

# Chapter 8

## Global Citizenship Education in West Africa: A Promising Concept?



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**Abstract** From early 2010, the concept of Global Citizenship Education (GCE) has been mainstreamed into international discourse and to a lesser extent in national discourse. Alongside education for sustainable development and education for peace, GCE has become the new buzzword in international development policies. However, its implementation remains problematic, especially in contexts such as West Africa where it faces major challenges. The exogenous origin of GCE and the lack of local stakeholders' involvement could diminish the relevance of the concept. Moreover, many multi-ethnic West African countries are still facing issues surrounding national citizenship and citizenship education. In this chapter, we discuss the potential of GCE in Francophone West Africa by reviewing the scientific literature on the topic.

**Keywords** Education · Citizenship · Globalization · Africa

### Introduction

Our interest in international education agendas and their implementation in specific national contexts leads us to analyze the relevance of some of the targets of Agenda 2030 for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), such as global citizenship education (GCE). Indeed, this target is explicitly included in Goal 4.7 where we can read that, along with other knowledge and skills, learners should acquire global citizenship (UNESCO et al. 2015). More broadly speaking, since early 2010, the concept of GCE has been mainstreamed into international discourse and, alongside education for sustainable development and education for peace; it has become the new buzzword in international development policies.

In this chapter, we discuss the potential of GCE in Francophone West Africa by reviewing the scientific literature on the topic. As we have not found any empirical studies on this specific region, we have expanded our scope to include literature on

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Sub-Saharan Africa. Our chapter is divided into two parts that examine the two key terms of the concept: ‘citizenship’ and ‘global’. This division allows us to highlight the main challenges but also the potential of GCE in the aforementioned context. In a transversal way, we are interested in the role that basic education can play. Moreover, we question the supposed ‘Westernity’ of the concept of GCE while nevertheless considering its potential in the Francophone West African context.

## The Issue of Citizenship

Before addressing the issue of citizenship in West Africa, it is necessary to outline the general definition of GCE. UNESCO (2015), which has considerably deepened this concept in recent years, proposes a definition that is internationally authoritative (see *Introduction* chapter). But we must recall that behind this definition, there are some strong concepts like human rights, social justice, diversity, gender equality and environmental sustainability that learners must take ownership of. There is also the idea of empowerment among learners. In addition, it is important to note that according to this same organization, GCE has a universal scope (not only a Western one):

There are no contradictions between the two concepts of Citizenship and Global Citizenship Education because in practice, global citizenship is a set of universally shared principles that we are asked to apply in everyday actions. Therefore, it emphasises duty, what an individual must do in terms of responsibility and which is universally accepted. (UNESCO-Dakar 2015, p. 17; translated from French).

Although this definition considers the transformative and universal purpose of education, several authors note that what lies at the heart of GCE is Western-centric perspectivism (Abdi et al. 2015; De Oliveira Andreotti and de Souza 2012). The concept of global citizenship has become prominent in European and North-American governments, civil society and educational discourse. However, the hypothesis that this concept would achieve consensus between and within Western countries has not been validated. Firstly, not all Western countries have embraced this concept (essentially being a product of the United Nations and countries such as South Korea). Secondly, many European politicians are sceptical about its relevance, and even more so about its possible implementation: wouldn’t their national citizenship be enough in itself?

As it is the case for GCE, many authors consider citizenship at the international level to be a Western concept since the concept arose in Europe in the seventeenth century following the Treaty of Westphalia: “Citizenship is about the lives of citizens who act in a given national space on the basis of institutionally or otherwise agreed upon rights and responsibilities” (Abdi et al. 2015, p. 1). That being said, at

that time, and even later, Europe was made up of empires (Germanic, Austro-Hungarian, etc.) whose populations were considered to be subjects rather than citizens. Later, during the colonial era, metropolitan people were considered full citizens (or almost considering that women did not have the right to vote), while colonized peoples were second-class citizens.

One of the major issues raised in the literature is that African national territories are inherited from colonisation and have always been a source of tension. Indeed, state borders were drawn artificially by foreign colonial powers without considering ethnic, linguistic, cultural or religious identity. Here again, we should bear in mind that most European borders are also arbitrary. For instance, the French national territory was established artificially imposing a shared sense of national identity, particularly in the case of the Alsace region and Corsica. If we take the case of Mali in West Africa, the country experienced the emergence of powerful empires from the fourth century, namely, the Malian empire, the Ghanaian empire and the Songhai empire. This was followed by a succession of small States that gained independence. In the second half of the nineteenth century, France gradually colonised all three kingdoms. The last empire fell in 1890 when French Sudan was created which in turn fell in 1946 (Kamissoko 2007).

According to Manby (2009), colonisation challenged the sense of membership in African communities as the creation of Nation-States with arbitrary boundaries brought together communities with diverse cultural backgrounds. These myriad identities pose challenges for citizenship laws based on equal rights and recognition. Rich Dorman (2014) notes that citizenship in Africa has been increasingly contested since the end of the Cold War and has been a source of violent political and democratic struggles throughout the continent. The denial of the rights of citizens, such as measures to prevent citizenship participation in social and political life, has been at the heart of many of the social and political upheavals in post-independence Africa. Manby (2009) pointed out that the struggle of stateless people in the Côte d'Ivoire led the country into years of civil war. In Mali, the absence of a State as well as ethnic tensions fuelled by jihadists resulted in violent attacks on Dogon, Fulani and other villages in early 2019. The Malian government is struggling to contain the country's unrest and ethnic tensions and has still not clarified its position.

According to Quaynor (2018), "there have been particular critiques that current frameworks for understanding citizenship fail to account for civic understandings and practices in both African and Afro-Diasporic societies" (p. 362). Thus, defining citizenship from a European historical perspective, such as that found in the United Nations Charter of Human Rights, runs the risk of losing conceptions of rights and participation that are important in particular contexts. Thus, beyond the question of borders, some rights, particularly the right to vote and women's rights, differ in strength and distribution according to the region. For example, the notion of voting as democratic participation can be largely symbolic and does not actually confer power to citizens to elect their political leaders, as can be noted in studies from different African societies. Citizenship laws in Africa were modelled on those of the European colonial States and some of the principles of citizenship inherited from

colonisation still remain in parts of Africa. This can be seen in laws that favoured men (mothers could not pass their citizenship on to their children if the father was not a citizen), whereas Indigenous African practices privileged identity based on matrilineal descent (Manby 2009).

This begs the question whether or not citizenship should not be stabilised in West Africa before considering GCE – or at least address local conflicts and guarantee citizens' rights. Is it not a chimera to create citizenship rights that would be recognized on an international scale?: “Any attempt to transpose the notion of citizenship beyond the Nation-State to the global level thus becomes even more problematic, particularly from a legal perspective” (Tawil 2013, p. 2). The challenges of national citizenship, caused by social, political and ethnic tensions, are such that we must ask ourselves whether GCE is not an additional burden. However, GCE could also be seen as a way to overcome tensions related to national citizenship (Akkari 2018). For example, in research conducted in Liberia, students and teachers reported few global ties, and they overwhelmingly associated citizenship with the Nation-State. Nonetheless, most of the students had transnational affiliations with football teams and considered the world outside their nation as a source of knowledge (Quaynor 2015a). One may even wonder if GCE may provide a means of freeing the country and its citizens from former colonial dominance, still very present even decades after independence, by promoting the idea that we do not belong to a country (the former colony) but to the world.

In any case, promising experiences in terms of citizenship have taken place in Francophone West Africa. For instance, in Burkina Faso, a political movement called the “Citizens’ Broom” (Balai citoyen) emerged in 2013 and called for all citizens to clean up the country. The symbol of a broom made of many twigs reflects the idea that an isolated citizen can do nothing but gathered together citizens can ‘clean up the mess’. This movement aims, among other things, to promote citizen consciousness, to control the actions of elected officials and public authorities, to improve social assistance and to preserve the environment. This type of action has not only a national scope but can have an international impact to the extent that ecological dimensions are taken into account (Monde Diplomatie 2015).

Moreover, there has been an effort to promote citizenship education in Francophone West African contexts and some studies have confirmed the advantages of this. Bleck’s (2015) research in Mali revealed that education of any type (including informal and Islamic schooling) plays an important role in empowering citizens as democratic agents. Simply put, students know more about politics than their peers who have not attended school. Education also appears to bolster parents’ participation. Citizenship education is even more pronounced in emerging democracies and post-conflict environments. For instance, less than 50% of people interviewed in a research on citizenship education in Liberia expressed trust in governmental institutions, local government officials, the police and political parties (Quaynor 2015b).

But once again, citizenship education must be able to bring about a change in pupils and students, who will be the citizens of the future – this implies a guarantee of a certain quality of teaching and learning. Quality in education remains a major

issue in Francophone West African school contexts compounded by low levels of enrolment and decreased quality of initial and in-service teacher training. Recently, the duration of teacher training courses has decreased significantly and teachers' satisfaction is often low. Furthermore, insufficient mastery of educational content and low levels of pedagogical competence affects student learning outcomes (Akyeampong et al. 2011). Even if the competency-based approach was implemented in national educational systems several years ago, getting pupils or students actively involved in complex tasks is challenging due to oversized classes and the traditional teacher-dominated instructional practices which emphasize recitation and memorisation (Lauwerier 2018):

We cannot use traditional teaching methods, which are limited to “knowledge transfer”, for that. We believe that we should enter a transformative learning system, making use of transformative pedagogy that leads to real personal and social change (cf. Sterling 2014). This in turn is another major challenge for Cameroon to face: to have consequently qualified trainers. And that is another story (Foaleng 2015, p. 22).

Since quality education is a primary instrument for citizenship, it is essential in the context of Francophone West Africa to raise the issue of the language of instruction. Indeed, despite the students, teachers and teacher trainers poor French language proficiency and the attempts to introduce national African languages in basic education systems, French remains the official medium of instruction. As a result, Lauwerier's (2018) study showed that few pupils adopt a proactive role or volunteer to answer the teacher's questions. Although they do repeat words or sentences when asked to, they do not always understand the meaning of what they are repeating. Despite these language comprehension difficulties, teacher do not encourage the use of the pupil's mother tongue since all school materials, including national assessments and examinations are in French. This highlights the importance of mother tongue education to effectively implement active citizenship education and form pupils who are capable of thinking about what it means to be a citizen in their own contexts (Lauwerier 2018).

After arguing that considering issues of citizenship and the quality of education should be prerequisites for implementing GCE in Francophone West Africa, we now reflect on the ‘global’ aspect of the concept.

## The Issue of Global

Behind the concept of global citizenship is the idea of the place and role of citizens in an increasingly global world. However, we know that in this globalized context, there are winners and losers, and that the balance is generally tilted against Africa, which does not fully enjoy the supposed benefits of the new global economy:

While we have achieved, through massive economic, cultural and technological globalizations, which by and large, has benefited wealthy northern countries and their corporations, there has been much devastation on the immediate lives and overall ecological locations of Indigenous populations (Abdi et al. 2015, p. 3).

In this context, can African people really feel part of a global community?

Yet, Youemura (2015) believes that the concept of global citizenship makes sense in Africa, given the continent's challenges for the planet: "The rising issues, such as population growth, youth bulge, urbanisation, climate change and inequalities have urged policymakers to re-prioritise their policies" (p. 74). Nevertheless, how will GCE support this transformation? Generally speaking, GCE, including in the Global North, has been considered within a minimalist framework, which at best would view global citizenship as a salve to solve the social and ecological challenges of globalization:

The common sense of education has been limited to the skills and knowledge that best serve market interests and practices. Given neoliberalism's embrace of possessive individualism, citizenship around the globe has been conflated to narrowly define common good as being solely based upon self-interest (Torres and Dorio 2015, p. 5).

In this way, GCE fits into neoliberal logic and is not unrelated to the aims of education at the global level, and in particular, those of the international organisations operating in Francophone West Africa. If we take the case of the World Bank, omnipresent for decades in this context, economic growth is at the heart of its concerns for education: "Simply put, investments in quality education lead to more rapid and sustainable economic growth and development" (World Bank 2011, p. v). In this respect, globalization, increasing in importance over time, will validate the World Bank's emphasis on education: "At the same time, the stunning rise of new middle-income countries has intensified the desire of many nations to increase their competitiveness by building more skilled and agile workforces" (World Bank 2011, p. 2). From this point of view, the organisation's priority is not to bring about profound transformations in response to global social and environmental issues. National governments in the present context often blindly repeat the discourse of international organisations, implying that GCE will remain at a superficial level. If we consider the discourse related to environmental issues from the World Bank, education would rather prepare students for a tsunami than suggest an alternative ecological model: "Comparing countries with similar income and weather conditions, those countries with better-educated female populations are more capable of coping with extreme weather events than countries with low levels of female education" (World Bank 2011, p. 13). Even UNESCO, less powerful in Africa than the World Bank but very active on GCE issues, seems to be uneasy with the conflict between economic growth and ecological issues as the organisation is concerned with the link between investing in education and its effects on economic growth (Lauwerier 2017). As Swanson (2015) suggested, it is imperative to distinguish neoliberalised approaches to GCE from critically engaged forms of GCE:

Global citizenship education has a task of educating, not only for global citizenship in its institutionalized and historically normalized categories, but as well or even more importantly now, for global social justice as part of being a citizen with undeniable basic rights irrespective of where you reside on planet earth (Abdi et al. 2015, p. 3).

In addition to this neoliberal vision of education, some authors consider the conceptions of the GCE as uncritically embracing “the normative teleological project of Western/Enlightenment humanism, which is deeply invested in the production of rational unanimity and unequivocal knowledge in regard to conceptualizations of humanity/human nature, progress and justice” (De Oliveira Andreotti and de Souza 2012, p. 2). For instance, on ecological issues, it is important to note that traditional beliefs such as animism, still practiced in many African contexts, are respectful of the environment. However, here again, globalization that has resulted in massive urbanisation and the use of intensive agriculture has generated environmental degradations and downplayed society’s values of respect for nature.

Another criticism of GCE and its ‘global’ nature concerns the usual classroom practices in Francophone West Africa. Indeed, GCE implies not locking oneself into simply local issues but instead opening up to the rest of the world. However, Lauwerier (2018) study in Senegal shows that there is a gap between what the curriculum suggests in terms of learners’ decentration and classroom practices. In addition, the study shows that teachers struggled to cover topics in curricula such as the philosophy of the Lumières and Pasteur’s vaccine of which they had little knowledge. In this respect, the majority of teachers that took part in this research stated that they mainly covered issues related to Senegal, as they were not well informed about foreign issues, even in neighbouring countries.

While taking into account these criticisms, we believe that the concept of GCE provides some relevant ideas to today’s global challenges – for example, that the world is not binary. The dynamics of society’s construction invite us to accept that concepts such as the GCE can make sense in contexts where they have not necessarily emerged. As suggested by Kane (1961) in his book “Ambiguous Adventure”, African society is torn between the desire maintain to cultural roots and the desire to embrace thoughts and values coming from elsewhere, including from the colonising countries.

It is interesting to note that the concept of GCE has already been incorporated into many reports and declarations at the national and regional levels in Africa as we can see in the two following examples:

The GCE framework adopted in the Kigali Declaration at the end of the Ministerial Conference on Education Post-2015 for Sub-Saharan Africa that took place in Rwanda in February 2015:

Priority areas highlighted in the statement include equitable and inclusive access for all; inclusion, equity and gender equality; teachers and teaching; educational quality and learning outcomes; science, technology and skills development; education for sustainable development and global citizenship education; youth and adult literacy, skills and competencies for life and work; financing, governance and partnerships; education in crisis situations (ADEA 2015).

We can see that GCE is explicitly listed as a key priority and therefore considered relevant for Francophone West African educational policies.

On a more concrete level, UNESCO-Dakar has implemented GCE related programs in West Africa and the Sahel on issues such as migration and the challenges of integrating refugees and migrants in host countries. These programs cover

different policy areas, including the protection of human rights and migrant employment as well as national security and social cohesion. UNESCO-Dakar implementation strategy focuses on capacity building for decision-makers, teacher trainers, curriculum development and advocacy (UNESCO-Dakar 2018).

Beyond the question of whether GCE is a fruitful concept for Francophone West Africa, it is perhaps more interesting to look at the key aims of GCE. From this point of view, we can see that many of its principles are historically rooted in African thought.

For instance, the non-governmental organisation (NGO) Oxfam's international framework for GCE aims to use a transformative approach based on social justice and by proposing key elements for 'responsible global citizenship':

- *“Knowledge and understanding:* social justice and equity; diversity; globalization and interdependence; sustainable development; peace and conflict.
- *Skills:* critical thinking; ability to argue effectively; ability to challenge injustice and inequalities; respect for people and things; co-operation and conflict resolution.
- *Values and attitudes:* sense of identity and self-esteem; empathy; commitment to social justice and equity; value and respect for diversity; concern for the environment and commitment to sustainable development; belief that people can make a difference” (Oxfam 2006, p. 4).

These elements do not a priori contradict the idea of having global objectives that do not come into contradiction with African values.

In this respect, Geldenhuys (2013) and Waghid (2018) identified three aspects in the various existing definitions of GCE that are similar to what is said in African discourses: “a participatory form of human attunement in relation to recognising people's rights and identities; a human rights discourse that counteracts war crimes, crimes against humanity, and crimes against peace in an atmosphere of an openness to culture and democratic public life; an equal moral respect to all humans discourse” (Waghid 2018, p. 98).

Beyond the possible application of GCE in Francophone West Africa, we can also highlight existing theories and practices in sub-Saharan Africa that are similar to the concept of GCE. Indeed, it is more interesting to see which concepts build a bridge between common values rather than focusing on GCE in itself: “It is important to consider that Indigenous knowledges and practices have rich traditions regarding citizenship and education” (Quaynor 2018, p. 373).

From this point of view, according to the recent UNESCO report (2018) *Taking it Local*, there are national/local/traditional concepts whose purpose is to promote ideas that reflect those at the heart of GCE. Two examples in the African context can be taken from this report. The first one refers to the Charter of Manden in Mali:

Born from a context of diversity of ethnicity and faith, the Charter of Manden provides guidance on how to respectfully and peacefully interact with other cultures and societies, thereby illustrating notions that are key to GCED, namely respect for diversity and solidarity (UNESCO 2018, p. 3).



The other example mentioned by UNESCO is the South African concept of *Ubuntu*, which means ‘I am because we are – we are because I am’. This concept has also been linked to GCE by other authors:

*Ubuntu* philosophy, with its emphasis on a social African humanism and spiritual way of collective being, provides the possibilities for replacing, reinventing and reimagining alternatives to the current destructive path of increasing global injustice, as it also offers opportunities to decolonize recuperative global citizenship discourses and coercive Western epistemologies (Swanson 2015, p. 33).

Thus, we believe that GCE is not a completely abstract concept for the context of Francophone West Africa.

## Conclusion

Despite its exogenous nature, we have seen that GCE can be considered a promising concept for Francophone West African educational systems and can be linked to related African concepts such as *Ubuntu*. Nevertheless, GCE programs can not overlook the challenges of citizenship (internal conflicts, citizens’ rights, types of pedagogy,...) and globalization (global inequality, in-depth change,...) in Francophone West Africa, which could potentially undermine its spread.

To further understand these challenges, we are currently conducting research to shed light on the potential relevance of this concept in Francophone West Africa, particularly in Senegal. To this end, we are analyzing to what extent the Ministry of education has integrated international discourse to propose relevant guidelines in national policy documents. We will complete this analysis through interviews conducted in Senegal with officials from the Ministry of Education on the one hand and representatives of international organisations, particularly UNESCO on the other. This will enable us to better understand their conceptualisation of GCE and its potential operationalisation.

We would like to conclude this chapter by identifying Francophone West Africa’s many educational challenges that we have not addressed. For instance, access to basic education still remains a major issue throughout the region. After more than 50 years of independence, West African countries have made significant progress in access to basic education, moving from a net rate of no more than 10% in the 1960s to a rate of 70–90% today. Nevertheless, these advances mask the fact that there are still too many out-of-school children and important gender inequalities and rural/urban disparities.

The region also faces serious challenges in terms of pupils’ learning outcomes as many children struggle to become literate despite having had access to schooling. The findings from the Programme for the Analysis of Education Systems of CONFEMEN (PASEC) on Francophone Sub-Saharan countries show large disparities between regions in terms of pupils’ learning outcomes. Indeed, on average in the 10 countries covered by these studies, more than 70% of the children in second

grade were below the sufficient competency threshold in early primary language (47% in mathematics). Moreover, 12.4% of the pupils had great difficulty (below the first level of this test) in language (16.2% in mathematics). By the end of primary school, two out of three students did not have sufficient proficiency in French. The same ratio was true for their competencies in mathematics as 27% of students had great difficulty in this subject (PASEC 2015). These results are indisputable evidence of a learning outcomes crisis in the majority of Francophone Sub-Saharan countries despite the efforts made in terms of access and resources allocated to early education. We therefore would like to conclude with the following reflection:

We are here in a society with schools that have 3 out of 4 students who would have difficulty reading; with predominantly illiterate adults who are abandoned to themselves in terms of education; in a society where the notion of citizenship has no meaning for the many and where resignation and resourcefulness reign as the main features of African postcolonial societies. How to proceed in such a society in order to hope that people can efficiently gain access (that is to say, in a transformative manner) to global citizenship? (Foaleng 2015, p. 21).

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