



# International educational tourism: Does it foster global learning? A survey of South African high school learners



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## HIGHLIGHTS

- International educational tourism has the potential to foster global learning.
- Research is based on an empirical study comprising 1152 Grade 11 learners.
- Curiosity, altruism and being open-minded are predictors of global learning.
- Engaging with cultural difference and facilitation of the process enhances global learning.
- Some types of international educational tourism are better at fostering global learning than others.

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## ABSTRACT

International educational tourism has the potential to foster global learning; however, very little empirical research exists to support this claim. This study responds to the growing demand in the literature for rigorous empirical research to test the underpinning assumption of IET. A global learning survey instrument is developed and completed by 1152 Grade 11 learners in 16 South African exclusive high schools. In doing so, this paper demonstrates that some types of IET are more conducive to global learning than others. Furthermore, for significant global learning to occur, educational tourism needs to be facilitated and cultural difference needs to be experienced.

Personality traits that include curiosity, altruism, and being open-minded to new experiences, are identified as predictors of global learning, but the effect of school-based academic achievement is small.

Additionally, through the synthesis of educational tourism, international education, experiential learning and global learning theories, the concept of IET is developed.

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## 1. Introduction

With the commodification of education and associated rapid growth in the number of exclusive schools since the 1990s, many schools have added international educational tourism (IET) opportunities to their curricula in order to remain competitive (e.g. Kenway & Fahey, 2014; Rizvi, 2014). The development of global learning is regularly given as an anticipated outcome of participation in IET and competition for places on some types of IET, for example school exchange programmes, is often great. Yet despite

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the considerable growth and diversification in high school IET, the subject is under-researched in terms of its scope and specific nature (Campbell-Price, 2014; Stone & Petrick, 2013). Research into the impacts of international educational travel has tended to concentrate on university student mobility, in contrast, studies on the effects of IET on high school learners is a newly emerging field (Kenway & Fahey, 2014; McCarthy & Kenway, 2014). Similarly, analysis of the concept of global learning and how educators can best nurture it in school children is a developing theme in the fields of geography education and global citizenship education (e.g. Béneker, Tani, Uphues, & van der Vaart, 2013; Choo, Sawech & Villanueva, 2012; DeMello, 2011; Merryfield, 2012). The need for global learning was highlighted by the results of the first global Humanitarian Index (Aurora Prize, 2016). The authors of the survey identified a “compassion gap” (Aurora Prize, 2016:15) between what people said they know and feel compared with what they

were prepared to do with regards to humanitarian issues. Carefully developed and facilitated IET has the potential to encourage global learning and in doing so start reducing the “compassion gap”.

Practitioners and theoreticians of international education have increasingly called for rigorous empirical research to scrutinize the underpinning assumption of the theory, namely that global learning does indeed occur as a consequence of IET (e.g.: Tarc, Mishra-Tarc, Ng-A-Fook & Trilokekar, 2012; Vande Berg, Paige, & Lou, 2012). This paper addresses that call by empirically evaluating global learning amongst 1152 high school learners, 989 of whom have travelled internationally. Through the modification of the world-mindedness scale developed by Béneker et al. (2013; 2014), a questionnaire was developed to compare global learning between participants of IET and those who had not travelled internationally, as well as to compare global learning amongst participants of different categories of IET. In doing so, this research bridges the gap between theory and practice and extends international education theory to the high school level of education.

In order to empirically test whether participation in IET encourages global learning in learners, the following three hypotheses were developed:

**Hypothesis 1.** *Learners who have travelled internationally demonstrate higher levels of global learning than those who have not.*

**Hypothesis 2.** *Of those learners who have travelled internationally, those who have participated in an IET experience demonstrate higher levels of global learning than those who have not.*

**Hypothesis 3.** *Some types of IET are better suited to encouraging global learning than others.*

Additionally, factors that support global learning during IET were investigated. Specifically, the need to experience cultural difference (e.g.: Gibson et al., 2008; Van 'T Klooster, 2014) and the role of facilitation of the process (e.g.: Paige & Vande Berg, 2012) were considered.

Finally, owing to places on some types of IET being limited, educators have to select who they consider are the best candidates for participation. Often, academically high achievers are chosen. This study also investigates whether school-based academic achievement is a good predictor of global learning and whether other personality traits might provide a better measure of the potential for global learning. These are: being curious and open-minded to new experiences (e.g.: Li, Olson & Frieze, 2013; Pitman, Broomhall, McEwan, & Majocha, 2010); being able to move out of one's comfort-zone (e.g.: Lilley, 2014); possessing an altruistic disposition with regards to helping others (e.g.: Lyons, Hanley, Wearing, & Neil, 2012; Zinser, 2012), and taking a regular interest in the news (e.g.: Adjutant et al., 2014).

In addressing the above mentioned issues, this study develops the theoretical concept of international educational tourism. From a planning and management perspective, it provides new insight regarding the type of school-based tours that encourage global learning, as well as the factors that support the process. Additionally, it identifies personality traits that are conducive to global learning and those that are not.

## 2. Theoretical background

The theories of educational tourism, international education, experiential learning and global learning originate in different academic disciplines but collectively construct the concept of international educational tourism (IET). International education and educational tourism both describe the process of traveling in order to learn and both disciplines employ experiential learning theory to

explain the manner in which effective learning takes place. Global learning describes a primary outcome of the process of IET and also provides the means to empirically test whether learning is indeed occurring as a consequence of that travel.

### 2.1. Educational tourism

Ritchie's (2003) segmentation model of educational tourism is generally considered the benchmark for educational tourism. It helps conceptualize the overlap between education and tourism and has contributed to developing awareness of educational tourism as a niche sector. However, by employing a market segmentation approach, the model excludes sectors of the industry in which learning may be a significant activity. Pitman et al. (2010) overcome this limitation by suggesting a process approach for defining educational tourism. According to them, educational tourism can be identified by three key features:

1. The trip is intentionally educationally focused.
2. The style of learning is experiential.
3. The trip is structured around an educational programme (Pitman et al., 2010:223).

Pitman et al. describe educational tourism as “involving a deliberate and explicit learning experience” (Pitman et al., 2010, p. 221), requiring active participation on the part of the educational tourists. Reflective practices that occur on site or during the tourism experience are important for learning, and in a departure from normal definitions of tourism, they suggest that the process of educational tourism “extends beyond the actual touristic experience and encompasses pre- (and post-) travel considerations” (Pitman et al., 2010:234). Richards (2011) elaborates further on the experiential nature of educational tourism, describing it as a co-operative form of tourism, whereby the tourists and the tour providers “co-create the desired experiences” (Richards, 2011, p. 38). Additionally, the attitude of the tourist, in term of willingness to learn, has been found to be more important for successful learning than any qualifications they might have (Pitman et al., 2010:225).

According to Van 'T Klooster (2014), in order for learning to occur during educational tourism, some degree of cultural difference from the tourist's normal life experiences needs to be encountered. This argument is a fundamental tenet of international education theory (e.g.: Deardorff & Jones, 2012; Deloach, Kurt, & Olitsky, 2015), with Li et al (2013:76) using the term *neophilia* to describe “a novelty seeking personality” that is more often present in students who choose to study abroad than those who do not. The concept has also been applied to global learning theory, with Lilley (2014) specifying the need to leave one's comfort zone and to engage with people beyond one's immediate community as a prerequisite for effective global learning.

### 2.2. International education

In contrast to educational tourism, international education is extensively investigated in the literature. International education theory has as its core the assumption that international travel, with its concomitant exposure to other cultures, nationalities and environments, is a highly desirable endeavour. International education proponents attest that it has the potential to foster intercultural learning and development (Vande Berg et al., 2012: xiii), and to facilitate global learning through the development of global awareness (Kurt, Olitsky, & Geis, 2013), global mindedness (DeMello, 2011) and global competence (Deardorff, 2014).

There is a growing concern however, that very little positive intercultural or global learning even takes place on many

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