

Managing Differences in Global Learning: Perceptions and Practices of Teachers in Bukavu/DRCongo

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Abstract

This study explores teachers' perceptions of global learning in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and how they manage differences in culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms. In an increasingly interconnected world, global learning equips students with critical thinking skills, intercultural understanding, and a sense of global responsibility. In Bukavu, DRC, where educational resources are limited and societal divisions persist due to precarious circumstances, teachers are challenged to integrate global learning principles while managing ethnic, linguistic, and socioeconomic differences in violent settings. Through qualitative interviews and focus group discussions with secondary school teachers and classroom observations, this study examines their awareness of global learning concepts, their pedagogical approaches, and the barriers they encounter in managing differences. Findings indicate that while teachers recognize the importance of global learning in fostering peace, tolerance, and critical engagement with global issues, they often struggle with inadequate training, rigid curricula, and the complexities of addressing diverse student backgrounds. Managing differences in classrooms requires teachers to employ adaptive strategies such as culturally responsive teaching, inclusive dialogue, and conflict-sensitive pedagogies. However, institutional support remains insufficient, limiting their capacity to effectively implement such approaches. This study underscores the need for professional development programs that enhance teachers' competencies in global learning and diversity management. It also highlights the role of policy reforms in embedding global perspectives into the national curriculum. By strengthening teachers' ability to navigate differences, the education system in the DRC can better prepare students for active and responsible global citizenship in regards to abstract sociality.

Keywords: Global learning, teacher perceptions, diversity management, inclusive education

Introduction

Globalisation has been steeped in diverse connotations and placed on two extreme positions; in the first position, it is perceived as "irresistible and benign force for delivering economic prosperity for humanity in the world and lastly, as a force for all contemporary ills" (Bakhtiari & Isfahan, 2006: 95). In spite of these quick diametrically opposed positions, people can quickly benefit from globalisation if they acquire the requisite skills, knowledge, capabilities and the rights needed to pursue their basic needs and livelihood (cf. Bakhtiari & Isfahan, 2006; Khan & Agnew, 2017; Scheunpflug, 2020). Education from creation and distribution transcends every natural or artificial barriers and triangulate with intercultural values.

Scholarship is no longer hemmed in a secluded and single setting but witnessing international, multilateral and interdisciplinary reimagining (Khan & Agnew, 2017). Subjective perceptions of knowledge from individuals is now replaced with plural interconnections, reflections and in most situation, consensually engaging collaborations (Khan & Agnew, 2017; Zhou, 2022). Within different contexts, globalism is often determined by the extent to which the different states have been shaped by environmental, economic transformation, trade relations, demographic shifts, cross-cultural relations and network crafting (Hovland, 2014; Raccagni, 2024). Teachers have the arduous task of providing the needed skills and competencies to learners to navigate these challenges and evolve with confidence by walking the walk that they prophesied. Hence, how effectively are they equipped during the pre and in-service empowerment? Complexities and complications resonating around the concept of global learning has made it elusive and truncated especially regarding the management of differences among individuals from different cultural backgrounds. In the study, a comprehensive examination is made to capture the abilities of Congolese teachers to manage differences in their different classes by applying global values that are inclusive and tolerates the diverse backgrounds of learners. An exploration of the situation in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) will be used as an example for this case.

Context of the Study.

In the context of the study, it is absolutely important to ensure that recognition is made for learning in the precarious condition of the DRC and to understand how in such circumstances, educators are able to thrive and dispense quality education with global values. Keen attention shall be observed pertaining to teacher professional development.

Education in Emergency: The Precarious Situation of the Democratic Republic of Congo

The DRC has been embroiled in an incessant conflict since independence thereby steeped in a precarious situation. Access to education regarding the teaching-learning process that support affected victims like teachers and the students provides hope rather than the debilitating psychological fallouts (Torrente, et al., 2015). The DRC as a major crossroad bordering 9 African Countries makes the situation complex as it has experienced political and social instability throughout its history (Kalisya, et al., 2015). In such a protracted eternalised conflict situation, only one-third, numbering 2.05 million children could make it to school as the Congolese education system faces “chronic underfunding, poor governance, lack of education materials and insufficient teacher training” (Brandt et al., 2022). Values of learning as and in any community or context requires respect, tolerance and understanding of the virtues of collaboration. Such interactive learning, enhances student’s diverse perspectives to be brought into the classroom for the benefit of others (Landorf et al., 2018). The DRCs precarious setting reduces its attempt at providing quality education to the people to be limited to emergency actions due to fear and uncertainty. Consequently, despite the resolve of the teachers to manage such situations of teaching in fear, the gap requiring the resolve of protagonists to reflect and ensure a conducive environment for learning to enable the teachers harness and manage in a cohesive manner, differences regarding their learners. In fear as a defeatist paradigm, teachers’ management of differences in their different classrooms becomes challenging and complicated.

The Globalization of Education and Its Challenges

Complex societal changes and compelling educational institutions and the preservation of their diverse identities makes the concept of globalisation of learning a daunting task. The different global technological boost fraught with contextual traditional educational spaces brings with it unprecedented opportunities but

marred by hiccups and challenges (Kisyanto, 2025; Raccagni, 2024). In global setting, school classrooms are composed of heterogeneous groups with different needs and students with different abilities, in which educational institutions, and especially teachers, are required to have the capacity to guide them along (Amigo et al., 2022). In the different contexts, teacher professional development to provide such exacting functions remains a jigsaw puzzle because of the absence of a concerted global approach. In global parlance, education is a fundamental human right, and hence, must be free, and compulsory regarding basic and elementary education. The application of compulsory basic education for all with the allocation of financial resources for quality education shows that different governments and experts have been able to gauge the society as a whole to assess the impact and the importance of education (Bakhtiari & Isfahan, 2006; UNESCO, 2005). Unfortunately, globalisation of education despite being a fundamental right of the learner has been perturbed by hiccups of different dimensions prominent amongst which are rapid technological advancements, global interconnectedness that eschews cross-cultural and multilingual education, environmental and ethical consideration and global challenges driving the need for education systems focusing on sustainability and global citizenship (Amigo et al., 2022; Rehman, 2025), thereby enhancing the notion of abstract sociality (Scheunpflug, 2020). Tailoring these challenges in the different contexts to meet the expectations of educators as experts to direct the needs of learners is an indicator of further gaps requiring more reflections especially in the case of the DRC.

Educational Landscape and Globalisation in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

The educational landscape in the DRC is very complex due to its war situation following independence and counting. School systems are more often than not, targets by military armed groups, thereby ushering grave violations of children rights, though posing as one of the key signatories of the *Safe Schools Declaration* which aimed at protecting students, teachers and schools from armed groups and militia (Locatelli, 2023). The education system of the Democratic Republic of the Congo faces multiple challenges that are related to the situation of severe poverty, the lack of public funding, the low quality of learning, class overcrowding and high illiteracy rates (Amigo et al., 2022, Locatelli, 2023). So glaring are cultural inequalities in diverse classrooms in the DRC where ethnic and linguistic diversity presents educational challenges to teachers especially dealing with the differences (Balinda, 2024). Teachers classroom challenges in the DRC becomes evident because of its 'fragility and conflict prawn nature which, detaches them from global social, historical context, interconnectedness between epistemology and power and the masking of privileges' (Khan & Agnew, 2017: 53). The neglect of the education system resulted in a crumbled preservice teacher training program, defunct in-service support apparatus, missing government payments for schools, a teacher shortage, schools with extreme class sizes, unsafe physical infrastructure, and a lack of teaching and learning materials (Aber et al., 2016; Balinda, 2024; Locatelli, 2023). Compounded by language challenges, and despite this, it is estimated that only 10% of the DRC's population is proficient in French and another 30% speak some French. Aber et al., further posit that although over 200 indigenous languages are spoken in DRC, four are most prevalent in particular regions of the country and have the status of national languages: Kikongo (southwest), Lingala (northwest), Tshiluba (central), and Kiswahili (east, southeast). The education landscape and triangulating it with global values is compound by the effective comprehension of global values by teachers especially regarding their inadequate training, diversity in their classrooms from language, different cultural settings, refugees and physically impaired students. Hence, managing such differences by teachers in classrooms in the DRC remains daunting and exacting.

The Role of Teachers in Managing Learning Differences

Classroom management that results to a conducive and serene environment for positive teaching and learning process is dependent on an educator 'savoir-faire' in managing differences, ensuring cohesion that promotes high academic performance. Classroom management embodies different aspects like physical, organisational, emotional and social management (Ahmed & Plessis, 2024). The position of the foregoing, resonates around teacher's professionalism to harness and check differences within that particular study space and ensuring inclusion by the learners and collaboration (Mbetengoy & Bouchamma, 2022). In the DRC, Balinda argues that the shortage and poor training of teachers makes the teaching-learning process skewed and challenging to handle differences. In this regard, it is essential to recognize the pivotal role of teachers' professional development, which must be viewed as a continuous and fundamental process. Only through opportunities for ongoing training and further education can teachers acquire the necessary skills to meet contemporary educational challenges and ensure a high standard of education, both within the school system and in their daily teaching practice (Raccagni, 2024). Unfortunately, the situation in the DRC, besides being precarious, indicates a probability of instinctive actions by the teachers to apply their subjective perceptions to handle all classroom challenges even if their understanding of global learning is implicitly deduced. Teaching and managing learners from different shades of the social spectrum requires an implementation of strategies for comprehensive professional development of teachers with a structured programme of training inscribed in the national curriculum of the DRC (Amigo et al., 2022; Zhou, 2022). The situation on ground points to a different scenario. Heterogeneity of each classroom steeped in emotional, physical and hostility challenges and fraught with the unprofessionalism of teacher due to poor training, indicates difficulties to manage heterogeneous and diverse classrooms in regards to the ethics of global education. The heterogeneity revolves around cultural, linguistic and ethnic diversity thereby presenting a diverse spread of the different classes irrespective of the extraneous factors (Balinda, 2024). Diversity in the classroom is not only life but a way of life. It is not a belief but a way of perceiving the world in the teaching-learning process. Consequently, the foregoing three norms in these diverse classrooms requires the students and the teachers from these varying backgrounds, do have to contribute and see the world from uniquely different advanced lenses (Balinda, 2024; Mbetengoy & Bouchamma, 2022) but tolerating and collaborating with each other. An observation from inside the classroom will divulge and provide further insights regarding the background of teachers in the DRC.

Problem Specification

Managing differences in global learning as per teachers in different contexts requires thorough professional training of teachers to be adept with these challenges in heterogeneous classes. Base on the historiography of the DRC, it has been plunge into war since independence without an end in sight. The precarious situation regarding schooling and teachers to be in tune with the evolving world, becomes challenging. The gaps and problems in these situation in regards to the postulations of different authors (Ahmed & Plessis, 2024; Hovland, 2014; Raccagni, 2024; UNESCO, 2005), presents different scenarios; teachers are poorly trained, sparse curriculum without clear indicators of global education, poor educational infrastructure, incomprehension of the didactics of global education, subjective understanding of handling challenges and differences of heterogeneous classrooms and the learners missing out on the acquisition of beneficial competences in the 21st century global setting. The challenges are multi-dimensional but for this study, emphasis is on the perception of teachers and their ability to manage

differences in heterogeneous classrooms in the framework of global learning which is the guiding question. A systematic examination of these aspects is therefore the focus of this study.

Literature Review

This chapter reviews different aspects related to global learning, and how educators help in mitigating and managing differences. The researchers will examine the conceptualization of global learning and theories, managing educational diversity, teacher perceptions in educational research and existing research on the DRC education system in the following paragraphs.

Theoretical Conceptualization of Global Learning

Global education is a holistic concept that resonates around the interconnectedness of communities, lands, people and interrelatedness of all social, cultural and natural phenomena (McGregor, 2014: 2). The challenges of globalisation require education to harness and train competent individuals to engage in a crucial role of navigating these problems. UNESCO (2014), argues that living together peacefully and side by side in an ever evolving way ensures an inclusive and peaceful world. Educational systems to meet these challenges must reform and transform themselves to embrace technological, economic and social differences (Rehman, 2025). Globalisation is a reality pegged on a growing interconnected world, and communication technologies, the development of a world wide web, and other dynamics (OECD, 2019; Raccagni, 2024) constitute this whole. Bakhtiari and Isfahan indicated the two extremes of globalisation by seeing it as “an irresistible and benign force to deliver economic prosperity to humanity all over the world, but blamed as the source of all contemporary ills and misfortunes” (2024: 95). In this position, if the educators are apparently not equipped for this purpose, it crumbles due to lack of mastery.

Theoretically, McGregor (2014), with inspiration from Pike and Selby, postulated that global education theory wrested on the need to counter powerful influence (dominant cultural belief systems) used to view life informed by those beliefs, and in keeping with Newtonians perceptions (a mechanistic and deterministic view of the universe governed by different norms. The concept of globalisation from inception was already skewed because different scholars indicated the complexities at inception. An illustration by Pike and Selby used in the paper by McGregor (2014: 3) strongly rejected the Newtonian thinking as “completely untenable” because it cannot be used to understand the complexities and interconnectedness of diverse cultures (Bourne, 2014; Scheunpflug, 2020) of the world and must be augmented with holistic and inclusive systems leaving no one behind. The debunking of the concept of globalism from inception provides acute complications and perhaps, account for its many haters. The Newtonian argumentation of its ‘mechanistic and deterministic’ orientation, placed the concept under the rug, thereby bringing out its superior power lenses. Bourne accentuates this argumentation by indicating that “global learning’ approach is the extent to which it went beyond a traditional view of seeing the Global South as just about poor people who were helpless and in need of aid and charity” (2014: 34). Global education is a holistic concept but embroiled in implicit power dynamics requiring sustained dialectical encounters to dissect it. The epistemological undertones of the concept require clarity, fairness and an egalitarian dimension. The protagonists are working hard to stabilise globalisation and its indicators by ensuring equality, social justice and fairness, that remains an exacting task.

The Management of Educational Diversity

Global education provides a rich framework for managing individual differences among learners by pr-

omoting inclusive strategies rooted in shared human values, open attitudes, essential skills, and responsive instructional approaches. By valuing human dignity, human rights, cultural diversity, and principles like justice, equality, and the rule of law, educators foster an environment where every learner feels respected and included (UNESCO, 2015). Attitudinal elements such as openness to cultural otherness, civic-mindedness, and tolerance of ambiguity further support learners in engaging with diverse perspectives and worldviews (Council of Europe, 2018). Skills such as empathy, critical thinking, adaptability, and plurilingual communication equip students to collaborate and learn effectively across differences (Boix Mansilla & Jackson, 2011). Instructional methods that integrate global perspectives, encourage participatory learning, and utilize digital tools not only to enhance engagement but also ensure that assessment and feedback are personalized and equitable (OECD, 2018). Thus, by embedding these elements, global education effectively addresses student diversity and enhances learning outcomes for all. However, the management of diversity in education apparently remains the stock in trade in principles and not practically especially in the context of war, particularly, the case of the DRC. Training teachers and equipping them with global skills is not well managed with only 57% trained while the rest are still unenlightened (Dryden-Peterson, 2010). The education sector policy strategy in the DRC from 2016-2025 rests on three principles, namely; developing access and ensuring equity; improving the quality of learning and improving governance and oversight of the system (Grolu, 2017). Conflicts and displacement have been particular impediments to school enrolment, attendance and retention of learners. Dryden-Peterson indicated that the majority of displaced children have had no access to formal or informal education since 1998. In the DRC, the teacher is confronted by multifaceted challenges that include managing differences, heterogeneous classes, the immediate community, society and professional networks (Forghani-Arani, Cerna & Bannon, 2019).

The training of teachers from the guidelines of the curriculum does not make room for cultural competency, indigenous curriculum rigidity which may be confrontational to contemporary educational practices, political and social hiccups which may resist the incorporation of indigenous knowledge into formal education, heterogeneity and divergence (Grolu, 2017, Luca, 2024). The inherent ambivalence becomes complex and acts as a probable fall back point for rescinding and rebranding policy documents. Effective and efficient management of differences in the classroom in DRC requires key skills management by teachers like teacher preparedness, teacher social and emotional proficiency, teacher-learner relationship, learner's motivation, behaviour and discipline that is responsible for learner's performance (Rehman, 2025), but this becomes dicey due to the lack of proper training of teachers in the DRC (Ahmed & Plessis, 2024; Raccagni, 2024). Educators therefore, depend on their subjective perceptions and instincts to managed differences in their diverse classrooms thereby, constituting a major challenge.

Existing Discourse on the DRC Education System

Different discourses have been published regarding the DRC educational system. The writers of these documents that include but not limited to (Manzuma-Ndaaba et al., 2015; Luca, 2024; Neda Forghani-Arani & Bannon, 2019; Ahmed & Plessis, 2024; Darmawan, Wijayanti & Nani Ratnaningsih, 2025) have harped on the strength of education in the systemic rung. With these writers, various dispositions in connection to quality education are in place from the input, output and the outcome processes with a conscious empowerment of the teachers as professionals. The defects are however not explicitly espoused by these different discourses thereby, overlooking some key indicators that are negated by the educational

stakeholders prominent amongst which are poor training of the teachers that is in tandem with these reflections (see Dryden-Peterson, 2010). Hence, their poor training makes them unable to handle key 21st century skills and competences (Forghani-Arani, Cerna & Bannon, 2019) which douse and almost reduce to shreds the training of the teachers in the DRC. Teacher training in the DRC does not holistically empower them with this knowledge to handle crosscutting global values like the ability to coexist by examining differences and adapting within society which ensure learning to live together (Darmawan, Wijayanti & Nani Ratnaningsih, 2025). The inability for the teachers to be well trained does not bring them in tune with the ever changing dynamics of the world, beside the ever evolving educational landscape (Khan & Agnew, 2017). Education and scholarship is not gotten from a singular source but from international partnerships, communities of exchange and interdisciplinary space (Khan & Agnew, 2017; Rehman, 2025). Integrating global learning in the disciplinary curriculum should be the common practice, including requirements to study global issues (Zhou, 2022). Earlier research (Balinda, 2024; Karanikola, Katsioulis & Palaiologou, 2022: 3) demonstrated challenges identifying precepts of global learning such as having an open “mind while actively seeking to understand the cultural norms, ability to have intercultural sensitivity as one’s ability to discern and experience relevant cultural differences” (Karanikola, Katsioulis & Palaiologou, 2022), and training teachers in the DRC to have such skills to use in managing their classes. The deontological epistemic directives emanating from the curriculum as a tool to transform teachers in the DRC denotes a limping paradigm. The Education system in the DRC after independence has been embroiled in instability, a precarious war torn environment and a disorderly unstructured foundational input processes. The curriculum negates key global skills and even the teachers trained in training colleges do not have or master global skills. In view of such challenges, managing differences and enhancing intercultural communication makes it difficult to adapt with global citizenship quest reduced to shreds.

Global education is the process of acquiring knowledge, disseminating information, and fostering mutual understanding among individuals worldwide. Achieving global learning necessitates the implementation of the following: the development of global competencies. Preparing students to engage with global issues and diverse cultures. Focus on equity and access: Ensuring that education is universally accessible, irrespective of background, integrating instructional strategies for active learning with global issues and incorporating them into existing curricula, facilitating project-based learning, engaging learners in solving real-world problems, fostering the next generation of global leaders, and incorporating various educational levels. This encompasses early childhood education, primary education, secondary education, tertiary education, and vocational training. The integration of education with the objectives of sustainable development, environmental protection and global citizenship is of the essence.

The Conceptual Framework

The pivotal role of teachers in the achievement of quality education of students in an ever evolving world stage, makes it imperative that teachers are well trained to employ diverse strategies to merging differences in the classroom from diverse backgrounds. The diverse background from the origin of the learners is pegged on their socio-economic background, culture, language, abilities and academic difference (Rehman, 2025). The mastery of learner’s background is definitely intended to guide the creation and adoption of required methods in the class of any teacher. This will culminate to strategies identified as effective drivers in this regard like: the integration of SDGs, development of global competencies, getting the students engage with global issues (Bakhtiari & Isfahan, 2006).

The educator proceeds with strategies that enhances reduction of disciplinary issues, the strengthening of relationships, the valuation of students, engagement, collaboration, and creativity, clear expectations, creativity and communication (Aber et al., 2016). Meanwhile, the global education practices can possibly influenced the achievement of quality education by a variety of factors, including informed global perspectives and sustainability, values, attitudes and skills leading to holistic citizenship and social equality. These factors encompass student access to and completion of coursework, postsecondary readiness and transition, school climate and safety, public resources for education, parental support and involvement, national standards and curriculum, labour market demands and relevance, and socio-cultural competencies to achieve the quality of education. Conversely, external factors, such as policies and resources allocated to these constructs, had to be made, accessible. These external factors play a significant role in the effectiveness of the strategies, which are designed to address all issues that may impede this process like discipline problems, strengthening relationships, value students, engage them, promote collaboration, and foster transcultural interaction as can be seen in fig.1 below.

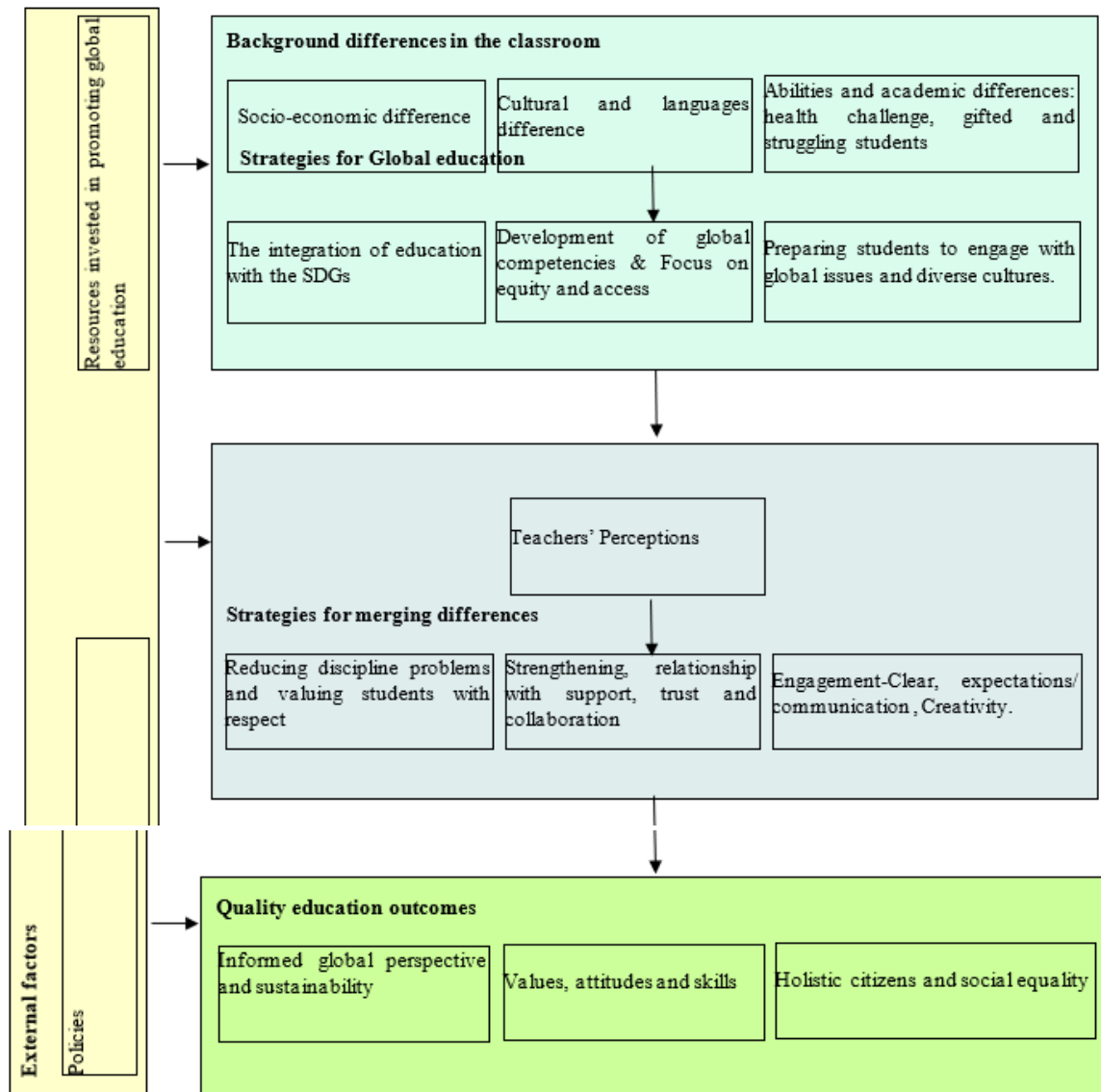


Figure 1: Conceptual framework

Authors' creation, 2025

3 Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative research approach to explore both the perceptions and practices of Bukavu secondary school teachers regarding global education. Given the interpretative nature of the research question, a qualitative design was most appropriate to capture the depth and complexity of teachers' experiences, meanings, and contextual understandings. The study was framed within a descriptive and exploratory paradigm, aiming to uncover not only what teachers know and do, but also how they interpret global education in the context of their local realities.

Population and Sampling

The population for this study consisted of secondary school teachers from Protestant schools in Bukavu, Democratic Republic of Congo. A purposive sampling strategy was used to select participants. Two groups of participants were targeted comprising group interviews and classroom observations.

- a) **Group interviews:** A total of 15 teachers were selected and organized into five focus groups, each consisting of three teachers (one specializing in languages, one in sciences, and one in social sciences). This composition allowed for a multidisciplinary perspective within each group.
- b) **Classroom observation:** Ten teachers were selected from ten different Protestant secondary schools, ensuring diversity across the various Protestant establishments present in Bukavu. Teachers observed came from a range of subject areas to reflect varied teaching practices.

Data Collection Methods

Group interviews were conducted to investigate teachers' perceptions and conceptual understandings of global education. An interview guide was developed based on the framework of Parmigiani et al. (2022). The guide was designed to encourage participants to reflect on these dimensions, discuss their relevance, and share their interpretations within the local educational setting of Bukavu. Each group interview lasted approximately 30 minutes, was audio-recorded, and conducted in a neutral setting to encourage openness and dialogue.

To examine actual teaching practices related to global education, classroom observations were conducted using a structured tool inspired by Cabezudo et al. (2008). This tool functioned as a self-assessment table for educators, focusing on key indicators of global education in teaching. A five-point Likert scale was used to rate various aspects of global education practices, ranging from 1 standing for "not at all" to 5 standing for "very frequently". This scale enabled the researchers to assess the degree of integration of global education elements into classroom practices, including attention to intercultural awareness and interaction, global issues, environmental concerns, and students' active involvement in societal change.

Data Analysis

The qualitative data from group interviews were transcribed and analyzed using thematic coding. A hybrid approach was applied, combining deductive codes derived from Parmigiani et al.'s framework and inductive codes that emerged from the data. Thematic analysis allowed for the identification of recurring patterns, contrasts, and context-specific insights into teachers' perceptions of global education.

Observation data were subjected to content analysis, focusing on the frequency and consistency of global education practices. Numerical ratings were tabulated and compared across participants and schools. Descriptive analysis was used to identify commonalities and variations in teaching behaviours aligned with global education principles.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical standards were rigorously followed throughout the study. Participants were informed about the purpose, voluntary nature, and confidentiality of the research. Informed consent was obtained prior to participation. Names of African capital cities were used to protect schools and participants' identities, and data was stored securely to prevent unauthorized access. The study was conducted with respect for the cultural and institutional contexts of the participating schools.

Results / Findings

This section which presents the results of this study, is divided into two main parts: teachers' perceptions of global education and teachers' practices related to global education. An analysis of what this means for the management of differences is provided in the discussion section.

Teachers' Perceptions of Global Education

The analysis of focus group interviews reveals that internationalization is predominantly regarded by Bukavu secondary school teachers in the Democratic Republic of the Congo as the foundational element of global education. The objective is to promote mobility, skill equivalence, and a common sense of global citizenship. The participants repeatedly emphasized the importance of coordinating educational systems across national boundaries. Among the various elements associated with global education, curriculum standardization emerged as the most recurrent theme.

Curriculum Standardization as the Central Pillar

For many teachers, internationalization is synonymous with the standardization of curricula, which they view as essential to facilitating global educational integration. Participants expressed a desire for a uniform education system, characterized by common structures across levels and consistent subject content, across all countries. One participant summarized this view:

"The importance of this teaching is explained by the fact that when I leave my country for a different one, I can easily get used to this new one... because everything I have learned here, the same friends, the same gentlemen there have also learnt it... we already have a program that is..." [5743–7172, Khartoum].

This quote, along with others, demonstrates a belief in the pragmatic benefits of standardization, particularly in terms of student and teacher mobility, curriculum continuity, and reducing skill disparities among learners globally. Participants highlighted that such uniformity ensures learners can seamlessly integrate into educational systems abroad, minimizing disruptions and reinforcing equity in learning outcomes [2005–2499; 2706–3260, Yaounde].

Other perspectives broaden the definition of standardization to include not only academic content but also comprehensive training in technology, language, and culture. In this expanded view, global education should encompass all aspects of human life, fostering the integration of individuals into diverse societies and promoting a shared global identity [16316–16636, Nairobi].

Engagement with Diversity and International Collaboration

In addition to curriculum standardization, participants placed significant emphasis on the value of engagement with diversity and collaboration with international counterparts. These were regarded as pivotal in dismantling educational impediments and empowering students to thrive within diverse institutional and cultural environments. One of the participants noted:

“If we ever said that education should be uniform in all countries of the world... we who are here in rural areas can receive a learner who comes from another country... he will not feel out of place” [872–1237, Louanda].

Collaboration and openness to learning from others were frequently associated with teamwork, exchange of best practices, and scientific innovation. Teachers framed cooperative education as essential to developing a globally competent workforce. Several participants referred to this dynamic as a form of "scientific espionage"; an informal term used to describe strategic knowledge transfer through scholarships, internships, and educational exchange programs:

“We send them [students] to spend their internship in Europe and start espionage... These young people will have to explain to us upon their return, how those in Europe do to manufacture vehicles, engines...” [12635–15917, Nairobi].

While this term may carry unintended connotations, its use reflects a strong emphasis on intentional learning from international innovations, with the goal of adapting successful practices to local realities. Participants cautioned, however, against blindly adopting foreign systems without first assessing their contextual relevance; specifically criticizing the abrupt implementation of the LMD (Licence–Master–Doctorat) system in the Democratic Republic of Congo [1381–2161, Louanda; 6226–6716, Yaounde].

Language Proficiency and Intercultural Competence

Another central theme in teachers' perceptions was the promotion of linguistic and intercultural competencies. Participants viewed multilingualism and cultural adaptability as foundational to global citizenship, enabling learners to communicate effectively, appreciate diversity, and navigate foreign environments:

“When you talk about globalization you will address all areas and not only the field of technology even to culture you put the emphasis, like the teaching of languages and other subjects so that a student trained here, when he arrives in Germany, he adapts easily thanks to the program applied in the school where he was” [16316–16636, Nairobi].

Teachers also articulated the value of developing a mindset of openness and inclusion, emphasizing the need to break down cultural barriers and foster mutual respect. This included recognition of the teacher's role in preparing students to compete and collaborate internationally:

“The teacher... can be here and teach at the same pace as that of Europe, America, or Asia... because the teacher trains citizens of the world” [5903–6148, Nairobi].

Underrepresented Elements of Global Education

The results also revealed significant gaps in teachers' conceptions of global education, even though the prevailing language focused on standardization, collaboration, and flexibility. The codebook created for this study identified several important aspects of global education that were either absent or weakly mentioned in participants' responses. Notably absent were topics such as critical thinking and global challenges such as the global economy and climate change. Although flexibility and critical thinking were not major themes, openness to change was occasionally examined through the prism of creativity and adaptability.

Furthermore, participants offered only sporadic reflections on learner-centered education, a foundational component of contemporary global education frameworks. One teacher referenced Rousseau's educational philosophy to advocate for placing students at the center of the learning process, emphasizing experiential learning and active student participation:

“...the child must be placed in laboratories... the teacher must place the child in front of the didactic materials; he must ask him questions so that there is feedback” [4615–5738, Louanda].

Yet, most participants acknowledged the challenges of implementing such pedagogy in practice, citing insufficient infrastructure, lack of training, and a theoretical overreliance in curriculum design. Others underscored the need for teachers to act as facilitators, guiding students through inquiry and discovery [5944–6279, Louanda; 9483–9826, Louanda].

Teachers’ Practices

The findings from classroom observations in ten secondary schools in Bukavu, in the Democratic Republic of Congo, are presented here, structured around four core components of global education: values, attitudes, skills, and learning. These components, derived from established global education frameworks and embedded in the study’s observation guide, allow for a systematic analysis of teacher practices in promoting global learning.

Values

This dimension examined teachers’ commitment to human dignity, human rights, cultural diversity, democracy, justice, equality, and the rule of law.

Human Dignity and Human Rights:

Across the observed classrooms, several teachers demonstrated practices aligned with the principles of human dignity and respect for human rights. These included acknowledging student effort regardless of academic performance, allowing students to choose portions of the course for assessment, and encouraging them to seek clarification when concepts were unclear. For example, in a mathematics class at Louanda secondary school, a teacher responded to widespread difficulty in solving an exercise by commending students’ efforts and converting the task into a group activity. This fostered peer collaboration and collective problem-solving, particularly benefiting those who were struggling.

Cultural Diversity:

A majority of teachers demonstrated at least a basic engagement with cultural diversity, with one teacher showing exemplary practice. At Nairobi secondary school, a language teacher introduced the culturally unfamiliar term “pounded yams” in a vocabulary lesson. To make the concept accessible, the teacher contextualized it using visual aids and encouraged students to share culturally relevant examples involving pounding techniques from their own communities. This enabled reciprocal learning and broadened cultural awareness. Other examples across schools included adapting content to introduce global cultures and facilitate comparative analyses on topics such as conflict resolution and inclusive evaluation.

Democracy, Justice, and Fairness:

Practices associated with fairness and justice were evident in nearly all lessons, except one. Indicators included fair treatment of students, transparent evaluation criteria, and equal opportunities for participation. These practices reflect an implicit support for democratic classroom environments.

Attitudes

Attitudinal elements were assessed through indicators such as openness to cultural diversity, respect, civic-mindedness, responsibility, self-efficacy, and tolerance of ambiguity.

Openness to Cultural Otherness

Practices varied significantly. While one teacher regularly integrated culturally diverse materials and e

ncouraged dialogue, most used such practices sporadically, and two did not employ them at all.

Respect:

The promotion of respectful behavior was evident in most classes, though implementation ranged from limited to extensive. Teachers implementing discouraged derogatory language, emphasized attentive listening, and encouraged the expression of diverse opinions. At Lagos Secondary School, a noteworthy incident occurred when a reserved student was mocked by peers after responding to a question. The teacher intervened promptly, emphasizing empathy and mutual respect, and clarified the intent behind encouraging the student's participation.

Civic-Mindedness and Responsibility:

Civic-mindedness was fairly evident in seven lessons, with teachers integrating societal issues and encouraging student participation in community or school improvement activities. Responsibility was promoted through class committees and group work, though with varying consistency: one teacher implemented it frequently, five fairly, and four sparingly.

Self-Efficacy and Tolerance of Ambiguity:

Teachers generally fostered self-efficacy through encouragement and goal-setting, though three cases showed minimal implementation. Tolerance of ambiguity was notably weak: only two cases demonstrated fair implementation, with most (seven) being limited and one absent altogether. At Cairo Secondary School, a third-year biology teacher encouraged students to propose environmental policies on plastic pollution in Lake Kivu. This task required critical thinking and embraced multiple viewpoints, illustrating a high tolerance for ambiguity and encouraging respectful debate.

Skills

This category assessed competencies including autonomous learning, critical thinking, empathy, communication, adaptability, and conflict resolution.

Autonomous Learning and Critical Thinking:

These were moderately observed. Teachers encouraged independent learning by assigning research tasks and offering self-assessment tools post-evaluation. Three teachers demonstrated frequent critical thinking exercises, while one did not implement any.

Empathy and Listening Skills.

Empathy was the most consistently implemented skill, present in six lessons frequently and four fairly. Teachers used role-playing, perspective-taking, and scenario-based questions to develop students' emotional awareness. For example, at Addis Ababa Secondary School, an English teacher asked students to analyze a character's feelings from a story, encouraging emotional reflection.

Flexibility and Adaptability.

These were generally implemented at a fair level. Teachers responded constructively to classroom challenges and encouraged students to adopt flexible learning strategies. In two cases, however, no such practices were noted.

Linguistic and Communicative Skills

Implementation in this area was limited. French was the only language permitted in most classes, and alternative languages were discouraged, sometimes under threat of punishment. Teachers also frequently interrupted students to correct grammatical errors, which inhibited communication.

Cooperation and Conflict Resolution:

Cooperative learning was inconsistently applied: one case of frequent implementation, four of fair use, and four of limited use. Conflict resolution was more widely present, with nine cases showing fair

application, including practices such as mediating disagreements and encouraging collaborative problem-solving.

Instructional practices

The learning component examined instructional approaches related to global education, including the integration of global perspectives, participatory methods, digital tools, and feedback mechanisms.

Integration of Global Perspectives:

This was largely underdeveloped, with six lessons showing minimal engagement and two showing none. Only two teachers demonstrated moderate efforts to include global content.

Participatory and Collaborative Learning:

Observed in varying degrees: three teachers used these approaches frequently or fairly, while six relied on individual tasks. Group work, when present, often led to more inclusive and interactive lessons.

Digital and Global Tools:

Use of digital resources was notably absent in most classrooms (eight cases), with only two lessons showing limited integration.

Assessment and Feedback:

Assessment practices were often superficial. In five observed lessons, feedback was entirely absent; in three, it was limited. A typical example occurred at Yaounde Secondary School, where a teacher announced students' scores without returning their graded work or offering commentary on their performance.

Summary

Overall, the findings for teachers' perception reveal that teachers in Bukavu predominantly perceive global education through the lens of internationalization, with a strong emphasis on curriculum standardization, intercultural cooperation, and linguistic competence. These elements are seen as essential to producing globally mobile and adaptable learners. However, significant components of global education (such as critical thinking, learner-centered pedagogy, and global issues) were either underemphasized or omitted. These findings suggest that while teachers support the idea of global education in principle, their understanding is shaped by pragmatic concerns and local challenges, highlighting the need for broader professional development and contextual support in implementing global education practices. As for practices, a moderate engagement with global education practices is reported. While values such as empathy, fairness, and respect are relatively well-integrated, there are notable gaps in areas like linguistic inclusivity, digital literacy, and global content integration. These disparities suggest the need for targeted professional development and policy support to foster a more holistic implementation of global education principles.

Discussion: Teachers' Perceptions of Global Learning. Their Aspirations and Local Constraints

The findings of this study on the perceptions and practices of secondary school teachers in Bukavu, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), concerning global learning and the management of individual learner differences presents the key themes emerging from the data, and framed by relevant theoretical and empirical literature on global education, inclusive pedagogy, and teacher agency in low-resource and post-colonial contexts.

From the collated findings, Bukavu secondary school teachers predominantly regarded internationalization as a lens to use to perceive global education, attributing significant values to be linguistic proficiency, cultural flexibility, and curriculum standardization. These perspectives align with scientific discourse on global education, which emphasizes the necessity of adapting educational systems pegged on cross-border mobility, comparability, interconnectedness and communication technologies (Mundy et al., 2016; Raccagni, 2024; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). The pursuit of educational justice and seamless academic transfer within international contexts is exemplified by teachers' advocacy for curriculum standardization. However, these perspectives can also reflect a technocratic and instrumentalist conception of global education, which prioritizes employability and outputs over critical thinking or regional significance (Tikly, 2004).

The interpretation of global learning as a pragmatic, albeit, limited concept is primarily shaped by its framing as a means of economic advancement and mobility (Rehman, 2025). The pursuit of socioeconomic advancement through educational endeavours is exemplified by the recurrent references to "scientific espionage" and the dissemination of knowledge through overseas internships, despite their informal character. In postcolonial contexts, where education is regarded as a conduit for social mobility and access to global opportunities, such perspectives are not uncommon (Soudien, 2007). This argumentation supports the position of Bakhtiari and Isfahan who posits its potency as an irresistible, benign force for economic prosperity to humanity everywhere (2024). However, significant components of global education are likewise marginalised by this pragmatic approach. Teachers' conceptualizations either neglected or marginalized critical thinking, learner-centered pedagogies, and engagement with global issues (such as inequality gender and climate change) and concurs the Newtonian mechanistic and deterministic view of the universe govern by different norms though strongly rejected by Pike and Selby, though still dangling (McGregor, 2014). Frameworks such as Oxfam's Curriculum for Global Citizenship and UNESCO's Global Citizenship Education (GCE) explicitly underscore these elements as being imperative for equipping students to navigate and address complex global issues, making these omissions noteworthy (Oxley & Morris, 2013; UNESCO, 2015).

Moreover, rather than fostering cross-cultural communication or challenging established knowledge systems, several teachers' references to intercultural competency and language acquisition were predominantly framed in terms of assimilation to dominant (typically Western) systems. In this context, the distinction between "soft" and "critical" global citizenship education as posited by Andreotti (2006) are particularly pertinent. The "soft" paradigm, which aims to integrate students into the global system without necessarily confronting its fundamental disparities, is predominantly reflected in the opinions of teachers. This enhances the skewedness, and complexities of globalization when the Newtonian lenses are brought to the fore.

Furthermore, although learner-centered education was referenced sporadically, the preponderance of teachers concurred that its implementation was arduous due to curriculum rigidity, inadequate training, and infrastructural limitations thereby falling short of the position of the Council of Europe (2018). These challenges are indicative of broader systemic constraints across the board that are prevalent in educational settings with limited resources (Schweisfurth, 2011), where pedagogical enhancements are often implemented from the top down and receiving minimal support.

Teachers' Practices: Partial Engagement with Global Learning Principles

In the four primary domains of values, attitudes, abilities, and instructional techniques, the observational

data indicated a moderate level of engagement with global learning practices. Despite the pervasive influence of certain principles, such as fairness, respect for diversity, and human dignity, in educational settings, the implementation of these values demonstrated significant variability across teachers and schools. In general, rather than engaging in more in-depth intercultural discourse or structural critique, cultural diversity was addressed primarily through the inclusion of superficial content, hence confirming Dryden-Peterson, (2010) position that a vast majority of teachers in the DRC are not well trained. This phenomenon can be interpreted as a tendency toward "celebratory multiculturalism," contrasting with the development of empathy or intercultural understanding (Banks, 2008), thereby, jettisoning the education strategy paper of the DRC of 2016-2025. This has been completely compounded by the multifaceted challenges related to teachers in managing these heterogeneous classes in the DRC and the precarious environment (Forghani-Arani, Cerna & Bannon, 2019). Teachers attitudes, especially regarding respect and civic-mindedness, were evident in many lessons. However, there was a lack of development in the ability to tolerate ambiguity, which is yet a critical element of global competence (Boix Mansilla & Jackson, 2011). The majority of teachers expressed unease with open-ended questions or contentious topics, which is in line with research conducted in other low-income countries where centralized curricula and high-stakes testing discourage critical or exploratory pedagogy (Vavrus & Bartlett, 2012). In regards to skills, critical thinking and empathy were occasionally encouraged, often through role-playing, storytelling, or class discussions. However, the overall frequency and extent of these activities remained limited. In addition, the results show a lack of support for linguistic diversity, with some teachers punishing students for speaking their native language which contravenes the position of OECD (2019) and Raccagni (2024) on the spirit and letter of global learning and education as well as contrasting with inclusive and multilingual methods promoted in other discourses on global education (Cummins, 2000; García & Wei, 2014).

Instructional strategies for global learning were particularly lacking in the areas of digital literacy, interactive learning, and the integration of global perspectives. These disparities are the result of systemic barriers such as curricular limitations, inadequate infrastructure, and lack of opportunities for professional development (Luca, 2024). With these defects, the curriculum lacks room for cultural competency for teachers and indigenous curriculum rigidity which is confrontational to contemporary education (Grolu, 2017; Luca, 2024) instead of inclusion through reflection. However, they also highlight a possible mismatch between the material circumstances of teachers' practice and their goals for global engagement (Priestley et al., 2012).

Managing Individual Learner Differences in the Context of Global Learning

Management of individual differences emerged implicitly rather than explicitly in both interviews and observations. Latent knowledge of student diversity is suggested by the ways in which teachers promote empathy, peer collaboration, and diverse assessment techniques. However, rather than being methodically incorporated into lesson planning, these activities were often improvised. In many lessons observed, it was evident that teachers made concerted efforts to be sensitive to the varied skill and comprehension levels of their students. For instance, when a mathematics teacher observed that a number of students were encountering difficulties with a particular exercise, he opted not to administer a punishment. Instead, he divided the class into groups, thereby facilitating a collective resolution of the problem (Ahmed & Plessis, 2024). While the aforementioned change may appear uncomplicated, it illustrates a pivotal aspect of effective difference management in heterogeneous settings acknowledging that students do not all

progress at the same rate, and providing opportunities for group learning as a form of support. In addition to demonstrating empathy, the study underscores the potential of peer dynamics to function as a form of scaffolding in contexts where teacher time and resources are limited, thereby highlighting the social nature of the learning process (Darmawan, Wijayanti & Nani Ratnaningsih, 2025; Scheunpflug, 2020) but this does not douse the ever changing gap and 21st century learning dynamics of the world, beside the ever evolving educational landscape (Khan & Agnew, 2017).

While these reactions were not invariably planned or systematized, they illustrate a form of spontaneous differentiation in which educators respond to students' needs in real time without resorting to formal frameworks or procedures. In contexts such as Bukavu, where educational facilities are over-sized, resources are limited, and systemic support for inclusive education is deficient, this approach is of paramount importance. In order to make rapid decisions regarding how to assist children who are lagging, distracted, or disoriented, teachers frequently depend on intuition, observation, and experience.

However, there were limitations to this practice. Many teachers continued to rely heavily on traditional lecture-based instruction, while others varied activities or encouraged collaborative learning. Students were often treated as a homogeneous group in lesson plans and assessments, with the same expectations, timing, and materials applied to each student. When differentiation did occur, it tended to be reactive rather than proactive. For example, most changes were made when students clearly failed to understand a subject, rather than when classes were first designed to accommodate different abilities.

Another area where student differences were poorly controlled was language. Despite the multilingual reality of Bukavu, the majority of schools taught only French. The use of native languages was deliberately discouraged or punished by certain teachers. This not only cuts off a useful cultural and cognitive resource, but also creates more obstacles for students who are already struggling with academic problems. Thus, instead of using linguistic diversity as a gateway to learning, schools inadvertently penalize it. This illustrates a conflict that requires further in-depth analysis and change between official policy and inclusive practice.

In addition, although some educators mentioned concepts that support student-centered learning, such as encouraging curiosity or providing students with hands-on experiences, these concepts were rarely incorporated into routine instruction. Teachers mentioned several obstacles, such as overcrowded classrooms, rigid curricula, little training, and the need to prepare students for national tests, but they also noted only theoretical support for teaching strategies that put students at the center of the learning process. These obstacles are not insignificant. They influence teachers' perceptions of what is possible and often result in instruction that values control and efficiency over adaptability and flexibility.

Despite these limitations, it is clear that many teachers are doing the best they can, under difficult circumstances. They are thoughtful, imaginative, and open to improvisation. However, accommodating learner differences will continue to be a matter of individual effort rather than institutional commitment until they have access to a more supportive structure that gives them the time, resources, and training they need.

For significant change to occur, managing learner differences needs to be rethought as an essential component of quality instruction, rather than an additional load for educators. This requires professional development that goes beyond theory to provide useful tactics based on local conditions. It also means fostering a school climate in which linguistic, cognitive, and social diversity are seen as assets rather than obstacles to be overcome.

Finally, it's critical to see educators as co-creators of inclusive education, not just implementers of policy. Even informally, their daily routines already influence how differences are handled. To create classrooms that are not only globally aware but also truly responsive to each learner, it is essential to recognize, encourage, and improve these behaviors.

Implications for Policy, Practice, and Teacher Development

These findings have important implications for education policy and teacher preparation in Bukavu/DRC and comparable settings. First, professional development programs should engage teachers in critical reflection on the goals and politics of global education, beyond the technical transfer of global skills. Teachers need support to interpret and modify global learning frameworks in ways that are both pedagogically sound and contextually relevant.

Second, educational reforms must address systemic barriers to the practical application of global learning principles. These include curriculum rigidity, lack of investment in digital resources, and lack of multilingual support. Finally, to enable teachers to respond effectively to diverse learners in a globalized environment, a greater emphasis on inclusive pedagogy is needed in both pre-service and in-service teacher training.

6 Conclusion

This study reveals a complex and evolving landscape of global education within secondary schools in Bukavu, Democratic Republic of Congo. Teachers demonstrate a growing awareness of global education principles; particularly those related to internationalization, curriculum standardization, intercultural exchange, and cross-border knowledge transfer. However, this conceptual understanding often remains theoretical and is not fully translated into consistent classroom practice. While values such as empathy, fairness, and respect are frequently observed, essential components of global education; such as learner-centered instruction, multilingualism, critical thinking, and digital integration, are underused or absent.

Practices that translate good management of differences, though present in certain classroom practices such as peer collaboration and differentiated assessment, tend to be implemented on an ad hoc basis rather than systematically integrated into pedagogical planning. The limited use of flexible teaching strategies, lack of personalized feedback, and linguistic rigidity underscore the need for stronger frameworks to support diverse learners. Teachers often operate within significant constraints, including rigid curricula, inadequate resources, and limited professional autonomy, which collectively hinder the effective implementation of inclusive and globally responsive teaching.

Ultimately, embedding global education in a meaningful and sustainable way requires not only curricular alignment with international standards but also a deep commitment to contextual relevance, learner diversity, and equitable participation. This holistic approach will better prepare students to navigate and contribute to an increasingly interconnected and dynamic global society. The epistemic strive and goal of global learning and handling heterogeneity in classrooms especially in the global South is not fluid due to improper orientation and understanding of its importance. More often than not, in most of these countries in the global south, educational policy documents and especially the curriculum is still steeped in colonial ethos and decoloniality is yet to take shape especially in the DRC. In the global North, sensitization about the values of global learning and citizenship are sustain and persistent but the global Souths understands such values implicitly, hence needing an explicit framework that can be guided probably by a global learning network of the global South.

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