# Cracking the "Silence Syndrome" in University Classrooms

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**Abstract:** There is a problem of "silence syndrome" in college classrooms, mainly manifested in the phenomenon of students being afraid, unable, and unwilling to speak. This study takes the operation management course as an example to illustrate the problem of classroom silence, analyzes the reasons for classroom silence, and explores solutions from the perspectives of teaching methods, classroom interaction, classroom atmosphere, evaluation mechanism, etc. Our research is beneficial for improving students' classroom participation, enhancing their classroom learning enthusiasm, and achieving the goal of mutual benefit between teaching and learning.

**Keywords:** Classroom Silence; Operations Management; Student Participation; Interactive Teaching

## 1. Introduction

In today's college classroom, "Silence" has become a phenomenon that cannot be ignored. As the data shows, although 74.60% of the students will occasionally speak in class, only 17.46% of the students can really actively participate in the discussion, and nearly 8% of the students almost never speak. Behind this silence, it actually reflects the students' complex psychology of "dare not say, cannot say, do not want to say". Taking the operation management course as an example, we can find that the formation of this phenomenon is not accidental, but the result of the joint action of many factors. From students' long-term passive learning habits, to the lack of in-depth understanding of abstract theory, to the influence of classroom atmosphere, and the driving force of utilitarian learning motivation, each link has virtually exacerbated the silence of the classroom. Therefore, how to solve this problem and revitalize the classroom has become an important issue to be solved in the current teaching reform. This paper is based on such a realistic background, in-depth analysis of the causes of classroom silence, and explore practical solutions, hoping to provide a useful reference for improving students' participation in the classroom and promoting teaching and learning.
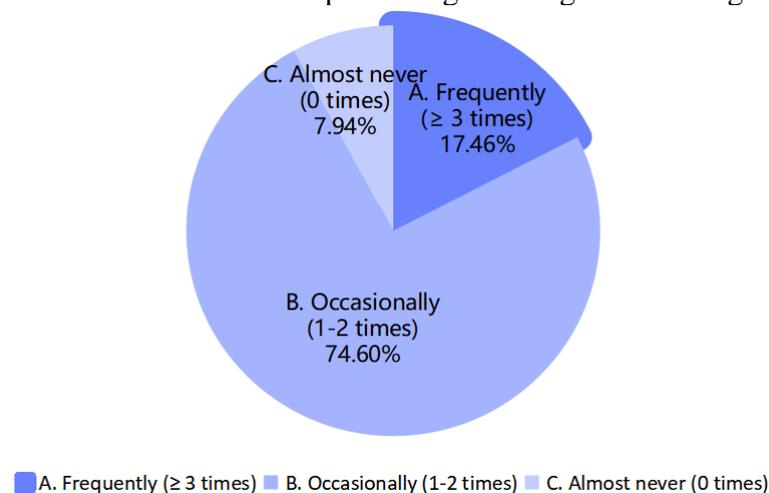


**Figure 1.** Distribution of Classroom Speech Frequency among College Students

## 2. The Causes of Classroom Silence Disorder

### 2.1 Students lack the habit of actively expressing themselves

Currently, some college students are often accustomed to passively receiving knowledge in the classroom and are not good at expressing their opinions in class. Moreover, these students often choose to remain silent when facing questions raised by teachers. The silence phenomenon is not simply lazy or indifferent, nor does it mean that they have no ideas, but the result of the combined effect of the long-term education model they have received and the customary expression in the current Internet era. Starting from the basic education stage, the teaching mode of schools for students belongs to "exam oriented education", which focuses on cultivating students' rote memorization of knowledge points and filling in memory methods, but does not cultivate students' ability to think independently(Deb & Ghosh, 2025; Zainab Jahangeer & Dr. Ismat Bano, 2025)，the result is that students gradually become "receivers" of knowledge rather than "researchers", forming the habit of mechanically receiving knowledge. If this passive learning habit is brought into university classroom teaching, it will cause tremendous pressure on them when facing questions that require thinking and being ready to answer at any time, and even generate resistance such as "not what I want to say, afraid of classmates and teachers hearing my wrong ideas"(Obenland et al., 2012).Therefore, when the teacher raises a question or asks students to speak up and answer a question during class, most students choose to remain silent.

In addition, modern college students are a group of people with "joke brains" on social media such as Weibo, Tiktok, Xiaohongshu, etc(Deb & Ghosh, 2025; Zainab Jahangeer & Dr. Ismat Bano, 2025).They like to express their opinions or leave comments on the internet in a concise and clear manner, but when entering the classroom for discussion, they need to have a logical and well founded statement. Therefore, one of their

learning difficulties is how to use logic to articulate their viewpoints. The internet has given students an anonymous protection area. Here, students hide behind the Internet, which does not prevent them from using words from various angles to defend themselves; In real classrooms, it is impossible not to see the teacher when speaking in class. Every speech will be seen by everyone and given instant eye attention, nodding affirmation or negation. Therefore, many students choose to avoid such situations. In addition, in the current era, students' daily lives are deeply influenced by digitalization. In all aspects beyond academic learning, they cannot do without mobile phones, various search engines or artificial intelligence software. To obtain something in a certain field, they only need to do simple searches, browsing or asking questions. The interaction with machines is one-way, and in classroom discussions, it requires eye contact, physical reactions, and even emotional interaction. Therefore, compared to walking into the classroom to quietly listen and record, they prefer to speak freely.

*2.2 Students do not have a deep understanding of the course content*

As for the operation management course, the content itself is not the direct reason for the dull classroom, but rather because students have not deeply understood the course content and cannot transform abstract theories into perceivable real production scenarios. This state of seeming to understand but not to understand weakens their enthusiasm for participating in discussions and undermines their confidence in expression.

In terms of rhythm, students know that they can calculate the result of producing one product in one minute after learning, but without some prompts, they cannot imagine what would happen in reality when a certain process exceeds the time limit by 10 seconds. Therefore, they cannot imagine what "rhythm" means for this production line. In addition, the equipment load factor is also the same, and students know how to calculate it. They know that the equipment load factor is 0.8 or 1.2, and they also know what this value represents. However, it is not clear why it is set in this way. Without knowing the possibility of being able to explain clearly, students are afraid that others will know they have not understood well, so they simply choose not to speak.

Therefore, in order to break the dull situation in the classroom, it is necessary to transform abstract knowledge into observable production scenarios for students, so that they can see how the rhythm drives the operation of a production line, how processes are mutually constrained, and how equipment load directly affects overall production capacity, thereby gaining the foundation and confidence they want to discuss and express..

*2.3 Classroom atmosphere and class culture influence*

The classroom is a teaching environment composed of every student and teacher. In this environment, class culture plays a significant role, invisibly influencing the behavioral choices of each individual in the class. A conservative and quiet class versus a positive and united class will provide its members with vastly different expressive contexts, thereby influencing individuals' willingness and behavior to express themselves.

Overall, if the atmosphere of the class is relatively quiet and reserved, anyone who speaks up first at this time will have a mental burden of "shooting the bird", and most people choose to remain silent. In this situation, as long as someone speaks first, this voice will receive more attention and attention. Due to the fact that the vast majority of people's choices are in a state of silence, it is believed that this silence may be a habitual state, and students who are "afraid to speak up" may give up expressing their thoughts after selective self-censorship due to conformity in their choices.

On the contrary, if in a positive, healthy, and supportive classroom atmosphere where everyone is familiar with and trusts each other, there will be more communication and exchange among classmates in this relatively secure environment(Begidova et al., 2024).So in this situation, students are willing to actively participate in classroom discussions, and the relationship between teachers and students is relatively harmonious(Conner et al., 2024).In addition, in this type of class, asking questions is a sign of "eagerness to learn", and answering wrong questions is a "brave" behavior. Occasionally, when a student answers a wrong question, other students may supplement or encourage them. In this positive classroom atmosphere, no student will

speak up just to speak up, as this situation is very common; But no one will feel like they are lagging behind everyone because they haven't spoken up.

Therefore, in terms of individual students, the same person may exhibit silence in Class A and talk confidently in Class B, not due to any internal changes, but mainly as a result of the influence of class culture.

*2.4 Students' intrinsic utilitarian learning motivation*

Excluding external factors such as course content and class culture, there is a widespread utilitarian learning motivation among current college students, which has become a key internal factor causing the "silent disease" in the classroom. This utilitarian tendency is mainly reflected in students often using "whether it is beneficial for exams" and "whether it can directly enhance employment advantages" as criteria for evaluating the meaning of learning. Specifically, when faced with limited study time and energy, students will instinctively prioritize tasks that can be directly converted into scores, such as preparing for exams, memorizing exam points, and completing assignments(Li et al., 2025).This psychological state has led to a situation where even if students have their own opinions on the topic of discussion, they often choose to remain silent due to "not taking the exam".



**Figure 2**. Comparison of Learning Motivation among Students with Different Intentions to Speak

It should be noted that this utilitarian learning mentality has deeply influenced students' performance in the classroom. Many students only focus on the "key points" outlined by the teacher during class and lack the enthusiasm to participate in open-ended case discussions. The typical behavior of students in the classroom is that they are busy recording the "test points" mentioned by the teacher, but their response to interactive activities that require independent thinking appears very indifferent; They expect teachers to provide standard answers directly, but are unwilling to discuss them in depth(Wang, 2024).

Therefore, this utilitarian learning motivation has transformed the classroom, which should have been a place full of intense collisions of ideas, into just a means of knowledge transmission(Zhang, 2019).When speaking is no longer seen as a rare opportunity to exercise thinking skills and improve comprehensive literacy, but easily classified as "ineffective efforts", the intrinsic motivation of students to participate in classroom interaction will significantly decrease.

## 3. Suggestions for Cracking Classroom Silence Syndrome

*3.1 Innovative teaching methods to enhance classroom attractiveness*

Innovative teaching methods are one of the ways to break the monotony of the classroom(Xie et al., 2022).Teachers can combine abstract theories with real business practices by teaching personal experiences, introducing social hot topics or actual business cases into the classroom, and avoiding the dull classroom atmosphere caused by rigid rote teaching in the past. This also stimulates students' curiosity and enhances their desire to think and express themselves to a certain extent(Snider & Southin, 2016; Thierman, 2025).

Taking the teaching of operations management course as an example, this article introduces the teaching design of master production planning. The practical training content can be introduced with a specific example - "Assuming we are the production planning department of a beauty brand, we have just received a large order urgently needed and need to ship 5000 new products within two weeks. But currently our production line is producing other products, and our inventory of materials is only enough to produce about 1000 units. The supplier has also stated that new materials will only arrive in 10 days. How should we handle this at this time?" Introducing the current hot topic: "The logistics of a famous beauty brand's new product has been stalled due to supply chain issues, leading to consumer anger." By putting students in the current predicament, the teacher can explain the main production plan, creating a simulated scenario for students to fully mobilize their skills to solve the problem. Breaking through students' comfort zone of thinking, guiding them to integrate their knowledge to solve problems, and at the same time, making students realize that the preparation of the main production plan is not only a fundamental mathematical work, but also requires comprehensive consideration of the reputation value, cost control, resource allocation, and other aspects of the enterprise. In this process, silence is broken and replaced by collisions of thoughts.

*3.2 Design progressive interactive elements to lower the threshold for expression*

In addition to innovating teaching methods to enhance the attraction of the classroom, teachers can also design a set of progressive interactive links according to the survey results.
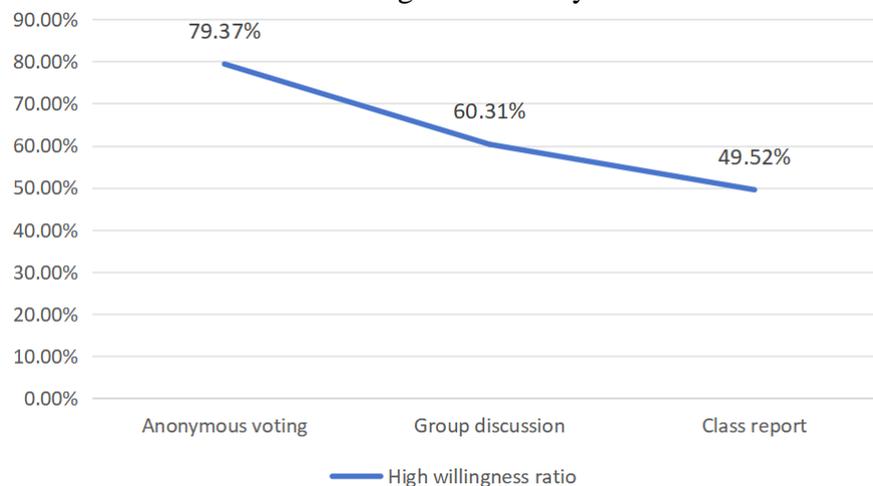


**Figure 7.** Comparison of students' willingness to participate in different interactive activities

After presenting the new theory, online learning platforms such as Study Pass and Rain Classroom can be used to post some simple multiple-choice and true/false questions for students to anonymously answer, in order to understand whether they have a preliminary understanding of this part of the theory, and thus achieve the goal of understanding students' mastery of new knowledge(Cui et al., 2023).At the same time, it can encourage teachers to observe students' performance, understand the teaching effectiveness of the classroom, adjust teaching plans, and timely improve teaching ideas and strategies.

On this basis, a "one minute speech" section can be set up, in which teachers can first give examples and demonstrations, and then ask students to refer to the examples for group discussions, sharing their own views within the group(Wei, 2011).Language expression with time constraints and templates greatly reduces the difficulty of language organization for students, and enables the transformation of individual ideas into collective results through group presentations(Wei, 2011).Meanwhile, group discussions are also an effective way to promote student interaction and internalization of knowledge(van Diggele et al., 2020).Through group collaboration, students can learn from each other, inspire each other, and solve problems together, thereby deepening their understanding of knowledge(van Diggele et al., 2020).

After these steps, students adapt to this form, and teachers can continue to ask difficult and divergent questions in depth, requiring students to repeatedly organize language expressions around the information they have obtained, and provide different answers or discourse styles from different perspectives(Ma et al.,

2024).At the same time, teachers can use questioning to stimulate students' further thinking, focusing on praising students' thinking rather than the correctness of their answers(Ma et al., 2024).Encouragement and praise from teachers can make students feel more confident in participating in discussions, willing to listen carefully to others' viewpoints, and respond more positively to the teacher's lectures (Fauth et al., 2019).

By going from easy to difficult and from anonymous to named, if teachers give students corresponding affirmation or praise at each stage, they can guide and gradually help students establish confidence in expression, achieve the transformation from "dare not speak" to "dare to speak" or even "willing to speak", and solve the problem of classroom silence easily (Fauth et al., 2019).

### 3.3 Create a relaxed and positive classroom atmosphere, establish trust relationships

A relaxed and pleasant classroom atmosphere is also crucial during the teaching process. As can be seen from the previous text, classes can be divided into two types: conservative and positive. Classroom silence often occurs in conservative classes because students in these classes often choose to remain silent due to fear of making mistakes and worrying about becoming the focus (Xie et al., 2022).Therefore, when facing conservative classes, the primary role of teachers is to be patient and inclusive guides. In terms of teaching strategies, they should start with zero risk anonymous interactions, such as using bullet comments or comments in learning tools, so that everyone's ideas can be seen without revealing their identity, thus breaking the deadlock of silence(Lai et al., 2024).Subsequently, a discussion mode can be conducted from the group to the whole class. The most important thing is that teachers need to provide positive feedback to every student who dares to try in a timely manner. When students believe that even immature ideas can receive recognition and encouragement from teachers, their expression concerns are gradually eliminated (Xie et al., 2022).Continuous affirmation from teachers can ignite students' inner motivation and encourage them to become more willing and efficient learners(Page et al., 2020; Sharova et al., 2024).In addition, teachers can also tell their own experiences to students through storytelling based on the specific course situation. This can gradually ease the silent or tense atmosphere, establish trust with students, and transform the classroom from a "judgment field" to a "safe house", allowing students to have a relaxed psychological atmosphere and express their thoughts without pressure.

When facing positive classes, because these classes already have a good foundation of interaction, teachers need to guide them to think more deeply. Therefore, in terms of strategy selection, it is necessary to be different from before. Teachers need to design more challenging tasks to guide them towards in-depth exploration of complex problems (Deng, 2025).

In summary, creating a classroom atmosphere cannot be a one size fits all approach. In conservative classes, teachers are like icebreakers; In a positive class, teachers are like experienced navigators. Teachers should adopt different teaching strategies based on the specific situation of the class, ultimately achieving the goal of solving the problem of classroom silence.

### 3.4 Optimize the evaluation mechanism and encourage deep thinking

At present, universities generally incorporate classroom interaction into their student learning evaluation system. Therefore, if we want to effectively stimulate students' willingness to express themselves, the key is how to optimize this mechanism, transforming it from a simple "speech counting" to providing different levels of motivation based on the depth of thinking.

The existing evaluation mechanisms often overemphasize the participation of formalism, but overlook the value of the thinking process. Therefore, not only should the number of speeches be recorded, but also the depth of the results, the rigor of the logic, and so on should be paid attention to(Wang, 2024).At the same time, different participation channels should be established for students with different characteristics - for those who are good at expressing themselves, classroom debates can be used; And those students who are accustomed to thoughtful consideration and have reservations can participate in the classroom through submitting notes or online discussions(Wang, 2024).This not only fully considers the individual differences among students, but also enables each student to find a suitable way of expression for themselves.

More importantly, teachers should provide personalized evaluations of students' performance in the classroom, pointing out the highlights and areas for improvement in students' thinking(Wang, 2024), so that students can intuitively perceive their own progress. Once students realize that every dedicated effort can receive patient feedback from the teacher and their own abilities are improved, classroom speaking is no longer a task to improve their grades, but rather an opportunity to showcase their personal abilities and enhance themselves, thereby achieving a tangible transition from passive response to active engagement.

## 4. Conclusion

Classroom silence is a common but thorny issue in university classrooms, but it is not an unsolvable teaching problem. Its formation has multiple reasons. From the perspective of students, long-term exam oriented education has made us accustomed to passively receiving knowledge, while the fragmented expression brought by social media has also made many students feel overwhelmed by the need for logical and clear classroom discussions. From the perspective of course content, courses like Operations Management, if they only stay at abstract theoretical explanations without connecting to actual production scenarios, students are likely to have a vague understanding and are afraid to speak up due to concerns about making mistakes. From the perspective of class atmosphere, a conservative and quiet class will put pressure on the first speaker, while an active class will encourage everyone to speak freely. From the perspective of learning motivation, utilitarian learning motivation weakens students' willingness to interact in the classroom.

To solve this problem, teachers can use examples or talk about typical cases, hot events, and other forms to make the teaching content lively and stimulate students' desire to express themselves; Combined with the presentation of knowledge in a shallow to deep manner, design a gradual interactive process, starting from a simple anonymous form, gradually transitioning to a guided group discussion form, and finally developing into a free state of class discussion. In this process, gradually exercise students' expression ability, and create a relatively relaxed learning environment for students. In such a learning environment, teachers adopt a tolerant attitude towards students' speech, treating the classroom as a place where students can boldly express their inner thoughts.

In general, breaking the dullness of the classroom is like unraveling a complex rope. It requires adjusting the way teachers teach content, the way teachers and students communicate, and the way students interact with each other. It also requires creating an active teaching atmosphere, allowing students to truly think and speak, transforming from passive listeners in class to thinkers and speakers, and achieving harmonious physical and mental development through interactive communication.

**AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS**

Yu Xie: Conceptualization, Methodology, Writing – Review & Editing.
Pingping Lu: Data Collection, Formal Analysis, Writing – Original Draft.
Wanting Deng: Investigation, Validation, Visualization.
All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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