

Chapter 11

A Unified Global Competence Framework for Studying Abroad



Linli Zhou and Crystal Green

Abstract Global competence refers to ones' capacity to live and work well in a context that is distinct from their cultural background (OECD, 2018). However, international students' need to develop both civic and career global competence has not been conceptually recognized and explicitly addressed in American Higher Education research and practices. This chapter establishes a framework of *unified global competence* aiming to analyze the interactions between civic aspects of global competence (i.e. building critical citizenship) and its career goals (i.e. developing career skill sets). In this framework, three sub-competences—information, social, and context competence—are identified as important for studying abroad and to reflect the interaction between civic and career global competence. We argue that unifying civic and career global competence is important to cultivate a well-rounded person in the context of cross-cultural learning. Thus, this chapter provides a multidimensional framework of unified global competence that could guide more comprehensive research and practices in international higher education programs.

Keywords International students · Civic-career interaction · Unified global competence

11.1 Introduction/background

Global competence refers to ones' capacity to live and work well in a context that is distinct from their cultural background (OECD, 2018). This definition highlights both the civic and the career pursuits of global competence, aiming to address a gap that has existed in American higher education for a long time. Universities in the United States usually separated civic educational programs (i.e. building critical citizenship) from career trainings (i.e. developing career skill sets). However, a career-civic unification is important to prepare our students to enter the future workforce and meanwhile to live well with the increasingly diversified people.

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International students' experience and demands are unique from their domestic peers. They not only study at school for their future career development, but are also in need of skills to understand and adapt to the new cultural and social environments that are different from their home contexts. Civic capabilities like cross-cultural understanding are especially important for both their career expectations and their engagement with other cultures (Ngai, 2011). International students' civic needs are always combined with their career aspirations, while the dual demands have not been systematically conceptualized with a framework. A unified global competence framework should be created to reflect the career-civic interactions and establish a comprehensive understanding of global competence for international students so that American higher education can better support current international students studying in American higher education.

This chapter establishes a framework of *unified global competence* aiming to offer implications for educational programs of comprehensive pursuits for both career and civic aspects. In this chapter, unified global competence will be explained with three sub-competences—information, social, and context competence. These sub-competences are recognized based on learning theories on competence for international students (Liu, 2012). This chapter conceptualizes and discusses each sub-competence with important concepts in education. *Information competence* is discussed in relation to multilingualism and critical literacy (Freire & Macedo, 2000). *Social competence* is analyzed with emotional intelligence and intercultural communication (Lane et. al, 2004). *Contextual competence* is defined with social responsibility and sustainability (UNESCO, 2015). Discussing these sub-competences with relevant concepts helps to understand the different layers and meanings of unified global competence as well as showcase the civic-career interactions for studying abroad experiences. A multidimensional framework will guide future research and practices to better support international students with unified global competence development in higher education programs.

11.2 Literature Review

In America, universities have been taking an increasingly competitive approach using the logic of human capital theory viewing students as sole future labors rather than a citizen of the society (Slaughter & Leslie, 2001). This market-driven approach forms purposes and organizations of higher education that has sidelined the democratic mission of universities as providers of upward social mobility (Slaughter, Slaughter, & Rhoades, 2004). A tension has emerged in American higher education recently. On the one hand, a human capital theory approach to higher education has an instrumentalist perspective to regard education as mere career preparation. On the other hand, a human-rights driven approach, as articulated by the United Nations and other international bodies, offers a holistic and cosmopolitan perspective on the purpose of higher education. Global competence education in America has long

enmeshed within these two competing visions of the aims, purposes and funding structures of higher education.

To review the current understanding of global competence, we draw from a variety of existing frameworks that have been used in the United States, including the Definition and Selection of Competences, the Ed Steps Framework for Global Competence, and Global Competence for PISA (Boix Mansilla & Jackson, 2011; OECD, 2005, 2018). We synthesized and re-organized these literatures into a framework of unified global competence for international students. The framework acknowledges the need to promote both collective social well-being and career readiness. However, it does not aim to provide a formula for problem-solving among diverse actors in complex situations. Rather the framework is designed to activate individuals' reflexive and reflective processes of critical thinking and learning in relation to their material and social environments as a source of personal and shared growth.

The Ed steps Framework produced by Boix Mansilla and Jackson (2011) offers a humanistic understanding of global competence. This framework divides global competence by identifying four critical attributes and domains. The first domain is *investigating the world* which asks students to explore (identify, analyze, and argue) affairs of global significance, that is phenomena that affect people worldwide. The second domain of global competence is *recognizing perspectives* which requires acknowledgement, respect, comparison, and understanding of different thoughts. The second domain is important to understand the complex global issues identified in the first domain. The third domain is *communicating ideas*, referring to language proficiency as well as thoughtful communication with a collaborative and adaptive approach towards achieving a common goal. The third domain (communicating ideas) is built upon the second domain (recognizing perspectives), which enables students to recognize and understand multiple perspectives. The last domain, *taking action* stresses the goal of making a difference in the world for globally competent students. A combination of all the previous three domains are necessary to achieve a potentially impact contributions to the world. The Ed steps framework essentially shaped the U.S. Department of Education International Education Strategy 2012–2016 with subject-specific strategies and teaching suggestions.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) global competence framework identifies four dimensions of global competence: (1) examine local, global and intercultural issues, (2) understand and appreciate different perspectives and worldviews, (3) interact successfully and respectfully with others, and (4) take responsible action toward sustainability and collective well-being (2018). These four dimensions of global competence integrate knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values together. The first dimension requires knowledge about the world and other cultures, such as intercultural issues, relationships, and interdependence. The second dimension calls for skills to understand and act, including information reasoning, effective communication, conflict management, and adaptability. The third dimension promotes attitudes of openness, respect, and global mindedness—to view oneself as connected to the world community and feel responsible for the common good. The fourth dimension demands an appreciation for human dignity and diversity. This combination of four different dimensions (knowledge, skills, attitudes, and

values) directly reflects the civic interests in global competence which promote understanding of the social responsibilities for the global common good (e.g. environmental changes).

The Definition and Selection of Competences (DeSeCo) framework (OECD, 2005) provides an inspiration to combine career and civic global competence. As an overarching and interdisciplinary conceptual framework, the DeSeCo framework identifies 3 categories of competences that are important for both individual and collective goals: (1) adapting tools for one's own purposes and using them interactively in specific contexts (2) interacting and engaging with socially heterogeneous groups, and (3) acting autonomously while situating oneself in a broader social context.

These competences are important for an individual to function in society—not only adapting to the new demands of employment (e.g. the changing technology and diversifying and compartmentalizing/ fragmenting societies), but also establishing citizenship to accomplish common goals (e.g. social justice, pollution). With a unified (career-civic combined) perspectives, we are introduced to a potential construction of unified understanding and definitions on global competence.

To define unified global competence, we further reviewed learning theories and synthesized relevant competence frameworks. Learning theories divide competences by four components: cognitive (thinking), affective (emotional/feeling, e.g. sensitivity), behavioral (psychomotor/physical), and situational (contextual) (Liu, 2012), while other global competence frameworks (Lane et al.'s global leadership competences model in 2009, and global competence framework by the OECD in 2018) added social perspectives and interpersonal skills.

While these existing frameworks are useful for conceptualizing global competence, we find that they do not address two key components of educational curricula. First, they do not specify the population of learners, but are instead general recommendations. We are interested in developing here a framework that is relevant specifically for adult international students, who represent a very small and privileged portion of the global population. Second, the general frameworks are not developed for a particular context. Therefore, we here develop a framework that is relevant to higher education in the United States. The imaginaries of American higher education have been marked by a tension between utilitarian market values, human capital theory and the commodification of education on the one hand, and the wholistic liberal arts vision of education as a democratizing endeavor on the other (Cornwell & Stoddard, 2001; Stoller & Kramer, 2018). There is a need for higher education in the United States to take into account both the instrumental and the intrinsic needs of education (Dumitru, 2019), and the unified global competence framework presents a synthetic model for reconciling these needs.

11.3 Research Methods

This paper uses a synthetic method to connect different ways of thinking about global competence from the field of education and management in order to create a unified framework. We first make a clear typology by reviewing the different definitions and understanding on the purposes of global competence. Two types of perspectives for understanding global competence are identified: career perspective that focus on cross-cultural employability and long-term career success; and civic perspective that focuses on social responsibilities for global common goods (e.g. environmental changes).

Comparing career with civic pursuits, this paper demonstrates the how discussion of career and civic global competence are less prominent in the literature but are significant for international students' development in the American higher education. Then we reconnect career and civic global competence into a framework of unified global competence and identified its three sub-competences—information, social, and context competences. The unified global competence is proposed to illustrate the career-civic interactions that best fits the dual demands of international students and enable higher education educators to support them more comprehensively by not only their work preparation but also their life adaptation in cross-cultural contexts.

11.4 Results

Three sub-competences—information, social, and context competences—are found as illustrative for the interactions between career and civic global competence. They are also found as the key competences that enable individuals to work and live well in a cross-cultural context. Figure 11.1 shows the review process and our findings.

Unified global competence has three components. The first component *information competence* refers to language and literacy skills and critical reading capacities, especially on divergent understandings of different cultures on the same issues. This refers to, for example, multilingualism and multiliteracies for completing work tasks, as well as critical understanding of information. From a career perspective, reading and understanding multiple languages (Reimers, 2009) are important for job task completion (such as presenting ideas, listening to and understanding international colleagues). From a civic perspective, critical reading is the key to recognizing different perspectives and worldviews in the information and making meaning in a multicultural context independently (Freire & Macedo, 2000; Boix Mansilla & Jackson, 2011). By relating information to the social, cultural, and ideological context, one will understand the quality, appropriateness, and value of that information. Contextualizing information also helps map the gaps in our current knowledge. Those with information competence can also identify appropriate sources in order to organize knowledge and information.

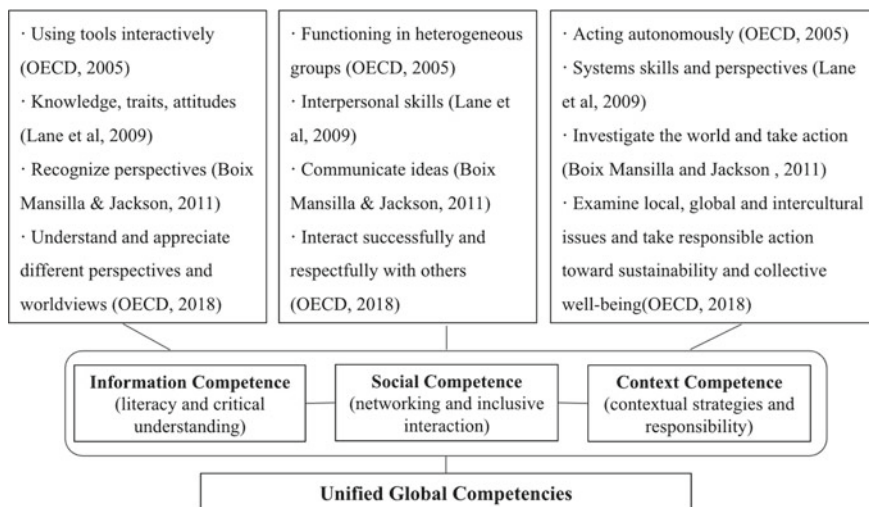


Fig. 11.1 Three sub-competencies of unified global competence

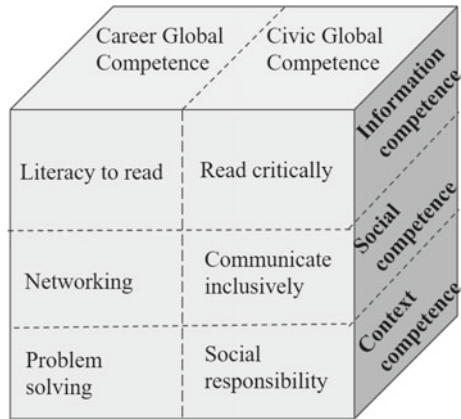
Social competence is the ability to network well and to communicate with different cultural groups inclusively. Social competence requires the skills of networking and communicating inclusively in order to respect diversity. Communicating and interacting with others to initiate, maintain, and manage personal relationships is essential for building the emotional intelligence that supports cross-cultural employability. Civically, while interacting with diverse groups, one should reflect the “big picture” of historical and social norms and situations to make not only accurate interpretations of the underlying emotional and motivational states of theirs and others, but also to recognize and understand the wide range of opinions, situations, and beliefs that are the basis for social cohesion and inclusion.

Context competence refers to coordinating different abilities to understand and collaborate with diverse groups of people towards the issues at hand. Context competence refers to contextual strategies to work and live and take social responsibilities. Context competence requires one to act autonomously; to set goals, make plans and propose strategies to control one’s job, life, and goals. Additionally, context competence requires one to move from individual goals to collaborative decisions and actions (UNESCO, 2015). Finally, it highlights the importance of system thinking and considerations of the context for any individual or collective behavior.

Information, social and context competences are the three sub-competences of unified global competence because they reconcile the competing discourses of career versus civic global competence. Figure 11.2 shows how these three competences incorporate both career and civic aspects of global competence.

Information, social, and context competences all contains aspects that fulfill both career and civic purposes. Figure 11.2 reveals global competence that combine career

Fig. 11.2 Career-civic interactions in unified global competence



and civic purposes. The unified global competence offers a multidimensional framework to understand and support international students’ development to live and work well while learning cross-culturally. We argue that unifying civic and career global competence is crucial to cultivate a well-rounded person in the context of cross-cultural learning. This coordinated approach will also enable more comprehensive research and supporting programs for international students in the international higher education programs.

By synthesizing the definition of global competence in different frameworks, this section constructs a typology of global competence (career, civic, and unified global competence), as shown in Fig. 11.3.

Three types of global competence are identified in this study—*career global competence*, the instrumental competence to facilitate cross-cultural employability and long-term career success; *civic global competence*, an intrinsic and relational competence to promote understanding the social responsibilities for the global common good (e.g. environmental changes); and *unified global competence* (containing three sub-competences—information, social, and context competences) to illustrate the interactions between career and civic global competence, and that enables students to work and live well in a complex world.

11.5 Discussion and Conclusions

This chapter presents a unified framework for global competence in higher education that identifies aspects needed to work and live well in a complex world. Unified global competence is comprised of three sub-competences: information, social, and context competences.

Competences are not developed in isolation; they are discursively mediated and contextual in nature. This means that competence is not only a matter of individual psychology, but is fundamentally social. Therefore, unified global competence

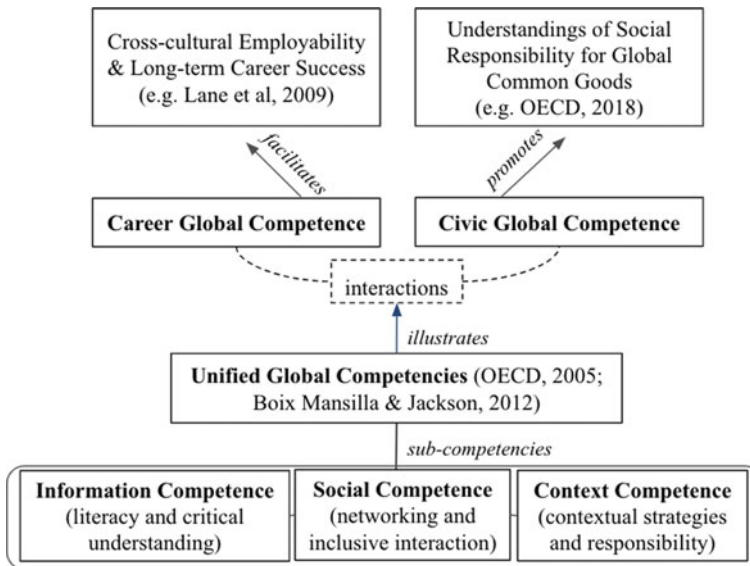


Fig. 11.3 A topology of global competence

cannot be approached solely from the perspective of individual personal development. Global competence is a capacity of individual students, however competences are held and used within interactions between the individual and their social contexts. We cannot circumscribe the development of these competences irrespective of the practices of daily interaction and the social environments and within which individuals live and work. An individual's cultivation of global mindedness as a dispositional or affective orientation is impoverished when pursued without consideration of the vibrant and challenging shared life in which global competences are negotiated and developed. Furthermore, the social nature of life requires the development of ethical practice based on understandings. Competences are therefore not only the property of discrete individuals, but are negotiated as properties and processes of the group (Sawyer, 2002).

The unified global competence framework presented here is meant for use with international students in higher education in the United States. The dual notions of career and civic competences as existing in opposition to one another is a unique and well-developed discourse in the United States. The reliance on human capital theory in the development of higher education in the United States, in particular around the rationales for international student exchange, has more similarities to the discourses for example in higher education in China than with the Humboldtian tradition in European higher education. In Europe, where the tension between human capital theory versus human rights as the basis for the provision of higher education have emerged within different imaginaries of higher education, a conceptual and curricular unification of career and civic competences may not be needed. However, in the United States, the purposes and means of promoting global competences for

international students remains unclear. This framework provides a tool for addressing this complexity.

Further, in presenting this framework we do not mean to imply that global competence development is linear. Development can be halting and recursive. It is also identity work that is contextual, experiential and happens over time through work and life. As an aspect of one's identity, global competences are dynamic and contextual. Global competence, like global citizenship, are approached differently in different countries (Lehtomaki, 2019). The unified framework shares similarities with the idea of *transversal competences*, meaning that competences are holistic and comprehensive, crossing disciplinary boundaries in all areas of study, work and life (Halinen, Harmanen, & Mattila, 2015). While we aim to present a *unified* framework for higher education, in the sense of that the framework is transversal across different domains of study and working life, we do not mean here to imply a *universal* framework that is applicable in all social, cultural, political or geographic contexts. The aim of a unified framework is not to create a hegemonic vision of global competence. Instead, we point to how cleaving civic and career competences in the development of adults misses the interplay between the competences needed to forge an integral life as whole people in work and civil society.

Finally, we recognize that this is an elite framework. The impetus for this work was a recognition of the lack of a framework for the development of global competence for international graduate students. In aiming to develop a framework for use in higher education, the competences we define are geared for a globally mobile intellectual elite. We recognize also that this framework does not explicitly incorporate critical theory, although we hold that neither does it exclude adaptation or implementation from a critical perspective.

11.6 Implications

The framework for global competence presented here can be used to open conversations in the United States higher education around the competences that international graduates students should develop. Popular discourses within higher education, specifically in the United States, about the development of global competence during graduate level university studies abroad, have tended toward increasing employment eligibility. Higher education institutions, therefore, face a moral conundrum in which expectations for domestic and international students' competences may be understood in different ways, both from the institutional perspective and from the students' perspective.

A clear typology of global competence is provided to overcome the lack of consensus of the different definitions among scholars of different fields (e.g. business and education). The three types of global competence—career, civic, and unified global competence—is helpful to direct research on international students. Especially, the concept of *unified global competence* (containing three sub-competences—information, social, and context competences) illustrates the interactions between

career and civic global competence and thus connects individual benefits (e.g. cross-cultural employability) with collective development (e.g. understandings of the social responsibilities for global common goods like environmental changes). With the coordinated approach, educators can better conceptualize the different dimensions and layers of meanings of global competence. Teachers could also clearly define their learning goals with the help of the multidimensional framework. Policymakers and administrators in higher education can support international students' recognition of their dual demands. American higher education can thus design programs that support both the career interests and their civic development of international students.

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