

## What Really Matters in Secondary-Level Students' Classroom Participation: A Study from the Student's Perspective

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### ABSTRACT

Effectively increasing student classroom participation has always been a crucial challenge for secondary teachers. The present study aims to address the factors that contribute to increased student participation in the classroom, therefore fostering an improved learning environment from the secondary-level students' perspective. This study uses a qualitative research approach to explore specific aspects of teachers' behavior that impact student participation. Through focused group discussions, students share their diverse experiences and perspectives, the dimensions of teachers' particular behavioral influence on active engagement in the classroom. The findings shed light on teachers' content delivery skills, the role of teachers' rapport building, the impact of teachers' willingness to explain in depth, and the influence of teachers' voices. The study suggests valuable insights for educators striving to create a more conducive and participatory learning atmosphere in secondary education.

**Keywords:** Classroom Participation, Students' Motivation, Teachers' Behavior

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### Introduction

“This student gossips in the class rather than listening”, “He rarely speaks up in the class,” “She never shows her class work”, “That student rarely can remember the contents discussed in the class”- and the list goes on. These are some common stereotypes often used to depict the issues of students' classroom participation in Bangladesh. Ensuring student classroom participation has always been a crucial challenge for secondary school teachers in Bangladesh (Mamun-ur-Rashid, 2023). It has been well-documented that poor classroom participation leads to poor achievement, problem behavior, student absenteeism, and dropout (Sun, 2020). On the other

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hand, students' classroom participation is positively associated with many positive outcomes including increased student motivation, academic achievement, and decreased problem behavior, school absenteeism, and dropout (Susak, 2016).

Secondary education in Bangladesh suffers from persistent issues such as increased non-completion, absenteeism, poor achievement, and dropout all of which are directly linked to a lack of student participation in the classroom (Habib & Mawa, 2022). Though there exists a series of labeling to describe students' poor participation in the classroom, little concern exists to explore why such poor participation of students or what really increases their participation in the class. In this regard, the present study seeks to explore the aspects of teachers' classroom practices that influence students' classroom participation (Lodge et al., 2018).

Previous research has evidenced the crucial role of teachers' classroom instructional practices in increasing students' participation in learning activities in the classroom. A teacher's ability to promote student motivation in the classroom is crucial for quality education. Besides, It is natural for teachers to expect students to pay attention, but neuroscience research shows that attention is a limited resource (Lindsay, 2020). It is not realistic to expect students to maintain their attention span for an entire one or two-hour class. As a leader, a teacher can play an important role in the classroom to increase students' motivation (Barr, 2016). Hence, it would be worth investigating to explore how teachers' behavior influences students' classroom participation.

### **Research aim and Research question**

The present research aims to explore the influence of teachers' behavior on students' classroom participation. The following research question guides this study:

How does teacher's behavior influence student's classroom participation?

### **Methodology**

This study employed a qualitative research approach. Given that the research aims to go beyond mere quantification and instead seeks to explore the qualitative dimensions of the teacher-student interaction, the qualitative approach was appropriate (Hammarberg et al., 2016). The qualitative approach allowed holistic exploration of the diversified elements of teacher's behavior influencing student participation in the class (Klehr, 2012).

Convenience sampling was employed to select participants. A total of twelve students from Grade 9, evenly distributed between three government (n=01) and non-government schools (n=02) from Dhaka city, with six females and six males, took part in three Focus Group Discussion (FGD) sessions. Each FGD session comprised four students. Students who have assent and written consent from parents were took part in the FGDs. Students were recruited irrespective of

their academic achievement and socioeconomic backgrounds. The researcher, with participant consent, documented notes and recorded discussions, subsequently transcribing the content for detailed analysis. Audio recordings were employed to capture verbal interactions accurately.

Thematic analysis was applied to the qualitative data to unveil patterns, themes, and nuanced insights regarding the multifaceted relationship between teacher behavior and student engagement. The research prioritized an in-depth exploration of subjective meanings.

Precise ethical considerations were observed throughout the study. Participants were provided with both verbal and written informed consent, ensuring clarity on the research objectives. Transparency was maintained by clearly communicating the purpose of the study. Confidentiality was upheld, with participant identification information used solely for methodological purposes within the study. Participants were informed about the absence of physical harm resulting from their involvement, and the principle of voluntary participation was underscored, allowing participants the freedom to withdraw at any stage without consequences (Siegle, 2023)

## Findings

This study focuses on finding the answer of the research question and organizing data by categorizing it by themes. Themes were developed through repeated data and interesting findings. Subthemes represent the diversities and range of data leading to a particular theme. The Major emerging themes of the study are as follows- Impact of Content Delivery style of the teachers, Role of Teachers' Rapport Building, Perceived role of teachers Constructive Feedback, Influence of Teachers' voice, Impact of teachers' willingness to go in-depth explanation. The following diagram depicts the major themes and the corresponding subthemes explored from the data analysis.

**Table 1**

*Major Themes of the study*

Themes	Subthemes
Impact of Content Delivery style of the teachers	Visualization of the contents Connecting contents with real life Explaining contents in a creative style
Perceived Role of Teachers' Constructive Feedback	
Teachers' Rapport Building	
Teachers' voice	
Teachers' Willingness to go In-depth explanation	Giving attention to students' sayings Satisfying students with proper answers when they have questions

### ***Impact of Content Delivery style of the teachers***

Students participated in the FGD, frequently mentioned that teachers' content delivery style has great impact on their classroom participation. For example, visualization of content by using teaching aids, connecting contents with the real life motivate them to engage more in class activities. There are three subthemes are determined under this theme, which suggests what participants meant by content delivery style, they are- visualization of the contents by using teaching aids, connecting contents with real life, explaining contents in an innovative style.

#### *Visualization of the Contents*

In accordance with their assertion, it is found that visualization of the contents by using different teaching aids, low-cost materials, hands-on activities increase involvement in classroom activities. A student drew an example of their biology class, how her teacher used fresh flowers from school garden to teach. She was telling in-details how she learnt about various parts of a flower by the help of teachers' active guidance with the brought flower. This teaching aid was available in the environment, without any additional cost, but still so much effective to teach particular lesson. Here, teachers' innovative thinking for teaching played a pivotal role in learning. A student named Fabiha (Pseudonym) mentioned that-

It is unthinkable that I never had to open that chapter twice. This practical work, we experienced in the class; served as a powerful motivator, inspired me to stay actively being engaged in that class and my learning stayed with me forever.

Another student gave example of Geography class how teacher used map to explain the river ways of Bangladesh. Initially the student shared her personal experience of finding Geography consistently confusing, but she ended with an experience of achievement:

Although I always face many challenges in life, now I can recognize the prominent rivers of Bangladesh on the map. I can roughly draw a map too. However, previously, the task of drawing a map was the most difficult thing for me. After the teacher brought the map to the class and explained it, my difficulties gradually diminished.

It is apparent that the student got better at finding and drawing the big rivers in Bangladesh on a map. Even though they faced personal challenges, they were able to overcome them and learn how to read maps well. This improvement in map skills is a clear sign of their progress.

In the same context, Niloy (Pseudonym) also described the enjoyment of knowing the human body through a model skeleton-

We learned different parts of the Human body with the help of a model skeleton gradually, a friend and I tried to understand the different veins and arteries of the heart. At that time, the teacher suggested looking at the book. Later, we,

along with the teacher, explored the circulatory system of the heart and the blood vessels. What seemed quite challenging in the book initially became much easier when we focused on the heart.

It reveals a progressive understanding of the contents through hands-on activities. The participant successfully opens the heart, marking a significant achievement. This indicates the significant role of a teacher's creativity to deliver complex lessons.

Similarly, A student described how their Chemistry class became so exciting when they did some amazing experiments with the Litmus paper the teacher brought with her. She said that it happened on the day teacher taught 'Acid and Base'. The chapter was too long for them at first, she thought it would be a boring and another hard-to-swallow chemistry chapter. But one day the teacher divided them into groups and asked them to bring soap powder, and lemon in the next class per group. So they did as the teacher said. At the next class, the teacher brought some colored paper which was homemade.

I always thought that litmus paper is a matter of laboratory. One day our Chemistry teacher said that she made rose petal paper at home and she used it as homemade litmus paper. We were quite amazed to hear that we could test the pH of things like lemon and detergent with this homemade litmus paper. I never knew we could make it our own. That day my love for Chemistry class increased. Now I know that I can make litmus paper with roses and turmeric.

Participants also mentioned that when a teacher takes a class in as usual lecture method, they do not always find curiosity to listen to what the teacher is saying.

The qualitative feedback suggests that the use of creative teaching aids positively influences the overall learning experience in the classroom. Furthermore, insights from other students repeated the same statement that incorporating teaching aids, such as homemade litmus paper, enhances engagement and interest in the class. The traditional lecture method, without visual aids, was seen as potentially less engaging, whereas the introduction of noticeable, hands-on elements sparked curiosity and attentive listening among students.

### *Connecting Contents with Real Life*

Students who participated in FGD frequently mentioned their positive experiences when the teacher explained a particular topic with real-life examples. Priya (Pseudonym) gave the example of how her teacher applied real-life examples in her science class and made the topic more understandable for them. She said,

In our science class, the teacher once posed a question: 'Why do we use toothpaste to clean our teeth?' The responses varied among us; some stated that toothpaste cleans our teeth. However, when the teacher followed up with 'How does toothpaste achieve that?' We found ourselves pondering.

Subsequently, the teacher inquired about the ingredients present in toothpaste, obtaining responses like fluoride and calcium from different students.

This highlights how real-life connections increased student engagement. When the teacher brought real-life examples, students started brainstorming about the topic. According to the participant, the class becomes interesting when she can connect with what the teachers are saying; if I cannot, it's challenging for her to stay attentive. This highlights the importance of relevance and connection in sustaining students' engagement and focus during the learning process.”

In a similar way, another student talked about her experience of how the teacher gave them real-life examples on class-

One day teacher was asking in the class who loves cheese, curd, butter? Then we answered. Some of us eat butter, and bread for breakfast. Some love cheese for pizza and pasta. After hearing our answers madam asked with a smile if we knew about how these yummy things were made from milk. We had no idea that curd, cheese even butter is made with bacteria. We were really amazed after hearing that.

The findings from the student narratives highlighted the profound impact of incorporating real-life examples into the classroom environment. Through the teacher's interactive approach, the students not only engaged in the discussion on their favorite dairy products but were also exposed to the fascinating processes behind their creations.

### *Explaining Contents in a Creative Style*

In the qualitative findings students frequently mentioned that they loved to learn literature in a creative way such as through storytelling, experience-sharing session, and more. They mentioned it as “We love it when teachers tell us different stories related to topic context.” When I asked about a particular day when their teacher explained some content in the way of storytelling. One of the students who participated in FGD drew an example of their English Literature class, when she did not bring textbook, still clearly understood the content because of the teaching style.

Correspondingly, another student was giving reasons why they never missed school in Thursday. Because, on every Thursday students organize a play or a group recitation by themselves in the Literature class on a topic from the textbook, rather than regular lecture-based class. The student emphasized that the subject itself is not the sole determinant of her engagement; rather, the learning method significantly influences her participation. The student expressed a preference for learning through activities, enhances their learning experience more than the preparation for routine classes. Another student mentioned about chemistry class, a particular day when she learned periodic table in school. The teacher asked students to write a particular

name of an element on a paper. Then she asked students to set the paper according to atomic number beside the blackboard with glue. Once a student set a note, she asked the next student with the next number to set the paper. The teacher instructed which students would write which column or row from the periodic table. This process was running as long as the periodic table was not fully done. The student was saying that the periodic table was not a monster to them after that class. She said that “After the orientation with the periodic table that day, whenever I get confused about a particular element, I try to remember which classmates of mine had set the name.”

### ***Perceived Role of Teachers Constructive Feedback***

Findings revealed that Teachers’ constructive feedback had a crucial influence on students’ classroom participation. According to participants, it is very important for them that the teacher values them, teacher wants to understand their perceptions. They commented that most teachers really don’t hear them, and their problems remain unsolved. They also noted that it makes a difference in classroom activities. One of their teachers hears their problem properly and tries to understand first, this quality really does makes difference. They think that a teacher should answer them after understanding their query; it is very disruptive to give a readymade answer or shut them up. In the conversation, the name Amia (pseudonym) was referenced as follows -

Amongst all the teachers, she is different. We can talk to her about our confusion, problems, or perceptions. She really wants to know what we are thinking and answers them accordingly. It makes us feel important and we feel involved in the class. So, I always observe attentively what is going in the class, so that I can raise a question or discuss something with the class.

In light of this statement from a participant of FGD, It seems that the teacher’s attention, which is a major step for giving constructive feedback has great influence on students’ engagement. Likewise, negative perception also been found, where a teacher ended up with negative comments whenever she shared her perceptions about a particular topic in the class.. “He always has a pattern of demeaning me in front of the whole class. Such as- ‘read the book first before asking such silly things’, ‘it seems you don’t have any connection with the class’ etc. So, I rarely speak up in that class to avoid other students laughing at me”. This student talked about the reason behind the decrease of speaking up in class concludes in her lesser participation in that class.

In another instance, experience underscores how constructive feedback from teachers can not only recognize students’ unique perspectives but also motivate them to think critically and make meaningful connections between classroom content and real-life situations. A student shared an example from their geometry class, illustrating how constructive feedback from teachers played a pivotal role in facilitating her learning of new concepts. She said, “I never

worried about the perfection of geometrical diagrams. One day while giving feedback, the teacher asked me for details about my diagram. However, in the feedback, she provided me with a completely new understanding how the theorem works by an equation”

In summary, these qualitative findings underscore the importance of constructive feedback in student learning involvement in the classroom.

### ***Role of Teachers' Rapport Building***

Students who participated in FGD brought several examples of teachers' rapport building with them which has positively influenced their classroom participation. A participant from FGD said that teachers' smiling faces influence her a lot. She said,

Our Social Science teacher always keeps a smiling face which lessens my fear of speaking up in the class. In other classes normally I do hesitate to speak up or ask questions as I feel what if I say something inappropriate.

This finding unravels the fact that when a teacher gives space to students to communicate with, it encourages students to talk with that teacher and discuss their queries. The Social Science teacher's welcoming smile creates a supportive environment, encouraging the student to actively participate and share thoughts without fear of judgment. This finding underscores the significance of teachers' positive and approachable behavior in fostering a conducive atmosphere for student engagement.

In this context, a different student mentioned finding teachers' sense of humor as an influence in their classroom active participation. She said that the Bengali subject teacher of the school uses funny examples to explain a difficult topic which helps her to comprehend easily, the teacher is changing the student's perspective from 'difficult' to 'funny' which makes the content easier. This perception linked the positive relationship of classroom fun to students' engagement.

In summary, students value teachers who genuinely listen to their concerns, understand their perceptions, and respond positively to their questions with specific and satisfying answers. Teachers who exhibit these qualities contribute significantly to students' engagement and motivation in the classroom.

### ***Influence of Teachers' Voice***

Students frequently remarked that teachers' voice matters in classroom participation. It is mentioned that the loud voice of teachers can attract students more which increases their classroom participation. There are several reasons behind it. One of the students thinks that the teacher who has a loud voice, students cannot gossip in that particular class because it seems that the teacher is talking to the whole class which makes them alert. Then they must have to concentrate on what teacher is saying as they have no option but to look at teachers' face. So,

it helps them to get into the topic easily. As they are concentrating, they start to understand the content better. According to the participants,

The low voice of the teacher creates different situation at the back benches. When the teacher talks quietly, it changes things for us at the back. It's hard to hear, making the class boring, and we start to feel sleepy

This finding underscores the influence of teachers' voices here. Also, the low vocal delivery of the teacher gives rise to dual scenarios in the rearmost rows of the classroom, dependent on the teacher's temperament. In instances where the teacher fosters an amicable atmosphere, students in these rows exhibit a reluctance to engage in discussions, indulging in gossip during instructional sessions out of boredom. The findings underscore the intricate mechanism between the teacher's communication modality, classroom dynamics, and student engagement.

### ***Teachers' Willingness to go In-depth Explanation***

This study finds that teachers' willingness to explain in details has an impact on secondary level students' classroom participation. According to the participants, "*We love it when teacher explain each topic in details.*" There are two subthemes under this theme, they are-Giving attention to students' sayings, satisfying students with proper answers when they have questions.

Students who have participated in FGD suggested specific areas, positive and negative experiences to describe their related experiences.

#### *Giving Attention to Students' Sayings*

Students emphasized the importance of teachers paying attention to what they have to say. They expressed that this attention is crucial because it reflects the teacher's value for their opinions, understanding of their perceptions, and willingness to engage with their concerns. Participants in the focus group discussions (FGD) shared their experiences with teachers who genuinely listen and try to comprehend their problems.

One participant highlighted a teacher who stands out because she genuinely listens to students. The teacher allows students to discuss their confusion, problems, or perceptions. This approach makes students feel important and engaged in the class. The student actively observes what is happening in the class, ready to raise questions or discuss topics with the teacher. In FGD a student annotated that "When the teacher really wants to know what we are thinking, it makes us feel important, and we feel engaged in the class."

On the other hand, another student shared a negative experience with a teacher who responded with negative comments when she shared her perceptions in the class. The student feels harassed and avoids answering questions in that teacher's class due to the fear of mockery by the whole

class- "I rarely speak up in that class now.", Statements like "Teacher said that it is not his duty to explain every single thing" was also highlighted by the participants in this regard.

### *Satisfying Students with Proper Answers*

Students highlighted the importance of teachers providing satisfying answers when students had questions. A teacher's ability to address specific queries is seen as an indicator of their preparedness for the class. Specific answers are considered essential for making connections with the content and facilitating a smooth transition to the next topic. According to FGD participants' perception, there are some criteria for the students' satisfaction. Such as- need for specification,

Students emphasized the importance of teachers being specific in their answers. They shared instances where teachers provided a lot of information but failed to address the specific queries of the students. *A student Nayma (Pseudonym) referenced as follows-*

When the teacher was talking in detail about scalar and vector quantities, instead of answering about how we measure the direction of vector quantity, I got more perplexed. He was giving a lot of information, but I was not getting my answer properly.

Students expressed that specific answers made it easier for them to connect with the content. Teachers who provide specific answers contribute to a better understanding of the material and enhance students' ability to relate to following topics. In this context one of the FGD participants mentioned that-"Specific answers make things easy and help to get the connections with the contents. So, it becomes easy for me to relate to the next topic the teacher discusses in the class."

In conclusion, the findings of the study describe different perspectives of the students on how teachers' behavior influence their classroom participation. In FGD, participants were generally discussing their experiences and perspective how teachers' behavior influence their classroom participation.

## **Discussion**

Increasing classroom participation is a persistent challenge in secondary education of Bangladesh (Habib & Mawa, 2022). Besides, research shows that innovative strategies in teaching style have powerful impact on student's learning. the choice of teaching methods relates directly to pupils' motivation; therefore, the choice will affect the pupil's performance only if it suits his/her motivation format (Zeid et al., 2017).

This study explores how teachers' behaviors influence secondary level students' classroom participation classroom participation and concluded with the following themes which are

believed to have influence on students' participation according to the findings which are- Impact of Content Delivery style of the teachers, Role of Teachers' Rapport Building, Perceived role of teachers Constructive Feedback, Influence of Teachers' voice, Impact of teachers' willingness to go in-depth explanation. It is noteworthy that These findings also resemble some prior studies.

This research finds that teachers content delivery style has an impact on students' classroom participation. In this context it underscores the influence of innovative teaching style, visualization of the topic and also real-life connection with the topic. Learning becomes more active (rather than passively listening to the teacher), permanent when it is relevant to the students' own lives and experiences (Roy, 2010). Similarly, McCarthy and Anderson (2000) suggested that active learning techniques are more effective for students than traditional one. The researchers gave example of role playing. Their experiment showed that the students who were taught by role play participated more in class and did well in the examination than the other students whom were taught by traditional teacher centric classroom. Visual aids demand complete attention. They may also enhance the imagination of students, leading to the development of skills such as critical thinking, debates, and group discussions (MACWAN, 2015)

Acharya (2017) suggests in his study, that when a teacher creates good relationship with the students, it had helped them to raise the questions easily with the teachers, express their opinions easily in the classroom, learn in friendly environment, motivate for learning, and help in learning process as whole. In a similar way this study also suggests that students don't fear to pose a question, express their opinions in the classroom context characterized by a positive report with the teacher. Similarly, the study by Loughrin et al. (2003) pointed that classroom awareness and diversity in teaching styles allows teachers to become more responsive to the needs of their students, reiterating the idea of the learning process being more than knowing and teaching being more than telling (Shoker, 2021). Likely, another study shows that students may less engaged in the classroom fearing that their answers will be criticized by the lecturers (Abdullah et al., 2012).

Teachers' Constructive Feedback always has an important role to play in students' learning more than mere feedback (Hamid & Mahmood, 2010). It helps to improve students' development on particular skill, and also holistically. Present study also indicates that teachers' feedback helped to improve students' learning on complex topic, constructive discussion helped to improved understanding. Likewise, teacher constructive feedback helped students to address their language writing difficulties, also both the feedback processes and process writing approach are interlinked and allowed students to reflect, revisit and reproduce an improved draft (Fatima, 2019).

This study also shows that teachers' voice, tone and loudness have an influence on students' classroom engagement. The teacher's tone of voice is a powerful instrument. It sets the tone and environment for the entire classroom in terms of engagement, behavior, and rapport with students (Shaw, 2017). Research suggests the importance of a classroom environment which has a good listening condition. The audibility of Educators and students is an essential factor in

determining the academic performance of school children (Ryan & Mendel, 2010).

In the contexts, students knowing that their queries in the classroom are not only welcomed but well-appreciated, they become more energetically occupied in the learning process. They share partnership in their learning rather than passive listeners of information (Roy, 2010)

Similarly, present study also indicates how important teachers' willingness of answering students question properly. Students feel encouraged when they find teachers are listening to their questions attentively and giving precise answer, consequently improves their critical thinking (Bergmark & Westman, 2018).

### **Limitations of the Study**

The present study is subject to certain limitations. Firstly, the research was conducted with a limited number of samples, making it challenging to generalize the findings to the entire population. Secondly, the sample schools were specifically chosen from the central area of Dhaka city, potentially providing only a partial representation of the actual situation.

### **Recommendation and Conclusion**

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that teachers incorporate more interactive teaching methods. Active learning, involving students in the learning process, enhances engagement and promotes better learning. Integrating real-life examples and experiences into lessons can significantly contribute to a more effective and meaningful learning environment. In this context, teaching strategies should be meticulously selected to ensure engagement of all the learners. To ensure enhancing learning environment more teachers training on teaching method, classroom management and Teaching-Learning materials are needed.

In conclusion, this study underscores the different dimensions of the way teacher's behavior can influence student classroom participation from students' perspective. As increasing classroom participation is one of the consistent problem in the secondary education of Bangladesh (Rahman et al., 2019), the recommendation of the study suggests some potential pathway to resolve this problem also creates scope of further study in bigger scale.

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