

## Contemporary Emphasis on Civic Education in the Process of Academic Preparation of Pedagogy Students

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### Abstract

This article explores students' perceptions on key issues focused on the topics, content and importance of global citizenship and education for peace within their academic training. The study is based on the survey method. The sample consists of 73 bachelor's degree students at Burgas State University “Prof. Dr. Assen Zlatarov” from majors in which the discipline “Civic education” is studied – Social Pedagogy, Preschool and Primary School Pedagogy, Preschool Pedagogy with a Foreign Language, Special Pedagogy. The focus of the study is on tracking students' perceptions in the context and the opportunities for optimizing and improving their academic preparation in the specific discipline in accordance with state requirements in the scientific field of Pedagogical Sciences. The analysis of the results clearly shows that students perceive global citizenship as a symbiosis between awareness and action. On the one hand, that we are all part of the huge global family, and on the other – we all have the only power and the huge and active role in solving world problems. Among the most common values noted by respondents are tolerance, respect, social justice and sustainability. The concept of education for peace is most often associated by students with the words dialogue, empathy, non-violent communication.

*Keywords:* higher pedagogical education, civic education, global citizenship, education for peace

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## Introduction

Civic education is gaining increasing importance in the preparation of future teachers, especially in the context of the challenges of globalization, intercultural interaction and the need for sustainable peace. In addition to professional knowledge, students in pedagogical specialties should develop values and skills that will allow them to form responsible, tolerant and active citizens. In Bulgaria, civic education is integrated into higher pedagogical education in accordance with national standards and European recommendations. However, questions remain about how students perceive its role and content, especially with regard to global citizenship and peace education. Their perspective is essential, as it influences their readiness to integrate civic competences into future teaching practice.

## Literature Review

In the context of global climate change, social inequality, poverty, limited access to water in different corners of the Earth and ongoing military conflicts, the uncertainty of the future is increasingly tangible. Ensuring a sustainable and secure future for future generations should be set as a goal in all education systems. This makes the role of preschool institutions one of the most important in laying the foundations for lifelong learning, according to the European and National Reference Frameworks for Lifelong Learning (Dimova, 2025).

Children are the future of the planet, they are the bearers of change and hope for a better world, therefore concepts such as global citizenship and education for peace must be present in curricula from an early age.

This section presents an overview of contemporary theoretical views and research related to the key concepts of civic education, global citizenship and education for peace.

Within the framework of contemporary studies on civic education, including those of Alscher, Ludewig and McElvany political and civic participation are seen as an integral part of a well-functioning democratic system and as a desired outcome of the educational process. Civic education aims to develop political literacy, interest in democratic processes and readiness for active participation in public life in young people. The use of appropriate teaching methods is crucial for achieving motivation and forming civic competences in adolescents (Alscher et al., 2022).

According to Balkanski and Zahariev (1998), civic education is an interdisciplinary and integrative educational process that combines social knowledge, skills, competencies, values, attitudes and democratic culture. It is a form of social and value training aimed at integrating the individual into society and at active participation in public processes, based on respect for human rights, legality and the moral principles of democratic governance (Balkanski & Zahariev, 1998).

Castles and Davidson (2000) make a clear distinction between globalization and global citizenship. While globalization is associated with transnational economic, cultural, and demographic processes that challenge traditional models of national belonging, global citizenship is defined by them as a necessary new framework for participation, identity, and rights in the context of cultural diversity and global mobility. It is not an extension of globalization, but a critical response to the challenges it poses to national citizenship (Castles & Davidson, 2000).

The Recommendation on Education for Peace and Human Rights, International Understanding, Cooperation, Fundamental Freedoms, Global Citizenship and Sustainable Development, adopted in Paris in 2023, defines the concept of “peace” as inextricably linked to “international understanding” and “cooperation”. This conceptual framework emphasizes friendly relations, understanding and cooperation among a wide range of stakeholders, and respect and observance of human rights and freedoms (UNESCO, 2023).

According to Harris and Morrison, peace education is understood as a philosophical and process-oriented approach aimed at building the personality and culture of peace through education. It creates a learning environment that promotes values, attitudes and behaviors that reject violence and prevent conflicts by addressing their roots. It is based on the principles of non-violence, respect for human rights, tolerance and social justice (Harris & Morrison, 2012).

In the Republic of Bulgaria, the formation of civic competences is guaranteed through the implementation of the European Framework of Key Competences for Lifelong Learning, in accordance with national regulatory documents, including:

- The Law on pre-school and school education
- Regulation No. 13 on civic, health, environmental and intercultural education
- Regulation No. 5 on pre-school education

Civic education is implemented in an integrated manner already in preschool age, being taught in various educational areas. In school education, it continues to be integrated into the curriculum of various subjects, and in grades XI and XII it is established as an independent academic discipline.

In the context of higher education, in the training of pedagogical specialists, the discipline “Civic Education” is mandatory only in certain specialties. Topics related to global citizenship and education for are considered as separate elements within the lecture course on the discipline.

### **Methodology**

The purpose of this study is to present the perceptions of future students on key issues related to the importance of global citizenship and peace education within their academic preparation.

The tasks to be solved in it are:

- to reveal the theoretical aspects of civic education, global citizenship and peace education
- to study the perceptions of students in the context of the researched issues
- to analyze the results obtained.

The study is based on the survey method. The sample consists of 73 bachelor's degree students at the Burgas State University “Prof. Dr. Assen Zlatarov”, Republic of Bulgaria. The respondents are studying in specialties in which the discipline “Civic Education” is included in the curriculum as a mandatory or elective subject. These are the specialties: Social Pedagogy, Preschool and Primary School Pedagogy, Preschool Pedagogy with a Foreign Language, Special Pedagogy.

The focus of the study is on tracking students' perceptions in the context and opportunities for optimizing and improving their academic preparation in the specific discipline in accordance with state requirements in the scientific field of Pedagogical Sciences.

### **Results and Discussion**

The study was conducted among 73 students of pedagogical specialties at the Faculty of Social Sciences of Burgas State University “Prof. Dr. Assen Zlatarov”, Republic of Bulgaria. All respondents are female and are studying in the specialties of Social Pedagogy, Preschool and Primary School Pedagogy, Preschool Pedagogy with a Foreign Language and Special Pedagogy. After completing the lecture course on the discipline “Civic Education”, an anonymous author's survey was conducted, including eight questions. This paper analyzes one of them.

The strongest emphasis in the survey was evident in the responses to the open-ended questions, in which the students clearly associated the concepts of “global citizenship” and “education for peace” with specific values, actions, and global challenges.

The freedom to formulate their own answers, without pre-set frameworks, led to authentic, meaningful, and diverse statements. The only instruction that the participants received was to share what they associated these two key concepts with.

This demonstrates not only the level of academic preparation of the students in the researched issues, but also their ability to apply what they have learned in real life and professional situations. Thus, an active civic position is formed, which is essential for their future role as educators and pedagogues.

The data obtained were thematically grouped, highlighting the main directions presented in Table 1.

The classification of responses by topic allows for a better understanding of the dominant attitudes and value orientations among future teachers. It also serves as a basis for developing possible teaching strategies aimed at developing a global mindset and a culture of peace.

**Table 1***Words and Concepts Associated With Global Citizenship and Education for Peace*

	Topic	Keywords and expressions	Key ideas/values
GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP	Essence and awareness	Awareness that we are part of a global society; Concern; Social responsibility	Awareness, belonging, responsibility
	Values and principles	Acceptance of cultural diversity and differences; Social justice; Socio-economic equality; Human rights; Tolerance; Empathy; Respect; Integration; Sustainability; Environmental preservation; Market economy	Equality, respect, empathy, sustainability, justice
	Actions and participation	Active role in solving global problems such as poverty, climate change, military conflicts; Participation in volunteer activities; Support for human rights causes; Protection of peace and nature; Learning foreign languages and getting to know new cultures; Being part of the change; Accepting differences as something valuable; Not judging without knowing	Activity, commitment, empathy, humanity
	Results and effects	A tolerant society is fairer, happier, stronger; In it, everyone feels accepted and valued; Each of us has a responsibility not only to our own, but also to the global community	Harmony, reciprocity, global responsibility
EDUCATION FOR PEACE	Characteristics	Friendship, dialogue, respect, understanding; Opens the mind and heart; Promotes tolerance and respect; Teaches non-violent communication; Develops critical thinking and empathy; Prevents conflicts through education; Young people are the engine of change	Dialogue, peace, respect, empathy, education
	Influence and significance	Key to building a more just, sustainable and tolerant society	Tolerance, sustainability, human values, understanding

*Source:* Author

The analysis of the results clearly shows that students perceive global citizenship as a symbiosis between awareness and action. On the one hand, that we are all part of the huge global family, and on the other – we all have the only power and the huge and active role in solving world

problems. Among the most common values noted by respondents are tolerance, respect, social justice and sustainability.

The concept of education for peace is most often associated by students with the words dialogue, empathy, non-violent communication. According to the respondents, it is education for peace that has the power to open the mind and heart, to promote mutual respect, to prevent conflicts through education.

The answers clearly show the interrelationship between the two concepts – global citizenship and education for peace. According to the students, they are inseparable elements of modern education, aimed at building a more just, sustainable and harmonious society, providing an opportunity for a better life for future generations.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, we share that the results of the study clearly show that the training in "Civic Education" achieves its goals, namely: awareness of the place and importance of global citizenship and peace education in contemporary education. Responses demonstrate good theoretical preparation, but also personal commitment to values such as tolerance, respect, social justice and sustainability. The freedom to express one's own position led to authentic and diverse interpretations that emphasize the need for deeper integration of these topics in the academic preparation of future educators. The study confirms that global citizenship and peace education should be strategic focuses in teacher training in order to ensure the upbringing of active, responsible and empathetic citizens capable of building a more just and sustainable society.

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