



HOW CAN IMPROVE STUDENT PARTICIPATION IN CLASS?

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**Abstract**

*Student participation is one of the most important parts of successful learning. When students actively answer questions, join discussions, and work with classmates, they understand lessons better and become more confident. However, many middle school students are often shy, afraid of making mistakes, or not interested in classroom activities. This article investigates the reasons why some students in grades 5 and 6 do not participate active ly in class and explores effective ways to improve participation. The study was conducted in two middle school classes with 60 students in total. A quantitative research method was used, and data were collected through questionnaire, classroom observation checklists, and participation records. The findings showed that students participated more actively when teachers used group work, games, positive feedback, and interactive activities. The research also found that fear of criticism and lack of confidence were the main reasons for low participation. The article concludes that creating a friendly classroom environment and using student-centered teaching methods can significantly improve classroom participation.*

**Key words**

*Classroom participation, student engagement, active learning, teaching strategies, motivation, group work, classroom interaction, middle school students, quantitative research, student-centered learning, classroom environment, grade 5 and 6 learners, cooperative learning, English language teaching, student confidence*

**Introduction**

Classroom participation is an essential element of effective education. Participation includes answering questions, asking for clarification, sharing opinions, joining discussions, and cooperating with classmates during lessons. Active students usually learn faster because they are mentally involved in the learning process. Participation also helps students develop communication skills, critical thinking, and self-confidence.

In many schools, especially in grades 5 and 6, teachers face the problem of passive learners. Some students remain silent during lessons even when they know the answer. Others avoid speaking because they are afraid of making mistakes in front of classmates. In some cases,





traditional teaching methods may not encourage active learning. As a result, students become less motivated and lose interest in classroom activities.

Researchers have explained that student participation is closely connected with motivation, teacher support, and classroom atmosphere. According to Lev Vygotsky, (1978). social interaction plays an important role in learning. Students learn better when they communicate and cooperate with others. Similarly, Jean Piaget (1952). believed that children learn actively through engagement and experience.

The purpose of this research is to identify the factors that influence classroom participation among grade 5 and 6 students and to examine strategies that can increase active involvement during lessons.

**The research questions of the study are:**

- 1. Why do some students not participate actively in class?**
- 2. What teaching strategies improve classroom participation?**
- 3. How do interactive activities affect student engagement?**

### **Literature Review**

Many researchers have studied classroom participation and student engagement. Participation is considered a key factor in academic achievement and language development. Students who participate actively usually show better understanding and stronger communication abilities.

According to Jeremy Harmer, (2007) students become more active when teachers create motivating and enjoyable lessons. Harmer explains that interactive activities such as pair work, role plays, and discussions increase learner involvement.

Research by Paul Dörnyei (2001) showed that motivation strongly affects classroom participation. Students who feel encouraged and supported by teachers are more willing to speak and join activities.

Another important factor is classroom environment. Stephen Krashen (1982) introduced the idea of the “affective filter.” According to this theory, students learn better when they feel relaxed and confident. Fear, anxiety, and stress reduce participation and learning performance.

Several studies on middle school learners found that cooperative learning improves engagement. Group work allows shy students to communicate in smaller and safer environments. Educational games and reward systems also help students become more active because they make lessons more enjoyable.

Previous studies also showed that teacher behavior has a strong impact on participation. Teachers who smile, encourage answers, and respect students’ opinions create a positive atmosphere. On the other hand, strict correction and negative comments may decrease student confidence.

Although many studies discuss participation, there is still a need to investigate how specific classroom strategies influence grade 5 and 6 learners in real educational settings. Therefore, this study focuses on practical methods used in middle school classrooms.





## **Methodology**

### Research design

This study used a quantitative research design to investigate classroom participation among grade 5 and 6 students. Quantitative research was chosen because it allows the researcher to collect numerical data and analyze participation levels clearly.

### Participants

The participants of the study were 60 students from one secondary school. Thirty students were from grade 5, and thirty students were from grade 6. The students were between 11 and 13 years old. Two English teachers also participated in the research process.

### Grade Number of Students Age Range

Grade 5 30 11–12

Grade 6 30 12–13

Total 60 11–13

### Data Collection Methods

The data were collected through three main instruments:

#### **1. Student Questionnaire**

The first data collection instrument used in this research was a student questionnaire. The questionnaire was prepared to identify students' opinions, feelings, and attitudes toward classroom participation. It consisted of 10 close-ended questions and was distributed to all 60 students from grades 5 and 6. The purpose of the questionnaire was to understand the main reasons why some students participate actively while others remain passive during lessons. Students answered a questionnaire containing 10 close-ended questions. The questionnaire focused on:

confidence in speaking, interest in lessons, fear of making mistakes, teacher support, classroom activities.

Students selected one of three answers for each question: "Always," "Sometimes," or "Never." This simple format was chosen because the participants were young learners and needed clear and understandable answer options.

The questionnaire was conducted during regular class hours and students were given approximately 15 minutes to complete it. Before answering, the researcher explained the purpose of the questionnaire and informed students that their answers would remain confidential. This helped students answer honestly and comfortably.

The collected questionnaire data helped the researcher identify several important issues. For example, many students reported that they were afraid of making grammatical mistakes when speaking in front of classmates. Others mentioned that they felt shy or nervous during oral activities. Some students stated that they participated more actively when lessons included games or group tasks.

The questionnaire provided numerical data that could easily be analyzed through percentages and comparison tables. Therefore, it played an important role in understanding students' attitudes toward classroom participation.





## **2. Classroom Observation**

The second data collection method used in the study was classroom observation. Observation allowed the researcher to directly examine students' behavior and participation during real classroom activities. This method was important because it provided practical information about how students interacted with teachers and classmates during lessons.

The researcher observed 10 English lessons over a period of five weeks. Each lesson lasted approximately 45 minutes. During the observations, the researcher sat quietly at the back of the classroom and carefully recorded students' actions without interrupting the teaching process.

An observation checklist was prepared before the study began. The checklist included several participation indicators such as;

- the number of students answering questions,
- participation in group work,
- participation in games and discussions,

student behavior during activities. The observation process was divided into two stages. During the first stage, the researcher observed traditional lessons where teachers mainly used lecture-based teaching methods. During the second stage, teachers introduced interactive activities such as games, pair work, role plays, and group discussions.

The observations showed clear differences between the two stages. During traditional lessons, many students remained silent and avoided participation. Only a small number of confident students answered most questions. However, during interactive lessons, participation increased significantly. Students became more willing to communicate, especially during pair and group activities.

The classroom observation also helped the researcher notice students' emotional behavior. For example, shy students appeared more relaxed when speaking in smaller groups rather than in front of the whole class. In addition, students smiled, laughed, and showed more excitement during educational games and competitions.

Overall, classroom observation provided realistic and detailed information about students' actual participation levels and classroom behavior.

## **3. Participation Record**

The third method used for collecting data was participation records. Participation records were used to measure students' classroom involvement over time. This method allowed the researcher to compare students' participation levels before and after the use of interactive teaching strategies.

During the research period, English teachers kept weekly participation records for each student. A special participation chart was prepared to record students' classroom activities systematically. Teachers kept weekly participation records for each student. Students received participation points based on:

- answering questions,
- asking questions,





joining discussions,  
completing group tasks.

Each student's participation was recorded after every lesson. Teachers used a simple scoring system to evaluate classroom involvement. For example:

- 3 points = active participation,
- 2 points = moderate participation,
- 1 point = low participation,
- 0 points = no participation.

The participation records were collected for five weeks. During the first two weeks, teachers used mostly traditional teaching methods. During the remaining three weeks, interactive and student-centered methods were introduced.

At the end of the study, the researcher compared the participation scores from the beginning and end of the research period. The results showed that most students improved their participation levels after interactive activities were introduced. Students who had previously remained silent began answering questions and joining group discussions more confidently. The participation record method was very useful because it provided continuous quantitative data about student engagement. It also helped teachers monitor students' progress and identify learners who needed additional encouragement and support.

### **Research Procedure**

The research was conducted in three stages:

1. First, students completed the questionnaire.
2. Second, classroom observations were carried out during normal English lessons.
3. Finally, participation records before and after interactive teaching strategies were compared.

During the study, teachers introduced several participation strategies:

1. group discussions,
2. pair work,
3. educational games
4. reward systems,
5. positive verbal encouragement.

### **Data Analysis**

The collected data were analyzed using percentages and comparison tables.

Participation rates before and after the use of interactive methods were compared to identify changes in student engagement.

### **Results**

The results of the study showed clear improvements in student participation after interactive teaching methods were introduced.

Questionnaire Results.

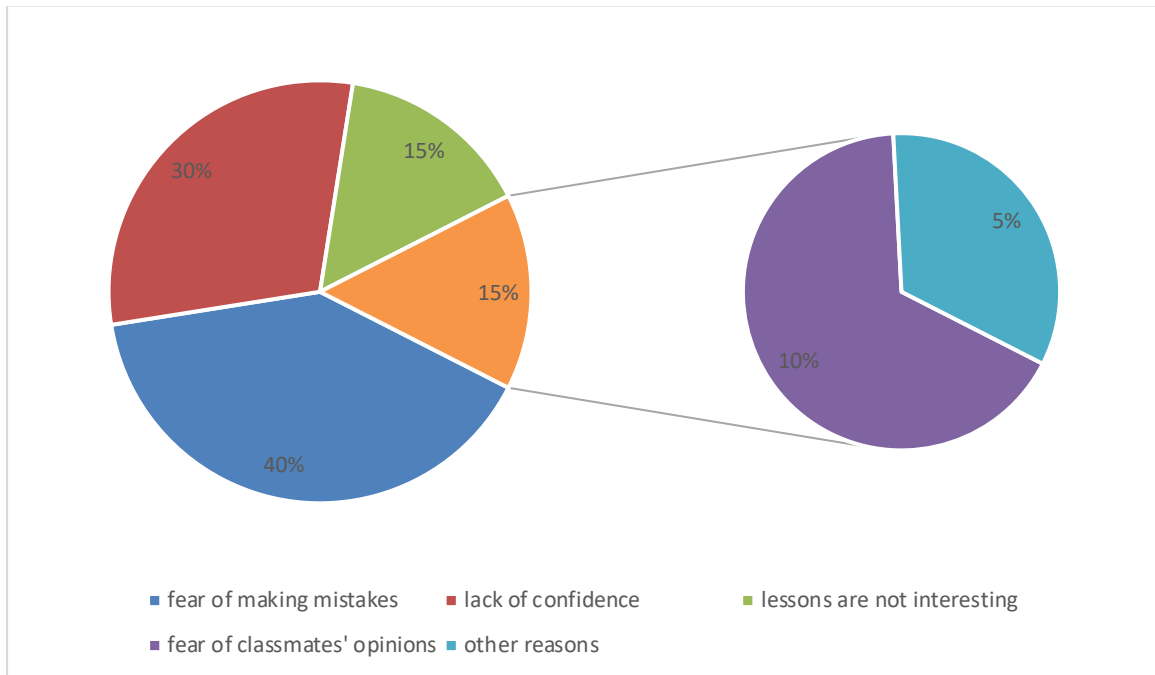




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The questionnaire revealed several reasons for low participation.  
Reason for Low Participation Percentage of Students



The findings show that emotional factors were the biggest barriers to participation.

### Classroom Observation Results

Before interactive activities were introduced, only 35% of students participated regularly in classroom discussions. After five weeks of interactive teaching strategies, participation increased to 72%.

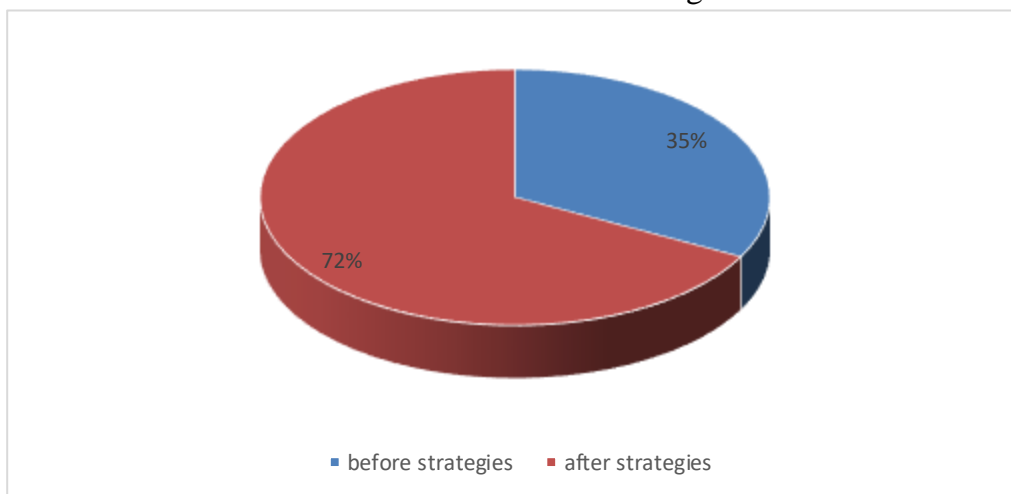
#### Teaching Stage Active Participation Rate

Before strategies 35%

After

strategies

72%



The observations showed that students were more active during:





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group discussions,  
games,  
pair work,  
competitions. Shy students also participated more when working in small groups rather than speaking in front of the whole class.

### Teacher Records

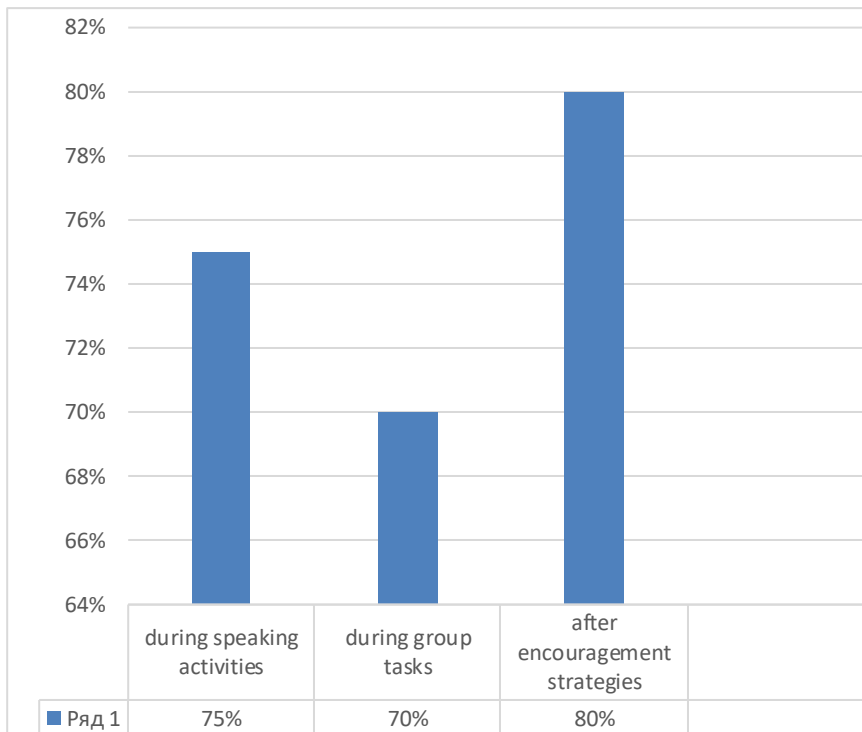
Teacher participation records showed that:

80% of students answered more questions after encouragement strategies,

75% became more confident during speaking activities,

70% showed better cooperation during group tasks.

Teachers reported that positive feedback such as “Good job,” “Excellent answer,” and “Well done” increased student motivation significantly.



### Discussion

The findings of this study support earlier research about classroom participation. Fear and low confidence were identified as the main reasons why students avoided participation. This result is similar to Krashen’s theory that anxiety negatively affects learning.

The research also showed that interactive teaching methods improve student engagement. Group work and games created a more comfortable environment where students felt less afraid of making mistakes. These findings agree with Vygotsky’s idea that social interaction supports learning development.

Positive teacher behavior was another important factor. Students participated more when teachers encouraged them instead of criticizing mistakes. Friendly communication helped students feel respected and motivated.





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The increase from 35% to 72% participation demonstrates that classroom environment and teaching style strongly influence student behavior. Traditional teacher-centered lessons may limit student interaction, while student-centered activities encourage active learning.

The study suggests that teachers should use different techniques to involve all learners, especially shy students. Every student should feel safe and supported during classroom communication.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, classroom participation is very important for successful learning and student development. This study investigated participation among grade 5 and 6 students and found that fear, low confidence, and uninteresting lessons reduce active involvement.

The research also showed that interactive teaching strategies significantly improve participation. Group work, games, pair activities, rewards, and positive feedback helped students become more active and confident.

Teachers should create supportive and motivating classroom environments where students are not afraid of making mistakes. Student-centered methods should be used regularly to increase engagement and improve learning outcomes.

Future research may investigate participation in larger schools or compare participation levels in different subjects.

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