

Research Briefing N° 81

Global learning in primary schools

The research focuses on the nature and impact on pupils of global learning in primary schools in England.

Key words: global learning; development education; global citizens; primary education

Key findings

Findings will be of value to teachers and school leaders, teacher educators and policy makers.



- Global learning at primary level is strongly linked to awareness of other cultures and diversity and developing learners as socially-aware, responsible global citizens.
- Global learning enhances pupils' awareness and interactions with diversity and can support mutual respect and responsibility.
- Schools that practice global learning include it in subject knowledge and curriculum content – particularly in geography, personal social and health education (PSHE) and citizenship.
- Subjects perhaps perceived to be too critical, complex or difficult for either / both pupils and teachers are less prevalent in primary schools.
- For most children active engagement in global learning seems to relate to their interactions with link schools overseas, fundraising activities and making small scale lifestyle changes.
- Learning about global issues does not necessarily translate to children's involvement in social action.
- The role of motivated individuals is most important in enabling global learning in schools. Demand on staff time is identified as the biggest inhibitor to global learning.
- The large majority of respondents think global learning has had a positive impact in their school. Benefits to schools include enhanced community cohesion, school ethos and pupil voice.
- The inclusion of global learning in curriculum content, topic-based learning and certain award schemes are perceived to have a positive impact on pupils.
- Staff see global learning having a positive impact on pupils' subject knowledge, skills and values.

What we did

The research, carried out in 2012 by the **IOE's Development Education Research Centre (DERC)**, looks at the nature of global learning (what it is) and how it is practiced in primary schools. It identifies factors which both encourage and limit global learning. It also explores how global learning can impact on children's knowledge, skills and values.

The study was developed in response to a lack of large-scale evidence on the impact of global learning. It was funded through the Department for International Development (DFID).

How we did it

The research responds to three questions:

1. What does global learning look like in practice in primary schools?
2. What are the facilitators and barriers to including global learning in primary schools?
3. How does global learning impact on children's learning in primary schools?

The main method of data collection was an online questionnaire completed by school staff (mainly teachers and school management). 217 responses were received to the questionnaire. Additionally, qualitative data was gathered via interviews with pupils in three schools at different stages of engagement with global learning.

The analysis locates the data alongside previous research and evaluations that explore aspects of global learning practice or impact.

Further information

[Hunt, F. \(2012\). Global learning in primary schools: practices and impacts. DERC Research Paper no. 9. London: IOE.](#)

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