Humanitarian Impact Index

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INTRODUCTION

In a time when global crises are often reduced to headlines and fleeting social media trends, many young people struggle to connect meaningfully with international humanitarian issues. Research shows that when students are personally invested in a topic, their engagement and retention increase significantly. However, youth are rarely guided toward discovering global issues that align with their existing values and emotional priorities.

This project introduces the **Humanitarian Impact Index** (**HII**) — a website that personalizes the learning process by connecting students to an international crisis based on the values they most care about. By ranking 12 issue categories (such as child welfare, political repression, or food insecurity), users are matched through an algorithm to a crisis where those issues are most prominent. This study investigates whether this values-based matching process helps students become more engaged and motivated compared to students who select issues independently.

DATA AND FINDINGS

Photos From Actual Website

Two-Group Experiment Effectiveness Test

Proof of Concept: Ranking Testing Results

User Survey: Did the website help you learn about a crisis you weren't previously aware of?

User Survey: Did the issue-ranking system change how you think about global crises?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES

To evaluate the accuracy and impact of the HII website, two phases of testing were conducted:

- **Beta Test (Proof of Concept):**
A small group of student volunteers, including Model United Nations participants, ranked 12 humanitarian issue categories by personal relevance. The website's algorithm then matched each student with the crisis most aligned with their values. Feedback from this test was used to refine both the issue categorization and algorithmic matching.

- **Two-Group Experiment Effectiveness Test(Main Study):**
Conducted with Government and Multicultural Studies students at Laguna Beach High School.

→ **Group A (Experimental)**: Students ranked the 12 issues and were algorithmically matched to a global crisis through the HII website.

→ **Group B (Control)**: Students ranked the same issues but were instead asked to independently research a crisis topic based on the issue they cared most about, without receiving a website-generated match or guidance.

DISCUSSION, ANALYSIS, AND EVALUATION

Taken together, the survey responses affirm the project's core thesis: that young people are significantly more likely to develop emotional investment and intellectual curiosity when global issues are framed in relation to their personal values — even, and especially, when the specific topic is previously unfamiliar. The data suggests that it wasn't simply recognition that fostered engagement, but surprise. For many Group A students, being algorithmically matched to a crisis that aligned with their value priorities — yet was outside their usual sphere of awareness — created a moment of cognitive dissonance. That unexpected alignment compelled them to pause, reflect, and dig deeper. In contrast, Group B participants, who sought out issues they already cared about, often stayed within familiar boundaries. This insight is critical for rethinking how educators introduce global topics. Instead of asking students simply to pick what interests them most, tools like HII offer a structured yet personalized entry point into difficult, overlooked, or complex global realities. The result is not just better engagement — it's broader global understanding.

CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND NEXT STEPS

At its core, this experiment sought to examine whether a tool like the Human Impact Index could meaningfully shift how students interact with global humanitarian issues — not just in terms of surface-level awareness, but in how deeply and reflectively they engage with topics they may have otherwise overlooked. By anchoring complex humanitarian issues to individual values — rather than popularity or media saturation — HII helps students confront neglected global realities through a lens that feels intimate and urgent.

The implication is profound: global awareness can be cultivated not by insisting on relevance to curriculum standards alone, but by revealing the deeply human connections between distant crises and students' internal moral frameworks. When students feel that their values matter in how global stories are told, they listen differently. They care more. And they learn not just about the world — but about their place in it.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS / REFERENCES

Full Research Paper: