

University of Windsor

Scholarship at UWindor

Electronic Theses and Dissertations

Theses, Dissertations, and Major Papers

2017

Classroom Engagement and Participation Among Chinese International Graduate Students: A Case Study

Beibei Xiang
University of Windsor

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholar.uwindsor.ca/etd>

Recommended Citation

Xiang, Beibei, "Classroom Engagement and Participation Among Chinese International Graduate Students: A Case Study" (2017). *Electronic Theses and Dissertations*. 6028.
<https://scholar.uwindsor.ca/etd/6028>

This online database contains the full-text of PhD dissertations and Masters' theses of University of Windsor students from 1954 forward. These documents are made available for personal study and research purposes only, in accordance with the Canadian Copyright Act and the Creative Commons license—CC BY-NC-ND (Attribution, Non-Commercial, No Derivative Works). Under this license, works must always be attributed to the copyright holder (original author), cannot be used for any commercial purposes, and may not be altered. Any other use would require the permission of the copyright holder. Students may inquire about withdrawing their dissertation and/or thesis from this database. For additional inquiries, please contact the repository administrator via email (scholarship@uwindsor.ca) or by telephone at 519-253-3000ext. 3208.

Classroom Engagement and Participation Among Chinese International Graduate
Students: A Case Study

By

Beibei Xiang

A Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies
through the Faculty of Education
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Master of Education
at the University of Windsor

Windsor, Ontario, Canada

2017

© 2017 Beibei Xiang

Classroom Engagement and Participation among Chinese International Graduate

Students: A Case Study

by

Beibei Xiang

APPROVED BY:

R. Cheran
Department of Sociology, Anthropology, and Criminology

Z. Zhang
Faculty of Education

B. Egbo, Advisor
Faculty of Education

May 24, 2017

DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I hereby certify that I am the sole author of this thesis and that no part of this thesis has been published or submitted for publication.

I certify that, to the best of my knowledge, my thesis does not infringe upon anyone's copyright nor violate any proprietary rights and that any ideas, techniques, quotations, or any other material from the work of other people included in my thesis, published or otherwise, are fully acknowledged in accordance with the standard referencing practices. Furthermore, to the extent that I have included copyrighted material that surpasses the bounds of fair dealing within the meaning of the Canada Copyright Act, I certify that I have obtained a written permission from the copyright owner(s) to include such material(s) in my thesis and have included copies of such copyright clearances to my appendix.

I declare that this is a true copy of my thesis, including any final revisions, as approved by my thesis committee and the Graduate Studies office, and that this thesis has not been submitted for a higher degree to any other University or Institution.

ABSTRACT

This qualitative case study explores the level of Chinese international graduate students' classroom engagement and participation in Canadian university classrooms. It also examines whether or not there are gender-based differences in the level of Chinese international graduate students' engagement and participation in classroom activities. The data was collected through one-on-one interviews from sixteen participating students (eight males and eight females) drawn from various faculties in a Canadian university. The findings of the study show that factors such as language barriers, cultural differences, student motivation, and instructors' teaching methodology contribute significantly to the level of Chinese international graduate students' classroom engagement and participation. Based on the perceptions of the participants, the study did not find particularly significant gender-based differences in the students' level of classroom engagement and participation. Overall, the findings of this study provide valuable insights into ways of supporting and encouraging Chinese international graduate students with regards to increasing their level of classroom engagement and participation.

Key words: classroom engagement, participation, Chinese, international, graduate, students, Canadian, university

DEDICATION

To myself

To my advisor

To my boyfriend

To my parents

To all people who inspire me

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I am particularly grateful to my thesis advisor Dr. Benedicta Egbo of the Faculty of Education at the University of Windsor. Without her useful and helpful suggestions, I could not finish my thesis smoothly and successfully. Sincere thanks to her for steering me in the right direction whenever I needed it.

My special thanks to my committee members, Dr. Zuochen Zhang and Dr. Rudhramoorthy Cheran. My greatest appreciation goes to them for their support and guidance for my thesis study.

I would also show my gratitude to my boyfriend Chenkai who shared his pearls of wisdom with me when I was doing my thesis. I am also grateful to my parents who gave continuous assistance and support to me during my study. I owe it all to you. Many thanks.

I am also grateful to Dr. Shijing Xu. She provided my opportunities to get involved in her program called Reciprocal Learning Project and I learnt a lot from her and my team members.

With a special mention to my sixteen participants who took part in my interviews. I was honored to have you all with your interesting and meaningful experiences in my research.

And finally, last but by no means least, appreciation goes to all the people who are always beside me.

Thanks for all your encouragement!

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|---|-----|
| DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY | iii |
| ABSTRACT | iv |
| DEDICATION | v |
| ACKNOWLEDGEMENT | vi |
| LIST OF FIGURES | x |
| CHAPTER I | 1 |
| INTRODUCTION | 1 |
| Background Information | 4 |
| Statement of the Problem | 6 |
| Purpose of the Study | 7 |
| Research Questions | 8 |
| Significance of the Study | 9 |
| Theoretical Framework | 9 |
| The Theory of Internationalization | 9 |
| Internationalization of Higher Education | 10 |
| Models of Internationalization in Higher Education | 11 |
| Definition of Terms | 12 |
| Classroom Engagement | 12 |
| Classroom Participation | 13 |
| Chinese International Graduate Students | 13 |
| CHAPTER II | 14 |
| LITERATURE REVIEW | 14 |
| The Internationalization of Education | 15 |
| Factors that Influence Classroom Engagement and Participation | 21 |
| Individual Motivation | 22 |
| Instructors and Teaching Methods | 24 |
| Cultural Differences | 25 |
| Language Barriers and Communicative Competence | 28 |

| | |
|--|----|
| Social Experiences in Higher Education..... | 30 |
| Other Factors Affecting Classroom Engagement and Participation..... | 31 |
| Gender and Classroom Engagement and Participation..... | 32 |
| CHAPTER III | 35 |
| METHODOLOGY | 35 |
| Introduction..... | 35 |
| The Research Site | 36 |
| The Participants | 36 |
| Data Collection | 38 |
| Data Analysis..... | 39 |
| Ethical Concerns..... | 39 |
| Limitations of the Study..... | 40 |
| CHAPTER IV | 41 |
| FINDINGS OF THE STUDY..... | 41 |
| The Purpose of Coming to Canada | 41 |
| Perceptions of their Programs and Courses | 43 |
| Participants' Expectations..... | 44 |
| Participants' Future Plans | 45 |
| Perceived Benefits of Programs..... | 46 |
| Participants' Challenges in Canada | 46 |
| Language and Communicative-related Barriers | 46 |
| Other Barriers..... | 48 |
| Differences between Canadian and Chinese Education..... | 49 |
| Understandings of the Concepts of Classroom Engagement and Participation..... | 52 |
| Perceptions of Chinese International Graduate Students' Level of Classroom Engagement and Participation | 54 |
| Factors Influencing Classroom Engagement and Participation | 56 |
| Language Barrier | 56 |
| Teaching Methods..... | 57 |
| Level of Motivation | 59 |
| Background Knowledge..... | 60 |
| Cultural Differences..... | 61 |

| | |
|---|-----|
| Other Related Factors | 62 |
| Gender-based Differences in the Level of Classroom Engagement and Participation | 63 |
| Personal Stories and Experiences | 64 |
| Participants Suggestions | 66 |
| Language Skills and Communicative Competence | 67 |
| Classroom Engagement and Participation | 68 |
| CHAPTER V | 70 |
| DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION | 70 |
| Discussions of Findings | 70 |
| Factors Influencing Engagement and Participation | 71 |
| Language Barriers | 71 |
| Differences in Education System and Teaching Methodology | 72 |
| Student Motivation | 74 |
| Cultural Differences | 76 |
| Other Related Factors | 77 |
| Gender-based Differences | 78 |
| Reflection | 79 |
| Suggestions for Future Research | 80 |
| REFERENCES | 82 |
| APPENDICES | 93 |
| APPENDIX A | 93 |
| APPENDIX B | 95 |
| APPENDIX C | 96 |
| APPENDIX D | 97 |
| VITA AUCTORIS | 103 |

LIST OF FIGURES

| | |
|---|----|
| Figure 1: The Number of International Students in Canada by all Levels from 2000 to 2014..... | 17 |
| Figure 2: The Number of International Students in Canada by all Levels in 2015 and 2016 | 18 |
| Figure 3: Top Countries of International Students in Canadian University Programs | 19 |
| Figure 4: The Number of International Students by Province..... | 20 |

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Universities in Canada are becoming increasingly internationalized, perhaps as a consequence of globalization, which Phillips and Schweisfurth define as “The growing interdependence and interconnectedness of the modern world through increased flows of goods, services, capital, people and information” (2014, p. 63). Although research on globalization and internationalization is a growing phenomenon, there is no consensus with regards to the definition of both concepts. Different from “globalization”, “internationalization” is defined as the phenomenon that appears as a result of globalization (Altbach & Knight, 2007). The deepened development of globalization and internationalization had a profound impact on education, especially higher education in most countries including China.

Dating back to the Qing dynasty, China closed its “doors” to prevent invasion from foreign enemies. This isolationist policy also blocked the development of international education in the country. Huang (2003) explained this phenomenon:

As early as the latter half of the 19th century, when China became a semi-colonial country, it established its modern higher education system by adopting foreign academic patterns, notably from Western models such as Germany, France, and the United Kingdom as well as Japan. In 1952, the Soviet communist model was introduced into the People’s Republic of China and dominated China’s higher education development almost until the end of 1970’s. (p. 225)

However, in 1978, as China began to implement its policy of reform and opening-up, it started to embrace the world, and conversely, the world took the initiative of knowing China better. This mutual recognition had significant impact on several sectors in China including education. According to Huang (2003), China sought for Western models of higher education again since the implementation of open-door policy in 1978. As Mok (2000) puts it, “The fundamental change in the philosophy and practices of governance ... caused similar process of transformation in the educational sector” (p. 110). This transformation allows a greater number of Chinese students to study abroad, Canada inclusive. According to the Government of Canada (Imagine-Education in Canada, 2014), “In 2014, Canada welcomed about 336,000 international students. Over 110,000 Chinese students made the choice to study in Canada, representing the largest group of foreign students in ... [the] country” (p. 1). This exponential growth of Chinese international students in Canada warrants the examination of their experiences, especially with regards to their experiences in Canadian universities. Such a study is particularly necessary given the fact that anecdotal and research evidence show that some Chinese students seldom engage with or, participate in classroom activities (Xie, 2010). Being passive in engaging and participating in classroom activities and discussions may hinder Chinese international graduate students’ academic achievement. In effect, exploring the level of Chinese international graduate students’ classroom engagement and participation in Canadian universities is of paramount importance.

Pedagogical differences may be the factors that influencing the level of Chinese international graduate students’ classroom engagement and participation. This may be linked to the progressive western pedagogies which are not often used in Chinese

classroom where teacher-centred methodology is prevalent. Hence, Chinese students are immersed in a teacher-centred pedagogy, and a high focus on examinations is a prevalent practice. Brown (1993) revealed that teachers in teacher-centred classrooms tend to concentrate more on examinations than on students' learning processes. Schooled within this type of pedagogical ideology, some Chinese students in Canada face a hurdle in academic acculturation.

In addition to pedagogical differences, language barriers also present challenges to Chinese students. They are regularly confronted with embarrassing situations that are linked to limited proficiency in English language. Although students in China start learning English in grade three, they seldom have opportunities to practice or speak the language. Wang (2009) noted that students who learn English language within the Chinese educational system have better performance in reading and writing compared to their listening and speaking skills. Therefore, most Chinese students could not interact with local people in English fluently even though they are eager to do so. Consequently, some Chinese international students in Canada may find it difficult to adjust to the Canadian fast-paced talking environment. Influenced by their mother tongue, Chinese international students often translate what they hear into Chinese and then, translate what they desire to express into English. Not surprisingly, the process of translation may lead to inaccuracies and lack of fluency when they are communicating in English.

Gender issues always draw attention from scholars. According to the historical evidence, the status of women in China has always been lower than that of men. Also, Chinese women who are expected to be docile and subservient did not always have access to educational opportunities. Fang (2000) described the personality of ancient

females in China as follows: “A woman is profoundly fettered by a feudal code of ethics, who has little power to resist, and yet who is unwilling to submit to the dictates of the male world” (p. 6). Similarly, Peng, Yu and Mills (2015) stated that women’s status was lower than that of men in Tang Dynasty because of the patriarchal society. Gradually, Chinese people began to attach more importance to female rights, including their right to education as a result of women’s movements. Since 1990, women in China have continuously advocated for gender equality in politics, social-economic status and education.

Within the context of the preceding discussion, this study is an investigation into the level of Chinese international graduate students’ classroom engagement and participation in Canadian universities based on qualitative data collected from in-depth interviews among Chinese international graduate students.

Background Information

Chinese students make up about one-third (33%) of Canada’s international student population (Canadian Bureau for International Education, 2015). Zhang and Zhou (2010) conducted a study about Chinese international students’ perceptions, expectations and experiences in Canadian universities, which revealed that more and more international students come to Canada to further their studies, especially Chinese students. Given this significant number, it is essential that Chinese international graduate students whose cultures and languages differ from those of Canadians, share their experiences of schooling in Canadian universities. It is expected that the findings of this study will help to improve the relevant curriculum policies and pedagogical practices.

Why do some Chinese international graduate students show lower participation and engagement in classroom activities? The prevalent Chinese teacher-centred teaching methods account for this problem. In the teacher-centred classroom, teachers are dominant knowledge givers while students are silent knowledge receivers. Additionally, this teaching method prevents students from expressing their views and ideas. Xie (2010) stated that some Chinese students are reluctant to participate in classroom activities due to teacher-centred methodologies. Without intensive practices in oral communication, it is difficult for Chinese students to learn English well. However, the implementation of the policy of reform and opening-up over the last 30 years has ushered in profound changes in various areas of life in China, including the education sector. Zhao, Mok and Cao (2016) note that “When discussing education in China, people always think of teacher-centered, rote learning and passive learners. However, after 15 years of reform, teachers, students and classrooms in China have changed a lot” (p. 89). Gradually, a more student-centred teaching style is gaining ground in China, and some schools have attempted to incorporate this teaching style into their curricula. Despite the fact that some Chinese international graduate students adapt themselves to the Canadian student-centred learning context, they are still subject to Chinese traditional teaching methods. Zhang and Xu (2007) argue that Chinese students who get used to teacher-centred teaching approach view their instructors as authority, which makes them be afraid of questioning their instructors. Consequently, they keep silence in class in order to avoid risks in making mistakes.

Another reason behind Chinese students’ limited engagement is the traditional gender relations in Chinese patriarchal society. Gender-based differences are another

issue that should be taken into account when exploring this phenomenon. Traditionally, women were deprived of many human rights, and generally had lower social status than men. Women's lack of access to equal educational opportunities aggravated matters, leading to gender-based discrimination. Tindall and Hamil (2004) argue that boys receive more opportunities and attention in class while girls receive less. Accordingly, female students may show lower engagement and participation in class (Higgins, 2010). This progress notwithstanding, the feeling of lower status persists among some female students. Consequently, this study will also examine whether or not there are gender-based differences in the level of classroom engagement and participation among Chinese international graduate students.

Statement of the Problem

As stated above, most Chinese international students are educated in teacher-centred educational contexts and cannot quickly adjust to Canadian classrooms which are, for the most part, student-centred. The lack of experience in interacting with instructors may keep Chinese international graduate students silent in Canadian university classrooms. Although some Chinese international graduate students attempt to engage and participate in classroom discussions and activities, they may encounter language-related barriers when communicating in English language with both their professors and classmates. Limited language proficiency is, therefore, a possible problem for Chinese international graduate students. Despite their increasing numbers in Canadian universities, many Chinese international graduate students have limited English proficiency, which may lead to communication apprehension thus preventing them from full participation in class.

Gender-based factors may also contribute to the problem. According to Jones, Evans, Byrd and Campbell (2000), instructors' awareness of gender related issues in class may motivate female students' interests and engagement in education. Thus, another research problem relates to whether or not there are gender-based differences in the level of Chinese international graduate students' classroom engagement and participation. An in-depth analysis of these issues is necessary in order to develop and implement appropriate policies and practices to support the students.

Purpose of the Study

This qualitative study is designed to explore the level of and the factors determining Chinese international graduate students' classroom engagement and participation in Canadian universities as well as gender-based differences between Chinese international graduate males and females. Although some studies have examined the challenges and obstacles that Chinese international students encounter in Canada, further studies need to be done regarding Chinese international graduate students' academic performance in Canadian classrooms. For example, Andrade (2006) stated that most international students face challenges when studying in English-speaking countries. These challenges include: Limited English language proficiency, the segregation of international students and domestic students, and the lack of funding and appropriate career placement. Yan and Berliner (2011) also conducted a study on Chinese international students' challenges in the United States. The findings show that there are three types of concerns that Chinese international students. These include academic concerns, socio-cultural concerns and personal concerns. Also, Wei, Heppner, Mallen, Ku, Liao and Wu (2007) explored the Chinese international students' challenges,

including acculturative stress, perfectionism, years in the United States and depressions. Li, Chen and Duanmu (2010) conducted a study in order to give an insight into Chinese international students' learning experiences overseas. The findings show that the learning success was the most significant predictors of academic performance for all international students.

In effect, classroom engagement and participation among Chinese international graduate students is a phenomenon that needs to be explored by researchers and educators. After exploring the level of engagement and participation, seeking the factors that cause this situation may be helpful to solve the problems. Additionally, gender-based differences another factor that was explored in this study.

It is anticipated that the findings of the study will provide insights into how to support and encourage Chinese international graduate students with regards to their levels of engagement and participation in the classroom.

Research Questions

This study will attempt to answer the following questions:

1. What are the factors that influence Chinese international graduate students' engagement and participation in Canadian university classrooms?
2. To what extent do language barriers affect Chinese international graduate students' classroom engagement and participation?
3. Are there significant gender-based differences in Chinese international graduate students' level of participation and engagement in Canadian classrooms?

Significance of the Study

This qualitative research explored the level of Chinese international graduate students' classroom engagement and participation in Canadian universities. The findings of the study should be of significant importance to many stake-holders in higher education including university administrators, professors, higher education policy makers as well as Chinese international graduate students. More importantly, the results will help to increase instructors' awareness of Chinese international graduate students' pedagogical needs, prompting them to provide more opportunities for classroom engagement for Chinese international graduate students. Furthermore, given the gender component of the study, males or females may require more support and intervention with respect to classroom engagement and participation. Finally, the recommendations of the study may contribute to important changes in international education policies in the study context in particular and in universities more generally.

Theoretical Framework

In the last several decades, most countries have been immersed in internationalization as a result of globalization. In particular, the trend towards the internationalization of education has afforded more opportunities for Chinese students to attend schools overseas. This study is grounded within and informed by the discourse on internationalization.

The Theory of Internationalization

The concept of internationalization has become important with increasing globalization and the emergence of a knowledge-based society. Although the concept has its origins in business, it has now been appropriated by and applied to other disciplines

including the field of education. Arum and Water (1992) referred internationalization to “the multiple activities, programs and services that fall within international studies, international educational exchange and technical cooperation” (p. 202). This study is based on the theory of internationalization which provides a growth of opportunity for Chinese students coming to Canada to study. Internationalization invites people attention around world to experience and learn something new and advanced mutually (e.g., education). Driven by the internationalization, more and more Chinese people come to Canada securing a higher education.

Internationalization of Higher Education

Internationalization in higher education is defined by Söderqvist (2002) as:

a change process from a national HEI [higher education institution] leading to the inclusion of an international dimension in all aspects of its holistic management in order to enhance the quality of teaching and learning and to achieve the desired competencies. (p. 29)

According to Callan (2000), the concept of internationalization in education, especially in higher education, has been fully adopted and applied to various fields in Europe and North America. Callan (2000) also noted that the exploration of internationalization benefits a majority of people like policy-makers and practitioners. Higher education is an essential component of the internationalization of education. The term “internationalization of higher education” emerged long time ago and can be used to describe various things, such as combining various curriculum contents from different countries, building and consolidating international relationship among countries, international student exchange programs and assisting other countries in education

development (Anweiler, 1977). Knight (2012) stated: “Internationalization has been one of the most crucial factors shaping higher education in the last three decades” (p. 27). Moreover, “The term internationalization began to be used widely by the higher education sector in the 1980s to promote international studies, educational exchange, and technical assistance” (Klaseck, as cited in Knight, 2012, p. 27). According to Gopal (2011), many worldwide higher education institutions have been internationalized in degrees and programs. Therefore, stakeholders like educators, professors, students, leaders and policy-makers need to make full preparations for the internationalization in higher education.

Models of Internationalization in Higher Education

There are various models of internationalization in higher education. The first and perhaps most popular model is student-exchange between countries. According to Anweiler (1977), exchanging students between countries is an essential part of international education. Exchanging students frequently between two countries not only expands students’ horizons but also promotes positive relationships between the two countries. The second model is communication and cooperation among professors from different countries. There are many ways for professors to communicate with each other, such as attending conferences and visiting schools in other countries. The third model is distance learning. Recently, the evolution of science and technology enables international teaching and learning through distance learning. In this model, students register for programs and courses online. A fourth model is the double degree program. (Morresi, Elías & Marcos, 2014). The double degree program involves two universities (one local university and the other foreign) offering a joint program to students who may receive

two degrees from these two schools after completing the courses. A fifth model is the corporate program in which one institution recognizes the program and the credits offered by another university from a different country. Each of these models expands students' horizons, improves and consolidates friendships among countries, and accelerates internationalization in higher education (Anweiler, 1977).

This research draws on the first model: exchanging students between countries. With the development of internationalization in higher education, a growing number of Chinese students seek further education abroad, especially in Canada. Studying in Canada provides more opportunities for Chinese international students as well as broadens their horizons. First and foremost, Chinese students desire to immerse themselves in an English-speaking country for better communication and improvement in English language, which they may not receive in China. Second, it is easier for them to experience many different cultures in Canada, as Canada is a multicultural country. Finally, Chinese international students could receive a degree from a Canadian university which will be useful and helpful in securing jobs after their graduation.

Definition of Terms

Classroom Engagement

Pintrich and Schrauben (1992) described classroom engagement as a motivated behaviour. Garrett (2011) conducted a study with regards to students' perceptions on classroom engagement. He found out that most researchers pay attention to the importance of classroom engagement in higher education, but few works focus on the definition of students' engagement. Previous research has found that there are various perceptions of classroom engagement and participation. Classroom engagement and

participation are different concepts even though they are sometimes perceived as the same. Generally speaking, classroom engagement refers to students' inner interests and motivation in academic learning, including participation in activities, group work and discussions.

Classroom Participation

Many studies have been done in defining the term “classroom participation”. Tatar (2005) confessed that classroom participation essentially refers to “behaviors, such as the number of times a student initiates an interaction or asks a question” (p. 338). Wright (2014) also pointed out that the meaning of classroom participation is that students should participate in the class actively by answering questions, joining the group work, and taking part in activities and discussions.

Chinese International Graduate Students

Chinese international graduate students refer to students who were born in China, have Chinese citizenship, and have come to Canada to attend graduate programs. This conceptualization excludes Chinese students who were born in Canada and received their prior education in Canada.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The diversification and internationalization of higher education in Canada have offered additional opportunities for international students to receive high quality education. Guo and Chase (2011) conducted a study to assist international students in adapting to an unfamiliar academic environment, as Canadian higher institutions enrolling an increasing number of international students. The findings of this study provide some implications suggestions for international students in Canada and it shows that internationalization becomes a worthy strategy to develop education, culture, etc. This trend in education foregrounds this study of Chinese international graduate students' classroom engagement and participation. Numerous researchers have showed interests in international students' classroom behaviours and achievements especially with respect to engagement and participation. Similarly, a variety of empirical examinations associated with Chinese international graduate students' classroom engagement and participation have been conducted. Some of these researches are explored in what follows.

Students' classroom behaviours and academic achievements are not only influenced by classroom engagement, but also by classroom participation. Participation comes in a variety of ways which enables teachers and students to learn from each other through activities, group work, etc. (Schultz, 2009). A major form of classroom participation is oral participation, which is highly valued in North America because speaking is the most direct way of expressing people's thoughts. Liu (2000) conducted a study to investigate the factors that influenced oral participation of international students. These include cognitive, effective, sociocultural and linguistics factors, which are

associated with international students' silence in class. As Frymier and Houser (2015) showed in their study, oral participation has a positive relationship with classroom engagement.

Furthermore, classroom participation plays an essential role in students' academic achievement. Rocca (2010) conducted a study which shows that the participation of students in the classroom benefits both teachers and students. For example, students' active participation and engagement in the classroom enhances their academic achievement and further development while teachers' dynamic participation motivates students' interest and as a consequence of contributing to a sense of attainment. However, Garrett (2011) stated that students cannot be forced to take part in group work and discussions in class as they have to take charge to know what they are willing to know. An inner motivation to learn the new knowledge is a necessity to engage and participate in class.

Gender is another dimension that can potentially influence engagement and participation, and will therefore, be examined in the chapter. As a starting point, the chapter begins with an exploration of the literature on the internationalization of higher education.

The Internationalization of Education

Internationalization is becoming a widespread global phenomenon, and as many writers have noted, globalization and internationalization are inter-connected concepts. For example, Altbach and Knight (2007, p. 1) argue that: “[g]lobalization is the context of economic and academic trends that are part of the reality of the 21st century, [while]

internationalization includes the policies and practices undertaken by academic systems and institutions” (p. 1).

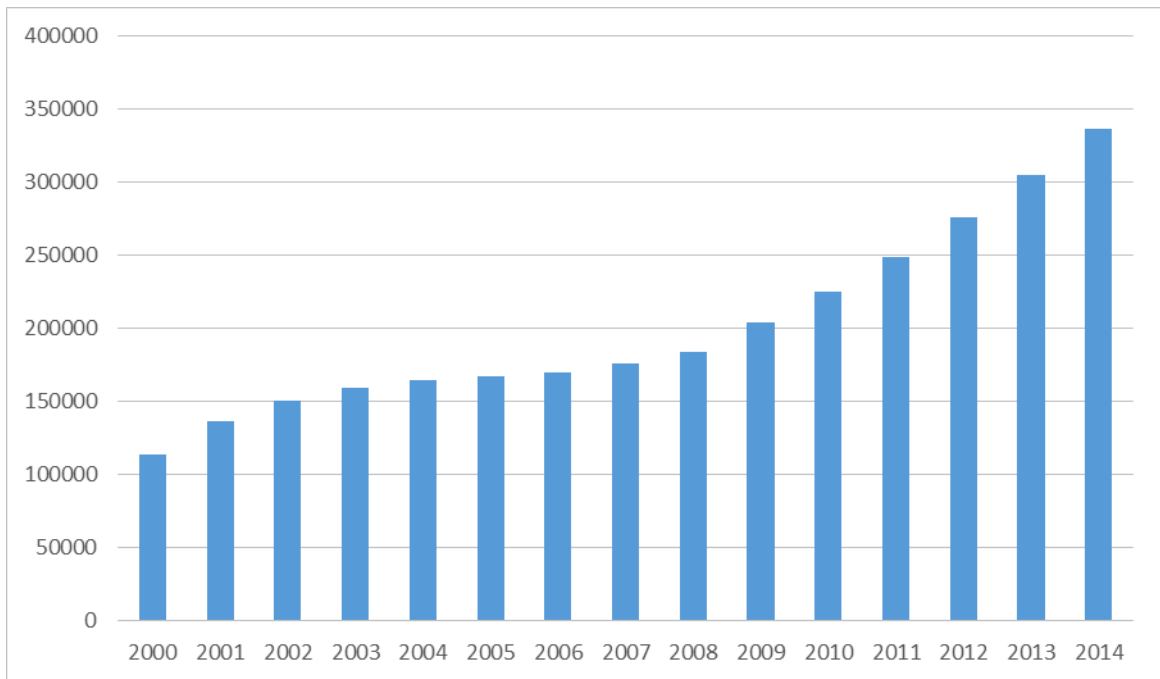
In the area of education, internationalization provides more opportunities for students to access to higher education in other countries. With regards to the present study, the internationalization of higher education has increased the number of Chinese students who come to Canada to obtain degrees in a variety of disciplines.

As a multicultural society, Canada welcomes diverse people and families from different parts of the world into the country each year. Also, some students make the choice to further their studies in Canada, which has in no small way, contributed to increases in the number of international students in the country. The popularity of Canada as a destination for international students is based on the perception that Canada has high standards and academic excellence. Davies and Hammack (2005) demonstrated that in North America, applications for universities increase sharply each year, which means students who would like to enter university become more competitive in Canada. Additionally, the tuition of many Canadian universities is lower than those of some English-speaking countries. This combination of high quality education and low tuition, has made Canadian higher education institutions attractive for students from other countries, especially China.

According to Kunin (2009), the number of international students in Canada at all levels increased at an average growth rate of 7% from 2000 to 2007. The Canadian Bureau for International Education (2015) stated that the year 2008 to 2014 (see Figure 1) witnessed a rapid increase in the number of international students who were studying in Canada. In 2014, Canada welcomed the most international students at all levels of the

education system since 2000. This number proves that Canada possesses excellent recourses and exceptional education programs at all levels of the various education systems.

Figure 1: The Number of International Students in Canada by all Levels from 2000 to 2014



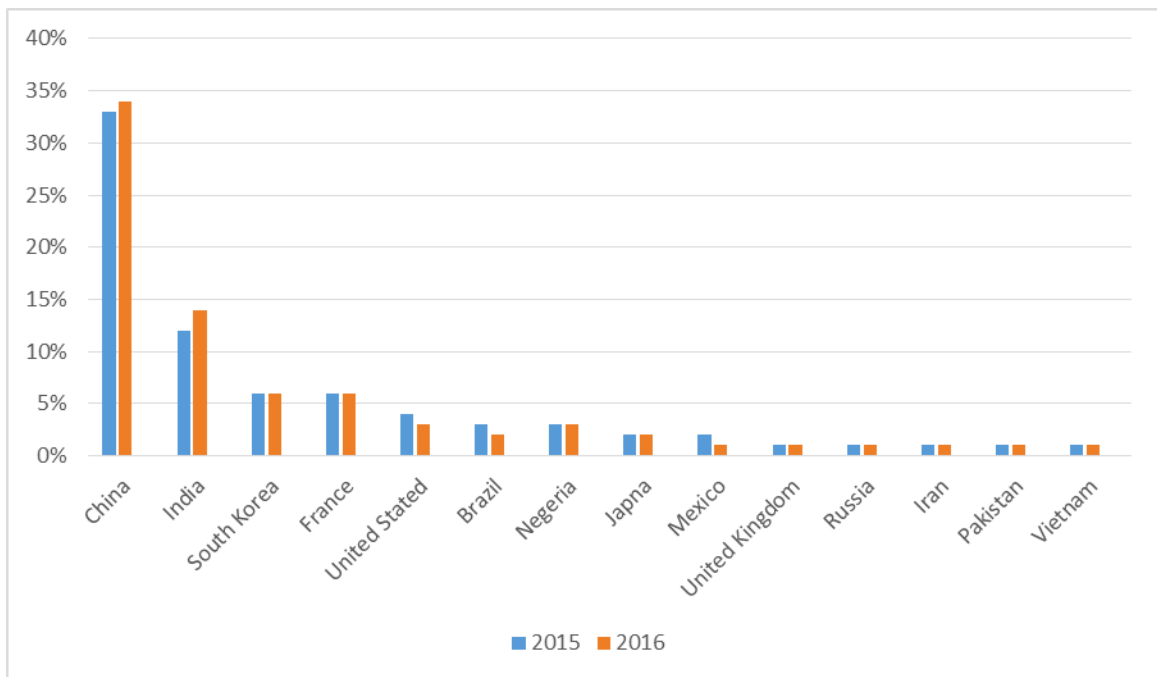
Source: Citizenship and Immigration Canada.

http://www.international.gc.ca/education/report-rapport/economic-impact-economique/sec_4.aspx?lang=eng

During the period 2015 and 2016, the number of international students who were studying in Canada reached the highest point. However, some countries had larger numbers of international students than Canada during the same period. As figure 2 shows in 2015 and 2016, Chinese international students constituted about 33% and 34%

respectively and ranked top among students from other countries. Also during the same period, the number of students from France, South Korea, Nigeria, Japan, UK, Russia, Iran, Pakistan and Vietnam was stable while the number of students from the United States, Brazil and Mexico actually decreased. A closer analysis of figure 2 shows that China and India account for the biggest share of the Canadian international education market.

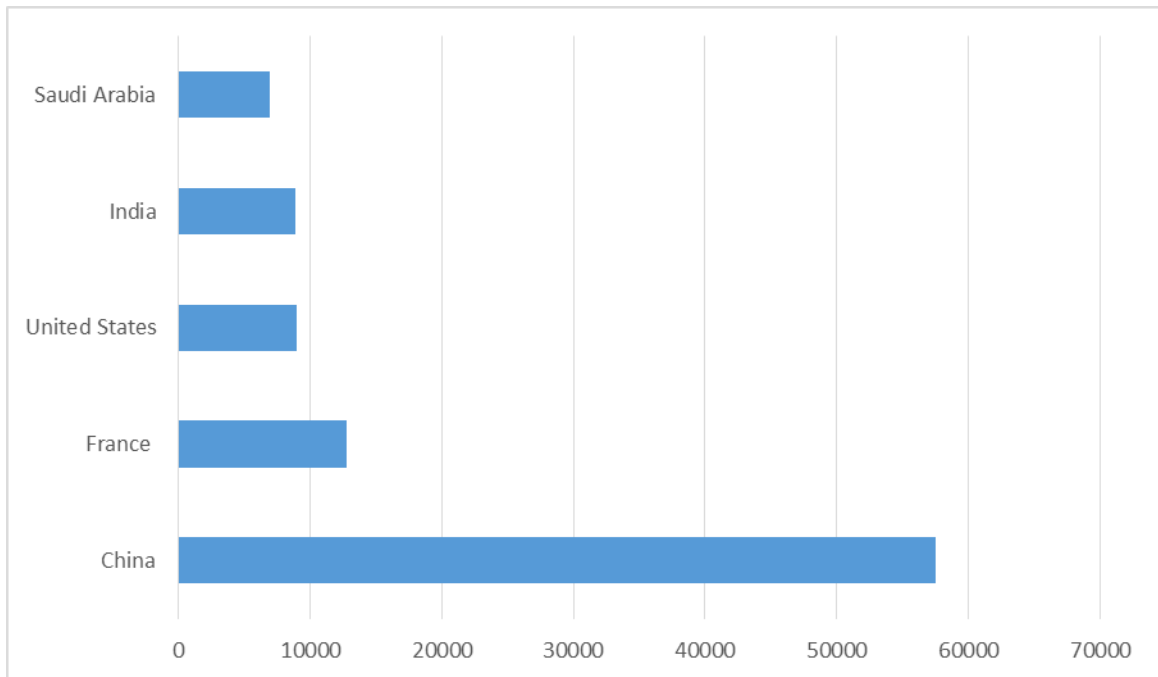
Figure 2: The Number of International Students in Canada by all Levels in 2015 and 2016



Source: Canadian Bureau for International Education. (<http://cbie.ca/media/facts-and-figures/>)

The preceding figures (1 and 2) provide data on the number of international students by all levels. More relevant to the context of this study, figure 3 shows that Chinese international students rank top among international students in Canadian university programs. Next to Chinese international students are students from France and the United States. This trend invites scholars to investigate Chinese international students' academic experiences in Canada. This study is an exploration of their experiences especially with regards to the factors that influence their engagement and participation in university classrooms. These factors are examined in the next section.

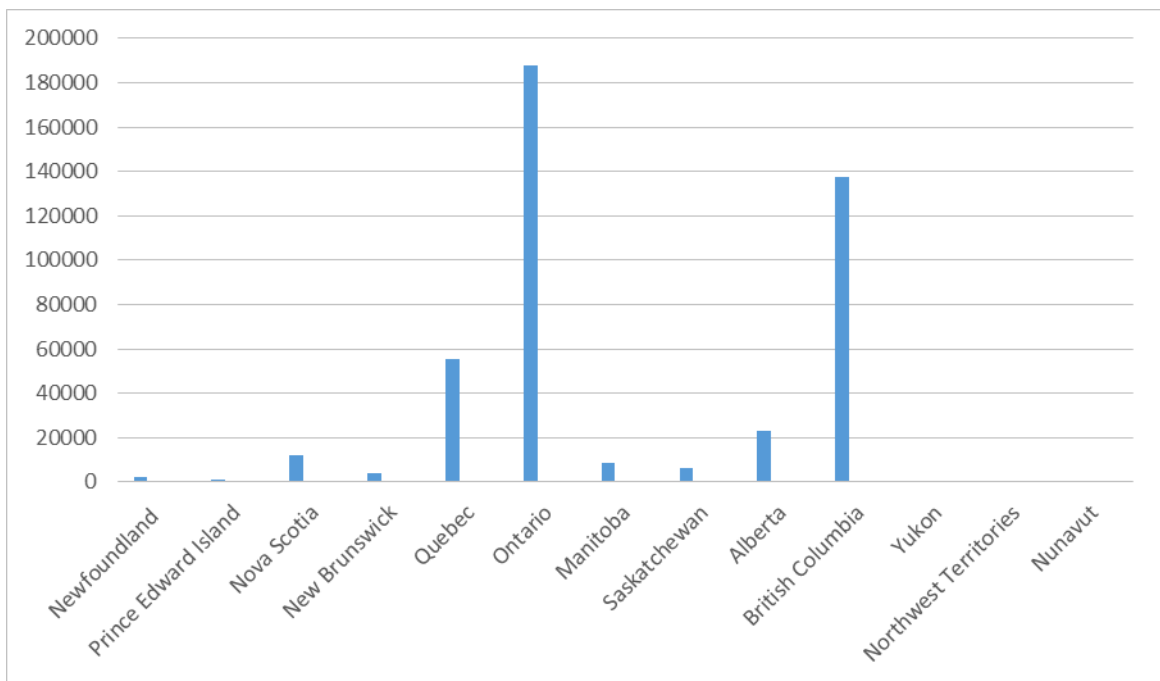
Figure 3: Top Countries of International Students in Canadian University Programs



Source: Canadian Bureau for International Education. (<http://cbie.ca/media/facts-and-figures/>)

International students occupy a large number among the students who study in Canada. As we can see, figure 4 shows the number of international students who study in Canada by province. It presents that Ontario Province admitted the most international students compared to other provinces, followed by British Columbia Province. Quebec Province and Alberta Province ranked No. 3 and No. 4 respectively among those provinces. According to figure 4, international students play significant role in Canadian education, especially in Ontario and British Columbia Province.

Figure 4: The Number of International Students by Province



Source: Global Affairs Canada. (<http://www.international.gc.ca/education/report-rapport/impact-2016/index.aspx?lang=eng>)

Factors that Influence Classroom Engagement and Participation

There are many factors that may contribute to or impede student classroom engagement and participation. These include: individual motivation, instructor and teaching methods, cultural differences, language barriers and communicative competence, social experiences in higher education and other factors. A number of cross-cultural studies have sought to explore the relationship between these factors and student engagement and participation. For example, a study conducted by Munezane (2013) showed that many factors affect Japanese EFL (English as a foreign language) classroom participation, including expectations from parents and friends, motivation and the language proficiency. Also, language barriers and communicative competence, such as English learning ability, are of vital significance when Chinese international students take classes in English-speaking countries. Another study conducted by Wen and Clément (2003) explored the factors influencing language learning willingness. The findings of the study show that cultural differences, personal values and societal contexts may affect Chinese students' willingness to learn English.

Lee (2009) conducted a study with six Korean students who attended discussions in US seminars. The study involved interviews and classroom observation. The findings of this study showed that many factors affect students' participation in classroom discussion in North America, including English language ability, social-cultural differences, social views on talk, gender and age, classroom norms, individual differences and context knowledge. Overall, large varieties of factors affect students' classroom engagement and participation.

With regards to this particular study, there are many factors that influence Chinese international graduate students' classroom engagement and participation. Various factors that have been previously explored guided this study. These factors are examined in this chapter.

Individual Motivation

Numerous studies have shown that individual motivation is one of the main factors that affect students' classroom engagement and participation. Martin, Yu and Hau (2014) conducted a study about students' motivation and engagement in three different contexts: Hong Kong, Mainland China and Australia. The study determined that different levels in motivation may contribute to different levels of engagement. Peng (2012) carried out a study among four university students. Multiple data were collected through semi-structured interviews, non-participant observations, and learning journals. The findings of this study show that learning interests may be a vital element (among many other factors) affecting students' classroom engagement and participation.

With survey, non-participant observation and interview as research methods, Howard and Henney (1998) investigated students' diverse life experiences and understandings of the situations which determine their willingness to engage and participate in classroom activities. In this study, the students identified four reasons for their participation in class discussions, including the following: "I am seeking information and clarification", "I have something to contribute to the class", "I enjoy participation", and "I disagree with something the instructor said" (p. 397). Thus, students' motivation may influence their classroom participation in discussions. The implication of this finding is that instructors should make every effort to stimulate

students' motivation in order to improve their classroom engagement and participation. Sit (2013) analyzed Chinese international students' learning characteristics saying that Chinese traditional teacher-oriented teaching style and exam-oriented teaching approach contributed to Chinese students' passive learning style in class. Most Chinese students are accustomed to learning for examinations which had been deeply seated in their minds. Hence, passing the examination is their goal and motivation to learn in class.

Students' classroom engagement and participation, to some degree, impacts on their achievement. Using questionnaires as the main source of data, Ams and Archer (1988) conducted a study on students' motivational process and performance goals. The researchers distributed questionnaires to 176 students. The findings of the study show that students' different performance goals could better distinguish students' distinct motivation and attitude. They also found that "students' perceptions of classroom climate were related to specific motivational variables that have significant implications for the development of self-regulated learning as well as a long-term involvement and interests in learning" (p. 265).

Another quantitative study conducted by Bernard (2010) demonstrated that motivation is a significant factor for students in the learning of a foreign language. A study which was conducted through survey with 151 Carnegie Mellon students identified six distinct motivational models and these motivations served as facilitators of class activities as well as predictors of students' achievement. Overall, motivation is an important factor (among others) in students' classroom engagement and participation.

Instructors and Teaching Methods

Various studies have examined the role of instructors and teaching methods in students' classroom engagement and participation. Zhang and Zhang (2013) investigated Chinese and American students' classroom engagement and critical thinking. Using a questionnaire, they attempted to find out whether or not teachers' positive emotions would affect students' engagement and critical thinking ability. The results showed that instructors' optimistic emotions could ameliorate students' classroom engagement and critical thinking ability in both cultures. A study by Zacharias (2014) using students' narratives as the main data source, found that instructors' role in the classroom may advance students' engagement and participation. The reverse is true for lecture-based teaching styles, which may give rise to students' low participation. This investigation also illustrated that instructors' in-class discourse norms can contribute to students' silent behaviours in the classroom. There are four elements of instructor discourse, including (a) lecture styles; (b) lack of modified input; (c) unfavorable instructors' feedback; and (d) instructors' pedagogical stories that may contribute to students' silent behaviours.

Other studies have, however, shown no relationship between instructors and students' engagement. For example, Howard and Henney (1998) concluded that the instructor's gender has no significant effect on students' classroom engagement and motivation. The same study also suggested that low classroom engagement and participation is not attributable to the instructor, although an instructor may act as a facilitator in addressing students' engagement classroom problems.

Teaching methods are also implicated in students' classroom engagement and participation. A study by Zhao, Mok and Cao (2016) examined how Chinese educators

and teachers implement curriculum reform in math classrooms through a combination of interviews, questionnaires, lesson videos, and students' achievement tests. The study showed that "A good teaching method would increase students' participation and highlight the important role of teachers in the classroom" (p. 88). Similarly, Denies, Yashima and Janssen (2015) demonstrated that some principles should be issued to guide teachers to design a form of student-centred classroom which is best suited to students even though researchers' study was based on French learning as a second language.

Huang and Brown (2009) investigated Chinese international students' academic learning in North American universities focusing on the cultural factors. They argued that there are six areas in which students from mainland China feel uncomfortable. Chinese international students questioned professor's teaching methods which stressed group discussions rather than the lecture-based method. Those students also felt uncomfortable when they were asked to do the group and discussions with their classmates because they prefer to learn the new knowledge based on the textbook.

Cultural Differences

A cultural perspective suggests that students' levels of classroom engagement and participation may be different as a result of their backgrounds. Jones (1999) claims that culture is one of the main factors that prevent most students from engaging and participating in classroom discussions. Through the analysis of data from a survey, the researcher found that some students who are unfamiliar with another culture may make a decision to be silent and have little or no interactions with other classmates or instructors to avoid embarrassment. It is this unfamiliarity that leads to low involvement in classrooms. Huang and Brown (2009) pointed out that lack of cultural common interests

deters some students from being involved in classroom activities. To a certain extent, cultural factors have negative impact on Chinese international students' participation and engagement.

Zhang and Zhou (2010) explored Chinese international students' perspectives, expectations and experiences at a Canadian university using a mixed method approach. Their findings show that cultural background differences were one of the most frequently mentioned factors from Chinese international students' perspectives, expectations and experiences in Canada. However, low engagement and participation also leads to disadvantages like having difficulties in making friends in the classroom. Similarly, Trice (2004) carried out a study about international graduate students' social interactions. The findings of the study show that students from some parts of Asia are concerned about developing friendships because of different cultural backgrounds and language barriers. In particular, Chinese students have a preference for communicating with people who share similar sociocultural backgrounds with them (Yan & Cardinal, 2013).

Wen and Clément (2003) explored how individual motivation affects Chinese international students' classroom engagement in North American universities based on the analysis of the cultural differences between China and western countries. They found that Chinese students tend towards collectivism and will express their ideas more freely as well as feel more comfortable in a group. The feeling of togetherness encouraged them to engage in group activities. Mukminin and McMahon (2013) adopted a phenomenological approach to understand their participants' experiences in North American campuses using in-depth interviews. The study showed that Asian students

usually are humbler and quieter. In effect, cultural differences are one of the major contributors to difficulties in engaging and participating in class discussions.

White (2011) conducted a study with some students who were reluctant to participate in class. Although they were aware that lack of participation might negatively affect their overall grades, students from some minority backgrounds were reluctant to participate in classroom discussions. Huang and Klinger (2006) conducted a study on Chinese graduate students' challenges and coping strategies in North American universities. The study which was conducted using semi-structured interviews found that Chinese graduate students face many challenges when they come to Canada. One of the major challenges they are confronted with is acculturation problem. Most international students could not adjust themselves very quickly to a new culture. Acculturation is regarded as a process in which individuals and groups, go through changes in various areas and try to adjust to a new cultural environment. (Lopez-Class, Castro, & Ramirez, 2011). Schwartz, Unger, Zamboanga and Szapocznik (2010) also define acculturation as changes that occur when individuals interact with people who are culturally different from them. Acculturation issues become more common with the development of internationalization. Acculturation problems do not only exist in Chinese graduate students' daily life, but also in their academic study. Buote, Pancer, Pratt, Adams, Birnie-Lefcovitch, Polivy and Wintre (2007) indicated that: "a strong relationship between new friendships that emerging adults form when they begin their university studies and their adjustment to the university environment" (p. 685). The friendship in Canadian universities may affect Chinese international graduate students' levels of classroom engagement and participation.

Language Barriers and Communicative Competence

Some other researchers present new perspectives on students' classroom engagement and participation. This group of researchers believe that language barrier is a vital factor. Kim (2006) adopted a survey to explore East Asian international students' oral communication needs, bearing in mind that listening and speaking skills are most frequently required when students are involved in class discussions and group activities. The findings of Kim's study showed that most Asian students who learn English as a second language have difficulties in listening/speaking tasks when engaging and participating in the classroom.

Malik and Sang (2016) compared Chinese students' classroom oral participation with other international students through classroom observation, for purposes of investigating the level of Chinese international students' participation and engagement in the classrooms. The results of this study further confirmed that Chinese students are more likely to be silent in the class, as a consequence of language barriers. Also, Sato and Hodge (2009) explored and described the sojourn experiences of Asian international students who study and live in North America using a multiple-case approach. The findings showed that most Asian international graduate students encounter language difficulties in North American university classrooms, and one of the major themes which emerged from the data is language barrier. Due to language differences, Asian students are often afraid of interacting with native English speaking students. Language barriers also act as obstacles to comprehending lectures and questions from others.

Liu and Littlewood (1997) revealed the myths of Chinese students' reluctance in classroom engagement and participation. The study showed that East Asian students,

themselves, are willing to participate in class discussions. However, they may show passive attitude in classroom engagement and participation when they have class in English-speaking countries, which means language as one of the factors, limited students' classroom engagement and participation. Also, the data shows that 43 percent students feel uncomfortable speaking English. The Chinese traditional Confucius culture has proved to be one of the significant factors. Scollen and Scollen (cited in Liu & Littlewood, 1997) stated that: "The Confucian teacher-student relationship does not encourage student questioning in class because 'questioning might be thought of saying that the teacher had not taught well because there were still unanswered questions'" (p. 374). Besides, this study also explained some possible causes of this situation, including "lack of confidence in spoken English", "anxiety from high performance expectations" and "perception of learner role" (pp. 376-377).

Mukminin and McMahon (2013) stated that lack of confidence made students to be afraid of participating in class discussions. Students believe that they are not fluent enough in English and therefore, lack the confidence to speak the language with their professors and fellow students. According to these researchers, "The feelings of lack of confidence and experience made it difficult to actively engage in delivering their academic assignments due to their cultural influences and limited English ability" (p. 8).

Communicative competence also affects students' classroom engagement and participation. Xu and Case (2015) stated that Chinese students began to learn English as a second language in grade three. However, Zhang (2012) notes that most Chinese students encounter obstacles that they rely heavily on the English materials in class instead of communicating independently in English. According to Hymes (2001), communicative

competence could be divided into linguistic competence and linguistic performance. Linguistic competence refers to the ability to fully understand the language form, which is assessed by internal grammaticality. Linguistic performance means the usage of language in a social context where the acceptability is a criterion. Therefore, language barriers and communicative competence play a vital role in influencing students' classroom engagement and participation.

Social Experiences in Higher Education

Chinese international students' interactions with other people is an essential part of their social life and academic learning in Canada. When Chinese international students come to Canada, they have to adapt to new environments as well as deal with the unfamiliar Canadian culture, values and people. Bennett and LeCompte (1990) demonstrated that education, which is presented in "structured form" plays an essential role in people's social experiences. The "structured form" refers formal institutions such as colleges and universities, while the "unstructured form" refers to the informal learning out of school. For example, this "learning is from the very beginning, socially and culturally mediated" (Unwin & Yandell, 2016, p. 21). Therefore, classroom engagement and participation could be regarded as one of social experiences in educational institutions.

McDowell and Montgomery (2006) conducted a study on international student experiences and social networks. The findings of the study showed that international students have difficulties with getting involved in social exchanges with other students. Some international students refuse to share their culture and language with others. These isolated students' reluctance to communicate with others, may lead to their low

classroom engagement and participation. In order to encourage students to have positive social experiences, most universities in North America make efforts to support them.

Guidry (2002) notes that:

The first way a university can help the students is by providing an international student center with advisers and counselors who can help students with common problems such culture, social life, health care, money matters, and so on. An international center can also be helpful in organizing social events; international students can meet other international students and American students as well. (p. 25)

According to Sato and Hodge (2009), people may find it difficult to build social connections with local people due to culture and language related differences. Thus, encouraging Chinese international graduate students to engage in social exchanges is a vital component of studying in a foreign country.

Other Factors Affecting Classroom Engagement and Participation

In addition to the major factors that are discussed above, studies have also examined other factors related to Chinese international graduate students' classroom engagement and participation. For example, Peng (2012) argued that the classroom environment might influence students' participation in the classroom. Also, lack of preparation in the class may lead to students' unfamiliarity to the courses or contents of the class. Thus, when professors ask questions, students who did not prepare well may have no idea how to answer the questions. If they are invited to give their opinions or ideas, they may not feel confident enough to speak.

Another study by Huang and Klinger (2006) explored learning challenges and the coping strategies of Chinese graduate students when they are studying in North American universities. The findings showed that one of the main challenges that Chinese graduate students face in North American universities is adapting to the classroom learning environment.

Gender and Classroom Engagement and Participation

In addition to other variables, there is also a debate surrounding gender-based differences in classroom engagement and participation. Tatum, Schwartz, Schimmoeller and Perry (2013) conducted a study to determine whether or not the percentage of male students affects students' willingness to engage and participate in class. Gender discrimination occurs in classrooms in the form of teachers calling on males more often than females. Research has shown that males speak more frequently than females in the class. Sadker and Sadker (1986) conducted a research on classroom interactions in elementary schools, secondary schools and higher education institutions. One of the conclusions they made is that male students receive more attention from teachers while female students have less time to talk in the classroom which contributed to gender-based differences in classroom engagement and participation. Lack of confidence, to some degree, determines female students' classroom participation. In a similar study, Khan, Ahmad and Ahmad (2014) found that: "[T]he enacted and ensued classroom environments tend to create an element of fear in female students, necessarily highlighting the role that patriarchal norms play in subduing the female lot in most matters of their lives" (p. 43).

There are however, some opposing views as some researchers believe that female students are more active than male students in classroom. Girardelli and Patel (2015) conducted a study and found that female students have stronger intention to engage and participate in class than males. Students and professors' gender may also influence students' classroom participation. Lee (2009) conducted a study about six Korean students' oral participation in seminars in the United State. Among these participants, there were three female students from class A and one female student from class B. The other students were males. The findings of the study show that although these six participants were silent during the discussion, female students were more active than male students.

Overall, gender-based differences play an important role in classroom engagement and participation, and females generally seem make less contribution with regards to participation and engagement. According to Crawford and MacLeod (1990), female students show lower participation and engagement in class compared to male students. However, this phenomenon is not caused by the instructors' discrimination and it could be best addressed by the instructors who are conscious of gender-based differences and create an equal environment for both male and female students.

Many studies had been investigated regarding students' classroom engagement and participation related factors as well as gender-based issues. These researches provide a foundation for my study to analyze the data which were collected during the interviews. Although a large number of relative articles has been reviewed on these topics, there are some gaps need to be filled. First, there are few articles about Chinese international graduate students, while most articles focus on Korean, Indonesian and American

students, especially undergraduate students. Therefore, researches on Chinese international graduate students need further exploration. Second, although many articles mentioned various factors that affect students' classroom engagement and participation, those factors were not fully explained to best address the research questions in this study.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This qualitative study uses a case study approach which according to Baxter and Jack (2008), “provides tools for researchers to study complex phenomena within their contexts” (p. 1). Different from the quantitative approach, qualitative research is appropriate for an exploratory study that examines the experiences of a particular group of students in their own words. Gelling (2015) defined the qualitative research as an approach that helps investigators examine the social experiences, academic learning experiences, as well as the factors affecting these experiences. There are five dominant research methods for each approach, including narrative study, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography and case study.

Based on the phenomenon under investigation, the case study was selected as the research method. According to Yin (as cited in Creswell, 2013) introduced this research method: “Case study research involves the study of a case within a real life, contemporary context settings” (p. 99). In case study, the types of research questions are posed by “how” and “why”. Moreover, there are no requirements to control each behavioural events, but the researcher needs to focus on contemporary events. All of these contributed to the use of the case study approach in this inquiry.

The goal of this study is to make a difference in this field by offering some suggestions and recommendations. The data for the study were collected through taped one-on-one interviews. Qualitative research interviews aim to collect information and facts by narrating real experiences of the participants. The process of interview is also

important in this study. To gain deep insights from the interview discussion, it is necessary for the investigator to act as a supportive listener. (Baxter & Babbie, 2003; Rossetto, 2014). The interviews were designed to explore the level of Chinese international graduate students' classroom engagement and participation and whether or not there are gender-based differences in levels of participation and engagement based on interviewees' own perceptions, experiences and stories.

Sixteen Chinese international graduate students at a university in Southwestern Ontario were interviewed using some guiding questions (see Appendix A) to elicit their experiences and participants with regards to classroom engagement and participation.

The Research Site

The interviews for this study took place in a university in Southwestern Ontario, Canada. This site was selected because it has a large number of Chinese international graduate students.

The Participants

As a Chinese international graduate student in Canada, I chose to ask Chinese international graduate students to share their stories and experiences in Canadian universities. Chinese students who were born and received their education in Canada were excluded from the study. Additionally, those who had any form of relationship with the investigator direct or indirect were also excluded. Ultimately, a convenient sample of sixteen interviewees (eight males and eight females) were interviewed among Chinese international graduate students at the university. The sample was drawn from various faculties within the university. The reason for interviewing participants from various faculties was to increase the diversity of opinions based on students' experiences in

different faculties, especially since different disciplines offer different programs and activities.

The recruitment of interviewees began with placing posters strategically around campus and by sending e-mails to Chinese international graduate students. The recruitment poster had the investigator's e-mail address through which interested Chinese international graduate students could contact the investigator. Several e-mails were also sent to international students through the e-mail address provided by the campus international student centre. Eventually, the participants were recruited through e-mail response and through introduction by those who had participated in the interview.

The interviews were conducted at mutually convenient locations which turned out to be either at the university's main library or in a group study room. The selected participants were informed of their rights including the fact that they could withdraw from the research at any time during the process, and had the right to ask any questions with regards to the research.

In what follows, I provide a profile of the participants. As mentioned above, there are sixteen participants (eight males and eight females) taking part in my interview. Among eight female participants, five students from the Faculty of Education, while the other three are from the Faculty of Science, the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Science respectively. The male interviewees are also from different faculties including the Faculty of Engineering, the Faculty of Business, the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Science and the Faculty of Education. Eight of interviewees had working experiences before pursuing their Masters degrees in Canada. One of them had

approximately 20-years working experience in China while the rest had less than 10-years working experience.

Data Collection

The interviewees were all Chinese international graduate students because their unique individual educational experiences differ from other international students. All the interviews were conducted in English language. As the investigator of this study, I am fluent in both English and Chinese. I was, therefore, able to assist participants who required additional clarification of some interview questions. The one-on-one interviews were tape-recorded with the permission of the participants and each interview lasted for approximately one hour.

In collecting the data, I was mindful of the processes as suggested by Creswell (2014) who states that “Data collection steps include setting the boundaries for the study; collecting information through unstructured or semi structured observations and interviews, documents, and visual materials, as well as establishing the protocol for recording information” (p. 196). Although interviews are time-consuming in terms of planning, conducting, and analysis, they can provide rich data associated with individual’s experiences and relevant knowledge of the phenomena. (Gelling, 2015). Each interview in this study began with some basic questions, including some basic information about participants and their courses. The participants were then asked some questions that were prepared in advance regarding classroom engagement and participation. Finally, they were asked to share their own experiences and stories, as well as provide some suggestions regarding students’ classroom engagement and participation.

Data Analysis

Fundamentally, in order to get familiar with the data, the investigator needs to approach all the collected data when doing the analysis part. Therefore, the emerged themes could be well categorized to better answer the research questions (Bouma, Ling & Wilkinson, 2004). Following this guideline, the study data were analyzed in three phases:

- The first phase took place while still in the field.
- The second phase was conducted after the interviews had been completed. During the second stage, the recorded interviews were transcribed and read several times by the investigator to determine emerging themes.
- In the third phase, similar ideas were integrated and that emergence of several themes.

The level of Chinese international graduate students' classroom engagement and participation in Canadian classrooms was explored based on participants' perceptions, experiences and stories. The accounts of both the male and female participants were also examined to determine whether or not there are gender-based differences in classroom engagement and participation. The findings of the study based on the analysis of data are reported in the next chapter.

Ethical Concerns

This study was approved by the university's Research Ethics Board. Accordingly, the participants were informed of their rights to voluntary participation. The confidentiality of the data was also guaranteed, and as a consequence, only pseudonyms will be used when describing the participants.

Limitations of the Study

There are several limitations to this study. First, the sample of sixteen Chinese international graduate students (8 males and 8 females) were drawn from one university in Southwestern Ontario. Therefore, the results cannot be generalized. Second, the participants were drawn from various disciplines, which means that the participants may have differential experiences of classroom engagement and participation. Although the purpose of this qualitative case study is to explore different perceptions and views, opportunities for classroom engagement and participation may differ based on students' disciplines or field of study. For example, students from science-related faculties may have more opportunities to engage and participate in the classroom as a consequence of mandatory participation in experiments, laboratory work etc.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Sixteen Chinese international graduate students participated in this study through one-on-one taped interviews which generated rich data. The analysis of data revealed several recurrent themes as follow: the purpose of coming to Canada; perceptions of their programs and courses; participants' expectations; participants' future plans; perceived benefits of programs; participants' challenges in Canada; differences between Canadian and Chinese education; understandings of the concepts of classroom engagement and participation; perceptions of Chinese international graduate students' level of classroom engagement and participation; factors influencing classroom engagement and participation; gender-based differences in the level of classroom engagement and participation; personal stories and experiences as well as participants suggestions. These themes are explored in details in what follows. For the sake of confidentiality and to protect the identities of the participants, only pseudonyms will be used in the discussion. Thus, the names of the female participants will be substituted with F1, F2, F3, F4, F5, F6, F7, F8, while the male participants will be described as M1, M2, M3, M4, M5, M6, M7, M8. A few of the participants have been in Canada for slightly less than one year, while a majority have been in Canada for a period of one to two years. However, one has been in Canada for three years and another for ten years. They are all international students.

The Purpose of Coming to Canada

The purposes of Chinese international students coming to Canada for study vary. One common reason for participants F1, F4, M1, M4, M5 and M6 who chose Canada as their ideal country for a Masters degree, is to seek academic improvement. Other reasons

such as searching for more opportunities and experiencing multiculturalism were also mentioned by these informants. F1 explains the reasons why she chose to study in Canada:

[B]ecause first of all, I want to change because I have been working in China for a while. I felt a little bored. So that is the first reason. And second reason is that I think there are, I mean, I am searching for education improvement, that is the second reason that I am coming here. And the third reason is that I have friends who are here [that] I can contact, you know, and I can hang out with.

Similarly, M6 desires to experience various cultures and to seek more opportunities in Canada. After working for 20 years in China, he wants to take a break in Canada as well as acquire more knowledge in his field of study.

Some other factors drive Chinese students' coming to Canada. Low tuition fees compared to some countries is an attraction for them. Participants F2 and M2 stated that they preferred Canada because the tuition fees of Canadian higher education institutions are lower than other English-speaking countries. Also, M3 and M7 held the same opinion that Canada is a country with a welcoming environment that make people feel comfortable. However, F3 came to Canada because she wants to stay away from home as she explained: "I like North America and I sort of want to be very far away from home. Not because I don't like my hometown but I want to try something new like adventure." However, participant F5 who came to Canada much earlier than the others held a different view stating that the Chinese exam-based education system is cruel for students

and she dislikes math, which is a mandatory subject in “Gaokao” (university entrance examination).

Perceptions of their Programs and Courses

According to the participants, there are some advantages and disadvantages to doing a graduate degree in a Canadian university based on their observations and experiences. The majority of the interviewees e.g., F1, F3, F5, F6, M3, M5, M6 and M7 believe that the professors in their faculties are very nice and professional. F6 showed her gratitude to the professors in her faculty:

In our faculty, I think our professors are perfect, because they have different teaching styles and different professional backgrounds ... As long as the professors can teach me a lot and don't waste my time, I think it is good.

Similarly, M6 stated: “The professors are nice and professional and they are very kind and they prepare [for] class in details. And they just explain and will help you improve and just give you all kinds of suggestions.” Another participant M5, noted that the professors in his faculty are kind and supportive. One of his professors would provide him assistance not only on his study but also, some other information about immigration program, which most Chinese graduate students will apply for on completion of their studies. Being proficient in Chinese, this professor would explain clearly to students who need such kinds of information. However, F1 suggested that she was not satisfied with her learning outcomes in one of her semester courses, because the instructor of this course was incapable of addressing students' needs.

Practicability and autonomy of learning were also pointed out as the advantages of their programs. F4 stated: “When talking about program, I think that I like the part that it has true practicum … That provide[s] [me] with opportunities to learn to practice with friends and feel different population.” Also, M7 made a comment to the effect that it is good for them to choose the courses they like, so they have more freedom. M8 showed his appreciations to the curriculum in his faculty as the courses that related to art were pleasing to him.

Some interviewees provided suggestions with respect to the courses in their faculties. According to them, it is necessary to provide some transitional and preparatory courses for those students who have weak background knowledge. F7 opined that some “connecting” courses are a necessity for students who have no relevant background knowledge. In that way, students may easily adapt to their studies in Canada and rapidly absorb new knowledge. Similarly, M7 suggested that there should be a bridge among the courses they are taking as well as a connection between the courses and their future career. Another participant, M5 reported that they are overloaded in some of their courses as they have too many materials to read after class.

Participants’ Expectations

Most interviewees had similar expectations of their graduate programs. For most, obtaining professional knowledge and practical skills from their programs were their ultimate goals. F3 explains: “I want to improve my language and my critical thinking ….” Similarly, M6 stated: “I think maybe, because I already worked for so many years. I want to learn some educational theory or some educational structures or more construct[ive] [knowledge].” F7 stated that she was eager to graduate and get her certificate, after which

she would like to learn another skill so she will be more competitive in finding a job in Canada. M8 expressed the view that he was willing to learn more practical knowledge related to daily life instead of only theories.

Participants' Future Plans

The majority of interviewees showed their eagerness to find jobs while some were open to pursuing higher degrees. M8 stated that he would like to get a job that interested him a lot in future. F5 explains her personal goal:

I want to work for a while until I get my PR. Even though I have been here for almost nine years, I am still an international student. That cost my family a lot. After working, probably I would apply for PhD or I don't know.

Similarly, F8 stated her thoughts in this way:

The future [plan] after graduation is to look for some jobs related to the program. Because we don't have teacher certificate here, so we cannot become a teacher here, so hopefully we can find a job that [is] related to education.

Nine out of the sixteen participants showed their readiness and/or desire to immigrate to Canada, as they can apply for ONIP (Ontario Immigrant Nominee Program) after taking a two-year Masters program in Canada. Different from the others, M3, a Masters student in an environment-related program, reported that he may go back to China to pursue a Chinese environmental career as the environment in China is now facing serious problems.

Perceived Benefits of Programs

According to the participants, there are various benefits that can be received from a graduate program, e.g., professional knowledge, practical skills, conduct to higher degree and qualification for immigration. F5 shared her feelings as follows:

The first one, of course, [is that a] Masters degree is a valuable degree. I can have that degree to have a better job, especially like art discourse in Canada like even all around the world. And I can also apply for PhD, that is definitely better for me. And also I think this applies for all Chinese international students [who] get Masters degree[s]. [It] is better for you to apply for a PR [in] [a] shorter [time] and less pressure.

Also, F6 and M6 stated that they gained professional knowledge from their programs. M3 explained that he learnt some practical skills from his program. These are all examples of the benefits of their programs. Different from others, M8 believes that his Masters program would improve his English language proficiency which will be satisfactory to him.

Participants' Challenges in Canada

Challenges exist in most Chinese international students' daily lives as well as in their academic learning when they come to Canada. In this category, language barrier was one of the most frequently mentioned challenges by these interviewees.

Language and Communicative-related Barriers

Three participants noted that some Chinese students face obstacles in speaking the English language even though they had learnt English for over 10 years. F5 came to Canada earlier than the other participants. When asked to talk about the challenges she is

facing, she responded that while she could write a perfect essay and fully understand what other people say, some of her classmates and teachers might misunderstand her when she speaks English which is embarrassing for her after living in Canada for almost 10 years. F1 also shared her thoughts:

According to my experience, I have learned English since, starting from junior one in middle school. So I have been learning English for more than ten years. But coming to Canada, I think, sometimes, [I] still come across embarrassed because of some slangs and idioms.

Another participant, M8 stated that even though he lived in Toronto for one and a half years and practiced English every day, he still needed to take an English improvement program before taking university courses.

Interviewees F2, F5 and M1 all expressed the view that they had difficulties in making friends with local people because of communication-related problems. F4 was apprehensive that she was not able to catch up with the speed with which local students speak English. F7 and M2 also offered their thoughts that sometimes it was difficult to communicate with local people and Chinese students do not understand well what other people were saying. F3 describes her own challenges in this regard:

When I first came here, very first class, the professor asked us to discuss without any forms learning about some assessment things. I was not very familiar with that, and at that point of time, my language was very poor. I didn't know how to properly communicate with Canadian people so I saw their face of not understanding me. I felt bad and things like that. Not very comfortable.

Other Barriers

In addition to language barriers, other challenges such as homesickness, assignment overload, teaching styles, cultural differences and social problems were also mentioned by the interviewees. For example, F1 stated that she was always under high pressure whenever the deadline for submitting an assignment was approaching. Sometimes, she had to stay up late until three or four a.m. in the morning to finish her assignment. F3 also discussed the problem of assignment overloaded: “Every week, I have to read a lot and I am a slow reader so I found it is overloaded.” F4 and M4 argued that one of their main challenges is homesickness. Although they lived with their Chinese roommates, they still experience loneliness.

Identity confusion, teaching method differences and cultural differences are also challenges that some of the participants stated that they face in Canada. M1 explained his challenge regarding identity confusion:

I think the most difficult is ... identity confusion. I can explain that. If you live in China, some people recognize your status and identity. People could know you, ... your family background, your status, your working experiences and so on based on your communications and other details. However, when you come to Canada, you are a new comer like entering another new society. People here don't recognize what you have already [achieved] in China. That is what I mean [by] identity confusion.

F8 shared her thoughts regarding not getting used to the teaching styles in Canada:

I do have some challenges especially in the classroom activities. I don't get used to the ways that many local students, they put up their hands they

... speak after teachers whenever they have something to say. I did not get used to that way; whenever I have some ideas I tend to keep it in mind. I don't like to show myself ... that much. So I think this is the challenge for me.

M8 described the cultural gap he is experiencing when he compares the city he now lives in with Toronto. "Here, the culture is more like Canadian culture and part of American culture. But in Toronto, it is an international culture like people. In general, they like to listen to the stories from different races and different cultures."

When asked how to overcome these challenges, the interviewees offered many suggestions and strategies for addressing those problems. To solve language problems, most of them would immerse themselves in exclusively English-speaking environments. Some of them would take part in activities held on the campus or other organizations to practice their English language and communication skills. With regards to too many assignments, most would download PowerPoint to preview the courses before the class and review them after class. As for cultural differences and homesickness, they try to get used to that and learn more about Canadian culture.

Differences between Canadian and Chinese Education

There are differences between Canadian and Chinese education. The biggest differences according to the participants, is the differences in teaching methodology. In Chinese traditional teaching method, the teacher is the one who always speak based on the lectures in the class. According to the F2, lecture-based teaching method is prevalent in China and teachers adopt this teaching style usually by reading the slides on the

PowerPoint. By contrast, most of the teachers in Canada are different. F1 also expressed a similar opinion:

For Chinese education, I feel that, this is what I always talk with classmates and sometimes, in Chinese classrooms, you can learn more because it [is] always the teachers who [are] giving the knowledge so you are taking the notes and you are receiving the knowledge. But in the Canadian education...if [class activity is] well-planned and well-thought out, I presume the students will benefit more because [of] their participation and engagement in the classroom. I think the best way to learn [is] by doing it, so that is my perception [of the two] education systems.

Students' level of freedom in teacher-centred classrooms and student-centred classrooms also vary. F3 noted that under Chinese teaching methods, teachers are stricter so students have to sit still and cannot speak without permission in the classroom especially in the first two tiers of the system. However, in Canadian classrooms, students can bring snacks and ask any questions whenever they want. Students in Canada and China have different levels of freedom due to differences in teaching methodology. F6 feels that Canadian teachers expect that students can actively participate in the activities and contribute to the class. However, Chinese teachers require students to be silent during class and to receive knowledge passively.

Access to knowledge is also different in China and Canada. F4 posited that Chinese students gain knowledge only from teachers but Canadian students acquire

knowledge in multiple ways. They can glean ideas from their peers in group activities and also from instructors through lectures. M6 explains further:

I think it is totally different. Because in China, you will ... learn the knowledge from the textbook and from the professors. But in Canada, they will try to help you ... how to learn the knowledge not just remember the knowledge [but] how to build the knowledge [and] how to construct [it] by yourself. You can use it. In China, you just learn the knowledge. I do not know what [it] is. But in Canada, you will know how to use it [for the good] to the society or the world.

M6 also gave a detailed explanation by taking one of his courses as an example. He took a course called “statistics” and in these courses, all the students were taught to use “concept map” to connect each term and concept for better comprehension. With this “concept map”, students grasped each concept as well as understood the relations between each concept. It is practical to apply this method into various areas to help students facilitate and connect concepts.

The differences in teaching method are also presented in many other ways. M1 noted that Canadian and Chinese teaching styles are dissimilar based on teachers’ physical position in the classroom. Chinese teachers are typically the “controller” and stand far away from students. Inversely, Canadian teachers are like facilitators or guides; they sit with students to discuss and carry out activities. M2, M3 and M7 said that the teaching style is more self-directed in Canada than it is in China, which means that Chinese students have to absorb knowledge step by step from teachers.

Besides the differences in teaching styles, there are other differences between Chinese and Canadian education systems. F1 believes that class size in Canadian and Chinese classrooms is different. Normally, class size in China is larger than in Canada. From another point of view, F4, F5 and M5 suggested that one of the differences is that Chinese education is an exam-oriented system. In China, every student is required to take tests to pass courses and earn their degrees. F5 said that most students are burdened with “Gaokao” (University Entrance Examination) in China. Similarly, participants F6 and M2 emphasized the differences in teacher-student relationship. F6 explained that students in China believe and respect whatever their instructors say. However, students in Canada have more freedom and can challenge their professors if they think that what a professor said is wrong.

Understandings of the Concepts of Classroom Engagement and Participation

The major objective of this study was to find out the level of Chinese international graduate students’ classroom engagement and participation. All the sixteen participants were, therefore, asked to give their own perceptions of classroom engagement and participation. Nine of the interviewees believed that both concepts have similar meanings, while the rest held the view that two concepts may differ in meaning.

Based on their perceptions and understandings, classroom engagement and participation not only mean students’ presence in the class but, also students’ communications and interactions with professors as well as participation in classroom discussions and activities. According to F3, classroom engagement and participation means that students need to listen to questions, answer the questions and think about the questions critically. F7 believed that the concepts of classroom engagement and

participation share the common idea that students get involved in class activities and discussions as well as actively communicate with professors and classmates. As M3 put it, “Engagement and participation mean [that] students need to join in … class [activities] and listen to … professors and discuss with [their] professors and classmates.” M7 also shared the view that engagement and participation not only mean that students are present in class but also, students engage and participate actively in lecture related activities like group discussions.

Slightly different from the others, M5 divides engagement and participation into two parts. From students’ sides, they need to respond to teachers’ questions while, professors need to motivate students to become involved in lectures actively.

Other participants had contrary views. M1 suggested that participation occurred when students recognize their roles in a group while engagement indicates that students are immersed in the learning process and contribute to group tasks. Based on his understanding, engagement happens after participation. F2 stated that participation means that students need to have more interactions with their professors and classmates. Also, students need to comprehend the requirements from the professors and take part in group work and discussions. For her, engagement means that students need to finish and complete course reading materials, assignments or group work online. Another participant, F5, explained her understanding of engagement and participation as follows:

I feel like there is always one participation part in our syllabus. So I think participation means you need to go to class, you need to answer questions and do your homework and talk to your group. You must have group discussions. Participation may like in the class. Engagement may be more.

Did you do your research before class? Did you review everything you have talked in the class? You can go to professors' office hour and talk to them what your opinion [is] about courses and something like that. I feel that it is the engagement with students, class material and professors.

M2 also expressed his opinion:

I think they are not the same. Participation means [that] you are part of this course, but engagement means you are willing to or you have the motivation that you want to discuss. Engagement and participation are easy to understand. Just like encourage students to be a part of this class or course, and each class you should preview and review before and after. You can discuss about some questions with professors and discuss or express your opinion.

On his part, M4 believes that classroom participation means that students will attend the class on time, listen to the lecture attentively and also take some notes. However, engagement is deeper than participation, and is reflected in students' performance when they interact and debate with their classmates in group discussions. M8 noted: "I think it is how you learn in classroom, how you learn in the program. Engagement means you got to listen to the class but participation means you have to participate in group work and research like this."

Perceptions of Chinese International Graduate Students' Level of Classroom Engagement and Participation

When asked about their general perceptions of the level of Chinese international graduate students' classroom engagement and participation, thirteen out of the sixteen

participants used the word “passive” to describe their general observation. The remaining three students described it with the word “medium”.

Based on F1’s observation, generally, Chinese international graduate students participated less than some domestic students in the course she has taken. F2 opined that Chinese international graduate students are inactive in the classroom because some of them may be easily distracted by the cellphones. However, some participants held the view that some of their Chinese classmates participate in the class very actively, while others do not. F4 noted that there are always students who are vigorously participate in class activities while others sit and listen to the professors passively. M5 gave his perspective: as follows “Some of our classmates are very interested in this program. They have their own academic background in [area] … so, [they] are more willing to answer questions and take [part in] more group work as well as do presentations.”

When asked about their personal level of classroom engagement and participation, the interviewees also provided some information. Some of the participants like F6 are very active in their classes. F6 explains:

I think I can [spend] much of my energy to participate [in] the classroom, because I do not want to waste time, my energy and my tuition fees. From another point, I think I want [to] communicate with other people, just like today I want to participate in the research study and I think it is interesting.

M3 shared that he always actively takes part in his classes even when he is not very interested in the course, he would try to be active because acquiring knowledge is a necessity in contemporary world.

Conversely, some other participants are not very active in the class. F8 would like to participate in group work and activities but, she does not like to stand up to speak in front of the whole class. F7 reported that she would not want to voluntarily answer the questions by professors because she does not want others to focus on her. Different from the others, M1 prefers to be active in small groups rather than large groups. M8 expressed his perception that even though he was not the most active person in the class, he would try to engage more if he was interested in the course.

Factors Influencing Classroom Engagement and Participation

This section presents the factors that influence Chinese international graduate students' classroom engagement and participation according to the perceptions of the participants. These factors include language barriers, cultural differences, teaching styles differences, background knowledge and some other factors.

Language Barrier

Language barrier was seen as a major factor by thirteen out of sixteen participants when they were asked about their perceptions of the factors that contribute or inhibit to classroom engagement and participation. F1 held the view that language barrier plays a crucial role in the level of Chinese international graduate students' engagement and participation in class. Some Chinese students could not express themselves accurately and fluently because of language barriers even though they are eager to do so. F2 shared her personal observation:

If all the groups [are] ... Chinese students, maybe they will [use] mandarin to talk to discuss. If the group is like half Chinese and half Canadian, sometimes, there will be an embarrassing situation. Still because of the

language or Chinese students cannot understand ... the professors' question[s] ... Or sometimes, Chinese students cannot understand the question[s], but they still don't ask Canadian students the meaning of questions. So, the discussions cannot go well.

Also, F6 noted that limited English is one of the biggest challenges: "Maybe they did not understand what the questions really mean." F8 held a similar view. She stated that if the Chinese students cannot understand the questions and cannot express their opinions, they are afraid to stand up to give answers.

A few participants mentioned that some specific academic terms are also obstacles they face when talking about language barriers. M1 noted that some Chinese students may not be able to fully comprehend the meaning of some specific academic terms, which may limit their understanding, and therefore, reduce their level of engagement and participation. M2, M3, M4, M5 and M6 held the same opinion that even when some Chinese students understand the meaning of questions, they refuse to participate because they could not express accurately and fluently. Similarly, F7 explained the reason why she does not want to be active in the class. Although she is interested in the courses and would like to learn, she sometimes faces language barriers so she cannot understand some of the terminologies professors use.

Teaching Methods

Nine interviewees stated that teaching methods play a vital role in the engagement and participation of Chinese international graduate students. Teaching methods in China and Canada vary, which may cause Chinese students' low levels of engagement and participation in the classroom, as they are accustomed to traditional Chinese teacher-

centred teaching styles, which have shaped the students' perceptions since they were young. F1 stated that the reasons why some Chinese students prefer to sit in class passively rather than voluntarily answer questions:

I think, might be, we did not have the habit, since we were little, we did not get training to do that. I think I have never taken any middle school courses or primary courses in Canada in North America. I heard that they encourage students ... to express their opinions. But in China, we did not do things like that, because of the class size, or because we are pursuing different things. We are pursuing for higher scores. So students should actually focus on their scores and test papers. I think that might be we are not be trained like this.

F8 also believed that a student-centred early childhood education motivates students to participate in classroom activities and discussions, as students who received their education in Canada were encouraged to share as many ideas as they can. As a consequence, Canadian students have higher levels of classroom engagement and participation than their Chinese peers.

In addition to childhood education, professors also motivate students' interests and engagement in the class. F2 stated that she became more engaged and active in her second semester because of the professors. The professors in those three courses were nice and professional as they made comprehensive preparations for each class. F3 also believed teaching method really matters: "Because the tradition of Chinese students is to listen to the lectures so they are not confident to express their ideas." Chinese education system is still quite hierarchical. F5 pointed out that the level of hierarchy between

teachers and students are obvious and profound: “I never called the full name of the teachers in China before, but here no one says Professor … no one says that. I think hierarchy here is more blurred. So it is more about engagement with your teachers here.”

Chinese traditional education methods also determine students’ engagement and participation in the class. M1 emphasized the dissimilarities in the teaching styles between China and Canada: “I think that maybe … most people may be accustomed to the teaching style in China, which is teacher-centered.” F5 mentioned that the Chinese traditional teaching system is still deeply rooted in Chinese students’ minds which contributes to their passive engagement and participation in Canada. Still along these lines, M6 stated that some students are influenced by the Chinese traditional classroom atmosphere which is teacher-centred. Thus, some students are used to sitting silently and receiving knowledge from professors. M7 stated: “I believe that it is an educational style. They receive [education] in China so it is hard to influence their behaviour. They feel like I can answer this question, [but] maybe I will [get] it wrong.”

Level of Motivation

Eight interviewees mentioned that students’ motivation may affect their classroom engagement and participation. Receiving a Master degree can be a powerful motivation for some Chinese students who made the decision to come to Canada to study. F1 shared that based on her observation, most of her Chinese classmates have enough motivation and interest in their courses but, they are afraid and shy to raise hands and take part in activities and discussions. However, for other students whose goals are to receive the degree certificate, they are reluctant to participate and engage in class actively. For example, F3 held the view that the level of motivation determines some

Chinese students' classroom engagement and participation. In order to get their degrees, some Chinese students tend to choose courses that have fewer assignments and presentations, let alone taking part in activities and discussions actively. F6 stated that most Chinese students' goals are only to receive a Masters degree, and do not care what kind of knowledge they acquire.

Other types of motivators e.g., academic improvement and high marks from courses were also mentioned. M1 emphasized the importance of students' motivation and interest in the courses. Some students are passive in class because they believe that there is no relationship between their GPA (grade point average) and classroom engagement and participation, which means that they could still receive high marks even if they did not actively participate in class. Using himself as an example, M4 stated that one of the reasons why he actively participates in class is that he wants to get higher marks. M8 stated that motivation would influence students' engagement and participation. He said that he is more active in a course in which he is interested.

Background Knowledge

Background knowledge was also cited as an important factor. Six interviewees mentioned that background knowledge is of great importance in influencing classroom engagement and participation. M5 noted that he may refuse to engage and participate actively in class when he is confronted with some obstacles like new academic terms. M1 stated: "I think the most difficult area for [a] new comer is [that] there are a lot of academic terms. Even native students have to read the materials relying on the dictionary. They don't like it." F6 pointed out that some students who have a low level of engagement and participation may not understand the meaning of the sentences. Even if

those questions are asked in Chinese, they still will not know how to answer. In that case, prior knowledge could determine students' willingness to participate in the class. M4 pointed out that some students may think that the questions are too difficult for them to answer. According to F4, possessing enough relevant background knowledge may make students feel more confident in the class.

Cultural Differences

Four of the interviewees mentioned that cultural differences also play a crucial role in classroom engagement and participation. F1 pointed out that cultural differences might be one of the factors because Chinese extensive and profound culture is deeply rooted in most Chinese students' minds. Compared to Chinese students, some local students are more willing to express their opinions. Chinese students are accustomed to sitting silently in the classroom and only receive knowledge from professors. M7 also noted that the culture Chinese people are immersed in is different from that of Canadians: "They are a little bit wild and Chinese people are more mild." Another participant, F5, shared her thoughts this way:

Someone comes to a totally different country ... to study; ... our humanity is to get into a group that we are more familiar with. That is the reason why Chinese people are always with Chinese people, and always eat Chinese food. That would be one of the factors that matters. But it is not easy to change.

F7 stated that although she is motivated and has interest in the courses she chose, she did not want other students and professors to pay too much attention to her if she stood up to

make a statement. Some Chinese students maybe not confident enough to answer the questions voluntarily because they are afraid of making mistakes.

Other Related Factors

Personality may also influence Chinese international graduate students' classroom engagement and participation. F5 gave an example of her friend who only passively participated in class. It may be challenging for introverted people like her friends to actively participate and engage in class activities and discussions. M2 stated that Chinese students who are introverted may be less willing to engage and participate in class activities and discussions even though they know the answers or have some good ideas.

F3 opined that some outside pressures may also affect students' level of engagement and participation. For example, you may not receive participation marks if you are passive, because some professors make participation part of their course evaluation. Therefore, students have to be more active in the class in order to receive higher marks. F4 noted that expectations from others also matter in classroom engagement and participation for students.

M6 pointed out two other factors that may contribute to a low level of classroom engagement and participation. One is class environment and the other is work experiences. He used an example to illustrate his point about classroom environment. He had two classes taught by the same instructor in one semester. Students in the course with only Chinese students showed lower engagement and participation compared with the course with both Chinese students and students from other countries. Some Masters degree students who had work experiences before entering their programs may be more mature so that they know that they should learn as much as possible and take

responsibility of their learning. Such students may be more active even if, sometimes, they do not understand, because they are not afraid of making mistakes and are therefore, more confident.

Gender-based Differences in the Level of Classroom Engagement and Participation

Potentially, gender-based differences between Chinese international graduate male and female students were also explored in the study. Some participants expressed their opinions of this issue based on their observations and perceptions. There was a variety of responses to this question. Five out of the sixteen interviewees believe that Chinese female graduate students are more active than males in their programs while two held the view that males are more engaged. However, nine participants stated that they did not notice any gender-based differences and believe that male and female Chinese international graduate students participate in class equally.

F1, one of those who believe that females are more active and more willing to talk in class, had this to say:

I guess maybe girls [find it] easier to open up conversation [than] boys. In Chinese culture, boys should be mature and calm. They don't talk too much; they are dependable, so they are less talkative, because of the culture.

Similarly, F4 held the view that females are more engaged based on her roommates' performance in class: "In Canada, because we are switching [to] second language and I think maybe because female[s] are naturally better in mastering new language than males. So they would find it easier to participate English in class". On his part, M2 feels that women are gifted in learning foreign languages so they may be more willing to talk.

He also explained that women may have better comprehension of some scholarly articles. M5 stated that females are more active in class than males as female students are more confident based on his observation. M8 believe that females engage more because men are more introverted than girls from his perspective.

F6 stated that male students are more engaged in the class, one of the reasons being that the status of women is lower than that of men in China. M3 believes that males are more active because they always ask more questions to ask.

Nine interviewees said that they did not find any significant differences between males and females in classroom engagement and participation. Both F2 and F3 come from the Faculty of Education said that there are fewer males than females in their faculty and in some of their classes, there was only one male student so they believe that there are no differences between males and females. Similarly, F5 said she did not see the differences as there are only two males in her program. M1, M4, M6 and M7 from other faculties instead of the Faculty of Education also shared the idea that there are no gender-based differences between males and females in their classes.

Personal Stories and Experiences

All the participants were asked to share some of their experiences and stories with regards to classroom engagement and participation. F1 shared what she observed in her classes:

Chinese international students, they turn to group work with Chinese students even if they have the opportunity to work with Canadian students. They are more likely to work with Chinese students, unless the teachers [put] them in ... groups. So most of the time, I see Chinese

students work with Chinese students. I don't think that is good because they have language barriers ... and they are not willing to do that. That is why I think they need to push themselves to get [out] of their "comfort zone" and try to work with [other] international students who are not from China.

F2 shared that she decided to push herself to study hard and improve her English after making friends with a Malaysian girl. F4 also shared her experience that she had made much progress since she came to the university. At first, she could only use short phrases to answer questions but now, she is better than before. F5, another participant shared her own experience as follows:

[At the] graduate levels, we have to do a thirty-minute individual presentation every month on talking about what progress you have made in the last month and how you are going to pursue in the future and so on. You are not doing it just in front of professors and classmates, you are going to do it [in front of] all the fourth-year undergraduate students. That is a huge challenge for me even though I have been here long enough to speak English. You know, in art program, they talk different than normal English-speaking people. They are writing a poem with their language [on a] daily basis. So that is incredible, and I used to spend hours a day before I had presentations, so [that] I can say something on the presentation. I have had seven to eight [of] these kinds of visual presentation and I think now I am pretty good [at] it.

F7, a student in the Faculty of Science, shared one of her embarrassing experiences:

I have a marketing course. And half of [the students] are from other countries and half of them are from China. Because I don't have [a] friend [in] that course, at the beginning, the professor said you need to form a group, but I don't have any group, because Indians [stay] with Indians and Chinese [stay] with Chinese.

F8 also shared one of her own experiences:

I remember in one course, I cannot really remember the name of the course, in the course, the professor taught some theory ... and she always organized some activities and role play that can motivate us to perform in front of the class. And in that way, we are pushed to do that and we found interest in doing that so I found students are getting more and more motivated by the [professors] and they became more interested in participating in ... classroom activities.

According to M1's account, he has become more active than before in class. He recalls that when he was asked to give his first presentations, he was afraid of speaking because of language barriers and lacking related knowledge. Gradually, he is able to do presentations confidently.

Participants Suggestions

At the end of each interview, the participants were asked to provide some suggestions regarding ways of increasing the level of Chinese international graduate students' classroom engagement and participation based on their own experiences and perceptions. Suggestions were made in several areas.

Language Skills and Communicative Competence

In order to improve Chinese students' language skills and communicative competence, F1 suggested that the professors need to assign students into groups with students from different countries. Also, at the beginning of each class, some "ice-breaking" games and activities as warm-up would be helpful. F2 suggested that Chinese students need to have more conversations and communications with Canadian students to overcome language barriers. F4 suggested that previewing the content they are going to learn would offer significant assistance in communicating with students and professors in the class. Students should not be afraid of making mistakes as these mistakes will help them to improve their language proficiency. Students should therefore, welcome corrections and suggestions when you make mistakes. F5 suggested that Chinese international graduate students need to read English books as many as possible and watch more movies as English movies here are without subtitles which would be beneficial to students' English learning. F8 suggested that universities/faculties, could organize English clubs for students to practice their English language skills and provide relevant assistance to them overcome the fear of speaking the English language.

M1 stated that making friends with local people is the most effective way to improve English language skills and proficiency. M2 and M3 suggested that Chinese students need to do more volunteering as well as ask for help from others when needed. M5 believes that local students could offer more help to international students. M8 suggested that Chinese students should practice more in their daily lives either with English speakers or some Chinese students.

Classroom Engagement and Participation

The suggestions were valued in this area. F1 suggested that students need to overcome their apprehension first. Then, they need to try to take part in as many activities as they can and not be afraid of making mistakes. Also, Chinese students who come to Canada for further studies should make every effort to learn more about Canadian culture by watching movies and reading books to help them immerse themselves in Canadian culture. Finally, as most Chinese students are not confident enough, it will be helpful if professors could ask domestic students to be more patient when Chinese students are responding to questions or speaking in class. F3 suggested that students need to be well prepared before classes so that they will feel confident in engaging and participating in class topics. F4 offered the following suggestions:

[Professors] need to pay more attention to international students and give [them] more chances. For example, one of my professors. ... is a Korean. He was [an] international [student] like me. In our first class, everybody introduced themselves, and he knew I am an international student. He would offer me like, if I have any difficulties or questions, I could always ask him. I did it when he [was] in the office and talked a little bit about my study obstacles, I think this really helps.

F8 believed that professors could design more activities to offer students more opportunities to communicate with their classmates. As students, M2 suggested that they need to seize the opportunities to talk while instructors need to provide more opportunities for Chinese students. M4 believes that professors could make participation

and engagement a part of the course requirement to encourage students to engage and participate in class. On his part, M6 had this advice for international graduate students:

Prepare for the class, and speak much more than domestic students. Maybe it takes you three hours; you can make it nine to twelve hours. You must be quite familiar with it. I think someone should [has told] them it is important to contribute to the class. I think maybe no one tell them. You should let them know it is not your own business. Contribution is everyone's business. You should do like that.

Sixteen Chinese international graduate participants (8 males and 8 females) stated their perspectives and perceptions with regards to classroom engagement and participation based on the interview questions. They also shared some personal stories and experiences of classroom engagement.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

The study was designed to explore the views and perceptions of Chinese international graduate students with regards to classroom engagement and participation. The previous chapter presented the findings of the study. This chapter will discuss the findings in relation to the literature. The chapter will also provide some recommendations and suggestions for future studies.

The findings of this qualitative study provide some insights with regards to Chinese international graduate students classroom engagement and participation: the factors that influence their classroom engagement and participation, how language barriers affect their engagement and participation as well as gender-based differences. To further discuss these themes, I return to the research questions:

- What are the factors that influence Chinese international graduate students' engagement and participation in the university classrooms?
- To what extent do language barriers affect Chinese international graduate students' classroom engagement and participation?
- Are there significant gender-based differences in Chinese international graduate students' level of participation and engagement in Canadian classrooms?

Discussions of Findings

Six out of sixteen interviewees illustrated that they actively participated in the classroom activities and discussions. Five participants stated that they would not get involved in the class voluntarily, while the other interviewees stated that their engagement and participation is variable depending on some factors. With respect to the

general situation of Chinese international graduate students' classroom engagement and participation, thirteen out of sixteen participants used the word "passive" to describe the general situation while the rest described it as "medium" level, meaning "average".

Chinese international graduate students' classroom engagement and participation is influenced by many factors and these interviewees described the situation by sharing some of their experiences and stories. Some of their perceptions and stories align with the views of scholars while other do not.

Factors Influencing Engagement and Participation

Language Barriers

The data emanating from this study unquestionably demonstrate that language barriers tend to be the most significant factor affecting Chinese international graduate students' classroom engagement and participation as this was mentioned by every participant during the interviews. This finding is not surprising since accent, intelligibility and comprehensibility are the obstructions that most Chinese international students who learn English as a second language face in their English learning process (Derwing & Munro, 1997). Nelson (as cited in Derwing & Munro, 1997) defined intelligibility as "the apprehension of the message in the sense intended by the speaker" (p. 2). While comprehensibility is defined as "judgments on a rating scale of how difficult or easy an utterance is to understand" (Derwing & Munro, 1997, p. 2). English as a second language learners vary considerably in terms of their capabilities in solving the problems in accent, intelligibility and comprehensibility, which are affected by some significant predictors, including first language, grammar and pronunciation (Derwing & Munro, 1997). During the class, the fluency of the native speakers, the limited intelligibility and

comprehensibility of the non-native speakers may prevent Chinese international graduate students' willingness to engage and participate in class.

The function of first language (L1) and target language (TL) is of great importance. According to Levine (2003), L1 may cause anxiety in speakers' TL learning. Littlewood and Yu (2011) also stated that L1 may have negative impact on target language learning. Due to the effects of first language, Chinese students may translate the questions they hear in class into Chinese for easier comprehension. Then, they may also translate what they want to express into English. However, they may not express their opinions fluently and accurately due to the differences between both languages.

Language barriers may also affect classroom engagement and participation in other ways. First, L1 may be one of the obstacles preventing Chinese international graduate students from making friends with native speakers, which may lead to fewer opportunities to practice speaking the English language. Lack of practice, in turn, contributes to students' low confidence in speaking English ultimately making them to become less engaged and disenfranchised. Second, Chinese students may translate what they hear into English due to the effects of L1. Gradually, they become afraid of making mistakes because they feel that others may laugh at them. This may also lead them to become less active in class activities and discussions.

Differences in Education System and Teaching Methodology

There are differences between Chinese teacher-centred and Canadian student-centred teaching practice from early child education to higher education. The Chinese test-oriented system also leads to the adoption of teacher-centred classrooms in which students sit still and receive knowledge from teachers passively. Being immersed in this

teaching approach with high pressure, students will become increasingly bored and less motivated (Dole, Bloom & Kowalske, 2015). Conversely, students in Canada are accustomed to learner-centred approaches which emphasize learning autonomy, freedom and outcomes of the students. (Scheurs & Dumbraveanu, 2014). The shift from teacher-centred to student-centred teaching style may cause the maladaptation among Chinese international graduate students when they study in Canadian universities as the Chinese traditional lecture-oriented approach is still deeply seated in their minds. This inability to adapt may lead to low levels of classroom engagement and participation.

The relationship between teachers and students is essential in students' learning process. Scheurs and Dumbraveanu (2014) explain the role of teachers in a learner-based approach:

A teacher is a facilitator and guide, and not a director or a dictator. He will facilitate learning activities, will try to understand how learners interpret knowledge, will guide and help them to refine their understanding and interpretations, will correct any misconception that can arise between learners at an early stage, and will improve the learned knowledge quality.

(p. 3)

On the contrary, a teacher's role in Chinese traditional classroom is that of a "controller" instead of guide. According to Chan (2009), hierarchy exists in Chinese classrooms which means that students respect their teachers in any circumstance and follow whatever their teachers say. Unfortunately, this hierarchy, to some extent, leads to students being afraid of sharing ideas freely and making mistakes. Some students are not confident enough to share their opinions because they do not want others to focus on them.

According to Zacharias (2014), lecture-based teaching styles (as in the case of Chinese education system) may contribute to students' low classroom engagement and participation.

Student Motivation

Student motivation was also mentioned by the participants of this study as an important determinant of student classroom engagement and participation. Motivation can be intrinsic or extrinsic. According to Ryan and Deci (2000), motivation plays an important role in academic study development. The authors define intrinsic motivation as “the doing of an activity for its inherent satisfactions rather than for some separable consequence” (p. 56), while extrinsic motivation is defined as “a construct that pertains whenever an activity is done in order to attain some separable outcome” (p. 60).

The data for this study show that engagement and participation may be influenced by students' motivation to improve their academic knowledge. Indeed, seeking academic improvement is a principal reason for most Chinese international graduate students who made decision to study in Canada. Skolnik (1986) argues that the higher education institutions in Canada are various, which are beneficial to the applicants. As a developed country, Canada's higher education programs enjoy a high reputation, which internationally attracts a large number of international students to come to further their education in the country. As mentioned in Chapter II, Peng (2012) stated that students' learning interest might be one of the factors that influence classroom engagement and participation. Enhancing academic knowledge serves as an intrinsic motivation, which may satisfy students themselves. To acquire knowledge, students have to master the knowledge content, language skills, communicative competence, critical thinking and

logical thinking. Therefore, engaging and participating actively in the class may provide more opportunities and knowledge to students in their study.

A study by Ams and Archer (1988) demonstrated that students' different goals may affect their classroom engagement and participation. Seen as an extrinsic motivation, looking for ideal jobs after graduation is a goal and future plans for most Chinese international graduate students. However, in this regard, students fall into three categories. The first group students will apply for OINP (Ontario Immigrant Nominee Program) after their graduation. As the Canada immigration policy shows, international students who finish their two-year Masters degree program meet the qualification to apply for PNP immigration program without any working experiences. Although working experience is not necessary for people who plan to immigrate via this channel, they still have to find jobs to provide financial support for themselves or even for their families after successfully receiving their Maple Cards. The second category made up of students who search for any other immigration methods like Express Entry which sets one-year or two-year working experience as a prerequisite. The third category are students who may not have any plan to immigrate to Canada and may go back to China. For these people, they still have to find jobs no matter where they are. Therefore, searching for jobs becomes an important goal for most Chinese international graduate students. Among these people, students who have preference in finding jobs related to their majors may try to actively participate in the classroom including group work and discussions.

As people know, Canada is a multicultural country with people and families coming from many different countries. Howard and Henney (1998) argued that students' diverse life experiences and understanding of the situations might determine their

willingness to engage and participate in the classroom. As an intrinsic motivation, experiencing multiculturalism offers Chinese international graduate students much more opportunities in communicating with people from various cultures as well as learning these cultures, which they will not achieve in China. In-class communication and out-of-class communication could provide more opportunities for students to learn about cultures mutually. However, most the interviewees in the present study, stated that based on their experiences, Chinese students have a preference in staying with Chinese students and speaking Chinese as they have more common topics to share with each other. According to Wen and Clément (2003), Chinese students tend towards collectivism and will express their ideas more freely as well as feel more comfortable in a group. That is one of challenges that Chinese people face when they come to Canada. This collectivism may reduce Chinese students' opportunities to communicate with local people. For those Chinese students who would like to experience Canadian culture, in-class multicultural communication becomes of great significance for them. A professor is not the only person that can provide this kind of opportunity. Chinese international graduate students themselves can also avail themselves as many opportunities as possible to communicate with students from other countries. This requires students to engage and participate more in class activities and discussions.

Cultural Differences

According to Egbo (2009), multiculturalism is one of the Canadian social policies that has had a significant impact on Canadian diversity. As a consequence of Canada's multiculturalism policy, a growing number of Chinese students make the decision to further their studies in Canada. However, a conflict of cultures may occur when Chinese

and Canadian cultures meet. Jones (1999) stated that students may be more silent when they are in an unfamiliar culture. Therefore, Chinese international students may not adapt quickly to the Canadian environment. According to Chen, Hastings, Rubin, Chen, Cen and Stewart (1998), “In Western individualistic cultures, children are encouraged to be assertive and independent in challenging situation. Acquiring self-reliance, autonomy, and assertive social skills are important socialization goals” (p. 678). However, Chinese collectivist culture ensures that students stay with others. Most people are also humble in group settings, and do not like others to focus on them. Also, “Asian cultures strongly value the need for behavioral and emotional control and the restriction of emotional expression during interpersonal interactions; highly expressive individuals are often regarded as poorly regulated and socially immature” (Ho, as cited in Chen, Hastings, Rubin, Chen, Cen & Stewart, 1998, p. 682). The point here is that Chinese students do not like to be the central figure in the classroom which may contribute to low levels engagement and participation in activities and discussions. Cultural differences are, therefore, important factors in determining Chinese international graduate students level of engagement and participation in Canadian classrooms.

Other Related Factors

Besides those discussed above, there are other factors that contributing to Chinese international graduate students’ classroom engagement and participation. These people’s expectations (e.g., parents, instructor and peers) and personality. The expectations from parents, professors and peers may influence students’ level of engagement and participation in class. Students who are expected to excel in school by their parents may decide to participate actively in class because that may increase their performance. On the

contrary, students who do not feel the pressure of high expectation may not pay much attention to engagement and participation.

With regards to personality, students who are introverted may be less active in the classroom. Chinese students' personalities, to some degree, are influenced by Chinese culture. According to Wen and Clément (2003), Chinese people may feel more comfortable when they stay with a group of people because collectivism, as part of their culture, is deeply rooted in their minds. When Chinese international graduate students study in Canada, they prefer to stay with Chinese people in a group, so that other people will not focus on them. In Canadian classes, Chinese students may not engage and participate as actively as Canadian students even though they may think about the questions themselves.

Gender-based Differences

As mentioned earlier in Chapter II, there are two opposing perspectives with regards to gender-based differences in university classrooms. Some researchers believe that male students are more willing to engage and participate in class than female students. For example, Sadker and Sadker (1986) argue that female students tend to be more silent than male students in class based on the research they have done.

Girardlli and Patel (2015) stated that female students tend to be more active than male students in the classroom. Similarly, some participants in this study hold the same view as these two researchers. Siegle and Reis (1998) conducted a study to explore whether there are gender-based differences between gifted females and males such as language art using survey as their research design. The findings show that female students receive higher marks in language arts than male students. From their point of

view, female students may be gifted in mastering a new language. For example, based on her review of the extant literature, Egbo (2009) stated that: “In general, the evidence shows that while boys and girls achieve equally in mathematics and science during the early years of schooling, by the time they arrive in high school, boys have started to outperform girls in these areas. Girls on the other hand, appear to have a degree of superiority in language-related competencies” (pp. 26-27).

Similarly, Sadker and Sadker (1986) suggested that male students may receive much more attention from their teachers than female students. In the present study, two interviewees believe that male students are more active because of their personalities. Male students tend to be more outgoing and talkative.

However, most participants did not observe any significant gender-based differences between males and females in their classrooms. Based on the data of this study, 56.25% of interviewees believe that there are no gender-based differences between Chinese males and females in their classroom from their perceptions; 31.25% believe that females are more active in their classrooms while only 12.5% participants said that male students engage and participate more in class.

Reflection

This study explored the level of, and factors that contribute to Chinese international graduate students’ classroom engagement and participation as well as gender-based differences that may exist. By interviewing sixteen participants (eight males and eight females), the investigator explored Chinese international graduate students’ perceptions and listened to their experiences and stories.

As a Chinese international graduate student studying in Canada, the investigator had some similar feelings as these sixteen participants after hearing their experiences and stories. In some of courses, the researcher was passive in answering questions and taking part in activities. After analyzing the interview transcriptions, several factors that contribute to low classroom engagement and participation were summarized, including language barriers, motivation, teaching methods, cultural differences and other factors. Language barrier, is one of the most significant factors that affect Chinese international students not only in academic learning but also in their daily lives. Therefore, as English learners, Chinese international graduate students must practice more in order to improve their English language skills and communicative competence, like reading as many books as possible, watching English movies without subtitles and making friends with native English language speakers to enhance their skills. In terms of classroom engagement and participation, Chinese international graduate students need to review the courses and books before class. In this way, they will be more familiar with the contents and may be more confident in sharing their ideas in class as a learning community. Another potential effective way to encourage Chinese international graduate students to be more active in the class is for professors and Canadian peers to provide them some assistance. They need to be more patient when Chinese students stand up to give talk in class. This would help Chinese students to become more active in Canadian classrooms.

Suggestions for Future Research

The findings of this study identified some factors that influence Chinese international graduate students' classroom engagement and participation in Canadian universities as well as some gender-based differences in levels of participation. Several

issues, however, require additional attention from the researchers and educators. For example, some questions related to the factors as well as gender-based differences discussed above require further investigation. These questions include the following:

- How does an ESL's (English as a second language learner) first language influence the target language (TL) when they learn English in Canadian classrooms?
- How can instructors help improve Chinese international students' language skills and communicative competence?
- What type of classroom groupings can best promote Chinese international graduate students learning?

The answers to these questions will be of immersed benefit to international students in Canada. Finally, these answers will not only enrich Chinese international graduate students' experiences, they will also be beneficial to university administration and policy maker with regards to supporting their international students.

REFERENCES

- Altbach, P. G., & Knight, J. (2007). The internationalization of higher education: Motivations and realities. *Journal of Studies in International Education, 11*(3-4), 290-305.
- Ams, C., & Archer, J. (1988). Achievement goals in the classroom: Students' learning strategies and motivation processes. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 80*(3), 260-267.
- Andrade, M. S. (2006). International students in English-speaking universities: Adjustment factors. *Journal of Research in International Education, 5*(2), 131-154.
- Anweiler, O. (1977). Comparative education and the internationalization of education. *Comparative Education, 13*(2), 109-114.
- Arum, S., & Van de Water, J. (1992). The need for a definition of international education in US universities. *Bridges to the Futures: Strategies for Internationalizing Higher Education, 191-203*.
- Baxter, L. A., & Babbie, E. (2003). *The basics of communication research*. Boston, MA: Wadsworth.
- Baxter, P., & Jack, S. (2008). Qualitative case study methodology: Study design and implementation for novice researchers. *The Qualitative Report, 13*(4), 544-559.
- Bennett, K. P., & LeCompte, M. D. (1990). *How Schools Work: Sociological Analysis of Education*. 95 Church Street, White Plains, NY: Longman Publishing Group.
- Bernard, J. (2010). Motivation in foreign language learning: The relationship between classroom activities, motivation, and outcomes in a university language-learning

- environment (Master's Thesis). Available from Dietrich College of Humanities and Social Science.
- Bouma, G. D., & Ling, R., & Wilkinson, L. (2004). *The research process*, USA: Oxford University Press.
- Brown, K. L. (1993). From teacher-centered to student-centered curriculum: Improving learning in diverse classrooms. *Education*, *124*(1), 49-54.
- Buote, V. M., Pancer, S. M., Pratt, M. W., Adams, G., Birnie-Lefcovitch, S., Polivy, J., & Wintre, M. G. (2007). The importance of friends: Friendship and adjustment among 1st-year university students. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, *22*(6), 665-689.
- Callan, H. (2000). Higher education internationalization strategies: Of marginal significance or all-pervasive? The international vision in practice: A decade of evolution. *Higher Education in Europe*, *25*(1), 15-23.
- Canadian Bureau for International Education. (2015). *Canada's performance and potential in international education*. Retrieved from <http://www.cbie.ca/about-ie/facts-and-figures/>
- Chan, D. W. (2009). The hierarchy of strengths: Their relationships with subjective well-being among Chinese teachers in Hong Kong. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *25*(6), 867-875.
- Chen, X., Hastings, P. D., Rubin, K. H., Chen, H., Cen, G., & Stewart, S. L. (1998). Child-rearing attitudes and behavioral inhibition in Chinese and Canadian toddlers: A cross-cultural study. *Developmental Psychology*, *34*(4), 677-686.
- Crawford, M., & MacLeod, M. (1990). Gender in the college classroom: An assessment of the "chilly climate" for women. *Sex Roles*, *23*(3), 101-122.

- Creswell, J. W. (2013a). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. California: Sage Publications.
- Creswell, J. W. (2013b). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. California: Sage Publications.
- Davies, S., & Hammack, F. M. (2005). The channeling of student competition in higher education: Comparing Canada and the US. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 76(1), 89-106.
- Denies, K., Yashima, T., & Janssen, R. (2015). Classroom versus societal willingness to communicate: Investigating French as a second language in Flanders. *The Modern Language Journal*, 99(4), 718-739.
- Derwing, T. M., & Munro, M. J. (1997). Accent, intelligibility, and comprehensibility. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 19(01), 1-16.
- Dole, S., Bloom, L., & Kowalske, K. (2015). Transforming pedagogy: Changing perspectives from teacher-centered to learner-centered. *Interdisciplinary Journal of Problem-Based Learning*, 10(1), 1-15.
- Egbo, B. (2009). *Teaching for diversity in Canadian schools*. Pearson Prentice Hall.
- Fang, G. (2000). The historical track of the Chinese ancient female personality. *Chinese Education & Society*, 33(6), 6-14.
- Frymier, A. B., & Houser, M. L. (2015). The role of oral participation in student engagement. *Communication Education*, 65(1), 83-104.
- Garrett, C. (2011). Defining, detecting, and promoting student engagement in college learning environments. *Transformative Dialogues: Teaching & Learning Journal*, 5(2), 1-12.

- Gelling, L. (2015). Qualitative research. *Art and Science Research Series*, 29(30), 43-47.
- Girardelli, D., & Patel, V. K. (2015). The theory of planned behavior and Chinese ESL students' in-class participation. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 7(1), 31-41.
- Gopal, A. (2011). Internationalization of higher education: Preparing faculty to teach cross-culturally. *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*, 23(3), 373-381.
- Government of Canada. (2014). *Imagine-Education in Canada*. Retrieved from <http://www.canadainternational.gc.ca/china-chine/study-etudie/index.aspx?lang=eng>
- Guidry, L. J. (2002). Preparing international students for a successful social experience in higher education. *New Directions for Higher Education*, 2002(117), 21-28.
- Guo, S., & Chase, M. (2011). Internationalisation of higher education: Integrating international students into Canadian academic environment. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 16(3), 305-318.
- Higgins, C. (2010). Gender identities in language education. *Sociolinguistics and language education. Bristol, UK: Multilingual Matters*, 370-397.
- Howard, J. R., & Henney, A. L. (1998). Student participation and instructor gender in the mixed-age college classroom. *Journal of Higher Education*, 69(4), 384-405.
- Huang, F. (2003). Policy and practice of the internationalization of higher education in China. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 7(3), 225-240.
- Huang, J., & Brown, K. (2009). Cultural factors affecting Chinese ESL students' academic learning. *Education*, 129(4), 643-653.

- Huang, J., & Klinger, D. A. (2006). Chinese graduate students at North American universities: Learning challenges and coping strategies. *Comparative and International Education/Éducation Comparée et Internationale*, 35(2), 48-61.
- Hymes, D. (2001). On communicative competence. In A. Duranti (Ed.), *Linguistic anthropology: A reader* (pp. 53-73). Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.
- Jones, J. F. (1999). From silence to talk: Cross cultural ideas on students' participation in academic group discussion. *English for Specific Purposes*, 18(3), 243-259.
- Jones, K., Evans, C., Byrd, R., & Campbell, K. (2000). Gender equity training and teacher behavior. *Journal of Instructional Psychology*, 27(3), 173-173.
- Khan, F. N., Ahmad, S. M., & Ahmad, N. (2014). The interplay between gender and student classroom participation: A case study of University of Swat. *Humanities and Social Sciences*, 21(2), 41-50.
- Kim, S. (2006). Academic oral communication needs of East Asian international graduate students in non-science and non-engineering fields. *English for Specific Purposes*, 25(4), 479-489.
- Knight, J. (2012). Concepts, rationales, and interpretive frameworks in the internationalization of higher education. *The SAGE Handbook of International Higher Education*. London: SAGE, 27-42.
- Kunin, R. (2009). Economic impact of international education in Canada. *Foreign Affairs and International Trade of Canada*. [No. 10 Set. 2009].
- Lee, G. (2009). Speaking up: Six Korean students' oral participation in class discussions in US graduate seminars. *English for Specific Purpose*, 28(3), 142-156.

- Levine, G. S. (2003). Student and instructor beliefs and attitudes about target language use, first language use, and anxiety: Report of a questionnaire study. *The Modern Language Journal*, 87(3), 343-364.
- Li, G., Chen, W., & Duanmu, J. L. (2010). Determinants of international students' academic performance: A comparison between Chinese and other international students. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 14(4), 389-405.
- Littlewood, W., & Yu, B. (2011). First language and target language in the foreign language classroom. *Language Teaching*, 44(01), 64-77.
- Liu, J. (2000). Understanding Asian students' oral participation modes in American classrooms. *Journal of Asian Pacific Communication*, 10(1), 155-189.
- Liu, N. F., & Littlewood, W. (1997). Why do many students appear reluctant to participate in classroom learning discourse? *System*. 25(3), 371-384.
- Lopez-Class, M., Castro, F. G., & Ramirez, A. G. (2011). Conceptions of acculturation: A review and statement of critical issues. *Social Science & Medicine*, 72(9), 1555-1562.
- Malik, M. A., & Sang, G. (2016). Students' oral involvement in the Chinese university classroom: A comparison between classes of Chinese and international students. *International Journal of Research Studies in Education*, 6(1), 19-28.
- Martin, A. J., Yu, K., & Hau, K. T. (2014). Motivation and engagement in the 'Asian Century': A comparison of Chinese students in Australia, Hong Hong, and Mainland China. *Educational Psychology*, 34(4), 417-439.

- McDowell, L., & Montgomery, C. (2006). Social networks and the international student experience: A community of practice to support learning? *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 13(4), 455-466.
- Mok, K. H. (2000). Marketizing higher education in post-Mao China. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 20(2), 109-126.
- Morresi, S., Elías, S., & Marcos, A. C. (2014). Teachers and students' mobility: A case of study in the context of the internationalization of education. *European Scientific Journal*, 1, 298-305.
- Mukminin, A., & McMahon, B. J. (2013). International graduate students' cross-culture academic engagement: Stories of Indonesian doctoral students on an American campus. *The Qualitative Report*, 18 (35), 1-19.
- Munezane, Y. (2013). Attitudes, affect and ideal L2 self as predictors of willingness to communicate. *EUROSLA Yearbook*, 13(2013), 176-198.
- Peng, J. E. (2012). Towards an ecological understanding of willingness to communicate in EFL classrooms in China. *System*, 40(2), 203-213.
- Peng, N., Yu, T., & Mills, A. (2015). Feminist thinking in late seventh-century China: A critical hermeneutics analysis of the case of Wu Zetian. *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: An International Journal*, 34(1), 67-83.
- Phillips, D., & Schweisfurth, M. (2014). *Comparative and international education: An introduction to theory, method, and practice*. A&C Black. New York, NY: Bloomsbury Academic.

- Pintrich, P. R., & Schrauben, B. (1992). Students' motivational beliefs and their cognitive engagement in classroom academic tasks. *Student Perceptions in the Classroom*, 7, 149-183.
- Rocca, K. A. (2010). Student participation in the college classroom: An extended multidisciplinary literature review. *Communication Education*, 59(2), 185-213.
- Rossetto, K. R. (2014). Qualitative research interviews: Assessing the therapeutic value and challenges. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 31(4), 482-489.
- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000). Intrinsic and extrinsic motivations: Classic definitions and new directions. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 25(1), 54-67.
- Sadker, M., & Sadker, D. (1986). Sexism in the classroom: From grade school to graduate school. *The Phi Delta Kappan*, 67(7), 512-515
- Sato, T., & Hodge, S. R. (2009). Asian international doctoral students' experiences at two American universities: Assimilation, accommodation and resistance. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*. 2(3), 136-148.
- Scheurs, J., & Dumbraveanu, R. (2014). A shift from teacher centered to learner centered approach. *Learning*, 1, 2.
- Schultz, K. (2009). *Rethinking classroom participation: Listening to silent voices*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Schwartz, S. J., Unger, J. B., Zamboanga, B. L., Szapocznik, J. (2001). Rethinking the concept of acculturation: Implications for theory and research. *American Psychologist*. 65(4), 237-251
- Siegle, D., & Reis, S. M. (1998). Gender differences in teacher and student perceptions of gifted students' ability and effort. *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 42(1), 39-47.

- Sit, H. H. W. (2013). Characteristics of Chinese students' learning styles. *International Proceedings of Economics Development and Research*, 62(8), 36-39.
- Skolnik, M. L. (1986). Diversity in higher education: The Canadian case. *Higher Education in Europe*, 11(2), 19-32.
- Söderqvist, M. (2002). *Internationalisation and its management at higher-education institutions: Applying conceptual, content and discourse analysis*. Helsinki School of Economics.
- Tatar, S. (2005). Classroom participation by international students: The case of Turkish graduate students. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 9(4), 337-355.
- Tatum, H. E., Schwartz, B. M., Schimmoeller, P. A., & Perry, N. (2013). Classroom participation and student-faculty interactions: Does gender matter? *The Journal of Higher Education*, 84(6), 745-768.
- Tindall, T., & Hamil, B. (2004). Gender disparity in science education: The causes, consequences, and solutions. *Education*, 125(2), 282-296.
- Trice, A. G. (2004). Mixing it up: International graduate students' interactions with American students. *Journal of College Students Development*, 45(6), 671-687.
- Unwin, A., & Yandell, J. (2016). *Rethinking education: Whose knowledge is it anyway?* Ottawa, Ontario: New Internationalist Publications.
- Wang, F. (2009). Student experiences of English language training: A comparison of teaching in UK and Chinese contexts. *English Language Teaching*, 2(3), 237-242.
- Wei, M., Heppner, P. P., Mallen, M. J., Ku, T. Y., Liao, K. Y. H., & Wu, T. F. (2007). Acculturative stress, perfectionism, years in the United States, and depression

- among Chinese international students. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 54(4), 385-394.
- Wen, W. P., & Clément, R. (2003). A Chinese conceptualization of willingness to communicate in ESL. *Language Culture and Curriculum*, 16(1), 18-38.
- White, J. W. (2011). Resistance to classroom participation: Minority students, academic discourse, culture conflicts, and issues of representation in whole class discussions. *Journal of Language, Identity & Education*, 10(4), 250-265.
- Wright, J. (2014). Participation in the classroom: Classification and assessment techniques. *Teaching Innovation Projects*, 4(1), 1-11.
- Xie, X. (2010). Why are students quiet? Looking at the Chinese context and beyond. *ELT Journal*, 64(1), 10-20.
- Xu, W., & Case, R. E. (2015). Age-related differences in motivation in learning English among Mainland Chinese students. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 25(1), 67-82.
- Yan, K., & Berliner, D. C. (2011). Chinese international students in the United States: Demographic trends, motivations, acculturation features and adjustment challenges. *Asia Pacific Education Review*, 12(2), 173-184.
- Yan, Z., & Cardinal, B. J. (2013). Perception of physical activity participation of Chinese female graduate students: A case study. *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport*, 84(3), 384-396.
- Yin, R. K. (2009). *Case study research: Design and methods*. California : Sage Publications.

- Zacharias, N. T. (2014). Second language teacher contributions to student classroom participation: A narrative study of Indonesian learners. *ELTWorld Online*, 6(1), 1-15.
- Zhang, D. (2012). Chinese primary school English curriculum reform. In *Perspectives on Teaching and Learning English Literacy in China* (pp. 67-83). Springer Netherlands.
- Zhang, Q., & Zhang, J. (2013). Instructors' positive emotions: Effects on student engagement and critical thinking in US and Chinese classrooms. *Communication Education*, 62(4), 395-411.
- Zhang, Z., & Xu, J. (2007). Understanding Chinese international graduate students' adaptation to learning in North America: A cultural perspective. *Higher Education Perspectives*, 3(1), 147-158.
- Zhang, Z., & Zhou, G. (2010) Understanding Chinese international students at a Canadian university: Perspectives, expectations, and experiences. *Comparative and International Education*, 39(3), 43-58.
- Zhao, W., Mok, I. A. C., & Cao, Y. (2016). Curriculum reform in China: Student participation in classrooms using a reformed instructional model. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 75(2016), 88-101.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

General Questions

1. Please tell me a little about yourself?
2. What is your educational background?
3. Why did you come to Canada?
4. Why did you choose this university?
5. What is your field of study?
6. Which part of your program do you like the most/least? Please explain.
7. What are your expectations of this program?
8. How many courses are you currently taking?
9. How do you like your courses?
10. What are your future plans/goals after graduation?
11. In what ways do you think your Masters degree will be of benefit to you?

Questions on Engagement and Participation

1. What challenges are you facing with regards to your studies in Canada?
2. How are you overcoming these challenges?
3. What is your understanding of “classroom participation and engagement”?
4. Based on your experiences so far, what are your perceptions of Canadian and Chinese education?
5. To what extent do you participate in classroom activities and discussions?
6. In your opinion, to what extent are Chinese international graduate students involved in the classroom?

7. What factors do you think influence the level of Chinese international graduate students' classroom participation and engagement?
8. Based on your observation, are there differences between Chinese international male students and female students' level of participation and engagement in the classroom? What are these differences?
9. If there are gender-based differences, what factors do you think contribute to differences?

Sharing Experiences

1. Please share some of experiences and stories about classroom engagement and participation.
2. What impact do these stories and experiences have on you?

Suggestions

1. Please provide some suggestions with regards to improving Chinese international graduate students' language skills and communication competence.
2. Please suggest some strategies that can help improve Chinese international graduate students' classroom engagement and participation?

Definition of Classroom Engagement and Participation

Engagement: Classroom engagement in this study means students' inner interests and motivation in academic learning.

Participation: Classroom participation in this study is mainly defined as raising hands, group work and classroom activities

APPENDIX B

Recruitment Material: Poster



University
of Windsor

**ARE YOU A CHINESE
INTERNATIONAL
GRADUATE STUDENT?**

Invitation to participate in a study

TITLE

Classroom Engagement and
Participation among Chinese
International Graduate
Students: A Case Study

1. To determine the level of classroom engagement and participation.
2. To determine whether there is a gender-based difference.

PURPOSE

METHOD

One-hour Interview

PARTICIPANTS

- Chinese international graduate students at University of Windsor
- Have good comprehension of English

INTERESTED IN PARTICIPATING

email me at xiangb@uwindsor.ca

This research has been cleared by
the University of Windsor
Research Ethics Board

APPENDIX C

Recruitment Material: Email

Dear Chinese international graduate students:

Please allow me to introduce myself. My name is Beibei Xiang and I am a Master candidate from Faculty of Education at the University of Windsor. Now, I am doing my master thesis under the supervision of Dr. Benedicta Egbo.

I am requesting your participation in my research study titled: **“Classroom Engagement and Participation among Chinese International Graduate Students: A Case Study”**.

The research has been cleared by University of Windsor Research Ethics Board.

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the the level of Chinese international graduate students’ classroom engagement and participation, and whether there are gender-based differences.

Chinese international graduate students from University of Windsor in different faculties are welcome to participate. You will be asked to attend approximate one-hour interview. If you are interested in my study, please contact me at xiangb@uwindsor.ca at your earliest convenience. Thank you.

Warm regards,

Beibei

APPENDIX D



CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

You are asked to participate in a research study titled “Classroom Engagement and Participation among Chinese International Graduate Students: A Case Study” conducted by Beibei Xiang from Faculty of Education at the University of Windsor and Dr. Benedicta Egbo.

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact me at the following e-mail address: xiangb@uwindsor.ca.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the level of Chinese international graduate students’ classroom engagement and participation, and whether there are gender-based differences in Chinese international graduate students’ engagement and participation in Canadian universities.

PROCEDURES

One-hour interview on University of Windsor campus.

POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

There are no known risks associated with this study. However, you may feel slightly uncomfortable when discussing your own experiences and stories of classroom participation and engagement.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY

This study may encourage you to engage and participate in Canadian classrooms and increase your motivation. It is anticipated that the findings of the study will provide insights into how to support and encourage Chinese international graduate students with regards to increasing their level of engagement and participation in the classroom. Furthermore, you can gain some practical knowledge regarding data collection as well.

COMPENSATION FOR PARTICIPATION

There will be no compensation for participation.

CONFIDENTIALITY

You have the rights to withdraw from the interview at any time, and to ask any questions related to the research. You can ask the investigator to explain any questions you may have. After fully understanding, you can choose to sign the consent form or not.

Your name will not be shown during the interviews and in the research. The raw data will be stored in a secure computer file folder or locked file cabinet. The researcher is the only person who have access to the data besides the supervisor. The data will be destroyed as soon as no longer needed after the completion of the research.

PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

You have the right to withdraw up and until the completion point of the interview. Any information collected during the interview may be kept by the researcher should you choose to withdraw.

FEEDBACK OF THE RESULTS OF THIS STUDY TO THE PARTICIPANTS

The findings of the study and all the relevant information will be provided to you. The results of the study will be posted wherever the researcher have recruited the participants.

Date when results are available: approximately 2017/05/31

SUBSEQUENT USE OF DATA

These data may be used in subsequent studies, publications and in presentations.

RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, contact: Research Ethics Coordinator, University of Windsor, Windsor, Ontario N9B 3P4; Telephone: 519-253-3000, ext. 3948; e-mail: ethics@uwindsor.ca

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT/LEGAL REPRESENTATIVE

I understand the information provided for the study *Classroom Engagement and Participation among Chinese International Graduate Students: A Case Study* as described herein. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

Name of Participant

Signature of Participant

Date

SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR

These are the terms under which I will conduct research.

Signature of Investigator

Date

APPENDIX E



LETTER OF INFORMATION FOR CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

You are asked to participate in a research study titled “Classroom Engagement and Participation among Chinese International Graduate Students: A Case Study” conducted by Beibei Xiang from Faculty of Education at the University of Windsor and Dr. Benedicta Egbo.

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact me at the following e-mail address: xiangb@uwindsor.ca.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the level of Chinese international graduate students’ classroom engagement and participation, and whether there are gender-based differences in Chinese international graduate students’ engagement and participation in Canadian universities.

PROCEDURES

One-hour interview on University of Windsor campus.

POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

There are no known risks associated with this study. However, you may feel slightly uncomfortable when discussing your own experiences and stories of classroom participation and engagement.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY

This study may encourage you to engage and participate in Canadian classrooms and increase your motivation. It is anticipated that the findings of the study will provide insights into how to support and encourage Chinese international graduate students with regards to increasing their level of engagement and participation in the classroom.

Furthermore, you can gain some practical knowledge regarding data collection as well.

COMPENSATION FOR PARTICIPATION

There will be no compensation for participation.

CONFIDENTIALITY

You have the rights to withdraw from the interview at any time, and to ask any questions related to the research. You can ask the investigator to explain any questions you may have. After fully understanding, you can choose to sign the consent form or not.

Your name will not be shown during the interviews and in the research. The raw data will be stored in a secure computer file folder or locked file cabinet. The researcher is the only person who have access to the data besides the supervisor. The data will be destroyed as soon as no longer needed after the completion of the research.

PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

You have the right to withdraw up and until the completion point of the interview. Any information collected during the interview may be kept by the researcher should you choose to withdraw.

FEEDBACK OF THE RESULTS OF THIS STUDY TO THE PARTICIPANTS

The findings of the study and all the relevant information will be provided to you. The results of the study will be posted wherever the researcher have recruited the participants.

Date when results are available: approximately 2017/05/31

SUBSEQUENT USE OF DATA

These data may be used in subsequent studies, publications and in presentations.

RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, contact: Research Ethics Coordinator, University of Windsor, Windsor, Ontario N9B 3P4; Telephone: 519-253-3000, ext. 3948; e-mail: ethics@uwindsor.ca

SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR

These are the terms under which I will conduct research.

Signature of Investigator

Date

VITA AUCTORIS

NAME: Beibei Xiang

PLACE OF BIRTH: Zhejiang, China

YEAR OF BIRTH: 1993

EDUCATION: Changzheng High School, Zhejiang, China, 2008

Hangzhou Normal University Qianjiang College
B.A., Zhejiang, China, 2011

University of Windsor, M.Ed., Windsor, ON,
2015