

# International exchanges for ESD in teacher education – internationally comparative experiences

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## Abstract

The Erasmus+ project “Global Sense – Developing Global Sensitivity Among Student Teachers” focuses on virtual international exchange opportunities on global challenges and their implications for future teaching practices in the context of sustainability and cosmopolitanism. The project has been designed to engage student teachers from France, Germany, Israel, Belgium and the USA in a collaborative process of acquiring reflective and actionable competencies that will enable them to address ESD issues holistically, with a special focus on GCED, in their future classrooms. Selected case studies from these partners will present an international collaborative approach to integrating GCED into teacher education, outlining supportive didactic and structural conditions for qualification processes.

## Keywords

Education for Sustainable Development; Global Citizenship Education; internationalisation of higher education; global/intercultural sensitivity; teacher education

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## 1. Introduction

In accordance with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4.7 (UN, 2015), Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) and Global Citizenship Education (GCED) represent viable strategies for addressing the multifaceted challenges of contemporary world society and for fostering a world community. These concepts are interrelated and mutually reinforcing, as they encompass both societal and educational transformation. This interrelationship provided the foundation for the Erasmus+ project “Global Sense – Developing Global Sensitivity Among Student Teachers”. This project aimed to equip students teachers<sup>1</sup> from the Nantes Université (France), the University of Education Weingarten (Germany), the Hebrew University of Jerusalem (Israel), the Université Libre de Bruxelles (Belgium) and the Temple University Philadelphia (USA) with the ability to holistically address GCED topics in their future classrooms through international exchange opportunities focusing on global challenges and their implications for future teaching practices within the context of sustainability and cosmopolitanism. Thus, “Global Sense” combined ESD/GCED as current international education policy with a further focus that has been a topic of common international requirements for a future-oriented university for some time now: the internationalisation of higher education (HE). In the following, against the backdrop of a brief overview of the internationalisation discourse in the participating countries, we will

provide a deeper insight into the conceptual considerations of “Global Sense” and aligned experiences on how to meet these requirements in the field of ESD with a special focus on GCED.

## 2. HE Internationalisation in Germany, France and Israel – a selective insight

Internationalisation has been described as “a vital aspect of higher education in the twenty-first century” (Klopper, 2020, para. 1). Thus, in *Germany*, due to national strategies (cf. a. o. HRK, 2008; BMBF & KMK, 2024) most higher education institutions now have well-developed internationalisation strategies and are trying to intensify their international cooperation with partner universities to provide international mobility opportunities for their own students as well as students from abroad. This shall improve the quality of vocational training for skilled workers and strengthen competitiveness on the international labour market. Moreover, in line with the discourse of transformative research, German universities increasingly see themselves as part of a transnational academic network in which societal challenges (such as sustainability and global justice) can be worked on across disciplinary boundaries (Bergmüller & Singer-Brodowski, 2023). These strategies partly seem to be successful: Germany is currently the third most popular country in the world to study in, and the num-

ber of international students at German universities is higher than ever before. However, at the same time, only five per cent of German students already spent some time studying abroad (DAAD & DZHW, 2024).

In *France*, internationalisation of higher education focuses on four main areas (Hugonnier, 2020): (1) as a lever to adjust the labour market by attracting talent, retaining international students and encouraging scientific immigration; (2) to improve the quality of higher education through internationalisation; (3) to generate export revenues for the economy and for the self-financing of institutions; (4) as a strategic tool of influence and of cooperation for development. This approach is therefore based on the idea that, in addition to seeking higher national prestige, internationalisation makes it possible to improve the efficiency, quality and relevance of education and research, with expected benefits for individuals in terms of quality of jobs and income levels, as well as for the economy in terms of competitiveness and growth. In 2022-2023 412,087 foreign students were enrolled in French higher education, an increase of 3% over one year and 17% over five years, and in 2021, more than 105,000 French students took part in mobilities.

It was in 2010, when *Israel* became a member of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) that ‘Internationalisation’ in HE policy started to be on the agenda of Israel’s Council of Higher Education (CHE), the national regulatory

<sup>1</sup> The project involved students in teacher education programmes for primary or secondary school at the participating partner universities (cf. chapters 4 and 5 for more details).

authority, or its funding arm, the Planning and Budgeting Committee (PBC). Until then, international student engagement related particularly to students from the Jewish diaspora (mainly from the United States). In 2016, the Office of Strategy and International Affairs was established focusing on the need to attract international students whose proportion was much lower than in OECD countries with an average of 9% of international students. So meanwhile, first tier higher education institutions (prestigious universities) as well as second tier institutions (community colleges, applied science schools) seek to increase their number of international students, broaden their international partnerships, and develop international research funds. Second-tier institutions with higher proportions of minority students – namely, Palestinian Arabs with Israeli citizenship – are interested in intercultural dimensions and often their internationalisation efforts are targeted towards managing the internal relations with this big group of students. They manage the intercultural dimension of internationalisation through peace-related initiatives, conflict resolution courses, and discussion groups, with the “other” being domestic students from a minority background. Universities do not seem to take interest in the intercultural dimension as an integral part of internationalisation. Here, internationalisation is treated as a feature of the higher education system’s competence that must be broadened and expanded (Yemini, 2017).

However, despite the prominence of HE internationalisation, also critiques have been expressed – especially concerning tendencies of neoliberalism (Bamberger et al., 2019), (neo)colonialism (Majee & Ress, 2020) and deficit narratives (Lomer & Mittelmeier, 2021). Against this backdrop, ESD and GCED as focus of international cooperation can contribute to overcome this critique and contribute to a dimension of HE internationalisation that goes beyond these shortenings and distortions. This potential will be outlined in the following – specially focussing on the context of teacher education.

### 3. GCED as theoretical framework

Global citizenship and related educational ideas as the base of the pedagogical concept of Global Sense have a long tradition dating back to antiquity and, from today’s perspective, are primarily associated with the European Enlightenment. The semantics of the underlying terms are discussed in various contexts: global/planet/world, citizenship beyond nations without a world state but within national education systems, education/learning, (re)colonisation (including debates on the value of indigenous knowledge), etc. (Akkari & Maleq, 2020; Lang-Wojtasik & Oza, 2020; Turner, 2020; Veugelers, 2011).

Thus, GCED is a concept of political and citizenship education as well as an umbrella-term to encompass

various transversal educational concepts like Education for Sustainable Development, Global Learning/Education, Inter-/Transcultural, Peace and Human Rights Education etc. (GENE, 2022; Wegimont, 2023). In this understanding the “primary aim of Global Citizenship Education (GCED) is nurturing respect for all, building a sense of belonging to a common humanity and helping learners become responsible and active global citizens. GCED aims to empower learners to assume active roles to face and resolve global challenges and to become proactive contributors to a more peaceful, tolerant, inclusive and secure world. [...]” (UN, 2023, para. 1). This is strongly connected with the circular and interconnected learning in a cognitive, socio-emotional and behavioural dimension (UNESCO, 2015, p. 14f.).

Against this backdrop, the following two postulates were important for the pedagogical design of Global Sense:

- GCED shall not merely focus on teaching content knowledge about the multiculturalism of the world, but also on enhancing students’ competencies to actively deal with such a multicultural world;
- Student teachers need to increase their own global competencies and reflect on their teaching as well as on their world views and their local and global social participation before teaching global competencies.

Both postulates refer to Vare et al. (2018) who derive as requirements for teacher education that teachers need a broad understanding of current global challenges and shall be enabled to “effectively engage their students in processes of positive social change” (ibid., p. 2). The will to encompass these postulates becomes obvious in the title ‘Global Sense’: With this title we wanted to refer to a feasible term that covers the core aspects of GCED – cognitive, socio-emotional, behavioural (UNESCO, 2020) and the context of the SDGs being referred to in the preamble – people, planet, prosperity, peace and partnership (UN, 2015). At the same time, we used the term ‘sense’ as a transition term between the dual role of teachers as human beings seeking their own positioning in the world, and teachers as future professionals helping others position themselves and face the challenges of the world.

Aligned with that, the Global Sense approach was also based on the work of Yemini et al. (2019), who indicate that “awareness of matters of national and international context (...) would be helpful for teachers in reflecting upon their role in educating students for global citizenship” (ibid., p. 88).

And: Research in Cultural Anthropology additionally outlines that (international) exchanges allow to change the perception of one’s own practices and to extend their meaning or form through cultural reinterpretation (Herskovits et al., 1947) i.e., in the case

of Global Sense, change the forms and meaning of GCED teaching practice.

#### 4. Global Sense – conceptual idea and didactical measures

Within the Erasmus+-Project “Global Sense – Developing Global Sensitivity Among Student Teachers” (2021 – 2024) the five partner universities developed an international, interdisciplinary learning setting that aimed at making student teachers competent in GCED by sensitising them to global issues, as well as to the implications of teaching these issues in their future classrooms. Furthermore, the project’s objective was to show the utility of international teaching cooperation and to sensitise student teachers to these matters as well. The pedagogical concept combined local (national, but also federal) and international materials, alternating phases of location-specific and international work, as well as individual and collective reflection. Over the course of the project, this concept was implemented in four rounds, reaching a total of 302 student teachers. Each round involved a four-stage process combining local seminars and international exchanges, which brought together student teachers from the participating countries (both virtually and on-site) in a collaborative, intercultural and interdisciplinary learning environment:

- In the *first* stage, the participants engaged in local seminars that introduced core global issues – specifically, “International Migration” and “Religion & Secularity” – and explored didactical approaches for addressing these topics.
- In the *second* stage, student teachers, working in tandems or small groups, developed lesson plans on self-selected topics related to the seminar themes. To support this learning process, the project consortium provided common didactic materials and a common lesson plan template.
- The *third* stage focused on synchronous international virtual exchanges facilitated by a teacher trainer from one of the partner universities. Here, the student teachers shared insights into national perspectives on the topics and discussed their lesson plans. These discussions aimed to foster both a broader understanding of global issues and a discussion of the challenges, pedagogical approaches, and implications of addressing global topics in their future classroom. A digital platform further facilitated asynchronous peer-to-peer interaction, allowing students to share feedback and insights on each other’s lesson plans.
- The *fourth* and final stage provided an explicit space for reflection. Participants were asked to write a short individual self-reflection on their experiences and their perceptions of how the international exchange has influenced their thinking about global challenges and their role as future teachers in teaching such topics. Additionally, fo-

cus groups were conducted within each participating country to allow collective reflection and sharing of experiences.

Alongside these virtual exchanges, a selected group of 13 students also had the opportunity to participate in on-site exchanges at the partner universities in Germany, France, or Belgium, allowing for a deeper exploration of the issues discussed.

## 5. Lessons learnt didactically and structurally

The scientific evaluation that accompanied the project pointed out several conceptual aspects that might inspire the discourse about implementing GCED and ESD in (international) HE. Four aspects shall be further outlined below that will also give a brief insight into the implementation strategies at four out of five of our participating universities:

### 5.1 Rhetoric and philosophy as context of GCED: the Université Libre de Bruxelles (ULB), Belgium

In French-speaking Belgium, (global) citizenship is part of the philosophy curriculum. So, the general orientation of citizenship within the curricula is mainly directed towards critical thinking and philosophical reflection on citizenship and civic engagement. Con-

sequently, within Global Sense at the ULB, a collaboration was initiated between the lecturer in charge of the Masters in Didactics in Philosophy and the rhetoric team of the ULB. Indeed, rhetoric, in its original form and in its contemporary rehabilitation, is closely linked to citizenship education (Chiron, 2019; Danblon et al., 2021) and tends to be revalorised as a possible school discipline that allows students to develop, among other things, critical thinking (Sevestre-Giraud, 2024) – one of the objectives presented in the teaching programme of philosophy and citizenship and also one of the main foci of GCED and ESD. Thus, the student teachers participating in Global Sense took part in rhetoric classes that introduced the question of global citizenship and how rhetoric could be a possible way to address issues related to global citizenship within a three-step session:

1. introducing the student-teachers to classical rhetoric, its pedagogical and civic foundations, and its resonance with contemporary rhetorical practice, both at the academic (more reflexive) level and at the pedagogical (more practical) level;
2. afterwards introducing students to the rhetorical exercise 'etopoeia', which is recognised as a possible way to emphasise openness to others, to consider another's point of view, and to include a reflection on the emotional components of argumentation, most notably empathy (Chiron, 2018). In the context of 'Global Sense', the student teachers were introduced to the notion of etopo-

eia – briefly, the written/verbal representation and embodiment of the words of a non-present speaker, from human character to natural elements and inanimate objects and abstraction, in the first person – through the problematic of global climate issues; and...

3. finally, in the third phase of the collaboration, asking the student teachers to write and present, in pairs, an etopoeia in which they would speak as if they were a natural element warning mankind about climate change.

However, although during the seminar the discussion and practical phases were quite lively and relevant to the issues faced by the student teachers, the rhetorical component was not as present in the lesson plans. This can be seen as a paradox: although rhetoric has been shown to be a possible way to address issues related to global citizenship (Vincent-Lacrin et al., 2020), it seems that its transfer and application in the classroom is, for the time being, mostly based on the presence of a rhetor and the long practice of it (Sans, 2017). So, the next step would be for rhetoricians to engage – as it has been done for example in the UK (see a. o. the project [Speaking Citizens](#)) – with ministerial and educational structures to re-integrate in a long-term form, rhetoric within the classroom (see also, the starting project "(Ré)enseigner la rhétorique, par qui ? comment?", within the framework of the [Collège de France: Agir pour l'éducation](#), where some of the researchers of the ULB are involved).

We believe that it is through projects such as Global Sense, and a collaboration between rhetoric and philosophy, and probably language classes (French class for Belgium and France for example, Italian class for Italy, German class for Germany, etc.), that rhetoric could enrich GCED and ESD.

*“My participation enabled me to think about the importance of dealing with diversity and alterity in my future classroom but also gave me the opportunity to have different reflections about how to teach students about global issues.” [Student teacher for secondary schools, male, ULB]*

*“Talking with future teachers from other countries made me realize that we, as future teachers, have the same goal: raising students’ awareness regarding these issues, which are central to today’s societies.” [Student teacher for secondary school, male, ULB]*

## 5.2 Inter- and transdisciplinary teaching cooperation in GCED: the Nantes University (NU), France

In France, citizenship education is very much focused on the French state and nation. However, certain parts of the curriculum are open to the outside world: see, for example, the fight against all forms of discrimination, the prevention of racism and anti-Semitism, environmental education and sustainable

development. Specifically, regarding the objective of building a civic culture, students in the eighth grade, for example, should be made aware “of individual and collective responsibility [that] can work in fruitful links with curricula of geography and life and earth sciences on the theme of development and sustainable development” (Ministry of National Education and Youth, 2024, p. 2). Or, in the seventh grade, in “connection with the history program, students identify the different stages that led to the construction of [the French] democratic state that is part of a democratic European Union” (Ministry of National Education and Youth, 2024, p. 3). And the values of the Republic (liberté, égalité, fraternité, laïcité), based on Article 1 of the 1789 Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, claim to be universal. Therefore, although the moral and civic education curricula are focused on French citizenship, the values they teach invite to reflect on and be concerned about global issues.

Against this backdrop, Global Sense at the NU was implemented in a moral and civic education course, focusing on civic education with the aim of promoting respect for others, teaching the values of the French Republic and building a civic culture. Of the students taking part in Global Sense, half were training to become secondary school history and geography teachers, and the other half to become senior education advisers. Additionally, the trainers participating in Global Sense used the time slots of their

English teaching colleagues, with their agreement, to propose a seminar on citizenship education and global issues in English. The participating trainers (one a history and geography trainer and the other a senior education adviser trainer) at first organised a half-day seminar for their own respective students. For a further half-day course, the trainers then grouped all their students together and divided them into inter-resp. transdisciplinary groups of four or five, half of whom were studying to become history and geography teachers and half of whom were studying to become Senior Education Adviser. In these groups, the students had to prepare their lesson plans together, which they then discussed with their peers from the other four partner universities in the international online exchange – for us a good way of getting sensitised for inter- and transdisciplinary cooperation in their future professional life.

*“In France global issues are usually taught by hist/geo:civics teacher, but now I see it can be taught by other teachers. Bringing teachers and students around a global issue for a week could bring cohesion.” (Student for senior education advisor, female, NU)*

### 5.3 Exploring GCED as a cross-disciplinary teaching principle: the University of Education Weingarten, Germany

In Germany, dimensions of GCED and ESD have meanwhile been included in the curricula of most federal states in Germany or will be included in upcoming revision processes. In the federal state of Baden-Württemberg, where the University of Education Weingarten is situated, ESD has been defined as a cross-disciplinary teaching principle in the educational plans of general education schools (Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports Baden-Württemberg, 2016) – containing an explicit reference to global citizenship and responsibilities within a global society: “Education for Sustainable Development empowers learners to make informed decisions and act responsibly to protect the environment, ensure a functioning economy and a just global society for current and future generations.” (ibid., translation by authors, para. 1)

Thus, at the University of Weingarten, a separate course on ‘Global Sense’ was set up as a compulsory elective seminar in the cross-cutting educational science programme for student teachers from different subjects, in concrete in a Masters’ module on ‘Education Innovation in transversal fields’. Here, the participants were qualified in terms of knowledge and cross-curricular didactics in the field of GCED (cf. Hitzelberger et al., 2023) and could gain experience

in the realisation of GCED as cross-disciplinary principle.

*“The discussion gave me another confirmation to teach global issues in primary school. [...] My goal is to deal with global issues in primary school because it is a topic that should be dealt in younger ages. We as a teacher shouldn’t be afraid, students have to learn complex issues and should understand that it is not easy because of its different perspectives.” [Student teacher for primary schools, female, UoE Weingarten]*

### 5.4 Dealing with ‘hot topics’: the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israel

In Israel, GCED is currently not included in the official curriculum of schools or in the matriculation exams. This absence may explain why GCED is not incorporated into teacher education programs at universities, which prepare future teachers to align their instruction with the mandatory guidelines set by the Ministry of Education (MOE). However, there are curricular connection factors, that justify GCED-perspectives in teacher education: So, e.g. it is in “Man-Geography and Environment”, a compulsory subject in middle school, that we see the global dimension integrated with local ones. “The field of study invites discussion on current issues that are on the national and global agenda in the areas of environment, society, cul-

ture, economy, regional planning, natural disasters, climate change, and more.”<sup>2</sup>

Beyond that, also in Civics as mandatory subject for the middle school matriculation exam, relations to GCED perspectives become visible: The overall objective of the new civics curriculum that started in 2023 is “to nurture good citizens in Israel – law-abiding individuals loyal to the state, caring, responsible, independently and critically thinking, committed to the fundamental values of the State of Israel as a Jewish and democratic state; aware of their rights, obligations, the characteristics of the regime, and what happens in their immediate and distant surroundings; humane, loving towards people, country, and state, and engaged in an informed and responsible manner in public affairs in order to preserve the good and improve what requires enhancement and correction in the country, society, and community” (Ministry of Education Israel, 2023, p. 4)

The first part of the curriculum therefore deals with the Declaration of Independence as the founding document of the State of Israel, with the characteristics of Israel as a Jewish and democratic state, and with key institutional aspects. This part will include the teaching of the topic of the regime in Israel, with an emphasis on the branches of government, as well as several representative symbols and laws. In the second part of the curriculum, two topics should be chosen among the following eight topics proposed:

<sup>2</sup> Source: [https://pop.education.gov.il/tchumei\\_daat/geography\\_adam\\_sviva/chativa-elyona/](https://pop.education.gov.il/tchumei_daat/geography_adam_sviva/chativa-elyona/)

(1) The State of Israel and the Diaspora, (2) Minorities in Israel, (3) Religion-State Relations, (4) Media and Democracy, (5) The Arab-Israeli Conflict and the Debate over it in Israeli Society, (6) International and Global Aspects, (7) Economics, Politics and Citizenship, and (8) the „Founding Fathers“. So, at least one elective topic, the sixth, explicitly deals with global issues (cf. [https://meyda.education.gov.il/files/Mazkirut\\_Pedagogit/ezrachut/hativadash.pdf](https://meyda.education.gov.il/files/Mazkirut_Pedagogit/ezrachut/hativadash.pdf)).

At the Hebrew University, the participants in Global Sense attended a didactic seminar on civic studies and the social studies-teaching course „Multicultural Civic Education: Global Perspective“ with a focus on the topics of citizenship and civic education. This course was the only one explicitly integrated with GCED concepts.

One didactical element in that course that should also be realised within the international online exchanges, and turned out to be an interesting tool to overcome the (future) teachers' reluctance of discussing socio-political topics and convey a critical global citizen education to their students, was the dialogical experience between student teachers on 'hot topics' (Kolikant & Pollack, 2009; Pollack & Ben-David Kolikant, 2012), i. e. topics that are supposed to be controversially discussed in a group.

These discussions forced the participants to reflect on their views on global issues and raised the stu-

dent teachers' awareness of the variety of GCED approaches, that differ largely between countries: from a teacher-centred approach to a more student-centred approach, from a lesson focusing on knowledge transmission to an emotionally focused one, from a lecturing type of lesson to a dialogical mode.

*“I couldn't become aware of such „emotional knowledge“ without interaction. It might even be that raw knowledge about the issues outside Israel cannot transfer such things successfully. This „Raw Knowledge“ and „Emotional Knowledge“ are things I would like to explore as a teacher.” [Student teacher for secondary schools, male, Israel]*

## 6. Conclusion

The results of the scientific evaluation of Global Sense show that the project provided participants with an international experience that allowed them to gain insights into different worldviews and didactic approaches: According to the student teachers who took part in the project, the international exchanges, in the light of the student teachers' respective national contexts, enabled them to become more aware of the political, social, cultural and economic relationships in their own country as well as in those represented by their peers. They felt empowered to critically reflect on these relationships and, at the same time, expressed that they had gained insight into dif-

ferent approaches to teaching (global) citizenship by discussing their lesson plans in an international perspective, thus enriching their own didactic expertise. They were sensitised to the learning challenges posed by current global and controversial political issues, as well as possible approaches to address these in their pedagogical work, and also shared their perceptions of the competencies they believe their students need to deal with global issues.

The findings show that teacher professionalisation in the field of ESD/GCED needs to enable teachers to develop not only subject knowledge but also corresponding personal convictions, values and competencies to authentically teach global issues. We could observe that there is a clear benefit for student teachers in engaging hands-on with authentic international interactions to overcome a cognition-based teaching and support didactical approaches with a socio-emotional and behavioural focus.

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