Face Threat Mitigation in Feedback: An Examination of Student Apprehension, Self-Efficacy, and Perceived Emotional Support

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FACE THREAT MITIGATION IN FEEDBACK: AN EXAMINATION OF STUDENT

APPREHENSION, SELF-EFFICACY, AND PERCEIVED EMOTIONAL SUPPORT

THESIS

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of

Arts in the college of Communication and Information at the University of Kentucky

By

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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

FACE THREAT MITIGATION IN FEEDBACK: AN EXAMINATION OF
STUDENT APPREHENSION, SELF-EFFICACY, AND PERCEIVED
EMOTIONAL SUPPORT

This experimental study examined the effects of an instructor's face threat mitigation tactics on student self-efficacy for learning and perceived emotional support from the instructor in a written feedback setting. Participants ($N = 401$) were randomly assigned to one of four feedback scenarios in which level of face threat mitigation and instructor age and status were manipulated. Student grade orientation and state feedback apprehension were measured prior to being exposed to the feedback scenario. Results indicate that high face threat mitigation is positively associated with student self-efficacy for learning and perceived emotional support from the instructor. Results also revealed that state feedback apprehension predicts self-efficacy for learning and perceived emotional support from the instructor. Grade orientation predicted self-efficacy for learning but did not significantly predict perceived emotional support from the instructor providing feedback. Finally, scenarios manipulated for instructor age and status did not significantly differ in self- efficacy for learning or perceived emotional support from the instructor. Implications regarding theory, the measurement of feedback apprehension, and student-instructor communication are discussed.

KEYWORDS: Face threat, face threat mitigation, politeness theory, feedback, instructor age, self-efficacy for learning, classroom emotions, grade orientation, feedback apprehension

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Chapter One: Introduction

In a perfect world, instructors would be able to ensure growth and academic success for all of their students while maintaining a positive relationship with them. Although debatable, Fymier and Houser (2000) suggest that the student-instructor relationship is interpersonal in nature and instructors are often trained to act as a role-model or mentor to their students and to use interpersonally competent communication. They are encouraged to practice immediacy (Kerssen-Griep & Witt, 2012), affinity-seeking strategies (Myers, Martin, & Knapp, 2005), appropriate disclosure (Miller, Katt, Brown, & Sivo, 2014), and other various rapport-building strategies with their students in order to provide them with a positive academic experience. However, they often face instructional challenges that may threaten the rapport that they worked hard to build with their students. Specifically, when instructors must provide students with feedback, they may unintentionally threaten student face and self-efficacy for learning. They could also unintentionally communicate a lack of emotional support for their students. Therefore, without proper communicative tools, instructors may struggle to provide students with constructive criticism while also maintaining a positive relationship with them. When it comes to instructional feedback, literature across the educational and communication disciplines has highlighted the need to mitigate face threats in feedback settings (Kerssen-Griep, Hess, & Trees, 2003; Trees, Kerssen-Griep, & Hess, 2009). Facework, which is a trainable instructional skill, is important to master and understand.

Goffman (1967) introduced the concept of *face*, which refers to the image that a person desires to display to the world. The concept of face is included in a variety of theories including feedback intervention theory (FIT; Kluger & DeNisi, 1996), politeness

theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987) face negotiation theory (Ting-Toomey, 1988), and others. In academic feedback situations, positive self-image can be threatened quite easily. If instructors are trained to practice facework, they may be more prepared to help students feel good about themselves and protect the instructor-student relationship while still improving their academic work. Facework includes interactional strategies that are designed to protect an individual's identity and image. Using Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory, instructors can strategically design feedback messages that protect their students' self-efficacy for learning.

Statement of Problem

Because instructional feedback is a relevant research topic and a potentially face-threatening situation (Kerssen-Greip, 2001), this study seeks to determine how instructors can strategically design feedback messages that practice skilled facework to increase student efficacy for learning, and communication emotional support in feedback situations.

While a large body of research has primarily examined face-to-face or video feedback (Kerssen-Griep & Witt, 2012; Kerssen-Griep, Trees, & Hess, 2008; Witt & Kerssen-Griep, 2011), feedback is often written in papers, in emails, on rubrics, or through electronic means on learning management systems (Can & Walker, 2011; Sopina & McNeill, 2015). Instructors are using online platforms for course-related materials such as assignments, syllabi, and discussions. Consequently, students are frequently asked to turn assignments in electronically using programs like Microsoft Word. There is an extensive body of research that examines instructors' written corrective feedback for ESL students (e.g., Di Loreto & McDonough, 2013; Mahfoodh & Pandian, 2011). It

suggests that English language learners prefer their instructors to pay close attention to their corrective feedback by considering ESL students' past experiences and carefully wording their corrective messages (Mahfoodh & Pandian, 2011). However, studies examining domestic students' perceptions of electronic and written feedback are even more scarce.

Existing methodological approaches examine students' perceptions of feedback in general (e.g., King, Schrodt, & Weisel, 2009; Malachowski Martin, & Vallade, 2013) or have manipulated instructors' verbal delivery of feedback with behaviors such as immediacy (Kerssen-Griep & Witt, 2015). To extend on what we know about feedback, this study uses quasi-experimental methods to examine specific face threat mitigation (FTM) techniques in written feedback, when delivered by instructors of various ages, and how those techniques help or hinder students' efficacy for learning and perceptions of instructors' emotional support. It also takes a unique approach to the topic by considering students' individual characteristics including state feedback apprehension and general grade orientation.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Instructional Feedback

In academia, instructional feedback cannot be avoided. De Kleijn et al. (2014) argued that the concept of feedback can be examined from various perspectives: the sender's perspective, the receiver's perspective, or an outside observer's perspective. This study employs the definition of feedback from the receiver's perspective, which is conceptualized as any information provided by an instructor to a student that the student perceives to be about his/her performance (de Kleijn et al., 2014). Given the relational aspect of teaching and learning, it is difficult for instructors to provide a feedback intervention that is completely void of emotion. Because feedback is an inherently face-threatening act (Brummernhenrich & Jucks, 2016; Witt & Kerssen-Griep, 2011), it can be challenging for instructors to maintain a positive relationship with their students when they are forced to critique their work.

Instructional scholarship has examined various communication strategies that instructors can use while providing students with helpful feedback. Many studies have applied FIT to provide a better understanding of how students perceive criticism (Dannels, Gaffney, & Martin, 2011; Kerssen-Griep & Witt, 2015; King & Young, 2002). The theory provides that face-threatening feedback has the potential to limit performance as it draws the receivers' attention away from the task itself. However, when feedback is solely focused on learning of the task, it is more likely to render positive results (Kluger & DeNisi, 1996). The concepts provided in FIT, such as face and receiver reactions, are closely related to those introduced by Brown and Levinson's politeness theory (1987).

Politeness Theory

Politeness theory was first formulated by Brown and Levinson (1987). They posited that in order to protect face, communicators use politeness to mitigate face threats that could potentially be imposed on another (Littlejohn & Foss, 2011). Humans have two identity needs: *positive face* and *negative face*. Positive face refers to the need for social affirmation while negative face refers to the need for autonomy or to be free from imposition (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Face-threatening acts (FTAs) refer to those speech acts that communicators use to assuage the potentially negative effect that things like criticism and disagreement can have on a receiver.

According to Brown and Levinson (1987), FTAs come in five possible forms. The first option is to deliver the FTA baldly or directly with no attempt to mitigate the effects with politeness. For example, in a feedback situation, a sender could say, "I would like you to change your methodological approach to this question." This request is both threatening of the receivers' autonomy (his/her own decision of what approach to use) and the receivers' social character (the request indicates that the receiver is wrong in some way). The second option is to deliver the FTA with positive politeness. In other words, this option allows the sender to use social affirmation or compliments in his/her language (e.g., "I would be so grateful if you would reconsider your approach to this question. You're a great critical thinker, so I thought you might."). A third option would be for the sender to practice negative politeness. That is, the sender would acknowledge that the request may be infringing on the receivers' autonomy. In this case, the sender would utter something such as, "I'm sorry to bother you while you're busy during finals week, but I would like to discuss your paper with you."

There are two other options for delivering FTAs. The fourth is considered the "off-the-record" FTA (Littlejohn & Foss, 2011). This option is indirect and often ambiguous. An example of feedback using this type of indirect request is, "I'm not sure this organization strategy works for your paper." An instructor might say this in hopes that the student will make a change, but is indirect and unclear about what needs to be changed. This type of request is often used ambiguously in hopes of the receiver agreeing to complete the task. However, if the receiver says something like, "I'm not going to change the organization," the sender can always claim that the statement was not a request at all. Finally, an FTA can be avoiding by simply not stating the request at all.

Brown and Levinson (1987) also offer a specific formula that explains which strategy we choose to employ when making requests: $Wx = D(S.H) + P(H.S) + Rx$. Essentially, this formula states that the amount of work (W) we put into being polite is dependent upon the interpersonal distance (D) between the sender and hearer (S and H), and that is added to the power (P) of the hearer over the sender, which is then added to the risk (R) of socially harming the hearer. There are several ways in which this formula can manifest. For example, the interpersonal distance between the sender and hearer may be quite small, but the power that the hearer has over the sender may be quite large (e.g., a strict parent). However, the sender and hearer may be of equal power but have a large amount of interpersonal distance between them (e.g., an academic tutor).

Politeness theory has been thoroughly examined in linguistic contexts. Mackiewicz and Riley (2003) introduced "moves" that can be used as linguistic strategies to either threaten or protect face. These strategies include using downgraders, supportive moves, or aggravating moves. Downgraders refer to language items that mitigate the

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threat or force of the request. Examples of downgraders are "possibly" and "please." Supportive moves are those that also mitigate the threat or force of the speech act but can stand independently. An example of a supportive move would be option three from Littlejohn and Foss (2011): "I'm sorry to bother you while you're busy during finals week, but…" Supportive moves tend to communicate a sense of (Lam, 2011). Aggravating moves, on the contrary, are those which intensify the force or threat of the speech act. They function in an opposite manner as they avoid alleviating any FTA. An example of an aggravating move would be, "Unless you want to receive an E in the course, send me your final paper."

Another aspect of linguistic politeness theory is the level of directness one uses in the design of his/her message. Lam (2011) posits that the degree of perceived politeness can be dependent upon the level of directness that the sender uses. This development draws upon Brown and Levinson's (1987) five FTA delivery options. For example, one can send a direct request such as, "Finish your paper before Monday," or one can be completely ambiguous or indirect by saying, "Your paper isn't going to write itself." Chan (2007) investigated directors' uses of politeness strategies in organizational meetings. The results indicated that people in power, similar to an instructor in the classroom, are indeed aware and concerned with protecting their subordinates' positive and negative faces. Other studies have indicated that politeness strategies are positively related to perceived levels of trust between leaders and members in business settings (White, 2007). In the instructional setting, scholars are particularly interested in how politeness strategies can mitigate face threats in instructionally relevant messages (Bromme, Brummernhenrich, Becker, & Jucks, 2012).

Face Threat Mitigation in Feedback

Based on Brown and Levinson's (1987) positive and negative face, instructional scholars have specifically examined face threat mitigation (FTM) techniques that instructors can use to minimize negative student emotional reactions (e.g., Kerssen-Greip & Witt, 2012; Kerssen-Griep & Witt, 2015). Research has determined that instructors' use of politeness strategies are positively related to student motivation and perceived mentorship (Trees et al., 2009). Kerssen-Griep and Witt (2015) used video recordings to manipulate various FTMs which were used to lessen the blow of criticism. FTMs were manipulated using specific language. Results indicated that greater FTMs led to greater student perceptions of instructor mentoring. Instructors' use of skilled facework in feedback settings have caused students to perceive more fairness and usefulness of the feedback. Students are also less likely to act defensive when skilled facework was used (Trees et al., 2009). Trees et al. (2009) discovered that students find face-attentive feedback to be easier to both accept and process. In an earlier study, Lim and Bowers (1991) determined that certain linguistic tactics in feedback situations such as qualifiers and hedges are associated with positive outcomes for both the student-instructor relationship and student academic success. FTMs are also associated with student perceptions of instructor credibility (Kerssen-Griep et al., 2008). Yet, each of these studies have overlooked a prevalent channel for providing feedback – written communication. Thus, with FIT in mind, instructors should also attempt to minimize face-threatening language in written feedback to elicit positive student outcomes.

Given the research that suggests skilled facework may foster student self-efficacy for learning and positive emotional reactions (Reinders, Cho, & Lewis, 2013), instructors

should weigh the advantages and drawbacks to using such messages, especially given the consideration of the student-instructor relationship as an interpersonal one (Frymier & Houser, 2000) that has a power difference. Research has determined that verbal aggressiveness is negatively correlated with affect toward the content and instructor (Myers & Knox, 2000). This concept holds true in computer-mediated communication where Finn, Shimkowski, O'Shaughnessy, and Heine (2011) concluded that verbally aggressive email messages can be destructive to the student-teacher relationship and have the same negative outcomes as they would in the classroom: decreased student affect and motivation. Therefore, it is important for instructors to be weary of the messages they are sending their students through written text. While it is virtually impossible for instructors to completely ease any fear of unpredictability, they may be able to alleviate some of the negative effects of academic feedback by practicing facework. Instructors should provide feedback with certain goals in mind: to protect students' self-efficacy for learning and their perceived emotional support from their teacher.

Taken together, the feedback literature suggests that students' receptivity and assessment of feedback can affect their perceptions of instructors (de Kleign et al., 2013; Trees et al., 2009) and students' state of mind (e.g., affect, motivation, Kerssen-Griep & Witt, 2012). Less is known about how feedback may influence students' perceptions of their efficacy to take the feedback and implement it in a valuable way. Further, because feedback is inherently face threatening, and face threats have been associated with a lack of perceived emotional support (Belschak & Hartog, 2009), less is known about the emotional responses to feedback which can affect students' approach and avoidance behaviors in the instructional setting (Kerssen-Griep & Witt, 2015). Thus, the following

sections will review the literature on self-efficacy for learning and emotions as they relate to feedback interventions.

Student Self-Efficacy for Learning

Bandura (1977) defines self-efficacy as an individuals' personal judgment of his/her capabilities to execute certain actions and achieve desired goals. People perceive differing expected outcomes regarding the same task due to their level of self-efficacy. For example, one student may have a high level of self-efficacy when it comes to spelling, but relatively low perceived self-efficacy in his or her mathematics course. Self-efficacy measures focus on the individual's thoughts about his/her own capabilities regarding a certain task, not his/her actual performance or overall self-concept (Zimmerman, 2000). Gucran (2005) defines self-efficacy as a judgment, not a function of one's ability. He also suggests that self-efficacy contributes to student success in that it affects academic behavior such as asking for help.

Gucran's (2005) findings enforce Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory, which posits that individuals' self-efficacy beliefs dictate their choices of tasks and efforts placed into those tasks. According to Bandura (1977) "The strength of people's convictions in their own effectiveness is likely to affect whether they will even try to cope with given situations" (p. 193). He insists that individuals tend to avoid situations that they perceive as threatening or intimidating based on their perceived capabilities. In mathematics specifically, research suggests that a student's attitude towards a subject is highly correlated with performance in that subject (Sherman & Wither, 2008; Kumar & Karimi, 2010). Research also suggests that students who hold a positive attitude about a

subject, such as mathematics, tend to put more effort into performing school-related tasks and therefore obtain higher performances (Adseoji & Yara, 2008).

For instructors, it is important to foster, and not hinder, the development of students' self-efficacy for learning, as the belief in one's own abilities can lead to a number of positive outcomes in classroom contexts. For example, Demiroren, Turan, and Oztuna (2016) found that with medical students, a positive correlation exists between self-efficacy beliefs and self-regulated learning and problem-based learning. On the other hand, a lack of self-efficacy for learning can act as the mediating variable between cognition and performance. For example, Yerdelen-Damar and Pesman (2013) discovered that self-efficacy for learning among physics students mediates the relation of metacognition to physics achievement. This finding tends to hold true across a variety of academic disciplines. In another study, students' self-efficacy for self-regulation was the greatest predictor of achievement in an intermediate French class (Mills, Pajares, & Herron, 2007). In music classes, there is a strong positive relationship between self-efficacy and performance as well as self-evaluation (Hewitt, 2015). In sum, the role of the instructor in building students' self-efficacy is critical, regardless of the discipline.

When applied to an instructor-student feedback intervention, building self-efficacy is still an interactive task that must take place between student and instructor. Schunk (1985) suggests that students often benefit from the verbal encouragement of their instructors. In fact, being encouraged to set their own goals improved students' likelihood to be self-efficacious and stick to achieving those goals.

Strategic feedback is important in building self-efficacy as well. Specifically, students will spend more time and energy on a certain task when task-related feedback is

presented (i.e., framing the feedback to focus primarily on the assignment or task) (Schunk, 1987). In other words, when instructors mitigate face threats in feedback, students can focus on the task-related feedback instead of relational implications of face threats, and efficacy is then influenced. The following hypothesis is presented:

H1: Students in higher FTM conditions will experience higher self-efficacy for learning than students in lower FTM conditions.

Self-efficacy for learning research suggests the extent to which an individual feels confident about a task will determine how the individual emotionally interprets the task (Schunk, 1985). A student who feels confident about an academic endeavor may see it as a challenge and employ effective coping strategies, but a student who does not have efficacy regarding the task will feel emotional distress (Chemers, Hu, & Garcia, 2001).

Student Perceptions of Instructor Emotional Support

Biggers and Rankis (1983) claimed that emotions make up nearly 40% of the variance in human behaviors. Therefore, in recent decades, student emotions have become an increasingly important area of instructional research. In situations where positive or negative emotions are experiences, individuals often seek or receive emotional support (Lancour, 2011; Melzer & Grant, 2016). Burleson (2009) suggests that feelings of emotional support lead to decreased emotional stress, improved emotional health, and more positive interpersonal relationships. These feelings occur when a receiver perceives sender's message to have the intention of desirable outcomes.

Specific to the instructional setting, emotional response theory (ERT) posits that specific interpersonal emotions will influence individuals' approach/avoidance behaviors (Mottet, Frymier, & Beebe, 2006). Therefore, scholars suggest that emotional stress and

self-efficacy are closely related (Chemers et al., 2001; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Specifically, providing positive feedback will generally lead to positive emotions such as pride and happiness, while negative feedback will often lead to emotions such as disappointment and guilt (Lazarus, 1991). Negative feedback also elicits higher amounts of turnover intentions and intentions to exhibit counter-productive work behaviors (Belschak & Den Hartog, 2009). These findings are slightly alarming given that negative feedback is often unavoidable and sometimes necessary when it comes to improving student performance.

It is also important to consider the vast amount of instructional situations that require long term, one-on-one instruction, such as master's theses and doctoral dissertations. This extended mentorship is bound to become interpersonal in nature. De Kleijn, Meijer, Pilot, and Brekelmans (2014), who specifically examined the student-instructor relationship in a master's thesis project, argue that students in these one-on-one situations attach a great deal of value to feeling supported by their mentors. Therefore, senders should consider being more sensitive to the receiver's perceptions of feedback.

Skilled facework (Goffman, 1967) in instructional messages can perhaps work to provide students with emotional support. However, when facework is not practiced in instructional settings, students have displayed negative emotional responses (Kennedy-Lightsey, 2010) and may subsequently lead to perceptions of poor emotional support. Specifically, Kennedy-Lightsey (2010) discovered that verbal confirmation (e.g., "great job") played an important role in reception of a message. When verbal confirmation was absent, students reported more negative emotional responses, even when receiving a good grade on the project. To assess how different levels of FTM in instructional feedback

affects students' perceptions of instructors, as a potential source of emotional support, the following hypothesis is presented:

H2: Students in higher FTM conditions will perceive more emotional support from the instructor than students in lower FTM conditions.

According to Oately and Johnson-Laird (1987), anxiety is one of the basic emotions that individuals experience, along with happiness, sadness, anger, and disgust. Izard (1977) argues that anxiety is a combination of other basic emotions, such as fear, distress, and anger. Anxiety can also be context-driven and be prompted by certain communicative events (Wrench, Goding, Johnson, & Attias, 2012). Closely related to anxiety is apprehension, which is characterized by active state of fear, while anxiety is more of a prolonged state. McCroskey (1982) created a typology for measuring context-driven anxiety with his communication apprehension measure (PRCA-24). **Student Apprehension**

Communication apprehension is an interpersonal construct that describes an individual's degree of anxiety that he/she feels in real or anticipated communication settings (McCroskey & Beatty, 1998). Although some suffer from trait apprehension, many people report feeling temporarily anxious in certain communicative situations and contexts (i.e., state). In the instructional context, student apprehension regarding communication with their instructors and how they perceive feedback has been examined (Booth-Butterfield, 1989; Malachowski et al., 2013; Martin, Valencic, & Heisel, 2002). Specifically, students with high levels of communication apprehension tend to view their instructors as less immediate and responsive (Allen, Long, O'Mara, & Judd, 2008). They also have a difficult time processing certain messages (Bourhis, Allen, & Bauman, 2006)

and tend to view instructional feedback as more critical and threatening than intended (Booth-Butterfield, 1989).

The research mentioned, however, measures communication apprehension using McCroskey's (1982) definition and PRCA-24 measure. While this measure has been successful in previous studies, it treats communication apprehension as a trait and focuses on receiver tendencies in verbal conversations (e.g., "Ordinarily I am very tense and nervous in conversations"). However, no current instruments measure a student's state apprehension prior to reading written feedback.

Perhaps the anticipation of reading instructional feedback contributes to student apprehension due to its unpredictable nature. Myers (1990) suggests that humans have an inherent need to attribute behavior to a cause and for predictability and controllability. In psychology, the unpredictability belief is defined as, "a pervasive belief that people are undependable and the world is chaotic" (Ross & Hill, 2002, p. 458). Because of the potentially face threatening nature of feedback, students likely experience some apprehension about receiving feedback, which is more context specific than general interpersonal or communication apprehension. Research on self-efficacy and feedback suggests that receivers will become less task-focused when a message is face-threatening (Schunk, 1987). Thus, the following hypothesis was forwarded:

H3: Student state feedback apprehension will be associated with student self-efficacy for learning.

However, because research on feedback and emotional support does not currently exist, it is unclear how feedback which is delivered in a written channel, as opposed to

face-to-face channel, will affect students' perceptions of instructor emotional support. Hence, the following research question is presented:

RQ1: Is state feedback apprehension associated with student perceptions of instructor emotional support?

Considering the possibility that feedback apprehension may affect how students' receive and respond to feedback, another important factor to consider is a student's grade orientation which may also affect their reactions to written feedback.

Grade Orientation

Grade orientation, introduced by Eison, Pollio, and Milton (1982), refers to the degree to which a student is motivated by earning a high grade in a course rather than his/her learning outcomes. Grade-oriented students tend to view classes as a "necessary evil" that stands in the way of achieving their professional goals (Eison, Pollio, & Milton, 1986; Kroll, 1988). Those with a high level of grade orientation typically exhibit lower levels of learner empowerment (Houser & Frymier, 2009) and affect for instructor and course (Eison et al., 1982). Eison et al. (1986) argued that students with high grade orientations also tend to attribute grades to chance or luck and therefore perceive low amounts of control when it comes to achieving a desired grade. Thus far, research has not examined grade orientation, self-efficacy for learning, and perceptions of emotional support in concert with one another. In the current study, the following research questions are posed:

RQ2: Is student grade orientation related to student self-efficacy?

RQ3: Is student grade orientation will be related to students' perceived emotional support from their instructors?

Finally, given the interpersonal distance and inherent power that an instructor often has over a student and his or her grade, instructor age will be examined as an indicator of interpersonal distance between students and instructors.

Instructor Age

Brown and Levinson (1987) suggest that interpersonal distance can be communicated using politeness strategies. Interpersonal distance can perhaps be influenced by age gap between sender and receiver. When it comes to instructor age, prior research has concluded that students tend to view the *ideal* instructor as younger (Edwards & Hardwood, 2003). Yet, younger instructors have reported feeling worried about appearing confident and building teacher-student relationships (Grant & Thomas, 2004). These worries are consistent with research that has concluded that students view older professors as being more credible (Semlak & Pearson, 2008), even if not ideal (Edwards & Harwood, 2003). At this point, research has not examined the interaction between instructor age, as an indicator of power distance, and student perceptions of instructional feedback. Specifically, we do not know whether an instructor's age has an effect on how students read written feedback. Therefore, the following research questions are explored:

RQ4: Does age of instructor providing feedback influence student self-efficacy?

RQ5: Does age of instructor providing feedback influence students' perceived emotional support from their instructors?

Chapter Three: Method

Brown and Levinson (1987) suggest that using politeness theory and its five FTA options as a typology is precarious. However, they also argue that politeness as an interpersonal rule is fundamental to social life. As such, some scholars advocate for using direct versus indirect messages instead of trying to manipulate communication to represent the five FTA options (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Chan, 2007; Lam, 2011). Finally, Brown and Levinson (1987) offer that power distance is a key factor that plays a significant role in the reception of politeness messages. Therefore, this experimental design will manipulate both level of directness of the FTA and the power distance associated with the sender of feedback, as indicated by age.

Participants

Participants ($N = 401$) were recruited through a research participation system at a large, southeastern university. Participants were awarded course credit to participate in the study. The inclusion criteria for this study were that participants must be enrolled as a student at the university and above the age of 18. Participants included males ($n = 115$), females ($n = 284$), one participant who self-identified as other, and one who did not report on his/her sex. They were between the ages of 18 and 53 ($M = 19.25$, $SD = 2.52$). The majority of participants ($n = 326$, 81.3%) were white/Caucasian, followed by ($n = 40$, 10.0%) African American, ($n = 17$, 4.2%), Hispanic, ($n = 10$, 2.5%) Asian or Pacific Islanders, and ($n = 8$, 2.0%) other. They were primarily first year students ($n = 302$), sophomores ($n = 25$), juniors ($n = 16$), and seniors ($n = 58$).

Simulation Material Creation, Pilot Testing, and Manipulation Checks

Four scenarios were created for the full study which manipulated two variables: age and FTM. To manipulate age, each feedback scenario was "given" by one of two people: a 23-year-old graduate teaching assistant or a 60-year-old tenured professor. In order to control for varying grade options, each participant received the same hypothetical "C+" grade. To manipulate FTM, the same instructional feedback message but applied either direct or indirect language. In the Low FTM conditions, language was direct, blunt, and concise (e.g., "I am disappointed"). The High FTM conditions include language that is indirect. The indirect language applies Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness strategies, catering to both positive and negative face (e.g., "You should consider working on APA formatting," "Try supporting your claims with credible evidence"). See final scenarios in appendix A. A manipulation check was distributed prior to the full survey. In it, only two scenarios which differed in level of FTM were presented.

Manipulation Check

A separate pilot test was utilized with an independent group of participants prior to distribution of the survey. The purpose of the manipulation check was to determine whether 1) the feedback scenarios were realistic and 2) the feedback scenarios displayed variance in the following: directness, helpfulness, sensitivity, tact, politeness, perceived justification (i.e., items to indicatelevel of face threat mitigation). Participants were also asked whether or not the feedback message made them "look good" and "feel liked." A 7-point Likert scale was applied to each item with each negative term (e.g., "not helpful"

and "not justified") on the low end (1) and each positive term (e.g., "helpful" and "justified") on the high end (7).

Participants ($n = 99$) were recruited from introductory communication courses and randomly assigned to one of two conditions varying in FTM; instructor age was not included as a variable in this test. Results from the manipulation check indicated that participants did see the feedback scenario as realistic ($M = 4.72$, $SD = 1.801$). A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was significant, determining that participants also detected variance in the content of the feedback conditions, $F(1, 98) = 43.695$, $p < .01$. Specifically, participants in the high FTM conditions rated the instructor's message as more favorable ($M = 39.04$, $SD = 7.05$) than those in the low FTM conditions ($M = 28.46$, $SD = 7.06$). Thus, the manipulation check for face threat mitigation was successful and the scenarios were deemed realistic.

Procedure

The study design was quasi-experimental. Each participant received a link to an online survey hosted by Qualtrics. Participants first completed the feedback apprehension and the grade orientation (GO) scales. Participants were then randomly assigned to one of four written feedback messages: low FTM and 23-year-old teaching assistant (TA) ($n = 108$), low FTM and 60-year-old professor ($n = 95$), high FTM and 23-year-old TA ($n = 112$), and high FTM and 60-year-old professor ($n = 86$).

To test whether random assignment was successful, an ANOVA was performed to detect group differences in state feedback apprehension and grade orientation. ANOVA results were not significant, $F (3, 400) = 1.027$, $p > .05$. Participants in each condition

did not significantly differ in grade orientation or state feedback apprehension prior to treatment. Thus, random assignment was successful.

After reading one of the four feedback scenarios, participants completed the self-efficacy for learning scale (Pintrich, Smith, Garcia, & McKeachie, 1993) and the emotional support subscale of the classroom emotions scale (CES, Titsworth, Quinlan, & Mazer, 2010).

Instrumentation

Feedback Apprehension. Because there is no existing scale that specifically measures written feedback-induced apprehension, a measure was created for this study. Items were taken from McCroskey's (1982) Interpersonal Communication Apprehension subscale from the Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA-24) and modified for the context of this study. The scale has previously been reliable in works that measure students' interpersonal and oral communication apprehension (Coatzee, Astrid, & Lizette, 2014; LaRochelle & Karpinski, 2016) (α=0.93-0.95). For example, the original item "While participating in a conversation with a new acquaintance, I feel very nervous" was modified to, "When I am about to read my instructor's feedback of my performance, I feel very nervous."

Participants responded to this new 4-item Likert-type scale on response options ranging from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (5). Items include statements such as, "I dislike reading feedback from my instructor" and, "When I am about to read feedback from my instructor, I feel indigestion or discomfort in my abdomen." A reliability test and exploratory factor analysis (EFA) were both performed on this scale. Criteria for factor and item retention included: 1) eigenvalues greater than 1.0 for retained

factors and 2) primary factor loadings of .50 or higher (Comrey & Lee, 1992). All items

loaded on the same factor at .581 and above, accounting for 60% of the variance. Results

indicated that the scale is reliable and unidimensional, $\alpha = .783$ ($M = 2.34$, $SD = .837$)

See Table 1 below.

Table 1

State Feedback Apprehension Inter-Item Correlation Matrix

	1	2	3	4
1. I dislike reading feedback from my instructor	--			
2. When I am about to read my instructor's feedback of my performance, I feel very nervous.	.255	--		
3. I am afraid to read feedback when I get an assignment back	.397	.674	--	
4. When I am about to read feedback, I feel indigestion or discomfort in my abdomen.	.344	.528	.609	--

Grade Orientation. Students' grade orientation (GO) was measured using the

grade orientation subscale of the Learning Orientation Grade Orientation Scale (LOGO

II; Eison et al., 1982). This 16-item subscale is a five-point Likert-type scale ranging

from *never* (1) to *always* (5). Items include statements such as, "I think grades provide

me a good goal to work toward," and "I think it is unfair to test students on material not

covered in class lectures and discussions, even if it is in reading assignments." The scale

has been previously obtained an alpha reliability coefficient of 0.74 *(M = 40.85, SD =*

8.53) (Goodboy, Booth-Butterfield, Bolkan, & Griffin, 2015). In the current study, the scale was reliable $\alpha = .734$ ($M = 39.47$, $SD = 7.04$).

Self-Efficacy for Learning. The self-efficacy for learning scale is an eight-item subscale taken from the Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire (MSLQ) (Pintrich et al., 1993). It is a 7-point Likert type scale, which ranges from *not at all true of me* (1) to *very true of me* (7). It is designed to measure a students' evaluation of his/her ability to achieve academic success with items such as, "I'm confident I can do an excellent job on assignments and tests in this course" and "I expect to do well in this class." Pintrich et al. (1993) reported an alpha coefficient of 0.93 ($M = 5.47$, $SD = 1.14$). The scale was also reliable in this study ($\alpha = .972$, $M = 28.77$, $SD = 10.52$).

Perceived emotional support from instructor. Titsworth et al.'s (2010) CES is a three-factor, 15-item, five-point Likert-type scale that assesses students' emotional experiences in an academic setting. It examines whether students perceive that their instructor is emotionally supportive of them (nine items, emotional support), how much emotional energy they put into an academic task (four items, emotion work), and how positive or negative students perceive their instructional experience (two items, valence). The nine-item emotional support subscale was applied to this study. Items include, "I get the emotional help and support I need from my instructor," "My instructor is not responsive to my concerns and feelings," and "It seems like I can talk to my instructor about my personal problems" with response options ranging from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (5). The subscale has previously been reliable (Mazer, McKenna-Buchanan, Quinlan, & Titsworth, 2014; Titsowrth, McKenna, Mazer, & Quinlan, 2013)

with an alpha coefficient of .89. Alpha coefficient in this study was .840 ($M = 23.08$, *SD* = 4.31).

Data Analysis Procedures

To address H1 and H2, conditions with matching main effect variables were collapsed into two groups: high FTM (conditions 3 and 4) and low FTM (conditions 1 and 2) . These two conditions were then analyzed using independent samples t-tests. The purpose of these tests were to determine whether the level of FTM had a significant main effect on student reports of self-efficacy and emotional responses to their assigned feedback scenarios. H1 posits that participants assigned to a higher level of FTM will experience higher levels of self-efficacy for learning. For this hypothesis, conditions were treated as independent variables while self-efficacy was treated as the dependent variable. H2 suggests that participants assigned to higher levels of FTM will experience more emotional support from their instructor. To test H2, similar to the t-test from H1, conditions were treated as the independent variables while participant reports of emotional responses were treated as the dependent variables.

To address H3 and RQ1, linear regressions were employed to determine whether participants' initial level of feedback anxiety is associated with participants' final self-efficacy for learning and perceived emotional support. In these regressions, feedback anxiety was treated as an independent variable while self-efficacy for learning and emotional support were treated as outcome variables.

RQ2 and RQ3 ask whether student grade orientation will be related to both self-efficacy for learning and perceived emotional support from the instructor providing them a "C+" grade. Correlations were used to determine whether these variables were related.

Finally, RQ4 and RQ5 inquired about the age of the instructor providing written feedback as a main effect. To determine whether the age of instructor influenced student self-efficacy and perceived emotional support from the instructor, an independent samples t-test was performed to detect group differences between conditions. To detect differences based on instructor age and status, conditions 2 and 4 (younger instructor) were collapsed together, and conditions 1 and 3 (older professor) were collapsed together. The purpose of this study was to determine the effects of the age of the professor providing feedback.

Specifically, participants were randomly assigned to one of four different feedback scenarios to determine whether level of FTM (i.e., directness and indirectness) and age of instructor influenced student self-efficacy for learning and perceived emotional support from the instructor. Grade orientation and state feedback apprehension were also measured and assessed for their relationship with student self-efficacy for learning and perceived emotional support from the instructor. The results of this study are presented in the next chapter.

Chapter Four: Results

Prior to analysis of each hypothesis and research question, a Pearson Correlation Matrix was performed on all variables in the study (see Table 2 below). Hypotheses and research questions were tested using the statistics software program, SPSS 24. The results from this study are outlined in the following sections.

Table 2

Correlation Matrix of All Variables

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4
1.State feedback apprehension	2.34	.837	--			
2.Grade orientation	39.47	7.04	.384**	--		
3.Self-efficacy for learning	28.77	10.52	-.125*	-.143*	--	
4.Emotional Support	23.08	4.31	-.004	-.002	.519**	--

Note: 1 = ** Correlation is significant at the .01 level
*Correlation is significant at the .05 level

Hypotheses 1 and 2

H1 suggested that participants in higher FTM conditions would experience higher self-efficacy for learning than those in lower FTM conditions. After conditions were collapsed, a 2-sample *t*-test revealed a significant, model, $t(1, 400) = -8.213$, $p < .01$. Group means and standard deviations are presented in Table 3. Specifically, the two conditions manipulated for high FTM were significantly different from the two conditions manipulated for low FTM on self-efficacy for learning. H1 was supported.

H2 posited that participants in higher FTM conditions would perceive greater emotional support from the instructor than those in lower FTM conditions. A 2-sample *t*-test was significant, $t(1, 400) = -7.208$, $p < .01$. Results indicated that participants in conditions using higher FTM perceived a higher level of emotional support from their instructor than participants in low FTM conditions (See Table 3). H2 was supported

Table 3
Group Differences in Level of FTM

	Mean (SD)			
	Low FTM	High FTM	*F*	*t*
Self-Efficacy	24.83(10.51)	32.82(8.89)	9.475	-8.213
Emotional Support	21.63(4.56)	24.56(3.48)	8.095	-7.208

**$p < .01$,

Hypotheses 3

H3 predicted that student state feedback apprehension would be associated with student self-efficacy for learning. A linear regression model with state feedback apprehension entered as the independent variable and self-efficacy entered as the dependent variable was significant, $F(1, 399) = 6.206$, $p < .01$, adjusted $R^2 = .013$. State feedback apprehension appeared to be a weak but significant negative predictor of self-efficacy for learning, $\beta = -.124$, $p < .05$, $t = -2.491$. H3 was supported.

Research Question 1

RQ1 inquired about whether student state feedback apprehension would be associated with student perceptions of emotional support from the instructor. Results from linear regression are significant, $F(1, 399) = 4.469$, $p < .01$, adjusted $R^2 = .009$.

State feedback apprehension appeared to be a weak but significant negative predictor of student perceived emotional support, $\beta = -.105$, $p < .05$, $t = -2.114$.

Research Questions 2 and 3

RQ2 asked if student grade orientation is related to student self-efficacy for learning. A two-tailed Pearson correlation revealed that the two items, were negatively correlated, $r = -.144$, $p < .01$.

RQ3 asked if student grade orientation is related to student perceptions of emotional support from the instructor. A two-tailed Pearson correlation revealed that there is no significant relationship, $r = -0.94$, $p > .05$. See table 1 for all correlations.

Research Questions 4 and 5

The final research questions inquired about the age of the instructor providing feedback and whether it had an influence on student self-efficacy for learning (RQ4) and perceived emotional support (RQ5). Once conditions were collapsed based on age and status main effects, a 2-sample t-test revealed that that there are no significant differences between conditions with a younger instructor to those with an older instructor on self-efficacy for learning [$t\,(1, 400) = .383$, $p = .702$] or perceived emotional support [$t\,(1, 400) = 1.095$, $p = .274$].

Post Hoc Analyses

After all a priori hypotheses and research questions were analyzed, the principal investigator conducted additional analyses to understand potential differences between the treatment conditions. It was reasoned that the associations between pre-treatment variables (i.e., grade orientation and feedback apprehension) and the post-treatment variables (self-efficacy for learning and perceived emotional support) would potentially

be different based on the specific experimental treatments received by participants. . In other words, four separate Pearson correlation matrices to test relationships between all variables were conducted. See tables 4-7 below.

Table 4

Correlation Matrix of All Variables from Condition 1

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4
1.State feedback apprehension	2.39	.784	--			
2.Grade orientation	39.70	7.72	.406**	--		
3.Self-efficacy for learning	24.85	11.21	-.007	-.130	--	
4.Emotional Support	21.87	5.02	-.017	-.050	.605**	--

*Note: 1 = ** Correlation is significant at the .01 level*
*Correlation is significant at the .05 level

Table 5

Correlation Matrix of All Variables in Condition 2

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4
1.State feedback apprehension	2.21	.778	--			
2.Grade orientation	38.52	7.22	.497**	--		
3.Self-efficacy for learning	24.80	9.71	-.148	-.225*	--	
4.Emotional Support	21.36	3.97	-.159	-.120	.522**	--

*Note: 1 = ** Correlation is significant at the .01 level*
*Correlation is significant at the .05 level

Table 6

Correlation Matrix of All Variables in Condition 3

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4
1.State feedback apprehension	2.39	.904	--			
2.Grade orientation	40.52	6.47	.349**	--		
3.Self-efficacy for learning	32.92	8.58	-.205*	-.097	--	
4.Emotional Support	24.66	3.61	.154	.240*	.226*	--

*Note: 1 = ** Correlation is significant at the .01 level*
*Correlation is significant at the .05 level

Table 7

Correlation Matrix of All Variables in Condition 4

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4
1.State feedback apprehension	2.35	.872	--			
2.Grade orientation	38.86	6.54	.279**	--		
3.Self-efficacy for learning	32.69	9.34	-.306*	-.286*	--	
4.Emotional Support	24.42	3.32	-.197	-.193	.290**	--

*Note: 1 = ** Correlation is significant at the .01 level*
*Correlation is significant at the .05 level

Summary

The results of this study highlight the impact of an instructor's FTM techniques in

written feedback. Because feedback is an inherently face-threatening situation, this study

examined how face supportive language impacted student self-efficacy for learning and perceived emotional support from instructor. Results indicate that an instructor's FTM techniques may cause a student to experience higher self-efficacy for learning and an increased perception of emotional support from their instructor.

Results also suggest that students' state feedback apprehension and initial grade orientation have an effect on self-efficacy for learning and perceived emotional support, regardless of language used in written feedback. More specifically, a high level of state feedback apprehension appeared to be associated with both self-efficacy for learning and perceived emotional support from instructor. Although it was not significantly associated with perceived emotional support from the instructor, initial grade orientation was significantly associated with student self-efficacy for learning.

Next, the age and status of the instructor providing feedback did not have a significant influence on student self-efficacy for learning or perceived emotional support from the instructor after reading the summative feedback message.

Finally, post hoc analyses revealed a significant correlation between 1) self-efficacy for learning and emotional support, and 2) state feedback apprehension and student grade orientation throughout each of the four conditions. However, the strength of the associations differed by condition.

These findings are discussed in more detail, along with practical and theoretical implications, in Chapter Five. The discussion concludes with limitations and future research directions.

Chapter Five: Discussion

The purpose of this study was to determine a) whether the level of FTM in written feedback and/or instructor age and status had an effect on student self-efficacy for learning and perceived emotional support from their instructor and b) explore the effect of students' initial level of grade orientation and state feedback apprehension on self-efficacy for learning and perceived emotional support. The results of this study contribute new knowledge to the field of instructional communication in several ways. First, results indicate that the language used in written feedback has an influence on both student self-efficacy for learning and perceived emotional support from the feedback provider. Second, state feedback apprehension prior to reading feedback has an effect on the receivers' perception of the message. Third, students' initial grade orientation prior to reading feedback influences self-efficacy for learning but not perceived emotional support. Finally, in some cases, the strength of the associations between student orientations (i.e., grade orientation and feedback apprehension) and student outcomes (self-efficacy for learning and perceived emotional support from the instructor) was determined by the level of face threat mitigation in the feedback Theoretical and practical implications are discussed in the following sections.

Effects of Face Threat Mitigation and Instructor Age

The results from this study indicate that a higher level of FTM in written feedback is associated with both student self-efficacy for learning and perceived emotional support from instructor. However, instructor age did not appear as a significant factor in the relationship between written feedback and self-efficacy for learning or emotional support. These findings are particularly interesting, given research that suggests that interpersonal

distance can be created through an age gap (Brown & Levinson, 1987) and that the ideal instructor is younger (Edwards & Hardwood, 2003). These findings suggest that student self-efficacy for learning and perceived emotional support were influenced only by level of FTM employed in each feedback scenario. These results indicate that it is the communication between student and instructor that matters rather than the age or status of the instructor. Results from this study also suggest that although interpersonal distance can be increased through age gap, that distance can be minimized through competent instructional communication.

Results also indicate that building self-efficacy for learning is an interactive task that must take place between student and instructor. Schunk (1985) suggests that students often benefit from the verbal encouragement of their instructors – the current study also confirms that self-efficacy for learning is co-constructed. In other words, student self-efficacy for learning depends on communication with instructor. More specifically, the nature of the communication between instructor and student is what matters; face-supportive communication leads to generally positive outcomes. These results are promising in that communication is something that can be altered or adjusted. An instructor of any age or status has to use these tools (e.g., FTM, face-supportive language) to foster student self-efficacy for learning and positive emotions whilst providing effective feedback.

Emotional support was also a significant and unique variable in this study as scholars have only recently begun examining facework and emotion together, particularly in the classroom setting (e.g., Kennedy-Lightsey, 2010). Burleson (2009) suggests that feelings of emotional support lead to decreased emotional stress, improved emotional

health, and more positive interpersonal relationships. Titsworth et al. (2010) argue that positive student emotions can improve the overall instructor-student relationship, student learning outcomes, and most importantly, students' ability to process feedback. Given the extant amount of research that concludes that emotions are an important part of the academic experience, instructors should consider using FTM strategies to foster positive student emotions and foster perceptions of being emotionally supportive to garner some of the positive outcomes associated with providing support. They should also be aware of the state of apprehension that their students may feel before reading feedback.

State Feedback Apprehension

Results from this study not only confirm that initial state feedback apprehension predicts student self-efficacy for learning, but it is also associated with less perceived emotional support from the instructor. These findings suggest that students' individual characteristics and traits can overpower the communication between student and instructor. In other words, if a student is apprehensive about instructional feedback prior to reading their instructors' comments, the instructor may have to work harder to build that students' self-efficacy for learning and perceived emotional support. However, although state feedback apprehension was a significant predictor of self-efficacy for learning and perceived emotional support, the interaction was statistically weak.

Because state feedback apprehension was a weak predictor of this study's outcome variables (student self-efficacy for learning and perceived emotional support from instructor), instructors can potentially use communicative tools to overcome that state of apprehension. For example, instructors can apply FTM techniques in their language to protect students' face and maintain levels of emotional support. However,

although instructors are able to foster student self-efficacy for learning and perceived emotional support through language, they should be aware that student grade orientation is a powerful factor.

Student Grade Orientation

Results from this study also illustrate that initial student grade orientation does predict self-efficacy for learning. In other words, students who are more grade oriented are automatically affected by the "C+" grade despite the instructor's level of FTM in written feedback. This is an alarming finding as it suggests that a below average to average letter grade is enough to negatively impact a student's perception of his or her ability to perform well in a class. An ethical dilemma may arise for instructors who are aware of this as they may be apprehensive in awarding a student a letter grade that he or she rightfully deserves. If instructors are concerned with fostering student self-efficacy for learning, they may fear distributing poor grades, even when necessary. This can be particularly concerning given Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory, which posits that individuals' self-efficacy beliefs dictate their choices of tasks and efforts placed into those tasks. One C+ grade could have the potential to discourage a student from putting significant effort into the remaining assignments in the course.

However, initial grade orientation did not appear to have an impact on students' perceived emotional support from their instructor. This finding may suggest that students who are highly concerned with their overall letter grade are not emotionally invested in the interpersonal aspects of the course. Instead, rather than being relationally focused, students who are highly grade-oriented are more task-focused. Moreover, they may not be concerned with building a relationship with their instructors. This would challenge the

notion that the student-instructor relationship is an interpersonal relationship (Frymier & Houser, 2000).

Theoretical Implications

This research study was primarily rooted in face threat mitigation theory, which stems from Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory. Both theories suggest that language choice is essential to protecting a recipient's positive and negative face. Findings from this study confirm what previous scholars have argued: applying FTM techniques and protecting one's face will generally lead to positive outcomes (Brummernhenrich & Jucks, 2016; Kerssen-Greip & Witt, 2015; White, 2007). In this study, students who read messages that employed higher levels of FTM experienced greater self-efficacy for learning and perceived emotional support from the instructor than those who read more direct, straightforward language (i.e., low face threat mitigation). Although primarily rooted in FTM, this study also has theoretical implications for feedback intervention theory (FIT) and emotional response theory (ERT).

FIT is another lens that is often used to examine instructor feedback. The theory posits that when face-threatening feedback is provided, the receiver applies coping strategies to react to the feedback (Kluger & DeNisi, 1996). One strategy is to abandon the task altogether, especially when there are multiple instances of face-threatening feedback. In fact, Mikulincer (1988) presented a body of evidence that suggests that receivers of negative feedback eventually abandon the task due to learned helplessness. Thus, if an instructor truly wants a student to learn and apply feedback, practicing face

threat mitigation can help students to avoid abandoning the task for better academic outcomes and better relational perceptions.

According to ERT, emotions will influence an individuals' approach/avoidance behaviors (Mottet et al., 2006). Research on self-efficacy also suggests that feelings of self-efficacy often dictate approach/avoidance behaviors (Bandura, 1986). Currently, scant research examines the two constructs together. However, if both emotional response and self-efficacy can have an impact on the effort a student puts into a class, both should be fostered, assuming the both student and instructor are emotionally invested in the relationship. Although it was not hypothesized that self-efficacy for learning and emotional support would be related to one another, a Pearson Correlation Matrix performed on all variables indicated that the two are significantly related, $r = .519, p < .01$, furthering the notion that they should both be examined together, with equal importance. However, this correlation only shed light on one piece of the phenomenon.

Post hoc analyses were performed to examine associations between variables in each of the four conditions. Results revealed that self-efficacy for learning and emotional support are associated with one another in both high FTM and low FTM conditions. However, the two are more strongly positively associated with one another in the low FTM conditions. This was initially surprising. While it is possible that an increase in self-efficacy for learning and perceived emotional support could occur in low face threat mitigation, it more likely that the two would decrease together when receiving low face threat mitigation (see tables 4-7). These results suggest that perhaps negative communication can create more damage to student efficacy and perceptions than positive

communication can help student efficacy and perceptions. In other words, face-threatening communication can be more powerful than face-supportive communication. Therefore, instructors should be aware of any face-threatening language they may be using in both written and verbal academic settings.

Recent scholarship has suggested that student academic entitlement and grade orientation are on the rise (Ciani, Summers, & Easter, 2008; Goldman & Martin, 2014; Vallade, Martin, & Weber, 2014). Although Frymier and Houser (2000) suggested that the student-instructor relationship is inherently interpersonal, other authors have claimed that student academic beliefs are changing and students' locus of control are shifting from internal to external among current generations of students. Although this study did not specifically measure academic entitlement, the absent relationship between grade orientation and perceived emotional support do indicate that students who are highly concerned with grades may not be concerned with receiving emotional support from their instructors. Thus, future researchers may wish to revisit the question of whether or not the instructor-student relationship is interpersonal, or if academic entitlement and grade orientation are on the rise, making the relationship impersonal. Hess and Mazer (2017) have revisited the phenomenon, suggesting that the instructional communication field's focus on the interpersonal aspects of teaching and learning has taken attention away from other frames for understanding the instructional communication process.

Finally, although not employed as an a priori framework, the instructional beliefs model (IBM; Weber, Martin, & Myers, 2011) is represented and supported in the current study. This theoretical framework suggests that teacher behaviors, student characteristics, and course-specific structural issues combine to influence student learning outcomes.

These first-order constructs are considered equally influential and mediated by the second-order constructs of students' instructional beliefs. The different pieces of the IBM model represented in this study can be combined to influence or predict student learning outcomes. More specifically, teacher behaviors such as emotional support and FTM in written language, paired with student characteristics such as grade orientation and state feedback apprehension can be treated as first-order constructs and examined together to predict learning outcomes using self-efficacy for learning as an instructional belief. This study did not examine learning outcomes, but the findings do provide support for the general framework. The IBM is a model that can easily be applied for practical use in classroom contexts, especially when teachers are aware of their students' beliefs and characteristics.

Practical Implications

Results from this study should be considered in both face-to-face and online classroom settings. In both contexts, instructors are typically required to provide written messages, including feedback, to their students. Therefore, they should be aware of the directness and politeness of their language. Although some students are task-oriented and concerned only with an adequate letter grade, there are those students who are relationally invested in the course.

For practical application in the classroom, instructors should take the opportunity at the commencement of the semester to inquire about their students' levels of self-efficacy for learning and other academic traits and states (e.g., state feedback apprehension, grade orientation). This would simply entail distributing a survey at the start of a course, similar to how public speaking instructors often ask their students to

report on their levels of public speaking apprehension. If instructors are aware of their students' feelings and relational goals, they can tailor their messages to protect students' faces and help meet those goals.

In addition, instructors may wish to compile a pool of "stock phrases" and tips to use in both written and verbal feedback. This list of phrases should be grounded in Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory and can act as a manual which instructors can use throughout their years of teaching. More specifically, phrases should be written with the intention of protecting both positive face (sense of belonging) and negative face (sense of autonomy). They should contain language that offers help (e.g., "feel free to come to my office" or "I would be happy to help you with this") and language that protects their freedom of choice (e.g., "you should consider changing the order of these paragraphs"). Having phrases ready can provide instructors with FTM practice and prepare them for potentially face-threatening feedback interventions (i.e., a face-to-face office meeting).

Instructors can also allow the results of this study to determine the channel through which they provide feedback. Because results imply that written language alone can effect student self-efficacy for learning and perceived emotional support, instructors may wish to provide face-to-face or video feedback to their students. Because written messages can be emotionally ambiguous (i.e., the nonverbal, emotional express is absent), perhaps avoiding written feedback altogether is best for some instructors who are not confident in their ability to protect students' face. Nonetheless, because this study is unique in examining written feedback, more research should be performed to understand

the limitations that come with the absence of nonverbal communication in feedback situations.

New Measure of Feedback Apprehension

Although unique to this study and new to instructional communication research, the state feedback apprehension measure used in this study proved to be reliable (α = .783) and unidimensional. State feedback apprehension, as a variable in this study, was also placed into a correlation matrix with all other variables in this study (grade orientation, self-efficacy for learning, and emotional support; see table 2). Results indicated that state feedback apprehension is significantly correlated with grade orientation and self-efficacy for learning providing initial evidence for construct validity. Therefore, the scale can be considered both reliable and valid and able to be examined alongside other variables in future research.

Moreover, the scale provides a unique contribution to instructional communication research in that it specifically deals with written feedback (e.g., "When I am about to read my instructor's feedback of my performance, I feel very nervous"). However, items can easily be manipulated to fit into a verbal feedback context. It is also comprised of four items, so it is brief enough to be incorporated easily into research or practice.

Limitations and Future Research

There are limitations that are both common in university research and specifically unique to this study. Limitations include subject recruitment methods, instrumentation, ecological validity, and other contributing factors that were not considered in the study, such as students' past experiences with feedback.

First, participants were required to complete this research study for course credit. Because they were able to complete the assignment on their own time through an online survey, participants were not monitored. Therefore, some may have been more interested in completing a homework assignment than providing thoughtful responses.

Second, the nature of subject recruitment presents a limitation to this study and others that resemble it. The population of first and second year undergraduate participants largely outnumbered the amount of juniors and seniors in the study. As juniors and seniors are closer to completing their college education, they may be more concerned with finishing with a higher grade point average (GPA). Therefore, future researchers may wish to discover whether student grade orientation is 1) higher among upper classmen, and, if so, 2) whether it interacts with any of the other variables presented in this study (self-efficacy, emotional support).

There are a few limitations that are unique to this study. The first lies in the instrumentation. Because there is no existing instructional feedback apprehension scale, the primary researcher compiled four modified scale items to measure participants' feedback anxiety. The scale was reliable and unidimensional and proved to be a strength in the current study. This existing scale should be further tested and validated. Additionally, instructional scholars may wish to create a more thorough apprehension measure that is unique to instructional feedback situations.

Furthermore, the ecological validity of the feedback situation presents a unique limitation. In the study, the primary researcher wrote theory-driven, summative feedback messages and assessed student reactions to those messages. First, students may receive feedback throughout assignments, rather than just summative feedback. Future research

should explore this approach to feedback provision to enhance ecological validity. Additionally, future scholars should consider asking participants about existing feedback messages that they have received and assessing their reactions to those messages. If participants were asked to pull from actual experiences, the relationship they have with the instructor would become a contributing factor in the research. For example, the existing relationships students have with their instructors, despite age or status, may come into play.

Additionally, an interesting finding arose from the current study. Instructor age and status did not significantly impact student self-efficacy or perceived emotional support. However, in the current study, students were asked to imagine receiving the message from a 60-year-old tenured professor or a 23-year-old teaching assistant, which ignores the nuances of ages and other status possibilities. It is entirely possible that a teaching assistant could be 60 years old or a tenured professor could be quite young. Further, this study does not ask students to examine written feedback from an adjunct professor, peer, advisor, or any other possible feedback provider. Future researchers should examine this phenomenon and determine whether an instructors' verbal and written word can overpower certain demographic traits (e.g., age, status, gender, or race). It is important to note, however, that verbal feedback settings could render different results. In verbal settings, instructor demographics, such as age and gender are more readily noticeable. In the current study, students were not viewing an instructor, but rather viewing a written message, so it is possible that they glanced over the short phrase that identified the instructor's age and status. Similarly, in an online classroom where

written feedback is salient, the student may never view the instructor and be unable to make assessments of age or status.

Moreover, instructional feedback should be more closely examined for other contributing factors. For example, students who have received negative feedback in the past could prove to have a higher level of feedback apprehension. In contrast, students who have become accustomed to receiving positive feedback may experience a more negative effect on their self-efficacy for learning and perceived emotional support when given a C+ grade. In other words, a straight-A student may experience a devastating blow when simply seeing a C+ grade. The antecedents to feedback apprehension, and those prior experiences would be important to examine for their influence on feedback processing.

This study is also limited by the homogenous sample. Previous research on grade orientation and academic entitlement has primarily focused on domestic students at large universities that are primarily white and this study is no exception. In the current study, white students account for 81.3% of participants. However, cultural factors may influence both student grade orientation, self-efficacy, and perceived emotional support from instructor. For instance, in cultures outside of the US, students may not be concerned with emotional support or building a relationship with their instructor. Although previous scholars have assumed that student traits such as academic entitlement are particularly Western phenomena (Ciania, Summers, & Easter, 2008; Jeffres, Barclay, & Stolte, 2014), others such as Blincoe and Garris (2017) have challenged that notion. Further research should be done to examine cultural factors that go into student

characteristics outside of academic entitlement (e.g., grade orientation, state feedback apprehension, self-efficacy for learning, and classroom emotions).

Finally, researchers may wish to examine the antecedents and causes of feedback apprehension. For example, are students more affected by previous feedback experiences the sheer amount of feedback, the content of the feedback, or some other factors? Relatedly, this study only examined state feedback apprehension, but because McCroskey (1977) argues that much of communication and receiver anxiety is trait, future instructional feedback research should examine both state and trait apprehension to provide better direction and training for instructor who wish to deliver feedback in a way that mitigates face threats and reduces student feedback apprehension.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of FTM in an instructor's written, summative evaluation of student performance on a particular assignment. Several unique contributions to instructional communication scholarship have emerged. First, the current study examines written feedback while others in the past have focused on face-to-face or video feedback (Kerssen-Griep & Witt, 2012; Kerssen-Griep et al., 2008; Witt & Kerssen-Griep, 2011). Moreover, it provides insight on the communication between student and instructor and the effect that feedback can have on a student's self-efficacy for learning and perceived emotional support. Since both self-efficacy and emotional support have been known to influence approach-avoidance behaviors (Bandura, 1986; Mottet et al., 2006), they should be fostered to enhance students' approach behaviors, and consequently, learning outcomes. To do so, instructors must be aware of both verbal and written messages they send to their students that may influence efficacy and perceptions

of emotional support. Studies such as this one are designed to equip instructors with the communicative tools to provide their students with a positive academic experience. Finally, this study further supports the importance of communication in teaching and learning. Because face threat mitigation mattered more than instructor age and status and more than students' initial grade orientation in facilitating student efficacy and perceived emotional support, it can be concluded that feedback communication can overpower instructor some instructor demographic traits and student characteristics. In other words, while some traits and characteristics are quite static, the communication, which is influential, is malleable in the classroom to benefit students.

APPENDIX A: EXPERIMENTAL CONDITIONS

Condition 1: Low level of FTM, older professor

Imagine, after turning in your final paper for a college writing course, that you are receiving the following message from your instructor, who is a 60-year-old, tenured professor:

Grade: C+

Overall, your paper is average. It contains several APA, grammatical, and organizational mistakes. Work on topic sentences and transitions. You also needed to support your claims with credible evidence. Finally, your conclusion did not sum up your main points or leave a lasting impression.

Condition 2: Low level of FTM, younger instructor

Imagine, after turning in your final paper for a college writing course, that you are receiving the following message from your instructor, who is a 23-year-old graduate teaching assistant:

Grade: C+

Overall, your paper is average. It contains several APA, grammatical, and organizational mistakes. Work on topic sentences and transitions. You also needed to support your claims with credible evidence. Finally, your conclusion did not sum up your main points or leave a lasting impression.

Condition 3: High FTM, older professor

Imagine, after turning in your final paper for a college writing course, that you are receiving the following message from your instructor, who is a 60-year-old, tenured professor:

Grade: C+

Overall, I see the argument that you're trying to make. However, you should consider working on APA formatting, grammar, and organization. Try supporting your claims with credible evidence and building a stronger, thought-provoking conclusion. These things would have brought your paper to an above-average score.

Condition 4: High FTM, younger instructor

Imagine, after turning in your final paper for a college writing course, that you are receiving the following message from your instructor, who is a 23-year old graduate teaching assistant:

Grade: C+

Overall, I see the argument that you're trying to make. However, you should consider working on APA formatting, grammar, and organization. Try supporting your claims with credible evidence and building a stronger, thought-provoking conclusion. These things would have brought your paper to an above-average score.

Demographics

What is your age? __ What is your gender?

Female __ Male __ Other __

What is your race? African American __

Asian / Pacific Islander __ Hispanic __ Caucasian __ Other (please indicate) _____

What is your academic rank? Freshman __

Sophomore __ Junior __ Senior __

Section 1 (taken before reading scenario):

Feedback Apprehension

Please select a number that best represents your feelings.

1	2	3	4	5

Strongly Disagree   Strongly Agree

1.   I dislike reading feedback from my instructor.

2.   When I am about to read my instructor's feedback of my performance, I feel very
       nervous.

3.   I am afraid to read the feedback when I get an assignment back.

4.   When I am about to read feedback, I feel indigestion or discomfort in my abdomen.

Grade Orientation (Eisson et al., 1983)

Please select a number that best represents your feelings.

1   2   3   4   5

Strongly disagree   Strongly Agree

1. I dislike courses in which a lot of material Is presented in class, or in readings, that does not appear on exams.

2. I do not find studying at home to be interesting or pleasant

3. Instructors expect too much out-of-class reading and study by students.

4. I think without regularly scheduled exams, I would not learn and remember very much.

5. Written assignments (i.e., homework, projects, etc.) that are not graded are a waste of my time.

6. I think it is unfair to test students on material not covered in class lectures and discussions, even if it is in   reading assignments.

7. I dislike courses which require ungraded out-of-class activities.

8. I think grades provide me with a good goal to work toward.

Please indicate how frequently your behavior coincides with the action described using the following rating scale:

1) Never 2) Seldom 3) Sometimes 4) Often 5) Always

1. I cut classes when confident that lecture material will not be on an exam.

2. I get irritated by students who ask questions that go beyond what we need to know for exams.

3. I will withdraw from an interesting class rather than risk getting a poor grade.

4. I try to find out how easy or hard an instructor grades before signing up for a course.

5. When looking at a syllabus on the first day of class, I turn to the section on tests and
    grades first.

6. I'm tempted to cheat on exams when I' confident I won't get caught.

7. I borrow old term papers or speeches from my friends to meet class requirements.

8. I try to get old tests when I think the instructor will use the same question again.

Section 2 (taken after reading scenario):

Manipulation Check Items

Please select the number that best represents your feelings.

How realistic is this instructor's message (i.e., can you see an instructor sending this
message to a student)?

1   2   3   4   5   6
     7

not realistic at all   very
realistic

Please rate your instructor's message and language based on these descriptors by choosing the number closest to your assessment:

Indirect 1   2   3   4   5   6   7 Direct

Helpful 1   2   3   4   5   6   7 Not Helpful

Insensitive   1   2   3   4   5   6   7 Sensitive

Not tactful   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Tactful

Rude   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Polite

Not justified   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Justified

Made me look bad   1   2   3   4   5   6   7 Made me look good

Made me feel disliked   1   2   3   4   5   6   7 Made me feel liked

Section 3:

Self-Efficacy for Learning (Pintrich et al., 1983)

Now that you have read the instructor's feedback on your paper, please select the number that best represents your feelings.

1   2   3   4   5   6
        7

Not at all true of me   Very true of me

After receiving this feedback:

1. I believe I will receive an excellent grade in this class.
2. I'm certain I can understand the most difficult material presented in the readings for this course.

3. I'm confident I can understand the basic concepts taught in this course.

4. I'm confident I can understand the most complex material presented by the instructor in this course.

5. I'm confident I can do an excellent job on the assignments and tests in this course.

6. I expect to do well in this class.

7. I'm certain I can master the skills being taught in this class.

8. Considering the difficulty of this course, the teacher, and my skills, I think I can do well in this class.

Classroom Emotions (Titsworth et al., 2010)

Think about the feedback that you have just received. Please select the number that best represents your feelings.

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Strongly disagree   Strongly Agree

After receiving this feedback:

1. I could get the emotional help and support I need from my instructor.

2. My instructor seems willing to help me make decisions about academic issues.

3. It seems like it would be difficult to talk about school-related issues with my instructor.

4. I think I could count on my instructor when things go wrong in my personal life.

5. It seems like I can talk with my instructor about my personal problems.

6. My instructor does NOT seem responsive to my concerns and feelings.

7. It seems like I CANNOT talk about my personal problems with my instructor.

8. I would generally describe the emotions I feel toward this instructor as positive.

9. I would generally describe the emotions I feel toward this class as positive.

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Vita

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