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Constructing Elementary School Students Moral Actions Through Global Citizenship Education

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Abstract

In an era of globalization, elementary school students are often exposed to diverse values that can cloud their moral.The crisis of moral degradation among the younger generation demands a reorientation of learning that focuses not only on cognitive intelligence but also on character development aligned with universal human values.This study aims to explore the process of constructing moral actions of elementary school students within the framework of Global Citizenship Education (GCE). Amidst the challenges of ethical degradation in the digital era, GCE is present as an instrument to expand children's moral understanding from a local to a universal scale. The research method used is descriptive qualitative, with data collection techniques through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentation studies on students and teachers at the elementary school level. Data analysis was carried out interactively to determine the phenomenon of students' moral development. The results of the study revealed that the construction of students' moral actions is formed through three transformative stages, namely (1) the Cognitive Stage, namely the formation of knowledge and understanding of global issues that provide an objective understanding of humanitarian and environmental issues, (2) the Moral Movement Stage, namely the affective internalization process where knowledge turns into empathy and deep concern and (3) the Action Movement Stage, namely the manifestation of real behavior in everyday life such as environmental care practices, honesty, and social solidarity. These findings confirm that elementary school students' moral actions are not formed instantly, but rather the result of the construction of global knowledge that touches the emotional side of children. This confirms that when global citizenship values are effectively integrated, individuals tend to demonstrate moral behavior that becomes a more consistent habit, both locally and internationally. This study concludes that strengthening moral action is an essential outcome of the Community Service Program (PKG), which can transform students from mere global observers into active moral actors.

Keywords: Global citizenship education, moral action, elementary school students

Introduction

The development of globalization entering the 21st century can have a significant impact on human life. One such impact is in the dimensions of technology and information. Technology and information are key components of this globalization. This technological and information development, in addition to facilitating efforts to improve national development in various sectors, can also lead to the emergence of moral issues (Sutrisno, 2021). Civics Education in Elementary Schools carries the primary mandate to shape citizens with character, morals, and patriotism. This moral character must be rooted in the values of Pancasila. However, in the context of the 21st century, Civics faces expanded challenges due to globalization. The younger

generation growing up in an era of advanced technology and rapid social change often faces various ethical issues such as a lack of empathy, rampant bullying, differences in values, and dishonesty. This is a major concern because they are the main pillars of change.

The phenomenon of globalization has had a dual impact on elementary school students; on the one hand, it has opened up broad access to information, but on the other hand, it has triggered a moral crisis such as increased individualism, bullying, and a fading sense of empathy for humanitarian issues (Salsabila et al., 2023). Empirically, elementary school education is still often trapped in mastering civics material that is cognitively rote without touching on the affective aspects that drive behavior. This problem occurs when character education taught in schools fails to shape moral action, so that students know what is good but lack the motivation to do it in their daily lives (Lickona, 2013). Therefore, understanding and practicing civics is crucial in shaping the character, ethics, behavior, and values that they will hold into adulthood. Furthermore, amidst the flow of global information that is so easily accessible, if it is not wisely filtered, the younger generation can become morally disturbed, which will certainly have a negative impact on the future of the nation (Sari, et.al, 2024). Bamber et al. (2018) have noted that currently there is only a brief analysis of the theoretical foundations related to global citizenship education. Social, environmental, and economic phenomena now transcend national boundaries, demanding a paradigm shift from national citizenship to global citizenship (Tandiseru, 2017). Akkari & Maleq (2020) state that global citizenship education's promising goal of empowering students to act responsively to global issues highlights the urgent need to shape global citizens. Following the definition of global citizenship, global citizenship education seeks to empower students of all ages to take an active role, both locally and globally, in building a more peaceful, tolerant, inclusive, and secure society (Leite, 2022).

In the contemporary era marked by global interconnectedness and massive digitalization, geographical boundaries are no longer a barrier to interaction between individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds and values. This phenomenon presents complex ethical challenges, where moral crises such as intolerance, bullying, and the degradation of empathy often arise as a consequence of individuals' unpreparedness to face diversity. In this context, education is no longer sufficient to simply equip students with cognitive abilities, but must also be able to construct concrete moral actions to shape the character of globally responsible citizens.

Global Citizenship Education (GCE) is a pedagogical response to these demands. It aims to equip students with the knowledge, skills, and values necessary to become proactive and responsible actors in building a more peaceful and sustainable world (UNESCO, 2015). It emphasizes three interrelated learning domains: cognitive, socio-emotional, and behavioral. Although the GCE framework has been integrated, both explicitly and implicitly (through the Global Pancasila Diversity Student Profile dimension), its implementation at the elementary school level in Indonesia often remains focused on the cognitive (Moral Knowing) and socio-emotional (Moral Feeling) domains (Rusnaini et al., 2020).

Teaching tends to focus on discussion and theoretical understanding, but has not succeeded in converting this knowledge and feelings into consistent and directed moral actions. A comprehensive character education framework, as proposed by Thomas Lickona (1991), states that good character must consist of three integral components: 1) Moral Knowing, 2) Moral Feeling, and 3) Moral Action. Herein lies the main problem. Many global character education programs fail to address the third pillar: students' willingness and habit of acting in a concrete, consistent, and globally conscious manner. Students may know that littering damages the environment (Knowing), and they may feel sad about pollution (Feeling), but they may not necessarily act consistently to reduce plastic waste (Action) as a contribution to global solutions.

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As previous research conducted by A. Rizal (2024) The results of the study showed that global citizenship education was identified as the key to preparing students to face complex global challenges, such as environmental issues, socio-economic inequality, and international conflict. This study suggests that the integration of global citizenship education can improve students' global awareness, critical thinking skills, and intercultural empathy. Another study conducted by Irma Irayanti et al., (2023), The results of the study showed that the moral character of Pancasila can be a more appropriate ethical foundation for global citizenship, and can be used to develop a more inclusive and holistic concept of global citizenship by incorporating the moral character of Pancasila as an ethical foundation.

Recent research in the field of Global Citizenship Education (GCE) shows that integrating global values into the curriculum can enhance students' multicultural awareness. Research by Smith et al. (2022) emphasized that exposure to global environmental issues can increase students' social awareness in elementary schools. However, this study focused primarily on developing a global mindset, without delving deeply into how this mindset transforms into consistent moral behavior in everyday school life. Furthermore, research by Pratama (2023) on character education in Indonesia shows that civics instruction is still heavily oriented toward strengthening a closed national identity. A limitation of these previous studies is the lack of exploration of how national and global identities can collaborate to shape moral action, where students act morally out of a sense of belonging to universal humanity, rather than simply fulfilling formal obligations as citizens of a particular country.

Research by Tarozzi and Mallon (2019) emphasized that the Community Empowerment and Development Program (PKG) serves as a tool to promote social justice through formal education. In Indonesia, research by Winarno (2020) shows that although the national curriculum has accommodated character values, its implementation is still very oriented towards a narrow national identity and does not provide enough space for understanding individual responsibilities as global citizens. Research by Goren and Yemini (2017) revealed that many PKG programs only end with theoretical discussions on environmental issues or human rights without addressing the psychological mechanisms that transform this empathy into concrete moral actions in students' smallest environments, such as schools and families. The urgency of conducting this research is expected to provide a description and overview related to strengthening moral actions through instilling global citizenship values in elementary schools.

Elementary school is a crucial phase or golden age in children's moral development. At this stage, children begin to develop their own sense of right and wrong and internalize the values they observe in their surroundings. Integrating global citizenship education into elementary school is not simply about providing insight into the outside world, but rather a strategic effort to build a solid ethical foundation. Through the right approach, students are encouraged not only to recognize what is good but also to experience and ultimately practice that goodness on a local and global scale. However, the reality on the ground often shows that citizenship education remains trapped in the cognitive dimension or the memorization of material and rigid national symbolism, without addressing aspects of moral action that are adaptive to global dynamics. Therefore, an in-depth study is needed regarding strategies for constructing moral action through a curriculum and learning practices based on global citizenship.

Based on this background and urgency, this study aims to explore how the concept of global citizenship education can be effectively integrated in elementary schools to trigger students' moral transformation. Through this analysis, it is hoped that a learning model can be found that can transform the classroom into a laboratory for moral action, where students learn to empathize, collaborate, and act as global citizens who uphold humanity. So that they become not only moral individuals locally, but also responsible global citizens who contribute positively.

Thus, this research focuses more on constructing the character or moral actions of elementary school students through instilling the values of global citizenship education.

Method

This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive design. This approach was chosen because the researcher wanted to explore in depth the process of internalizing values and the manifestation of moral actions of elementary school students in the context of Global Citizenship Education (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The focus of qualitative research allows researchers to capture the meaning behind student behavior and understand how they respond to global issues through concrete actions in the school environment. This research was conducted in three elementary schools in Cilacap Regency on November 21-24, 2025. The research subjects were principals, teachers, and students. According to Adhimah (2020), qualitative research is natural research and the data produced is descriptive. Qualitative research is a research method that focuses on in-depth and natural observation and understanding, the results are presented in descriptive form and interpreted comprehensively (Waruwu, 2024).

The data in this study were obtained through three main techniques: in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation. According to Sugiyono (2019), participant observation is the primary technique in data collection, which includes in-depth interviews, documentation, observation, or a combination of the three (triangulation). When using observation techniques, it is important to explain what has been observed; while for interviews, it is necessary to determine who will be interviewed. Data collection was dominated by semi-structured in-depth interviews. The interviews aimed to explore complete narratives of participants' experiences related to understanding, challenges, and real-life examples of moral reconstruction. This technique was supported by participant observation in classrooms and school environments to observe the manifestation of moral action in the context of real interactions.Data was collected through comprehensive interviews with specially selected informants to obtain comprehensive information. Furthermore, documentation was conducted through data collection from various sources, including lesson plans (RPP) or teaching modules, curricula, and teachers' anecdotal notes, which served as triangulation material. In addition,

Anggito & Setiawan (2018) explain that data analysis involves three iterative stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. These three processes form a continuous cycle throughout data collection, helping researchers gain a comprehensive understanding. Data analysis follows phenomenological principles. The process begins with verbatim transcription of all interviews. Researchers then conduct data reduction by identifying and extracting significant units of meaning that directly describe the experience. These units of meaning are then grouped into cohesive theme clusters. The final stage is Essence Synthesis, in which researchers formulate the structural core of participants' shared experiences about how moral action in PKG is reconstructed in elementary schools. Data validity is maintained through source triangulation (teachers, students, documents) and member checking with participants.

The data analysis technique used is the interactive model from Miles, Huberman (2014), which consists of three stages, namely data reduction, data presentation and drawing conclusions.

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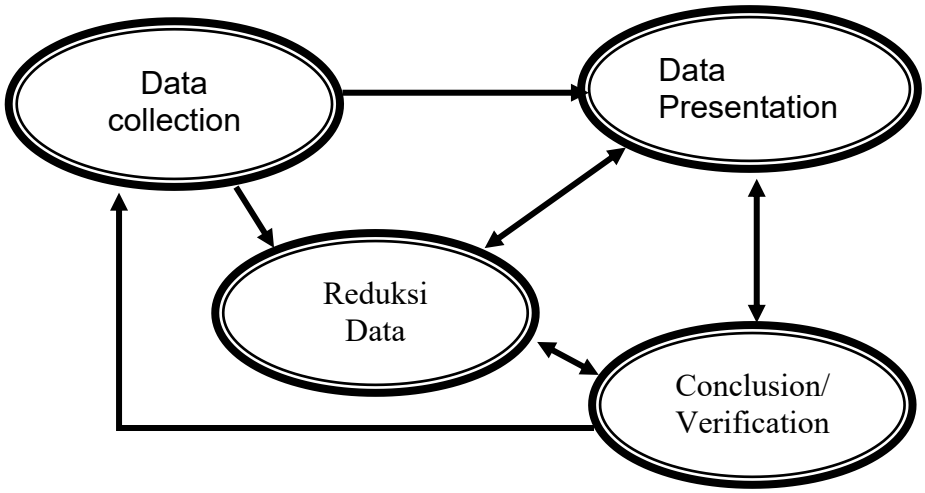


Figure 1 Miles Cycle Data Analysis, Huberman (2014)

Results

Results of interviews, observations and documentation

Observations show that the construction of students' moral actions is realized through the internalization of global citizenship education values in schools, which is characterized by increased empathy, inclusive behavior in friendships, and real responsibility towards the environment such as reducing plastic waste. This finding is reinforced by a documentary study through teaching modules that integrate global issues, students daily reflection journals, and social project portfolios that demonstrate the transformation from theoretical understanding to real action.The synergy between observations of classroom activities and curriculum documentary evidence proves that Global Citizenship Education is effective in shaping students characters who are not only cognitively intelligent but also have a moral commitment as global citizens.

The process of constructing moral action in elementary school students through Global Citizenship Education (GCE) was found to be a continuous and integrative series of processes. Based on data collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation studies, it was found that strengthening students' morals occurs through three main, mutually constructing stages.

First, cognitive construction through the development of global knowledge and understanding. At this stage, students begin to develop an awareness of their place as part of the global community. Knowledge is no longer limited to the local environment but extends to addressing global issues. Based on an interview with one of the classroom teachers, this process begins with recognizing the reality of difference. The process of constructing students' morals begins with the expansion of knowledge, where students understanding, initially limited to ethnic differences in the local sphere, transforms into global awareness after receiving material on global childrens rights.This phenomenon indicates a cognitive shift as students begin to recognize the unequal fate of children in various parts of the world, which then becomes the starting point for developing critical thinking on issues of global justice and poverty.Theoretically, this aligns with the moral development model that emphasizes that exposure to broader perspectives is a primary stimulant in increasing empathy.By linking local and global realities, students not only understand diversity but also begin to build a foundation for moral action based on universal human values and deep social sensitivity.

Second, the emergence of a moral movement through the strengthening of affection. The knowledge gained is then transformed into a moral movement within students, where empathy is the primary driving force. This was evident in an interview with a sixth-grade student who expressed her feelings after learning about the disaster. Students moral actions are also evident through the emergence of self-regulation driven by affective responses to global environmental issues. When students are exposed to the reality of floods and landslides caused by irresponsible human activities, feelings of sadness emerge that then transform into practical ecological awareness. This emotional experience triggers real behavioral changes, where students proactively pick up and dispose of trash properly as a preventative measure to maintain environmental cleanliness and prevent disasters. Scientifically, this phenomenon reflects the link between moral feeling and moral action in Thomas Lickona's theory of character development. Students empathy for the impact of environmental damage acts as a catalyst that transforms theoretical knowledge about global sustainability into personal responsibility.Thus, Global Citizenship Education successfully constructs moral action through a personal-emotional approach, where students not only understand environmental risks cognitively but also feel morally compelled to take mitigation actions in their immediate environment for the greater global good.

Third, the manifestation of the action movement as a moral crystallization. The final construction is found in the form of concrete actions carried out consistently in schools. These actions encompass social inclusivity and a sustainable lifestyle. A teacher explains the manifestation of these actions in the field.Global Citizenship Education in elementary schools also significantly constructs students' moral actions in social aspects and human solidarity.This phenomenon is seen when students spontaneously take the initiative to embrace new friends without regard for differences in religious background or ethnicity. This moral transformation extends from inclusive behavior in the playground to concrete philanthropic actions, such as raising donations for victims of natural disasters and class tuition initiatives to visit sick friends. Scientifically analyzed, these students collective actions reflect the successful internalization of global citizenship values, which emphasize the ethics of caring and social responsibility.This non-coercive behavior indicates that universal values have been integrated into the structure of students consciousness, where empathy is no longer merely understood as a concept but is actualized in the form of action. This success confirms that education based on a global perspective is able to construct exclusive groupings and replace them with an inclusive culture of mutual cooperation, which is an important foundation for the creation of a harmonious civil society in the future.

Table 1. Construction of Moral Action in Global Citizenship Education

Construction Stages	**Form of Phenomenon**	**Interview Core (Field Data)**	**Indicators of moral action**
Cognitive	Understanding and awareness	Starting to realize that there are other children in the world whose fate is different.	Understand global rights and justice
Moral Movement	Empathy and responsibility	Feeling sad, pity for the victims of the disaster	The emergence of a sense of responsibility and concern
Action Movement	Real behavior	Inviting friends from different backgrounds to play, collecting donations	Recognizing diversity, philanthropy and environmental action

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	for disaster victims, waste recycling projects

The table above illustrates a coherent flow of student character formation. The cognitive dimension serves as the foundation for informed moral action. The moral movement dimension serves as an emotional catalyst because without this stage, knowledge would remain merely a meaningless theory. Finally, the action movement dimension is the output or final result of this construction. This explanation confirms that elementary school students' moral actions are global-local, where global understanding is applied in concrete actions at the local scale (school). Interview excerpts reinforce evidence that students have undergone a transformation from simply knowing to feeling empathy and caring, which ultimately leads to action.

Discussion

Strengthening moral actions in the cognitive, socio-emotional and behavioral dimensions in relation to global citizenship education in elementary schools

Constructing students moral actions through Global Citizenship Education (GCED) is a transformational process that integrates aspects of moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action into daily behavior. Theoretically, this aligns with Lickona concept of moral action, where moral competence will only emerge if students possess a moral will driven by empathy. Field findings regarding the disappearance of primordial barriers and the emergence of social solidarity indicate that GCED has succeeded in broadening students' horizons from a domestic consciousness to an inclusive moral one. Theoretically, this practice aligns with the authentic values of Pancasila, where the spirit of mutual cooperation and just and civilized humanity are actualized on a global scale. Thus, this moral construction does not erode national identity, but rather strengthens students character as citizens with strong civic virtue and ethical responsibility toward global issues such as justice and environmental sustainability.

In general, research findings related to moral action in the PKG demonstrate several key points highlighting the importance of integrating three dimensions: cognitive, socio-emotional, and behavioral. The research findings indicate that the implementation of GCED in three elementary schools in Cilacap Regency significantly strengthened students' moral action through the successful integration of cognitive, socio-emotional, and behavioral dimensions. These results establish a link between the comprehensive PKG framework.

Based on the data analysis conducted, it was found that the reinforcement of moral action in elementary school students occurs through a dynamic cycle involving the interaction of three main components: cognitive, moral movement, and action movement. This cycle is not simply linear, but rather mutually reinforcing and ultimately forming habits (habituation). Below is a triangle diagram depicting the moral action reinforcement cycle, which includes cognitive, moral movement, and action movement, and how these components form habits.

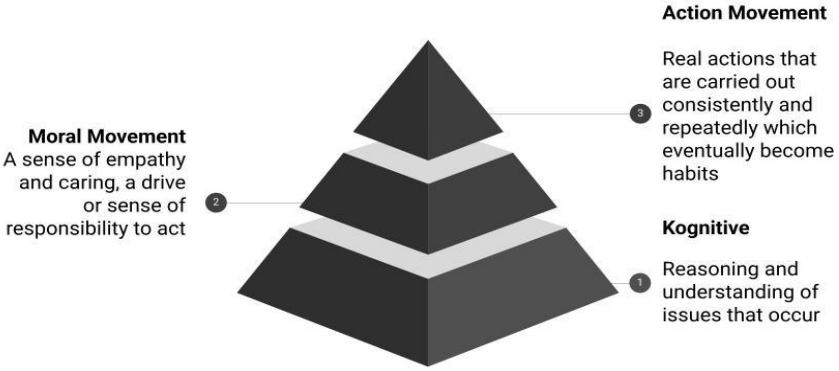


Figure 2. Moral action reinforcement cycle

In the cognitive stage (knowledge and understanding), students demonstrated increased ability to identify global issues such as environmental problems and social injustice. The significance of this finding is that global insight provides material for students' minds to understand the complexity of the world beyond their local environment. Cognitive strengthening is the foundation for informed moral action. Teachers strive to relate lesson material to simple global issues such as plastic waste, through stories or videos. Strengthening in the cognitive dimension is characterized by increased critical understanding of students on simple global issues, such as justice, the environment, and diversity. The cognitive dimension needs to be instilled, where students need to understand that they are not only involved, understand, but also promote how to create a safe, peaceful, and tolerant environment.

In the Moral Movement Stage (Affection and Empathy), observations indicate an emotional resonance or moral movement where students begin to feel a deep concern for human suffering in other parts of the world. This supports research that PKG is able to touch the human side of students, not just logic. Socio-emotional strengthening is emphasized through the instillation of the values of empathy, tolerance, caring, and responsibility. Beckwith, V. J. (2022) CGED or global citizenship education develops attitudes and values that encourage a sense of responsibility. The socio-emotional dimension centers on the importance of having values, attitudes, and social skills that enable students to develop emotionally, psychosocially, and physically and enable them to live together with others respectfully and peacefully (Leite 2022). These feelings serve as the main motivator for Moral Action. The findings obtained were that students showed expressions of concern when watching videos of floods or landslides in other areas or countries, were able to interact positively with friends from different backgrounds, and showed respect for other cultures. Teachers also explicitly provided examples of empathetic attitudes such as sharing and not teasing friends. These findings directly validate UNESCO's (2015) framework which places empathy and solidarity at the heart of PKG.

The Action Movement (Real Action) stage, the culmination of this process is the emergence of concrete actions in the school environment, such as initiatives to reduce single-use plastic and humanitarian fundraising. Behavioral reinforcement is realized through concrete student actions, driven by project activities at school. The behavioral aspect, or consistent Moral Action, is the culmination of the PKG instillation. According to UNESCO (Tan 2020), the behavioral dimension is related to effective and responsible actions at all levels to achieve a more harmonious and sustainable world. The findings show that students engage in concrete

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behaviors such as simple projects, volunteering, and pro-environmental actions related to global and local issues. Students are involved in plastic or waste recycling projects, and donation activities. Students voluntarily pick up trash without being asked by teachers and choose their own drinking bottles because they are environmentally friendly.

The findings regarding these three stages align with Lickona's (2013) theory on character components, which include moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action. The results of this study also support the study by Tarozzi & Mallon (2019), which emphasized that global education at the elementary level must be transformative. However, this study offers a different perspective than the study by Goren & Yemini (2017), which tended to be skeptical of elementary school students' ability to understand abstract global concepts. The findings of this study actually prove that through appropriate methods, elementary school students are capable of carrying out actions that are purer and more selfless than adults, because their empathy is not yet distorted by complex political or ideological interests.

These findings reinforce the theory of social constructivism in moral education, where global knowledge is a catalyst for children's moral development. For teachers, the results of this study indicate that the elementary school curriculum must be designed to stimulate these three stages sequentially. Teachers should not stop at providing material (cognitive), but must design activities that trigger emotional engagement (moral movement) and facilitate social projects (action movement) in schools. This study has several limitations. First, the limitations of the qualitative methodology with a limited number of participants make these results unable to be generalized to all elementary schools with different economic backgrounds. Second, the interpretation of moral movement (affective aspect) is subjective based on interview results and observations of visible behavior, so there may be bias in assessing the depth of students' true moral feelings. Third, the short duration of the study did not allow researchers to see whether this action movement will become a permanent habit or is only temporary during the activity. Thus, the implications of this study open up opportunities for further research involving variables including internal and external factors that impact the formation of action movement.

Conclusion

Based on the data analysis and discussion presented, this study critically concludes that the construction of moral actions in elementary school students through Global Citizenship Education (GCE) is not an automatic process, but rather the result of three interacting stages: cognitive, moral movement (affective), and action movement (behavioral). This finding confirms that GCE plays a crucial role as a catalyst that transforms students perspectives from mere local citizens to responsive global moral actors. This study proves that strengthening moral actions begins with adequate knowledge and understanding of global issues, which are then internalized into empathy, and finally manifest in concrete actions. The aim of this research is to explore the process of constructing moral actions in elementary school students within the framework of Global Citizenship Education (GCE). Amidst the challenges of ethical degradation in the digital age, GCE serves as an instrument for expanding children's moral understanding from the local to the universal.The success of GCE at the elementary school level lies in its ability to simplify abstract global issues into personal emotional experiences. Thus, the moral actions that emerge are not merely compliance with school norms, but rather the crystallization of students' consciences that feel connected to universal humanity. This study paves the way for further research considering that family environmental factors also play a significant role in shaping students' moral actions, which are not fully captured in this study. Furthermore, the dimensions of the Action movement phase found are still short-term, and the consistency of these actions

in the future still requires further monitoring. The main contribution of this research lies in the integration of Lickona's moral development theory with UNESCO's global citizenship framework in a practical context in elementary schools. This research challenges the long-held assumption that global issues are too complex for early childhood and scientifically proves that the moral development stage of elementary school children is actually a golden period for instilling global empathy. These findings provide a new theoretical basis for curriculum development that no longer separates national identity and global responsibility, but rather unites them as a unified whole of moral action. Furthermore, future research needs to explore more deeply the role of digital technology as a medium for constructing global moral actions so that students not only have empathy in the real world, but also demonstrate strong ethics in interactions in cyberspace.

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