

## TEACHER'S PERSPECTIVE

# SILENCE IN THE CLASSROOM: UNPACKING THE DYNAMICS OF STUDENT PARTICIPATION AND TEACHER'S ROLE

### AUTHOR BIO

Santosh Kumar is a doctoral candidate at the Centre for the Study of Social Systems (CSSS), Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), New Delhi—a former assistant professor at Hindu College, University of Delhi. His research interests encompass science and technology studies (STS), sociology of health and medicine, and Environmental Sociology.

### ABSTRACT

This academic piece examines the phenomenon of silence in the classroom through the lens of a teacher's experience in teaching sociology at the Department of Sociology, Hindu College, University of Delhi, for three semesters. The author delves into the complexities of why some students remain silent while others actively participate in classroom discussions. Factors such as gender, caste, class, language, region, and religion are considered, along with the influence of English-medium schooling on students' comfort with verbal expression. The study also explores how a teacher's persona and approach can encourage students to open up and participate actively in the learning process. Drawing upon sociological imagination, the author emphasizes the interconnectedness of individual experiences and societal structures. Furthermore, the study highlights the significance of creating a democratic and inclusive classroom space, where the teacher transcends social backgrounds and listens attentively to the students' perspectives to foster meaningful engagement in learning.

### INTRODUCTION

Classroom dynamics play a crucial role in shaping the educational experience of students. The act of speaking or remaining silent in a classroom is an intricate aspect that warrants closer examination. As a teacher in the Department of Sociology at Hindu College, the author observed distinct patterns of participation among students. While some students actively engaged in classroom discussions, others maintained a prolonged silence, prompting the author to reflect on the topic of silence in the learning environment. This research explores the factors that contribute to student silence, the role of the teacher in fostering an inclusive classroom, and the impact of societal backgrounds on students' participation.

### THE MULTIFACETED SILENCE

In the sociology classroom, the presence of both vocal and silent students poses intriguing questions. The reasons behind students' hesitancy to participate actively can be diverse, encompassing elements like linguistic barriers, hesitancy, and feelings of awkwardness.

Unraveling the dynamics of silence requires an understanding of the act of speaking among different sets of students. Teachers are tasked with innovating evaluation methods for silent students and facilitating their active participation. The distinction between silence and speaking in the classroom involves multiple layers, making it a complex issue to address.

### THE INTERPLAY OF INDIVIDUAL AND SOCIAL FACTORS

At first glance, the act of silence or speaking might seem to depend solely on an individual's choice and agency. However, a deeper analysis reveals that individual efforts are intricately entwined with societal factors. The diverse backgrounds of students, including gender, caste, class, language, region, and religion, significantly influence their participation. For instance, fluency in the English language, emphasized in college, may be influenced by students' linguistic background and exposure to English-medium schooling. The interconnectedness of individual and societal aspects necessitates a teacher's consideration of students' linguistic skills within their social context.

### CASTE, CLASS, AND LANGUAGE IN THE CLASSROOM

India's social fabric is intertwined with a complex caste system, which also permeates the educational realm. Upper caste-class students, having benefitted from English-medium schooling and accumulated intergenerational capital, often occupy prominent roles in classroom interactions. On the other hand, lower caste-class students may encounter challenges in asserting themselves verbally due to exclusionary institutional practices. The impact of caste, class, and language on student silence calls for teacher awareness and sensitivity.

### CLASSROOM AS A DEMOCRATIC SPACE

The classroom is envisioned as a democratic space where students and teachers engage in a dynamic exchange of ideas. However, for some students, grasping unfamiliar topics may require unlearning and a careful integration of past experiences. In this context, a teacher's role is vital in creating an environment conducive to expression and fostering comfort among students. Encouraging interactive tutorial meetings and small-group activities can facilitate student familiarity and active participation, especially for those who are initially hesitant.

### A TEACHER'S PERSONA: TRANSCENDING SOCIAL BACKGROUNDS

To break the long silence among certain students, a teacher must transcend their own social background, encompassing caste, class, gender, and religion. A welcoming image projected by the teacher can instill confidence in students and motivate them to engage actively. By being attentive listeners, teachers can comprehend students' perspectives and adapt their teaching methods to suit individual understanding. This proactive approach fosters an inclusive classroom environment and encourages students to participate openly.

### TOWARD INCLUSIVITY: BRIDGING THE POWER GAP

The teacher-student relationship holds significance in exploring the dynamics of power within the classroom. The goal of a teacher should be to create a democratic relationship that bridges the power gap and facilitates mutual understanding. Emphasizing the role reversal, where teachers can adopt the perspective of students, can foster empathy and create a nurturing learning environment.

### CONCLUSION

Silence in the classroom is a multi-dimensional phenomenon shaped by individual choices and societal structures. This study highlights the importance of understanding the interplay of caste, class, gender, language, and region in influencing students' participation. To create an inclusive and democratic classroom, teachers must transcend their social backgrounds and actively listen to students' perspectives. Encouraging student interaction through small-group activities and interactive tutorials can further enhance engagement. By unlearning biases and ensuring equitable evaluation methods, teachers can break the barriers of silence and create an enriching learning experience for all students, fostering a culture of active participation and academic growth.

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