

*Enhancing Global Citizenship Education in Japan's K-12 Curriculum:
Exploring Lessons and Opportunities for Growth*

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Abstract

This study explores the efficacy of K-12 Global Citizenship Education (GCE) in Japan, evaluating its impact on personal empowerment and elucidating the challenges and prospects associated with the GCE curriculum. Aligned with the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) framework, which envisions GCE as a means to instill respect for human rights, social justice, diversity, gender equality, and environmental sustainability while nurturing responsible global citizenship, our research pursues two primary inquiries: (1) To what extent does the GCE curriculum empower students? and (2) How do the duration and consistency of GCE implementation influence empowerment levels? To answer these pivotal questions, we conducted in-depth interviews with educators from selected UNESCO Associated Schools in Japan and graduates of those schools currently attending college in the United States. This interdisciplinary approach yielded insights from six teachers and six students, all proficient in English as native speakers or bilinguals. Employing semi-structured one-on-one interviews conducted via online videoconferencing, we encouraged the conversational exploration of GCE topics while collecting data on specific facets. Our study aspires to enrich comprehension regarding the integration of GCE within the Japanese educational landscape and its potential to foster personal empowerment. The outcomes of this research also hold the potential to inform and shape GCE policies and practices in Japan, offering invaluable insights into the nuances of its implementation and the challenges it may encounter in this unique context.

Keywords: Global Citizenship Education (GCE), UNESCO Associated Schools, Empowerment, K-12 Curriculum, Japanese Education

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Introduction

In Japan today, pressing educational challenges, such as student disengagement, anxiety-driven absenteeism, and a distressing suicide rate among youth, emphasize the critical need for educational empowerment. Powerlessness is a significant health risk factor, and many crises, such as the current state of the education system, underscore the importance of education for empowerment (Bergsma, 2004; Kirk et al., 2015; Leivas, 2018). Concurrently, the global landscape confronts unprecedented challenges amid the pandemic, accentuating the demand for education that empowers individuals to drive positive change.

This study focuses on Global Citizenship Education (GCE), an approach recognized for fostering individual empowerment and leadership in the context of social contribution (Esquivel & Ikeda, 2018; Reimers, 2016). Since the end of the world wars, UNESCO has been implementing various initiatives to promote GCE, including establishing and expanding the Associated Schools Project Network (ASPnet). Japan, boasting the world's largest number of UNESCO Associated Schools (1,120 schools as of 2019), offers a unique setting for examining how GCE is implemented and its impact on personal empowerment (UNESCO, 2019).

While GCE has the potential to empower individuals, little is known about how GCE is implemented in Japanese educational settings and how it contributes to personal empowerment. Considering this, the present study addressed two primary questions:

- To what extent does the GCE curriculum empower K-12 students?
- How does the duration and consistency of GCE curriculum delivery influence empowerment?

In this study, the key terms were defined as follows:

1. Global citizenship education (GCE): It equips learners with values, knowledge, and skills grounded in human rights, social justice, diversity, gender equality, and environmental sustainability, empowering them to be responsible global citizens (UNESCO, 2018).
2. Empowerment: It realizes unbounded potentialities within one's life (Ikeda, 2016).
3. Youths: K-12 students

Literature Review

Numerous educational challenges have garnered significant attention in Japan, including the troubling phenomenon of students abstaining from school due to apathy and anxiety, as reported by the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT) in 2020 (MEXT, 2020). Alarmingly, Japan stands as the sole G7 nation where suicide ranks as the leading cause of death among young people, with school-related issues exacerbating this grave concern, as underscored by a 2019 report from the Japanese Ministry of Health, Labour, and Welfare (Ministry of Health, Labour, and Welfare, 2019).

Furthermore, today's global landscape is marred by the looming specter of pressing global challenges and an unstable international milieu, intensified by the rapid pace of competition amidst the ongoing pandemic. United Nations (UN) Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, in his visionary statement at the Transforming Education Summit convened at the United Nations in September 2022, called for a profound examination of how curricula and pedagogical approaches can empower learners to drive transformative change (Guterres,

2022). In this crisis era, a critical question arises: What form of education can equip young individuals to confront society's formidable challenges and fundamentally address the present predicament? GCE, championing individual empowerment and leadership for societal contribution, has garnered significant recognition in recent years.

The imperative of curriculum development for GCE is increasingly pronounced, echoed by the UN's Global Education First Initiative and embedded in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). A retrospective look at Japan's history of educational internationalization underscores the contemporary significance of GCE. From the Meiji era (1868–1912) onwards, Japan actively promoted the exchange of its students abroad and embraced Western culture (Ninomiya et al., 2009). Subsequently, in the 1980s, the Japanese government initiated programs such as the "Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Program" to bolster foreign language education and international exchange (Ninomiya et al., 2009). Throughout the 20th century, UNESCO's concept of Education for International Understanding gained prominence in Japan (Ninomiya et al., 2009). Since 1953, UNESCO has expanded the Associated Schools Project Network (ASPnet). More recently, Japan has launched government initiatives like the Super Global High School and Super Global University projects. However, as highlighted by global citizenship education expert Makoto Kobayashi of Tamagawa University and other researchers, a cohesive and systematic GCE curriculum remains elusive in Japan (Kobayashi, 2018). Thus, a compelling need arises for the development and promotion of an educational curriculum that can empower young individuals in Japanese schools, fostering their capacity to actively contribute to society with optimism and purpose.

UNESCO Associated School Project Network (ASPnet)

As of March 2023, Japan boasts an impressive count of 1,115 UNESCO Associated Schools, constituting approximately 10% of the global ASPnet membership. Spanning more than 180 countries, the network encompasses a wide spectrum of educational institutions, including preschools, elementary, junior high, and senior high schools, as well as teacher training colleges (UNESCO, 2019). At its core, ASPnet centers its educational mission on three pivotal themes: 1) Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), 2) Global Citizenship Education Development (GCED), and 3) Intercultural Learning (UNESCO, 2019).

These schools are ardently committed to fostering international understanding and peace education through various initiatives, including international student exchanges, teacher training programs, and collaborative projects. In doing so, they champion UNESCO's values of peace, tolerance, and respect for cultural and ethnic diversity. ASPnet operates under the auspices of UNESCO, enjoying support from governments, educational institutions, organizations, and individuals worldwide. Furthermore, participating schools actively engage in international conferences, seminars, and assorted activities to propagate the ideals of peace, tolerance, and cultural diversity. They serve as conduits for the sharing of best practices, resources, and knowledge while also facilitating collaborative educational endeavors.

ASPnet extends an open invitation to primary and secondary schools that share a dedication to UNESCO's objectives and the ASPnet program's vision. Schools seeking membership must submit applications to UNESCO and undergo a rigorous self-assessment process. Once accepted into the network, schools commit to periodic reporting to demonstrate alignment with the network's overarching objectives.

Empowerment constitutes a central tenet and aspiration within global citizenship education. According to Reimers (2016), the core of the global competence cultivated through global citizenship education resides in the concept of “empowerment”—the belief in individuals’ capacity to effect meaningful change and fulfill their leadership roles. This transformative journey requires a continuous curriculum from kindergarten through high school (K-12) to instill the essential skills in each student. Global citizenship education is often intertwined with empowerment, and numerous definitions of “empowerment” emanate from education, psychology, and other disciplines (Bergsma, 2004; Ikeda, 2002, 2012, 2016; Kirk et al., 2015; Zimmerman, 1995).

It is frequently asserted that empowerment must manifest in action, translating into concrete leadership efforts (Bergsma, 2004; Ikeda, 2012, 2016; Kirk et al., 2015). As articulated in Ikeda’s proposal titled “For a Sustainable Global Society: Learning for Empowerment and Leadership” (2012), education must not merely kindle empowerment but also drive tangible transformation (p. 10). Ikeda (2016) delineates four interdependent processes within global citizenship education: learning and understanding societal issues, reflection on one’s way of life, empowerment through realizing one’s potential, and the exercise of transformative leadership within the community.

Courage, according to Ikeda (2012, 2021), represents a cornerstone in ensuring that empowerment transcends rhetoric and translates into purposeful action. He contends that education should imbue individuals with the courage to act and persevere in the face of adversity (Ikeda, 2016). Specifically, Ikeda champions global citizenship education as a means to embolden students with the courage to act and harness the potential of each human being (Ikeda, 2014, 2016).

Ikeda’s commitment to global citizenship education emerged from his deep involvement with the Soka movement, nurtured by his association with Josei Toda in the post-World War II era. The Soka movement, a beacon of peace, culture, and education in 20th-century Japan, staunchly opposed exclusionary ethno-religious identity and ultra-nationalism (Goulah, 2020). Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, Toda’s mentor and the movement’s founder, introduced cosmopolitanism to Japan and championed global citizenship, transcending narrow nationalism (Makiguchi, 1981, p. 15). Josei Toda further honed the concept, responding to global events like the Korean War to foster a sense of shared humanity beyond racial and national divides. He emphasized global citizenship education to nurture individuals capable of challenging national authority based on the dignity of life.

Ikeda carries forward this legacy, aiming to unlock every individual’s potential while dismantling barriers of prejudice, collective egoism, and discrimination. His advocacy is evident in significant documents, including his 1996 address at Columbia University Teachers College titled “Thoughts on Education for Global Citizenship” and his 2018 joint statement with Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Adolfo Pérez Esquivel, titled “To the Youth of the World: An Appeal for Resilience and Hope.” This commitment is underscored by the forty annual peace proposals submitted to the UN since 1983. Central to Ikeda’s global citizenship concept is the courage to engage in dialogue, transcending fear of differences and affirming the inherent goodness in everyone.

The philosophy of global citizenship profoundly shapes the curriculum of educational institutions founded by Ikeda, including Soka University of America, whose mission centers on cultivating a steady stream of global citizens dedicated to a contributive life. The Soka

schools, spanning kindergarten to university level, are firmly rooted in Soka's humanistic philosophy, derived from Buddhism. They instill values of respect for the individual, self-challenge, and personal transformation. These institutions emphasize critical thinking, self-expression, and an appreciation for beauty and nature while nurturing dialogues on the world's most pressing moral and ethical concerns. Through these experiences, students grasp the significance of action and its potential to drive positive change. Furthermore, Soka schools offer diverse extracurricular activities such as music, sports, and service learning, fostering physical and mental well-being, creativity, and social responsibility. Ultimately, these schools serve as living embodiments of Daisaku Ikeda's vision, forging a global community founded on peace, creative coexistence, and mutual understanding. Guided by Ikeda's educational philosophy, they seek to empower individuals as active agents of transformation.

Methodology

Participants

The participants for providing information to our research questions were: (1) teachers at UNESCO Associated Schools designated for GCE—Soka Schools in Tokyo and Osaka, and Colegio Soka do Brasil in Sao Paulo; and (2) students who graduated from Soka Schools in Tokyo and Osaka and are currently second-year students at Soka University of America (SUA) in the United States (U.S.). Six teachers and six students participated (see Tables 1 and 2 for their demographic data). All participants were proficient in English as native speakers or bilinguals.

Table 1: Participants—Teachers

| | School Where Teaching or Taught (Years Taught at the School) | Gender | Educational Background |
|------------------|---|--------|--|
| Teacher A | Kansai Soka Elementary, Junior High, and High School (6 years); Tokyo Soka Junior High and High School (10 years) | F | MA TESOL from U.S. |
| Teacher B | Tokyo Soka High School (4 years) | F | BA in Liberal Arts from U.S. BA in Education from Japan |
| Teacher C | Kansai Soka Elementary, Junior High, and High School (20 years) | F | MA TESOL from U.S. |
| Teacher D | Kansai Soka High School (16 years) Kansai Soka Jr. High School (5 years) | M | MA TESOL from U.S. |
| Teacher E | Brazil Soka High School (1/2 year) | F | MA TESOL from U.S. |
| Teacher F | Tokyo Soka Jr. High School (3 years) Tokyo Soka High School (3 years) Brazil Soka Schools (5 years) | F | MA TESOL from U.S. |

Table 2: Participants—Students

| | School(s) Graduated | Gender | Total No. of Years Attended the School(s) |
|------------------|--|--------|---|
| Student A | Kansai Soka High School | F | 3 |
| Student B | Kansai Soka High School | M | 3 |
| Student C | Kansai Soka High School | M | 3 |
| Student D | Kansai Soka Elementary School Kansai Soka Junior High School Kansai Soka High School | F | 12 |
| Student E | Tokyo Soka Elementary School Tokyo Soka Junior High School Tokyo Soka High School | M | 12 |
| Student F | Tokyo Soka Elementary School Tokyo Soka Junior High School Tokyo Soka High School | M | 12 |

Data Collection Procedures

Our data collection process involved semi-structured one-on-one interviews conducted via online videoconferencing—Zoom. This approach facilitated a conversational exploration of GCE topics while ensuring the collection of precise data on relevant subjects. Each interview was audio recorded, transcribed, and analyzed through thematic analysis.

For our interviews, we engaged with participants, posing a series of interview questions related to GCE. Teachers were invited to share insights on the GCE curriculum, offering their perspectives on its potential and challenges. In contrast, students provided valuable information on how the GCE curriculum influenced their personal empowerment.

Our data collection process commenced after receiving Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval in December 2022, with interviews conducted throughout January and February 2023. Each interview spanned approximately 40 to 60 minutes and was recorded using Zoom’s recording function. In cases where a participant declined to be recorded, detailed notes were taken. All interviews were conducted in English. Our data collection efforts encompassed audio recordings (complemented by supplementary notes) and the subsequent transcription of each interview.

Data Analysis

We conducted a thematic analysis of the data obtained from interviews. This involved reading through the transcripts of the interviews, coding and identifying key themes, and writing up a detailed description of the findings. We then used the themes to interpret the data and draw conclusions from the results.

Findings

GCE's Contribution to Student Empowerment and Leadership

All participants, including both students and teachers, expressed strong positive responses to Research Question 1, which sought to assess the extent to which the GCE curriculum contributes to student empowerment and leadership. Their insights revealed various avenues through which GCE fosters empowerment:

- Curriculum impact: GCE instilled confidence in students that they could contribute meaningfully to addressing societal challenges. It expanded their knowledge base and awareness and bolstered their proficiency in skills like public speaking.
- Environmental factors: Beyond the curriculum, participants acknowledged the significance of the learning environment. Interactions with passionate teachers and their role models, as well as engagement with classmates, played pivotal roles in empowerment.
- Student leadership within the realm of GCE was also evident through a range of initiatives.
- Involvement in school events: Students took the initiative in organizing school events, donation campaigns, and exhibitions addressing social issues.
- Public speaking: GCE gave students the confidence to speak before large audiences.
- Knowledge confidence: Students felt more self-assured in their understanding of global issues.
- Influence of guest speakers: Interactions with guest speakers were cited as particularly empowering.

In addition to these curricular elements and the supportive role of teachers, friendships, and camaraderie among students were highlighted as essential environmental factors that bolstered empowerment. These relationships fostered a warm atmosphere, encouraging students who may have been reserved to open up.

Furthermore, participants recognized that GCE extends beyond empowerment, contributing significantly to student leadership:

- Initiatives and campaigns: Students initiated donation campaigns, created exhibits to address environmental concerns, and organized school events, including public speaking opportunities.
- Projects beyond school: Students actively communicated their GCE knowledge to the wider community.
- Long-term impact: While some effects may not be immediately apparent, participants acknowledged that GCE could shape students' future choices, both in terms of their education and careers.

Notably, participants identified various factors that contribute to empowerment and leadership in the broader school experience, extending beyond the elements covered in the GCE curriculum:

- Dialogue-friendly environment: Opportunities for open dialogue and discussion nurtured empowerment by allowing students to share concerns and goals.
- Extracurricular activities: Engagement in extracurricular activities, such as the school's open campus events, bolstered students' confidence and interpersonal skills.

- Leadership opportunities: School events provided platforms for students to take leadership roles within the community.
- Teacher role models: Positive examples set by caring and supportive teachers had a significant impact on students' leadership and behavior.

Overall, participants identified diverse elements in the general school experience that contribute to empowerment and leadership, which may not necessarily be covered in the GCE curriculum. These multifaceted factors collectively shape students' growth, self-assurance, and leadership capabilities within and beyond the classroom.

Duration and Consistency of GCE Influencing Empowerment

Participants provided diverse perspectives on the relationship between the length of the GCE curriculum and the degree of empowerment and leadership it fosters: five of the 12 participants were positive, four were ambivalent, one was negative, and two had no direct response. A summary of responses is provided in Table 3.

Table 3: Summary of Responses to RQ2

| Affirmative | Ambivalent | Negative | No mention |
|-------------|------------|-----------|------------|
| Student B | Student A | Student C | Teacher E |
| Student D | Student E | | Teacher F |
| Teacher B | Student F | | |
| Teacher C | Teacher A | | |
| Teacher D | | | |

Those who believed in a connection between curriculum length and empowerment highlighted the following impacts of a longer curriculum:

- Increased commitment to caring for and respecting others (Teachers B, C, and D).
- Enhanced student activity and engagement (Student D).
- Deeper personal growth and development (Student B).

However, ambivalent participants emphasized individual factors such as determination and mindset as key influencers of empowerment and leadership (Students E and F, Teacher A). They suggested that these aspects were more critical than the curriculum's length and that the true extent of empowerment might only become evident in the future (Student A).

Student C, who denied a direct relationship between curriculum length and empowerment, also stressed the importance of students' commitment and highlighted the timing of empowerment as more significant than the curriculum's duration. Additionally, Student B, who believed in the connection, noted the relevance of the location where GCE occurs, emphasizing the value of addressing real-world problems in the educational setting.

Regarding the importance of consistency in the K-12 GCE curriculum, all participants expressed its significance. However, they also identified challenges in achieving this consistency:

- Some schools, like Tokyo Soka Schools and Kansai Soka Schools, are actively working to address curriculum consistency by organizing meetings among elementary, middle, and high school teachers to share insights and practices (Teachers B and D).

- Participants emphasized the importance of maintaining curricular coherence across grade levels, benefiting current and future students (Student D).
- Students appreciated the continuity of education across different levels, noting the transition from knowledge acquisition in elementary school to leadership development in middle school (Students D and F).
- English curriculum consistency received particular attention and praise (Student F and Teacher D).
- However, difficulties in implementing a consistent curriculum were also acknowledged.
- Scheduling disparities between elementary, middle, and high school teachers hindered collaborative discussions (Teacher A).
- Variations in teaching styles among the same teachers over different years posed challenges to achieving uniformity (Student A).
- Cross-curricular alignment, not just within grade levels but across subject areas, was deemed essential (Teacher C).

In sum, participants recognized the importance of curriculum consistency in GCE but acknowledged the complexities and obstacles in achieving it. These varied responses highlight the multifaceted nature of curriculum design and implementation in the context of empowerment and leadership development.

Participants' Familiarity With UNESCO Associated Schools

Five of the 12 participants had prior knowledge of UNESCO Associated Schools, while the remaining seven were unfamiliar with them and did not explicitly mention them. The participants who were acquainted with UNESCO Associated Schools shared their insights into the benefits and potential drawbacks of these programs as follows:

- Teacher B highlighted the opportunity these schools provide for individuals who may not initially be interested in global issues to broaden their horizons and learn about the world.
- Teacher C emphasized that UNESCO Associated Schools offer students a platform for personal growth, enabling them to contribute more effectively to their communities.
- Teacher F underscored the value of these schools as a source of cross-school learning opportunities for teachers. They also emphasized the importance of school leadership in maximizing the utility of UNESCO Associated Schools.
- Drawbacks of UNESCO Associated Schools.
- Teacher F also pointed out that UNESCO Associated Schools projects can sometimes become bureaucratic, suggesting that the effectiveness of such initiatives may depend on the leadership within individual schools.
- Examples of GCE Curricula: Participants shared examples of GCE curricula from their respective schools, providing insights into the diverse approaches taken.
- Tokyo Soka High School offers a three-year program called “Global Citizenship Inquiry Studies (GCIS),” aimed at developing problem-solving, research, and collaborative skills. They also provide various activities, including overseas language training.
- Kansai Soka High School provides the “Global Research and Inquiry Time (GRIT),” a three-year curriculum to enhance research, discussion, and leadership skills. The school also offers activities such as debates and Model United Nations simulations.
- Participants from both schools discussed their involvement in the Super Global High Schools (SGH) program accredited by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports,

Science, and Technology (MEXT) in Japan. Student D highlighted how the SGH program ignited her passion for English, while Student E noted limitations regarding the program's accessibility.

- Teacher A highlighted the challenges of teaching about the world beyond one's own country, even with a curriculum in place.
- International Baccalaureate (IB) and Global Citizen Diploma: Teachers from Brazil Soka Schools discussed their incorporation of the International Baccalaureate (IB) program and its advantages and disadvantages.
- According to Teacher F, the IB program raises student achievement and academic standards but can place a burden on both students and teachers. They emphasized the importance of flexibility, similar to the Global Citizen Diploma, another framework for global citizenship education.

In summary, the discussion revealed a multitude of voices and perspectives regarding the unique circumstances and approaches of each school's GCE curriculum, as well as the advantages and challenges associated with UNESCO Associated Schools and other educational frameworks.

Discussion

In pursuing a more effective GCE curriculum that fosters student empowerment and leadership, the series of interviews has unearthed key elements that warrant attention. These elements, drawn from the participants' valuable insights, are essential in shaping a robust GCE curriculum. They encompass curricular content and the broader educational environment, often overlooked but essential in nurturing empowered leaders of tomorrow.

The participants responded positively to Research Question 1 regarding the GCE curriculum's contribution to student empowerment and leadership. They found that it gave them confidence, new learning and awareness, and the ability to speak in front of others. The environmental setting, including interactions with teachers and peers, also contributed to their empowerment. Examples of student leadership included initiatives at school events, donation campaigns, and career choices. Factors that contribute to empowerment and leadership in general, not just in GCE, include an environment that promotes dialogue, extracurricular activities, and language/study abroad programs.

The responses to Research Question 2 about the relationship between the length of the GCE curriculum and the degree of empowering leadership were varied. Those who were positive noted the impact of the curriculum in terms of growth, understanding, and commitment. At the same time, those who were ambivalent explained that the degree of empowerment depends on the individual and their determination and mindset. The opposing participant said that the degree depends on the student's determination and that timing is more important than length. The participants in the study found that achieving consistency in the K-12 GCE curriculum was important for students, citing continuity of English education and cross-curricular approaches. However, they admitted it was difficult to complete due to different teaching styles and scheduling conflicts among teachers. More research is needed to maximize GCE's impact and develop and implement a robust curriculum for empowerment and leadership that can replace methods such as studying abroad.

Most participants indicated that the longer the GCE curriculum, the better. However, it cannot be entirely ruled out that the length is necessarily causally related to the degree of

student empowerment and leadership. The earlier the students begin taking the GCE curriculum, the greater the degree of student empowerment and leadership may be, as several pointed out that the timing of when students start taking the curriculum is also essential. At the same time, the quality of the GCE curriculum may be important, and length and timing may not be absolute factors since the degree of empowerment and leadership could be ultimately highly dependent on the determination and mindset of each student. Nevertheless, according to the responses of most participants, the degree and likelihood of empowerment and leadership tend to increase when students are exposed to the GCE curriculum early and for a more extended period of time.

The importance of consistency in the GCE curriculum is evident according to the participants and is an area being researched today. As with curriculum, it is vital to refer to Ikeda's (2016) GCE framework and use the interplay between empowerment and leadership to embed continuity and interconnectedness in the curriculum at different educational levels. The effectiveness of linking subjects together and achieving a cross-curricular curriculum will also need to be investigated in the future. The need for consistency may provide an opportunity to consider initiatives and systems that allow teachers to interact and create curricula together in solidarity in a way that leads to their own empowerment.

It will be important in the future to investigate what efforts and approaches are essential to make the process of learning and action in empowerment and leadership sustainable rather than temporary. This will require research on how to maximize the impact of the GCE well into the future, considering Einstein's famously saying that education is what remains after one has forgotten what one has learned in school. In addition to such a temporal challenge, GCE, by its nature, entails geographically tricky tasks, as it assumes that students will learn about issues happening elsewhere without traveling. There is a need to continue to develop and implement a robust curriculum for empowerment and leadership that can replace methods such as studying abroad. Nonetheless, the findings through this series of interviews may indicate that there is potential for GCE despite such hurdles as these.

Conclusion

This research examined how K-12 Global Citizenship Education (GCE) in Japan could contribute to personal empowerment and what potential and challenges the curriculum had. We interviewed teachers and students from several UNESCO Associated Schools to assess how much the curriculum could empower students. This study aimed to understand the implementation of GCE in Japan and how it could empower youth. The results of this research can provide insight into the potential and challenges of GCE in Japan as well as GCE policies and practices in Japan.

The world has faced various educational challenges recently, such as increasing student apathy and anxiety. Global citizenship education is increasingly seen as a potential solution to these issues, as it promotes individual empowerment and action to exercise transformative leadership for social contribution. GCE has been a part of the Japanese education system since the Meiji era, but there is still a need for a more systematic curriculum to be established. GCE is a vital tool in fostering empowerment and leadership in individuals.

Empowerment is a central aspect and goal of GCE, and it is essential to accompany empowerment by action, such as exercising leadership. Ikeda (2014, 2016) has long advocated for GCE, which can empower students with the courage to take action. This

concept was originally developed by Tsunesaburo Makiguchi and Josei Toda, who proposed a cosmopolitanism that is neither narrow-minded nationalism nor vacuous globalism and education for global citizenship to challenge national authority. Through this, Ikeda hopes to empower youth to develop their potential and create a more peaceful world. Ikeda's Soka educational institutions, which include kindergartens, elementary, middle, high schools, and universities, are based on the humanistic philosophy of Soka derived from Buddhism. Ikeda's vision of creating a global community of peace, creative coexistence, and mutual understanding through education empowers individuals to become active change agents.

This study's findings provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of GCE curricula in schools. It shows that not only the curriculum itself but also the human factors—such as interaction with teachers, teacher role models, and classmates—stand out as elements that accelerate the process of empowerment and action. It also suggests that the schools provide learning that leads to empowerment and transformative action, regardless of the length or consistency of the curriculum. It also indicates the possibilities of a curriculum to encourage learning that can lead to actual action, such as school event initiatives, donation activities, career choices, the creation of exhibits on social issues, and presentations of what students have learned outside of school.

However, there are possible improvements in schools with existing GCE curricula that were the subject of this study. Modifications may be needed to develop and implement a more effective curriculum to empower students and the action process. One of the ways to do this is to create a coherent curriculum and system from elementary through high school. Another important aspect is to design a curriculum that reflects the voices of teachers in the field. Even if there are clear curriculum objectives, there are contents and curricula that are difficult to teach and implement due to various constraints such as culture. It is also important to note the possible limitations of this study. This research is a descriptive study, and its findings and conclusions lack statistical significance. The nationality of the students who agreed to be interviewed was limited to one, so the scope of the study needs to be further expanded. Moreover, there is a need to conduct a study to see the differences in views of the curriculum for both teachers and students, which was not the focus of this study, and to conduct a study specifically on the students' perspectives.

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