

Article

Global Spiritual Citizenship Education: From Spiritual Bankruptcy to Sustainable Peace

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Abstract

This paper introduces the concept of ‘Global Spiritual Citizenship Education’ as a response to ‘spiritual bankruptcy’ within contemporary educational paradigms, which prioritise mechanistic outcomes over relational development. Synthesising universal human values with culturally responsive pedagogies, the framework seeks to cultivate compassion, moral imagination, and interconnectedness within secular contexts. Through an integrative literature review and comparative analysis of post-pandemic recovery, conflict-affected environments, and contemplative educational innovations, the study identifies evidence-based strategies that transcend religious boundaries while honouring local cultural epistemologies. Case analyses from Rwanda, Finland, and Nepal reveal convergent success factors, positioning schools as sanctuaries of human connection aligned with the UN’s SDG 4.

Keywords: *Spiritual education, global citizenship, post-conflict recovery, contemplative pedagogy, educational transformation, SDG-4*

Introduction: The Crisis of Disconnection in Global Education

The confluence of unprecedented global crises has revealed profound inadequacies in contemporary educational paradigms. The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted learning for over 1.6 billion students worldwide (UNESCO, 2020, 2021). This disruption showed that systems focused on content delivery, rather than human relationships, struggle when in-person connections are not possible. Studies found that countries with stronger trust, teacher autonomy, and collaboration in their education systems showed more resilience during the crisis (OECD, 2021). Meanwhile, conflicts continue to displace millions of children (UNICEF, 2022). Rapid digital change is also reshaping learning in ways that often weaken human connection (Reich, 2020; Twenge, 2017). However, policy discussions still focus on



access, completion, and standardised outcomes. They often ignore what this paper calls education's deepest crisis: *spiritual bankruptcy*.

This paper uses 'spiritual' in a strictly secular, humanistic sense, distinct from religious or metaphysical frameworks. Following Palmer (1998) and Noddings (2005), it defines spiritual dimensions as relational, ethical, and contemplative capacities, such as empathy, moral imagination, interconnectedness, and compassionate awareness, that connect individuals to communities and shared humanity. Although scholars sometimes use terms like 'relational education' or 'socio-emotional development', this paper keeps 'spiritual' to show education's deeper existential purpose beyond instrumental rationality, while remaining compatible with secular, pluralistic contexts.

'Spiritual bankruptcy' is the erosion of empathy, compassion, and meaningful relationships in education systems focused on efficiency and competition. It occurs when collective wisdom is most needed and when half of all mental health disorders emerge before age 14, yet remain largely undetected in schools (WHO, 2025). Climate catastrophe, technological change, authoritarianism, and inequality require citizens who can collaborate across cultures. However, education still produces learners ready for individual competition rather than collective flourishing. This is a misalignment between what education provides and what society needs. United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 promotes inclusive, quality education (UN, 2015), but current frameworks fail to address the relational aspects needed to develop global citizens who can heal divisions and promote peace. UNESCO's (2017) indicators focus on literacy and subject knowledge but miss the contemplative, ethical, and empathetic skills needed to meet global challenges. This gap between aspirations and implementation reveals theoretical impoverishment in today's educational discourse.

Noddings (2005) highlighted that caring relationships form the basis of meaningful education, while hooks (2003) argued that compassion and love enhance intellectual rigour. Palmer (1998) emphasised that good teaching arises from the teacher's identity and integrity, pointing to often-neglected spiritual dimensions. Despite these insights, today's school systems still focus on standardised tests over human growth. They overlook the reflective and compassionate sides of education. Montessori (1988) saw that children have inner lives full of feeling and expression. However, this idea is not part of most modern theories or practices. Nussbaum (2010) criticized utility-focused education and showed that a sole focus on economic results undercuts democratic skills. An example is 'narrative imagination,' or thinking deeply about the lives of others. This lack of unity creates the situation that Habermas (1971) called 'instrumental rationality,' which limits learning to efficiency and control. Curricula become narrow, and learning is treated as technical work. The most needed capacities for solving common problems are often ignored (Pring, 2004). Hence, this paper offers a Global Spiritual Citizenship Education framework that blends universal human values with teaching that suits different cultures. It analyses post-pandemic recovery, conflict areas (Rwanda, Finland, Nepal), and new research-based practices that can grow compassion, connection, and imagination.

This paper is organised into five sections. First, it lays out the theoretical foundations. Second, it presents the guiding principles and pedagogy of Global Spiritual Citizenship Education. Third, it examines diverse case studies. Fourth, it explores policy pathways for

expansion. Finally, it concludes by emphasising education's potential to nurture global consciousness, local wisdom, and spiritual renewal, key elements for addressing widespread challenges.

Analytical Approach

This paper uses an integrative literature review to build a framework for Global Spiritual Citizenship Education, drawing on critical pedagogy (Freire, hooks), ethics of care (Noddings), contemplative education (Palmer), culturally responsive teaching (Ladson-Billings, Gay), and post-conflict education research (2000-2024). Database searches targeted peer-reviewed journals, policy documents, and authoritative reports linking spirituality, global citizenship, and sustainable peace. Case studies from Rwanda, Finland, and Nepal were chosen to reflect post-genocide recovery, a Nordic welfare state, and resource-limited South Asia, enabling an evaluation of the framework's applicability, though local adaptation remains necessary. Iterative thematic synthesis identified patterns across theories and contexts. Although grounded in empirical evidence, this framework faces limitations: reliance on secondary case data, the need for longitudinal validation, and the requirement for cross-cultural testing for generalisability.

Theoretical Foundations: Reimagining Educational Purpose Beyond Instrumental Rationality

Contemporary educational theories have become increasingly fragmented, prioritising cognitive development at the expense of human dimensions essential for meaningful learning and genuine relationships. This crisis marks a shift from education's historical role as a transformative force. To understand this crisis, it is necessary to trace the decline of holistic educational models and to explore how alternative visions might restore this transformative mission.

The Eclipse of Holistic Educational Vision

Dewey's (1916) pragmatic philosophy envisioned schools as democratic communities, encouraging both individual growth and collective flourishing. Dewey believed genuine learning comes from active participation in meaningful social contexts, not passive absorption of set content. For Dewey, education rebuilds experience and boosts our ability to shape future experiences. Education is about democratic participation, not just individual progress. In this way, schools become places where students practice citizenship, rather than just learn about it.

Montessori's (1988) pedagogy challenged mechanistic approaches to education. She saw children as whole beings whose minds, emotions, bodies, and spirits develop together. She noted children have inner lives rich in feeling, which anticipates ideas in current emotional intelligence research. Montessori also highlighted spiritual aspects often

overlooked in traditional schooling. Her holistic view sees education as the nurturing of human potential, developing all dimensions simultaneously.

Over time, these transformative visions have become less central. Habermas (1971) called this the dominance of instrumental rationality: when people focus only on efficiency, prediction, and control. In education, this leads to narrow curricula, standardised assessments, and performance management. Learning becomes a technical process rather than a human one (Pring, 2004). As a result, schools often value measurable results over real relationships, competition over collaboration, and economic productivity above all.

Critical Pedagogy and the Spiritual Dimension of Learning

Freire's (1970) critique of banking education anticipated this instrumentalisation. He demonstrated how oppressive educational practices reduce students to passive receptacles and turn teachers into depositors of predetermined knowledge. His vision of problem-posing education shows authentic learning emerges through dialogue, critical reflection, and shared inquiry into meaningful questions about existence and social change. This approach acknowledges what might be called education's spiritual dimension: wonder, meaning-making, and transcendent purpose. These qualities motivate genuine learning, not mere compliance. In problem-posing education, teachers and students are co-investigators of reality. They develop critical consciousness through praxis: reflecting and acting to transform the world.

Freire argued that dialogue forms the foundation of authentic education. Knowledge emerges through relationship, not simple transmission; understanding develops through encounter, not passive reception. This relational idea challenges the individualistic assumptions dominating today's schools. It suggests that what this paper calls 'spiritual bankruptcy' comes from excluding dialogue, relationship, and collective meaning-making from learning. hooks' (2003) pedagogy of love builds on this by emphasising that in education, love should be demonstrated through action rather than merely an emotion. Her integration of spiritual and critical pedagogy illustrates that prioritising care, compassion, and love actually strengthens, rather than diminishes, intellectual rigour. This results in learning experiences that are more genuine and transformative compared to those produced by rationalist methods.

Ethics of Care and Relational Pedagogies

The ethics of care tradition provides valuable insights for developing spiritually grounded education in secular contexts. Noddings (2005) highlighted caring relationships as the core of meaningful education. She argued that education depends on mutual exchange. Those receiving care must somehow acknowledge it, even if not verbally, to show they recognise and appreciate the attention given. This relational view challenges individualistic assumptions. It also recognises that intellectual growth needs emotional security and trust. Noddings envisioned schools as caring communities. In these settings, teachers and students live together, enjoy each other's company, and form genuine relationships that reach beyond academic content. Such communities support both academic success and character growth.

They do this by modelling ethical relationships, practising care across differences, and creating places where everyone feels recognised and included. This focus on relationships as the foundation for education strongly supports what this paper calls Global Spiritual Citizenship Education.

Current research in social-emotional learning supports this view. For example, Durlak et al. (2011) reviewed over 200 school programs. They found that students in relationship-focused interventions improved in social-emotional skills, attitudes, connection to school, positive behaviour, and academic performance compared to control groups. Neuroscientific research further confirms that emotion and cognition are deeply intertwined; meaningful learning occurs only when students care about what they are learning, as emotions activate brain mechanisms that support memory, attention, and decision-making (Immordino-Yang, 2015). These results show that attending to relational and emotional aspects strengthens, rather than weakens, academic achievement. This counters the belief that holistic methods reduce intellectual rigour.

Global Citizenship and Narrative Imagination

Contemporary global citizenship education literature recognises that cognitive approaches alone are limited in fostering global awareness. Nussbaum's (2010) capabilities approach highlights narrative imagination as vital for democratic participation in an interconnected world. This means seriously thinking about others' lives and imagining their situations. It is more than gaining factual knowledge about distant peoples and places. It calls for empathy, ethical awareness, and a commitment to human dignity across cultures. Nussbaum argues that education should prepare people to see how local issues connect to global events. This view shows that solving global problems needs both knowledge and empathy. However, current frameworks often stay within secular-rational models and struggle to address the motivational and meaning-making aspects needed for lasting global solidarity.

Contemplative Dimensions of Learning

Recent scholarship in contemplative education offers promising directions for integrating spiritual dimensions within secular educational contexts while maintaining religious neutrality. Palmer and Zajonc's (2010) exploration demonstrates how practices such as mindfulness, reflective writing, and contemplative dialogue may enhance both learning outcomes and personal development while remaining accessible across diverse backgrounds. Their research shows that contemplative pedagogy includes activities that intentionally build awareness and encourage exploration of consciousness and lived experience, all without requiring any specific religious beliefs. Barbezat and Bush's (2014) analysis suggests that mindfulness-based approaches enhance students' capacity for sustained attention, emotional regulation, and empathetic understanding. It supports academic achievement across diverse disciplines. Students participating in contemplative education programmes developed greater capacity for perspective-taking, emotional awareness, and compassionate responding compared to control groups, suggesting that contemplative practices cultivate universal

human capacities relevant across cultural contexts. This emerging field recognises that contemplative practices need not be explicitly religious to cultivate capacities such as attention, empathy, compassion, and ethical sensitivity, enabling meaningful engagement with complex global challenges. Such approaches offer possibilities for Global Spiritual Citizenship Education: pedagogical frameworks that honour universal human values while remaining culturally responsive and religiously neutral.

Addressing Potential Critiques and Limitations

Global Spiritual Citizenship Education invites legitimate scholarly critique. First, some secular rationalists claim that robust civic education grounded in Enlightenment thought and democratic debate is sufficient for global citizenship. These critics believe spiritual aspects are unnecessary. However, rationalist approaches may overlook key sources of motivation, emotion, and meaning that sustain ethical commitment. Research in moral psychology shows that ethical action comes not just from logic, but from a mix of emotion, intuition, and commitment to higher values (Haidt, 2001). This approach does not dismiss rational thought but argues it is not enough to solve humanity's greatest challenges.

Second, some critics may question whether contemplative teaching methods work in under-resourced schools. These schools face bigger issues, such as a lack of literacy, poor infrastructure, and teacher shortages. However, evidence from Nepal and similar settings shows that dialogue-based, culturally rooted methods can thrive with limited resources. These approaches may even support both academic and social development. The issue is not whether these schools can afford holistic education, but whether they can afford to ignore the relational and ethical factors vital to social and collective progress. However, any plan must respect resource limits and use approaches that can last in the current environment.

Third, policymakers want tangible results and accountability. Empathy, compassion, and interconnectedness are hard to measure. Although this is a valid concern, research in social-emotional learning has created tools to measure relational skills, perspective-taking, and ethical thinking (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning [CASEL], 2020). Assessments must meet accountability demands while recognising that not all educational outcomes can be standardised without losing their true value.

Finally, universal approaches might risk imposing dominant cultural values on others and ignoring local wisdom, potentially amounting to cultural imperialism in educational reform. However, Global Spiritual Citizenship Education aims to respect local cultures and community control. It develops universal human abilities through culture-specific teaching, not by enforcing one method for all. Constant care is needed to avoid making everything the same. This means regular community consultations and strong leadership from local and indigenous groups during periods of change.

Theoretical Synthesis: Towards Transformative Educational Paradigms

Building on foundational insights while addressing their limitations, this paper proposes that contemporary education requires a fundamental paradigm shift from instrumental to transformational purposes. Global Spiritual Citizenship Education draws on critical

pedagogy, the ethics of care, contemplative education, and global citizenship theory. It goes beyond current frameworks by focusing on universal human capacities: empathy, interconnectedness, and ethical reasoning, all within locally grounded and culturally responsive settings. This approach fills a crucial gap in educational discourse. There is a lack of frameworks that honour cultural wisdom, remain secular, and build deep human capacities to tackle global challenges together. Existing methods often prioritise universal rationality over cultural particularity or emphasise cultural difference while neglecting shared human values. However, Global Spiritual Citizenship Education shows that we can cultivate compassion, empathy, and ethical reasoning through teaching that respects local wisdom traditions, thus building global consciousness.

This framework sees spiritual dimensions in education as separate from religious content. It does not reduce academic rigour. Instead, focusing on relationship, meaning-making, contemplation, and ethics improves both learning results and preparedness. Students become ready for the global challenges ahead. The following section outlines the framework's core principles and demonstrates how theory can inform real teaching in today's educational settings.

Global Spiritual Citizenship Education: A Transformative Pedagogical Framework

Global Spiritual Citizenship Education emerges from the recognition that contemporary educational challenges require pedagogical approaches that simultaneously honour local cultural wisdom, cultivate universal human capacities for empathy, ethical reasoning, and collaborative problem-solving. This framework advances beyond existing models by integrating insights from culturally responsive pedagogy, contemplative education, and global citizenship theory within a coherent approach to addressing ‘spiritual bankruptcy’ in contemporary education. The framework rests upon four interconnected principles: Cultural Rootedness, Universal Human Values, Contemplative Practice, and Global Consciousness. These principles operate synergistically to create learning environments that foster both intellectual development and character formation essential for meaningful engagement with global challenges.

Cultural Rootedness: Honouring Local Wisdom Traditions

Effective implementation requires deep engagement with culturally responsive pedagogical approaches, honouring students' cultural backgrounds and fostering critical consciousness. Ladson-Billings' (1995) work on culturally relevant pedagogy established that effective education for diverse student populations must demonstrate cultural competence, foster critical consciousness, and maintain high academic expectations while valuing students' home cultures and experiences. This research revealed that when educators position students' cultural knowledge as legitimate intellectual resources rather than deficits requiring remediation, both academic achievement and cultural pride increase simultaneously. Longitudinal research on integrating Aboriginal perspectives into Canadian school curricula confirms these findings, demonstrating improvements in critical thinking, self-esteem, and school retention when Indigenous ways of knowing are treated as valid intellectual frameworks rather than supplementary content (Kanu, 2011).

Gay's (2018) comprehensive analysis of culturally responsive teaching emphasises that authentic cultural responsiveness requires educators to develop 'cultural consciousness': a deep understanding of how culture shapes teaching and learning. Her research demonstrates that when educators integrate students' cultural references, communication patterns, and learning preferences into instruction while maintaining rigorous academic standards, students show enhanced engagement, deeper comprehension, and a stronger connection to educational content. This approach recognises that culture shapes not merely what students learn but how they construct knowledge and make meaning from experience. Khalifa et al. (2016) extended this scholarship through their framework for culturally responsive school leadership, arguing that institutional transformation requires leaders who can develop culturally responsive curricula and teacher preparation, engaging students and parents in community contexts. Their research emphasises that culturally responsive approaches must extend beyond individual classroom practices to encompass whole-school cultures honouring diverse ways of knowing and being. This systemic perspective recognises that isolated culturally responsive practices within otherwise dominant cultural frameworks prove insufficient for genuine transformation.

Within Global Spiritual Citizenship Education, cultural rootedness involves systematic integration of Indigenous wisdom traditions, religious contemplative practices, and local knowledge systems that cultivate universal human values through culturally specific approaches. Indigenous perspectives emphasise that humans are not separate from the natural world but exist within an interconnected web of relationships that carry ethical responsibilities (Cajete, 2000). For example, *Ubuntu* philosophy from Southern African traditions offers profound insights into interconnectedness and collective responsibility that inform global citizenship education while remaining grounded in specific cultural contexts (Ramose, 2003). The concept that 'a person is a person through other persons' provides a culturally resonant foundation for understanding mutual dependence and shared humanity, transcending individualistic frameworks dominating Western educational discourse. Similarly, Islamic concepts of *Ummah* provide culturally grounded frameworks for understanding universal human brotherhood, transcending national boundaries while honouring religious identity (Esposito, 2011). Buddhist traditions emphasising compassion and interconnectedness, Hindu concepts of 'Dharma' as righteous duty towards collective wellbeing, and indigenous practices of community decision-making offer diverse cultural entry points for cultivating universal capacities for empathy and ethical reasoning. This approach recognises that spiritual dimensions need not be universally articulated to foster universally valuable capacities, that cultural particularity and universal aspiration prove mutually reinforcing rather than contradictory (Dhakal et al., 2024a).

Universal Human Values: Empathy, Compassion, and Ethical Reasoning

Global Spiritual Citizenship Education recognises that certain human capacities prove essential across all cultural contexts for addressing shared global challenges. Empathy enables perspective-taking essential for navigating cultural differences and resolving conflicts peacefully. Compassion provides an ethical foundation for solidarity and collective action. Ethical reasoning enables thoughtful engagement with complex challenges lacking simple solutions. These universal capacities need not be cultivated through culturally neutral approaches. Rather, cultural traditions provide diverse pathways for developing shared human qualities through locally meaningful practices. The framework thus positions culture

not as an obstacle to universal values but as an essential resource for their cultivation. This perspective challenges both cultural relativism and cultural imperialism, imposing particular cultural expressions as universal norms. Research in moral development supports this integrated approach. Haidt's (2001) social intuitionist model demonstrates that moral judgements emerge through complex interactions between intuition, emotion, and reasoning shaped by cultural contexts. This suggests that cultivating ethical reasoning requires attending to emotional and intuitive dimensions alongside rational deliberation, that moral education must engage whole persons within culturally meaningful frameworks rather than abstract principles divorced from lived experience.

Contemplative Practice: Developing Inner Capacities

Contemplative practices provide crucial methodologies for cultivating attention, self-awareness, emotional regulation, and ethical sensitivity essential for meaningful learning and global citizenship. Practices such as mindfulness, reflective writing, contemplative dialogue, and meditative inquiry enhance both academic learning and personal development while remaining accessible across diverse cultural and religious backgrounds. Scholarship on contemplative pedagogy identifies multiple approaches suitable for secular educational contexts: stillness practices including meditation and centering, movement practices such as walking meditation and martial arts, creative practices including journaling and artistic expression, activist practices such as bearing witness and service learning, and relational practices including deep listening and dialogue (Coburn et al., 2011; Simmer-Brown & Grace, 2011). This diversity enables culturally responsive implementation, fostering universal capacities for inner awareness and ethical reasoning.

Barbezat and Bush's (2014) research found that students participating in contemplative education programmes developed greater capacity for sustained attention, emotional regulation, and empathetic understanding compared to control groups. Particularly significant is evidence that contemplative practices enhance academic achievement, reducing stress and anxiety, suggesting that attending to inner development enhances rather than detracts from intellectual performance. Mindfulness-based approaches provide particularly promising frameworks for secular educational contexts. Zenner et al.'s (2014) meta-analysis examining mindfulness interventions in schools found consistent positive effects on cognitive performance, stress resilience, and emotional wellbeing across diverse student populations. Teachers implementing mindfulness programmes report improved classroom climate, stronger student relationships, and increased job satisfaction (Roeser et al., 2013), suggesting that contemplative approaches benefit entire learning communities rather than individual students alone.

Global Consciousness Through Local Action

Global Spiritual Citizenship Education recognises that authentic global consciousness emerges through deep engagement with local challenges rather than abstract study of distant issues. This principle builds upon Dewey's (1916) insight that meaningful learning occurs through genuine problems and real consequences within students' lived experience. Global awareness disconnected from local action risks producing abstract cosmopolitanism lacking practical commitment to solidarity and justice. Service-learning pedagogies provide crucial

frameworks for connecting local engagement with global consciousness. Eyler and Giles' (1999) seminal research demonstrated that well-designed service-learning experiences enhance students' civic responsibility, personal efficacy, and moral development, deepening learning through real-world application. Their analysis revealed that programmes incorporating sustained reflection, genuine community partnership, and connection to academic content produce more significant outcomes than either classroom learning or volunteer service alone. Mitchell's (2008) analysis of critical service-learning demonstrates how community engagement can foster both local problem-solving capacity and critical consciousness about systemic inequalities. This approach aligns with Global Spiritual Citizenship Education's emphasis on connecting local action with understanding of global structural challenges, recognising that addressing immediate community needs requires examining broader patterns of inequality, power, and resource distribution.

Moreover, research on global virtual exchanges offers promising models for connecting local action with global consciousness by leveraging digital technologies. O'Dowd's (2018) analysis of telecollaborative learning demonstrates that structured online exchanges between students in different countries enhance intercultural competence, global awareness, and collaborative problem-solving skills when designed around shared inquiry into meaningful challenges. These approaches enable students to develop global consciousness through authentic relationships and collaborative action rather than abstract study, fostering lasting cross-cultural friendships and continued international collaboration beyond programme completion (Lee & Markey, 2014).

Relationship-Centred Learning Communities

Central to Global Spiritual Citizenship Education is recognition that meaningful learning emerges through authentic relationships characterised by care, respect, and mutual engagement. This principle draws from Noddings' (2005) ethics of care, positioning caring relationships as the foundation of educational practice. Schools should become places where teachers and students live together, talk with each other, and take delight in each other's company, where the relationship itself becomes the primary curriculum through which all other learning occurs. The CASEL's (2020) framework identifies five core competencies essential for effective learning: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. These competencies align closely with capacities cultivated through contemplative practice, cultural responsiveness, and ethical reasoning. Hence, systematic attention to these dimensions enhances both academic achievement and wellbeing, preparing students for meaningful participation in democratic societies.

Assessment and Implementation Considerations

Assessing Global Spiritual Citizenship Education outcomes requires approaches honouring both academic achievement and character development while remaining culturally responsive and developmentally appropriate. Traditional standardised assessments prove inadequate for capturing growth in empathy, ethical reasoning, or capacity for cross-cultural relationships. Portfolio-based assessment approaches offer promising alternatives for documenting student growth across multiple dimensions, honouring diverse learning styles and cultural

expressions (Arter & Spandel, 1992). Community-based assessment approaches involving local community members in evaluating students' contributions to real-world problem-solving offer additional strategies for measuring practical outcomes. These approaches honour community knowledge, fostering accountability to local needs and priorities. The International Baccalaureate's (2019) approach to assessing approaches to learning and global engagement through extended projects and reflective portfolios provides models for measuring complex competencies extending beyond traditional academic subjects. However, successful implementation requires careful attention to local contexts, institutional readiness, and community concerns about secular approaches to spiritual dimensions in education. Khalifa (2018) emphasised that institutional transformation requires sustained community engagement, culturally responsive curriculum development, and ongoing professional development to build educator capacity for culturally sustaining practice. Professional development approaches must address educators' own cultural consciousness, contemplative practice experience, and capacity to facilitate dialogue across difference, requiring sustained investment that extends beyond technical training to encompass personal growth and cultural competency development.

The following section examines how these principles manifest in practice through three case studies from Rwanda, Finland, and Nepal, exploring the framework's potential applicability across diverse cultural contexts, illuminating both successes and ongoing challenges in transformative education implementation.

Global Applications: Case Studies in Transformative Education

The theoretical principles of Global Spiritual Citizenship Education find preliminary support through diverse international implementations, suggesting the framework's potential across varied cultural contexts. Three cases illuminate how educational systems integrate spiritual dimensions, fostering both academic achievement and character development: Rwanda's post-genocide reconciliation education, Finland's wellbeing-centred approach, and Nepal's post-conflict inclusive pedagogy.

Rwanda: Unity and Reconciliation Through Educational Transformation

Rwanda's post-genocide educational reconstruction shows key principles of Global Spiritual Citizenship Education, a model rooted in ethical, spiritual values shared across cultures. This approach was used to address social trauma after the 1994 genocide, as rebuilding schools focused on healing, reconciling, uniting the country, and restoring learning. Freedman et al. (2008) describe how curriculum reform aimed to blend universal human values, such as dignity and mutual respect, with local wisdom to bridge divides. Teaching focused on dialogue, empathy, and the exploration of identity, belonging, and responsibility. Students study Rwandan values of unity and how they relate to diversity and inclusion (Blackie & Hitchcott, 2018). This reflects Cultural Rootedness, the integration of traditions and philosophies into education, manifested in concepts such as *Ubwiyunge* (reconciliation after conflict) and *Ubushingantahe* (a traditional system of mediation and moral integrity). Rather than relying solely on external peace education models, the curriculum incorporates Indigenous wisdom within established frameworks.

Building on these educational efforts, research points to positive outcomes. King (2014) found that unity education fosters cross-ethnic friendships, perspective-taking (the ability to see from others' viewpoints), and empathy. Graduates show a commitment to reconciliation (restoring relationships) and community leadership. These findings show that spiritual meaning, empathy, and ethical commitment can lead to real progress toward social healing, though there is little long-term data. Blackie and Hitchcott (2018) note both successes and ongoing issues. Prejudice has lessened, but some communities still resist because trauma is unresolved. Teachers who are unprepared for sensitive conversations often use standard teaching methods, which weakens the program. Similar patterns have been observed in Northern Ireland's integrated schools, where teachers sometimes prioritise harmony over genuine engagement with divisive issues, limiting the transformative potential of peace education (Donnelly, 2004). Together, these insights highlight that future educational change must prioritise healing at the community level and require strong teacher training in culture, trauma, and dialogue leadership to achieve lasting impact (Russell, 2020).

Finland: Holistic Development Through 'Sivistys'

Finland's education system shows how Global Spiritual Citizenship Education can be embedded within national policy frameworks prioritising wellbeing and academic achievement. The Finnish National Board of Education (2016) emphasises growth as a human and societal member, recognising that meaningful learning requires emotional, social, and ethical development. Central to Finnish education is *Sivistys*, meaning personal cultivation, intellectual growth, and character, which reflects a commitment to holistic development (Sahlberg, 2014). This model values trust, collaboration, and genuine teacher–student relationships while maintaining high academic standards. Finnish schools cultivate contemplation through reflection, outdoor learning, and creativity. The lack of standardised tests until late secondary school creates space for relationship-based, personalised learning, often constrained by assessment-driven systems.

Building on this holistic framework, global education in Finland is integrated rather than treated as a separate subject. Curricula link global consciousness to local engagement through environmental projects, cultural exchanges, and inquiry into how local actions connect with global challenges (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2015). Students develop global awareness through community-based learning, illustrating Global Consciousness Through Local Action, where authentic cosmopolitanism emerges from deep engagement with place rather than abstract study. International assessments show that Finnish students achieve strong academic outcomes while reporting higher wellbeing, stronger teacher relationships, and greater intrinsic motivation than peers in test-focused systems (OECD, 2019). Although causation is complex, evidence suggests attention to spiritual dimensions complements academic success. Finland's pandemic recovery was notably resilient due to trust-based systems and strong teacher–student relationships.

Nepal: Post-Conflict Healing Through Inclusive Pedagogy

Nepal's post-conflict educational reconstruction demonstrates the application of Global Spiritual Citizenship Education in South Asian settings marked by religious diversity and social complexity. The conflict (1996–2006) disrupted schooling, damaging over 15,000

schools and creating deep social divisions (UNESCO, 2010). Recovery called for addressing trauma, promoting social cohesion, and rebuilding trust across divided communities. The Ministry of Education's School Sector Reform Programme (2009–2015) recognised the need to combine academic achievement with social healing. Peace education became part of mainstream curricula, emphasising dialogue, conflict resolution, and understanding diverse perspectives (Ministry of Education, 2009). This approach developed peaceful coexistence capacities among all students. Nepal also integrated cultural values into its education framework to enhance the impact of peace education. This set the stage for unique approaches that blended cultural tradition with formal curriculum, as explored below.

A hallmark of Nepal's approach was integrating cultural wisdom, defined as socially valued, collective insights from traditions, into secular frameworks. Drawing from the foundations established in the previous phase of educational reform, the curriculum incorporated Buddhist compassion and mindfulness (the quality of being present and aware), Hindu dharma (righteous duty or one's ethical obligation), and indigenous community decision-making (locally governed deliberative processes), fostering empathy and collective responsibility while respecting diversity (Thapa, 2013). This demonstrates how spiritual capacities and the ability to embody ethical and empathetic attitudes can be nurtured through varied cultural paths without imposing universal norms (Dhakal et al., 2024b). Schools using dialogue-based and culturally integrated methods saw better inter-ethnic cooperation and less conflict-related tension than those focusing solely on academics (Dhakal, 2024; Lopes Cardozo, 2008). Students involved in peace education demonstrated stronger perspective-taking, greater understanding of the causes of conflict, and a firmer commitment to nonviolence. However, sustainability depends on overcoming resource shortages and political instability, as well as ensuring institutional support. Ultimately, Nepal's experience highlights the need for holistic, contextually grounded strategies that bridge tradition and modern education, offering guidance for other multicultural societies seeking sustained peace and social harmony.

Synthesis: Principles in Practice

Analysis of these case studies reveals patterns supporting Global Spiritual Citizenship Education's framework. Programmes that achieve initial success demonstrate cultural rootedness, practices anchored in their traditions and contexts, and genuine community engagement. They employ contemplative practices (such as mindfulness or reflection) that enhance learning, foster global consciousness and use relationship-centred approaches that strengthen both academic achievement and character. These cases suggest integrating spiritual dimensions without religious content or diluting academic rigour may be viable across cultures, though further systematic validation through comparative and longitudinal research is needed. Implementation requires ongoing professional development, strong leadership, community consultation and ownership, and assessment methods that value multiple learning dimensions. Political context also shapes possibilities, with local autonomy and community involvement enabling more successful integration than centralised, standardised systems. These insights shape the policy pathways and implementation strategies described next.

Policy Pathways and Implementation Strategies

Scaling Global Spiritual Citizenship Education requires strong policy frameworks, addressing institutional capacity, professional development, funding, and assessment. This section outlines steps to help implement new educational methods while navigating the political, cultural, and institutional challenges encountered in major reform.

Reframing UN Sustainable Development Goal 4

The United Nations SDG 4 aims to ensure inclusive, equitable education and promote lifelong learning. However, SDG 4 must shift to address 'spiritual bankruptcy' in today's educational systems (UN, 2015). Current indicators focus on access, completion, and literacy, but often ignore meaning-making and relationships, which are key to fostering global citizenship. UNESCO's (2017) framework recognises this and emphasises education for sustainable development, global citizenship, and cultural diversity. Still, current suggestions mostly use cognitive, rational methods. These do not fully support the development of empathy, ethics, or contemplation required for real global engagement (Pashby, 2018; UNESCO, 2018). Global Spiritual Citizenship Education gives a new way to reach SDG 4's aims by making schools places for both academic learning and spiritual growth. To do this, SDG 4 indicators should also measure student wellbeing, empathy, cross-cultural relationships, and community engagement, alongside academic results. The World Bank (2018; see also UNESCO, 2021) notes that learning outcomes include social and emotional skills, not just subject knowledge. This creates space to include broader approaches in development plans, especially in places facing crisis, where such methods are most important.

International Cooperation and Knowledge Sharing

Implementing Global Spiritual Citizenship Education in different national settings needs strong international cooperation. Mechanisms for knowledge sharing must respect cultural sovereignty and local educational priorities. The UNESCO Associated Schools Network (ASPNet), which includes over 11,500 schools in 182 countries, provides a framework for piloting these approaches and recording implementation experiences (UNESCO, 2019). Expanding this network to include contemplative pedagogies, culturally responsive practices, and relationship-centred learning would enable cross-cultural learning. This would also support local adaptation. The OECD's Education 2030 framework states that education should develop knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values for well-being (OECD, 2018). This framework highlights transformative competencies such as empathy, responsibility, and collaborative problem-solving. These closely align with Global Spiritual Citizenship Education principles and give policy legitimacy for implementation. International teacher exchange programmes focused on contemplative pedagogy, culturally responsive education, and peace education can build educator capacity, promote cross-cultural learning, and enhance implementation strategies.

Professional Development and Institutional Capacity Building

Effective professional development must address educators' contemplative practices, cultural competency, and skills for facilitating dialogue across differences. As Palmer (1998) argues, good teaching stems from the teacher's identity and integrity, not just technique, so strategies for educator formation are essential. These should nurture teachers' spiritual development, cultural consciousness, and authentic relationships, while also providing pedagogical training.

Professional learning should go beyond personal practice to include culturally responsive pedagogy, conflict-resolution skills, and tools for facilitating discussions about identity, difference, and social justice. Teachers' social-emotional competence is foundational, as educators cannot effectively cultivate these capacities in students without first developing themselves (Oberle & Schonert-Reichl, 2017). Khalifa (2018) emphasises that institutional transformation depends on ongoing professional development that grows educator capacity for cultural competence, critical consciousness, and community engagement. The Mindfulness in Schools Project (2020) demonstrates that combining personal contemplative practice with classroom implementation skills benefits teachers, leading to improved emotional regulation, greater empathy, a better classroom climate, higher job satisfaction, and reduced burnout. The strongest professional development programs span multiple years, provide peer learning and collaborative inquiry, integrate personal practice with pedagogical application, and offer ongoing mentorship. Leadership development is equally crucial, as transformative programs need principals who foster a school culture valuing relationships, contemplative practice, cultural responsiveness, and academic achievement.

Funding Mechanisms and Resource Allocation

Implementing Global Spiritual Citizenship Education needs creative funding methods. These should support long-term growth, community involvement, and whole-system evaluation rather than focusing solely on short-term academic gains. Current funding in international development often prioritises clear academic outcomes in short-term projects. This makes it hard to adopt relationship-centred and contemplative methods, which need ongoing support. The Global Partnership for Education's (2022) framework addresses this issue. It highlights the need for stronger systems, fairness, and academic progress. This framework provides ways to advocate for Global Spiritual Citizenship Education in international funding, especially in crisis areas that need holistic support. Private foundations are showing more interest in contemplative and social-emotional learning, which could help fund research and pilot programs to build evidence for wider use. Community-based funding adds important support to institutional grants, especially for indigenous and post-conflict education. Local communities can help set education priorities through participatory budgeting. This ensures that programs match real community needs, increase local ownership, and support sustainability.

Assessment and Accountability Frameworks

Traditional standardised assessments often fail to accurately measure the key outcomes of Global Spiritual Citizenship Education. New assessment frameworks must blend academic achievement with character development, be culturally responsive, and practical. Portfolio-based systems can track student growth in multiple areas and give authentic evidence of learning. The International Baccalaureate (2019) assesses learning and global engagement through projects and reflective portfolios, providing a model for measuring complex skills beyond academic achievement. Community-based assessments involve local members in judging students' contributions to real-world problems. This respects community knowledge and builds local accountability. Peer assessment and self-reflection help students track their own growth in empathy, ethics, and collaboration (Schön, 1992).

Addressing Political and Cultural Challenges

Implementing Global Spiritual Citizenship Education might face significant political and cultural challenges, particularly given differing views on secular versus spiritual education in public systems. The central difficulty is reconciling conservative concerns about identity, dialogue, and contemplative practices with secular reservations about the use of spiritual language in schools. Meeting these challenges requires precise language, open community consultation, and clear evidence that such education strengthens rather than threatens local values. Maintaining a distinction between spiritual development and religious instruction is essential. In an increasingly polarised climate, successful implementation depends on thorough engagement, empirical proof of effectiveness, a focus on universal values above specific traditions, and persistent, patient dialogue rather than coercion.

Conclusion: Education as a Pathway to Spiritual Renewal

Contemporary educational systems show 'spiritual bankruptcy' at a time when humanity faces global challenges that demand collective wisdom, empathy, and cooperation. The COVID-19 pandemic, rising mental health crises, long-standing conflicts, and rapid technological change show that education focused only on efficiency fails to prepare citizens who can heal social divisions and address shared challenges with solidarity and understanding.

This paper's central contribution is to outline Global Spiritual Citizenship Education as a comprehensive theoretical framework, which refers to an approach to education that fosters both spiritual awareness and global responsibility among learners. This framework brings together insights from critical pedagogy, which questions power dynamics in education; culturally responsive education, which adapts teaching to learners' cultural backgrounds; contemplative learning, which emphasises self-reflection and mindfulness; and global citizenship theory, which encourages students to see themselves as members of a global community. It proposes that universal human capacities, such as empathy, compassion, interconnectedness, and ethical reasoning, can be systematically developed and cultivated through evidence-based teaching that transcends religious boundaries while respecting diverse cultural wisdom traditions.

Its four foundational principles are: Cultural Rootedness (grounding learning in local cultural contexts), Universal Human Values (emphasising values like respect and integrity shared across cultures), Contemplative Practice (using mindfulness and reflection techniques), and Global Consciousness (awareness of global interconnections and responsibilities). These provide concrete guidance for educational transformation while remaining adaptable across diverse cultural contexts. Preliminary evidence from Rwanda, Finland, and Nepal suggests that incorporating spiritual dimensions into education supports both academic success and character development. These cases indicate that contemplative practices, encouraging dialogue, and focusing on meaning-making are associated with positive outcomes. Such approaches help cultivate skills needed for democratic participation and peaceful coexistence. However, implementation challenges remain, including limited professional development resources, political resistance, and assessment difficulties. Addressing these barriers requires ongoing institutional dedication, broad community involvement, and new policy frameworks.

Global Spiritual Citizenship Education addresses educational crises through transformative learning, supporting the UN's SDG 4: Quality Education mandate. Scaling these approaches calls for rethinking education's purpose. Instead of simply transmitting information, schools must promote human transformation. Quality indicators should go beyond academic results to include relational and ethical measures. Professional development must help educators grow their own contemplative skills and cultural awareness. Educational systems face a choice: continue with narrow, mechanistic methods that fragment development, or adopt transformative models grounded in universal values and relationship-focused, culturally responsive teaching. Students today face challenges such as climate change, technological shifts, inequality, and social division. Their ability to respond together relies on how schools nurture their spiritual development for wise, compassionate action. Global Spiritual Citizenship Education positions education as the key to spiritual renewal. It offers ways to make schools into communities where learners develop both intellect and the character needed for a just, sustainable, and spiritually renewed world, anchored in relationship, wisdom, and collective commitment.

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