

From Local to Plural Locality: Reconceptualizing Global Citizenship Education in Thailand and Asean

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Article information	Abstract
Article history: Received: 24 May 2024 Last revised: 9 May 2026 Accepted: 11 May 2026 Available online: 18 May 2026 Keywords: Global citizenship education (GCE) ASEAN curriculum Decolonization Place-based education (PBE) Teacher agency	<i>This article examines the reconceptualization of Global Citizenship Education (GCE) within Thailand and the ASEAN context, advocating for a transformative and critical approach. It argues that current ASEAN curriculum initiatives, while ambitious, often adopt a content-oriented approach that fails to adequately promote critical thinking or recognize diverse identities. Drawing on Andreotti's framework (2006, 2011) of soft versus critical GCE, the article proposes a shift towards a more reflexive, power-aware, and solidarity-focused educational model. The study explores four interconnected themes: evolving concepts of citizenship, the importance of plural locality in fostering global perspectives, curriculum inquiry approaches for GCE implementation, and the role of teacher agency. By integrating place-based education principles with critical GCE frameworks, the article suggests strategies for balancing local identities with global awareness. It critically examines the challenges and opportunities in implementing such approaches across the diverse ASEAN region, including the need to decolonize educational discourses and empower teachers as agents of change. The article concludes that effective GCE in Thailand and ASEAN requires a delicate balance between regional coherence and local adaptation, emphasizing the importance of context-sensitive strategies that respect cultural diversity while working towards shared educational goals. This approach not only enhances the effectiveness of GCE but also contributes to broader goals of ASEAN integration and global citizenship.</i>

INTRODUCTION

In the early 2010s, Thailand's role as a founding member of ASEAN, coupled with the implementation of policies facilitating free trade and population mobility, presented unprecedented challenges to its national education system. These challenges, rooted in the tensions between globalization and local identities, raised fundamental questions about the purpose of education: Should it prioritize comprehensive human development or cater exclusively to the demands of an increasingly globalized labor market?

In response to these complex challenges, the Office of the Basic Education Commission (OBEC) developed the ASEAN curriculum mandate (ASEAN Secretariat, 2012). This initiative aimed to integrate ASEAN studies into the existing curriculum while fostering 21st century learning skills. At its core, the curriculum emphasized regional interconnectedness through a people-to-people approach, positioning education as a tool to shape understanding of ASEAN (Chanbanchong et al., 2015).

On the other hand, despite its ambitious goals, the ASEAN curriculum has faced significant criticism. Thongthew (2013) argues that the curriculum, implemented across various educational levels, adopts a content and subject-oriented approach that prioritizes imparting knowledge about ASEAN over developing critical thinking skills. This approach fails to adequately recognize the value of diverse identities within ASEAN, bridge the gap between global and local contexts, or sufficiently promote equity, justice, and sustainable development.

These shortcomings of the ASEAN curriculum reflect broader debates surrounding Global Citizenship Education (GCE). Andreotti's (2006) seminal work on soft versus critical GCE provides a theoretical framework to analyze these issues. The ASEAN curriculum aligns closely with Andreotti's concept of soft GCE, which often promotes simplistic solutions and uncritical views of global issues. In contrast, critical GCE encourages learners to challenge existing power structures, question their positionality, and embrace diverse perspectives. The ASEAN curriculum's emphasis on regional unity through a homogenized lens exemplifies the limitations of soft GCE. By focusing on imparting factual knowledge rather than fostering critical consciousness, it risks reinforcing existing power imbalances and perpetuating a savior mentality instead of empowering learners to become agents of change.

This article argues for a reconceptualization of GCE within the Thai and ASEAN context, emphasizing the need for a transformative and critical approach. By embracing Andreotti's critical GCE framework and drawing on postcolonial and decolonial perspectives (Andreotti, 2006; Nguyen & Chia, 2023), we advocate for an educational approach that challenges dominant narratives, values diverse perspectives, and empowers learners to address global issues critically and ethically.

To address these challenges, this article is structured around four interconnected themes: 1) The qualities of citizenship in a new dimension: Examining the evolving concept of citizenship in the 21st century, 2) Plural locality as a foundation of global citizenship: Exploring how local identities can inform and enrich global perspectives, 3) The curriculum inquiry approach for GCE: Proposing a critical, process-oriented pedagogy for implementing GCE, and 4) Empowering teacher agency in GCE: Critical perspectives from Thailand and ASEAN.

By exploring these themes, we aim to demonstrate why GCE is essential for citizenship education in Thailand and the broader ASEAN context. We argue that a comprehensive, multi-dimensional approach to citizenship education is necessary—one that transcends national boundaries while fostering a shared sense of identity and responsibility among learners. Ultimately, this article seeks to explore the transformative potential of GCE within the Thai and ASEAN context. By critically reviewing definitions of global citizenship and presenting the implications of GCE,

we aim to contribute to the continuing dialogue on educational reform in the region and provide a framework for developing more inclusive, critical, and empowering strategies to citizenship education.

The qualities of citizenship in a new dimension: Examining the evolving concept of citizenship in the 21st century

The citizenship conception in the 21st century demands a thorough reconceptualization, particularly in Global Citizenship Education (GCE) discourse. This section critically investigates this reconceptualization, drawing on Andreotti's seminal work on critical GCE and contemporary scholarship in global education. Central to this analysis is the emphasis on reflexivity, power analysis, and solidarity as key components in shaping the qualities and competencies of citizenship. On the other hand, it is crucial to acknowledge the theoretical challenges, ongoing debates, and competing agendas within the field of GCE, especially as they pertain to the Thai and ASEAN context.

Andreotti's (2006) influential work on soft versus critical GCE provides a foundational framework for understanding the limitations of traditional approaches to citizenship education. Her critique distinguishes between two primary methods. First, soft GCE tends to cultivate superficial knowledge and compassion, often resulting in a "savior complex" that inadvertently reinforces existing power structures. In the context of Thailand and ASEAN, soft GCE might manifest as curricula that emphasize regional unity without critically examining power dynamics or historical inequalities within the region. Second, critical GCE, on the other hand, encourages learners to recognize their positionality within global and local power structures, deconstruct privilege, including examining the privileges associated with certain national or ethnic identities within ASEAN and develop ethical solidarity that transcends paternalism, fostering genuine understanding and cooperation among ASEAN nations.

The critical perspective advocated by Andreotti requires educators to foster reflexivity by encouraging students to critically investigate their own assumptions and biases about their place within Thailand, ASEAN, and the global community, understanding how local actions in Thailand or other ASEAN countries can have regional and global implications and examining historical and ongoing power imbalances within ASEAN and between ASEAN and other global entities.

In her later work, Andreotti (2011) expands these concepts by introducing the decoloniality and diversity to GCE. Decoloniality concept emphasizes the need to dismantle colonial power structures and epistemologies underlying traditional GCE. In the ASEAN context, this might involve critically examining how Western educational models have influenced regional curricula and proposing alternatives rooted in local knowledge systems while diversity approach advocates for including marginalized voices and alternative knowledge systems. For ASEAN, this could mean integrating indigenous knowledge and perspectives from lesser ethnic groups into the broader educational framework. Andreotti's critique of traditional GCE's Eurocentric bias is particularly relevant to Thailand and ASEAN, where educational systems have often been influenced by Western models. Her call for a pluriversal approach acknowledges multiple

ways of knowing and being, which aligns well with the diverse cultural landscape of Southeast Asia.

While Andreotti's framework provides valuable insights, careful consideration is needed regarding how these concepts translate to the Thai and ASEAN context by examining not only global power structures but also intra-ASEAN dynamics and Thailand's position within the region, adapting critical GCE approaches to align with local cultural values and educational traditions and considering how critical GCE can foster genuine collaboration and understanding among ASEAN nations while acknowledging historical tensions and disparities.

As we apply these concepts to Thailand and ASEAN, several ongoing challenges and debates in the GCE field deserve attention, as follows. The lack of a universally accepted conception of global citizenship poses challenges for curriculum development and implementation (Standish, 2014). Balancing the cultivation of global perspectives with the preservation of national and local identities remains a key challenge, particularly in the diverse ASEAN region. Translating theoretical frameworks into practical, culturally relevant curricula requires careful consideration and ongoing evaluation and ensuring that critical GCE approaches are accessible to all learners, not just elite or urban populations, is crucial for meaningful impact across Thailand and ASEAN.

In this light, scholars in global education argue that GCE must transcend national boundaries, embracing a holistic understanding of global issues, intercultural competencies, and multiple perspectives. Key aspects of this approach include addressing ethnocentrism, developing a multiperspectival approach and acknowledging diverse worldviews, histories, and power dynamics (Gaudelli, 2009; Merryfield, 2000; Ross, 2018; Torres, 2017). Global education aims to equip learners with the ability to comprehend the intricate connections between local, national, and global aspects. This conceptualization expands the traditional notion of citizenship to encompass multiple dimensions from local, national, regional (particularly relevant in the ASEAN context) and global. The emergence of global education responds to the realities of an increasingly interconnected world, fostering awareness of the need for global equity, the value of human dignity, the significance of sustainable development and the pursuit of peace (Kennedy, 2012; Kirkwood, 1995).

In the context of Thailand and ASEAN, one must recognize that GCE complements rather than contradicts national or regional citizenship. This integration can be viewed as a developmental process by developing a strong understanding of national identity and duties, expanding perspectives to the regional (ASEAN) level and further broadening the outlook to a global scale. In this light, Hanvey's (1982) framework supports this approach, asserting that global awareness education enhances an individual's ability to connect personal conditions to community and world issues. Hanvey also identified five key elements of global education as follows: critical consciousness, planetary and ecological understanding, cross-cultural knowledge, understanding of global changes and recognition of human dignity.

The Framework for 21st Century Global Citizenship outlines essential components for learner development including core subjects such as English, second foreign language, arts, maths, economics, geography, history, sociology, science, 21st-century issues such as global

awareness, financial literacy, citizenship education, health literacy, and environmental/ecological literacy as well as innovation skills, ICT-related skills and life skills (The Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2011). In addition, Thai Bureau of Administration of Secondary Education (2010) proposes framework describing a global citizen as someone possessing respect for human dignity, knowledge and understanding of human rights, recognition of diversity, awareness of social justice, conflict resolution skills, interdependence awareness, ability to evaluate global issues and understanding of sustainable development goals (SDGs).

Despite its promise, GCE faces significant challenges. Rapoport (2015) and Standish (2014) highlight the lack of clear definitions and objectives in GCE. Abdi (2017) critiques the often rhetorical and elusive nature of global citizenship concepts and the gap between aspirational ideals and practical implementation in diverse contexts. UNESCO (2014) also notes tensions between global solidarity and global competition, local and global interest and universal values and individual/cultural differences and the challenge of implementing GCE as a truly transformative approach that questions existing power structures and fosters critical thinking.

Given these frameworks and challenges, educators and policymakers in Thailand and ASEAN must consider the following issues. How can global citizenship frameworks be adapted to reflect the unique socio-cultural, historical, and political contexts of Thailand and ASEAN? How to cultivate a sense of global citizenship while preserving and celebrating national and regional identities? Implementing GCE that goes beyond superficial knowledge to develop critical thinking, reflexivity, and awareness of power dynamics. Developing concrete strategies to translate GCE ideals into effective classroom practices and measurable outcomes and exploring how GCE can foster greater understanding and collaboration within ASEAN while acknowledging diverse national interests.

Reconceptualizing citizenship in contemporary Thai and ASEAN society involves moving beyond narrow nationalistic focus to embrace a form of GCE that equips learners with critical thinking skills, fosters empathy and intercultural understanding, develops a commitment to social justice and balances global awareness with local and regional identities. This approach requires integrating both soft and critical GCE methods, with an emphasis on developing reflexivity, power analysis, and solidarity. On the other hand, addressing the ambiguities and conceptual challenges surrounding GCE is crucial for its effective implementation and realization of potential. The ongoing debates and tensions in the field of GCE offer opportunities for Thailand and ASEAN to contribute to the global discourse, potentially developing models of citizenship education that are both globally oriented and deeply rooted in regional values and perspectives.

Plural locality as a foundation of global citizenship: Exploring how local identities can inform and enrich global perspectives

The integration of local identities with global awareness is a crucial aspect of GCE, particularly in Thailand and the broader ASEAN region. This section explores the significance of a bottom-up approach that values diversity and bridges the global-local divide, aligning with the principles of place-based education (PBE) advocated by Grunewald and Smith (2014). By critically examining this approach, we can better understand its potential impact and challenges within the Thai and ASEAN educational landscape.

Place-based education (PBE) offers a framework for anchoring learning in local contexts while fostering a broader understanding of global citizenship. PBE integrates local environments, communities, and cultures into the curriculum, enabling students to develop a committed sense of place, identity, and belonging (Grunewald & Smith, 2014). This approach is particularly relevant in the diverse cultural contexts of Thailand and ASEAN, where balancing local traditions with global awareness is a pressing challenge (Jaikrasen & Ketsing, 2025; Na Lee, 2016).

To illustrate the application of PBE principles in Thai citizenship education, we can examine the case of primary and secondary schools in the northern provinces. The schools developed local curriculum through collaboration between the school and the community, employing strategies such as participatory community-based education, school-community involvement and integrated planning. These strategies fostered cooperation among various stakeholders, including parents, local leaders, monks, business owners, and public health volunteers. By doing so, the schools created a learning environment that reflected local values and traditions while preparing students for global citizenship (Jatuporn, 2022).

While the PBE approach shows promise in integrating local identities with global awareness, a critical examination of its implementation and potential impact in the Thai and ASEAN context remains essential. In terms of strengths, PBE can help preserve local cultures and traditions that might otherwise be eroded by globalization. The approach also fosters stronger connections between schools and their communities, potentially leading to more relevant and sustainable educational outcomes. Students can better understand global issues by relating them to local experiences, enhancing their critical thinking skills.

Regarding challenges, there is a risk of overemphasizing local perspectives at the expense of global awareness. Educators must strike a careful balance to ensure students develop both local and global competencies. The success of PBE often depends on local resources and community engagement, which may vary significantly across different regions in Thailand and ASEAN. In addition, the push for standardized education metrics and performative indices, often based on Western frameworks, may conflict with the localized approach of PBE.

Jungck and Kajornsinsin's (2003) inquiry into Thai wisdom's role in education reform highlights the country's attempts to negotiate between global influences and local traditions. This approach reflects a broader trend in Thai education policy to "glocalize" knowledge by combining GCE with local values. On the other hand, the implementation of this approach varies across different contexts within Thailand.

In schools along Thailand's ASEAN borders, the integration of ASEAN studies into local curricula provides a unique example of glocalization. To illustrate, these schools incorporate knowledge sets related to neighboring ASEAN languages and cultures. Various research projects and educational programs emphasize local history, culture, geography, ethnicity, and trade. In addition, the teaching and learning processes prioritize a community-based approach and utilize external learning resources (Kamput, 2018). This approach demonstrates Thailand's efforts to prepare students for regional integration while maintaining local relevance. On the

other hand, the effectiveness and potential limitations of these programs warrant critical scrutiny, such as ensuring consistent quality across different border regions, balancing the focus on neighboring countries with broader global perspectives, and addressing potential biases or stereotypes in cross-cultural education.

Kennedy's (2012) study provides a framework for understanding citizenship education in the ASEAN context, emphasizing four critical elements as follows: 1) curriculum—focusing on social and ethical responsibilities, community engagement, and political knowledge, 2) community—involving parents, community leaders, and organizations in school development, 3) world—broadening local engagement to address global issues and 4) self-interest—guiding students to understand their roles as new generation citizens. This framework offers a comprehensive approach to citizenship education. On the other hand, its implementation across diverse ASEAN countries raises several questions: How can this framework be adapted to suit different political systems within ASEAN? What challenges might arise in balancing national interests with regional and global perspectives? And how can educators ensure that the self-interest component doesn't conflict with broader community and global concerns?

The case of Myanmar, as explored by Anui and Arphattananon (2021), highlights the complexities of integrating culturally diverse ethnic content into local curricula. Their research reveals ongoing challenges. Despite policies advocating inclusivity, practical application remains limited and hinders the development of truly localized curricula and the lack of adequate preparation for educators to handle diverse cultural content. These findings, along with Jatuporn's (2022) critique of cultural politics in local curriculum development, underscore the need for more critical engagement with ethnic and cultural diversity in educational policies, decentralization of curriculum development to allow for genuine local input and comprehensive teacher training programs focused on cultural sensitivity and inclusive education.

In this light, the experiences of Hong Kong and Japan in developing GCE curricula grounded in PBE principles offer valuable insights for Thailand and ASEAN. Hong Kong's approach incorporates global citizenship issues from elementary to high school levels and includes international community issues, global events, human rights, environmental consciousness, and global responsibility. Regarding Japan's strategy, the 2008 reforms emphasized personal virtues and understanding of global citizenship and grounded experiences in real-life community situations, promoting coexistence and collaboration (Kennedy, 2012). While these approaches demonstrate successful integration of global and local perspectives, their applicability to the ASEAN context requires careful consideration as follows: How can these models be adapted to suit the diverse cultural landscapes of ASEAN countries? What resources would be required to implement similar comprehensive programs across ASEAN? And how might different political systems within ASEAN affect the implementation of such curricula?

To move towards a holistic citizenship curriculum and instructional approach in Thailand and ASEAN, we propose the following framework. First, unified thought process—developing a curriculum that connects all elements under a cohesive philosophical framework and balancing diverse national philosophies within ASEAN while maintaining a unified approach. Second, contextual relevance—ensuring curriculum content is relevant to local and national contexts,

promoting national development and patriotism alongside international understanding. Third, human rights and equality—incorporating human rights, freedom, and equality into citizenship education and addressing varying interpretations of these concepts across different ASEAN nations. Fourth, integration of local and global perspectives—utilizing PBE as a framework for developing global citizenship, aligning with Andreotti’s (2006) critical GCE approach by fostering reflexivity, solidarity, and power analysis with critical consideration as in whether this integration can be achieved without privileging Western perspectives on global citizenship.

While this holistic framework offers a promising approach to citizenship education, its implementation in Thailand and ASEAN faces several challenges. For example, ASEAN countries have varying educational structures and priorities. Thus, balancing national interests with regional and global perspectives, ensuring equitable implementation across diverse socio-economic contexts and preparing educators to facilitate this complex, multi-dimensional approach are important challenges for consideration. On the other hand, these challenges also present opportunities for innovation such as developing shared resources and best practices across ASEAN, leveraging ASEAN’s diversity as a learning resource for global citizenship, using digital platforms to connect students across the region and globally and positioning ASEAN as a leader in innovative citizenship education.

The curriculum inquiry approach for GCE: Proposing a critical, process-oriented pedagogy for implementing GCE

This section critically examines how curriculum inquiry can facilitate GCE in Thailand and ASEAN. It advocates for a paradigm shift from content-oriented to process-oriented pedagogy, aligning with critical GCE principles and the concept of plural locality grounded in PBE. By drawing on promising ideas from scholars in the global south, this approach aims to transform subjectivities, decolonize discourses, and empower teacher agency.

Traditional approaches to GCE often focus on content delivery, potentially reinforcing Western-centric perspectives. A process-oriented pedagogy, on the other hand, offers several advantages such as encouraging students to question assumptions and power structures, allowing for the integration of local knowledge and experiences and focusing on developing critical thinking and problem-solving skills (Valdez, 2020). Building on the concept of plural locality discussed earlier, PBE also provides a framework for grounding GCE in local contexts by helping students understand global issues through local manifestations, involving local stakeholders in the educational process and integrating indigenous knowledge and practices.

Three concrete pedagogical approaches offer practical pathways for implementing process-oriented GCE in Thai and ASEAN classrooms. First, community inquiry projects engage students in investigating local issues - such as water governance along the Mekong or ethnic minority language preservation in northern Thailand - and connecting these to global frameworks such as the SDGs. Second, cross-border collaborative learning, already practiced in Thai schools along the Myanmar and Lao PDR borders, can be deepened through joint problem-solving tasks that treat ASEAN languages as tools of inquiry rather than merely subjects of study.

Third, participatory action research (PAR) models, as demonstrated in Jatuporn et al.'s (2026) research in northern Thai schools, enable students and communities to co-construct knowledge and develop locally meaningful solutions - precisely the transformative orientation Andreotti's critical GCE demands.

These approaches; on the other hand, face real constraints such as curriculum standardization pressures, resource inequalities across provinces, and the dominance of examination culture in Thai schooling. Nonetheless, pilot programs across ASEAN—from Thailand's community-based curriculum initiatives to Japan's real-life grounded learning (Kennedy, 2012)—demonstrate that process-oriented pedagogy is feasible when supported by institutional flexibility and sustained teacher preparation.

In this light, incorporating perspectives from global south scholars can enrich GCE in Thailand and ASEAN by transforming subjectivities through challenging students to reconsider their position in global power structures, decolonizing discourses through critically examining dominant narratives in global citizenship and empowering teacher agency by recognizing teachers as curriculum developers and change agents (Sameephet, 2025).

Lin's (2012) interpretation of Chen Kuan-Hsing's *Asia as method* (Chen, 2010) provides a compelling framework for rethinking curriculum development in the ASEAN context. This approach offers several key advantages including resisting the West as method approach, which often uncritically applies Western educational models to Asian contexts, advocating for the integration of diverse Asian knowledge systems and ways of thinking into curriculum development, prioritizing the rich cultural and intellectual traditions of ASEAN countries and centering the perspectives and experiences of local communities in educational discourse.

While *Asia as method* offers a promising approach, its implementation in Thailand and ASEAN faces several challenges because of diversity within Asia, power dynamics and global connectivity. To illustrate, how can this approach account for the vast diversity within ASEAN itself? What are the implications of potentially privileging certain Asian perspectives over others? And how can this approach balance regional focus with the need for global engagement?

In Thailand, applying *Asia as method* to curriculum design requires a nuanced approach that integrates local identities and perspectives with GCE. This could involve incorporating Thai and Southeast Asian philosophical traditions, such as Buddhist concepts of interconnectedness, into GCE frameworks, using ASEAN-specific examples to illustrate global issues, fostering a sense of regional identity alongside global awareness, promoting the study of ASEAN languages alongside global languages, recognizing linguistic diversity as a resource for global citizenship and facilitating intra-ASEAN student and teacher exchanges to promote regional understanding and solidarity.

Andreotti's (2011) foundational critique of traditional GCE approaches provides valuable insights for developing more critical and transformative educational practices in Thailand and ASEAN. Key aspects of this critique include recognizing and challenging the dominance of Western knowledge systems in GCE, countering portrayals of the Global South as backward

or in need of Western intervention, dismantling colonial power structures and epistemologies in educational contexts and including marginalized voices and alternative knowledge systems in curriculum development.

Incorporating Andreotti's insights into GCE curriculum development in Thailand and ASEAN could involve examining the impacts of colonialism and neocolonialism on ASEAN countries and their educational systems, centering ASEAN perspectives on global issues, challenging dominant Western narratives, integrating traditional ecological knowledge and local wisdom into GCE curricula and fostering connections between ASEAN students and global peers based on mutual respect and recognition of diverse perspectives.

The combination of Asia as method and Andreotti's decolonial critique therefore offers a powerful framework for reimagining GCE in Thailand and ASEAN. On the other hand, both the synergies and potential tensions between these approaches demand careful consideration. Regarding synergies, both emphasize the importance of local and regional perspectives. They challenge the dominance of Western epistemologies in education and both approaches aim to empower marginalized voices and knowledge systems. In terms of tensions, Asia as method may risk creating a new form of hegemonic regionalism, while decolonial approaches emphasize global interconnectedness. The focus on Asian perspectives in Asia as method might inadvertently marginalize certain voices within the region.

Empowering teacher agency in GCE: Critical perspectives from Thailand and ASEAN

Building upon the initiatives for transforming subjectivities and decolonizing discourses in education, this section critically examines the crucial role of teacher agency in implementing GCE within the setting of Thailand and ASEAN. By analyzing the interplay between policy, practice, and socio-cultural factors, we can better understand the complexities of enacting educational change in the region.

Scholars increasingly recognize that teachers are not merely passive implementers of curriculum but active agents of change with the capacity to shape curriculum enactment (Priestley et al., 2015). This perspective is significantly relevant and complex in the context of ASEAN studies and GCE, where the success of curriculum implementation largely depends on the commitment, efforts, and vision of school principals and teachers at the practical level.

In the diverse educational landscape of ASEAN, teacher agency takes on additional layers of complexity. To illustrate, the ASEAN region encompasses a wide range of cultural and educational traditions. Teacher agency must be understood within these varied contexts, as educators navigate between local values and global perspectives. In addition, while policies may promote GCE and ASEAN studies, the actual implementation often falls to teachers. Their interpretation and adaptation of these policies significantly influence student learning achievements. The ability of teachers to act as agents of change is often constrained or enabled by available resources, which can vary greatly across and within ASEAN countries. The extent to which teachers can effectively implement GCE and ASEAN studies curricula is closely tied to their access to relevant professional development opportunities. More importantly,

the degree of autonomy granted to teachers within their educational institutions can significantly impact their ability to enact institutional and curricular changes (Wichaidit, 2025).

Nguyen and Bui's (2016) research on educational change in Vietnam provides valuable insights for understanding teacher agency in the broader ASEAN context. First, the enculturation of teacher agency is influenced by institutional and socio-cultural milieus and it highlights the need for context-sensitive approaches to educational change. Second, factors influencing reform enactment include teachers' understanding of policy intent, local educational environment and personal beliefs about pedagogy and learning. This research addresses the implications for Thailand and ASEAN by the necessity of aligning GCE initiatives with local socio-cultural contexts and the importance of comprehensive teacher training that addresses both theoretical and practical aspects of GCE.

Evidence from Thai educational contexts illustrate the relational dimension of teacher agency in GCE. Sapphasuk and Nawarat's (2019) study of multicultural schools in northern Thailand found that teachers who function as curriculum co-developers—working alongside community elders, local leaders, and parents—demonstrate significantly higher levels of critical reflexivity than those implementing top-down mandated curricula. These teachers actively negotiate between OBEC's national standards and local community epistemologies, serving as what Giroux (1992) calls "border crossers" who mediate between institutional imperatives and lived community realities.

This reconceptualization carries direct structural implications. Rather than treating teachers as policy recipients, educational systems must provide protected time for collaborative curriculum inquiry (akin to Japan's Lesson Study), school-level committees that incorporate teacher voice, and professional development that builds capacity for critical self-reflection on positionality and cultural assumptions (Saito et al., 2026). In border province schools, where teachers routinely navigate significant linguistic and cultural diversity, such agency is already practiced: educators select locally relevant materials, invite community members as co-educators, and adapt official content to reflect multilingual realities (Sapphasuk & Nawarat, 2019). Supporting and scaling these teacher-led innovations—rather than standardizing them away—represents one of the most promising pathways toward transformative GCE in the region.

Empowering teacher agency in GCE implementation within Thailand and ASEAN requires a delicate balance between regional coherence and local adaptation. By adopting flexible, context-sensitive strategies, educational stakeholders can work towards shared educational goals while respecting the rich diversity of the ASEAN region. This approach not only enhances the effectiveness of GCE but also contributes to the broader goals of ASEAN integration and global citizenship. The path forward demands continuous reflection, adaptation, and collaboration among all stakeholders in the educational ecosystem. By recognizing and empowering teachers as key agents of change, Thailand and ASEAN can pave the way for a more inclusive, effective, and locally relevant approach to global citizenship education.

The following table maps fundamental distinctions between content-driven, soft GCE practice and the process-oriented, decolonial framework proposed in this article across seven dimensions

salient to the Thai and ASEAN context. This comparative analysis clarifies the transformative shifts required at the levels of curriculum design, pedagogy, teacher role, knowledge systems, and assessment - and serves as a diagnostic tool for practitioners and policymakers evaluating existing programs.

Table 1
Comparative framework: Conventional GCE vs. reconceptualized critical GCE in the Thai and ASEAN context

Dimension	Conventional (Soft) GCE (Current ASEAN practice)	Reconceptualized Critical GCE (Proposed framework)
Curriculum orientation	Content-oriented; transmits knowledge about ASEAN and global issues; prioritizes factual recall and regional unity	Process-oriented; inquiry-based; connects local issues to global frameworks (e.g., SDGs, human rights); emphasizes critical analysis
Pedagogical approach	Teacher-centered delivery; emphasis on content coverage and standardized outcomes	Participatory and dialogic; community inquiry, participatory action research (PAR), and cross-border collaborative learning
Teacher role	Passive implementer of mandated curriculum; transmitter of policy	Active co-constructor of curriculum; critical agent mediating between policy, community epistemologies, and learner needs
Knowledge systems	Predominantly Western and national-official frameworks; ASEAN identity constructed as homogeneous	Pluriversal; integrates indigenous, local, and ASEAN-specific epistemologies alongside - not subordinate to - global perspectives
Assessment approach	Standardized metrics; measurable outcomes based on content mastery	Authentic and context-sensitive; values critical thinking, reflexivity, and community engagement alongside academic outcomes
View of identity	Additive; global citizenship layered onto national identity without critical examination	Integrative and transformative; plural locality as the foundation from which global awareness is built
Risk profile	Reinforces savior mentality; reproduces power asymmetries uncritically; marginalizes local knowledge	Requires sustained institutional support, teacher capacity-building, and active resistance to standardization pressures

Note: The comparative framework draws on Andreotti's (2006, 2011) distinction between soft and critical GCE, integrated with place-based education principles (Grunewald & Smith, 2014) and the Asia as method approach (Chen, 2010; Lin, 2012). The reconceptualized model does not reject conventional approaches outright but identifies specific dimensions where transformative shifts are necessary for GCE to be genuinely responsive to the Thai and ASEAN context.

The four themes examined in this article—plural locality, curriculum inquiry, decolonial critique, and teacher agency—are not independent strands but mutually reinforcing dimensions of a coherent framework for critical GCE. Figure 1 illustrates how these dimensions converge around Andreotti's (2006, 2011) core principles of reflexivity, power analysis, and solidarity, situated within the broader ASEAN sociocultural and political context. Together, they point toward an educational vision that is locally rooted, regionally coherent, and globally engaged.



Figure 1 A Reconceptualized Framework for Critical GCE in Thailand and ASEAN

CONCLUSION

This article has argued for a fundamental reconceptualization of GCE in Thailand and the ASEAN context, and in doing so advances three original contributions to the field. First, it establishes plural locality as a foundational principle for GCE in multi-ethnic, culturally diverse settings. While place-based education has been developed primarily in Global North contexts, this article demonstrates its analytical relevance within ASEAN—where cultural and linguistic multiplicity is not a complication to manage but a resource to mobilize. Plural locality offers a framework that resists both uncritical cosmopolitanism and narrow nationalism.

Second, it proposes a curriculum inquiry framework that bridges Andreotti's (2006, 2011) critical GCE model with Chen Kuan-Hsing's Asia as method (2010), moving beyond theoretical critique to identify concrete pedagogical pathways—community inquiry, cross-border collaborative learning, and PAR—that are theoretically robust and contextually grounded in ASEAN realities. This advances existing approaches that apply critical GCE frameworks without attending to the specific structural conditions of Southeast Asian schooling. Third, it reconceptualizes teacher agency as a relational, institutionally-embedded capacity requiring active cultivation through structural reform, rather than an individual attribute. Teachers who function as curriculum co-constructors and community mediators—as evidence from northern Thai multicultural schools demonstrates—are better positioned to enact transformative GCE than those operating as policy implementers.

Taken together, these contributions position Thailand and ASEAN not as recipients of globally circulating GCE frameworks, but as contexts capable of generating distinctive insights that enrich international debates. Moving forward, policymakers and educators must prioritize flexible, context-sensitive strategies, comprehensive teacher development, and the integration of indigenous knowledge - building educational systems that are simultaneously locally rooted, regionally coherent, and globally engaged. In this sense, the reconceptualization of GCE in Thailand and ASEAN is not merely a regional concern; it is a contribution to reimagining citizenship education for an increasingly multipolar world.

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