

LIFELONG LEARNING AS A STRATEGY FOR EDUCATING GLOBAL CITIZENS WITHIN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract

Recent research emphasizes the need for education on global citizenship (GC) within higher education (Davis, Evans & Reid, 2005; Ibrahim, 2008; Schultz, 2007). However, GC is an ill-defined concept (Schultz, 2007) and its position in university policies is unclear (Holvoet, 2007). Therefore, the GC concept is difficult to implement within universities' educational practice (Fullan, 2002; Hargreaves & Goodson, 2006). In order to overcome possible impediments, the reported research aimed at elucidating visions of policy makers on the role of higher education institutes with regard to positioning GC in society.

The findings resulted from a two round Delphi inquiry and in-depth interviews with 20 key figures in the field of academic policy making in five Flemish universities, representatives of the Flemish government's education department and members of GC education agencies.

Respondents reported two components as basic conditions for universities to educate their students as global citizens: the need for a reflexive learning approach and an international learning environment. Conditions and difficulties in creating such environments were distinguished. As lifelong learning is defined as "a way of empowering people for active

engagement with important personal, social and global issues” (European Commission, 2001), this concept is considered as appropriate to supply a framework for GC.

Key Words: *global citizenship, higher education*

JEL Classification: I2

1. INTRODUCTION

Contemporary society can be characterized as global (LEAP, 2007). It expects higher education institutes to prepare students to participate in a responsible and adequate way in all levels of that society (Green, 2002). Graduates need to be able to function independently and voluntarily in life, to participate actively in their community and are responsible for their personal development (Gibson, Rimmington, & Landwehr-Brown, 2008). Therefore recent research results emphasize the (growing) need for education on global citizenship within higher education (Davis, Evans & Reid, 2005; Ibrahim, 2008; Schultz, 2007).

However, the concept of global citizenship is rarely consistently defined with regard to intent and approach (Ibrahim, 2008; Schultz, 2007). As a result it does not occupy a clear position in current universities' policy (Holvoet, 2007) and is therefore difficult to implement in educational university practice (Fullan, 2002).

1.1 Global citizenship: a complex and contested concept

The meaning of the term GC varies from a vague sense of belonging to a global community to a more specific global polity that collectively enforces legal and human rights and responsibilities enshrined in international law (Ibrahim, 2008). Both extreme interpretations are highly contested: the former because of its vague and utopian character (Ibrahim, 2008) and the latter due to the non-existence of a global government (Davis et al., 2005).

Several authors therefore try to make GC operational, seeing it as a gradual concept (Davis et al., 2005; Gibson, et al., 2008, Hanvey, 1987; Ibrahim, 2008). Hanvey (1987) provides us with an overview of the different levels of GC, which they interpret as cultural awareness.

At the lowest level, the individual is aware of superficial and visible cultural characteristics and stereotypes. At the highest level we find awareness of how other cultures are organised. In between lays the awareness of subtle cultural traits and differences obtained by cultural conflict or intellectual analyses.

According to Hanvey (1987) being in contact with other cultures is crucial for fostering cultural awareness as a central competence for being a global citizen.

1.2 Global citizenship education within universities

Due to the difficulties with the GC concept, we suggest a framework is needed in order for universities to implement GC education. For constructing such a framework, we need to distinguish the needed preconditions for GC education within higher education. These need to be aligned with the characteristics of GC mentioned above.

Recent research distinguishes two appropriate strategies for universities to foster GC: a reflexive teaching and learning approach and internationalization. The first is based on the assumption that in order to develop GC so-called 'second order changes' need to occur within the students' thinking patterns (Davis et al., 2005; Gibson et al., 2008). To facilitate these second order changes,

stimulating reflexivity is the key (Fullan, 2000). Authentic and cooperative learning emerge to be appropriate learning strategies to foster GC (Davis et al., 2005), provided that this occurs within an international context (Gibson et al., 2008). This means universities should engage in internationalizing the curriculum, virtual and in real life cultural exchange, and international mobility (Murphy, 2007).

These approaches lead us to the concept of lifelong learning as an appropriate framework. Research indicates that reflexivity is also a key concept in stimulating lifelong learning competences (Kember et al., 2007). Furthermore, lifelong learning is defined as “*a way of empowering people for active engagement with important personal, social and global issues*” (European Commission, 2001). This description connects lifelong learning to citizenship education. In order for lifelong learning to be meaningful in the context of GC education, special attention will be needed for the global aspect of citizenship (Munck, 2010).

2. AIM AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The reported research aimed at elucidating visions of policy makers on the role of higher education institutes with regard to positioning GC in society. The vision and thoughts of academic authorities on GC and the university as a learning environment for GC were investigated. In this article two focal points are addressed, based on the theoretical assumptions above:

- Do academic authorities and other significant players acknowledge the importance of global citizenship education in higher education?
- In what way can universities educate global citizens?

Overarching these two questions the appropriateness of lifelong learning as a framework for GC within higher education will be discussed.

3. METHOD

The study consisted of two phases: a Delphi inquiry and in-depth interviewing.

3.1 Delphi inquiry

The Delphi is a series of sequential questionnaires our ‘rounds’, interspersed by controlled feedback, that seek to gain the most reliable consensus of opinion of a group of experts (Linstone & Turoff, 1975). Because the technique is useful in achieving consensus in a given area or lack of empirical knowledge (Powell, 2003), it is suitable for this study considering GC in higher education is a relatively recent topic.

The Delphi-respondent group consisted of a selection of key figures in the field of academic policy making, internationalisation and quality management in different Flemish universities, educational representatives of the Flemish government and organisations in the field of GC education. We involved the latter because of their indicated surplus value for increasing knowledge on GC within the universities (supra). We contacted 33 possible respondents for the Delphi inquiry and nineteen of them were willing to participate. Fifteen respondents completed the two-round Delphi.

3.2 In-depth interviewing

The in-depth interviews were held with five vice-chancellors of five Flemish universities. Because of their crucial positions in university policy, they could frame the results of the Delphi within

current and future university policy. These semi-structured interviews were thus based on the structure and results of the Delphi.

4. RESULTS

Corresponding to the two focal points, this section is set up in two segments: the vision of universities on global citizenship within higher education on the one hand, and prerequisites for universities in order to foster GC on the other hand. Special attention is paid on lifelong learning as a framework for GC.

4.1 The meaning of global citizenship within higher education

All respondents were convinced about the important impact of higher education institutes in the personal development of students.

Three main elements were mentioned defining the concept of global citizenship: an inclusive world vision, a sense of solidarity and a philosophical background. Respondents associated an inclusive world vision with the insight in an interdependence of different continents, regions, groups regarding economical, political, cultural and ethical processes. A sense of solidarity was viewed as an emotional matter. Most respondents associated this emotional component with behavioural processes such as a social engagement of individuals. The third element – a philosophical background – was considered indicative for the fact that the interpretation of global citizenship is not value-free: interpreting the concept of global citizenship is always based on existing underlying principles and values.

Notwithstanding a mutual agreement on defining global citizenship, respondents recognized the problematic character of the concept. First, they identified an obvious link with the term ‘citizenship’ which implies the existence of global political or democratic institutions. As a result, some argued to define global citizenship as a responsibility in order to fulfil a duty to society. Subsequently a global citizen can be seen as a member of a global society sharing the responsibility to think about the organisation of that society.

Second, respondents emphasized the Western line of approach when considering global citizenship. Such an approach holds the risk of overestimating a Western interpretation of how society should be organised and therefore patronizing non-Western cultures. In line with this critique respondents also stated that global citizenship is characterized by a tendency towards being overambitious and therefore impossible.

4.2 Construction of a suitable learning environment for educating global citizens within higher education

There was a consensus on the fact that “(...) *wanting to be a learning environment for global citizenship, openness is needed*”. Respondents were asked respondents to make this ‘openness’ concrete. Two components evolved: curricular and extracurricular ‘space’ for global citizenship on the one hand, and internationalisation on the other.

4.2.1 Curricular and extracurricular ‘space’ for GC

Respondents believe universities should be attentive for integrating the competences typical for GC in the curriculum. A possibility is to link GC themes to the different specific fields of study. Next to this disciplinary approach, a cross-disciplinary one is acknowledged: e.g. optional subjects on GC topics.

Furthermore, respondents wish to stimulate studying abroad or foreign internship. Additionally, they agree on the requirement of learning a foreign language as point of support for going abroad in the scope of a study, which is also valuable for students staying home, because it fosters contact with foreign students. Besides, it's an important factor for the international charisma of universities.

Extracurricular examples of GC education are lectures and debates on GC related themes and exposures. In order to narrow the gap between curricular and extracurricular GC education, credits could be attributed for attending extracurricular activities.

Next to these (extra-) curricular observations, respondents consider teaching and learning approaches suitable for educating GC. In their opinion, student centeredness is recommended. They promote facilitating contact between students with different cultural backgrounds and making them interact within an authentic situation on an authentic problem or learning issue. Enabling this, e-learning and/or distance learning could be important means.

4.2.2 The university as an international learning environment

In order to realise these curricular and extracurricular openness, internationalisation arose as the most important enabling factor. In addition universities should be attentive for societal engagement. Respondents consider internationalisation to be an umbrella concept consisting of four elements:

- **Student mobility.** All corresponding universities state the numbers of outgoing as well as incoming students are low. The causes for these low numbers are sought after in financial and language policy and the so-called 'churh tower mentality' of students. Respondents call for flexibility in curricula, e.g. recognition of foreign credits and flexible time paths for courses and exams.

- **Teacher mobility.** This considers welcoming and sending out (guest) professors, teacher exchange programmes, foreign research and development cooperation. Obviously student mobility could also be benefiting from these actions.

- **Internationalisation@home.** Examples are guest professors, stimulating contact between incoming foreign and home staying students, foreign research experiences of teachers incorporated in the curricula, non-Dutch courses for foreign as well as own students, distance and e-learning, for example by means of video conferencing, and last but not least simply incorporating an international point of view in the content. Perceived obstacles here are the low level of ICT implementation, foreign students tending to prefer each others company and language legislation.

- **Partnerships with external (foreign) institute.** This strategy could be considered as supporting all others, but is also a strategy itself. Partnerships between higher education institutes can be situated on the research as well as the educational field. In addition, these partnerships can not only be developed between universities, but also between higher education institutes and the business or the non-profit sector. Respondents state that European examples exist, but are still in one's infancy.

Finally, respondents remark that many individual academics and academic units often have extended foreign contacts and make internationalization attempts. However, these attempts are seldom embedded at the institutional level. Respondents suggest for universities to list all

internationalization activities, on different levels, in order to clarify the universities' degree of internationalization.

Because of the complex and contested character of global citizenship, respondents were rather reserved on implementing the concept as such. They all plead to embed it in a more solid and accepted concept within higher education. Respondents recognized the concept of lifelong learning – defined as “*a way of empowering people for active engagement with important personal, social and global issues*” (European Commission, 2001) – as appropriate to supply a supportive framework for the introduction of global citizenship in higher education. Indeed, lifelong learning policy facilitates more flexibility within study programmes and broadens the dimension of internationalization in higher education institutes.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

In order to overcome possible impediments, this research aimed at elucidating visions of policy makers on the role of higher education institutes with regard to GC. Results of this study provide support for the need for reflection (Davis et al., 2005; Gibson et al., 2008; Murphy, 2007), an authentic and cooperative learning approach (Davis et al., 2005), and an international learning environment (Gibson et al., 2008; Murphy, 2007) in order to provide graduates with the competences needed to participate in a global society.

However, cautiousness is recommended when using GC as an educational concept. Results indicated the fragile character of GC. Therefore our respondents feel embedding GC within the concept of lifelong learning seems appropriate because this concept enhances flexible study programmes and internationalization within higher education. Next to these reasons mentioned by our respondents, a few other motives can be distinguished. First, reflexivity is seen as a key concept of lifelong learning (Kember et al., 2007). Thus when creating a reflexive learning environment, students will develop lifelong learning competences. If within this an international angle is adopted, GC could also be enhanced – nested in the framework of lifelong learning.

Next, lifelong learning as a framework for GC could also provide extended possibilities for attuning partnerships with organisations other than colleague universities, and university education, for these partnerships have the ability to integrate non-formal learning opportunities within the formal educational context of the university. This will increase the development and sharing of knowledge in the field of GC (Fullan, 2000).

Yet, some limitations should be mentioned regarding this research. First of all, due to the focus on the Flemish universities, the number of respondents is limited and the scope of the research is rather narrow. Therefore we strongly recommend further research to extend the focus to the European or even global area, in order to determine the degree of internationalization within universities.

Furthermore, this research elucidated visions of universities' policy makers. Further investigation will be needed to verify whether and to what extent internationalization and a reflexive learning environment actually enhances GC competences of graduates. Therefore the construction of an extensive GC competence profile is acquired.

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