



Vol. 3 No. 12 (December) (2025)

## **From Local to Global: How Pakistani Teacher Candidates Conceptualize Citizenship Beyond National Borders**

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### **Abstract**

This phenomenographic research study explores qualitatively distinct conceptualisations of citizenship among Pakistani teacher candidates. As the globalisation process defines the traditional nation-state structures, the process of how teachers negotiate the conflicting aspects of the three dimensions of citizenship—local, national, and global—becomes of paramount importance in educational reform. The phenomenographic approach is used in this study, where the collective differences between citizenship conceptions among 32 teacher candidates at public sector universities in Punjab, Pakistan, are analysed. Semi-structured interviews found that there were five different conceptions of citizenship, including Citizenship as National Loyalty, Citizenship as Religious Identity, Citizenship as Democratic Participation, Citizenship as Cultural Awareness, and Citizenship as Transformative Global Agency. The results reveal the manner in which Pakistani teacher candidates mediate between the competing discourses of Islamic nationalism, democratic pluralism, and cosmopolitanism in postcolonial settings. This paper unveils the persistent tensions between the cultural-religious systems inherited in the past and the new global consciousness, including the implications of curriculum design in teacher education. The findings suggest that the process of shifting future teachers to critical global citizenship requires pedagogical strategies that disrupt assumed notions of belonging and develop transformative agency to address structural inequalities at both the local and global levels.

**Keywords: Phenomenography, Global Citizenship Education, Teacher Education, Pakistan, Prospective Teachers, Citizenship Conceptions, Outcome Space**

### **1. Introduction**

The fast globalisation of the world has brought about the need to conceptualise citizenship in entirely new ways that transcend national borders, especially in the field of teacher education, where future teachers are influencing the civic awareness of the generations to come (Andreotti, 2014). This reconceptualisation has a critical significance in Pakistan due to the fact that as a country, the postcolonial heritage has been rather challenging, with



## Vol. 3 No. 12 (December) (2025)

citizenship education historically oriented towards Islamic identity and national patriotism as opposed to pluralistic or cosmopolitan inclinations. (Davies, 2006; Muhammad, 2019). Pakistani teacher candidates encounter conflicting citizenship that swings between nationalism with a religious tint to democratic pluralism and, at the same time, has to deal with the global demands of intercultural competence and transnational unity (Qureshi & Kalsoom, 2022; Safdar, Mahmood, Hameed, et al., 2025; Safdar, Mahmood, & Muhammad, 2025). The most important step is to learn how these teachers think about citizenship across national boundaries, since their ideas and beliefs inevitably influence pedagogical practices and curriculum implementation in Pakistani classrooms (Carr et al., 2014; Khalid et al., 2022; Wang & Hoffman, 2016).

This phenomenographic inquiry examines qualitatively different experiences and ways in which Pakistani candidate teachers think about citizenship at the local, national, and global levels. This study fills a chronological gap in the body of educational research because prior literature is written in a Western context or has considered citizenship as a unitary construct and does not examine the differences in conceiving citizenship (Oxley & Morris, 2013). Using the perspective of phenomenography, this study explores the systemic variance in the conceptualisations of the local-global continuum of citizenship held by prospective teachers, revealing hierarchically related categories of descriptions that constitute an outcome space of understanding (Åkerlind, 2025; Balding et al., 2024). The findings help shed light on the contradictions between inherited cultural-religious systems and developing cosmopolitan ideals as well as provide suggestions on curriculum design and pedagogical redesign of Pakistani teacher education programs.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Global Citizenship Education in Teacher Education

The concept of global citizenship education has become a contested space in the scholarship of teacher education and includes both liberal humanistic approaches to teaching that adopt universal values to critically understand structural disparities and power inequalities (Franch, 2020; Johnston & Ochoa, 1993). Liberal perspectives give precedence to cosmopolitan abilities, such as intercultural consciousness, sympathy for cultural otherness, adherence to universal human rights relying on Kantian morals, and the capability approach developed by Nussbaum to establish ideal global citizens (Appiah, 2006; Nussbaum, 2007). These models have been criticised for perpetuating Eurocentric universalism to the exclusion of non-Western epistemology in favour of neoliberal market logic in the name of global integration (Popkewitz, 2012; Roman, 2003). However, critical theorists support the idea of the justice-based citizenship that would enable teacher candidates to examine how global capitalism, neocolonialism, and structures of hegemony form and reproduce inequalities among nation-states (Carr, 2011; Torres & Bosio, 2020; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004).

All phenomenological approaches focus on the lived experience and reflective conscious process of teacher candidates and promote autobiographical inquiry into personal histories as determinants shaping a sense of citizenship and belonging (Van Manen, 2016). The poststructuralist academic field in the recent past questions the existence of fixed concepts of identity and citizenship, how subjectivities are constructed through power-knowledge regimes, and how normative regimes of citizenship characterise the distribution of differing recognitions (Butler, 2016; Todd, 2015). Pedagogical practices in teacher education programs worldwide vary with service-learning and study abroad opportunities on one side of the spectrum and critical analysis of curriculum and deliberate



## Vol. 3 No. 12 (December) (2025)

conversation on the other side (Appleyard & Mclean, 2011; Goren & Yemini, 2017). The challenge of teacher education is to move beyond the additive approach to simply follow the global content towards the transformative practices that might help potential teachers to critically reflect their own positionality and create agency as change agents.

### 2.2 National Identity and Citizenship in Pakistan

In Pakistan, citizenship education is embedded in a historically constructed nationalist discourse dominated by Islamic identity and the two-nation theory that divided the people of Pakistan and Hindus into separate nations, which necessitated the formation of Pakistan (Muhammad, 2019). The textbooks used in Pakistan pay much attention to Islamic heritage and the formation of Pakistan as a Muslim homeland, the content of which shows the ideological influence of Jamaat-e-Islami on bureaucracies in the field of education (Muhammad, 2019). The 2006 curricular reform tried to bring forth democratic pluralism and acknowledge the ethnic, linguistic, and religious plurality in Pakistan, although the views of teachers suggest that they still tend to follow Islamist paradigms of national identity rather than pluralistic ones (Muhammad, 2019).

This contradiction between the official activities of pluralism and the lived sense of religiously based teacher nationalism produces pedagogical dissonance in the implementation of citizenship education (Qureshi & Kalsoom, 2022). The idea of Pakistani citizenship education is shaped around the sense of responsibility and obligation to the nation-state instead of rights-based or participatory citizenship, reflecting what Westheimer and Kahne (2004) describe as personally responsible citizenship centred on change at the systemic level. The cultural content of minorities, especially religious and ethnic minorities, in the curriculum reflects the forces of assimilation, implying the elimination of specific cultural practices through a unifying Islamic-nationalist model (Muhammad, 2019). Recent research has established urgent areas of educational reform, which include updating learning materials with contemporary global content, improvements in teacher education syllabuses, and the development of critical pedagogy which can help learners acquire knowledge about global challenges but is sensitive to local conditions (Qureshi & Kalsoom, 2022).

### 2.3 Tensions Between Local and Global Citizenship

The interaction between the national, regional, and global levels of citizenship is one of the central theoretical contradictions, with scholars debating whether cosmopolitan citizenship inevitably erodes national feelings or whether multiple citizenship identities can coexist (Fischman & Haas, 2012). They claim that abstract global citizenship detached from national citizenship presents vulnerability to stateless people, refugees, and undocumented migrants which are victims because, despite their lack of juridical citizenship, they remain exploitable (Roman, 2003).

On the other hand, a thick or deep democracy entails the abandonment of thin electoral participation in favour of substantive participation in power-structured social relations on a variety of levels, from local to transnational (Furman & Shields, 2005). Global citizenship discourses undertaken in postcolonial settings such as Pakistan are threatened to reproduce neocolonial relationships when adopted without considering the effects of Western epistemologies on the curricular framework, as well as the enforcement of structural asymmetries between nation-states through the curriculum and the development of educational opportunities (Andreotti, 2014). In this situation, candidate teachers must negotiate competing citizenship imaginaries including inherited models of



## Vol. 3 No. 12 (December) (2025)

religious national belonging, state-affirmed pluralism, and transnational discourses on cosmopolitanism and human rights. This bargaining takes place under the material conditions such as limited resources, examination-based pedagogy, institutional cultures that do not allow questioning the official narratives.

### 3. Theoretical Framework

This paper follows the non-dualistic ontology of phenomenography that denounces the Cartesian dualism of subjects and objects in favour of a view of experience as constitutive of the relationship between subject and phenomenon (Marton & Booth, 2013; Svensson, 2025). By examining the collective, as opposed to individual, meaning-making, phenomenography explores the qualitatively diverse ways individuals experience, conceptualise, perceive, and understand different facets of phenomena in their world (Marton & Booth, 2013; Sims, 2024). The research takes a second-order perspective, characterising the world as seen by participants rather than claiming objective reality, which prioritises the lived experience of citizenship by the participants preceded by the definition assigned by the researcher (Balding et al., 2024). The concept of variation is central in phenomenographic analysis because insights must be made in recognising any phenomenon one wants to know about, and it is essential to assume that something is variable and constant in different ways to participate in the phenomenon (Åkerlind, 2025).

The structured set of logically related categories of description is the outcome space, which represents the variety of meanings that form a collective understanding in a given setting (Marton & Booth, 2013). The outcome space has categories that are generally ranked (limited, more complex, and more inclusive), but the hierarchy reflects developmental possibilities and not deficit thoughts (Sims, 2024). The phenomenon of citizenship has several dimensions, including political status, cultural identity, democracy, and ethical accountability, each of which may be taken differently by teacher candidates. The theoretical framework also builds on the interests of critical pedagogy that focuses on power in that the conceptions of teacher candidates are created with an ideological landscape that can be influenced by the history of Pakistan as a postcolonial nation with interests in Islamic nationalism and the pressures of globalisation present around the world today (Carr, 2011; Giroux, 2006). The appropriateness of phenomenography with a critical orientation allows the exploration of the manner in which the predominant discourses organise the space of possible conceptions, being sensitive to differences that may represent emergent or opposing ideas.

### 4. Methodology

#### 4.1 Phenomenographic Research Design

Phenomenography is a suitable methodological option in research focusing on introducing variation in lived experiences and the resultant understanding of a single phenomenon by some individuals (Balding et al., 2024; Sims, 2024). Phenomenography is methodologically consistent with the research goals because this study explores a single phenomenon, which is the concept of citizenship in local-global terms, according to Pakistani candidate teachers who collectively experience it (Åkerlind, 2025). The research design adheres to the protocols in the phenomenographic approach, such as purposive heterogeneous sampling, semi-structured interviews based on experience and not on abstract definitions, and an iterative methodology of analysing individual transcripts and pools of meaning (Sims, 2024).



## Vol. 3 No. 12 (December) (2025)

Phenomenographic interviews utilise a democratic and dynamic format in which participants govern the conversation, whereas researchers investigate specific experiences and transitions to more abstract meanings (Sims, 2024). The study conforms to the constitutive characteristics of phenomenography: the collective direction of group variation as an alternative to personal psychology, the second-order view of the direction taken by the participants, and the construction of an outcome space which helps to manifest hierarchically related conceptions (Marton & Booth, 2013). The analytical process can be described as a zigzag process in which the individual meaning unit is alternated with the collective pattern to guarantee that the interpretations are maintained within the participant data and expanded to a wider contextual meaning (Sims, 2024). Bracketing was used in the study to set aside the preconceptions of researchers regarding citizenship, although phenomenography acknowledges that complete neutrality is not possible and demands a reflexive focus on the impact of the researcher's positioning on interpretation (Svensson, 2025).

### 4.2 Participants and Sampling

The participants included 32 teaching pre-service teacher candidates from two universities within the government sector in Punjab State, Pakistan, through purposive sampling to have a diverse range of experiences (Sims, 2024). The criteria used to select them were diversification in the backgrounds of disciplines, rural-urban backgrounds, economic status, and participation or exposure to the idea of global citizenship as either a course or extracurricular activity (Marton & Booth, 2013). The population included 19 females and 13 males aged between 22-26 years old, which represents the gender demographics of Pakistani teacher education programs. The subjects of different specialisations, such as social studies, English, science, and mathematics, were represented, and it was possible to discuss how disciplinary positioning could influence the worldview of citizenship concepts (Muhammad, 2019). Phenomenographic sampling emphasises heterogeneity instead of homogeneity to obtain as much variation as possible in the experience aspect of the phenomenon, unlike other methods of qualitative research that aim to obtain a representative sample (Sims, 2024).

### 4.3 Data Collection

The data were collected in the form of individual semi-structured interviews (60-90 minutes) in which data were gathered using the Urdu language to allow participants to express themselves in their own language. The interview guide started with concrete questions that prompted the participants to talk about citizenship-related experiences, educational experiences at school, their involvement in the community, or reflection on how they engage with global news (Sims, 2024). Questions were not based on definitions such as global citizenship? Rather, participants were requested to recount their experiences when they were connected or responsible to people outside Pakistan, experienced tensions between their national loyalty and global loyalty, or envisioned their future role as teachers addressing citizenship (Van Manen, 2023). Probing, which takes place during follow-up, consists of clarifying questions in the language of the participants to gain deeper insight into the underlying conceptions without enforcing the researchers' conceptions (Sims, 2024). The audio-recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim in Urdu, with illustrative excerpts translated into English to be published without conceptual loss.



## Vol. 3 No. 12 (December) (2025)

### 4.4 Data Analysis

The analysis was conducted based on phenomenographic guidelines that considered all dimensions of aspects of citizenship that participants paid attention to together with how they organised relationships between these aspects (Åkerlind, 2025; Svensson, 2025). The meaning units or transcript pieces that conveyed full thoughts of citizenship were first extracted and compared across the dataset, which allowed the identification of patterns of either similarity or difference (Sims, 2024). This was facilitated by the zigzag process which iteratively moves back and forth between particular transcripts and the shared pool of meanings to determine themes that went beyond the cases that occurred in the particular case but were still empirically based (Sims, 2024). Themes were successively narrowed down into sets of descriptions that were categorically different ways of perceiving citizenship, each exemplified by empirical referents of participant data (Marton & Booth, 2013). The categories were coded into an outcome space showing logical and developmental associations, generally moving through the limited to broad cognition of the meaning of citizenship and passive to agentic biases towards civic engagement (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). Critical dimensions of variation were also analysed, such as the referential aspect (what citizenship essentially means to the participants) and the structural aspect (how the participants distinguished the aspects of citizenship). During the analysis process, researchers kept reflexive journals that recorded interpretive choices and engaged in consultation with Pakistani education researchers to ascertain the cultural appropriateness of their interpretations (Schugurensky & Wolhuter, 2020).

### 5. Findings

The phenomenographic study identified five qualitatively different notions of citizenship among teacher candidates in Pakistan which were arranged in a hierarchical outcome space beginning with locally constrained and continuing to globally transformative orientations. Various conceptions of citizenship are ways of experiencing citizenship in relation to national and transnational belonging.

#### 5.1 Conception 1: Citizenship as National Loyalty

The most fundamental conception considered citizenship as a sign of responsibility to Pakistan by obedience to laws, respecting national symbols, and protecting national interests. Those who shared this idea insisted on the role of personal responsibility in upholding social order and being role players in developing their nation through individual moral behaviour and not by political intervention. Citizenship possessed the meaning of being a good Pakistani who adheres to the rules, respects older people and undertakes hard work towards the development of the country without questioning the present social set ups or power distribution. This narrow vision of democratic citizenship is that of passive obedience, as opposed to being actively engaged in the governing process or expressing policy criticism. National identity was perceived to be provided intuitively instead of being socially constructed, and Pakistan was conceived as a unified entity despite its inner diversity. The dimensions were recognised globally to the extent that they were considered threats to national sovereignty or necessitated militant responses to protect Pakistan's interests. Teacher candidates who shared this view envisioned teaching citizenship through patriotic ceremonies, learning the names of different heroes in Pakistan, and nurturing national pride in Pakistani success. The formative feature of this conception placed citizenship into a pyramid with the duties of the nation over and above any obligation to transnationalism representative of what was described as a nation-statist ideology.



## Vol. 3 No. 12 (December) (2025)

### 5.2 Conception 2: Citizenship as Religious Identity

A second conception-based citizenship essentially on Islamic identity is the one that perceives Pakistani citizenship as something that cannot be done without Muslim religious membership and moral responsibilities based on Islamic teachings. The participants appealing to the concept of the Muslim global community developed a paradox between the nation-states and the Islamic identity issuing the citizens of Pakistan, while simultaneously strengthening the national Islamic nature of Pakistan. Citizenship involved living by Islam values, assistance of fellow Muslims, and empowering Pakistan as an Islamic nation and civic merits were based on religious and not secular democratic platforms. This understanding broadened the understanding of citizenship to the whole Muslim world but continued to be exclusive to non-Muslim Pakistan and defined relations with non-Muslim states in terms of religious differences (Roman, 2003). The pedagogical approach teacher candidates forged hosted Islamic values as building blocks to citizenship, allowing its students to be Muslim first and Pakistanis second (Muhammad, 2019). The structural element made the religious community the most significant referent of citizenship duties with the national and international dimensions subjugated by Islamic structures that put the unity of believers ahead of pluralistic interactions with otherness. This conception corresponds to the dominance of Islamist views in Pakistani education bureaucracies and opposition to pluralistic changes in the curriculum.

### 5.3 Conception 3: Citizenship as Democratic Participation

A broader definition of citizenship was defined as active involvement in the operation of democratic mechanisms, such as deliberation, voting, civic organising, and civic keeping the government accountable. The participants prioritised the issue of rights and responsibilities of citizens and considered citizenship as the right to contribute to the process of making decisions that impact our lives and collaborative efforts to address the common issues of the community. This participatory citizenship also transcended individual accountability for group participation in institutional forms, such as community organisation, political parties, and civil society. The global dimensions are related to the acknowledgement of transnational concerns, such as climate change, poverty, migration, and the need to act across borders, unless the participants targeted particular ways of coordination beyond the mere request to cooperate internationally.

The teacher candidates were also expecting pedagogical strategies of student councils, model elections, and deliberate discussions on local and national matters, but they were not yet clear how they could involve global citizenship dimensions effectively. The structural dimension showed the existence of contradictions between national sovereignty and global interdependence, and participants recognised that modern challenges are too complicated to be handled by nation-state structures but are still dedicated to national structures of political action. Such a conception seems to be the result of exposure to democratic principles by changing the curriculum, but without much hands-on experience in substantive democratic acts in Pakistani schooling systems.

### 5.4 Conception 4: Citizenship as Cultural Awareness

This was a conception where intercultural competence, as well as cosmopolitan sensibilities, were put at the forefront, and citizenship was perceived to mean that one must be aware of cultural diversity both nationally and internationally. According to the participants, the key citizenship skills in the globalised world were respect for other cultures, knowledge of other nations, and appreciation of diversity. Cultural consciousness



## Vol. 3 No. 12 (December) (2025)

citizenship entailed learning to empathise with those who differed, perceiving humanity despite dissimilarity, and being open to seeing things differently. International dimensions have been raised with the accent of intercultural communication, global awareness, and global human rights patterns. Participants projected that future education methods would involve multicultural and content, global exchange schemes, and desperate scrutiny of stereotypes regarding all other cultures. However, this conception was individualistic and attitudinal, as opposed to structural, as in the personal disposition of toleration, instead of asking how global capitalism brings about uneven development. The structural factor placed culture in the central focus of interpreting the local-global dimensions of citizenship at the expense of the political economy and other historical backgrounds of colonialism (Popkewitz, 2012). Participants found it difficult to explain how cultural awareness could be applied in practice to actions other than watching various sources of media or attending cultural events (Goren & Yemini, 2017).

### 5.5 Conception 5: Citizenship as Transformative Global Agency

The broadest conception conceptualised citizenship as a critical consciousness and transformational action that dealt with structural injustices at the local, national, and global levels. According to the participants, being a citizen is a promise to question why things are the way they are, challenge established systems that provoke poverty and social oppression, and act towards social justice in any given place (Freire, 2020). This citizenship, which is based on justice, entailed the examination of the effects of colonialism, neoliberalism, and hegemonies on the construction of unequal life opportunities across and within nations. Global dimensions were conceptualised through the prisms of structural interdependence that seen local services, gender disparity, access to education, and so on, to transnational economic and political dynamics that necessitate collective opposition. Pedagogical students are expected to cover pedagogical strategies, such as critical literacy, problem-posing education, community-based action research, and working with social movements (Giroux, 2006). For these participants, citizenship implied the creation of abilities to read the world critically among students and take action as a collective force to change oppressive situations. The structural perspective placed citizenship from a fundamentally relational perspective, acknowledging that privilege and marginalisation are in a state of interdependent position, which cannot be solved by charity but needs systemic transformation (Todd, 2015). The participants who believed in this conception recognised the conflict between transformative ideals and institutional constraints of examination-based Pakistani education systems but demanded that agency of the teacher can assist in establishing space of critical consciousness even in constraining conditions.

## 6. Discussion

The outcome space demonstrates that there is a developmental process which implies a transformation of citizenship as passive national loyalty to active agents of the world, but this distinction is a possibility of growth but not stages (Sims, 2024). Conceptions one and two represent hegemonic discourses within Pakistani citizenship education that focus on nation-statist and Islamist models of building the idea of citizenship based on exclusionary belonging instead of inclusive participation (Muhammad, 2019). The presence of these conceptions among teacher candidates has implied little accomplishment of curriculum reforms that advance democratic pluralism; alterations in textbooks do not show potential success when trying to change textbook ideological connotations entrenched in teacher candidates' minds (Muhammad, 2019). Conception three denotes a middle ground in



## Vol. 3 No. 12 (December) (2025)

which democratic involvement is circumscribed by national structures while accepting global interdependence, which is termed the tension between thick democratic ambitions and thin institutional facts. This aspect of cultural awareness of Conception Four is more akin to liberal humanistic practices in global citizenship education literature, but Andreotti argues that this aspect of global citizenship leads to soft global citizenship that advocates charity over justice (Andreotti, 2014).

Conception five is the only one that involves global citizenship with critical theoretical perspectives subjecting structural inequalities to questioning, but even more advanced interpretations face the difficulty of translating critical consciousness into specific forms of pedagogical intervention due to its institutional nature (Carr, 2011; Carr et al., 2014).

The results shed light on the development of conceptions held by candidate teachers at the intersection of inherited cultural structures, official curricula, and the introduction of discourses circulating in the media and higher education across the world. Importantly, conceptions exhibited inward conflicts, in which the subjects were either obligated or charged with national allegiance and global accountability without fully coming into terms with those allegiances or even reconciling them which could potentially be contradictory (Fischman & Haas, 2012).

The outcome space indicates that what is necessary to shift teacher candidates to broader conceptions of global citizenship is not merely to offer information on global issues but to design experiences that challenge the way power structures precondition the possibilities of citizenship and build group effectiveness in taking action (Greene, 2000; Wang & Hoffman, 2016). Education programs in teacher training will need to explore the ideological dilemmas that are being pushed upon Pakistani teacher candidates to open up deliberative spaces into which the competing imaginations of citizenship may be critically analysed, as opposed to assuming any agreement on liberal cosmopolitan structures (Roman, 2003).

### 7. Conclusion

This phenomenographic inquiry indicates that Pakistani teacher candidates formulate the cultural meaning of citizenship by means of five qualitatively distinct conceptions between nationally bounded allegiance and transformative global action, each of which signifies different structural connections between local and global aspects. The results indicate that global citizenship cannot be conceived as a unitary phenomenon; rather, it should be explored with a focus on differences in the way prospective teachers perceive the meaning of the concepts of citizenship. Teacher education programs must involve pedagogical approaches that go beyond the delivery of global materials to the development of transformative experiences that enable students to critically analyse the discourses of citizenship with regard to how citizenship is discursively formed under a particular historical and political landscape.

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## Vol. 3 No. 12 (December) (2025)

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## Vol. 3 No. 12 (December) (2025)

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