



Attractions of Cape Town to African Francophone Students

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Abstract

This study set out to find the attractions of Cape Town as an educational destination for African francophone students using a qualitative interview-based research methodology. Francophone students migrate to Cape Town to firstly learn the English language and then seek tertiary education of global repute. The natural environment, lifestyle, personal safety and generally tolerant local people are added attractions. Incidences of racism, xenophobic attacks, high rentals and college fees negate students' experiences in the city and leave a bad taste in the mouth. Insightful recommendations are drawn to address the real needs of African francophone students which generally appear to be misunderstood and unaddressed by formal tertiary learning institutions and other interested organizations.

Keywords: Cape Town; Educational Tourism; African Francophone Students; Intra-Africa Tourism; South Africa

Introduction

International travel for the purpose of study is a well-recognized and rapidly growing tourism niche market (Donaldson & Gatsinzi, 2005). This kind of travel is referred to as 'education tourism'. Education tourism can be defined as the process in which people travel across international borders to acquire educational services (Abubaker, et al., 2014). Educational tourism involves a deliberate and explicit learning experience that requires active participation on the part of the educational tourists (Pitman, et al., 2010; Packer, 2006). Temporary migration to another country for study purposes is still the major way many African students access specialised education. These student travellers also engage in tourist activities in the host country thereby contributing towards the growing tourism market (Donaldson & Gatsinzi, 2005). This notion of travelling for the purposes of achieving an education is not a new phenomenon but to date, very little research has been conducted in this area (Jason, et al., 2011; Tarrant, et al., 2014). The concept of educational travel has been largely ignored because of its broad and complex nature and yet further knowledge



could assist in the development of products that better fulfil learners' needs (Pitman, et al., 2010). Countries, institutions of higher learning and cities that do not receive international students lose a fortune, potential future growth and may even face extinction (Drucker, 1997).

The main reasons for the rise in educational tourism can be attributed to the globalisation of markets and the search for reputable education that increases employability (Sjoberg & Shabalina, 2010; Jong, et al., 2010; Beerkens, 2002). Another reason given for the growth of educational tourism is that it exposes students to international experiences of diversity and multicultural understanding that help them build sensitivities to *inter alia*, social justice (Bellamy & Wineberg, 2006; Lutterman-Aguilar & Gingrich, 2002). Students also opt to acquire education from foreign universities because the qualifications that they seek are not available in their home countries, and where the qualifications are indeed offered, they are not aligned to their or industry's preferred skills. An example is of the tourism education at Chinese universities offered at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. This tourism education lacks alignment as universities, industries and government work in silos without coordination. Such scenarios arise due to weak commitment from both the industry and government (Davidson, et al., 2015).

Research also posits that the absence of qualified academics with world-class staff experience at local universities has also promoted educational tourism (Imenda, et al., 2002). The majority of academic lecturers lack the basic qualifications required including doctorate degrees. Lack of capacity to provide high quality postgraduate courses within their home countries push students to international destinations with better prospects. In China and India for instance, there has been an increase in demand for skilled and trained labour in the hospitality industry owing to the growth in tourism and hospitality services. However, this growth has not been reflected in the education system hence the move of most students to countries such as Australia where quality programmes in tourism and hospitality are offered (Davidson, et al., 2015). Students also travel across borders to acquire education in countries where better education is offered if the countries are also in close proximity, have a favourable climate, are relatively cheaper and are within a generally safe environment (Barron, et al., 2002).

Factors that motivate and attract international students are captured in tourism literature by the push-pull theory. Llewellyn-Smith & McCabe (2008) argued that decision making by international students about where to study, takes a hierarchical order starting from choosing a country, the university and then the city in that order. The interplay of push in the country of origin, and pull factors in the host country, motivate and attract the student to certain destinations (Nikjoo & Ketabi, 2015). A preponderance of academic research has covered these factors in terms of what is considered by international students with regards to country and institution level factors. Without being destination specific, country level studies tend to overgeneralize. Factors about the attractions of specific cities, in particular, are not well articulated in educational tourism research. For geographically big countries, cities within a country may have sharp disparities, endowed with different resources and may be under the administration of different political parties who may promote different policies (van Winden, et al., 2007). In addition, in multilingual countries, the major language spoken in a particular city may be a determinant pull factor. South Africa is no exception to this phenomenon, it has a multi-party local government administered system, and it is geographically large and multilingual. Against this background, this research will emphasize on pull factors that attract a specific group of international students to a specific city.

Intra-Africa educational tourism in higher education is growing rapidly. Student travellers represent a massive multi-billion growing niche market. Yet there are limited studies around this niche market. The few studies have pointed to South Africa as the leading continental destination of African foreign students (Lee & Sehoole, 2015). South Africa is an expansive



country with cities possessing idiosyncratic factors that attract foreign students. The attractions of the city of Cape Town as an educational destination for francophone students from the African region will be explored. This group of students comes from what were previously French colonies and they predominantly speak the French language. They are culturally different from Southern Africans who mainly speak and teach in English. Therefore, the decision of a culturally conducive city is critically important. Some may intend to learn and improve their English, hence a city that has a predominantly English speaking people would work to their advantage. Under these circumstances, the choice of a city is critically important.

Research Objectives

Several authorities have suggested various reasons such as good word-of-mouth, marketing and destination image as key drivers of tourists (Prayag, 2008; Arambewela & Hall, 2009; Abubakar & Ilkan, 2016). The study seeks to investigate the factors that attract students from the African francophone countries in choosing Cape Town as the destination of studies. The study specifically aims to achieve the following objectives;

- To identify key factors that influence francophone students to choose Cape Town as an educational destination.
- To identify the factors they would recommend about Cape Town as an educational destination to their countrymen.
- To find out any unanticipated (positive and negative) experiences that might have affected the stay of the student.

Research Questions

The study aims to answer the following research questions:

What factors attract African francophone students to locate in Cape Town for their studies?

What would you recommend about Cape Town to other people from your country interested in studying?

What other experiences did you or did not enjoy in Cape Town?

Rationale of the Study

World tourism has rapidly increased in recent times and tourism actors are increasingly focusing on enhancing consumer information (Brown & Hall, 2008; Tefera, 2015). The growth has been hinged on globalization, increased global connectedness, political freedom, civilization and relative peace. In the same vein, the educational tourism sector has also grown rapidly to unprecedented levels (Neale-Shutte & Fourie, 2006; Lee & Sehoole, 2015; Mpinganjira, 2012; Abubakar, et al., 2014). Despite the growth of the travel for education and learning sector, it remains largely ignored by both industry and academia (Pitman, et al., 2010; Tashlai & Ivanov, 2014).

As academic institutions jostle for international student recruitment, they need to align their positioning to the needs of the various foreign students' segments in order to capture the educational tourism market. In view of that, it is paramount to know the attractions of specific students segments to the city in which the institution is located so that they work to meet those expectations in order to make the student experience enjoyable. The knowledge helps institutions to develop their curriculum to the needs of overseas students. More importantly,



institutions of higher learning need to equip students with boundary spanning skillsets across industries, cultures, and countries (Naidoo, 2006).

There is a growing population of students from African francophone countries in higher education institutions in Cape Town. The cause of the spike has not been empirically studied hence a growing niche market cannot be ignored (Bhuiyan, et al., 2010). Some generic studies have looked at the attractions of South Africa as a destination for educational migrants without looking at the intricacies of particular cities. This research would be of great interest to academic institutions in the city, provincial and local governments of Cape Town. The international students market has been noted by Arambewela and Hall (2009) to be highly heterogeneous and requires effort to segment. This study will help the country, universities, and cities to develop appropriate strategies that incorporate the needs of francophone students as a market segment. Segmentation of the education tourism is critically important for destination promotion (Chen, et al., 2013).

Educational tourism is an important economic activity for all countries, especially developing countries. As more and more governments are privatizing or commercializing institutes of higher learning (Kruss, 2002), the pecuniary benefits of educational tourism can improve the financial sustainability of institutions of higher learning (Arambewela & Hall, 2009). Drawing more international students can help institutions alleviate poverty by cross-subsidizing the education of local low-income students and fostering economic growth (Scheyvens, 2007). As such, educational tourism is a multi-dimensional facet that can achieve a lot more things and draws interest from a diverse audience (Cohen, 2009). The combination of education, tourism and migration of a certain age group (usually the youth) for studies and the interrelationship with other economic variables make the research area attractive to interdisciplinary scholars (Lesjak, et al., 2015). In fact, Pitman, et al. (2010) encourage academics from multi-disciplines to explore the research area.

Literature Review

Destination attributes are key to the attraction of tourists including educational tourists (Prayag, 2008). In general, the developed world has traditionally been attractive to students from developing countries. In some developing countries demand for tertiary education, driven by population growth and quest for knowledge, outstrips national capacity (Neale-Shutte & Fourie, 2006). Students from less developed countries end up migrating to developed countries with excess educational capacity to pursue their studies. The comparative advantage, prestige, and power of institutions from developed countries in curriculum, resources and scientific research is a great attraction for international students (Arambewela & Hall, 2009).

The United States of America (US) has traditionally been the dominant destination for higher education migrants. However, in recent times a decline of international students from sending countries into the US has been observed. At the same time, some emerging economies and regional education hubs are aggressively contesting for foreign students (Katircioglu, 2014; Knight, 2011). Education tourism is big business, estimated at about \$194 billion in 2012 (Lesjak, et al., 2015). As an example, it contributes over \$12 billion to the US economy and has other social, economic and cultural benefits (Altbach, 2004). Global marketing initiatives by emerging economies and strengthening of their tertiary education systems to gain international recognition and accreditation of qualifications is attracting overseas students (Katircioglu, 2010).

South Africa has emerged as a prime educational destination on the African continent (Bennell & Pearce, 2003). On gaining democracy in 1994, South Africa opened its borders to African and international scholars in order to build its education system (Donaldson & Gatsinzi, 2005). South Africa draws most of its students from surrounding countries in the



Southern African Development Community (SADC) region. International students are attracted to study in South Africa for several reasons. The country offers comparatively better higher education than most of the countries in the region. South Africa attracts foreign students outside the African continent for reasons like cultural exchanges, affordable higher education and emigrating with family. Foreign students may be drawn into the country because of easier admission requirements. For instance, Zimbabwean students who cannot gain entry into highly selective universities at home end up studying in South Africa. The lure of a higher lifestyle and possibilities of better employment and career opportunities pulls students into the host country (Yang, 2007). These include flexible student employment possibilities (Munro, et al., 2007). The host country's international relations with other countries and efficient processing of study permits may persuade students to enroll. The political stability of the host country and its economic environment influence the decision by international students (Lesjak, et al., 2015).

International students are equally particular about the destination city in which the institution of higher learning is located. International students have been observed to consider other factors such as the level of student fees, location of the institution and culture of the city (Katircioglu, 2014). The weather, cultural, natural and man-made attractions in the destination city also motivate the selection of particular institutions (Packer & Ballantyne, 2002; Llewellyn-Smith & McCabe, 2008; Rezvani, 2012). Cubillo & Cervino (2006) noted the importance of the city of destination in co-producing the educational experience and its influence on pre-departure decision making.

The City of Cape Town is a predominantly tertiary industry centre complemented with a light manufacturing industry. Its tertiary industry is heavily skewed towards tourism. The attractions of Cape Town's traditional tourism industry is well researched (Frey & George, 2010; Ramukumba, et al., 2012). Yet there is limited research on the attractions of the Mother City, as Cape Town is fondly known, as an educational destination (George, 2010). The educational tourism niche market generally faced a paucity of academic studies (Brown, 2009; Tashlai & Ivanov, 2014). The emergence of intra-African educational migration is understudied (Lee & Sehoole, 2015). Most of the academic studies in educational tourism are confined to the traditional international destinations for international students in the developed world (Mpinganjira, 2012; Brown & Aktas, 2011). However, Abubakar, et al. (2014) observed a reverse trend where emerging economies are rapidly turning into educational tourist destinations. In corroboration, Lee & Sehoole (2015) noted a decline in international students studying in developed countries. Concurrently, there has been a surge in foreign student enrolment in less developed countries (OECD, 2014; Katircioglu, 2014).

A handful of studies have looked at individual emerging countries as educational tourism destination (Katircioglu, 2014; Abubakar, et al., 2014; Mpinganjira, 2012; Lee & Sehoole, 2015). They have been perennially considered source markets with an almost one way traffic of students from the global south to the north (Altbach, 2004; Brohman, 1996). Against this background, it is understandable why there has not been a lot of studies that unpack the attractions of developing countries as a destination for international students. With scant national educational tourism, there is virtually no academic interest to explore intricacies peculiar to cities as destinations of educational tourists. The actual destination city of educational tourism is very important for our understanding of its attractions to foreign students when they formulate their international study decision. A study focusing on understanding the attractions of the City of Cape Town to francophone students is therefore warranted.

Cape Town prides itself of four (4) large multi-faculty and multi-campus public universities, numerous vocational training centers and a myriad more private institutions of higher learning that continue to attract an ever-growing legion of regional and international students. Among these students are Francophone students. International students are a key



driver of financial performance for universities and they contribute towards export earnings for the nation (Mpinganjira, 2012; Katircioglu, 2010; Bhuiyan, et al., 2010). Local and international students from the Southern African Development Community (SADC) regions are charged the same fees, while students outside the SADC are charged higher fees. Apart from the Democratic Republic of Congo, all African international francophone students are outside the SADC region. This is a critical source of financial sustainability for local universities as fiscal challenges force governments to reduce spending on tertiary education (Ivy, 2001). The African francophone region commands the largest population in Africa. Understanding and tapping aggressively into this market could provide the silver lining for Cape Town tourism.

This study sets out to explore the attractions of Cape Town as an educational destination for students from the African Francophone countries. Understanding higher educational tourism may lead to important changes in the curriculum and teaching strategies in reflection of the composition of students (Ayikoru, et al., 2009). At an institutional level, the cutthroat competition for student recruitments puts pressure to ensure courses meet industrial needs for both the local market and the student source market industries. Universities must be fixated on improving students' learning experiences to create a good reputation (Arambewela & Hall, 2009). Students from non-English speaking countries face challenges with their participation and engagement with the subject (Lugosi & Jameson, 2017). Adjustments may be required in learning and assessment approaches to accommodate the diversity of international students (Arambewela & Hall, 2009). Preparatory courses may also need to be developed as bridging courses to ensure that the foreign students are integrated into the learning environment of South Africa.

Student tourism promotes diversity and multiculturalism (Quezada, 2004). Africa is divided into several ethnic groups and speaks several languages. Students may be frustrated when emigrating to other countries whose language they cannot speak (Quezada, 2004). At the same time, this might be a motivation to learn a new language (Iglesias, 2014). The depiction of the specific destination through images and television advertising may support consumer decision (Busby, et al., 2013).

Intra Africa educational tourism helps the growth of trade and multicultural exchange (Richards, 2014). It can help the transition of the continent from a disjointed continent to an inclusive place (Lesjak, et al., 2015). The exponential social changes driven by globalization, immigration, information technology and access to information created fierce competition amongst institutions of higher learning for international students (Brussow, 2005; Mpinganjira, 2012).

Research Methodology

The research was carried out through a thorough literature review complemented with a qualitative data collection of empirical evidence. Secondary data was collected from numerous academic studies for the extensive literature review. Primary data was collected through a qualitative research methodology to gain detailed information about the topic under study. The use of ethnographic research methods is also persuaded to gain intricacies of the social aspects that make Cape Town an attractive destination for Francophone tertiary students (Brown, 2009). Such in-depth information can be gained through interviews with the respondents. Students from the African Francophone countries enrolled at Mancosa, a private institute of higher learning, were purposively selected for personal interviews. They are current students who are enrolled in various undergraduate degree programs. The sample included eight (8) female students and six (6) male students. The respondents were drawn from Democratic Republic of Congo, Gabon, and Congo Brazzaville. Their ages ranged from 20-25 year old. This is quite a young population looking for academic excellence. The interviews with each student lasted approximately forty-five (45) minutes to



an hour and were conducted in English as all the respondents conversed in good English. The interviews were recorded and the researchers sat in each of the interviews to pose questions and take notes. Nonverbal communication was observed and noted during the interview. The qualitative research method was chosen for its ability to capture comprehensive text. Semi-structured questions were used to draw open-ended response from the respondents. Respondents were advised of informed consent and researchers assured confidentiality of identity. The interviews were stopped after information saturation. Collected data was analysed to come up with specific themes or issues that relate to the attractions of Cape Town to the francophone students. Thematic analysis was carried out to extract prominent discrete points discussed by the participants. The setting of the study is reflective of francophone students in higher education institutions in South Africa enabling the finding to be transferable (Brown & Aktas, 2011).

Results

Reasons for Choosing Cape Town

Learning the English Language

All of the respondents indicated that they made the decision to relocate to Cape Town to specifically pursue their studies. All of the interviewed students indicated that they came to Cape Town to learn the English language as doing so would increase the chance of getting a good job in their home countries. Respondents were unequivocally clear that learning English in Cape Town improves their pronunciation. This is in line with Cubillo & Cervino's (2006) observation that international students could be attracted to certain destinations to learn and speak a perfect language. The following comments allude to this:

If you want to be able to pronounce English properly, you are better off studying in Cape Town.

In my country, if you speak good English it's easy to find employment in government departments serving the English speaking public or helping to translate between English and French in meetings.

In my country, if you speak English, you get better opportunities. Many organisations in Congo Brazzaville pay good salaries for people employed as translators.

English is an important asset back home. It can open up great opportunities. If you get your qualification here in South Africa and if you speak English well, you will get a good job.

Influence of Family Members

The decision was mainly influenced by parents at home or family member(s) already resident in Cape Town. Considering the age group of the respondents the family unit was expected to make great influence as to where to locate for education studies. Parents in the Africa francophone region are encouraging their children to learn English since it is the first international language. In Gabon, for instance, the government is actually promoting the notion of citizens learning English. The following comments show how families are preparing their children to be multilingual in the francophone region.

I wanted to go to France, but my father insisted that I should go to an English speaking country.

We came to join my sister who was already in Cape Town.



My father made all the decisions for me.

Safety and Security

Safety and security is one of the major considerations of young international students when migrating. Family members play an integral part in making decisions that ensure safety and security. In most cases, the interviewees had someone from home, either family member or friend to receive them on their first visit. The decisions were based on Cape Town being relatively safe and generally more welcoming to foreigners.

My mother made the decision for us to relocate to Cape Town because it is safe.

I did not have any family member in Cape Town, so someone else from my country assisted me to settle.

Educational Institutions

The choices of top of the range universities in Cape Town attracted prospective francophone students into the city. The interviewed group of students indicated that they first came to Cape Town to learn English as a preparatory course before applying to any institution of higher learning. The myriad of educational institution choices in Cape Town makes it attractive for taking the preparatory studies while residing in the city. The students responded about their ambitions to study at some of Cape Town's educational institutions as highlighted below:

When I came here was attracted to the University of Cape Town but when I applied they rejected my application.

When I came from home I intended to study law at the University of Cape Town but they rejected my application citing language problems.

Online Reviews of Cape Town

Most of the respondents did not know much about natural and man-made attractions of Cape Town before visiting the city. However, one respondent shopped online about the attractions of the city and was moved by the pictures and electronic reviews of the city. This is revealed by the statement below:

...I then searched on the Internet and Cape Town came out as the most beautiful city in Africa. I liked the pictures I saw and decided that I wanted to experience life in Cape Town.

Recommending Cape Town back Home

Most of the interviewees indicated that they would positively recommend Cape Town to anyone including their countrymen interested in studying or visiting the city. Only one said they would not recommend Cape Town positively because of its expensive house rentals and lack of employment opportunities for students.

Attractive Natural and Artificial Environment

Cape Town stood as a welcoming city with a beautiful natural and man-made environment. The students also made comments about high quality lifestyle and entertainment enjoyed in



Cape Town that they would recommend people back home to come and experience. The comments below captured this notion:

When I came here I could not speak a word of English but no one laughed at me when my English was not correct. They encouraged me to keep learning.

Beautiful places like Table Mountain, the Lion's Head, Ratanga Junction and the Waterfront are not there in my country, so I will definitely recommend others to come and experience them.

Cape Town is very safe than what we hear from the outside. In fact, it is even safer than Brazzaville.

I did not know much about Cape Town when I moved here. I was fascinated by the beautiful places that I saw such as the Waterfront, Stellenbosch, Robben Island and Muzoli's where you can meet other people from other places.

Global Student Village

The interviewees also said that Cape Town has a lot of students from different countries studying at the many universities in the city and it helps to share ideas and learn about other countries. There is a good global mix of students in Cape Town which presents a diverse global cultural exchange environment (Cubillo & Cervino, 2006). This may help to build a new global community of leaders who are cross-cultural and sensitive to inclusion (Brown & Aktas, 2011). The global student exchange village was captured by some of the respondents as stated below:

Cape Town has a young population of students from other countries. I like to exchange more with students from other countries. We can link up on business and share ideas.

I do not want to spend too much time with people from my country because my English language will not improve. Also, people from my country do menial jobs as security guards and car park attendants. They are not ambitious and there is nothing great to share. I would rather be in the company of students from other countries.

Opportunities for Small Businesses

Cape Town was also recommended as a city that offers a lot of opportunities for small business development. Students noted that it is easy to start a business in Cape Town. This is captioned by the below response:

My parents deal in artefacts and Cape Town was an attraction because of the flow of tourists. Their business is doing well because they located in a city that receives international travellers that value contemporary African art.

Unanticipated Experiences

The students highlighted that racism was still a problem in some public places in Cape Town. The interviewees narrated encounters of racism in the town of Stellenbosch and in public transport such as trains. The interviewees were taken aback by the rampant xenophobic attitude of some black South Africans. They also pointed out that it was very difficult and cumbersome to get student permits even if you submit all the required documents. Expensive accommodation and tuition fees worried students a great deal:



I was very surprised with the attitude of black South Africans attending shops, each time I am shopping and they hear me struggle with English they always ask me when I would go back to my country.

While I was at some place in Stellenbosch, the residents called the police to get us out of their neighborhood.

Implications to Academia, Practice, and Policy-Makers

The results are limited because the study was carried at one institution and the results of such qualitative research cannot be generalized. These results are important to institutions of higher learning in Cape Town and should help them to massage their marketing communication when pitching in francophone countries. Cape Town tourism authorities could benefit from partnerships with universities for outreach or programme information sessions in the francophone countries to market both the learning institution and the destination. Tourism industry players could and should collaborate more with institutions and offer attractive group packages for the student market. To academics, this is a grey area yearning for further studies. Virtual technologies may also be used to help prospective students to gain more knowledge about the city so as to reinforce their decision making (Zarzuela, et al., 2013).

International study administrators must remain aware that the market for international students is a highly competitive market. Many countries are contesting for this market such that any negative changes to a country, such as continued social unrest and disobedience will dent student inflows. National leaders will need to maintain good international rapport to keep the national brand in 'pole position'. Investments in higher education and the attraction of quality scholars in institutions of higher learning will help maintain South Africa as a regional, if not continental drawcard of international students in Africa and beyond. The country could benefit from targeted national and provincial policies that specifically relate to foreign students initiatives. Incentives to attract foreign students would go a long way in establishing South Africa and indeed Cape Town as a favorable educational destination. Intra-Africa educational tourism will speed the transfer of technology and knowledge as well as create unity and inclusiveness within the continent.

Conclusion

Francophone students travel to Cape Town specifically to learn the English language which takes approximately twelve months before they enrol for degree programmes. The ability to speak English and French in the francophone region is considered an asset for opening agency opportunities. All the students did their pre-university language lessons from an institution outside where they are enrolled for their tertiary studies. Perhaps bridging courses in English language and cultural studies at higher learning institutions could help francophone students improve their proficiency in the language and integration into the community.

The decision to relocate to Cape Town is heavily influenced by family. In most cases, students travel to join some family members already resident in Cape Town. Parents actively participate in the decision-making process. They consider the Cape Town city safe and welcoming to internationals. The presence of universities of international repute also influences the decision. They seek tertiary education from South Africa because they perceive it as superior to their home country and internationally recognized. Francophone higher education students who checked the attributes of the city online alluded that they



were attracted to study in Cape Town so as to get the chance to experience life in what is arguably the best city in Africa. The students highlighted that they will recommend to other fellow countrymen interested in studying in Cape Town that it is a viable option. They, however, bemoaned the high student fees, expensive accommodation and difficulties in student permit applications. Some students reported unacceptable and awful incidents of racism and xenophobic attacks which of course tend to blemish what would otherwise be a great idea.

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