Self-Efficacy Reduces Impediments to Classroom Discussion for International Students: Fear, Embarrassment, Social Isolation, Judgment, and Discrimination

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Abstract

Approximately one million international students were enrolled at U.S. universities in the academic year 2015–2016, and the number has been steadily rising since. Although these students aim to increase intercultural communication skills, international knowledge, and critical thinking skills, some international students experience difficulty participating in class discussion. Several studies have revealed a range of obstacles to full participation in in-class discussions, including language, cultural differences, academic differences, and social isolation. Among these barriers, some studies have identified emotional factors that significantly affect learning. This study was an in-depth exploration of the adverse emotional factors that impede discussion participation. Using a qualitative approach, twenty-three international students at one university were interviewed, and their responses analyzed. Students reported that fear, embarrassment, social isolation, judgment and discrimination were barriers to participation. These findings are discussed in the context of a framework for reducing negative emotional states, employing self-efficacy theory. This framework was applied to the interview results and the author's observation of international students' behavior in dormitories and university offices. These findings suggest a possible intervention approach for educators to help international students express themselves in the classroom.

Keywords: international students; classroom discussion; negative emotions; self-efficacy theory; educators' intervention.

Introduction

Approximately one million international students were enrolled in U.S. institutions of higher education in the academic year 2015–2016 (*Education US*A, 2016). International students typically aim to increase their intercultural communication skills, global knowledge, and critical thinking skills through discussion and international education (Urban & Palmer, 2014). In U.S. classrooms, international students provide a number of benefits, including: (a) increasing the diversity in educational settings, and (b) contributing new perspectives to discussions in the classrooms (Lee & Rice, 2007). Class discussion is considered one of the best ways to foster educational growth, because individuals can enhance their ideas through collaboration with others. This exposure heightens mutual understanding and motivates students to continue learning. Educators can harness pedagogical discussion techniques in diverse classrooms (Brookfield, & Preskill, 2012). In addition, from an economic viewpoint, international students contributed $35.8 billion to the U.S. economy in the academic year 2015–2016 (Institute of International Education, 2015).

While the internationalization of American higher education institutions is mutually beneficial for international students and domestic students, some international students face a number of communication/discussion problems. Lobo and Gurney (2014) reported that while international students' expectations of course components and teaching materials were largely met within U.S. universities, many international students struggled with an expectation of in-class discussion in increasingly multicultural classrooms. Specifically, a large number of international students were reported to be unable to contribute in communication-related activities. One study reported that some international students may not be accustomed to in-class participation, and may be used to more teacher-centered classroom environments in their home countries (Karuppan & Barari, 2011). Educators are often apprehensive about these students' lower levels of class participation and the effect on their learning (Kim, 2012). Some researchers have attempted to identify the causes of international students' infrequent communication within intercultural classrooms, finding that they commonly encounter cultural adjustment, social isolation, and academic challenges including communication with professors, classmates, and staff, as well as confronting culturally different ways of thinking and doing in the US (Wu, Garza, & Guzman, 2015).

Much of the research on international students has examined cultural differences or differences in learning styles between domestic and international students (Welikala, 2015). To expand the existing literature on international students' in-class discussion, the present study focuses on negative emotional factors as impediments to participation in discussion. Negative emotions such as fear of making language mistakes can erode individuals' abilities to make decisions (Kligyte, Connelly, Thiel, & Devenport, 2013). Weisfeld (2014) reported that individuals sometimes respond uncomfortably or inappropriately when another person commits a minor linguistic mistake; consequently, embarrassment is often created and exacerbated by others' laughter or smiling. This emotional agitation is associated with negative impacts on self-esteem.

The current study used a qualitative approach, interviewing 23 international students at one university and analyzing their responses. In-depth emotional factors were predicted to function as impediments to discussion participation. If adverse emotional factors negatively impact on international students' classroom discussion, there may be a need to reduce the levels of these emotions. Employing self-efficacy theory as a theoretical lens may be useful for reducing impediments and improving expressiveness. Thus, the current study sought to discern which

adverse emotional factors are impediments for international students to participate in classroom discussion, and to find a way to reduce their impact.

Literature Review

U.S. classrooms include students from a variety of backgrounds in both culture and language. However, it has been observed that most international students exhibit a lack of participation in class discussion, with adverse impacts on their academic performance (Kim, 2012). International students in the U.S. face cultural adjustment, social isolation, and academic challenges, including communication with professors and classmates (Wu, Garza, & Guzman, 2015). International students with a lower level of English proficiency often experience difficulties in class participation. In addition, international students often struggle with cultural differences, including social expectations of interaction, educational values, and teacher-centered pedagogies (Bista, 2012). Moreover, some international students spend more than 5 hours per day studying. This tendency to perfectionism can result in creating an unbalanced environment in which to learn. If perfectionism is channeled in a healthy and positive way, the student can feel fulfillment in learning. However, maladaptive perfectionism can create problematic situations, including constant concerns about making mistakes, and self-doubt in learning and the associated perceived expectations (Hamamura & Laird, 2014).

Fear and embarrassment have been found to contribute to international students' reticence to engage in in-class discussion. Typical fears of international students include making mistakes, experiencing shame, and uncertainty. Previous research demonstrated that the fear of making language mistakes was most related to overall fears of failure for international students (Conroy, 2004). A major drawback of the fear of making mistakes is that fearful emotions erode individuals' ability to make decisions, and fear of making language mistakes can impede individuals' thoughts and actions (Kligyte et al., 2013). The fear of failure generates shame and embarrassment and involves feelings of inability (Sagar & Stoeber, 2009). Weisfeld (2014) found that some individuals responded uncomfortably or inappropriately when another person committed a minor or unusual linguistic mistake; subsequently, embarrassment was often created and exacerbated by others' laughter or smiling. This emotional perturbation included negative self-respect and was sometimes accompanied by a slumped posture, gaze avoidance, and blushing. Meanwhile, Uphill, Groom, and Jones (2014) reported that among the emotions of anger, apprehensiveness, embarrassment, and happiness, embarrassment significantly predicted increased unsuccessful involvement.

International students commonly have perceptions of social isolation and discrimination. Social isolation is derived from the perception of a person as an outsider. A segment of domestic students perceive individuals as "others" or members of an outgroup, or, alternatively, a sequence of overlapping outgroups based on features such as nationality, their status as second language speakers, cultural framework, and work orientation. The "other" is related to the label "international student" (Harrison & Peacock, 2010). Although international students provide substantial benefits to universities, a considerable number of international students experience prejudice and discrimination from American classmates (Charles-Toussaint & Crowson, 2010). Wadsworth, Hecht, and Jung (2008) described how discrimination negatively transforms international students' learning experiences in an educational environment. American students may have a bias towards international students regarding English skills, which can be interpreted as discrimination against international students. International students' discriminatory experiences symbolize a rejection by others, which may intensify their perception of being considered an outsider who is unwanted by others (Wang, Wong, & Chu-

chun, 2012). Moreover, because international students who perceive discrimination from their classmates tend to have detrimental outcomes, their educational dissatisfaction may be one of the adverse consequences (Wadsworth, Hecht, & Jung, 2008).

Self-efficacy theory may be a useful framework for developing approaches to reduce negative emotions, by elevating self-efficacy. According to self-efficacy theory, the perception of efficacy is influenced by four factors: (1) experience of mastery that has led to prior successes can raise self-efficacy, because people are more likely to believe they can succeed at new tasks, (2) vicarious experience, observing someone who is similar to themselves successfully achieving something, (3) verbal persuasion and encouragement by others to increase the confidence that they can accomplish tasks, and (4) somatic and emotional states involving stress, anxiety, and fear can adversely affect self-efficacy, and can cause failure or inability; in contrast, relaxation techniques and positive self-talk can reduce negative emotional states (Bandura, 1994).

Applying the above four factors in a classroom setting, educators can help international students express themselves by providing them with clear opportunities. This can increase the likelihood of a successful experience, which can induce subsequent success. When an educator uses verbal persuasion and praises an international student's expressiveness, they may feel more confident in classroom discussion. When an international student observes other international students' learning achievements, they may have a positive perception of their own ability to accomplish the same work. When an international student is able to overcome initial adverse emotional factors and develop a positive mindset, other international students facing negative emotional factors may be encouraged to develop similarly positive mindsets.

Based on the literature reviewed above, the present study investigated the emotional factors impeding international students' participation in the classroom. These theoretical foundations suggest that international students may be able to raise their efficacy and overcome adverse emotions, and that educators may be able to help reduce the negative impact of these factors by assisting international students using self-efficacy theory.

Methods

Participants

The target participants were international students at a U.S. university. In line with Creswell (2013), in the current study, international students of various ages, nationalities, and genders were recruited, as well as those with different length of time at the institution. There were no restrictions based on race and gender in the sampling. However, participants were required to be international students who used English as a second language. I conducted 23 individual interviews with volunteers from 15 different countries in the library of the university. The 15 countries included: Brazil and Venezuela in South America; Mexico in Central America; Haiti in the West Indian Islands; Vietnam, Korea, Sri Lanka, Japan, Nepal and Malaysia in Asia; Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan in the Middle East; and Macedonia, Spain and Germany in Europe. Four Saudi Arabian students, three Japanese students, two Venezuelan students, two German students, and two Brazilian students volunteered to take part in the study. Thus, five countries in the sample were represented by more than one participant. For the remaining 10 countries, one student from each country took part (See Appendix).

The recruiting processes followed four phases in a 3-month period from October to December 2014. The four phases included: (a) random samples via email in which every member of international students has an equal opportunity to be interviewed for participation in the study (Baxter & Babbie, 2004); (b) flyers delivered to locations in which international students gathered, such as the university dormitory and a university office; (c) personal contact with potential participants within courses, and assistance from the university faculty to identify potential participants, and (d) the offer of a participation incentive by providing a cup of coffee for interviewees.

In qualitative methods, researchers collect data until saturation has been attained. According to Baxter and Babbie (2004, p. 319), "Saturation means that you have reached the point where your data are repetitive. Saturation occurs when additional data do not add additional insights". In many types of quantitative research, theoretical saturation is considered to occur with around 20–25 interviewees (Creswell, 2013). In the present study, 23 individual interviews were conducted, producing 421 double-spaced pages of transcripts.

Data Collection

International students volunteered via email to participate in this project. Each participant was sent an Excel table in which the date and time inputs were set up so that they could insert check marks in the boxes to indicate the times at which they were available to be interviewed. At the bottom of the Excel table, participants were instructed to report their gender, nationality, the length of time learning at the university, and major. The interviews were scheduled, and confirmation of the scheduled date, time, and place was emailed to each participant. The interviews began on October 5 and ended on December 23, 2014.

Before the interviews, informed consent was obtained, and participants were instructed that they could withdraw at any time and that their confidentiality would be secured, based on the Institutional Review Board guidelines. Audio was recorded during the interviews, and the recordings ranged from 30 to 73 minutes in duration. Each interview was transcribed verbatim.

International students' behavior and conversations were observed at the "Cultural Day Parties" held at the university dormitory (three times), at the President's Open House (once), and at a party for international students held at a university office (once). Notes about students' behaviors and conversations were recorded in a notebook.

Qualitative Method

In the interviews, it was important to establish relationships with international students, to enable understanding of implicit and explicit meanings in each participant's responses and behaviors. A qualitative approach enables researchers to comprehend the meanings and actions of each participant by focusing attention on their communicative acts (Creswell, 2013). Interpretive and inductive approaches allow researchers to study the intentions, meanings, and actions of the participants directly from the data, rather than from predetermined hypotheses (Charmaz, 2005). For these reasons, a qualitative approach was selected as the preferred methodology in the current study, and semi-structured interviews were employed. Following the method described by Baxter and Babbie (2004), the semi-structured interview consisted of a list of open-ended questions. The use of open-ended questions encouraged interviewees to use their own words, and provided freedom to the interviewer in terms of order and the use of alternative language. Semi-structured interviews have two major benefits. First, researchers

can focus on gaps in information. Second, researchers can compare participants' responses and discern common themes in their conversations by summarizing the frequencies of their responses. In the current study, semi-structured interviews provided a way of comparing interviewees' responses and commonalities, enabling emerging themes to be identified.

Coding and Data Analysis

To analyze the transcribed interviews, I conducted analysis of the qualitative data, according to Chamaz's (2005) coding method: (1) in vivo coding, (2) sub-focus coding, and (3) focus coding. In the in vivo coding, I checked and circled the words line by line that I interpreted as obstacles to expression, referring to the in vivo codes. After choosing the in vivo codes of the 23 interview transcripts, all of the codes were input into the Excel table, which totaled 85 in vivo codes.

In vivo coding involves naming each data in line, enabling researchers to consider the data from a range of perspectives that may differ from participants' interpretations. In sub-focus coding, I organized similar in vivo codes together, classified them in the Excel worksheet, and named subthemes, such as social isolation, shallow expression, or discrimination. The subthemes amounted to 39 items. Subsequently, I analyzed the 39 subthemes, focus-coded them into an over-arching theme, "Emotional Factors." Following this procedure, I reduced 39 subthemes into three. The components of the themes were fear, embarrassment, social isolation/judgmental discrimination, which represented in-depth emotional factors. Figure 1 illustrates the layers of the codes. Data analysis in qualitative research typically utilizes three analysis strategies: preparing and organizing data, reducing the data into themes through a process of coding and condensing the codes, and finally representing the data in figures, tables, or a discussion (Creswell, 2013). The present study used these three recommended qualitative data analysis strategies.
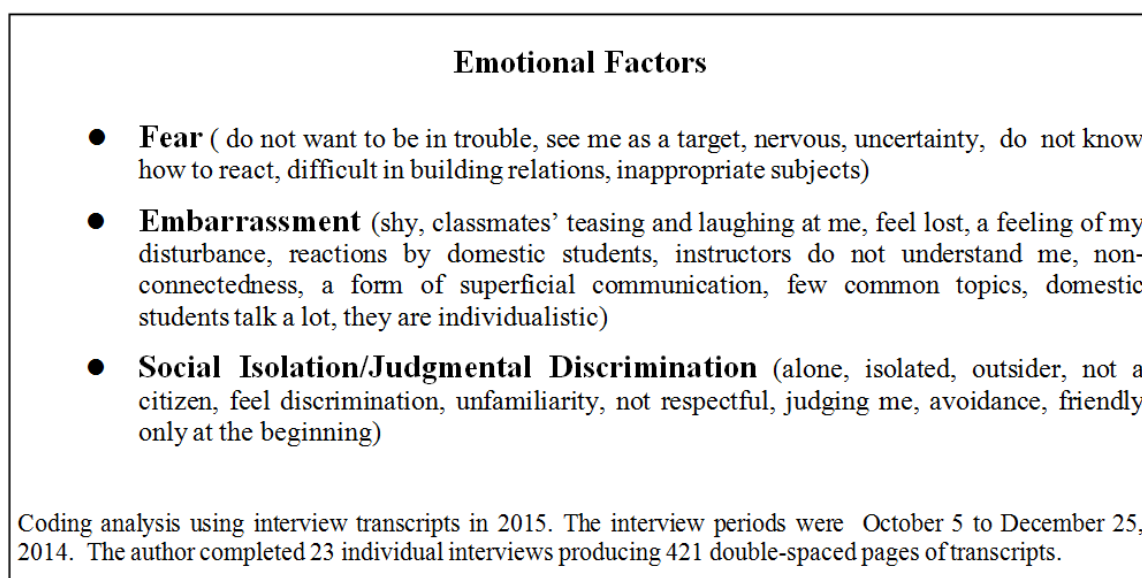

Emotional Factors

- **Fear** (do not want to be in trouble, see me as a target, nervous, uncertainty, do not know how to react, difficult in building relations, inappropriate subjects)

- **Embarrassment** (shy, classmates' teasing and laughing at me, feel lost, a feeling of my disturbance, reactions by domestic students, instructors do not understand me, non-connectedness, a form of superficial communication, few common topics, domestic students talk a lot, they are individualistic)

- **Social Isolation/Judgmental Discrimination** (alone, isolated, outsider, not a citizen, feel discrimination, unfamiliarity, not respectful, judging me, avoidance, friendly only at the beginning)

Coding analysis using interview transcripts in 2015. The interview periods were October 5 to December 25, 2014. The author completed 23 individual interviews producing 421 double-spaced pages of transcripts.

Figure 1: Codes representing emotional factors of less expressiveness.

Fear

Participants reported that they were often embarrassed and fearful of making language mistakes or giving responses that are beside the point. They reported being embarrassed when they made mistakes, as other students often reacted by laughing, even if the laughter was not mean-spirited. This mix of embarrassment and fear resulted in students keeping to themselves, reducing expressiveness, and evading social interaction with their classmates. All participants except one expressed emotions of fear and embarrassment.

James mentioned the fear of making mistakes in front of his classmates, such as giving a wrong answer, and a mixture of feelings about being an outsider. Because he did not want to give an incorrect answer resulting in his classmates laughing at his linguistic mistakes, he kept quiet. Moreover, he felt that his classmates should understand that he came from a different country and may face language challenges.

> Making language mistakes is the biggest problem. I am scared of saying something in the classroom. I want to say the right thing. I don't want them to laugh at my language mistakes… I am the only international student, an outsider, and the others are all local students, so I want to tell the right thing so that they can understand me. I don't want to be a wrong person or a wrongly answered person… They should understand that I am coming from a different culture from a different part of the world where accent is obviously different and the writing is going to be different as well. (James)

James made this statement with a disappointing facial expression and a low tone of voice. However, when James was talking about his classmates' laughter at his language mistakes, he raised his voice. When he stated that he wanted his classmates to understand that he is from another country, I sensed his strong desire for his classmates to empathize with his circumstances within the classroom.

Kate also described a sense of frightfulness during group discussion, because her classmates corrected her language mistakes, although she felt her English was not bad. Over time, Kate entered contexts in which she was frightened that she would not understand what her classmates were discussing. Kate's fear was increased when her classmates corrected her mistakes. In the interview, Kate initially spoke English quickly, then began speaking even faster about this fearful situation, with more gesturing. This behavior revealed Kate's strong emotional experience of fear, reduced confidence, and sadness. Another participant, Ariel, felt a strong sense of fear/embarrassment of being laughed at after giving a wrong answer, which made her lose confidence in herself. In the first semester, Ariel was highly motivated, but gradually became disappointed and remained silent within the classroom. Ariel looked exasperated then discouraged when she was describing her classmates laughing at her language mistakes.

Embarrassment

Jordan mentioned that he was laughed at for his accent or incorrect answers, and began to avoid participating in class discussion.

> I never ever raised my hand and said anything in class because I got embarrassed of my accent so saying something wrong. In my first semester at the university, I

was doing presentation and then I said a word different and my classmates laughed. It was so embarrassing. So after that, I was like, not raising my hand and didn't say anything at all in discussion because if I say something, everyone laughs again. But with time it gets better. At the time, I was really embarrassed because I didn't really understand why they were laughing. (Jordan)

Although he reported that the situation was improving, Jordan shrugged his shoulders and looked down. This behavior appeared to suggest that Jordan was not able to find any solutions that he was satisfied with. In the interview, Jordan was passionately speaking in a high pitch, emphasizing his emotional appeal regarding his classmates laughing at his accent or incorrect answer. His use of the term "everyone" in the phrase "…if I say something, everyone laughs again" was indicative of his experience of social isolation.

Roy reported losing confidence speaking English in class discussion, because every time he spoke English he made language mistakes. Roy did not want to be embarrassed within the classroom. Professors did not ask for Roy's opinions, so Roy said that he did not have any experience in the classroom. The professors realized that Roy did not want to be embarrassed in the classroom, which led the professors to be hesitant to ask him to express his opinions. Roy described this context with a negative facial expression, and expressed that he was alone in the classroom. Meanwhile, Meryl reported that her classmates proceeded with the discussion at a very fast pace, so she asked them to explain the content of the conversation. Her classmates, however, explained very quickly, in a way that was still difficult for her to understand. Meryl was very embarrassed, and felt lost. Finally, Meryl said that her classmates were not able to understand the extent to which she was not able to understand them, implying that she desired for her classmates to understand her circumstances.

Perceptions of Social Isolation/Judgmental Discrimination

Participants expressed that they were eager to share opinions through fruitful discussion. Some students, however, perceived judgment and discrimination by domestic classmates, especially toward their English skills. Such perception of judgment and discrimination led to international students' dissatisfaction with their learning.

Tom felt that his classmates were judgmental when he asked questions within the classroom, and he recognized their judgmental facial expressions. Subsequently, Tom avoided speaking up within the classroom.

Some students can be very judgmental to my talking, my accent. They think why I am asking to them. I see some students can be very judgmental when I ask questions, like American students really do. They look at me like, I'm damn, I don't know. So, I don't ask in the classroom. His or her facial expressions can tell obviously, and it's not that hard to tell if somebody's judgmental. (Tom)

In the interview, Tom seemed to let off his emotions, articulately describing his classmates' judgment, and blaming them in a sharp tone. Tom's behavior implied the current state of his reduced expression and sense of social isolation within the classroom. The last sentence "You can tell obviously, it's not that hard to tell if somebody's judgmental." emphasized his feelings of social isolation derived from his classmates' inappropriate responses.

Demi reported that her classmates judged her because she made mistakes when expressing herself in English. Consequently, Demi had a strong fear of her classmates' judgment when she expressed her opinions. Demi said she was nervous, unable to open her mouth, and felt completely paralyzed. Demi reported she did not speak English because her classmates would judge her English skills. She continued to explain that English was not her first language and it was natural to make language mistakes. Given that Demi is generally a student with a cheerful sprit, and that she did not have any difficulty expressing herself in her country, her reticence indicated how strongly she perceived judgment from her classmates. In the meantime, Ariel felt a strong perception that she was a foreigner after she gave an off-topic response and was laughed at by her classmates. Ariel did not want to be in this situation, and kept silent in the classroom. Ariel said she was the only international student and non-citizen in her class, and described her negative perception that her classmates viewed her as a target in the classroom. In the interview, Ariel articulately spoke in a loud voice, sometimes in a dispirited tone of voice, and her perception of being the only international student was accompanied by sighing. Her behavior and negative facial expressions indicated that she felt she could not do anything other than remain silent in the classroom.

In summary, some international students felt social isolation and avoided communication. These obstacles have serious negative impacts on communication for international students. The themes underlying these perceptions influenced their expression within the classroom. Moreover, the results indicated that international students experienced fear, embarrassment, perception of social isolation and discrimination in classroom discussions at a tertiary education institute, even though they enrolled because of a desire to learn critical thinking and international communication skills through classroom discussions.

Experience of Mastery and Verbal Encouragement from Professors and Classmates

Some international students continued to hold adverse emotions and became increasingly reticent within the classroom, even though some had attended the university for 3 or 4 years. On the other hand, a small percentage of the participants came to embrace positive states of mind over time. This change directed them toward holding more efficacious mindsets, providing confidence in expressing themselves and generating perceptions of fulfillment and enjoyment about participating in discussions. Some students reported a range of successful experiences, as described below.

Susan was initially silent in the classroom, and completely avoided speaking. She had strong opinions and wanted to express herself but felt that she did not have an adequate vocabulary and was afraid to speak up. However, when she had an opportunity to give a presentation about her country's traditions, food, how people spend their vacations, and how people greet each other, her classmates became interested in her culture. Susan discussed her culture with her classmates, and they provided feedback and discussion. She was able to see on her classmates' faces that they were enjoying her presentation. Even if Susan was unable to find the correct word during the discussion, she would attempt to find another similar word. This change in her emotional state increased her confidence.

When Donald answered a question in the classroom, he saw that most of his classmates did not understand what he was trying to say, which at first made him greatly embarrassed. He felt further embarrassment when attempting to answer subsequent questions. However, he learned that his professor enjoyed having international students in the class when the professor told the class that international students were able to provide new perspectives and different ideas to

those of American students. Subsequently, Donald began to feel that his contributions could improve classroom discussion. One day, Donald's professor asked the class about a project that would plan to make more parking lots. Most of the American classmates said that they would create more parking lots in various locations. In contrast, Donald said that people could better utilize public transportation instead of using cars, thus using parking lots less often, which could lead to more free parking spaces. Donald's opinion was highly appraised by his professor and classmates.

Ashton took a drawing class, in which each student presented their drawing. The other students asked each presenter questions about their drawing, such as the intention behind the drawing, and what was implied by each color. After the question and answer session, the class had a critique hour, regarding design, color, lines, images, and implications. Ashton was extremely nervous thinking about how his teacher and the other students would evaluate his work. Moreover, Ashton was afraid of speaking English, because he wondered whether he would be able to answer their questions and convey what he wanted to express. These feelings often occurred during class discussion. In one class, Ashton had already written notes about his critique at his apartment beforehand. Ashton presented the critique, based on his writing. He described the relationships between color and emotion in his work, noticing that some classmates nodded their heads and seemed to deeply understand his critique. Ashton felt that he was able to express what he intended to convey about the meaning of his drawing, and it was easy for others to understand him when he wrote about the meaning of his work beforehand.

Encouragement by Other International Students' Vicarious Experiences

The International Program Office at the university provides opportunities for international students to gather, such as in the President's House, university dormitories, and a university office. This encourages international students to exchange information about academic learning and adjustment to life in the U.S. The author visited these locations, to observe international students' behaviors, and listen to conversations among them. International students were highly talkative and responsive, regardless of differences in nationality. At an event called the "Cultural Day Party" held for domestic and international students at the dormitory, students were even more open-minded and socially interactive, educating each other about their cultures, education, sightseeing spots, and food through a presentation by a representative of each country. Recognizing others' fulfillment could lead to having vicarious experiences that refers to learning by observing someone similar to oneself doing successfully. The following conversations were among those at the dormitory.

Carlos was asked about his government providing money to learn for students to study in the U.S. Carlos explained that an international student who obtained a grade-point average (GPA) above 3.5 was eligible to receive financial support. Fortunately, Carlos achieved a GPA of 3.7 each semester, so his government provided $3,000 at the end of each semester. The other international students in the conversation were very interested in the amount of money and Carlos' achievements, telling him that he obtained superb grades and was from an immensely affluent country.

Two international students praised Emily's presentation about her culture. Presentations were held twice a month as an event at the "Cultural Day Party." Emily told two international students about her experience of building confidence giving presentations. At university in her home country, Emily had given at least 21 presentations per semester. The international students were excited about her experience, commenting that this was an impressive number

of presentations, and asking what she had learned as a result. Emily told them that she learned to always face the audience, and avoided looking at the Power Point slides.

Donald and several international students sitting around him mutually asked and answered questions about how they were engaging in their learning. Donald said that he had more assignments than at university in his home country, but he continued trying his best, and was achieving good grades. The other students said they managed to complete their assignments, but it was sometimes difficult to finish every assignment, even with their best efforts. Donald explained that he scheduled his time for assignments and exams each week. The other students were very interested in Donald's methods of learning.

The international students sitting around Carlos, Emily, and Donald were excited and inspired by their successful learning experiences, expressing admiration and bright facial expressions. Valuable information about learning situations was exchanged through interactions that were enlivened by informal and responsive communication.

Although the author did not hear conversation about classroom discussions at these locations, it was obvious from listeners' bright facial expressions that the international students with successful experiences heightened the other students' motivation to learn at the university.

Emotional States

The emotional states of some international students regarding self expression changed from negative to positive mindsets over time. These students stopped worrying about their accents, grammatical mistakes, incorrect responses, and cultural differences. Some expressed the belief that making language mistakes was natural for international students, and it was important to make themselves understood. Students expressed that speaking up in the classroom made an individual confident even if they made language mistakes, and noted that individuals can learn different perspectives from classroom discussion.

Jordan was initially embarrassed about other students laughing at his accent and incorrect responses. Over time, Jordan believed that his English would improve, and that this would happen to everyone. Jordan considered that the most important thing was whether he understood his professor and his classmates, and whether they understood what he expressed, not whether his sentences were grammatically incorrect, or whether his classmates talked about his accent or inappropriate responses. Although Jordan still had language barriers regarding pronunciation, grammar, and structure, he did not pay undue attention to them. Jordan assumed that there would be continuous improvement. Moreover, Jordan felt that it was beneficial to participate in discussions and get different perspectives in the classroom.

When Robert expressed himself, he noticed his classmates talking about his accent, but it did not matter to him. Rather, Robert considered that speaking up about his opinions in classroom discussions made him confident because he was able to engage in the course, understand it better, and learn from discussions. With regard to cultural differences, Robert thought that it was natural for cultures to be different, and he was able to understand the differences.

Julia sometimes misunderstood what her professor asked the class and gave incorrect answers, which led her to become less expressive in the classroom. Julia, however, considered that she came to the U.S. to study, and she did not want to lose the opportunity to learn. Unless Julia participated in discussions and ask questions, she would not be able to learn from the class.

Thus, Julia asked her professor to write the important points on the blackboard so that she could participate in discussions. Although Julia once considered that cultural differences in discussions might affect her ability to express herself in the classroom, she believed that, if she ascribed her self-expression to her culture, she would be less able to achieve as an international student. Unless Julia stepped beyond her culture, her only option would be to go back to her country, she said.

Gil did not understand technical terms and had to ask about the meaning of words that were relatively simple for domestic students, such as "agenda". In addition, Gil was unable to understand what her professor said if they spoke too quickly. Thus, when she first got to the university, Gil was very uncomfortable with her English. She was, however, aware that this experience was natural. When Gil misunderstood something, her professor and classmates corrected her mistakes. However, she thought this happened to everyone. Gil had heard some of her friends commenting that they were sometimes uncomfortable in classrooms because they did not want to make mistakes in English or be made fun of for their accents. Gil felt that students had those thoughts were because they were afraid to participate in classroom discussions, and believed they should be able to be more involved in the class and learn from participation. Gil stressed that everyone makes mistakes, even in their own language.

Jordan, Robert, Julia, and Gil enthusiastically described their changed beliefs. Obviously, their positive emotional states emerged from their strong desire to absorb different viewpoints and international knowledge and from a shared idea that making mistakes is natural. Moreover, they felt strongly that international students came to the U.S. from their countries to learn, and this should not be disrupted. These changes in their thoughts contributed to their ability to embrace positive emotional states and mindsets.

Discussion

The results revealed several in-depth emotional factors that were impediments to participation in class discussion for international students, which are supported by the literature (Conroy, 2004; Kligyte et al., 2013; Saga & Stober, 2009; Weisfield, 2014; Uphill et al., 2014; Harrison & Peacock, 2010; Wadsworth et al., 2008; Wang et al., 2012): (1) fear of making language mistakes, (2) embarrassment when an international student was laughed at for their language mistakes or incorrect responses, and (3) perceptions of social isolation, judgment or discrimination within the classroom resulting from English language ability, or being the only international student or non-citizen in a classroom. The literature has provided evidence that such adverse emotional states can contribute to an inability to make decisions, as well as increasing unsuccessful involvement and educational dissatisfaction (Conroy, 2004; Kligyte et al., 2013; Weisfield, 2014; Uphill et al., 2014; Harrison & Peacock, 2010; Wadsworth et al., 2008; Wang et al., 2012; Charles-Toussaint & Crowson, 2010). The following section discusses the findings in the context of developing methods for reducing the negative emotional factors identified above, utilizing self-efficacy theory.

Self-efficacy theory is based on four sources of self-efficacy: (1) mastery experience, (2) vicarious experience, (3) verbal persuasion, and (4) somatic/emotional states. In the current study, some respondents reported experiences of mastery (e.g., successfully presenting ideas and opinions about increasing parking lots, educating other about their cultures, and presenting an analysis of the meanings of colors and lines in a drawing). In these cases, professors provided or allotted time for international students to present their ideas and opinions. Simultaneously, their expressiveness was evaluated positively by their professors and

classmates, and, in several cases, the value of international students providing unique perspectives was expressed. These types of evaluation and commenting constitute verbal persuasion.

The observation of international students' behavior at social events revealed that some international students conveyed successful experiences about their learning, such as learning about delivering good presentations and obtaining good grades, and managing time well in preparation for exams and assignments. Although vicarious experience typically requires observation rather than simply hearing about success, learning that someone who is similar to one's self has successfully achieved a task, may provide international students with opportunities to observe other international students' successful performance. At the university examined in the current study, a great number of international students attend the "Cultural Day Party" and exchange information about their learning environments, providing many opportunities for mutual support and learning.

Research on emotional states has revealed that positive self-talk can reduce adverse emotional states (Brown, Malouff, & Schutte, 2013). The adverse emotional states of some international students developed into positive mindsets over time. In some cases, strong beliefs led to a change in thought patterns, derived from the aspiration to absorb different perspectives and international knowledge. In addition, a number of students expressed the idea that making mistakes is normal, and emphasized that the aim of international students was to study critical thinking and understanding different perspectives.

Self-efficacy theory provides a framework for reducing negative emotional factors, by heightening self-efficacy, which involves strengthening mastery experience, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, and somatic/emotional states, by emphasizing international students' successful experiences and robust beliefs. Thus, students can generate prior successes and observe others' successful performance by exchanging information about learning settings. This enables students to develop confidence in their expression, spurred by others' applause and positive emotional responses.

Conclusions

An increasing number of international students coming to the U.S. struggle to participate in classroom discussion, even though their intention is to learn critical thinking and obtain valuable knowledge through discussion. The current study explored the adverse emotional factors impeding discussion participation among international students. The results revealed that international students commonly experienced fear, embarrassment, social isolation, judgment and discrimination. In addition, the study developed a potentially useful approach for reducing negative emotional states by employing self-efficacy theory and emphasizing mastery experience, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, and somatic/emotional states, following international students' successful experiences and robust beliefs.

The proposed approach involves an educational intervention, in which educators can help international students enhance their self-efficacy and reduce adverse emotions. Within the classroom, educators can provide opportunities for international students to speak up within the classroom and praise their expressiveness. They can highlight the strong points of international students who have different viewpoints and encourage them to focus on positive emotional states. A previous study by Brown, Malouff, and Schutte (2013) supports the proposed methodology. In that study, participants were asked to focus on or imagine one or

more thoughts of a great athlete that were related to the sources of self-efficacy. As a result, participants experienced more positive affect than control group participants (Brown, Malouff & Schutte, 2013).

The current study involved several limitations that should be considered. First, the degree to which a participant's personality is extroverted or introverted is related to their expressiveness, and this trait was not examined in the current study. Second, the degree to which participants were able to describe their feelings in detail in the interview may have been limited by their use of English as a second language. Finally, the extent to which participants were able to express their true feelings was unclear. These limitations could potentially be addressed by asking participants to answer a simple post-interview questionnaire about their personality traits, and whether they felt they were able to express each detail they desired to convey in the interview.

The study leaves a number of questions open for future research. Future studies could compare the effectiveness of each of the four components of self-efficacy theory. In addition, data could be collected from a large number of international students from a range of institutions, rather than from a specific group at one university. Comparisons could be conducted by personality, gender, country, and length of learning at a university.

In conclusion, the current study explored in-depth emotional factors as impediments to participation in classroom discussion for international students at a U.S. university. The results revealed that international students experienced fear, embarrassment, and perceptions of social isolation, judgment and discrimination, which led to less expressiveness and reluctance to participate. The findings indicated that the four components of self-efficacy theory may be useful for increasing students' efficacy and reducing negative emotional states. These results suggest that educators may be able to assist students in reducing negative emotional factors via educational intervention.

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Appendix

Demographic summary of international students

	Pseudonym	Nationality	Duration (min.)	Female 1, male 2	Under-grad 1, grad 2, PhD 3	Year status	Degree seeker 1, not 2	First Language
1	Ariel	Saudi Arabia	73	1	2	3	1	Arabic
2	Julia	Japan	62	1	3	3	2	Japanese
3	Robert	Haiti	54	2	1	2	1	Creole
4	Nicole	Nepal	30	1	1	1m	2	Nepalese
5	Evan	Vietnam	50	1	1	1m	2	Vietnam
6	Susan	Saudi	58	1	2	2	1	Arabic
7	Emily	Mexico	45	1	1	3m	1	Spanish
8	Jordan	Venezuela	47	2	1	3	1	Spanish
9	Roy	Korea	65	2	1	3	1	Korean
10	Donald	Brazil	47	2	1	1.2	2	Portuguese
11	James	Sri Lanka	54	2	1	2	1	Tamil
12	Shelly	Malaysia	52	1	1	3m	1	Mali
13	Joe	Saudi Arabia	53	2	1	2	1	Arabic
14	Gil	Venezuela	42	1	1	3	1	Spanish
15	Lily	Germany	55	1	1	4m	1	German
16	Kate	Germany	62	1	1	4m	1	German
17	Brad	Macedonia	62	2	2	1.5	1	Macedonian
18	Carlos	Saudi Arabia	73	2	1	3	1	Arabic
19	Hanna	Spain	45	1	1	3m	2	Spanish
20	Ashton	Japan	71	2	1	3.5	2	Japanese
21	Meryl	Japan	60	1	2	4m	1	Japanese
22	Tom	Afghanistan	62	2	1		1	Pashtu
23	Demi	Brazil	69	1	1	1	2	Portuguese