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COURSE SAMPLE



LEADERSHIP OF INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS

MA Educational Leadership in Practice

Leadership of International Schools

MA EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP IN PRACTICE ONLINE

WELCOME TO THE UNIT

This unit centres on international educational institutions and how to lead them. It examines the key concepts of internationalisation, globalisation and global citizenship. In Theme 2 you will develop a fuller understanding of the field of international education through the analysis of international educational networks and partnerships and through examining an international curriculum (the International Baccalaureate) thus gaining deeper insights into how internationalism and the focus on global citizenship a key aspect of international education systems. In Theme 3 we will analyse the leadership of international schools/organisations against the framework of the UNSDGs, and the particular challenges educational leaders face within the international context. In the final Theme we will examine motivations for leading international schools despite the obvious challenges and complexities.

UNIT AIMS

The aims of this unit include:

1. Develop key understanding of conceptualisations of globalisation and internationalisation
2. Develop understandings of the international school from a critical perspective
3. Critically examine the challenges of leading international schools

UNIT OVERVIEW

Unit Overview

Theme 1: Conceptualising Internationalism and Globalisation

Theme 2: Conceptualising Internationalism and Globalisation

Theme 3: Leading International Schools

Theme 4: To Lead or not to Lead?

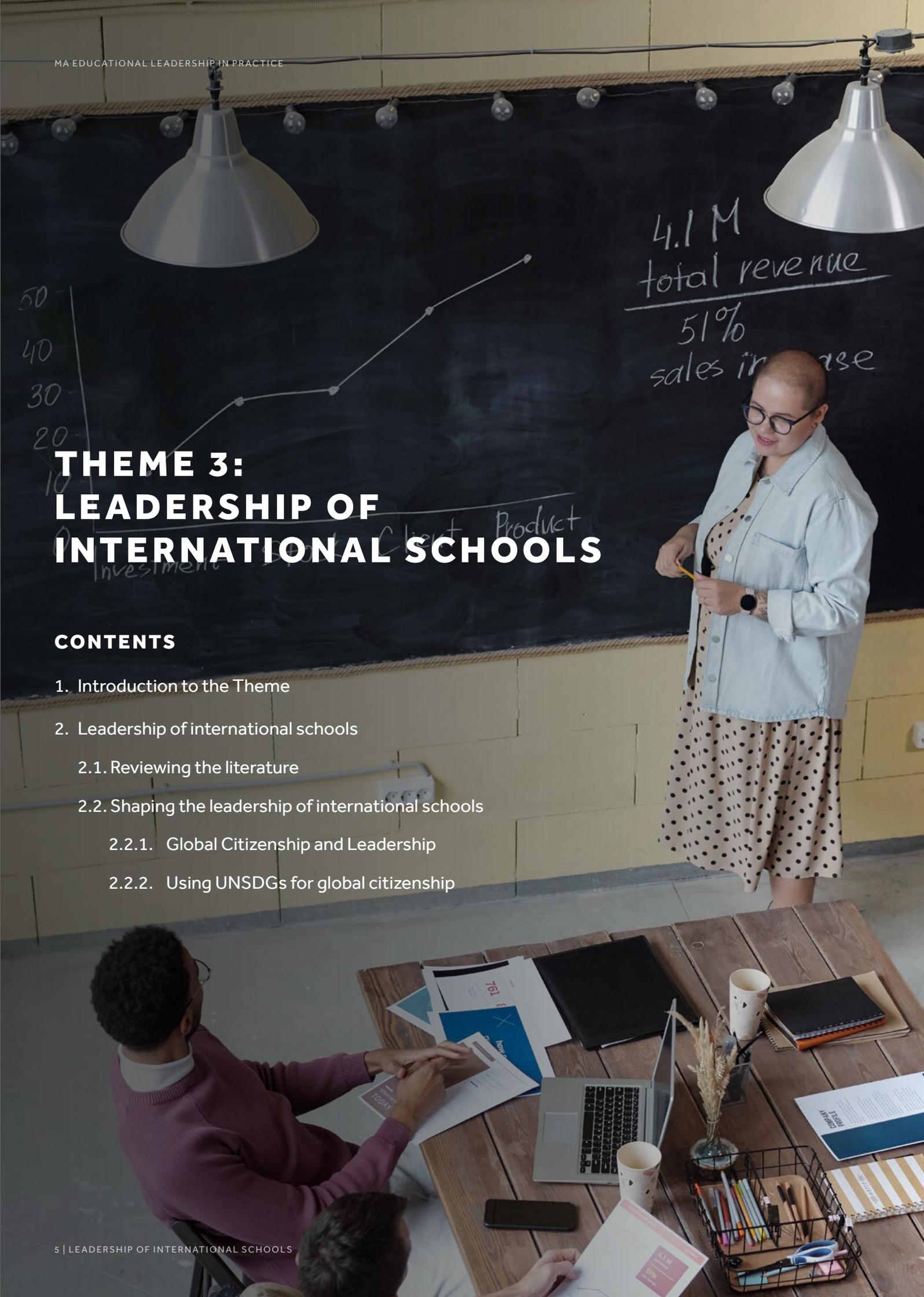
INTENDED LEARNING OUTCOMES

Category of outcome	Students will be able to:
Knowledge and understanding	Demonstrate an understanding of globalisation and internationalisation within global education systems
	Critical evaluate discourses around international schools' curricula with particular reference to the IB
Intellectual skills	Part A and B critically evaluate the challenges of leading international schools
Practical skills	Critically analyse and interpret research and conceptual papers in international schools' leadership through creating and delivering a formal video presentation.
Transferable skills and personal qualities	Demonstrate an ability to critically examine the work of others in the field of international education
	Construct and defend arguments through effective communication and presentational skills

THEME 3: LEADERSHIP OF INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS

CONTENTS

1. Introduction to the Theme
2. Leadership of international schools
 - 2.1. Reviewing the literature
 - 2.2. Shaping the leadership of international schools
 - 2.2.1. Global Citizenship and Leadership
 - 2.2.2. Using UNSDGs for global citizenship



1. INTRODUCTION TO THE THEME

In this Theme, we begin exploring the complexities of leadership within international school contexts. We engage with key literature that highlights the multifaceted challenges leaders face, including managing cultural diversity, navigating governance and accountability structures, addressing recruitment, retention, and high staff mobility, overseeing financial management, and supporting student well-being. While these challenges are not exclusive to international schools, the unique characteristics of these environments often amplify their significance.

We will also consider global citizenship and leadership through the lens of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. Building on this, the Theme examines the specific factors within international schools that shape and influence leadership practices.

2.1 REVIEWING THE LITERATURE

Leadership in international schools may be interpreted in a different way from national and state forms of school leadership. Blandford and Shaw, (2001), say that a description of international schools is impossible given the enormous variance in their makeup. They also point to a paucity of documentary evidence in international school leadership, which Hayden (2006) terms a 'dearth of material'. Keller (2014) adds that,

"While international schools vary tremendously, and elude definition, the industry of international schools continues to grow rapidly. The person who finds themselves in a senior leadership role of such challenges faces significant challenges," (from Keller (2014)).

Leading international schools in practice presents unique challenges that stem from their diverse and dynamic nature. Here are the specific practical challenges commonly faced by leaders in international school settings:

MANAGING CULTURAL DIVERSITY

- + **Staff and Student Diversity:** International schools often comprise teachers, staff, and students from various cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Leaders must navigate and integrate these differences to create a cohesive and inclusive environment.
- + **Cultural Sensitivity:** Leaders need to be culturally aware and avoid biases or cultural misunderstandings. Missteps in this area can lead to conflicts or feelings of exclusion.
- + **Curriculum Alignment:** Ensuring the curriculum resonates with the cultural backgrounds of the school community while meeting global educational standards.

MOBILITY AND TURNOVER

- + **High Staff Turnover:** International schools often experience frequent staff turnover due to expatriate contracts, leading to challenges in maintaining continuity and institutional memory.
- + **Student Transience:** High mobility among students due to parents' relocations requires leaders to create systems that support social and academic transitions.

BALANCING GLOBAL AND LOCAL PERSPECTIVES

- + **Global Vision vs. Local Context:** Leaders must align the school's global educational vision with local laws, cultural norms, and expectations.
- + **Regulatory Compliance:** Adapting to local regulations while maintaining international standards can be complex.

CREATING A UNIFIED SCHOOL CULTURE

- + **Integrating Communities:** Leaders must build a unified school culture that integrates the values of diverse stakeholders—parents, staff, and students—while respecting their unique identities.
- + **Communication Challenges:** Language differences and varying communication styles can hinder understanding and collaboration.

GOVERNANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY

- + **Complex Governance Structures:** International schools often operate under boards of governors, sponsors, or parent associations, which can lead to conflicting priorities and expectations.
- + **Accountability Pressures:** Balancing accountability to stakeholders, such as accrediting agencies, parents, and local authorities, requires strong governance and communication skills.

RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

- + **Attracting Talent:** Recruiting qualified, experienced teachers who understand international education can be challenging.
- + **Retention Issues:** Retaining staff in competitive international markets where schools offer varying levels of benefits and support.

FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

- + **Sustainability:** International schools often rely heavily on tuition fees. Leaders must manage budgets carefully while maintaining quality.
- + **Economic Uncertainty:** Financial challenges due to global or local economic downturns can affect enrolment and operational funding.

ADDRESSING STUDENT WELL-BEING

- + **Mental Health:** International students may face challenges such as homesickness, cultural adjustment, or academic pressure. Leaders must prioritize mental health support.
- + **Bullying and Inclusion:** Ensuring an inclusive environment where all students feel safe and valued, despite cultural or linguistic differences.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR TEACHERS

- + **Continuous Learning:** Ensuring teachers receive training in culturally responsive teaching methods, international curricula (like IB, Cambridge, or American systems), and technology integration.
- + **Varied Experiences:** Addressing the differing professional development needs of teachers from diverse educational systems.

CRISIS MANAGEMENT

- + **Global Crises:** Managing disruptions from global events, such as pandemics or political instability, that can affect school operations.
- + **Local Emergencies:** Dealing with natural disasters or regional conflicts that may impact safety and continuity.

PARENTAL EXPECTATIONS

- + **Diverse Demands:** Parents from different cultural and professional backgrounds may have varying expectations for teaching methods, extracurricular activities, and school leadership.
- + **Engagement:** Building trust and effectively communicating with a diverse parent body.

ACCREDITATION AND STANDARDS

- + **Multiple Standards:** International schools often aim for accreditation from multiple agencies (e.g., CIS, IB, NEASC), requiring leaders to align practices with multiple frameworks.
- + **Quality Assurance:** Ensuring rigorous educational standards while addressing the unique needs of an international school community.

Leading an international school requires a blend of cultural intelligence, adaptability, strategic thinking, and strong interpersonal skills to navigate the complexities of a global educational environment. Leaders must balance the needs of a diverse community while fostering an inclusive, high-performing school culture.

However leading international schools can present some issues:

“International schools and their communities can become isolated from their immediate locality and from their homelands. This can, in turn, intensify relationships due to limited social possibilities and both psychological and linguistic isolation. [This] kind of environment produces a psychic prison, which increases distance, frustration and emotional tension. There are different levels of interaction, diverse groups and subcultures, made up of permanence and transience. [We should recognize] the power distance and politics caused by these emotional plays between permanent and transient groups in an international expatriate community. The boundaries of these groups can isolate them from outside and fragment them from within.”

(Caffyn 2010 p. 74)

For Caffyn there are numerous challenges for international schools and their leaders as highlighted above.

Please READ: the following article:

Rey, J., Boolay, M. & Gez, Y. (2020). *Precarious Privilege: personal debt, lifestyle aspirations and mobility among international school teachers.* Globalisation, Societies and Education.

RECOMMENDED READING:

Roberts, L., and S. Mancuso. (2014) *“What Kind of International School Leaders are in Demand Around the World? A Test of Differences by Region and Stability Over Time.”* Journal of Research in International Education 13 (2): 91-105.

READING TASK: ANALYSIS OF READINGS

Once you have read the article/s, please comment on the following:

- + If teachers and teacher leaders are living and working in transient and precarious spaces, how likely is it they will be focussed upon the inner goods of education, and not the financial gains?
- + Are inequalities being disrupted, or reproduced?
- + What do international schools want, from teachers and from leadership?
- + What can educational leaders do to promote values?

2.2 SHAPING LEADERSHIP OF INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS

This section examines questions of equity, power, and values within international schools. Central to this exploration are the issues of who benefits from current structures and practices, who is marginalised or disadvantaged within them, and what leaders can do to address these imbalances. The discussion considers the role of values in shaping proposed changes, interrogating whose values are prioritised, how they are constructed, and how they influence leadership decisionmaking.

The section also investigates how international schools are led and how institutional values have evolved over time. It highlights the tensions that arise as these values intersect—often uneasily—with marketised practices such as branding, competition, and the commodification of education. Through this lens, we analyse what international schools present as their distinctive offer and interrogate the extent to which these claims align with their practices.

Finally, the section introduces a critical examination of the persistent dominance of white educators and “innercircle” Englishdominant speakers in teaching and leadership roles. These dynamics raise important questions about representation, legitimacy, and the realisation of genuinely international education. Students will be invited to reflect on these issues through the following prompts:

- + What might you do, as an educational leader, to make your school include staff that better reflect the term international?
- + People who belong to dominant groups may be said to be ‘blind’ to their own position and to some of the advantages they have, but more pointedly, to the disadvantages their privilege generates for others. How can you see this being problematic in an international schools’ scenario?

READING TASK

Gardner-McTaggart (2019). [Leadership of International Schools and the International Baccalaureate Learner Profile](#). *Educational Management Administration and Leadership*, Sage, 47; 5, pp.766-784

2.2.1 GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP AND LEADERSHIP

In this section we will examine how the United Nations in the form of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the IB has driven notions of global citizenship framed as a western conceptualisation. We will consider questions such as who benefits and who loses in international schools? What can be done about this as a leader? What place do values have in the proposed changes? Whose values, are they? We will explore how values have developed in international schools not always harmoniously alongside marketised practices and what is on offer and conclude by exploring the problematic dominance of white western English native speakers as teachers and leaders.



Cambridge and Thompson (2004) introduced the globalist and internationalist agendas into the field of education, regarding international schools. Marshall (2011) illuminates the economic and social aspects of Global Citizenship Education by turning to the instrumentalist agendas at play. Marshall references Whitehead's (2005) study of 40 south-Australian schools offering the IB which were found to be selling social advantage rather than social justice. When taken together with the IB mission statement:



"The International Baccalaureate aims to develop inquiring, knowledgeable and caring young people who help to create a better and more peaceful world through intercultural understanding and respect. To this end the organization works with schools, governments and international organizations to develop challenging programmes of international education and rigorous assessment.

These programmes encourage students across the world to become active, compassionate and lifelong learners who understand that other people, with their differences, can also be right." (IBO.org)

This seems further evidence of the IB's dualistic appeal to both sides of the global educational phenomenon, and its success (Marshall, 2011). Questions arise as to how leadership negotiates these tensions.

In the previous Theme, we saw the IB emerged from an Anglo-European or Western point of conception. Western-ness can be highly appealing, as 'the West' may be viewed as the developed world, and access to this world, can be access to success. An example of Westernisation can be found in Tamatea's (2008) case study research in Malaysia and Brunei, which supports the argument that, despite its apparent 'Westernisation', the liberal humanist framing of education in international schools is perhaps the most effective approach to international mindedness. 'The Enlightenment' citizenry of fraternity, equality and liberty is a predominantly Western and Eurocentric one, for a European cultural diaspora.

Leadership of IB international schools may well strive to inculcate Global Citizenship Education into a living day-to-day model. After all, the IB mission statement is clear on the orientation towards peace, equity, and global sustainability. IB directors have this as a central facet of their mission.

However, some perceive that Global Citizenship Education is already framed in a Western conception that is unable to engage in a truly equitable education (Andreotti, 2011).

FORMATIVE TASK X: READING AND RESPONDING

Gardner-McTaggart, A. (2020b). [Washing the world in whiteness; International schools' policy](#). *Journal of Educational Administration and History*, 53/1, pp.1-20 x

RECOMMENDED READING

Sellami, A. L. et al. (2019) 'Definitions of educational leadership – Arab educators' perspectives', *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 25(5), pp. 767–786. [doi: 10.1080/13603124.2019.1690701](#).

1. How can international schools overcome presenting themselves as white, English-speaking spaces of privilege?
2. These schools' profit from the distinction of being this way, is it even worth their while changing to be more international, or should they continue to offer what 'the international gaze' demands?
3. What role does an international school have in defining what internationalism is, and how important is this for the soul of the school?



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I wanted to have an international experience since I've worked in international education for so long and I know how our lives - professionally and personally - can change if we have international experiences.

2.2.2 USING UNSDGs FOR GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP

The [United Nations: Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#) sets out the rights that each and every individual human being has, and consist of thirty articles. The SDG global indicator framework includes the 17 overarching Goals plus 169 targets and 247 indicators (UN [Citation2020](#)). Three of the targets refer to education for sustainable development (ESD), global citizenship education (GCED) and/or climate change education.

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), established in 2015, present a comprehensive framework aimed at addressing global challenges such as poverty, inequality, and climate change by 2030. While these goals are widely endorsed, they have also faced various critiques concerning their feasibility, coherence, and underlying assumptions.

1. AMBIGUITY AND BROADNESS

The SDGs encompass 17 goals with 169 targets, leading to concerns about their clarity and manageability. The extensive scope may dilute focus, making it challenging to prioritize actions effectively. Critics argue that attempting to address too many objectives simultaneously can lead to fragmented efforts and reduced impact.

2. CONFLICTING GOALS AND TRADE-OFFS

Some SDGs appear to conflict, particularly those promoting economic growth alongside environmental sustainability. For instance, Goal 8 advocates for sustained economic growth, while Goal 13 calls for urgent action to combat climate change. Achieving high economic growth may exacerbate environmental degradation, highlighting a potential contradiction within the SDG framework. [cite turn0search15](#)

3. VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION AND IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES

The non-binding nature of the SDGs means that countries have the autonomy to choose which goals to pursue, leading to uneven commitment and implementation. This flexibility can result in inadequate progress, especially if nations prioritize goals based on political or economic convenience rather than global urgency.

4. MEASUREMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY ISSUES

Monitoring progress towards the SDGs is complex due to the lack of standardized indicators and reliable data. This complexity hampers accountability, making it difficult to assess which nations are meeting targets and which are lagging. Without robust measurement systems, ensuring transparency and driving improvements becomes challenging.



5. ETHICAL AND CONCEPTUAL CRITIQUES

Some scholars argue that the SDGs are underpinned by Western-centric notions of development, emphasizing individualism, competition, and market-driven growth. This perspective may overlook alternative development models and fail to address systemic issues contributing to global inequalities.

6. FINANCIAL AND RESOURCE CONSTRAINTS

Achieving the SDGs requires substantial financial investments. However, critics point out that the goals do not adequately address the need for equitable resource distribution or challenge existing economic systems that perpetuate inequality. Without addressing these systemic issues, mobilizing the necessary resources may be difficult.

7. OVEREMPHASIS ON ECONOMIC GROWTH

Several SDGs prioritize economic growth as a means to reduce poverty and improve living standards. However, evidence suggests that economic growth does not automatically lead to poverty alleviation or equitable development. This reliance on growth may overlook the need for more profound structural changes in global economic systems.

SUMMARY

While the SDGs provide a valuable framework for global development, addressing these critiques is essential for enhancing their effectiveness. This involves ensuring that goals are specific, achievable, and mutually reinforcing, with clear indicators and mechanisms for accountability. Additionally, integrating diverse perspectives and prioritizing systemic changes over mere economic growth are crucial steps towards sustainable and equitable development.

REFERENCES

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- + Hickel, J. (2019). The contradiction of the sustainable development goals: Growth versus ecology on a finite planet. *Sustainable Development*, 27(5), 873-884.
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- + Hickel, J. (2020). Five reasons to think twice about the UN's Sustainable Development Goals. *The Rules*.

READ: Leite, S. (2022). [Using the SDGs for global citizenship education: definitions, challenges, and opportunities](#). *Globalisation, societies and education.*, 20(3), pp.401–413.

In the article Leite asks: 'what does it mean to be a global citizen today, and how do educators help students make sense of the historical context that has brought us to this moment?' Leite also presents a useful critique of the SDGs.



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