

## ANGEL Briefing Paper

# MEASURING GLOBAL COMPETENCIES: A CRITICAL ASSESSMENT

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### Introduction

**There is growing interest from policy-makers and educationalists to measure global competencies to ensure that formal education systems develop as necessary for the future. This brief draws on research to map and evaluate the different approaches to global education and their impact on its assessment.**

Research cautions about global competencies measurements as:

1) Understanding global competences in terms of the definition of global education as defined in Maastricht declaration (2002) **requires a broad scope** – combining intercultural questions, sustainability, human rights, global social justice and the understanding of glocality as well as contingency - and means that measuring is a complex task.

2) As yet there is **no competence model which is based on empirical evidence** – but this is a prerequisite to measure competencies.

3) Until now existing models and instruments have a **limited (or biased) focus** and therefore

they have failed to assess the complexity of global competences (especially OECD 2018 with its focus on an elitist cosmopolitan intercultural understanding, lacking the dimension of global social justice).

4) Closest to the **multidimensional global competences** are assessment instruments that cover democracy, citizenship and critical thinking skills.

5) International research **integrating multiperspectivity of different cultures** is necessary for designing truly global assessment instruments.

6) A roadmap forward is suggested: measuring global competencies is linked to a **strategic and cumulative research approach** that focuses on understanding of global learning as multidimensional processes.

The research strategy builds on recognition of different perspectives and world views, applies a broad methodological approach, and includes concepts of global fairness, mutual understanding and complex problem solving.

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## Approaches to global education and learning guide assessment

**NEOLIBERAL APPROACHES**, influenced by human capital theory, see education as an investment (Rizvi, 2017) and the purpose of acquiring global competencies primarily to make a nation's economy more competitive or as necessary for employability. They emphasise individual achievement and view the key benefits of global education as increased global economic and labour competitiveness (Goren & Yemini, 2017). They are characterised by an acceptance of the free trade-based global economy as normative and often link global competencies to entrepreneurial skills.

An example of this approach can be seen in the OECD (2018), which sees "a significant opportunity for nations and economies seeking to prosper in today's interconnected world to invest" in integrating global education. Capability approaches have been critiqued as relying on the contested assumption that individual self-interest benefits the public interest. Moreover, it is argued, by viewing global education primarily as an investment rather than as a common good, these approaches are also 'morally blind' (Oxley & Morris, 2013). Therefore, measurements of global competencies based on these approaches *lack ethical and social dimensions* of global education and learning.

**GLOBAL CONSCIOUSNESS APPROACHES** view global education and learning as a moral imperative and aim for collective goals such as social justice and peace. These typically take a liberal humanist or cosmopolitan position and their goals include universal human rights, intercultural understanding; empathy and recognition of the other.

Two key ideas predominate - the idea that everyone belongs to our human community and has equal worth; and that cultural diversity should be respected and protected. However, despite emphasising that each person has a moral obligation to help further the wellbeing of all, critics argue that the universalist values of these approaches are nonetheless centric on a specific world view (Oxley & Morris, 2013) and that they do not sufficiently challenge current imbalances of power. Thus, they promote equality rather than

equity. Measurements based on these approaches may include knowledge and skills in terms of understanding of human rights and social justice yet *lack capacity to be applied across diverse contexts* or universally and *lack awareness on imbalances of power* and related aspects.

**CRITICAL APPROACHES** based on decolonial thinking have risen to prominence in academic research. Framed largely in opposition to the two mainstream positions, they view global education and learning as a conception which needs to be critically engaged (Pais & Costa, 2017). These approaches consider mainstream positions as transmissive rather than transformative and argue that without examining assumptions, educators risk perpetuating inequitable economic, social and political structures that disadvantage the very groups they seek to help.

Furthermore, critical global education contends that mainstream definitions of global competency privilege particular groups (i.e. those from higher socio-economic and richer country backgrounds), for example they often assume that learners have access to the internet or are able to visit other countries. Nevertheless, to date critical approaches remain largely theoretical and have yet to be applied systematically. The normative standpoint of these approaches *lacks a sound foundation*. Fully developed and validated measurements drawing from these approaches are not yet available.

**ADVOCACY APPROACHES** prioritise active citizenship in order to achieve a shared goal such as fighting social injustice, poverty or environmental damage (Gaudelli, 2016). These typically focus on responsibilities towards the rights of other groups (or nature) and may often be combined with other positions such as moral consciousness. In terms of advocacy, statements and participation in actions may be measured, yet *learning through advocacy is difficult to measure* by standardized instruments and there is a lack of instruments to consider the special conditions of learning by engagement and advocacy as well as informal learning processes.

## Geopolitical differences in approaches

A serious challenge for measuring global competencies is the contextual emphasis on different dimensions of learning. Furthermore, there is wide regional variation in the implementation of global education and learning (see figure 1), shaped largely by national concerns.

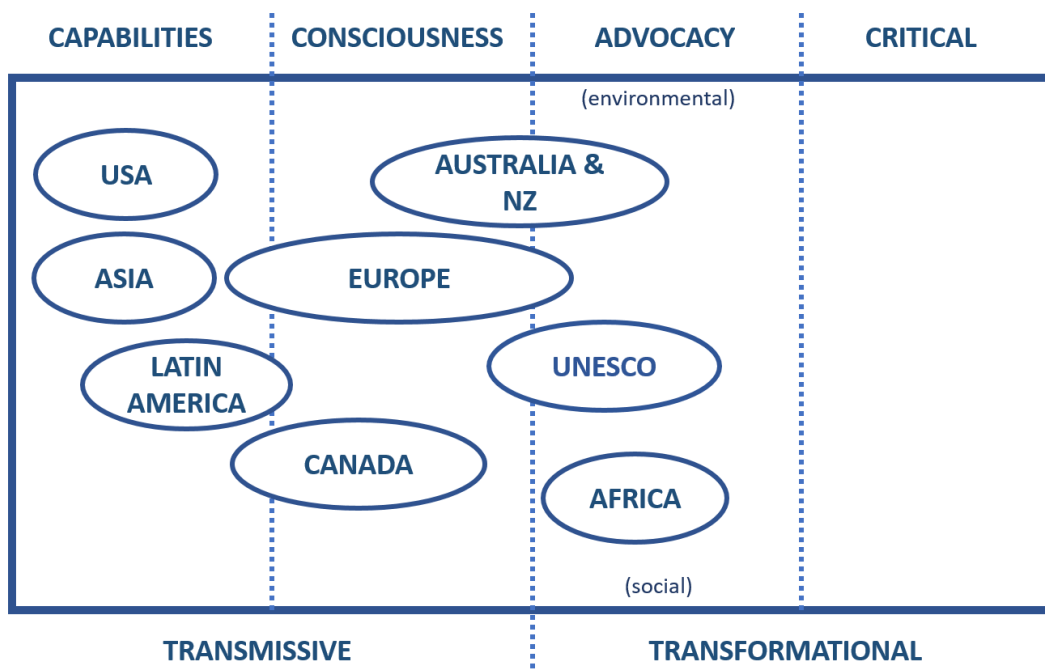
For example, European and Canadian frameworks typically adopt a global consciousness approach as a response to the challenges posed by immigration. Thus, they emphasise inclusive citizenship and promote social cohesion and acceptance of minorities as key outcomes. In Europe, there is often also an accent on justice.

Meanwhile the US and Asia favour a neoliberal approach which highlights the development of work-related skills, reflecting their focus on global competitiveness. Finally, some lower-income regions view global education as a means of empowerment, to give pupils their own voice; for others, global education is mostly simply about

learning English (culture) as an aid to mobility (Goren & Yemini, 2017).

The conceptualisations of global education and learning have been critiqued as being defined by scholars and organisations in power, ignoring diversity of knowledge, less known and non-Western perspectives (Gaudelli, 2016; Sharma, 2018). There is an evident need for increasing and diversifying the knowledge-base in global education and learning (Scheunpflug & Mehren, 2016).

Surprisingly, despite significant academic support, there is little evidence of critical approaches being applied. This may be because decoloniality is a more recent approach, or a result of policy-makers being unwilling to challenge the dominant status quo. It may also reflect how the growing instrumentalisation of teaching in many educational systems is preventing practitioners from exercising reflexivity and critique (Pais & Costa, 2017).



**Figure 1: GE typologies used by region.**

*Based on Goren & Yemini (2017)'s meta-study of 90 empirical research articles and Oxley & Morris (2013)'s global education typologies.*

## Assessment of global competencies

Given the complexity and breadth of approaches to global education and learning, a large variety of measurement tools needs to be considered to assess different dimensions of global competencies, covering human rights, citizenship, peace education, life skills, critical thinking etc.

Figure 2 charts some of the examples that have attempted to measure global competencies. It shows, for example, how the OECD PISA 2018 assessment focusses mainly on knowledge and skills, and individuals.

The influence of the OECD’s economic background and interest in human capital theory is clear. References to criticality; awareness of one’s own perspective; analysis from multiple perspectives; and shared human dignity are absent. Additionally, concerns have been expressed over a bias to power in some of the survey’s questions, leading to many nations not taking part in the OECD PISA global competencies assessment (Coughlan, 2018).

Other assessments mostly follow a moral consciousness approach, although the Global Mindedness Dispositions Instrument (GMDI), which was only piloted, was an attempt to introduce more criticality yet with weak connections to actual learning (Goren & Yemini, 2017). In addition, most place a higher emphasis on trying to capture the values and attitudes of respondents than the OECD PISA.

Most existing measurement tools focus on individuals’ knowledge and skills, as Figure 2 shows, typically gathering data through questionnaires. There is little assessment of learning processes, how global competencies are being put into practice or on global learning in teacher education (Lehtomäki, Moate & Posti-Ahokas, 2018). Furthermore, very few consider global competencies at a school level, despite evidence that a whole school approach seems to be more effective (UNESCO, 2018).

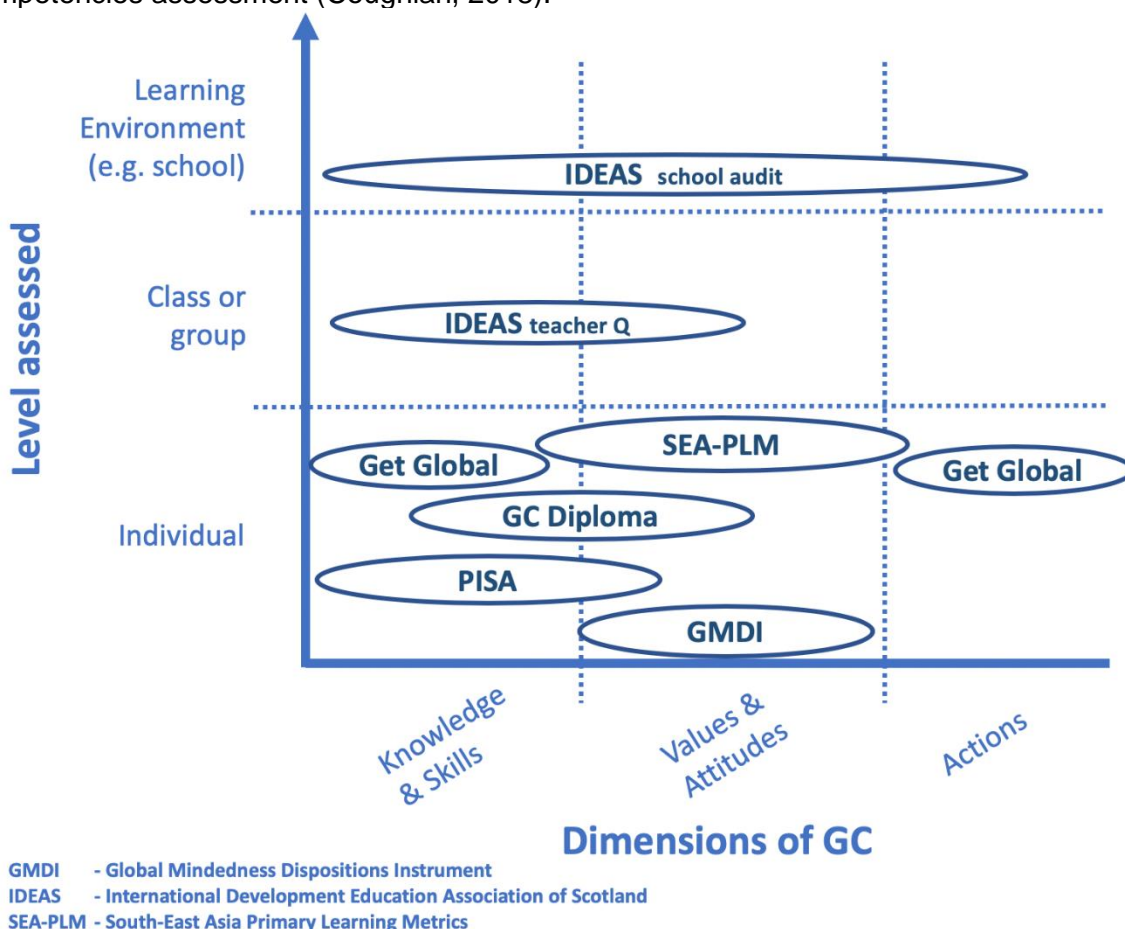


Figure 2: Attempts to measure global competencies

## Conclusions and policy implications

The recent global rise in nationalism suggests that many people view the diversity resulting from globalisation as a threat to their own culture. However, the desire for cultural isolationism assumes that our interdependence can be reversed, a somewhat implausible notion (Rizvi, 2017). In this context, the importance of a clearly articulated purpose for global education is clear.

Research demonstrates that the way in which global education and learning is conceptualised has significant implications for practice and assessment. Therefore, it is important to explain the underlying ideology and to define and use terminology consistently and appropriately.

For example, the term “global competencies” associates readily with a competency-based positioning, thus policy-makers who align their global education differently may consider using an alternative term such as “global mindedness” or “global awareness” instead.

Finally, it seems that global education is most effective when it is an integrated, whole school approach, rather than just as a topic or set of learning outcomes. Consequently, consideration should be given as to whether assessments could be focused more at this level and as continuous organisational learning and development rather than on measurement of individual learners.

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