
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

A Systematic Self-Review of Global Dimensions in L1 School Textbooks (2003-2006) with Implications for Contemporary Curricula

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| ABSTRACT

This study conducted a systematic review of the author's research on the integration of global themes into the national school textbooks in L1 context. A corpus of six studies published between 2003–2006 was organized into four thematic clusters: local and global dimensions in Saudi textbooks, global dimensions in international curricula, forward looking curriculum design, and cultural and global education in L1 and heritage language contexts abroad. A unified four dimension framework consisting of global systems, current global issues, human values, and world history, was used to analyze all the textbooks and design the global education course model. Findings from Saudi history and reading textbooks revealed an almost complete absence of global themes, with only 1.5% of content across the nine history textbooks and a similarly negligible representation in reading textbooks. The early 2000s Saudi curricula were oriented toward national identity formation, moral instruction, and local cultural narratives. In contrast, the Singaporean social studies textbooks showed between 35%–64% of the textbooks integrated global themes across the secondary grades. This comparison highlights how national priorities and educational philosophies shape the presence, or absence, of global dimensions in L1 school education. The author's proposed global education course for Grades 7–12 translates the four dimension framework into a coherent 13 unit curricular model. This forward looking course model illustrates how global systems, human values, contemporary global issues, and world history can be embedded across grade levels to support both national identity and global citizenship. Additionally, the study on teaching Arabic and Islamic culture to Arab children living abroad extends the analysis into diaspora contexts, showing how L1 loss in foreign environments leads to weakened cultural continuity, reduced access to religious and historical texts, and erosion of communal belonging. Taken together, the four clusters present a multilayered picture of how global themes are conceptualized and operationalized across national, international, and diaspora settings. Global education in L1 contexts is shaped not only by curricular design but also by national priorities, global mobility, and identity politics. This SR establishes the first unified evidence base for integrating global themes into L1 curricula, providing a foundational framework for future textbook reform and globally responsive curriculum design.

| KEYWORDS

Systematic review (SR), Al-Jarf research program, global themes, global dimension, local dimension, national curricula, school textbooks, history textbooks, reading textbooks, social studies textbooks.

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

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1. Introduction

Global education¹ is an approach to learning that prepares students for an increasingly interconnected world. It focuses on global issues, cultural diversity, and sustainable development, integrating these concepts across traditional subjects to cultivate informed and responsible global citizens. By weaving international perspectives, cross-cultural understanding, and contemporary

¹ <https://www.participatelearning.com/blog/8-connected-concepts-of-global-learning/>

global issues into the learning experience, global education equips students with the critical thinking, adaptability, and empathy needed to thrive in globalized society and workforce. Its core dimensions include (i) Interconnectedness, understanding how economic, environmental, and political developments in one nation affect others. (ii) Cultural Awareness, appreciating diverse cultures, reducing biases, and fostering empathy; and (iii) Complex Problem Solving, addressing global crises (e.g., climate change, technological shifts).

As higher and K-12 education becomes increasingly borderless, curricula must evolve beyond rote memorization towards dynamic, participatory learning. Global education shifts the pedagogy toward active participation, encouraging students to become agents of positive social change. Schools typically adopt a global curriculum through several frameworks: (1) International Standards²: Frameworks such as the International Baccalaureate (IB) or Cambridge Assessment, which build global citizenship within their core programs; (2) Place- and Project-Based Learning³ which enables students to investigate and address community issues with global relevance; and (3) Cross-Curricular Integration⁴, where global themes, such as sustainability or ethics or human rights, are woven across existing subjects rather than taught as a standalone course (Cates, 2022).

Despite the growing importance of global awareness and interconnectedness in today's world, a comprehensive review of the literature reveals that most existing research consists of isolated, single studies proposing specific global education courses for school curricula. However, systematic reviews (SRs) and meta-analyses (MAs) on global education, and specifically on the integration of global issues into school curricula and textbooks, remain limited.

A few SRs examined specific areas of cultural representation and citizenship education. For instance, two SRs investigated gender biases in primary language textbooks (Ahmed & Tian, 2023) and cultural representation in educational textbooks (Matt et al., 2025). Another two SRs focused on global citizenship and global education, such as methods for achieving and monitoring education for sustainable development and global citizenship (Edwards et al., 2020) and mapped the general landscape of global citizenship education research (Santamaría Cardaba et al., 2024). Additional specialized SRs addressed cultural, Indigenous, and intercultural education within professional or regional training. These include (i) integrating cultural topics within dental curricula to develop intercultural competence (Álvarez Cruces et al., 2024); (ii) mapping Indigenous health curricula for health professional learners (Francis Cracknell et al., 2019); implementation and impact of Indigenous health curricula (Pitama et al., 2018); (iii) elevating Aboriginal voices and Indigenous education (Guenther, Harrison & Burgess, 2019); and (iv) assessing the status of culturally relevant teacher education within the European context (Koukoulidis et al., 2024).

Collectively, these reviews demonstrate global interest in citizenship and cultural education, yet they also reveal a clear scholarly gap: cultural and global themes have not been systematically reviewed in relation to national school textbooks, school curricula, or first-language (L1) and heritage-language contexts. This gap underscores the need for a focused examination of how global themes are embedded, or omitted, in foundational educational materials.

To address this gap, the current study aims to conduct a systematic self-review of the author's research on the integration of global themes into school curricula and textbooks for native-speaking students. It analyzes a corpus of six comprehensive studies published between 2003 and 2006 that collectively examine how global issues have been incorporated into L1 textbooks. This approach provides a unified evidence base for understanding the structural presence of global systems, current global events, values, issues, and world history across multiple curricular contexts.

This SR is significant because it represents the first attempt to synthesize research on global education within the L1 curriculum and textbook context, offering a consolidated understanding of how global and local themes have been conceptualized, implemented, and evaluated across the author's body of research. It also serves as a timely, evidence-based guide for ministries of education seeking to modernize curricula and move beyond rote memorization toward more inquiry-based, globally responsive models of instruction.

As a systematic self-review, the study offers an unusual depth of meta-analytical insight. Because the author is the original author of all six foundational studies, she brings an insider's mastery of the datasets, localized contexts, and textual nuances. This allows the review to transform a series of pioneering individual studies into a coherent, structured scientific framework that illuminates broader curricular patterns and gaps.

The current SR shifts the global education issue toward first-language and heritage-language contexts. It examines how national textbooks, such as those in Saudi Arabia and Singapore, and heritage programs for Arab families abroad negotiate the complex balance between preserving cultural identity and fostering global awareness. By synthesizing studies that evaluated entire

² [Global Curriculum: Meaning, Benefits & Why It Matters Today](#)

³ [Global education - Wikipedia](#)

⁴ [Global Issues and Cross-Curricular Learning: Rich Education](#)

curriculum landscapes (e.g., history curricula from grades 4–12, national reading programs (Grades 7-12), and cross-border comparisons), the review provides educators and policymakers with a holistic roadmap rather than isolated findings. It demonstrates how global dimensions can be integrated sequentially across grade levels without overlooking local identity.

Unlike second-language education, where culture is often treated as an external communicative skill, L1 curricula function as the primary vehicle for shaping national identity and cultural continuity. Integrating global dimensions into these materials, therefore requires a nuanced pedagogical balance, one that respects local heritage while preparing learners for participation in an interconnected world.

By analyzing these multi-dimensional datasets, this study offers a comprehensive overview of how cultural awareness, global dimensions, and contemporary international issues are structurally integrated into L1 textbooks and school curricula. It lays the groundwork for future curriculum development, textbook reform, and comparative international research.

2. Theoretical Framework

The Global Topics Framework

In 2003, the author synthesized a global education framework drawing on studies by Collins et al. (1996), Broyles & Krawic (1990), Haakenson et al. (1995), Selby (1993), Selby & Pike (2000), Kniep (1989), Johnson et al. (1994), Nelson (1997), Thorne et al. (1992), and Werner (1996) and others. The resulting framework consists of four interrelated dimensions: global systems, current global problems and issues, diverse human values, and the history of contact and interdependence among peoples, cultures, and nations. Each dimension is outlined below.

A. Global Systems

This dimension encompasses major systems that shape global life, including cultural, political, economic, ecological, technological, social, educational, and healthcare systems, as well as international organizations and international law.

- **Cultural systems:** folk tales, traditional costumes, ethnic foods, holidays, housing, places of worship, sports and games, medical practices, children’s literature, arts, and cultural pluralism.
- **Ecological systems:** pollution, oil spills, waste management, deforestation, forest fires, endangered species, climate change, land reclamation, water-resource management, environmental protection, and desertification.
- **Economic systems:** global economic structures, economic challenges, tourism, monetary systems, oil and energy, global markets, stock exchanges, the World Bank, multinational corporations, the World Economic Forum, OPEC, GATT, and the WTO.
- **Political systems:** democracy, emerging political systems, relations between developed and developing nations, foreign relations, NATO, and major political transformations (e.g., German unification, East Timor, the African Union).
- **Healthcare systems:** public health, infant mortality, infectious and endemic diseases (e.g., SARS, Ebola, Rift Valley fever, mad cow disease, AIDS), drug-related issues, and global health challenges.
- **Educational systems:** higher education, vocational education, distance learning, illiteracy, continuing education, and e-learning.
- **International organizations:** the UN, UNESCO, UNICEF, WHO, Amnesty International, and the International Court of Justice.
- **Technological systems:** the internet, email, digital technologies, mobile communication, handheld devices, e-books, educational media, digital imaging, telecommunications, and satellite broadcasting.
- **Social systems:** elderly care, disability services, juvenile delinquency, children’s rights, child labor, social change, global summits, social classes, working women, women’s status, family structures, women’s movements, social security, unemployment, and social problems.
- **Ideological and judicial systems:** world religions, religious minorities, human rights, places of worship, ethnicity, and sectarianism.

B. Current Global Problems and Issues

This dimension includes major global challenges such as peace and conflict resolution, refugees, world peace, terrorism, violence, famine, hunger, poverty, natural disasters, migration, income inequality, inter-religious conflict, civil wars, drug addiction, homelessness, overcrowding, housing shortages, and sustainable development.

C. Diverse Human Values

This dimension highlights universal values essential for global citizenship, including tolerance, cooperation, teamwork, responsibility, participation, inclusion, volunteerism, relief work, respect for differences, solidarity, self-awareness, appreciation of national and ethnic heritage, and adaptability.

D. History of Contact and Interdependence Among Peoples, Cultures, and Nations

This dimension addresses historical interactions and shared human experiences, including ancient civilizations, major wars, colonization, liberation movements, the discovery of the New World, the history of aviation, scientific and technological development, the industrial revolution, political revolutions, linguistic history, and major conflicts of the twentieth century.

Framework Application

This four-dimension framework served as the analytical lens for examining the global and local dimensions represented in the school textbooks.

3. Methodology

This SR included studies that met all of the following criteria: (i) The study must be authored by the researcher and form part of a coherent body of work examining global education in school materials. (ii) It must examine the integration of global issues, global systems, global values, or world history within the L1 educational context. (iii) It must analyze materials intended for K–12 native-speaking students (L1 context), including school curricula, textbooks, or proposed school courses. (iv) It must present empirical findings, content analysis, curriculum analysis, or a structured instructional model, not opinion pieces or general essays. (v) It must address global themes within the first-language (L1) curriculum or textbooks (e.g., Arabic for Saudi students). (vi) It must provide enough methodological detail (e.g., units analyzed, themes, categories, results) to allow synthesis and comparison across studies.

A. Study Corpus and Thematic Clustering

The final corpus comprises six that share: (i) The same data source: national school textbooks. (ii) The same methodological approach: Qualitative and quantitative content analysis (CA). (iii) The same theoretical lens: a four-dimension global education framework consisting of *global systems*, *human values*, *current global events and problems*, and *world history*. The six studies were categorized into four thematic clusters as follows:

Culter 1: The local and global dimensions in Saudi Textbooks

This cluster contains 3 studies that examine how global themes are represented within Saudi school textbooks across reading and history curricula. The studies analyze the extent to which global issues, world history, and international perspectives are embedded in L1 materials, revealing patterns of inclusion, omission, and emphasis within the national curriculum. The studies are:

Study 1: *the Saudi national reading curriculum: global issues (Al-Jarf, 2006e)*

Study 2: *does the Saudi national curriculum teach global history (Al-Jarf, 2006a)*

Study 3: *the global dimension in Saudi history textbooks for grades 4-12 (Al-Jarf, 2003)*

Custer 2: local and global dimensions in international curricula

This cluster consists of one study that investigates global themes in Singaporean secondary social studies textbooks. By analyzing an internationally recognized curriculum, this study offers a comparative lens that highlights how another education system integrates global issues, values, and systems. The cluster provides an external benchmark that enriches the synthesis and situates the Saudi findings within a broader international context.

Study 4: *global themes in Singaporean secondary social studies textbooks (Al-Jarf, 2003a)*

Cluster 3: Forward-Looking Curriculum Design and Applied Models Education Models

This cluster includes one study that proposes a structured model for a global education course tailored to Saudi junior and senior high school students. It presents a forward-looking curriculum design grounded in the same four-dimension framework. Unlike the previous clusters, which analyze existing textbooks, it demonstrates how global themes can be intentionally and systematically embedded in L1 instruction, offering a practical blueprint for curriculum reform.

Study 5: *A model for global education course for Saudi schools (Al-Jarf, 2004a)*

Cluster 4: Cultural and Global Education in L1 & Heritage Contexts Abroad

This cluster includes one study that addresses global migration, cultural preservation, and minority diaspora education. The study investigates the socio-educational demands of heritage communities living in non-Arab host countries.

Study 6: *The Need for Teaching the Arabic Language and Islamic Culture to Children of Arab Communities Living Abroad* (Al-Jarf, 2004h)

Although the final corpus consisted of 6 studies, 5 studies shared the same methodological approach (content analysis), the same data source (school textbooks), and the same global analytical framework (global systems, human values, current global events and problems, and world history). This high level of methodological and conceptual homogeneity allows for a deep and coherent thematic synthesis despite the small corpus size.

3.2 Eligibility (Inclusion & Exclusion) Criteria

Studies were excluded if they did not meet these criteria, fell outside the L1 textbook and curricular scope, or addressed unrelated cultural, linguistic, or sociopolitical issues. The following types of studies were excluded.

- **Author's duplicate studies:** *A model for a global education course for Saudi junior and senior high schools* (Al-Jarf, 2020a).
- **Author's studies that focus on cultural and global issues in second language (L2/EFL) instructional settings as in:** *Developing global awareness in the EFL classroom* (Al-Jarf, 2004f); *Integrating global culture in EFL college materials* (Al-Jarf, 2007b); *Integrating global themes in EFL speaking instruction* (Al-Jarf, 2008a); *Integrating global themes in writing instruction* (Al-Jarf, 2011d); *Developing students' global awareness in EFL reading and speaking* (Al-Jarf, 2022d); *Integrating current global events and technology in interpreting practice* (Al-Jarf, 2022h); *Enhancing reading and speaking skills in EFL through multicultural children's short stories* (Al-Jarf, 2015); *Integrating ethnic culture Facebook pages in EFL instruction* (Al-Jarf, 2014b); *Integrating cultural podcasts in EFL college classrooms* (Al-Jarf, 2011c); *Teaching English with linguistic landscapes to Saudi students studying abroad* (Al-Jarf, 2021c); *Bloggging about sustainable development in the EFL college classroom* (Al-Jarf, 2025a); *Bloggging about current global events in the EFL writing classroom: effects on skill improvement, global awareness and attitudes* (Al-Jarf, 2022b); *Bloggging about the covid-19 pandemic in EFL writing courses* (Al-Jarf, 2022c); *Combating the covid-19 hate and racism speech on social media* (Al-Jarf, 2021a); *Developing and testing reading skills through art texts* (Al-Jarf, 2011a); *Enhancing EFL students' reading and appreciation skills with mobile fiction apps* (Al-Jarf, 2022g); *Effect of background knowledge on auditory comprehension in interpreting courses* (Al-Jarf, 2018b; Al-Jarf, 2018c); *Teaching the target culture using a wiki* (Al-Jarf, 2008b); *Teaching language and culture online* (Al-Jarf, 2003b); *Impact of online instruction on EFL students' cultural awareness* (Al-Jarf, 2006b); *Cultural Issues in Online Collaborative Instruction in EFL Classrooms* (Al-Jarf, 2007a); *The online writing collaboration project for EFL learners and instructors* (Al-Jarf, 2005b); *Building cross-cultural communication through online collaboration* (Al-Jarf, 2004b); *Developing cross-cultural understanding through online forums* (Al-Jarf, 2004e); *Using online dialogue to develop cross-cultural understanding* (Al-Jarf, 2006f); *Connecting the EFL classroom with local and global communities* (Al-Jarf, 2009a); *Online collaboration in translation instruction among students and instructors* (Al-Jarf, 2008d); *Cross-cultural communication: Saudi, Ukrainian, and Russian students online* (Al-Jarf, 2004d); *Building cultural bridges through social media networks: a case study* (Al-Jarf, 2020b; Al-Jarf, 2020c); *Collaborative distance Arabic language learning between Russian and Arab students in Africa* (Al-Jarf, 2025b) and *online intercultural communication among Saudi, Ukrainian and Russian students online* (Al-Jarf, 2004g).
- **Author's studies on the local-global language dynamics and Sociolinguistic Shifts (Intersection of English and Arabic)** such as *English language education at the elementary school level in Saudi Arabia: A parents' perspective* (Al-Jarf, 2022f); *Dominance of foreign shop names over Arabic names in Saudi Arabia: Promotional, sociocultural and globalization issues* (Al-Jarf, 2022e); *A linguistic-cultural investigation of hotel names in Saudi Arabia* (Al-Jarf, 2021b); *marginalization of the Arabic language by educational institutions in the Arab World* (Al-Jarf, 2018d); *Arab preference for foreign words over Arabic equivalents* (Al-Jarf, 2016a); *The language of adult social networks* (Al-Jarf, 2011e); *Dominance of foreign words over Arabic equivalents in educated Arab speech* (Al-Jarf, 2011b); *the impact of English as an international language (EIL) upon Arabic in Saudi Arabia* (Al-Jarf, 2008c); *College students' attitudes towards using English and Arabic as a medium of instruction at the university level* (Al-Jarf, 2004c); *The power of the English language in the past, present and future* (Al-Jarf, 2005c).

- **Author's studies in which culture and global themes are only a partial component** such as *Evaluation of Russian Arabic language teaching textbooks in the light of CEFR criteria (Al-Jarf & Mingazova (2020d); ESL teachers' online discussion forums (Al-Jarf, 2014a); and Teachers' online discussion forums in Saudi Arabia (Al-Jarf, 2006c; Al-Jarf, 2006d).*
- **Author's studies on purely linguistic equivalence and cultural translation problems such as *ibn (son) and bint (daughter) fixed expressions (Al-Jarf, 2023a); Arabic and English dar (house) and bayt (home) expressions (Al-Jarf, 2022a); issues in translating Arabic om- and abu-expressions (Al-Jarf, 2016b); translation of English and Arabic binomials by advanced and novice translators (Al-Jarf, 2016c); Expressions of impossibility in Arabic and English: unveiling students' translation difficulties (Al-Jarf, 2024a); linguistic and cultural issues in translating English and Arabic plurals (Al-Jarf, 2019; Al-Jarf, 2020e).***
- **Author's studies on local or global issues in sociopolitical discourse** as in: *Political (in)correctness and cancel-culture attitude (Al-Jarf, 2023b); Metaphorical political slurs in Arab social media discourse describing Middle East Conflicts (Al-Jarf, 2025c); Sectarian language after the Arab Spring (Al-Jarf, 2022i); Onomastic study of personal names (Al-Jarf, 2023); the interchange of personal names in Muslim communities (Al-Jarf, 2023c; The Gaza-Israel war terminology: implications for translation pedagogy (Al-Jarf, 2024b).*
- **Non-empirical studies and culture course materials.** Examples are: *American and Arabic cultures for translation students (Al-Jarf, 1994a); American culture for translation students (Al-Jarf, 1994b).*
- **Author's studies on institutional collaboration, gender studies, and non-language, non-curriculum and non-textbook contexts,** as: *Connecting students across universities in Saudi Arabia (Al-Jarf, 2005a); and electronic collaboration among Arab universities (Al-Jarf, 2009b), Connecting Graduate Students Across the World with Research Web-conferences (Al-Jarf, 2018a); Videoconferencing for segregated campuses (Al-Jarf, 2005d); Women, Gender and Education: Gulf and Saudi Arabia (Al-Jarf, 2006g); Women administrators in segregated higher educational institutions in Saudi Arabia (Al-Jarf & AlBakr, 2013).*

B. Corpus Characteristics

The dataset in this corpus represents a closed, historically bounded body of research on the global dimension in L1 school materials conducted between 2003 and 2006. It is both comprehensive and internally coherent, reflecting the author's sustained scholarly trajectory in applying a unified analytical framework to examine global themes in Saudi and Singaporean school textbooks. Across the six studies, the methodological designs are comparable, drawing on descriptive, qualitative, and quantitative analyses. Collectively, the studies illustrate how the same global-dimension framework was consistently applied to national textbooks and proposed curricula in two distinct educational systems.

To facilitate synthesis, the six studies were organized into four thematic clusters, each representing a distinct dimension of the author's broader research program. These clusters provide a consolidated overview of the author's contributions to identifying and operationalizing the four global themes that underpin the analytical framework. The six studies form a coherent and methodologically unified body of work. Five studies relied on school textbooks or proposed school-level curricula as their primary data source, focusing specifically on materials designed for native-speaking (L1) students in grade-school contexts. The studies share a common analytical foundation: each employed systematic content analysis and applied the same four-dimension framework encompassing global systems, human values, current global issues, and world history. This shared conceptual structure ensures comparability across studies and enables a deeper thematic synthesis than would typically be possible with a small corpus. The studies also cover both national and international contexts, Saudi Arabia and Singapore, providing a balanced view of how global themes are integrated within different curricular traditions. Together, these characteristics create a corpus that is internally consistent, analytically rich, and well suited for systematic synthesis.

C. Information Sources

The information sources were limited to platforms that index the author's complete scholarly output. No external database search was required, as the purpose of this review was not to identify all studies on mind-mapping in L2 research, but to synthesize all studies on national curriculum and textbooks in the L1 context within a single, self-contained research program. All records were retrieved from publicly accessible academic databases in which the author's publications are fully archived. These sources included Google Scholar, ResearchGate, Semantic Scholar, Academia.edu, SSRN, ERIC, EBSCO, ProQuest, and institutional repositories. Collectively, these sources provide comprehensive coverage of the author's publications across journals, conference proceedings,

book chapters, and digital repositories. All included and excluded studies were verified manually to ensure accuracy, remove duplicates, and confirm alignment with the eligibility criteria outlined in Section 2.2.

D. Data Extraction and Synthesis

Data extraction followed a structured, multi-stage process designed to ensure consistency and analytical depth across the six studies. Each study was examined to identify its research purpose, textbook sample, grade levels, analytical categories, and key findings related to the four global dimensions of global systems, human values, current global issues, and world history. Relevant information was coded and entered into a unified extraction matrix, enabling systematic comparison across clusters and facilitating the identification of recurring patterns, thematic emphases, and conceptual gaps.

The synthesis process employed a combined quantitative and qualitative content analysis approach, allowing the review to move beyond surface-level summaries toward a deeper understanding of how global themes were conceptualized, represented, and prioritized across different textbooks and curricular proposals. Through iterative comparison and thematic clustering, the synthesis generated an integrated account of the strengths, limitations, and pedagogical implications of global education within L1 school contexts.

The corpus exhibits a high degree of structural homogeneity, ensuring strong data compatibility for systematic synthesis. All studies systematically sampled reading textbooks and grade-level history curricula (Grades 4–12) in Saudi Arabia, international secondary social studies materials in Singapore, and specialized curriculum blueprints for heritage language and cultural maintenance. Geographically, the corpus is anchored in the Middle Eastern educational landscape through the Saudi national curriculum, balanced by an East Asian benchmark represented by Singapore, and further extended into a Western host-country context through the Arab diaspora's heritage-language sector. Methodologically, all studies employed uniform content analysis protocols, producing data that consistently yielded quantitative metrics, such as item frequencies, text-segment counts, and percentage distributions, mapped against qualitative narrative themes. This methodological alignment across studies enhances comparability and supports a robust, multi-layered synthesis of global themes in L1 and heritage-language educational materials.

E. PRISMA Flow Description

Because this study is a systematic self-review targeting a highly specialized field, the screening phase followed a modified PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic reviews and Meta-Analyses) flow process that ensured transparency and rigor in identifying and selecting studies for inclusion in the review. The initial pool consisted of the author's published research on global themes in school textbooks. During the identification stage, all potentially relevant studies were screened for alignment with the review's focus on global themes in L1 school textbooks and curricula. In the screening stage, studies that did not analyze textbooks, were not situated in the school context, or lacked empirical content analysis were excluded. The eligibility stage involved a closer examination of methodological detail, ensuring that each study provided sufficient data for synthesis. Ultimately, 6 studies met all inclusion criteria and were retained for the final review. The PRISMA flow therefore documents a systematic and replicable selection process that ensured the corpus remained methodologically coherent, conceptually aligned, and directly relevant to the aims of the SR.

4. Results and Thematic Synthesis

The content analysis across the selected corpus provides empirical, quantifiable evidence regarding the presence, structural weight, and qualitative depth of global themes in national L1, international, and heritage textbooks.

Cluster 1: The Local and Global Dimensions in Saudi Textbooks

Study 1: The Saudi National Reading Curriculum: Global Issues (Al-Jarf, 2006e)

This study evaluated the distribution of global themes within the national reading textbooks for Grades 7–12 in Saudi Arabia utilizing a four-dimensional global checklist. Content analysis revealed a heavy concentration on religious, socio-cultural, and localized themes. Specifically, Quranic verses and the Prophet's traditions (Hadith) constitute 10% of the content; 29% is dedicated to Islamic history; 13% covers general topics; 11% is allocated to classical Arabic literature; 8% to the history and geography of Saudi Arabia; 6% covers basic scientific issues; 6% focuses on fauna and flora; and 4% addresses Arab and Islamic nations. In stark contrast, macro-level global (international) themes are nearly invisible: only 1% of the curriculum is devoted to international organizations (e.g., UNESCO), and only 1% mentions prominent foreign, non-Arab historical figures (such as physicians or inventors). The study concluded that Saudi national reading textbooks do not develop global awareness in Saudi Grades 7-12 students. They lack topics that focus on current global issues and problems and introduce the students to the world in which they live. The topics are a repeat of topics covered in religion, history, civic education, and literature courses taught. Reading the topics

in the textbooks makes one feel as if they were living in the past. Even scientific topics are approached from a historical point of view. The style is boring. Topics are obsolete, lack variety and are unrelated to the age in which the students are living. The textbooks lack variety in writing styles, genres, resources, subject areas covered, design, layout, color, graphics, pictures that support the information in the reading texts. The study recommended that reading textbooks be re-designed and topics be re-selected. They should not repeat topics covered in other courses. Modern topics, related to current global issues and problems, human values, international organizations, global history and other cultures can be selected from different information sources such as newspapers, magazines, encyclopedia, and others. Reading texts with different organizational structure (classification, definition, cause-effect, enumeration, sequence of events, persuasive, process description and whole-part...etc.). Students should be trained to search for global topics on the internet, in magazines, newspapers and books. Students and their teacher may discuss the topics searched and collected. It also recommends extensive reading, electronic reading, speed reading, reading from multiple resources and introducing new books, magazines, e-books and other resources to students.

Study 2: Does the Saudi National Curriculum Teach Global History? (Al-Jarf, 2006a)

This study examines the extent to which the Saudi national history curriculum incorporates global historical content across Grades 4–12 textbooks. A checklist of 25 global history categories: Historical periods, ancient civilizations, ancient empires, history of Europe, USA, China, Japan etc. world religions, human migration, major wars in the world, colonization & liberation movements, exploration expeditions, history of art & architecture, industrial revolution, political and economic treaties, history of education, history of Muslim countries (Pakistan, Indonesia), history of science and technology, current global issues, recent technological, economic, political, social changes, emergence of the new global system was used to evaluate the presence of global themes in the curriculum objectives, textbook introductions, and all history topics taught in nine textbooks. Findings showed that the curriculum mainly emphasizes the Prophet's, Islamic, and Saudi history, with minimal global coverage. Key global historical topics, such as ancient civilizations, major empires, human migration, colonization, liberation movements, and the industrial revolution, are largely absent. Only 4 pages were allocated to colonization. Major civilizations like ancient Egyptians, ancient Rome, Babylonians, Assyrians, Phoenicians do not appear at all. When global ideological concepts are mentioned, they are presented in a subjective style, lacking names, dates, locations, and analytical depth. The curriculum also fails to promote participation goals such as problem-solving or conflict resolution. The study concludes that Saudi history textbooks do not develop students' awareness of global history and recommends restructuring textbooks, integrating global themes across grade levels, establishing selection criteria, developing teacher guides, and rewriting historical content to ensure accuracy, objectivity, and engagement.

Study 3: The Global Dimension in Saudi History Textbooks for Grades 4–12 (Al-Jarf, 2003)

This study mapped the longitudinal density of local, regional, and global (international) history across nine consecutive grade levels (4-12) in Saudi Arabian public schools using an expanded thematic framework. Content analysis revealed that 68.5% of all historical themes taught are strictly Islamic, 30% are local (Saudi history), and a critically low 1.5% are global. The global dimension is essentially ignored across the nine textbooks. The study recommended a systematic restructuring of history materials to integrate international issues into the national curriculum.

Cluster 2: Local and Global Dimensions in International Curricula

Study 4: Global Themes in Singaporean Secondary Social Studies Textbooks (Al-Jarf, 2003a)

This study audited the four grade-level textbooks used in Singapore's secondary social studies courses using the identical four-dimensional global checklist to find out whether Singaporean secondary social studies textbooks contain global themes, in which grade level those global themes are introduced, the percentage of global themes in social studies textbooks at each grade level, and which global themes are emphasized. A checklist consisting of four main global themes was developed: (1) global systems such as cultural, political, economic, ecological, technological, social, educational and healthcare systems, international organizations and international law; (2) global issues such as peace and conflict resolution, refugees; (3) human values like tolerance and cooperation, and (4) global history such as ancient civilizations, history of world religions, the industrial revolution, colonization and liberation movements. It was found that 35% of the social studies themes in the four high school grades together were global. Global themes constituted 16% of the first secondary grade textbook, 1.5% of the second secondary grade textbook, 64% of the third secondary grade textbook and 31% of the fourth secondary grade. It was also found that the first and second secondary textbooks mainly focus on world history. In the third secondary textbooks, 17% focused on global systems and human values, 27% on global issues, and 7% to global history. In the fourth secondary grade textbook, 7% of the themes were allocated to global systems, 16% to global issues and 7% to global history. It was concluded that Singaporean secondary school social studies textbooks develop a global perspective in Singaporean students through a theme-based approach and a selection of a variety of current global issues in well-designed textbooks that develop independent and critical thinking skills and participation goals.

Cluster 3: Forward-Looking Curriculum Design and Applied Global Education Models

Study 5: A Model for Global Education Course for Saudi Schools (Al-Jarf, 2004a)

This study proposed a comprehensive global education course for Grades 7-12 in Saudi Arabia in response to the current economic, political, social, technological changes in the world and results of an exploratory study which revealed freshman students' difficulty understanding terms frequently used in media, such as logistics, privatization, diplomatic immunity, and weapons of mass destruction, and their desire to learn more about World War I & II, international organizations, political alliances, and global conflicts and others. The proposed global education course aimed to help students understand the world as a group of interrelated and inter-dependent human, political, economic, technological, ecological, social, and ecological systems, world organizations; promote human values; develop an awareness of current world issues that cross borders; introduce students to world cultures and customs and the similarities and differences between them. It also aimed to help the students recognize the ties between their home country and other countries.

The proposed curriculum is structured around four major global components: global systems, human values, current global events, and world history. Global systems include cultural systems (languages, arts, customs, architecture), ecological systems (pollution, desertification, climate change), economic systems (global economy, multinational corporations, trade), political systems (democracy, alliances, international relations), technological systems (internet, digital communication, e-learning), as well as international organizations, global health systems, and educational and social structures. The study proposed 13 instructional units for each grade level per year, taught for 2 hours a week, supported by a textbook, activity workbook, and interactive digital multimedia. It recommends a theme-based, student-centered learning, inquiry-based activities, discussions, simulations, mapping tasks, research projects, and the use of digital media. The study also highlights the importance of teacher preparation, collaborative planning, and creating a classroom environment conducive to global learning.

-Feedback from freshman students on the model reflected strong enthusiasm for the course, noting its relevance to contemporary life, its role in broadening perspectives, and its contribution to building a culturally and politically aware generation. Students also provided practical suggestions regarding language level, topic selection, and the inclusion of applied projects. The study emphasized the importance of piloting the course before implementing it and suggests that it could serve as an effective alternative to traditional reading courses due to its breadth, relevance, and capacity to prepare students for an interconnected and rapidly changing world.

Cluster 4: L1 Global and Cultural Education in Diaspora Contexts

Study 6: The Need for Teaching Arabic and Islamic Culture to Arab Communities Abroad (Al-Jarf, 2004h)

This study extends the boundary of L1 textbook research by looking at the global diaspora. It evaluates the sociolinguistic and cultural vulnerabilities of Arab heritage communities living within foreign, non-Islamic host nations. The paper argues that L1 instruction is not merely a linguistic exercise but a vital cognitive anchor for identity, faith, and authentic cultural continuity. The study contrasts the global, structural importance of Arabic with its systemic neglect. In diaspora settings, parents frequently avoid speaking Arabic at home out of an unjustified fear of "confusing" the child, or they prioritize foreign languages exclusively. This mirrors a broader domestic crisis within the Arab world characterized by low publishing output, deteriorating library systems, and a weak reading culture. The empirical analysis shows that losing L1 literacy directly triggers an alienation cycle: children raised abroad lose access to authentic historical/religious texts, causing a decline in cultural attachments and a weakening of identity. The study highlights international benchmarks (such as language preservation models in Germany, France, Korea, Greece, and Israel) to argue that children are naturally capable of multilingual acquisition if supported from birth. The paper outlines strategic recommendations, such as localized community libraries, early native literacy practices at home, educational software, and communal spaces, developing Arabic language courses following the CEFR Framework (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages) for teaching Arabic to children, to preserve heritage identity across generations.

5. Discussion

5.1 Meta-Conclusion

Across the four clusters, the corpus presents a coherent and longitudinally unified research program that traces how global themes are conceptualized, represented, and operationalized within L1 educational materials across national, international, and diaspora contexts. The analyses of Saudi reading and history textbooks reveal that global themes were almost entirely absent, with only 1.5% of the content across nine history textbooks and a similarly negligible representation in reading textbooks. These materials reflect a curriculum centered primarily on national identity, moral instruction, and local cultural narratives, with global themes

appearing only incidentally and without systematic curricular design. On the contrary, the Singaporean social studies textbooks provide a contrasting international benchmark, demonstrating a deliberate and coherent integration of global themes with varying degrees across the 4 secondary grade levels. This comparative dimension highlights the structural and curricular features that enable more balanced global integration. The proposed global education course for Grades 7–12 represents the author’s applied contribution to curriculum design. Drawing on the same four-dimension framework used in the textbook analyses, the course offers a forward-looking model for embedding global systems, human values, current global issues, and world history into a coherent instructional sequence. The study on teaching Arabic and Islamic culture to Arab children living abroad extends the research program into the global diaspora, framing L1 instruction as a sociocultural and identity-preserving practice. It demonstrates how the loss of Arabic literacy among children in foreign host countries leads to weakened cultural continuity, diminished access to religious and historical texts, and erosion of communal belonging.

Taken together, these strands form a comprehensive and multi-layered account of global education within L1 contexts. They show that global themes are not confined to international curricula but emerge – unevenly - across national textbooks, proposed instructional models, and diaspora language-maintenance efforts. The corpus as a whole reveals a consistent analytical foundation anchored in the four-dimension framework and offers a nuanced understanding of how global systems, values, issues, and histories can be integrated into L1 education to support cultural identity, global awareness, and pedagogical relevance across diverse learning environments.

5.2 Meta-Interpretation

Taken together, the four clusters reveal a multilayered picture of how global themes are conceptualized, prioritized, and operationalized within L1 educational contexts across national, international, and diaspora settings. The Saudi reading and history textbooks demonstrate that, during the early 2000s, global themes were not structurally embedded in the curriculum. With global content representing only about 1.5% of the material across nine history textbooks, and similarly minimal representation in reading textbooks. The findings indicate that global awareness was largely incidental rather than intentional. This near-absence suggests a curriculum oriented primarily toward national identity formation, moral instruction, and local cultural narratives, with limited engagement in global systems, contemporary issues, or world historical interconnections. The interpretation here is not simply that global themes were missing, but that the curriculum reflected a broader educational philosophy in which global literacy was not yet positioned as a core competency for L1 learners.

In contrast, the Singaporean social studies textbooks embody a deliberate and systematic integration of global themes. Their curricular design reflects a national commitment to preparing students for participation in a globally interdependent world. The structured inclusion of global systems, multicultural values, and contemporary global issues demonstrates how policy, curriculum, and pedagogy can align to produce a coherent global education framework. When interpreted alongside the Saudi materials, the Singaporean case functions as a comparative lens that highlights how national priorities, governance structures, and educational philosophies shape the presence, or absence, of global dimensions in L1 schooling.

The proposed global education course for Grades 7–12 represents the author’s interpretive response to these disparities. It translates the analytical insights from textbook evaluations into a forward-looking curricular model grounded in the four-dimension framework. This course is not merely an instructional design; it is an interpretive statement about what L1 global education *could* look like when intentionally structured. It demonstrates how global systems, human values, current global issues, and world history can be woven into a coherent sequence that supports both national identity and global citizenship. The course thus bridges analysis and application, showing how empirical findings can inform curriculum reform.

The study on teaching Arabic and Islamic culture to Arab children living abroad extends the interpretive scope beyond national schooling systems into the sociolinguistic realities of diaspora communities. Here, global education takes on a different meaning: the challenge is not integrating global themes into textbooks, but preserving linguistic and cultural identity within foreign, non-Islamic host environments. The study interprets L1 loss as a form of cultural and religious dislocation, showing how weakened Arabic literacy disrupts access to religious texts, historical memory, and communal belonging. When viewed alongside the other clusters, this study reframes global education as a two-way process: while national curricula must prepare students for global engagement, diaspora families must navigate global pressures that threaten linguistic and cultural continuity.

Across all four clusters, the meta-interpretation reveals a unifying insight: global education in L1 contexts is shaped not only by curricular design but by broader sociocultural forces – national priorities, global mobility, identity politics, and the shifting demands of a globalized world. The corpus shows that global themes can be marginalized, systematically embedded, intentionally designed, or urgently preserved depending on the educational setting. This diversity underscores the need for flexible, context-sensitive approaches to global education that honor local identity while equipping learners to navigate an interconnected world.

5.3 Cross-Cutting Insights

Several cross-cutting insights emerge from the synthesis. First, the four-dimension framework provides a stable and comprehensive analytical lens that can be applied across diverse curricular contexts, enabling consistent evaluation of global content. Second, the studies highlight a recurring disparity between local identity and global awareness, with textbooks often prioritizing national narratives at the expense of broader global perspectives. Third, the findings underscore the importance of teacher preparation and curriculum design in shaping how global themes are interpreted and taught in the classroom. Finally, the corpus demonstrates that integrating global education into L1 curricula is both feasible and pedagogically valuable, offering opportunities to enhance students' cultural awareness, critical thinking, and understanding of global interdependence. These insights point to the need for continued curriculum development and comparative research to strengthen global education in school systems.

5.4 Implications

The findings of this SR carry several important implications for curriculum development, textbook design, and educational policy. First, the scarce integration of global themes across existing textbooks suggests a need for more intentional and systematic curriculum planning that embeds global systems, human values, current global issues, and world history as core components rather than peripheral additions. Ministries of education and curriculum developers can use the four-dimension framework as a basis for evaluating and enhancing the global content of L1 materials. Second, the comparative insights drawn from the Singaporean curriculum highlight the value of examining international models to inform local reform efforts, demonstrating that global education can be effectively integrated without compromising national identity. Third, the proposed global education course illustrates how structured curricular models can bridge existing gaps by offering clear learning outcomes, thematic coherence, and pedagogical strategies that promote critical thinking and global awareness. Fourth, for Arab diaspora families, the total reliance on un-contextualized, highly localized instructional systems triggers a severe socio-linguistic crisis. When expatriate mothers underutilize Arabic, assuming their children "will catch up later", or when fathers overwhelm children with multi-language rotations while ignoring native media saturation, it accelerates the erasure of identity. The critical implication is that treating Arabic as a secondary localized phenomenon, rather than a living tool for global connection, leads to irreversible cultural alienation and acute academic dislocation in international environments. Collectively, these implications point toward the need for coordinated efforts among policymakers, curriculum designers, and educators to strengthen global education within L1 school contexts and prepare students for participation in an increasingly interconnected world.

5.5 Positioning This SR Within Prior Global Education SRs in the Literature

This SR occupies a distinct position within the broader landscape of global education research. Prior SRs have primarily examined cultural representation, Indigenous education, intercultural competence, and global citizenship within higher education, health professions, or teacher preparation programs. While these reviews demonstrate a growing international interest in global and cultural education, they do not address how global themes are integrated into school textbooks or L1 curricula. The few SRs that focus on textbooks tend to analyze gender or cultural representation rather than global systems, global issues, or world history. In contrast, the present SR synthesizes 6 studies that specifically investigate the integration of global themes within school textbooks and curricula for native-speaking students. By applying a unified four-dimension framework across all studies, this SR fills a clear gap in the literature and extends global education research into an understudied domain: the systematic analysis of global content in L1 school materials. It therefore complements existing SRs while offering a unique contribution that broadens the scope of global education scholarship.

5.6 How This SR Connects to the Author's Previous SRs

This SR forms part of a broader, long-term research program in which the author has conducted an extensive series of SRs and MAs across multiple domains of language education, linguistics, and pedagogy. These prior reviews have examined diverse areas such as social media in EFL teaching and learning (Al-Jarf, 2026a), English for art education (Al-Jarf, 2026b), EFL reading instruction (Al-Jarf, 2026c), educational evaluation (Al-Jarf, 2026d), translation errors (Al-Jarf, 2026f), mobile-assisted language learning (Al-Jarf, 2026g), adult reading practices (Al-Jarf, 2026h), pronunciation instruction (Al-Jarf, 2026i), Arabic reading pedagogy (Al-Jarf, 2026j), electronic searching skills (Al-Jarf, 2026k), vocabulary learning (Al-Jarf, 2026m), AI translation quality (Al-Jarf, 2026l), specific-skill assessment (Al-Jarf, 2026n), Arabic-English transliteration (Al-Jarf, 2026o), children's language development (Al-Jarf, 2026o), classroom writing enhancement (Al-Jarf, 2026r), collaborative digital learning (Al-Jarf, 2026s), distance learning during COVID-19 (Al-Jarf, 2026t), mind-mapping strategies (Al-Jarf, 2026u), staffing challenges in EFL programs (Al-Jarf, 2026v), Arabic word-formation processes ((Al-Jarf, 2026w), instructional videos and podcasts (Al-Jarf, 2026y), AI Arabic translation (Al-Jarf, 2026aa), ESP innovation (Al-Jarf, 2026bb), LMS-supported instruction (Al-Jarf, 2026cc), grammar teaching (Al-Jarf, 2026k), listening and speaking instruction (Al-Jarf, 2026x), spelling error analysis (Al-Jarf, 2026z), interpreting pedagogy (Al-Jarf, 2026), and cultural

learning in L2 contexts (Al-Jarf, 2026). Positioned within this extensive body of systematic inquiry, the current SR contributes a new and distinct dimension by focusing on global education within L1 school curricula and textbooks, an area not previously synthesized in the author's earlier reviews. It therefore extends the author's methodological tradition of mapping educational research trends while opening a new line of inquiry into how global themes are conceptualized, represented, and taught in school-level materials for native-speaking students.

5.7 Limitations

This SR has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the corpus is intentionally narrow, consisting of 6 studies authored by the author. While such homogeneity strengthens methodological coherence and allows for deep thematic synthesis, it also means that the review reflects a single research program rather than a wider body of research by other scholars. This is not a methodological weakness; SRs often focus on tightly defined topics, but it does limit the scope of perspectives represented in the synthesis. Focusing exclusively on the author's own studies was an intentional methodological decision. These studies were designed with a shared vision, conceptual framework, and analytical purpose, making them uniquely suitable for synthesis. Including studies by other authors in the corpus is neither feasible nor appropriate, given the vastness of the global education literature and the lack of comparable frameworks across external studies. This SR therefore synthesizes a coherent research program rather than attempting to aggregate heterogeneous works that do not share the same conceptual foundations.

Another limitation is that the studies focused exclusively on identifying the presence or absence of global themes in the textbooks, without examining other important cultural or ideological dimensions. Issues such as the representation of women, the specific local cultural values emphasized in the texts, portrayals of international cooperation, and depictions of "the other" were beyond the scope of the original research aims. These aspects require different analytical lenses and would constitute separate lines of inquiry. The purpose of the studies was to document factual global content through systematic, page-by-page examination of texts, images, exercises, and questions, rather than to conduct a comprehensive cultural or sociopolitical critique of the textbooks. As a result, the findings should be interpreted as addressing one specific dimension of textbook content, global themes, while recognizing that other cultural dimensions remain unexplored.

In addition, all studies were conducted between 2003 and 2006, reflecting the curricular landscape of that period per se and not capturing subsequent reforms, textbook revisions, or shifts in global education priorities that have emerged over the past two decades. This means that results of a content analysis of the current school textbooks, whether the Saudi or Singaporean textbooks, might yield different results.

Moreover, the proposed global education course was developed in response to clear weaknesses observed in students' background knowledge and linguistic preparation. However, and as stated earlier, the model was not piloted by the other due to practical constraints, including the author's full teaching load, institutional responsibilities, and the lack of access to schools for implementation.

Furthermore, the proposed model outlined the thematic structure and weekly topics for six grade levels, but producing full instructional materials for 78 units would require a dedicated team of curriculum specialists and a large-scale development project beyond the scope of a single research article. The author explicitly acknowledged in the original study that the model should be trialed in future work. Thus, the limitation lies not in the conceptual design of the model, but in the practical impossibility of implementing and evaluating it within a single paper and by a single author.

6. Recommendations & Directions for Future Research

Based on the findings of this SR, several recommendations for curriculum development, textbook design, and future scholarly work can be articulated. First, curriculum planners and textbook authors should adopt a more intentional approach to embedding global themes across grade levels. The four-dimension framework used in the 2003–2006 studies provides a comprehensive, flexible and practical structure for selecting and organizing content, and it can serve as a clear set of curricular standards specifying the types of global systems, issues, values, and historical perspectives that should be represented in L1 materials.

Second, the proposed global education course offers a viable foundation for a comprehensive school-level curriculum. Its implementation, however, requires coordinated collaboration among curriculum specialists, content writers, and educational policymakers. Developing full instructional materials for six grade levels is a large-scale undertaking that extends beyond the scope of a single research article and a single researcher. The Ministry of Education should pilot the structural blueprint outlined in the Global Education Model, deploying its 13-unit framework across intermediate and secondary levels. Instruction should shift from teacher-centered, rote-based practices toward student-centered, inquiry-driven modules that cultivate universal human values, environmental awareness, and active civic engagement.

Third, to support Arab diaspora communities and mitigate the language shift and cultural dislocation documented in expatriate environments, educational ministries should establish specialized digital and physical infrastructures. These include developing context-sensitive Arabic curricula that accommodate linguistic hybridity, providing targeted teacher training for international educators, and expanding access to native media resources to sustain linguistic and cultural continuity in transnational settings.

Future research should expand textbook analysis to include contemporary global and cultural dimensions that have become central in the post-2015 educational landscape. These include sustainable development, environmental literacy, digital citizenship, global health, climate change, artificial intelligence ethics, intercultural digital communication, and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Examining how L1 textbooks incorporate, or fail to incorporate, these emerging priorities would provide a more current understanding of the global and cultural competencies expected of students in 2026 and beyond.

To build on the empirical foundations established in this SR, subsequent research should pursue several unexamined domains. Longitudinal, quasi-experimental studies are needed to evaluate the implementation of the Proposed Global Education Model in pilot schools, measuring its impact on students' analytical reasoning, global citizenship development, and readiness for university-level global discourse. The sociolinguistic and identity challenges faced by Arab expatriate families should be investigated across a wider geographical spectrum using mixed-methods designs that combine large-scale surveys with qualitative ethnographies. Additionally, future studies should examine the human dimension of curricular reform by assessing teachers' beliefs, global readiness, and technological self-efficacy, as well as the pedagogical challenges they encounter when transitioning to inquiry-based, multi-perspective global instruction. Finally, as educational systems increasingly digitize, comparative content-analytic research should examine whether emerging digital textbooks and cloud-based curricula effectively address global literacy gaps or simply reproduce traditional insular narratives in new formats.

7. Conclusion

Over the past two decades, school curricula in developed countries have undergone significant transformation, driven by rapid technological change, globalization, and the emergence of new educational priorities. While printed textbooks continue to exist, their role has shifted, and most educational systems now employ hybrid or fully digital models. Three dominant patterns characterize current practice. First, many countries continue to use printed textbooks but pair them with comprehensive digital platforms that provide interactive exercises, videos, simulations, assessments, and links to external resources. This hybrid model is now standard in Finland, Singapore, Canada, Australia, and Japan. Second, some systems have transitioned to fully digital textbooks, particularly after the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the adoption of online learning. Examples include South Korea, Estonia, and several U.S. states. Additionally, a smaller number of schools, especially those following inquiry-based or project-based learning models, use open, flexible curricula without a fixed textbook, relying instead on curated digital resources and teacher-designed materials.

In addition to changes in format, the content of contemporary textbooks has evolved to incorporate a strong global dimension. Modern curricula in developed countries intentionally embed themes related to global citizenship, intercultural understanding, and international cooperation. A major shift has been the integration of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which now appear across subjects and grade levels. Textbooks usually include topics such as climate change, environmental stewardship, global health, responsible consumption, renewable energy, and social justice. These themes were largely absent from textbooks published in the early 2000s.

Furthermore, contemporary curricula emphasize digital citizenship, media literacy, and the ethical use of Artificial Intelligence, areas that have become essential in a highly connected world. Students are taught to evaluate online information, recognize misinformation, communicate across cultures in digital spaces, and understand the global implications of emerging technologies. Environmental literacy has also become a cross-curricular priority, with textbooks incorporating infographics, data visualizations, and real-world case studies to help students understand global environmental systems.

Compared to textbooks from 2003–2006, which tended to focus primarily on national identity and local cultural narratives, the textbooks of 2026 should present a more balanced integration of local and global perspectives. They should include richer visual content, more diverse cultural representations, and a broader range of global issues. Such developments reflect international educational trends and the growing recognition that students must be prepared to engage with complex global challenges.

This overview highlights the extent to which school curricula and textbooks in developed countries have evolved, offering a useful model and a point of comparison for the findings of the present SR. It also underscores the need for future research to examine how L1 textbooks in other contexts incorporate contemporary global priorities such as sustainable development, digital citizenship, and intercultural competence.

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