

# Redesigning College English Goals: A Global Citizenship Approach

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**Abstract:** *This study evaluates the curriculum goals of a compulsory College English I course at a Chinese university through the lens of global citizenship education (GCE), identifying limitations and proposing pedagogical reforms. Adopting UNESCO's three-dimensional GCE framework (cognitive, socio-emotional, behavioral), the analysis critiques existing course objectives using scholarly literature on language curriculum design and intercultural education. While current goals promote language proficiency and critical analysis of English media, they exhibit three critical gaps: (1) Insufficient engagement with global power dynamics and inequalities; (2) Essentialist treatment of culture (limited to China vs. "Western" binaries); (3) Instrumentalist language views neglecting identity-shaping power. Proposed solutions emphasize teacher agency in adapting goals via global-issue integration, culturally responsive tasks (e.g., TBLT), and critical curriculum contextualization. Successful GCE integration requires empowering teachers to mediate rigid objectives, foster intercultural complexity, and navigate macro-level constraints (e.g., exam-oriented systems). The study advocates for goal flexibility and non-Western GCE perspectives in EFL contexts.*

**Keywords:** *Global citizenship education; EFL curriculum design; teacher agency; intercultural competence; Chinese higher education*

## 1. Introduction

The paper aims to analyze and evaluate the objectives of the College English I course in a Chinese university through the lens of global citizenship. It seeks to identify and provide plausible solutions to the existing issues within the course curriculum.

The context of this course is English as a foreign language (EFL) course in a prestigious university in Shanghai, China. This is a compulsory course for all non-English major Chinese students in the year1 take. Students who study in this university are coming from different regions of China with diverse backgrounds. The majority of students are at B2 level in CEFR, while some may achieve C1, some may at B1.

This paper will unfold in four parts: The first part will establish the theoretical framework and explore relevant debates. The second part will provide a comprehensive evaluation, examining goals of the curriculum from a global citizenship perspective. The third part will propose future changes based on the analysis, emphasizing the role of teacher agency in implementing these modifications. Finally, the paper will reflect on the analysis and proposals and their impact on the author's own thinking.

## 2. Conceptual Framework

In this theoretical section, the related concepts of goal in language education curriculum will be introduced initially. Following that, the notion of global citizenship will be described, specifically focusing on the three-dimensional framework proposed by UNESCO (2015) [1].

### 2.1. Goal of Language Curriculum Design

When discussing the concepts of goals in language curriculum design, there are various interpretations. Generally, goals in language education curriculum refer to the desired outcomes or achievements that learners are expected to attain through language instruction. These goals encompass

the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and abilities that learners are expected to acquire (La Belle, 1999)[2].

Robert M. Gagné (1985) conceptualizes goals in language education design as specific, measurable, and observable language-related outcomes that learners are expected to achieve [3]. This perspective highlights the importance of providing a clear focus for instruction and using goals as criteria for evaluating learner progress.

However, Macalister and Akkari (2020) propose a different approach to goals in language curriculum [4]. They suggest that goals can be kept brief and general, with the elaboration of various aspects of language learning, including language, ideas, skills, or text (discourse), occurs in the content and sequencing part of the curriculum design. This vagueness allows teachers for negotiation with learners' needs, as curriculum designers often have to predesign the curriculum before fully understanding the specific needs of learners in particular contexts.

The vagueness of goal in Macalister and Akkari (2020)'s language curriculum can be supported by the fact that faithfully following a curriculum goal as designed does not necessarily guarantee consistent learning results [5]. This highlights the importance of teachers to mediate the curriculum based on their own contexts. Admittedly, the inclusion of vagueness in goals can lead to a greater reliance on teachers' proficiency in learning outcomes. Teachers become the decision-makers, responsible for determining what to teach and how to teach without the presence of clear instructions. This places a significant emphasis on the competence and expertise of teachers in mediating the curriculum to suit the specific needs of their students.

## 2.2. Global Citizenship

The notion of global citizenship goes beyond national boundaries and is associated with the values of a person seeking to improve coexistence within a particular community [6]. As such, the concept of global citizenship is personalized and cannot be fully concluded.

The diverse interpretations of global citizenship are closely linked to different perspectives on understanding the world, social relationships, and the concept of citizenship itself. These interpretations also have implications for teaching and researching global citizenship education (GCE) [7].

To provide clarity on the essence of global citizenship education, UNESCO has developed curriculum guidance with the objective of cultivating the knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes necessary for learners to contribute to a more inclusive, just, and peaceful world (UNESCO, 2015: 15). According to this guidance, UNESCO defines three key learning outcomes in the cognitive, socio-emotional, and behavioural domains, and identifies three corresponding learner attributes that GCE should aim to develop.

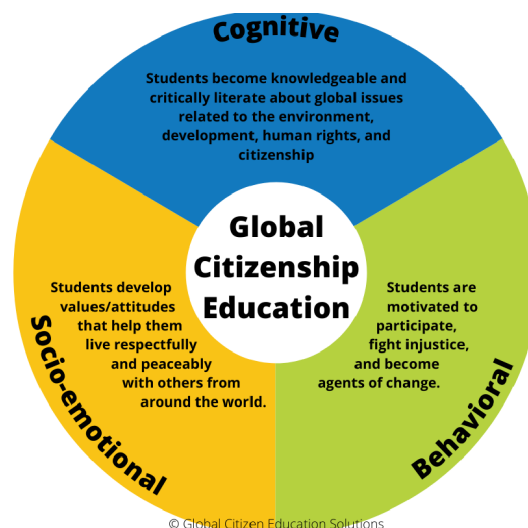


Figure 1: Global Citizenship Education: topics and learning objectives (UNESCO, 2015)

As shown, in the figure 1, the cognitive aspect of Global Citizenship Education (GCE) emphasizes the acquisition of knowledge and critical thinking abilities to gain a deeper understanding of the world and its intricacies. The socio-emotional dimension focuses on cultivating values, attitudes, and social skills that foster respectful and peaceful coexistence with others. Lastly, the behavioral dimension

pertains to the actions, practical application, and involvement of learners, as well as their capacity to act responsibly alongside others at local, national, and global scales.

Proposed by Jackson [8], the foreign language education is one of the essential means to achieve global citizenship education. In his explanation, firstly, foreign language education allows individuals to gain a deeper understanding of different cultures and perspectives, which is essential for fostering global citizenship under the category of socio-emotional development. Secondly, learning foreign languages facilitates effective communication across borders and cultures, motivating individuals to engage with a diverse range of people and communities on a global scale, which represents the development of behavior. Lastly, foreign language learning can also align with the aim of promoting global citizenship education in the category of cognitive, as it contributes to the development of critical thinking, competencies, and knowledge that are essential for global citizenship.

However, there are certain limitations and challenges associated with the concept of Global Citizenship Education (GCE). Firstly, the discussions on global citizenship have been predominantly influenced by Western philosophical notions within democratic contexts, leading to criticisms that other perspectives and cultural contexts have been overlooked [9]. Secondly, GCE is a broad and multidimensional topic, and its relevance varies for different populations. Consequently, the ability to quantify and measure its implementation, as is typically done with new topics in the curriculum, is limited [10]

### 3. Analysis

Graves [5] highlights the existence of various curriculum types, and in this context, the author focuses on the intended curriculum to analyze strengths and weaknesses of its goals. The curriculum of College English 1 was carried out since 2020; the learning goal of this course is as follows Figure 2[10]:

Course Goal and Contents	
Course Goal	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Students should be able to understand English conversations and engage in daily communication. They should also be able to comprehend more challenging English texts and recognize the similarities and differences between English-speaking countries and Chinese culture. Furthermore, they should have a better understanding and interpretation of Chinese culture based on this foundation.</li> <li>2. Students should be able to apply a broader range of language knowledge beyond their high school foundation. They should be capable of using a wider range of vocabulary for communication and have an understanding of introductory knowledge in the fields of science, technology, and humanities.</li> <li>3. Students should be able to utilize critical thinking skills to analyze and appreciate English articles, films, and other media.</li> <li>4. Through timely completion of assignments, regular attendance, and active participation in classroom learning, students should cultivate qualities such as honesty, integrity, diligence, and a pragmatic attitude.</li> </ol>

Figure 2: Course goal of College English 1 in Shanghai Jiao Tong University (Shanghai Jiao Tong University, 2020)

### **3.1. Strengths**

Generally speaking, the goals in this course represent language, ideas, skills, and text (discourse), which are essential aspects of language learning in Macalister and Akkari (2020)'s definition of goal in language education curriculum.

Specifically, one of the course goals intends to develop students' ability to critically analyze English articles, films and media. The focus on critical skill development aligns with the cognitive parameter of UNESCO (2015)'s curricular guidance, which stresses the need among students to be knowledgeable and critical literate.

In the meanwhile, the goal emphasis on improving language proficiency including understanding English conversations, comprehending challenging English texts. The emphasis on students become literate can help learners to use language confidently for learning and communicating in and beyond schools and participate in society more willingly [11]. Thus, students can be motivated to participate in social issues with improved language confidence, which represents the dimension of 'Behavior' of UNESCO (2015)'s curricular.

Lastly, the goal of understanding the similarities and differences between English-speaking countries and Chinese culture, aligns with UNESCO's emphasis on socio-cultural development as helping students to develop respectful attitudes towards different culture values. In addition, the goal stresses the improvement of better understanding Chinese culture by comparing cultures with English-speaking countries, to some extent, is powerful to defend against western colonial ideologies. As proposed by Wang in 2015, the deepen understanding of Chinese culture can facilitate the cultural confidence, and thus helps to shape one's citizenship identity.

### **3.2. Problems**

Beside the aforementioned merits of the course goals, there are also several drawbacks to consider.

Firstly, while the goals of the course emphasize language, ideas, skills, and discourse, they lack explicit emphasis on engaging with broader global issues, power dynamics, and inequalities, which are central to the perspectives of global citizenship education as outlined by UNESCO (2015). Although the goal illustrates the need of developing critical thinking skill, which is essential in global citizenship education, the chosen topic related to enhancing critical thinking skills in this goal primarily focuses on the ability to critically evaluate different genres in English, rather than addressing global issues directly. The development of critical thinking skills should not be limited to academic papers but should encompass broader contexts and embrace different notions of criticality [12].

In addition, the goal only mentions the exploring of culture differences between Chinese and English-speaking countries; while wiping out other cultures can be problematic in certain ways. Firstly, it may reflect a Western bias, with Western values and perspectives being presented as the norm. This can marginalize non-Western cultures and reinforce existing power dynamics between the Global North and the Global South [13]. Furthermore, the way of distinguishing culture only depending on national boundaries may lead into an essentialist view. To be more specific, the essentialist believes there is a clear and fixed distinction between different cultures, disregarding the diversity and fluidity that exists within cultures [14]. Hence, the goal is contradicted to the encouragement from UNESCO (2015), which urges the developing intercultural competence and promoting the recognition of shared values and experiences across cultures in its socio-emotional segment.

Moreover, as mentioned in the course goal, the focus on the improvement of language proficiency only for instrumental purposes including reading academic papers and communicating with other people is no longer enough. Language serves as more than a mere tool for communication and comprehension; it also possesses symbolic power. It not only informs and facilitates understanding but also has the ability to shape individuals' perceptions of themselves and others, influence their identities, and determine their access to resources and opportunities. In global citizenship, language plays a crucial role in fostering understanding, empathy, and meaningful connections across cultures, which allows individuals to engage in intercultural dialogue, challenge stereotypes, and promote inclusivity (UNESCO, 2015). Therefore, the goal of language should not be confined to its instrumental function alone, as it holds the power to convey meaning in significant ways.

Lastly, as Macalister & Akkari (2020)'s definition of goal in language curriculum can be not very precise but remain vague, the vagueness should be adapted by teachers based on the particular contexts

they are going to teach. However, in the case of this course goal, it offers a detailed clarification of what and how teachers should teach in the College English class. For instance, it specifies the desired qualities students should develop, such as honesty and integrity. However, this leaves limited room for teachers to make necessary adaptations based on the individual needs of their students in different teaching contexts. Consequently, the flexibility of the enacted curriculum may become compromised.

#### 4. Proposal for Change

Given the aforementioned limitations, practical suggestions for change in this area are now offered, taking into account the principles of global citizenship education. Furthermore, an analysis of the potential benefits and challenges associated with these proposals is also provided.

Considering that teachers are the most influential agents of GCE, determining both the ways and the extent to which it is implemented in classrooms [15], many things can be improved in the course goal with the increased teacher agency.

Firstly, while aiming at developing students' language proficiency, cultural understanding, and critical thinking skills, teachers can intendedly make global connections to the classroom. For example, teachers can serve as facilitators by posing thought-provoking questions that encourage students to think critically, guiding them to make connections between individuals and broader contexts, and fostering discussions on diverse viewpoints and values among students [16].

However, it is important to note that the implementation of global connections may vary due to the diverse teaching content found within the curriculum and the unique needs of the learners. Therefore, it is crucial for teachers to proactively take the initiative and adapt their instructional approaches based on the specific teaching context they encounter. This flexibility allows teachers to tailor their methods to best suit their students' requirements and create a more meaningful learning experience.

Secondly, the mere representation of Chinese culture and English-speaking countries' cultures can lead to various issues, as highlighted in the analysis section. Instead, the emphasis should be on creating inclusive and culturally responsive learning environments that promote global citizenship [17]. To achieve this, teachers can establish a safe and respectful space within the classroom where all cultures are equally valued, avoiding any prioritization or comparison.

In addition, the adoption of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) pedagogy can be beneficial [18]. This approach canters around organizing tasks that create information gaps, allowing for cultural topics to be integrated. Moreover, TBLT aligns with the overarching goal of enhancing students' communicative skills. However, it is crucial to note that while developing intercultural communicative competence, which aligns with the socio-emotional dimension of UNESCO's curricular framework (2015), teachers should encourage students to delve into the complexity of cultures [19], including moving beyond simplistic conclusions about culture based on regional, religious, ethnic, or other perspectives.

Lastly, to address the detailed goal instruction may hinder teachers to meet students' particular needs, teachers can interpret the stated goals and contextualize them to meet the specific needs and circumstances of their students. This involves considering the diverse abilities, interests, and backgrounds of learners and modifying instructional strategies, materials, and assessments accordingly. According to Gerard, Bradford, and Linn (2022), supporting teachers to customize curriculum has shown to improve the effectiveness of teaching [20].

There are some factors that may interfere the proposals for change. According to the Douglas Fir Group (2016), the potential concerns will be analyzed from macro, meso, and micro level [21].

On the macro level, Chinese society places a strong emphasis on conformity and national identity. The emphasis on conformity in Chinese society can be seen in the educational system, where students may be encouraged to conform to societal norms and values. This emphasis on conformity may limit students' exposure to diverse perspectives and hinder their ability to think critically and engage in global issues.

When considering the meso level, the aforementioned proposals primarily focus on teacher agency to address the challenges related to global citizenship education in the course's objectives. However, it is worth questioning the extent to which teachers can truly exercise agency. Insufficient levels of teacher agency can impede the implementation of necessary changes [22]. Furthermore, global citizenship education places significant demands on teachers in terms of professional development. They need to acquire expertise in its practices and be attuned to the tensions, complexities, benefits, and potentials

associated with it. In the chosen context, the teachers possess extensive qualifications, holding doctoral degrees in English literature and having published reputable books and articles. However, their proficiency in applying global citizenship education within second language teaching may face criticism.

From a micro-level perspective, the exam-oriented nature of the Chinese educational system may have implications for learner agency and the development of global citizenship. In this system, students are often focused on achieving high scores and meeting specific learning outcomes, which are typically determined by standardized exams [23]. This emphasis on exam results may lead students to prioritize short-term goals and overlook the broader skills and perspectives associated with global citizenship. One key aspect of global citizenship is critical thinking, which involves the ability to analyze information, evaluate different perspectives, and make informed decisions. However, the development of critical thinking skills requires time and a more holistic approach to education, which may not align with the exam-oriented system. As a result, learner agency, or the ability of students to take ownership of their learning and pursue their own interests and goals, can be impaired.

## 5. Conclusion

The analysis of the College English course goal and the aforementioned proposals have inspired me to reflect on how I can exercise my agency to address the shortcomings related to global citizenship in my future teaching practice. Firstly, I have gained a deeper understanding of the concept of goals in language education curriculum. Rather than perceiving the general descriptions of goals as vague, I now see them as an opportunity to harness teacher agency and make necessary adaptations based on the specific needs of learners.

Secondly, I have come to recognize that culture is multi-layered and personalized, and cannot be simply defined by superficial dimensions such as regions, race, or gender. In my future teaching journey, instead of presenting students with preconceived notions of cultural features based on single dimensions, I intend to encourage them to explore cultural diversities based on their own cultural experiences.

Lastly, during my research on conceptualizing the framework of global citizenship education, I have noticed a significant gap in scholarship exploring GCE ideas from non-Western perspectives, particularly those from the East (Choo, 2020) [24]. This has sparked my interest in conducting research to contribute to narrowing this gap.

In summary, writing this paper has allowed me to view language education from a broader global perspective and has made me more attentive to aspects I previously overlooked. Such growth and analysis are the essence of learning and development.

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