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# Beyond Literacy and Numeracy: Cultivating Global Mindsets in Malaysian Education

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Education for sustainable development (ESD) has been globally informed on the mission to transform learning environments at all levels. As the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has become the leading agency for ESD, this organization is also responsible for the implementation of the framework ESD for 2030. Thus, there are five main ideas highlighted, namely, advancing policy, transforming learning environments, building capacities of educators, empowering and mobilising young people, and accelerating local levels of action (UNESCO, 2024).



Teaching and learning should encourage students to be globally prepared in various ways. It is deemed important that education becomes a central part of understanding the surroundings and the world. It should be the means to escape poverty and open the doors to many opportunities. Research done by the Ministry of Education reported that factors contributing to Malaysian students' dropout rates at schools from the family domain were "poverty, parents of low academic backgrounds, and a lack of interest in their children's education" (UNICEF, 2023). At the school level, more than 95% of secondary school students at risk of dropping out came from families with a monthly income of less than RM 1,500. Apart from being financially underprivileged, these students

had low academic achievement, "absenteeism, disciplinary problems, and a lack of motivation to study" (UNICEF, 2023). This suggests that the students need a learning environment to nurture their own learning process. An environment that cultivates knowledge can be obtained through understanding cultural diversity and learning the values that can be adopted.

Through cultural awareness programmes, students can learn about other cultures all over the world, and this can indirectly shape the students' worldview towards global issues. Based on Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2018, 15-year-old Malaysian students demonstrated lower abilities to connect real-world issues to their learning and act upon them (United Nations Children's Fund, 2023). However, the report indicated that the respondents showed an interest in learning about other cultures, whereas Malaysian students scored significantly lower in awareness of "global issues, respect for people of other cultures, cognitive adaptability and self-efficacy regarding global issues and perspective-taking". To promote global awareness at the university level, lecturers and administrators can spread the awareness through campus recycling programmes, hallway displays and study abroad initiatives (Katzarska-Miller & Reysen, 2021). Moreover, the integration of global issues can be embedded in the teaching and learning process where students are exposed to global issues such as global warming and climate change through in-class discussions and activities. Research indicates that the Malaysian education system has made strides in incorporating Global Citizenship Education (GCED) at the school level, which has been shown to effectively nurture global citizenship among students (Kamaruddin & Matore, 2020). GCED is a crucial component of SDG Target 4.7, which aims to attain SDG 4 and Agenda 2030. It assists students in gaining the 21st-century knowledge and skills necessary to become



responsible citizens who can act locally and think globally, as well as contribute to the creation of sustainable, inclusive, and peaceful societies (APCEIU, 2021). Despite that, the implementation of GCED at the university level remains limited, thus, it is a call to integrate these elements more thoroughly among university students. A study involving Malaysian university students found that while they possess moderate levels of knowledge, skills and attitudes towards global citizenship, there is a significant need for deeper and more widespread integration of GCED at the tertiary level (Yusof et al., 2019).

Therefore, education should not only transcend beyond how to read, write and count but also understanding the values and manners. From an educational perspective, students should learn about the importance of having a global mindset alongside the academic knowledge that they have. As academic practitioners work hand in hand to materialise the educational goals at national and international levels, there is a growing need for students to equip themselves with a global approach yet be locally grounded. By being fully prepared with the necessary skills needed, students will be able to become “ethical, empathetic and respectful human beings” (UNESCO, 2024) who can adapt to and survive the challenges and fears of an increasingly interconnected world.

**Figure 1**  
Links between SDG 4 and other SDGs



Retrieved from National Progress Report on SDG 4: Education 2030 Malaysia, as cited in Vladmirova and Le Blanc (2015)

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