

Global Awareness and Perspectives in Jordanian History Textbooks

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Abstract

This paper examined the global awareness and perspectives in the Jordanian history textbooks for grades 6-10 of the upper basic cycle. The purpose of this paper is fivefold: (i) to analyze the history textbooks in order to explore the inclusion of global and local dimensions, (ii) to explore in which grade levels global and local dimensions are introduced and taught, (iii) to look into the percentage of global dimension compared to the local dimension, (iv) to envisage a list of global topics that can be taught, and (v) to discuss the role of teachers in engaging students in global education. To achieve the purpose of this study, 18 concepts related to global awareness distributed in five main domains were developed. These are the concepts that may prove useful to teachers faced with the task of providing instructions about global dimension. The content was analyzed to examine the repartition of the global and local dimensions based on the number of pages in the textbooks. It was concluded that the Jordanian history textbooks are biased and the global dimensions are almost ignored for grades 6-10 of the upper basic cycle. Therefore it is recommended that the Jordanian history textbooks be reviewed and re-designed in order to infuse global dimension.

Keywords: Global Awareness, Global Perspective, History Textbooks.

Introduction

Education influences and reflects the values of society, and the kind of society we want to be. It is meant to change people for the better and to create prosperous, productive and meaningful lives. It helps students recognize their role and responsibilities as members of this global community. As Steiner (1993) once noted our subject matters are only important if they serve to make our students more human.

As we live in one world, we have come to realize that what we do affects others, and what others do affects us, as never before. Events which take place thousands of miles away can have an immediate political, economic, and cultural impact on us. Environmental damage, for example, does not stop at national boundaries. Also, population change might have an impact on environmental quality and resource management. In an era defined by somewhat injustice, racism, famine, drug trafficking and environment degradation, the need for global perspectives embedded in the school curriculum has never been apparent. Although the world has become a small village due to the advances in computer technology and satellite communications, students are less likely to go out of their way to understand current events in the world, and more likely to see themselves as citizens of their own country as opposed to the world.

Schools need to foster the students' knowledge and understanding of other countries throughout the curriculum, and evidence indicates that global issues and problems are growing in magnitude and will neither go away nor resolve themselves (Hicks & Holden, 2007). Therefore, it is inevitable that students should be given opportunities to observe the similarities and differences between peoples everywhere, and develop skills that will enable them to make informed decisions and take responsible actions in combating problems and challenges that face human beings. As a result, students can make a positive difference in this world by teaching them about global issues and encouraging them to see the world through other eyes and take actions to make the world a better place.

Global Awareness

Global awareness defines aspects of the subject – specific that relate to people's place within the wider-world, and relates to the whole globe in all countries, across political and geographical borders. It does not deal in isolation with a problem, an area of the world, or an aspect of a specific culture.

Young & Cummins (2002) wrote that global awareness is about being aware of the need to understand and tackle problems and having the willingness and ability to take action in support of our local and global communities. It also provides people to work with teams of people from a range of voices, backgrounds, and perspectives.

Olser & Vincent (2002) noted that global education is based on the principles of cooperation, non-violence, respect of human rights and cultural diversity, democracy and tolerance. Collins, Czarra and Smith (1996) suggested that global education should include the international problems and challenges, cultures and global connections.

There are many reasons that can be put forward for the importance of teaching the global dimension in schools. Students should develop the ability to suspend judgment when confronted with new data or opinions that do not coincide with their present understandings or feelings, and will examine the common and diverse traits of other cultures and will appropriately tolerate cultural diversity (Goldstein & Selby, 2002). McGough & Hunt (2012) pointed out that global learning is seen to casually impact the development of students' values, knowledge, skills, competencies, and interaction with diversity and communication. This conceptual framework should be an integral part of the designed curriculum, policies and ethos of communities of learning.

Acquiring global awareness also encourages students to develop a world view and see the world from an alternative perspective (Banks, 2007). In acquiring global awareness, we aim to continually broaden our views of other people, and avoid behavior that is based on unconfirmed assumptions or stereotypes.

Review of Literature

To the researcher's knowledge, there are no studies that address the inclusion of global awareness and perspectives in the Jordanian history textbooks taught at schools.

History occupies a vital place in the training of responsible and active citizens, and in the developing of tolerance and appreciation for all kinds of differences in beliefs, ethnic backgrounds, customs, ethics, politics, cultures, and others. It provides the opportunities to connect current events to historical events in different parts of the world. Therefore, we must equip students with the knowledge, intellectual skills, and attitudes they need to enable them to cope effectively with the global realities.

Peters, Britton and Blec (2007) noted that the global dimension of citizenship is manifested in behavior that does justice to the principles of mutual dependency in the world. Mansilla and Gardner (2007) define global awareness as the capacity and the inclination to place ourselves and others in the broader matrix of our contemporary world. Friedrich Nietzsche (1844 - 1900) stated that shifting our perspective allows us to realize that objectivity is only gained by understanding many perspectives on an issue (Keith, Anseli-Pearson (2006). Edge, khamsi and Bourn (2009) gathered evidence through interviews with teachers and students in ten secondary schools, focusing on the value and impact of the global dimension and how it is put into practice.

Lawson (2008) in a study of schools in England demonstrated the connections many schools were making through the global dimension to wider educational themes. Australian teenagers reported considerable concern about wealth and poverty, war and peace, technological and environmental changes (Hutchinson, 1996). Demovsky & Niemuth (1999) developed and implemented a program for increasing global skills and awareness of ethnic diversity in the classroom so that students could better understand each other.

The Purpose of this Study is fivefold

1. To analyze the history textbooks taught at Jordanian schools from 6th – 10th grades of the upper basic cycle in order to investigate the inclusion of the global and the local dimensions.
2. To explore in which grade levels global and local dimensions are introduced and taught.
3. To look into the percentage of global dimension compared to the local dimension in the history textbooks.
4. To envisage a list of global topics that can be taught in the history textbooks at Jordanian schools.
5. To discuss the role of teachers in engaging students in global education.

Operational Definitions

Global awareness:

Is a theoretical recognition and appreciation based upon an applicable knowledge of the size, complexity and diversity of the earth conceived as a single entity.

Global Perspective:

Is a planetary view or opinion on a certain topic that takes into account the affects of any decision on a global scale.

History Textbooks:

The history books that are taught by Jordanian students of the upper basic cycle from 6th – 10th grades in the academic year 2012/2013

Significance of the Study

After reading the introduction on the first page of all history textbooks taught at Jordanian schools, the researcher did not find any goal regarding enhancing the students' global awareness of students. As a result, it is expected that Jordanian students will lack an appreciation and acceptance of different cultures in this ever changing world. Also, a lot of our school students have rarely travelled outside Jordan, so by instilling global awareness, this will help them broaden their sight and encourage them by looking at the bigger picture. In addition, the relentless focus on exam results, combined with an overburdened and outdated curriculum, has squeezed out any time in Jordanian schools for learning about other contemporary issues and challenges related to other countries. Therefore, efforts of history teachers have fallen short by presenting a fragmentary view of the world.

Schools in Jordan are not helping our students to understand the world which they live in. Teachers are wary of topics that involve controversy, with concerns that they may lack the requisite knowledge or adequate time, or they may create classroom conflict.

This paper examines the notion of global awareness and perspectives by discussing the inclusion of global education in the Jordanian history textbooks at Jordanian schools for 6th – 10th grades of the upper basic cycle. In our rapidly changing society, an urgent need exists to address and infuse global awareness into curricula in general and social studies books in particular, since lack of awareness has a negative impact on students' acceptance of other nations and their cultures (Demovsky & Niemuth,1999).

The researcher believes that there is an urgent need to develop global perspective in the minds of Jordanian students by adding global issues to their history books. The Jordanian history textbooks taught at Jordanian schools need to be re-designed to encourage creative discussions from diverse perspectives, and to give students the opportunity to exchange knowledge and ideas on alternative solutions for global issues.

By promoting global awareness and perspectives, students' horizons will be broadened (D'Sena, 2007). Unfortunately, in the Jordanian history textbooks, problems facing our world are seldom studied, if at all.

Questions of the Study

1. What are the domains that the global and local dimensions focus on?
2. What are the percentages of global dimension to the local dimension taught in the history textbooks?
3. At what levels are the global and local dimensions are taught most?
4. What should Jordanian students be expected to know and understand about the world?
5. What is the role of history teachers in engaging students in global dimension?

Limitations of the Study

The study was limited to analyzing the content of the five Jordanian history textbooks from 6th – 10th grades taught in the academic year 2012\2013.

Methodology

The sample consisted of all history textbooks from grades 6 to 10 of the upper basic cycle in Jordan. The number of written pages covering the global dimension with the pictures, maps, diagrams and questions were counted. Then, they were compared to the number of pages addressing the local dimension. The researcher was only looking into the pages that a topic received mention. The percentages of the global and local topics presented in the history textbooks were calculated.

The researcher has attempted to organize a typology that may prove useful to teachers of history faced with the task of introducing global issues, problems, and challenges.

A checklist consisting of five main domains was developed. Those include: cultural, economic, technological, ecological and political issues. Under these five domains came the following 28 topics:

Environmental problems	World organizations
Over- population	Money laundering
Human rights and values	Democracy
Diversity	Civil strife
Interdependence	HIV\AIDS
Sustainable development	Natural disasters
Social justice	Racism
Conflict resolution	Crime and alienation
Climate change	Philosophy & literature
Child abuse	Food & poverty
Major wars	Ancient civilizations
Technocratic revolution	Major religions
Tolerance	Terrorism
Drug use	Genocide & ethnic cleansing

The preceding topics identified by the researcher were scrutinized, reacted to, and verified by a group of referees specialized in history and methods of teaching social studies. The referees were asked to look into the issues in the history textbooks and select the very important ones, the somewhat important, the less important, and the not important ones in our time.

A scale was used for this purpose ranging from 1–4 (not important, less important, somewhat important, and very important). The referees were also asked to apply the necessary modifications they see fit on these topics. The important and somewhat important topics were adopted, and the less important and the no important ones were excluded, and few topics were modified. The introductions, indices, titles of the chapters, questions, and references were excluded.

The following checklist of global history was chosen by the group of referees. It consists of 18 concepts if adopted will provide a framework within which to understand the global dimension.

Genocide & ethnic cleansing	Environmental problems
World organizations	Human rights & values
Philosophy & literature	Major religions
Ancient civilizations	Diversity
Food & poverty	Interdependence
Democracy	Social justice
Crime & alienation	Conflict resolution
Child abuse	Major wars
World organizations	Technocratic revolution

Table 1: Number of pages and percentages of topics in the history textbooks according to grades and units

Grade	Topics	No. of pages	Percentage
6th Grade			
Part 1			
Unit 1	Rashidi Era	38	21%
Unit 2	Umayyad Era	43	25%
Part 2			
Unit 4	Abbasid Era	23	13%
Unit 5	Independent States from the Abbasid Caliphate	42	24%
Unit 6	The Outside Invasion to the Islamic World and the Role of Islamic Forces Facing it	29	17%
Total		175	100%
7th Grade			
Part 1			
Unit 1	The Foundations of Old Civilizations	18	10%
Unit 2	Civilization of Arab Peninsula	35	20%
Unit 3	Mesopotamia	18	10%
Part2			
Unit 4	Levant Civilization	24	13%
Unit 5	Nile Valley Civilization	18	10%
Unit 6	The Old Civilization of the Arab Maghreb	14	8%
Unit 7	The Old World Civilizations Outside the Arab World	52	29%
Total		179	100%
8th Grade			
Part 1			
Unit 1	Europe in the Middle Ages	16	11%
Unit 2	Europe in Renaissance	32	22%
Unit 3	Era of Revolutions	29	19%
Part 2			
Unit 4	National Unions in Europe	16	11%
Unit 5	Colonization and Freedom Movements and Independence in Asia and Africa	22	15%
Unit 6	Major Wars in the 20 th Century	16	11%
Unit 7	History of Science and Technology	16	11%
Total		147	100%
Grade 9			
Part 1			
Unit 1	Political Life in the Islamic State (Governance and Management System)	33	22%
Unit 2	Economic Life in the Islamic State	33	22%
Unit 3	Social Life in the Arab – Muslim Community	14	9%
Part 2			
Unit 4	Scientific and Literary Life	57	37%
Unit 5	Islamic Art and Architecture	14	9%
Total		151	100%
Grade 10			
Part 1			
Unit 1	The Ottoman Empire and the Arab World	26	17%
Unit 2	Colonialism in the Arab World to the End of the First World War	28	19%
Unit 3	Arab Awakening	20	13%
Part 2			
Unit 4	National Resistance in the Arab Countries Since the European Occupation to Independence	34	23%
Unit 5	Issues and Problems of Contemporary Arab History	26	17%
Unit 6	Jerusalem: History and Civilization	16	11%
Total		150	100%

Table (1) showed that history textbooks concentrate mainly on national history, Islamic history, Arab history and global history sequentially. There are no globally shared issues like the protection of culture and environment, empathy, tolerance and respect for other religions, colors, values, public policies, learning environment, philosophy and literature. If students receive narratives from a national perspective, it will be very hard at a later stage to open their minds for other perspectives.

Some great historians have seen human self-awareness as the very essence of history. Arnold Toynbee (1889-1975) noted that history is a search for light on the nature and destiny of human beings. History education provides an insight into the past, and helps draw out the connections between the past and the present. Therefore we must equip students with knowledge, intellectual skills and attitudes they need to cope with the challenges and problems of the world when they get older.

Table 2: Percentages of global dimension to local dimension in all history textbooks

	Global Dimensions		Local Dimensions	
	No. of pages	Percentage	No. of pages	Percentage
6th Grade	-----	0%	165	100%
7th Grade	70	39%	109	61%
8th Grade	174	100%	-----	0%
9th Grade	-----	0%	151	100%
10th Grade	-----	0%	150	100%
Total	244	30%	757	70%

Table (2) showed that the five history textbooks cover 30% of the global dimension and 70% of the local dimension. The 30% constitute mostly the history of different parts of the world and does not tackle the issues of global dimension as defined by the educational literacy. Issues such as environmental problems, diversity, social justice, food and poverty, child abuse, climate change, major religions, democracy, and conflict resolution were never mentioned.

Results of the Study

The study revealed that the history textbooks taught at Jordanian schools focus mainly on the local dimension which addresses the national, Arabic and Islamic issues.

In order to rectify the situation in the absence of curricula that include the global dimension, students should be given the outlook and skills that equip them with mental flexibility and a basic respect for perspectives other than their own. This requires students to stand in others' shoes and understand all viewpoints, and to work towards a more just and sustainable world where power and resources are more equitably shared.

To engage students in global education, teachers should

1. Use an interdisciplinary approach within and beyond history textbooks.
2. Make links to multicultural education.
3. Take advantage of technology.
4. Conduct new avenues for research in the global arena and make use of this research in the classroom.
5. Teach students to understand, tolerate, and accept cultural differences in others.
6. Encourage students to think of themselves as part of the global community where actions in one place have implications for others across the globe.
7. Help students think critically and creatively about topical and controversial issues.
8. Help students to consider the slogan "act locally, think globally" to be the norm not the exception in the current knowledge – based global society.
9. Instill in students a curiosity of the world and a desire to work together in making the world a better place to live in.

Recommendations

The following is a list of suggested recommendations that the researcher believes if implemented would contribute positively to the global awareness of Jordanian students:

1. Jordanian history textbooks should be reviewed and re-designed in order to inculcate global awareness into curriculum instruction.

2. Students should know of problems and challenges that go beyond the borders of Jordan.
3. Students should be given opportunities to critically examine their own values and attitudes, and develop skills that will enable them to combat prejudice, injustice and discrimination.
4. Criteria should be set to choose the global issues that are significant to be included in the history textbooks.
5. Teachers need time and space to reflect on making global awareness central to their practice.
6. Teachers' guide should be introduced to prospective history teachers to emphasize the current global issues, methods of instruction, and resources that can be utilized.
7. Set strategies that would merge the global with local dimensions in the history textbooks.
8. Global perspectives should be developed through a theme – based approach and a selection of a variety of current global issues.
9. Encouraging and helping history teachers to visit foreign countries to familiarize themselves with other cultures.
10. Adding one or two textbooks dealing with issues and key concepts related to other countries or embedding global awareness in the existing books.
11. Use a range of credible resources that cover a multitude of viewpoints.

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