

Reading Habits and Preferences among Students in a Malaysian Public University: Exploring Opportunities for Developing Global Citizenship Dispositions

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Abstract

This study explores how voluntary narrative engagement, which refers to reading beyond academic requirements is influenced by disciplinary background, academic seniority, and reading frequency, and how these inclinations can potentially be harnessed to shape Malaysian university students' dispositions toward Global Citizenship Education (GCE). Despite the systematic integration of GCE frameworks in Malaysia, research indicates a “stagnation point” where higher education students demonstrate only moderate global citizenship awareness. Survey data (n=200) cross-tabulated with qualitative student accounts revealed that while voluntary reading frequency is lower among senior level students, an underlying interest in global themes is still present. Findings also demonstrated that disciplinary identity had a role in determining how students preferred to engage with complex sociopolitical issues. For instance, Arts and Humanities cohorts exhibited strong preferences for long-form prose (novels) and visual media (documentaries) to deconstruct human narratives, whereas Science and Engineering, and Social Science students favored discursive, pragmatic, and highly interactive pedagogical formats such as group discussions and peer exchange. Furthermore, qualitative analysis uncovered that narrative engagement could serve as a safe, non-threatening mechanism for students to practice perspective-taking, allowing them to navigate topic of

"difficult differences" such as systemic inequality and historical prejudice without the perceived risks of overt political activism. Finally, students tend not to prefer engaging with traditional, lecture-based dissemination and formal research tasks in GCE. To nurture greater interest in this area, university teachers may need to consider students' disciplinary backgrounds and preferred teaching and learning activities as they strive to shape dispositions towards global citizenship.

Keywords: global citizenship education; reading habits; narrative engagement; preferences; higher education

1. Introduction

Higher education institutions do not function as mere hubs for technical expertise; they also play a part in nurturing global citizens. A global citizen has critical knowledge of self, culture, and social-historical positioning; while simultaneously is aware that all human beings are interdependent (Nussbaum, 2002). This global citizen has knowledge of world issues and possesses a moral sensitivity to social injustice, inequality and racism; and is seen not to pursue a life that benefits themselves by disadvantaging others (Clifford & Montgomery, 2014).

As a response to this social purpose, Global Citizenship Education (GCE) principles have become infused into existing courses, especially in the humanities, social sciences, education, and STEM. GCE is not necessarily a stand-alone subject with a set curriculum but rather a framework or prism through which education can be considered (UNESCO, 2015). Fostering such global citizenship requires universities to encourage their students to develop a sense of 'global consciousness', where individuals understand and appreciate that the lives of those around the world are linked; and from there, they can work towards achieving a more just and sustainable world (Gacel-Ávila, 2005).

In Malaysia, which is the context of this study, GCE has been systematically integrated into the curriculum as early as primary school as a multidisciplinary topic aimed at enhancing students' knowledge and behavior toward sustainability (Zakaria et al., 2021). Despite this early exposure, GCE remains a rather new and underdeveloped concept in the Malaysian educational landscape. Research indicates that while the framework exists, a critical approach to global issues that moves beyond rote learning toward systemic analysis is largely absent. Past research has shown that by the time students reach the higher education level, their knowledge and attitudes toward global citizenship are reported to be at only a moderate level (Yusof et al., 2019). Given the early exposure they receive during their foundational years, this lack of growth suggests a 'stagnation point' in the development of Malaysian students' global citizenship dispositions

There are many ways in which GCE can be integrated into higher education curricula. For the purpose of this paper, we specifically focus on reading because it can enable students to engage with global citizenship themes and topics in both direct and indirect ways. At the national level, initiatives to promote reading are evident through efforts such as the National Reading Decade (DMK) 2021–2030, which aims to transform Malaysia into a reading nation by 2030 to produce

a knowledgeable, globally competent society. The nation hosts annual international bookfairs, literary festivals, and book talk events to actively promote the reading habit among Malaysians. Initiatives such as *KotaBaca* and *Projek BacaBaca* aim to foster a reading culture within schools and communities. Since there is importance placed on reading at a national level, and since reading plays an obvious role in academia, it can be utilised as a vital tool to create awareness among university students on topics related to global citizenship.

To effectively utilize reading for GCE, however, a distinction must be made between functional academic reading and voluntary reading. Although much of university reading is driven by course requirements centred on extracting factual information, the first part of this paper explores students' voluntary, leisure-time engagement with a variety of texts. It is precisely this kind of narrative engagement that holds the potential to cultivate global citizenship dispositions. The emotional immersion it entails provides a greater opportunity for empathy building and exposure to multicultural perspectives, which are needed when analyzing and evaluating systems of inequality and complex global challenges.

Furthermore, narrative engagement is a suitable means for developing global citizenship dispositions because it is perceived as a less threatening and controversial way to encourage students to explore topics of "difficult difference". Typically, themes of "difficult differences" such as racial, ethnic, and gender inequality, or issues relating to struggles for human rights, freedom, and power, form the discourse of GCE. In certain contexts, openly discussing these controversial issues puts one's personal safety at risk and brings about some level of uncertainty (Joseph Jeyaraj, 2026; Joseph Jeyaraj & Harland, 2016). Therefore, narrative texts can function as a tool which enables students to safely explore the lives of fictitious characters and imagined realities, which in many ways still mirror real life. Here, students are led to "read" the word (texts), and at the same time "read" the world (Wink, 2000).

If there is a desire to get students to engage more meaningfully with themes of global citizenship through narrative engagement, the first step is to understand what their current reading preferences are, and to explore the kinds of topics and pedagogical tasks that are of interest to them. At present, little is known about how a student's specific academic discipline, their seniority in the university system, and their personal reading frequency interact to influence their interest in global themes. Understanding these preferences is essential for creating a "targeted" approach to GCE that resonates with students from diverse backgrounds.

Therefore, the research questions that guided this study were:

1. What are university students' voluntary reading habits and preferences based on their disciplinary background, and level of seniority?
2. What is students' interest in global citizenship themes based on their disciplinary background, reading frequency, and level of seniority?
3. What is students' interest in GCE classroom activities based on their disciplinary background, reading frequency, and level of seniority?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Reading Habits and Attitudes among Malaysian University Students

Reading is widely recognized as a crucial skill that significantly influences university students' intellectual and emotional growth, and overall academic success. Despite its importance, research has shown mixed results on the reading habits and attitudes of individuals from different contexts. To understand how often people read, and why they read, it is worth noting that reading typically happens on a continuum. On one end is functional academic reading, which focuses primarily on the information readers must extract from textbooks and course materials (Rosenblatt, 1978). On the other end is voluntary narrative engagement, where reading happens for enjoyment, leisure, and emotional immersion.

Numerous studies have been carried out to uncover reading habits and preferences among university students, and mixed results have surfaced. For example, based on Baba and Affendi's (2020) study in a selected Malaysian university, most students can be described as frequent readers with more than 60% reporting reading daily and weekly. It was also found that there were slightly more students who read daily for leisure (41.3%) compared to those that read daily for academic purposes (37.5%). Another study revealed that the most preferred text among university students in a Malaysian public university was books and that most spent about one to two hours a day reading (Azizan & Sokman, 2024). These more recent insights contrast with research conducted over two decades ago, which found that students in two selected Malaysian universities read primarily for functional academic purposes rather than voluntarily for pleasure (Abdul Karim & Hasan, 2007). It was found that the majority of students read newspapers and academic books more frequently compared to fiction and literary texts. Despite these seemingly positive indicators, broader research surrounding reading highlights a persistent barrier to engagement. Hassan Mohammed et al., (2019) noted that 80% of Malaysian university students are described as reluctant readers, attributing this tendency to five primary influencing factors: (1) Internet usage, (2) environmental influences, (3) lack of motivation, (4) peer pressure, and (5) competing entertainment options.

The rapid advancement of information and communication technologies has caused a transformative shift in reading habits, pulling students away from traditional printed texts toward electronic media. The widespread availability of digital information has led to an increase in the amount of time people spend reading on screens. Research highlights that websites have become an increasingly vital reading source for Malaysian university students, who report a strong preference for digital materials over printed texts (Yusof, 2021). The Internet has become the core of digital reading, with Malaysian students frequently utilizing online resources to read news, check emails, and access social media platforms like Instagram (Oh et al., 2022). While this digital shift provides highly accessible information, it also introduces distractions, as students often use the same digital devices to listen to music or play games.

2.2 Global Citizenship Education (GCE) in Malaysian Higher Education

A survey of literature over the past two decades reveals how GCE has become infused into

much of higher education curricula in one way or another. The aim of GCE is to prepare students to become global citizens by developing “an awareness of other perspectives, a vision of oneself as part of a global community of humanity as a whole, and a moral consciousness to act for the good of the world” (Dill, 2013, p. 2). There seems to be no single way to achieve or assess GCE because of its differing definitions, length, and outcomes in learning. Over the years it has been conceptualized and sought to be understood in many ways, including from cultural, psychological, evolutionary, sociological and spiritual perspectives (Torres & Bosio, 2020).

In the Malaysian higher education context, Yusof et al., (2019) revealed that the level of knowledge, skills, and attitudes of students towards global citizenship is at a moderate level. They also highlighted that the relationship between knowledge, skill, and attitude towards global citizenship was high, positive, and significant. Another study by Abdullah and Ahmad, (2025) among multi-ethnic Malaysian undergraduates revealed that there were differing conceptions of citizenship, especially ecological citizenship, and that understandings of good citizenship varied between ethnic groups. Their study uncovered a need for more explicit citizenship education within Malaysia’s complex socio-political backdrop, where questions of citizenship and identity are continually negotiated.

Although the operationalisation of GCE remains uneven across contexts, it is still nevertheless integrated into Malaysian higher education in a range of ways. This has been done through in-class pedagogical strategies, out-of-class experiences and also through specific resources to guide GCE implementation. Garba et al., (2026) sheds light on how teacher educators from five different universities in Malaysia conceptualized and enacted GCE in Islamic and Moral Education. Various in-class pedagogical strategies were used including grounding GCE in Islamic ethical and/or universal moral principles, using culturally familiar language to address student concerns about Westernization and making GCE actionable in curriculum and practice. There are also instances when GCE was integrated through out-of-class activities. Henderson et al., (2018) conducted a study on a group of Australian and Malaysian pre-service teachers who participated in a short-term outbound mobility programme and were later tasked to reflect on themselves as culturally responsive global citizens during and after the two-week programme. In other instances, such as teacher education, specific resources were curated to provide guidance on how GCE can be implemented. One example is the creation of a teacher training module *Pendidikan Kewarganegaraan Global untuk Institusi Pendidikan* which was developed by USM’s Global Citizenship Education Cooperation Centre- Malaysia and used to train pre-service teachers on GCE integration (Almuddin et al., 2025). Together, these examples demonstrate that there does not need to be a standardized approach to GCE and that higher education institutions can develop diverse, contextualized strategies and resources to foster global citizenship.

2.3 Narrative Engagement as a Vehicle for Global Citizenship

While reading for pleasure and GCE are often examined in isolation, reading can intrinsically support the core objectives of global citizenship. Reading significantly affects both the intellectual and emotional growth of an individual, allowing those who read to actively widen

their mental horizons and their understanding of the world. Some examples come from the literature classroom where Edgar (2020), Seller (2021) and Smith (2023) mention that students' awareness towards others increased through narrative engagement. In all three studies, literature helped students develop empathy through discussion, writing and reflection. To ensure students were offered opportunities for narrative engagement, texts that were accessible and meaningful were selected, and classroom activities that promoted discussion such as such as pairing social and cultural texts to prescribed texts, and providing counter narratives were implemented. This kind of emotional and intellectual expansion is needed when seeking to nurture dispositions and awareness towards global citizenship.

Research demonstrates that engaging with diverse narratives increases students' awareness of others and prompts them to reflect on their own positionality. Specifically, perspective-taking allows students to travel into the minds of others and explore different societies by enabling students to "walk in another's shoes". Narrative engagement which gets students to connect personally with characters and situations, develop socioemotional competencies, and prompt students to imagine themselves in the place of others. Hence it has been noted that "walking in another's shoes" can lead to emotional engagement with texts (Vijayarajoo & Samuel, 2013) and at the same time the development of criticality (Iskhak et al., 2020). Here, students get to safely navigate complex global realities, and narrative engagement becomes a tool to raise global consciousness and to facilitate dispositions towards global citizenship.

3. Method

The sample for this study comprised exactly 200 undergraduate students ($n = 200$) actively enrolled in a Malaysian public university. The university's vision and mission are driven by three core values: Ihsan (an Arabic term meaning "to do beautiful things", "perfection", or "excellence"), Diversity, and Sustainability. As such, a range of high-impact educational practices are championed, one of which is diversity and global learning, which encourages students to explore cultures, life experiences, and worldviews different from their own. Therefore, while GCE is valued by the institution, students' openness to exploring GCE related themes and issues through texts are largely unknown.

Upon obtaining approval from the institution's human ethics committee, data collection proceeded. An open-ended survey was administered through Google Form to gain insight into the reading habits and preferences of students. Participants comprised of Foundation and Bachelor level students from 15 faculties, one school and one centre. For the purposes of data reporting, participants have been divided into four broad categories. Due to the institution specialization in agriculture, there is one category for participants from the agricultural and environmental background. This categorization was made to separate the hard-technical or clinical tracks from applied ecosystem fields to honor the institution's profile as an agricultural research university. The four disciplinary categories were: 1) Arts and Humanities; 2) Social Sciences; 3) Science and Engineering; 4) Agricultural and Environmental Sciences. Additionally, participants were grouped by seniority into Juniors (Years 1 and 2) and Seniors (Years 3 and above).

The open-ended survey was divided into four sections:

Section 1: Demographic Information

Section 2: Voluntary Reading Habits and Preferences (Reading beyond academic requirements)

Section 3: Interest in Global Citizenship Themes

Section 4: Classroom activities on Global Citizenship

Survey data was analysed in two distinct phases. First, quantitative (measured on 5-point Likert scale and multiple-choice selections) were exported and analyzed using descriptive statistics. Data was aggregated to calculate frequencies, percentages and means. Data was cross tabulated against the three primary independent variables: academic discipline, reading frequency, and level of seniority, allowing for comparative analysis across different student demographics.

Second, qualitative data in the form of open-ended textual responses were analyzed using a directed content analysis approach. Responses were first reviewed to filter out non-substantive answers. Rather than generating isolated qualitative themes, the remaining textual data was manually coded to align with the predefined quantitative constructs of the study (e.g., specific GCE pillars and pedagogical modalities). Finally, these qualitative responses were integrated directly into the quantitative discussion to triangulate and extend the findings, utilizing specific participant quotes to provide contextual depth and validate the trends observed in the numerical data.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 RQ 1: What are university students' voluntary reading habits and preferences based on their disciplinary background, and level of seniority?

We first sought to gain an understanding of the sample's ($n = 200$) reading habits and preferences by grouping them according to four broad disciplinary backgrounds alongside their reading frequency outside of course requirements. Reading habits were categorized into High Frequency (Daily/Weekly) and Low Frequency (Monthly/Rarely/Never).

Table 1. *Sample Size and High-Frequency Reading by Discipline*

Academic Discipline	Sample Size n (%)	High Frequency Readers (%)
Arts & Humanities	33 (16.5%)	51.5%
Social Sciences	65 (32.5%)	47.4%
Science and Engineering	67 (33.5%)	38.8%
Agricultural & Environmental Sciences	35 (17.5%)	37.1%

Participants from the Arts & Humanities represented the majority where 51.5% engaged in high-frequency voluntary reading. Perhaps for these students, reading was a normalized daily habit that overlapped with their academic identity. Conversely, a form of reading deficit can be noted among participants from disciplines such as Science and Engineering and Agricultural and Environmental Sciences. Over 60% of these students reported that they rarely read and never engaged in reading outside of their coursework. This significant proportion of low-frequency readers across these disciplines echoes the broader national concerns identified by Yusof et al., (2019), who noted that 80% of Malaysian university students display reluctance toward reading. This phenomenon could have potential repercussions in efforts to cultivate a reading generation that reads for pleasure and enjoyment.

We were also interested in finding out what types of literary texts participants across the university preferred. To uncover this, we provided participants with a list of text genres and asked them to select all that were related to their interests. Table 2 presents the overall institutional averages alongside disciplinary breakdowns.

Table 2. *Preferred Literary Text Type Based on Academic Discipline*

Literary Text Type	Institutional Average	Arts & Humanities	Social Sciences	Science & Engineering	Agricultural & Environmental Sciences
Novels	86.00%	93.90%	87.70%	76.10%	94.30%
Short Stories	73.50%	81.80%	70.80%	70.10%	77.10%
Graphic Novels	50.00%	63.60%	47.70%	40.30%	60.00%
Poetry	30.50%	39.40%	38.50%	19.40%	28.60%
Plays	22.50%	27.30%	24.60%	20.90%	17.10%

It was found that prose (short stories and novels) was preferred by students across the institution indicating that both long and short-form prose were popular choices. Interestingly, while the Arts & Humanities demonstrated a predictably high affinity for Novels (93.90%), the Agricultural & Environmental Sciences cohort slightly surpassed them, amounting to 94.30%. The qualitative responses provided crucial insight into this institutional preference for long-form prose; students frequently noted that novels allowed for a deeper, more sustained emotional connection to complex global realities. For instance, when describing the impact of reading a novel over shorter formats, one student detailed how reading Amy Tan's novel allowed them to ... *understand a little bit the perspectives of people with experiences similar to this...* and actively prompted them to ...*analyze my own relationship with my mother through the lens of conservative cultural norms* (Arts & Humanities, Junior). This could suggest that the overwhelming preference for novels across the institution is driven by a desire for immersive, empathetic reading experiences. The high institutional preference for novels (86.0%) and short stories (73.50%) stands in stark contrast to the findings of Abdul Karim and Hasan (2007) nearly two decades prior, which indicated that Malaysian students read primarily for functional purposes rather than voluntary pleasure. The high affinity for prose observed in this university suggests a potential generational shift; students today demonstrate the capacity

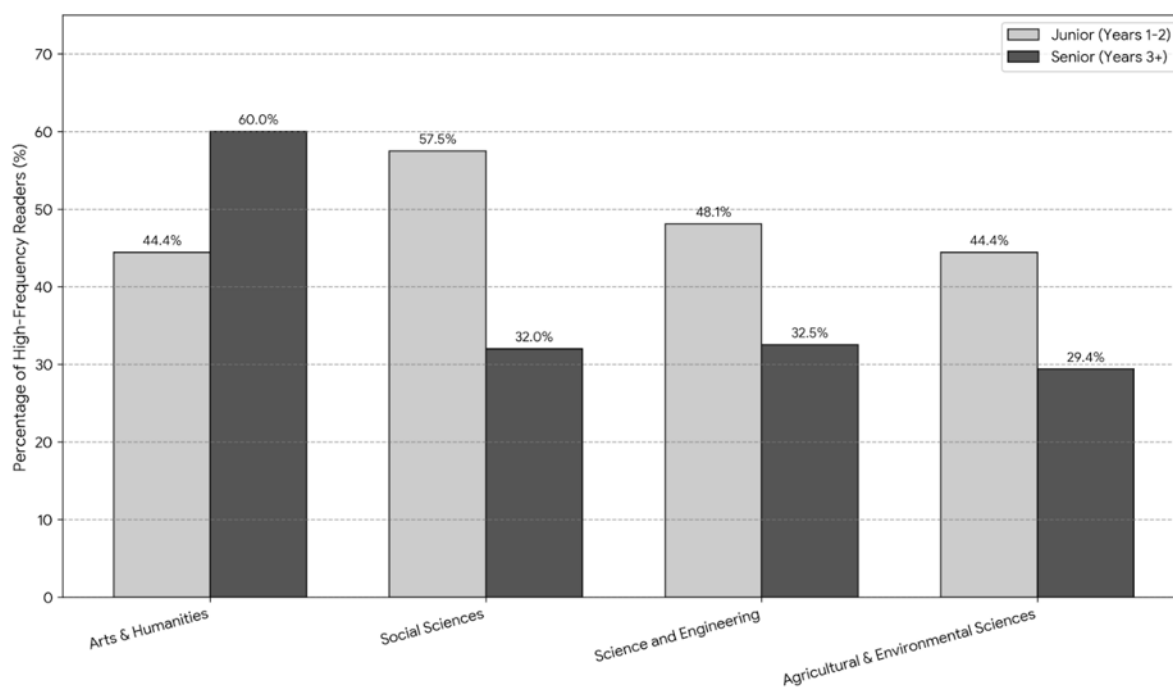
and inclination for voluntary narrative engagement which facilitates the exploration of diverse perspectives and worldviews.

Additionally, graphic novels represented a viable multimodal alternative, capturing exactly half of the overall population (50%). The Arts & Humanities (63.60%) and Agricultural & Environmental Sciences (60.00%) cohorts reported stronger receptivity toward these visual texts. However, this interest was lower among participants from the Social Sciences (47.70%) and Science & Engineering (40.30%).

Furthermore, we noted that participants' interests tended to be lower when it came to literary formats that are more abstract and performative. Poetry and plays registered as the least preferred literary genres across the entire institution (30.50% and 22.50% respectively), but this disengagement was particularly noticeable within Science & Engineering and Agricultural & Environmental Sciences. Only less than 30% of participants from each of these respective disciplinary backgrounds expressed interest towards reading poetry and plays. This lack of interest could be attributed to the fact that students from the sciences and technical tracks may be less inclined to explore texts which are more abstract, metaphorical and dramatic.

Another aspect in relation to reading habits that we sought to investigate was reading frequency based on level of seniority. The data illustrates that there seems to be a strong behavioural shift that happens when students transition into their final years of study. High-frequency reading is descriptively lower among Seniors (36.1%) compared to Juniors (50.5%). At the same time, low-frequency reading is dominant and is at 63.9% among Seniors. To gain deeper insight into those that engage with reading frequently, i.e daily and weekly, beyond course demands and requirements, we sought to discover if there were any differences among students based on their discipline and level of seniority (Figure 1).

Figure 1. *High Frequency Reading by Discipline*



Based on Figure 1, two striking findings were evident. First, unlike other disciplines, only Arts & Humanities Seniors read more frequently compared to Juniors and also compared to Seniors from other academic disciplines. High-frequency reading differs from 44.4% among Juniors to 60% among Seniors from the Arts & Humanities. This could indicate that students within programmes involving language, design and cultural studies begin to embrace reading for pleasure or voluntary reading as part of their academic identity. This may be attributed to academic and disciplinary socialisation where reading becomes part of a student's professional and personal ethos. The next rather striking finding was seen among the Social Sciences group. They showed the largest difference in reading frequency between Juniors and Seniors compared to other disciplinary groups. Social Science juniors entered the university as the most avid readers (57.5%). However, among Seniors, only 32% reported high-frequency reading. Here, university teachers may need to consider how they can increase dispositions towards reading for pleasure among senior level students at a time where they may likely be experiencing academic-text fatigue.

4.2 RQ2: What is students' interest in global citizenship themes based on their academic discipline, reading frequency and level of seniority?

To address the second research question, participants' general interest levels were measured on a 5-point Likert scale where 1 = Strongly Disinterested and 5 = Strongly Interested. The data (n=200) was analyzed across three independent variables: Academic Discipline, Level of Seniority, and Reading Frequency.

Table 3. *GCE Interest Score by Academic Discipline*

Academic Discipline	Mean GCE Interest Score (M)
Arts & Humanities	4.30
Social Sciences	3.85
Science and Engineering	3.79
Agricultural & Environmental Sciences	3.57

In the context of the 5-point scale used in this study, a high mean score ($M \geq 4.0$) indicates a strong, positive level of interest in global themes, whereas a lower mean ($M \leq 3.0$ or below) reflects moderate to low receptivity. As previously demonstrated in Table 3, participants in the Arts & Humanities exhibited the highest interest and receptivity towards learning about global citizenship themes ($M=4.30$). One reason for this could be because curricula in the Art & Humanities very often require the deconstruction of human narratives and societal power structures. Hence, ideals related to global citizenship acted as a natural extension of their existing disciplinary identity. In contrast, interest was lower among Science & Engineering and Agricultural & Environmental Sciences. Science & Engineering participants reported moderate interest ($M=3.79$), while the Agricultural & Environmental Sciences students reported the lowest institutional average ($M=3.57$).

Data were also analysed to examine participants' academic discipline and their preferred GCE themes which were based on three main prominent GCE pillars: Cultural Diversity, Social Justice, and Environmental Sustainability.

Figure 2. *Interest in Core GCE Themes Based on Academic Discipline*

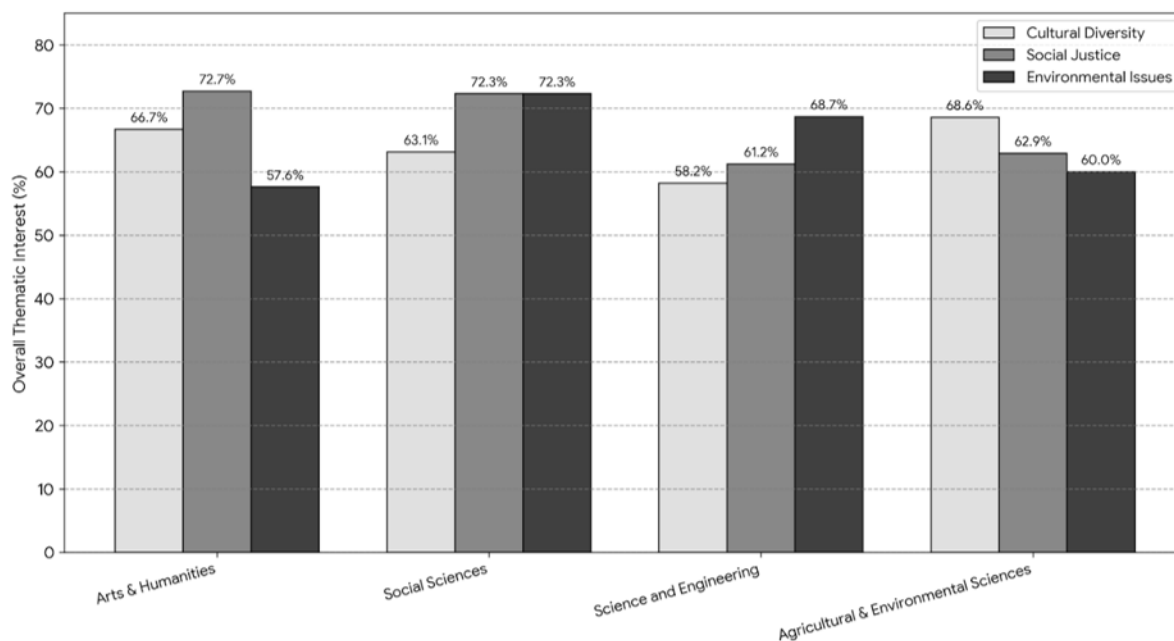


Figure 2 illustrates that overall thematic interest varies by academic discipline. Students in the Arts & Humanities and Social Sciences exhibited the strongest preference for Social Justice themes (72.7% and 72.3%, respectively). Conversely, Environmental Sustainability resonated most strongly with Science & Engineering (68.7%) and Social Sciences (72.3%) group. Yet, it was somewhat unexpected that among the three themes, participants from the Agricultural & Environmental Sciences reported the lowest interest in Environmental Sustainability. A possible explanation for the unexpected low interest may stem from 'academic fatigue,' where students whose daily coursework is already saturated with environmental sciences seek escapism during their leisure time. Additionally, out of the three themes, Cultural Diversity maintained a relatively consistent baseline of interest across the institution.

To probe further into the participants' interests, they were asked to select up to three preferred GCE sub-themes for each core theme. Tables 4–6 show the preferred sub-themes relating to three main GCE pillars: Cultural Diversity, Social Justice, and Environmental Sustainability.

Table 4. *Preferred Cultural Diversity Sub-Themes Based On Discipline*

Cultural Diversity Sub-Theme	Arts & Humanities	Social Sciences	Science & Engineering	Agricultural & Environmental Sciences
Identity & Self-Discovery	66.70%	55.40%	56.70%	68.60%
Traditions & Customs	66.70%	63.10%	58.20%	51.40%
Cross-Cultural Love & Relationships	42.40%	53.80%	47.80%	42.90%
Popular Culture	33.30%	49.20%	49.30%	48.60%
Cultural Celebrations	42.40%	43.10%	41.80%	45.70%
Generational Conflicts	33.30%	43.10%	37.30%	37.10%
Cultural Clash & Integration	39.40%	23.10%	25.40%	28.60%
Colonialism & Post-Colonialism	18.20%	21.50%	25.40%	37.10%
Immigration & Diaspora	18.20%	15.40%	7.50%	28.60%

Table 5. *Preferred Social Justice Sub-Themes Based On Discipline*

Social Justice Sub-Theme	Arts & Humanities	Social Sciences	Science & Engineering	Agricultural & Environmental Sciences
Racial Discrimination	72.70%	58.50%	56.70%	62.90%
Gender Inequality	60.60%	63.10%	55.20%	60.00%
Education Equity	45.50%	72.30%	61.20%	51.40%
Criminal Justice Reform	48.50%	53.80%	44.80%	48.60%
Healthcare Access	45.50%	47.70%	41.80%	45.70%
Income Inequality	42.40%	38.50%	32.80%	37.10%
Disability Rights	33.30%	26.20%	29.90%	14.30%
LGBTQ+ Rights	33.30%	15.40%	17.90%	22.90%
Immigration & Refugee Rights	27.30%	21.50%	17.90%	17.10%

Table 6. *Preferred Environmental Sub-Themes Based On Discipline*

Environmental Sustainability Sub-Theme	Arts & Humanities	Social Sciences	Science & Engineering	Agricultural & Environmental Sciences
Nature vs. Technology	57.60%	72.30%	59.70%	60.00%
Climate Change	48.50%	49.20%	68.70%	57.10%
Human-Nature Connection	57.60%	63.10%	34.30%	54.30%
Sustainable Living	39.40%	47.70%	55.20%	54.30%
Conservation & Biodiversity	39.40%	29.20%	32.80%	51.40%
Environmental Justice	33.30%	36.90%	32.80%	34.30%
Ecological Imbalance	24.20%	32.30%	31.30%	31.40%
Environmental Activism	27.30%	33.80%	26.90%	31.40%

When diving deeper into specific sub-themes, distinct disciplinary priorities emerged that reflect participants' academic training. Within Cultural Diversity (Table 4), "Identity & Self-Discovery" and "Traditions & Customs" were the preferred topics, capturing over 50% interest across almost all disciplines. This indicates a broad desire among students from a multicultural society like Malaysia, to understand personal positioning within historical contexts.

Regarding Social Justice (Table 5), preferences highlighted deep systemic concerns. Arts & Humanities students overwhelmingly prioritized "Racial Discrimination" (72.7%), while Social Sciences students focused heavily on "Education Equity" (72.3%) and "Gender Inequality" (63.1%). Conversely, sub-themes such as 'LGBTQ+ Rights' registered comparatively lower interest across the institution, with only 15.40% and 17.90% among the Social Sciences and Science and Engineering groups. This lower engagement likely reflects Malaysia's complex socio-political backdrop. As noted by Joseph Jeyaraj and Wald (2020), openly discussing highly sensitive or legally restricted controversial issues can bring about

uncertainty and perceived personal risk, which may have prompted students to gravitate toward safer avenues of social justice inquiry.

Finally, within Environmental Sustainability (Table 6), Science & Engineering students demonstrated a predictable, high affinity for "Climate Change" (68.7%). Meanwhile, Social Sciences and Arts & Humanities students were highly interested in the intersectional topics of "Nature vs. Technology" and the "Human-Nature Connection," indicating a desire to explore the sociological and philosophical impacts of environmental degradation rather than just the hard science. Interestingly, while students were highly eager to explore the systemic impacts of the environment, their interest in 'Environmental Activism' remained notably low across all disciplines, with the highest only at 33.80% in the Social Sciences. This disparity suggests that while Malaysian students could be comfortable developing a critical attitude toward ecological issues, they may hesitate to engage with the confrontational or politically charged implications of 'activism'. This aligns with the observation that students prefer less threatening, non-confrontational avenues to explore global citizenship over direct political action.

While Tables 4, 5, and 6 outline the students' quantitative thematic preferences, the open-ended responses revealed the depth of their engagement with these GCE pillars. When asked to recall a text that profoundly impacted their understanding of global issues, students across diverse disciplines explicitly cited narratives that tackle systemic inequality and global socio-historical trauma. Within the Social Justice and Cultural Diversity pillars, students actively utilized literature to deconstruct systemic biases. For instance, the high interest in gender inequality (over 55% across all disciplines) was powerfully contextualized by one student who cited Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. The participant reflected on the shock of encountering ...*gender discrimination backed up by law...*, specifically noting a scene where a law enforcer refused to intervene in domestic abuse because ...*what a man does in his home is his business...* (Arts & Humanities, Junior). Similarly, a Science & Engineering student demonstrated a profound grasp of historical exploitation by citing David Grann's *Killers of the Flower Moon*, noting that the text exposed them to ...*how the native Americans are exploited which show the social inequality and hierarchy...* (Science & Engineering, Senior). Furthermore, students showed a keen interest in texts exploring localized historical prejudices, with one participant highlighting Durian Sukegawa's *Sweet Bean Paste* for its exposure of Japan's 1953 Leprosy Prevention Law, reflecting on how ...*many former patients of this disease experience prejudice and discrimination from society...* (Arts & Humanities, Senior).

Aligning with the Environmental Sustainability pillar, some students connected ecological degradation directly to real-world consequences. One student explicitly linked global consumption to environmental decay, recalling a text that highlighted ...*how technology wastes are killing earth and the gadgets are making us lose our relationship with our loved ones...* (Arts & Humanities, Senior). Citing a text on carbon footprints, another student explained how reading exposed the class divides inherent in environmental action: *Ordinary people, contribute to reducing footprint by not using these and that things for environment purpose but*

higher ups, celebrities, rich use their private jet frequently. It adds a different perspective to me about the issue. Really interesting. (Social Sciences, Senior).

These qualitative responses illustrate the power of narrative engagement as a medium to navigate “difficult differences” in a safe, non-threatening space. Rather than engaging in controversial or risky political debates, students reflected through the fictitious realities of these texts to critically evaluate real-world systemic inequalities. By connecting narratives of historical exploitation and ecological degradation to their modern realities, these students are actively learning to “read the world” alongside the word (Wink, 2000). This deep, reflective engagement demonstrates the moral sensitivity and awareness of human interdependence that Nussbaum (2002) and Clifford and Montgomery (2014) argue are foundational to global citizenship.

Ultimately, these reflections demonstrate that the high interest scores reported in the quantitative data are not merely abstract preferences; they are connected to active, voluntary reading practices. More importantly, these responses illustrate the concept of perspective-taking discussed earlier. By engaging with narratives, students can transcend their own realities and develop empathy for marginalized groups. For example, after reading a harrowing Korean novel about institutional abuse, one student noted, *...I paid more attention on topics related to disability justice and understand more about why we should care about marginalized people...* (Arts & Humanities, Senior). Other students used literature to reflect on their own tendencies to judge others, noting that fiction helps them connect with people because they previously *...could not understand what that person is going through...* (Social Sciences, Junior). Through this type of narrative engagement, students were reflecting on complex sociopolitical structures while simultaneously building the empathetic dispositions required to navigate them.

Reading Frequency and Academic Seniority

While discipline can serve as a foundational influence towards global citizenship topics, a student’s personal reading habits and seniority level can also reveal insights into their reading interests. Table 7 illustrates the mean interest scores across these two parameters.

Table 7. *GCE Interest Scores by Reading Frequency and Seniority Level*

Variable	Group	Number of Participants (n)	Mean Interest Score (M)
Reading Frequency	High Frequency (Daily/ Weekly)	87	4.03
	Low Frequency	113	3.72

	(Monthly/ Rarely/ Never)		
Seniority Level	Juniors (Year 1-2)	103	3.89
	Seniors (Year 3 and above)	97	3.81

It was found that participants who actively maintained high-frequency reading crossed the critical 4.0 threshold ($M=4.03$) demonstrating descriptively higher dispositions toward global themes than their low-frequency peers ($M=3.72$). This suggests that regular exposure to literary texts could lead to more openness towards a diverse range of themes such as social justice, cultural diversity, and environmental sustainability. However, while the data shows a strong influence between high- frequency reading and a higher interest in global citizenship themes ($M=4.03$ vs $M=3.72$), it is important to note that this is a correlation; frequent reading relates to this interest, but it cannot be definitively claimed as the direct cause.

To uncover if simple progression through university education heightens dispositions towards global citizenship, interest levels were compared across academic seniority. The data reveals a slightly lower interest among seniors ($M=3.81$) compared to juniors ($M=3.89$). This indicates that the standard university education may not always automatically produce globally conscious graduates. Without deliberate pedagogical interventions, the initial curiosity students possess upon entering university may likely slowly erode under the pressure of academic text-fatigue and narrow disciplinary specialization.

4.3 RQ3: What is students' interest in GCE classroom activities based on their disciplinary background, reading frequency and level of seniority?

Table 8. *Preferred GCE Classroom Activities by Discipline, Reading Frequency, and Seniority*

Pedagogical Activity	Arts & Humanities	Social Sciences	Science & Engineering	Agricultural & Environmental	High Frequency	Low Frequency	Juniors (Year 1-2)	Seniors (Year 3+)
Group discussions	45.5%	60.0%	42.5%	55.2%	48.3%	52.2%	52.4%	48.5%
Watching documentaries / films	63.6%	43.1%	53.4%	31.0%	55.2%	43.4%	45.6%	51.5%
Interacting with diverse classmates	60.6%	46.2%	47.9%	34.5%	46.0%	48.7%	50.5%	44.3%
Creative expression activities	57.6%	44.6%	45.2%	44.8%	46.0%	47.8%	50.5%	43.3%
Guest speakers	30.3%	49.2%	42.5%	51.7%	42.5%	45.1%	43.7%	44.3%
Hands-on projects	33.3%	36.9%	43.8%	51.7%	37.9%	43.4%	39.8%	42.3%
Role-playing / Simulations	24.2%	38.5%	24.7%	24.1%	31.0%	27.4%	31.1%	26.8%
Conducting research	45.5%	23.1%	16.4%	27.6%	29.9%	21.2%	23.3%	26.8%

When examining classroom activity preferences across demographic variables (Table 8) to address RQ3, distinct pedagogical profiles emerged based on academic discipline. Arts & Humanities students demonstrated a strong preference for visual and culturally immersive modalities, ranking documentaries (63.6%) and interacting with diverse classmates (60.6%) as their top choices. This preference for cultural immersion was also supported by qualitative feedback from students seeking authentic, cross-cultural exchange, with one participant succinctly highlighting that classes should have activities which enable students to ...*Interact with international students more...* (Arts & Humanities, Junior). The desire to interact with classmates from diverse backgrounds (60.6%) among Arts and Humanities students directly operationalizes the core goal of GCE: fostering a "global consciousness" where students recognize their interdependence (Gacel-Ávila, 2005; UNESCO, 2015). It indicates that students do not want to learn about global citizenship in isolation; rather, they seek to actively practice it through cross-cultural, dialogic exchange with their peers.

Furthermore, the strong preference for watching documentaries and films (55.2%) among high frequency readers directly reflects the transformative shift toward digital and screen-based consumption highlighted in recent reading habit literature. However, rather than acting purely as a distraction, students recognized multimedia as an engagement tool, noting that ...*Watching different type of documentaries, film, animation, or drama can attract students to get involved in discussing about global issues...* (Science & Engineering, Senior). Conversely, students in the Social Sciences and Agricultural & Environmental Sciences favored more dialogic and social activities, showing a strong preference for group discussions and hearing from guest speakers (60.0% and 55.2%, respectively). Qualitative responses reinforced this desire to move away from standard lecture formats, with participants requesting teachers to ...*engage activities that [are] more creative and practical like games, simulation, debate and more...* (Social Sciences, Senior).

Indeed, traditional formal research was deeply unpopular across the Science and Engineering and Social Science groups (ranging from 16.4% to 27.6%), though it retained moderate appeal among Arts & Humanities participants (45.5%). Beyond discipline, students' personal habits and seniority introduced minor variances; for instance, high-frequency readers were notably more receptive to analyzing documentaries (55.2%) than their low-frequency peers (43.4%). Meanwhile, Juniors exhibited a slightly higher enthusiasm for interactive and creative expression activities compared to Seniors, suggesting a mild shift toward passive consumption formats as students advance in their university education.

5. Conclusion

This study aimed to explore how selected university students' reading habits, disciplinary backgrounds, and academic seniority intersect with their dispositions toward Global Citizenship Education (GCE). The findings illustrate that there is potential for narratives to be used as a tool in GCE. While the data indicates that voluntary reading frequency is less frequent as students transition into their senior years, their underlying interest in global themes remains

present across the institution.

The findings highlight that a "one-size-fits-all" approach to GCE is insufficient. In this context, disciplinary identity significantly shapes how students prefer to engage with global themes. While Arts and Humanities cohorts demonstrated a natural affinity for deconstructing human narratives through long-form prose and visual media, students in the Science and Engineering and Social Science groups exhibited a strong preference for pragmatic, discursive, and highly interactive pedagogical formats.

The integration of quantitative trends and qualitative student voices reveals that standard, lecture-based dissemination and traditional formal research tasks are no longer the most effective methods for cultivating global consciousness. Students are interested in multimedia integration, authentic cross-cultural peer interactions, and real-world problem-solving. If Malaysian universities are to overcome the current 'stagnation point' of GCE development, educators must strive to create dynamic, multimodal classroom experiences. By purposefully drawing upon students' existing literary and media interests, university teachers can successfully transform curiosity into the critical, empathetic global citizenship dispositions required to navigate our increasingly interdependent world.

To build upon these findings, future research should consider longitudinal studies to track the evolution of students' global citizenship dispositions and voluntary reading habits from their first year through graduation. Additionally, experimental or intervention-based studies could test the efficacy of the students' preferred classroom activities, such as utilizing graphic novels, documentaries, and cross-cultural simulations, to measure their direct impact on cultivating global consciousness and global citizenship dispositions. Finally, since this research was conducted among only 200 students in a single institution, expanding this research across multiple diverse institutions, including private universities, would help determine how different institutional cultures influence GCE engagement on a wider scale.

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