Author’s response to reviews

Title: Exploring the experiences of being an ethnic minority student within an undergraduate nursing education: A qualitative study

Authors:
Sylvi Monika Flateland (sylvi.flateland@ui.no)
Maxine Pryce-Miller (Maxine.Pryce-Miller@uwe.ac.uk)
Anne Valen-Sendstad Skisland (anne.skisland@ui.no)
Anne Flaatten Tønsberg (anne.k.tonsberg@ui.no)
Ulrika Söderhamn (ulrika.soderhamn@ui.no)

Version: 1 Date: 09 May 2019

Author’s response to reviews:

BMC Nursing, ID: NURS-D-19-00015
Exploring the experiences of being an ethnic minority student within an undergraduate nursing education: A qualitative study
Sylvi Monika Flateland, MSc; Maxine Pryce-Miller, PhD; Anne Valen-Sendstad Skisland, PhD; Anne Flaatten Tønsberg, MSc; Ulrika Söderhamn, PhD

The authors are grateful for the comments from the reviewers. We have considered them with care and have made the following amendments to the manuscript and have written comments to editor and reviewers. Changes are marked yellow in the manuscript.

Tarja Heponiemi (Reviewer 1):
This manuscript examines qualitatively experiences of foreign-born students from undergraduate nursing programme. The topic is quite interesting and timely. The manuscript is basically logically written in many places, but there are some serious flaws and shortcomings in the manuscript. The authors should focus much more attention to writing, synthesis of the results and finalizing of this paper.

Thank you, we want to revise the manuscript according to your comments.

I think that one big problem of this paper is that it talks about minority-language speaking students, but the sample includes 8 foreign-born students coming from very different cultural and ethnic background compared to Norway (Africa and Middle East). With this sample I think that the results reflect more widely this migrant status than solely being minority-language-spearker. To get results from being a minority language speaker would demand that sample would include also those minority language speakers that come from countries that are closer to Norway culturally and ethnically such as Nordic and European countries. Thus, I strongly recommend
that authors totally rethink the rationale of the study and revise study questions accordingly. It would be better to talk about migrant students, foreign-born students, visible-minority students or alike. Also results support this given that cultural differences seemed to be important factors here.

Thank you for comments, we want to change to ethnic minority students. We have used the term ethnic minority student throughout the article.

Altogether authors should also pay much more attention to the writing and finalizing of this paper. This paper needs language check by a native English speaker. In some places language is very difficult to read and sentences can be very long and confusing as well as there exist problems with proper tenses. For example, in background 1st sentence is unclear "...minority language studying within different countries, including undergraduate education…and their encounters within..." who's encounters with who? First sentence of the second paragraph of background starting with "Furthermore, identity..." is very difficult to understand. Discussion: "Despite many of the students facing faced traumatic experiences" etc.

The language has been edited. We have rewritten the whole article. See Background and Discussion.

Abstract: Methods could already describe how many interviews were conducted. We have added the number of interviews in the abstract. See Abstract.

Background:
In order to strengthen the rationale of the study, it would be good to give some more information about the situation/system in Norway. For example, it could be useful to provide some number about the amount of migrant/minority -language- speaking nursing students in Norway. Is it typical that these non-native students are integrated to the programs with native students, or are there international nursing programs available for these students as well? How the minority -language- speaking/migrant students are selected to the nursing programs, e.g. is there some language test they need to accomplish? Are any of the education given in English or in other language that Norwegian?

In the background there are given some more information about the nurse education system in Norway. See Background

Background is also rather confusing, given that authors mix minority speakers, students with dark skin etc, and it is difficult to know who authors are talking about in different places. Thus, I suggest that authors rewrite background totally and make it clearer and more logical.

We have rewritten the Background and hope it is clearer and more logical. See Background.

Methods:
Recruitment of participants: I suggest that authors rewrite also sample section, given that for me it was rather difficult to understand. More information is needed. For example, in how many places are this kind of education given in Norway and how many students altogether. How many of these are migrants (according to this paper it seems that only 11 migrant students in Norway 3rd grade with finished bachelors thesis, is this correct?). From how many undergraduate programs? Much more information is definitely needed from this undergraduate system in
Norway, such as where is this education given etc. Moreover, were all students from one educational unit/nursing school or all over the country? Some reasoning could be provided for the inclusion criteria, e.g. why third year students (and not for example students in different phases of their studies?) and why specifically those who had finished their thesis?
We do not have any special kind of nursing programme given to migrants. They follow a normal programme as native-born students in Norway.
The reason why we choose third years students was that they have experiences from the whole programme.
We have rewritten sample section. See Recruitment and sample.

Design: You describe that qualitative approach was chosen to gain an in-depth insight into the subjective experiences of students. Whether you can get an in-depth insight with semi-structured interviews depends on the type of questions that were asked, which is not described in the manuscript. The structure of the interview should be added as a table. Also, were some prompt questions asked or were participants free to lead the discussion and elaborate in the way the preferred?
The questions were open-ended and thereby the students could speak open and freely about their experiences.
We have in the text described the questions and following-up questions and therefor a table is not necessary. See Design and Data collection.

Data collection: As said earlier, some examples could be added about the questions that were asked in interviews.
We have described the questions. See Data collection.

Analysis: To increase the transparency of the analysis, you could add information about 1) what were seen as meaning unit (e.g. words? phrases? whole description of some situation?) 2) how many meaning units/codes in total emerged from the data and 3) how the trustworthiness of the analysis was ensured; How the codes and categories were verified and how the underlying meaning behind the categories (latent analysis) was determined?
We have added new text and hope that the analysis is clearer. See Analyses.

Discussion:
Line 54: I think that the sentence starting with "This confirms that minority -language- speaking students are highly dedicated.." is quite a strong statement for a qualitative study.
The reorganised and rewritten the discussion section. The sentence is removed. See Discussion.

Line 21: "In this way, the nursing programme was more challenging for these students than for native students." Since there's was no comparison between the minority -language- speaking and native student, such conclusion can't really be made. And as you write later, lack of certain role models can also be a problem for native students. This is a good point and can be the case also with other few findings of this study. E.g. the transition from high school to university, negative experiences related to clinical practice and challenges in the supervisory relationships and importance of peer-support during studies and when transitioning into working life.
We have rewritten the discussion section. See Discussion.
Discussion about the language skills of minority-language-speaking/migrant students is relevant. As I mentioned earlier, some discussion could be added about how the language skills are checked in the student selection (or are they?) before starting the program. We have written about language skills and tests in the background and discussed language challenges.

See Background and Discussion.

Implications for nursing education practice
You write that cooperation between universities and clinical practices should be more aligned. This makes the reader to wonder what is the current role of university/nurse educators in the clinical practice of nursing students in your country. And also, what is the role and responsibility of nurse educators in integrating minority-language-speaking/migrant students to the class? Based on the findings it seems that the role of the nurse educator was not that central (except for the support that was obtained for academic writing), since participants mostly expressed the need to get support (e.g. mentoring) from other students. This could be discussed in the 'Discussion' section. We have written about the cooperation between university and practice. There are no guidelines for following up foreign-born students in another way than other students.

We have added some new text in the background, discussion, implications for nursing education practice and conclusion. See Background, Discussion, Implications for nursing education practice and Conclusion.

In the end of the chapter it's not clear who's cultural competence should be improved?
We have rewritten the sentence. See Implications for nursing education practice.

Geraldine Lee, PhD, BSc (Reviewer 2):
The issue of a multiculturalism is extremely relevant and this includes within university and in the nursing profession.
We agree.

I have concerns about this paper for the following reasons:
The authors state that anonymity of the participants was applied but yet, within table 1, there is a table with gender, age and birth place and given the paper comes from a named school of nursing, the participants would be clearly identifiable.
We have removed the table and added the information in the text anonymous. See Recruitment and sample.

My second concern is that the interviews were undertaken by an academic who is involved in the students' programmes and this could be seen as coercion. Given the comments that the students make, it could be interpreted that they feel pressured into participating as they are potentially reliant on academics to pass their degree and they may have been placed in an awkward position and felt they had to participate. Given that they reported they were feeling isolated, this to me, is a major issue with this paper.
The students had fulfilled all exams and we have added new texts about it. We did not experience that the students were pressed to participate in the study. See Recruitment and sample and Strength and limitations.

Many of the feelings around placement etc suggest there was either conscious bias or overt racism but the authors completely ignore the issue and given the current rise in anti-immigrant feeling, this paper could have been a really good opportunity to discuss the issues around multiculturalism but does not. This is disappointing.

A major methodological flaw is that there was no control group - it would be really useful to see what themes were common amongst other nursing students and what were their perceptions? We have discussed this.

A control group is not usual in a qualitative study. The aim of this study was to obtain the eight students’ experiences through the three years in a nursing programme. See Discussion.

Conscious bias is an important concept but this is not addressed in the paper. See above. See Discussion.

What processes are in place when students face issues with patients who refuse to engage with them in what appears to be racism (students do mention their skin color so there is no mis-interpreting this).

We have added new text in the discussion. See Discussion.

The role of the university in preparing students for their programmes and providing academic support is not reported. What processes are in place for students where there are academic needs?

What processes are in place where students state that other students don't engage with them?

How does the academic manage this in the classroom? Surely they would notice this whilst teaching and yet, there is no mention of how academics as the education providers address this. We hope we have discussed it satisfying. We think it is important to start with the academics and improve their cultural knowledge. See Discussion.

The sample size is too small and there are some comments which are unsupported - page 2 - the feelings of crisis in migrants, there is adequate evidence that young adults have higher rates of depression and anxiety than previous generation but this is not addressed. Is there evidence that these students had ‘feelings in crisis’.

It is not clear if these findings would not be common in other students and this is not addressed.

It is a limitation that the sample size is small. See Strength and limitations.

We have no evidence that the students had feeling of crises. See Strength and limitations.

There are many unsupported statements about the students - is there evidence that the students have ‘faced traumatic experiences’?

We have added more examples told by the students. See Findings.

With their daily demands of family and career, how can it be determined that these students have higher rates than other students when this was not examined?

We have not written about higher rates. In the findings the students’ experiences are described. See Findings.
I am not sure why alcohol and drinking was brought up? Are you suggesting that all of these students are Muslims? It is not clear why this is in the paper unless you are referring to culture in Norway, etc and cultural integration.
It was the students’ experiences, but they did not speak about religion.