

The Culture of Silence in Classrooms: Why Students do not ask Questions and What Teachers can do

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ABSTRACT

The interaction within the classroom is the lifeblood of teaching and learning. But the general practice of our schools is that only the teacher seems to speak for the whole hour. Children sit quietly in confusion, neither asking questions nor participating in lesson discussions. The result is that learning becomes one-sided and the child merely listens instead of learning. This silence of the students should not always be interpreted as inattention, discipline or disinterest. This silence can also be due to the fear of making a mistake. Students fear criticism. They may have low self-esteem and a language barrier. Peer pressure and bad past experiences also contribute to this. Apart from this, the teacher's attitude and social environment also have an effect. This research paper examines this class silence. It has brought forward investigations related to class interaction, questioning and student participation. This paper distinguishes between two types of silence. There is a useful silence, in which the child thinks. The second is imposed silence, which prevents the child from speaking and thinking. The premise of the thesis is that silence is not just a student's personal flaw. This arises from psychological, pedagogical, social and institutional reasons. This paper discusses ways to change the class. The teacher should give the child time to think by asking questions. Dialogue and conversation are given space in the class. Eliminate fear from the child and increase communication with peers. Finally the result of the study revealed that teacher creates a classroom environment where making mistakes is not considered a bad thing. Asking questions conducting healthy discussions and having different opinions is the foundation of learning.

Keywords: Classroom Silence, Questioning, Student Participation, Fear of Negative Evaluation, Classroom Interaction and Teacher Questioning.

Introduction

A classroom is not only the name of walls and concrete material, where the teacher comes and leaves after giving a lesson. It is actually a place to meet and think together. Here, knowledge is created when there is conversation, questioning, discussion and reflection.

But our classes usually look like something else. The teacher asks a question. There is silence in the class. Only two or four specific children speak. Then the teacher gets bored and answers it himself. Students are confused in their hearts but they do not raise their hands. The entire period passes; the child does not speak but remains silent.

Sitting silently is not a bad thing. A child needs time to think. Silence is useful for brainstorming and formulating answers. As Rowe (1986) said that after a question the child should be given time to think, the teacher should not speak immediately. So the real point is not why the class is a chip. What is the reason for this silence?

The interaction between the teacher and the Student is the life of education. Meehan (Mehan, 1979) stated that speaking in the classroom is a method. The study of Nystrand (Nystrand et al., 1997) elaborated that lessons should not be merely memorized but should be communicated with children. In such a class, the child not only listens but also leads the conversation by asking questions and giving his point of views. Asking a child is a big thing. The question suggests that the child's mind is running. Dillon (1988) wrote that learning is incomplete without questions. The child will ask and then he will open up and the teacher will also understand where his confusion lies. If the child remains mute, the teacher will never know what he has misunderstood.

New research also shows that children often keep quiet out of fear. They think that if they speak, everyone will laugh. Yue (Yue et al., 2022) worked for nursing students. He noticed that children who lacked courage, kept quiet to avoid humiliation and Embarrassment.

So class silence is not a small matter. This is a deep educational problem. It is impossible to make any alterations to the classroom setting unless you understand the fear of the child. Learning environment cannot be improved without knowing the cause of the child's fear. It is important for the teacher to establish a trust where the student can ask questions without fear, not hesitate to make mistakes and participate openly in the learning process

Objectives of the Study

The main objectives of this research paper are as follows:

- To know the psychological, social, pedagogical and domestic or cultural reasons why children hesitate to speak up in class.
- To Clarify the difference between contemplative silence and fearful silence
- To Examine how the teacher's speech and behavior affects the child's asking questions, and whether it makes or breaks his or her motivation.
- To identify the ways that teachers can change the classroom environment, so that children can talk without fear and ask questions openly.

Methodology

This research is based on a thematic analysis style under Narrative Literature Review. Relevant academic books, research articles, theoretical discussions and empirical observations have been carefully reviewed for the study. In the analysis of the content, classroom interaction, practical participation of students, nature of questions and interaction within the class were particularly taken into consideration. Along with this, important aspects such as wait-time after the teacher asks questions, self-efficacy of students, fear of ridicule in front of peers, dialogic teaching and continuous assessment during teaching are covered in depth.

The material has been selected based on its relevance to the issue of silence occurring within the classroom. In order to maintain intellectual continuity, both old basic research and new contemporary research studies are interwoven, so that traditional approaches to classroom Interaction ideas can be adapted to today's psychological safety and student engagement demands. Instead of counting the results separately, all the main points are compared to each other to give a coherent thought pattern. Therefore, this paper does not present a field survey or statistical data but rather brings forth a clear understanding of classroom silence in the light of the existing body of knowledge and clarifies its practical implications for teachers and educators.

Understanding the Culture of Classroom Silence

The meaning of "culture of silence" in the classroom is the environment where students are unwilling to speak up, ask questions or disagree when given the opportunity. The child deliberately avoids speaking and keeps his questions to himself. This silence of the child can be due to several reasons:

- He may not have understood the teacher's words or questions.
- The matter is understood but does not have the courage and self-confidence to speak.
- Fear that the rest of the children will make fun or laugh if they speak.
- There may be a misconception that speaking is only the teacher's job, the child's job is only to listen.

- Or has he ever been scolded for asking questions in the past and now he does not want to take the risk.

So when the whole class is sitting in silence, don't just decide without thinking:

- All children are listening very attentively.
- All are very competent and intelligent.
- The class is very polite and disciplined.
- Everyone agrees with the teacher. L
- Children do not know anything.
- Or children have no interest in learning.

The true meaning of silence is understood only when the reason behind it is known. The famous educator Meehan (Mehan, 1979) stated that classroom discourse is governed by a certain social code. Children learn not only to book lessons there but also learn when to speak, how to respond, what response is preferred and what type of participation is considered appropriate in the school environment. When they see that speaking can be harmful, they gradually learn that the safest course is to sit quietly with their heads bowed and wait for the teacher to answer on his own.

This is where the overall mood of the class comes into play. If the teacher admires immediately the child who answers correctly and warns the child who makes a mistake, then the other children learn a negative the lesson and decide not to open their mouths until they are absolutely certain that the answer is correct.

Why don't Students ask Questions?

- **Fear of Making a Mistake**

The main reason why a child not speaks in class is the fear of wrong answer. Before speaking, the child keeps thinking that if the answer is wrong, the teacher will scold and others will laugh. In a class where reprimands are made for omissions, the child never dares to open his lips. He thinks that keeping his mouth shut is the safest; at least it won't be a spectacle in front of everyone. According to Cooper and his colleagues (Cooper et al.), children become very nervous when speaking in front of the class because they fear that everyone else will think they are less intelligent. Therefore, not opening one's mouth actually becomes a direct way to avoid humiliation and embarrassment.

- **Fear of Falling in the Eyes of People**

As observed a child never afraid of being wrong. He is more worried about what others will think about him. He feels that he will be unworthy and useless person in front of others. According to Yue and colleagues (Yue et al., 2022), "the higher fear in a child, the quieter he or she is in class in contrast, a child who is confident in his understanding speaks freely. It is evident that mere verbalization does not make children speak". So the teacher should create such a class environment where no one laughs at the questioner.

- **Lack of Self-Confidence (Lack of Self-Efficacy)**

The famous scholar Bandura (Bandura, 1997), described that self-efficacy is a one's belief in his own capacity and ability. A student who trusts in his hard work does not shy away from difficult lessons. He hopes he will understand. But the one whose trust is broken, he thinks in his heart that everyone has understood this, only I am lacking. This hesitation prevents him from asking the question. Being silent only perpetuates his confusion and he falls further behind in his studies. Thus it becomes a cycle:

Breakdown of trust → reluctance to speak → silence → remaining confused → further loss of trust → and deep silence.

To break this cycle, the teacher should encourage the child with small and simple questions.

- **Peer Pressure**

A child does not sit alone in class, he is surrounded by peers. He thinks about how others will react before he speaks. He worries that the children will call him idle if he asks directly and if he talks hard, he will be ridiculed as over-smart. The opinion of peers is very important for a child, especially during adolescence. Fassinger (Fassinger, 1995) examined more than a thousand college students and said that speaking is not only related to the child's temperament. The overall atmosphere of the class

also plays a big role in this. Where colleagues respect each other's words, speaking becomes easier. Where everything is joked about, the child knows how to keep quiet.

- **Haste and Attitude of the Teacher**

Sometimes the teacher himself unknowingly imposes silence on the class. For example, the teacher asked, "Does anyone have a question?" And without stopping for two seconds, he said, "All understood, take the next lesson." The child understands by this quickness that one should not block the teacher's way by asking questions. Likewise, if a teacher interrupts a child, or gets angry at a direct question, children gradually stop asking questions. According to Chin (Chin, 2007), the teacher's questions are a means of constructing knowledge by supporting the child's thinking. It should not be a mere rote test method.

- **No Time to Think**

A simple reason for silence in class is that the teacher does not give the child time to think after a question. Rowe's research (Rowe, 1986) shows that teachers hardly pause for a second after asking a question. In such a hurry, they either start talking themselves or make a fast kid stand up. In such a short period of time, the child neither understands the meaning of the question nor can wrap up his thoughts. Tobin (1986) confirmed that if the teacher get a pause for just three to five seconds after a question, the classroom atmosphere changed and children began to speak on their own. So, the silence immediately after the question is not inappropriate. Children need a little time to organize thoughts in their minds.

Difference between Positive and Negative Silence

Not every silence in the congregation room is the same. To understand its meaning, it is necessary to draw a line between productive and negative silence.

Positive Silence

It is a meaningful and intellectual silence. A student is silent when he:

- Deeply pondering the teacher's question;
- repeating old information in the mind;
- structuring your argument neatly;
- critically studying the text; or
- Comparing alternative saws.

This silence supports cognitive processing and is evidence of maturing knowledge. **Negative silence**

This is the status quo where the student remains silent due to situational coercion despite having the ability or desire to speak. Its motivations are:

- Fear of the teacher or fear of the class;
- Fear of ridicule and embarrassment;
- Lack of self-esteem and nervousness;
- Bitter experiences of peer pressure and ridicule;
- Language and communication impairments; or
- A classroom environment conducive to questioningIt discourages you.

This distinction is important because the teacher's job is not to remove all silence from the classroom. The teacher should end this helpless negative silence but give space and time to the positive silence of thinking and understanding.

Teacher and student conversation

In a traditional classroom, the teacher asks, the child answers by begging the line and the teacher checks. The study of Meehan (Mehan, 1979) declared that this one-sided approach does not allow the child to think. Nystrand and colleagues (Nystrand et al., 1997) and Mercer (Mercer, 2000) highlighted dialogic teaching. According to him, the goal is not to increase children's verbal count but to bring a real dialogue in the class where children question each other's ideas and understand together.

A Culture of Questioning

Just increasing the number of questions does not make the point. It is important to make children realize that questioning is not a crime or a weakness but a right to learn and everyone can make mistakes. According to Dillon (1988), asking questions is a desire to acquire knowledge. If the teacher also openly admits in the class that "I have to see this too", then the fear of looking perfect all the time is removed from the child's heart.

Establishment of Psychological Safety in the Congregation Room

Courage to ask questions arises only when the child has no fear of disrespect or ridicule. Psychological safety does not necessarily mean that every wrong thing is forced to be accepted as right but rather the aim is to use the wrong answer as a means of guiding and explaining the child.

A teacher's outright saying, "This is absolutely wrong", demoralizes the child. Instead, if the teacher says, "Your point is interesting, let's work together to see where the difference is," then the child is willing to think further. Similarly, the sneer that "you should have known that already" on a basic question silences the child forever. If the teacher openly says, "If you have this confusion, it is possible for others too", then this one sentence removes the fear from the child's head and makes it easier for him to ask questions.

Practical Strategies for Teachers

- **Wait-Time:** Instead of asking for an answer immediately after the question, wait for a few moments. According to Rowe (Rowe, 1986) and Tobin (1986), this pause enhances children's meaningful participation.
- **Think-Pair-Share:** First let the child think alone, then share with a partner, then share in front of everyone. This eliminates the fear of speaking alone.
- **Acceptance of incomplete answers:** Accept the child's raw answer rather than snapping it and guide him to a complete answer.
- **Encouraging responses to questions:** "That's an important point", "Why do you think that?" Phrases like this reassure children that their thinking is valued.
- **Anonymous questions approach:** For more hesitant children, use slips, question boxes or digital resources to ask questions anonymously.
- **Encourage self-questioning:** Ask children to create questions based on facts, concepts and criticism so that they are not just listeners but questioners.
- **No Ridicule Rule:** Resolve on the first day of the year, "We may disagree but we will not make fun of anyone."
- **Formative Assessment:** According to Black and Williams (Black & Williams, 1998), the purpose of question-and-answer is not to classify students but to understand where they need help and how to change the direction of instruction.

Rethinking the definition of "a good classroom"

A completely silent classroom is generally considered formal and perfect but this idea needs to be tested. Children may be quiet because they are engrossed in study or thinking; But it may also be that they are not opening their lips due to fear. Likewise, not every noisy class is successful, because the real thing is meaningful interaction.

So a class cannot be judged on a mere scale of quietness or noise. The main criteria are these questions:

- Are students asking independent questions?
- Can they justify their point?
- Can they disagree in the realm of literature?
- Do they ask for clarification to clear up their confusion?
- Do they respond to each other?
- Do they have the courage to admit that they did not understand?
- Does the teacher listen carefully to the opinions of the children?

- Is a mistake considered an opportunity to learn?
- These are the scales that give an accurate indication of the true learning environment of a classroom.

Discussion

The literature presented in the paper suggests that classroom silence is a multifaceted problem. It cannot be saved simply by naming the child's hesitation, weakness, speech impediment or lack of interest.

There are four levels working behind it:

- **Individual level:** Student's weak self-efficacy and fear of failing in front of people.
- **Interpersonal level:** Classmate reactions and teacher-student relationship.
- **Instructional level:** questioning method, wait-time, teacher's attitude and classroom conversation style.
- **Cultural level:** The misconception that speaking is only the teacher's right and asking questions is impolite.

This understanding belies the fundamental question. No longer asking "Why are children quiet?" but thinking "What classroom environment has made them quiet?" Where errors are reprimanded and only correct answers are valued, children cannot be expected to participate confidently. So the teacher's job is not to forcefully invite but to create an environment where the child feels mentally and psychologically safe.

Educational Implications

The points discussed lay down some indispensable practical requirements for teachers and teacher training systems:

- **Teacher Training Orientation:** New teacher training courses should include formal practice of classroom dialogue dynamics, instructional questioning, wait-time and turning incorrect answers into comprehension tools.
- **Performance measure:** In schools, teachers should not be evaluated on the speed of handling the syllabus but the quality of intellectual participation of the students in the class should be the real criterion.
- **Perception of silence:** Teachers should not perceive silence as carelessness; It can also be an indicator of confusion, stress, fear or deep thought.
- **Universal pathways to participation:** The right to speak should not be limited to a few confident children; Questions on slips, exchange in pairs, group activities and written reflections are alternative ways to involve every child.
- **The intellectual principle of the class:** In the class room, the truth should be established in practice that participation is not a condition to be "right" in advance but participation is the way that teaches a person to think.

Conclusion

The awkward silence in the classroom is not the result of a lack of knowledge but of ridicule, ridicule and a deep fear of failure. This chip is rooted in the unilateral dominance of the teacher, lack of time to think and peer pressure. The remedy is not to force children to speak but to create a safe environment where they feel free to speak. When mistakes are considered the ladder of learning, questions the right and wait-time a part of thinking, the power of the class turns into intellectual awareness. The best class is not one that is completely dumb but one where every student has the courage to say "I don't understand", "I disagree", or "Why?" without fear; because these questions are not a hindrance to learning but the brightest proof of living understanding.

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