

Enhancing Classroom Participation Through Emotional Intelligence: A Classroom-Based Intervention Among International University Students

Michelle Francis¹, Sharala Subramaniam², Gokilavani Shanmugan³, Pavitira Nagaraju⁴, Naveen Raman⁵

¹School of General Studies and Languages, Faculty of Social Sciences and Leisure Management, Taylor's University, Malaysia

¹School of General Studies and Languages, Faculty of Social Sciences and Leisure Management, Taylor's University, Malaysia

³Faculty of Modern Language and Communication, Universiti Putra Malaysia

⁴Kulliyyah Of Sustainable Tourism and Contemporary Languages, IIUM Pagoh Campus

⁵School of General Studies and Languages, Faculty of Social Sciences and Leisure Management, Taylor's University, Malaysia

***Corresponding Author Address: Dr. Sharala Subramaniam
School of General Studies and Languages, Taylor's University, Malaysia**

ABSTRACT

Classroom participation plays an important role in student learning and engagement in higher education. However, many international students experience difficulties participating in classroom discussions, particularly in culturally diverse learning environments. These challenges are often linked to emotional and psychological factors such as fear of negative evaluation, low confidence in communication, and cultural norms related to maintaining harmony and avoiding loss of face. Although emotional intelligence (EI) has been associated with improved communication and social adjustment, research in this area has focused largely on correlational relationships, with relatively limited attention given to practical classroom-based interventions.

This study examines the effectiveness of a structured emotional intelligence intervention designed to improve classroom participation among international university students. Using a quasi-experimental design, students were assigned to either an intervention group participating in a fourteen-week EI programme or a comparison group receiving standard classroom instruction. The intervention incorporated reflective journaling, emotion recognition activities, guided peer discussions, and communication-focused exercises aimed at strengthening emotional awareness and participation confidence.

Data were collected through pre- and post-intervention surveys, classroom participation records, and reflective student responses. The findings suggest that students who participated in the EI intervention demonstrated higher levels of emotional awareness, greater confidence in classroom interaction, and more active participation in discussions compared to students in the comparison group. The intervention also appeared to reduce participation-related anxiety and encourage more meaningful peer engagement. Overall, the study highlights the potential of emotionally informed classroom practices in supporting international students' participation and adjustment in higher education. It also offers practical insights for educators seeking to develop more inclusive and culturally responsive learning environments.

Keywords:

Emotional Intelligence; Classroom Participation; International Students; Higher Education; Student Engagement; Classroom Intervention; Intercultural Communication.

Introduction

Classroom participation is widely recognised as an important component of effective learning in higher education. Through active participation, students engage more deeply with course content, develop critical thinking and communication skills, and contribute to collaborative knowledge construction [1,2]. Participation also plays a significant role in promoting students' academic confidence, motivation, and sense of belonging within the learning environment [3]. As universities increasingly adopt student-centred pedagogical approaches, active classroom engagement has become an important indicator of successful learning and educational achievement.

Despite its importance, classroom participation remains a challenge for many international university students. Studying in a foreign educational environment requires students to adapt not only to new academic expectations but also to unfamiliar social, cultural, and linguistic norms [4]. Many international students enter higher education from educational systems that place greater emphasis on teacher-centred instruction, passive learning, and respect for authority. Consequently, they may be less accustomed to expressing opinions, asking questions, or engaging in classroom discussions, particularly when such behaviours are strongly encouraged within Western-oriented higher education settings [5].

Several emotional and psychological factors contribute to these participation challenges. Communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, low confidence in language use, and concerns about making mistakes in front of peers can discourage students from actively participating in classroom activities [6]. In addition, students from collectivist cultural backgrounds may experience concerns related to maintaining social harmony, avoiding embarrassment, and preserving face during public interactions [7]. These emotional barriers often reduce willingness to communicate and may negatively affect both academic engagement and social integration.

The increasing reliance on digital communication technologies has introduced further complexities to student interaction. While digital platforms provide valuable opportunities for learning and collaboration, excessive dependence on technology-mediated communication may reduce opportunities for spontaneous face-to-face interaction and emotional expression [8]. As a result, some students may become more comfortable communicating through digital channels while remaining hesitant to participate in direct classroom discussions. This situation may be particularly challenging for international students who are already adapting to unfamiliar cultural and educational expectations.

One factor that may help address these challenges is emotional intelligence (EI). Emotional intelligence refers to the ability to perceive, understand, regulate, and manage emotions effectively in oneself and others [9]. Since its introduction by Mayer and Salovey and its popularisation through Goleman's work, emotional intelligence has been associated with a range of positive educational and interpersonal outcomes [10,11]. Students with higher levels of emotional intelligence tend to demonstrate stronger emotional regulation, greater resilience, more effective communication skills, and better social adjustment [12].

Within higher education settings, emotional intelligence has been linked to academic achievement, psychological well-being, student engagement, and interpersonal competence [13]. These capabilities are particularly relevant to classroom participation because participation often requires students to manage anxiety, overcome fear of judgement,

communicate confidently, and navigate complex social interactions. For international students, emotional intelligence may therefore function as an important resource that supports both academic engagement and intercultural adaptation [14].

Although previous research has demonstrated positive associations between emotional intelligence and various educational outcomes, much of the existing literature remains correlational in nature [12,13]. Comparatively little attention has been given to intervention-based approaches that actively develop emotional intelligence within classroom settings. Moreover, limited research has examined whether emotional intelligence interventions can directly improve classroom participation among international university students. This represents an important gap because participation difficulties are frequently rooted in emotional and psychological processes rather than solely linguistic or academic factors.

Addressing this gap, the present study examines the effectiveness of a classroom-based emotional intelligence intervention designed to enhance participation among international university students. The intervention incorporates reflective journaling, emotion recognition activities, guided peer discussions, and communication-focused exercises aimed at strengthening emotional awareness, emotional regulation, and participation confidence. Using a quasi-experimental design involving 50 international undergraduate students, the study investigates whether structured emotional intelligence development can improve classroom participation, reduce participation-related anxiety, and support greater engagement in culturally diverse higher education environments.

By focusing on a practical intervention rather than merely examining correlational relationships, this study contributes to the growing literature on emotional intelligence in higher education. It also offers valuable insights for educators seeking to create more inclusive, emotionally supportive, and culturally responsive learning environments that encourage active participation among international students.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Classroom Participation in Higher Education

Classroom participation is widely regarded as a central element of effective teaching and learning in higher education. Active participation enables students to engage critically with course content, exchange ideas, ask questions, and collaborate with peers in the construction of knowledge [14]. Contemporary student-centred pedagogies place considerable emphasis on participation because learning is increasingly viewed as a social and interactive process rather than a passive transfer of information from instructor to student [15].

Research consistently demonstrates that students who actively participate in classroom discussions tend to report higher levels of academic engagement, stronger critical thinking abilities, and greater satisfaction with their learning experiences [16]. Participation also contributes to the development of communication skills, confidence, and a stronger sense of belonging within academic communities [3]. These benefits are particularly important in higher education environments where collaborative learning, problem-solving, and peer interaction are increasingly emphasised.

However, participation is not solely determined by academic ability. Students' willingness to participate is often influenced by psychological, social, and contextual factors. Anxiety, fear of making mistakes, low confidence, and concerns about peer judgement have all been identified as barriers to classroom engagement [17]. Understanding these factors is therefore essential for developing strategies that encourage more inclusive participation.

2.2 International Students and Participation Challenges

International students frequently face additional barriers to classroom participation compared to domestic students. Transitioning to a new educational environment often requires adaptation to unfamiliar teaching approaches, communication styles, and cultural expectations [18]. While many universities encourage active discussion and student interaction, some international students may come from educational backgrounds where classroom participation is less emphasised or where deference to instructors is strongly encouraged.

Language proficiency can further influence participation. Even when students possess adequate academic language skills, concerns about pronunciation, grammar, or expressing ideas accurately may reduce their willingness to speak during class discussions [19]. These concerns are often accompanied by fear of negative evaluation and communication apprehension, both of which have been shown to inhibit participation behaviour [20].

Cultural values may also shape classroom interaction patterns. In many collectivist societies, students may be socialised to prioritise harmony, avoid public disagreement, and minimise behaviours that could attract unwanted attention [21]. Consequently, some students may avoid classroom participation to reduce the risk of embarrassment or loss of face. Such behaviours do not necessarily reflect a lack of interest or knowledge but rather different cultural expectations regarding communication and learning.

When participation challenges persist, international students may experience reduced social integration, lower academic confidence, and weaker connections with peers and lecturers [22]. Addressing these barriers therefore requires approaches that consider both emotional and cultural dimensions of student participation.

2.3 Emotional Intelligence and Student Engagement

Emotional intelligence has emerged as an important construct within educational research due to its association with academic success, psychological well-being, and social functioning. Emotional intelligence is generally defined as the ability to perceive, understand, regulate, and utilise emotions effectively in oneself and others [9].

Within educational settings, emotionally intelligent students tend to demonstrate stronger self-regulation, greater resilience, and more effective coping strategies when facing academic challenges [23]. Emotional intelligence has also been linked to improved interpersonal relationships, communication skills, and collaborative learning behaviours [24]. These competencies are particularly relevant to classroom participation because participation often requires students to manage anxiety, respond to uncertainty, and communicate effectively in social situations.

Research suggests that emotionally intelligent students are generally more confident in expressing their ideas and more capable of managing participation-related fears [25]. They are also more likely to engage constructively with peers and instructors, contributing positively to classroom discussions and collaborative learning activities. Consequently, emotional intelligence may serve as an important factor supporting active classroom engagement among international students.

Furthermore, emotional intelligence appears to facilitate intercultural adjustment. Students who are able to recognise and manage emotional responses effectively may be better equipped to navigate cultural differences, build relationships across diverse groups, and adapt to unfamiliar educational environments [26]. This suggests that emotional intelligence may play a particularly important role in supporting participation among international learners.

2.4 Emotional Intelligence Interventions in Education

Although emotional intelligence has been associated with numerous positive educational outcomes, researchers have increasingly recognised the importance of developing emotional intelligence through structured interventions rather than treating it solely as an individual trait [27]. Social-emotional learning programmes, reflective learning activities, and emotional skills training initiatives have demonstrated positive effects on students' emotional competencies and academic experiences [28].

Common intervention strategies include reflective journaling, emotional awareness exercises, role-playing activities, peer discussions, and communication-focused training. These approaches aim to strengthen students' ability to recognise emotions, regulate emotional responses, and engage more effectively in interpersonal interactions [29]. Previous studies have reported improvements in emotional regulation, self-confidence, social competence, and psychological well-being following participation in emotional intelligence interventions [30].

Despite these encouraging findings, relatively little research has explored the role of emotional intelligence interventions in enhancing classroom participation among international university students. Existing studies have largely focused on outcomes such as academic performance, well-being, leadership, or social adjustment, with limited attention given to participation behaviour as a specific outcome [31]. Moreover, few intervention studies have examined how emotional intelligence development may help students overcome participation barriers rooted in communication anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, or cultural adjustment challenges.

This gap highlights the need for research investigating whether structured emotional intelligence interventions can improve classroom participation within multicultural higher education settings. The present study seeks to address this gap by evaluating the effectiveness of a classroom-based emotional intelligence programme designed specifically to enhance participation confidence and engagement among international university students.

3. Conceptual Framework And Hypotheses

The present study is grounded in the assumption that classroom participation is influenced not only by cognitive and linguistic factors but also by emotional and psychological processes. For international university students, participation often requires managing anxiety, overcoming fear of negative evaluation, interpreting social cues, and communicating confidently within unfamiliar cultural environments. Consequently, emotional intelligence may serve as an important mechanism that supports active classroom engagement.

Emotional intelligence theory suggests that individuals who are better able to recognise, understand, and regulate emotions are more capable of coping with stressful situations and engaging effectively in social interactions [9]. Within educational contexts, emotional intelligence has been associated with communication confidence, self-regulated learning, academic engagement, and interpersonal adjustment [23,24]. These competencies are particularly relevant to classroom participation because participation frequently involves emotional risks, including fear of making mistakes, uncertainty about social expectations, and concerns regarding peer judgement.

The intervention developed for this study draws upon emotional intelligence principles proposed by Goleman [10] and incorporates four key components: emotional awareness, emotional regulation, reflective communication, and supportive peer interaction. Through reflective journaling, emotion recognition exercises, guided discussions, and communication-focused activities, students are encouraged to become more aware of their emotional responses while developing strategies for managing participation-related anxiety.

The conceptual framework proposes that participation in the emotional intelligence intervention enhances students' emotional awareness and emotional regulation skills. Improved emotional competencies are expected to increase communication confidence and reduce participation anxiety, ultimately leading to more active classroom participation.

Figure 1 presents the conceptual framework guiding the study.

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

Emotional Intelligence Intervention

- Reflective Journaling
- Emotion Recognition Activities
- Guided Peer Discussions
- Communication-Focused Exercises

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Emotional Intelligence Development

- Emotional Awareness
- Emotional Regulation
- Social Awareness
- Communication Confidence

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Participation Outcomes

- Reduced Participation Anxiety
- Increased Classroom Confidence
- Improved Peer Interaction
- Higher Classroom Participation

Based on this framework, the following hypotheses are proposed.

H1: Emotional Intelligence Development

Students who participate in the emotional intelligence intervention will demonstrate significantly higher levels of emotional intelligence compared to students receiving standard classroom instruction.

This hypothesis is based on previous intervention studies showing that emotional intelligence competencies can be developed through structured educational programmes involving reflection, emotional skills training, and interpersonal learning activities [29,30].

H2: Communication Confidence

Students who participate in the emotional intelligence intervention will demonstrate significantly higher levels of communication confidence compared to students receiving standard classroom instruction.

As emotional intelligence improves students' ability to understand and regulate emotional responses, they may become more comfortable expressing ideas and engaging in classroom discussions [24].

H3: Participation Anxiety

Students who participate in the emotional intelligence intervention will report significantly lower levels of participation-related anxiety compared to students receiving standard classroom instruction.

Participation anxiety has been identified as a major barrier to classroom engagement among international students [20]. Emotional regulation strategies developed through the intervention are expected to reduce anxiety associated with speaking and interacting in classroom settings.

H4: Classroom Participation

Students who participate in the emotional intelligence intervention will demonstrate significantly higher levels of classroom participation compared to students receiving standard classroom instruction.

Enhanced emotional awareness, increased communication confidence, and reduced participation anxiety are expected to contribute to more frequent and meaningful classroom engagement.

H5: Relationship Between Emotional Intelligence and Participation

Improvements in emotional intelligence will be positively associated with improvements in classroom participation among international university students.

This hypothesis reflects the assumption that emotional intelligence functions as an underlying mechanism supporting participation behaviour through enhanced emotional regulation, communication confidence, and interpersonal effectiveness.

Together, these hypotheses provide a framework for evaluating the effectiveness of the intervention and examining the role of emotional intelligence in supporting participation among international students. The following section outlines the methodology used to test these hypotheses.

4. Methodology

4.1 Research Design

This study employed a quasi-experimental pre-test–post-test design to examine the effectiveness of a classroom-based emotional intelligence (EI) intervention in enhancing classroom participation among international university students. Two groups were involved: an intervention group that participated in a structured fourteen-week emotional intelligence programme and a comparison group that received standard classroom instruction without additional EI-focused activities.

A quasi-experimental approach was selected because students were assigned to existing classes rather than being randomly allocated to groups. This design allowed the study to examine changes in emotional intelligence, communication confidence, participation anxiety, and classroom participation over the duration of a regular academic semester while maintaining the natural classroom setting.

Pre-intervention and post-intervention data were collected from both groups to evaluate changes associated with the intervention.

4.2 Participants and Setting

The study was conducted at a private university in Malaysia involving international undergraduate students enrolled in compulsory language and communication-related courses. These courses were selected because classroom participation, discussion, and peer interaction formed important components of the learning process.

A total of **50 international students** participated in the study. Students represented diverse cultural and national backgrounds, including countries from East Asia, Southeast Asia, the Middle East, and Africa. Participants were divided into:

- Intervention Group (n = 25)
- Comparison Group (n = 25)

Participation in the study was voluntary, and ethical approval was obtained from the university's research ethics committee prior to data collection. Students were informed of the study objectives and provided written consent before participating.

4.3 Emotional Intelligence Intervention Programme

The intervention was implemented over a period of fourteen weeks and was integrated into regular classroom activities. The programme was designed to strengthen emotional awareness, emotional regulation, communication confidence, and interpersonal interaction through a series of structured activities.

The intervention consisted of four key components:

a) Reflective Journaling

Students completed weekly reflective journals focusing on classroom experiences, emotional reactions, communication challenges, and participation behaviours. Reflection activities encouraged students to recognise emotional triggers and develop greater self-awareness.

b) Emotion Recognition Activities

Students participated in guided exercises designed to improve their ability to identify and interpret emotional cues in themselves and others. Activities included scenario analysis, emotional mapping, and discussion of emotional responses in classroom situations.

c) Guided Peer Discussions

Structured small-group discussions provided opportunities for students to share perspectives, practice active listening, and develop confidence in expressing opinions. Facilitators encouraged supportive communication and constructive feedback.

d) Communication-Focused Exercises

Students engaged in short presentations, discussion leadership activities, role-playing exercises, and collaborative problem-solving tasks. These activities were designed to strengthen communication confidence and reduce participation-related anxiety.

Table 1 presents the intervention structure.

Table 1. Overview of the 14-Week Emotional Intelligence Intervention

Weeks	Focus Area	Activities
1–2	Emotional Awareness	Self-reflection, emotional journaling
3–4	Understanding Emotions	Emotion recognition exercises
5–7	Emotional Regulation	Coping strategies, reflection activities
8–10	Communication Confidence	Discussion tasks, classroom interaction exercises
11–12	Peer Engagement	Collaborative learning activities
13–14	Integration and Reflection	Presentations, reflective evaluation

4.4 Research Instruments

Multiple instruments were used to evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention.

Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence was measured using a validated emotional intelligence questionnaire adapted from previous educational research. The instrument assessed dimensions such as emotional awareness, emotional regulation, empathy, and social competence.

Communication Confidence

Communication confidence was measured using a self-report scale assessing students' confidence when participating in classroom discussions, asking questions, presenting ideas, and interacting with peers.

Participation Anxiety

Participation anxiety was measured using items adapted from classroom communication apprehension and participation anxiety instruments. Higher scores indicated greater anxiety associated with classroom participation.

Classroom Participation

Classroom participation was assessed through:

- Lecturer observation records
- Participation frequency tracking
- Student self-assessment
- Reflective journal entries

Participation indicators included frequency of contributions, quality of engagement, willingness to ask questions, and involvement in peer discussions.

4.5 Data Collection Procedures

Data collection occurred at two stages.

Pre-Intervention Phase

At the beginning of the semester, participants completed baseline surveys measuring emotional intelligence, communication confidence, and participation anxiety. Initial participation observations were also recorded.

Intervention Phase

The intervention group participated in the fourteen-week emotional intelligence programme, while the comparison group continued with standard classroom instruction.

Post-Intervention Phase

At the end of the semester, all participants completed the same survey instruments. Classroom participation records and reflective journal data were also collected for analysis.

4.6 Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

The analysis included:

- Descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations)
- Reliability analysis using Cronbach's alpha
- Paired-sample t-tests to compare pre- and post-intervention scores within groups
- Independent-sample t-tests to compare intervention and comparison groups
- Correlation analysis to examine relationships between emotional intelligence and classroom participation

Qualitative data from reflective journals were analysed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's six-step approach. Themes relating to emotional awareness, participation confidence, anxiety reduction, and classroom engagement were identified and interpreted.

The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings provided a more comprehensive understanding of how the emotional intelligence intervention influenced classroom participation among international university students.

5. Results

5.1 Participant Profile

A total of 50 international undergraduate students participated in the study, with 25 students assigned to the intervention group and 25 students assigned to the comparison group. Participants represented a range of cultural and linguistic backgrounds and were enrolled in language and communication-related courses at a private university in Malaysia.

Pre-intervention assessments indicated that there were no substantial differences between the intervention and comparison groups in terms of emotional intelligence, communication confidence, participation anxiety, or classroom participation. This suggests that both groups were relatively comparable at the beginning of the study.

5.2 Changes in Emotional Intelligence

Following the fourteen-week intervention, students in the intervention group demonstrated noticeable improvements in emotional intelligence compared to those in the comparison group. The greatest improvements were observed in emotional awareness and emotional regulation.

Students reported becoming more conscious of their emotional responses during classroom interactions and more capable of managing feelings of nervousness and uncertainty when participating in discussions. In contrast, students in the comparison group showed only minor changes across the same period.

These findings support **Hypothesis 1**, suggesting that emotional intelligence competencies can be strengthened through structured classroom-based activities.

5.3 Communication Confidence

Students who participated in the emotional intelligence programme reported higher levels of communication confidence at the end of the semester. They indicated greater confidence when expressing opinions, asking questions, contributing to discussions, and interacting with peers during classroom activities.

Classroom observations also suggested that intervention-group students became increasingly willing to volunteer responses and initiate communication during lessons. Comparatively smaller changes were observed among students in the comparison group.

These findings provide support for **Hypothesis 2**, indicating that emotional intelligence development may contribute positively to communication confidence.

5.4 Participation Anxiety

The intervention group demonstrated a reduction in participation-related anxiety following the completion of the programme. Students reported feeling less concerned about making mistakes, speaking in front of others, and being negatively evaluated by classmates or lecturers.

Reflective journal entries revealed that many students became more comfortable sharing ideas during classroom discussions and were less likely to avoid participation opportunities. Several participants described feeling more relaxed and emotionally prepared when engaging in communication activities.

These findings support **Hypothesis 3**, suggesting that emotional intelligence interventions may help reduce participation anxiety among international university students.

5.5 Classroom Participation

Classroom participation records indicated that students in the intervention group participated more actively than those in the comparison group. Improvements were observed in several areas, including:

- Frequency of contributions during classroom discussions
- Willingness to ask questions
- Engagement in group activities
- Responsiveness to peer comments
- Participation in collaborative learning tasks

Lecturer observations suggested that students who initially demonstrated low participation gradually became more involved in classroom interactions throughout the intervention period.

These findings support **Hypothesis 4**, indicating that the emotional intelligence intervention contributed to higher levels of classroom participation.

5.6 Relationship Between Emotional Intelligence and Classroom Participation

Analysis of the data suggested a positive relationship between emotional intelligence and classroom participation. Students who demonstrated greater improvements in emotional awareness and emotional regulation also tended to show higher levels of communication confidence and classroom engagement.

The findings indicate that emotional intelligence may function as an important factor supporting participation behaviour among international students.

These results support **Hypothesis 5**, which proposed a positive association between emotional intelligence and classroom participation.

5.7 Mediating Role of Communication Confidence

The findings further suggest that communication confidence may help explain the relationship between emotional intelligence and classroom participation. Students who reported improvements in emotional intelligence also demonstrated increased confidence when communicating in classroom settings, which appeared to contribute to greater participation.

Although further statistical testing would be required to confirm a mediation effect, the observed pattern of findings provides preliminary support for **Hypothesis 6**.

5.8 Qualitative Findings

Thematic analysis of students' reflective journals identified four major themes.

Theme 1: Increased Emotional Awareness

Students reported becoming more aware of their emotional reactions during classroom participation.

"I realised that I was nervous every time I wanted to speak, but after the activities I started to understand why I felt that way."

Theme 2: Improved Communication Confidence

Many participants described feeling more confident expressing opinions and participating in discussions.

"I feel more comfortable sharing my ideas now because I worry less about making mistakes."

Theme 3: Reduced Fear of Negative Evaluation

Students reported becoming less concerned about being judged by classmates or lecturers.

"Before, I stayed quiet because I was afraid of saying something wrong. Now I participate more because I know learning involves mistakes."

Theme 4: Stronger Peer Relationships

Participants highlighted the importance of peer discussions in creating a supportive learning environment.

"The group discussions helped me feel connected to my classmates and made participation easier."

5.9 Summary of Findings

Overall, the findings suggest that the classroom-based emotional intelligence intervention contributed positively to students' emotional development and classroom engagement. Compared to students receiving standard instruction, participants in the intervention programme demonstrated:

- Higher emotional intelligence
- Greater communication confidence
- Lower participation anxiety
- Increased classroom participation
- Stronger peer engagement

Taken together, these findings indicate that emotionally informed classroom practices may provide an effective strategy for supporting participation among international university students in culturally diverse higher education settings.

6. Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the effectiveness of a classroom-based emotional intelligence intervention in enhancing classroom participation among international university students. The findings suggest that students who participated in the fourteen-week emotional intelligence programme demonstrated higher levels of emotional awareness, greater communication confidence, reduced participation anxiety, and more active classroom participation compared to students receiving standard classroom instruction. These findings provide evidence that emotional intelligence can be intentionally developed through structured classroom activities and that such development may positively influence students' participation behaviours.

The first finding of the study indicates that students who participated in the intervention demonstrated improvements in emotional intelligence, particularly in emotional awareness and emotional regulation. This finding is consistent with previous research suggesting that emotional intelligence is not a fixed trait but a set of competencies that can be strengthened through reflective and experiential learning activities [24,25]. Through reflective journaling, emotion recognition exercises, and guided discussions, students were encouraged to become more aware of their emotional responses during classroom interactions. Such activities appear to have helped students better understand and manage feelings associated with participation, supporting earlier work on emotional intelligence development in educational settings [26].

A second important finding relates to communication confidence. Students who participated in the intervention reported feeling more confident when expressing opinions, asking questions, and engaging in discussions. This finding supports previous studies that have

linked emotional intelligence with interpersonal communication and self-confidence [22,23]. Emotional intelligence may enhance communication confidence by helping students regulate anxiety, interpret social situations more accurately, and respond more effectively to interpersonal challenges. For international students, who often face additional linguistic and cultural barriers, these emotional competencies may be particularly valuable in facilitating classroom engagement.

The reduction in participation anxiety observed among intervention-group students also represents a significant finding. Participation anxiety has long been recognised as a major barrier to classroom engagement, particularly among international students who may experience concerns about language proficiency, cultural expectations, and fear of negative evaluation [6,19]. The findings suggest that emotional intelligence activities provided students with practical strategies for recognising and managing these emotional challenges. By developing greater emotional regulation skills, students appeared better able to cope with participation-related stress and engage more confidently in classroom interactions.

The findings further demonstrated that students in the intervention group participated more actively in classroom discussions and collaborative learning activities. This outcome aligns with student engagement theory, which emphasises the importance of emotional, behavioural, and social factors in promoting active learning [29]. While many participation interventions focus primarily on communication skills or instructional techniques, the present study suggests that addressing students' emotional experiences may be equally important. Participation often requires students to take interpersonal risks, and emotional intelligence may provide the psychological resources needed to support these behaviours.

Another noteworthy finding concerns the relationship between emotional intelligence and classroom participation. Students who demonstrated greater improvements in emotional intelligence also tended to report higher communication confidence and greater classroom engagement. This finding supports previous research indicating that emotional intelligence contributes to positive academic and interpersonal outcomes [12,13]. It also reinforces the argument that emotional intelligence functions as an important underlying mechanism supporting participation behaviour.

The qualitative findings provide additional insight into how the intervention influenced students' experiences. Reflective journals revealed that students became more aware of their emotional responses, less concerned about making mistakes, and more comfortable interacting with peers. Many participants described a gradual shift from avoidance to active engagement, suggesting that emotional intelligence development may influence participation not only through skill acquisition but also through changes in students' perceptions of themselves and their learning environment.

The study also contributes to the growing literature on international student adjustment. Existing research has frequently highlighted the academic, linguistic, and social challenges faced by international students [4,21]. However, comparatively less attention has been given to the emotional dimensions of classroom participation. The findings suggest that emotional intelligence may serve as a valuable resource that supports both classroom engagement and broader social adaptation. By helping students manage emotional challenges associated with participation, emotional intelligence interventions may contribute to more positive educational experiences and stronger social integration.

From a practical perspective, the findings highlight the potential value of integrating emotional intelligence development into higher education teaching practices. Relatively simple classroom activities such as reflective journaling, guided discussions, and emotion-awareness exercises may help create learning environments that are more supportive of participation and engagement. Such approaches may be particularly beneficial in culturally diverse classrooms where students bring different communication styles, educational backgrounds, and participation expectations.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the study involved a relatively small sample of 50 international students from a single university, which may limit the generalisability of the findings. Second, the intervention was conducted over one academic semester, and longer-term effects were not examined. Third, some measures relied on self-reported data, which may be influenced by social desirability or response bias. Future research could involve larger and more diverse samples, longitudinal designs, and additional objective measures of participation and engagement.

Despite these limitations, the study provides important evidence regarding the role of emotional intelligence in supporting classroom participation among international university students. The findings suggest that emotionally informed educational practices can contribute to more confident, engaged, and participative learners. As higher education institutions continue to become more internationalised and culturally diverse, interventions that address students' emotional as well as academic needs may become increasingly important in promoting meaningful participation and successful learning outcomes.

7. Implications For Practice

The findings of this study have several important implications for higher education institutions, educators, and student support practitioners seeking to enhance classroom participation among international university students. As universities continue to become increasingly internationalised, there is a growing need to develop learning environments that not only support academic achievement but also address the emotional and social challenges experienced by students from diverse cultural backgrounds.

7.1 Implications for Teaching and Learning

One of the most significant implications of this study is that classroom participation should not be viewed solely as a communication or language issue. The findings suggest that emotional factors such as anxiety, confidence, self-awareness, and emotional regulation play a substantial role in determining students' willingness to engage in classroom discussions and learning activities. Consequently, lecturers should consider adopting teaching strategies that support students' emotional as well as cognitive development.

Simple classroom practices such as reflective activities, guided discussions, peer collaboration, and opportunities for low-risk participation may help students gradually develop confidence and reduce participation-related anxiety. Creating supportive learning environments where mistakes are viewed as part of the learning process may also encourage students to participate more actively without fear of negative evaluation.

7.2 Implications for International Student Support

The findings highlight the importance of providing targeted support for international students during their transition into higher education. Orientation programmes and student development initiatives often focus on academic skills and institutional procedures but may pay less attention to emotional adjustment and communication confidence.

Universities may benefit from incorporating emotional intelligence development into international student support programmes. Workshops focusing on emotional awareness, stress management, communication skills, and intercultural adaptation may help students navigate participation challenges more effectively. Such initiatives could complement existing academic support services and contribute to stronger student engagement and retention.

7.3 Implications for Curriculum Design

The study suggests that emotional intelligence can be developed within regular classroom settings rather than being treated as a separate or standalone programme. This finding has important implications for curriculum design. Educators may consider embedding emotional intelligence activities into existing courses through reflective journaling, collaborative learning tasks, peer interaction exercises, and structured communication activities.

Integrating emotional intelligence into the curriculum may help students develop skills that extend beyond academic performance, including interpersonal communication, emotional regulation, teamwork, and resilience. These competencies are increasingly recognised as important graduate attributes in contemporary higher education and professional environments.

7.4 Implications for Culturally Responsive Teaching

The findings also reinforce the importance of culturally responsive teaching practices. International students often bring different educational experiences, communication styles, and cultural expectations into the classroom. Educators should recognise that reluctance to participate may not necessarily indicate a lack of knowledge, motivation, or interest but may instead reflect cultural norms, communication anxiety, or adjustment challenges.

Culturally responsive teaching involves creating inclusive environments where diverse perspectives are valued and where students feel psychologically safe to contribute. Providing multiple participation opportunities, encouraging collaborative learning, and recognising different communication preferences may help reduce participation barriers and support more equitable classroom engagement.

7.5 Implications for Emotional Intelligence Development in Higher Education

The positive outcomes associated with the intervention suggest that emotional intelligence development deserves greater attention within higher education policy and practice. While universities frequently prioritise academic knowledge and technical competencies, emotional intelligence may be equally important in supporting student success, particularly in multicultural learning environments.

Higher education institutions may consider incorporating emotional intelligence development into leadership programmes, student engagement initiatives, communication courses, and co-

curricular activities. Such efforts may contribute not only to improved classroom participation but also to broader outcomes such as student well-being, interpersonal competence, and employability.

7.6 Summary

Overall, the findings indicate that emotionally informed educational practices can play an important role in supporting classroom participation among international university students. By recognising the emotional dimensions of learning and communication, educators and institutions can create more inclusive and supportive environments that encourage active engagement.

The study demonstrates that relatively simple classroom-based interventions can positively influence emotional awareness, communication confidence, and participation behaviour. As higher education continues to become more diverse and globally connected, emotionally responsive and culturally inclusive teaching approaches may become increasingly important for promoting meaningful student engagement and success.

8. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

While the findings of this study provide encouraging evidence regarding the effectiveness of a classroom-based emotional intelligence intervention, several limitations should be acknowledged when interpreting the results.

First, the study involved a relatively small sample of 50 international undergraduate students from a single private university in Malaysia. Although the participants represented diverse cultural backgrounds, the findings may not be fully generalisable to international students studying in different institutional, disciplinary, or national contexts. Future studies should involve larger and more diverse samples across multiple universities to enhance the generalisability of the findings.

Second, the intervention was conducted over a single academic semester. While positive changes were observed in emotional intelligence, communication confidence, participation anxiety, and classroom participation, the long-term sustainability of these improvements remains unclear. Future longitudinal studies could examine whether the benefits of emotional intelligence interventions persist beyond the intervention period and continue to influence students' academic engagement over time.

Third, several measures used in the study relied on self-reported data. Although self-report instruments provide valuable insights into students' perceptions and experiences, responses may be influenced by social desirability bias or participants' willingness to provide favourable answers. Future research could incorporate additional objective measures such as video-recorded classroom observations, peer assessments, or learning analytics to provide a more comprehensive evaluation of participation behaviour.

Fourth, the study focused primarily on classroom participation as the main outcome variable. While participation is an important indicator of student engagement, emotional intelligence may also influence other educational outcomes such as academic achievement, intercultural competence, student well-being, communication effectiveness, and social integration. Future

studies could explore these additional outcomes to provide a broader understanding of the educational impact of emotional intelligence interventions.

Finally, the study examined a combined intervention consisting of reflective journaling, emotion recognition activities, guided peer discussions, and communication-focused exercises. As a result, it was not possible to determine which specific intervention components contributed most strongly to the observed improvements. Future experimental research could investigate the relative effectiveness of individual intervention strategies to identify the most impactful approaches for supporting classroom participation.

Despite these limitations, the study contributes valuable evidence to the growing body of research on emotional intelligence in higher education. By demonstrating the potential benefits of a classroom-based intervention, the findings provide a foundation for future investigations into emotionally informed teaching practices and student development initiatives.

Future research should therefore focus on larger multi-institutional studies, longitudinal evaluations, and more sophisticated analytical approaches to better understand the mechanisms through which emotional intelligence influences classroom participation. Particular attention should be given to the experiences of international students, as they often face unique emotional, linguistic, and cultural challenges that may affect their engagement in higher education. Such research would contribute to the development of more effective, inclusive, and evidence-based educational practices for increasingly diverse learning environments.

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