

East Asian Students' Spoken Participation in American College Classrooms: Does Institutional Diversity Matter?

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While East Asian students make up a significant portion of international students at American colleges, they may have difficulty verbally participating in classes due to intersecting factors including, but not limited to, English proficiency, anxiety, culture, and classroom dynamics. This qualitative study used interviews to examine the following: The factors East Asian international students believed had an influence on their spoken participation at the most diverse liberal arts college in the United States; whether diversity played a role; and participants' suggestions for how professors could encourage their participation. Findings suggested diversity did not alleviate perceptions of a marginalized identity among participants; their lower English proficiency remained a strong identifier. Listening comprehension difficulties, including diverse accents, seemed an underlying cause of other hindrances to participation. Other key factors were English-related anxiety, peer pressure, and activity format (whole-class versus group), while several factors appeared interrelated. Participants overall favored group work, a more explicit approach to requiring participation, and adjustments to help them understand lectures. Suggestions for professors included activities for building intercultural communication skills among international and domestic students alike. EAP programs can likewise benefit from prioritizing listening skills, including colloquial expressions and exposure to diverse accents.

Introduction

Highly represented among students who study abroad in the United States, East Asian international students (EAISs) bring diversity and different perspectives to American universities. However, instructors may struggle with their tendency toward reticence in class, which can be partially explained by sociocultural, linguistic, and educational differences, but also by a host of other interrelated factors (Liu, 2001). These include anxiety (Harumi, 2011), identity (Morita, 2004; Zheng, 2010), differences in educational background and expectations (Banks, 2016; Nakane, 2006, 2007; Sasaki & Ortlieb, 2017), cultural communication styles (Harumi, 2011; King, 2011), and contextual factors such as the instructor's teaching style (Fassinger, 1995). The multiple influences make it difficult to form generalizations about EAISs' participation habits.

Thus, studies involving various contexts are needed to uncover additional factors that influence spoken participation among EAISs. Specifically, few studies have examined the potential role of ethnic or linguistic diversity within the classroom. The present qualitative study aimed to fill this gap by interviewing EAISs at a highly diverse college (roughly 80% minority and 26% international students) to elicit self-reported factors influencing their spoken participation, as well as their suggestions for how professors could encourage participation. This study also sought to explore what effect, if any, such a diverse environment might have on students' attitudes toward participation.

Background

International Students in the United States

International students increase both the enrollment and cultural diversity of higher education institutions, while also exposing local students and faculty to new perspectives, cultures, and languages (Wu, Garza, & Guzman, 2015). The United States has the largest number of international students in the world. Between 2018 and 2019, there were 1,095,299 international students studying at higher education institutions in the United States, a number representing a 38.6% increase over the previous decade and 5.5% of the total higher education population (Institute of International Education, 2020). This population included a

significant number of Asian students; Chinese students were the largest group, represented at 34%, followed by India at 18% and South Korea at 5%. Students from Japan, Taiwan, and Vietnam collectively made up another 6% of this total, making EAISs highly represented. Factors contributing to the influx of international students in the United States include the prestige of US education, greater economic prosperity among students' families, and a lack of access in students' home countries; higher education within China, for example, is only available to 2.5% of the population (Valdez, 2015).

General Challenges

With the benefits of studying in the US come challenges for many international students. They commonly face stress during adjustment to an unfamiliar culture, language, and academic setting (Liu, 2001; Wu, Garza, & Guzman, 2015). Limited communicative competence can bring difficulty to students who otherwise may achieve high scores on standardized tests of English (Liu, 2001; Wong, 2004). International students may also possess cultural capital and skills in their home countries that may not apply in an overseas environment (Ryan & Hellmundt, 2005). For example, a student with high scores in an exam-based education system, strong social connections, and success with lecture-based teaching styles may find that these do not necessarily translate to success in American universities. Asians in particular may face greater challenges while studying in American universities; Inoue (1999) found that Asian students perceived more difficulty in American classrooms than non-Asian international students, irrespective of their length of stay in the US, while Chinese students have expressed difficulty adjusting to an interactive teaching style and focus on critical thinking (Liu, 2016; Wong, 2004), group work and unfamiliar assignment types (Wong, 2004), and making socioemotional connections (Liu, 2016).

Challenges to Spoken Participation

In the classroom, one of the challenges international students may face is spoken participation, often a requirement in American college courses (Ferris & Tagg, 1996). Speaking in class offers a range of learning benefits; it helps students develop communication skills and use

content-specific language (Weimer, 2009), while speaking tasks such as classroom discussions can help students understand content and build critical thinking skills (Brookfield & Preskill, 2005; Murphy et al., 2009). For international students in particular, learning to successfully participate in American college classes can facilitate cultural adaptation, increase confidence, and build intercultural communication skills (Liu, 2001). Despite these benefits and expectations, students may not participate orally in class for a number of reasons. Factors such as teacher-centeredness, class dynamics, and the type of class activity have correlated with spoken participation levels among college students in general (Fassinger, 1995; Rocca, 2010), though research has revealed additional factors that affect international students and EAISs in particular. These are explained below.

English proficiency. Silence in class can result from processing language rather than anxiety, shyness, or unwillingness to communicate (Bao, 2014). Interestingly, one trait that has correlated with better academic performance is students' *perceived* level of English ability, more so than actual ability as measured by standardized tests (Wan, Chapman, & Biggs, 1992; Xu, 1991). EAISs have indeed reported their spoken participation as hindered by English ability in a number of studies (Cheng, 2000; Ellwood & Nakane, 2009; Kim, 2006; King, 2011, Nakane, 2005, 2007), more so than by other variables such as cultural differences (MacGregor & Folinazzo, 2018). However, seemingly no studies to date have correlated test-measured English proficiency with empirically-measured participation frequency.

Culture and educational background. Examples of cultural influences on participation include Japanese students' tendency to remain silent to show politeness toward the teacher and preserve harmony by not disrupting the class (Banks, 2016; Nakane, 2007; Sasaki & Ortlieb, 2017). Jones (1999) and Passero (1993) further note that a cultural tendency to prioritize face-saving and making mistakes may reduce speaking, a trend supported by classroom observations and student interviews with Japanese international students (Nakane, 2006, 2007; Sasaki & Ortlieb, 2017) and other East Asians (Liu, 2001). EAISs also tend to seek academic help from their peers of the same background rather than from professors or classmates from the local culture (Liu, 2001).

Contrasts between education systems can also affect how much students speak in class. There are significant differences between traditional Asian academic norms and those of the United States, which

can have at least a partial effect on reducing spoken participation (Banks, 2016; Jones, 1999; Nakane, 2007; Passero, 1993). Specifically, adapting to US academic norms for Asian students can mean shifting from memorization-based learning to a focus on critical thinking (Xu, 2015), and from collectiveness and harmony to individuality and opinion-sharing (Liu, 2001). Learning in Japanese classrooms, for example, tends to be passive and teacher-centered (Hammond, 2007; King, 2011; Moxon, 2009; Passero, 1993), while Chinese students tend to prefer a passive learning style (Charlesworth, 2008) and have reported difficulty adapting to American professors' more interactive teaching styles (Liu, 2016; Valdez, 2015). While a misconception exists that Chinese students are accustomed to learning "by rote" versus a more strategic method of thoughtful memorization (Biggs, 1996; Cooper, 2004), neither habit involves speaking and may nonetheless require adjustment to succeed in American college classrooms.

In the case of Japan, another significant difference is the level of formality and structure assigned to spoken class participation. Unlike the open, casual discussions in many American college classrooms, Japanese classes tend to feature "gatekeeper" students who formally present answers on behalf of a group after first conferring with classmates (Anderson, 2018; Hammond, 2007; Moxon, 2009; Passero, 1993). This "collective communication system" was observed among Japanese university students in English-language classrooms by Banks (2016). Because of this difference, Japanese students may face difficulty adapting to Western professors' expectations of what successful classroom participation entails (Ellwood & Nakane, 2009; Kim et al., 2016).

Given these differences in preferred learning styles and classroom dynamics, it is unsurprising that a disparity can exist between students' and instructors' expectations regarding participation (Girardelli et al., 2020). However, studies have also shown that Asian university students desire to participate (Cheng, 2000), believe participating can improve English and critical thinking skills (Girardelli et al., 2020; Liu, 2001), view it as important for academic success (Kim, 2007), and believe in the benefits of American-style education in general (Valdez, 2015; Wong, 2004). Additionally, evidence has suggested that undergraduate students from Japan are aware of the importance of spoken participation, understand the differences in cultural communication styles, and desire to speak in class (Ellwood & Nakane, 2009; Harumi, 2011; Nakane, 2006; Sasaki & Ortlieb, 2017). This trend suggests students are not

opposed to spoken participation; they may simply need to become accustomed to it.

Communication style. Pragmatic transfer from the L1 can affect how one expresses oneself in English, and a number of studies have explored this in the case of Japanese students' class participation. For example, different methods of turn-taking between Japanese and American conversations can cause uncertainty about how to participate (Hammond, 2007; Murray, 2018), while a longer acceptable length of silent pauses in Japanese can also pose a challenge to turn-taking (King, 2011; Kumagai, 1994; Nakane, 2007). Student frustrations in Harumi's (2011) 197-participant questionnaire and Ellwood and Nakane's (2009) study reflect this; students indicated their silence resulted in part from missing the chance to speak.

Affective and contextual factors. Affective factors such as peer pressure and anxiety can also inhibit EAISs' spoken participation (Harumi, 2011; Tsui, 1996; Xia, 2009), as can identity as a marginalized or less competent member of a group (Morita, 2004; Zheng, 2010), pressure from negative stereotypes (Valdez, 2015), or an individual preference to be quiet (Kim et al., 2016). Furthermore, student interviews and classroom observations have revealed contextual factors affecting participation such as teacher interaction styles (Morita, 2004), rapport or class size (Sasaki & Ortlieb, 2017), and peer familiarity (Kim et al., 2016). Zhou et al. (2005) further discovered that professors and peers appeared to devalue the indigenous knowledge of Chinese students as compared with the Eurocentric knowledge held by American students, which may have discouraged the former from participating.

Complexity and intersectionality of factors. A good example of the scope of factors affecting participation is Liu's (2001) study involving interviews with 20 Asian graduate students. In addition to English ability and cultural influences, students in Liu's study mentioned factors ranging from a strong will acquired from military service to interest in the subject matter. Other factors included the number of Asians in the class, stress from a heavy workload, personality traits, and a student's prior discussion-based teaching experience.

Because several of these factors likely affect domestic students as well, it is difficult to make generalizations about what affects the participation of EAISs in particular. It is important to avoid stereotypical "East versus West" cultural dichotomies when making assumptions about what affects EAISs' decisions to speak in class (Banks, 2016; Nakane,

2007), and the complexity and range of possible factors is important to consider. Straker (2016), for example, argues that the literature places too strong a focus on culture and English ability as affecting EAISs' participation, and proposes that sociocultural theory can offer a better explanation, while King (2011) reminds us that cultural influences exist "only to a degree in conjunction with other variables" (p. 60). These ideas support the dynamic nature of "willingness to communicate," an attribute introduced by MacIntyre et al. (1998) that is not static but rather based on circumstances such as the given social situation or motivation at a particular moment.

Legitimate peripheral participation. Students who do not speak in class may be choosing to silently participate instead, by pondering their peers' responses or comparing answers with classmates (Liu, 2001); in this way, they may view attentive listening as a legitimate form of participation (Girardelli et al., 2020; Kim, 2007), reflecting Lave and Wenger's (1991) framework of legitimate peripheral participation as a way of learning. For EAISs, this is a common transitional step in negotiating their identity from a marginalized member to a fully involved member in the classroom as a community of practice (Sung, 2017), especially when they first begin study in the US (Kim, 2007).

Rationale for the Present Study

While clearly not possible to pinpoint a single variable that can be manipulated to help *all* EAISs speak in class, it is helpful to understand the range of possible factors. As such, Liu (2001) calls for further studies to reveal additional factors, while Wu, Garza, and Guzman (2015) state the need to explore additional college contexts. Considering these needs, the present study aimed to explore EAIS participation in a new context, one with a high level of ethnic and linguistic diversity as well as other features that could have an effect on participation.

Specifically, this study explored the perspectives of undergraduate EAISs at Pine Manor College, the most ethnically diverse liberal arts college in the United States at the time of the study (*US News and World Report*, 2020). During the fall 2019 semester, roughly half the students at this institution were multilingual, while 26% were international students and over 80% were non-white, low-income, and the first in their families to attend college. Thus, although their length of residence (LOR) in the US and English proficiency were more limited than domestic

students, the international students at this college were not in fact a multilingual minority, nor could they be considered underrepresented ethnically. Similarly, adjusting to the academic culture of college and achieving social capital is often a challenge for not only international students (Wu, Garza, & Guzman, 2015), but also first-generation students (Falcon, 2015) who made up four-fifths of the student body. Because of these commonalities, it was interesting to examine whether the EAISs, while a minority at this college in terms of their international status, were more likely to participate in class due to shared features with their classmates—multilingualism, non-whiteness, and potential unfamiliarity with the academic environment—lessening their “outsider” status and contributing to a sense of belonging. Indeed, a sense of belonging is important for international student success (Glass, 2018; Singh, 2018) and is not nationally or geographically bound; it is still possible among a heterogeneous group through building connections, sharing ideas, and cultivating a feeling of inclusion (Glass, 2018).

Other features of this college that made it an interesting context for research were its mission statement’s emphasis on personalized education and serving underprivileged students, a relatively small student population of approximately 400, and high faculty-to-student ratio of 15 to 1. Given this unique environment, it was worth exploring the EAISs’ perspectives on spoken participation, in part to determine the role of diversity.

Finally, the present study aims to fill a gap in terms of the EAIS student demographic. Namely, while much research has been published regarding participation among EAISs in the US at the graduate level (Kim, 2007; Liu, 2001; Xia, 2009), and in countries such as Australia (Cooper, 2004; Nakane, 2005, 2006; Sasaki & Ortlieb, 2017; Wong, 2004) and Canada (Morita, 2004; Zhou et al., 2005), only a few studies examining participation involve EAISs in the United States at the undergraduate level (Girardelli et al., 2020; Inoue, 1999; Valdez, 2015; Zheng, 2010). Undergraduate students, being younger and less academically experienced, likely hold different views of participation. For instance, empirical studies have found younger students at American universities participated less frequently and held less positive views about participation than older students (Howard & Henney, 1998). This presents an interesting contrast to studies specifically involving EAISs, in which students held positive views of participation (Ellwood &

Nakane, 2009; Harumi, 2011; Nakane, 2006; Sasaki & Ortlieb, 2017). This may be because the EAISs further considered participation a way to practice and improve their English.

Research Questions

The following research questions were posed for this study:

1. To what factors do EAISs attribute their level of spoken participation at a highly diverse college?
2. Will participants' responses suggest that the diversity in their classes has an effect on their participation?
3. What recommendations do students have for instructors to assist with their spoken participation?

Method

Recruitment and Participants

This study used convenience sampling to recruit participants during the spring 2020 semester who were current or prior students of the interviewer-researcher. It was decided to recruit students from the researcher's own classes for two reasons. First, this ensured that all participants had experienced a similar classroom context and participation expectations in the researcher's own courses. Second, it helped the interviewer-researcher understand any references made to his own class, and ensured all participants had a general level of familiarity with him, as an existing relationship with participants can ensure accurate communication and improve validity (Zakaria & Musta'amal, 2014).

Participation was voluntary and offered no reward. Participants were recruited via an email request or in person. In total, 11 EAIS participants were recruited. All of the participants except one had matriculated into the college from an EAP pathways program located on campus, and were in their first or second year of college. Table 1 presents demographic information.

Table 1. Participant Demographic Information

Participant	LOR (Months)	Gender	College Year	Intended Major	GPA	Age	Nationality/ L1
S1	7	F	Freshman	Education	3.58	19	Chinese
S2	7	F	Freshman	Undecided	4.00	26	Japanese
S3	11	M	Freshman	Business	2.75	19	Chinese
S4	11	M	Freshman	Business	2.34	19	Chinese
S5	32	F	Sophomore	Psychology	3.58	19	Chinese
S6	18	M	Sophomore	Education	3.75	20	Chinese
S7	18	F	Sophomore	Comp Sci	4.00	20	Korean
S8	18	M	Sophomore	Business	3.96	20	Korean
S9	11	F	Freshman	Undecided	3.58	18	Chinese
S10	10	M	Freshman	Business	3.24	18	Chinese
S11	8	M	Freshman	Graphic Design	0.00	20	Chinese

Note. LOR = Length of residence. GPA: Cumulative; 4.0 scale.

Research Design and Data Collection

Instrument

This study used an exploratory qualitative instrument; student responses in the interviews would be examined to determine possible trends in factors affecting their spoken participation. The research instrument was a semi-structured interview conducted in English, lasting between 10 and 15 minutes. Two of the interviews were held in the researcher's office, while the remaining nine were conducted via Zoom video conferencing software. Interview audio was recorded using Audacity or Zoom and manually transcribed verbatim following each interview.

After a series of short questions to elicit basic demographic and academic data, four open-ended questions were asked (see Appendix). The researcher asked follow-up questions as necessary to obtain more information. This semi-structured approach was used in order to reveal possible additional factors related to participation that the initial questions may not have elicited. During the interviews, the interviewer-researcher took notes on emergent themes.

Role of the Interviewer-Researcher

Because qualitative interview data is inherently a co-construction between the interviewer and interviewee, it is important to give attention

to the interviewer's role and orientation vis-a-vis the interviewee (Thomas, 2006). The researcher in this case should be viewed, as Blair (2015) states, as "a subjective teacher-researcher attempting to get at the heart of what his student-participants were trying to share," and in a unique position to help interpret the participants' perspectives in an authentic way (p. 23). Thus, a reflexive approach was adopted to consider how the researcher's status could influence interpretation of the data.

The researcher, a white American L1 English speaker who had lived and taught in each of the participants' countries for at least one year and had studied their native languages for several years each, had a general familiarity with the cultural and linguistic differences these students faced. All except two participants were the researcher's advisees and had taken his First Year Seminar, a course involving discussions on personal identity and culture, while all except four had taken his Foundational Writing course. Thus, all participants had been the researcher's own students for one to three semesters, and had known him for between four and 16 months. As such, the researcher was at least somewhat familiar with each of the participants' personalities, participation habits in his classes, and academic performance. Finally, the two participants who were not his advisees occasionally chatted with the researcher during office hours; the researcher felt he thus had a fairly established academic relationship with all participants.

The researcher also observed that most first-year EAISs in his classes struggled with participation, and in the case of three participants, sufficient English ability in general. This being said, the researcher considered himself in a strong advocating role for the international students at this institution; he was the sole faculty member with an academic title mentioning and specifically created to help "English language learners," and had taught ESL/EFL for nine years prior to the two years he had served at the present institution. Such experiences and positionality informed the interview questions (Appendix).

Data Analysis

Data analysis was performed using grounded theory, a methodology which aims to construct a theory grounded in data in order to explain a pattern of behavior (Chun Tie et al., 2019). In addition, a general inductive approach was used for analyzing the interviews, which permits

“findings to emerge from the frequent, dominant or significant themes inherent in raw data, without the restraints imposed by structured methodologies” (Thomas, 2006, p. 2). In this regard, coding of the interviews was performed as an iterative process in stages. First, the researcher manually performed initial coding on the transcripts. In grounded theory, the aim of initial coding is to generate a maximum number of codes and label important excerpts (Chun Tie et al., 2019, p. 4). The instances of each initial code were counted manually and stored with the corresponding excerpts in Excel. As new codes emerged, transcripts were reread and their coding updated accordingly. Next, the researcher identified themes within the initial codes and collapsed similarly-themed codes into more general codes. With this refined scheme, no code was assigned to an individual participant more than once. Finally, codes were compared with demographic data in an effort to capture an overall “picture” of each individual participant and identify additional trends.

Results

This study aimed to identify factors affecting the amount of spoken participation among the EAIS participants, including how classroom diversity may have played a role, as well as their suggestions for professors on how to increase their participation.

Factors Affecting Spoken Participation

Initial coding resulted in 51 codes, which were grouped into 12 general codes representing self-reported factors affecting spoken participation. Table 2 displays the initial codes and their groupings; Table 3 below presents the frequency of each grouped code. The most frequently mentioned factors related to students’ participation were listening comprehension, activity type (group versus whole-class), race/ethnicity of peer(s), and anxiety surrounding both English ability and the classroom climate. Factors are explored below through the categories of linguistic, affective, contextual, cultural and related to diversity.

Table 2. Initial and Grouped Codes

Initial Codes	Grouped Code	Sample Excerpt
1. Lack confidence with English 2. Worried about English 3. Discomfort speaking English	Anxiety (English ability)	Sometimes I feel my English not good...so sometimes my confidence not enough. (S1)
4. Fear being judged 5. Worried about wrong answers 6. Comparison to others' English ability 7. Negative classroom atmosphere 8. Empathetic listeners 9. Motivated/inspired by peers 10. Comparison to domestic students	Classroom Climate / Peer Pressure	...everyone staring at you... (S4)
11. Used to staying silent in class 12. Rote memorization	Influence from prior education system	In Korea...we are used to the education that memorize and the teacher lectures. (S7)
13. Hesitation causes loss of turn 14. Lack of time to prepare answer 15. Students dominate discussion 16. Pace of discussion	Turn taking	I'm in the middle of should I do it or should I not, and then just time is gone. (S7)
17. Heavy cognitive load from listening 18. Difficulty understanding classmates 19. Desire slower pace of lecture 20. Desire subtitles on videos 21. Struggle with speaking pace 22. Struggle with accents 23. Struggle with slang 24. Listening comprehension affects participation	Listening comprehension	...their accent is really strong, so sometimes we cannot understand. (S8)
25. Interest in topic 26. Familiarity with topic 27. Interest in speaking with students from other cultures	Topic Interest / familiarity	...something I'm really interested in, that's gonna bring me to talk more. (S5)
28. Comfort with same-ethnicity peers 29. Comfort with peers who have mutual English struggles 30. Racial/ethnic groups 31. Discomfort with speaking in English to same-L1 peers 32. Discomfort with students from other cultures 33. Discomfort with peers of higher English ability 34. Domestic-international student tension	Race / ethnicity of peers	...maybe Asian will be easier. (S1)

Initial Codes	Grouped Code	Sample Excerpt
35. Nervous speaking in front of class [Group work]	Activity type (group vs. whole class)	Group works are good. It's an effective way for shy people. (S2)
36. Helps with shyness		
37. Helpful for Asian students		
38. Less stress than whole class		
39. More comfort due to being directly asked questions		
40. Opportunity to socialize		
41. Learn new ideas		
42. Aids understanding		
43. Tiredness	Personality / mood / motivation	I'm the type of person I like to start a conversation with people. (S5)
44. Time of day		
45. Extroversion		
46. Desire to move conversation along		
47. Believed participation improves English		
48. American friends	Friends with domestic students	I don't feel any difference when I speak with American classmates, because I also have a few American friends... (S4)
49. Small class size makes participation easier	Class size	If the class are pretty big, it's difficult for me to speak out. (S2)
50. Feelings about professor	Instructor rapport / teaching style	I not talk too much because the professor. In his class maybe feel some nervous. (S10)
51. Professor's teaching style		

Table 3. Factors Affecting Spoken Participation

Grouped Code	<i>n</i>	%
Anxiety (English ability)	6	14.3
Classroom climate / Peer pressure	6	14.3
Listening comprehension	6	14.3
Activity type (group vs. whole class)	5	11.9
Race/ethnicity of peers	4	9.5
Influence from prior education system	3	7.1
Topic interest / familiarity	2	4.8
Turn taking / pace of class	2	4.8
Personality / mood / motivation	2	4.8
Friends with domestic students	2	4.8
Class size	2	4.8
Instructor rapport / teaching style	2	4.8
Total	42	100

Note. *n* = instances of each code. To avoid rounding error, total percent rounded to 100.

Linguistic Factors

No participants directly described any lack of ability to express themselves in English; any concerns with English production were related to anxiety over *perceived* ability, supporting findings that this trait, more so than actual ability, affects academic performance (Wan, Chapman, & Biggs 1992; Xu, 1991). In contrast, more than half of the participants attributed their participation difficulties in part to listening comprehension of both classmates and professors, including trouble understanding slang, accents, and fast speech. As S9 explained, "if I understand more, I can speak more." One participant (S11) was particularly frustrated with his classmates' slang and fast speech, stating that "sometimes local American destroys the conversation when talking to international students." Another (S1) described how listening carefully to comprehend lectures placed high demands on her cognition such that she had to remain quiet, while two (S1 and S3) desired for professors to aid with listening comprehension by adjusting their speaking pace and using subtitles.

Affective Factors

Affective factors are emotional factors that influence learning, including attitudes, motivation, and anxiety (Henter, 2014). Among participant responses, these mainly included anxiety related to English or peer pressure. Interestingly, all mentions of English production were related to confidence or anxiety rather than actual ability, as illustrated by excerpts from S3 ("Chinese or Asian students, they are worried about their accent, their pronunciation, their grammar") and S7 ("Some students are make fun of others if they say something wrong, if they make mistakes in their English").

Other mentions of anxiety were related to peer pressure rather than English ability: "They just call your name in front of whole class...she or he puts me on the spot...it's like everyone staring at you" (S4), "We're kind of afraid of somebody judging us.... What if we make a mistake and everyone's like 'what?'" (S7), and "Many international students are still not speaking. If they're not saying I feel like I should not say something either" (S7). Here, S7 expressed pressure to "fit in" to the role of international students who do not speak, suggesting she still identified as such rather than as a mainstream member of the class. The

other comments above described pressure from being called out individually (S4) or being judged (S7), independent of English ability.

Participant S11, who was also critical of American classmates for “destroying the conversation,” perceived a particularly uncomfortable classroom climate, and described the silencing effect this had on him in class: “Other students provide me with a sense of unfriendly. There are always lots of questions about schoolwork I would like to ask, but with the unfriendly environment, I lost the motivation to communicate.” This participant’s personality or lack of social connections at the college could also have contributed to this more unwelcoming view of his class. Specifically, the researcher perceived S11 to be a student more inclined to socialize with professors than peers, who rarely spoke with other students before or after class, including fellow Chinese students.

Other less common affective factors included extroversion (“I’m the type of person I like to start a conversation with people” [S5]), and mood (“I’m a little tired, morning class, so I don’t want to speak” [S1]). Interest or familiarity with the topic was also a factor; S5 stated he would speak more if the topic was “about Chinese culture or something I’m really interested in,” while S6 had a “passion to talk with others with different cultural background.” In this case, S5 felt more comfortable speaking about familiar topics, while in contrast S6 wished to explore and learn from other cultures. Participant S6 may have felt this way due to a higher English proficiency or a greater proclivity toward new experiences. In these situations, more in-depth data on individuals is needed to determine the effect that English ability has on affective factors.

Contextual Factors

In response to the third interview question, nearly half of the participants said smaller group work was more comfortable and conducive to participation than speaking in front of the class, while others such as S1 mentioned that smaller classes helped them speak: “We can participate more relaxed. We won’t feel lots of pressure. In a big class I was a little shy” (S1). In addition, two participants described the difficulty they faced with turn-taking in class, including S7 (“I’m in the middle of should I do it or should I not, and then just time is gone”) and S2 (“Domestic students speak a lot, like pretty fast...so sometimes I don’t have a chance”). For S2, a Japanese student, the struggle with claiming a

turn could be related to the differences in silence length and turn-taking style between Japanese and Western culture. It could also be purely a matter of English proficiency, as comprehending the speech of others and preparing what to say in a face-paced discussion are functions of both listening comprehension and fluency. Finally, participants mentioned professor variables, including rapport and affinity (“the role of professors is very important. I like to share my opinions with some professors that I like” [S6]), as well as the silencing effects of a teacher-centered style: “The professor always talks about the PowerPoint and student don’t have too much chance to speak” (S10).

Cultural Factors

Several participants described how educational experiences in their home countries influenced their silence in class. These included S1 (“We stayed in China’s class a long time, so we want to keep quiet and listen to the teacher carefully and write notes. It’s our habit”) and S7 (“In Korea, we don’t think that much as the others, we are used to the education that memorize and the teacher lectures”). In contrast, participant S2 described how she felt comfortable participating because the educational style at her “special” middle and high school in Japan made speaking in class and sharing ideas more familiar: “Individuality was a big focus...teachers asked us to give our opinions a lot.”

Additionally, social connections and positive experiences interacting with American students led to positive views toward speaking with classmates. Participant S4, who was Chinese, said that because he had American friends on campus, he felt no difference between talking to American and Chinese students. As he stated, “We don’t speak the same language, but we think in the same way sometimes.” Similarly, participant S5 said she “made many friends with Americans that way, and like from every country. Just talk.” For these participants, it seems that social connections with American peers reinforced positive feelings about participation. For S5, “just talking” helped her make friends and in turn helped her recognize the benefits of speaking. Similarly, S4, having made American friends, felt more comfortable speaking with other American students.

The Role of Diversity

Overall, the high ethnic diversity of the college did not appear to promote participation among students. Conversely, ethnic groups restricted who students were comfortable speaking with; four participants expressed that their attitudes toward speaking with classmates were affected by ethnicity. For example, S8 referenced “Asian groups and a black group,” while S1 described her preference for working with other Asian students: “If I look around and there’s some faces like Asian faces, I want to talk with her or him because it’s easier...we can understand each other culture.” Similarly, S10 stated, “Many people in China don’t want to talk with the foreigner.” These comments reflect what Liu (2001, p. 41) describes as a “dependence on ethnic communication channels” common among Asian students.

Participant S11, in line with his other perceptions of a more unfriendly classroom atmosphere, felt more directly intimidated. As he stated, “international students and domestic students also have some, like, invisible discrimination.” Perhaps he perceived discrimination due to the seating arrangement in the researcher’s class, where Asian and Black students tended to sit in separate groups, or because his English-proficient group members did not make accommodations to their speech to aid his comprehension. This participant also mentioned struggles with slang and fast speech, which could have left him feeling excluded from the lively conversations about sports that his domestic classmates often engaged in during the researcher’s class. Diversity also appeared to pose a linguistic challenge due to the wide range of accents. As S11 stated, this was “a really diverse school, which means the accents of English is also diverse. But sometimes this makes us hard to understand.”

An exception to these negative effects of diversity was the perspective of S6, who desired to speak with those from other cultures. In this regard, motivation and willingness to engage with diversity appear to be factors in whether diversity has a positive effect on participation.

Entering a Community of Practice

Four participants said their English proficiency and participation had increased with time spent studying in the US. In addition, comments

from S7 and S9 reflected a gradual transition from peripheral participation to being a fully involved member of the class as a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). For S7, this transition happened as he became familiar with the community norms through observing his classmates: "My first semester I also had a hard time expressing my ideas. By my second and third it got better because I understand the domestic student are also doing that." For S9, the transition happened as her English ability improved: "The first time I come to PMC, I'm a little bit shy and afraid to talk because I'm not good at English...but I tried to speak a lot...Nowadays I like to speak in class."

Participants' Suggestions for Instructors

Table 4 presents participants' suggestions for how professors could encourage spoken participation.

Table 4. Suggestions for Instructors

Description	<i>n</i>	%	Sample Excerpt
Give encouragement	1	8.3	The professor can tell me, don't worry about your accent, your grammar... (S3)
Aid with listening comprehension	2	16.7	...they could put some subtitles. (S1)
Aid with content comprehension	1	8.3	Professors can give more examples... (S9)
Be more direct in encouraging participation	4	33.3	...give them a chance, not "who wants to speak," but point someone out... (S7)
Relate topics to students' interests or lives	2	16.7	...something I'm really interested in, that's gonna bring me to talk more. (S5)
Make use of group work	2	16.7	...group activities to help us join in classes. (S8)
Total	12	100	

Note. *n* = number of participants who mentioned the type of suggestion.

Overall, two main themes emerged from the suggestions. First was the desire for instructors to be more direct in promoting participation, such as by cold-calling on students or designating a speaking phase of the lesson, mentioned by four participants (36.4%). For example, participant S2 stated, "For Japanese students, it's more familiar to point out," which also suggested her knowledge of the Japanese educational system extended beyond her own experiences with participation-focused

secondary school classes. Participant S7 further suggested professors announce a speaking phrase of the lesson: “not ‘who wants to speak,’ but...‘let’s speak from here.’”

The second theme was a favorable attitude toward speaking in groups, with participants stating it was “an effective way for shy people” (S2), “the best way for Asian students” (S3), and “less stress than to speak in front of the whole class” (S4). One participant, S7, described how group work allowed one to respond to direct questions from domestic classmates, rather than taking the initiative to speak out in a whole-class setting. This comment echoes both the desire for more structured participation and advice for instructors to control turn-taking (Jones, 1999; Morita, 2004). Two participants enjoyed the social aspect of group work, as it helped “make a new friend” (S9), and “learn each other’s cultures” (S11), while participant S6 said he enjoyed group work due to his “strong passion to talk with others with different cultural background.” This trend supports recommendations for group work to encourage spoken participation (Hammond, 2007; Kim et al., 2016), and suggests that students can benefit from cross-cultural interaction, but only if made comfortable or intrinsically motivated.

Discussion

Factors Affecting Participation

The self-reported influences on EAISs’ spoken participation included linguistic, affective, cultural, and contextual factors, supporting the trend that suggests participation is a complex phenomenon. Specifically, self-reported concerns that hindered participation included listening comprehension, nationality of peers, anxiety surrounding English, difficulty with turn-taking, and the class activity format (whole class versus group). These results support previous findings that participation is influenced by anxiety (Harumi, 2011; Nakane, 2005, 2007; Xia, 2009; Tsui, 1996), turn-taking difficulty (Ellwood & Nakane, 2009; Harumi, 2011) and group versus whole-class activity format (Rocca, 2010). In addition, the concerns about listening comprehension reflect it as a commonly mentioned difficulty (Jinyan, 2005), while comments describing contrasts from prior educational experiences support findings that these differences can affect participation (Banks, 2016; Charlesworth, 2008).

Supporting the optimistic trend in prior studies (Ellwood & Nakane, 2009; Harumi, 2011; Nakane, 2006; Sasaki & Ortlieb, 2017), all participant comments suggested they were aware of the expectation for participation and generally desired to speak; none had negative feelings about the merits of participation itself. This contrasts with the American undergraduate students in Howard and Henney's (1998) study, who held more negative views about participation in their early years of college, perhaps because being non-ELLs they did not consider it a benefit to their English. The positive views in the present study could also be a function of participants' experiences in the EAP preparatory program on campus, in which they were taught American academic norms and professor expectations.

The Effect of Diversity

Despite the ethnic diversity of their classes, students in this study still drew a clear distinction between the domestic students and themselves. This distinction was constructed linguistically, as suggested by comments about contrasts in English proficiency and its related anxiety, as well as struggles with accents or slang. It appeared that the ethnic diversity alone did not necessarily ease the EAISs' sense of being marginalized; instead, they focused on their limited English proficiency as a deficiency, which maintained their identity as less competent group members and hindered participation, a finding in line with Morita (2004) and Zheng (2010). This supports findings that lower English proficiency is tied to lower sense of belonging (Singh, 2018), in that language barriers can hinder group work and the formation of social connections with English speakers (Chen & Zhou, 2019). Furthermore, that many of their domestic classmates, like them, were also minorities and entering an unfamiliar environment as first-generation students did not seem to ease the EAISs' apprehension over participating, nor did the fact that over a quarter of the students at this college were international students.

In addition to constructing a distinction based on English proficiency, participants also constructed one ethnically, through comments such as "don't want to talk with the foreigner" (S10), the "Asian group and a black group" (S8), and comfort with "Asian faces" (S1). Additionally, while discrimination in these students' classes may have certainly existed, it is possible that the "invisible discrimination" mentioned by

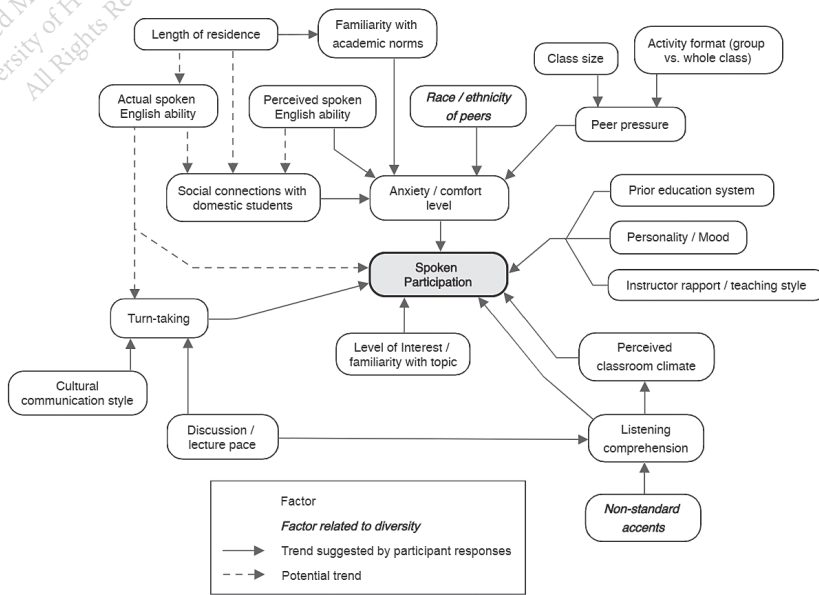
S11 was in part a function of his heightened sensitivity to an unfriendly class atmosphere due to lower listening ability or other factors. Lee and Rice (2007) mention, for instance, that because international students at US colleges are often from high socioeconomic backgrounds, they may be more sensitive to discrimination as they no longer find themselves part of the dominant social culture (Lee & Rice, 2007).

EAISs can have difficulty understanding non-native English accents (Major et al., 2002), and it appears that the classroom diversity exacerbated these challenges for two participants. Furthermore, classmates and instructors in their EAP program were generally from their own countries or the US, respectively, rather than the African American, Haitian, Cape Verdean, and Latinx students in their mainstream college classes. This fact may have left them underprepared to understand other accents.

Relationships Between Factors

These results provide insight into what Liu (2001) describes as complex “interrelationships among [students’] cognitive, sociocultural, affective, linguistic, and pedagogical perspectives” that affect their participation (p. 153). Figure 1 presents possible relationships between factors affecting participation based on results of this study. For example, while one participant, S1, described Chinese students’ “habit” of being quiet in class, she also said small class sizes enabled her to “participate more relaxed.” It appeared that for this student, the smaller class sizes she encountered during only seven months of study in the US had a significant, positive effect on her participation despite habits formed through years of a more passive education style in China. This supports Straker’s (2016) deemphasis on culture and draws attention to different “weights” of variables affecting participation. Smaller classes have been linked with greater participation in other studies (Rocca, 2010), and reducing class size may be powerful enough to counteract other factors that inhibit participation such as limited English proficiency.

Figure 1. Possible Relationships Between Factors Affecting EAISs' Spoken Participation



Interestingly, no participants mentioned any direct lack of ability to express themselves in English; instead, anxiety over their *perceived* English ability, which can also affect academic performance overall (Wan, Chapman, & Biggs 1992; Xu, 1991), was commonly cited. This reflects findings of other studies (Cheng, 2000; Ellwood & Nakane, 2009; Kim, 2006; King, 2011, Nakane, 2007) that correlated self-reported English ability and participation. In terms of receptive English ability, their listening comprehension also affected their participation indirectly; if they could not understand the professor, classmates, or course content, they felt in less of a position to speak.

It is likely that English proficiency was also behind other factors influencing participation. As mentioned, the “unfriendly” classroom atmosphere perceived by S11 may have manifested because he struggled to understand his classmates and thus felt excluded. These linguistic factors could have also contributed to the preference of S1 for working with other Asian students, or the reluctance to speak with “foreigners” mentioned by S10. Similarly, S7’s anxiety over giving the wrong answer, which she stated was “not [an] English problem,” may have in fact

stemmed from misunderstanding content due to listening ability. In other words, the ethnic or affective influences on participation may in fact be underlyingly linguistic. Conversely, confidence from strong English ability could play a role in S5 describing herself as “the type of person that likes to start a conversation.”

Finally, LOR may have been an overarching factor leading to greater participation, due to increases in English proficiency, cultural adjustment, or social connections. Over one-third of participants described increases in both English proficiency and participation with time spent studying in the US, reflecting how participation habits can evolve over time alongside a student’s gradual entrance into a community of practice (Kim, 2007; Liu, 2001; Sung 2017). Two participants also found it easier to participate due to social connections with American peers, having overcome (or avoided) the common struggles with socioemotional connections mentioned by Liu (2016). Perhaps these friendships “demystified” American students and made them more approachable in class. One of these participants was S5, who had spent nearly three years in the US, the longest among participants.

Conclusion

This study examined self-reported factors affecting the spoken participation habits of East Asian international students at a highly diverse college, to determine in part how diversity may have played a role. The factor of English-related anxiety stood out and supports previous findings on the effect of perceived English ability, while it appears that English proficiency, especially listening comprehension, can either directly or indirectly affect participation. Specifically, better listening comprehension can increase understanding of course content and aid participation, while it may also lead to more accurate interpreting of the classroom atmosphere and ability to socialize with classmates, which may in turn lead to less anxiety and more participation. Similarly, certain factors may have greater influence over participation and “override” others, such as the smaller class sizes that helped one participant despite her cultural habit of being quiet in class.

Results implied that classroom diversity could hinder participation by exacerbating challenges to listening comprehension, and that diversity alone does little to make international students more comfortable by

lessening their status as “minorities” in the classroom unless instructors are prepared to explicitly support intercultural communication and positive group dynamics. Thus, the onus is on instructors as what Gay (2010, p. 45) calls “cultural organizers,” responsible for integrating students and providing chances for them to express their cultures and perspectives. Specific strategies for doing so are presented in the next section.

Pedagogical Implications

A framework that focuses on the responsibilities of the universities hosting international students rather than the students themselves (Lee & Rice, 2007) can help inform advice for instructors to encourage participation. First, teachers should design activities to raise awareness of the classroom’s diversity and help students recognize they belong to a multicultural group, such as peer-teaching an aspect of one’s culture. Additionally, “jigsaw” activities that require students to peer-teach course terminology or concepts can also increase international students’ sense of empowerment and belonging, as they demonstrate competence by teaching their classmates rather than through English proficiency alone.

Instructors can help break down the communication barriers inherent in a linguistically diverse classroom by deliberately assigning multicultural groups, setting expectations, and pre-teaching communication strategies. Before a group activity, instructors can declare that its secondary purpose is to raise awareness of the classroom’s diversity and provide a chance to practice intercultural communication skills. Students can be provided and encouraged to use a list of strategies such as asking for repetition, being cognizant of colloquialisms, giving each other “thinking time,” and recasting to verify they understand their classmates. To raise empathy and linguistic awareness, domestic students can also record and listen to their casual conversations, identify colloquialisms, and teach these expressions to their international peers.

Group work can provide opportunities to speak that are not as face-threatening as speaking in front of the entire class, and most students in this study as well as others (King, 2001; Xia, 2009) suggested or preferred group work for this reason. However, because other participant comments as well as Chen and Zhou (2019) suggest language barriers can discourage participating in groups, instructors

should form groups carefully and provide support. As participants also commonly suggested, instructors can be more intentional by calling on students or deliberately announcing a discussion phase of the lesson. These suggestions reflect those by Jones (1999) and Morita (2004) that instructors control turn-taking.

For the EAP teachers who prepare students for English-medium classes, listening comprehension, not only of lectures but also of classmates, should be emphasized. It is important to expose students to different accents and colloquialisms, as well as include top-down listening skills such as how to cope with partial understanding of a group discussion.

Finally, it is necessary for professors to recognize the legitimacy of peripheral participation, which can eventually lead to full participation. To help with assessment, students can record their contributions in “participation logs” (Docan-Morgan, 2015), in order to better capture what they may be thinking or wish to say even if they do not participate orally.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

Because this study explored a limited number of student perspectives in a particular context, caution should be used in generalizing the findings to *all* EAISs. In addition, other variables such as TOEFL score, personality, motivation, or academic ability were not measured yet could likely affect participation habits. More in-depth interviews and studies that control for the professor, class, length of residence, and both perceived and actual English proficiency are needed to isolate and explore the weights and relationships of the variables affecting EAIS participation. For instance, perhaps sufficiently strong rapport or coping strategies can “override” anxiety, while a class of mostly EAISs may increase feelings of belonging and lessen anxiety.

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Appendix

Interview Questions

1. How do you feel about your participation in classes this semester, specifically speaking in class?
2. What do you think affects your choice to speak or not speak in class?
3. How do you feel about speaking with your classmates during class, like with a partner or in a small group?
4. What do you think could make you speak more in class? Do you have any suggestions for professors to help international students participate more in class by speaking?