

The Global Learning Programme (GLP) is a four-year programme of support to schools funded by the Department for International Development (DFID) and managed by the Centre for Global Education (CGE) with the aim of embedding Global Learning in the classroom and at a whole school level. The aims of the research conducted by Ulster University were to assess the impact of the GLP in enhancing Global Learning practice in grant aided primary, post-primary and special schools in Northern Ireland and to examine the progress of pupils in Years 5 to 10 over the duration of the programme.

Global Learning

Global Learning helps learners make sense of the increasingly globalised, complex and rapidly changing world in which they live. It equips children and young people with the essential knowledge, skills and dispositions that will enable them to realise their potential and make a positive contribution to a fair and sustainable world. Since 2015, 50% of schools in Northern Ireland have taken part in GLP training, which aimed to enhance their Global Learning practice and thus support learners to achieve the desired learning outcomes.

Whole School Impact of the GLP

There were six possible stages of global learning progression for schools:



Online questionnaires and interviews with teachers leading on Global Learning within their schools, over three years, showed progress in Global Learning in almost all areas, although few reached the final embedding stage. This may be an indication that the programme needs a longer lifespan in order to allow for a deeper and broader development of this work. Interviews with pupils from Years 5 – 10 showed notable development in their questioning attitudes towards cause and effect in regard to global matters, as well as how these were manifested in their local community.

1. Curriculum Teaching & Learning

According to one post-primary Lead Teacher, Global Learning was the only initiative that has crossed over from a pastoral dimension into curriculum development. In post-primary schools, some Lead Teachers and their colleagues taught Global Learning in a connected way across different subjects by Year 3 of the GLP including Geography, History, RE, LLW, Drama and Dance. The research suggested Geography as a leading (but by no means sole) subject home for Global Learning. However, teachers were also identifying opportunities for integrating Global Learning into primary thematic units and other secondary subjects to allow for more meaningful and relevant connected learning for pupils.

2. Community Connections & Awards

There was considerable evidence of GLP schools working with others (to avoid isolation and to share ideas), including with NGOs, and with complementary initiatives. There was quite marked progress by Year 3 in respect of helping parents/carers to understand the aims and benefits of Global Learning. However, there was still relatively little uptake of complementary school awards, although incorporating a global dimension into the delivery of the Eco-Schools Award topics was rated much better.

3. Impact on Learners

Teachers' actions resulted in greater pupil knowledge of the key concepts of Global Learning (poverty, global inequality, social justice, sustainable development and global interdependence). Pupils improved their critical thinking skills and their ability to question, and could now recognise how world events are presented in the media. In terms of their understanding of how society might make a difference, there was a positive shift upwards. Questions asked by pupils during interviews plainly showed their curiosity, perplexity and, moreover, their concern about some of the more prominent global problems.

4. Effective Leadership

The research identified clear support from senior managers and colleagues as a key enabler of Global Learning. Such support was evidenced by schools providing increased timetable capacity and opportunities for collegiality and preparation; encouraging connectedness to other parts of the curriculum; embracing a pastoral dimension; forging links to NGOs or even countries in the Global South; and, crucially, allowing the inclusion of Global Learning within individual teachers' planners and within whole school development planning. The inclusion of Global Learning in schools' ethos and vision and policies saw a steady upswing too. Surveys and interviews suggested the Lead Teachers' colleagues were becoming much more aware of the Global Learning Programme, were finding and using the resources on the GLP website and developing and using their own materials.

5. Key Challenges for Global Learning

Key challenges included colleagues' busyness (although they generally welcomed help from Lead Teachers), timetable restrictions (prioritisation of academic subjects and the Transfer Tests at age 11), industrial action and the lack of dedicated time or designated funding for this work. There were also distinctive challenges associated with assessing Global Learning. Teachers were still very conscious of the difficulty around combining charitable fundraising with developing a sense of social justice and concern for the environment. Nonetheless, this is a challenge that is worth the effort.

Recommendations

- Schools should persevere with the provision of opportunities for pupils to engage with Global Learning across the curriculum. To do so, teachers need ongoing guidance and support. These issues will continue to impact upon every aspect of our lives at local and global levels, and building pupils' knowledge, understanding, skills and dispositions in Global Learning is in accord with the curriculum.
- It will be very difficult for teachers to make progress without support at national (Department for International Development) and local (Department of Education) government levels. Policy development might usefully encompass curricular change, initial teacher education, school governance and inspection.
- Specifically, support from the Department for International Development might encompass funding to sustain the expert support for schools (both face-to-face and online via the GLP website) and the ongoing collection of research evidence, so that a longitudinal analysis might be maintained during any transitional period and further developed if the programme is extended.
- Further research should ideally permit collaboration with relevant Higher Education Institutions across the UK, and also enable dissemination of findings to wider audiences.
- The extension of the GLP in Northern Ireland might usefully support broadening it to other curricular areas and phases with accredited/certificated course provision, including professional cooperation between teachers, locally, nationally and internationally. Such progress would only be possible within a fully engaged, supportive, high-level policy environment.

The full GLP impact report, on which this 'At a glance' summary is based, can be downloaded from the GLP website: www.globallearningni.com/about-the-glp/the-impact.

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The Global Learning Programme is funded by the UK Government.

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