



## GRADE 5 STUDENTS' PASSIVITY IN LESSONS: CAUSES, CONSEQUENCES, AND EVIDENCE-BASED INTERVENTIONS

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**Abstract:** This article examines student passivity in Grade 5 classrooms — a widespread but often overlooked barrier to effective learning. Using a mixed-methods approach combining classroom observations, student questionnaires, and teacher interviews (n=72 students, 4 teachers), the study identifies fear of making mistakes, shyness, and teacher-centered instruction as the primary causes of passive behavior. Findings reveal that 70% of students exhibit moderate or high levels of passivity, and that highly passive students score an average of 34 points lower on academic assessments than their highly active peers. Evidence-based interventions including Think-Pair-Share, cooperative group work, formative assessment, and the cultivation of emotionally safe classroom environments are shown to be highly effective. The study concludes that addressing passivity requires both instructional reform and a deliberate shift in classroom culture.

**Keywords:** *student passivity, classroom engagement, Grade 5, motivation, interactive learning, primary education, self-efficacy*

**Annotatsiya :** Ushbu maqolada 5-sinf o'quvchilarining darslardagi passivligi — samarali ta'limga to'siq bo'ladigan keng tarqalgan, ammo ko'pincha e'tibordan chetda qoladigan muammo ko'rib chiqiladi. Sinf kuzatishlari, o'quvchi so'rovnomalari va o'qituvchi suhbatlarini o'z ichiga olgan aralash metodologiya asosida (n=72 o'quvchi, 4 o'qituvchi) o'tkazilgan tadqiqot passiv xulq-atvorning asosiy sabablari sifatida xato qilishdan qo'rqish, uyatchanlik va o'qituvchi markazli



ta'limni aniqlaydi. Natijalar shuni ko'rsatadiki, o'quvchilarning 70% i o'rta yoki yuqori darajadagi passivlikni namoyon etadi, juda passiv o'quvchilar akademik baholarda faol tengdoshlariga qaraganda o'rtacha 34 ball kam to'playdi. Think-Pair-Share, guruhli ish, formativ baholash va emotsional jihatdan xavfsiz sinf muhitini shakllantirish kabi isbotlangan aralashuvlar yuqori samarali ekanligi ko'rsatildi.

**Калит so'zlar (UZ):** *o'quvchi passivligi, sinfda ishtirok, 5-sinf, motivatsiya, interaktiv ta'lim, boshlang'ich ta'lim, o'z-o'ziga ishonch*

**Аннотация (Русский язык):** В данной статье рассматривается пассивность учащихся 5-х классов на уроках — распространённое, но часто недооцениваемое препятствие эффективному обучению. С использованием смешанная методология (n=72 ученика, 4 учителя) исследование выявило, что 70% учащихся демонстрируют умеренный или высокий уровень пассивности. Главными причинами являются страх сделать ошибку, стеснительность и ориентация на учителя. Пассивные учащиеся получают в среднем на 34 балла меньше, чем активные. Доказано, что Think-Pair-Share, групповая работа, формативное оценивание и создание эмоционально безопасной среды являются высокоэффективными стратегиями.

**Ключевые слова :** *пассивность учащихся, вовлеченность на уроке, 5-й класс, мотивация, интерактивное обучение, начальное образование, самоэффективность*

## INTRODUCTION

Student passivity is one of the most persistent and consequential challenges in primary education worldwide. In Grade 5 classrooms, a critical transitional year, students frequently remain silent during lessons, avoid answering questions, and refrain from participating in group discussions. Even when teachers create explicit opportunities for engagement, only a minority of students respond actively. This



problem carries serious long-term implications. Grade 5 marks the developmental stage at which children must shift from receptive, memory-based learning toward more complex cognitive operations: critical analysis, verbal reasoning, and collaborative problem-solving. When passivity becomes habitual at this stage, it can impair cognitive development, undermine academic achievement, and limit social competence well into adolescence.

Theoretical support for addressing passivity is robust. Vygotsky's Social Development Theory holds that cognitive growth is fundamentally social, constructed through dialogue and interaction with more knowledgeable peers or adults. Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis further argues that emotional states — particularly anxiety and low confidence — can suppress language output and cognitive engagement. Together, these frameworks underscore that passive classrooms do not merely fail to stimulate students; they actively impede development.

This study addresses three central research questions:

<b>RQ1</b>	What are the primary causes of student passivity in Grade 5 classrooms?
<b>RQ2</b>	What are the academic and social consequences of sustained passivity?
<b>RQ3</b>	Which evidence-based interventions most effectively reduce passive behavior?

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Student passivity — broadly defined as the absence of active participation in learning activities including speaking, questioning, and collaborating — has been



extensively studied across educational contexts. The literature identifies three interconnected causal domains.

### **Psychological Causes**

Bandura's theory of self-efficacy is central to understanding classroom passivity. Students with low self-efficacy beliefs — those who doubt their ability to succeed — consistently avoid challenging academic tasks. The anticipation of failure creates a self-protective silence: it is less threatening not to try than to try and fail publicly. This fear of negative evaluation intensifies in classrooms where errors are treated as failures rather than as learning opportunities.

### **Instructional Causes**

Teacher-centered pedagogy restricts student participation by reducing classroom interaction to a one-way transmission model. When teachers dominate discourse, students assume the passive role of receivers. Hattie's landmark meta-analysis of over 800 studies confirms that teacher-student interaction and high-quality feedback rank among the most powerful determinants of student achievement. Classrooms that lack structured interactive activities systematically deprive students of the dialogic engagement necessary for deep learning.

### **Social and Environmental Causes**

Social dynamics exert powerful influence on classroom participation, particularly in the late primary years when peer approval becomes increasingly salient. Students who fear ridicule or negative judgment from classmates choose silence as a social strategy. Environmental factors compound this: large class sizes reduce individual participation opportunities, fixed seating arrangements limit collaborative interaction, and inadequate lesson time restricts the use of student-centered activities. Deci and Ryan's Self-Determination Theory provides a further explanatory lens. When students' basic psychological needs — autonomy,



competence, and relatedness — are not met, intrinsic motivation diminishes and passive behavior increases. Effective classroom environments must therefore be designed to actively support all three needs simultaneously.

## METHODOLOGY

This study employed a mixed-methods research design, integrating quantitative and qualitative data to provide a comprehensive picture of passivity in Grade 5 settings. Research was conducted across three classes comprising 72 students and 4 teachers over a four-week observation period.

Method	Purpose	Participants
Classroom Observation	Measure frequency and type of participation	72 students, 4 classes
Student Questionnaire	Assess attitudes, confidence, and reported causes	72 students
Teacher Interviews	Identify behavioral patterns and perceived barriers	4 teachers
Academic Records	Compare scores across participation groups	72 students

Structured observation checklists recorded participation frequency across three behavioral categories: answering teacher questions, engaging in group tasks, and volunteering unsolicited contributions. Questionnaire data were analyzed using descriptive statistics; interview transcripts were coded thematically to identify recurring explanatory patterns.

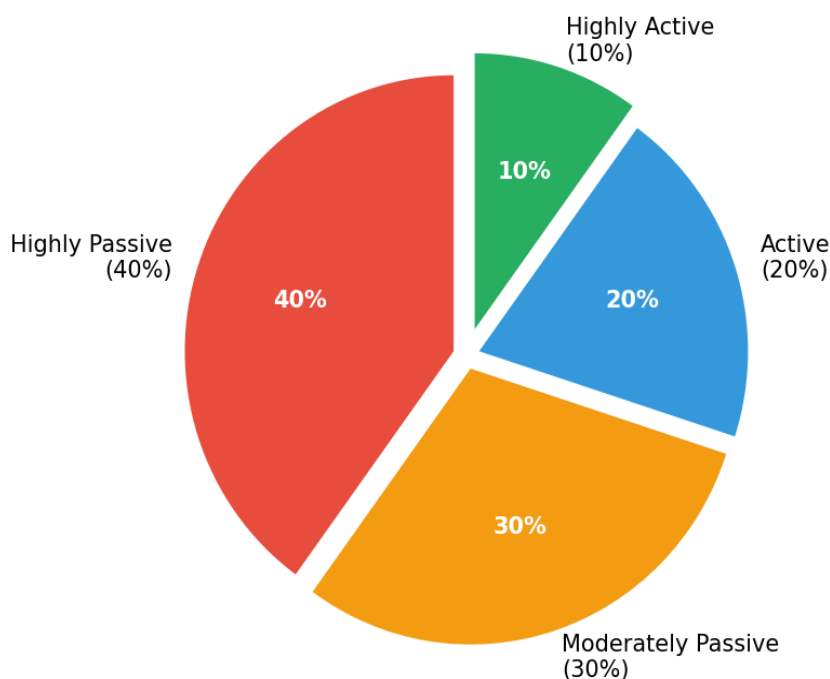
## RESULTS AND FINDINGS

### Participation Levels



The findings confirm that student passivity is pervasive. Across all three observed classes, 70% of students demonstrated moderate or high levels of passivity. Only 30% participated regularly or enthusiastically. The distribution is illustrated in Figure 1.

**Figure 1: Student Participation Levels  
(n = 72 students)**



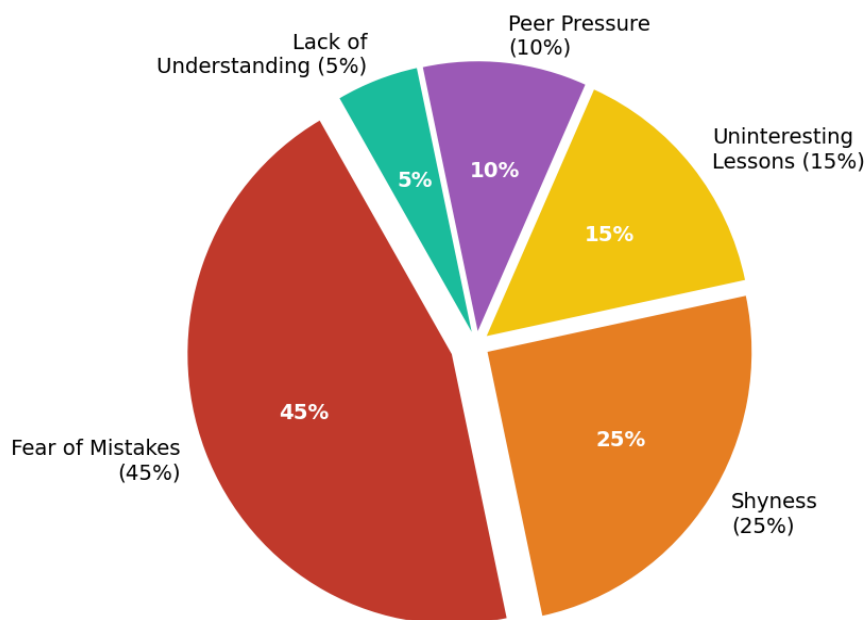
*Figure 1: Distribution of Student Participation Levels (n = 72)*

As Figure 1 illustrates, the largest single group — 40% of students — are highly passive, contributing rarely or never to class discussion. Combined with the 30% who are moderately passive, this means seven out of every ten students are not meaningfully engaged in their own learning.

Five causes of passivity were identified through student self-report. Fear of making mistakes was overwhelmingly the most frequently cited factor, reported by nearly half of all students. Figure 2 presents the full distribution.



**Figure 2: Main Causes of Student Passivity  
(n = 72 students)**



*Figure 2: Main Causes of Student Passivity — Student Survey Results (n = 72)*

Fear of mistakes (45%) dominates, followed by shyness (25%), uninteresting lessons (15%), peer pressure (10%), and lack of understanding (5%). This pattern strongly suggests that the emotional climate of the classroom — rather than students' cognitive limitations — is the primary driver of passive behavior. Creating psychologically safe environments is therefore the most urgent priority.

### **Academic Performance Comparison**

A significant and consistent relationship between participation level and academic performance was identified. The differences between groups are substantial and statistically meaningful, as illustrated in Figure 3.

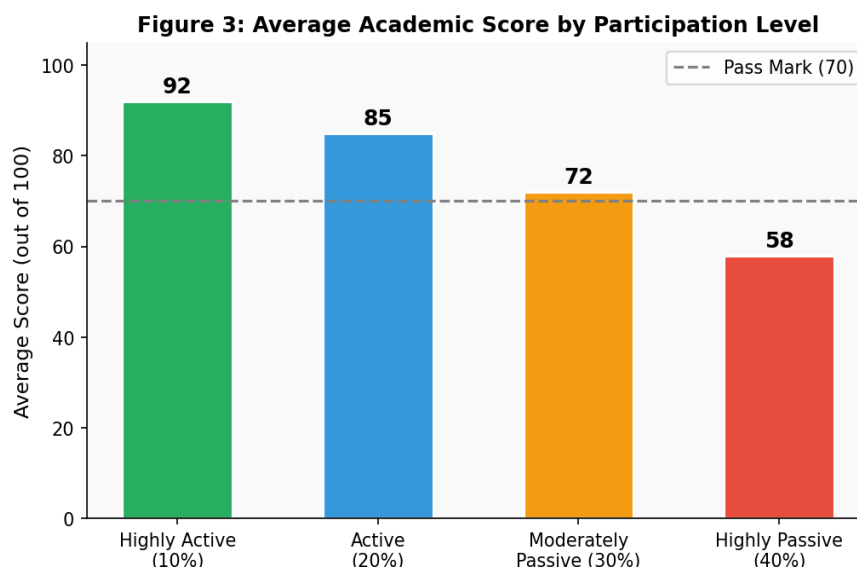


Figure 3: Average Academic Score by Participation Level (out of 100)

Participation Group	Share of Class	Avg. Score	Performance Level
Highly Active	10%	92 / 100	Excellent
Active	20%	85 / 100	Good
Moderately Passive	30%	72 / 100	Satisfactory
Highly Passive	40%	58 / 100	Below Average

The 34-point gap between highly active and highly passive students confirms that classroom participation is not a peripheral behavioral issue — it is a direct determinant of academic achievement. Students below the 70-point pass threshold are drawn almost exclusively from the passive groups.

## DISCUSSION



The results confirm that student passivity in Grade 5 constitutes a serious and multi-causal barrier to learning. The findings align closely with established theoretical frameworks and extend the empirical evidence base in several important respects.

The dominance of fear of mistakes as a causal factor is consistent with Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis. High anxiety creates a cognitive barrier that suppresses both verbal output and cognitive engagement. For a student who anticipates judgment, the classroom becomes a high-stakes performance arena rather than a safe learning environment. This dynamic is especially powerful at Grade 5, where peer relationships and social comparison become developmentally salient. Merrill Swain's Output Hypothesis provides complementary insight: language and cognitive development require active production, not merely receptive exposure. A student who listens but never speaks, reads but never writes, observes but never contributes, is being denied the very processes that drive learning. Passive classrooms thus do not just fail to stimulate students — they structurally prevent the cognitive engagement necessary for growth. The instructional dimension is equally significant. Teacher-centered classrooms reduce student participation by design. However, teachers in this study reported a notable observation: when structured interactive activities were introduced, even typically passive students began to engage. This suggests that passivity is not an immutable trait but a context-dependent behavior — one that responds positively to deliberate instructional changes.

### **EVIDENCE-BASED INTERVENTIONS**

Based on both the empirical findings and the existing literature, six strategies are recommended for reducing student passivity and building more engaged classrooms. Figure 4 presents teacher effectiveness ratings for five of these strategies.

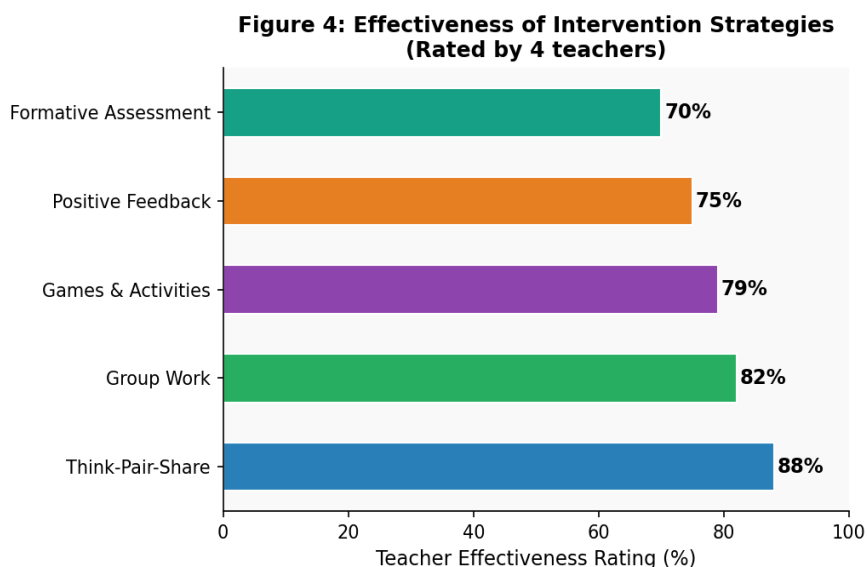


Figure 4: Teacher Effectiveness Ratings for Intervention Strategies (n = 4 teachers)

Strategy	Description	Effectiveness Rating
Think-Pair-Share	Students think individually, discuss with a partner, then share with the class	88%
Group Work	Small groups reduce audience size and social risk for shy students	82%
Games & Activities	Educational games lower stakes and increase intrinsic motivation	79%
Positive Feedback	Treating mistakes as learning steps builds psychological safety	75%



Formative Assessment	Low-stakes exit tickets and signals identify struggling students discreetly	70%
Classroom Culture	Respect norms, flexible seating, and encouraging displays build belonging	High impact

A critical cross-cutting principle emerges from both the findings and the strategy ratings: emotional safety precedes academic engagement. Before any specific technique can be effective, students must believe that their classroom is a place where honest effort — including the honest effort that produces mistakes — will be welcomed rather than judged. Building this culture is not a soft or secondary concern; it is the foundational precondition for all other interventions.

### Conclusion

Student passivity in Grade 5 classrooms is widespread, significant, and solvable. This study shows that 70% of students display moderate or high passivity, mainly driven by fear of making mistakes, and highly passive students score about 34 points lower than active peers. Therefore, reducing passivity is essential not just for classroom management, but for improving learning outcomes and ensuring equal educational opportunities. Interactive methods like Think-Pair-Share and group work are effective, but only when supported by a classroom environment where participation feels safe and valued. Overall, passivity is not simply a student issue—it is shaped by emotional, social, instructional, and environmental factors. Addressing it requires improving teaching practices, building a supportive classroom culture, and ensuring students' psychological safety. In summary, most students are affected by passivity, fear is the main cause, academic performance is



significantly impacted, and emotional safety is the key condition for engagement. Future research should explore long-term effects and test these findings with larger, more diverse groups.

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