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Exploring Global Citizenship in English Language Teaching : Insights from Undergraduate Students in Japan

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Exploring Global Citizenship in English Language Teaching: Insights from Undergraduate Students in Japan

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Abstract

With English having the largest number of speakers worldwide, the integration of global citizenship education (GCE) into English Language Teaching (ELT) was inevitable. By testing students' beliefs and values, GCE enhances their critical thinking, cultural sensitivity, social accountability, and linguistic proficiency, giving them confidence to weigh in on worldly topics. With this in mind, a brand-new global issues and current events course was built using a global citizenship framework as part of a newly launched Global Engagement Program at Kansai Gaidai University. Through a qualitative analysis of student feedback gathered via an end-of-course survey, this case study examines 70 undergraduate students' perspectives on the very first implementation of the course, indicating positive perceptions of course design, materials, assessments, and the instructor's approach. Results also support content and language integrated learning (CLIL) as effective in GCE. The study concludes by advocating for GCE as a transformative approach in ELT.

Keywords: global citizenship education, global citizenship, global engagement, global education, ELT

Introduction

With almost 1.5 billion speakers of English worldwide (Ethnologue), it was only a matter of time before global citizenship made its way into English Language Teaching (ELT) classrooms. Integrating global citizenship into ELT curricula not only enhances students' linguistic abilities to discuss global issues but also fosters critical thinking, cultural awareness, and social responsibility. English is a lingua franca, and the benefits of learning another language have been well-documented. Still, it's worth pointing out that language learning can help to develop students' intercultural competence through exposure to different cultural perspectives and practices (Byram, 2015). Thus, taking a global education approach to ELT cultivates a generation of globally aware and culturally sensitive individuals with the ability and potential to thrive in an interconnected world. It not only increases their academic and

professional prospects but also empowers them to become informed and active participants in addressing global challenges.

It is with all of this in mind that the College of Global Engagement (CGE) was launched at Kansai Gaidai University in the Spring 2023 semester. Seventy-five local Japanese students were admitted in its first semester as part of the English for Global Citizens (EGC) Program, an intensive English program (IEP) designed to advance these students' English skills as they continue their English-medium studies in the CGE and prepare for a study abroad experience. This paper presents a qualitative analysis of their perceptions of a new course offered for the first time in the Fall 2023 semester as part of the EGC program: Global Communication II. This course focuses on exploring global issues and current events from a global perspective. The purpose of this paper is to highlight the importance of a global education framework in English language instruction with reference to students' perceptions and feedback.

Literature Review

The world has never been more connected than it is right now thanks to globalization, and this has raised questions about what it means to be a global citizen and the role it should play in education. Though it has evolved over time since it arose in the 1970s, global education can be defined as “education which promotes the knowledge, attitudes and skills relevant to living responsibly in a multicultural, interdependent world” (Fisher & Hicks, 1985, p. 8, as cited in Cates, 2022a, p. 3). Building upon that, UNESCO (2015, p. 14) asserts that global citizenship “refers to a sense of belonging to a broader community and common humanity” and draws upon three conceptual domains: cognitive (knowledge and critical understanding of local, national, and global issues), socio-emotional (solidarity, empathy, and respect for diversity), and behavioral (acting responsibly at local, national, and global levels). Thus, it can be said that a true global citizen “understands how the world works, values differences in people, and works with others to find solutions to challenges too big for any one nation” (UNESCO, 2024). The benefits of a global citizen approach to ELT are numerous (Bosio, 2024; Cates, 2022a, 2022b; Galinova, 2015; Hillyard, 2008; Oxfam, 2015; UNESCO, 2015, 2024) which, in addition to those mentioned above, can include:

- engaging learners through the use of real-life stories and situations with intentionally selected topics, materials, and/or even guest speakers

- emphasizing political, economic, social, and cultural interdependency between the local, the national, and the global
- gaining a deeper understanding of systems of inequalities and historical events that underpin current developments
- motivating learners to be more curious about the world and their role in it
- putting knowledge into practice and making it relevant to learners' realities
- nurturing learners' critical language awareness by exploring how language is used to represent the world and the ways people experience it
- preparing learners to appreciate the nuances of language and the complex interactions between language and culture
- exposing learners to newer teaching approaches like project-based learning and experiential learning
- fostering opportunities for service learning and other volunteer work
- promoting qualities like open-mindedness, inquisitiveness, truth-seeking, sound judgment, self-confidence, and systematicity
- developing effective communication, critical literacy, and critical thinking abilities
- contributing to the holistic development of the learner.

The aim of global citizenship education is to be transformative, to expose students to the world, its peoples, and its problems through dynamic lessons that test and expand their knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values so that they can mold a more inclusive, sustainable world. As such, Cates (2022a) posits that the three key content areas encompassed by global education are geographic literacy (knowledge of the world's people and places, including where they are on a map), world themes (international topics shared by the world's peoples, countries, and cultures), and global issues (developing an understanding of important world problems). The author took this framework into great consideration when building the Global Communication II course, which students reflected on in this paper. Furthermore, Bosio (2024) outlines six pedagogical priorities that can be seamlessly integrated into these content areas and guide teachers in their approach: cultural context integration, critical language awareness, global issues exploration, intercultural communication competence, reflection and dialogue, and real-world application. The work of these two researchers is quite complimentary, with Bosio's six pedagogical priorities being the meat on Cates's content area bones. With this in mind, this case study addresses the following research question:

RQ1: What were students' perspectives on the course, including its topics, design, assessments, and overall effectiveness?

Background and Methodology

This case study involves a new course called Global Communication II, which has more of a content and language-integrated learning (CLIL) design than a traditional skills-based or integrated skills-oriented IEP course. In CLIL courses, language and content go hand-in-hand; content subjects are taught in the target language, and as a result, knowledge of the target language becomes the means of learning content (Darn, n.d.). Content can include materials that are modified for second language learners as well as authentic materials, with teachers using instructional strategies to assist learners with unknown language and accommodate the second language focus overall (Coyle et al., 2010). Thus, Global Communication II was built using content that exploits opportunities for language learning, and as such, students learned English by studying content-based subjects. No coursebook was used; instead, content was developed and selected to revolve around a range of global issues and current events, focusing on topics and themes related to human rights, displaced people, UNESCO challenges, peacekeeping and conflict resolution, big data, as well as the United Nations. Project-based learning, in which students engage through the act of inquiry (Leat, 2017, as cited in Laverick, 2018), was a key aspect of the course, and there were three speaking assessments that encouraged students to use input from class: creating a poster presentation for a simulated mini-conference on human rights; planning and recording a video as imagined famous YouTubers who have a popular YouTube channel to discuss a chosen global issue with guests; and role playing as journalists who must analyze and present on a current global conflict. These projects, which were done both in and out of class, required them to hone and refine their skills (Laverick, 2018), particularly their critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and language skills. Other assessments included theme-based quizzes and a portfolio of students' classwork, which included eight Current Events assignments. Current Events were an almost weekly in-class activity that required students to choose a news story from an approved English news website, analyze it, present and discuss it in small groups called News Circles, and reflect on the group discussion. This was a demanding task that required students to spend a significant amount of prep time tending to language items within the article and answering a worksheet with guiding questions about the article's content to

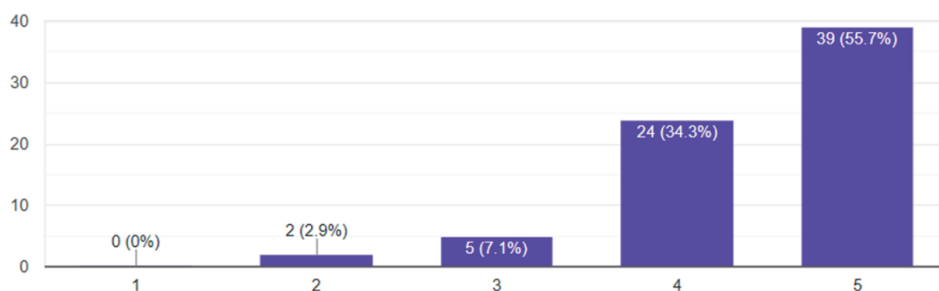
help focus their group discussions. These tasks in particular aimed not only to develop their summarizing, paraphrasing, skimming, scanning, language, and conversational skills through authentic and meaningful input but also to increase their world knowledge and empathy.

In the Fall 2023 semester, the EGC course, Global Communication II, was delivered for the first time. There were 73 local, first-year CGE students who were enrolled, and they were placed into one of four different classes according to their English proficiency scores on an in-house placement exam. Their levels ranged from native speaker to B1 on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). In order to analyze their perceptions of the course, an anonymous online survey was given at the end of the semester. The survey questions covered a variety of topics, including course assessments, specific in-class activities, the development of skills and world knowledge, relevance of course themes, overall enjoyment of the course, and even timing and pacing. The survey was posted on the course's e-component, Blackboard LMS, for students to do in their free time, and 70 students responded. Honesty and openness were encouraged, and as such, anonymity was emphasized in order to persuade students to share their true feelings and opinions. The survey consisted of eight Likert-scale questions, from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5), and two open-ended questions that allowed them to elaborate on their responses in more detail. The goal of the survey was to collect student feedback on various aspects of the Global Communication II course to gauge the success (or lack thereof) of its first implementation and to identify areas that may require adjustment for the next time the course is delivered in the following fall semester.

Results and Analysis

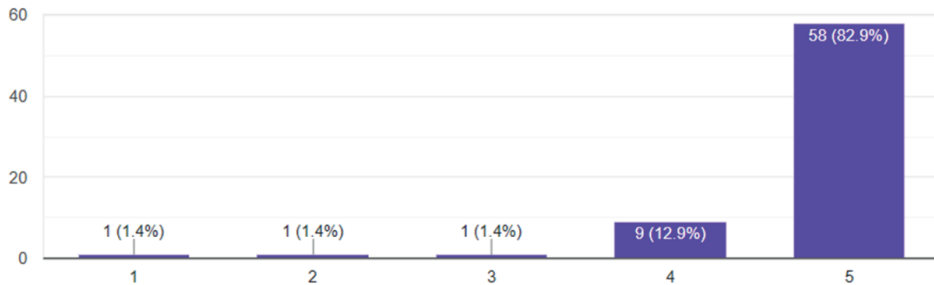
1. This course supported my language skills.

70 responses



2. This course developed my knowledge of the world.

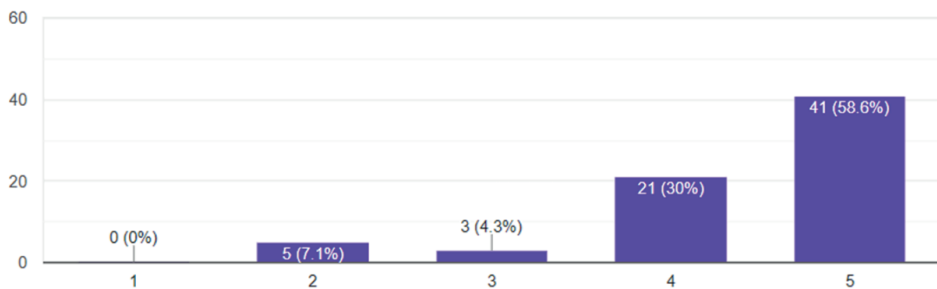
70 responses



The results of Questions 1 and 2, with a 90% and 95.8% positive response rate, respectively, indicate a strong positive impact of the Global Communication II course on both language skills and world knowledge among students. This high level of satisfaction in both areas underscores the course's comprehensive approach to global citizenship education, highlighting that through CLIL, students were able to acquire the target language when seen in real-life contexts that broaden their world views (Darn, n.d.).

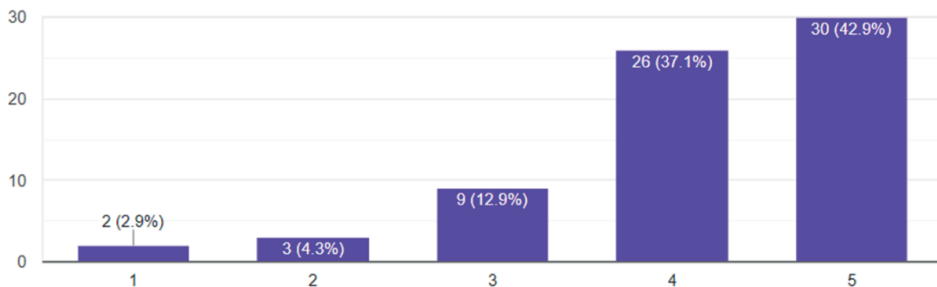
3. The Current Event assignments (news article analysis) were beneficial for me.

70 responses



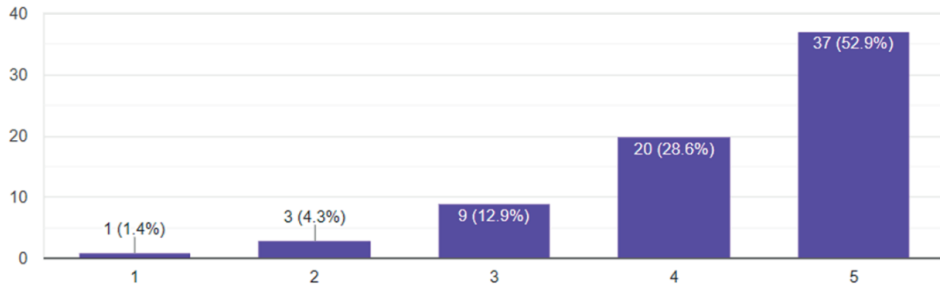
4. I enjoyed talking about the news during News Circles discussions.

70 responses



5. The Speaking Assessments (Human Rights Poster Presentation, YouTube Talk Show, and Conflict Analysis Presentation) improved my academic skills.

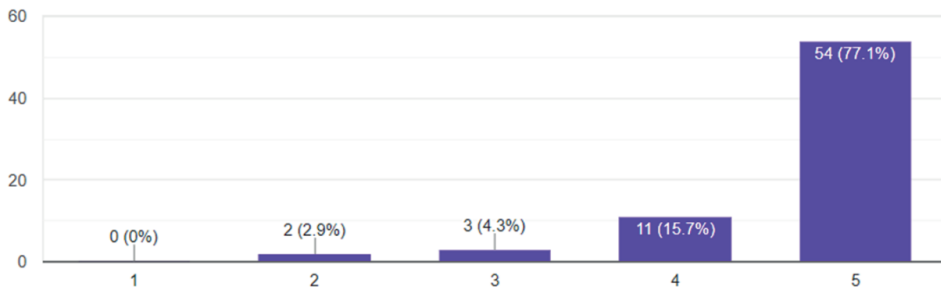
70 responses



As seen from Questions 3-5, at least 80% of students had positive experiences with the assessments and current events activities designed for this course. These results suggest that the evaluations were well-received and that students perceived them as engaging and valuable in reinforcing their learning on the whole. While comments in Question 9 suggest students may need more guidance in this area, the evaluation tools in this course are effective.

6. The themes and topics we discussed in this course were interesting and relevant to today's world.

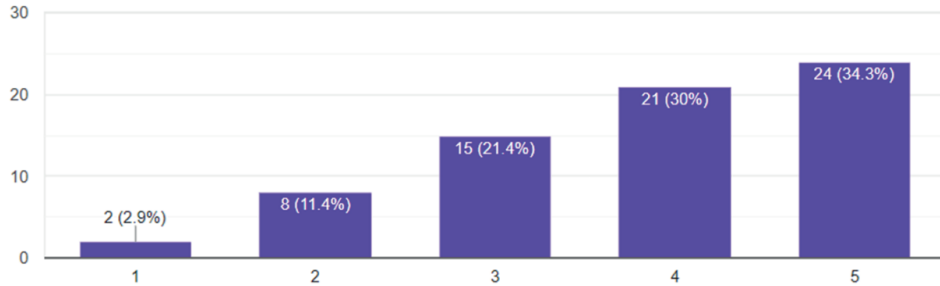
70 responses



Over 90% of students agreed with Question 6 to some extent. Such strong endorsement of the course content indicates that the themes and topics addressed throughout the semester resonated deeply with students. They elaborated on these ideas further in Question 10.

7. The amount of time and energy that this course required from me was REASONABLE.

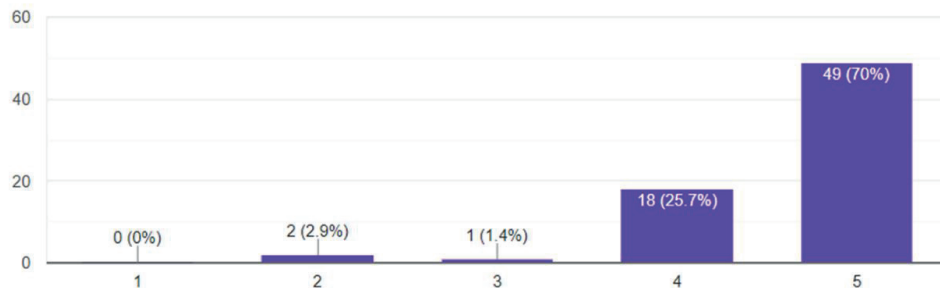
70 responses



The results of Question 7 are extremely valuable when considering adjustments that need to be made before the course is delivered again. While coursework should push students, it should also be realistic, giving students time to experiment with, refine, reflect on, and consolidate what they have learned. If students are to produce quality work, implementing a realistic approach to learning and application is key. This is further discussed in the analysis of Question 9.

8. Overall, I enjoyed this course.

70 responses



The 96% approval rate from 70 students for Question 8 is representative of the course's success. This was achieved through a harmonious blend of meaningful topics, engaging materials, ample opportunities for language development, pushing students outside of their comfort zones, and a nurturing, safe learning environment in which to put it all together. Students further elaborated on their experiences in Question 10.

9. What changes could be made to improve the course?

70 responses

1. I wanted to need time to prepare for speaking assignment during the class
2. I want interval between presentation. The time between Speaking Assessment 2 and Speaking Assessment 3 period is too short, so we can't prepare for these enough.
3. Tell us the whole course assignments at first class so that we can make a plan.
4. I wanted you to tell me about the due date for presentation more beforehand so that we can prepare with time.
5. We need more time to prepare presentation.
6. Please take time in class to prepare speaking assignments
7. Setting Current Event per each 2 weeks
8. I really satisfied with this course. But one thing I want to tell is that I wanted you to give more time to prepare for assignment in class. And I wanted to know information about order of presentation as soon as possible.
9. The speaking assignments were too hard to do out class. Therefore, it's better to provide more time to prepare the assignments in class.
10. I wanted more time to prepare presentation.
11. more time to prepare the final projects
12. The amount of assignment was appropriate, but I wanted more time to prepare.
13. In class, I want you to take more time for us for preparation of our Speaking Assessment. It was so hard to prepare for our presentations almost outside of the class.
14. Use textbooks in the class might improve this course.
15. It would be helpful for students if you give students to time to prepare speaking assessments in class.
16. I would like to have more time to do SA during classes.
17. I think news circle should be one with two weeks. It's so hard to do news circle every week, and it's more deeply to research if we have two weeks.
18. I would like you to put some videos you had shown us in your class on Blackboard because sometimes I could not hear or understand the contents of the videos.
19. On news circle assignment, it was sometimes difficult for me to choose article, so if there were some recommend article or topic, it would be easier and be able to

know from different topics.

20. Due date of assignments should be extended because it sometimes too short for me.
21. Most of us had a hard time with coming up with questions to ask other students during current events. I don't really have an idea how to change this but I just wanted to point it out because I had a hard time with it.
22. maybe reduce the times we do the news article
23. Less homework..? I guess
24. Take some time to work on speaking assessments in class. It is difficult to do all of the work out of class especially collaborating projects.
25. Sometimes I had been feeling overwhelmed by the tons of homework, overall I'm really satisfied with your classes.

Though Question 9 was a mandatory question, some students chose to leave it blank. Others responded with answers like “nothing” or gave responses that were not about the course. For these reasons, a smaller selection of only the most relevant comments have been shared. The results of this question, in addition to those of Question 7, show an overwhelming call for more preparation time for the assessments and Current Events assignments. As such, adjustments will be made for this when the course is delivered again in the following fall semester, including changes to the course schedule and number of Current Event assignments. Other comments were related to having access to course materials on Blackboard, wanting more guidance with Current Event article analysis and News Circle discussions, and, as expected, reducing the amount of homework. Interestingly, comment 14 suggested one way to improve the course is to use a coursebook. However, while students may be used to the convenience of coursebooks, the author deliberately did not incorporate one to allow for the exploration of more diverse topics and sources of information through lessons and materials that were more tailored to their needs.

10. Please write your opinions or other comments about this course below.

70 responses

1. News Circles activities made my speaking skills improve.
2. I really enjoyed this course. This class is the most interesting of five classes I had. I have to say thank you.
3. This course taught me a lot of current issues.

4. News article activities can improve my English skills.
5. Every time I do Current Events, I get new information about world. It was really beneficial, I think.
6. I particularly enjoyed the courses because it had a lot of discussion between students, and also content that I am interested about such as UN or SDGs.
7. Current Event was good assignment for both improving English skills and knowing about the news in the world.
8. Although there are many tasks, this course was so interesting! I could get many knowledges of world problems.
9. I really enjoyed this course because of your passion and smile :) I also satisfy the content of this course: I can learn many things and discussed a lot.
10. News circle was hard for me, because I had to do that every week. However it was very interesting for me to discuss news and my experiences with classmates and teacher.
11. It was helpful that teacher check mistakes and correct during current event news circles.
12. I can get a lot of knowledge and skills in this class. I can have a good time because I can practice speaking English.
13. I done a lot of homework every week, but I enjoyed and could obtain ability to research about global issues and present my information or feelings.
14. It was always exciting class!
15. This class gave me an opportunity to not only listen to the teacher but also actively talk to the students. Also, the teacher was always cheerful, so I was rarely bored.
16. Youtube Talk Show Assessment was fun for me because I had never taken such a video.
17. There were a lot of assignments, so it was a little hard, but I could learn how to control my limited time efficiently. Thank you.
18. Doing Current even every week was a hard but it was beneficial so much.
19. I think this course gave me a lot of opportunities to speak English.
20. The world information you had told us in class was broaden my perspective and my interest to the world.
21. I really enjoyed this course because I learned a lot of things all over the world. And I know/surprised there are many issues that I don't know around the world.

22. The content of your lecture was so interesting for me because I am really interested in global issues.
23. Your positive attitude is contagious, keep spreading the positive vibes!
24. I really appreciated that you made a lot of efforts to check our tons of Current Event assignments and other speaking assessments. Also, all the presentations and lectures that you made over the course of the entire classes were such wonderful ones. As a teacher, you are so professional. Thank you for your all the efforts and sacrifices for our future learning journey.
25. I really liked this class because there were so much discussion that I can show my opinion and the topic was exactly what I wanted to learn.
26. Current news assignments were great opportunity to know new terms.
27. Your classes were really fun and interesting and also easy to know because you explain difficult words and use body language.
28. I think the contents of this course was interesting and they helped me to understand and expand my perspectives to the world. But one thing that I want to say is there are little bit too much things to do, and sometimes so hard for me to take a balance between other classes' works.
29. It was really interesting because I could learn many things related to current world.
30. As a whole, it's been always attracting for me, although I had some difficulty understanding terms. The way the class was done helped me get motivated so much. It's my pleasure to take this class honestly.
31. I believe this course was great! Truly enjoyed the teacher's energy as well.
32. It was a great practical use of our English Skills and overall critical thinking
33. It was hard but was also satisfying because I was able to do things I never thought I was able to. I felt very accomplished in this class.
34. I especially enjoyed learning about the world from human rights to the world heritages!
35. The topic and theme that were discussed in the class was new to me and I got interest in those issues.
36. I really enjoyed this course because it helped me improving not only my English but also my knowledge towards world.
37. I like the class because teacher always make the environment that students can feel comfortable and motivated.

38. Since I worked on Current Event analysis, I think I've got better at reading articles more quickly and critically. In the news circle, I am really grateful that I could learn the importance of checking my own understanding.
39. I especially liked the discussions about the British Museum and the peacekeeping missions. Controversial topics are the best.
40. I really liked your passion in your class. You always encourage us and try to understand my opinion even though I struggled to express it in English. I really really liked your class!!
41. I think this course was one of the best required courses at this university. Through this course, I could develop not just English skills, but the knowledge about the world and communication skills to deliver information. So thank you!!
42. This course is very fun!!!!
43. Thank you for teaching and giving really interesting lectures about world issues.
44. I could enjoy your every class and I always went to school looking forward to your classes. Your energetic, powerful and funny lectures always made me happy and engaged.
45. Thanks for your teaching, I could learn and consider about those issues a lot, and I could broaden my knowledge and horizons.
46. I really liked taking this course.
47. I like the homework about news articles.

Question 10 was also a mandatory question, with many responses solely thanking the teacher or reiterating responses from Question 9. Thus, like Question 9, a smaller selection of only the most relevant comments have been included here. Most students felt very positively about the course, and there were a few points that especially stood out. First of all, in addition to a large number of students expressing that the topics of study were interesting, many were also consciously aware of the language learning aspects of the course, as seen in comments 4, 7, 11, 12, 19, 26, 27, 30, 36, 40, and 41. Moreover, some students, such as those in comments 8, 10, 13, 17, 18, 28, 33, and 40, appreciated the challenging nature of the course and how it pushed them to grow in various ways. However, perhaps the most underestimated factor that emerged from students' responses was the impact the teacher's approach had on the course. Cates (2022b) emphasizes the importance of framing lessons on global issues in a manner that leads students to engage with topics in a positive and constructive way,

lest they become demotivated or even depressed. Teachers must navigate the intricacies of controversial and sometimes shocking subjects with care and sensitivity, addressing diverse student opinions thoughtfully while striving to cultivate empathy and maintaining a safe, inclusive classroom environment. This is not only reflected in how a topic is presented by teachers, but also in how their own attitudes are portrayed in class. Students inevitably pick up on such things, which is evident in comments 2, 9, 14, 15, 23, 24, 27, 30, 31, 37, and 40-45.

Conclusion

The findings from the student survey conducted after the first semester of Global Communication II reveal overwhelmingly positive student experiences, highlighting the importance and advantages of integrating global citizenship education into language classrooms. It not only tests learners' current beliefs and values and encourages them to recognize and appreciate alternative ways of being (UNESCO, 2015), but it also gives them a chance to apply their language learning to local, regional, national, and global issues (Oxfam, 2015).

To create an enriching and supportive learning environment, teachers should effectively balance the exploration of international challenges with diverse perspectives, empathy, and actionable insights. However, they must be cautious to avoid overwhelming students with the gravity of these topics. In addition, it's important to maintain the content and language balance if approaching global citizenship education in ELT through CLIL, as did the course scrutinized in this paper. Though there may be more emphasis on content over language (or vice versa) at times, both of them should be present (Coyle et al., 2010). By intentionally engaging with global issues in their English studies, students are motivated to develop a broader worldview and the skills necessary to navigate and contribute meaningfully to society as a global citizen.

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