

CONCEPTUALIZING GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP AT JAPANESE SECONDARY SCHOOLS:  
A CASE STUDY ON THE SUPER GLOBAL HIGH SCHOOL PROGRAM

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ABSTRACT

As the third largest global economy facing the most extreme projected population decline, Japanese government and industry leaders have been feeling the pressure to mitigate expected decelerations to economic growth through the development of global human resources at the higher education level. To support this endeavor, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) created an initiative to foster global leaders at the upper secondary school level. Meanwhile, global citizenship education is gaining momentum around the world at all levels of education to provide students with the skills and knowledge necessary to promote sustainable development, which is in part due to an increased public awareness regarding the interconnectedness of our world today.

Despite global citizenship education's increasing popularity, the global academic discourse on the topic is heavily dominated by literature produced in English-speaking western societies, such as Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Furthermore, those literature are also geographically focused on western societies. Thus, the unbalanced academic discourse on the topic runs the risk of perpetuating forms of knowledge favored by western societies, which can distort how global citizenship is truly understood by the non-western and non-English speaking societies. Therefore, in-depth studies focused on non-western societies will illuminate discussions on how global citizenship is understood in

their own respective contexts, which will enable global comparisons for the improved practice global citizenship and its education.

This thesis aims to explore the conceptualizations of global citizenship and global leadership by teachers and students at Japanese secondary schools to provide a Japanese perspective in the global discourse on the topic of global citizenship education. Per a case study on the Super Global High School Program developed by MEXT, this study employed qualitative methods of data collection, including semi-structured interviews with teachers, focus group discussions with students, and student questionnaire surveys. A qualitative content analysis of the primary and secondary data revealed several themes that helped illustrate the relationships between global citizenship, global leadership, and global human resources as conceived by MEXT, individual schools, teachers, and students.

Results revealed that global citizenship is seen as a prerequisite to global leadership by teachers and students, which all teachers and most students aspire to obtain suggesting an awareness of the importance of global citizenship and global leadership. A contrastingly small number of students expressed a sense of indifference owing to a lack of interest and self-confidence, with one student expressed resistance to global citizenship citing fear of the loss of national identity. A further analysis of these results gave rise to the categories of “tolerant” and “resistant” attitudes towards the concepts of global citizenship and global leadership.

There were two unexpected results from this study. The first was that students were unable to clearly express their understanding of Japanese identity with Japanese citizenship. This hints at a deeper implication regarding how education assists students in the construction and negotiation of their national identity while creating a global identity per the mission of the Super Global High School Program to foster global leaders. The second unexpected result

identified teachers as an unexpected beneficiary of the program that was designed for the students by the teachers. Teachers stated that they had never thought about their own identity as a global citizen prior to the interview, and thus used it as an opportunity to reflect on their experience. Enlightened by the realization of their transformation through SGH, a couple teachers stated their way of thinking or their techniques in teaching have changed for the better.

Based on these results, a brief comparison on the visions and intentions held by MEXT, individual schools, teachers and students showed a small difference. Where MEXT sees SGH as a means to develop global leaders, the individual school seeks to develop both global citizens and global leaders. However, teachers expressed their intention to focus on developing their students as global citizens first, while students were open to the idea of being either a global citizen, a global leader, or neither. Thus, the sense of misalignment in visions and intentions stems from the explicit lack on MEXT's part to include the qualities and expectations of global citizenship in the context of global leadership and human resource development.

The results of this study contributes to the development of the concepts of global citizenship and its education by relating it to global leadership, which has not been yet been documented in literature. Moreover, this study introduces the Super Global High School Program for which there are no studies in English. Results overtly highlight global citizenship and global leadership as components to Japan's global human resources agenda as a measure to cope with the need for different business strategies to sustain its economy. However, the potential contribution of this study is in assisting in the current reforms being made for the new national secondary education curriculum that will be implemented in 2020. Included in this reform will be a course on public citizenship, but reforms will also consider ways in

which teacher mentality can shift from the traditional to the contemporary that will assist in the education of the new generation.

Thus, future research should consider a comparative study of the SGH and non-SGH teachers to show the mindsets of both types of teachers would assist in the development of improved teacher training programs designed to transform ways of thinking. Additionally, a study that examines the “sense of Japanese identity” that MEXT prescribes as a facet of global leadership cultivation should illustrate in further detail the depth of understanding among students learning about citizenship in a demographically shifting Japan.

Keywords: Global citizenship education, Global leadership, Global human resources, Secondary education, Super Global High School