Dear Editors,

Many thanks to the editors who took the time to go through my paper. The comments provided have also aided me in improving the way I write. This something I grateful for. Please my find my responses to these comments.

Regards,

Willie Chinyamurindi (Author)

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| **Reviewer** 1 **Comments** | **How this has been addressed in the paper** |
| Provide data of international students in SA universities using HEMIS data | I thank the reviewer for making me of HEMIS and as a powerful resources I will use for my work going forth. Concerning the change, the following has been added:  South Africa is witnessing a growth in international student enrolment (HEMIS, 2010; 2014). Most notably, the growth appears to be students from the South African Development Community (SADC) region. Figures in 2010 showed students from SADC standing at 46 204 and those students outside SADC to be 19 915.  The references have been added to the final reference list. |
| The question of narrative is used rather loosely in my view. Effectively the study uses focus group discussion from which three narratives of belonging are drawn. This does not mean that the methodology used is narrative. This has to be thought through and revised. | Many thanks for this correction. Based on this, the following changes have been made:   * The title has been changed to read: **NARRATIVES OF A SENSE OF BELONGING: PERSPECTIVES FROM A SAMPLE OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN SOUTH AFRICA** * The abstract – changes have been made as indicated in red. * Reference al through the document, have been changed as per this suggestion. |
| The importance of developing a sense of belonging is not adequately rationalized. Why is it important for students to have a sense of belonging should really be a question to discuss in some detail. | To address this. Some changes have been made. First, a sub-heading has been placed under the main heading literature review to read: ***Sense of a belonging & The academic context and another heading: Sense of a belonging, The academic context & International students***    New references have been added in this section e.g.   * Kolesovs, A., & Melne, I. (2017). Predictors of the sense of belonging to country: Exploring a new model. Proceedings of the International Scientific Conference, Volume 1, 26-27 May 2017. * Lambert, N.M., Stillman, T.F. & Hicks, J.A. (2013). To belong is to matter: Sense of belonging enhances meaning in life. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 39(11), 1418 – 1427. * Mohammad, A. (2010). Relationship between Self-esteem and Academic Achievement amongst Pre-University Students. *Journal of Applied Sciences*, 10 (20): 2474-2477. * Mansour, G., Bahman, B., & Hadis, E. (2011). Factors Affecting Accounting Students’ Performance: The Case of Students at The Islamic Azad University. International Conference on Education and Educational Psychology. Social and Behavioral Sciences, 29, 122 – 128. |
| Very little is said about the issue of language in the context of learning in a second language which happens to be the experience of many international students in HE. If the author searches language and the experience of international students, that would open up a useful set of research which speaks to some of these issues of a sense of belonging. | A section has been added addressing the issues of language as suggested by the reviewer:  Research exists (especially amongst immigrants) detailing the role and influence of language in assisting or hindering a sense of belonging (Martinez-Callaghan & Gill-Lacruz, 2017). The issue of language appears to emerge due to the cultural differences that may be existent especially within a campus setting (Triandis, 2009). In some cases, language then is found to exist as a barrier between international and domestic students that stops them from interacting (e.g. Lin, Chen & Duanmu, 2010; McMahon, 2011; Yao, 2016).  This is to be to be seen within information on factors that affect a sense of belonging in the Literature review. |
| Little is also made of the rural context of this university. I think that would be an opportunity to create an interesting basis for conceptualizing issues of a sense of belonging in HE. We don't know much about this side of things. | I thank the reviewer for this comment. However, upon re-reading the transcripts, my data appears not to mention any aspects of rurality. I can only assume this aspect (important as it is), I mention as a basis of setting the context for the study. I add to the future research section, the need to explore this aspect. The following has been added:  Future research could explore the element of rurality and how it links with the development of a sense of belonging. This may be an interesting basis for conceptualizing issues of a sense of belonging in the South African higher education especially on rural campuses. |
| **Reviewer** 2 **Comments** | **How this has been addressed in the paper** |
| In the abstract – I wrote: “South African universities have witnessed an influx of international students.”  Reviewer 2 wrote: “Such a wording is rather loaded that has been deployed in other contexts of media reporting such as xenophobic violence, in very ideologically unsavoury ways. Please amend or qualify statement with actual statistics.” | I take on board this comment. The word influx is not the right word here. The sentence has been changed to: “South African universities have witnessed an increase in the number of international student enrolment.” |
| Concerning the first finding, the reviewer wrote: “Say some more about this. Is the formation of in and out groups self-formation? In other words, the discussion here and quote provided seem to imply that such categorization and formation is an agentic and active practice that is linear and unidimensional. Are there more intricacies that also indicate this is often organic and two-dimensional?” | I have gone back to the transcripts and re-read them in trying to address this concern. I observe the formation of the in and out group to be something that is deliberate done by international students. The reason for this being due to issues such as a) the xenophobic attacks that have happened in the country and also b) an association with other international students due to the common feature of not being South Africa. These two points could be what the reviewer refers to as “intricacies” that lead to the in and out group self-formation. In addressing this in the paper, I have added some quotes from participants that attribute the formation of the in and out group.  Further, to aid the presentation of the first finding– a main heading: **Narrative One: “Us” and “Them”** and a sub-heading: ***The source of “Us” and “Them”*** are used to aid the logic and flow of ideas. |
| Concerning the second finding:  This narrative discussion encompasses three distinct thematic areas of discussion. Although they speak to challenges experienced by the students, I wonder if a better sub-heading can be used that captures these different themes? This may mean separating them but not necessarily. | Sub-headings have now been incorporated to accompany the second finding to be:   * **Curriculum Transformation** * **Visibility and Involvement of the International Office** |
| Concerning the first factor:  This discussion speaks clearly to issues of curriculum transformation that is also about globalizing knowledge and engaging more continental dialogue. | Based on the suggestion made – the first factor has been changed from: **the need for a curricular that fosters international examples** to **Curriculum Transformation**. |
| **Concerning the role of the international office:**  It would be useful to interrogate and frame critical analysis of how students frame belonging and the roles and functions that they ascribe to university structures. In other words, to what degree should structures within the university assume such a responsibility. I want the author here to critically engage what the idea of the university is and to what extent such an idea is designed to meet the stipulations of belonging of its members. | The responses given by the participants appear to lay responsibility to the international office in addressing issues around such issues. In my view, I cannot integrate this further, as it appears to be views of participants. Yes there is merit in what the reviewer states but it could indicate a lack of awareness by international students of the “university ethic” and also other office structures that may be in existence (outside the international office) to assist with their integration. |
| Concerning generalizability – the reviewer adds - I would not consider this a limitation. True to the tenets and principle of qualitative / narrative enquiry, such an objective is in fact very problematic. | The following has been added: “Based on previous work using the same methodological approach (Chinyamurindi, 2016a, b) qualitative nature of this work usually relies on small sample sizes and do not assume a position of generalizability. This can be flagged as methodological concern.” |
| The limitations sections needs revision. | Revisions have been made to this section as suggested – the author thanks the reviewer for the additional readings suggested. The following has been added:  “Based on previous work using the same methodological approach (e.g. Chinyamurindi, 2016a, b) qualitative nature of this work usually relies on small sample sizes and do not assume a position of generalizability. This can be flagged as methodological concern. However, some limitations exist in the current work. First, a bias existed in how the sample of participating international students were selected. Only those international students most available to take part in the focus group were included in the sample. Second, given participant voice to the role of the university, especially the international office, the views of such office structures (important as they are) are not in included in the study. Albeit these limitations, the aim of this work was to understand the emerging sense-making (Chinyamurindi, 2016a, b) around the experience of being international students and the issues of how a sense of belonging is not only perceived but also experienced. To this end, this research has attempted to do so.” |
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