

Reimagining Good Citizenship in Ethiopia: Overcoming Historical Legacies and Embracing Contemporary Opportunities

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Abstract

This study examines how historical regime legacies hinder the development of good citizenship in Ethiopia and the potential role of global citizenship education in overcoming these barriers. Using a naturalistic inquiry paradigm and qualitative methods, data were collected through semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and document analysis. The findings reveal that ethnic federalism, coupled with poor governance, has intensified disputes over citizenship and ethnic identity, threatening national unity. Corruption, lack of accountability, and political repression further impede the cultivation of responsible citizens. Schools in Oromia, influenced by a legacy of fear, fail to provide environments that encourage student expression and critical thinking. Moreover, Ethiopian citizenship education often conflicts with global citizenship education principles, which emphasize critical thinking, social justice, and active engagement. The study recommends that the Ministry of Education enhance teacher training, create supportive school environments, and implement policies to reduce corruption. Embracing global citizenship and inclusive civic education is essential to address historical legacies and foster democratic, active, and responsible citizens..

Keywords: Citizenship Education, Democratic Education, Ethiopia, Global Citizenship, Political Legacies

Introduction

Recognizing that we are in the first quarter of the twenty-first century, it is equally critical to reimagine how citizenship should be perceived and defined by the attributes of Ethiopia. Indeed, the tradition of citizenship education (hereafter CE) in Ethiopia dates back to the imperial regime, particularly to the 1955 revision of the monarchical Constitution following the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Nonetheless, post-1991 appeared to have become an exciting time with the establishment of a federal form of government and the promulgation of the 1995 constitution. The accommodation of diversity through CE received significant attention in both the 2022 and 1994 education policies to accomplish the goal of producing good citizens (hereafter GC). In this regard, we believe that it is crucial to explore how the legacies left by past regimes have impeded good citizenship and how these legacies should be addressed, thereby embracing modern opportunities in alignment with a global citizenship perspective. To this end, this study is structured into four distinctive sections. The first part is an introductory section that outlines the background, problem statement, and research questions. The second section provides an overview of the literature review and theoretical framework of the study. A detailed description of the study's methodology is used in the third section. The fourth section presents the findings, discussions, and concluding remarks and suggestions based on the study's results.

GC is a complex concept with various meanings and attributes, making it difficult to establish a universal definition among scholars. These scholars have noted that the idea of GC is frequently contested and controversial, suggesting that it is not universally accepted. To avoid confusion regarding this concept, the notion of 'Reimagining Citizenship' in this article pertains to examining the attributes of citizenship through the lens of recent developments achieved by humanity while also acknowledging the significance of the local context in Ethiopia. The process of reimagining incorporates both national and global contexts by embracing opportunities to advance citizenship and identifying historical legacies that may support or obstruct. CE in Ethiopia dates back to the imperial regime, particularly to the 1955 revision of the monarchical Constitution (Defere, 2018) following the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Although it was introduced during the imperial regime and has been part of the education system for over half a century, the post-1991 period became an exciting time for it with the establishment of a federal form of government and the promulgation of the 1995 constitution. Further, it has been defined by both changes and continuity that are intricately connected to the shifting political regimes that have governed the country since CE was integrated into the school curriculum. That is why Belay (2017) and Melese and Tadege (2019) noted that CE in Ethiopia is a subject influenced by political motivations. Notably, it is essential to comprehend how the legacies left by previous.

Based on this rationale, we believe that citizenship needs to be reimagined in one way or another in Ethiopia.

Nowadays, various scholars indicate that the level of development attained by human beings has raised questions about the roles that citizens play at the national level and how their attributes are being perceived (Treviño & Carrasco, 2021). These scholars emphasize the importance of empowering citizens, especially the younger generation, to address 21st-century issues and improve individual and societal well-being, shifting the perception of citizens based on their past attributes (Davies, 2023). Given this, people everywhere aspire for their youth to be informed, critical thinkers and active citizens who can address complicated issues and benefit both individuals and communities and the nations as a whole. Recognizing that we are approaching the 2030 agenda of SDG, it is critical to reimagine how citizenship should be perceived and defined in Ethiopia, aligning it with a global citizenship perspective.

Of course, in Ethiopia, GC is capable of tackling 21st-century challenges and fostering a global perspective. The education policy that the government is working on is to promote democratization and produce GC (Yayeh, 2018). To implement this policy, CE has been recognized as an important tool for producing GC, and schools have been assigned the roles and responsibilities of creating favorable conditions. Given this, it is critical to assess how well the objective of producing good citizens has been accomplished and how challenges left by the former regimes have hindered the achievement of these objectives.

The article centers on two key points to achieve the objective of this study. First, cognizing that Ethiopia's education policy theoretically advocates for fostering good citizens, it critically explores how the legacies left by past regimes have been impeding good citizenship and how these legacies ought to be addressed. Notably, identifying historical legacies that hinder the advancement of good citizenship is crucial in itself. This section particularly critically examines the impact of former regimes' legacies on the development of good citizenship, focusing on the curriculum, schools, and teachers. Second, it emphasizes how citizenship in Ethiopia can be reimagined by embracing new contemporary opportunities, in line with a global citizenship perspective.

Statement of the problem

A world-old nation marks Ethiopia, with over one hundred twenty million people, as the cradle of modern humanity, with diverse ethnic groups, abundant resources, and over eighty languages. However, the nation is today facing growing divides and difficulties that jeopardize its social cohesion, despite this historical significance and promise, as well as the assertions made by the post-1991 education policies to cultivate responsible citizens. Ethnic-based conflicts, political instability, and social unrest have increased in Ethiopia over the last twenty years, contributing

to increasing polarization, hatred, and disorder (Jima, 2021). These internal tensions and youth disenchantment are causing alienation and detachment from national identity, which threatens the country's future and unity and deteriorates citizens' love and trust.

The government education policy aims to promote democratization and produce good citizens. To that end, CE has been considered an essential tool for creating good citizens, and schools have been given the roles and responsibilities of fostering favorable conditions. However, the discourse at the policy level does not correspond to the current reality. Practically, young people are also blamed for antisocial behavior. Such behavior is attributable to a lack of citizenship values, relevant ethics, morals, and individual and collective responsibility. While this situation needs to be constantly improved, it is getting worse from time to time, and citizens have become victims of various problems, which runs contrary to the theoretical discourse of education policy in general and the intended objectives of CE in particular. Therefore, it is imperative to critically assess how CE is presented, whether it promotes active engagement, and how well it aligns with the country's objectives and the broader principles of global citizenship education.

Of course, some research on CE has been done in Ethiopia. As can be seen from various literature, there is very little research on GC in Ethiopia compared to developed countries (Yayeh, 2018; Ayane & Mihiretie, 2024). First, the previous study failed to offer insights into how the legacies of last political regimes influenced the curriculum, schools, teachers, and students, hindering the advancement of GC. Second, previous research has not demonstrated the effectiveness of incorporating modern opportunities into CE in fostering good citizens. These are the gaps that this study wants to address.

Research Questions

This research is directed towards providing evidence-based answers to the following questions:

1. How have the legacies left by regimes been impeding good citizenship?
2. How ought the legacies left by regimes to be addressed?
3. What are the contemporary opportunities for redefining good citizenship in Ethiopia?
4. How do those opportunities align with global trends and help Ethiopia to cope with the current situation?

Literature Review

Concepts and Primary Qualities of Good Citizenship

It is essential to provide operational definitions for the key concepts in this study. The term "reimagined citizenship" refers to innovative, critical, or global understandings of belonging and participation that go beyond traditional, state-centric frameworks. Historical legacies denote to persistent social, political, and educational trends that have been operationalized through allusions to institutional traditions, curriculum, or narratives that have shaped contemporary conceptions of citizenship (Robinson, 2022). Scholars have noted that the concept of good citizenship is often contested and controversial, indicating that it is not universally accepted. Puntaswari (2020) defines GC as individuals who are aware of their rights, responsibilities, social responsibility, sensitivity, intelligence, discipline, and critical, creative, and inventive thinking. Westheimer and Khane (2004) identified three key qualities of a GC: personal responsibility, participation, and a justice-oriented approach. Pharcharuen (2019) also identified seven essential qualities for 21st-century GC: self-reliance, respect for equality, respect for other rights, obedience to rules, a democratic outlook, and societal responsibility. Schoeman's (2005) study on South African teachers' perceptions of GC identified eight key characteristics: responsibility, morality, tolerance, participation, critical thinking, patriotism, obedience, and knowledge.

Theoretical framework of the study

The conceptualization and characterization of citizenship in Ethiopia appear to be complex and controversial. Good citizens were loyal to the monarchy and committed to the Dergue regime, embodying Marxism-Leninism and making sacrifices for a socialist system. Even in the post-1991 period, the transition to ethnic federalism significantly impacted Ethiopian citizenship, enhancing the association between citizenship and ethnic identity. Understanding the impact of the legacies left by previous regimes on citizenship, we intended the study to be examined through the lens of the critical theoretical framework. A critical theoretical framework is a comprehensive approach that seeks to understand and challenge power dynamics, social structures, and inequality. It has offered an essential lens to reveal the invisible hegemonic power and privileges of the dominant groups. Critical theorists have regarded teachers as transformative agents who can engage their students in the practice of social change (Giroux, 1992). They viewed schools as a place for social change in the fight against societal injustices (Steinberg & Kincheloe, 2010; Abdi, 2007).

In the same vein, citizenship is a term that has a broad and multidimensional concept that can be defined in various ways. Scholars have offered various arguments on the idea and definition of GC since ancient times. Nowadays, the

rapid changes taking place in the twenty-first century have raised questions about the roles that citizens play at the national level and how they are perceived (Treviño & Carrasco, 2021; Bosio & Torres, 2019 & UNESCO, 2014). In light of this, our understanding and description of citizenship and its primary attributes may be outdated in the modern world. So, we also want the study to be viewed through the lens of the global citizenship theoretical framework in addition to critical theory. The global citizenship theoretical framework can provide a set of principles and assumptions that guide the implementation of education aimed at preparing students to be responsible, informed, and active global citizens (Guo, 2013). It is a framework that emphasizes educating students to uphold social justice, engage in global critical thinking, and take action for sustainability, peace, and international human rights. We think that the worldwide citizenship perspective can serve as an adequate theoretical framework since it seeks to develop informed, critical, responsible citizens who can consider and understand themselves within the interconnectedness of the local and global context of the 21st century (Davies, 2023 & UNESCO, 2014).

Critical theory focuses on societal inequality, while the GCE perspective promotes inclusivity and justice in a global context. The GCE perspective emphasizes active global citizenship, encouraging individuals to transcend national boundaries in their attitudes. In contrast, critical theory advocates for education that inspires people to resist oppression and injustice. Both perspectives can influence how CE in Ethiopia functions, either as a means to emancipate students or as a way to enable them to critically engage with their social realities and become active, informed citizens. Thus, this perspective is equally preferable to analyze how educators perceive good citizenship and its key characteristics in Ethiopia.

Methodology

Research scholars agree that many factors need to be considered when choosing a research paradigm and approach. Weil (2017) states that some of the basic factors in selecting a research approach are the nature of the issues to be addressed, the personal experiences of the researcher, and the audience of the study. Given this, we employed a naturalistic inquiry paradigm, utilizing a qualitative approach and a qualitative case design to investigate how the historical legacies left by the former regimes hindered GC development. In their seminal work, Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that naturalistic inquiry seeks to understand a phenomenon instituted in a natural setting, without controlling or manipulating the environment. In this regard, we believe this approach is well-suited for examining how CE is experienced, shaped, and interpreted in Ethiopia, where various factors—such as socioeconomic and political conditions, along with cultural diversity—influence how citizenship is thought and understood.

The study was conducted in six secondary schools located in Ambo Town, Bishoftu Town, and Sheger City in the Oromia Regional State from September 2024 to March 2025. Purposive sampling was utilized to select the study area from the rest of the towns and places of Oromia Regional State. These study sites were chosen for their proximity to Addis Ababa, the capital of Ethiopia, and the security conditions being considered.

Twelve CE teachers, six school directors, and two MoE experts were involved. Six focus group discussions with students were also conducted, where none of them were less than eighteen years of age. All research participants were selected through purposive sampling. The purpose of purposive sampling, also known as theoretical sampling, as suggested by Patton (1990), is to choose data that is rich for case study depth. It was believed that the study participants had a substantial influence on how this study would be carried out. These teachers are directly involved in teaching and learning and playing an essential role in the classroom implementation of the CE curriculum. School directors are expected to understand how schools can foster a conducive environment for developing good citizens. Moreover, Ethiopian Ministry of Education experts are assumed to have a sufficient understanding of CE curriculum development and education policy documentation issues.

Table Participant Demographics

Variables	Categories	Teachers		Experts		Directors		Students FGD	
		f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Gender	Male	5	42	2	100	4	67	16	53.3
	Female	7	58	0	0	2	33	14	46.7
	Total	12	100	2	100	6	100	30	100
Educational Levels	Grade 11 & 12	0	0	0	0	0	0	30	100
	Diploma	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Degree	7	58	0	0	2	33	0	0
	MA	5	42	2	100	4	67	0	0
Work Experiences	1-10 years	1	8.3	0	0	1	16.7	0	0
	11-20 years	8	66.7	1	50	3	50	0	0
	21 and above	3	25	1	50	2	33.3	0	0

Semi-structured interviews were used with these participants to gain insight into their lived experiences, perspectives, emotions, and opinions. Patton (1990) emphasized that interviews are essential for understanding individuals' thoughts and feelings, as well as for revealing insights that cannot be directly observed objectively. Bryman (2016), for his part, describes interviewing as a tendency to be flexible, adapting to the direction that interviewees take the interview. In line with

this, it is essential to use semi-structured interviews as a tool for collecting data to understand teachers' perceptions of good citizenship. Students' FGD was also used to increase the depth and dependability of the data gathered through semi-structured interviews. This instrument provided a platform for students to express their collective views and experiences, thereby offering a broader perspective. The combination of these two data collection techniques ensures a more comprehensive understanding of the study's subject.

Method of Data Analysis

We utilized qualitative analysis, which involves interpreting words and meanings from semi-structured and focus group discussions. The audio recordings were transcribed and listened to several times to become acquainted with the subject of the investigation. Essential concepts, patterns, and recurrent ideas related to this inquiry were classified and categorized into themes that reflect everyday experiences and viewpoints of the informants. To make sure these themes were consistent and pertinent to the study topics, they were further refined through comparisons across the data set. To comprehend the broader implications, these themes were finally interpreted, and conclusions were drawn.

Research ethics approval

The institution's ethics committee approved the study. Obtaining authorization, we proceeded to the school and engaged in discussions with management and teachers. We told participants that the study's primary aim was to collect data for the research entitled 'Reimagining Good Citizenship in Ethiopia: Overcoming Historical Legacies and Embracing Contemporary Opportunities.' We obtained verbal authorization from informants to use their pseudonyms instead of their real names. Then, we made program adjustments and conducted interviews using audio recorders, taking notes, with duration of thirty to forty-five minutes for the interviews.

Trustworthiness

This study was carefully examined for credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmation to ensure trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Multiple data sources, such as focus groups with students, document analysis, and interviews with teachers, school administrators, and Ministry of Education specialists, were used to increase credibility. Rich, thorough descriptions of the study's background, participants, and methods were provided to support transferability, allowing readers to assess how the results might be used in different contexts. Maintaining meticulous documentation of data collection and analysis created a transparent audit trail of the study process, ensuring dependability. Ultimately, continual researchers' reflections, peer conversations, and meticulous

data and interpretation cross-checking improved confirmability by ensuring that the results accurately represented participant experiences rather than researcher presumptions.

Findings and Discussion

The findings of this study were presented and analyzed under two research questions.. Through this approach, we identified how the legacies left by regimes have been impeding good citizenship and how these legacies ought to be addressed. We also examined how Ethiopia can adapt to the current circumstances by reimagining citizenship in line with global trends by embracing contemporary opportunities.

Citizenship education in Ethiopia: the historical legacies of the regimes and their conundrums

Ethiopia's history has been shaped by various civilizations, cultures, and governmental structures, with citizenship closely linked to identity, ethnicity, nation, and regional loyalty. The regimes that have appeared in Ethiopia at various times, including imperial monarchy, the Dergue government, and the post-1991 regime, have influenced the concept of citizenship in one way or another. Understanding the impact of legacies left by previous regimes on the curriculum, schools, and educators, and how these elements are currently manifesting is crucial for comprehending the current situation.

The authoritarian ideals of citizenship

The monarchy era curriculum aimed to instill authority and national cohesion, based on Orthodox Christianity, fostering belief in the monarchy's absolute power and its everlasting nature. In this regard, the focus of moral education in Ethiopia during the Imperial era was allegiance to the monarch and Orthodox Christianity, with a particular emphasis on cultural conformity and obedience to authority. A GC at the time was defined as someone who would die on guard duty for the monarch, would follow the monarch's laws, and would adhere to traditional Christian morality (Michael, 2017).

After the demise of the imperial regime, the Dergue came to political power, suspending all experiences and deeds of moral education and replacing them with political education. The Dergue's ultimate goal was to establish a communal society by adhering to Marxism-Leninism ideology, which led to the shift from moral education to political education in the education system and indoctrinated the younger generation to its ideology. The subject's content was more focused on promoting socialist ideology by prioritizing the working class and educating students about socialism (Bayeh, 2016). All of these circumstances run counter to the notion of the global citizenship education perspective that CE should produce

good citizens who are personally responsible, participatory, knowledgeable, and competent, uphold the law, are morally concerned for others, and are respectful of human dignity (Weismither & Khane, 2004).

Ethnic Federalism ideals to citizenship and its conundrums

It is possible to consider and utilize the ideals of ethnic federalism in relation to citizenship as a historical legacy. In this regard, we believe that understanding how the unique political system of ethnic federalism, introduced in the 1990s, has shaped the concept of citizenship in Ethiopia is crucial. Indeed, the establishment of the structure of ethnic federalism has radically addressed the cultural problems of the nations during the monarchy and the Dergue regime. The 1995 constitution declared that all regions and ethnic groups can use their native language as their mother tongue. The adoption of the mother tongue in Ethiopia represented a significant change for various ethnic groups, aligning with the 2017 UN Declaration of Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious, and Linguistic Minorities. Ethnic groups can now establish their own regional states as part of their right to self-determination under the new system. To address Ethiopia's multiethnic makeup and encourage self-rule, this decentralized system of government was implemented. Particularly, Article (39, p.3) declares,

Every nation, nationality, and people in Ethiopia has the right to a full measure of self-government, which includes the right to establish institutions of government in the territory that it inhabits and to equitable representation in state and federal governments.

However, the shift to ethnic federalism had significant effects on Ethiopian citizenship as well. Citizenship and ethnic identity became more closely associated under ethnic federalism. Ethnic federalism can be viewed as a means to embrace Ethiopia's ethnic diversity by acknowledging and preserving the unique characteristics of each group. The following is an informant's opinion of how issues with ethnic federalism impede the growth of citizens:

Understanding citizenship is complicated by a dilemma between national identity and ethnic federation. Additionally, there are problems related to the administration of ethnic federalism. Young people tend to prefer ethnic identification over national identity (Baro, Ambo Town).

The interview revealed that the significant challenge lies in balancing the broader national concept of citizenship with the ethnic group concept of identity. A dilemma arises from the concept of 'ethnic federalism ideals to citizenship,' as it fosters both inclusivity and divisiveness. Individuals who belong to a minority ethnic group or who do not strongly identify with one ethnic group may find it challenging to claim their citizenship. This has somewhat undermined the idea of a common Ethiopian identity. The rationale is that in Ethiopia, citizenship is

determined by ethnic affinity and the associated regional state rather than by a person's relationship to the larger national entity.

Regarding the 1995 constitution's establishment of equality for all ethnic groups, we do not believe that ethnic federalism is a problem in itself, as it acknowledges the existence of ethnic groups. However, the current situation regarding the leadership of ethnic federalism and the treatment of ethnic groups is problematic. The manner in which political elites are governing the country is rife with bias. They are exploiting their legal powers to the fullest extent possible illegally and unconstitutionally.

The EPRDF regime left behind a negative legacy that continues to plague Ethiopia today. To that end, the TPLF, with its authoritative and divide-and-rule policy under the umbrella of EPRDF, employed different mechanisms not only to dominate the political economy of the region but also to create and perpetuate different kinds of conflicts throughout the region. This trend became a negative legacy, thereby currently spreading throughout the country, causing various security problems and violence, thereby exposing the masses to poverty and hunger (Jima, 2021).

One may argue that there are several causes for the conflict and violence that are currently plaguing Ethiopia. Still, the main issues are interethnic rivalry and the poor administration of ethnic federalism. Given this, young people's sense of national identity has been detached and ignored, opening wide doors for the promotion of ethnic group identity. This approach is inconsistent with the perspective that understanding and appreciating the diversity of human experiences, acknowledging the interconnectedness of people worldwide, and feeling a sense of belonging to the global community are integral aspects of global citizenship (Davies, Evans & Reid, 2005).

Instead, Ethiopia must rethink citizenship, considering either an ethnically based identity or a more comprehensive Ethiopian identity. However, globalization is becoming more widely acknowledged in the twenty-first century, and the degree of human growth has created a strong compulsion for us to participate in this global system. Thus, we firmly believe that Ethiopian citizenship should be reimagined, moving beyond the current dilemmas and aligning it with a global citizenship perspective.

Schools as political indoctrination instruments

School is considered the hub for developing good citizens who can benefit themselves, the nation, and society at regional, national, and global levels. Schools promote intellectual development by fostering open communication, critical thinking, and independent thinking through self-expression, discussions, and extracurricular activities. Heathcote (2017) highlights school as a hub for socialization and ideological power, shaping future law-abiding individuals.

Citizenship education enhances critical skills like persuasive communication, logical reasoning, and evidence-based argumentation. However, schools have not been independent and have served as a platform for the political entity in authority to further its goals and ideas under the consecutive regimes. Instead of creating conducive atmospheres for students to discuss and debate issues of democratic principles, human rights, and social justice, they have been used for other purposes.

Post-1991 education policies prioritize using CE for producing good citizens, urging schools to teach citizenship in a way that supports national unity and acknowledges ethnic identities. The concept of citizenship became more complex by teaching students about the rights and responsibilities of their ethnic group within the larger Ethiopian state. Nowadays, schools face political dilemmas in guiding students through complex challenges and preparing future citizens to recognize and value their national and regional identities. Therefore, we might contend that the educational institutions must be free from these kinds of conundrums and embrace a new setting that encourages inclusive, democratic, and active citizen participation.

The legacy of fear and political repression in schools

Both under previous regimes and currently, schools are places of political repression and fear, making it difficult for both teachers and students to voice criticism. One of the experiences so far was that teachers were expected to manage and regulate their students' behavior and actions, rather than discuss and debate important issues such as the principles of democracy, rule of law, human rights, and justice. The cumulative effects of these factors have created an atmosphere of fear and self-censorship. The atmosphere of fear fostered by authoritarian regimes suppressed active citizenship, which necessitates freedom of expression and political participation.

This trend was not only exclusive to past regimes in Ethiopia. Even today, the approaches from the past continue as a legacy. The research participant states the following about the actual situation in schools:

According to my school's real ground, although citizenship education emphasizes democratic principles, the rule of law, equality, justice, and human rights, the school cannot foster a conducive atmosphere for students to engage in discussions and debates on these crucial issues (Dure, Sheger City).

Interview results revealed that Ethiopian schools are neither proactive in facilitating such atmospheres nor are they on the right trajectory. Where such conditions cannot be created, CE will not succeed in achieving the goal of producing GC. This circumstance contradicts critical theory's views that schools can be used as forums to oppose hegemonic and assimilationist ideologies and fight against societal injustice (Naseem, 2011; Steinberg & Kincheloe, 2010 & Abdi, 2007). We believe schools should be free from such legacies and serve as centers

for socialization and transformation, shaping individuals who will become the driving forces of future generations through CE.

Teachers as agents of political ideology

Still, other legacies have to do with teachers. Whether during the imperial regime or the Dergue government, teachers were viewed as agents of political ideology. Religious leaders were responsible for teaching moral education, particularly during the imperial era. They were spreading the myth that the king was unquestioned and had absolute authority. Teachers who pushed their students to think critically about democratic principles and independently were also discouraged under the Dergue administration, rather than Marxist-Leninist ideology. The historical legacy demonstrates that teachers have prioritized conformity over independent thought in the classroom, resulting in the creation of obedient citizenship loyal to authoritarian regimes. Indeed, research participants also confirm attempted to use teachers to support the EPRDF. The participant described it as follows:

I think it is not far from the reality. In the post-1991 era, teachers lacking appropriate professional training in citizenship education were assigned to teach the course simply because they were members of the EPRDF. I also remember, in 2007, there was a month-long meeting in Hawassa. I attended that occasion. At the end of the occasion, it was concluded that a teacher with a positive attitude can teach citizenship. A positive attitude at that time implied teachers who became the perpetrators of the missions and objectives of the political party in power (Goru, Bishoftu Town).

This circumstance also demonstrates that citizenship education has not been able to escape the political vicious circle, even though we live in the twenty-first century. Critical theory considers teachers as transformational agents who may engage their students in social change praxis for the benefit of both individuals and communities, which is incompatible with the way teachers work in this setting (Giroux, 1980).

Lack of teachers' training in democratic citizenship

Historically, teacher preparation programs in both imperial and Dergue regimes prioritized the dissemination of state-approved information over the development of teachers' capacity to foster critical thinking and active engagement in the nation's civic life. Teachers were supposed to teach students about democratic governance, citizenship rights, political engagement, human rights, and social justice, but authoritarian regimes resisted this.

In the same vein, post-1991, education policy suggests teachers should be adequately prepared and continuously trained in CE (MoE, 2009), but the practical situation in schools contradicts these theoretical discourses. Teachers trained in

other fields of study are teaching the subject without adequate professional training. Ethiopia's approach to teachers training and preparation as well as professional development runs contrary to the global citizenship education perspective, which emphasizes qualified, well-prepared teachers with adequate resources, partnerships with parents and communities, and effective leadership (de Oliveira et al., 2016). Teachers need profound understanding of citizenship education to engage students in insightful discussions on democracy, rule of law, human rights, and social justice, thereby combating discrimination and inequalities.

Transforming the Political Legacies of Past Regimes in Ethiopian Citizenship Education

This study claims that Ethiopian citizenship education has often reflected authoritarian values by emphasizing compliance and conformity over democratic participation. Freire (1970) and Giroux (2011), drawing on critical pedagogy, contend that by encouraging critical consciousness and the questioning of power dynamics, education should free students rather than domesticate them. Schools should implement dialogue-based and participatory pedagogies that teach students to critically analyze social and political systems, solve civic problems, and define citizenship as active, thoughtful engagement in democratic life in order to challenge authoritarian ideologies.

The study revealed that Ethiopian educational institutions have been subjected to a long history of political repression, leading to fear and silence, limiting open dialogue and critical inquiry. Giroux (1988) asserts that educators should take on the role of transformative thinkers by establishing learning environments that enable students to express their opinions and confront injustice. This calls for creating democratic learning settings where fear and authoritarian control are replaced with communication, mutual respect, and trust. Students can grow in self-assurance and civic agency in these settings, which are essential components of critical and global citizenship.

The study reveals that Ethiopia's ethnic federal structure, despite its aim to promote autonomy and inclusivity, has actually exacerbated divisions and identity-based politics. This challenge has shaped citizenship education, frequently resulting in disjointed ideas of citizenship that are more closely linked to ethnic identity than to a common sense of national or international belonging. A foundation for overcoming these differences is provided by Global Citizenship Education (UNESCO, 2018), which promotes empathy, intercultural understanding, and international solidarity. Under this context, Ethiopian schools must integrate curricula that emphasize shared environmental issues, human rights, and communal responsibility to foster unity in diversity.

The study also demonstrated how schools have occasionally been utilized to spread particular ideological narratives through political indoctrination. GCE and

critical theory both stress the importance of fostering critical media literacy, social awareness, and autonomous thought to de-ideologize education. According to UNESCO (2015) and Nussbaum (2010), education should assist students in developing a sense of self as responsible, reflective people who are capable of making moral decisions and actively participating in society. Students should not only be taught facts; they should also be educated to analyze political messaging critically, identify bias, and think about how their actions affect their communities and beyond. Students become not simply knowledgeable citizens but also kind, global citizens who can make valuable contributions to society in this way.

Embracing global citizenship and global citizenship education as contemporary opportunities

Global citizenship

Various sources indicate that global citizenship is a very controversial phrase among scholars and has different interpretations. Despite these controversies and differences in interpretation, there is a common understanding that global citizenship does not imply a legal status. Global citizenship refers to a sense of belonging to a broader community and common humanity rooted in universal values and respect for diversity and pluralism, linking local to global and national to international (UNESCO, 2014). Global citizenship transcends the conventional understanding of citizenship, which is often associated with national identity, borders, or ethnic groups, especially in the context of Ethiopia today.

The historical legacies of Ethiopia have been characterized by struggles for independence, efforts to defend against external threats, and the maintenance of its sovereignty and unity. Recently, however, conflict, violence, and inter-ethnic strife have become increasingly prevalent. As a result, there has been a widespread deterioration of social cohesion, along with increased migration, poverty, and unemployment. These issues require a more comprehensive and collaborative approach, both in Ethiopia and globally. In this regard, the global citizenship perspective represents a transformative concept that could help Ethiopia overcome the lingering barriers created by regimes with inherently narrow ethnic and regional divides, enabling the country to engage with the broader, interconnected world of the 21st century. Global citizens understand their role in the global community, impacting the world stage. The process of reimagining citizenship involves ensuring that students develop a perspective of global citizenship. A student who has adopted a global citizenship perspective will first perceive and understand themselves through the lens of global citizenship, as a citizen who has transcended national legal status. Accordingly, reimagining citizenship is nothing more than perceiving and understanding themselves through the lens of global citizenship.

Global citizenship education

Global citizenship education is a transformative concept that can help every country overcome persistent barriers created by regimes with narrow ethnic and regional divides, enabling nations to engage with the broader, interconnected world of the 21st century (UNESCO, 2014). It is a crucial step towards fostering cultural, national, and global identities for contemporary citizens, not just an extension of local or national citizenship education (Davies, 2023). It offers new opportunities to expand the concept of citizenship by referencing global frameworks for democracy, human rights, social justice, international peace, environmental sustainability, and cultural exchange (DiCicco, 2016). In Ethiopia, despite changing political regimes, the education system has failed to cultivate active and informed citizens. Therefore, embracing global citizenship education is crucial for Ethiopia to reimagine citizenship and adapt to 21st-century world.

Understanding global citizenship education in the Ethiopian context

Global citizenship transcends the conventional understanding of citizenship, which is frequently associated with national identity, borders, or ethnic groups. Global citizens understand that they are part of a worldwide community and that their actions and decisions have a significant impact on the world stage. This entails embracing global values like social justice, sustainability, human rights, peace, and international collaboration (UNESCO, 2014). In Ethiopia, a country characterized by diverse ethnic groups, a rich cultural heritage, and an abundance of resources, global citizenship education offers a path forward by encouraging unity, inclusivity, and engagement with global issues. This approach is crucial in the sense that students can be taught through citizenship education that they are part of a larger global community in addition to being Ethiopian citizens.

Global citizenship education as a bridge between historical legacies and contemporary opportunities

Global citizenship education offers Ethiopia an opportunity to redefine good citizenship by moving beyond ethnic or regional identities, which have historically been sources of division. Tensions between groups have occasionally been made worse by ethnic federalism in Ethiopia's heterogeneous society. Global citizenship education, on the other hand, promotes the growth of a cohesive national identity that is centered on shared global ideals and transcends ethnic boundaries. This means that global citizenship education involves adapting local traditions passed down from grandfathers to global circumstances rather than undermining them. Teaching students about global citizenship might help them see themselves as part of a larger global community rather than just as Ethiopians or members of particular ethnic groupings.

How global citizenship education can be embraced in Ethiopia's contemporary context.

Citizenship in Ethiopia is primarily tied to local circumstances and to some extent to national contexts. This situation seems an illusion when compared to the development attained by human beings in the 21st century. To address this kind of challenge, how citizenship is viewed and perceived needs to be reimagined. Reimagining citizenship requires embracing contemporary opportunities and acknowledging them as one part of the resolution. To understand how global citizenship education can be embraced in Ethiopia, it is important to know how it relates to other contemporary opportunities. The main ones are:

Good governance and effective institutions: Global citizenship education, seen as a contemporary opportunity, aims to promote CE to achieve its goal of nurturing responsible good governance and effective institutions. The following is how an informant describes the issue of good governance:

In Ethiopia today, some individuals who have risen to positions of governmental authority, instead of working and leading their lives properly, seek to enrich themselves through the covert embezzlement of public resources. The government has intentionally overlooked these practices. This suggests that what is taught in the classroom contradicts the realities occurring in society. Students are aware of the circumstances in their respective localities, as they are, in one way or another, members of society. This situation hinders students from developing a sense of accountability, which can erode principles of good governance (Fenet, Sheger City).

In this case, promoting good governance and effective institutions is central to CE because it helps students understand their responsibilities as engaged, responsible members of a democratic society. GCE can enable students' understanding of accountability, transparency, and participation in governance, emphasizing the importance of democratic processes, good governance, and the rule of law. The future generation of Ethiopian leaders will be shaped by educating young people about the principles of good governance, democratic values, the significance of active citizenship, and their respective roles and responsibilities.

Empowering young people to be change agents: Empowering youth through CE entails providing them with the tools, confidence, and opportunities to take control of their own lives, make decisions, and have a good impact on their communities. Given the current state of affairs in Ethiopia, the majority of young people are dissatisfied because of the country's instability and poor governance. However, the total population of the country is predominantly youth age groups. An informant's description of the empowerment of the youth is as follows:

Due to the ongoing political crisis, the youth of Ethiopia appear to be in despair and experience a growing sense of detachment from their national identity.

This situation could undermine citizens' love and trust, thereby threatening the country's future and unity (Ahimed, Bishoftu Town).

The interview results revealed that in Ethiopia, there is a lack of empowerment and attention from the government to the youth, considering that they will become the leaders and representatives of the country. This approach is incompatible with the considerations being made for young people in the 21st century, as they represent the foundation of our sustainability. Scholars emphasize the importance of empowering citizens, especially the younger generation, to address 21st-century issues and improve individual and societal well-being, thereby shifting the perception of citizens beyond their past attributes (Davies, 2023). Adebayo (2017) emphasized that children are our most precious resource and the cornerstone of our country's future, as they will lead our nation, build wealth, and promote global citizenship. Youth must be recognized as educators, leaders, and advocates in addition to being learners (UNESCO, 2014). It can be argued that global citizenship education should view this youth demographic in Ethiopia as an opportunity to enable them to become informed, responsible, and actively engaged global citizens, addressing the nation's tragic disorder and violence.

Developing critical thinking and global awareness: These skills require a profound understanding of the world, thorough analysis, and rational decision-making with a clear rationale. In light of this, DiCicco (2016) remarks that global citizenship education is crucial for equipping students with the knowledge and competencies they need to succeed in the dynamic and interconnected world of the twenty-first century. People everywhere aspire for their youth to be informed, critical thinkers and active citizens who can address complicated issues, benefiting both individuals, communities, and the nation as a whole. However, one participant said about critical thinking and citizenship education in Ethiopia:

In Ethiopia, citizenship education has improved periodically along with the shifting of political regimes. However, as I understand it, it has not managed to escape the political trap in any way, thereby hindering critical thinking and student participation. While CE has fostered active participants and informed, responsible citizens, in Ethiopia it has promoted loyal, obedient, and submissive individuals (Kuma, Ambo Town).

According to the interview, both GC and CE need to be reimagined and reconsidered from the perspective of global education. Ethiopia is currently facing a tragic political situation, being one of the countries with significant conflict issues. This is complex problem arises from a lack of critical thinking and global awareness. In the twenty-first century, global citizenship education is essential to encourage both citizens and students to critically examine nations marked by ongoing ethnic tensions, persistent political conflicts, and significant social divisions at both local and global levels, such as Ethiopia.

Human rights and social justice: Globalization has led to a broad acceptance of democratic ideas and universal human rights, often embodied in international agreements and organizations like the United Nations, of which Ethiopia is a member. Ethiopian citizenship education incorporates human rights issues; however, there is a discrepancy between policy discourses and actual practice. The ongoing insecurity in Ethiopia is causing significant human rights violations, which contradict the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and demand substantial government efforts.

Indeed, global citizenship education encourages an educational system that advocates social justice to strengthen equality, fairness, and human rights for all, opposing discrimination and inequalities based on race, religion, gender, age, and social and economic status. Teaching students about human rights and social justice promotes the values of diversity and inclusion. It encourages students to appreciate different cultures, backgrounds, and perspectives. This is crucial in fostering a tolerant and harmonious society where diversity is celebrated, and discrimination is challenged. Students learn to value human differences and become advocates for inclusive practices both within their immediate communities and in the broader world.

Social cohesion and peace building: Ethiopia, one of Africa's oldest nations, is globally recognized for its significant African issues and as the first Black nation to resist fascist forces. In the early 20th century, it was a League of Nations member and played a crucial role in maintaining world peace, a role that has continued since the UN's establishment. However, the participant described the actual condition of affairs in Ethiopia as follows:

Ethiopia is a country where conflicts and disagreements on various issues are increasing and social cohesion is deteriorating from time to time. Therefore, in the recent past, conflict and war in Ethiopia have also destroyed fixed assets estimated at billions of birr. Above all, thousands of lives have been lost. This is a tragic aspect of Ethiopian history (Kaku, Ambo Town).

This problem might be resolved if students' perspectives shift and they are taught about social cohesiveness and peace-building in the respective curriculum. In this regard, GCE offers an opportunity to overcome past divisions by fostering a mindset that prioritizes dialogue, peace, and tolerance (UNESCO, 2014). The UN underscores the importance of global stability, security, and peace. It urges, future generations to denounce the adverse effects of war and to foster a mindset that appreciates diversity, social cohesion, and peace-building, which necessitates global citizenship education. In this scenario, by emphasizing intercultural understanding and our shared humanity, GCE might strengthen social cohesion and contribute to Ethiopia's long-term stability and progress.

Implications

This research has key implications for policy, practice, and theory. At the policy level, Ethiopia's curriculum needs to be reformed to incorporate human rights, embedding critical thinking, and global citizenship principles in a way that goes beyond authoritarian approaches. Teacher field based training programs should give educators the tools they need to build classrooms where students may actively participate and reflect. These tools should include multicultural awareness and democratic and critical pedagogy. Addressing issues in the nation's ethnic federal structure is crucial as locally relevant methods can promote inclusive and unified citizenship education. Practically, schools should provide safe spaces for dialogue, where students can openly discuss political and social issues without fear, and engage with real-world challenges critically. In the classroom, promoting critical pedagogy encourages students to think critically about authority, cultivate civic agency, and cultivate empathy and teamwork. Theoretically, the study contributes to global citizenship education and postcolonial education theory by showing how historical legacies of authoritarianism, political repression, and ethnic federalism continue to shape citizenship practices. In postcolonial contexts, scholars and practitioners can better understand how to foster thoughtful, responsible, and engaged citizens by connecting these local realities with more general frameworks of democratic and global citizenship.

Concluding Remarks

Ethiopia, a prominent African nation, has played a crucial role in maintaining world peace since the UN's establishment, yet is currently grappling with political turmoil. The lack of accountability and transparency in Ethiopia along with corrupt practices like theft, embezzlement, and anarchy, has significantly hindered the development of responsible citizens. This situation is exacerbated by the complexities of the divide-and-rule strategy inherent in the ethnic federalism of the post-1991 regime, threatening the country's future and unity. Therefore, Ethiopia, recognized for its pivotal role in the African Union, must urgently embrace a mindset that prioritizes diversity, social cohesion, and peace-building for future generations. This can be achieved by adhering to the UN's focus on global stability, security, and peace within this interconnected community.

Ethiopian CE has been dynamic and shaped by the appropriation narratives of the regimes. Not only does citizenship education in Ethiopia focus solely on national dimensions, but it has also been unable to escape the censorship of a particular political regime in one way or another. In this regard, fostering citizens capable of addressing the challenges society faces in the 21st century is difficult. Therefore, it is essential to embrace GC and GCE that promote inclusive, democratic, and active civic engagement.

The study revealed that school environments are not autonomous and are influenced by authoritarian regimes' legacy of fear and repression, preventing dissent and criticism by teachers and students. Teachers are inadequately trained in citizenship education, emphasizing conformity over independent thought in the classroom, which results in the development of obedient citizens who become loyal to authoritarian regimes, which runs counter to the perspective of global citizenship.

The government should promote an educational system that addresses the historical legacies left by past regimes and adopts a new paradigm by embracing contemporary opportunities like global citizenship and global citizenship education. These promote inclusive, democratic, and active civic engagement to reimagine citizenship. The Ministry of Education should increase stakeholder awareness, supply qualified teachers, and foster a conducive environment for citizenship education in schools.

Finally, the study has some drawbacks that reduce its reliability. Despite using various data sources, such as student focus groups, document analysis, and interviews with teachers, school administrators, and Ministry of Education specialists, the study is limited to six secondary schools and eight primary schools in three towns in the Oromia Regional State, Ethiopia. The study also employed a qualitative approach without considering a quantitative one. Another limitation of this study is that it is cross-sectional, and hence a longitudinal approach was not considered. We recommend that future research should employ mixed research approaches and expand its scope to include a broader geographical area, diverse regions, and a wider array of stakeholders. We also recommend prioritizing programs focused on instilling good citizenship attributes in students to foster social transformation within a dynamic world, underscoring the need for baseline research to guide these efforts.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Data availability statement

Empirical data referred to in this article are available upon request to the corresponding authors but are not publicly available due to privacy restrictions.

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