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EDUCATIONAL TOURISM: MAIN DESTINATION AND ECONOMIC IMPACT

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Abstact

This article defines what educational tourism means and the impacts it has on society and students. Educational tourism means travelling partly to study and learn. In recent decades, educational tourism has been increasing year by year. UNESCO reported there are 7,3 million international students around the world. It is a mode of travel to various destinations that helps students gain knowledge and experience in fields such as culture, history, and social communication, and builds awareness of different cultures. Foreign students also contribute significantly to the national economy through tuition fees, living expenses, the service sector, and the labor market, and they also strengthen the international competitiveness of educational institutions and support innovation. We also consider potential conflicts, such as language barriers, cultural differences, and financial constraints. In this context, we explore these triggers.

Keywords: international destinations, educational tourism, international students, economy, innovations.

Introduction

Educational tourism is one of the most well-known economic sources. UNESCO data released in 2025 show that the number of educationally mobile students reached nearly 6.9 million in 2023, up from 2.1 million in 2000, an increase of 28% (The PIE News, 2025). The main factor behind this increase is the availability of different programmes that support study abroad, such as ERASMUS. According to International Education Research, Erasmus forms co-operations among universities that enable fore more than 150,000 students to study abroad in one of 33 participating countries. This article aims to examine the destinations and triggers that international students are choosing these days.

Research and methodology

To better understand the dynamics of study abroad in recent years. Some statistics and data are helpful. According to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, there were over 4,8 million international students in 2016, up from 3,9 million in 2011, as reported by Global Migration Indicators. According to UNESCO, there are six famous host countries for students.

This table illustrates the top educational destinations around 2025 and 2026. The US leads with 1.18 million international students, followed by the UK and Australia.

Table 1. The top educational destinations around 2025 and 2026

#	Country	International students	Academic year	Change
1	United States	1,177,766	2024/25	+4.5% (record high)
2	United Kingdom	685,565	2024/25	down from 732,285 in 2023/24
3	Australia	~566,000	2024	visa caps introduced

#	Country	International students	Academic year	Change
4	Germany	420,000+ (another source: ~469,000)	2025/26 winter semester	growing; tuition mostly free
5	France	443,500	2024/25	target of 500,000 by 2027
6	Canada	~300,000	2025/26	−29% vs 2023/24

About 6.9 million students studied outside their home country in 2024.New study vi sas issued by the US, Canada, UK and Australia fell about 38% between 2023 and 2025; Germany and France may now have passed Canada in new enrolments.

Germany's and France's figures vary by counting method, so the order of ranks 4–5 is not definitive.

Next in line are China (380,000, 2024/25) and Japan (336,708, May 2026. Among the top countries, the USA represented the largest number. Moving from the discussion of student origins to that of the USA, the USA was the top OECD destination country for mobile territory students (1. nt (1.176,776 students) in 2024/2026

UK was the destination of choice for 26% of the total number of students from abroad. In 2024/2025, there were approximately 685.576 international students enrolled, 19% of all students registered at UK universities.

Looking at data for the OECD area in 2024, there were 566.000 international students; over half of them were from Asia, especially China.

Studying in Germany is much easier compared to other countries because tuition is mostly free. In the winter semester of 2025, the number of international students in Germany reached 420.000.

Materials

This literature review focused on the role of educational tourism in developing countries. The first phase of desk research focused on collecting academic contributions about educational tourism using Google Scholar, searching in Scopus, EBSCO, and Web of Science databases, and different books about the educational tourism industry.

According to Aspects of Tourism Managing Educational Tourism, the editors mentioned that the growth of both education and tourism as industries in recent decades has led to growing recognition of these industries from both economic and social perspectives. As Roppolo(19996;1991)notes as countries become more interdependent, their success, growth and economic prosperity will largely depend on the ability of these two industries- education and tourism- to create the avenues necessary to support international exchange and learning. The changes in the tourism industry over the last decades, coupled with the changes in education, have facilitated mobility and learning becoming an important part of tourism. Smith and Jenner note that educational tourism has generated little excitement to date from the tourism industry, and this is reflected in the gathering of research and data. They note that very little research has been done because this segment is not seen as warranting it, yet because little research has been done, the industry is unaware of the true size of the segment (Smith and Jenner, 1997a: 60). Ropolo (1996) agrees and notes that there are many areas yet to be examined empirically concerning the links between education and tourism. The growth of both education and tourism as industries in recent decades has led to growing recognition of these industries from both economic and social perspectives. As Roppolo(19996;1991)notes as countries become more interdependent, their success, growth, and economic prosperity will largely depend on the ability of two industries- education and tourism- to create the avenues necessary to support international exchange and learning. The changes in the tourism industry over the last decades, coupled with changes in education, have facilitated mobility and learning becoming an important part of tourism. Smith and Jenner note that educational tourism has generated little excitement to date from

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Results and discussion

Host countries can earn substantial revenue from international students. During the academic year, students contribute millions through tuition fees, living expenses, and accommodation. Studies of the U.S., Italy, and the U.K. show that the economic impact on host countries has been considerable. In the U.S., 1,094,792 international students contributed $39 billion to the economy and supported more than 455,000 jobs during the 2017–2018 academic year. A 2013 study by the Association of American College and University Programs in Italy found that international educational programs generated particularly significant value in the education sector, which accounted for 46.9% of the total value added from international students, largely through tuition expenditures. Their impact on other sectors was also notable: real estate (1.2%), sales (6.9%), food and beverage (5.8), transport (40%), and other services, including arts and entertainment (more than 1%), were affected. The tertiary sector experienced the greatest impact, creating opportunities to develop more services and benefits, especially in destinations where these programs are well established. In this paper, we consider educational tourism as a learning experience organised and managed by educational institutions. Of course, learning takes place during any kind of travel, for leisure or to visit a destination, for example, but in our definition, education is the learner's primary purpose and tourism the secondary one. However, we argue that the tourism component should be considered by any institution organising or managing educational programmes, in order to exploit the opportunities offered by a destination for achieving learning goals. More specifically, the paper focuses on educational tourism related to HEI students in international mobility programs, who are educational tourists inasmuch as their overall experience at the destination includes leisure and tourism activities

Conclusion

This work explored the role of educational tourism in fostering local development through educational tourism. Statistical data show that the number of students studying abroad throughout the world is increasing. Research has provided evidence about the significant impact of international education tourism, including students' potential involvement in place-based activities, increased tourism business, and economic and social benefits to the host country, which relate to the sustainability of this form of tourism for the destination. In turn, these educational tourists also benefit from their experiences personally and professionally. This paper presents academic contributions that define educational tourism. Moreover, it explores the role of universities in enhancing educational tourism and in promoting local development; to do so, the authors, in this study, considered international students as educational tourists, and provided a description of the outcomes of educational tourism for students and destinations.

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