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Samuel Ikendi
Department of California
Agriculture and Natural
Resources, University of
California - Merced, 5200 N.
Lake Road, Merced, CA 95343
United States

Reagan Mulungi Mwenyi
Department of Special
Education, Leadership and
Professional Studies, Missouri
State University, 901 S.
National Avenue Springfield,
MO 65897, United States

Rosemarie Somers
Department of Agricultural
Sciences, Clemson University,
821 McMillian Road, Clemson,
SC 29634, United States

Samrat Sikdar
Department of Human
Sciences, Mississippi State
University, 255 Tracy Drive,
Starkville, MS 39762, United
States

Brenda Asasira Kakungulu
Department of Agricultural
Sciences, Makerere University,
P.O. Box 7062 Kampala,
Uganda

Correspondence Author;
Samuel Ikendi
Department of California
Agriculture and Natural
Resources, University of
California - Merced, 5200 N.
Lake Road, Merced, CA 95343
United States

National anthems and flags: Strategic tools for global citizenry and cross-cultural competence development in global educational programs

Samuel Ikendi, Reagan Mulungi Mwenyi, Rosemarie Somers, Samrat Sikdar and Brenda Asasira Kakungulu

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Abstract

Global citizenship development has become central in higher education. This study adopted the global citizenship education and cross-cultural competence frameworks to uncover the intrinsic meaning of national anthems and flags from 18 countries purposively selected across the six continents. The purpose was to assess how interaction with these regalia promote cross-cultural competence and global citizenship development among students engaged in global education programs. Analysis of national anthems revealed five themes: victory, loyalty, divine protection, identity development, and natural endowments. In victory, for instance, the *Star-Spangled Banner* applauds Americans' fight for liberty; in loyalty, *Kimigayo* echoes the significance of imperial family in Japanese culture; and in divine protection, Emirates anthem praises the Islamic fabric, much alike the Jamaican anthem. While the Russian anthem holds Russia's Soviet past in search of a distinct identity. Analysis of national flags revealed six themes: unity, forward-motion, inspiration, faith, territory growth, and Southern Cross/Crux. In unity, for instance, the Union Jack's crosses and saltires indicate countries in the Great Britain, the forward-motion of grey crowned-crested crane on the Ugandan flag represent progress toward brighter future much alike the Indian flag, embossed with *Ashoka chakra* with 24 spikes indicating life in movement. Additionally, Australian flag reflects growth in territory where the seven points on six stars represent Australian territories and future states, while the astronomical stars on the Brazilian flag represent the Southern Cross, a navigation tool. In summary, national flags and national anthems are not just pieces of clothes or songs, they represent values that govern nations. To become globally competent, one must understand their identity and be aware of factors that shape other countries' deep-rooted cultural ideals embedded in their national regalia. Education institutions can use anthems and flags in orientations to help students understand their new cultural environments. Understanding the inherent meanings of the national regalia of the destination countries can significantly assist learners in developing cultural empathy and intelligence to prosper in those nations and strengthen mutual understanding and collaboration as global learning groups.

Keywords: Cross-cultural development, global citizenship, global education, identity development, national anthems, national flags, study abroad

Introduction

Global citizenship development has become a central part of higher education institutions striving to equip learners with the knowledge and skills to navigate the global workforce (Bird *et al.*, 2024; Figland-Cook *et al.*, 2025; Foster *et al.*, 2024; Ikendi *et al.*, 2023; Roberts *et al.*, 2024; Spence *et al.*, 2023; Sullivan *et al.*, 2025)^[7, 22, 24, 32, 73, 74]. Global citizenship plays an ideal role in developing individuals who are aware of their national identities and are competent in understanding and respecting diverse cultures and norms that are different from their own. One aspect of developing global citizenry is understanding the intrinsic meaning of and paying allegiance to national regalia such as national anthems and national flags of the countries where students participate in global education programs.

National flags (Wagner and Marusek, 2021)^[78] and anthems (Moreno-Luzón and Nagore-Ferrer, 2024)^[54] serve as a representation of a nation's identity, embodying collective ideals and aspirations. These regalia are essential in promoting unity and national pride among citizens, offering a shared foundation that surpasses diverse backgrounds. Passed down through generations, anthems and flags communicate the historical relevance and sovereignty, through continued engagement with the customs surrounding them, reinforcing

the development of global citizenship across cultural divides among students participating in global education programs. Literature is replete on national flags for promoting civic responsibility (Marinthe *et al.*, 2023; Mee, 2024; Wagner and Marusek, 2021) [49, 51, 78], astronomical research using stars on flags of Brazil and Australia (Bucur, 2022; Gullberg *et al.*, 2020) [11, 27], and medical research, like using the Y-shaped letter on the South African flag as an electrocardiographic sign to study high lateral myocardial infarction (Nadig *et al.*, 2025; Rathinasamy *et al.*, 2024) [56, 62]. Likewise, there is enough research on national anthems revealing the topologies, identities, and ideals of countries (Johan, 2021; Manhire, 2023; Moreno-Luzón and Nagore-Ferrer, 2024) [37, 47, 54]. However, there is little existing literature on these regalia towards influencing cross-cultural competence to develop global citizens in global education, yet it is paramount to have students engaged in global programs.

Moreover, in the United States, the committee chairs of 9/11 asserted that “The U.S. cannot do effectively in a competitive international environment when the workforce lacks exposure and understanding of the world” (Kean and Hamilton, 2008, p. 1) [39]. Since then, the United States geared up efforts in study abroad programs (Institute of International Education, 2024) [34]. Europe developed its student mobility programs (Granato *et al.*, 2024; Zotti, 2021) [25, 80] and instituted the service-learning programs (Aramburuzabala *et al.*, 2019; Ribeiro *et al.*, 2021), and the declaration of the Bolgana process has improved students experiences (Crosier and Maki, 2022) [16]. There is also growth in programs including global service-learning enriching students’ global experiences through cultural immersions in African, Asia, Latin America, Australia and the Americas (Tapia *et al.*, 2024) [75]. As students continue to participate in global education programs, so does the need to

learn about the values that define the destination countries embedded in their sacred national regalia.

Purpose and research questions of the study

The purpose of this inquiry was to assess how interaction with national anthems and national flags promotes cross-cultural competence and global citizenship development among students. By analyzing the thematic and lyrical content of anthems and flags from 18 countries across the six continents, we discuss their potential as tools for global citizenship across the cultural divide.

Continents and case study countries include Africa Egypt, Ghana, South Africa, and Uganda; Asia Japan, India, Singapore, and the United Arab Emirates; Europe Denmark, Germany, Italy, Russia, and the United Kingdom; North America Jamaica and the United States; South America Brazil and Costa Rica; and Oceania Australia. In conducting this investigation, we looked toward answering two main research questions including:

1. What are the thematic contents embedded in the *national anthems* that foster cross-cultural competence and global citizenship development among global educational students?
2. What are the thematic contents embedded in the *national flags* that foster cross-cultural competence and global citizenship development among global educational students?

Conceptual frameworks: In this investigation, we developed a framework (Fig. 1.) based on the global citizenship education of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO] (2015) [77] and the cross-cultural competence models (Cross *et al.*, 1989) [17]. In the framework, the interaction of the learning triad with the national regalia leads to the development of global citizens with intercultural capital to communicate and contribute effectively to the global economy.

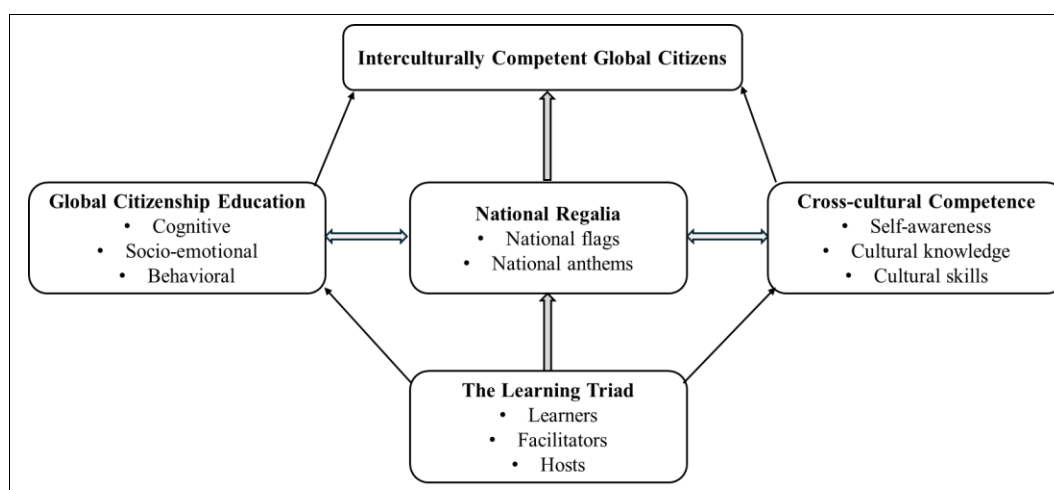


Fig 1: A Conceptual Framework for Developing Interculturally Competent Global Citizens

Global citizenship was defined as “a sense of belonging to a broader community and common humanity” (UNESCO, 2015, p. 14) [77]. The global citizenship education model focuses on three dimensions: cognitive, socio-emotional, and behavioral providing a holistic approach to understanding how national anthems and flags can promote global citizenship. The cognitive dimension emphasizes an understanding of the interdependence of different cultures, populations, and norms, whereby a change in one aspect of

a given culture, that change could have a ripple effect on the other populations and their cultural norms. The socio-emotional dimension stresses the value of empathy, respect, and appreciation of diversity, gaining a *sense of shared humanity*. The socio-emotional dimension also focuses on independent learning through peer interactions in educational and non-educational settings, as shown in the learning triad.

The behavioral dimension promotes active involvement at

local, national, and global levels to create a sustainable global economy. Providing opportunities for intercultural dialogue around the thematic content of anthems and flags can promote ethical responsibility and develop culturally engaged global citizens. Global citizenship education also highlights the importance of adopting a life-long approach to acquiring knowledge, skills, and values that promote global citizenry (Hartman *et al.*, 2023; Rizvi *et al.*, 2022)^[29, 65].

Cross-cultural competence was defined as a “set of congruent behaviors, attitudes, and policies that come together in a system ... enable that system ... to work effectively in cross-cultural situations” (Cross *et al.*, 1989, p. 13)^[17]. Cross created a 6-point continuum unfolding a progression from cultural destructiveness to proficiency, but this study focused on elements of self-awareness, cultural knowledge, and cultural skills. Self-awareness acknowledges the significance of cultural diversity and the influence of one’s own cultural bias during engagements. Self-awareness is a product of intentional self-reflection, necessary to understand and deal with our own biases.

Equally, cultural knowledge relates to understanding other culture’s beliefs, values, and practices that foster effective communication among students. Learning about one another country’s national anthem and flag such as its history, expands the learner’s understanding of that culture which fosters cultural immersion, an indicator of collegiality and self-identity development in global education programs (Buchanan *et al.*, 2021; Snodgrass *et al.*, 2021)^[10, 72]. Cultural knowledge is essential to reflecting on the content and descriptions of one’s own and other countries’ flags and anthems, in the context of this study. Cultural skills of the cross-cultural competence model entail developing communication strategies necessary for effective socio-cultural interactions. Empathy and mutual respect for cultural norms and significant symbols such as national flags and anthems are examples of shared qualities. Cultural skills promote meaningful intercultural dialogue with different flags and anthems during global learning.

Methodology

This investigation employed a constructivist perspective where we sought to create knowledge and meaning (Crotty, 1998)^[18] embedded in the thematic contents of 18 national anthems (Appendix 1) and national flags (Appendix 2) from countries across six continents. We believe that there are intrinsic meanings embedded in the flags and anthems, and gaining this knowledge guarantees an inquiry. We employed a case study research methodology and collected data through content analysis (Creswell and Poth 2018)^[15]. We viewed each country as a case/unit of analysis and collected and analyzed data on a case-by-case basis. We also utilized a cross-case tactic in analysis considering our cases/countries as members of a community/continent. We intended to generate rich detailed descriptions of the meanings embedded in the flags and anthems to answer our research questions. So, we looked for and compared the perspectives within and among the cases, given their dispersion and cultural differences. We were enthralled by Yin’s (2017) emphasis that multiple case studies be based on two logics, which on careful selection, cases either “predict similar results or contrasting results but for anticipatable reasons” (p. 91). The case study allowed us to use many sources of data gathered from document analysis,

observations, and field notes to report an account of case-by-case-based themes.

Selection criteria for the case study countries

Countries were selected based on either researchers’ citizenship and pursuit of graduate education, regional location, geopolitics, agricultural production, and/or the United States study abroad students in 2022/2023, with latest statistics (Institute of International Education, 2024)^[34]. The United States was treated as a baseline relating to study abroad criteria and researchers’ graduate education. Besides, all investigators participated in study abroad programs. Birth citizenship was critical since researchers should be able to support their reasoning around the meaning of their national flags and anthems. In addition to the United States within North American, Jamaica was selected on two criteria of birth citizenship and a representative of the Caribbean region.

In South America, Brazil and Costa Rica were selected. Brazil was selected based on the criterion of agricultural production in comparison to the United States and Argentina, all of which are rainfed grain production regions of the Americas, but Brazil with fewer production risks than Argentina (Cabrini *et al.*, 2025)^[12, 1]. Costa Rica was the top destination for the United States study abroad students in Central America. Additionally, Australia was selected from Oceania since it had the highest number of United States students who studied abroad on that continent.

In Africa, Uganda was selected on the criteria of researcher, citizenship, and representation of East African, South Africa on the criteria of highest number of study-abroad students in the Southern region, much alike Ghana in West Africa, and Egypt in the Middle East Arab-Africa region. In Asian, India was selected on the criteria of citizenship and representing South and Central Asia. At the same time, Japan had the highest number of study-abroad students from the United States in East Asia and Singapore in South East Asia. The United Arab Emirates was selected on regional criteria as the Middle East Arab region. Also, Emirates had the second-highest number of United States study-abroad students after Israel which was not selected based on geopolitical criteria with negative implications on visiting students (Almassri, 2024)^[12].

In Europe, the United Kingdom was selected to represent the British Isle, also based on a recent breakaway from the European Union and its implications on European education mobility programs (Zotti, 2021)^[80]. Italy was selected since it had the highest number of United States students in study abroad programs and is a representative of Southern Europe, much like Denmark in the Nordic region, and Germany in the Central, and Russia in the Eastern regions of Europe (IIE, 2024).

Data collection procedures

We employed multiple data collection techniques such as observation of the artifacts on the national flags, review of documents detailing the history of flags and anthems and listening to the music and lyrics of the anthems. We also consulted our colleagues who are natives of the countries under our study. This consultation was informational to get clues about their national flags and anthems specifically answering questions about what knowledge and not about whom opinion. This discussion is not considered human subjects to guarantee an Institutional Review Board

approval (Bristol *et al.*, 2014)^[9]. Data collection began with a review of the history of each national flag and anthem.

In the first phase, we assigned each member to write an annotated bibliography of their national anthem and flag on a maximum of three pages. After that, we assigned ourselves to at least one country from a different continent and wrote similar annotations. Although we used different data sources such as the Central Intelligence Agency of the United States (2024)^[13] for national anthems and flags, and Fleihan (2024) for national flags, we also identified in each country a Department in charge of national flags and anthems to compare our results.

In the process of writing the annotations, we downloaded all the flags and anthems and created folders with country files. Also, we played the lyrics and the music of each anthem individually and in a team to get to understand the contents written on paper and how its passed out to the public through music. The multiple methods of data collection supported our triangulation process in addition to memos written on key findings (Lemon & Hayes, 2020).

Data analysis, interpretation, and presentation

We began our analysis with the national flags. To ensure consistency, each flag was examined using a set of guided elements such as color scheme, symbols and emblems, and geometric shapes and patterns. These indicators were then cross-examined with the annotated bibliography to understand their meaning. We then used thematic analysis to identify elements that were similar and different regarding, their historical significance, national identities, and cultural values. After identifying themes, we conducted a cross-case comparison of each theme to note the differences and similarities in their unique features (Creswell & Poth 2018)^[15]. Through a meta-theme association process, we developed broader overarching themes encompassing patterns that emerged from the data (Saldana, 2024).

Similarly, for anthems, we first read all the annotations we wrote, played and listened to the music, lyrics and melody of each anthem while following written notes. In all anthems, we looked for the English-translated versions. These methods enabled us to write analytical memos relating to key features identified in the anthem (Lemon & Hayes, 2020). Overall, we engaged in a dialogue with our data by asking questions amongst ourselves relating to key themes we each identified. We then proceeded with reading the annotation while continuously triangulating with the analytical notes that each took to facilitate generating a comprehensive analysis. This analysis will enable our readers to understand the intrinsic meaning embedded in the anthems for consideration in their unique programs.

Our findings are presented based on research questions and their respective themes, concurrently with discussions. We shared our insights into the findings while making connections within and amongst cases. We theorized with literature across different global education programs that foster intercultural and global citizenship development. We exercised caution in transferring the findings beyond the study's scope. However, the good side is that our research methodology allowed us to overcome this limitation by looking at the phenomenon from multiple viewpoints with varied methods and triangulation.

Findings are presented in rich thick description and analytical discussions to account for the intrinsic value embedded in the national anthems and national flags of our

case study countries. By doing that, we are optimistic that other researchers and readers could potentially consider the findings and their use within their unique study and/or program settings. Readers have the liberty to decide whether the findings possibly transfer to working with students in similar global education programs. Moreover, member checking was conducted with each researcher to ensure the accuracy of interpretations when synthesizing contextual meanings where we drew conclusions and implications linked to global citizenship education and cross-cultural competence.

Goodness and trustworthiness of our investigation process:

These concepts emphasize an account of the data, generating profound interpretations (Rose & Johnson, 2020), a central doctrine of constructivist orientation. We exercised caution in reporting correctly by constantly reflecting on our study questions. Central to our study was reporting in thick descriptions to account for the interpretations generated from the thematic analysis of the national flags and anthems.

We reflected on our positionality and reflexivity right from the conceptualization of the project and in the selection of countries as well as generating paper trails throughout our inquiry to control for personal biases with the potential to impact our results (Norton, 2017)^[57]. Using the case study methodology, we overcame the validity issues by looking at the phenomenon of our study the intrinsic value of the anthems and flags from various viewpoints. We used methods such as observation of national flag designs, analysis of written contents on national flags and anthems, and listening to the lyrics and the music of all the anthems.

Throughout our investigation, we had in mind that all research is about creativity, it is considered as a blueprint, the uniqueness, and particularity one-story matters which we employed in writing the final manuscript. These aspects made us successful in sharing the new knowledge gained out of the search for the meaning embedded in the flags and anthems and their influence on the development of cross-cultural competence and global citizenship. As Miles and Huberman (1994) put it, "words themselves do not contain meaning, it is a bucket of water, we have to interpret them for meaning and knowledge creation" (p. 56).

We sought support from peers who have participated in global programs and are also familiar with qualitative inquiry. Amongst the investigating team, we gained trustworthiness through peer debriefing, held several Zoom meetings, and also created a WhatsApp group where altogether constantly shared our themes and any intruding findings to support our interpretations. The feedback from our peers and within ourselves was incorporated into the final write-up. We understand that interpretations are always considered as satisfactions of results to create meaning. In this respect, much attention was paid to our results so that our inquiry benefits a variety of readers, enriching them with new knowledge from what we found in this inquiry on the uniqueness and particularity of national anthems and flags within and across the continents.

Results and Discussions

The influence of national anthem on cross-cultural and global citizenship development: The analysis of the national anthems supports the response to the research question focusing on how the interaction with anthems

influences the development of cross-cultural and global citizenship development among students in global education programs. A total of five major themes were revealed

including victory, loyalty, divine protection, identity in development, and natural endowment (Table 1).

Table 1: Themes that Emerged from Analysis of National Anthems Aligned by Countries

The 18 selected countries		Themes from the content and lyrical analysis of national anthems				
		Victory	Loyalty	Devine protection	Identity development	Natural endowment
Asia	India	Yes				
	Japan		Yes		Yes	
	Singapore				Yes	
	United Arab Emirates			Yes		
Europe	United Kingdom	Yes	Yes			
	Italy	Yes				
	Denmark		Yes			Yes
	Russia				Yes	
Oceania	Germany	Yes			Yes	
	Australia				Yes	
Africa	South Africa	Yes		Yes	Yes	
	Uganda			Yes		Yes
	Ghana	Yes		Yes	Yes	
	Egypt	Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes
North America	United States	Yes				
	Jamaica			Yes		
South America	Brazil	Yes				Yes
	Costa Rica	Yes				Yes

See Appendix 1 for additional details

The victory theme: The *victory* theme manifests in the anthems of the United States, the United Kingdom, India, Brazil, Costa Rica, South Africa, Italy, Egypt, Ghana, and Germany. The United States's *Star-Spangled Banner* was adopted on March 3rd, 1931, and was penned by Francis S. Key motivated by the battle of Fort McHenry. The lyrics were in a four-stanza poem Defense of Fort McHenry with a melody inspired by a 1775-79 English song To Anachreon in Heaven (Clague, 2022) ^[14]. The anthems applauded the American flag's perseverance through a 25-hour British barrage at Fort McHenry, September 13-14, 1814, signifying the resilience of the Americans in their fight for liberty and freedom.

Similarly, the South African *Lord Bless Africa*, is a symbol of unity against apartheid and was proclaimed by President Nelson Mandela in 1994 and gazetted in 1997 (Magangane, 2016; Waterman, 2020) ^[46, 79]. The anthem was a Xhosa hymn composed by Enoch Sontonga in 1897, which became an anthem for the anti-apartheid movements in South Africa.

The Indian anthem, *Jana Gana Mana*, is part of a Brahmo hymn that conveys the spirit of pluralism, a concept of unity in diversity. Adopted on January 24th, 1950, *Jana Gana Mana* is the first stanza of a five-stanza hymn written by Nobel Laureate R. Tagore (Bhattacharya, 2011) ^[6]. On December 27th, 1911, this anthem was first sung in Kolkata, India during the Calcutta session of the Indian National Congress.

Relatedly, the lyrics of the Brazilian *Hino Nacional Brasileiro* embrace freedom, resilience, love, and natural beauty. The lyrics were composed by the poet Joaquim Duque-Estrada and the melody was composed by Francisco da Silva (Moreno-Luzón, 2024) ^[54]. The anthem replaced the one composed by Emperor Pedro I and was performed in 1831 after Emperor Pedro relinquished the throne. This anthem is a "patriotic song and call to arms in response to a colonial humiliation inflicted on the Portuguese by Britain in Africa" (p. 23).

Similarly, the Costa Rican *Noble Homeland, Your Beautiful Flag* consists of four stanzas, each evoking and celebrating values of peace, hard work, national pride, and the readiness of Costa Ricans to defend their nation and fertile soil for providing life's necessities. The anthem "even talks of the will to swap the tools for weapons if needed to defend the homeland" (Toscano, 2024, p. 66) ^[76], like other anthems of Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Cuba, Guatemala, and Uruguay that were composed in the face of war. The anthem was first performed on June 11th, 1852, as a ceremonial welcome to delegates visiting the country. On September 15th, 1903, the lyrical content, along with the existing melody, was first performed in San José and then adapted as the country's national anthem in 1949 after the civil war.

The national anthem of Italy, *The Song of the Italians*, evokes themes of patriotism, unity, and the struggle for freedom as well as a symbol of Italian pride and identity. Anthems created inspired by war reflect an alert. Prado (2024) ^[61] provided examples including Italy's "Let us join together in cohort" and many other European nations including France's "To arms, citizens! / Form your battalions!"; in Latin America including Mexico "Mexicans! Brave follow!"; and Asia, like, South Korea "In joy and suffering, we will love the fatherland" (p. 101). In 1847, Goffredo Mameli composed the lyrics, while Michele Novaro composed the music of *The Song of the Italians* inspired by the French anthem, *La Marseillaise*, evoking a sense of patriotism leading up to the Austrian war. *The Song of the Italians* has six stanzas but only the first stanza is sung at events.

The national anthem of Germany, *The Song of the Germans* reflects victory. The lyrics were adopted from a poem written by August H. H. von Fallersleben in 1841, while the music was appropriated from a melody composed by Joseph Haydn in 1797 (Waterman, 2020) ^[79]. The anthem has transformed, reflecting changes in the socio- and geo-political influence of Germany and it expressed a longing for national unity among the Germany states. The anthem

was adopted in 1922 during the Weimar Republic, while the choice to only retain the third stanza was made in 1952 after World War II, reflecting Germany's commitment to a peaceful and democratic future. The third stanza was re-acknowledged as the country's national anthem in 1990 after the reunification and the fall of the Berlin Wall. The first line in the song has also inspired the unofficial motto of Germany with values of unity, rights, and freedom. Despite the standoff wars, the Germany anthem illustrates constrictive tones as embedded in its wording including words of unity, heart, fortune, flourish, and blessing, like the anthem of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Silaghi-Dumitrescu, 2023) ^[71].

Additionally, the Ghanaian anthem, *God Bless Our Homeland Ghana* pays tribute to the national identity aspirations and unity. The anthem's enduring legacy lies in its ability to encapsulate Ghana's journey from colonialism to independence and pursuit of unity. Adopted in 1957, the anthem was composed by Micheal Gboedzoe, with lyrics penned by E. Pappoe-Thompson. New lyrics were introduced after overthrow of Kwame Nkrumah in 1966 (Israel et al, 2023; Mensah et al., 2023) ^[35, 52].

Likewise, the Egyptian anthem, *My Country, You Have My Love and My Heart*, is a historic and integral song of Egyptian identity and victory for over a century. The opening line emphasizes the singers' love and devotion to their nation, and their willingness to sacrifice. Sayed Darwish, a renown Egyptian musician, composed the anthem in 1878, which was officially adopted in 1979, marking a significant milestone in Egyptian nationality (Essam, 2015; Podeh, 2021) ^[21, 59]. The anthems' theme reinforces the reference to Egypt as the *Mother of all countries* and also a sense of responsibility and shared purpose among citizens.

Loyalty theme: *Loyalty* is denoted in the anthems of the United Kingdom, Denmark, Australia, and Japan. The anthem, *God Save The King*, is a patriotic song that was first played in London in 1745, a time when Prince Charles defeated the army of King George II near Edinburgh (Pickering, 2017) ^[58]. The performance was arranged to show patriotic fervor for the King and a style of greeting the monarchs.

Relatedly, *Advance Australia Fair* also shows loyalty to the King, because Australia is a Commonwealth country with the King of England as its Monarch, *Advance Australia Fair* and *God Save The King* are sung in Australia at functions where the Monarch is present.

Similarly, Denmark has an astonishing aspect as one of the two nations in the world with two national anthems holding equal status. The anthem *Kong Christian*, adopted in 1780 holds the status of the royal anthem and *There is a Lovely Country*, adopted in 1844, holds the status of the national anthem (Lund & Tønnesson, 2021) ^[44]. *Kong Christian* is only played during the royal and military programs.

Also, the anthem of Japan, *Kimigayo*, translated as *His Imperial Majesty's Reign*, expresses a wish for the emperor's reign to last for generations, reflecting the historical significance of the imperial family in Japanese culture. *Kimigayo* was recognized in 1999 when the Act on National Flag and Anthem was passed (Kim, 2024) ^[40]. The lyrics are rooted in Japanese poetry of the Heian period (794-1185) and were adapted from a Waka poem emphasizing harmony, longevity, and the natural beauty of Japan.

Divine protection theme

Divine protection is eminent in Jamaica, the United Arab Emirates, South Africa, and Ghana. The Emirates anthem, *Long Live My Country* had its melody composed by Mohammed A. Wahab and adopted by Emirates in 1971 (Podeh, 2021) ^[59]. The anthem invokes ideals of loyalty, service, and the Islamic faith, establishing a connection between the citizens of the seven emirates. The lyrics praise the Emirates as a nation held by the tenets of Islam, reinforcing the national cultural and religious values that define the Emirati identity, like other Arabic anthems.

Relatedly, *Jamaica, Land We Love* also emphasizes a deep sense of patriotism, the need for divine guidance and protection, for their country and people. Robert Lightbourne wrote the music while Rev. Hugh Sherlock arranged the lyrics (Toscano, 2024) ^[76]. Like Jamaica, most Caribbean countries including Saint Lucia, Guyana, and Surinam, their anthems reflect divine protection.

Similarly, the two anthems of South Africa, *Lord Bless Africa* and *The Call of South Africa*, their combined lyrics focus on asking God to bless Africa and a call to unity in the fight for freedom. Specifically, *The Call of South Africa* is an adaptation of a poem written by C. J. Langenhoven, with a melody composed by Rev. M. L. de Villiers in 1921 (Magangane, 2016) ^[46]. This anthem like most of the anthems in the Caribbean had a hand of religious leaders so did their focus on God's divine protection.

Also, the anthem *God Bless Our Homeland Ghana* signals Ghanaian belief in religion and a constant quest for divine protection and God's provisioning. Much alike *Oh Uganda, the Land of Beauty*, the first stanza, *Oh Uganda! May God uphold Thee*, directly speak to God for protection in the land of beauty and natural endowments of Uganda.

Natural endowment theme

The *natural endowment* theme is mainly pronounced in the Ugandan anthem, *Oh Uganda, the Land of Beauty*, which focuses on praising the nation's natural endowment, relationships with neighboring countries, and the citizens' aspirations for the future. Written by George W. Kakoma, *Oh Uganda, the Land of Beauty*, has three stanzas and was first sung on October 8th, 1962, on Uganda's independence day, coinciding with the lowering of the Union Jack (Moussa & Mwanaka, 2021) ^[55]. The selection process for the anthem involved a nationwide advertisement, seeking a song that would convey Uganda's nature, history, and future.

Before independence, *God Save the Queen/King* and Union Jack served as the primary national symbols of Uganda as a British protectorate. Because of the natural endowments, specifically its climate and fertile soils, Sir Winston Churchill in his memoir of 1908 called Uganda the *Pearl of Africa*, and there is a popular saying that in Uganda, even a walking stick can germinate! On the other hand, the Danish national anthem, *There Is a Lovely Land* emphasizes the beauty of the Danish culture and the country's natural landscape (Ambrosius, 2024) ^[3] synonymous with natural endowment.

Identity development theme

The theme of *identity in development* is reflected in the anthems of Australia, Japan, Germany, South Africa, Russia, Ghana, Singapore, Egypt. The Australian anthem, *Advance Australia Fair*, adopted in 1984, plays an

important role in merging historical significance with contemporary national pride. The anthem was composed by Peter D. McCormick reflecting the ambitions of a young country during a period when Australia was starting to solidify its cultural and national identity (Manhire, 2023)^[47]. Despite its composition in 1878, it was overshadowed by *God Save the Queen/King*, deemed fitting for a nation with colonial ties. The anthem has changed from its original lyrics and writing to reflect diversity and rich history as a growing nation with the recent changes in 2020 (Manhire, 2023)^[47].

Similarly, *Kimigayo* reflects Japan’s rich history and its evolving national identity, while praising its beauty and influence in geo-politics. Despite its deep historical roots and traditional significance, *Kimigayo* has sparked controversy, particularly in the post-war era (Kim, 2024)^[40]. Critics argue that *Kimigayo* reflects militaristic sentiments and veneration of the emperor, conflicting with the principles of modern democracy and popular sovereignty established in Japan’s constitution. This criticism suggests identity in development in a contemporary world of democracy.

Also, *The Song of the Germans* reflects the identity in development given the changes it has gone through with every war and unification after the fall of the Berlin Wall. The latest version of 1990 was inspired by the unofficial motto of Germany which preaches unity, rights, and freedom (Silaghi-Dumitrescu, 2023)^[71].

Additionally, the *State Anthem of the Russian Federation* holds a rich history. Its composition, change, and re-establishment reflect broader socio-political narratives shaping the nation’s identity from the imperial era, and Soviet times, to the current period, reflecting change in national identity, ideologies, and cultural sentiments. In 2000, when President Vladimir Putin assumed power, a move to reinstate the *Hymn of the Soviet Union* was made after an alteration to the lyrics by the original co-author, Sergei Mikhalkov (Sadowski, 2021)^[68] holding to the country’s Soviet past in search of a distinct Russian identity. In another fascination, the Singaporean anthem, *Onward Singapore*, also reflects an identity in development right from the time and process of its composition. In a long version composed by Zubir Said in 1958 for the city of Singapore, a shorter version was re-created and adopted in 1959 as the national anthem (Johan, 2021)^[37]. What is captivating in the anthem is the need for it to be very brief, straight to the point, and identical while playing its lyrics in the three official languages of Singapore including English, Mandarin, and Tamil without alteration of its meaning. Dr. Toh Chin Chye guided Zubir Said in the composition and shortening of the anthem with a keen interest in translating

the anthem to Malay, an indigenous language that would appeal to all the Singaporean races. The central essence of the anthem is an expression of the mood of the people of Singapore and to heighten their feelings towards their nation.

The two national anthems of South Africa are symbols of identity in development, with one anthem focusing on patriotism and another seeking divine protection from God. The anthems *Lord Bless Africa* and *The Call of South Africa* when combined reflect South Africa’s complicated history and the nation’s struggle to create a unified identity in the post-apartheid period, after 1994. *Lord Bless Africa* is the latest that was proclaimed in 1994 and gazetted in 1997 (Magangane, 2016)^[46]. It is sung interchangeably between sections in five languages including Sotho, Xhosa, Zulu, Afrikaans, and English, which are among the twelve official languages in South Africa. The duality of the anthem illustrates the blend of cultures and histories that define a diverse South Africa today.

Similarly, *God Bless Our Homeland Ghana* plays a true reflection of identity in development specifically in its changes from the time of first adoption in 1957 at independence to 1966 after the overthrow of Kwame Nkrumah. A lexico-pragmatic analysis of the anthem by Israel *et al.* (2023)^[35] indicates that the “first stanza signifies a new beginning from colonialism; the second stanza stands for a new beginning for the present Ghana land, while the last 8 lines connote a new beginning for the future of Ghana” (p. 175). With such developments, Mensah *et al.* (2023)^[52] propose the translation of the anthem, into local languages to allow non-English-speaking natives to take pride in their sacred anthem.

Similarly, the Egyptian anthem, *My Country, You Have My Love and My Hearts* symbolizes identity in development. For instance, from its composition in 1878 to its adoption in 1979, the anthem tells a story of the growth of Egyptian nationality over a century (Essam, 2015)^[21]. Through the anthem, the repetition of certain lines serves to create a sense of responsibility and shared purpose among the Egyptians. Its powerful lyrics and melody have become synonymous with Egyptian patriotism and provide a sense of national pride and unity.

The influence of national flags on cross-cultural and global citizenship development

The thematic content analysis of 18 national flags revealed six themes including unity among territories, forward motion, inspiration, faith and religion, territory growth, and southern cross (Table 2), as are essential to the cross-cultural and global citizenry development of students in global education.

Table 2: Themes that Emerged from a Content Analysis of National Flags Aligned by Countries

The 18 selected countries		Themes from the content analysis of national flags					
		Unity	Forward motion	Inspiration	Faith and religion	Territory growth	Southern Cross
Asia	India	Yes	Yes				
	Japan	Yes				Yes	
	Singapore	Yes				Yes	
	UAE	Yes		Yes	Yes		
Europe	United Kingdom	Yes					
	Italy	Yes		Yes	Yes		
	Denmark	Yes			Yes		
	Russia	Yes		Yes			
	Germany	Yes					

Oceania	Australia	Yes				Yes	Yes
Africa	South Africa	Yes	Yes	Yes			
	Uganda	Yes	Yes				
	Ghana	Yes		Yes			
	Egypt	Yes		Yes			
North America	United States	Yes				Yes	
	Jamaica	Yes					
South America	Brazil	Yes					Yes
	Costa Rica	Yes		Yes			

See Appendix 2 for additional details

The unity among territories theme

Unity among territories is demonstrated in the United States, United Kingdom, Brazil, Costa Rica, United Arab Emirates, Germany, Egypt, and Ghana. For instance, the United States flag is comprised of 13 horizontal stripes representing the original colonies and 50 stars on a blue field representing its 50 states, symbolizing unity among states. Before independence in 1776, each state had its own flag after which a single flag was adopted to celebrate equality, fealty, and purity (Hamilton, 2022) ^[28]. Also, the Emirates flag was adopted on December 2nd, 1971 coinciding with the new federation's independence (Shahzad *et al.*, 2024) ^[70], and unity is manifested in its design uniting all the seven emirates of Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Sharjah, Ajman, Umm al-Quwain, and Fujairah.

The Union Jack also represents unity among countries under Great Britain, it has one cross and two saltires superimposed on each other (Rojas, 2025; Dubilet, 2023) ^[19, 66]. This flag holds a red cross (red cross of Saint George patron Saint of England and Wales) with white edges. This red cross is embedded into a red saltire (saltire of Saint Patrick patron Saint of Ireland). Saint Patrick's saltire is superimposed on the saltire of Saint Andrew (patron Saint of Scotland). The crosses and saltires represent Great Britain.

The Brazilian flag has 27 stars in the blue globe, with each star representing a state (Bittar, 2021) ^[8]; much alike the Costa Rican flag which also boasts a coat of arms in the central red strip with seven stars, representing its seven provinces (Baker, 2021) ^[5]. Also, the Germany flag went through many wars, with each war resulting in a change in government and using or reinstating a previous flag until 1990 at the end of the Soviet empire and the unification of East and West Germany (Eckels, 2021) ^[20].

The South African flag has six colors reflecting Africans (black, green, and yellow) and White settlers (red, blue, and white). These colors represent their countries (White settlers) and the native colors derived from the African National Congress (ANC) party that led South Africa through apartheid to independence in 1994 (Adam & Moodley, 2023) ^[1].

The Italian flag was adopted in 1861 when Italy became unified (Leone, 2021) ^[43], features three equal vertical stripes of green, white, and red. Green represents hope, the plains and hills of Italy. White symbolizes faith, and red represents charity and bloodshed during the war for independence.

Similarly, Egyptian flag is a tricolor with three horizontal stripes of red, white, and black, with the Eagle of Saladin adorning the center in the white stripes. The flag symbolizes the country's enduring history, its struggle for independence, and its ambitions for unity and progress. The red on the top stripe represents the struggles and sacrifices for independence before the 1952 revolution. White

symbolizes peace, optimism, and a bright future and also marks the end of monarchy and the transition to a republic. Black denotes the oppression under colonial rule and triumph over that period. The Eagle with outstretched wings is a symbol of power, strength, and national pride, and below the eagle is a scroll of Egypt written in Arabic.

Also, the Ghanaian flag is a symbol of unity, symbolizing African independence as the first African country to attain independence in 1957 (Manu-Osafo *et al.*, 2021) ^[48]. The flag adorns a five-pointed black star symbolizing unity and the role of Ghana in emancipating Africa and as a beacon of hope.

Inspirational theme: National flags with *inspirational* themes include Costa Rica, Italy, South Africa, the United Arab Emirates, and Ghana. The Costa Rican flag was inspired by the French flag and was designed by First Lady Doña Pacífica and adopted in 1848 (Baker, 2021) ^[5]. Modifications were made like the inclusion of the national emblem in the central red strip, but the essence of the tricolor used since 1988 tells a story of liberty, unity, peace, possibilities, and equality for all. The colors, blue on either end of the flag represent opportunities and infinite possibilities, white symbolizes peace, wisdom, and aspiration, and red represents sacrifices for freedom from the Spanish. The Italian flag was designed under the influence of the French tricolor flag as a revolutionary flag under Napoleon (Dubilet, 2023; Leone, 2021) ^[19, 43].

The Russian flag was inspired by the Dutch as Peter I strove to establish a maritime presence and modernize partnerships with Europe (Greenway, 2014) ^[26]. The flag has changed overtime to the most recent since 1991 with the collapse of the Soviet empire and its red flag that featured a hammer and a sickle to the current white, blue, and red striped flag. White signifies freedom and independence and red for bravery, generosity, love, and courage.

Similarly, the South African flag features three of its six colors, including black, green, and yellow which were inspired by the ANC party flag which drove South Africa from apartheid to independence in 1994 (Adam & Moodley, 2023) ^[1]. These three colors represent indigenous the people of South Africa. Also, the Emirates flag was designed by 19-year-old, Abdullah Al Maainah inspired by Safi-u-din Al Hali's poem which described *our acts as white, plains as green, battles as dark, and swords as red*.

Additionally, the design of the Ghanaian flag was done in 1957 by Theodosia Okoh, inspired by the geography and rich cultural history, and diversity of Ghana (Amegatcher & Silverman, 2022) ^[4]. Okoh chose red, gold, and green, and each color symbolizes something peculiar about Ghana. However, the flag had a brief change in 1964 when a white stripe was introduced, but it reverted to its original design in 1966 after a coup d'état. The red color represents the blood

shed of the Ghanaian people who fought for independence, and gold symbolizes mineral resources gold and green embodies the lush vegetation and other natural resources.

Forward-motion: The Ugandan, Indian, and South African national flags represent a *forward-motion*. The Ugandan flag is embossed with a white disk in the center bearing a grey crowned-crested crane in a forward motion towards the hoist, representing collective progress toward a brighter future. The flag has two sets of black, yellow, and red stripes running in the same order across the fly with black representing African people, yellow for abundant sunshine, and red for blood brotherhood, pointing to common ancestry (Moussa & Mwanaka, 2021) ^[55].

Also, the Indian flag holds three horizontal color bands of saffron, white, and dark green with a navy blue wheel (*Ashoka chakra*) at the center having 24 spokes, indicating life in movement and death in stagnation (Kaur, 2021) ^[38], suggesting that India shall always move forward. Saffron signifies courage, strength, renunciation, and sacrifice of the nation, white for peace, light and truth, and deep green for growth, fertility, and auspiciousness of the nation.

Additionally, the South African flag reflects a Y-shaped letter signifying forward into the future, given its abundant gold, represented by the yellow color, and fertile land by the green color. The Y-letter is formed as the green center line heads towards the left, it splits at the end to form a V-shape or two sides of a black isosceles triangle with two gold borders. The Y-letter has a tie to the South African motto of unity which is strength, implying a convergence of individuals to a common goal. Health scientists have used the Y-shaped letter on the flag as an electrocardiographic sign to study high lateral myocardial infarction (Nadig *et al.*, 2025; Rathinasamy *et al.*, 2024) ^[56, 62].

Faith and religion: The national flags of Denmark, Italy, and Emirates symbolize *faith and religion*. The Danish flag, *Dannebrog*, was designed with a prominent white Nordic cross which represents peace and christianity and the red color depicts battle and sacrifice. *Dannebrog* has a prolong history and there is a story popular in Denmark that the flag fell from the sky during the battle of Lindanise on June 15th, 1219 in Estonia (Leimus *et al.*, 2019), they also say a legend dropped *Dannebrog* from the sky during the battle which eased Danish's victory. On May 8, 1625, the *Dannebrog* was formally accepted and recognized as the national flag of Denmark. *Dannebrog* holds the Guinness World Record as the oldest constantly used flag. It is noteworthy that the Danes were the first to adopt a cross in their national flag and there follows other Nordic nations, hence the name the Nordic cross.

Similarly, in Italy, the seat of the Catholic Church, and among the three colors in the flag is white which corresponds to faith, a symbol of Italian devotion to God. Likewise, on the Emirates flags are four Pan-Arab colors (Shahzad *et al.*, 2024) ^[70] with three horizontal stripes of green, white, and black stretching from a vertical red stripe at the hoist. Green indicates prosperity, white signifies peace, black represents the strength of the mind, and red symbolizes the fabric that holds all other colors together.

The territory growth theme

In the *territory growth* are national flags of Australia, the United States, and Japan. The Australian flag has a rich

history, reflecting the country's journey toward independence and national identity while acknowledging Australia's ties to the Monarch of Great Britain. The flag has gone through changes, for instance, six of its seven stars were changed to seven points except the smallest star, which remained five-pointed. The large Commonwealth Star was also changed to seven points, representing the six original colonies of Australia, and the seventh point representing the territories and any other future states (Dubilet, 2023; Mee, 2024) ^[19, 51]. Much like the United States flag, the design has evolved with the addition of the 50th star in 1960 when Hawaii joined the union (Hamilton, 2022) ^[28].

The Japanese are reflected in the meaning and essence of their flag which features a red circle on a white background, where white symbolizes purity and honesty and the red circle represents a sun disk, coinciding with Japan's name as *the land of the rising sun*. Although the flag was first used by Emperor Monmu in 701 AD, it was formalized in 1999. In Shinto belief, the sun has historically been critical that the Japanese emperor is a descendant of the sun goddess Amaterasu (Powell, 2021) ^[60]. The flag gained prominence during Emperor Meiji in 1868 as Japan sought to modernize and assert its identity. The flag's meaning has evolved; its earlier use focused on the militaristic expansion of Japan, while today it is viewed as a sacred symbol of good luck and natural endowment.

Southern Constellation/Southern Cross/Crux

The flags of Australia and Brazil are embossed with the constellations. A constellation is a visible group of stars connected by imaginary lines to create patterns and patterns that are assigned meanings such as animals and objects, based on shared cultural narratives (Bucur, 2022; Gullberg *et al.*, 2020; Medway *et al.*, 2019) ^[11, 27]. Constellations act as a bridge between nature the stars and culture meanings. The blue globe in the Brazillian flag has 27 white stars placed strategically based on exact calculations of astronomical coordinates with 26 stars representing the states and a federal district (Bittar, 2021) ^[8]. The arrangement of stars on the disc is a symbol of the constellation in the night sky over Rio de Janeiro when Brazil became a republic. The star above the white band on the disc represents Parà, the largest territory above the equator. Stars vary in size depending on the size of the state it represents. Similarly, one of the constellations on the celestial globe is the Southern Cross Crux also featured on the Australian flag. According to space scientists, Crux, is convenient for navigation purposes in times when one has lost their campus or the sun has set.

Conclusions

This inquiry assessed the fundamental aspects of global citizenship and cross-cultural competence development associated with the intrinsic meaning of 18 national anthems and national flags across all six continents. Students who engage in global programs interact with these regalia during their learning abroad, making them aware of their own identities and those of the host countries whose values are embedded in these sacred insignias. In a thematic analysis of the anthems, we found both common themes and distinctive narratives that underscore each nation's identity, history, and aspirations.

Five themes emerged: *victory, loyalty, divine protection, identity development, and natural endowments*. We also

found similarities and differences conveying specific meanings associated with national flags in six core themes: *unity among territories, forward motion of nations, inspiration, faith and religion, territorial growth, and the southern constellation*. The multiple essences in these anthems and flags generate cultural knowledge, promoting a sense of cultural empathy, cross-cultural competence, and global citizenry.

Conclusions and reflections from national anthems

A thematic and lyrical analysis of the national anthems of Germany, *The Song of the Germans* and Italian, *The Song of the Italians* reveals their transitions from nationalism through Nazism and Fascism to symbols of democracy, equality, and freedom in modern society. These evolutions communicate critical transformation in national ideology and shared identities that help shape global citizenry among students interacting with the historical narratives that shaped these nations' identities. Also, *The State Anthem of the Russian Federation* prompts discussions around the interactions between the Soviet past and enduring national pride in Russia in search of a distinct identity, a historical narrative that could benefit global students.

The theme of victory was very prominent in anthems detailing the struggle for independence and illustrating how historical narratives inform contemporary perceptions about national identity, democratic values, and freedom that arose from the sacrifice and resilience of past leaders. The lyrics of the *Star-Spangled Banner* of the United States signify the resilience of the Americans in the fight for liberty and freedom and currently stand as a global defender of democratic values. The South African *Lord Bless Africa* demonstrates the determination that led people from the shackles of apartheid. The Indian *Jana Gana Mana* conveys the spirit of pluralism, a concept of unity in diversity demonstrated in the Calcutta session.

Similarly, the lyrics of the Brazilian *Hino Nacional Brasileiro* embrace freedom, resilience, love and move from colonial and Emperor leadership to democratic values. The Costa Rican *Noble Homeland, Your Beautiful Flag*, celebrates the values of peace, hard work, national pride, and the readiness of Costa Ricans to defend their nation. *The Song of the Italians* reminds us of the spirit of patriotism and unity, and the struggle for freedom inspired by French *La Marseillaise*. *God Bless Our Homeland Ghana* pays tribute to the liberators, as the first African country to get independence. *The Song of the Germans* reflects the changes in the geopolitical influence of Germany, and it expresses a longing for national unity after the fall of the Berlin wall. Similarly, *My Country, My Country, My Country* of the Egyptians emphasizes love and their willingness to sacrifice and reinforce Egypt as the *Mother of all countries*.

The royalistic anthems of the United Kingdom, *God Save the King* and Denmark, *Kong Christian* communicate the persistence of monarchical systems in an evolved society. Much like the Japanese *Kimigayo*, which denotes the influence of the imperial family in Japanese culture, though with criticisms for its militaristic sentiments and glue on the imperial family in the democratic era (Kim, 2024) ^[40], signifying Japanese search for a new identity.

Related sentiments are found in *Advance Australia Fair*, with current debates questioning their continued reflection on *God Save the King*, causing modifications with the recent in 2021 (Manhire, 2023) ^[47] as Australia solidifies its

cultural and national identity. The *Onward Singapore*, also reflects an identity development right from its composition and translations into languages, more so to Malay—an indigenous language that appeals to all races in an expression of the mood and feelings of Singaporeans towards their nation.

Another revelation relates to the natural endowment, which is prominent in several anthems. For instance the Ugandan, *Oh Uganda, the Land of Beauty* praises its natural resources and its aspirations. The Costa Rican anthem emphasizes defending the fertile soils of the country to keep providing life's necessities, just like the Egyptian flag. The Danish national anthem, *There Is a Lovely Land*, emphasizes the beauty of the Danish natural landscape and its provisioning to the economy.

Relatedly, we found religious aspects in the anthems of Egypt and the Emirates with the tenets of Islam binding these countries, and so is the message in their anthems seeking Allah's divine protection and guidance. The second South African anthem, *The Call of South Africa*, and the Jamaican, *Jamaica Land We Love*, have their fabric vested in divine protection, and these anthems, like most Caribbean anthems, were written by religious leaders, so do their focus on God.

Also, *Oh Uganda, the Land of Beauty*, references God upholding the nation, and *God Bless Our Homeland Ghana* calls for God's blessings upon the country. These anthems emphasize the role of a supreme being in blessing the nation and guiding its citizens toward a common aspiration. Understanding the values that other countries cherish encourages intercultural dialogue, thereby dispelling misconceptions about those people and their customs. For instance, common depictions of religion in Africa include extremism (Janson *et al.*, 2024) ^[36], much like the Arab world (Ritonga *et al.*, 2023) ^[64], but the reality is often one of pluralism and co-existence. Many communities embrace a diversity of beliefs, blending traditional practices with world religions, and promoting social cohesion and respect for diverse spiritual expressions, which undergirds the cognitive and socio-emotional dimensions of global citizens.

Conclusions and reflections from national flags

The flags of the United States, Brazil, and Costa Rica have stars denoting unity. There are 50 stars on the United States flag representing its states, 27 on the Brazilian flag, and six on the Costa Rican flag to represent its provinces. Unity in the Italian and German flags is reflected in a tricolor flag, a revolutionary color flag inspired by the French. The Italians and Germans became unified after a civil war for Italy and the fall of the Berlin wall for Germany, just like the South African flag relating to the revolutionary party during apartheid. Meanwhile, the United Kingdom and Emirates have different versions of unity. The United Kingdom, through the saltires and crosses that reflect the countries that makeup Great Britain, and the Emirates colors unify the seven emirates that make up the United Arab Emirates.

Also, South Africa stands out with its six colors, three of which unify the natives and three for the white settlers, altogether reflecting brotherhoods at the end of the apartheid. Relatedly, the designers of the Italian and Costa Rican flags were inspired by the French tricolor revolutionary flag, for which those countries were undergoing fundamental changes in their political space. The Russian was inspired by the Dutch during the periods of

maritime trade across Europe, although changes in political administration caused shifts in the flag designs. After the collapse of the Soviet empire, the original colors were reinstated including white for freedom and red for bravery and generosity. The Ghanaian flag was inspired by its natural endowments and diversity of culture.

Conversely, on the flag of India is the *Ashoka Chakra* with 24 spikes and Uganda is a crested crane in a forward motion towards the hoist, all upholding a sense of progress toward a brighter future. Also, the Y-shaped letter on the South African flag communicates a sense of a growing nation owing to its abundant resources, represented by the gold color on the flag. Additionally, the flags of United States, Australia, and Japan reflect territory growth, for instance, for every state that joins the Union of the United States, a star is added, with the last addition for Hawai in 1960. As for Australia, we saw a change in the number of points on six of its seven stars, with a seventh point reflecting states and future territories while crescent moon on the Singaporean flag is symbolic of a growing young nation.

Another revelation was on the Australian and Brazilian flags whose stars represent the Southern Cross. Space research and navigation are among the key roles of these astronomical stars on the flags. In faith and religion are the flags of Denmark, Emirates, and Italy, with Denmark bound by the Nordic cross for Christianity, Italy with its white color on the flag which corresponds to faith, and the Emirates with the Pan-Arab colors bound by the values of the Islamic faith.

In summary, understanding the cultural values of a nation is reflected through their national flags and anthems. In this period of globalization, it is somewhat mandatory to become global citizens to achieve success in various professions. Our findings explain the potential of national anthems and flags as global education tools that enhance intercultural behavior dimensions that may promote active global citizenship. Dialogues about anthems and flags help global learning students reflect on their national identities and those of their hosts.

Notably, there is a collision in the histories of some of the countries that students choose to visit as some of them were their home countries' colonial masters in the near or distant past. These critical reflections also encourage students to engage with their history and promote intercultural dialogue and healing. Ultimately, as global learning students experience new cultural environments, they learn to see themselves through these new national regalia, providing opportunities for identity development and self-authorship. This holistic approach to global education facilitates shared responsibility, empowering students to contribute locally and globally to systemic change.

Implications and recommendations

Global education goes beyond knowledge acquisition, encompassing transformative experiences, and encourages intercultural learning and cultural competence development. Institutions are increasingly recognizing the significance of cross-cultural competence and developing global citizens. These institutions have employed several strategies to prepare students to engage with individuals from diverse backgrounds. Notable examples include engaging in experiential learning internships, student mobility, and study abroad programs; in Europe, Asia, Africa, Americas, and Australia (Tapia *et al.*, 2024)^[75].

While students are in these global programs, national flags and anthems provide a culturally immersive experience that promotes cultural intelligence and respect for the defining experiences of that nation's identity. These engagements may foster the capacity to comprehend effectively across cultural domains, a key component underlying the cross-cultural competency model. Moreover, students may be encouraged to critically reflect on their culture through the lens of self-awareness, culture, and identities. To become globally competent, one must understand their own identity and be aware of factors that shape other countries' deep-rooted cultural ideals.

A national anthem or flag is not just a piece of cloth or a song; it represents the values and norms that govern that nation. It captures historical and cultural significance as it instills a sense of unity, identity, purpose, and a sense of moral responsibility among its citizens. Caring about the flag or anthem of a country can broaden students' perspectives and help them see the world beyond their worldview. For instance, national anthems such as victory, loyalty, divine protection, identity development, natural endowment, and national flag themes like unity, forward motion, inspiration, faith and religion, territory growth, and the Southern Cross could encourage students to appreciate the diverse cultural heritage of these countries and help them develop a more empathic worldview.

Additionally, anthems and flags could enrich students' educational experience about historical events that led to their development and how they shape a country's national identity. Moreover, they could also lead to greater respect and may reduce stereotypes about diverse backgrounds in global education programs, a key aspect of cross-cultural competence. This educational attainment is possible through developing critical thinking skills that encourage students to compare cross-cultural values and norms among countries. In doing so, they also develop an ability to ask critical questions about what the symbols represent, why they were chosen, and how they influence national identity.

Future research should explore pedagogical applications of national anthems and flags in global education settings such as international student affairs. Institutions can use anthems and flags in student orientations to help them understand their new cultural environments (Ikendi, 2025; Ikendi *et al.*, 2022; 2023; 2025)^[30, 33, 32, 31]. Discussions about anthems and flags by educators and practitioners can promote healthy reflections about identity and diversity developments.

As such, this study identifies a blend of elements that encompasses cross-cultural competence and global citizenship education, creating an ecological framework upholding the principles of respectful multicultural engagement. Intentional discussions about national regalia encourage meaningful social connections based on shared experiences and interests. Understanding the inherent meanings of the national regalia of the destination countries will significantly assist the learners in developing cultural empathy and intelligence to prosper in those nations and strengthen mutual understanding and collaboration as global learning groups.

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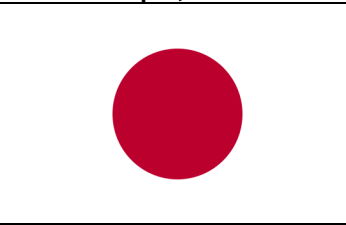
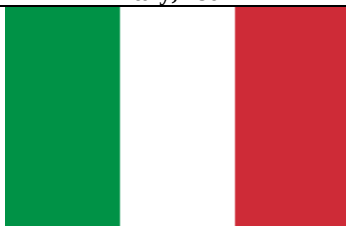
Appendix 1

National Anthems of 18 Case Study Countries Across the Six Continent

Continents and countries	Region of the country	Name of the national anthem and their translations to English version	Year of anthem
Asia			
India	South and Central	<i>Jana-Gana-Mana</i> : Thou Art the Ruler of the Minds of All People.	1950
Japan	Eastern	<i>Kimigayo</i> : His Imperial Majesty's Reign	1999
Singapore	South East	Onward Singapore	1959
UAE	Middle East	National Anthem of the United Arab Emirates	1971
Africa			
South Africa	Southern	God Bless Africa and The Call of South Africa	1994
Egypt	Northern	My Country, You Have My Love and My Heart	1979
Ghana	Western	God Bless Our Homeland Ghana	1957
Uganda	Eastern	Oh Uganda, Land of Beauty!	1962
Oceania			
Australia		Advance Australia Fair	1984
Europe			
Denmark	Scandinavia/ Nordic	There is a Lovely Land and	1844
		<i>Kong Christian</i> (Royal)	1780
United Kingdom	British Isle	God Save the King/Queen	1745
Russia	Eastern	The State Anthem of the Russian Federation	2000
Germany	Central	The Song of the Germans	1952
Italy	Southern	The Song of the Italians	2017
North America			
Jamaica	Caribbean	Jamaica, Land We Love	1962
United States	North	The Star-Spangled Banner	1931
South America/Latin America			
Brazil	Southern	Brazilian National Anthem.	1890
Costa Rica	Central	Noble Fatherland, Your Beautiful Flag	1949

Main data sources: Central Intelligence Agency of the United States (2024)^[13].

Appendix 2**National Flags of 18 Case Study Countries Across the Six Continents**

India, 1947 	United Arab Emirates, 1971 	Singapore, 1959 
South Africa, 1994 	United Kingdom, 1801 	Japan, 1999 
Denmark, 1625 	Jamaica, 1962 	Italy, 1861 
Brazil, 1889 	United States of America, 1960 	Russia, 1991 
Uganda, 1962 	Australia, 1984 	Germany, 1919/1949 
Ghana, 1957 	Egypt, 1984 	Costa Rica, 1848 

Main sources: Central Intelligence Agency of the United States (2024) and Fleihan (2024) ^[13].