

# Every lesson counts: SDGs in the English classroom

## Follow up questions and answers

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### 1. How do you assess students' progress in understanding and engaging with SDGs?

When creating The Globals we were conscious of the fact that our main aim was to make good people who speak good English, not just people who speak good English. Due to this, we decided to focus on The Globals being a language practice platform, which means that we don't include any direct language assessment. Instead our assessment is focused on what the students do both in the classroom but more importantly, in their local community.

### 2. Do students need a certain level of English proficiency to effectively engage with SDG topics in the classroom?

In short no. We discussed in the talk how our target learners are aged around 11 to around 17, when designing The Globals this knowledge meant that we could cover all of the goals directly. When it comes to young learners, our approach with The Globals won't work in the same way, which is why it is better to introduce the SDGs in smaller amounts, choosing certain goals and matching to topics covered in the lesson and then drawing an overlap from the classroom to the global environment. The Globals is aligned to the CEFR over 5 levels, so we had the opportunity to make Level 1 more approachable for learners with a lower English proficiency while still engaging with the Goals in the same, effective way.

### 3. How can we make SDGs relevant and understandable for very young learners?

The best way to make a concept relevant is to draw parallels between what the learners recognise and the SDGs. We should be aware of very young learners' cognitive development too, we can begin to work on this through cause & effect questions, such as *What happens if we*

<https://www.britishcouncil.or.th/en/programmes/teach/asean2024>

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*plant more trees?* instead of directly addressing deforestation, we would be using storytelling or using visuals as well as play to approach the Sustainable Development Goals in an indirect way to lay a strong foundation for future life.

Due to very young learners often having a lower level of English language understanding and also knowledge of the world the best way to approach would be through connecting a concept or topic in the classroom with an aspect (sub-target) of one of the Goals, for example, if we're teaching a unit on Food in a young learners lesson, we could teach the vocabulary and concepts in the normal way, then introduce the concept of Goal 2 - Zero Hunger or Goal 3 - Good Health and Well-Being firstly through images and asking learners what they think of, for example, a child with no food on the table and what they notice about the difference between the learners' lunchtime meal at school and the child in the photo. Following a brief discussion with visuals a video explaining the issue surrounding the goal would be a good next step, and depending on the Goal/topic, asking the learners to think about a project or a picture they could produce to show their family the aim of the goal and its importance.

#### **4. What's the difference between The Globals approach and other methodologies like CLIL or PBL?**

There are overlaps between The Globals and CLIL and PBL approaches. It is possible to say that The Globals incorporates both CLIL and PBL in its structure but we've included a more scaffolded approach to learning not just the language but the subject too. We strive to inform the learners not just about culture in another place in the traditional English language publishing CLIL approach but to draw similarities between something the learners see and recognise in their own lives and something different. The final section of each of our goals hands over responsibility to the learners to produce their project, very similar to the PBL method. Up until that point, the teacher has been present but not taking full control of the classroom, we have the teacher guiding the learners, showing them the problems through our material and asking the learners to take the initiative and discuss and hopefully find solutions to major issues and problems in the world.

#### **5. How can we encourage reluctant speakers to engage in discussions about complex topics like poverty or climate change?**

We discussed this question briefly at the end of the talk, and another similar question came up- How do we approach sensitive issues in the classroom related to the goals, especially political ones. We always recommend an honest approach from the beginning, with school administrators and teachers first, that the theme of the SDGs is about difficulty, it is about touch issues but we gain something by showing these issues to learners. We need to prepare learners for the reality of life and the world but the important thing is the way in which we do that. We should always be sensitive about not what we talk about in the classroom, but how.

As I mentioned in the talk, there are reluctant speakers in every classroom around the world in every single lesson, not just the English language lessons. When I was at school I wasn't very good at maths and I remember even if I knew the answer, I was sure that I'd made a mistake and everyone else was right, which meant that I didn't offer the correct answer. The truth is, the

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issue isn't about reluctance to speak about 'complex issues', but confidence and feeling comfortable in the classroom; to make the classroom a space where concepts, ideas and feedback is encouraged and through The Globals and the SDGs we can reinforce this and build the confidence by emphasising the fact that we're not looking for correct answers, but ideas. We're building problem-solving skills which means having a discussion and sharing our thoughts. It is a process though to make those reluctant to speak confident enough to share their thoughts (and it's also a subject of another talk that I can prepare at a later date!)

## **6. Can you provide more examples of the 'act' projects that students have undertaken?**

This could be a very long answer- The Globals has 5 levels and each level covers each of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, each goal has a different Act section at the end and there are no repetitions of the projects covered in the Act sections, so there are 85 different projects that learners complete. Some of my favourites are: organising a walk for water (in the Goal learners saw a group of women in Africa who have to walk a long distance every day just to collect water), so the learners first keep track of how much water they use on a daily basis, then calculate how far they would need to walk to collect that much water. They then go on to organise a walk with posters and announcements to let the public know what they're doing and why. Another project in the same goal asks the learners to document themselves surviving a day at home with only a certain amount of water for every day household tasks. A further example asks learners to look at their local community and town or city and research energy production and consumption, and to find viable alternatives. They then contact the local council or mayor and present their findings. There are so many it's very difficult to list each one, to see more examples it's possible to go to <https://theglobals.co/> and register for a 7 day Demo account that grants access to all of the sub-topics of each goal.

## **7. How do you balance teaching English skills with teaching about SDGs?**

When we created The Globals, we were conscious of the fact that we both wanted, and needed to integrate all of the skills into the platform. The balance happens by approaching the SDGs as we would any English language lesson. We open with a discussion or warm-up where we're establishing that safe space where learners can exchange ideas freely, before moving on to a brief explanation of the goal and what it aims to do. Learners then receive more information about the goal through a reading text, a writing piece and a listening piece (as well as other activities and sections). Often The Globals is used in skills classes with teachers happy that they can feel like they're making a difference through their teaching and learners experiencing and exploring new concepts and ideas and then taking responsibility for change.

## **8. What resources do you recommend for teachers who want to start integrating SDGs into their lessons?**

It's very difficult to begin with. As I mentioned in the talk, if you type into a search-engine *How to Integrate SDGs* there will be lots of results, but they lack any body or information about how to begin teaching the concept of the Sustainable Development Goals. There are some lesson

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plans but they only cover one or two lessons and often only specific goals, almost as a one-off project in the classroom. This is why the approach we talked about is the most successful, in our view, where we scaffold the knowledge about the goals and then hand over the steering wheel to the learners and allow them to undertake the project.

## **9. How can we measure the long-term impact of teaching SDGs on students' attitudes or behaviours?**

The first step we have to take is to allow the learners to know about the SDGs, to experience them and see what they are, to allow them to recognise the changes that need to be made before going on and making those changes. After we've done that we'll begin to see behavioural change, first in the school environment, a learner may become aware of the importance of recycling and instead of using any rubbish bin will start to separate, or to request that the school offers separate bins if they don't already have them. Then we'd like them to continue that at home, which is something we often can't monitor, but once it begins the impact will be seen or heard about. From the house the learners will take their new attitudes into the wider world, influencing those around them and normalising the behaviour. Ideally these ideas will stay with the learners as they grow and move into the world of work and pass on the same messages to others.

## **10. Can you elaborate on how The Globals platform handles the donation of virtual coins to real-world causes?**

As we saw in the talk, for each activity learners are awarded virtual coins (Jupas), normally in an online educational platform or even some games and apps, those virtual coins stay in the realm of the platform; learners can buy upgrades or change features of their characters etc.

We decided to take those Jupas that learners earn and give them the opportunity to make a difference in real life. Each learner has a section in their account called *Support Others*, there are a number of items in three categories: Education, Food and Health. There are different Packs of varying size in each category with each costing a different number of coins. Learners can buy a pack, which is registered on the system, the teacher can monitor who has bought what from their account too. At the end of the academic year, we take the information from the system, who has bought what and how much, and provide it to those in need through various charities and organisations.

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