissions
2. Preserve the memory of the past
3. Advise the government on integrating memory and human rights into peace policies
4. Introduce history and human rights into the curriculum
5. Assist victims of human rights violations
6. Carry out reconciliation
7. Introduce Timor-Leste's peacebuilding experience to the international community

To implement this mandate, the CNC introduced the Integrated Memorialization Programme. Commemoration is the act that occurs after the

truth is revealed. These two processes are crucial in the discourse of transitional justice. They establish truth as a documented, multidimensional mechanism and provide opportunities for symbolic reparations. On the other hand, memorialization can strengthen empathy between communities and individuals. The memorialization process is crucial in post-conflict contexts and transitions from war to peace, injustice to justice, and from destruction to development, as in Timor-Leste.

Judy Barsalou and Victoria Baxter (2007) define memorialization as “a process that satisfies the desire to honour those who suffered or died during a conflict and as a means to examine the past and address contemporary issues” (p. 1). It can either promote social recovery after violent conflict ends or crystallize the sense of victimization and the desire for revenge. Memorialization occurs throughout the conflict life cycle: before it begins, during the conflict, and after it ends. Memorialization initiatives take different forms depending on who initiates them, the stage of the conflict in which they are initiated and the kind of society that emerges after violence ends. Thus, memorialization is a highly politicized process that reflects the will of those in power.

This is the concept of memorialization that the CNC intends to introduce: how to contextualize political differences during conflict within reconciliation processes and to build peace. Memorialization must unite divided communities to achieve democracy and stability. This process must involve the creation of a universally accepted national vision and interests for the future, political and economic reforms, and significant changes in societal attitudes toward the past (Kelly & Hamberer, 2004, p. 10). While we recognize that healing trauma and wounds will take time, we can

provide recognition through memorialization as a first step toward effectively confronting our past (p. 13).

The primary objective of the Integrated Memorialization Programme is to provide an avenue for public discourse that recognizes the diversity of narratives and experiences that shape peace-building, justice and the prevention of violence. The Memorialization Programme also aims to collect, archive and create platforms for the public to share their memories of the past. The aim is for the programme to serve as a platform for the public to acknowledge these memories and to preserve the past. The concept of memory referred to here is human history, not the academic discipline of memory studies.

The specific objectives of the Integrated Memorialization Programme are:

- Creating a platform for individuals and communities from different ethnocultural and political backgrounds to share stories and engage communities in dialogue and memorialization
- Preserving historical memory through research, archiving and public review of narratives
- Facilitating a shared understanding of policies and programmes on how to utilize historical memory

The Memorialization Programme addresses key questions raised by the recommendations for reconciliation and peacebuilding in *Chega!* and *Per Memoriam Ad Spem* reports, including:

- How can narrative documentation of stories be used to contribute to justice and peace?
- How does storytelling create empathy and compassion, and how does it transform these

emotions into peacebuilding and reconciliation?

- How can memory be used to understand the roots of conflict in Timor–Leste?
- Can memory be used to facilitate people's acceptance that there are multiple truths, and that absolute truth may not be a significant issue, but the ability and space to listen to others' stories and acknowledge them are necessary?
- How can we build community–level memorialization rituals as a way of complementing each other, rather than limiting them?
- How can we create memorialization programmes that not only pass on memories and experiences to the next generation, but also create a discourse about how Timor has emerged from a culture of violent conflict?

To provide answers to these questions, the CNC carries out the following activities:

1. Preserving historical memory

- Acting as the custodian of CAVR/Commission of Truth and Friendship (CTF) archives and victim testimonies
- Establishing municipal memorial museums
- Promoting inclusive stories representing women, youth, and marginalized communities
- Ensuring accuracy in the face of historical denial or distortion
- Fostering community–based oral history narratives
- Researching historical archives

2. Community–based dialogue and reconciliation

- Facilitating intergenerational knowledge–sharing on conflict and reconciliation
- Victim–centred peacebuilding
- Creating safe spaces for dialogue on sensitive historical issues

3. Education for peace

- Integrating history, human rights, transitional justice and peace education into the teaching curriculum
- Training teachers and lecturers
- Organizing site visits
- Facilitating intergenerational sharing of memories
- Organizing exhibitions, cultural festivals, dialogue and community learning events

4. Advocacy for reparations and victim support

- Designing memorials and symbolic recognition initiatives
- Involving survivors directly in decision–making processes
- Bridging divides through shared remembrance
- Documenting victims' memories
- Providing health treatment to victims
- Reuniting stolen children
- Building houses for the most vulnerable victims
- Providing scholarships for victims' children

Building a shared narrative with Indonesia

Timor–Leste's historical narrative is crucial for building a strong foundation for relations with our international neighbours, especially Indonesia. As the Indonesian historian, Dr Asvi Warman Adam, told the Commission at the national public hearing on self–determination:

The collective memory of both countries will determine the nature, strengths, and weaknesses of the relationship between the two parties. This will be reflected when writing the history of the relationship between the two countries... Both countries need to form a joint team to write a shared history. (CAVR, 2005)

In 2023, the CNC collaborated with the Secretary of State for Arts and Culture to organize the

Fronteira Festival, with the theme, 'Strengthening Culture to Strengthen Reconciliation'. This festival aimed to reunite the Timorese who were politically separated in 1999. The festival was held in Bobonaro Municipality in 2023, in Oekusi in 2024 and in Covalima in 2025.

The festival resulted in the Dame Ambeno Declaration, the film *Memories from Timor*, released in Jakarta in July 2025, and two books titled *Jejak Jejak Ingatan* (Traces of Memory) and *Meraih Cahaya* (Reaching for the Light) which I launched in Yogyakarta on August 19, 2025 and in Jakarta on August 21, 2025. These films and two books are the first steps in building a shared narrative to strengthen reconciliation for peace.

Challenges to reclaiming peace narratives

Timor-Leste and Indonesia are facing the following challenges to reclaiming collective narratives:

1. Political transitions: Frequent changes in government, political leadership and institutions impede the implementation of the recommendations in the *Chega!* and *Per Memoriam Ad Spem* reports through the CNC. Timorese politics needs an overhaul so that the CNC can reintroduce its mandate and resume work.
2. Lingering trauma: The psychological impact of conflict remains unaddressed for many, hindering efforts to build a cohesive national identity.
3. Lack of investment in Humanities education: None of the eighteen universities in Timor-

Figure 1. Timorese reconciliation processes, Maulau, Maubisse, Ainaro, Timor-Leste, 2021



Note. Image courtesy of Hugo M. Fernandes (2021).

Leste has faculty members or centres for history, human rights or humanities. Thus, the CNC develops the curriculum, trains teachers and creates additional reading materials to support teachers and lecturers.

4. Lack of partners: Only a few national non-governmental organizations and international agencies work on the issue of transitional justice, making it difficult to reach out to the most remote areas to document and introduce collective narratives.
5. Indonesian government's differing priorities: Since 1998, the Indonesian government has focused on rebuilding democracy and maintaining national unity amid political rivalry. Implementing the recommendations is currently not among their policy priorities.

Impact and conclusion

CNC transforms painful history into a unifying force, shifting the national story from victimhood to resilience and solidarity. By embedding truth, justice and remembrance in education, culture and

policy, CNC strengthens Timor-Leste's foundations for lasting peace.

Reclaiming the collective narrative of peace in Timor-Leste is both a moral imperative and a practical necessity. By acknowledging its past, celebrating its cultural diversity and addressing socio-economic and psychological challenges, the nation can build a shared vision of peace that honours its history and inspires its future. While the journey is fraught with challenges, the resilience and determination of the Timorese people offer us hope for a brighter, more harmonious tomorrow.

Timor-Leste's struggle for independence from 1974 to 1999 left deep scars—mass atrocities, displacement and divisions. The CAVR and CTF processes documented these violations and issued recommendations for reconciliation and justice. The CNC, established in 2016, is mandated to safeguard this legacy and transform it into a foundation for sustainable peace.

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**Democracy in the Post-Truth Crisis:
The Role of Global Citizenship Education**

03

PART

Pathways forward: Advancing a democratic and peaceful culture

Rilli Lappalainen

W. Andy Knight

Clement Emenike Adibe

Edward Vickers

Miki Sugimura

Nicole Fournier-Sylvester

Transforming the world: Education, sustainability and Ubuntu



Rilli Lappalainen

Founder and CEO, Bridge 47

Rilli Lappalainen is Founder and CEO of Bridge 47, a global network of civil society organizations, researchers and policymakers to promote the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 4.7. Bridge 47 advocates for the equal recognition of non-formal, informal and formal education, as well as lifelong learning. Bridge 47 believes that education itself needs to be transformed while also emphasizing its essential role in helping societies evolve to create a more sustainable future. Lappalainen is also President of CONCORD, a Confederation of European development Non-Governmental Organizations that works with the European Union on sustainable development and international cooperation. He has spent over thirty years fighting for global solidarity and sustainable development in Finland and other countries in different corners of the world.

Globalization

Globalization has defined almost every aspect of our society's growth over the past hundred years. Thanks to globalization, location-specific items such as avocados have become available across the world. Cultural globalization has resulted in K-pop becoming a global phenomenon. Facebook, YouTube and Netflix are examples of digital globalization, keeping us connected and up to date. Geographic globalization has enabled people to work, live and travel to different countries to a greater extent due to visa sharing. Globalization has also affected politics. International organizations such as the United Nations (UN) that decide on actions and laws at an international level have improved the lives of billions of people all over the world. People are increasingly beginning to recognize that Earth is a single entity for which we must all be responsible—an example of environmental globalization.

On the one hand, globalization has lifted many countries out of poverty by amplifying trade and other economic exchanges. On the other hand, globalization operates in the interests of the world's richest countries. Economic inequality in terms of income, wealth distribution and trade that benefits certain parties disproportionately is a major criticism against countries leading the way in promoting globalization.

In particular, the inequality gap is exemplified by the Oxfam report (2025), which reminds us that since 2015, the richest 1% have gained at least \$33.9 trillion in wealth in real terms, enough to end

annual poverty twenty-two times over. Billionaires—roughly 3,000 people across the world—have gained \$6.5 trillion in real terms, whereas \$4 trillion is the estimated annual cost of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Further, globalization of the world by air and sea, while enabling us to gain new perspectives and explore new cultures, has undoubtedly had a negative impact on our planet. Travel-related emissions have contributed to global warming, increasing greenhouse gas levels and air pollution. Deforestation and the depletion of natural resources have had enormous consequences for global ecosystems and biodiversity. The massive production of single-use materials, such as plastic, has also contributed to problems with waste disposal and increased pollution worldwide.

Planet of human beings

Human beings have created the conditions of the world we live in today. It is also human beings who can change how we live. Bridge 4.7 is a global civil society organization that works with individuals and organizations to support the full implementation of SDG 4.7 (United Nations General Assembly, 2015). Towards this goal, we aim to bridge all types of value-based education, including global citizenship education (GCED), formal and non-formal education, informal education and lifelong learning. Finding solutions to create more equitable societies, halt climate change, and fortify democracy requires us to reflect and think beyond the surface.

The iceberg model

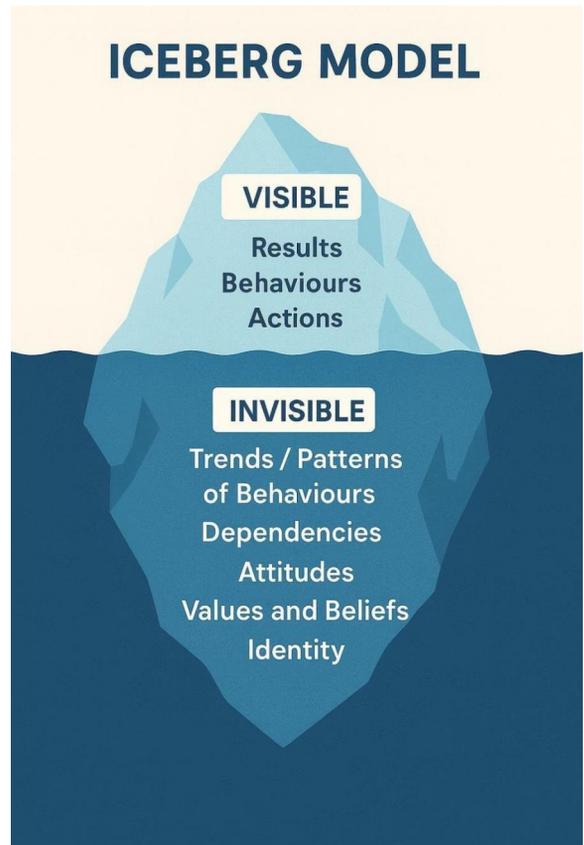
The ‘iceberg model’ is a systems–thinking tool that helps unpack complex challenges at multiple levels. Generally, human beings react to visible challenges and situations, trying to anticipate what may happen. However, if we want real results, it is the invisible patterns of behaviour, dependencies, attitudes, values and beliefs that we must transform.¹⁾ This kind of work often requires regeneration, redesign and reframing. The bottom of an iceberg may be invisible, but it can significantly impact the iceberg’s position in the ocean.

Based on a robust analysis of more than half a million Valuegraphic surveys in 152 languages all over the world, there are fifty–six values that drive universal human behaviour. These values reveal what people care most about around the world. From this list, the first ten values are as follows (Valuegraphics, 2020):

1. Family
2. Relationships
3. Financial security
4. Belonging
5. Community
6. Personal growth
7. Loyalty
8. Religious affiliation or spirituality
9. Employment security
10. Personal responsibility

As the world becomes increasingly complex, understanding how human values shape attitudes and behaviours can deepen our understanding of human nature and systemic change. While it is not surprising that family is considered the most important value by people globally, it is interesting to note that several other values that denote human connection, such as relationships and

Figure 1. Iceberg Model



Note. Adapted from “Beyond culture,” by Hall, E. T., 1976, Doubleday. Infographic created by APCEIU using OpenAI’s DALL-E in 2025.

belonging, also rank among the top ten. Financial and employment security also score high around the world.

Examining the geographical differences in human values, it is notable that loyalty was ranked low by people from North America and Europe. Furthermore, the global average ranking for freedom of speech hovered near the bottom of the list. According to Freedom House’s (2024) latest report global freedom declined for the 18th consecutive year in 2023. The scope and scale of deterioration were extensive, affecting one–fifth of the world’s population. Almost everywhere, the downturn in rights was driven by attacks on

pluralism—the peaceful coexistence of people with different political ideas, religions, or ethnic identities—that harmed elections and sowed violence (Freedom House, 2024). It is possible that this value would rank higher if the survey were conducted now. Education was ranked surprisingly low across all continents. Morality demonstrated the widest variance across all regions, ranking highest in the Middle East.

Every human being is shaped by their environmental conditions. Ethics, values and traditions also transform individuals. Formal education plays a crucial role in laying the foundation for the skills and knowledge we will need later in life. However, since our environment is constantly changing, our learning must occur throughout life. Lifelong learning is not centred on an individual; it also shapes the learning of the community around them.

It is human beings who make decisions that impact humanity and the planet. To transform globalization into a force for the greater good of all, we should be mindful of the invisible elements that drive human thought and behaviour. Over the last eighty years, there have been several instances of global cooperation resulting in multilateral agreements on issues such as climate change, ocean conservation, and addressing plastic waste, which directly affect our lives on the planet. As an example, climate change is a global challenge that transcends national borders. Greenhouse gas emissions from one country contribute to the warming planet, impacting all nations, regardless of their individual emission levels. Therefore, addressing climate change effectively necessitates a unified, global approach. International agreements provide the framework for this unified action, establishing common goals, standards, and mechanisms for collaboration.

Global reform

We must transform the current global architecture to better meet the needs of people. Although this may sound challenging, several efforts are already underway. These may appear disconnected from our regular lives, but they affect us all. Citizens worldwide should not only be aware of these efforts but also actively participate in them.

Since 1945, the UN has contributed to improving the lives of millions of the world's poorest and most vulnerable people. However, the organization's processes were designed when global challenges and priorities were different. Today's challenges require complex, globally integrated responses that no single agency can provide unilaterally. Building on its numerous past achievements, the UN must demonstrate that it can continue to be effective, efficient and transparent in supporting countries and their priorities.

As a result, the UN is currently undergoing an organizational reform process. UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres has started a process which seeks not only to improve the organization's efficiency, but also to reassert the value of multilateralism at a time when public trust in global cooperation is low. The reform process aims to strengthen the UN's capacity to address today's global challenges, including conflict, displacement, and inequality, as well as climate shocks and rapid technological change, while also responding to external pressures such as shrinking budgets and growing political divisions within multilateral spaces.

The first level of change is focused on the UN's internal systems. It includes the organization's strategic planning approaches, accountability mechanisms, administrative arrangements and

budgetary practices. An example of this is the UN's global campaign, '1 for 8 billion', aimed at reforming the process for selecting the next UN Secretary-General (1 for 8 Billion, n.d.). The campaign urges all Member States to strongly consider nominating women candidates. Another example is Democracy Without Borders' campaign to establish a parliamentary assembly at the UN. The campaign aims to 'give a voice to citizen-elected representatives and... make decisions in people's best interest' (Democracy Without Borders, n.d.).

Since reforming the UN is ultimately a shared responsibility, the second level of change lies with Member States. The organization is attempting to shift to more predictable and flexible funding approaches that are needed to offer the type of high-quality, integrated and tailored support envisioned in the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

I propose that the UN should also consider a third level of reforms. Achieving a peaceful, just and sustainable world requires an extraordinary leap forward. Since the emergence of democracy in ancient Greece to its spread to modern states from the eighteenth century, the UN could consider ushering in the third democratic transformation—expanding democracy at a global scale by advocating for a democratic world parliament.

Education and sustainability

Sustainable development encompasses an ambitious global agenda for the development of resilient, socially just human life within the limits of planet Earth. The SDGs currently serve as the normative framework for global sustainability efforts (Biermann et al., 2022). Although SDGs are not without controversy due to their inherently conflicting objectives (Hickel, 2019), the urgency

to achieve global sustainability is virtually undisputed in academia and international politics (Rockström et al., 2023; United Nations Economic and Social Council, 2025).

As important as the SDGs are, the findings of the mid-term report on their implementation are sobering (Sustainable Development Solutions Network, 2025). Currently, none of the seventeen goals are on track. The report also states that, for some goals, a regression has been underway.

In terms of solutions, the mid-term report highlights universal quality education as crucial to achieving the SDGs. Assessment studies have supported this by showing how quality education (SDG 4)—particularly Target 4.7²⁾—have a strong positive relationship with various other SDGs (Xiao et al., 2023). Several researchers have reiterated that linking education (Wals & Benavot, 2017) with sustainability (Van Poeck et al., 2020) is fundamental to the progress of both fields.

Against this backdrop, UNESCO and its Member States consider education for sustainable development (ESD) as 'an enabler for all 17 SDGs' and a 'foundation for the required transformation' (UNESCO, 2021). At the World Conference on ESD in 2021, UNESCO called upon Member States to establish ESD as 'a foundational element of our education systems at all levels' (p. 2). In November 2023, Member States adopted the *Recommendation on Education for Peace and Human Rights, International Understanding, Cooperation, Fundamental Freedoms, Global Citizenship and Sustainable Development* (UNESCO, 2024). Building on the *1974 Recommendation* (UNESCO, 1974), it acknowledges that peace is built not only through international negotiations but also in classrooms, on sports fields, in communities and



throughout life. It provides concrete guidance on how education, in all its forms, dimensions, and environments, can become a pathway to construct lasting peace.

Ubuntu: I am because we are

For sustainable transformation, we must look beyond education at the hidden forces driving human action, such as the values depicted in the lower half of the iceberg model. The Ubuntu philosophy holds that one's humanity is defined through others (Mugumbate & Chereni, 2020). It was popularized globally by figures such as Nelson Mandela and Archbishop Desmond Tutu, particularly in the context of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, where it played a critical role in establishing restorative justice (Kurtz, 2022).

Ubuntu values compassion, mutual support and

the well-being of the collective. This moral obligation transcends superficial kindness. It is about genuine empathy and the recognition that your humanity is tied to others. By fostering communal harmony, Ubuntu encourages consensus-building and peaceful conflict resolution. Ubuntu manifests in everyday acts of compassion and respect. Whether through sharing resources or resolving conflicts for the greater good, Ubuntu's influence permeates all aspects of life. It extends beyond human relationships to embrace our connection with nature, urging a harmonious coexistence with the environment. In leadership and education, Ubuntu fosters a sense of collective responsibility. Ubuntu-based education prioritizes collaboration and respect, shifting the focus from individual achievement to community engagement. Leaders who embrace Ubuntu are viewed as facilitators of communal harmony rather than pursuers of individual glory.

Action

We have got a unique gift: we live on this beautiful planet alongside its people, flora and fauna. We are duty-bound to ensure that it remains intact for future generations. By living the Ubuntu way,

learning from experience and staying curious, we can cultivate a deeper appreciation for life and respect the planet. Human beings have created the conditions in which we live; therefore, human beings can transform them for the better.

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- 1) For an example of effective systemic change, please see the short film *Systems Do Change: A Story of the Civil Rights Movement*. Available at <https://youtu.be/AZhr7FQpg>
 - 2) Target 4.7 of the SDGs calls for education systems worldwide to ‘ensure [by 2030] that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development’ (United Nations General Assembly, 2015, p. 21).

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**Democracy in the Post-Truth Crisis:
The Role of Global Citizenship Education**

From good governance to global citizenship: Reclaiming democracy in a time of backsliding



W. Andy Knight

Distinguished University Professor, Department of Political Science, University of Alberta

W. Andy Knight is a Distinguished University Professor and Provost Fellow for Black Excellence and Leadership at the University of Alberta, Canada. An internationally respected scholar of global governance, peace and security, and human rights, he has authored and edited sixteen books and held the prestigious Fulbright Distinguished Chair in International and Area Studies at Yale University, United States. A Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada, he served as Director of the Institute of International Relations at The University of the West Indies, Trinidad, where he co-founded the Diplomatic Academy of the Caribbean. His advisory roles include collaborations with the United Nations, the United Nations University, the International Development Research Centre, the World Economic Forum and governments in the Global South. He is also the host of *Blacktalk*, a podcast promoting anti-racist and inclusive global dialogue. Born in Barbados and educated in Canada, he exemplifies a lifelong commitment to equity, education and international collaboration—principles at the heart of global citizenship education.

Introduction: Democracy's global appeal and fragility

Democracy has long been celebrated as the most legitimate form of governance, associated with human dignity, civic equality and the promise of accountability. Its global spread during the so-called 'third wave' of democratization in the late twentieth century seemed to mark the triumph of liberal values and the decline of authoritarian systems (Huntington, 1991). In the 1970s, only around forty states could be considered democratic. By the early 2000s, more than 120 states identified themselves as democracies, and the United Nations (UN), the World Bank, and regional organizations invested heavily in electoral support and institutional reform (Carothers, 2002).

However, that optimism has given way to anxiety. Across continents, democratic systems are faltering. In the United States (US), institutional erosion and populist assaults on the rule of law have undermined what was once considered the most stable democracy in the world. In Africa, military coups have returned with alarming regularity. In the Middle East, the authoritarian retrenchment that followed the Arab Spring demonstrates the resilience of autocracy. Even the Republic of Korea—a country often hailed as a democratic success story—is experiencing severe strain as polarization deepens in society and people's institutional trust is declining. In Nepal, a new generation has taken to the streets to protest corruption and unresponsive governance, only to face repression, highlighting the limitations of democratic commitments.

This global pattern of democratic backsliding raises urgent questions: Can democracy survive as both a sustainable governance model and a global norm? What strategies can help societies to resist

authoritarian temptations while cultivating inclusive and resilient democratic cultures? Moreover, how can UNESCO's mandate for global citizenship education (GCED) contribute to the renewal of democracy at both local and global levels?

The crisis of good governance in the age of backsliding

Redefining good governance

The notion of 'good governance' emerged in the 1990s as an essential complement to democracy. It emphasized transparency, accountability, respect for the rule of law and citizen participation as preconditions for sustainable development (World Bank, 1993). Good governance was supposed to provide institutional depth to electoral democracy, ensuring that democracy was not merely procedurally sound but also substantively effective (Knight, 2018).

However, today, good governance is in crisis. Institutions meant to uphold accountability are being hollowed out. Corruption, polarization, disinformation and executive aggrandizement are eroding the credibility of democratic governance. Leaders are exploiting democratic procedures to entrench illiberal rule, while citizens increasingly doubt the capacity of governments to deliver justice and equality.

United States: From beacon to bellwether of decline

The US was long regarded as the world's model for democracy. However, in recent years, it has become a case study in democratic backsliding. Efforts by Donald Trump and his allies to undermine the legitimacy of elections, weaken judicial independence and politicize the bureaucracy have shaken the foundations of American democracy (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018). Gerrymandering and

voter suppression have disproportionately affected minority populations, while the storming of the Capitol on 6 January 2021 symbolized how fragile democratic norms have become. The return of Trump to power in 2025 has further normalized attacks on institutional independence, sending a dangerous signal to aspiring autocrats worldwide that democracy can be manipulated from within.

Africa: The return of coups

Across Africa, fragile democratic institutions are under siege. Military coups in Mali (2020, 2021), Guinea (2021), Burkina Faso (2022) and Niger (2023) have rolled back gains made since the 1990s. Juntas have often justified these reversals as responses to corruption and insecurity, but they highlight the weakness of institutions that are incapable of resolving crises through constitutional means (Rwodzi, 2025). The African Union's normative commitment to democracy and constitutional rule rings hollow when its members repeatedly suspend and delay transitions back to civilian government.

Middle East: Authoritarian entrenchment

The democratic aspirations unleashed during the Arab Spring have essentially been reversed. In Egypt, the promise of Tahrir Square has been extinguished by the consolidation of military authoritarianism under President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi. In Iran, democratic reform remains stifled by clerical control and the violent repression of dissent. Saudi Arabia continues to promote modernization without political liberalization, while the Israel–Palestine conflict has underscored the fragility of inclusive governance in deeply divided societies. The Middle East exemplifies the persistence of authoritarian resilience, even in the face of popular mobilization.

The Republic of Korea: Polarization in a mature democracy

The Republic of Korea offers a sobering reminder that even established democracies are not immune to backsliding. In recent years, the country has witnessed unprecedented polarization around President Yoon Suk-yeol's administration. Controversial reforms to prosecutorial powers have been perceived by many as partisan maneuvers to weaken checks on executive authority (Han, 2025). At the same time, opposition parties have been accused of obstructionism, further eroding trust in political institutions. Mass protests in Seoul during 2024–2025, some calling for Yoon's resignation, revealed both the vibrancy of Korean civil society and the fragility of its democratic consensus. Civil society remains robust, but the escalation of political antagonism risks undermining institutional legitimacy and reinforcing populist appeals.

Nepal: Elections without democracy

Nepal demonstrates how elections alone cannot secure democratic legitimacy. Since the end of the monarchy and the adoption of a federal democratic constitution in 2015, Nepal has held regular elections. However, governance failures, entrenched corruption and lack of responsiveness have left many citizens disillusioned (Zipperer, 2025). In August and September 2025, massive demonstrations erupted in Kathmandu and other cities, driven by frustrations over unemployment, inequality and the impunity enjoyed by the elite classes. The government's heavy-handed crackdown on protesters—including arrests of students and civil society leaders—exposed the shallow roots of democratic practice. These protests underline the core argument of this paper: democracy cannot be equated with periodic elections. Genuine democracy requires listening to dissenting voices and ensuring that governance is inclusive, participatory and accountable.

Democracy beyond ballots: Rights, inclusion and accountability

Joseph Schumpeter defined democracy as little more than a method for selecting leaders through free and fair elections (1942). This minimalist definition has dominated the field of political science for decades. However, in today's world, democracy requires much more than ballots.

True democracy must be judged by the following:

- Participation: Citizens must have opportunities beyond elections to shape decisions through civic forums, participatory budgeting and inclusive consultation.
- Inclusion: Women, youth, indigenous peoples, minorities and marginalized communities must be empowered as central actors, not mere voters.
- Accountability: Institutions must ensure transparency and enforce checks and balances against executive overreach.
- Rights: Human rights protections must remain

non-negotiable, providing the foundation for democratic legitimacy.

- When these principles are absent, elections risk legitimizing illiberal rule rather than sustaining democracy. The cases of the Republic of Korea and Nepal vividly demonstrate this dynamic: both countries held elections, but their democratic integrity was compromised when governments failed to engage with their citizens inclusively and protect their expressions of dissent.

The United Nations and the global norm of democracy

Although the word 'democracy' does not appear in the UN Charter, the organization has been central in promoting democratic governance since the end of the Cold War. The UN has provided electoral assistance, institution-building and post-conflict democratization support in Namibia (1989), Cambodia (1993), El Salvador (1994) and South Africa (1994) (Newman, 2004). Since then, the UN has assisted more than 100 states, embedding



democracy promotion within its peacebuilding and development agenda.

Democracy gained further normative recognition in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) of 2000 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of 2015, particularly SDG 16, which calls for 'peace, justice, and strong institutions'. The UN has made democracy a pillar of global governance, linking it to development, security and human rights.

However, challenges remain:

- Overemphasis on process: UN assistance often focuses on elections rather than democratic culture.
- Institutional deficits: The UN itself faces criticism for democratic deficits, particularly the unrepresentative Security Council.
- Resistance to external promotion: Authoritarian leaders portray democracy assistance as neo-colonial interference, undermining its legitimacy.

Despite these challenges, the UN remains indispensable for sustaining democracy as a global norm. Its role in setting standards, supporting institutions and promoting inclusive governance is an important counterweight to the resurgence of authoritarianism.

From good governance to global citizenship education

Institutions alone cannot safeguard democracy. Laws and procedures are necessary, but democracy ultimately depends on civic dispositions, values and practices. This is where GCED, championed by UNESCO, becomes indispensable.

GCED fosters the attitudes and skills needed to sustain democracy:

- Critical thinking: Equipping citizens to resist propaganda, disinformation and conspiracy theories.
- Respect for diversity: Nurturing empathy and solidarity across ethnic, gender and cultural lines.
- Dialogue and civic responsibility: Cultivating skills such as listening, compromise and peaceful engagement.
- Global perspective: Encouraging citizens to see themselves as part of an interconnected human community, committed to universal rights and sustainability.

In an age of populism, xenophobia and digital manipulation, GCED provides the cultural infrastructure for democracy. Without it, even the strongest institutions can collapse under the weight of polarization and disinformation. With it, societies can cultivate resilience against regression and authoritarian appeal.

Reclaiming democracy: Building resilient democratic communities

The global struggle over democracy is at a crossroads. Reclaiming democracy requires a comprehensive strategy across multiple levels:

- Deepening democracy locally and nationally: Enhancing citizen participation in municipal governance and local politics, promoting inclusive policies and protecting minority rights.
- Broadening democracy globally: Reforming multilateral institutions such as the UN to address their own democratic deficits and ensure legitimacy in global governance.
- Embedding GCED: Integrating civic education across curricula worldwide so that democracy is not only institutional but also a lived reality in classrooms, workplaces and communities.

Reclaiming democracy also requires confronting the forces driving backsliding: inequality, corruption, disinformation and the manipulation of identity politics. Addressing these root causes will require not only institutional reforms but also cultivating a culture of democracy and civic responsibility.

Conclusion

Democracy is under siege. From Trump's dismantling of US institutions to coups in Africa, from authoritarian retrenchment in the Middle East and polarization in the Republic of Korea to the repression of protests in Nepal, the threats to democracy are manifold and global. However, democracy remains humanity's best hope for justice, peace and dignity.

The UN has helped establish democracy as a global norm, but institutions alone cannot safeguard it. We must invest in the cultural foundations of democracy, ensuring that citizens are empowered to think critically, respect diversity and participate actively in civic life.

As Boutros-Ghali (1992), the former UN Secretary-General, once observed, 'Democracy at all levels is essential to attaining peace, prosperity, and justice' (para.82). Reclaiming democracy today requires moving from good governance to global citizenship, from fragile institutions to resilient democratic communities, and from passive electorates to active citizens, capable of defending democracy for future generations.

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**Democracy in the Post-Truth Crisis:
The Role of Global Citizenship Education**

Peace education must begin at home: Reflections on the UNESCO agenda for peace education in the global post-truth environment



Clement Emenike Adibe

Professor, Department of Political Science, DePaul University

Clement Emenike Adibe is a Professor of Political Science at DePaul University, Chicago, Illinois, United States. He obtained his Ph.D. in Political Science from Queen's University, Kingston, in 1995, specializing in International Relations and Comparative Politics. Before joining the faculty of DePaul University in 1996, he was a Killam Postdoctoral Fellow at Dalhousie University in Canada, where he was also an Assistant Professor of Political Science and coordinator of the Weekly Research Seminar series from 1995 to 1996. In that capacity, he was responsible for inviting and scheduling international cooperation academics and practitioners to discuss issues related to global cooperation and international peace and security. Between 1992 and 1994, he was an International Institutions Fellow at Harvard University and Brown University. In 1995, he served as a researcher at the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research in Switzerland. In that capacity, his work focused on peace processes aimed at ameliorating and resolving conflicts in West and East Africa. He served as a member of the Board of Directors of the Academic Council on the United Nations System from 1997 to 2000 and as a member of the Academic Council on the United Nations System in 1999. During this time, his major accomplishment was advocating the expansion of the United Nations' educational mission to the disadvantaged corners of the world. The result was that the first Academic Council on the United Nations System summer workshop was held in Namibia in the early 2000s. He also had the privilege of participating in numerous conferences and colloquia on global education for peace and development at the United Nations University in Tokyo, Japan, under the auspices of Dr Obijiofor Aginam's Global Peace and Sustainability initiatives from 2009 to 2014. At DePaul University, he has been part of the Global Learning Engagement initiative, which leverages learning technologies to facilitate teaching and learning about global peace and sustainable development across continents.

Introduction

The theme of the tenth International Conference on Global Citizenship Education (GCED) in Seoul, Republic of Korea, in August 2025, ‘Democracy in the Post-Truth Crisis: The Role of GCED’, aptly captures the twin global crises of the twenty-first century. These crises are: (a) weakening democracies around the world, or what Larry Diamond (2015) referred to as ‘democratic recession’, which is most apparent and consequential in the West, and (b) the concomitant collapse of humanity’s faith in fact or truth. In one recent example of the ‘post-truth crisis’, the United States President Donald Trump dismissed the country’s Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) commissioner, Dr Erika McEntarfer, on 1 August 2025, just hours after the Bureau reported that ‘job growth in the US. had slowed to a near-halt’ (Cox, 2025). According to Natalie Sherman, the New York-based business reporter for the British Broadcasting Corporation, President Trump simply refused to accept the truth conveyed by the BLS data, that his administration had created fewer jobs than expected: “On social media, Trump claimed that Erika McEntarfer, commissioner of the Bureau of Labor Statistics, had ‘RIGGED’ jobs figures ‘to make the Republicans, and ME, look bad’” (Sherman, 2025). The crises of truth and democratic recession have led to widening political polarization within many democracies and growing instability abroad. Conflicts that were hitherto manageable have snowballed into catastrophic wars. In short, as Robert Kagan argued, we are witnessing the resurgence of ‘the jungle’ of global instability at tremendous speed (2018). It is against this background, therefore, that the peace project appears to be more urgent than ever. To this end, I pose the following questions in this essay:

1. How do we promote the idea and culture of peace in these challenging times?

2. What is the role of global peace education in advancing the cause of peace in the twenty-first century?
3. What role will UNESCO’s Recommendation for transformative education play to help the global community achieve peace?

My argument in this essay is that peace education is one of the few tools available to the international community to confront and defeat the pervasive warmongering and xenophobia that characterize our contemporary world. Peace education should start early and be mainstreamed into the formal and informal educational processes of the world’s states and societies.

This essay is divided into four sections. The introductory section outlines the context, research questions, and my argument in this essay. The second section examines conceptions of peace and their relevance to post-truth society. The third section analyses the UNESCO Recommendation for transformative education as a framework for promoting peace in these challenging times. The fourth and concluding section presents the case for early peace education for the world’s youth, beginning with the fundamental unit of society: the family.

Peace in a post-truth international environment

Centuries of scholarship—from Kant (1795/1939) to contemporary peace thinkers (Galtung, 1969; Anderson, 1985; Oneal & Russett, 1999; Howard, 2001; Barash, 2018)—have resulted in two notions of peace: ‘negative’ and ‘positive’ peace. As Anderson has noted, this conceptual bifurcation is hardly surprising because our understanding of peace has been ‘inherited from the world’s cultures’, influenced by the passage of time,

personalities, events and religion (Anderson, 1985, p. 101; Philpott, 2000; Galtung, 1969). According to Anderson, 'The words for peace in diverse cultures of the world reflect the essence of the foundations of those cultures' (p. 101). For example, two important words that emerged from the Graeco-Roman roots of Western culture have come to define the concept of peace. The Greek word, *eirene*, generally describes peace as the 'order secured by an interlude in war' and the Roman word, *pax*, simply means 'a state of affairs that is 'secured by an agreement or compact' (p. 101). Logically, therefore, Immanuel Kant stated in his highly influential work, *Perpetual Peace* (1795/1939), that lasting peace would be attained through the complete adherence of interdependent republics to constitutional and international law. As western military and political power spread throughout the world from the eighteenth century onwards, this European conception of peace as the absence of war or, as Thomas Hobbes (1651/2009) put it, 'the period when war was neither imminent nor actually being fought' became the dominant notion of peace. Because of the association of this conception of peace with violence—that is, the interregnum between violence and the absence of violence—the Scandinavian scholar, Johan Galtung, called it 'negative peace' (1969, p. 183). According to John Oneal and Bruce Russett, even proponents of negative peace, including Kant, 'knew that the mechanism of power politics [in which they were immersed, could] produce only temporary respite from conflict, not lasting solutions' (1999, p. 1). This realization, therefore, necessitated an expansion of our understanding of peace beyond Western philosophy, culture, and experience.

The second notion of peace, i.e., 'positive peace', resulted from dissatisfaction with 'negative peace' and a yearning for more, as war became increasingly

prevalent in Europe and knowledge of other cultures increased (Howard, 2001). For instance, many Europeans learned from the Middle East that 'people relate true peace to God or the gods'. In this region, people generally believe that 'It is only when the gods are satisfied that human beings will be at peace' (Anderson, 1985, p. 101). In Judaism, the word '*shalom*' is often equated with wholeness, justice and well-being. It can be taken not only to mean the absence of war but fulfillment of human needs as well. It can refer to a socio-political order in which all are bound in a covenant which leads to every person's well-being' (pp. 101–102). The emphasis on every person's well-being conveys a deep sense of collective welfare. This notion of community well-being in Judaism's conception of peace differs markedly from the individualism of Western philosophy and Christian theology, despite the shared Abrahamic religious patrimony of Judaism, Islam and Western Christianity (Galtung, 1969, p. 185; Philpott, 2000). Similarly, the conception of peace as harmony and the well-being of every person in the community is evident in Africa, as Desmond Tutu (2000) demonstrated in his brilliant analysis of *ubuntu* theology, which emphasizes the interconnectedness of individuals in society to form an organic whole.

Anderson offers further proof from Asia that 'positive peace' in the non-Western world has a strong cultural emphasis on harmony: 'In India, the Sanskrit word *santi* refers to "peace of mind" or a well-ordered inner state of the self' (1985, p. 102). In China, the 'Chinese word for peace, *ho p'ing* or *ping ho* has cosmological significance' in its reference to 'obedience to the cosmic order' which could mean 'a social order in which "right relationships" are observed, or... to a harmonious state of mind' (p. 102). In summary, 'positive peace' is about harmony and social justice. According to

Michael Howard (2001, p. 2), positive peace 'implies a social and political ordering of society that is generally accepted as just'. Justice, in this sense, is far more than adherence to the rule of law: the backbone of democracy and the negative peace-infused theory of 'democratic peace' (Oneal & Russett, 1999). Rather, according to Galtung, in positive peace, justice means the 'egalitarian distribution of power and [economic] resources'. It is based on this reasoning that Galtung argued that '...peace conceived this way is not only a matter of control and reduction of the overt use of violence, but of... vertical development. And this means that peace theory is intimately connected not only with conflict theory, but equally with development theory' (1969, p. 183).

What does the foregoing analysis of the meanings of peace portend for contemporary world order? As many studies have argued recently, the international community's excessive devotion to the cause of negative peace in the era following the Second World War has resulted in the creation of multiple multilateral organizations and security organizations. This has upended the liberal international order as we have known it, at the expense of positive peace (Haass, 2017; Sanger, 2024; Niblett, 2017; Brands & Gaddis, 2021). David Sanger best captured the sheer enormity of this misjudgment thus:

We were... convinced that, for all the shock, trauma, and disorder of the twenty-first century, the world would sort itself out in the way we had long anticipated. Key to that was the almost universally held assumption that Russia and China—a fast-declining power and a fast-rising one—would integrate themselves into the West in their own ways. Each, it was argued, had an overwhelming national interest

in keeping its products, profits, and financial interactions flowing, even with geopolitical adversaries. Economics would ultimately trump nationalism and territorial ambition (2024, p. 18)

As we now know, this classic Keohanean 'after hegemony' thesis (Keohane, 1984) did not pan out as predicted. Instead, it failed rather woefully, as China and Russia formed the BRICS¹⁾ with new, emerging powers. BRICS was conceived as a counterweight to Western economic power, while also enabling these countries to flex their military muscle in their self-proclaimed spheres of influence in South Asia and the near-abroad, respectively (Mazarr, 2017; Hathaway & Shapiro, 2020; Mearsheimer, 2021; Economy, 2024; Kendall-Taylor & Fontaine, 2024). The result, according to Sanger, is the messy international disorder which we live in today: 'an era of new Cold Wars—two underway simultaneously' (2024, p. 25).

The 'debate' which had been underway since the 11 September 2001 terrorist attack in the US was accelerated by the Great Recession that followed seven years later in 2008 (Roubini, 2008; Miller-Idriss, 2021). In the US, the twin political and economic shocks of the twenty-first century produced a toxic political environment of self-doubt, uncivil discourse, flagrant disregard for facts or truth and deep political polarization on just about any major issue (Haass, 2017, p. 302). North American political dysfunction is now so glaring to its allies and the rest of the world that its potential negative consequences for international peace and security have become a matter of concern among scholars and practitioners (Niblett, 2017):

In Washington, it is no longer a safe assumption that the United States views its role as being the indispensable nation; a major swath of the

Republican Party, which throughout the Cold War advertised itself as the defender of democracy and individual freedom around the world, has abandoned that view. And while just a few years ago it was commonplace to say that we could not solve climate change or manage pandemics without the close cooperation of the world's most powerful nations, now even floods, droughts, wildfires, and new viruses cannot bring together leading nations that are undermining each other every day (Sanger, 2024, pp. 25–26).

So, how do we reverse this trend and avert the curse of Thucydides (400 B.C./1974) in this century, which held that 'rivalry between the major powers of the day and rising competitors is the natural way of international affairs' (Haass, 2017, p. 215)? In the section that follows, I examine the role of global peace education as a crucial tool to reclaim the international civic space from ultranationalist movements that seek to reverse the gains of globalization and multilateralism.

UNESCO Recommendation for transformative education as the framework for peace education

UNESCO is a 'specialized agency [of the UN] dedicated to strengthening our shared humanity through the promotion of education, science, culture, and communication. We set standards, produce tools and develop knowledge to create solutions to some of the greatest challenges of our time, and foster a world of greater equality and peace' (UNESCO, n.d.). By its own definition, UNESCO should be the world's principal vehicle for advancing positive peace. At its forty-second General Conference in November 2023, its Member States adopted an extensive list of recommendations to advance its peace education agenda. Titled *Recommendation on Education for Peace and*

Human Rights, International Understanding, Cooperation, Fundamental Freedoms, Global Citizenship and Sustainable Development (henceforth, UNESCO Recommendation), the document is a significant contribution to the global peace education agenda and deserves to be examined in detail (UNESCO, 2023). The UNESCO Recommendation's preamble takes a holistic approach to peace:

Peace not only requires the absence of war or armed conflicts but also requires an inclusive, democratic and participatory process in which human security, respect for State sovereignty and territorial integrity, dialogue and solidarity are encouraged, internal and international conflicts are resolved through mutual understanding and cooperation, sustainable development in all its dimensions is achieved, universal access to lifelong and life-wide education, including in emergency and conflict situations is provided, poverty in all its forms and dimensions including extreme poverty is eradicated, all human rights and fundamental freedoms of all persons without exception are upheld and *active global citizenship is promoted* (UNESCO, 2023, Preamble; emphasis added)

Aside from its expansive and maximalist definition of peace, UNESCO Recommendation offers an insightful definition of education as 'an inalienable human right', a 'lifelong and society-wide process, through which everyone learns and develops to their fullest potential, the whole of their personality, sense of dignity, talents and mental and physical abilities, within and for the benefit of local, national, regional and global communities and ecosystems' (UNESCO, 2023, p. I: 1a). Following this, it calls for 'transformative education', which should embody the following twelve characteristics (UNESCO, 2023, p. II: 6):



1. Analytical and critical thinking
2. Anticipatory skills that enable learners to ‘act as agents of change’
3. Respect for diversity
4. Self-awareness, that is, ‘the ability to acknowledge and reflect critically on one’s personal values’
5. Sense of connectedness and belonging
6. Empowerment, agency and resilience
7. Decision-making skills
8. Collaborative skills
9. Adaptive and creative skills
10. Citizenship skills
11. Peaceful conflict resolution and transformative skills
12. Media and information literacy, communication and digital skills

UNESCO Recommendation outlines fourteen principles to enable Member States to achieve the goal of transformative education (UNESCO, 2023, p. IV: 8).

These are:

1. Quality education is a common good
2. Quality education should be grounded in ‘rights and corresponding obligations’
3. Non-discrimination
4. Ethics of care and solidarity
5. Gender equality
6. Equitable access to quality education
7. Safe and healthy learning environment
8. Learning is a continuous and lifelong process
9. Knowledge is a co-creative process
10. Freedom of thought, conscience, religion, belief and expression
11. Capacity building for problem-solving
12. International and global education
13. Intercultural and intergenerational dialogue for cooperation and solidarity
14. Awareness of the interdependence of individuals, communities, countries, natural resources and ecosystems

Taken as a whole, the UNESCO Recommendation are ambitious in scope and auspicious in their timing. It is at once a forward-looking document that provides a road map to positive peace, as well as a reminder of our commitment made at the signing of the UN Charter in San Francisco in 1945 to end the “scourge of war” and violence through a system of collective security and an active programme to promote individual freedoms and dignity through cooperation and respect for cultures (United Nations, 1945, Preamble). By uniting the two notions of peace with the two pillars of UN’s system—collective security (negative peace) and collective development (positive peace)—the UNESCO Recommendation provide a pragmatic path to attain the goal of human security for all.

Despite its many strengths, however, the document is not without its shortcomings, and I shall highlight three of them. The first and one of the most glaring of these is the statist character of the document, despite the preponderance of evidence before us—the highly acclaimed report of the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS) is one example—that states constitute the greatest impediment to human security in the twenty-first century (ICISS, 2001). Adopted by the UN in 2005, the ‘responsibility to protect’ principle was born out of this realization. This principle seeks to override the long-standing principle of state sovereignty in defence of humanity when people’s rights are egregiously violated, and their lives are endangered by acts of commission or omission by states. For this reason, what the world needs in the twenty-first century is to realize that the goal of positive peace is to prioritize people, rather than state sovereignty. This can be achieved through concerted and intentional efforts by UNESCO and like-minded

non-governmental organizations and local civil society organizations to cultivate the hearts and minds of individual citizens and groups in their respective states. Across the world, people have immense goodwill for the positive peace agenda of UNESCO and other agencies, which should be leveraged to advance their noble agenda. In 1997, Ted Turner—the founder of the ubiquitous news network, Cable News Network—donated \$1 billion to the UN to support its mission at a time when the US government had not made its national contribution due to policy disagreements (2017). Turner called it ‘the best investment’ he ever made (2017). Today, Bill Gates—the billionaire founder of Microsoft and one of the world’s biggest philanthropists through the Gates Foundation—has donated substantial amounts of money and expertise to the cause of global public health, even though the US government has pulled out from major global public health institutions, such as the World Health Organization and UNESCO. There is a greater need today to increase citizen outreach throughout the world to garner material, intellectual, moral, and strategic support for positive peace initiatives.

The second major weakness of the UNESCO Recommendation is its faith in the general belief that quality education is a public or common good. Adam Smith—the eighteenth-century Scottish philosopher and father of the modern discipline of economics—was one of the earliest advocates of accessible quality education for youth as a public good for which the state should bear the financial responsibility. That notwithstanding, it took several centuries of unrest and war before British elites made education accessible to all. The economic reasons for Smith’s advocacy were as evident in the early Industrial era as they are today in the post-Industrial era. An educated population, Smith

reasoned, provided a bountiful pool of skilled labour that employers could tap to produce goods and services that generate revenue for society (1776/2003, pp. 962–964). The political reasons that militated against the actualization of educational access for all European social classes in Smith’s time are still with us today. Education, as UNESCO recognizes, empowers individuals: educated people can ‘become agents of change and protagonists of their own future’ (UNESCO 2023, p. I: 1i). Historically, the idea of ‘people power’ has been anathema to the ruling classes that rely on the subservience of the masses to maintain their power, control and privilege. That is why denying people educational access through underfunding and vetting curricula and books, as well as the general crackdown on educational institutions, has been the hallmark of authoritarian regimes throughout history. The UNESCO principle of educational access for the masses poses a threat to the ruling class, not just in developing countries, but also in developed countries, as exemplified by the Trump administration’s actions since 2025. UNESCO should have a people-centred plan to respond to the expected pushback from elites who seek to undermine its goals for transformative education.

The third and final critique of the UNESCO Recommendation is that they underestimate, and possibly ignore, the ongoing nationalist backlash against one of its core principles: the promotion of ‘an ethic of global citizenship and shared responsibility for peace, human rights and sustainable development for the benefit of all’ (UNESCO, 2023, p. IV: 8n). Shared responsibility for the benefit of all is precisely what nationalists have come to rail against. Driven partly by economic inequality occasioned by the resurgence of ‘patrimonial capitalism’ in the West (Piketty,

2014) and a deep-seated antinomy toward immigration, many white nationalists in Europe and the US have come to resent the notion of any benefits going to anyone except themselves and people they consider to be their racial kin. J. D. Vance, the current US Vice President, wrote a highly successful memoir in 2016 titled *Hillbilly Elegy*, where he attributed Trump’s electoral success in the 2016 presidential election to high voter turnout among poor and working class whites who felt ignored and economically marginalized, and resented globalization and those they imagined took their jobs away: non-White immigrants. Ultra-right parties are gaining ground in Europe as well, and it is only a matter of time before they win a majority of seats in national parliaments, allowing them to assume power and enact policies that are unlikely to resemble UNESCO’s principles of global citizenship. This contemporary dilemma raises the question: how do we counteract the growing cancer of race-based nationalism in the international body politic?

Early peace education as an antidote to the twenty-first century’s resurgent nationalism

Arun Gandhi, the grandson of Mahatma Gandhi—the most famous proponent and practitioner of nonviolence in the twentieth century—appeared before the UN on 9 September 2015 to present a case for a new peace culture. In his presentation, Gandhi spoke passionately about his early childhood experience with his parents, who raised him and his two sisters on the basis of his grandfather’s principle of nonviolence as the foundation of peace. Nonviolence, he said, is a necessary condition for peace, and it should be instilled early in life at the level of one’s family—the fundamental unit of society—through parental example. In his family’s culture, Gandhi explained that ‘control’ came through ‘love and respect’

rather than ‘fear and punishment’. He said that when he and his sisters would misbehave, they were not punished. Instead, his parents would prepare family dinners for them but refuse to eat them. His parents would fast for days as a form of ‘penance’ and would take the blame for the children’s misbehaviour. Gandhi explained that the sight of the pain and anguish they had caused their parents made him and his siblings commit themselves to not ‘misbehave’ again (Mayong, 2015). The lesson of his childhood upbringing is that punishing children for misbehaving, he said, sows the first seed of violence that multiplies over time. Violence is learned. Peace must be learned as well. Therefore, education is the key to learning peace and unlearning violence (Mayong, 2015).

The broader significance of Arun Gandhi’s thoughts is that the seed of peace must be sown early in our youth, beginning with informal education at the family level. This requires parents to model a culture of nonviolence in their everyday lives for their children. With that, children will have a strong foundation on which society can build a culture of peace throughout the subsequent stages of their educational experience, from primary through post-secondary levels. For this to work, however, society must invest in the material well-being and dignity of the family as the fundamental social unit of society. As many studies have shown, poverty and lack of education are positively correlated, and low-income families experience greater levels and forms of violence than affluent families do (Elliott, 2022; Vance, 2016). Therefore, it has been recommended that ‘better education at every level from preschool

through K-12 through all forms of post-secondary education and on to lifelong learning’ should be promoted in societies to stimulate economic growth and empower the citizenry (Haass, 2017, p. 291).

Aside from the family and formal educational settings, youths also learn informally from their peers, on the streets, in their neighbourhood, on playgrounds and on multiple platforms. For the most part, peace education is deficient in spaces where falsehoods, unfiltered and dangerous emotions, hate and outright violence dominate. UNESCO and like-minded agencies should contribute peace education content to these platforms directly or through collaborations with prominent corporate and private content producers and influencers.

This meeting-point of education, economic opportunity and peace is the very essence of Johan Galtung’s theory of peace formulated more than a half a century ago, that ‘peace research, defined as research into the conditions—past, present and future—of realizing peace, will be equally intimately connected with conflict research and development research; the former often more relevant for negative peace and the latter more relevant for positive peace, but with highly important overlaps’ (1969, p. 183). Peace education should be a truly global endeavour that simultaneously cuts across multiple spaces—social, political, economic, health, formal, informal, digital—to reach the greatest number of people possible. For the sake of our common humanity, the goal of this enterprise should be to eliminate the dichotomy between negative and positive peace.

1) BRICS is the acronym for a group of emerging economies—Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa—that emerged in the twenty-first century to pursue a common economic agenda. BRICS was conceived as a possible counterweight to the G-7—comprising the United States, Germany, France, Britain, Italy, Canada and Japan—that had long dominated the global economic agenda since the end of the Second World War.

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Democracy in the Post-Truth Crisis:
The Role of Global Citizenship Education

Reflections on contemporary challenges to peace education



Edward Vickers

Chairholder, UNESCO Chair on Education for Peace, Social Justice and Global Citizenship at Kyushu University

Edward Vickers holds the UNESCO Chair on Education for Peace, Social Justice and Global Citizenship at Kyushu University, Japan, and is currently President of the Comparative Education Society of Asia. He researches the history and politics of education in contemporary Asia, especially in Chinese societies (China, Hong Kong and Taiwan). He also researches the politics of conflict-related heritage in Asia. His books include *Education and Society in Post-Mao China* (2017, co-authored with Zeng Xiaodong), *Constructing Modern Asian Citizenship* (2015, co-edited with Krishna Kumar), and *Remembering Asia's World War Two* (2019, co-edited with Mark Frost and Daniel Schumacher). He also co-authored the 2017 UNESCO report, *Rethinking Schooling for the 21st Century: The State of Education for Peace, Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship in Asia*. He is currently working with Mark Frost and Hasini Haputhanthri on an edited volume provisionally titled *Violent Heritage in Modern Sri Lanka: Past Conflict as Public History*.

Question 1: How should education respond to the evolving understanding of peace in today's rapidly changing world?

The way this question is posed raises a contentious issue. By asking 'how should education respond', the question seems to imply that 'education' or 'educators' have agency; that 'education' professionals have the power to determine how their sector should respond. But to what extent is this true?

Too often, it is agency—and the dignity that comes with a sense of our own power to act—that is lacking, both in the professional lives of teachers and educators and in the experience of citizens and workers in our societies. For educators, this manifests itself in many ways, including attacks on academic freedom, erosion of the power of teachers' unions, derision of the teaching profession and increasingly burdensome demands for 'accountability'.

The dominant conception of education in most societies today is profoundly instrumental. We tend to perceive education primarily as a means to achieving various external goals, such as productivity, economic growth and national strength, rather than as an end, as something intrinsically worthwhile. Now, of course, the instrumental aspects of education—to secure qualifications for landing a good job or to equip workers with the appropriate skills—are extremely important. However, it appears that under the intense competitive pressures we face as societies and individuals, we are losing sight of the intrinsic value of education—its role in expanding and deepening our consciousness of what it means to be human. This is evident in many societies where public support for education in the arts and humanities has drastically reduced, and there is an

ever-narrowing focus on science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) and supposedly job-oriented 'skills' instead. The abandonment of studies that foster a heightened, critical awareness of our shared humanity is contributing to a dangerous erosion of the foundations of peace and international understanding in our contemporary world.

Ironically, the narrowing focus of education policy on the instrumental pursuit of skills in STEM is taking place even as the advancement of artificial intelligence threatens to drastically shrink and transform the scope for human employment in the technology sector. Almost a hundred years ago, the economist John Maynard Keynes predicted that the advance of technology would liberate us from drudgery, ushering in a fifteen-hour working week and enabling ordinary workers to devote more time to arts, crafts and cultural pursuits of various kinds (Keynes, 1963). Various Victorian thinkers, including Karl Marx, had a similar vision of the potentially liberating power of technology and its implications for education. Instead, the advance of digital technology has radically concentrated power and wealth in the hands of a tiny minority, exacerbating inequality and fuelling widespread anger and discontent. At the same time, the technological developments that threaten to cause mass unemployment and impoverishment are also complicit in the plague of misinformation that is directing public anger towards various scapegoats—minorities, migrants, refugees and 'foreigners' in general. Indeed, the owners or controllers of this technology themselves are at times directly involved in attempts to use it to steer public anger away from obscene wealth inequalities and towards 'foreigners' or various culturally or racially defined 'enemies within'—think Elon Musk and Twitter. It

is not just the violent conflicts in Ukraine or Gaza, but the spectacle of armed troops on the streets of major cities in the United States and elsewhere that should be raising alarms about threats to peace, as civic trust breaks down and is replaced by order enforced through the barrel of a gun.

In short, education's contribution to meeting the fundamental threats to peace in today's world must involve these aspects:

1. Respect for the autonomy and agency of professional educators, and the intrinsic value of education itself. We need to challenge the conception of education as primarily or essentially a technical matter of inculcating 'skills' and insist on the central importance of the arts and humanities. This means rethinking the relationship between education and the state, since instrumentalism is often rooted in the assumption that

education is a tool of state power and national aggrandizement.

2. If realizing a more humanistic vision of education means less state involvement in the management of the sector, then it will require more state action in other areas. Chronic inequality, misinformation and the technology-driven concentration of political and economic power are not problems that education can tackle alone. We need states and governments to regulate technology and use taxation to reclaim for the public an appropriate share of the massive wealth that it produces. With such state action, perhaps we can achieve Keynes' vision of the fifteen-hour work week and tap into expansive new opportunities for learning and culture. Without it, we are all going to find ourselves increasingly reduced to the status of serfs or slaves in a new social order that



Yannis Varoufakis has described as characterized by ‘technofeudalism’ (Varoufakis, 2024).

What all of this implies is a recognition of the inescapably political nature of education. This applies both to its content and organization. Education must engage with politics, so that students acquire the knowledge and values they need to act as responsible, informed and active citizens who are ready to critically handle the stream of hate-filled misinformation to which social media subjects them. However, reshaping education in the ways I have indicated will also require changing how education is organized and governed, and therefore ultimately changing how our societies are governed. This means educators will often need to organize themselves and act politically, with all the risks that could entail.

Question 2: How can countries retool education and learning pedagogies to develop individuals who are cognitively knowledgeable, empathetic, compassionate and mindful of the relationship between peace and conflict dynamics?

To begin with, let us avoid phrasing it as ‘retooling’ education. That sort of language reinforces the conception of education as a mere tool or instrument that I have just been criticising. We need to be wary of thinking of changing education as an essentially technical exercise, involving the introduction of new pedagogical approaches or psychological techniques.

These days, debates over how education can or should contribute to developing empathetic, compassionate and ‘mindful’ individuals often

invoke the potential of social and emotional learning (SEL). Now, I do not want to dismiss all talk of SEL. However, often the approaches that are promoted under the banner of SEL are radically decontextualised and adopt an atomistic focus on individual learners, or even individual ‘brains’. The assumption behind much of this thinking seems to be that if we can install the appropriate emotional or psychological ‘software’ into the minds of our students, then we will end up with a society full of empathetic, compassionate, resilient and mindful individuals, and social problems and tensions will naturally evaporate. Equally, discussions of SEL often imply that the responsibility for addressing threats to peace and civility in our societies lies with individuals, rather than with institutions, states or political elites.

Interestingly, the question is framed in terms of the need to be mindful of ‘peace and conflict dynamics’. That looks to me like code for ‘politics’ and brings me back to my earlier remark about the need for education to engage with politics. However, political engagement must mean more than emphasizing the importance of empathy, compassion, mindfulness and so on. In fact, these qualities can—and often are—emphasized specifically to depoliticise the curriculum and delegitimize its explicit engagement with politics. Context is everything. For example, I have recently worked on ‘gratitude education’ programmes in Asian contexts. We may automatically assume that ‘gratitude’—like empathy or happiness—is a ‘good thing’. But is it? Doesn’t it depend on who we are being told we should be grateful to, and why?

‘Resilience’, a quality that is endlessly invoked in debates over SEL, may also be seen as ‘invariably good’. But is it possible that we may be developing too much resilience? Resilience places the onus on

the individual to respond or adapt to a societal order that is taken as a 'given'. If we stress the imperative of 'resilience' too much, we may delegitimize righteous anger and discontent. This is a very real danger. There are excellent reasons for people—especially for young people today—to feel angry and discontented. Education and educators should be prepared to engage honestly and thoughtfully with the anger their pupils may be experiencing. Anger is seldom, if ever, discussed, let alone valued, in SEL discussions even though it is an essential driver of social change. If it is denied or sidelined in educational contexts, it may fester and explode online and on the streets. We need to engage with anger, not to defuse it or delegitimize it but to help our young people channel it in productive ways. This implies employing far more creative and imaginative approaches not only in areas such as citizenship education, but also in terms of creating opportunities to discuss the sources of social discontent and ways of bringing about social and political change. These approaches can also be applied in other areas, notably in the study of history and literature. Again, the humanities and social sciences play a crucial role in this regard.

The study of foreign languages is another area of potentially crucial importance to peace and international understanding that is neglected in predominantly instrumental conceptions of education. For example, in 2004, the Tony Blair-led United Kingdom government abolished the requirement for all students in England to study one foreign language up to the age of sixteen. They did this on the assumption that the status of English as a global language made learning foreign languages unnecessary. However, they were also influenced by instrumentalist conceptions of the purpose of education, as

reflected, for example, in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) tests. Despite recent talk of 'twenty-first-century competencies' such as 'resilience', the OECD remains resolutely focused on education as a tool for generating productive and compliant 'human capital'; education's intrinsic value and its role in peace building (as distinct from pacification) do not figure in their calculations (Auld & Morris, 2019). Since 2009, English pupils have performed significantly better than many of their European neighbours in the PISA tests, especially in Maths (from 27th to 11th overall). These tests do not assess foreign language proficiency. Over a similar period, the study of foreign languages in England has drastically declined, while it remains common for young Europeans to study two or three foreign languages. It is not entirely coincidental that this period has also seen Britain's chaotic exit from the European Union and a rise in tensions with its European neighbours.

What is missing from the education debate in Britain—and here in East Asia—is the importance of foreign language education in supporting sympathy for and an understanding of other cultures and societies. This is an area that deserves much more attention.

Question 3: Based on your professional experience, could you kindly articulate key challenges or perceived impediments to attaining the 'Guiding Principles of the UNESCO Recommendation'? Is education a viable route to achieving them?

Addressing the last part of this question first, I believe that education is a necessary route to achieving the 'Guiding Principles of the UNESCO Recommendation', but it is not sufficient. One key

challenge we face in the education debate today is an almost universal tendency to over-inflate the ‘transformative’ potential of education. This is especially evident in the rhetoric of the United Nations and UNESCO. While acknowledging the crucial importance of education, we urgently need to dial down the rhetoric of ‘transformation’ and recognize the limits to education’s capacity to solve various social problems. Over emphasizing education’s transformative potential distracts from politics, economics and the factors that fuel conflict within and between our societies; I believe that is precisely why this sort of rhetoric is so popular with political and corporate leaders who are keen to shore up our socio-economic status quo. Rather than constantly talking up the power of education to ‘transform’ our reality, we need to give more attention to the political and economic transformations that are necessary if we are ever to realize a truly emancipatory and humane vision of education and society.

I trained as a historian and spent a lot of time at university studying early twentieth-century global history. We often discuss the importance of studying history to promote international understanding and raise awareness of the value of peace, and indeed, history can serve that purpose. However, today it is more common to find history being used to promote exclusionary and chauvinist visions of nationhood and to foment resentment against foreigners and ‘enemies within’. Many of the conditions that pushed countries towards extreme nationalism and fascism in the 1930s are also present today: economic stagnation, spiralling inequality and chronic employment insecurity (primarily due to technology). Then, as today, these factors were key to producing the anger and resentment that populists, fascists and militarists exploited. At the same time, a powerful inter-

national peace movement associated with the League of Nations began spreading. As militaristic, expansionary regimes grew in power both in Europe and here in East Asia, democratic societies rallied for peace and campaigned against increasing military spending or ‘foreign entanglements’. Traumatized by the bloodshed of the First World War, the public pressured their leaders to ‘give peace a chance’, and prominent public figures such as Bertrand Russell, Aldous Huxley and Mahatma Gandhi agitated against war in all circumstances. In this context, political leaders delayed rearming in the face of fascist aggression, resorting instead to the futile pursuit of compromise and appeasement. Meanwhile, North Americans retreated into isolation.

In our post-Cold War world, many of us—especially in the relatively comfortable and prosperous societies of Europe, North America and East Asia—came to believe that major wars were a thing of the past. We expected a ‘peace dividend’. However, the war in Ukraine, the bloodshed in Gaza, the conflicts in Sudan and Myanmar, and the obvious threats to peace here in East Asia and elsewhere—all of these should awaken us to the reality that peace cannot be secured or maintained through talk alone. The recent past—particularly the history of the twentieth century—teaches us that maintaining peace requires strength; it requires a public commitment to military defence and a readiness to stand up for societies that offer dignity, freedom and security to their citizens. One problem we face today, as we did in the 1930s, is that liberal democracies are failing to provide many of their citizens with dignity, freedom and security, making them increasingly skeptical of liberalism and democracy—a sentiment that demagogues and dictators at home and abroad can exploit. Ultimately, preserving peace requires

creating or maintaining societies that enable all citizens to have a decent, dignified and secure livelihood. This was the foundation of the success of Europe's postwar social democracies and East Asia's developmental states; it was also a key lesson from the catastrophic failures of the 1930s. However, today, it seems we have forgotten this lesson. It is not just ordinary citizens who seem to be losing faith in the shared ideals of freedom, dignity and democracy; many scholars are actively complicit in undermining such ideals. Especially in English-speaking societies, scholarship in the humanities and social sciences appears to be increasingly dominated by talk of Western 'epistemic violence' and the imperative of 'decolonisation'¹⁾. Within academia, and especially in the field of education, many prominent scholars write of liberal democracy as a 'fraud' or as a cover for 'Western hegemony', exhorting us to 'think

otherwise' and learn from 'indigenous' wisdom'²⁾. We can see this sort of language and the influence of such ideas at several points in UNESCO's 'Futures of Education' report³⁾ (UNESCO, 2021). However, while criticism of Western arrogance and its ignorance of other cultures is often perfectly valid, it has taken on extreme forms such as tribalism and cultural relativism that threaten the belief in and commitment to our shared humanity. In many instances, we see self-styled 'decolonial' scholars based in the West who align themselves or are co-opted by authoritarian regimes in Asia and elsewhere that are often brutally oppressive and pose a growing military threat to their neighbours. In other words, as educators committed to confronting the most serious threats to peace in our world today, we must be honest and realistic about where these threats originate and the limited capacity of education to address them on its own.

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- 1) For example, see Takayama, K., Sriprakash, A., & Connell, R. (2017). Toward a Postcolonial Comparative and International Education. *Comparative Education Review*, 61(S1), S1–S24. <https://doi.org/10.1086/690455>
 - 2) For example, see Takayama, K., Kettle, M., Heimans, S., & Biesta, G. (2024). Engaging with 'China': A dialogue among APJTE editors. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, 52(4), 389–399. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1359866X.2024.2391679>
See also Silova, I., Rappleye, J., & You, Y. (2020). Beyond the western horizon in educational research: Toward a deeper dialogue about our interdependent futures. *ECNU Review of Education*, 3(1), 3–19. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2096531120905195>
 - 3) For example, see the section on 'Learning to heal the wounds of injustice' (p. 55), which refers to a need for the 'decolonization of pedagogy'. Here and elsewhere in the report (e.g. p. 126), exhortations to 'decolonize' or embrace 'indigenous knowledges' are clearly targeted at the 'Global North'. Colonial-style oppression of marginalized communities and cultures by regimes in the 'Global South' (e.g. China, India) is nowhere acknowledged. The assumption of a dichotomy between 'Global North' and 'Global South', or 'modernity' and 'indigeneity', pervades the document. A background paper for the Futures report accurately identifies legacies of prejudice and racism associated with British colonialism in particular, but assumes that 'racism' and 'colonialism' are uniquely the products of 'Western' coloniality: Sriprakash, A., Nally, D., Myers, K., & Ramos-Pinto, P. (2020). *Learning with the past: racism, education and reparative futures*. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000374045>

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A contemporary perspective to peace education: The 2023 UNESCO Recommendation on Education for Peace, Human Rights and Sustainable Development



Miki Sugimura

President, Sophia University; Professor, Department of Education; and Chairholder,
UNESCO Chair on Education for Human Dignity, Peace and Sustainability at Sophia University

Miki Sugimura is the President of Sophia University in Japan and a Professor of Comparative and International Education in the Faculty of Human Sciences. She also holds the UNESCO Chair on Education for Human Dignity, Peace and Sustainability. She earned her M.Ed. and Ph.D. from the University of Tokyo, Japan. She is a Visiting Professor at the United Nations University Institute for the Advanced Study of Sustainability, a Research Fellow at the Japan International Cooperation Agency's Ogata Sadako Research Institute for Peace and Development, Vice Chair of the Promotion of Sustainability in Postgraduate Education and Research Network in the Asia-Pacific, and a member of the Executive Board of the World Council of Comparative Education Societies. In 2022, she was appointed to UNESCO's International Expert Group for the revision of the *1974 Recommendation concerning Education for International Understanding, Cooperation and Peace and Education*. She is a member of the Advisory Group on the Action Research Project on Transforming Futures: Enhancing Practice for Education for Sustainable Development for 2030. Her research focuses on international education, comparative education and multicultural education.

Introduction

In 2023, UNESCO revised its seminal *1974 Recommendation concerning education for international understanding, cooperation and peace and education relating to human rights and fundamental freedoms* (henceforth, the *1974 Recommendation*) (UNESCO, 2023). The newly issued document entitled *Recommendation on education for peace and human rights, international understanding, cooperation, fundamental freedoms, global citizenship and sustainable development* (henceforth, *2023 Recommendation*) reaffirms and reorients UNESCO's global educational agenda toward three universally shared goals: human rights, peace and sustainability (2023). These goals are not only foundational to ensuring safe and dignified lives for all without exclusion but also reflect the evolving priorities of contemporary society. Notably, while the *1974 Recommendation* emphasized human rights and peace, the 2023 revision introduces sustainability as the third essential pillar.

The implementation of the *2023 Recommendation* poses a critical challenge: how can its principles be translated into practice across diverse educational contexts? In response, UNESCO Bangkok and the Asia-Pacific Centre of Education for International Understanding, in collaboration with other regional UNESCO offices and the Government of Thailand, developed a *Road Map to Implement UNESCO's 'Recommendation on Education for Peace, Human Rights and Sustainable Development' in Asia-Pacific* (2024c). This process involved universities, research institutions and other stakeholders, aiming to bridge the gap between policy and practice in both educational and administrative settings.

This article aims to examine the perspectives

necessary for implementing the *2023 Recommendation*. It begins by reviewing existing discourses on peace education, then analyses the characteristics of the *2023 Recommendation* and introduces examples of the Road Map and initiatives to implement peace education. Finally, it discusses contemporary challenges in implementation.

Defining 'peace' in peace education

Education plays a pivotal role in fostering peace. The field of peace education encompasses a range of approaches. One primary approach involves re-examining the concept of peace. Discourses in educational philosophy and theory have explored diverse interpretations of peace, emphasizing the need to contextualize its meaning across different cultural and historical settings.

Galtung, often referred to as the father of peace studies, distinguished between 'negative peace' and 'positive peace'. The absence of war constitutes 'negative peace'. Galtung categorized violence into three types: direct violence that threatens basic human needs (Galtung, 1969, p. 169), structural violence embedded in social systems and policies (Galtung, 1969, p. 171), and cultural violence that legitimizes harm through norms and ideologies (Galtung, 1969, p. 292). In the 1960s, Galtung began advocating for 'positive peace'—defined by the absence of structural violence in the form of poverty and discrimination.

The concept of peace has been repeatedly examined in key international documents. The preamble to the UNESCO Constitution famously states, 'Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defenses of peace must be constructed'. This principle has informed numerous initiatives, including the *1974 Recommendation*, the *UNESCO Declaration and*

Integrated Framework of Action on Education for Peace, Human Rights and Democracy published in 1995, *Learning: The Treasure Within* (1996), the *UN Resolution on the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Nonviolence for the Children of the World* (1998), *Peace Education in UNICEF* (1999), the *Earth Charter* (2000) and *Reimagining Our Futures Together* (2021), among others (APCEIU, 2023, pp. 22–23).

Pedagogical approaches to peace education span a wide range of disciplines, including educational philosophy, subject-specific instruction, teaching methodology, curriculum theory, psychology, teacher education, social education, family education, academic administration and education law. Within these disciplines, thematic practices such as environmental education and human rights education have emerged as key avenues for exploring peace and human dignity.

Takeuchi (2011) proposed a critical and generative reinterpretation of accumulated peace education practices, aiming to develop new theories and innovative pedagogies.

In 2024, UNESCO further categorized peace education into its purposes, goals and practices, noting:

There are wide-ranging learning goals and objectives of peace education practiced around the world in various contexts. Most efforts begin with a foundation focused on education ‘about’ peace, imparting relevant knowledge and critical thinking on the conditions of sustainable peace and how to achieve them, and developing a critical understanding of violence in all its multiple forms and manifestations (2024a, p. 7)

UNESCO has also emphasized that peace education should extend beyond formal schooling to include non-formal and informal learning, as well as lifelong learning. Importantly, while peace education is global in scope, its implementation must be culturally and contextually grounded:

While education for peace is global in scope, its practices should be culturally and contextually specific. Effective practices identify and acknowledge the intersections and interdependencies between global threats to peace and local manifestations of violence and injustice. While establishing holistic peace programmes is the ideal for the long-term goals of global peace, considering people’s present situation and supporting their immediate needs is an important strategy and best practice (2024a, pp. 9–10)

Peacebuilding and education

In considering the role of education in peacebuilding, it is essential to examine how education can contribute to societal reconstruction and the development of new social systems in the aftermath of conflict or disaster. Within the field of international educational development, peacebuilding through education encompasses multiple phases: (a) providing emergency humanitarian support to protect lives and health immediately following conflict or disaster, (b) long-term educational efforts aimed at restoring daily life, and (c) providing sustained support for new opportunities amid ongoing instability.

Each phase represents a vital dimension of peacebuilding. Notably, advancing toward ‘positive peace’ requires not only visible forms of support but also invisible, soft forms of international

cooperation. Komatsu (2006) emphasized that ‘international educational cooperation’ involves more than constructing school buildings. It includes designing educational programmes that can help children learn about peace and developing pedagogical methods to ease interethnic tensions, as well as creating safe and sustainable learning environments. His insights stemmed from his experience as an educational officer with the United Nations Interim Administration Mission and as an advisor to UNESCO and the Japan International Cooperation Agency in conflict regions, including Kosovo, Sarajevo, Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Education in pursuit of peace as reflected in the 2023 Recommendation

The *2023 Recommendation* provides a clear framework for implementing educational approaches that promote peace. According to UNESCO, the revision of the *1974 Recommendation* was informed by the report *Reimagining Our Futures Together: A New Social Contract for Education* issued by the International Commission on the Futures of Education (2021), as well as the Transforming Education Summit in 2022 (2024b). This marked the first revision of the original *Recommendation* in nearly fifty years.

The 2023 Recommendation is composed of a preamble, conceptual definitions, fourteen guiding principles, key action areas and a monitoring framework. The guiding principles serve as a comprehensive foundation for transformative education, articulating the normative values that underpin quality learning. These principles emphasize the acquisition of knowledge, skills, values, attitudes and behaviours as core educational objectives.

The key action areas are organized into seven domains, each corresponding to educational system requirements. These domains include:

1. Policies and laws
2. Governance mechanisms
3. Curriculum and pedagogy
4. Assessment
5. Teaching material and resources
6. Learning environments
7. Development of teachers and education personnel

Roadmaps and initiatives to implement the 2023 Recommendation

In the Asia-Pacific region, UNESCO and APCEIU co-hosted a meeting to develop a roadmap for implementing the *2023 Recommendation*, in collaboration with the Thai government. Held in Bangkok in June 2024, the event was supported by Sophia University and New Zealand’s Centre of Asia-Pacific Excellence. Participants discussed regional characteristics and implementation challenges, emphasizing the importance of regional collaboration as an additional dimension to the seven action areas. They identified priority issues and concrete measures for each domain relevant to the Asia-Pacific region (UNESCO, 2024c).

Figure 1. Scene from the Regional Policy Dialogue and Launch of the 2023 Recommendation



Note. Photo courtesy of UNESCO Bangkok (2024)

Following this, APCEIU published the *Roadmap for Implementing the UNESCO 2023 Recommendation* in 2024. This Roadmap is notable for integrating global citizenship education—a longstanding focus of APCEIU. It outlines key initiatives for each of the seven domains and evaluates their implementation (APCEIU, 2024).

In Japan, the Japan Association for International Education (JAIE) commemorated the revision of the 1974 *Recommendation* by hosting a special event in 2024. The Society also issued a Japanese translation of the 2023 *Recommendation* (JAIE, 2024b). To promote engagement, the Society created a card-based educational tool titled *Creating Peace, Human Rights, and Sustainable Development Together* (JAIE, 2024a), which was used in workshops to encourage participants to internalize the *Recommendation's* principles.

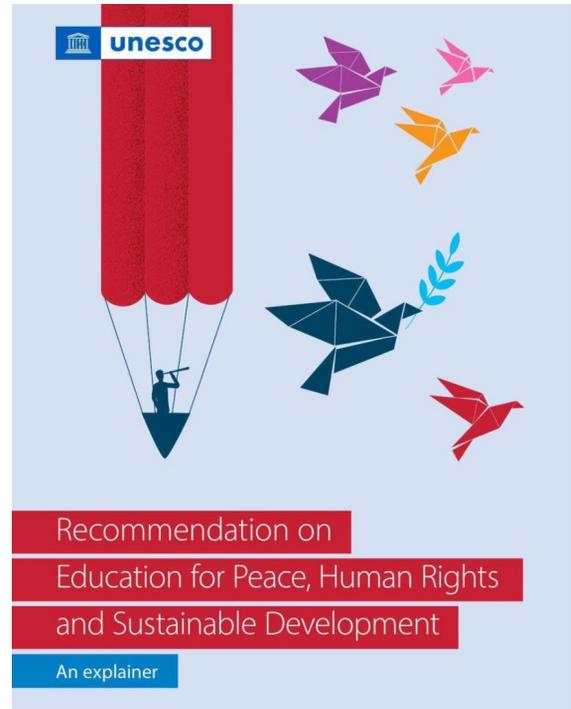
Additionally, from 2022 to 2024, the Society organized a fifteen part series titled ‘Culture of Peace Dialogues’ that explored diverse approaches to peacebuilding through education, including conceptual frameworks, practical applications and the role of educators and communities.

In March and May 2022, the Japan Society for Educational Research, in collaboration with the Japan Comparative Education Society and the Japan Society for International Development, organized emergency seminars titled “‘War’ and ‘Education’ in light of the Ukraine crisis’ (Japanese Educational Research Association, 2022). These seminars emphasized reconciliation through collaborative educational processes. The discussions highlighted the need to pursue quality education that fosters coexistence and intergenerational responsibility, even under life-threatening conditions and at the risk of authoritarian regimes or

nationalist agendas attempting to manipulate civic education. Participants stressed the importance of inclusive and equitable education that responds to diverse cultural backgrounds and individual needs. The seminars emphasized the role of education in cultivating a sense of belonging and solidarity—not only in conflict zones but also in multicultural societies. Participants envisioned schools as spaces to strengthen human connections and transcend the horrors of war, fostering empathy and understanding.

In this context, participants concluded that education for sustainable development, along with enquiry-based, dialogic learning to develop critical thinking, was essential to peace education. These

Figure 2. Cover page of *Recommendation on Education for Peace, Human Rights and Sustainable Development: An explainer*



Note. From UNESCO (2024b)

approaches align closely with the vision set forth in the *2023 Recommendation* as well (Japan Society for Educational Research, International Exchange Committee, 2022).

Contemporary challenges in implementing the 2023 Recommendation

Given the complexity of contemporary society, concerns persist regarding the effectiveness of peace education and the difficulty of addressing its themes. Some educators remain hesitant to engage with peace education due to its perceived sensitivity and abstract nature (APCEIU, 2023, p. 8).

A central challenge in peace education lies in how to construct, maintain and advance peace within classroom practice. Specifically, it concerns the visibility and assessment of learning outcomes. Within existing educational systems, it is tough to evaluate the acquisition of skills, values, attitudes and behaviour—key learning objectives emphasized in the *2023 Recommendation*. This issue is closely tied to the broader question of how to assess competencies in educational contexts.

The second challenge relates to the diversity of national education systems. According to APCEIU (2023), peace education can become politicized, with its implementation varying significantly across countries. A comparative study of Japan, China and South Korea revealed that geopolitical tensions and historical legacies in East Asia complicate efforts to promote sustainable peace. In such contexts, it is often difficult to emphasize the importance of knowledge, values, attitudes and skills necessary for peace education. Moreover, since peace education inevitably involves sensitive issues, teachers may be reluctant to engage with politically charged topics, which further hinders its implementation (APCEIU, 2023, p. 8).

Conclusion

Education today stands at a critical juncture, where transformative change is not only desirable but imperative. The *2023 Recommendation* offers a comprehensive framework to reimagine the role of education in fostering peace, human rights and sustainability. However, the challenge lies not in articulating principles but in implementing them across diverse educational systems and socio-political contexts.

In the Asia-Pacific region, efforts have already been made to develop implementation roadmaps. It is essential to operationalize these frameworks at both the national and local levels, while simultaneously advancing regional and global collaboration. Moreover, the visibility and assessment of educational outcomes—particularly those related to competencies such as values, attitudes, and behaviours—remain unresolved issues that require further methodological innovation.

These challenges are not unique to peace education; instead, they reflect the fundamental tensions inherent in education itself. While immediate solutions may be elusive, educators across all contexts continue to grapple with the practical demands of daily instruction. The integration of the *2023 Recommendation* into everyday teaching practices remains limited, underscoring the need for sustained reflection and strategic engagement.

To this end, transnational platforms that facilitate dialogue, solidarity and collaborative action at a global scale must be established. Such platforms must transcend singular definitions and prescriptive models, embracing pluralistic and learner-centred approaches. In doing so, they can ensure that education for peace is not merely thematic, but a transformative endeavour that redefines the nature and purpose of education.

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**Democracy in the Post-Truth Crisis:
The Role of Global Citizenship Education**

Integrating the digital into global citizenship education



Nicole Fournier-Sylvester

Senior Research Advisor, Canada Centre for Community Engagement and Prevention of Violence, Public Safety Canada, Government of Canada

Nicole Fournier-Sylvester is a Senior Research Advisor at the Canada Centre for Community Engagement and Prevention of Violence, which leads the Government of Canada's efforts to prevent and counter radicalization. She leads the organization's work in early/upstream prevention and in countering youth radicalization through multi-sectoral partnerships, education and capacity building. With over twenty years of experience in education, she has worked as a teacher, researcher and programme manager for Canadian and international organizations, including the Global Centre for Pluralism, UNESCO and Project Someone. She has a Ph.D. in Education and a record of publications, presentations and professional development workshops on global citizenship education, dialogue, critical thinking, futures literacy and building resilience to hate. She is currently a Board Member at Harmony Movement, a non-profit that promotes equity, diversity and inclusion by educating and empowering youth to become leaders for social change.

Understanding digital citizenship and its relationship to global citizenship education

The term digital citizenship is often used to describe ‘the ability to navigate our digital environments in a way that’s safe and responsible and to actively and respectfully engage in these spaces’ (Media Smarts, n.d.), with the term ‘digital’ referring to the online realm, encompassing the internet, digital tools and other online environments.

An active digital citizen needs the skills to analyse, evaluate and create digital content responsibly and ethically. While we may interact in the digital world similarly to the offline world, we are not always mindful of our online actions and how they can affect our reputation, safety and growth as digital citizens (Media Smarts, n.d.).

Just as an active citizen needs to understand the political structures, rights and responsibilities they have in their own contexts, digital citizens need to understand the systems within which digital technology operates. This includes recognizing how profit models drive platform design, manipulate behaviour and collect data, as well as how algorithms exploit insecurities and reinforce specific perspectives.

Ultimately, digital citizenship entails questioning, critiquing and challenging existing socio-political systems, while also understanding the role that digital environments play in maintaining or disrupting the status quo. It involves critically examining how technology can reinforce or challenge existing power structures, using these spaces to learn from and amplify underrepresented viewpoints, and to act for the social good.

From my perspective, digital citizenship is not separate from global citizenship education (GCED)—it is an extension of it. GCED is inherently

dynamic, evolving as our world becomes more interconnected. The digital realm introduces new challenges and opportunities, but the core principles of GCED—critical and creative thinking, understanding and respect for diversity, and participation and engagement (UNESCO, 2014)—remain constant.

For example, much of my work has focused on dialogue around social issues, which is central to GCED. Over the past fifteen years, our understanding of inclusive dialogue has deepened, shaped by insights into power, trauma and diverse knowledge systems.

Technology has opened up new pathways for dialogue and participation, which I explored in my Ph.D. Since then, platforms that connect students globally for dialogue have only grown. When intentionally designed, online learning environments can offer safe and accessible spaces for young people to connect across divides. These platforms can help address power imbalances and engage multiple ways of knowing—through digital storytelling, collaborative tools such as wikis and visualizing conflicting narratives (Fournier-Sylvester, 2016).

So, while dialogue remains at the heart of GCED, the tools and contexts continue to evolve. The digital reshapes and expands the contexts in which global citizenship is practiced.

From my perspective, our task is to ensure that the foundation of GCED is strong enough to adapt its practices to meet the demands of a digitally interconnected world. Further, the application of digital citizenship within GCED is highly context-specific and will evolve based on local contexts and access to digital tools and online environments.



Educational responses to digitally accelerated threats in the context of global citizenship education

To respond to the threats and harms accelerated by digital technologies, one must understand and address the root causes that drive youth toward hate and violence. Although technology has accelerated the radicalization process—with algorithms and social media amplifying hate—the underlying psychological drivers remain the same (McAleer, 2018).

Without addressing these drivers, we risk treating symptoms rather than the underlying conditions that drive young people to hate and violence. In many cases, hate groups and violent ideologies fill emotional voids—unmet needs often tied to social isolation, grievance, a lack of purpose and the absence of a sense of belonging or agency.

Once underlying issues are addressed, a global citizenship curriculum that includes the digital literacy skills to identify and respond to hate,

along with an understanding of the real-life impacts of hate, disinformation and misinformation, technology-facilitated gender-based violence will be significantly more effective.

Prioritize global citizenship education

Global citizenship, and its digital components, should not be treated as an add-on or enrichment activity—it must be the foundation of education.

As discussed, digital literacy is an inextricable component of GCED and is vital for recognizing and addressing online hate speech. By teaching learners to critically evaluate media content and understand the manipulation techniques used by platforms and hate groups, we can build their resilience to online hate speech. This will empower them to engage responsibly in digital communities and counter hate speech effectively.

Integrating GCED will help address the root causes and impacts of hate speech and promote values

such as human rights, gender equality and social justice. By doing so, we can build resistance to fear and hate-based narratives and empower learners to become active promoters of peaceful and inclusive societies (Fournier-Sylvester, 2022).

GCED's core competencies, including critical and creative thinking, understanding and respect for diversity, and participation and engagement (UNESCO, 2014), are not only relevant across all subject areas but are also essential for employment, mental health and social cohesion. When global citizenship is siloed or optional, it becomes accessible only to certain schools or students. Instead, it must be integrated into teacher education and professional development, across curricula and recognized as essential to building peaceful, inclusive, and future-ready societies.

Build understanding of the root causes and consequences of hate speech

It is essential to educate learners about the causes and consequences of hate speech. I will discuss the underlying causes of hate speech later. However, by incorporating discussions on historical events such as the Holocaust and other genocides into the classroom, we can concretize the impact of hate speech. This will help learners identify the conditions that erode democratic structures and reflect on their role in countering hate (Fournier-Sylvester, 2022).

Promote pluralism, critical thinking and social and emotional competencies

Our education systems must embrace pluralism and integrate multiple perspectives into the curriculum and teaching practices. Integrating multiple perspectives can help challenge dominant narratives that exclude or marginalize.

Building emotional and social competencies is

crucial in diffusing hateful emotions and advancing equity and social inclusion. Social and emotional regulation helps regulate aggression, fosters compassion and promotes peaceful behaviour. By contextualizing social and emotional learning within broader historical and cultural contexts, we can equip learners with the skills to resist hate speech and work towards social inclusion (Fournier-Sylvester, 2022).

Teaching materials need to be reviewed to eliminate stereotypes and ensure diverse viewpoints are represented, while emphasizing shared values and human rights (Fournier-Sylvester, 2022). Digital spaces can be used to seek and integrate underrepresented viewpoints when they are not available in the curriculum or school environment.

Support educators to provide opportunities for dialogue

To counter the appeal of hate online, young people need non-judgemental spaces to express their frustrations, injustices and grievances and to channel those emotions into healthy, civic forms of engagement. This is not an easy task. We must provide professional development opportunities that equip educators with the skills to create respectful learning environments and, when possible, to engage in dialogue-based pedagogies.

Supporting teachers also means recognizing the limitations of what can realistically be addressed during class time, especially amid competing curricular priorities. If the classroom is not the most suitable space for students to engage in complex, emotionally charged conversations—due to limited teacher training, time constraints or the inherent power dynamics between students and educators—then policymakers should consider alternative approaches. This could include allocating

dedicated time and bringing in trained external facilitators, either during or outside of school hours, to create safe spaces where youth can express themselves and explore the loneliness, complexity and uncertainty they often face. These interventions can complement classroom learning while ensuring students have meaningful opportunities for dialogue and reflection.

Take a whole-of-school and whole-of-society approach

All aspects of school life should integrate these principles to improve interactions between educators and learners. Schools should act as hubs for social cohesion by modelling respect, transparency, participation in decision-making, nonviolence and gender equality. Respect for difference must be reflected in how everyone in a school community treats one another—from teachers and students to administrative staff and custodians.

To avoid cognitive dissonance between home, community and school, schools and/or boards of

education can act as bridges between families, community-based organizations and local decision-makers to support young people at risk, establish a shared language and approach to global citizenship and develop strategies to build resilience against online hate.

Pedagogical approaches to fostering peace and addressing hate speech through digital citizenship education

As hate speech, disinformation and misinformation, technology-facilitated gender-based violence and radicalization to violence proliferate in step with digital advances, we must confront a difficult truth: online influencers and recruiters have often been more effective at meeting these emotional needs of young people than parents, educators or institutions.

When young people feel unheard or invisible, they are more likely to turn online, where they become vulnerable to hate and radicalization. Hate groups may provide a sense of belonging and purpose—



however distorted—that many young people are searching for.

Teachers can help create spaces of belonging and provide opportunities for youth to develop a sense of belonging, agency and purpose. At the same time, they can equip young people with the skills not only to navigate these systems, but also to question and challenge them.

Belonging

Belonging means feeling valued as part of a community—knowing your voice matters and that you can be your authentic self. Research shows that students who feel a strong sense of belonging are more motivated, perform better academically, attend more regularly, engage in fewer harmful behaviours and report higher self-esteem and mental health (Cohen, 2022). These outcomes build resilience against hate and radicalization, online and offline.

Creating these conditions requires rethinking how we structure learning environments. To foster a sense of belonging, teachers can minimize competition and criticism, value failure as part of the growth process and emphasize collaboration through small-group work, peer mentoring, jigsaw classrooms, inclusive dialogue, culturally relevant curricula and opportunities to share personal stories. Teachers can also shift disciplinary approaches—replacing zero-tolerance policies with restorative justice and promoting a ‘call-in’ culture rather than a ‘call-out’ one.

Agency

Agency is the belief that you are the author of your actions and capable of influencing your life and circumstances. It supports psychological stability, personal responsibility and resilience. When youth

feel a sense of agency, they are more likely to engage proactively, think critically and navigate challenges effectively.

As discussed, in today’s digital landscape, fostering agency in students requires more than technical literacy—it demands critical awareness of how digital environments are engineered. Students must understand how platforms are designed to maximize engagement, how algorithms shape what content they see, and how their personal data is collected, commodified and monetized. To truly experience agency, they need insight into the business models behind these platforms and how malicious actors exploit digital tools.

Students should also learn how these systems are intentionally crafted to bypass critical thinking, appealing directly to emotion and amplifying existing—often legitimate—grievances. Crucially, they must be able to recognize when AI-driven tools, including chatbots, are being used not just to build relationships, but to manipulate, radicalize, and in extreme cases, promote violence and genocide. Once they understand this, youth can recognize manipulation and advocate for change, becoming active citizens rather than passive consumers.

Developing a sense of agency in the digital space can be fostered by providing opportunities to conduct a digital footprint analysis and assigning tasks that involve creating awareness campaigns or exploring how misinformation spreads through fictional conspiracy theories.

Purpose

Finally, teachers can help students develop a sense of purpose—the belief that their lives have meaning and direction. Teachers can support this by connecting learning to real-world impact,

encouraging self-reflection, fostering student voice and choice and building inclusive environments.

Teachers can highlight role models who have found purpose through adversity, creativity or service, and provide opportunities for civic engagement and youth-led initiatives. Purpose also means helping students explore how their interests align with future opportunities through

mentorship, career exploration and life planning.

By intentionally designing educational spaces that foster belonging, agency and purpose, teachers can counteract the emotional voids that hate groups exploit—and build a generation more resilient, empowered and ready to shape a better world.

References

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- Fournier-Sylvester, N. (2016). *Connected: Facilitating transformative online dialogue in peace-building, reconciliation and global citizenship education programs*. (Doctoral dissertation, Concordia University). <https://spectrum.library.concordia.ca/id/eprint/981444/>
- Fournier-Sylvester, N. (2022). *Addressing hate speech: Educational responses*. UNESCO; United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000382290>
- McAlear, J. (2018). *The cure for hate: A former white supremacist's journey from violent extremism to radical compassion*. Per Capita Publishing.
- Media Smarts. (n.d.). *What is digital citizenship?*<https://mediasmarts.ca/digital-media-literacy/general-information/digital-media-literacy-fundamentals/what-digital-citizenship>
- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. (2014). *Global citizenship education: Preparing learners for the challenges of the 21st century*. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000227729>

Further Reading

PART 01 Democracy at risk in the post-truth era

Jeong-han Kang

Kang, J., & Song, M. (2023). *Toward narrative-driven data mining in the post-truth age.* *Korean Journal of Sociology*, 57(2), 89–130.

This paper explains in more detail how narrative-driven data mining can contribute to scientific evidence-building in the post-truth age.

Becker, H. S. (2017). *Evidence.* University of Chicago Press.

This book beautifully illustrates how scientific evidence is bound to scientists' perspectives and research design without degrading scientific integrity.

Harari, Y. N. (2024). *Nexus: A brief history of information networks from the stone age to AI.* Random House.

This book interprets various stages of human history through different ways of organizing information. If the reader is convinced by these interpretations, they may become more concerned about how AI's ways of organizing information could threaten democracy.

Kelechi Kalu

Fassin, D., & Honneth, A. (2022). *Crisis under critique: How people assess, transform, and respond to critical situations.* Columbia University Press.

Anchored in the concept of crisis, this collection of essays offers an interdisciplinary and transnational

perspective for analysing the diverse uses of crisis and its impact on societies and on issues affecting ordinary citizens worldwide, especially in the Global South. It is such a crisis that democracy has found itself within the prevailing narrative of post-truth and fake news, to which an interdisciplinary perspective is better suited to help us unpack its veracity.

Crouch, C. (2004). *Post-democracy.* Polity Press.

This book explores mass-based democratic politics that ushered in the ascendancy of liberal democracy in the early twentieth century. According to Crouch, the rise of global economic elites and the privilege of liberal democracy have essentially undermined the power of the masses, rendering democratic party politics vapid as they have sidelined relevant issues important to ordinary people and elevated the control of party politics by economic elites.

Farkas, J., & Schou, J. (2024). *Post-truth, fake news, and democracy (2nd ed.).* Routledge.

Farkas and Schou offer an alternative interpretation of the concepts of post-truth and fake news within the context of democracy. The authors believe that contemporary democracy faces a crisis due to post-truth arguments and fake news circulating on social media platforms. They argue that democracy's future is even more at risk if those who serve as custodians of truth—journalists, academics and public intellectuals—lose their monopoly as gatekeepers of truth.

PART 02 Global citizenship education responses to the post-truth crisis

Section 1 Youth-led actions for strengthening democratic literacy

Nominmaa Ulziibat

APCEIU. (2022). No. 63 – EIU best practice: Check Check Project—Mobilizing Mongolian youth. <https://www.unescoapceiu.org/post/4933>

This monograph highlights the Check Check initiatives as a recognized model for effective youth-led MIL and GCED. This source provides insights into practical implementation, peer-to-peer engagement, and equity-focused approaches that have been acknowledged internationally.

Hobbs, R. (2017). Measuring the digital and media literacy competencies of children and teens. In F. C. Blumberg & P. J. Brooks (Eds.), *Cognitive Development in Digital Contexts* (pp. 253–274). Academic Press.

<https://share.google/eMDnYuSKPdpvFYKUv>

This paper provides practical guidance on engaging youth in critical media production and consumption. It emphasizes active learning approaches that empower young people to analyse, create, and share digital content responsibly, complementing the participatory methods used in the Check Check Project.

Mihailidis, P. (2019). Civic Media Literacies: Re-imagining human connection in an age of digital abundance. Routledge.

Mihailidis explores the intersection of media literacy and civic participation, highlighting how informed and critically engaged youth can address misinformation and contribute to community development. This work supports the Check Check approach of combining media literacy with leadership and social responsibility.

Salma Noorfitria Ningrum

Hobbs, R. (2017). Create to learn: Introduction to digital literacy. Wiley.

This publication provides a practical primer linking media production and critical analysis, useful for educators designing active DCE exercises.

Council of Europe. (2023). Digital citizenship education handbook: Being online, well-being online, rights online (2022 ed.).

<https://www.coe.int/en/web/education/-/digital-citizenship-education-handbook>

This handbook provides a framework for integrating DCE into GCED curricula and includes classroom activities that complement MIL (Media Information Literacy) practice.

West, D. M. (2018). How to combat fake news and misinformation. Brookings.

This publication offers policy-oriented recommendations that help bridge the debates on education, civic literacy, and platform accountability.

Section 2 Educators' strategies for countering post-truth narratives

Samsoo Sa-U

Sa-U, S. (2024). The Community of Philosophical Enquiry (CoPE) as a pedagogy to support Thai undergraduate Muslim students' encounters with Islamophobia. In J. Forstenzer, F. Demissie, & V. Boontinand (Eds.), *The pedagogy of the Community of Philosophical Enquiry as citizenship education: Global perspectives on talking democracy into action* (pp. 127–142). Routledge.

This chapter reflects directly on the author's practice in Thailand's Deep South, demonstrating how CoPE can provide Muslim students with critical tools to resist Islamophobia and engage in democratic dialogue. It is especially relevant for

contextualizing reflective pedagogy in Muslim minority settings.

Hussien, S., & Hashim, R. (2017). Hikmah pedagogy. In D. A. Roozen, F. Schweitzer, & Z. A. Oseni (Eds.), *Interfaith education for all: Theoretical perspectives and best practices for transformative action* (pp. 97–106). Springer.

https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-6351-170-4_8

This chapter introduces the Hikmah pedagogy developed in Malaysia, which emphasizes philosophical dialogue as a means of cultivating critical and ethical citizenship. It provides a strong Islamic foundation for dialogical approaches to GCED and complements the i-GCED framework.

Liow, J. C. (2009). *Islam, education and reform in Southern Thailand: Tradition and transformation*. Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.

This book provides a comprehensive historical and political analysis of Islamic education reform in Southern Thailand. It is an essential reading for understanding the broader socio-political and religious context in which i-GCED has been developed.

[Charu Saini](#)

UNESCO. (2024). *Global citizenship education in a digital age: Teacher guidelines*.

<https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000388812>

This publication explores the foundations of digital citizenship education and offers practical tools and techniques for educators, researchers, and policymakers to develop related competencies.

Section 3 Institutional and educational initiatives for promoting peace and citizenship

[Bert J. Tuga](#)

APCEIU, & Philippine Normal University. (2021). *Philippine GCED lesson exemplars*.

<https://tinyurl.com/PHGCEDLessonExemplars>

This online repository offers lesson plans designed to integrate GCED across different subjects and grade levels. It provides teachers with ready-to-use models that link classroom learning to global citizenship values.

APCEIU, Philippine Normal University, & GCC-Philippines. (2024). *Paghabi: A collection of best GCED practices in the Philippines*.

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1yIHIS4Otqt4vZV5Ngd9KqvJ4dq1DLM5A/view?usp=sharing>

The first volume of the *Paghabi* series highlights pioneering GCED practices from various institutions. It captures innovative approaches and stories of how schools and universities began weaving global perspectives into local educational contexts.

APCEIU, Philippine Normal University, & GCC-Philippines. (2025). *Paghabi: A collection of best GCED practices in the Philippines*.

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1GD08Mi_WIA Yr2j0XHyLGWX7qi5YZPz0g/view?usp=sharing

This second volume expands coverage of GCED practices by featuring additional case studies and success stories and strengthens GCED practices, reflecting how institutions sustain and innovate in embedding global citizenship in education.

GCC-Philippines. (n.d.). *Welcome to the GCED Cooperation Centre – Philippines!*

<https://gced.pnu.edu.ph/>

The official site of the GCED Cooperation Centre Philippines provides access to resources, project

updates, and institutional partnerships. It is an essential hub for educators, researchers, and policymakers engaged in GCED work.

PART 03 Pathways forward: Advancing a democratic and peaceful culture

Rilli Lappalainen

Democracy Without Borders. (n.d.). *Campaign for a UN parliamentary assembly.*

<https://www.democracywithoutborders.org/unpa-campaign/>

The webpage hosted by Democracy Without Borders outlines the international campaign to establish a United Nations Parliamentary Assembly (UNPA). The campaign's core argument is that the current United Nations structure is limited because it represents Member States rather than global citizens, leading to a "democratic deficit" that hinders effective action on global issues such as climate change.

Island, H. (n.d.). *Systems thinking: The iceberg model.* SessionLab.

<https://www.sessionlab.com/methods/systems-thinking-the-iceberg-model>

The webpage hosted by SessionLab introduces an iceberg model to explore a systems-thinking approach and to improve problem-solving skills. It provides detailed instructions and core exercises to be applied in various educational settings.

Bridge 47. (n.d.). *Target 4.7.*

<https://bridge47.org/global-citizenship>

This page defines Sustainable Development Goal Target 4.7 as the foundation of Transformative Education, emphasizing its role in equipping learners with the values and 21st-century skills needed to tackle global injustice. It highlights how

GCED empowers individuals to move beyond passive learning and become active agents of change in building a more just and sustainable world. See also:

<https://bridge47.org/resources/07/2021/foresight-and-sdg-47-publication>

W. Andy Knight

Diamond, L. (2019). *Ill winds: Saving democracy from Russian rage, Chinese ambition, and American complacency.* Penguin Press.

This book provides a comprehensive look at the global threats to democracy, from external authoritarian influence to internal complacency. Diamond's analysis underscores why democracy requires both vigilance and active renewal.

Norris, P., & Inglehart, R. (2019). *Cultural backlash: Trump, Brexit, and authoritarian populism.* Cambridge University Press.

This study explores how cultural grievances and identity politics fuel populism and democratic backsliding in established democracies. It is useful for understanding the broader cultural dimensions of democratic fragility.

International IDEA. (2023). *The global state of democracy 2023: The new checks and balances.*

<https://cdn.sanity.io/files/2e5hi812/production/0c4fe84a1378d22287fdcfdf36584c237264bef9.pdf>

This annual report provides up-to-date empirical data on democratic backsliding and resilience across the world, making it an invaluable reference for policymakers and scholars alike.

Sen, A. (1999). *Democracy as freedom.* Oxford University Press.

Sen argues that democracy must be understood not merely as electoral procedures but as a process of collective reasoning and freedom. His normative

vision aligns with the call for a substantive, inclusive and resilient democracy.

Edward Vickers

Varoufakis, Y. (2024). *Technofeudalism: What killed capitalism.* Vintage.

Varoufakis argues that ‘big tech’ has turbocharged the growth of inequality in the contemporary world, channeling huge wealth to a tiny minority, while making life more precarious for the rest of us. At the same time, features of this technology are transforming our culture and politics, fueling the spread of misinformation and atomizing our societies, making it more difficult to organize resistance to the exploitative forces that are impoverishing and disempowering us. This book provides the opportunity to consider the kind of world we are preparing students to face, and what would need to change—beyond education—to create a future that is just and sustainable.

Davies, W. (2018). *Nervous states: How feeling took over the world.* Vintage.

A companion to his earlier book *The Happiness Industry* (2015), *Nervous States* analyses the origins of pervasive public impatience with ‘experts’, and the drift towards forms of politics (i.e., populism) that privilege emotional authenticity over reason and evidence. Davies identifies the arrogance of experts and their inflated claims to knowledge as part of the problem. He argues that for expertise to be taken seriously by increasingly insecure and fearful populations, experts need to discover a new humility and learn to take seriously the emotions of the people they study, rather than seeing them merely as bundles of statistical data.

Táíwò, O. (2022). *Against decolonisation: Taking African agency seriously.* Hurst.

Intervening in what is an increasingly fraught

academic debate, Táíwò argues that calls for ‘decolonisation’ are often far less emancipatory than they at first sight appear. Emphasis on the importance of ‘authenticity’ and the ‘indigenous’ voice, he contends, far from empowering non-Europeans, actually strips them of rational agency by expecting them to conform to essentializing visions of ‘native’ tradition. By effectively delegitimizing (as ‘inauthentic’) African or Asian appeals to purportedly ‘Western’ notions such as liberalism, democracy, or human rights, this is a recipe for entrenching authoritarianism. Táíwò’s polemic is crucial reading for those of an instinctively ‘progressive’ bent who may be inclined to fetishize indigenous wisdom.

Miki Sugimura

APCEIU. (2023). *Common curriculum guide for peace education in Northeast Asia.*

<https://www.unescoapceiu.org/post/5051>

This guide serves as a framework for supporting peace education in diverse communities across Northeast Asia. Its primary function is to aid in the design and development of peace education programmes tailored to various contexts within the region.

APCEIU. (2024). *APCEIU roadmap for implementing the UNESCO 2023 recommendation.*

<https://www.unescoapceiu.org/post/5225>

This publication presents a concrete roadmap for implementing the UNESCO 2023 Recommendation, particularly in the Asia-Pacific region, by drawing parallels with APCEIU’s strategic framework for advancing GCED.

UNESCO. (2024). *Peace education in the 21st century: An essential strategy for building lasting peace.*

<https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000388385>

This publication proposes a comprehensive frame-

work presenting specific principles and approaches for implementing peace education, guided by UNESCO's strategic direction.

UNESCO. (2024). *Road Map to implement UNESCO's "Recommendation on Education for Peace, Human Rights and Sustainable Development" in Asia-Pacific.*

<https://www.unescoapceiu.org/post/5173>

This roadmap presents key perspectives for implementing the UNESCO 2023 Recommendation, drawing on discussions from the July 2024 meeting at the UNESCO Bangkok Office. It particularly reflects the insights of Asia-Pacific stakeholders who examined the Recommendation within the context of regional specificities and challenges.

[Nicole Fournier-Sylvester](#)

Eradicate Hate Global Summit, & Institute for Strategic Dialogue. *Prevention through education: A practitioner's framework for prevention programming.*

<https://eradicatehatesummit.org/wp-content/uploads/PPN-Prevention-Through-Education-1.pdf>

This guide equips educators and practitioners to prevent hate and violence and foster social cohesion through capacity building. It offers practical strategies that promote pro-social values and create inclusive learning environments, reducing the risk of social exclusion. Additionally, it provides guidance on implementing trauma-informed teaching practices to support students affected by trauma.

Media Smarts. (2018). *Classroom guide: Integrating digital literacy into your classroom practice.*

https://mediasmarts.ca/sites/mediasmarts/files/guides/classroom_guide_digital_literacy.pdf

This guide helps educators build digital literacy skills, including ethics and empathy, privacy and security, community engagement, digital health, consumer awareness, information evaluation, and content creation and remixing. It also tackles common challenges in integrating digital literacy into the classroom—such as limited technology and classroom management issues—and provides links to resources, apps, and tools for creating digital media.

UNESCO. (2026). *Addressing hate speech through global citizenship education: A handbook for educators.*

<https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000397247>

This handbook provides a conceptual framework that explains the definitions, causes, and consequences of hate speech, alongside practical approaches, activities, and resources to help schools co-create inclusive learning environments that value diversity. It promotes strategies to cultivate critical thinking, model responsible global citizenship, and foster resilience against hate speech. By combining theory with practice, this resource empowers educators to promote respect, inclusion, and shared responsibility within their classrooms and communities.

**Democracy in the Post-Truth Crisis:
The Role of Global Citizenship Education**

Introduction to the 10th International Conference on Global Citizenship Education

Since 2016, the Asia-Pacific Centre of Education for International Understanding under the auspices of UNESCO (APCEIU) has convened the International Conference on Global Citizenship Education (IConGCED). The Conference serves as a platform for strengthening partnerships through the sharing of knowledge and exemplary practices in GCED, while also fostering dialogue on future directions and strategies at the international, national and regional levels.

Marking its tenth anniversary, the Conference addressed the growing fragility of democracy amid today's technological, political, social and existential challenges. While digital technologies—particularly social media—have expanded the public sphere by enabling the rapid circulation of diverse perspectives, algorithmic systems often intensify confirmation bias and polarization. The proliferation of disinformation and misinformation not only reflects a broader crisis of truth characteristic of the post-truth era—where emotional appeals and personal beliefs frequently overshadow objective reality—but also erodes social cohesion and public trust.

Against this backdrop, the Conference explored how contemporary challenges, including threats to democracy and social fragmentation, might be addressed through the transformative potential of education. In particular, discussions focused on the roles and contributions of GCED in responding to these challenges, the sharing of educational practices across contexts, and ways of fostering solidarity and peace in conditions of political and socio-economic polarization. As a milestone edition, the 10th IConGCED offered space to reflect on past achievements, highlight ongoing initiatives, and consider collaborative pathways toward a more socially just, peaceful, and sustainable world.

Title	The 10th International Conference on GCED: Platform on Pedagogy and Practice
Theme	Democracy in the Post-Truth Crisis: The Role of GCED
Dates	27–28 August 2025
Venue	Seoul Dragon City, Republic of Korea
Participants	350 in-person participants from 50 countries, including policymakers, educators, researchers, practitioners, and education stakeholders from international organizations and civil society, as well as members of the general public interested in GCED. In addition, 1,105 participants joined online on 27 August and 489 participants on 28 August.
Co-organized by	Asia-Pacific Centre of Education for International Understanding (APCEIU); Ministry of Education of the Republic of Korea; and Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Korea
In partnership with	UNESCO; UNESCO Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Education for Peace and Sustainable Development (UNESCO MGIEP); and Chungnam National University BK21 FOUR Center for Global Citizenship Education and Research
Website	https://icongcded.unescoapceiu.org/





DEMOCRACY IN THE POST-TRUTH CRISIS : THE ROLE OF GCED

탈진실 위기 속 세계시민교육과 민주주의

27-28 August 2025
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GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP DEMOCRACY

GCED



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