

# GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP COMPETENCE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS AWARENESS AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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**Abstract** - The increasing global challenges of the 21st century demand that higher education institutions cultivate graduates who are not only knowledgeable but also ethically grounded and actively engaged in addressing global issues. This study examined the relationship between Global Citizenship Competence (GCC) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) awareness among university students in Northern Philippines. Employing a descriptive-correlational research design, the study involved 250 college students who completed standardized instruments measuring three dimensions of GCC—intercultural competence, social responsibility, and global civic engagement—and awareness of all 17 SDGs. The results indicate that students demonstrate high levels of global citizenship competence, with social responsibility being the most pronounced dimension. Similarly, overall SDG awareness was high, with students particularly cognizant of goals related to education, climate action, peace, and partnerships. Correlation analysis revealed significant positive relationships between all dimensions of GCC and SDG awareness, highlighting that students with stronger ethical values, intercultural understanding, and civic engagement tend to have greater recognition and understanding of global sustainability initiatives. These findings contribute new knowledge by emphasizing the role of moral and ethical development in translating global citizenship into sustainable development awareness, and by identifying areas of lower recognition, such as innovation, industry, and institutional partnerships, as targets for curricular enhancement. The study underscores the importance of integrating cognitive, affective, and behavioral domains in higher education programs to develop graduates capable of acting as informed, responsible, and proactive global citizens.

**Keywords:** *Global Citizenship Competence, Sustainable Development Goals, University Students, Ethical Values, Civic Engagement, Higher Education, Philippines*

## I. INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly interconnected and complex world, higher education institutions are expected to prepare students not only for professional success but also for responsible participation in global society. Rapid globalization, technological advancement, environmental degradation, social inequalities, and transnational challenges have intensified the need for individuals who possess the

knowledge, skills, and values necessary to engage with global issues responsibly. In response to these challenges, the United Nations introduced the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015 as part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The SDGs consist of 17 interconnected goals that aim to address global concerns such as poverty, climate change, inequality, and environmental sustainability (United Nations, 2015). Achieving these goals requires not only governmental and institutional commitments but also the active participation of informed and responsible global citizens. Education plays a central role in advancing sustainable development and fostering global citizenship. Recognizing this, UNESCO strongly advocates for the integration of Global Citizenship Education (GCED) within formal education systems. GCED seeks to empower learners to understand global challenges, appreciate cultural diversity, promote social justice, and contribute to sustainable development (UNESCO, 2015). In particular, SDG 4: Quality Education emphasizes the importance of equipping learners with the knowledge and competencies needed to promote sustainable development, including global citizenship, human rights, gender equality, and cultural diversity. Target 4.7 of SDG 4 explicitly highlights the need for education systems to develop learners who can actively contribute to building peaceful, inclusive, and sustainable societies.

Within higher education, universities serve as important platforms for cultivating global citizenship competence among students. Global citizenship competence refers to the combination of knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes that enable individuals to understand global interdependence and act responsibly toward global challenges (OECD, 2018). These competencies typically include global awareness, intercultural understanding, social responsibility, and civic engagement. Students who develop strong global citizenship competence are more likely to demonstrate empathy toward diverse cultures, participate in civic initiatives, and support sustainable development efforts (Akcay, et al., 2024; Chhatlani, 2023). Consequently, universities are increasingly integrating sustainability education, service-learning programs, internationalization initiatives, and interdisciplinary learning experiences to nurture globally competent graduates (Wang, et al., 2022; Alm, et al., 2022; Bonilla-Jurado, et al., 2024; Militante, et al., 2025).

Despite growing global attention toward sustainability and global citizenship, research suggests that awareness and understanding of the Sustainable Development Goals among university students remain uneven (Leiva-Brondo, et al., 2022; Zamora-Polo, et al., 2019; Maoela, et al., 2024). While many institutions promote sustainability through curricular and co-curricular programs, students' knowledge of the SDGs and their implications for society varies significantly (Leal, et al., 2024). Several studies indicate that although students may be generally aware of global issues such as climate change and poverty, their familiarity with the specific goals, targets, and implementation strategies of the SDGs is often limited (Ogundele, et al., 2024; Husban, 2025; Maoela, et al., 2024). This gap highlights the need to examine how educational experiences contribute to students' understanding of sustainable development and whether competencies related to global citizenship influence their awareness and engagement with the SDGs.

In the context of higher education, the relationship between global citizenship competence and SDG awareness is particularly significant. Students who possess strong global awareness and intercultural competence may be more likely to recognize global challenges and support sustainability initiatives (Elamin., 2025). Similarly, individuals who demonstrate high levels of social responsibility and civic engagement may exhibit stronger commitment to addressing issues related to poverty reduction, environmental protection, and social equity. Understanding this relationship can provide valuable insights into how universities can strengthen educational strategies that promote both global citizenship and sustainability awareness among students. The role of higher education institutions in promoting global citizenship and sustainable development is also increasingly emphasized within national education policies (Smaniotta, et al., 2020; Husban, 2025). In the Philippines, higher education institutions are encouraged to integrate sustainability and global perspectives into their academic programs and institutional initiatives (Duran & Mariñas, 2024). The Commission on Higher Education (CHED) has consistently emphasized the importance of producing globally competitive graduates who are socially responsible and responsive to national and global challenges. Through various policies and initiatives, CHED promotes the integration of sustainable development principles, internationalization of education, and civic engagement programs within universities. These efforts aim to align Philippine higher education with global educational priorities and contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Moreover, Philippine universities have increasingly adopted sustainability-oriented programs such as environmental advocacy campaigns, community engagement projects, service-learning initiatives, and research activities related to sustainable development (Cudia & Legaspi, 2025; Armas & Jugo, 2024; Suganob, et al., 2025). Many institutions also incorporate topics related to climate action, social justice, and responsible citizenship into their curricula. These initiatives reflect the broader effort of the Philippine higher education sector to contribute to national development while also addressing global sustainability challenges. However, despite these institutional efforts, there remains limited empirical research examining how university students in the Philippines understand and engage with the Sustainable Development Goals and how their global citizenship competencies influence such awareness. The Philippine context presents a unique environment for examining global citizenship and sustainability education. As a developing country that faces various socio-economic and environmental challenges—including poverty, vulnerability to climate change, and social inequality—the Philippines has a strong stake in advancing sustainable development (Hoffman & Muttarak, 2020; Alvero & Alvero, 2025). Educating students about

global citizenship and sustainability is therefore essential in preparing future leaders and professionals who can contribute to addressing these issues. University students represent a critical group in this regard, as they are expected to become active participants in nation-building and global cooperation.

Despite the increasing emphasis on global citizenship education and sustainability in higher education, empirical studies focusing on the relationship between global citizenship competence and awareness of the Sustainable Development Goals among university students in the Philippines remain limited (Rivera, 2025; Alvero & Alvero, 2025). Much of the existing research has focused either on sustainability education or on civic engagement separately, with relatively few studies examining how competencies associated with global citizenship may influence students' understanding of the SDGs (Ackay, et al., 2024; Ribeiro, et al., 2023; Nunez, 2025). This gap underscores the importance of conducting research that explores how global citizenship competencies contribute to students' awareness and engagement with sustainable development initiatives.

Therefore, this study seeks to examine the level of global citizenship competence among university students and determine its relationship with their awareness of the Sustainable Development Goals. Specifically, the study aims to assess students' competencies in terms of global awareness, intercultural competence, social responsibility, and civic engagement, and to determine whether these competencies are associated with their awareness and understanding of the SDGs. By exploring this relationship, the study intends to contribute to the growing body of literature on global citizenship education and sustainability in higher education. The findings of this research may provide valuable insights for higher education institutions seeking to strengthen their efforts in integrating global citizenship education and sustainability into the curriculum and student development programs. Furthermore, the results may inform policy makers, educators, and curriculum developers in designing educational strategies that promote greater awareness of the Sustainable Development Goals and encourage students to actively participate in sustainable development initiatives. Ultimately, fostering global citizenship competence among university students may play a crucial role in advancing the collective efforts of societies toward achieving a more sustainable, inclusive, and equitable future.

## II. METHODS

This study utilized a descriptive–correlational research design to examine the relationship between global citizenship competence and awareness of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) among university students. The descriptive component of the study aimed to determine the level of global citizenship competence of students across its major dimensions, while the correlational component sought to determine whether a significant relationship exists between global citizenship competence and students' awareness of the Sustainable Development Goals. This design is appropriate for educational research that seeks to describe existing conditions and explore the relationship between variables without manipulating them, thereby allowing the researcher to examine naturally occurring phenomena within the academic environment.

The respondents of the study consisted of 250 undergraduate students enrolled in a private university in the northern region of the Philippines, specifically the University of Saint Louis Tuguegarao. The participants were selected using a convenience sampling technique, wherein students who were available and willing to participate during the period of data collection were included in the

study. Prior to the administration of the survey questionnaire, respondents were informed about the purpose of the research and were assured that their responses would be treated with strict confidentiality and used solely for academic purposes. Participation in the study was voluntary, and respondents were given the option to withdraw from the study at any time without any form of penalty.

Global citizenship competence in this study was examined across three major dimensions (Gaitan-Aguilar, et al., 2024; Nuñez, 2025; Garcia-Gomez, et al., 2025; Einfeld & Collins, 2008; Lau, 2025; Chhatlani, 2023).

- a. Intercultural Competence, represents the cognitive and skills domain of global citizenship. This dimension includes students' knowledge and understanding of global issues, cultural diversity, and global interdependence, as well as their ability to communicate effectively across cultures and critically analyze global concerns. It also reflects competencies such as examining global issues, appreciating different cultural perspectives, and interacting respectfully with individuals from diverse backgrounds.
- b. Social Responsibility, reflects the affective and values domain of global citizenship. This dimension focuses on students' sense of global justice, respect for human rights, environmental awareness, solidarity with others, and moral responsibility toward addressing global challenges that affect communities beyond their immediate environment.
- c. Global Civic Engagement, represents the action-oriented domain of global citizenship. This dimension encompasses students' participation in civic and community initiatives, volunteer activities, advocacy efforts, and everyday practices that contribute to addressing global issues at the local level, often referred to as "glocal" action. It also includes students' involvement in collective initiatives and their sense of responsibility toward future generations.

SDG Awareness was measured using a set of survey items developed to assess students' familiarity with and understanding of the Sustainable Development Goals introduced by the United Nations. The scale was designed to capture students' level of knowledge about the 17 Sustainable Development Goals.

Data were gathered using a structured survey questionnaire designed to measure students' level of global citizenship competence across the three dimensions and their awareness of the Sustainable Development Goals. The data collected were analyzed using appropriate descriptive and inferential statistical tools to determine the level of global citizenship competence, the level of SDG awareness, and the relationship between these variables among the participating university students.

### III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. Global Citizenship Competence of University Students

Dimension	Mean	Qualitative Description
Intercultural Competence	4.18	High
Social Responsibility	4.64	Very High
Global Civic Engagement	4.31	High
Overall Mean	4.38	High

The analysis of university students' global citizenship competence demonstrates that students possess a high level of overall competence, suggesting that they are well-prepared to navigate global issues, act ethically, and engage in civic initiatives. This overall high rating reflects the integration of cognitive, affective, and behavioral domains in their education and extracurricular experiences, which aligns with the principles of UNESCO's Global Citizenship Education (GCE) framework (UNESCO, 2015).

The Intercultural or Global Competence dimension, rated high, indicates that students have a solid understanding of global issues, cultural diversity, and interdependence, and possess the cognitive and analytical skills required for intercultural communication. This finding suggests that students are capable of recognizing and critically analyzing global challenges while considering multiple cultural perspectives. These results corroborate the work of Gal and Mor (2025), who found that university students exposed to internationalized curricula, intercultural learning, and cross-cultural activities demonstrate higher global awareness and critical thinking skills. Similarly, Arzieva (2025) noted that intercultural competence develops not only through study abroad programs but also through classroom activities, community engagement, and discussions on global issues. In the Philippine context, the high level of intercultural competence may be influenced by exposure to multicultural environments within universities, the use of technology to access international news and resources, and integration of global topics into courses. Filipino students are increasingly exposed to international perspectives via online learning, social media, and institutional collaborations with foreign universities, which likely contributes to their ability to analyze global problems critically and engage respectfully with diverse perspectives (Alvero & Alvero, 2025; Eugenio, 2025).

The dimension of Social Responsibility, which received the highest rating, reflects students' deep sense of moral obligation toward addressing global challenges, including human rights, environmental sustainability, and social justice. This finding indicates that students are not only aware of ethical issues but also internalize values that guide their attitudes and decision-making. According to Chao, et al. (2025), the affective domain of global citizenship involves the formation of ethical and value-driven consciousness, which develops through reflective learning and engagement with moral and societal challenges. The very high rating in social responsibility aligns with the Philippine educational emphasis on values formation, service-learning, and civic engagement. Many universities integrate community outreach, volunteerism, and environmental programs into their curricula, enabling students to practice solidarity and moral responsibility in concrete contexts (Utemisova, 2025; Liu, 2025). The results suggest that these interventions are effective in fostering value-driven global citizens who are committed to addressing societal and environmental issues beyond their immediate communities. Moreover, this strong social responsibility orientation indicates that students are likely to support the goals of sustainable development, as values and moral awareness have been shown to predict pro-environmental behavior, civic engagement, and advocacy for social justice (Guan, et al., 2022; Afasr & Umrani, 2019; Latif, et al., 2022). These findings emphasize that the affective domain of global citizenship is crucial for nurturing students' motivation to act ethically in both local and global contexts.

Meanwhile, the Global Civic Engagement dimension was also rated high, reflecting students' active participation in civic initiatives, volunteering, advocacy, and other forms of behavioral engagement addressing global issues. This result suggests that students

are translating their knowledge and values into tangible action, consistent with the behavioral or action-oriented domain of global citizenship. Although slightly lower than social responsibility, the high rating indicates that Filipino students are increasingly involved in activities such as community service, environmental campaigns, and student organizations focused on social and global issues. However, the literature emphasizes that behavioral engagement often lags behind cognitive and affective competencies, as it requires access to structured opportunities, sustained motivation, and institutional support (Xu, et al., 2023; Chong, et al., 2018). The findings suggest that while students are willing and capable of participating in civic actions, universities may need to provide more systematic platforms, such as service-learning programs, interdisciplinary projects, and partnerships with local and international NGOs, to further strengthen active engagement.

Overall, the high overall global citizenship demonstrates that students have effectively integrated knowledge, values, and action-oriented skills necessary for meaningful participation in global and local contexts. This overall high rating is consistent with findings from other studies in Southeast Asia, which report that students develop stronger global citizenship competencies when curricula incorporate intercultural learning, social responsibility projects, and opportunities for civic engagement (Chhatlani, 2023; Budiharso, et al., 2024; Wren, 2021). From a theoretical perspective, these findings support the OECD (2018) framework for global competence, which emphasizes the interconnectedness of cognitive, affective, and behavioral domains in preparing students to address complex global challenges. In the Philippine higher education context, the high levels of competence across all dimensions reflect universities' successful integration of sustainability education, ethical reflection, and civic engagement programs, which collectively prepare students to respond to pressing social, environmental, and ethical challenges. Furthermore, the study highlights a key implication for higher education policy: while cognitive and affective competencies are already strong, enhancing behavioral engagement remains essential to ensure that knowledge and values translate into consistent action. Structured programs such as international collaboration, service-learning, advocacy campaigns, and student-led sustainability initiatives can bridge the gap between awareness and practice, equipping students to become proactive global citizens capable of contributing to both local and global development goals.

Table 2. Awareness of University Students on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

SDG No.	SDG Title	Mean	Qualitative Description
1	No Poverty	4.25	High
2	Zero Hunger	4.14	High
3	Good Health and Well-being	4.23	High
4	Quality Education	4.68	Very High
5	Gender Equality	4.08	High
6	Clean Water and Sanitation	3.84	High
7	Affordable and Clean Energy	3.58	High
8	Decent Work and Economic Growth	3.75	High
9	Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure	3.48	Moderate
10	Reduced Inequalities	4.10	High
11	Sustainable Cities and Communities	4.03	High
12	Responsible Consumption and Production	3.87	High
13	Climate Action	4.56	Very High

14	Life Below Water	3.98	High
15	Life on Land	3.48	High
16	Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions	4.55	Very High
17	Partnerships for the Goals	4.60	Very High
	Overall Awareness	4.07	High

The findings indicate that university students generally demonstrate a high level of awareness of the Sustainable Development Goals. Among the 17 goals, students were particularly aware of areas related to quality education, climate action, peace and justice, and partnerships for development, reflecting strong recognition of SDGs that are directly linked to both their academic environment and societal concerns. This suggests that students are cognizant of global challenges and understand the importance of initiatives that promote equitable education, environmental sustainability, governance, and collaborative efforts for development.

Other goals, such as those addressing basic needs, sustainable cities, and responsible consumption, were also recognized by students, though with slightly lower emphasis. This pattern is consistent with prior research indicating that students tend to be more aware of SDGs that are widely discussed in educational curricula, media, and community programs, while less tangible or policy-focused goals may receive less attention (Chou & Vun, 2025). The overall high awareness reflects the effectiveness of educational institutions in integrating global sustainability issues into academic and co-curricular programs, enabling students to understand the purpose, relevance, and interconnections of the SDGs.

The high level of awareness of SDGs aligns with students' demonstrated Global Citizenship Competence, particularly in the domains of social responsibility and intercultural awareness. Studies show that knowledge of global sustainability issues is closely linked to values-driven engagement, ethical reasoning, and motivation to act on global concerns (Bonilla-Priego, et al., 2021; Bhattacharya, et al., 2022; Rahmawati, et al., 2022). In the Philippine context, universities actively promote sustainability education through community projects, environmental initiatives, and advocacy campaigns, which likely reinforce students' understanding and recognition of the SDGs (De Ramos & Balance, 2021). Moreover, the findings suggest that students are not only aware of the SDGs conceptually but also understand the significance of individual and collective actions in achieving these goals. This awareness is critical, as the literature emphasizes that knowledge of global challenges, when combined with values and civic engagement, forms the foundation for translating awareness into concrete actions that address local and global issues (Skarmas, et al., 2019; Carmona, et al., 2024). In this sense, students' SDG awareness complements their global citizenship competence, demonstrating that higher education institutions are effectively fostering both knowledge and ethical disposition toward sustainable development.

These results have important implications for curriculum design and institutional policy. While students exhibit strong awareness of key SDGs, there is room to enhance engagement with goals that are less intuitive or more structural, such as industry innovation, partnerships, and global economic systems. Integrating interdisciplinary projects, service-learning initiatives, and collaborative programs with community and international partners can provide students with practical experience, deepen their understanding, and strengthen the link between awareness and active contribution toward sustainable development (Hermann, et al., 2025; Alvarez-Vanegas, et al., 2024; Vaverkova, et al., 2024).

Overall, the study confirms that high SDG awareness among university students is closely associated with their global citizenship competence, particularly in ethical and civic dimensions. Universities play a pivotal role in nurturing students who are not only knowledgeable about global challenges but also committed to taking action to address them, thereby preparing graduates to become responsible and proactive global citizens capable of contributing to sustainable development both locally and internationally.

Table 3. Significant Relationship between Global Citizenship Competence and Awareness on SDGs among University Students

Variables	Pearson-R	p-value
Intercultural Competence and SDG Awareness	.580	.000*
Social Responsibility and SDG Awareness	.762	.000*
Global Civic Engagement and SDG Awareness	.305	.000*
Overall Global Citizenship Competence and SDG Awareness	.520	.000*

\*significant at .05 level

The analysis of the relationship between Global Citizenship Competence (GCC) and students' awareness of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) revealed significant positive associations across all dimensions. Specifically, students who demonstrated higher levels of intercultural competence were more likely to show a heightened awareness of SDGs. This suggests that cognitive and analytical skills related to understanding global interdependence, cultural diversity, and global issues play an essential role in enhancing students' recognition of sustainability initiatives. This finding aligns with studies indicating that global competence enables learners to contextualize global challenges, critically evaluate information, and appreciate the relevance of international development agendas, including the SDGs (Kjellgren & Richter, 2021; Samar, et al., 2024; Tynybayeva, et al., 2025).

The social responsibility dimension showed the strongest positive association with SDG awareness, highlighting that students who are more ethically and value-driven tend to be more knowledgeable about sustainable development initiatives. This result underscores the critical role of moral and ethical development in global citizenship, where concern for social justice, environmental stewardship, and human rights translates into greater attention to global sustainability goals. Previous studies support this link, suggesting that values-based education and reflective engagement are key predictors of students' awareness of global issues and their willingness to contribute to sustainable solutions (Huang, et al., 2024; Zhou, et al., 2025). In the Philippine context, the emphasis on values formation, service-learning, and community outreach programs likely contributes to this strong association, as students are trained to recognize their moral obligations to both local and global communities (Balisado-Villarin, 2025).

The global civic engagement dimension was also positively associated with SDG awareness, although the correlation was comparatively lower. This indicates that students who actively participate in civic, volunteer, or advocacy initiatives are more likely to understand and recognize the SDGs, but behavioral engagement alone does not fully account for awareness. This aligns with the "knowledge-action gap" commonly observed in global citizenship research, where students may hold knowledge and values but require

structured opportunities and sustained guidance to translate awareness into consistent action (Carmona, et al., 2024; Alvero & Alvero, 2025). Encouraging greater participation in service-learning projects, sustainability campaigns, and collaborative advocacy programs could further strengthen this link.

When considering overall Global Citizenship Competence, there was a significant positive relationship with SDG awareness, suggesting that students who integrate cognitive, affective, and behavioral competencies are more likely to recognize the importance of the SDGs. This finding supports the theoretical framework of Global Citizenship Education, which posits that holistic development in knowledge, values, and action enhances learners' capacity to engage with complex global challenges, including sustainable development (UNESCO, 2015; OECD, 2018). In other words, students who possess both global understanding and moral commitment are better prepared to comprehend and act upon international initiatives like the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

These findings have important implications for higher education in the Philippines and similar contexts. The significant relationship between GCC and SDG awareness suggests that fostering global citizenship competencies can directly enhance students' understanding of sustainability goals. Universities can capitalize on this by embedding interdisciplinary curricula, co-curricular activities, and community-based projects that simultaneously develop cognitive skills, ethical values, and civic engagement, thereby reinforcing awareness of the SDGs while preparing students to contribute meaningfully to local and global development.

#### IV. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study reveals that Global Citizenship Competence is a critical predictor of students' awareness of the Sustainable Development Goals, highlighting the integral role of cognitive understanding, ethical values, and civic engagement in shaping their recognition of global sustainability challenges. In particular, the strong link between social responsibility and SDG awareness emphasizes that moral and value-driven education enhances students' capacity to internalize and act upon global priorities, providing new evidence of how global citizenship education translates into sustainable development understanding in the Philippine higher education context. The findings also suggest that while students are generally aware of widely discussed SDGs, less attention is given to structural or policy-focused goals, pointing to an opportunity for universities to design targeted curricular and co-curricular interventions. By integrating knowledge, ethical reflection, and practical engagement, higher education institutions can cultivate graduates who are not only informed but also capable of taking meaningful action toward global sustainability, thus extending the theoretical and practical understanding of the relationship between global citizenship and SDG awareness.

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