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**Exploring the Relationship between Students' Shyness and Class Engagement at
Secondary School Level**

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Abstract

The purpose of the study was to explore the relationship between students' shyness and class engagement at the secondary school level. The study aimed to investigate the students' views on the reasons for the problems of shyness and class engagement. This study was descriptive in nature, employing a quantitative approach and correlational in design. A questionnaire comprising 30 closed-ended statements was developed on a five-point Likert-type scale. The sample of the study consisted of 400 students (grade 10th) from public secondary schools in Lahore District. The questionnaire was piloted by 50 students, and the reliability of the instrument was checked by Cronbach's Alpha formula, which was found to be 0.819. The random sampling technique was used to select the sample for this study. For data analysis, an independent sample t-test, one-way ANOVA, and Pearson r were used. Pearson's r correlation was computed to determine the relationship between shyness and class engagement. The results revealed a statistically significant negative correlation ($r = -.194$, $p = .001$) between shyness and class engagement. This indicates that as shyness increases, class engagement tends to decrease. While the strength of the correlation is small, it remains meaningful in highlighting that shyness can negatively influence students' active involvement in class activities. There is a need to foster supportive, inclusive, and low-anxiety classroom environments that help shy students feel more confident and comfortable to engage, thereby enhancing both their engagement and academic development.

Keywords: Explore, Relationship, Students, Shyness and Engagement.

Introduction

Shyness is generally considered a personality attribute marked by uneasiness, nervousness, or anxiety during social interactions or when engaging with others (Abbasi et al., 2020). Students who experience shyness often display behaviours such as avoiding communication, speaking in a low tone or with hesitation, steering clear of eye contact, and experiencing heightened self-awareness in group environments (Ahmad et al., 2020). This trait can have a notable impact on students' willingness to participate in classroom activities (Batool & Zubair, 2018). In psychologically, shyness is associated with emotional discomfort and fear, especially in settings where individuals perceive themselves as being observed or assessed. It commonly manifests as extreme self-consciousness, fear of criticism, and a tendency to hold back socially. Shy people often want to interact socially but feel unable to do so due to internal anxiety and lack of confidence (Derakhshan et al., 2024). Shyness is different from introversion—while introverts may simply prefer solitude or quiet settings, shy individuals experience distress when faced with social interaction, even when they desire connection (Hassan et al., 2021). In educational settings, especially among adolescents in secondary schools, shyness may manifest as reluctance to speak in class, avoidance of group activities, or fear of asking questions. These behaviours can limit students' academic engagement, social development, and self-esteem (Coplan & Bowker, 2021). Shyness can be influenced by a combination of biological factors (such as inherited

temperament), environmental influences (such as parenting style or past experiences), and situational factors (like unfamiliar settings or perceived pressure (Archbell & Coplan, 2021)). Shyness in secondary school students is a psychological and emotional state characterized by discomfort, hesitation, or fear in social and performance situations, particularly those involving peer and teacher interaction. During adolescence—the stage when students are typically in secondary school—individuals undergo significant cognitive, emotional, and social changes (Chen et al., 2022). These changes can heighten self-awareness and sensitivity to social evaluation, making some students more prone to shyness. In this context, shyness refers to a student's tendency to avoid social attention, refrain from initiating or responding in classroom discussions, and exhibit reluctance to participate in group activities or oral presentations (Coplan & Bowker, 2021). Shy students may appear quiet, reserved, or withdrawn—not because they lack ideas or intelligence, but because they experience internal anxiety, self-consciousness, and fear of negative judgment. In classroom settings, these students may avoid raising their hands, hesitate to speak even when they know the answer, or refrain from participating in collaborative tasks (Devrim & Küçük, 2023). Shyness can also manifest physically through signs such as blushing, sweating, or avoiding eye contact. It's important to distinguish shyness from introversion: while introverted students may prefer solitude but still feel comfortable speaking when needed, shy students *want* to interact but feel emotionally blocked or fearful. This psychological barrier can limit their academic engagement, hinder the development of communication skills, and affect their overall self-esteem (Chen et al., 2021). Recognizing and understanding shyness in secondary school students is essential for teachers, as timely intervention and supportive strategies can help shy students gradually build confidence, improve class engagement, and succeed both socially and academically (Gazelle & Faldowski, 2019).

Objectives of the Study

1. To explore the level of shyness among secondary school students.
2. To determine the relationship between shyness and class engagement among secondary school students.
3. To examine secondary school students' perceptions regarding how shyness affects their class engagement.

Research Questions

1. What is the level of shyness among secondary school students?
2. What is the relationship between shyness and class engagement among secondary school students?
3. What are the secondary school students' perceptions regarding how shyness affects their class engagement?

Review of Literature

The nature of shyness lies in an internal conflict where individuals desire social interaction but simultaneously feel anxious or insecure about engaging with others. The nature of shyness is not inherently pathological, but when intense or persistent, it can interfere with social development, academic engagement, and self-esteem. It often stems from early life experiences, parenting styles, cultural influences, or even genetic predispositions (Sedova & Navratilova, 2020). Understanding the nature of shyness is essential in identifying its impact on various domains of a student's life and developing supportive interventions that promote confidence and social participation without forcing immediate change or confrontation (Henderson et al., 2001). Shyness in secondary school students can arise from a variety of interrelated factors, including biological, psychological, environmental, and social influences. One of the primary causes is genetic predisposition—some individuals are born with a temperament that makes them more sensitive to social stimuli, leading to increased self-awareness and anxiety in social situations (Wu et al., 2022). Family environment also plays a crucial role. Overprotective or overly critical parenting, lack of emotional support, or limited exposure to social situations during childhood can hinder the development of confidence and social skills, resulting in shy behaviour during adolescence (Sedova et al., 2019). Negative past experiences, such as being bullied, ridiculed, or humiliated in front of peers, can further reinforce fear of social interaction (Schnitzler et al., 2021). In the school context, academic pressure, fear of making mistakes, and performance anxiety—especially in highly competitive or judgmental classrooms—can cause students to withdraw and avoid participation (Schmidt & Poole, 2019). Low self-esteem and poor self-image also contribute significantly; students who doubt their abilities or worry excessively

about others' opinions are more likely to stay silent and avoid interaction (Hassan et al., 2021). Additionally, cultural and societal norms can influence shyness; in some cultures, modesty and quietness are encouraged, which may be misinterpreted as shyness in educational settings. During adolescence, puberty-related emotional changes and increased sensitivity to peer judgment can intensify feelings of insecurity and shyness (Mjelve et al., 2022). Therefore, shyness in secondary school students is not caused by a single factor but rather a combination of internal dispositions and external experiences that shape their confidence and comfort in social and academic environments. Students who experience shyness often hesitate to engage in classroom activities due to a strong fear of being judged or negatively evaluated. This apprehension may arise from concerns about how their peers or teachers might perceive their responses or behaviour. As a result, shy students tend to avoid speaking up in class, fearing ridicule, misunderstanding, or criticism (Morek et al., 2022). This type of behaviour often stems from a lack of self-confidence or the fear of being judged for making mistakes in front of others. These students might question their knowledge or feel anxious about providing incorrect answers, which further discourages them from participating in class discussions. Overall, shyness is commonly linked to reduced self-esteem and feelings of inadequacy, making active involvement in classroom settings particularly challenging. Buss (1986) a prominent temperament researcher, identified two distinct forms of shyness. The first, known as fearful shyness, closely aligns with Kagan's (1997) notion of behavioural inhibition, where younger children exhibit caution and distrust toward unfamiliar individuals. The second type, self-conscious shyness, tends to appear in older adolescents and is characterized by heightened awareness and sensitivity in situations where they feel socially evaluated (Buss, 1986). As children develop a theory of mind—understanding that others may have different thoughts and perspectives—this form of shyness becomes more pronounced, with individuals becoming increasingly aware of their behaviour in social contexts (Li et al., 2020). Zimbardo and Radl (1981) view shyness through its influence on personality, suggesting it exists on a spectrum. At one extreme are individuals who actively avoid social interaction and prefer solitude. People who experience situational shyness are typically placed toward the lower end of the shyness continuum. In specific social scenarios, particularly those related to social performance or success, they may exhibit temporary signs of shyness without internalizing it as part of their identity (Schmidt & Poole, 2019). Those who fall into the moderate range of the spectrum often feel uneasy or anxious when interacting with certain individuals or in particular situations. The level of discomfort they face can significantly interfere with their ability to function effectively in social settings (Zimbardo & Radl, 1981). On the far end of the spectrum are individuals who suffer from chronic shyness, a more severe and impairing form. This type is marked by a persistent fear of negative evaluation, coupled with intense emotional distress or anxiety that can disrupt goal-oriented behaviour and daily functioning (Henderson et al., 2001). Individuals with chronic shyness often experience overwhelming anxiety when required to perform in public and struggle to manage their emotional responses (Zimbardo & Radl, 1981). Shyness exists on a continuum, and its intensity can vary significantly from one individual to another. Generally, shyness can be categorized into two main levels: low and high levels. Low level of shyness in secondary school students refers to mild and occasional feelings of nervousness or hesitation in specific social or academic situations, without causing significant disruption to the student's overall functioning or performance (Archbell & Coplan, 2021). Students with low shyness may feel slightly uncomfortable speaking in front of large groups or unfamiliar peers, but they are still able to participate in class discussions, interact with teachers, and engage in group activities when encouraged or given time to prepare. This form of shyness is generally situational and short-lived, often appearing during new experiences such as the beginning of a school year, entering a new classroom environment, or presenting in front of the class for the first time. Unlike moderate or severe shyness, low-level shy students do not avoid social or academic interaction altogether. Instead, they may need a little more support, encouragement, or time to adjust before feeling fully confident (Böheim et al., 2020). This level of shyness is considered developmentally normal during adolescence, especially as secondary school students are undergoing emotional and social changes that increase their sensitivity to peer opinions. With positive reinforcement, inclusive classroom practices, and opportunities for low-pressure participation, most students with low-level shyness can gradually become more comfortable and engaged in school life (Downing et al., 2020). High level of shyness in secondary school students refers to an intense, persistent form of social anxiety and fear of interaction that significantly interferes with a student's

academic performance, classroom engagement, and social development. Students with high levels of shyness often experience overwhelming self-consciousness, fear of embarrassment, and an intense concern about being negatively judged by others. As a result, they may completely avoid participating in class discussions, hesitate to ask for help, withdraw from group work, and remain silent even when they know the correct answers (Gazelle & Faldowski, 2019). In severe cases, these students may show physical signs of anxiety such as sweating, trembling, rapid heartbeat, or even panic when faced with social or performance situations like oral presentations or public speaking. This deep level of discomfort can lead to academic underachievement, lack of peer relationships, low self-esteem, and feelings of isolation. High-level shyness often stems from a combination of factors, including negative past experiences (e.g., bullying or ridicule), low self-worth, critical home environments, or genetic sensitivity to stress (Derakhshan et al., 2024). If left unaddressed, this level of shyness can develop into more serious social or emotional disorders, such as social phobia or chronic anxiety. Hence, teachers, parents, and school counsellors must recognize these students at an early stage and offer tailored support, including personal encouragement, counselling, activities that boost self-esteem, and a supportive classroom environment that gradually fosters their participation and academic success. Classroom engagement is a crucial aspect of the learning process, involving students' active engagement through asking questions, answering, contributing to discussions, and collaborating with peers. However, for many secondary school students, shyness acts as a significant barrier to meaningful classroom involvement (Devrim & Küçük, 2023). Shyness, often rooted in fear of negative evaluation, self-doubt, and social anxiety, leads to behavioural withdrawal and reduced verbal interaction (Oflaz, 2019). Secondary students, who are at a critical stage of social and emotional development, often become more aware of peer judgment and may fear embarrassment or rejection. As a result, shy students tend to remain silent even when they understand the material or have valuable insights. Their reluctance to speak or participate can be misinterpreted by teachers as disinterest or lack of preparation, which may lead to reduced academic support and engagement. This withdrawal not only limits their learning opportunities but also affects their confidence, communication skills, and peer relationships (Ran et al., 2018). Studies have shown that students with higher levels of shyness participate less frequently in class activities, especially those that require public speaking or spontaneous responses. Mundelsee and Jurkowski (2021), observed that there is an inverse relationship between shyness and classroom participation; as students' shyness increases, their level of participation tends to decrease." To support shy students in becoming more engaged, educators can implement strategies such as small-group discussions, reflective writing exercises, anonymous feedback tools, and consistent yet gentle encouragement. These methods can gradually reduce students' reluctance and promote greater engagement in classroom activities. The link between shyness and classroom engagement at the secondary school level presents a multifaceted challenge within the fields of educational psychology and classroom management (Morek et al., 2022). Shyness—commonly described as a tendency to feel uneasy, anxious, or uncomfortable in social situations, particularly with unfamiliar individuals—can significantly hinder a student's confidence and readiness to participate in learning environments. At the secondary level, students are expected to engage actively through asking questions, responding to the teacher, collaborating in group discussions, and presenting ideas confidently. (Mjelve et al., 2019). Shy students may avoid eye contact, remain silent during class discussions, and withdraw from collaborative learning tasks. Such behaviours are not indicative of a lack of understanding or academic ability but are instead manifestations of their internal psychological struggle. As a result, shy students often go unnoticed despite having the potential to excel academically (Mundelsee & Jurkowski, 2024). The lack of engagement not only limits their learning opportunities but also affects their academic confidence and self-esteem over time. Numerous studies have shown a negative correlation between shyness and classroom engagement, meaning that the more a student exhibits shy behaviours, the less likely they are to engage in classroom discourse. This disengagement can create a cycle where the student feels increasingly isolated, less confident, and more reluctant to participate. Teachers may misinterpret this silence as disinterest or lack of preparation, further distancing the student from the learning process (Nyborg et al., 2020). Therefore, understanding the relationship between shyness and class engagement is vital for educators, school counsellors, and policymakers. Creating a psychologically safe classroom environment—one that values quiet reflection alongside verbal participation—can help reduce the negative impact of shyness (Sangani & Jangi, 2019). Encouraging alternative modes

of expression, such as written responses or small group discussions, and using positive reinforcement can empower shy students to gradually overcome their fears. Addressing this issue through supportive teaching strategies can lead to more equitable classroom dynamics, improved academic performance, and enhanced social-emotional development for all learners (Nilsen, 2018). Class engagement is a critical component of the learning process—it requires verbal expression, interaction with peers and teachers, and a willingness to be visibly involved in learning tasks (Chen et al., 2019). For shy students, the classroom becomes a source of psychological discomfort where they fear making mistakes, being ridiculed, or receiving negative feedback from peers (Nguyen, 2020). As a result, these students often avoid asking or answering questions, participating in discussions, or volunteering for classroom activities, which leads to lower engagement and reduced academic visibility. This behavioural withdrawal does not reflect a lack of knowledge or competence, but rather an emotional barrier that prevents expression (Nyborg et al., 2022). Shy students may also experience internalized stress, cognitive overload, and low self-efficacy, which further diminishes their readiness to participate. This reduction in engagement can affect not only their academic achievement but also their opportunities to develop communication, collaboration, and critical thinking skills—core competencies emphasized in secondary education (Oflaz, 2019). Therefore, educators need to recognize the behavioural signs of shyness and adopt inclusive pedagogical practices that reduce performance pressure and create a supportive, low-anxiety learning environment. Strategies such as peer collaboration, think-pair-share, anonymous response systems, and positive reinforcement can help reduce the negative impact of shyness and gradually encourage increased participation among shy secondary school students (Derakhshan et al., 2022).

Materials and Methods

This research employed a descriptive design with a quantitative and correlational approach. Data were gathered through survey. The study's target population included male and female students enrolled in the matric (grade 10th) from public secondary schools in Lahore District. A randomly selected sample of 400 matriculation students, comprising both boys and girls from public secondary schools in Lahore district. To assess the relationship between students' shyness and class engagement at the secondary school level, a self-constructed questionnaire was used. The research instrument included two sections: the first collected demographic information such as name, gender, and age, while the second section consisted of 30 closed-ended items on a five-point Likert-type scale. To ensure the instrument's reliability, a pilot study was carried out with 50 matric students from public secondary schools, and reliability was found 0.819 while using Cronbach's Alpha formula. Content validity was established through expert evaluation. For data collection, researchers personally visited all the government secondary schools in Lahore district. The data were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistical methods. Mean scores and standard deviations were calculated to present the distribution of responses. To identify the relationship between variables, Pearson's correlation coefficient was applied. Furthermore, an independent samples t-test assessed gender-based differences, while a one-way ANOVA evaluated age-related variations. Ethical standards were strictly upheld throughout the process; participants were informed about the confidentiality and all data were securely maintained for academic purposes only.

Results and Discussion

Table 1

Descriptive statistics on the level of shyness among secondary school students.

Sr. No	Statements	M	SD
1.	I become anxious when required to speak before the entire class.	3.72	1.112
2.	I avoid asking questions in class, even when I don't understand something.	3.63	1.327
3.	I feel shy when my teacher asks me to participate in class activities.	3.69	1.185
4.	I avoid participating in school events due to shyness.	3.45	1.344
5.	I feel uneasy when interacting with unfamiliar classmates.	3.49	1.380
6.	I prefer to stay quiet in group discussions at school.	3.48	1.336
7.	I feel uncomfortable being the centre of attention in the classroom	3.76	1.208
8.	I hesitate to raise my hand in class, even when I know the answer.	3.88	1.152
9.	I often feel self-conscious during class presentations or oral tests	3.58	1.288
10.	I feel more confident when I am not required to speak during lessons.	3.62	1.190
11.	I become self-conscious when required to read aloud in front of the class.	3.65	1.237
12.	I avoid sitting in the front rows because I feel nervous.	3.59	1.200
13.	I get worried about being judged when I speak in class.	3.85	1.100

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14. I feel shy when I am called on unexpectedly by the teacher.	3.68	1.101
15. I often stay quiet even when I want to join classroom discussions.	3.71	1.122

N=250

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for students' shyness level, including statement-wise mean and standard deviation related to Research Question 1 of the questionnaire. A total of 15 items were evaluated, and their respective mean and standard deviation values are shown in the table. The results indicate that the lowest mean scores ($M = 3.45, 3.59, \text{ and } 3.63$) were observed across the statements. These findings suggest that shyness is present among students, as reflected by the lower mean values.

Table 2

Correlation Coefficient between shyness and class engagement among secondary school students.

Variables	N	Pearson-r	Sig
Shyness and Class Engagement	250	-.194	.001

The Pearson correlation coefficient was utilized to assess the relationship between shyness and class engagement among secondary school students. Findings revealed a statistically significant negative small relationship between the two variables ($r = -.194, p = .001$), indicating that as shyness increases, classroom engagement decreases. Despite its significance, the correlation is relatively weak, given that the coefficient value is below .30. These results imply that students with higher shyness levels tend to engage less in classroom activities, potentially affecting their academic involvement and performance.

Table 3

Descriptive statistics on secondary school students' perceptions regarding how shyness affects their class engagement.

Sr. No	Statements	M	SD
1.	I believe my shyness limits my ability to learn through group work.	3.91	1.116
2.	I avoid answering questions in class because I am shy.	3.83	1.188
3.	I avoid taking leadership roles in class projects due to my shyness.	3.81	1.317
4.	I believe I could engage more in class if I were less shy.	3.74	1.213
5.	I believe my shyness prevents me from taking part in class discussions.	3.74	1.245
6.	I participate less in class when I feel shy or anxious.	3.90	1.178
7.	I find it hard to talk to my teacher during class due to my shyness.	3.91	1.173
8.	I feel that I engage less in classroom activities because of my shyness.	3.88	1.074
9.	I prefer working alone instead of in groups because I am shy.	3.85	1.212
10.	I feel uncomfortable giving presentations in front of my classmates.	3.95	1.118
11.	I think my academic performance suffers because of my shyness.	4.05	.915
12.	I stay quiet in class even when I have something to say.	3.96	.902
13.	I hesitate to ask questions when I don't understand the lesson due to my shyness.	3.62	1.424
14.	I feel that my teachers don't notice me because I am too quiet in class.	3.54	1.350
15.	I feel that shyness lowers my confidence to participate in class	3.63	1.362

N=250

Table 3 presents the descriptive statistics regarding secondary school students' perceptions of how shyness affects their class engagement. It includes statement-wise mean and standard deviation values related to Research Question 3 of the questionnaire. A total of 15 statements were analysed, and their corresponding mean and standard deviation values are shown in the table. The findings indicate that, according to students' perceptions, shyness does affect their class participation. Notably, the highest mean score was recorded for Statement 11: "I think my academic performance suffers because of my shyness." ($M = 4.05$), indicating that most students expressed strong agreement with this statement.

Table 4

Independent Samples t-test on Students' Shyness Based on Gender Differences

Gender	N	M	SD	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Male	141	3.47	.731	-1.972	247	.046
Female	109	3.63	.621			

Table 4 illustrates a statistically significant difference in shyness levels based on gender ($p < .05$). To explore this difference, an independent samples t-test was applied. The analysis showed that equal variances were assumed, and a notable difference was observed between the mean scores of

male students ($M = 3.47$, $SD = .731$) and female students ($M = 3.63$, $SD = .621$); $t = -1.972$, $p = .04$ (two-tailed), indicating that gender plays a role in reported shyness levels.

Table 5
Independent Samples t-test on Students' Class Engagement Based on Gender Differences

Gender	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>T</i>	<i>Df</i>	<i>Sig. (2-tailed)</i>
Male	124	3.82	.623	-1.382	237	.165
Female	126	3.72	.611			

Table 5 reveals that there was no significant statistical difference in class engagement between male and female students ($p > .05$). An independent samples t-test was utilized to evaluate this variation, assuming equal variances. The results demonstrated that the mean engagement scores of male students ($M = 3.82$, $SD = .623$) and female students ($M = 3.72$, $SD = .611$) did not differ significantly; $t = -1.382$, $p = .16$ (two-tailed), suggesting gender did not have a substantial impact on class engagement levels.

Table 6
Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) to Compare Students' Shyness across Different Age Groups

Age	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>P</i>
15 years	41	3.81	.515		
16 years	138	3.91	.623	2.263	.025
More than 16	71	3.45	.743		
Total	250	3.65	.798		

This table highlights a significant statistical variation in the levels of shyness among secondary school students ($F = 2.263$, $p = .025$, $p < .05$). ANOVA was conducted to examine the significant differences based on age. The majority of students were 16 years old. For students aged 15 years ($n = 41$), the mean score was 3.81 ($SD = .515$); for those aged 16 years ($n = 138$), the mean was 3.91 ($SD = .623$); and for students more than 16 years ($n = 66$), the mean was 3.45 ($SD = .743$).

Table 7
Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) on Class Engagement of Students by Age

Age	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>P</i>
15 years	41	3.96	.508		
16 years	138	3.62	.515	7.223	.000
More than 16	66	3.88	.545		
Total	250	3.75	.542		

This table presents a notable statistical difference in the comparison of classroom engagement among secondary school students based on gender ($F = 7.223$, $p = .00$, $p < .05$). ANOVA was employed to examine the significant differences in class engagement across different age groups. The majority of the students were 16 years old. Students aged 15 years ($n = 41$) had a mean score of 3.96 ($SD = .508$); those aged 16 years ($n = 138$) had a mean score of 3.62 ($SD = .515$); and students older than 16 years ($n = 66$) had a mean score of 3.88 ($SD = .545$).

Discussion

This study aimed to explore the relationship between students' shyness and class engagement at the secondary school level, with a particular focus on students' perceptions of how shyness influences their engagement in classroom activities. The research offers meaningful insights into how emotional and social factors—particularly shyness—impact academic behaviour, including gender-based differences, peer interactions, and engagement levels. The first objective of the study was to explore the level of shyness among secondary school students. To address this, the research question posed was: *What is the level of shyness in secondary school students?* Descriptive statistics were applied to analyse students' responses to the shyness-related items. The results indicated that the overall mean scores were moderately low, reflecting a significant presence of shyness among students. These findings are consistent with the work of Hughes and Coplan (2010), who reported that teachers often hold lower expectations for shy students, not due to a lack of ability, but because of students' hesitancy and fear of public interaction. These emotional barriers often inhibit self-expression, which negatively affects classroom involvement. The second objective was to determine the relationship between shyness and class engagement among secondary school students. The associated research question was: *What is the relationship between shyness and class engagement of secondary school students?* For this purpose, a Pearson product-moment correlation analysis was employed. The results revealed a statistically significant negative small correlation between shyness and class engagement (r

= $-.194$, $p = .001$). Although the correlation was weak in magnitude, it indicates that increased levels of shyness are associated with decreased class engagement. These findings align with Evans and Evans (1987), who highlighted that shy students tend to participate less in class, not due to cognitive limitations, but because of social discomfort and anxiety in group settings. The third objective of the study was to examine secondary school students' perceptions regarding how shyness affects their class engagement. The corresponding research question was: *What are the secondary school students' perceptions regarding how shyness affects their class engagement?* Descriptive statistics were again used to analyse student responses. The findings revealed that a large number of students acknowledged shyness as a barrier to active participation in class. These self-perceptions point toward the internal struggle students' face when attempting to contribute to group discussions or public academic settings. This supports Hughes and Coplan's (2010) conclusion that shyness in childhood negatively correlates with academic engagement and that such engagement is a strong predictor of academic achievement.

Conclusion

This study aimed to explore how shyness correlates with classroom engagement among secondary school students. The findings indicate that shyness is a prevalent issue at this educational level, with notable differences observed across genders. Students with higher levels of shyness tend to participate less in classroom activities, confirming that shyness can act as a barrier to effective academic engagement. A statistically significant negative correlation ($r = -.194$, $p = .001$) was found between shyness and class engagement, suggesting that as students become more shy, their willingness or ability to engage in class discussions and activities decreases. Although the correlation was small in magnitude, it remains meaningful in understanding the behavioural dynamics of shy students. Additionally, students themselves perceived shyness to have a strong negative impact on their engagement, reinforcing the need to address this issue in educational settings. The study supports existing literature, which emphasizes that shyness does not reflect a lack of ability but rather stems from social anxiety and discomfort, which can hinder student expression and classroom engagement. Therefore, it is important for educators, school counsellors, and policymakers to develop supportive and inclusive classroom environments that encourage shy students to participate, gradually reduce their anxiety, and promote their academic success. And there is a need to foster supportive, inclusive, and low-anxiety classroom environments that help shy students feel more confident and comfortable to engage, thereby enhancing both their participation and academic development.

Recommendations

Teachers should cultivate a positive, non-judgmental, and emotionally safe environment where shy students feel comfortable expressing themselves and participating in class discussions.

Incorporate small-group and peer-supported learning strategies to minimize performance pressure and reduce anxiety for shy students, thereby increasing their chances of classroom engagement.

Offer multiple modes of classroom participation—such as written reflections, digital tools, or anonymous submissions—to accommodate students who feel uncomfortable speaking publicly.

Use specific praise and recognition to affirm students' efforts, which can enhance self-esteem and encourage shy students to contribute more confidently.

Integrate activities that build students' social confidence, emotional regulation, and self-expression as part of regular classroom routines.

Schools should provide trained counsellors to help students manage severe levels of shyness that significantly impact their academic involvement.

Provide professional development for teachers on how to identify shy behaviour and use strategies that support and include shy learners in classroom participation.

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