2021, 15(1), 117-132
Novitas-ROYAL (Research on Youth and Language)
ISSN: 1307–4733

Research Article

Uncovering EFL Learners' Perspectives on a Course Integrating Global Issues and Language Learning

Nalan BAYRAKTAR BALKIR[1]

[1]Ph.D., Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University, Çanakkale, TURKEY
nbayraktar@comu.edu.tr
ORCID: 0000-0002-1966-569X

Article information

Submission	12/02/2021	Revision received	15/03/2021
Acceptance	22/03/2021	Publication date	11/04/2021

Keywords: Global issues, global education, FLE (foreign language education), learners' perspectives, tertiary level learners

Abstract: The fact that our world increasingly faces serious problems including poverty, wars, environmental destruction, climate change, pandemics, gender inequality, hunger, oppression and so on raises the question of the role of foreign language teaching profession in struggling to find solutions to those global issues. This understanding relates to an educational stance called global education which aims to equip learners with the knowledge, skills, and ability to effectively communicate in a foreign language and enable them to be socially conscious of global problems and provide them with the linguistic tools to take action. In this regard, this study aimed to uncover a group of tertiary level EFL learners' perspectives on a course integrating global issues and language education. To this end, a study with a qualitative design was conducted, and focus group interviews were held with a group of students at a state university in Turkey. The data analysis revealed that the learners' conceptions of global issues included ones such as poverty, environment, education, and oppression. Furthermore, they had mainly positive opinions about the effects of dealing with global issues in class, primarily referring to expanding their perspectives and improving learning gains. Finally, they made suggestions for textbook content and classroom activities. The results of this study might contribute to the attempts to make global education one of the vital approaches of foreign language education with the hope that the world could turn into a better place.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Küresel sorunlar, küresel eğitim, yabancı dil eğitimi, öğrencilerin bakış açıları, yükseköğrenim öğrencileri

İngilizceyi Yabancı Dil olarak Öğrenen Öğrencilerin Küresel Sorunlar ve Dil Öğrenimini Entegre Eden bir Dersle ilgili Bakış Açıları

Özet: Dünyamızın, yoksulluk, savaşlar, çevre tahribatı, iklim değişimi, salgın hastalıklar, cinsiyet eşitsizliği, açlık ve baskı gibi hızla artan küresel sorunlarla karşı karşıya kaldığı gerçeği, yabancı dil eğitiminin bu tip sorunlara çözümler bulmada nasıl bir rol üstlendiği sorusunu ortaya çıkarmaktadır. Bu anlayış, öğrenenleri yabancı bir dilde etkin bir şekilde iletişim kuracak beceri ve bilgiyle donatma ve aynı zamanda sorunların çözümüne katkıda bulanabilmelerini sağlamak amacıyla, onların küresel sorunlar hakkında sosyal bilinç ve sorumluluk sahibi olmalarını hedefleyen bir eğitim akımı olan küresel eğitimle ilintilidir. Bu bağlamda, bu çalışma, İngilizceyi yabancı dil olarak öğrenen bir grup üniversite öğrencisinin küresel sorunlar ve dil öğrenimini entegre eden bir dersle ilgili bakış açılarını ortaya çıkarmayı hedeflemektedir. Bu doğrultuda, nitel bir çalışma tasarımı benimsenmiş ve bir Türk devlet üniversitesi hazırlık programında öğrenim görmekte olan bir grup öğrenciyle odak grup görüşmeleri yürütülmüştür. Veri analizinin sonucunda, öğrenciler küresel sorun olarak yoksulluk, çevre, eğitim ve baskı gibi kavramları dile getirmişlerdir. Ayrıca, sınıfta küresel sorunları işlemenin etkileriyle ilgili olarak, özellikle ufuklarının genişlemesi ve dil öğrenim kazanımlarının artması bakımından genelde olumlu düşüncelere sahip oldukları görülmüştür. Son olarak, ders kitabı içeriği ve sınıf etkinlikleri ile ilgili olarak önerilerde bulunmuşlardır. Bu çalışmanın bulguları, dünyamızı daha iyi bir yere dönüştürme umuduyla, küresel eğitimin, önemli bir yabancı dil eğitimi yaklaşımı olması yönündeki çabalara katkı sağlayabilir.

To Cite This Article: Bayraktar Balkır, N. (2021). Uncovering EFL learners' perspectives on a course integrating global issues and language learning. *Novitas-ROYAL (Research on Youth and Language)*, *15*(1), 117-132.

1. Introduction

Our world faces enormous and serious problems, including environmental destruction, climate change, pandemics, social and gender inequality, hunger, poverty, wars, oppression. These issues, often which are man-made, call for urgent action that requires us to overcome them and heal all the wounds of nature, human beings, animals, and the whole planet. In line with this urgent call, numerous actions have been initiated, and projects have been launched by a variety of authorities in the world. Some featured actions include Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) proposed by the United Nations (UN), and actions with an educational focus such as UNESCO's (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) 'Education for Sustainable Development Goals' and a number individual or collaborative initiatives undertaken in the regional and global scope, all of which have common goals for creating a better, sustainable, and more liveable world for all. Amidst all these efforts, education has played an inevitable role in raising individuals with an awareness of the existence, causes, and the nature of the global problems, and a potential to take democratic action to find solutions to them, all of which relate to global education. In this respect, foreign language education (FLE) appears perfectly suitable for inducing language learning as an effective means to reach desirable ends in educating such individuals as the themes and the content about global issues could be easily adapted for language teaching. For this reason, this study aims to investigate the practices, perceptions, and perspectives related to the use of global issues in a language course in a particular FLE setting with a specific group of English as a foreign language (EFL) learner hoping to make even a small difference in implementing a global approach to FLE, and eventually to a better world.

1.1. An Overview of Global Initiatives Addressing Global Issues

Our world is undergoing an alarming period as it is surrounded by increasingly devastative issues, as exemplified in the previous section. Indeed, they are so commonplace that unless urgent action is taken to find solutions to those issues, catastrophic consequences will be inevitable. Fortunately, a number of global or local initiatives deriving from this urgent call have been made by a variety of authorities, associations, and institutions, all of which have common goals for creating a better, sustainable, and more liveable world for all.

To begin with, SDGs, developed and initiated by the UN in 2015, are an action project with an international dimension that aims to tackle common global issues and thus transform the world for the better. SDGs are intended to be achieved by the year 2030. This project includes seventeen goals specified as No Poverty, Zero Hunger, Good Health and Well-being, Quality Education, Gender Equality, Clean Water and Sanitation, Affordable and Clean Energy, Decent Work and Economic Growth, Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure, Reducing Inequality, Sustainable Cities and Communities, Responsible Consumption and Production, Climate Action, Life Below Water, Life On Land, Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions, Partnerships for the Goals (United Nations, 2015).

Being on such an important mission, this featured project has been supported by educational practices, considering that educating people is essential to transform our planet into a better world. One such educational support is provided by UNESCO in the form of 'Education for Sustainable Development Goals', which aims to guide support for policymakers, curriculum developers and educators in designing strategies, curricula and courses to promote learning for the SDGs (UNESCO, 2020). Another educational project

initiated by UNESCO again is Linguapax, which was launched in 1987 by an international committee of language experts to develop positive attitudes and values towards linguistic diversity, multilingualism, cross-cultural awareness, and understanding, thus promoting peace via educational practices (Marti, 1996).

Besides all these aforementioned initiatives to create a better world, a variety of organizations within the field of language education exist that aim to promote all these efforts through foreign language teaching, such as IATEFL's GlSIG (Global Issues Special Interest Group) and TESOL's Social Responsibility Interest Section (See Jacobs and Cates, 1999 for a more complete list of associations/organizations). When all these initiatives on the institutional level are combined with educators' or individuals' efforts with a sense of awareness and responsibility, they might serve to combat the problems worldwide.

1.2. Global Education and Foreign Language Education

Our planet is increasingly exposed to countless global issues, which alert all sectors and professional groups to take urgent action and press them to find solutions to those problems. The field of FLE is no exception because every profession is socially responsible for society and, on a broader scale, for the world in which they live. Furthermore, the study of languages might be considered a powerful means for furthering cross-cultural understanding, tolerance, and respect for diversity. In addition, since the content of language courses is quite flexible, FLE is highly convenient for adopting and using themes and materials concerned with global issues (Cates, 2002). Indeed, both formal language teaching associations mentioned above, as well as other institutions, individuals, and groups of teachers have been implementing practices that promote the transformation of the world for the better. When the relevant literature is reviewed, all these practices could be classified under a pedagogical approach called "Global Education" (GE). Fisher and Hicks (1985, p.8) define GE as "education which promotes the knowledge, attitudes and skills relevant to living responsibly in a multicultural, interdependent world." Similarly, Cates (2002, p. 41) describes GE as a new approach that "aims to enable students to effectively acquire a foreign language while empowering them with the knowledge, skills, and commitment required by world citizens to solve global problems". To summarize, GE aims to promote foreign language learning, while at the same time develop committed world citizens to take actions to find solutions to the world problems that our planet has been suffering from.

A global approach to education has four main goals. Cates (2002, p. 41), a leading scholar in the field of GE, specifies these goals as follows:

- Knowledge about world problems: the nature of world problems, their causes, and viable solutions
- Acquiring skills: communication, critical and creative thinking, cooperative problem solving, nonviolent conflict resolution, informed decision making, and the ability to see issues from multiple perspectives
- Acquiring global attitudes: global awareness, curiosity, an appreciation of other cultures, respect for diversity, a commitment to justice, and empathy with others
- Action: democratic participation in the local and global community to solve world problems

As could be inferred from this categorization, for the successful implementation of a global approach in education, first, learners should gain an awareness of the existence, nature, causes and possible solutions of global issues. Second, they should be equipped with all necessary skills to be able to address world problems. Third, they should acquire attitudes such as respect for diversity and appreciating different cultures, etc. Finally, they should be ready to solve problems through democratic participation. When designing and implementing GE, it is essential to set and pursue all these goals.

GE comprises a variety of topics and themes as global issues vary highly in type and number. However, it might be categorized into four main fields as reviewed and suggested by Jacobs and Cates (1999):

1. peace education (concerned with reducing violence and with devising peaceful resolutions of conflicts),
2. development education (concerned with deploying sustainable solutions for overcoming poverty),
3. human rights education (concerned with ensuring everyone the freedom to voice their views and to enjoy protection from injustice and discrimination),
4. and environmental education (concerned with defending nature) (p. 45).

This categorization could serve as a roadmap for curriculum planners and teachers during the planning and implementation stages in adopting and integrating a global approach into FLE.

When selecting materials for integrating a global approach to language teaching, there are several online and digital sources which could be made use of for planning and conducting courses within the framework of GE. One such source is the digital book titled "Integrating global issues in the creative English language classroom: With reference to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals" by Alan Maley and Nik Peachey, which offers a wealth of teaching materials and ideas for classroom use. This resource can raise learners' awareness of global issues as listed by the UN in the form of seventeen SDGs and also empower them to adopt an active and participatory stance in attempts to tackle the issues (Maley & Peachey, 2017).

With respect to content, FLE is a flexible field as there might be selections of content from all themes and areas. In addition, global issues could be exploited well through all four skills, grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation in a language course, and a shift from a focus on structure to focus on language is requisite. As for methods, more student-centred and experiential learning is required for active student learning in the GE framework. Experiential learning could be realized through activities such as class simulations, role plays, inviting guest speakers, student projects, interviews, presentations, etc. In terms of materials, some featured sources have been listed above. In addition to them, teacher-made lesson materials, course books, and student-made materials can also be sources of instruction in GE (compiled from Cates, 2002). There is a wealth of materials everywhere, especially on the internet, so it is essential to keep an open mind in order to deliver effective instruction that contributes to the efforts to achieve the objectives mentioned above.

1.3. A Review of Studies on Global Education in FLE

A review of relevant literature reveals that a number of studies have been implemented that focus on various dimensions of GE and with varying groups of participants as the subjects

of the study. Since the present investigation included foreign language learners as the participants of the study, studies focusing on learners will be reviewed in this section.

To start with, Omidvar and Sukumar (2013) carried out a study in which GE was integrated into a second language course. The results of the study revealed that the participants' awareness of global issues increased, and their skills for analyzing problems and applying critical thinking skills in the environment improved. The study also showed that such a curriculum could foster tolerance and appreciation of different cultures and backgrounds. In another study, Rothman and Sanderson (2018) analyzed student reflections through interviews and surveys in relation to practicing The Language of Peace Approach (LPA) and global issues. The results of the analyses revealed that the incorporation of LPA and global issues naturally fit into FLE, and the participants' awareness of global citizenship and critical thinking skills were improved. Kaplan (2019) conducted a study that explored 250 Turkish high school EFL students' perceptions of integrating global issues in English classes. The results indicated that the participants had slightly positive perceptions on the integration of global issues in English classes. In addition, they shared that the use of global issues can improve their world knowledge, vocabulary, and speaking skills. In an action research conducted by Başarır (2018), the study explored how the theme-based model of the content-based language teaching approach could promote learners' language skills and consciousness of global issues in learning English. Based on the findings, it was found that teaching English through a theme-based language teaching approach had a positive effect on the facilitation of the participants' basic language skills. Furthermore, their awareness of global issues, including respect for diversity, gender equality, and global warming increased. In a study conducted by Arikan (2009), contextualized grammar instruction was combined with environmental peace education activities whereby pre-service English language teachers applied such activities to secondary school students in the scope of the teaching practicum course. The results of the study revealed that teaching English grammar through environmental peace education activities was effective in FLE.

As could be concluded from this available review of research, covering global issues, or integrating GE with FLE might result in a number of educational gains such as awareness-raising of global issues, promotion of tolerance and appreciation of different cultures, gender equality, climate change, critical thinking skills, etc. and language learning outcomes like improvement of vocabulary and speaking skills. Based on the findings of these studies, it appears to be worthwhile to design and implement language courses with a global issues component and examine the process and the results through scientific investigations.

1.4. Purpose of the Study

This research study aimed to explore a group of tertiary-level EFL learners' conceptions of global issues, their perceptions of the quality and impact of the instruction they received in terms of a global approach to language learning, and their suggestions for textbook content and classroom activities at the end of the academic year. For these purposes, the following research questions were addressed in this study:

1. What are the participants' conceptions of global issues?
2. How do the participants evaluate the learning process in terms of the textbooks, the instructors, and the course design?
3. How do they perceive the effects of the course with the inclusion of a global approach?

4. What are their suggestions for textbook content and classroom activities concerning global issues?

Having stated the purposes above, the current study with a group of EFL learners in a Turkish higher educational context could contribute to expanding the repertoire of research on global education in FLE.

2. Method

2.1. Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative research design which is derived from phenomenological philosophy. The ontological aspect in this paradigm is concerned with relativism, which means that multiple realities exist, and their construction differs depending on individuals' meaning-making in relation to their world. The epistemological view in this paradigm asserts that the nature of knowledge is subjective, i.e., individuals' experiences form the basis of factual knowledge (Allison & Pomeroy, 2002). In this tradition, individuals' inner thoughts and mental capacities such as perceptions, understandings, feelings, values, etc., are often investigated. Hence, there is an effort to avoid making generalizations as the results cannot be applied to all the settings or participants (Pring, 2000). In line with these features, this study aimed to explore a group of learners' conceptions and perspectives of a particular phenomenon concerning their learning process; thus, a qualitative research design was adopted in search of the answers to the research questions.

2.2. Participants

The research site of this study is GEPP (General English Preparatory Program) at the School of Foreign Languages at a Turkish university. GEPP offers general English instruction to students enrolled in English-medium departments, specifically Biology, Environmental Engineering, Molecular Biology and Genetics, International Relations, Business Studies, Biomolecular Sciences, and Turkish Studies. Two courses, Main Course and Skills, are taught throughout a 24-hour-a-week intensive instruction lasting an academic year. Instruction encompasses all language areas and four skills (grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation in integration with reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills). Students are expected to complete the program at B1-B2 levels. The textbooks that were selected for the Skills course were Unlock Level 3 Reading and Writing Skills (Westbrook, 2014) and Unlock Level 3 Listening and Speaking Skills by Cambridge University Press (Ostrowska, 2014). The books included themes, most of which dealt with some common global issues, such as environment (e.g., deforestation), transport (e.g., solving traffic congestion), animals (e.g., endangered species), health and fitness (e.g., tackling obesity), etc. Along with exploiting these themes presented by the textbooks, learners were required to do further tasks and extension activities like writing essays, giving presentations, doing group projects, sharing their opinions on an online platform, etc.

Qualitative research usually comprises small sample sizes as there is a tendency to focus on the specific (Friedman, 2012). In this research, a small group was selected for the purposes of the study, and a sample of convenience was preferred since it was an accessible group to the researcher. The participants were selected from an intact GEPP group involving 20 preparatory year students. A total of 6 students took part in the focus group interview. Four of the participants were female and two were male. Their ages ranged between 18 to

25. Three participants' major was Molecular Biology and Genetics while other participants' major was Environmental Engineering.

2.3. Data Collection

In order to gather data, a focus group interview was held with the participants at the end of the academic year. The interview guide was prepared by the researcher and involved 7 open-ended questions in line with the purposes of the study. When preparing the guide, leading, biased or complex questions were avoided, and the questions were checked in terms of clarity and comprehensibility of the items (Friedman, 2012). In the next round, the questions in the guide were examined and evaluated by an expert in the field with respect to face and content validity and whether they fit the purposes of the study. At the beginning of the interview, the participants were informed about the aims and other details of the study, and the whole session was recorded to be used for the transcription phase by the researcher upon their consent.

2.4. Data Analysis

After the interview recordings were transcribed, and inductive content analysis was carried out. In the first place, about one third of the data was analyzed by two coders independently to assess the intercoder reliability. The two sets of analyzes were found to be parallel 89%, which pointed to a high level of consistency between the raters. In the second place, the entire data was condensed into meaning units, and then codes were created in the form of a description of the condensed meaning. Later, related categories were identified out of the codes, which finally led to the specification of themes and broader units encompassing related categories (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017). In the end, arising categories and themes were tabulated to be displayed during the Findings section. Additionally, quotes from the transcripts were also included while presenting the findings. The findings from the analysis of each research question are presented in turn in the subsequent parts.

3. Findings

3.1. Participants' conceptions of global issues

When the participants were required to list some common global issues during the interview, the themes that emerged from the recurring responses were poverty, environment, education, and oppression. These themes were divided into further categories, which are displayed in Table 1.

Table 1.

Participants' conceptions of global issues

Themes	Categories	Participant Codes
Poverty	Economic problems	P2
	Income inequality	P6
Environment	Climate change resulting from irresponsibility and selfishness	P5
	Environmental pollution	P6
Education	Problems in education	P4
	Lack of equal educational opportunities	P4
	People's ignorance	P4

Oppression	Cyclical oppression	P1

The data in Table 1 reveals that the participants' conceptions of prevalent world problems center mostly on poverty deriving from economic problems and income inequality. This issue was reflected by one of the participants during the discussion:

> P2: *"To me, the biggest global issue is poverty, in other words, economic problems. If a solution is found to this problem, and economic balance is sustained, poverty could be tackled."*

Another interviewee shared a similar view:

> P6: *"Income inequality is the most visible problem that the economy creates. In this way, the poor get poorer, and the rich get richer."*

The second global issue mentioned by the participants is environmental problems with a focus on climate change stemming from peoples' irresponsibility and selfishness. The following excerpt from the interview reveals this theme:

> P6: *"A serious global issue for me is climate change resulting from carbon emission and environmental pollution. There is only one place that we can live in, and it is our world. If we do not take the necessary precautions, we will have left a deformed place for future generations. Perhaps, life will come to an end because, with increasing emission, the greenhouse effect is rising, which leads to the change of climates."*
>
> P5: *"I completely agree with you (P6), and I believe the most important reasons for climate change are irresponsibility and selfishness."*

As for the third-world problem expressed by the participants, issues related to education were emphasized. For example, P4 made the following comment:

> P4: *"I think the most serious global issue is problems related to education. The fact that countries cannot find an effective way for providing education, change it repeatedly, or they do not want to educate the public intentionally are some of the causes of this problem… If we can deal with this problem, I believe that we can overcome many global issues…"*

The final issue that was highlighted by one of the participants was oppression. P1 expresses his viewpoint as follows:

> P1: *"I think oppression is the biggest cause of all kinds of problems. For example, an inadequate and unequal level of income creates unhappiness within the family because people feel oppressed. When people are oppressed, they tend to put pressure on others around them, and this occurs in a cyclical way."*

In sum, from the participants' viewpoints, four prevalent global issues that were revealed during the focus group interview were poverty, environment, education, and oppression, which have also been mentioned among common global issues in the introduction to this study.

3.2. Participants' evaluation of the learning process in terms of the textbooks, the instructors, and the design of the course

The findings related to the participants' evaluation of the learning process in terms of the textbooks, the instructors, and the course designs are displayed in Table 2.

Table 2.

Participants' evaluation of the textbooks, the instructors, and the design of the course

Themes	Categories	Participant Codes
Quality of the textbooks	Encouraging the students to investigate the issues in more depth	P1, P2, P5, P6
	Sufficient coverage of the issues	P2, P6
	Lack of connections between the units	P4
	Lack of examining the roots of the problems	P1, P4
	Insufficient for the Ss' level	P4
Quality of the instructors	Having sufficient knowledge about global issues	P4
	Being hesitant to express their thoughts	P1, P4, P6
Design of the course	Proper balance between the study of the language and global issues	P2, P3, P4, P5
	Breaking monotony	P6

In terms of the quality of the textbooks, the first category revealed that they encouraged the students to investigate the issues in more depth. P6, for example, stated that:

> P6: *"The books push us towards searching the issues further, and we were required to do some research in order to do the writing and speaking assignments at the end of the units. As a result, we were informed more."*

As the second category suggests, the participants found the textbooks quite sufficient to cover global issues in general. However, they also believed that there was a lack of connections between the units, and the roots of the problems were not thoroughly examined. In addition, one participant found the textbooks insufficient for their level. Some of these points were reflected in the following excerpts from the interview:

> P4: *"There are no connections among the themes. For example, they (the books) address the traffic problem as if it is a separate issue instead of considering it as a result of excessive consumption."*

> P1: *"It is true that we need to search for a topic after we cover it in the class. However, it would have been much better if they had added some parts including what could be done, solutions, reasons, or some discussion starters related to the issue at the end of the unit."*

In relation to their evaluation of the instructors, two categories emerged as '(instructions) having sufficient knowledge about global issues and being hesitant about expressing their thoughts'. To describe these categories further, two quotations from the interview are included below:

> P4: *I am sure that my teachers have sufficient knowledge about global issues, but I worry that they do not feel free to express their opinions."*

> P6: *"I agree with P4. Not only at university but also in high school, when we were talking about these issues, our teachers were hesitant about expressing their thoughts. They don't share what they know even if they have the knowledge."*

As for the third theme, the design of the course, four categories arose. First, the participants shared the opinion that there was a proper balance between the study of the

language and global issues. Second, the inclusion of global issues into the course broke the monotony. Third, there was an expansion of perspectives; fourth, there was an improvement of learning gains (i.e., in grammar, vocabulary, and speaking). These categories are reflected in the following quotations from the interview:

> P2: *"I think the balance between learning grammar, vocabulary, and studying global issues was just appropriate."*
>
> P5: *"You feel that not just grammar or vocabulary, but also problems and issues concerning all of us serve our goals. In other words, you don't only learn English, but also your knowledge of the world accumulates. Otherwise, it would have been just memorizing if we just had focused on grammar and vocabulary study; and we wouldn't have participated that effectively."*
>
> P6: *"We have been able to form a base of knowledge about global issues during the course. Thus, I can increase my knowledge at this point. In addition, dealing with such issues breaks the monotony."*

In sum, the findings indicate that the participants were content with the textbook with respect to its potential to motivate them to investigate the issues in more depth and with its sufficiency to present a good coverage of the issues. However, some criticism arose in that they found the textbooks insufficient for their level, and they lacked connections between the units. As for the quality of the instructors, although the participants found them adequately knowledgeable about global issues, they perceived them as being too hesitant about sharing their opinions in the class freely. Finally, for the participants, there was an appropriate balance between the instruction of language areas and skills, and the study of global issues.

3.3. Participants' perceptions of the effects of the course adopting a global approach

The findings in relation to how the participants perceive the effects of the course with the inclusion of a global approach are shown in Table 3.

Table 3.

Participants' perceptions of the effects of the course adopting of a global approach

Themes	Categories	Participant codes
Expansion of one's perspective	Learning to look from different perspectives	P3, P5
	Changing and broadening their own viewpoints	P4, P6
	Increase in cross-cultural understanding	P6
Improvement of learning outcomes	Contribution to the learning of grammar and vocabulary	P1, P2, P4, P5, P6
	Accumulation of knowledge of the world	P1, P4, P6
	Gaining the ability to think and speak in English	P1, P4, P5, P6
	Development of thought/ knowledge systems	P6
	Usefulness of acquiring real-life knowledge	

As shown in Table 3, the participants' perceptions of the effects of the course integrating a global approach were reflected by two themes. The first theme, expansion of one's perspective, was grouped under three categories (i.e., learning to look from different perspectives, changing and broadening their own viewpoints, and increase in cross-cultural

understanding). The following excerpts from the interview could illustrate this finding more clearly:

> P3: *"We can hear different opinions. During the class discussions, I can hear a variety of ideas, and this makes me learn to look from different perspectives."*
>
> P1: *"The most important effect is making the students be able to think in English. As most of us have some knowledge in Turkish about some of the issues, we can also think about them in English, which makes us gain a different ability."*
>
> P6: *"It (the study of global issues and cultures) contributed to our understanding of the variety of traditions of belonging to different cultures."*
>
> P4: *"As these books are produced by different nations, we can also get to know their opinions about these global issues, and as a result, we can change and expand our own perspectives."*

Improvement of learning outcomes was the second theme arose out of content analysis. The initial coding of the data led to five categories (i.e., contribution to the learning of grammar and vocabulary, accumulation of knowledge of the world, gaining ability to think and speak in English, development of thought or knowledge systems, and usefulness of acquiring real-life knowledge). There were various expressions shared by the participants pointing to this theme and categories. Some of the selected excerpts are included below to show the interviewees' verbatim responses:

> P6: *"We can develop a thought system over these issues. If we take the issues in the books as a base, we can build on our own knowledge by adding more information."*
>
> P4: *"I believe speaking fluency is dependent on thinking fluency. Thus, if we want to be fluent in English, we need to have opinions about an issue. The fact that global issues are addressed in the book makes our ideas flow and contributes to our speaking fluency."*
>
> P4: *"If we want to be fluent in English, we need to have opinions about an issue. The fact that global issues are addressed in the lessons, and the book makes our ideas flow and contributes to our speaking fluency."*
>
> P1: *"The most important effect is making the students be able to think in English".*

As this set of emergent data shows, the participants generally had positive perceptions regarding the inclusion of global issues in the skills course. It is notable to see that the participants attribute the impact of such instruction to some important outcomes, such as the expansion of their perspective and improvement in learning gains.

3.4. Participants' suggestions for textbook content and classroom activities concerning global issues

The findings regarding the participants' suggestions for textbook content and classroom activities concerning global issues are presented in Table 4.

Table 4.

Participants' suggestions for textbook content and classroom activities concerning global issues

Themes	Categories	Participant codes
Topic suggestions for the textbooks	Gender equality	P1, P4
	Homophobia	P1, P4
	Philosophical approaches	P2
	Education systems in different countries	P4, P6
Principles to follow in textbook design	Addressing sensitive issues with caution	P6, P2, P3
	Establishing connections/bridges between units	P4
	Teaching/showing different opinions	P1
	Selecting issues that meet on a common ground	P6
Speaking tasks	Giving daily five-minute talks about different topics	P3
	Interviewing activists and recording short videos	P1
Social responsibility projects	Writing petitions about problems and submitting them to the local or national authorities	P1, P6
	Feeding street animals and visiting an animal shelter	P1
	Preparing healthy snacks and sharing the recipes with others	P5

The findings obtained from the data analysis revealed four main themes, namely topic suggestions for the textbooks, principles to follow in textbook design, speaking tasks, and social responsibility projects.

The first theme was reflected in four categories. The participants suggested several topics, such as gender equality, homophobia, philosophical approaches, and education systems, to be incorporated into textbooks. To illustrate these categories further, the following quotations are given from the interview transcript:

> P1: *"To me, some topics are more important than the others (of course, they may change from one to another). For example, they could have excluded fashion and included topics like gender equality and homophobia".*

> P4: *"Instead of such sharp issues, they could have included education systems in different countries."*

Out of the analysis, some issues concerning the principles to follow in textbook design also emerged. Four categories were grouped under the second theme, namely addressing sensitive issues with caution, establishing connections/ bridges between units, teaching/ presenting different opinions, and selecting issues that meet on common ground, which could also be observed in the following excerpts.

> P4: *"There should be a bridge among the topics. There shouldn't be sharp jumps. The topics should follow one another as they do in a novel. In this way, our interest in the topics will increase."*

> P6: *"Some topics might be offensive for some countries or cultures. That's why it's important to be cautious when choosing issues and to meet on a common ground."*

The third theme in Table 4 is speaking tasks. The participants suggested some ideas which were related to two categories. For example, they offered to give daily five-minute talks about different topics and to interview activists, and record short videos.

> P3: *"Various kinds of information could have been gathered, and everybody could have made a five-minute talk about a different topic every day in the class."*

> P1: *"Small activities like this could be done. For example, we could talk to environmentalists who have devoted themselves to this issue. We could record a short video about it as in the case of the animal shelter."*

The final theme is social responsibility projects. The participants offered various projects that could be grouped into three categories: writing petitions about problems and submitting them to local or national authorities, feeding street animals and visiting an animal shelter, preparing healthy snacks and sharing the recipes with others.

> P1: *"Everybody is aware of the fact that there is a problem with public transportation. Based on our own observation, we could have taken notes about what is wrong or what could be adjusted, and then we could have presented them in the class. And this could have been written as a petition and submitted to the municipality."*

> P6: *"For example, we could have done an activity like preparing healthy snacks in the unit related to health and fitness."*

> P5: *"We could have given a tiny recipe, and we might want to use it in our daily life, or we might live abroad, and we can use it when somebody asks for a recipe."*

The findings obtained in this section carry a lot of importance as they could also serve as a needs analysis for developing and designing materials and courses aiming to make GE a significant component of foreign/second language education.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

This study aimed to explore a group of tertiary-level EFL learners' conceptions of global issues; their evaluation of the learning process in terms of the textbooks, the instructors, and the design of the course; their perceptions of the effects of the course with the inclusion of a global approach; and their suggestions for textbook content and classroom activities regarding global issues. The findings of the data analysis yielded several insightful results to take into consideration.

First, the participants' conceptions of global issues revealed problems such as poverty, environment, education, and oppression. The fact that the participants were aware of some of the common global issues that the world is facing might imply that they have knowledge about the nature and causes of world problems and suggest some possible solutions to the problems. This relates to the first goal of GE as suggested by Cates (2002). Therefore, it might be concluded that the participants of this study had knowledge about the existence, nature, and causes of some prevalent issues. To the author's knowledge, there are not many academic studies investigating learners' conceptions of global issues, but the results of a survey on an online website could be used as a reference of comparison at this point. The survey is called Cambridge Global Perspectives Survey (2020), and it was carried out with over 11,000 students aged 13 to 19 from 12 target countries. According to the results, the three most serious global issues of concern were climate change, pollution, and poverty,

and economic inequality. Similarly, in the present study, climate change, environmental pollution, and poverty were among the global issues that the participants noted. It could be predicted that students from different age groups and cultures appear to be aware of serious problems that our world is facing, which might be considered a prerequisite to develop the necessary skills and attitudes to tackle such problems.

Second, the study sought answers to how the participants evaluated their learning process in terms of the textbooks, the instructors, and the design of the course. The findings showed that they were satisfied with the textbooks regarding their potential to encourage the learners to explore the issues further and with their adequacy to cover the issues quite well. However, they found the textbooks insufficient for their level, and they believed they lacked appropriate transitions between the units. This finding has some implications for material developers in that they need to revise their current materials to check if the content and design fit appropriately into a global approach and if they meet the needs of learners in various parts of the world. This implication is also true for other material developers who plan to create new materials in the future. In terms of the quality of the instructors, while they thought their instructors had sufficient knowledge about global issues, they perceived them as being hesitant to freely share their opinions in the class. This result calls for the need to create more comfortable and democratic learning environments where ideas flow and flourish and turn into actions as both instructors and learners feel free to share their opinions. Finally, the participants felt that there was an appropriate balance between the instruction of language areas and skills and the study of global issues. Likewise, in a study by Rothman and Sanderson (2018), student reflections through interviews and surveys in relation to practicing The Language of Peace Approach (LPA) and global issues revealed that such incorporation naturally fits into FLE. The findings of the current study also show such integration was also found quite appropriate by the participants. These results imply that the participants' readiness level to take part in a learning process where foreign language instruction and GE were integrated is quite high, which might encourage instructors to design and implement such a course in pursuit of both achieving language learning goals and goals addressing global issues.

Third, the findings indicated that the participants had generally positive perceptions of the effects of the skills course adopting a global approach. It was noticed that they attributed the impact of such instruction to some important outcomes, such as expansion of their perspective and improvement in learning gains. They also pointed out that their cross-cultural awareness and understanding increased. In terms of learning gains, they focused on the improvement of their grammar and vocabulary and in their ability to think and speak in English. Besides, they felt their thought systems developed and found acquiring real-life knowledge quite useful. These results also align with those of Kaplan's (2019) and Başarır's (2018). In those studies, similar results were obtained with respect to language learning gains, increase in awareness of world problems, and positive perceptions related to the integration of global issues into the course. Likewise, Omidvar and Sukumar (2013) found out that the participants' awareness of global issues increased, and their skills for analyzing problems and applying critical thinking in the environment improved. The study also showed that such a curriculum could foster tolerance and appreciation of different cultures and backgrounds. In addition, Arikan's (2009) study indicated that teaching grammar in the context of global issues was an effective strategy in foreign language education. In conclusion, it is presumed that incorporating language education and GE can yield promising results in terms of promoting language learning outcomes, developing positive global attitudes such as respect for diversity, appreciation for different cultures and cross-

cultural understanding, and activating their readiness to take action and create solutions for global problems.

Fourth, the findings indicated that the participants offered some valuable suggestions for textbook content and classroom activities concerning global issues. Some of their suggestions were related to topic selection for textbooks. They gave some topic suggestions like gender equality, homophobia, and education systems in different countries. They also mentioned some principles to follow in textbook design, such as addressing sensitive issues with caution, establishing connections between units, etc. Finally, they shared some ideas in relation to speaking tasks and social responsibility projects. All the findings emerged in this section carry some important implications for curriculum designers, material developers, educators, and EFL teachers as it has been considered essential to take learners', a significant stakeholder of the learning process, needs and perspectives into account in designing and delivering any course and developing course materials.

Similar to any educational sciences research, this study is also subject to several limitations. Firstly, the findings of this study are limited to the size of the sample group, which was composed of 6 students from an intact group of EFL learners at a Turkish university. Additionally, regarding human nature, individuals have unique personal experiences and consequently have different perceptions of those experiences. Because of these two reasons related to the sample and the nature of qualitative inquiry, the results of this study cannot be generalized for all populations of learners and FLE contexts.

As for the suggestions for future research, researchers might implement studies with a range of learner groups from different age intervals, cultures, educational levels and socioeconomic classes to find out what specific groups need to be instructed and how they perceive the world around them with a focus on global problems. With the emerging results, new ways of course and materials design and teaching techniques and methods might arise. In addition, researchers interested in GE studies in FLE could implement experimental studies in which they carry out a program involving a range of activities or topics and investigate the effects of the program. Finally, an action project within the scope of a school or university could be designed and carried out to achieve tangible results in pursuit of creating an awareness of global problems, developing appropriate attitudes and capacity to be able to solve global problems.

To conclude, like all the educators in the world, EFL teachers also have the potential to act as agents of change who are able to see the problems in their own communities, local or global, and can take steps to address the issues through their instruction and along with their learners.

Ethical Issues

This study is exempt from the current research requirement in Turkey for ethics committee approval that came into force in 2020 since the data of this study were collected in June 2019.

References

Allison, P., & Pomeroy, E. (2000). How shall we "know"? Epistemological concerns in research in experiential education. *Journal of Experiential Education, 23*(2), 91-98.

Arikan, A. (2009). Environmental peace education in foreign language learners' English grammar lessons. *Journal of Peace Education, 6*(1), 87-99. DOI: 10.1080/17400200802655064

Başarır, F. (2018). *An action research on development of students' language skills and awareness of global issues through theme-based English teaching* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Çukurova University, Adana.

Cambridge Assessment International Education. (2020, March 1-7). Cambridge Global Perspectives survey results. Retrieved from https://www.cambridgeinternational.org/programmes-and-qualifications/cambridge-global-perspectives/survey-results/

Cates, K. A. (2002). Teaching for a better world: Global issues and language education. *Human Rights Education in Asian Schools, 5*, 41-52.

Erlingsson, E., & Brysiewicz, P. (2017). A hands-on guide to doing content analysis. *African Journal of Emergency Medicine, 7*(3), 93-99.

Fisher, S., & Hicks, D. (1985). *World studies 8–13: A teacher's handbook.* Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd.

Friedman, D. A. (2012). How to collect and analyze qualitative data. In A. Mackey & S. M. Gass (Eds.), *Research methods in second language acquisition* (pp. 180-200). Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell.

Jacobs, G. M., & Cates, K. A. (1999). Global education in second language teaching. *KATA: A Biannual Publication on the Study of Language and Literature, 1*(1), 44-56.

Kaplan, M. (2019). *Perceptions and practices of Turkish EFL teachers and students on the use of global issues* (Unpublished master's thesis). Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University, Çanakkale.

Maley, A., & Peachey, N. (2017). *Integrating global issues in the creative English language classroom: With reference to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.* British Council: London.

Marti, F. (1996). Linguapax, languages and peace. *The Language Teacher, 20*(10), 33-44.

Omidvar, R., & Sukumar, B. (2013). The effects of global education in the English language conversation classroom. *English Language Teaching, 6*(7), 151-157.

Ostrowska, S. (2014). *Unlock listening and speaking skills*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Pring, R. (2000). *The philosophy of educational research*. Continuum: London.

Rothman, J. R., & Sanderson, S. (2018). Language and peace: Using global issues in the English language classroom to create a more sustainable dialogue. *TESL Reporter*, *51* (2), 53-76.

UN General Assembly. (2015, October 21). *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.* Retrieved from https://sdgs.un.org/goals

UNESCO (2020). *Education for sustainable development: a roadmap.* Retrieved from https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000374802

Westbrook, C. (2014). *Unlock reading and writing skills.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.