# Exploring the Global Issues in English Language Teaching: EFL Teachers' Perspective

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**Abstract**

The purpose of this research is to examine how a particular textbook series portrays global issues. It explored teachers' attitudes towards the inclusion of global issues in the textbooks using content analysis and interviews with six English language teachers. The study found that the textbooks are primarily focused on subjects that promote and develop competence and that global issues are not given priority. The teachers who were interviewed identified a list of factors that could affect the selection of global issues to be incorporated in the textbooks.

**Keywords**: global education, global issues, language teaching and learning, culture

## 1. Introduction

All of us have been inundated with stories about global challenges including racism, prejudice, starvation, and poverty. These stories may make us wonder whether we have adequately prepared our children to deal with these issues in the future. Many writers have claimed that living in a world marked by diversity, mutuality, and social relations necessitates a desire to understand diverse cultures and societies and the challenges that we face and promotes the type of schooling that prepares students to become global citizens (Erfani, 2012; Kirovaa and Veselinovska, 2015; Almogbel, 2015). This can be accomplished by incorporating global education into our educational system. Fisher and Hicks (1985, p. 8) define global education as "education that develops the information, attitudes, and abilities important to living responsibly in a multicultural, interconnected society." It has also been defined as an "[effort] to bring about changes in the content, methods, and social context of education so that students are better prepared for citizenship in a global age" (Kniep 1985: 15). This teaching/learning strategy promotes awareness of the complex nature of new millennium living and character development, communal growth, and success in a global context (Erfani, 2012; Kirovaa and Veselinovska, 2015, Almogbel, 2015). Global education, or teaching and learning about global challenges, is not limited to a single discipline but can span the entire national curriculum. Language teaching, however, is thought to be the best environment for teaching global issues as one of the primary goals of language learning is to enable communication among cultures and peoples (Erfani, 2012). This is especially true of English, which is considered to be a universal and worldwide language. According to Matsuda (2006), English language learners must cultivate some understanding of world cultures and concerns to become competent users of English in an international environment. Therefore, incorporating global topics into language lessons can provide a substantial and authentic communication opportunity. Many countries around the world have recognised the need to include the concept of global issues in language training.

## 2. Literature Review

International education and its subfields are of increasing interest to the modern world; consequently, scientific efforts must help simplify and apply it to daily life, particularly with globalization and the development of global world concepts.   Globalisation blends cultures and civilizations, connecting humanity (Yahya 2009). On the other hand, it fuels a dichotomy between liberal defenders who celebrate interdependence between states and radicals who regard it as an expansion in capitalism's global control (Ahmed, 2012).

Many scientists, including Antonio Gramsci (1971), who offered a Marxist paradigm for the concept of dominance, agree with capitalism's global control .Writing about the cultural dimension of dominance, he states that the state's educational institutions are the source of cultural dominance, exerting influence through various avenues. Authoritarian dominance, in his opinion, is the most harmful sort of dominance.

According to Guven (2008), reform movements emerged only after it became clear that there were flaws in existing educational materials, arising from the failure to reflect worldwide developments in education. Such reforms threw Arab citizens into a frenzied race against time. The future is filled with numerous obstacles and it is important to prepare for such obstacles by producing individuals who are capable of facing and meeting them (Al-Omran, 1992).

The Education and the New World Order Conference, held in Egypt in 1992, affirmed the need to expand international understanding in curricula, as well as to begin to apply the positive concepts associated with the so-called new world order—freedom, democracy, humanity, and others—in education (Gutub et al., 1992, p. 190). International education reflects concerns about the dialogue of civilizations, respect for others, cultural interaction, strengthening citizenship, cultural tolerance, child and other human rights, world peace, and international cooperation, in addition to giving educational systems and institutions of all kinds an international dimension (Ahmad, 2012).

Inspired by these factors, among others, the researcher opted to research international education issues in Sudan, to shed light on the most critical issues raised in textbooks.

## 3. Research Questions

1. How far are global issues incorporated into the Headway textbook?

2. How do teachers react toward incorporating global issues in teaching?

## 4. The Objectives of the Study

1.To investigate how far global issues are integrated into the Headway textbook.

2. To explore teachers' attitudes towards global issues in language teaching.

## 5. Methodology

This study used a descriptive and analytic approach to investigate the component of global issues addressed in a textbook. A content analysis was used. In addition, six teachers were interviewed.

*Material - The material of this study*

This research was based on the intermediate, upper-intermediate, and advanced levels of Headway New Third Edition. The Headway English language textbooks are widely used in Sudanese institutions to teach English, particularly as a university prerequisite subject. It is also extensively used in English language institutes.

*İnterviews*

Semi-structured interview questions were sent to ten English instructors. Only six replied to the email. They were given the following questions to answer:

1- What are the standards for choosing global issues in language teaching?

2- Who is in charge of selecting global issues in language teaching?

3- Who should make the decisions about what global ethics should be promoted in foreign language education?

## 6. Results and Discussion

*Interview result*

I used description and classification processes to analyse the collected data. The findings of this study cannot be generalised for various reasons, including the fact that their cultural and educational backgrounds heavily influenced the participants' responses. However, a few similar themes emerged from the responses and these patterns could be used as a starting point for a more detailed and broad investigation.

*Q 1 - What are the standards for choosing global issues in language teaching?*

The interview data revealed five themes. They are the students' level of interest; relevance in context; availability of teaching resources; teachers' knowledge, and practicality.

The findings reveal that the most crucial factor for selecting global topics is students' characteristics and interests. This finding fits in with current teaching trends that favour learner autonomy and learner centering.

The standards of selection show a discrepancy between world topicality and local needs, which are often opposed. However, both of these criteria reflect the fundamental characteristic of the global education trend – namely, that it is derived from social context and social need. These findings are in harmony with Merry field (1994) who asserted the need to attain global awareness should equally study both home culture and abroad one, in addition to interest in the content and experiences that are used in preparing the program

The availability of teaching resources could be viewed as a post-selection methodological challenge to teaching global concerns rather than to picking global issues to be discussed in a foreign language classroom.

The teacher's knowledge requirement implies that a 'global' foreign language instructor must have specialised knowledge, which contradicts the claim of some proponents of global education that "teachers can [...] examine issues with students as co-learners."

On the other hand, the practicality criterion appears to allude to the actual effect of improving students' knowledge of a specific global issue, as evidenced by increasing learners' awareness of global issues.

*Q2- Who is in charge of selecting global issues in language teaching?*

My findings indicate that students and teachers (individually or in groups) favour deciding together which global issues to consider. Moreover, students are recognised as active actors in the teaching-and-learning process and as legitimate contributors to decision-making. As one of the participants wrote:

> By participating in decision-making, student motivation improves, bringing enhanced quality and efficiency in learning.

Another participant's reply offers a different perspective:

> Individual pupils and even some teachers will not have enough information to make an informed decision; there should be an agreement achieved by various institutions and instances and room for individual teacher (and student) preferences.

Higher-level decision-making can go beyond referring to a specific context and describe basic norms applied to various situations. Furthermore, a cross-curricular approach to global education could be encouraged by the school administration or the Ministry of Education. Meanwhile, the higher the decision-making level, the greater the risk of losing touch with real-world classroom demands and difficulties. Moreover, higher-level decisions will take time to affect the actual teaching process.

The idea of combining several levels of decision-making was favoured by many of the respondents. The participants presented two distinct approaches to combining different degrees of authority. One is using a top-down strategy:

> The minister should decide on the basic and necessary ones. Then, later, teachers might gather to adjust the issues based on specific student groupings. Then, individual teachers and students can pick what to discuss in and out of class.

Another participant recommends the bottom-up approach:

> The Ministry of Education should gather information from students, teachers, and school administrators, analyze it, and determine what should be included in foreign language instruction.

When these findings are contrasted to the replies to the question on what actually occurs, two significant points are highlighted. First, the choice of textbook is the main factor that influences the selection of specific global topics to be discussed in class. This reflects the reality of the respondents' teaching environments, which are heavily reliant on textbooks. Second, it was observed that students are given significantly less 'power' to make decisions in actual educational contexts than the participants in the study believe they should have. In practice, much of the initiative comes from the teachers themselves.

*Q3- Who should make the decisions about what global ethics should be promoted in foreign language education?*

As a group, teachers were identified as being the best placed to identify the global values to be discussed in class. Teachers offered variable views regarding this point: Some say it is the ministry responsibility, while others argues about a broader perspective or collection of perspectives should be identified as a guide to making decisions.

The statement made by one of the participants that "the Ministry may be better suited to deliver trustworthy data through questionnaires and surveys" leads us to the last research question.

## 7. Content analysis of the textbook

Checklists of global issues introduced in the textbook (Headway)

| Items | Book 4 | Book 5 | Book 6 | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Justice | | | | |
| Human rights | | | | |
| Peace | | | | |
| Freedom | | | | |
| Population Growth | | 1 | | 1 |
| AIDS/CORONA | | | | |
| Violence /Genocide | | | | |
| Terrorism | | | | |
| Ethnic Conflict | | | | |
| Social inequality | | | | |
| Environment Destruction | 2 | 1 | 1 | 4 |
| Appreciation of other cultures | 1 | 1 | | 2 |
| Respect for diversity | 1 | | 1 | 2 |
| Poverty / Hunger | | 1 | | 1 |

The table above demonstrates the frequency in which topics related to global issues are covered in the textbook. The results reveal that only a few global issues are featured in the textbook. These texts are typically set in and are representative of a certain cultural milieu. The texts cover a wide range of topics including science, culture, short stories, poetry, people, sports and language skills. According to Banegas (2010), such course books are criticized not only for avoiding provoking topics, but also for presenting a romantic view of countries such as Britain or the USA. In his words, in an attempt to avoid some controversial and real issues, material writers opt for

selecting themes that are rooted in the British or American culture

It is critical to stress how a syllabus is decided upon and the teachers' role in these decisions. The Ministry of Education in Sudan and the publisher establish the broad outline of the curriculum and its content. The teacher does not play a role in this process.

Most publishers advise coursebook authors to avoid including sensitive issues in their publications. Likewise, most books are collections of information and activities to increase English communication abilities and do not tackle social issues. However, the primary goal of ELT materials should be to help students read their world while reading their words (Rashidi and Safari, 2011). As a result, most coursebooks focus on seemingly innocuous topics (such as eating, shopping, or travel) rather than real-world challenges such as ozone depletion, nuclear waste disposal, the spread of AIDS and ecological disasters.

## 8. Conclusion

Today's world is plagued by significant global concerns including terrorism, racism, pollution, ethnic conflict, and poverty, to name a few. These global challenges have raised the curiosity of educators to consider all aspects of global issues in the preparation of materials, in the course design, and their teaching methods.

Looking over ELT textbooks taught in Sudanese culture revealed that these books are either centre-oriented or sanitised. Thus, avoiding such topics and embracing this new approach, namely global challenges, in the construction of ELT textbooks might be regarded as favouring a pro-western culture.

The study found that students' characteristics (such as interests and needs, age and language proficiency) is the most popular factor in determining which global concerns to cover and which global ideals to promote in foreign language instruction. Current developments in technique, such as learner-centredness and learner autonomy, are likely to reinforce these findings. Another important factor for selecting global issues and values appears to be contextual characteristics.

To summarise, the need to learn English in a globalised world is acknowledged, so providing textbooks based on global issues not only enables learners to acquire and use a foreign language efficiently, but also empowers them with the knowledge, skills, and commitment required of world citizens to solve global problems.

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