

# **Belonging and Learning Immersion: Insights from African International Graduate Students in the U.S.**

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## **Abstract**

Higher education institutions benefit significantly from international students who bring diverse perspectives and experiences, fostering innovation and enrichment across various academic fields. However, engaging these students presents a challenge due to their high enrollment numbers and frequently inequitable experiences. Research on their engagement, integration, and motivational factors is still underdeveloped. Specifically, there is limited understanding of how a sense of belonging may predict learning immersion among African international graduate students in the United States.

This study utilizes data from 108 piloted survey of African international students, analyzed through structural equation modeling (SEM), to examine the relationship between a sense of belonging and dimensions of learning immersion. Findings suggest that while a sense of belonging (Mean=4.534) positively impacts academic enjoyment (Mean=3.979), at [S.E =0.333\*] it does not significantly influence intrinsic motivation (Mean=0.2.770) at [S.E = 0.123] and the absorption dimension (Mean=0.2.134) at [S.E = -.83] of immersion. These mixed results highlight crucial implications for researchers and higher education policymakers. It is vital for institutions to understand these students' needs and tailor services to enhance their integration and learning experiences. Drawing on the acculturation stress perspective, the study contends that international students may allocate cognitive resources to managing adaptation challenges, a process that may impede their academic engagement and motivation and as such warrants follow up research. The paper discusses possible intervention areas that higher education institutions can consider to better support these students.

**Keywords:** Sense of Belonging, Learning Immersion, Structural-equation-model (SEM), International Graduate Students