

Culturally grounded student engagement in global citizenship education in Philippine higher education

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Article Info

Article history:

Received Mar 15, 2026

Revised Jul 8, 2026

Accepted Jul 26, 2026

Keywords:

Cultural value

Global citizenship education

Higher education

Phenomenology

Student engagement

ABSTRACT

Global citizenship education (GCE) is increasingly integrated into higher education; however, student engagement remains limited, often characterized by superficial participation rather than meaningful involvement. This study addresses this gap by examining how students experience engagement in GCE within a developing-country context. Using an interpretive phenomenological approach, data were collected from 25 undergraduate students in a Philippine state college through in-depth interviews and analyzed using interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA). The findings reveal that engagement becomes meaningful when students participate in authentic community-based activities, develop emotional connections to real-world issues, engage in critical reflection on complex systems, and exercise voice and initiative in learning. Importantly, the study identifies culturally grounded engagement as a key dimension, showing that Filipino values such as *bayanihan* (communal unity), *pakikipagkapwa-tao* (shared humanity), and *malasakit* (profound care) function as resources that shape how students interpret and engage with global issues. These findings suggest that engagement in GCE is not only multidimensional but also culturally embedded. The study contributes to the literature by extending existing student engagement frameworks to incorporate cultural context as a core dimension. Practically, it highlights the need for culturally responsive and experiential pedagogies to enhance meaningful engagement in higher education.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Global citizenship education (GCE) has become a critical priority in higher education as institutions attempt to prepare students for an increasingly interconnected world shaped by complex global challenges such as climate change, migration, inequality, and geopolitical conflict [1], [2]. This issue is particularly significant in Global South contexts, where higher education institutions often operate under structural constraints and where GCE remains underexplored in relation to local cultural and institutional realities. Universities are expected to develop graduates who possess intercultural understanding, critical thinking, and social responsibility necessary for participating in global society. However, despite the growing integration of global citizenship outcomes in university curricula, many studies report that students demonstrate limited engagement with global issues, often participating only at a surface level rather than developing meaningful

commitment to global responsibility [3], [4]. This limited engagement is particularly evident in behavioral participation, emotional connection, and critical reflection, where students comply with academic requirements but fail to demonstrate sustained involvement or personal investment in global citizenship learning. Weak engagement undermines the transformative purpose of GCE because learning outcomes such as critical consciousness, intercultural competence, and civic participation depend on students' active involvement in the learning process [5], [6]. When engagement remains superficial, students may graduate without the capacity to critically respond to global challenges, limiting the effectiveness of higher education in preparing globally responsible citizens. In the context of Philippine state colleges and universities, particularly in regional areas such as Caraga, these challenges are further intensified by resource limitations, uneven access to global learning opportunities, and institutional constraints that affect the delivery of GCE. This limitation has significant consequences, as it may result in graduates who lack the critical global competence, reflective capacity, and active citizenship skills necessary to engage with complex global challenges.

Student engagement is commonly defined as a multidimensional constructs consisting of behavioral, emotional, cognitive, and agentic involvement in learning activities [7]. Behavioral engagement refers to participation in academic and co-curricular activities, emotional engagement involves interest and affective connection, cognitive engagement reflects investment in deep understanding, and agentic engagement represents students' active contribution to the learning process. These dimensions are essential in GCE because developing global awareness requires not only knowledge but also emotional commitment, critical reflection, and personal agency [8], [9]. When students participate only to complete requirements without emotional or cognitive investment, GCE becomes procedural rather than transformative. However, existing frameworks often treat these dimensions as context-neutral and insufficiently account for how sociocultural factors influence engagement, particularly in non-Western educational settings. In response to this limitation, this study introduces the concept of culturally grounded engagement as a central analytical lens to explain how students' cultural identities shape the nature and depth of their engagement in GCE. Therefore, examining engagement as a multidimensional experience provides a more accurate understanding of how students connect with global citizenship learning.

While existing studies have examined GCE in terms of curriculum design, policy implementation, and learning outcomes, limited attention has been given to how students experience engagement as a lived and meaning-making process. Moreover, current engagement frameworks often remain context-neutral and insufficiently account for the role of cultural identity in shaping engagement, particularly in Global South higher education contexts. This gap limits the explanatory power of existing models in understanding why meaningful engagement remains difficult to achieve in culturally diverse and resource-constrained settings. Research in European and American universities shows that students often treat global citizenship content as peripheral, resulting in passive participation and limited reflection [10], [11]. In Asian higher education, exam-oriented learning traditions have been associated with reduced critical inquiry and minimal classroom interaction [12]. Scholars in Global South contexts further argue that Western-centered frameworks of GCE sometimes fail to connect with local cultural realities, which may lead to resistance or disengagement [3], [13]. In the Philippine context, studies indicate that although global competence outcomes are included in the curriculum, student participation often remains compliance-based, with limited emotional involvement and shallow cognitive processing [9], [14]. Research also reports tensions between global citizenship concepts and local cultural identity, particularly in regional state colleges where students face limited resources and fewer opportunities for international exposure [4]. While these studies provide valuable insights, they predominantly focus on curriculum design, policy implementation, or quantitative outcomes, with limited attention to how students experience engagement as a lived and meaning-making process. This limitation is problematic because it overlooks how engagement is actually constructed by students in context, thereby restricting the ability of existing frameworks to explain why meaningful engagement remains difficult to achieve in practice, particularly in resource-constrained and culturally diverse higher education settings. Moreover, the role of cultural identity as a potential enabler of engagement remains underexplored, particularly in Global South higher education contexts. Therefore, this study addresses this critical gap by examining student engagement as a lived, culturally situated experience, with particular focus on how cultural identity functions as an active mechanism shaping meaningful engagement in GCE.

This study addresses the identified gap by examining the lived experiences of student engagement in GCE among college students in the Caraga Region, Philippines. Guided by the student engagement framework, the study explores how students experience behavioral, emotional, cognitive, and agentic engagement in global citizenship learning using an interpretive phenomenological approach. This approach allows a deeper understanding of how students construct meaning from their participation rather than only measuring observable outcomes. Specifically, the study positions cultural context as a central analytical lens, examining how Filipino values shape students' engagement with GCE. By focusing on students from

Philippine state colleges, the study situates engagement within a developing-country context where cultural values, socioeconomic conditions, and institutional realities may influence how GCE is experienced.

This research contributes to GCE scholarship by proposing culturally grounded engagement as an additional dimension influencing how students connect with global learning. This study extends and challenges existing student engagement frameworks by positioning culturally grounded engagement not merely as a contextual factor, but as a constitutive dimension that shapes how engagement is experienced and sustained in non-Western higher education contexts. In doing so, the study refines prevailing models by demonstrating that cultural identity actively structures engagement rather than simply influencing it externally. More specifically, this study advances student engagement theory by positioning culturally grounded engagement not as a contextual variable, but as a constitutive dimension that fundamentally shapes how engagement is experienced and sustained in non-Western educational contexts. Empirically, the study provides qualitative evidence from Philippine state colleges, a context that remains underrepresented in global citizenship research.

Practically, the findings offer actionable insights for higher education educators, and secondarily for curriculum designers and policymakers by highlighting the importance of integrating culturally responsive pedagogy, community-based learning, and student voice in GCE. For example, this may include incorporating local cultural values into course content, designing community-based projects that address real social issues, and creating structured opportunities for students to co-design learning activities and express their perspectives in the classroom. By highlighting the importance of engagement as a lived experience rather than only a curricular outcome, the study supports the development of educational practices that promote meaningful participation in an increasingly globalized world. This study offers a novel contribution to GCE and student engagement literature by conceptualizing culturally grounded engagement as a constitutive dimension rather than a contextual influence. Unlike existing frameworks that treat culture as an external factor, this study demonstrates that cultural identity actively shapes how behavioral, emotional, cognitive, and agentic engagement are experienced and sustained. By providing qualitative evidence from a Philippine higher education context, the study extends prevailing engagement models and introduces a culturally embedded understanding of engagement that is particularly relevant for Global South educational settings.

2. METHOD

2.1. Research design

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological research design to explore the lived experiences of students engaging with GCE in Philippine state colleges. Phenomenology is appropriate for investigating how individuals interpret and construct meaning from their experiences, particularly when the research aims to understand the depth and quality of participation rather than measure outcomes [15]. Specifically, the study used interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA), which focuses on how participants make sense of significant experiences within their personal and social contexts [16]. IPA was selected because student engagement in GCE involves complex emotional, cognitive, behavioral, and agentic processes that require in-depth interpretation rather than surface-level description [17]. The approach allows detailed examination of individual experiences before identifying shared patterns across participants, making it suitable for understanding multidimensional engagement in higher education.

2.2. Participants and sampling

The participants were 25 undergraduate students from a state college in the Caraga Region, Philippines, who had substantial exposure to GCE. Purposive sampling with maximum variation was used to select participants who could provide rich descriptions of their experiences [18]. Inclusion criteria required that participants: i) were in their third or fourth year of study; ii) had completed at least two courses or activities related to GCE; and iii) were willing to participate in in-depth interviews. Students with minimal exposure to global citizenship learning were excluded to ensure that participants could meaningfully reflect on their experiences. The use of a relatively small sample is consistent with IPA, which emphasizes depth of analysis rather than large sample size [16]. Recruitment continued until sufficient information power was achieved, meaning that the data collected were adequate to answer the research questions.

2.3. Data collection

Data were collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews designed to capture participants' experiences of engagement in GCE. Semi-structured interviews were chosen because they allow participants to describe their experiences in their own words while still addressing the research objectives [18]. Interview questions focused on behavioral participation, emotional responses, cognitive involvement, and opportunities for student voice in learning activities. Each interview lasted approximately 45–60 minutes and was conducted in a setting convenient for the participants. With consent, interviews were audio-recorded and

transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy. Follow-up questions were used when necessary to clarify meanings and deepen the description of experiences.

2.4. Data analysis

Data were analyzed using the IPA procedure described by Smith *et al.* [16]. Analysis followed a systematic process beginning with repeated reading of each transcript to achieve immersion in the data. Initial notes were made to identify significant statements, language use, and emerging meanings. These notes were then developed into emergent themes that captured the essence of participants' experiences. Themes within each case were examined to identify connections and patterns, after which cross-case analysis was conducted to determine shared and divergent themes among participants. The analysis focused on understanding how behavioral, emotional, cognitive, and agentic engagement were experienced and how cultural context influenced these experiences. Throughout the analysis, the researcher maintained reflexivity by continuously examining personal assumptions to ensure that interpretations remained grounded in participants' accounts.

2.5. Ethical consideration

This study followed ethical standards in conducting research involving human participants. Prior to data collection, permission to conduct the study was obtained from the office of the university president of the participating state college, confirming that the research complied with institutional requirements. All participants were informed about the objectives and purpose of the study before the interviews were conducted, and participation was strictly voluntary. Participants were also informed of their right to decline participation or withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences. Written informed consent was obtained from each participant, and confidentiality was ensured by removing identifying information from transcripts and using codes instead of real names. All data were stored securely and used only for research purposes in accordance with accepted ethical practices in educational research.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis revealed that student engagement in GCE is a multidimensional experience shaped by behavioral, emotional, cognitive, agentic, and culturally grounded factors. While previous engagement models emphasize behavioral, emotional, and cognitive components [17], [19], the findings of this study show that these dimensions operate as an integrated system rather than as separate constructs. Participants described engagement as a process that involves active participation, emotional connection, critical reflection, personal initiative, and cultural relevance. This indicates that engagement in GCE is not a linear or isolated process but a dynamic interaction of multiple dimensions that reinforce one another. In addition, the findings indicate that cultural context plays a significant role in shaping how students experience GCE, suggesting the presence of a culturally grounded dimension of engagement that extends existing theoretical frameworks. This finding suggests that existing models of student engagement may be insufficient when applied to culturally diverse contexts, as they do not fully account for the influence of local values and identity in shaping meaningful participation.

3.1. Behavioral engagement through community-based praxis

3.1.1. Active participation beyond compliance

Participants distinguished between superficial task completion and genuine contribution characterized by initiative, leadership, and sustained effort. This sub-theme captures how behavioral engagement in GCE transcended minimum requirements to encompass proactive involvement in organizing, guiding, and ensuring quality of community activities.

“Joined a community service project through my school that focused on environmental awareness like clean-up drive. Actively helping organize activities, guiding the younger kids, and making sure everyone understood the importance of what we were doing.” (P1, P4, P10)

“I packed and distributed relief goods like rice and kits from dawn till dusk. Exhausting with aching muscles and rain, but fulfilling amid grateful faces.” (P14)

This sub-theme exemplifies what Hwang and Bae [20] term “committed participation” engagement characterized by going beyond assigned tasks to take responsibility for activity quality and outcomes. These findings indicate that behavioral engagement is not defined solely by participation frequency but by the degree of ownership and responsibility students assume in learning activities. The distinction participants

drew between active and passive participation validates recent research emphasizing that behavioral engagement quality matters more than quantity [21].

P14's juxtaposition of "exhausting" with "fulfilling" captures the paradox of effortful engagement: physical difficulty did not diminish but rather enhanced meaningfulness. This validates Campbell *et al.* [22] research demonstrating that effort invested in meaningful activities increases rather than decreases engagement quality, as individuals perceive their labor as consequential. The "grateful faces" P14 witnessed provided immediate feedback affirming the impact of their work what Compare *et al.* [23] term "relational support" that enhances intrinsic motivation through social recognition of contribution.

These findings indicate that sustained engagement emerges when students perceive their actions as socially meaningful beyond academic requirements. Rather than relying on external incentives, authentic community-based activities encourage students to assume leadership roles, take ownership of outcomes, and persist despite physical demands. This underscores the importance of designing learning experiences that emphasize real-world impact rather than compliance-driven participation. This suggests behavioral engagement in GCE contexts emerges not from compliance structures but from perceived consequentiality the belief that one's actions genuinely matter for communities served [24].

3.1.2. Embodied, physical engagement

Participants described behavioral engagement through visceral, bodily language emphasizing physical labor, material action, and somatic experience. Rather than abstract or intellectual participation, engagement involved hands-on work with tangible objects (relief goods, trash, and activities) and physical presence in community spaces.

"I packed and distributed relief goods like rice and kits from dawn till dusk. Exhausting with aching muscles and rain, but fulfilling amid grateful faces." (P14)

"During a coastal cleanup drive...I actively participated in collecting trash along the shore...walking along the beach, we picked up plastic bottles, wrappers, and other debris." (P24)

This sub-theme reveals behavioral engagement in GCE as fundamentally embodied, involving the whole person rather than only cognitive participation. The materiality described by participants such as "rice and kits" and "plastic bottles, wrappers, and other debris" highlights the concrete and sensory nature of their experiences. This aligns with embodied cognition research, which emphasizes that learning occurs through interactions between the body and physical environments [25]. These findings suggest that engagement is strengthened when learning is grounded in direct, sensory, and physically immersive experiences rather than abstract or simulated activities.

The embodied nature of participation also enables students to develop deeper connections to global issues by experiencing social and environmental realities firsthand. This suggests that GCE pedagogy should prioritize community-based and experiential learning contexts, where students engage in meaningful actions with real consequences. As Stanlick and Szmodis [26] argue, behavioral engagement requires "doing real things in real contexts with real consequences," a condition reflected in participants' embodied community praxis.

3.2. Emotional engagement as transformative catalyst

3.2.1. Somatic-embodied emotional responses

Participants consistently described emotional engagement through physical sensations in their bodies, indicating that emotional responses to global issues were not abstract feelings but embodied experiences. Students reported sensations such as heaviness in the chest, tension, changes in breathing, and warmth, reflecting deep affective involvement in learning.

"Learning about children who are unable to attend school because of poverty and corruption... I could feel a heaviness in my chest as I thought about the challenges they face. At the same time, it inspired me to continue pursuing my path as an educator." (P1)

"My body felt tense at first...my chest felt heavy, and I noticed my breathing slow down as I tried to absorb what I was seeing and hearing. Emotionally, I felt a mix of sadness, guilt, and awakening." (P7)

"My heart raced, and I could almost feel the fear and uncertainty these families faced... sharing reflections and emotions with my classmates made the experience even more powerful." (P12)

"My chest felt tight as I thought about the damage being done to the environment, but at the same time, I felt a warmth inside me when I imagined how collective action could bring healing." (P19)

This finding provides empirical support for Koulaouzidis *et al.* [27] proposition that emotion requires central positioning in transformative learning theory, not peripheral acknowledgment. It also validates recent

calls for “affective neuroscience of transformative learning” [28], and recognition that “emotions are fundamental to moral judgment and behavior” in citizenship education, as applied to sustainability learning by Jordan *et al.* [29]. These findings indicate that emotional engagement is not merely a reaction to learning content but a mechanism that shapes how students interpret and internalize global issues.

These findings validate contemporary service-learning research demonstrating that authentic community engagement produces qualitatively different learning outcomes than classroom-only instruction [30], and extend recent work showing behavioral engagement deepens when students perceive their actions as consequential for communities beyond the classroom [31]. Importantly, the embodied nature of these emotional responses suggests that emotional intensity can facilitate deeper cognitive engagement by directing attention and reinforcing meaning-making processes. As Basu [32] argue, meaningful behavioral engagement requires perceiving one’s actions as contributing to something beyond the self precisely what participants experienced through community-based GCE praxis. This implies that integrating emotionally meaningful and contextually grounded experiences may be essential in fostering sustained engagement in GCE.

3.2.2. Complex, mixed emotions

Participants experienced contradictory emotions simultaneously rather than singular, unidimensional affects. Sadness intertwined with inspiration, guilt combined with awakening, concern coupled with hope revealing emotional engagement as multifaceted and paradoxical.

“I could feel a heaviness in my chest as I thought about the challenges they face. At the same time, it inspired me to continue pursuing my path as an educator.” (P1)

“Emotionally, I felt a mix of sadness, guilt, and awakening.” (P7)

“My chest felt tight as I thought about the damage being done to the environment, but at the same time, I felt a warmth inside me when I imagined how collective action could bring healing.” (P19)

This emotional complexity distinguishes transformative engagement from simpler affective responses. Research suggests that mixed emotions are associated with deeper processing of ambiguous and multifaceted issues, whereas unidimensional emotions often reflect more superficial engagement [33]. Given that global challenges such as climate change and inequality involve both urgent problems and potential solutions, emotional engagement must encompass both difficult and constructive responses. In this study, the coexistence of discomfort and hope indicates that students are actively negotiating meaning rather than passively reacting to content.

The findings also challenge critiques that exposure to global issues leads to disengagement or hopelessness. Instead, participants experienced what recent scholarship describes as “constructive hope,” where difficult emotions coexist with a sense of agency and possibility [34]. For example, P19’s sense of warmth emerged from imagining collective action, demonstrating that hope was grounded in realistic engagement rather than denial of problems.

These findings suggest that effective GCE pedagogy should not avoid difficult emotions but create spaces where emotional complexity is acknowledged and processed. When students are supported in navigating both discomfort and hope, they are more likely to sustain engagement and develop a sense of responsibility toward global issues. This aligns with emotion pedagogy scholarship, which emphasizes the importance of validating complex emotional responses as part of meaningful learning [35].

3.3. Cognitive engagement through critical inquiry

3.3.1. Productive discomfort and struggle

Participants demonstrated cognitive engagement by grappling with complex global systems, analyzing power structures, questioning assumptions, and sustaining inquiry despite ambiguity. This form of engagement extended beyond surface-level memorization to what Deng [36] describes as “deep and self-regulatory” engagement. Participants consistently characterized their learning experiences using language denoting difficulty, discomfort, and intellectual struggle, while simultaneously describing these experiences as meaningful and worthwhile.

“I struggled to understand how government decisions affect vulnerable communities. Thinking deeply felt unsettling but meaningful.” (P20)

“I was thinking about why some families were more affected than others... it felt sad but made me think a lot.” (P17)

“I was grappling with the idea that global citizenship is not just about knowing global issues, but about embracing diversity and seeing it as a gift... My mind was busy connecting ideas.” (P19)

The use of verbs such as struggling, grappling, and thinking deeply reflects what scholarship identifies as engagement with threshold concepts, where learners confront complex and transformative knowledge that requires sustained intellectual effort [37], [38]. Importantly, participants did not perceive discomfort as a barrier but as an integral part of the learning process, suggesting that cognitive challenge can facilitate deeper understanding and integration of ideas. These findings support the concept of productive discomfort, where intellectual difficulty promotes deeper engagement rather than disengagement. This challenges pedagogical assumptions that equate comfort with effective learning and aligns with research on desirable difficulties and productive struggle [39], [40]. In this context, discomfort becomes meaningful when students are able to reflect on and make sense of complex issues.

Pedagogically, these findings suggest that effective GCE should incorporate cognitively demanding tasks while providing appropriate scaffolding to support meaning-making. This may be understood as “supported disequilibrium,” where learners are challenged to reconsider assumptions but are guided sufficiently to prevent cognitive overload. Such an approach aligns with transformative learning perspectives that emphasize the importance of supported disorienting experiences in fostering deeper understanding [41].

3.3.2. Systems thinking and causal analysis

Participants employed metacognitive strategies that reflect engagement beyond content absorption. For instance, P17’s questioning of “*why some families were more affected than others*” exemplifies causal systems thinking and equity-oriented analysis [42], while P19’s recognition that global citizenship involves “*embracing diversity and seeing it as a gift*” rather than merely “knowing global issues” demonstrates epistemological sophistication that distinguishes instrumental knowledge from transformative understanding [5]. This metacognitive awareness suggests that participants were not only learning about global issues but developing a more critical and reflective form of global consciousness [43].

“I struggled to understand how government decisions affect vulnerable communities.” (P20)

“I was thinking about why some families were more affected than others.” (P17)

These findings indicate that cognitive engagement in GCE is characterized by the ability to analyze interconnected systems and interrogate underlying causes of social issues rather than focusing on isolated facts. Such engagement aligns with perspectives that view learners as active agents in knowledge construction, participating in critical inquiry rather than passively absorbing information [14], [44]. The findings also highlight the role of emotional engagement in supporting cognitive processes. Consistent with research in educational neuroscience, affect and cognition are functionally integrated, with emotion acting as a facilitator of higher-order thinking such as analysis and reflection [45]. This interplay suggests that emotional engagement contributes to the depth and quality of cognitive processing in global citizenship learning. Pedagogically, these findings suggest that GCE should incorporate instructional strategies that explicitly develop systems thinking and causal analysis. Approaches such as concept mapping, case analysis, policy evaluation, and comparative inquiry can support students in understanding how social, political, and environmental factors interact within complex global systems [46].

3.4. Agentic engagement: voice, initiative, and co-creation

3.4.1. Initiative-taking and proactive contribution

Participants experienced heightened engagement when provided with opportunities for authentic voice, initiative-taking, and co-creation of learning. This agentic dimension reflects a shift from students as passive recipients to active contributors who shape the direction of their learning. Consistent with Cook-Sather *et al.* [47], agentic engagement involves proactive participation, expression of ideas, and personalization of learning experiences.

“Speaking up and taking action felt empowering because I was contributing my own ideas and helping shape the direction of our project. Having the opportunity to share my thoughts gave me a sense of voice and agency in the learning process.” (P4)

“Taking that initiative made the lesson feel more meaningful and real, and it helped me gain confidence in expressing my thoughts.” (P7)

“It felt risky to step forward... Speaking up and taking action gave me a sense of ownership, I wasn’t just following instructions, I was shaping the direction of our learning.” (P19)

Participants described going beyond assigned requirements by conducting independent research, introducing new ideas, and actively contributing to learning activities. This form of initiative-taking aligns with what Bosio [11] describes as enriching agentic behavior, where students add value beyond expectations. These findings indicate that agentic engagement is defined not only by participation but by students’ capacity to influence and co-direct the learning process. When students are given space to exercise voice and

initiative, they develop a stronger sense of ownership, confidence, and personal relevance in their learning. The findings also suggest that overly structured pedagogical approaches may constrain student initiative. While guidance remains necessary, effective GCE pedagogy should balance structure with openness, creating opportunities for students to contribute ideas and shape learning activities. Such an approach can enhance sustained engagement by positioning students as active partners in the learning process [34].

3.4.2. Ownership and co-creation of learning

Participants described experiencing psychological ownership of learning, perceiving themselves as shaping rather than merely receiving instruction and creating rather than consuming educational experiences.

“Speaking up and taking action felt empowering because I was contributing my own ideas and helping shape the direction of our project.” (P4)

“I wasn’t just following instructions, I was shaping the direction of our learning.” (P19)

These findings challenge traditional pedagogical models that position instructors as sole designers and students as passive recipients. Contemporary scholarship increasingly recognizes students as legitimate knowledge-holders whose perspectives can meaningfully inform curriculum design [48]. In the context of GCE, this partnership is particularly valuable, as students contribute cultural knowledge, lived experiences, and community insights that enrich understanding of global issues. Psychological ownership appears to strengthen engagement by fostering a sense of responsibility and personal investment in learning. When students perceive themselves as contributors rather than recipients, they are more likely to engage deeply and sustain their participation, suggesting that co-creation functions as a mechanism for enhancing meaningful engagement.

Pedagogically, these findings support the integration of co-creation practices within GCE, such as collaborative syllabus design, student-led sessions, co-developed assessment criteria, and opportunities for students to propose alternative learning tasks. However, implementing co-creation requires cultural and contextual sensitivity. In educational settings where hierarchical structures are emphasized, students may initially feel uncertain about participatory roles. Therefore, educators should provide clear guidance, scaffold participation, and gradually introduce co-creation practices to support meaningful student involvement [6], [36].

3.5. Culturally grounded engagement: Filipino values as engagement enablers

3.5.1. Cultural pride and identity affirmation

Engagement was significantly enhanced when GCE pedagogy recognized Filipino cultural values and local contexts. Rather than experiencing tension between cultural identity and global citizenship, participants described values such as *bayanihan* (communal unity), *pakikipagkapwa-tao* (shared humanity), and *malasakit* (profound care) as foundational to their understanding of global issues. These findings suggest that sociocultural context does not merely influence engagement but constitutes it, positioning culturally responsive pedagogy as central rather than peripheral to meaningful engagement [17].

“I felt a mix of concern, pride, and responsibility. Pride, because I began to see how Filipino values like bayanihan, empathy, and resilience were also forms of global citizenship.” (P7)

“As a Filipino, I connected global issues to local values like bayanihan and resilience... being a global citizen means sharing Filipino values while engaging with the wider world.” (P25)

“I researched Filipino concepts like ‘pakikipagkapwa-tao’ (shared humanity) and brought them into class. Finally connecting my own identity to the discussion...and being heard...transformed my learning.” (P13)

“Hearing examples related to disasters in the Philippines made the lesson more meaningful and relatable. I felt respected and engaged because our local realities were connected to global concerns.” (P22)

These findings challenge assumptions in Western-oriented GCE frameworks that position non-Western students as needing external exposure to develop global perspectives [9]. Instead, participants demonstrated that local cultural values function as meaningful entry points for engaging with global issues. When these values are recognized within pedagogy, students draw upon them as intellectual and interpretive resources, enabling deeper and more personally relevant forms of engagement. This supports context-sensitive approaches to GCE that emphasize plurality and cultural grounding [19]. Importantly, the findings reinforce the study’s proposition that culturally grounded engagement is a key dimension shaping how students connect with global learning. Rather than treating culture as an external variable, the results show that cultural identity actively structures engagement by influencing how students interpret, relate to, and act upon global issues.

Pedagogically, these findings highlight the importance of explicitly integrating students' cultural frameworks into GCE. This may include connecting global concepts to local experiences, incorporating culturally relevant examples, and creating opportunities for students to contribute their own cultural knowledge in learning activities [43]. Such approaches support more meaningful and sustained engagement by aligning GCE with students' lived realities.

3.5.2. Cultural identity as engagement resource

Participants actively drew upon their cultural knowledge, identity, and Filipino concepts as intellectual resources that enriched learning and deepened engagement, rather than treating culture as separate from academic work.

"I researched Filipino concepts like 'pakikipagkapwa-tao' (shared humanity) and brought them into class. Finally connecting my own identity to the discussion...and being heard...transformed my learning." (P13)

This sub-theme illustrates how cultural identity functions as an integrative resource that connects multiple dimensions of engagement. Drawing on cultural knowledge involves behavioral engagement (e.g., conducting research), cognitive engagement (analyzing relationships between concepts), agentic engagement (contributing ideas), and emotional engagement (experiencing pride and connection). These findings suggest that cultural identity activates and links these dimensions simultaneously, rather than operating as a separate or external factor [4], [34]. This integrative role reinforces the study's central proposition that engagement in GCE is not experienced as isolated dimensions but as interconnected processes shaped by sociocultural context. Cultural identity enhances how students participate, reflect, feel, and take initiative, positioning culturally grounded engagement as a cross-cutting dimension that strengthens and sustains engagement across domains. Pedagogically, these findings highlight the importance of integrating students' cultural identities into learning processes. Creating opportunities for students to use their cultural knowledge as legitimate academic resources can deepen engagement and support more inclusive and context-responsive approaches to GCE, particularly in Global South contexts.

4. CONCLUSION

The study contributes to the literature by extending existing student engagement frameworks to incorporate culturally grounded engagement as a key dimension shaping how students connect with global learning. Empirically, it provides qualitative evidence from a developing-country context that remains underrepresented in global citizenship research. Practically, the findings suggest that higher education institutions should move beyond compliance-based approaches by designing culturally responsive and experiential learning environments. This includes integrating Filipino cultural values into course content, embedding structured community-based projects that address real social issues, and creating formal opportunities for student voice such as co-designed activities, reflective dialogues, and student-led initiatives. Institutions may also support faculty through professional development focused on culturally responsive pedagogy and experiential learning design. These strategies can help transform engagement from passive participation into meaningful and sustained involvement in GCE. Future research may examine culturally grounded engagement across different institutional contexts, compare experiences among diverse cultural groups, or explore how engagement develops over time through longitudinal designs. Such directions can further refine understanding of how culturally embedded engagement operates in varied educational settings and contribute to more inclusive and context-responsive GCE frameworks.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author expresses sincere gratitude to the university administration for granting permission to conduct this study and to the student participants who generously shared their experiences. Appreciation is also extended to colleagues and mentors who provided valuable support during the completion of this research.

FUNDING INFORMATION

Authors state no funding involved.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS STATEMENT

This journal uses the Contributor Roles Taxonomy (CRediT) to recognize individual author contributions, reduce authorship disputes, and facilitate collaboration.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

Authors state no conflict of interest.

INFORMED CONSENT

We have obtained informed consent from all individuals included in this study.

ETHICAL APPROVAL

The research involving human participants complied with institutional policies and national regulations for academic research. Permission to conduct the study was granted by the Office of the University President of the participating state college. All participants were informed about the purpose of the study and provided voluntary informed consent prior to participation.

DATA AVAILABILITY

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, [EDGP], upon reasonable request.

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