

Fostering a sense of belonging in transnational higher education through the use of an AI empowered enboarder programme in year 1

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A sense of belonging underpins a student's life affecting their academic performance, motivation during the course of their study, and continuing into their career (Dost & Mazzoli Smith, 2023; Pedler et al., 2022). Newly enrolled undergraduate students face variable challenges having to adapt to their learning environment quickly. This project hopes to address this through the development of a scalable, online easy to administer, AI empowered onboarding programme. Using technology enhanced learning, this enboarder programme will aim to reach students at pre-arrival stage and after registering for higher education programmes. A technology enhanced programme, in the form of an application, specifically designed for new students and AI adapted throughout the year will aim to promote a sense of belonging and support students in their engagement with the university before their actual arrival and their studies. The enboarder programme will leverage AI to address students' needs through a personalised approach, selecting options that will consider geographical and cultural optics to support students' unique positions within their university and higher education.

Use of game mechanics will be a thread running through this programme that will help promote engagement with students acquiring awards for completing activities that will enhance their learning and sense of belonging to an academic community. Students will log onto their enboarder programme with tasks to complete based on their accomplishment of previous tasks. AI will select activities based on students' individual answers to develop students' connection to their respective institution so that they begin day one of their university journey enthused, aligned and attuned to the organisation and its values. To determine the frequency of the activities and impact of the programme, listening rooms, photovoice and surveys alongside quantitative data generated by the application will be used as key performance indicators measured against benchmarks. A dashboard of engagement data will inform recommendations for how an enboarder programme, employing pedagogy and academic support can enhance a student's sense of belonging by providing targeted support for students to encourage attendance and positively impact progress, attainment and progression.

References

Dost, G., & Mazzoli Smith, L. (2023). Understanding higher education students' sense of belonging: A qualitative meta-ethnographic analysis. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 47(6), 822–849.

Pedler, M. L., Willis, R., & Nieuwoudt, J. E. (2022). A sense of belonging at university: Student retention, motivation and enjoyment. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 46(3), 397–408