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Teaching globalization from a local perspective – past concepts, present challenges, and future approaches

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- Challenges such as the ‘globalisation backlash’ are rooted in lifeworld experiences.
- These experiences are rarely addressed by global citizenship education.
- Past concepts of economic education can help to explore these lifeworld experiences.
- They also help to select meaningful cases for teaching globalisation.
- Linking students’ experiences with a socio-economic analysis can prevent public deception.

Purpose: The ‘globalisation backlash’ poses a challenge to society and civic education. This article develops future approaches to teaching globalisation by drawing on past concepts of economic education.

Approach: An in-depth literature review on the contemporary challenges of globalisation is given and compared to the conventional approaches of teaching globalisation. Past concepts of economic education are introduced and examined for their applicability in this context.

Findings: Since the ‘globalisation backlash’ is rooted in subjective experiences of the local environment, approaches such as lifeworld-orientation are useful to activated students’ understandings. Socio-economic approaches can complement this with sociological, economic, and political theories that reveal the mechanisms behind personal experiences.

Practical implications: Diagnostic teaching becomes necessary to link the students’ realm of experience and globalised reality.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Current affairs such as social inequality, immigration, economic interdependence, digitalisation, and environmental issues can be classified as part of an extensive transformation process that is closely linked to the mega-phenomenon of globalisation. Alongside growing political, cultural and technological interdependence, economic globalisation is considered as the main driver of contemporary political controversies and scientific research (Rodrik, 2018): With the 'globalisation backlash', a phenomenon has appeared that spurs rejectionist sentiments among several groups of society, fuelled by the experience of social dislocations and the desire to limit growing global dependencies. This link was observed best in the United Kingdom and the United States of America, where the increasing rejection of the liberal free trade regime and the rise of (right-wing) populist movements led to Brexit and the election of Donald Trump (Rodrik, 2018, p. 23). Recent developments such as the COVID pandemic and the Russian invasion of Ukraine have highlighted the vulnerability of national economies due to their dependence on global trade relations and value chains. Accordingly, it can be assumed that ongoing globalisation will be accompanied by massive conflicts over coping with and shaping its future. Adolescents in particular are faced with adapting to an increasingly interdependent world. To become autonomous and responsible citizens, adolescents need to gain a substantial understanding of globalisation's dynamic nature, how it influences their identities and their understanding of the world. Furthermore, a potential growing nativism and right-wing populism among young European and American voters in precarious situations needs to be addressed by teaching them how to shape the effects of globalisation processes that affect their everyday lives (Zagórski et al., 2021).

Despite these challenges, conventional approaches of economic education often remain in a nation-state perspective, describing global phenomena based on macroeconomic models, highlighting aggregate effects by simultaneously hiding the underlying social processes and individual fates on a local level (Hedtke, 2018, p. 316–319). Teaching globalisation through the lens of macroeconomics, students perceive international trade as a mechanism leading to marginal collective benefits. However, such an approach does not only neglect the individual gains of free trade but also the burden it can impose on the everyday life of individuals. Furthermore, the question arises by which teaching methods students can get insights into the ambivalent and contradictory nature of globalisation without contributing to a feeling of helplessness in face of several dislocating experiences (Sander, 2011, p. 426–427).

Based on the contemporary challenges this article asks for strategies and approaches, that are useful to cope with the increasing demands imposed on individuals by the complexity of globalisation. It builds a bridge between general approaches to global learning and existing approaches of economic and social science education. At the centre of this article, the potential of selected concepts of economic education (life-situation-concept, socio-economic plurality as well as paradigmatic and institutional approaches) are evaluated regarding the requirements of understanding contemporary problems of

globalisation.

The concluding argument of this article is that globalisation needs to be understood as a cause for several complex socio-political phenomena taking place in the students' realm of experience. Because of the 'globalisation backlash', questions of identity and subjective understandings need to be addressed in class. Thus, teachers should explore students' perspectives and widen their horizons with additional theoretical perspectives that help them reflect on their own understandings.

2 THE PRESENT – GLOBALISATION AND ITS BACKLASHES

Globalisation has become a rich field of social science research and a concept that is applicable to describe and explain current social processes on a global, national, and local level. However, growing integration into the global system has created new dependencies and constraints for nation states. In this context, the term 'globalisation backlash' was coined. It refers to the radical rejection of globalisation and its consequences for developed countries, following the growing opposition by the public regarding the supranationalisation of politics, increased immigration and economic turbulences. Contemporary political upheavals such as the Brexit vote and Donald Trump's presidential election can be interpreted as a public reaction to the performance of governments under the constraints of globalisation (Rodrik, 2018, p. 23).

A review of the latest literature points to the argument, that these developments can be explained by individual attitudes towards globalisation, which are based on political ideology, level of education, economic knowledge, and subjective understandings (Kuo & Naoi, 2015; Hainmüller & Hiscox, 2006, p. 492; Mansfield & Mutz, 2009, p. 452). The latter factors in particular underline the necessity for a review of contemporary approaches to economic education since subjective understandings of globalisation are often at odds with scientific understandings. Furthermore, these understandings are fed by personal concerns (e.g. loss of one's own job) and are characterised by the perception of indirect effects on one's personal environment (Broz, Frieden & Weymouth, 2021, p. 465).

From a theoretical perspective, the globalisation backlash and an individual's political orientation are linked by two causal pathways (Rodrik, 2021, p. 140). First, the economic consequences of deeper international integration can lead to deteriorating economic prospects or even job loss in non-competitive regions. On this basis, political preferences can emerge that go hand in hand with the rejection of globalisation and the pursuit of preserving one's own interests. Second, economic dislocations can cause a sense of social insecurity, especially when one's own home region experiences a decline in significance and quality of life. Taken together, the powerful dynamics of globalisation can destabilise the worldviews of vulnerable communities in a way, that nurtures desires to return to traditional values and identities that provide stability. This includes stronger group identification, nostalgic views, or the defence of group privileges, which in turn can result in structural discrimination of 'others' such as migrants, unemployed or religious minorities.

Based on this theoretical insight, globalisation should not be reduced to an economic process happening on an international level but rather seen as a cause for several phenomena that are observed by individuals in their local environment. To exemplify this: Inhabitants of the English city of Newcastle reported that worldwide competition led to local companies going out of business. Commercial decline on the local high street was associated with a downward spiral that affected other local spheres such as the housing market and crime, inducing a general feeling of being left behind. A sentiment strongly associated with political support for 'Brexit' (Silver et al., 2020). Consequently, globalisation has broad implications for the socioeconomic structure of local communities, which in turn have a lasting effect on the context in which people are embedded and affect their decisions and actions (Carreras, 2019). This assumption is supported by empirical studies on the 'globalisation backlash' which provide evidence that regions and communities exposed to increased import competition and free trade are significantly affected by unemployment because of job cuts and plant closures (Autor, Dorn & Hanson, 2016). The consequences of these distortions can be observed in many socially relevant dimensions. These include the perceived loss of social status of low-educated, young, white men (Autor, Dorn & Hanson, 2019) and demographic shifts due to migration of the younger population in an affected region (Greenland, Lopresti & McHenry, 2019). Because of rising unemployment and migration, regions affected suffer lower tax revenues, which in turn lead to declining expenditures in public goods such as schools, police, fire departments, recreational areas, public transportation, or social housing (Feler & Senses, 2017). A declining status in these areas is accompanied by an increase in drug abuse and suicide (Pierce & Schott, 2020) and finally a growing number of votes for right-wing populist and extreme right-wing parties in elections (Milner, 2021). These findings are not limited to the USA but can similarly be observed in other regions of the world and underline the necessity to consider teaching approaches that include the subjective understanding of students

In conclusion, evidence indicates that globalisation processes are rarely perceived from a national perspective. On the contrary, public perception of globalisation is formed by its effects on local communities but also on the economic status of individuals and families, their perceived quality of life and identity.

3 THE PAST – CONVENTIONAL APPROACHES TO TEACHING GLOBALISATION

Despite its ambivalence and multidimensionality, a narrow and predominantly economic understanding of globalisation is present in public debates. In the past, a national perspective dominated teaching approaches to globalisation, with curricula of various western countries becoming more focused on transnational perspectives in recent times. Nevertheless, a national focus still prevails, since the core concern of civic education in most countries is forming a civic identity (Kennedy, 2011, p. 320-321).

Against this background, various conceptions have been developed that attach more importance to the transnational perspective when discussing globalisation. Teaching

approaches such as 'global citizenship education' are more concerned with a multidimensional concept of globalisation and choose transnational as well as socio-political and moral dimensions to guide learning processes. Topics are selected in such a way that they are not only significant on a national level, but also enable transnational insights into a global society (Sander, 2011, p. 426). Cosmopolitan values and acting as a world citizen are declared the normative goals of social science education. Its objective is forming an identity of global citizenship, which is necessary for understanding the world society and learning about how to shape it (Veugelers, 2011, pp. 474). Accordingly, the individual responsibility of learners as world citizens should be addressed and different dimensions (e.g. moral, political, cultural, critical-democratic) of globalisation weighed against each other in order to form a complex understanding of the world (Veugelers, 2020, p. 14). Therefore, it is necessary to work on topics that exemplify the manifold dimensions of globalisation while adopting a transnational perspective.

While such an approach can reveal cosmopolitan ideas to learners and provide orientation for responsible future actions, it implies that topics become more abstract, placing high demands on the learners' ability to analyse such issues. Following the guiding objective of global citizenship education, learning processes leave the level of personal and local environment as well as the national community behind and enable learners to take a global position. In a paradoxical way, this ideal of universality can become oppressive rather than liberating since it reinforces inequalities. Global citizenship imposes ideas and practices that ignore local realities and the individual realm of experience.

Even though the objective of promoting global citizenship, including a universal moral-political power of judgment, seems desirable, it cannot be neglected that individuals develop conflicting roles and identities in the process of socialization. Additionally, teaching cosmopolitan values poses dangers of one-sidedness and overwhelming students in a way that is incompatible with the idea of emancipation. Since cosmopolitanism itself has become part of a controversy in political science, it should be considered as one legitimate world view amongst several others (de Wilde, Koopmans, Merkel, Strijbis & Zürn, 2019). Taken together, transnational approaches to globalisation run into danger of developing moralising tendencies, turn political cosmopolitanism into a moral cosmopolitanism and lead to lip service which deprives learners of the possibility to become political agents (Eis & Moulin-Doos, 2017, p. 57).

Findings from selected studies confirm the assumptions made above. First, classroom research suggests that teachers tend to moralise topics concerned with global sustainable development. Students are put in a passive position by letting them reproduce moral appeals. Sometimes they even reject these altogether (Wettstädt & Asbrand, 2014, p. 9). On the other hand, students can be activated to reflect on their own ideas and about topics of global concern when they are given space to explore and analyse issues independently and without teacher guidance (Fischer, 2017). Regarding its economic dimension, it becomes apparent that the perspective on issues of globalisation depends on a student's

social status, since highly educated adolescents point out mostly positive aspects, whereas less educated adolescents emphasise dangers for their future careers (Fischer et al., 2016, p. 138–141). Being confronted with complex topics and the challenges of adopting a universal perspective on globalisation processes may also lead to feelings of helplessness and a lasting impression that it is impossible to exert meaningful political influence (Fischer et al., 2016, p. 142).

A central characteristic of learning about globalisation has been shown to be that its topics cannot be taught from an objective perspective but are subjective in their nature with different consequences for individuals in each case (Myers, 2010, p. 154–156). With reference to the findings presented on the ‘globalisation backlash’, it becomes clear that the effects of globalisation do not only impact economic but also social, cultural, and political dimensions of people’s everyday lives. Hence, they can be abused as an instrument of public deception when the underlying mechanisms remain misunderstood. The perception of one’s own socioeconomic situation, as well as the relative condition of the local community affects a person’s attitude towards free trade, migration, cosmopolitanism, and supranational politics. Thus, the subjective perception of globalisation has to take the centre stage in economic education.

4 THE FUTURE? – BETWEEN LEIFEWORLD, SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND PARADIGMATIC PERSPECTIVES

The challenges presented above are multifaceted. They include questions of how to interlink people’s diverse subjective understandings of the world, how to choose significant cases to illustrate globalisation’s multidimensionality, and how to empower students in shaping the globalised world. Taking a closer look at the well-equipped toolbox of economic education serves as a starting point to answer these questions.

4.1 Globalisation as realm of experience between everyday life and global reality

The *life-situation-approach* of economic education is rooted in the experience and subjective understanding of individuals, which makes it compatible with the learning theory of constructivism. Since students already acquire a subjective understanding of economics in their everyday life, economic education should focus on these life situations first. According to Steinmann (1997), life situations can be considered as repeated social interactions that carry personal significance, such as deciding about one’s future career, consumption or negotiating an employment contract. In class, this usually goes hand in hand with the analysis of conflicts of interests (e.g. consumer and business interests). Taking on globalisation processes through the lens of the life-situation-concept can lead to meaningful discussions since they are omnipresent and shape several life situations that do not only occur in the context of generating income (labour, production) and expenditure (consumption, savings, investments), but also in situations that involve a

social and political dimensions. Examples for the everyday encounter with aspects of global competition and global production are commonly offered by true-to-life experiences such as the use of digital technology (e.g. smartphones, social networks), observing symptoms of global trade (e.g. variety of products in stores, increasing competition), or migration (cultural diversity, questions of identity). The encounter between the personal realm of experience and the reality of globalisation can lead to convergence but also destabilise world views and finally become a topic of personal relevance.

Therefore, teaching economics should not start with simply confronting students with economic theory. Instead, teachers should find out how students have constructed their conceptual understanding about the socio-economic structures their lives are embedded in. These findings can serve as a basis for choosing relevant topics that challenge students' understanding and initiate meaningful learning. Analysing local examples, such as the closure of businesses, the outsourcing of jobs and its consequences can supply orientation to students and make them more sensitive to the effect of globalisation on the world around them. While global competition provides opportunities for local businesses which in turn supply jobs and prosperity, communities become dependent on and more vulnerable to developments on global markets. To realise the existence of these mechanisms and how they work, students need to gain fruitful insight into economic theories and methods of analysis. Instead of moralising the actions of business executives or blaming the incompetence of local politicians for the outsourcing of jobs, this opens opportunities to consider global and local structures and how they incentivise the observed behaviour. Applying this knowledge improves students' abilities to examine the situation they are in. It does not only provide them with the necessary analytical tools to disassemble the world around them but also how to reassemble it according to their ideas and needs.

Taken together, this approach goes beyond picking subjects of current political discussions or exploring exemplary cases that are meaningful to students and give insights into the mechanisms of globalisation. It conceptualises students as autonomous agents with specific interests that are created by their different social positions (gender, origin, socioeconomic status, future career path, etc.). They are also affected by globalisation processes to varying degrees, which result in privileged positions, but also in manifold disadvantages. In addition to focussing on the individual level of 'coping' with situations, this approach also underlines the social 'challenge' of globalisation processes, such as social inequality and power asymmetries. Therefore, Steinmann (1997) has placed the life-situation-concept in a comprehensive social theory and pointed to the embeddedness of individuals and groups in a complex social reality. In this framework, identifying winners and losers of globalisation no longer takes place on an international but rather on the individual level. The life-situation approach enables students to question the relationship between different actors, their interests, and dimensions of global - but also local - privileges and disadvantages, to illuminate individual and joint scope for action and to

shape the political, social and economic spheres of globalisation.

4.2 Global interaction and cooperation from a paradigmatic perspective

The global economic reality can also be taught from a *paradigmatic perspective* and conceptualized as a realm of competition in which the interaction between actors is characterized by conflicting interests. This mechanism can be understood on a systemic level as a complementary incentive with regulatory functions, whose prosperity-enhancing effect is illustrated by Adam Smith's metaphor of the 'invisible hand'. The social function of these basic principles, such as negotiation processes or competition (limitation of power, creation of welfare) can be understood by switching from the level of individual action to the level of social order. The distinction between micro and macro levels allows students to analyse a variety of social dilemmas: While knowledge and action may differ on an individual level (e.g. 'fair trade'), a potential change of perspective away from the moral characteristics of an individual (consumer behaviour) to the conditions influencing an action may open up new insights into the importance of structures and their incentives. The change of production conditions and fair remuneration in developing countries, such as in the trade of textiles or raw materials, is no longer the responsibility of individual consumers, but becomes a task for society as a whole. This counteracts a 'moralising individualisation' of collective problems. The assessment of the effect of global competition can be extended from the individual case - in which competition may have a negative effect - to the collective level, for which possible beneficial effects of competition become apparent. With this change in perspective, it is possible to question ideas such as preserving jobs in the home country being valued higher than creating jobs in foreign countries ('anti-foreign-bias'). By looking at this issue from a macro level or through a 'veil of ignorance', the consequences for different actors and groups can be assessed (Loerwald & Schreiber, 2020, p. 202).

4.3 Socioeconomic plurality and interdisciplinary perspectives on globalisation

Economic education can be considered as a specific dimension among others in the framework of social science education. *Socio-economic concepts* emphasize the necessity of interlinking the plurality of ideas about economics, politics, and society (Hedtke, 2014). This approach seems to be particularly productive for teaching globalisation to examine the interdependence between social reality and globalisation. For example, operational decisions such as offshoring do not only involve questions of business administration and economics, but also sociology, politics, and ethics. On the one hand, an outsourcing decision must be seen through the eyes of a company, which is concerned with its profitability and thus its long-term economic success. At the same time, this decision has to be seen in the context of global competition and international trade, which, based on a utilitarian approach, can emphasize the wealth gains from the transnational division of

labour. Profits can benefit both consumers and foreign workers and, in aggregate, may outweigh the negative consequences for domestic workers, who might lose their jobs. This in turn can result in social upheavals, such as unemployment, a potential loss of status for individuals and groups, as well as a dwindling attractiveness of affected regions. This gives rise to further challenges that put political actors under pressure. Therefore, socio-economic concepts argue in favour of embedding economic education in the diversity of perspectives that social sciences have to offer and, at the same time, opposes narrow ideas that reduce complex phenomena to a single discipline. Due to the lack of a core content, the exemplary and multidisciplinary analysis of significant cases of globalisation can help to link knowledge from different disciplines to gain an improved understanding of the complex processes happening around the world.

4.4 Global institutions, systems, and economic thought

The concept of *institutional economics* emphasises that the economy is an inseparable part of the political and social system within a society, which is why economic education should be dedicated to teaching about the interdependent structures of economics and politics and how they can be shaped. In context of globalisation, this includes discussing national and international rules and regulations of the world economy. In a broader sense, teaching about the roles of specific actors, who want to influence the global economic order beyond its existing structures (e.g. NGOs), become more relevant. Examining tensions between national autonomy, democratic self-determination and the global market economy can be introduced by identifying cases in which the relationship between economic and political spheres is characterized by differences, ambiguity, and dynamics. For example, the comparative political economy of the welfare state provides approaches that show the 'worlds' (Scandinavian social-democratic world, continental European conservative world, Anglo-Saxon liberal world) and 'variants' (coordinated market economy, liberal market economy) of welfare state (Esping-Andersen, 1990). These typologies can also be used in a simplified form in social science teaching. Such analyses of economic governance complement a 'thinking about economic orders' (Kruber, 1994) where alternatives of economic governance can be discussed. Further examples are the comparative analysis of liberal and protectionist trade policies, the growing importance of organizations such as the G20 or the WTO and their influence on global wealth and power distribution. These examples point to the fact that many political problems and conflicts are subject to an economic dimension, and that economic action is embedded in a regulatory framework that is subject to international political negotiations.

The subject of globalisation shows that conventional concepts of economic education have a complementary character and can open up a problem-oriented, multi-perspective analysis of contemporary challenges. This includes both a sensitivity to students' experiences and linking them with disciplinary perspectives. Both life-situational-concepts as well as socioeconomic variants refer to the educational goal of autonomy and

improving one's living conditions while simultaneously offering space for critical perspectives. They also raise questions regarding the possibilities of influencing global politics, while paradigmatic and institutional concepts focus on the scientific tools for exploring the functions of these structures.

5 CONCLUSION: MEDIATING BETWEEN LIFEWORLD AND THE PERSPECTIVES OF THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

Recapping the listed concepts of economic education shows that future teaching should tie together the individual understandings, life experiences and the diversity of theoretical perspectives. This approach can build a bridge to individual points of view and give students the opportunity to reflect critically on their own position in the complex network of globalisation. Accordingly, the encounter with the plurality of interpretations is in line with the central principle for the development of subject-oriented judgments (Weber, 2014, p. 137).

The discussed phenomenon of the 'globalisation backlash' can be interpreted both as an expression of growing disorientation as well as increasing inequality resulting from global competition. The perceptions of direct and indirect local effects that have consequences on people's life can make individuals experience disorientation or even degradation. Regardless of how a person assesses such phenomena, it remains to be emphasised that the growing global interdependencies and the design of international institutions depend on the people's assessments. Therefore, it remains questionable whether the pedagogical focus on transnational and global perspectives as well as normatively far-reaching goals, such as global citizenship, are adequate solutions to these cases of disorientation. Teaching scientific 'facts' about the dynamics of globalisation do not do justice to the subjective understanding's students adhere to. Teaching economics by solely selecting important facts and figures fails to acknowledge the manifold life experiences and social expectations to which young people are exposed to in their various social roles. These include solidarities (family, peers), dependencies (parents, employers), and rivalries (economic and political competitors).

Against the backdrop of dealing with these diverse challenges, adolescents should rather be given the opportunity to reflect on their roles as family members, friends, members of a social class, national or even global citizens. They deserve the opportunity to develop these roles and to reconcile the demands, contradictions and responsibilities that go hand in hand with them (Arnett Jense, Jensen Arnett & McKenle, 2011, p. 289).

These insights have far-reaching consequences for teaching globalisation and economic education as a whole. Instead of approaching the topic of globalisation from a scientific perspective, teachers should start on a local level and give room to the students' experiences. Since their subjective understandings of globalisation is the starting point, the mechanisms behind their understandings need to be examined and understood by teachers. This change from teaching scientific content to giving more weight to students'

understanding puts high requirements on teachers and their professional behaviour. An extensive understanding of the content knowledge about globalisation needs to be linked with an intensive analysis of the students understanding. By doing so, teachers need to structure learning processes by productively combining insights from both fields and to select significant cases that engage students in learning. Therefore, developing diagnostic abilities becomes more urgent for the future of teaching. Especially teacher education needs to focus more on diagnostic teaching. Teachers need helpful suggestions and easily accessible methods for economics classes that encourages diagnostic teaching. Otherwise, time pressure, an overwhelming workload, and several obligations besides teaching will make this paradigm shift doomed to fail. The consequences of not promoting diagnostic teaching when dealing with globalisation might be even worse as the extensive literature review has already shown.

Put differently: It is not enough to know about the structures of globalisation, but they need to be found in the local environment and in students' perceptions. Diagnostic teaching is the key to explore the realm of students' experiences that are in need of growth and complexity. Despite these suggestions, it is necessary to look beyond existing concepts, especially because in the future, categories such as emotion and identity are going to gain more and more attention. Even though this subjectivity of learning was regarded as an obstacle in social science education for a long time, it has become more relevant for economic education since these characteristics are the basis for individual attitudes and judgments (Besand, 2016).

However, applying these concepts still poses a challenge to teachers because it places high demands on their diagnostic abilities. The future of economic education will rely on new ideas on how to engage teachers in diagnostic teaching and to raise awareness for the importance of students' subjective understandings.

Taken together, the presented concepts of economic education prove to be potential mediators between subjective and scientific understandings of globalisation phenomena. They can build a bridge between the students' experiences of globalisation and the complexity of global processes. However, the phenomenon of the 'globalisation backlash' explored here, also shows that identity, social status, and individual experiences need to become more important for economic teaching and learning in general.

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