



ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP IN THE NEW GEOGRAPHY CURRICULUM OF GREEK PRIMARY EDUCATION

Vana Chiouⁱ

Department of Geography,
University of the Aegean,
Greece

Abstract:

This study aimed to investigate active citizenship-related content in the new geography curriculum of Greek primary education through textual analysis. The analysis identified active citizenship elements across three dimensions: knowledge, affective domain, and skills. The findings indicate that the new curriculum strengthens political and cultural knowledge, fosters values of tolerance and respect for diversity, enhances various skills, and promotes attitudes toward sustainable development, mutual understanding, and cooperation. However, the study reveals gaps regarding the inclusion of social and economic knowledge, forms of participation, and dispositions, highlighting the need for refinements in the curriculum to prepare students better to become active citizens.

Keywords: active citizenship education, geography curriculum, primary education

1. Introduction

In recent years, we have witnessed the emergence of an increasingly technology-driven and culturally diverse society, which is confronted with various global challenges, including, but not limited to, financial crises, social inequalities, violations of human rights, wars, migration, and so on. In this context, it is imperative that individuals are prepared to respond effectively to such challenges, demonstrating respect to others while taking initiatives and responsibilities as active citizens.

Active citizenship refers to *“the ability to participate in politics and society, characterised by the knowledge, skill, and confidence to engage effectively in one’s environment and society.”* (Active Citizen Compass, n.d.). It is connected with the knowledge and skills required for individuals to be capable of engaging with politics, law, and the economy, which are the main pillars of a democratic society (Bacian & Huemer, 2023). In this sense, active citizenship emphasises the responsibilities of the citizens rather than their rights

ⁱ Correspondence: email b.xiou@aegean.gr

(Birdwell *et al.*, 2013), advocating for community engagement, volunteerism, and solidarity (Wind-Cowie & Gregory, 2011).

It is apparent that education plays a key role in creating a democratic society where people value diversity and show respect for human rights and commitment to the common good (European Commission, 2025a, b). From this perspective, active citizenship education should aim to equip students with knowledge and skills, to cultivate values and attitudes to prepare them to be active and democratic citizens throughout their lives (Doğanay, 2012).

The European Commission has long emphasised the importance of equipping young people with knowledge and various skills, such as intercultural, social, and communication skills, to interact effectively. Various initiatives and projects, like the EU Youth Strategies for 2010–2018 and 2019–2027 (Council of the European Union, 2009, 2018), and the Erasmus+ project (European Commission, 2025b), have prioritised the preparation of young people with the necessary competencies to be agents of change and supporters of the European values (Council of the European Union, 2012).

In line with these European strategies, contemporary educational policies across Europe focus attentively on the promotion of active citizenship in schools, aiming to create the circumstances that will help students to be thinking, active, and responsible citizens of tomorrow. Curricula design is actually guided by the knowledge, the skills, and the attitudes that future democratic citizens should possess (Doğanay, 2012). From the perspective of national policies, systematic studies indicate that contemporary national curricula of EU members are highly aligned with European policies and oriented to equip students with knowledge and various skills to effectively live and thrive in a challenging environment with responsibility (Bacian & Huemer, 2023; Chiou, 2025; Eurydice, 2012, 2016; Navarro-Medina & de-Alba-Fernandez, 2015; Paesen *et al.*, 2025; Reynolds *et al.*, 2019; Saleminezhad *et al.*, 2025; Veugelers, 2015).

Focusing on Greece, the promotion of active citizenship has been a central objective of the national curricula. Article 16 of the Greek Constitution (1975, revised in 2008) designates education as a fundamental responsibility of the state, aiming to cultivate free and responsible citizens. As an EU member, Greece has progressively aligned its national curricula aims and pillars with European educational directives. Law 1566/1985 further reinforced this objective by emphasising the preparation of democratic citizens. Later, the major educational reform in 2003, complemented with the supplementary curricula of 2011, integrated active citizenship content to prepare students to acquire necessary knowledge and skills to successfully perform responsibility in their own and broader societal and global context (Chiou, 2025; Tridimas, 2020). Since 2021, the new curricula, both for primary and secondary education in Greece, have been in a pilot phase, with full implementation to be expected in the coming year(s). According to their primary principles, the new curricula aim to support meaningful learning and connections between subjects and students' lives within local and broader communities, fostering acceptance and understanding through collectivism.

A review of secondary education curricula of 2011 in Greece (Chiou, 2025) highlighted that, while all curricula include learning objectives, outcomes, and suggested

activities related to active citizenship, there remains an imbalance between theory and practice. Specifically, findings revealed a restricted number of suggested learning activities to focus on students' engagement in authentic or hypothetical life problems, thus, the opportunities to apply their knowledge and skills.

Despite the raft of educational policies on preparing students to be active citizens, there still remains significant debate in literature regarding the role of schools and teachers (Sim *et al.*, 2016). Discussions persist on the most effective didactic methods for supporting such learning activities (Wood *et al.*, 2018), with projects and service learning suggested as more engaging ones (Smith & Graham, 2017). Undoubtedly, citizenship education, incorporating both affective and cognitive dimensions, can offer opportunities for students to engage in critical and transformative democratic processes, fostering democratic engagement (Wood *et al.*, 2018).

2. Research Methodology

2.1 The Focus of the Study

The aim of this study was to identify the presence of active citizenship-related content in the new geography curriculum of Greek primary education.

It is widely recognised that geographical knowledge fosters the understanding and interpretation of the world, as well as various phenomena across different spaces, levels, and scales. Geography provides a set of tools and methods that facilitate the comprehension of phenomena and relationships on local, national, and international levels (Sarno, 2011). As such, geography education complements citizenship education by enabling students to critically analyse and respond to environmental and societal challenges, fostering participation in sustainable practices, and a sense of responsibility.

This underscores the alignment between geographical knowledge and the European educational priorities on preparing students to be active citizens.

This study aims to address the following research questions:

- What types of knowledge related to active citizenship are embedded in the new geography curriculum of primary education?
- What values and attitudes does the new geography curriculum promote to prepare students for active citizenship?
- What skills are fostered through the new geography curriculum to equip students for active citizenship?

2.2 Material

The geography curriculum, like other Greek curricula, comprises centralised decisions made by the Ministry of Education and applied to all Greek schools. In Greek primary education, the geography lesson is taught as a stand-alone lesson in the fifth and sixth grades.

The new geography curriculum has been pilot testing since the school year 2021-2022 and is expected to be implemented in all Greek schools in the next year(s). It

comprises the primary data source in this study and can be found on the website of the Institute of Educational Policy (2023) (<https://iep.edu.gr/el/nea-ps-provoli>).

The new geography curriculum for fifth grade comprises four thematic areas:

- a. Maps,
- b. Natural environment and the relationship between humans and the natural environment in Greece,
- c. The anthropogenic environment of Greece and Hellenism, and
- d. Natural hazards - prevention – protection.

The new geography curriculum for sixth grade comprises four thematic areas:

- a. The Earth as a celestial body.
- b. Natural environment and the relationship between humans and the natural environment on earth,
- c. The inhabitants of the Earth and the continents of our planet, and
- d. Global problems.

2.3 Method

Textual analysis was used (Smith, 2017) to investigate the messages related to active citizenship in the new geography curriculum, which served as a source for deriving data. First, the author screened the curriculum by reading its content twice to understand it better. The content was examined line-by-line to identify the semantic relationships between the words and phrases in each sentence and to highlight active citizenship elements. Related to active citizenship content was categorised based on Doğanay's dimensions of active citizenship education (2012) (Table 1).

Table 1: Dimensions of active citizenship education

Knowledge	Political	Political and legal system, basic concept, principles and institutions of democracy, distribution of power and authority throughout history, concept of democratic citizenship, citizens' rights and responsibilities including human rights, political decision making on local, national and international level, current political issues, main events, trends and change agents of national, European and world history, media literacy and the role of media in personal and social life, national and international security
	Social	Social relations, social rights, the function and work of voluntary groups and civil society, social differences (welfare, social security, health, etc)
	Cultural	The history and cultural heritage of one's own country, predominance of certain dominant roles and values, different cultures in the local, regional, national, and global context, preservation of the environment
	Economic	Economic rights, economic principles and consequences of economic development, key financial matters and associated economic literacy, sustainable development locally and internationally
	Forms of participation	Knowledge of the forms of political, social, cultural, and economic participation to the life.

Affective domain	Values	Acceptance of the rule law, respect for human dignity, respect for human rights, believing in democracy, believing in peace, believing in social justice, equality and equal treatment of citizens, rejection of prejudice, racism and all kind of discrimination, believing in solidarity, respect for tolerance and toward differences, Respect for reasoning, Believing in preservation of environment, Believing in sustainable development, valuing the freedom, valuing the fairness
	Attitudes	Commitment to truth, open mindedness, commitment to peace and constructive solutions to problems, feeling confident to engage politically, trusting in democratic principles, institutions and procedures as well as importance of civil action, feeling responsible for own decisions and actions, commitment to the value of mutual understanding, cooperation, trust and solidarity, commitment to the principles of sustainable development, sense of belonging
	Dispositions	The intention to participate in the political community, the intention to be active in the community, the intention to participate in civil society
Skills	General skills	Critical thinking, critical examination of information, distinguishing statements of facts from an opinion, reaching a balanced judgement, decision or point of view based on critical examination of information and reasoning, defending reached position, problem solving, decision making, creative thinking, inquiry skills, communication skills, using media in an active way
	Participation Skills	Monitoring and influencing policies and decisions including participating in peaceful protesting, resolving conflicts in a peaceful way, participating voluntary-civil organizations as a member or contribution, building cooperation and coalitions, displaying democratic leadership, living in a multicultural environment, handling all kind of differences including gender, social, cultural, racial, and religious, engagement in protecting environment, ethical consumption and boycotting unethical products

Source: Doğanay, 2012.

3. Results

The analysis of the curriculum identified the presence of active citizenship-related content in three dimensions of active citizenship education: knowledge, affective domain, and skills.

Table 2 presents content related to active citizenship within the knowledge dimension. The analysis revealed content for the categories of political and cultural knowledge, but no relevant content was found for social and economic knowledge and for the knowledge regarding forms of participation.

Table 2: Knowledge related to active citizenship in the new geography curriculum

Political Knowledge	
Political and legal system	To discuss the necessity of the administrative division of Greece and to recognize the three regions of Greece and their capitals. (expected outcome, p. 22746)
	To distinguish the levels of administrative division of the country. (expected outcome, p. 22746)
	To distinguish the geographical divisions of the country. (expected outcome, p. 22746)

	To identify the political characteristics of Europe's identity (expected outcome, p. 22750)
	To identify the political characteristics of Asia's identity (expected outcome, p. 22750)
	To identify the political characteristics of Africa's identity (expected outcome, p. 22750)
	To identify the political characteristics of America's identity (expected outcome, p. 22750)
	To identify the political characteristics of Oceania and Antarctica's identity (expected outcome, p. 22750)
Main events, trends and change agents of national, European and world history	To analyze the historical evolution of the island (i.e., Cyprus) and its relationship with Hellenism. (expected outcome, p. 22747)
	To name the countries in which the Greeks of the diaspora live and to mention the causes that forced them to migrate. (expected outcome, p. 22747)
Cultural Knowledge	
History and cultural heritage of own country	To specify the bonds of the Greeks of the diaspora with the homeland and their contribution to it. (expected outcome, p. 22747)
Different cultures in the local, regional, national, and global context	To identify the cultural characteristics of Europe's identity (expected outcome, p. 22750)
	To identify the cultural characteristics of Asia's identity (expected outcome, p. 22750)
	To identify the cultural characteristics of Africa's identity (expected outcome, p. 22750)
	To identify the cultural characteristics of America's identity (expected outcome, p. 22750)
	To identify the cultural characteristics of Oceania and Antarctica's identity (expected outcome, p. 22751)

Tables 3 and 4 present content related to active citizenship within the affective domain, specifically focusing on values and attitudes. No content related to dispositions was found in the new geography.

Table 3: Values related to active citizenship in new geography curriculum

Values	
Respect for tolerance and toward differences	To accept and respect the culture, lifestyle, and values of other people. (expected outcomes, p. 22741)

Table 4: Attitudes related to active citizenship in new geography curriculum

Attitudes	
Commitment to the principles of sustainable development	To develop attitudes and adopt behaviors that contribute to environmental protection and the prospect of sustainable development. (general objective, p. 22740)
	To identify the impacts of human activities on the natural environment, developing positive attitudes and behaviors that contribute to environmental protection and sustainable development. (specific objective, p. 22741)
	To adopt a positive attitude towards the preservation of the natural environment and biodiversity. (expected outcome, p. 22746)

Commitment to the value of mutual understanding, cooperation, trust, and solidarity	To recognize the importance of collective action on a local, national, and global scale for problem-solving. (general objective, p. 22740)
	To accept and respect the culture, lifestyle, and values of other people. (expected outcomes, p. 22741)

Table 5 presents skills related to active citizenship. The results indicate that the new geography curriculum aims to enhance both general skills and participation skills.

Table 5: Skills related to active citizenship in new geography curriculum

General Skills	
Defending reached position - Problem solving - Decision making - Creative thinking - Inquiry skills - Communication skills - Using media in an active way	To develop decision-making skills, problem-solving abilities, the ability to design projects or conduct small geographical research, and present their findings. (general objective, p. 22740)
	To develop risk management skills by understanding natural disasters and protecting the environment with a focus on sustainable development. (specific objective, p. 22740)
	To investigate geographical issues, global issues (specific objective, pp. 22740 - 22741)
	To be able to present projects using various media, techniques, and representation tools. (specific objective, p. 22741)
	To collect and organize information in order to present their work orally, in writing, or by creating collages or posters. (expected outcomes, p. 22741)
	To adopt protective measures against volcanic eruptions. (expected outcome, p. 22747)
	To react correctly in case of an earthquake. (expected outcome, p. 22747)
	To adopt protective measures against other hazards (landslides, fires, floods, severe weather phenomena: stormy winds, thunderstorms, hail, snowfall, frost, heat waves). (expected outcome, p. 22747)
	To present project for Europe (expected outcome, p. 22750)
	To search, select, record, and utilize information from different sources about Europe. (expected outcome, p. 22750)
	To present project for Asia (expected outcome, p. 22750)
	To search, select, record, and utilize information from different sources about Asia. (expected outcome, p. 22750)
	To present project for Africa (expected outcome, p. 22750)
	To search, select, record, and utilize information from different sources about Africa. (expected outcome, p. 22750)
	To present project for America" (expected outcome, p. 22750)
	To search, select, record, and utilize information from different sources about America. (expected outcome, p. 22750)
	To present project for Oceania and Antarctica. (expected outcome, p. 22751)
	To search, select, record, and utilize information from different sources about Oceania and Antarctica. (expected outcome, p. 22751)
Critical thinking	To evaluate behaviors that contribute to environmental protection and the prospect of sustainable development. (expected outcomes, p. 22741)
Participation Skills	
Building cooperation and coalitions	To implement projects by learning to collaborate as a team to achieve common goals." (specific objective, p. 22740)
	To acquire teamwork and communication skills.(specific objective, p. 22741)

	To participate responsibly and collaborate in order to present their work. (expected outcomes, p. 22741)
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4. Discussion

This study aimed to investigate active citizenship-related content in the new geography curriculum of Greek primary education. The findings highlighted three key areas where active citizenship content is evident: knowledge, affective domain, and skills.

Findings reported expected outcomes linked to political knowledge and specifically to administrative and geographical divisions of Greece, the political characteristics of the identity of continents, and issues related to Cyprus and Greek diaspora. Additionally, expected outcomes were also found to be associated with cultural knowledge, focusing on bonds with Greek diaspora and the cultural characteristics of continents. This knowledge is essential for students to become informed citizens about political and cultural issues in different levels, spaces, and time (Bacian & Huemer, 2023; Doğanay, 2012; European Commission, 2025b).

The new curriculum was also found to promote the values of tolerance and respect for diversity while it supports attitudes toward sustainable development, mutual understanding, and cooperation. These affective elements are crucial for students while interacting in diverse contexts. The promotion of students' collaboration on local, national, and global issues fosters a sense of responsibility and the importance of community engagement. This approach is essential in addressing contemporary challenges that require cooperative solutions (European Commission, 2025a, b).

Furthermore, the findings showed that the new geography curriculum fosters the enhancement of various skills, including critical thinking, inquiry, decision-making, problem-solving, cooperation, and participation skills. These skills are essential for students to perform active participation in democratic processes, to make responsible decisions, to effectively engage in civic life and to contribute to collective action (Chiou, 2025; European Commission, 2025b).

However, the study also uncovers some gaps in the curriculum. Notably, there is a lack of content related to social and economic knowledge and participation forms, which are vital aspects of active citizenship (Doğanay, 2012). Understanding social issues, such as inequality and human rights, and economic concepts, such as sustainable development, is fundamental for students to become responsible citizens. Moreover, while the curriculum outlines valuable knowledge, values and attitudes, there is a noticeable gap in dispositions, including practical applications of these competencies in real-world contexts. This result is in line with a recent review of secondary education curricula in Greece (Chiou, 2025), indicating that practical applications are consistently laid behind the enhancement of knowledge, skills, and attitudes when it comes to active citizenship.

5. Conclusion

The incorporation of active citizenship elements into the geography curriculum of Greek primary education reflects broader European educational priorities aimed at preparing responsible, engaged citizens who actively contribute to society. The new geography curriculum for Greek primary education integrates elements of active citizenship across multiple dimensions, including political and cultural knowledge, values of tolerance and respect for diversity, and attitudes related to sustainable development, mutual understanding, and cooperation while also fostering various skills. By promoting these competencies, the new curriculum lays a solid foundation for developing future active citizens. This comprehensive approach ensures that students are not only equipped with the essential knowledge but also develop the necessary skills, values, and attitudes to participate actively and responsibly in diverse real-world contexts. However, gaps in promoting social and economic knowledge as well as limitations in fostering students' dispositions to participate in the political community and the civil society should be considered by policymakers and curriculum designers. Addressing these gaps will help further integrate the missing elements of active citizenship in the curriculum and provide students with opportunities for practical applications in real-life situations, better preparing them for democratic engagement and responsibility.

6. Limitations

This study provides valuable insights into the presence of active citizenship content in the new geography curriculum for Greek primary education, but it also has a few limitations.

First, the analysis is based solely on the curriculum text, which may not fully represent how diverse dimensions of active citizenship are put into practice in the classroom. Future research could involve natural classroom observations or interviews with teachers to gain a deeper understanding of how active citizenship is taught.

Second, the study focuses on the new curriculum, which is still in a pilot phase. Future studies should examine the outcomes of the full implementation to assess whether the identified gaps in social and economic knowledge are addressed and whether the practical application of active citizenship dimensions improves over time.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

About the Author

Dr. Vana Chiou, is Faculty member (Laboratory Teaching Staff) at the Department of Geography, University of the Aegean (Greece). Her research interests include contemporary methods of teaching, assessment, teacher training, and inclusion in education. She is co-editor of the book series "Voices from the Classroom" (Waxman publications). Her published work includes editing books, chapters in books and articles

in Greek and international journals. She has been a participant in and co-coordinator of different European projects.

Email: b.xiou@aegean.gr

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