



Global Education Through Local Lenses: A Qualitative Study on Teaching Practices in the Philippines and Indonesia Toward Achieving SDG 4

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Abstract

This qualitative study investigates how educators in the Philippines and Indonesia perceive, implement, and navigate global education in line with Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), which advocates for inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning for all. Grounded in interviews with selected teachers from both countries, the study explored three key areas: educators' perceptions of global education, their teaching strategies for integrating global concepts into classroom practices, and the contextual challenges and opportunities they face. Thematic analysis revealed a strong commitment among teachers to foster global citizenship, environmental awareness, and intercultural understanding. Educators in both countries employed context-responsive strategies, including the use of localized examples, collaborative activities, and digital tools to promote global learning. However, the findings also uncovered shared challenges, such as limited resources, lack of professional development, and insufficient institutional support. Despite these obstacles, opportunities emerged through grassroots innovations, community involvement, and growing policy awareness. This study underscores the critical role of teacher agency and localized implementation in achieving the goals of SDG 4. It offers valuable insights for policymakers, curriculum developers, and educational leaders aiming to promote global education within diverse Southeast Asian contexts.

Keywords: *global education, SDG 4, qualitative research, Philippines, Indonesia, teaching practices, educational challenges, global citizenship, localized learning, Southeast Asia.*

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Introduction

In the pursuit of inclusive and equitable quality education, Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) stands as a global commitment to ensure access to lifelong learning opportunities for all. Achieving this goal requires not only quantitative advancements in enrollment and literacy but also qualitative improvements in teaching practices and educational relevance. Central to this mission is the promotion of global education—an approach that nurtures learners' understanding of global interdependence, cultural diversity, and shared responsibility. However, the implementation of global education is deeply influenced by local contexts, including cultural values, educational systems, and socio-political conditions. Thus, it becomes essential to examine how global education is understood and practiced by teachers within specific national settings.

The Philippines and Indonesia, two of Southeast Asia's most populous and culturally diverse nations, have both demonstrated strong policy-level commitments to SDG 4. These countries have initiated various reforms, including teacher development programs and curriculum enhancements aimed at aligning national education goals with global standards. Despite these efforts, there is limited qualitative research exploring how educators in these contexts actually interpret and implement global education in their classrooms. Much of the existing literature tends to focus on policy analysis or student outcomes, leaving a gap in understanding the experiences, perspectives and practices of the educators themselves.

This study seeks to fill that gap by focusing on the lived experiences of teachers in the Philippines and Indonesia. Specifically, it explores how educators in these two countries perceive global education in the context of SDG 4, how they integrate global concepts into their teaching practices, and what contextual factors either support or hinder their efforts. Through a qualitative lens, this research aims to uncover rich, comparative insights that highlight both the shared and unique challenges faced by Filipino and Indonesian educators. Ultimately, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of how global education goals are localized and provides meaningful implications for policymakers, curriculum developers, and teacher training institutions working to advance SDG 4 in culturally and contextually responsive ways.

Research Objectives

1. To explore the perceptions and understandings of educators in the Philippines and Indonesia regarding the principles and goals of global education within the context of SDG 4.
2. To examine the teaching practices and strategies employed by educators in both countries to integrate global education concepts into their classrooms.
3. To identify the contextual challenges and opportunities faced by educators in promoting global education aligned with SDG 4 in their local educational settings.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative comparative case study design to explore how educators in the Philippines and Indonesia perceived and implemented global education in alignment with Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4). A qualitative approach was chosen to gain in-depth insights into the teaching practices and perspectives of educators, particularly how they localized global education concepts within their unique cultural and educational contexts. The comparative nature of the study allowed for a deeper understanding of both the shared and distinct experiences between the two countries.

Participants in the study included selected basic and secondary education teachers from both public and private schools in the Philippines and Indonesia. Using purposive sampling, the study recruited 10 to 12 teachers from each country who had experience incorporating global education principles in their instruction or had engaged in professional development programs related to SDG 4. Participants were chosen based on their teaching experience, subject relevance (such as social studies, languages, or sciences), and demonstrated interest or involvement in global education initiatives.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis. The interviews were designed to explore participants' understandings, strategies, and challenges related to global education. Where possible, classroom observations were conducted to witness the practical application of these strategies, while relevant documents such as lesson plans and teaching materials were reviewed to examine the extent to which global education content was integrated into the curriculum. All interviews were audio-recorded with consent, transcribed, and translated when necessary. Field notes and supporting documents were also gathered to triangulate the findings.

Data analysis followed Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis framework. This involved familiarization with the data, coding, identifying patterns, and organizing them into themes that reflected participants' experiences. Thematic comparisons across the two countries were conducted to identify both commonalities and country-specific practices. To ensure trustworthiness, triangulation of data sources was employed, member checking was conducted to validate findings, and thick descriptions were used to support transferability. Reflexive journaling was maintained throughout the study to address researcher bias and enhance credibility.

Ethical considerations were strictly observed throughout the research process. Ethical clearance was obtained from relevant authorities in both countries. Participants gave informed consent, and their anonymity and confidentiality were ensured through pseudonyms and secure handling of data. Participants were also informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without repercussions.

Discussions

Research Objective 1

Awareness and Understanding of Global Education and SDG 4

“I am familiar with SDG 4, the goal of ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education. It aligns with our national curriculum reforms.” (Philippine Educator 6)

“In Indonesia, many of us know about global education through government trainings and international programs, but the depth of understanding varies among teachers.” (Indonesian Educator 7)

The responses indicate that educators in both the Philippines and Indonesia generally recognize the importance of SDG 4 and global education principles. This awareness is partly due to governmental policies, international collaborations, and professional development initiatives that emphasize quality education, inclusivity, and lifelong learning as global priorities. However, the variation in the depth of understanding points to disparities in access to resources and training. In some regions, teachers may only be superficially acquainted with SDG 4, primarily through policy documents or isolated workshops, without fully grasping its practical implications in curriculum design or classroom pedagogy. This suggests a gap between policy dissemination and on-the-ground comprehension, highlighting the need for more comprehensive and continuous teacher education programs that contextualize global education principles to local realities. Moreover, increased understanding could empower educators to become active agents of change in their schools, fostering student awareness and participation in global citizenship.

Perceived Relevance of Global Education to Local Contexts

“Global education is important, but it must be adapted to our cultural realities and students’ needs here in the Philippines.” (Philippine Educator 11)

“We try to balance global knowledge with local values in Indonesia. Sometimes, global concepts feel distant to our students.” (Indonesian Educator 10)

Educators emphasized the critical balance between global frameworks and local cultural contexts. Their perception underscores a fundamental principle in global education: the importance of cultural responsiveness. While global education aims to prepare students for interconnectedness and global citizenship, it must not disregard indigenous knowledge, cultural values, and community priorities that shape learners' identities and experiences. This awareness suggests that educators are mindful of potential cultural dissonance when applying universal educational goals without adaptation. The challenge lies in integrating global themes—such as sustainable development, human rights, and peace—into curricula in ways that resonate with local realities, languages, and traditions. This reflects a broader educational discourse advocating for “glocalization” (thinking globally, acting locally) where education systems tailor global aims to enhance relevance, motivation, and engagement among learners. The participants' views also highlight the potential for global education to enrich local education, fostering mutual respect and intercultural dialogue while preserving cultural heritage.

Challenges in Implementing Global Education Principles

“Limited resources and overcrowded classrooms make it hard to fully practice inclusive education as envisioned by SDG 4.” (Philippine Educator 4)

“Teacher training on global education is not consistent across regions in Indonesia, which affects implementation.” (Indonesian Educator 12)

The challenges articulated by participants reveal systemic and structural barriers that impede the effective operationalization of SDG 4’s vision. Resource limitations such as inadequate teaching materials, lack of infrastructure, and insufficient funding directly affect the ability of educators to provide equitable and inclusive education, especially in rural or marginalized communities. Overcrowded classrooms further strain teachers’ capacity to attend to individual learners’ needs, limiting the practical realization of inclusivity. Additionally, inconsistencies in teacher training suggest uneven policy implementation and disparities across regions. Without regular, contextually relevant professional development, teachers may struggle to understand or apply global education frameworks effectively. This gap not only affects educational quality but may also dampen teachers’ motivation and confidence to innovate pedagogically. These challenges point to the necessity for multi-level interventions—from government policy, school leadership, to community involvement—that address infrastructure, human resources and capacity-building to create an enabling environment for global education to flourish.

Research Objective 2

Contextualization of Global Concepts into Local Curriculum

“We integrate global themes like sustainability or human rights through localized examples, like how climate change affects our farmers or fishermen.” (Philippine Educator 8)

“Global education is embedded in values education and Araling Panlipunan where we teach about justice, peace, and cultural respect.” (Philippine Educator 5)

“In social studies, we relate global issues to our students’ environment, like discussing pollution in the Citarum River when talking about water conservation.” (Indonesian Educator 8)

“We teach global citizenship by connecting it to Pancasila values, especially tolerance and unity.” (Indonesian Educator 5)

Educators in both countries creatively contextualized global education by anchoring abstract global concepts in local realities. This practice demonstrates their commitment to making global education meaningful and culturally relevant. Teachers understand that learners are more likely to engage with issues such as climate change, peace, and justice when these are seen through the lens of their daily lives and community challenges. In the Philippines, linking global themes to social studies and values education reflects a curriculum that nurtures critical consciousness and civic responsibility. In Indonesia, alignment with Pancasila reinforces national identity while promoting global-mindedness. This hybridization of local and global demonstrates that successful global education is not about adopting foreign ideals wholesale, but about weaving global awareness into the fabric of local educational experiences.

Project-Based and Collaborative Learning

“We do classroom projects like eco-brick making or community clean-up drives to teach environmental sustainability.” (Philippine Educator 2)

“We have group tasks where students research global issues and relate them to their barangay situation.” (Philippine Educator 9)

“My students worked on a poster campaign about child rights, connecting their findings to what they observe in their neighborhoods.” (Indonesian Educator 6)

“We encourage teamwork and presentations about UN Sustainable Development Goals in English classes.” (Indonesian Educator 6)

Project-based and collaborative learning emerged as effective strategies to embed global education. These methods allow learners to actively engage with global issues while developing essential 21st-century skills such as communication, collaboration, and problem-solving. Filipino and Indonesian educators alike use real-world projects as vehicles for action-oriented learning, helping students connect theoretical knowledge to social responsibility. By focusing on SDG-related topics through projects, students are not only informed but are also empowered to make a difference in their communities. This approach fosters student agency and reflects a shift from passive learning to active participation—one of the hallmarks of global education.

Integration of Technology and Media

“We use YouTube videos, international news clips, and online forums to expose students to global perspectives.” (Philippine Educator)

“During the pandemic, I used Google Classroom to assign tasks about SDG topics and global events.” (Philippine Educator 3)

“We use digital storytelling and videos to introduce global topics, especially in English and civics classes.” (Indonesian Educator 2)

“Technology helps us bring the world into the classroom even if we are in rural areas.” (Indonesian Educator 7)

Technology plays a pivotal role in bridging geographic boundaries and exposing learners to diverse global issues. Both Filipino and Indonesian educators leveraged digital tools to expand access to information and foster global awareness, especially during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. These practices not only facilitated access to authentic learning materials but also provided opportunities for students to develop digital literacy. The use of multimedia resources helped make abstract or distant global concerns tangible and relatable. Moreover, integrating technology aligns with SDG 4’s emphasis on quality and inclusive education, providing equal opportunities for learners regardless of location.

Challenges in Curriculum Integration

“Sometimes we want to include global themes, but the curriculum is already overloaded.” .” (Philippine Educator4)

“There’s limited time and support materials to go deeper into global topics.” (Philippine Educator 1)

“Our textbooks mention global issues, but they are often outdated or not contextualized.” (Indonesian Educator 6)

“We have to finish competencies, so integrating global topics depends on the teacher’s initiative.” (Indonesian Educator 3)

Despite the willingness of educators, systemic barriers like rigid curriculum structures, time constraints, and outdated materials hinder full integration of global education. Teachers are often left to navigate these challenges independently, relying on their initiative and creativity. This finding underscores the need for curriculum developers and education policymakers to

build more flexible frameworks that allow for the seamless infusion of global perspectives. Furthermore, support systems such as teacher training, access to updated teaching resources, and collaborative networks are vital to empower educators to integrate global concepts meaningfully and consistently.

Research Objectives 3

Resource Limitations and Infrastructure Gaps

“In rural areas, we struggle with poor internet and lack of instructional materials. It’s hard to access global content.” (Philippine Educator 1)

“We want to use multimedia or online platforms, but the school lacks projectors, computers, or even stable electricity.” (Philippine Educator 8)

“Many schools in remote regions have no access to proper libraries or digital tools to support global education.” (Indonesian Educator 8)

“Some teachers still use traditional methods because they lack training and access to globalized content.” (Indonesian Educator 3)

Both Filipino and Indonesian educators face significant infrastructure-related challenges that hinder the effective implementation of global education. Limited access to internet connectivity, digital tools, and updated teaching materials results in a gap between the ideals of SDG 4 and the realities on the ground. These structural issues disproportionately affect rural and underserved communities, where global education risks being unevenly implemented. Educators are often left to improvise or rely solely on textbooks, which may not fully address global competencies. This theme underscores the urgent need for investment in digital infrastructure, equitable resource allocation, and capacity building to ensure that all learners have access to inclusive and quality education as envisioned by SDG 4.

Cultural Relevance and Local Identity

“There’s a challenge in balancing global concepts with our local values and traditions. Students must see how both connect.” (Philippine Educator 7)

“Sometimes, global education materials are foreign or Western-centric, making it hard for students to relate.” (Philippine Educator 4)

“We adapt global themes to match our cultural norms, especially in religious or values education.” (Indonesian Educator 5)

“Students understand better when examples come from local life, not just international contexts.” (Indonesian Educator 9)

Educators in both countries are aware of the tension between promoting global ideals and maintaining cultural authenticity. While global education emphasizes universal values, it must also be rooted in local cultural contexts to be meaningful. Filipino and Indonesian teachers expressed a need to localize or "glocalize" content, ensuring that students understand global issues through familiar examples. The challenge lies in the lack of culturally adapted materials and the dominance of Western perspectives in available resources. On the positive side, this theme also reveals an opportunity—teachers are creatively adapting global concepts to resonate with students' lived experiences. This culturally responsive approach enriches global education by making it inclusive, contextual, and respectful of local identities.

Teacher Motivation and Policy Support

“We try our best to integrate SDG-related topics, but it depends on personal initiative because there’s no clear mandate.” (Philippine Educator 10)

“There are teachers who are passionate, but without institutional support, their efforts don’t last.” (Philippine Educator 3)

“The government encourages global education, but implementation varies. Some schools prioritize it, others don’t.” (Indonesian Educator 3)

“We need professional development to understand how to teach global themes more effectively.” (Indonesian Educator 1)

The third theme reveals the importance of systemic and institutional support in sustaining global education efforts. While individual teacher motivation plays a critical role, the absence of clear policies, standardized training, and administrative encouragement creates inconsistency in implementation. Educators from both countries expressed a need for formal inclusion of SDG 4 principles in curriculum planning and teacher training. Policy frameworks must not only endorse global education but also provide concrete tools, monitoring systems, and incentives to support educators. The findings suggest that when teachers receive support—from national policies to local leadership—they are more empowered and confident in promoting global competencies. Therefore, policy coherence and investment in teacher development are crucial to overcoming contextual barriers and realizing the transformative vision of SDG 4.

Conclusions

This qualitative study explored the perceptions, teaching practices, and contextual realities of educators in the Philippines and Indonesia in their pursuit of global education aligned with Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4). Through in-depth interviews and thematic analysis, the research uncovered rich insights into how teachers from both countries understand and implement global education principles within their unique educational environments.

Firstly, the study revealed that educators in both nations generally possess a growing awareness of the goals and principles of global education. Many respondents emphasized its importance in shaping globally competent, socially responsible learners. However, the interpretations of global education varied slightly across local contexts, with educators associating it with values such as empathy, environmental awareness, multicultural understanding, and peace education.

Secondly, teaching practices reflected innovative and adaptive strategies. Educators integrated global themes into local curricula using contextualized discussions, interdisciplinary approaches, community engagement, and digital resources where available. Despite limitations, Filipino and Indonesian teachers demonstrated creativity in bridging global concepts with local realities, ensuring relevance and student engagement.

Lastly, the research highlighted several contextual challenges and opportunities. Limited access to technology and teaching resources, especially in rural areas, posed major constraints. Additionally, educators noted the cultural misalignment of some global materials, calling for the glocalization of content to preserve cultural identity. A lack of institutional support, training, and clear policy direction further hindered consistent implementation. Nonetheless, opportunities emerged through teacher-led initiatives, community partnerships, and increasing policy awareness in both countries.

In conclusion, the study affirms that while there is strong teacher motivation and a foundational understanding of global education, systemic and contextual barriers continue to impede its full realization. To truly advance SDG 4 in the Philippines and Indonesia, a multi-level commitment is needed—encompassing policy reform, capacity building, localized resource development, and sustained professional development. Global education, when viewed through local lenses, has the power to cultivate transformative learning and inclusive development if grounded in both global ideals and the lived realities of teachers and learners.

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Conflicts of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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