



ACT Research Briefing 2

Teacher and student attitudes and experiences of Citizenship Education compared



In association with



**Middlesex
University
London**

Introduction

The National Citizenship Education Study (NCES) is a research project designed by the Association for Citizenship Teaching and Middlesex University as part of the Active Citizenship in Schools programme 2021-2025. More information is available at www.teachingcitizenship.org.uk/research.

In 2022-23 the NCES surveyed 1,264 secondary students across eight schools as well as collecting data from teachers in 75 schools. These research briefings share some of the findings from this first year's data that will be of practical interest to teachers.

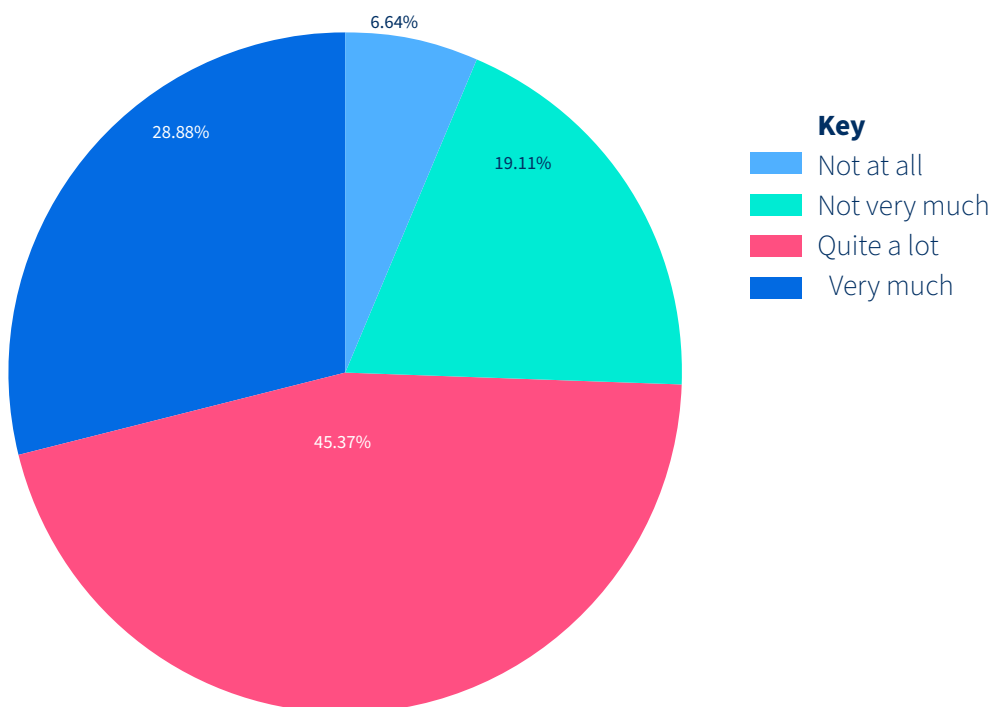
In a nutshell

Using data from the National Citizenship Education Survey it is possible to compare teacher and student experiences of citizenship education and how these differ. Analysis of the data, for example, shows that both teachers and students report that Citizenship is an important subject. Teachers and students also report similar levels of curriculum coverage and class climate. Teachers and students, however, reported different levels of curriculum activity and teachers typically overestimated student interest in the subject. The findings point to an overwhelming support for Citizenship in schools (even if this is not necessarily reflected in the resources allocated to the subject) and suggest that teachers might benefit from explicitly framing curriculum activities in terms of citizenship education.

Attitudes towards Citizenship Education

When asked if it was important to learn about Citizenship Education topics, the overwhelming number of students surveyed responded positively. 74.25% of students reported that it was 'quite' or 'very' important to learn about Citizenship topics.

Do you think it is important to learn about these [Citizenship Education] topics?

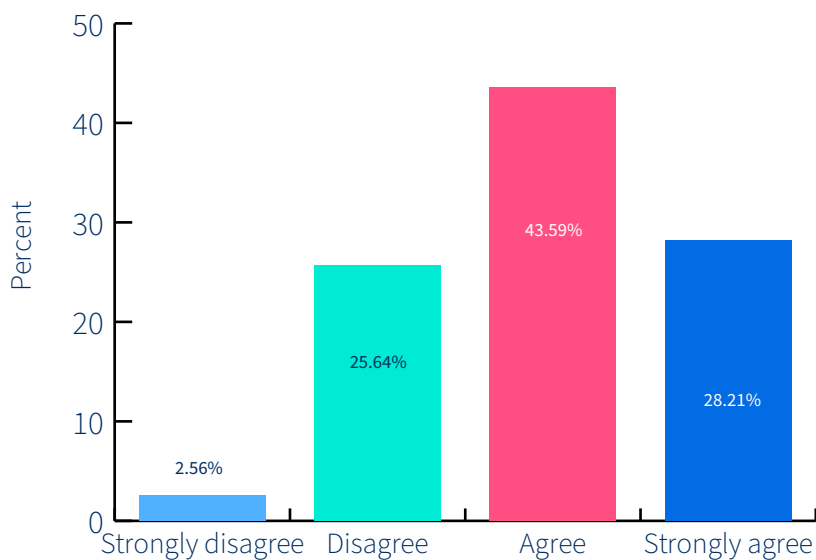


The teachers who participated in the survey were asked to report on the level of support for Citizenship among school leaders. Almost 80% of teachers responded that their school leaders were fully supportive of the subject. This level of support, however, is not always reflected in the resources allocated to the subject. The same survey, for example, found that over 40% of schools do not have consistent teams teaching in citizenship in KS3. In making the case for Citizenship, teachers may wish to highlight these findings.

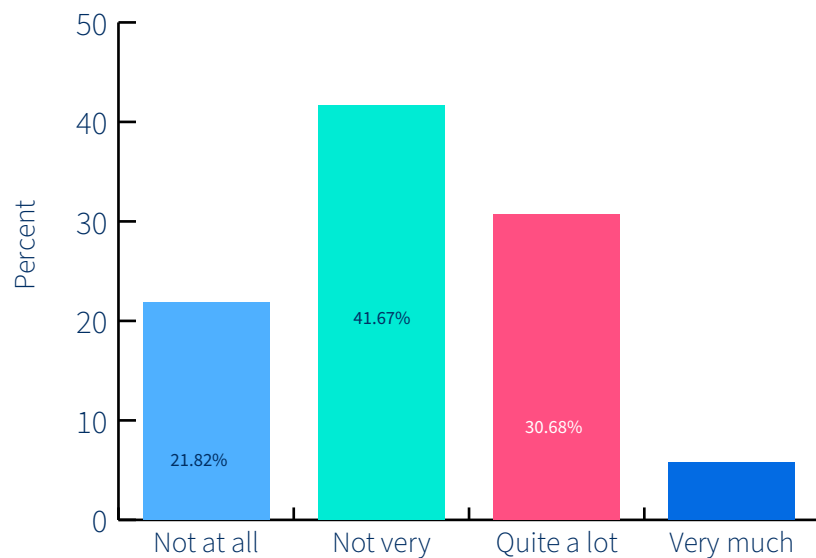
Interest in Citizenship Education

The survey data suggests that teachers tend to overestimate student interest in Citizenship Education. 71.8% of teachers said that they 'Agree' or 'Strongly agree' with the statement: students in my school are interested in Citizenship. When students were asked if they found Citizenship topics interesting, however, only 36.5% of students reported 'Quite a lot' or 'Very much' interest in the subject.

Teachers: to what extent do you agree with this statement: students in my school are interested in Citizenship



Students: when you learn about these topics, do you generally find the lessons interesting?



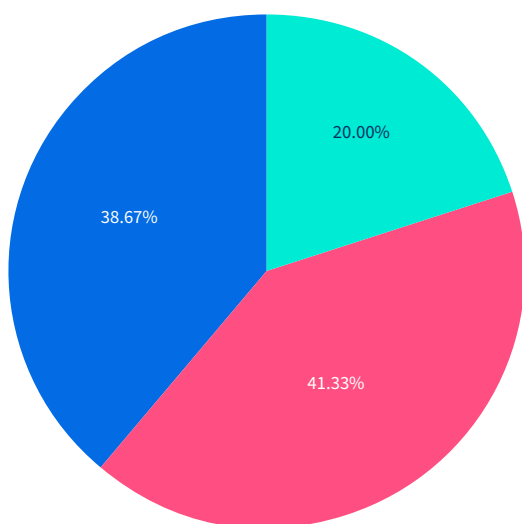
The data shows that many students value Citizenship even if they are not personally particularly interested in lessons. 41.8% of students reported ‘quite a lot’ or ‘very much’ interest in the subject but 81.9% recognised it was ‘quite’ or ‘very’ important to learn about Citizenship topics.

Curriculum coverage

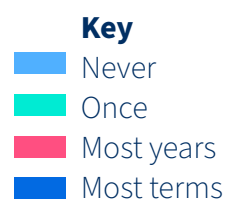
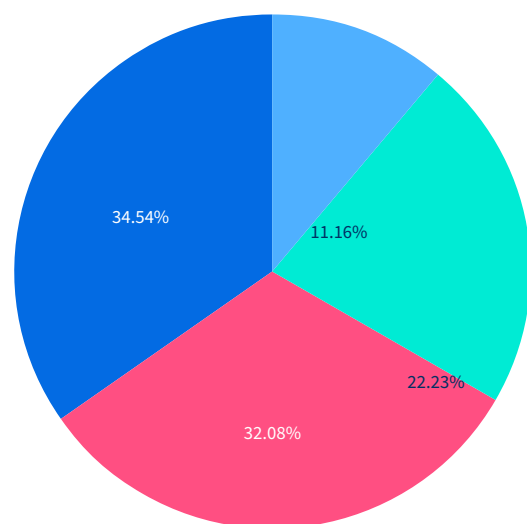
When asked about the frequency with which citizenship education topics were taught, teachers and students reported similar responses. Inequalities, the media, and human rights, were topics that teachers reported teaching most frequently (over 66% of teachers reported covering these topics extensively across KS3). Students also reported learning most frequently about inequalities, the media, and human rights (students reported learning about these topics ‘most years’ or ‘most terms.’ Media: 66.6%; Inequality: 63.7%; and Human Rights: 48.1%).

In contrast to teachers, however, students also reported learning frequently about The Environment and Climate Change (66.62% said that they learn about it ‘most years’ or ‘most terms’). This suggests that students are learning about Climate Change in other subjects. This also suggests that the exclusion of climate change from the current programme of study has deterred Citizenship teachers from engaging fully with this aspect of contemporary politics.

Teachers: how often is the following topic taught? *The environment and climate change.*



Students: how often do you learn about the environment and climate change?



Curriculum activities

While teachers and students reported similar levels of subject coverage, they each reported different levels of Citizenship curriculum activities. In general, teachers tended to report higher levels of Citizenship curriculum activities than students.

60.5% of teachers reported that students undertake active citizenship projects ‘most years’ or ‘most terms,’ whereas only 21.2% of students reported undertaking active citizenship projects ‘most years’ or ‘most terms.’ 68.5% of teachers reported that students vote on a topical subject during form time or in a lesson ‘most years’ or ‘most terms,’ where as only 23.5% of students reported voting on a topical subject during form time or in a lesson ‘most years’ or ‘most terms.’ 97.4% of teachers reported that students discuss topical issues in the news ‘most years’ or ‘most terms,’ where as only 26.3% of students, by contrast, reported discussing topical issues in the news ‘most years’ or ‘most terms.’ Finally, 96.1% of teachers reported that students discuss controversial issues ‘most years’ or ‘most terms,’ whereas only 37.4% of students, by contrast, reported discussing controversial issues ‘most years’ or ‘most terms.’

When compared to curriculum coverage, the different levels of curriculum activity reported by teachers and students stand out sharply and suggest that they should not be taken at face value. One explanation for these differences between teacher and student responses may have something to do with the way in which curriculum activities are presented in class. The students surveyed, for example, might have signed a petition or written to their MP during the year but not thought about such activities in terms of active citizenship. If this is the case, teachers would benefit from explicitly and coherently framing these activities in a way that is recognizable to students as citizenship education.

Approaches to teaching

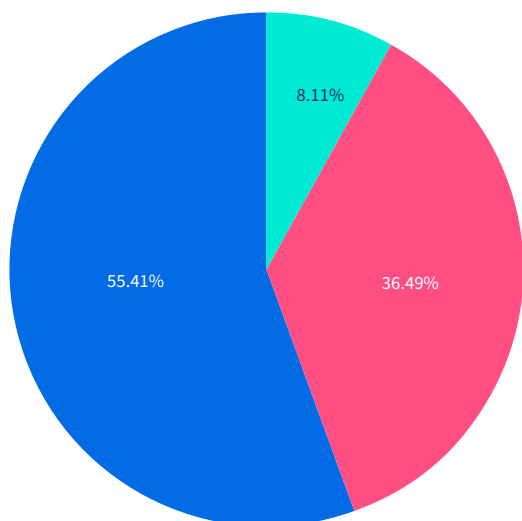
In general, teachers reported high levels of free and open discussion in their classrooms. When asked if they respected students’ opinions and encouraged them to make up their own minds, the overwhelming number of teachers answered positively. This trend was repeated cross a range of Open Climate Classroom measures, which included questions about freedom of expression and the discussion of controversial issues. Over 90% of teachers ‘Agreed’ or ‘Strongly agreed’ with the statement:

- Students are free to disagree openly with teachers about political and social issues during class.
- Students are encouraged to make up their minds about issues.

The student survey included the same set of questions, and the responses to these were similarly positive. Around 60% of students ‘Agreed’ or ‘Strongly agreed’ with these two statements. Given the link between Open Classroom Climate and effective citizenship education demonstrated in the research literature, these findings are especially welcome. However, it is also worth noting that the students were less positive than the teachers, suggesting teachers’ positive intentions and perceptions are not always shared by all students.

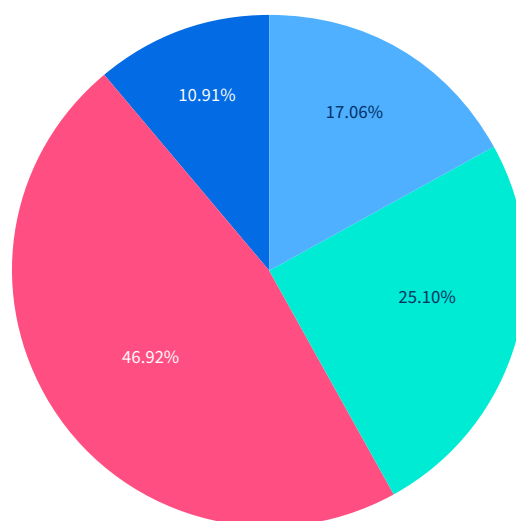


Teachers: students feel free to disagree openly with their teachers about political and social issues during class



Key
■ Disagree
■ Agree
■ Strongly agree

Students: do you feel free to disagree openly with teachers about political and social issues during class?



Key
■ Strongly disagree
■ Disagree
■ Agree
■ Strongly agree

¹ The National Citizenship Education Study (NCES) is a research collaboration between the Association for Citizenship Teaching (ACT) and Middlesex University. The NCES will continue to run for at least two more years and we are keen to grow to include many more school. For more details about our findings and how you can get involved visit www.teachingcitizenship.org.uk/research/

To cite this report use the following reference:

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This publication is one of a series of outputs developed from the research study. For more information about ACT, the Active Citizenship in Schools programme and how to join the National Citizenship Education Study, please see www.teachingcitizenship.org.uk/research