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Teachers' Perspectives on Strategies for Supporting Diffident Students in Classroom Environment at Middle School Level

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ABSTRACT

Diffident is a difficulty experienced by many students. Students who are diffident will experience anxiety and want to avoid many educational situations. These students face many difficulties in the classroom that go unnoticed. Therefore, this study was designed with objectives to highlight the effects of diffident students in teaching learning process, to find out the reasons why teachers neglect diffident student, and to asses' activities to encourages and support diffident students in teaching. The data was collected using simple random sampling technique from 30 teachers on a questionnaires having close ended items with five points Likert Scale. The results of the present research provide insight to the difficulties experienced by diffident students that most of the students that are diffident face different problems such as achieving their goals, feel anxious and depressed in new environment, unable to accept challenges and start of new tasks because they think if they fail what the people or friends will think about them. It was also concluded that diffident students are not social and their attitude also affect their all performance as they are not ready to give response to teachers or participate in any activities carried out in class.

Keywords: Diffident Students, Teachers, Classroom, Education, Likert Scale, School



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Introduction

Diffident students often want to engage in social interaction, but the inhibition is due to fear and anxiety caused by the social interaction itself. The classroom is a highly stressful place for diffident students; not only does the classroom contain many groups of students, but it similarly requires verbal engagement (Coplan, 2011). The diffident students will participate less in class and experience anxiety when they participate. Furthermore, when diffident students participate in class, they will speak less and provide the least informative content because of their anxiety (Corzier, 2001).

Although students who are shy may not regularly participate in class, this does not necessarily indicate a lack of knowledge or skills. Rather, it may be due to anxiety about participating in classroom interactions. As a result, teachers may have lower expectations of shy students, but it is important to recognize that they may still possess the necessary knowledge and skills to succeed (Hughes and Coplan, 2010).

Diffident students experience depression and academic adjustment problems. They often receive information from their instructors and internalize it. Particularly, in situations where they do not receive feedback. Diffidence, characterized by low self-esteem, is not just an individual problem but a societal one as well (Rubin et al., 2009). Academically engaged students are positively correlated with academic achievement, and if struggling students are not academically engaged, their academic performance is lower (Amerstorfer et al., 2021).

Statement of the problem

Shy or diffident students often struggle with attending school as compared to their more outgoing peers. A significant portion of the learning process involves social interactions with both teachers and classmates, which can increase anxiety and stress levels for these students. Moreover, teachers may sometimes perceive these students as less intelligent than their more extroverted counterparts, leading to negative impacts on their self-esteem and further dissuading them from engaging with school. As such, it is essential for school staff to acknowledge and appreciate the unique traits of shy students, while creating a supportive environment that fosters their learning and development.

Research Questions

What specific strategies are being used for teaching to diffident students in the class?

How do teachers create a conducive learning environment for diffident students?

What is the impact of teaching strategies on learning process of diffident students?

Objectives of the Study

To highlight the effects of diffident students in teaching learning process.

To find out the reasons why teachers neglect diffident students.

To asses' activities to encourages and support diffident students in teaching.

Literature Review

Education plays a crucial role in shaping an individual's life and their perspective of the world. Education is a valuable tool that enriches our lives and transforms us into better individuals. It provides us with the necessary tools and skills to navigate life and make positive contributions to society (Eggum, 2012). There are many students who differ in their ability to share ideas and participate in various activities. Those who are able and willing to do so are often referred to as confident students, whereas those who feel hesitant and unable to share their ideas are often labeled as diffident students due to their lack of



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confidence. So diffident is the temperamental trait characterized by wariness fear and self-consciousness in social situations. In elementary school, diffident students is associated with a wide range of socio emotional difficulties including peer relationships and internalizing problems low self-esteem anxiety (Wood, 2006).

According to Findlay and Coplan (2008), a child's family background plays a crucial role in shaping their behavior and personality, particularly during their elementary school years. Children who experience significant levels of stress within their families during their early years are more likely to exhibit shy behaviors during middle childhood and beyond. However, interestingly, if a child experiences family stress during their middle childhood years, it does not necessarily result in the development of shyness. In cases where a child's parents have high levels of stress and anxiety, they may model poor coping techniques, neglect their child's needs, and inadvertently instill a fear of rejection in their children. Such behaviors and attitudes can significantly contribute to the development of shyness in children. Additionally, parents who have frequent conflicts with their children are more likely to have children who develop shyness. These children may also become overly dependent on their parents and take a passive stance when interacting with other peers and new individuals (Feng et al., 2011).

Children who are identified as being diffident may experience a range of difficulties both within and outside of the classroom. Compared to their non-diffident peers, they tend to have more internalizing problems and exhibit stronger negative emotional responses. Additionally, diffident students may experience frequent and uncontrollable anger, as noted by Eggum et al. (2012). These inappropriate displays of anger can further exacerbate relationship troubles for these students, who already find it challenging to initiate and maintain relationships with peers. This, in turn, can lead to a poorer self-concept. Furthermore, diffident students are at a higher risk of experiencing anxiety and depression. They tend to report feeling sad more frequently than non-diffident students, which can have a significant impact on their emotional well-being (Eggum, 2012).

Higher levels of anxiety can have a negative impact on academic performance, especially for diffident students. According to Arbeau and Coplan (2010), diffident students often struggle with interacting with their peers, which can make it challenging for them to establish and maintain friendships. These relationships may become chaotic and further exacerbate social aversion for these students. Furthermore, teachers may have less developed relationships with diffident students since they tend to avoid social situations. As a result, teachers may not engage with diffident students as much as they do with their more outgoing peers.

Teachers often incorporate peer groups in classroom activities, which typically lead to increase social interaction among students. However, diffident students tend to withdraw from these groups. Research suggests that smaller groups that are not led by teachers may be more conducive to social interaction for diffident students (Crozier and Alden, 2005). Additionally, diffident students may find it easier to interact with younger children, and assigning them as helpers to younger students may be beneficial. During recess, diffident students may become invisible, and it is important to avoid forcing them into social situations that may increase their anxiety. Rather than forcing these students, gentle encouragement can be used to ease them into social situations (Scott, 2006). Diffident children often feel anxious or inhibited in unfamiliar situations or when interacting with others, and may prefer to observe from the sidelines rather than join in. Parents can provide gentle encouragement to help their child become more outgoing.

Methodology



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Population and sample of the study

The teachers (80), from the 10 middle schools (private and public) of Upper Chitral, Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan, were taken as the population of this study. A simple random sampling technique were used, selecting 3 teachers from each school. The total of 30 teachers were selected as sample.

Instrument, Data Coding and Analysis

A self-structured questionnaire having 20 items was used as instrument for data collection. Items were close ended based on 5 points Likert Scale. For data analysis, coding was done for the items of questionnaire. The items coded as T1 to T20 (Table 1). The collected data was then analyzed via SPSS version 21.

Table 1. Objectives, items, and code used in this study to collect data from the teachers.

Objectives	Items for Teachers (N=30)	Code
To highlight the effects of diffident students in teaching learning process	You find your students confident in class	T1
	Your students never underestimate themselves	T2
	You like to communicate with your students daily	T3
	You don't get angry when your students commit mistakes	T4
	You find students very attentive during teaching	T5
	You always initiate and promote class discussion	T6
	You don't punish your students normally	T7
	You see students feel uninterested and inattentive during the class	T8
	Your students feel fear when you ask them questions	T9
	Students don't feel comfortable during the class	T10
To find out the reasons why teachers neglect diffident students	You help your students when they face any problem in learning	T11
	You find your students naughty as they usually tease each other	T12
	Your students don't quarrel with each other	T13
	Your students report bad events regularly	T14
	Students directly ask you questions when the class finishes	T15
	You never face any problem while teaching	T16
	Your students normally get high grades	T17
To asses' activities to encourages and support diffident students in teaching	Your students understand whatever you teach them	T18
	You try to enhance students' creativity using multiple activities	T19
	You always assist your students	T20



Results

To highlight the effects of diffident students in teaching learning process (Teachers N=30)

Results highlighting the effects of diffident students in teaching learning process (Teachers N=30) were presented in Table 2. The item were presented in the codes as given in Table 1 (T1 to T10). T1 indicated that 46.7% of the teacher were disagreed to the statement that they find their students confident in class, 40% of them were agreed to the statement whereas only 13.3% were not sure regarding the statement. T2 indicated that 72.7 % of the teacher were disagreed to the statement that their students never underestimate themselves. While 16 % of them were agreed to the statement whereas only 10% were not sure regarding the statements. T3 indicated that 53.3% of the teachers were agreed to the statements that they like to communicate with their students daily. While 40 % of the respondents were disagreed to the statements. Whereas only 6.7% were not sure regarding the statements. T4 indicated that 73.3% respondents were disagree that they don't get angry when students commit mistakes while 16.7% were agree whereas 10% of the respondents were not sure to the statements. T5 indicated that 59.7% of the teachers were dis agreed that they find their students very attentive during teaching. While 40 % of the respondents were strongly agreed to the statements. T6 indicated that 83.3 % of the respondents were disagreed that they always initiate and promote class discussion while 16.7% of the respondents were strongly agreed to the statements. T 7 indicated that 59.7% of the respondents were disagreed to the statement that they don't punish their students normally while 39.7 % respondents were strongly agreed to the statements. T8 indicated that 76.7 % respondents were strongly agreed that they see students feel uninterested and inattentive during the class. While 23% of the respondents were disagreed to the statements. T9 indicated that 99 % of the respondents were agreed that their students feel fear when you ask them questions. T10 indicated that 76% of the respondents were strongly agreed to the statements that their students don't feel comfortable during the class. While 23% of the respondents were disagreed to the statements.

Table 2. Frequencies and percentages of the respondents (Teachers N=30), highlighting the effects of diffident students in teaching learning process.

Code	N (%)				
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
T1	08 (26.7)	04 (13.3)	04 (13.3)	09 (30.0)	05 (16.7)
T2	01 (3.3)	04 (13.3)	03 (10.0)	17 (56.7)	05 (16.7)
T3	12 (40.0)	04 (13.3)	02 (6.7)	09 (30.0)	03 (10.0)
T4	03 (10.0)	02 (6.7)	03 (10.0)	16 (53.3)	06 (20.0)
T5	12 (40.0)	00 (00.0)	00 (00.0)	08 (26.7)	10 (33.3)
T6	05 (16.7)	00 (00.0)	00 (00.0)	18 (60.0)	07 (23.3)
T7	04 (13.3)	08 (26.7)	00 (00.0)	11 (36.7)	07 (23.3)
T8	08 (26.7)	15 (50.0)	00 (00.0)	04 (13.3)	03 (10.0)
T9	10 (33.3)	20 (66.7)	00 (00.0)	00 (00.0)	00 (00.0)
T10	08 (26.7)	15 (50.0)	00 (00.0)	04 (13.3)	03 (10.0)

To find out the reasons why teachers neglect diffident students (Teachers N=30)

Results finding out the reasons why teachers neglect diffident students (Teachers N=30) were presented in Table 3. The item were presented in the codes as given in Table 1 (T11



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to T17). T11 indicates that 56% of the teachers were strongly agreed to the statements that they help their students. When they face any problem in learning while 43 % of the teachers were disagreed to the statements. T12 indicated that 54% of the respondents were strongly agreed to the statements to find their students naughty as they usually tease each other. While 31% of the teachers were disagreed to these statements. Whereas 12% teachers were not sure to the statements. T13 indicated that 59% of the respondents were strongly disagreed to the statements that students don't quarrel with each other while 39 % of the teachers were agreed to the statements. T14 indicated that 83% of the teachers were strongly disagreed to the statements while 16% of the teachers were strongly agreed to the statements. T15 indicated that 99% of the teachers were agreed to the statement that Students directly ask you questions when the class finishes. T16 indicated that 99 % of the teachers strongly agreed to the statements. T17 indicated that 52% of the teachers were strongly agreed to the statements that they normally get high grades. While 46% of the teachers were not sure about the statements.

Table 3. Frequencies and percentages of the respondents (Teachers N=30), finding out the reasons why teachers neglect diffident students.

Code	N (%)				
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
T11	6 (20.0)	11 (36.7)	00 (00.0)	13 (43.3)	00 (0.0)
T12	02 (06.7)	10 (33.3)	03(10.0)	10 (33.3)	05 (16.7)
T13	04 (13.3)	08 (26.7)	00 (00.0)	11 (36.7)	07 (23.3)
T14	02 (06.7)	03 (10.0)	00 (00.0)	15 (50.0)	10 (33.3)
T15	10 (33.3)	20 (66.7)	00 (00.0)	00 (00.0)	00 (00.0)
T16	10 (33.3)	20 (66.7)	00 (00.0)	00 (00.0)	00 (00.0)
T17	05 (16.7)	11 (36.7)	14 (46.7)	00 (00.0)	00 (00.0)

To asses' activities to encourages and support diffident students in teaching (Teachers N=30)

Results assessing activities to encourages and support diffident students in teaching (Teachers N=30) were presented in Table 4. The item were presented in the codes as given in Table 1 (T18 to T20). T18 indicated that 49% of the teachers were disagreed to the statements that the students understand whatever they teach while 39% of the teachers agreed whereas 10% of the teachers not sure. T19 indicated that 83% of the respondents were strongly agreed to the statements the try to enhance students' creativity using multiple activities while 16% disagreed. T20 indicated that 99% of the respondents were agreed the statements they always assist their students.

Table 4. Frequencies and percentages of the respondents (Teachers N=30), assessing activities to encourages and support diffident students in teaching

Code	N (%)				
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
T18	02 (06.7)	10 (33.3)	03 (10.0)	10 (33.3)	05 (16.7)
T19	25 (83.3)	00 (00.0)	00 (00.0)	05 (16.7)	00 (00.0)
T20	10 (33.3)	20 (66.7)	00 (00.0)	00 (00.0)	00 (00.0)

Weighted mean analysis of the results



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The weighted mean analysis of the results were performed to analyze the overall response of the respondents to each question and draw a conclusion. The weighted mean analysis was performed using the method described in the previously published literature (Tabassum et al., 2025; Tabassum et al., 2026) and presented in Figure 1. The results indicated that the overall response of teachers (N=30) to item T1, T5, T7, T11, T12, T13, and T18 was neutral. The response to item T9, T15, T16, T19, and Y20 was strongly agree. The response to item T3, T8, T10, and T17 was just agree. While the response to item was T4, T6, and T14 disagree.

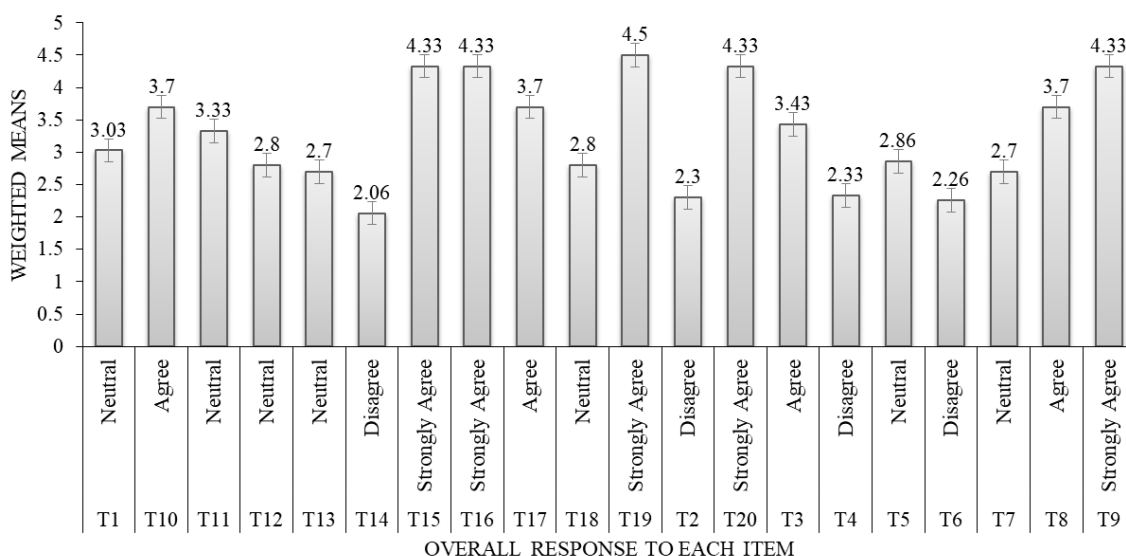


Figure 1. Weighted mean analysis for the overall response of the items (T1 to T20)

Discussion

Children who are shy may experience a constant sense of evaluation and fear of rejection, which may cause them to avoid social interactions or withdraw from social situations (Shultz, 2018). Shy students may exhibit a preference for social exclusion, neglecting their existing peer relationships, which can result in rejection by their peers (Rubin and Coplan, 2010). According to Findlay and Coplan (2009), a child's family background plays a crucial role in shaping their behavior and personality, particularly during their elementary school years. Such children may also become overly dependent on their parents and take a passive stance when interacting with other peers and new individuals (Feng et al., 2011). Diffident students tend to participate less in classroom activities and feel anxious when they do participate. Moreover, when they do participate, they may speak less and contribute less meaningful material due to their anxiety, as highlighted by Corzier (2001). However, the reason for their lack of participation is not due to a lack of knowledge or skills, but rather due to their anxiety about interacting in the classroom, as reported by Hughes and Coplan (2010).

Research has been conducted on the school adjustment of diffident students, including their attitudes towards school as measured by school liking (Coplan et al., 2008). While diffident students may experience internalizing problems and socio-emotional difficulties, not all of them develop later problems. Similarly, it is important to consider how teachers and other school staff can create a supportive classroom environment that encourages diffident students to participate without feeling anxious or overwhelmed (Crozier and Alden, 2005).



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Conclusion

It is concluded from this research that most of the students that are diffident face different problems such as achieving their goals, feel anxious and depressed in new environment, unable to accept challenges and start of new tasks because they think if they fail what the people or friends will think about them. It was also concluded that diffident students are not social and their attitude also affect their all performance as they are not ready to give response to teachers or participate in any activities carried out in class.

Author's contributions

Data collection, Formal Analysis, Data visualization, Writing-original draft: Ms. Khalida Zia and Dr. Rozina Tabassum. Writing-review and editing: Dr. Rozina Tabassum. Data curation, Article review: Ms. Ambareen Gul and Ms. Tahira Akhtar. Supervision: Dr. Mushtaq Ahmad.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declared that they have no competing interest.

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