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Global Citizenship Education: A Systematic Review of Educational Research

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Abstract

Background/purpose. This article aims to analyze the scientific literature on Global Citizenship Education (GCE) to examine whether it has educated critical citizens capable of transforming the world.

Materials/methods. This article conducts a systematic review of the existing literature on CGE in the primary social science databases in Ibero-America until 2022, using the PRISMA method (Urrutia & Bonfill, 2010). The selected documents are analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively using Atlas software, which allows for identifying the main themes prevalent in research on CGE.

Results. The results showed how GCE research became more relevant over time. However, several aspects still require further research, such as GCE in formal education at non-university levels, GCE in informal and non-formal education, or educational resources for working on GCE.

Conclusion. In conclusion, it has been possible to glimpse gaps that represent new lines of research necessary to promote the formation of global citizenship that acts to transform the world into a more sustainable and humane place.

1. Introduction

Today's society must be understood from a global perspective, given that people are citizens of an interconnected world that we must care for and preserve. The need to understand that we live in a global society in which the acts that occur in some countries impact others, and vice versa, has increased during the last years, as the entire population must move towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) proposed by the United Nations (UN, 2015) in the 2030 Agenda (Karaose y Tülübaş, 2023; Rodrigues et al., 2023).

The target is supposed to train the population to become global citizens. In that case, the fact that Global Citizenship Education (GCE) is becoming essential should not be under discussion. International organizations such as the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) have incorporated global competence into its relevant PISA report since 2018; in fact, the OECD considers that students should be able to "examine local, global and intercultural issues, understand and appreciate different perspectives and world views, interact successfully and respectfully with others, and act responsibly towards sustainability and collective well-being" (OECD, 2018, p. 5). Similarly, the UN indicate in SDG 4.7 the objective that "by 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote Sustainable Development, including, among others, through education for Sustainable Development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, [...], global citizenship…" (UN, 2015, p. 17).

UNESCO also stresses the formation of global citizenship as a critical aspect for forming citizens capable of facing the challenges of today's society (UNESCO, 2014, 2015). UNESCO considers training in GCE vital for several reasons. First, it is closely linked to growing interdependency and interconnectedness between countries in economic, cultural, and social areas through increased international trade, migration, communication, etc. It is also linked to our concerns for global well-being beyond national boundaries and based on the understanding that global well-being also influences national and local well-being. (UNESCO, 2014, p. 14).

Therefore, the relevance of the research conducted in this study is manifest in the need to investigate CGE and promote the formation of a critically aware citizenship capable of acting to transform the world into a better place. In the words of the Global Education Network Europe (GENE): "Living together in diverse societies remains a challenge, and there are both reasons for concern and reasons to be hopeful" (GENE, 2020, p. 12).

This study makes a necessary contribution to research on GCE for two key reasons: (1) it is not limited only to making a list of published papers on this topic, as the one conducted in Global Digest (2020, 2022), and (2) it goes beyond reviewing the discourse on GCE in teacher education (Estellés & Fishman, 2020; Yemini et al., 2019). Our research aims to conduct a more comprehensive and detailed review of the academic literature on GCE by performing a quantitative and qualitative analysis. This allows us to make a relevant and novel contribution since, by qualitatively analyzing in depth each of the articles, we manage to discover trends in the research conducted to date and to establish future lines of research on GCE issues that have not yet, from the research field, been given the necessary attention.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Global citizenship education

Defining GCE is an arduous and complex task, given that it is subject to multiple connotations and constant changes over time. This lack of agreement among scientists to define GCE leads to multiple definitions and studies that focus on analyzing existing notions, such as those conducted by Beckwith (2022), Goren et al. (2020), Pais and Costa (2020), or Santamaría-Cárdaba (2021).

Official organizations such as UNESCO consider GCE to "refer to a sense of belonging to a broader community and common humanity. It emphasizes political, economic, social and cultural interdependency and interconnectedness between the local, the national and the global" (2015, p. 14). Bourn, for his part, considers that the GCE "is becoming a distinctive pedagogical approach that in many ways is counter-hegemonic and that challenges the dominant orthodoxies and ideologies that have historically influenced educational theory and practice" (Bourn, 2020, p. 20).

Currently, multiple authors such as Andreotti (2014, 2021), Bamber et al. (2017), McLaren and Bosio (2022), and Sant et al. (2018) have added the adjective critical to GCE. These authors understand GCE as an educational process that should teach citizens to think critically, trying to enliven in them a commitment to defend human rights and make the world more equitable.

Additionally, this study is aligned with Critical GCE, an educational process that aims to educate citizens with critical and global awareness. Hence, they are not only able to reason about the existing social reality but also to act in defense of human and Sustainable Development.

2.2. Global citizenship education topics and aims

After understanding the definition of GCE that underlies this study, it is necessary to comment on the topics and objectives of this educational process. Regarding the topics, Mesa (2019) or OXFAM (2018) agree that among the main topics of GCE are:

> …the causes and consequences related to inequality in the distribution of wealth and power in the world, as well as the inequalities between men and women as a result of the discrimination they have suffered throughout history, violence, global warming, and cultural diversity. (Mesa, 2019, p. 21)

The Council of Europe (2008, 2019) proposes guidelines for GCE that point out that the purpose of teaching the subjects linked to this global training is "to enable individuals to understand global issues, empowering them with the knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes desirable for world citizens to cope with global problems" (Council of Europe, 2019, p. 19). For this reason, the contents to be transmitted from GCE should:

> … analyze and link the problems of a micro-context with global issues (which are also macro-context problems) and move from a close reality (the family, the neighborhood, the school, the city) to an intermediate reality (the region, the state) and to a more distant reality (the global world). (Council of Europe, 2008, p. 23)

Therefore, the objectives of GCE could be summarized as fostering critical thinking so that the population understands the social reality and the existing relations between different countries; knowing the economic, political, and social relations between different countries that cause exclusion and inequality; and developing attitudes and values that promote a sense of responsibility so that people act in favor of Human Rights, Sustainable Development and social equality to achieve the common good (Beckwith, 2022; Leite, 2022; Tarozzi & Inguaggiato, 2018).

Given GCE's undisputed relevance nowadays, it is essential to discover what is being researched and what aspects have not yet been studied. Herein lies the relevance of this study, as it will make a necessary contribution to future lines of research; in addition, this systematic review of the literature will provide an exhaustive and essential perspective of the research developed on GCE—the following section details how the review of existing research on GCE has been carried out.

3. Methodology

This research used a systematic literature review methodology to "collect all empirical evidence that meets pre-specified eligibility criteria to answer a specific research question" (Liberati et al., 2009, p. 2). The study particularly sought answers to these questions: What is the status of GCE in the current scientific literature? What aspects of GCE are most researched? Are there any unresearched questions about GCE? This methodology is practical and effective for performing meta-analyses of published research in databases of scientific relevance, as indicated by authors such as Li et al. (2021) or Materla et al. (2019).

The study used the 27-item checklist and the four-phase PRISMA flowchart to ensure the quality and replicability of the research (Urrutia & Bonfill, 2010).

3.1. Eligibility Criteria

The dataset for this study included academic articles, doctoral theses, books, book chapters, and other academic papers published in social sciences and education fields between 1970 and 2022. The primary language had to be English and/or Spanish, and the nature of the studies could be theoretical or empirical.

Studies that did not focus on CGE as such were eliminated. Our search using the term "Development Education" hinted at many results that dealt with other issues, such as Systems Development Education or Emotional Development Education. Table 1 shows the documents found in the first search and after filtering in each database consulted.

Table 1. Documents can be found in different databases (using keywords).

Database	Journal articles	Doctoral theses	Books	Book chapters	Other documents of interest	Total	Selected when filtering by title
WoS	1425		9	80	107	1621	408
Scopus	1241		7	20	242	1510	296
Dialnet	1419	210	75	868		2572	321
Total						5703	1025

To safeguard the quality of the documents, we used several criteria:

For articles, we selected only papers published in indexed journals that underwent anonymous peer review. We selected books and book chapters that were coordinated or edited by relevant people in the study area.

For doctoral theses, the documents had to be directed by at least one academic related to the study area.

For other papers, we selected reports and working papers endorsed by researchers and organizations recognized for their work in CGE.

Figure 1 shows the information flow diagram through the different phases of the systematic review marked by the PRISMA group.
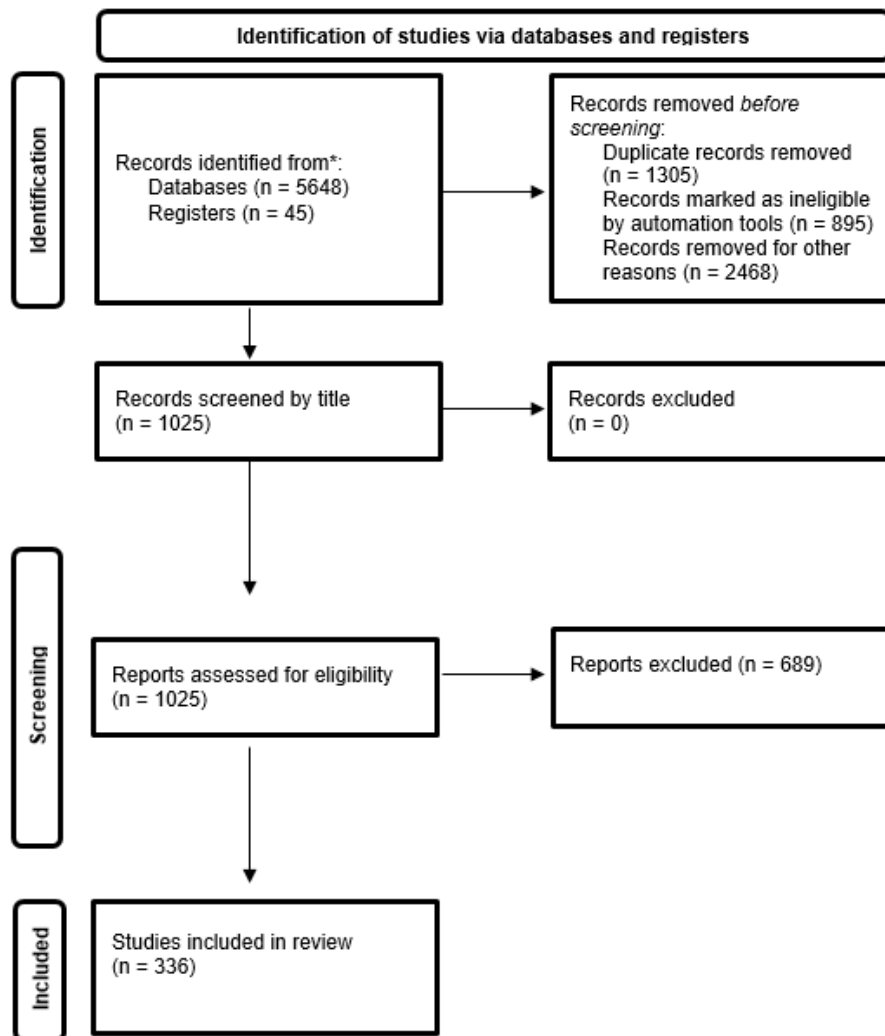
Figure 1. Information flow diagram of the different phases of the systematic review.

3.2. Data Sources

To begin with, we conducted an exhaustive search of the existing GCE academic literature in the most relevant databases in the field of Social Sciences in Ibero-America. These databases include Web of Science (WoS), Scopus, and Dialnet, which were selected following the recommendations of PRISMA and the argumentation presented by Codina (2017) for developing bibliographic searches in social sciences in the Ibero-American territory.

3.3. Data Search

The searches were conducted between December 2 and 23 (Year 2022), using the terms "Development Education" and "Global Citizenship Education." These searches were conducted in English and Spanish using quotation marks to achieve greater precision of the results (see Table 2).

Table 2. Search equations.

Search equations
1. TITLE-ABS-KEY ("Development Education") AND (LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA , "SOCI")
2. TITLE-ABS-KEY ("Global Citizenship Education") AND (LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA , "SOCI"))
3. TITLE-ABS-KEY ("Global Citizenship Education" AND "Development Education")
4. TITLE-ABS-KEY ("Global Citizenship Education" OR "Educación para la ciudadania global")
5. TITLE-ABS-KEY ("Development Education" OR "educacion para el desarrollo")

The documents found in each database were recorded according to whether they were articles, doctoral theses, books, book chapters, or other documents. Adding up the data from the five searches in the different databases consulted, we obtained 5693 results. We then filtered based on title and abstract to select articles that worked on GCE, which revealed 1025 documents in total.

3.4. Study Selection

3.4.1. Screening

In the screening phase, after filtering the 1025 documents by title and abstract, we performed a brief quantitative analysis to identify how the publications on GCE were distributed on an annual basis: "between 2016 and 2022", "between 2010 and 2015", "between 2000 and 2009", "between 1990 and 1999" and "before 1990". Figure 2 shows that publications on GCE have been increasing significantly in recent years, which reveals how this subject has recently acquired particular relevance.
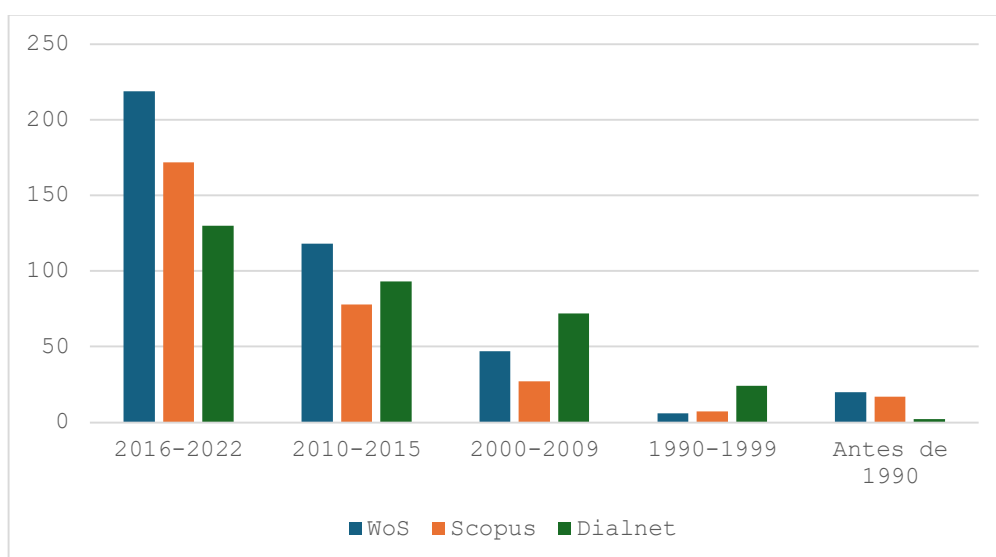
Figure 2. Publications according to period and database.

3.4.2. Evaluation

A rubric was used to assess the relevance of the papers, which involved six criteria (aims and purposes, literature review, theoretical frameworks, participants, methods, results, and conclusions). Three researchers independently measured the full texts and assessed whether they met the quality standards outlined by Mullet (2016).

Each of the six criteria was assessed on a 4-point scale where 1 = Does not meet the standard, 2 = Nearly meets the standard, 3 = Meets the standard, and 4 = Exceeds the standard. The criteria were summed to make the final selections. Items scoring 14 or less were excluded as not meeting the relevance standard.

During the quality assessment process, 689 documents were excluded, so the records finally included in the study were 336.

3.5. Data Analysis

First, a qualitative analysis of the documents was carried out. This started with a detailed reading of all the selected documents. Next, the documents were grouped according to categories and subcategories that emerged inductively from the initial exploration (see Table 2). This categorization was carried out using the qualitative analysis software Atlas.ti version 8, which made it possible to organize the documents to carry out this qualitative approach properly.

Table 3 shows the results of the qualitative analysis of the documents selected in the systematic literature review, using the categories and subcategories as a reference.

Table 3. Categories and subcategories of analysis.

CATEGORIES		SUB-CATEGORIES
GCE FIELDS	Formal education	Early Childhood Education
		Primary Education
		Secondary Education and Baccalaureate
		Higher Education
	Non-formal and informal education	NGOS
		Other entities (local, regional administration, etc.)
		Media, campaigns
Teachers and GCE		Teacher training
		Teachers' perceptions
Educational resources		Textbooks
		NGO Materials
Educational legislation		GCE and study plans
		GCE in educational curricula

Theoretical and conceptual studies	GCE related contents	Sustainable Development
		Climate Change
		Gender
		Peace and conflict
	Evolution and conceptualization of GCE	
	Other aspects	

4. Results

4.1. GCE Fields

4.1.1. Formal education

Regarding formal education, the studies were structured according to the educational level at which they were carried out. Thus, it was found that the number of GCE research studies carried out in higher education was much higher than in the rest of the educational levels.

First, several studies analyzed the treatment of GCE at the university in higher education. Authors such as Domínguez-Fernández, Prieto-Jiménez, and López-Catalán (2020), Hammond and Keating (2018), Hawkins, Mok, and Neubauer (2012), or Pashby and Andreotti (2016) focused their studies on how GCE was promoted in the university environment. In this sense, Gaynor (2016) concluded that universities were failing to develop critical global citizens who were socially engaged.

Some publications collect experiences on GCE carried out in higher education, among which studies by Coelho et al. (2022), McGee (2014), and Romero-Rodríguez et al. (2017) stand out. Other papers, such as the articles by Domingo and Sánchez (2002) or Hevia et al. (2017), make some proposals to deal with this topic in universities.

Secondly, it should be noted that among the selected publications, some focused on teaching GCE in primary education, such as Hameed's (2020) and Oberman and Waldron's (2017) studies. Thirdly, we found studies that are conducted at the Secondary and Baccalaureate Education levels, also referred to in some post-primary publications, among which the following can be highlighted: Aiello (2019), McCarthy and Gannon (2016) or Palmer (2016). Fourth, some research addressed GCE at the Early Childhood Education level, although less frequently than the other educational levels. Among the selected papers, only the studies by Anderson (2019), Hancock (2017), and Kenyon and Christoff (2020) alluded to this educational level.

It should be noted that some of the selected documents focused on the other two areas of GCE: informal and non-formal education; for this reason, the results related to these two educational sectors are detailed in the following section.

4.1.2. Non-formal and informal education

On the one hand, regarding non-formal education, several studies related to teaching GCE through NGOs were located among the search results obtained (Brown, 2018; Martínez-Scott et al., 2019). Likewise, among the searches were two publications by Boni (2017) and Boni et al. (2019) dealt with a strategy carried out in Valencia (Spain) on the training of global citizens through collaboration with NGOs and local and regional administrations,

On the other hand, several studies focused on promoting GCE through informal education. Authors such as Sallah (2020) showed that some formative experiences were carried out in this area, while others, such as Le Bourdon (2018), focused on the informal spaces promoting this. Additionally, some articles focused on analyzing GCE in the media or awareness-raising advertising campaigns (Harshman, 2018; Sheridan et al., 2017). Some other research also focused on the role of teachers in relation to GCE, as discussed in the following section.

4.2. Teachers and GCE

Some of the studies related to GCE focused on the teacher figure. In this sense, some research was related to teacher training, and others were related to teachers' perceptions and attitudes. Concerning research related to GCE and initial teacher education, some studies were conducted as literature reviews (Estellés & Fischman, 2020; Yemini et al., 2019), whereas others focused on showing strategies and good practices for trainers (Larsen & Searle, 2017; O'Meara et al., 2018). However, most studies focused on analyzing the teaching of GCE in initial teacher education (Baildon & Alviar-Martin, 2018; Tarozzi & Mallon, 2019).

Additionally, we can differentiate studies that investigated teachers' perceptions of GCE (Çolak et al., 2019; Kim, 2019) and research that focused on analyzing the attitudes of teachers (Blasco-Serrano et al., 2019; McCormack & O'Flaherty, 2010) and students (González-Valencia et al., 2022; Yusof et al., 2019).

It is worth noting that some of the collected papers focused on analyzing the didactic resources used for teaching GCE, as detailed in the following section.

4.3. Didactic Resources

The presence of GCE in teaching resources was also studied in the documents reviewed. A distinction was made between textbooks used in formal education and materials produced by NGOs.

Some research analyzed the treatment of GCE in textbooks, such as in Korea (Choi & Kim, 2020) or various teaching manuals for Citizenship Education in Secondary Education in Spain (Ortega et al., 2012). Moreover, Ventura (2005) reflected on the resources developed by NGOs and, for their part, Daly and Regan (2014) analyzed materials produced by Irish NGOs.

Other research focused on analyzing GCE in legislative documents, as discussed in the next section.

4.4. Educational Legislation

Educational legislation was also the focus of some documents included in our review. Specifically, the research analyzed GCE's treatment in educational curricula and study plans.

Some research analyzed GCE in educational policies in different country contexts, such as Colombia (De Poorter & Aguilar-Forero, 2019) and Korea (Auh & Sim, 2018). Auh and Sim (2018) stated that aspects of GCE, such as social justice at the global level, are ignored. Additionally, research conducted by Costello (2011) and Danju and Islek (2018) aimed to explain how GCE could be added to curriculum design. Similarly, Hammond and Keating (2018) and Lumb et al. (2019) concentrated their research on the treatment of GCE in higher education curricula, while Golden (2016) conducted his research at the primary education level.

In addition, studies by Graves (2002) and Ibrahim (2005) investigated the treatment of GCE in educational curricula. Similar studies by Leek (2016) or Osler (1994) analyzed how GCE was promoted in school curricula, while Chong (2015) or Wang (2019) focused on secondary education curricula. Notably, this line of research focused on the presence of GCE in only the curriculum of the Social Sciences (Aguilar-Forero et al., 2019; Weatherly, 2004).

4.5. Theoretical and conceptual studies

Several theoretical and conceptual studies focused on the relationship of GCE with different contents or on its evolution and conceptualization.

On the one hand, four themes emerged related to GCE in the publications reviewed: sustainable development, climate change, peace and conflict, and gender aspects. First, GCE appeared to be linked to sustainable development in studies such as those conducted by Ellis (2015), Gallagher (2018), and Scheunpflug and Asbrand (2006). Secondly, this theme was present in research related to climate change, such as those by Kagawa and Selby (2015) and Martínez-Sainz and Khoo (2020). Third, GCE appeared to be related to gender issues in studies such as those conducted by Dillon (2019) and Tormey and Gleeson (2012). Fourth, research by Brown and Morgan (2008) and Toh and Cawagas (2017) investigated GCE in relation to peace and conflict.

Next, among the documents found, some of them focused on the evolution and conceptualization of GCE. Authors such as Goren and Yemini (2017) and Sant et al. (2018) performed analyses of the different conceptualizations of GCE, while others such as Dillon (2018) or Khoo (2011) reflected on its historical evolution.

On the other hand, studies related to other aspects also appear among the studies reviewed. Authors such as Andreotti (2016, 2021) and Carrica and Bernal (2019) focused on analyzing the challenges faced by GCE. Additionally, other studies, such as those by Biccum (2015) and McCloskey (2016), investigated activism and GCE, while authors such as Higgs (2018) and Sant's (2018) reflected on this topic.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

This literature review highlighted the increase in research investigating GCEs in the last ten years, which indicates that GCE is gaining more interest in the social science community (Beckwith, 2022; Leite, 2022; Pigozzi, 2006; Smith et al., 2017). However, the number of publications on this topic is greater in English than in Spanish, which indicates the special relevance of this topic from an international perspective.

Regarding the areas of GCE, it should be noted that, by approaching the publications in the formal field, it has been possible to verify a decrease in the number of studies as one moves down the educational level; this is so because most of the research focused on higher education (Massaro, 2022), while in the lowest educational level, i.e., pre-school education received little research interest. Thus, conducting research at educational levels below the university level opens a wide range of possible investigations. Authors such as Haslip and Gullo (2018) and Moss (2017) agree that focusing on early education is crucial and emphasize the relevance of investigating GCE at these educational levels.

It is worth noting that studies conducted on GCE in non-formal and informal educational contexts tended to focus on issues linked to NGOs and advertising campaigns. However, there is a lack of studies on GCE in social networks, as among the papers collected, only the one prepared by Quaynor and Sturm (2018) analyzed teachers' views on GCE on Twitter. Therefore, conducting research on GCE in social networks is an aspect that is yet to be deeply analyzed and possesses particular importance in today's interconnected society (Hoffman, 2017).

Moreover, concerning research on teachers and GCE, it was found that most research focused on initial training and on knowing the attitudes or perceptions of teachers on this issue (González-Valencia et al., 2022). However, it has been observed that there is a small number of articles analyzing GCE in educational resources, which is an avenue of research that could be deepened due to the importance of analyzing these materials (Ganapathi, 2018).

To conclude, this literature review highlighted the main trends among the studies carried out on GCE. It has also been useful to glimpse gaps that represent new lines of research needed to deepen this topic and promote the formation of global citizenship that aims to transform the world into a better place.

Declarations

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