



Building Beyond Borders: Research Insights on Global Justice Education in Higher Education

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Abstract

This report is the final phase of a four-year research study conducted under the Praxis Project at University College Cork (UCC), exploring how Global Justice Education (GJE) can be embedded in higher education. While the research was hosted at UCC, its findings and insights are relevant to the wider higher education sector. Earlier phases focused on staff and student engagement with global justice themes. While the study began within the framework of Global Citizenship and Development Education (GCDE), feedback from participants prompted a shift toward the more critical and systemic framing of GJE.

Drawing on dialogue with UCC staff, students, leadership, and external partners from civil society and academia, this phase examines interdisciplinary collaboration, institutional integration, student activism, and ethical global partnerships. Coinciding with UCC's Global Engagement Plan (2025), the report offers insights—not prescriptions—for aligning higher education policy, teaching, and research with social justice aims.

Research Questions

1. How can Global Justice Education (GJE) be effectively embedded into higher education institutions, particularly in the context of University College Cork (UCC)?
2. What are the primary structural, institutional, and pedagogical barriers to integrating GJE into university curricula and policies?
3. What strategies and practices have been effective in advancing GJE at UCC, and what lessons can be drawn for other institutions?
4. How do staff, students, and institutional stakeholders perceive the role of universities in fostering global justice and social transformation?

Findings and Analysis

This study explores how Global Justice Education (GJE) can be embedded across higher education. Building on earlier phases focused on staff and student engagement, this final phase highlights the role of institutional structures, interdisciplinary collaboration, partnerships, and policy frameworks. Though the study was based at UCC, the findings do not relate specifically to one university but offer broader relevance in the Irish context.

Key findings include:

- Ongoing confusion around global education terminology.
- GJE lacks formal recognition in most universities, especially beyond teacher education.
- Structural barriers hinder interdisciplinary collaboration.
- Students need more experiential learning opportunities.
- Universities must adopt more ethical global engagement policies.

RESEARCH APPROACH

Critical Participatory Action Research (CPAR)

Collaborative, justice-driven research methodology focused on dismantling systemic injustices

DATA COLLECTION METHODS



Semi-Structured Interviews

25 interviews with faculty, students, and community stakeholders



Focus Groups

Five sessions with students and faculty



Document Analysis

Analysis of policies, syllabi, and reports



Observational Research

Observation of classes, meetings, and

Literature Review

Earlier parts of this study analysed historical and policy contexts and highlighted the need to move beyond soft, individualised models of global citizenship. This, part 3 of the study focuses on GCE/GJE in HE Policy.

- GCDE is often depoliticised
- Neoliberal influences have diluted its radical potential, favouring individual change over structural transformation.
- GJE offers a more radical approach.
- It centres power, justice, and social movements—emphasising action, not just awareness.
- Institutional barriers remain. These include Eurocentric curricula, underfunding, resistance to activism, and siloed disciplines.
- There is room for transformation. Opportunities lie in linking education with grassroots justice movements, embedding feminist and decolonial pedagogy, and fostering community-led research.

Towards a Framework for Embedding Global Justice Education in Higher Education

Theme	Key Focus
Conceptual Clarity and Positionality	Ensure epistemological and conceptual clarity. Avoid interchangeable use of related terms (e.g. GCE, DE, ESD) by defining institutional terms.
Formal Recognition of Global Justice Education	Integrate GJE formally into curricula through academic programmes, modules, and institutional strategies.
Experiential and Community-Based Learning	Prioritise ethical partnerships and community-engaged learning that address real-world justice issues.
Interdisciplinary Collaboration	Break down disciplinary silos by promoting cross-departmental dialogue and justice-themed collaboration.
Student Engagement and Support	Recognise and support student-led justice initiatives through credit-bearing opportunities, funding, and mentoring.
Ethical Global Partnerships	Foster equitable, reciprocal relationships—especially with Global South partners—based on shared governance and knowledge



All three parts of this study can be found here:
<https://praxisucc.ie/research>

