

Cultivating Global Awareness Through Online Dialogic Teaching: A Case Study

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Abstract This study examined how a dialogic approach in an online media literacy class at a university in China helped to develop college students' global awareness when the world was disrupted by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19). Using writing exemplars from students' online dialogues and reflective journals, this article demonstrates the potentialities of an online dialogic approach to guide a sense of togetherness and critical solidarity. The digital dialogical approach provides an expanded space for students to converse with multiple voices, meditate on tensions, and rethink their own stances as citizens of their country and the world. The article also underscores the role of higher education in cultivating a sense of global community among the younger generation and bridging the ideological divide in society.

Keywords online dialogical approach, Chinese college students, global awareness, national identity, media literacy

1 Introduction

Globalization has intensified interactions among people from diverse cultural and national backgrounds and strengthened the interconnectedness and interdependence between nations in various areas (Ramirez et al., 2016). However, as the world was grappling with the coronavirus disease (COVID-19), a global rise of nationalism was occurring when countries were facing a shortage of resources and acting to close borders (Rachman, 2020). The fear many people experienced and the lack of solidarity between nations were making nationalism more salient as people looked to support their own smaller communities (Bieber, 2022).

When media inside and outside China constructed competing narratives and engaged in a blame contest on COVID-19, they ignored the fact that pandemic was a direct consequence of mounting ecological destruction (Murdock, 2021). This blame game also exacerbated the rift in the world when combating the virus is a shared responsibility in the globalized world (Ryan, 2023). To reclaim solidarity among nations and defeat the common enemy, it was important to build global awareness among people and to help them understand these issues from a broader perspective. Global awareness refers to the recognition and understanding of the interconnectedness and interdependence of people worldwide and appreciates the complexities of global issues to critically assess the impact of these issues on local, national, and international scales (UNESCO, 2024).

With a critical dynamic backdrop of the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic-related disruptions, along with various media coverage inside and outside of China, and the global rise of nationalism and the imperative for global awareness, this case study explored how a dialogic approach in an online media literacy class impacted Chinese college students' global awareness. Drawing on the archival data from an elective class for undergraduates at a university in China, this paper analyzed students' responses to foreign media coverage of China and its people during the early stage of the COVID-19. It also examined students' perceptions of media bias by analyzing Chinese media comments.

2 Global Awareness, Perceived Media Bias, and Dialogic Teaching

2.1 | Global Citizenship Education and Global Awareness

Given the interconnectedness of global societies and the

pressing challenges worldwide, global citizenship education (GCED) has been more important than ever. According to UNESCO (2024), GCED is about teaching and learning to become global citizens who share a sense of belonging to the common humanity. It promotes a global perspective that links local issues to global contexts and national concerns to international realities. A fundamental principle of global citizenship is that individuals should extend their awareness and commitment beyond national borders to reach the whole of humankind (Ignatieff, 1995; Kingwell, 2000). To reflect this principle, GCED is expected to develop students' global awareness for critical and active engagement with an ever-increasing inclusive, diverse, and interdependent world (Marope et al., 2017).

Hanvey (1976) is one of the early scholars to propose five dimensions that prepare students to achieve global awareness, including being aware of different perspectives, global issues, cross-cultural differences, global dynamics, and human choices. Dill (2013) defined global awareness as a multi-faceted concept that entails “an awareness of other perspectives, a vision of oneself as part of a global community of humanity as a whole, and a moral conscience to act for the good of the world.” It encompasses an understanding of global interconnections, acknowledgment of diversity, and critical engagement with global issues. While scholars provide different descriptions of the concept, the overlapping definition includes a frame of reference containing plural views of global issues that go beyond a particular country (Sampson & Smith, 1957). It also involves a willingness to be open-minded and continual reflection on why and how people come to have different perspectives on global issues (Merryfield, 2012). This leads to a balanced understanding of oneself and the world around them (Noddings, 2005).

The contributions of these leading scholars provide a comprehensive framework for integrating global awareness into educational practices. Global awareness in this study centers on students' critical understanding of media narratives and different interpretations that transcend national boundaries. It also fosters an open-mindedness that encourages students to embrace a broader human community as global citizens.

2.2 | Perceived Media Bias and National Identity

The media play a crucial role as gatekeepers and agenda-setters of how the other is represented or framed, “to construct a sense of who ‘we’ are in relation to who ‘we’ are not, whether as ‘us’ and ‘them’” (Cottle, 2000). Regardless of the political system, Brinks et al. (2005) argued that mass media consistently engage in

the reproduction of national identity and the protection of national interest. Media coverage contributes to national identity building by developing a positive national self-image and encouraging identification with the nation (Hall, 2000; Nossek, 2004). Moreover, media narratives have the potential to shape the positive image of nations (Wanta et al., 2004). Furthermore, foreign news narratives often present international affairs in the context of group identification based on nationality or patriotism (Sheets et al., 2015).

Consequently, these opposing media narratives act as a heuristic cue to activate partisan identities, including national identities, which leads to perceptions of media bias (Vallone et al., 1985). Individuals are more likely to consume media content that is consistent with their worldview or congruent with their in-group narrative (Knobloch-Westerwick & Lavis, 2017). Meanwhile, media consumers with strong partisan attitudes are more likely to perceive bias of relevant coverage (Reid, 2012). Researchers claim that strong in-group identification leads individuals to conform to group norms, subsequently affecting how individuals process media sources and contents (Hogg & Reid, 2006).

Given the different media narratives and the audience's decision to process information based on their in-group identification, scholars argue for the importance of developing media literacy skills among audience. They assert that scholars and practitioners must engage audience with the underlying reasons for their perceptions of media coverage, including political predispositions and stances towards controversial issues (Tully et al., 2020). In addition, recognizing one's own perception of different media and approaching media narratives from multiple perspectives can foster critical global citizenry (Golan et al., 2021).

2.3 | Dialogic Teaching

According to Ehre et al. (1981), thinking and knowing occur in and through dialogic speech which acts as an interface between a speaker and a real or imagined audience. Dialogic teaching is an approach that encourages students to examine ideas and opinions of peers, teachers, and teaching materials to construct and reconstruct knowledge (Alexander, 2017). Beyond knowledge construction and reconstruction, the essence of dialogue lies in building connections and relationships based on mutual understanding (Noddings, 2005). Noddings (2005) envisioned teachers engaging students in “open, honest dialogue—sharing, guiding, and staying with them as they struggle with problems we have not solved.” Dialogic teaching crosses the boundary between self and other, helping students reframe issues in ways that affirm their social identities while also revealing those values held in common

(Wegerif, 2013). It can utilize facilitated encounters to reduce threatening speech that feeds polarization and to shift the focus from divisive identities to those that promote connection (Barthold, 2020).

Critical dialogue is a central component of a Freirean approach to critical pedagogy. According to Freire (2007), true dialogue generates critical thinking which “discerns an indivisible solidarity between the world and the people and admits of no dichotomy between them”. This process provokes students to critically reflect on important and potentially contentious issues, leading to a deeper understanding of their own and others’ perspectives (Freire, 2007). It is about critical discourse and enhanced perspectives on vital issues that exist in our mediated and unmediated worlds (Christ & De Abreu, 2020).

This study examines a pedagogical approach to emphasize the global pandemic as a universal challenge faced by people around the world. Dialogic teaching method employed aims to engage students in dialogue with their peers, the media narratives, and themselves on critical issues confronting humanity. By encouraging students to look at the larger social landscape and think beyond their immediate responses, this approach addresses the imperative for global awareness amid different narratives. Dialogic teaching aims to help students deconstruct various media narratives, rethink their own stance and that of both real and imagined audience, and reclaim the solidarity beyond national borders. This aligns with Henry Giroux’s claim in dialogue with Emiliano Bosio that human suffering transcends national boundaries and educators assume the responsibility for connecting their work to larger social issues while fostering students’ capacity to critically analyze those problems (Giroux & Bosio, 2021).

This study aimed to answer one overarching research question: How could the critical dialogic teaching process in an online media literacy class support students to build their global awareness when we were interconnected but isolated during the COVID-19 (Freire, 2021)? It aims to shed light on the employment of a dialogical approach in higher education to cultivate critical solidarity among students around the world.

3 Method

This small-scale, qualitative, practitioner research case study examined the impact of an online dialogic approach on students’ global awareness in a media literacy class (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). It focused on how Chinese college students in this class responded to media coverage and how they examined Chinese netizens’ comments. The course was offered online by the first author in the spring semester of 2020 as an

elective to junior and senior undergraduates at a Chinese-foreign joint education institute in China. This joint engineering institute required that all junior and senior students took humanities electives to gain new ways of critical thinking and inquiry. All courses at the institute were taught in English, and 30 Chinese students enrolled in the class. At the time, China was combating the virus. Most universities in China went online to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Foreign media coverage of China during the pandemic varied, incurring immediate responses from Chinese netizens on social media platforms. Under this specific circumstance, part of this course was designed to analyze narratives, develop their critical media literacy, and cultivate global awareness.

This study drew upon the archival data of students’ online posts and journals in three weeks when the course specifically focused on media and national identity. It explored how college students responded to media narratives and foreign countries during the pandemic. In the first week, students selected one piece of media coverage and shared their thoughts on Blackboard Discussion Forums. It showed students’ perceptions on biases that might be tied to their nationality. In the second week, students examined netizens’ comments and added their thoughts about the comments. The purpose was to prompt students to critically examine their responses on the Internet and be aware of their own perception bias as citizens. For each week’s post, students first explained their selected piece of media coverage and their thoughts about it. Then, they reviewed and commented on posts by their classmates. In the third week, students wrote a reflective journal summarizing how the discussions in the past two weeks affected their understanding of the world as shaped by media coverage. The Blackboard Discussion Forums for the first two weeks involved peer interaction, and the online journal for the third week was submitted to the instructor privately and was not accessible to peers.

Throughout the teaching process, the instructor, also as the first author, provided weekly prompts for students to write down their thoughts online. To engage students in dialogue, the instructor set two separate deadlines for the first two weeks: the first deadline for students to post their original thoughts on their selected media pieces, and the second for them to comment on peers’ posts. The instructor sent messages through QQ, a Chinese instant messaging application, about the approaching deadlines, requiring them to comment on at least two posts by their peers. Students were also requested to read and respond to the comments they received from their classmates. To prioritize discussions among students, the instructor refrained from commenting on students’ posts, instead prompting them to respond to each other’ ideas. The

instructor also made it clear at the beginning that the course was to seek students' genuine thoughts for open discussion with no standard responses or right way of thinking.

The archival data in this study mainly consisted of three parts: students' initial online posts, their comments on their classmates' posts, and their reflective journals afterward. As all courses in this joint institute were taught in English, students' online posts and reflective journals were also written in English. We tried to find out whether and how students' sense of national identity and global awareness revealed in their online dialogues and reflections on media bias. We read and reviewed all these materials, and generated codes relevant to national identity, bias, and open-mindedness. We also imported all documents to NVivo and ran queries to locate expressions that corresponded to these codes and placed them under emerging themes. Finally, we selected exemplars from students' original writing for the three weekly themes: shared national pride and acute perception of media bias, jointly developed awareness of perception bias and open-mindedness, and further reflected on one's awareness of self and the other. To protect confidentiality, we replaced students' names with numbers when presenting the data.

Unlike quantitative research that seeks statistical representativeness and generalizes findings to a larger population, this qualitative case study does not aim for generalization. Instead, it focuses on how individual students in this specific context develop their thoughts on particular issues by tapping into the depth, complexity, and meaning (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017). Therefore, the exemplars selected for this paper aim to provide insight into how and why the identified themes emerge among students.

4 Findings

4.1 | Shared National Pride and Acute Perception of Media Bias

Quite consistent with the media perception theory, students took delight in reading foreign media coverage of how China took active measures to combat the virus and expressed their national pride when communicating with their classmates. One student, for example, selected a foreign news report titled *Coronavirus: How Can China Build a Hospital So Quickly?* which described China's speedy construction of cabin hospitals in the hotspot city to receive COVID-19 patients. The student quoted the report as saying "The engineering work is what China is good at. We have records of building skyscrapers at speed. This is very hard for Westerners to imagine." In response, the student conveyed his pride by writing: "They, the

foreign reporters, were shocked by the speed that China just used eight days to build a hospital. China's rapid and effective action comes to success, and there are zero new cases in recent days." (Student 12, Online Post, March 20, 2020)

The pride this student expressed in China's effective strategies was reinforced through online dialogues with classmates when they analyzed how China had made this happen. One student commented on this post, praising China's mobilization of various resources to combat the virus: "The construction of Huoshenshan Hospital, a makeshift hospital, is a Chinese miracle, which makes us feel the power of our country." (Response 1 to Student 12, March 22, 2020)

Another student echoed this sentiment of national pride, reflecting on China's increasing capacity to handle catastrophes, "Obviously, a typical Chinese miracle: the construction of Huoshenshan and Leishenshan temporary hospitals shocked the world! As a Chinese citizen, I felt greatly proud of my motherland." (Response 2 to Student 12, March 24, 2020)

While students unanimously voiced national pride in reading positive media coverage of China, they also quickly located bias in negative reporting. This response aligns with research indicating that when one's identity is threatened, one will demonstrate a sharper perception to media bias (Müller, 2013). Classroom dialogues and exchanges of ideas also propelled students to critically analyze the reasons for the media bias and trace these narratives back to their historical roots.

One post drew several comments from other students and initiated a further discussion on reasons for other varied voices. It considered the ideological differences as the main reason:

These reflect cultural differences that may lead to biases. I think this is because the ideological differences have also greatly influenced people's perceptions and beliefs. (Response 1 to Student 25, March 22, 2020)

These dialogues from the first week showed that students strongly identified with positive foreign media narratives that reinforced their national identities and prides. They also quickly recognized bias of foreign media's coverage of China and jointly analyzed the cause of this bias with their peers. However, students were not specifically aware that their perception of media was closely associated with their national identity.

4.2 | Jointly Developed Awareness of Perception Bias and Open-Mindedness

Researchers have found that even though audiences can analyze media bias from different perspectives, few

individuals explicitly tie their evaluations of such bias with their predispositions (Tully et al., 2020). While students showed a collective sense of national identity when reviewing foreign media coverage, this course also challenged them to examine the effect of this predisposition on the perception of media. As part of this reflective process, students took an insider look at how Chinese netizens were discussing foreign countries on social media platforms and shared their thoughts about these discussions.

One student analyzed the discourse of a video titled *You Must Stay at Home*, in which the then Prime Minister of a foreign country was asking the citizens to stay at home after his previous mass immunization strategy. On Chinese social media platforms, netizens were mocking this changing stance. When reading comments by Chinese netizens, this student recognized the audience bias on the internet and realized the common human vulnerabilities experienced during the pandemic. He wrote: “Hupu, a Chinese social media platform, is just a basketball forum, so some discussions may be biased. ... no matter who is infected with the virus is very regrettable, and it is a disaster for human beings.” (Student 27, Online Post, March 27, 2020)”

One student’s comment on this post pointed out the ignorance of mocking others during the pandemic and agreed that the virus was the common enemy of humans regardless of background. This comment showed respect for differences and invited a more careful examination of various strategies adopted by other countries:

Yes, I think it is ignorant to laugh at the unfortunate in the face of a catastrophe that threatens all of us, and that any kind of cultural or political difference should be accepted at this moment. When we look at this event, we should not draw a quick conclusion, but also think about why they chose such a policy. Is it a deliberate choice or a helpless move due to various reasons? (Response 1 to Student 27, March 29, 2020)

Another student echoed the call for kindness, criticizing some netizens’ negative comments about other countries. The post also highlighted the interconnectedness of people worldwide and reiterated the importance of unity to combat the virus:

There are also people laughing at some countries for their severe conditions... If so, we are the same as those racists. In the face of such a rampant virus disaster, no one should laugh at or target others since the fate of all people in the world is closely linked. We need to unite and help each other to fight

against the virus. (Response 2 to Student 27, March 29, 2020)

One response emphasized the importance of examining one’s own biases when it came to prejudice:

We have been complaining about the unfair treatment we have received, but at the same time, we might treat others with unfair treatment. This kind of behavior does not mean that we are resisting unfairness. On the contrary, we are complicit in wrong practices. The best way to resist unfair treatment is to be good ourselves. (Response 1 to Student 26, March 29, 2020)

By dialoguing with their peers on how Chinese netizens discussed situations abroad, students gained insight into how national identity could impact perception of media bias and lead to bias against others. These online dialogue also prompted students to rethink their predispositions on media and the other, fostering a call for open-mindedness and kindness. Dialogues from the first two weeks led to a further reflection, allowing students to critically examine their thoughts in a broader global context.

4.3 | Further Reflection on One’s Awareness of Self and the Other

After examining both domestic and international media in the first two weeks, the third week was designed to provide students with a further reflection on their discussions. They were asked to write reflective journals titled *Understanding My Country And the World Through Media*, which encapsulated their perceptions of otherness tied to national identity and media narratives. Upon further reflection, students showed a more developed understanding of national identity and media bias. They began to check their unconscious biases, fostering a more open-minded approach.

One student highlighted the importance of balancing confidence and respect as China continues to develop. The student reiterated the idea of being equal and stressed the importance of global unity in addressing global issues:

With the rapid development of China, we have the capital to be confident and we need to show our confidence and respect. What is more, in the face of natural disasters such as epidemic diseases, global warming, and lack of water, human beings are all equal and need to cooperate to overcome difficulties regardless of ethnicity. (Student Journal, April 10, 2020)

Another student reflected on the concept of nationalism, expressing love and protection of one’s

homeland:

Through the reflection on these two weeks, I always think of a word, nationalism. I have been thinking: What kind of nationalism is right? I think the right nationalism mainly includes two aspects: One is to love one's own country and nation; the other is to safeguard their own national interests. This ideology is essential for people and a country. (Student Journal, April 10, 2020)

Some student's reflections centered on the role of media in leading bias against people from different nations. One student, for example, emphasized the need for audiences to keep an open attitude towards differences and to use media critically to understand the world.

I think the formation of bias against different nationalities at present is not only for historical reasons, but also for the guidance of the media. We should use the media as a tool to understand the world, rather than being controlled by the media. (Student Journal, April 13, 2020)

The past dialogues also led students to rethink unconscious biases and how those biases could be identified and scrutinized. As one student wrote:

My rationality tells me that I should treat everyone equally. I ought to love, to develop mutual understanding and empathy... Many students have mentioned that discrimination is wrong. We should not discriminate. But actually, discrimination always happens unconsciously. Nevertheless, I think there is a solution to the problem of discrimination, and education can mitigate that. (Student Journal, April 10, 2020)

This further reflection provided students with a space to stand back and explicitly tie their previous responses to both national and global contexts. Upon deeper deliberation, students examined national identity and media bias from a global perspective, reflected on their own predispositions, and called for solidarity among humanity.

5 Discussion on Multi-Voiced Dialogue, Reflection, and Global Awareness

As the COVID-19 interrupted the world in the past years, it invoked competing media narratives and

activated divergent responses from audiences based on their national identification. This situation further exacerbated global rift when solidarity was needed to combat the common enemy. This study shows that a reflective dialogic approach has the potential to bridge the rift by providing students with an interactive space to dialogue with various media narratives, their classmates, their instructor, and themselves. This multi-voiced dialogue crosses the boundaries of individual, collective, and other perspectives across time and space, leading to a critical understanding of media and an acute awareness of global perspectives and unity during challenging times.

The value of dialogue and reflection in education has been recognized for its potential as a transformative tool in fostering open-mindedness through reciprocity and respect (Freire, 2021). The reciprocity and respect were first exemplified in students' salient national identity when they engaged with foreign media narratives. As Chinese college students, they shared national pride in reviewing positive reports on China's effective strategy to combat the virus and quickly identifying biases in negative coverage of China. They also collectively discussed the reasons for media bias from historical, ideological, and political perspectives. The reciprocity, in this stage, was built upon students' identification as Chinese and their shared responses to foreign media narratives as the other.

Scholars have pointed out that an exclusive emphasis on national citizenship education "is no longer singularly sufficient for understanding our complex world" (Gaudelli, 2002). Meanwhile, citizenship education rooted in national affiliations and the persistence of nations is an important consideration in the context of educating global citizens (Richardson, 2008). It is also believed that developing global awareness and becoming world citizens does not inhibit students from developing pride in their own countries (Woods & Dickson, 2017). The dialogical space in this study accommodated the coexistence of national pride and global awareness without overlooking either of them. Students' perceptions of media bias, developed through pedagogic encounters with peers, and equipped them with skills and competencies in envisaging national identity and global awareness as coexisting factors in the interdependent world (Dyrness, 2021; Torres & Bosio, 2020). When negative coverage incurred a general backlash and prompted anti-foreign comments on social media platforms (Wang & Catalano, 2022), the multi-voiced dialogue provided students the opportunity to stand back and to critically examine these nationalist sentiments. Students identified audience bias, dismissed accusing each other, and called for tolerance of differences in the face of global disaster. By interacting with different voices from

the media and with peers, they gained a new vision and underscored the solidarity instead of the dichotomy between people worldwide during challenging times (Ligorio, 2013).

In addition, this study showed the power of digitally mediated communication in facilitating a dialogical approach. In this online class, students wrote and posted messages on discussion forums, allowing them to read and respond to each other's posts asynchronously. This expanded the space and time for dialogue, amplifying the dialogical dimensions of communication (Wegerif, 2013). These amplified dimensions diminished tensions among students, various media narratives, and virtual community associated with the media platforms. Constant reflection on their dialogues led students to examine concepts that had been embedded in their thinking but not previously addressed. They rethought how nationalism, media bias, and perception bias could affect people's thoughts and behaviors in different ways. Students also recognized the initiative to critically examine these factors and become more self-aware. Moreover, students realized the crucial role of education in mitigating bias against others and developing growing open-mindedness and inclusiveness.

6 Conclusions

On May 5, 2023, the World Health Organization (WHO) announced its decision to end the pandemic's emergency status, more than three years after declaring COVID-19 pandemic a public health emergency in January 2020. While this announcement has pressed the button for the world to move on, the pandemic incurred competing narratives in media against each other and exposed the fragility of the globalized world. In the current post-pandemic era, the world continues to suffer the rippling effect of this divide and other urgent global issues. It is important to reflect on how our globalized society and the media respond to the crisis within the national frameworks and to consider what we can do to reach solidarity among people around the world.

Using writing exemplars from a small number of Chinese college students in an international joint program, this study does not claim representation. Instead, it reveals the potential of a dialogic approach to cultivating global awareness by providing interactive space for dialoguers to examine multiple voices in an online environment. This approach stretched the dialogical time and space, diminished tensions, and incurred critical reflection. By prompting students' constant examination and reexamination of media narratives, their responses, and those of their peers, the

open inquiries in the online dialogic approach were helping students in this study develop a more balanced understanding of themselves and the world beyond. This process encouraged them to become more committed to the common humanity as global citizens.

The study also hopes to shed light on the role that media, higher education, and broader society can play in addressing ideological divide and bringing unity among citizens around the world. As Thich (1965) noted, our true enemies are "intolerance, ... hatred and discrimination which lie within the heart of man." During the pandemic, the shared global experience, and the fact that the "enemy" is not another nation or group of people but an indiscriminate virus, should promote greater cross-national solidarity and cooperation. However, the immediate response has often been marked by division and polarization (Bieber, 2022). This small study, therefore is a call for solidarity and cooperation in combating our true enemies, including intolerance, hatred, and discrimination. It underscores the importance of building a more tolerant and united world in the post-COVID era.

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Contributions Both authors worked together on the manuscript. The first author conducted the research and wrote the manuscript. The second author provided suggestions on the analysis and revision of the research.

Data Availability Statements The authors confirm that all data generated or analysed during this study are included in this published article.

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