



Teacher Strategies to Support Children with Selective Mutism in the Classroom

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Article Info

Abstract

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Selective mutism (SM) presents unique challenges in the classroom, characterized by an inability to speak in specific social situations despite normal verbal abilities in other settings. This literature review aims to identify effective strategies for supporting children with SM. The objectives include understanding SM, educating the school community, and implementing individualized support strategies. The review employs a synthesis of current research to outline key approaches, emphasizing the importance of comprehensive awareness to avoid misconceptions and foster a supportive environment. Findings highlight the need for early identification, tailored interventions, and accommodating both verbal and non-verbal communication. Effective collaboration among teachers, parents, and therapists is essential for consistent support and progress. The review concludes that a holistic, empathetic approach combined with targeted strategies and community-wide education is critical for creating an inclusive classroom environment that supports the academic and social development of children with SM.

1. INTRODUCTION

Selective mutism (SM) is a complex and often overlooked psychological phenomenon that poses unique challenges within the classroom setting. Characterized by a persistent inability to speak in social situations, such as school, SM is classified as an anxiety disorder under the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition (DSM-5) (Kovac & Furr, 2019; Kristensen et al., 2019). This disorder manifests as a form of social withdrawal and non-verbal communication in response to anxiety-provoking situations. Due to its rarity, SM remains largely underrepresented in educational discourse. Affecting approximately 0.1-1% of children worldwide, SM is more prevalent in girls and typically emerges between the ages of 2 and 5 (Sharp et al., 2007). This lack of awareness can lead to misinterpretations and ineffective interventions by teachers, as limited knowledge about the condition hinders their ability to recognize the unique needs of affected students. Consequently, children with SM may face hindered social and intellectual development.

Selective mutism (SM) is an anxiety disorder characterized by a child's consistent inability to speak in certain social settings, such as school, despite speaking normally in other environments, like at home. This condition arises from the child's anxiety and fear in specific social situations that make them uncomfortable (Child Mind Institute, 2023; Kristensen et al., 2019; McDaniel, 2021; Muris & Ollendick, 2021; Saburi, 2018). The American Psychiatric Association (APA) (2013) classifies SM as an anxiety disorder and states that SM is diagnosed using specific criteria outlined in the DSM-IV. Emphasizing the developmental nature of the disorder, it usually manifests before adulthood (Anstendig, 1999; Sharp et al., 2007). It is not due to a lack of knowledge of the language or a communication disorder. Children with SM can speak normally where they feel safe but remain silent in expected

speaking situations (Cohan et al., 2008; Kristensen et al., 2019; NORD, 2011). The primary characteristic of SM is the inability to speak in unfamiliar or challenging social environments, which does not align with their verbal abilities. SM is not fully understood, but genetic factors, behavioral inhibition, and environmental influences like parenting style and family dynamics play roles in its development (Erawati & Juherna, 2023; Kristensen et al., 2019; Muris & Ollendick, 2021). It is often associated with social anxiety disorder and other anxiety disorders, with children showing high levels of social anxiety and comorbid anxiety disorders (Child Mind Institute, 2023; Erawati & Juherna, 2023; Kristensen et al., 2019; McDaniel, 2021). Prevalence rates for SM vary significantly, typically between 0.03% and 1.9%, with a higher occurrence in school-aged children (Muris & Ollendick, 2021; Sharp et al., 2007).

The disorder's prevalence and identification are influenced by the context of studies, such as clinical, school, or general population settings, and the age range of the children studied (Muris & Ollendick, 2021). Children with SM may also have other issues like speech and language difficulties, developmental delays, and autism spectrum disorders, complicating their treatment (Muris & Ollendick, 2021; Saburi, 2018; Sharp et al., 2007b; Wong, 2010). The disorder's impact can significantly disrupt an individual's social, educational, and emotional development, necessitating early identification and intervention (Kos, 2023; Longobardi et al., 2019; Martinez et al., 2015; Welsh, 2017). Teachers play a crucial role in identifying and supporting students with SM, but a lack of awareness and understanding among educators can delay diagnosis and appropriate intervention (McDaniel, 2021).

Children with selective mutism (SM) face significant communication barriers, often refusing to speak to certain people, including peers and teachers, in social settings such as school. This refusal can last for years, leading to challenges in participation, asking questions, presenting, or seeking help, potentially causing school avoidance and separation anxiety (Erawati & Juherna, 2023; Martinez et al., 2015; Omdal, 2008; White & Bond, 2022). SM also disrupts social interactions, as children with SM struggle to initiate or respond to social interactions, affecting their ability to form friendships and engage in group activities, which can lead to social isolation (Fahrunnisa, 2022; Longobardi et al., 2019; Omdal, 2008; Wijayanti & Murtini, 2021; Williams et al., 2021). Academically, children with SM may have difficulties participating in activities requiring verbal responses, impacting their academic achievement. Teachers might find it challenging to accurately assess their understanding and learning, and their silence can be misinterpreted as a lack of knowledge or interest (Erawati & Juherna, 2023; Longobardi et al., 2019; Omdal, 2008; Williams et al., 2021). Emotionally, the anxiety and frustration associated with SM can affect the child's self-esteem and confidence, leading to feelings of helplessness and exclusion. This emotional strain can negatively impact their psychological and emotional well-being, hindering social and cognitive development (Omdal, 2008; Williams et al., 2021). Therefore, providing appropriate support is crucial to help children with SM manage their anxiety, build positive self-esteem, and engage more effectively with their surroundings.

The etiology of SM is multifaceted and can vary across cultures and contexts (Kovac & Furr, 2019; Kristensen et al., 2019). While the exact cause remains elusive, genetic and environmental factors are considered to play significant roles. Genetic predisposition may increase the likelihood of SM, while environmental triggers, such as trauma or stress, can precipitate its onset (Cohan et al., 2008; Kristensen et al., 2019). The course and prognosis of SM are also variable, with some children exhibiting spontaneous recovery while others require ongoing support. Therefore, children with selective mutism (SM) will face barriers in communicating with people around them for an indefinite period. Early identification and treatment of SM are crucial, and teachers play a role in identifying and supporting these children (Martinez et al., 2015). Research shows that treating children with SM is more effective when started earlier. Delays in appropriate intervention can result in a longer healing process (Cohan et al., 2006; Kovac & Furr, 2019). Conversely, recognizing and addressing selective mutism at an early stage can have a significant impact on the prognosis and outcomes for individuals with SM. Thus, it is important for educators, parents, and mental health professionals to identify and address SM as soon as possible to facilitate better communication development in affected children.

In the context of education, selective mutism (SM) can be a serious barrier to student participation in learning activities such as discussions, question-and-answer sessions, and presentations. In situations where speaking is a crucial means of communication, the silence of a child experiencing selective mutism can be misunderstood as cognitive inability or as a manifestation of their negative behavior. Effective communication between teachers and students is a cornerstone in the context of education. Good interaction not only facilitates an optimal teaching and learning process but also creates meaningful experiences for students. Huriaty, 2010 emphasizes that communication is a primary means in learning, where speaking and writing become crucial tools in reconstructing students' experiences. Through this communication, students can relate new experiences to their past experiences. Additionally, Masdul, 2018 highlights that effective communication between teachers and students directly impacts the achievement of learning objectives. When communication flows smoothly, the learning process becomes more meaningful as information can be conveyed clearly and students are more engaged in learning activities. Through communication, students can also express their understanding of the lesson material, share ideas with classmates, and actively participate in group activities.

In the learning context, two-way interaction between teachers and students, as well as among students themselves, plays a vital role in the exchange of information and ideas (Huriaty, 2010; Masdul, 2018). However,

for children with selective mutism (SM), discussions, Q&A sessions, and presentations can be serious obstacles. They may find it difficult or even unable to participate actively verbally due to the social anxiety they experience. Teachers also face challenges in facilitating children with SM. Teachers can feel frustrated and powerless when students do not show progress despite the efforts made in teaching (Saburi, 2018; White & Bond, 2022; Williams et al., 2021). Additionally, they face difficulties in obtaining special support and resources for students with selective mutism (SM) (White & Bond, 2022; Williams et al., 2021). Another challenge is adhering to school policies and curriculum standards that require verbal participation from students, making the assessment of students' abilities difficult (White & Bond, 2022).

Despite being faced with such conditions, teachers still need to find appropriate strategies to help students with this condition feel comfortable and engaged in classroom interactions. Additionally, they must create an inclusive and supportive classroom environment (Saburi, 2018; Williams et al., 2021) where all students feel heard and valued for their contributions, including children with SM. Selective mutism (SM) presents unique challenges in the educational setting, where traditional approaches often lack specificity in addressing the diverse needs of affected students. Previous research has primarily focused on psychological interventions (Bergman et al., 2013; Cohan et al., 2006), characteristics (Kristensen et al., 2019b; Muris & Ollendick, 2021; Sahidin et al., 2020), and strategies (Elizur & Perednik, 2003; McDaniel, 2021) for managing SM without categorizing these approaches into structured frameworks. This study aims to fill this gap by systematically categorizing teacher strategies into broader, more comprehensive points. By organizing the strategies into major categories, this research offers a clearer and more actionable framework for educators. The novelty of this approach lies in its ability to synthesize and streamline existing methods into a cohesive model, providing a practical guide for teachers to implement more effective support for students with SM. This categorization not only clarifies the application of various strategies but also enhances their effectiveness by focusing on their practical integration within the classroom environment.

2. METHODS

This journal will summarize and categorize how teachers can support children with selective mutism in the classroom through a literature review of various relevant research journals. This study employed a literature review methodology to examine and categorize strategies for supporting children with selective mutism (SM) in the classroom. Given the rarity and complexity of SM, a systematic approach was necessary to gather comprehensive insights from existing research. The method consists of several crucial steps: formulating the research question, selecting relevant databases, setting inclusion and exclusion criteria, performing the search, and analyzing the results. The main research question guiding this review is: "What strategies do teachers use to support children with selective mutism in educational settings?" This question aims to uncover effective practices and interventions that educators can implement to promote communication and participation among students with selective mutism.

To begin, a systematic literature search was conducted across academic databases, including Google Scholar, PubMed, and ERIC. Keywords such as "selective mutism," "classroom strategies," and "interventions" were used to identify relevant journals and articles. Studies included in the review were peer-reviewed and specifically addressed strategies for managing SM within educational settings, with a focus on intervention techniques, teacher strategies, and case studies. Data extraction involved collecting relevant information from selected articles, including study objectives, methods, participant characteristics, and reported strategies for managing SM. This process ensured that key insights from each study were captured and available for analysis.

The collected strategies were then categorized into major themes based on their functionality and application. This categorization process involved identifying recurring strategies and grouping them into broader categories. The aim was to create a structured framework that could provide actionable guidance for educators. No primary data collection instruments were used in this study, as it relied on existing literature. Instead, a systematic review protocol was developed to ensure consistency in the literature search and data extraction processes. The validity of the categorization was confirmed through peer review and cross-checking by multiple researchers, ensuring accuracy and comprehensiveness. The research steps included conducting the literature search, selecting and extracting data from relevant studies, categorizing and analyzing the strategies, and synthesizing the findings to develop a comprehensive framework for teacher strategies. This structured approach aimed to enhance understanding and application of effective strategies for supporting children with selective mutism in educational settings.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

To support children with selective mutism (SM) in the classroom, teachers must develop a comprehensive understanding of the disorder. According to (White & Bond, 2022), it is crucial for teachers to learn about SM to grasp the underlying anxiety and recognize that children with SM are not being defiant. This understanding helps dispel common misconceptions, such as believing that children with SM do not speak because they are shy or rebellious. By acknowledging the complexity of SM, teachers can provide more effective and appropriate support to their students.

Educating both staff and students about SM can foster a supportive environment, preventing verbal or physical harassment and encouraging peers to assist their classmates (Kos, 2023; Kristensen et al., 2019). White & Bond (2022) emphasize the importance of informing other school staff about SM to create a supportive environment. Educating classmates about SM helps raise awareness and understanding, ensuring that students with SM feel comfortable and accepted. Collaborative efforts involving teachers, staff, students, and parents are vital for fostering a school community where children with SM feel supported.

Early identification and assessment of individual needs are crucial for planning appropriate interventions, as the characteristics of SM can vary widely among children. Kristensen et al. (2019) explain that the range of SM characteristics varies from children who can communicate nonverbally and interact with peers to those who completely avoid social settings, experiencing more severe impairment. Teachers must recognize this spectrum and tailor their approaches to meet each student's unique needs. Kos (2023) underscores the importance of promptly addressing the difficulties of students with SM by identifying their individual abilities, developmental needs, and educational requirements through daily interactions. Early identification of SM symptoms aids in timely planning and implementation of interventions.

In summary, teacher strategies focusing on understanding and awareness of SM, including knowledge, socialization, early identification, and individualized approaches, are essential for supporting students with SM. By developing a comprehensive understanding of SM, raising awareness throughout the school community, and tailoring approaches based on individual student needs, teachers can create a supportive and inclusive environment. Collaborative efforts involving teachers, school staff, students, and parents are critical to ensuring that students with SM receive the support they need to succeed academically and socially.

Creating a supportive learning environment for students with selective mutism (SM) involves adapting instructional approaches to meet their unique needs. Adaptations include modifying the content, materials, or instructional strategies to cater to these students effectively. Kos (2023) emphasizes the importance of teachers adjusting their methods to suit the abilities and needs of students with SM. Such adjustments help students participate more comfortably in classroom activities. For instance, White & Bond (2022) suggest that teachers can facilitate non-verbal participation by encouraging gestures like nodding, pointing, or writing. Utilizing non-verbal communication methods such as gestures, writing, or picture cards can help students engage without the pressure of speaking (Saburi, 2018). Incorporating multi-sensory activities, including visual and tactile elements, can also support language connection and participation over time, leading to gradual verbal engagement.

Accommodations for children with SM involve changes in how they learn or are assessed without altering the actual content or learning objectives. White & Bond (2022) indicate that teachers should modify their expectations for verbal participation, avoiding calling on these students or requiring them to give oral presentations. Accommodations may also include providing extra time for tests or assignments and using alternative assessment methods that do not necessitate verbal communication. Implementing these strategies can create an inclusive and supportive learning environment, making students with SM feel more comfortable and actively engaged in the learning process.

Adaptation generally refers to changes made to the educational environment, curriculum, or instructional methods to help students overcome barriers to learning. This can involve altering the way content is delivered or assessed to suit the needs of individual students. Adaptations are part of specially designed instruction and are often implemented for students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). They can include changes in the presentation, response, setting, timing, and scheduling of assignments or assessments. Accommodation, on the other hand, refers to changes in how a student accesses information and demonstrates learning, without altering the educational standards or expectations (IDAHO SESTA, 2022). Accommodations are intended to "level the playing field" by providing students with the means to demonstrate their knowledge without being hindered by their disabilities. Examples include allowing a student to provide oral responses instead of written ones or providing additional time for tests. Accommodations do not change what is being taught but rather how it is taught or assessed. Both adaptation and accommodation are crucial in ensuring that students with disabilities can participate meaningfully in general education settings and achieve their educational goals.

Gradually exposing students to anxiety-inducing situations in a controlled manner and avoiding forcing verbal communication are crucial strategies for supporting students with SM. Teachers can help reduce anxiety and build confidence by creating a structured, predictable, and supportive classroom environment (Kovac & Furr, 2019; Kristensen et al., 2019; Saburi, 2018). Establishing clear routines and schedules can lower anxiety levels, as can using visual aids like picture schedules (Saburi, 2018). Additionally, allowing students to acclimate to the classroom environment, such as arriving early and seating them near friends who provide comfort, can be beneficial (Kristensen et al., 2019; Saburi, 2018). It's important to avoid negative comments about the child's inability to speak, as this can increase anxiety (Saburi, 2018). Reducing pressure and expectations for speaking, while accepting non-verbal communication initially, is also recommended (Kristensen et al., 2019).

Other strategies include asking choice questions that require brief responses and praising any verbal participation, considering the student's reactions (Saburi, 2018). Teachers should provide alternative communication methods while still offering opportunities for verbal practice (White & Bond, 2022). Allowing communication in small, comfortable groups before larger ones can reduce anxiety. Recognizing anxiety triggers

and providing support like breaks, access to the bathroom, and opportunities to calm down are essential (Saburi, 2018). Gradual exposure to anxiety-inducing situations should be controlled and aligned with the student's therapy (Saburi, 2018). Avoiding the forceful encouragement of speaking is crucial, as it can exacerbate anxiety (Kristensen et al., 2019). Assigning small responsibilities to boost confidence and praising verbal attempts, even if whispered, can gradually lead to clearer and more complex speech (Kristensen et al., 2019b; White & Bond, 2022). Patience and a warm, understanding relationship can provide a sense of safety and comfort, helping students develop trust and feel less anxious at school.

Building close collaboration to help students with selective mutism (SM) involves regular and effective communication between teachers, parents, and therapists. Kristensen et al. (2019) highlight the importance of teachers working closely with parents and the child's therapist to ensure a consistent approach across different environments. This collaboration is essential for all parties involved to understand the child's needs and support each other in providing assistance. Saburi (2018) further explains that teachers need to coordinate with parents to align their care plans and implement coordinated techniques such as modeling, shaping, prompting, and stimulus fading. Consistency in approach across all settings is crucial for the child's progress. Additionally, teachers should collaborate with school psychologists to develop appropriate behavioral intervention plans (Kos, 2023).

Regular communication between teachers, parents, and therapists is vital. Teachers should hold routine meetings to discuss the child's progress, successful strategies, and areas needing adjustment while celebrating small victories (White & Bond, 2022). Parents bring valuable expertise about their child, making their involvement critical. Teachers should also share their observations with parents, as symptoms of SM often become more apparent when the child starts school or kindergarten (Kristensen et al., 2019). Moreover, it is important for teachers to educate themselves, other school staff, students, and parents about SM to create awareness and support throughout the school community (Kos, 2023). With a better understanding of SM as an anxiety-related condition, rather than defiance or shyness, teachers can adopt more sensitive and accommodating approaches aimed at reducing student anxiety. Effective collaboration and communication enable a comprehensive, school-wide approach that is most beneficial for students with selective mutism.

By fostering an understanding of SM, creating a supportive environment, and maintaining open communication and collaboration, teachers can effectively support children with selective mutism, helping them to thrive both academically and socially (Kos, 2023). Overall, strategies that emphasize understanding and awareness of selective mutism (SM)—including knowledge, socialization, early identification, and personalized approaches—are vital for effectively supporting students with this condition. By cultivating a deep understanding of SM, promoting awareness throughout the school community, and customizing strategies to meet the unique needs of each student, teachers can foster a supportive and inclusive environment. Collaborative efforts among teachers, school staff, students, and parents are crucial to ensure that students with SM receive the necessary support to communicate in ways that are understandable to others. This approach not only enhances classroom participation but also contributes to the social development of these children. Creating a supportive learning environment for students with selective mutism (SM) involves a multifaceted approach that encompasses understanding the disorder, fostering awareness, and implementing tailored strategies. This comprehensive approach is crucial for helping children with SM communicate better and interact more effectively with their teachers and peers.

Table 1 and Table 2 outlines the comprehensive strategies for supporting children with selective mutism (SM) in the classroom, categorizing them into three primary areas: Understanding SM, Creating a Supportive Environment, and Collaboration and Communication. At the core of these strategies is Understanding SM, which involves educators gaining a deep understanding of selective mutism as an anxiety disorder. This foundation helps dispel misconceptions and ensures that teachers are better equipped to provide appropriate support. According to White and Bond (2022), understanding the underlying anxiety in SM is crucial for recognizing that children with SM are not being defiant but are experiencing significant anxiety. This understanding serves as the basis for implementing effective support strategies. Creating a Supportive Environment branches into three subcategories below.

First, adaptation. This involves modifying instructional materials and classroom routines to accommodate the needs of students with sm. Teachers can use alternative communication methods, such as gestures and writing, to facilitate student participation without the pressure of verbal communication (saburi, 2018). Second, accommodation. Teachers adjust their expectations for verbal participation and assessment methods. This includes allowing students with sm to communicate non-verbally and providing alternative assessment methods that do not require speaking (white & bond, 2022). These accommodations ensure that students with sm can demonstrate their understanding and skills in a supportive setting. Third, building confidence & reducing anxiety. Strategies to build confidence and reduce anxiety are critical. This involves gradual exposure to anxiety-inducing situations, structured routines, visual aids, and praise for small achievements (kovac & furr, 2019; kristensen et al., 2019; saburi, 2018). By creating a predictable and supportive classroom environment, teachers can help reduce the anxiety levels of students with sm. Fourth, collaboration and communication emphasizes the importance of regular and effective communication among teachers, parents, and therapists. Fifth, regular communication. Routine

meetings to discuss the child's progress and adjust strategies are essential. Consistent communication ensures that all parties are aligned and can celebrate the child's successes and address any challenges promptly (white & bond, 2022). Sixth, consistent approach. Coordination of care plans and strategies between the school and home is crucial. This consistency helps reinforce the support provided to the child across different environments (kos, 2023; saburi, 2018). Educating the entire school community about sm fosters a more understanding and inclusive environment (kos, 2023). By fostering an understanding of sm, creating a supportive environment, and maintaining open communication and collaboration, teachers can effectively support children with selective mutism, helping them to thrive both academically and socially. This comprehensive approach not only enhances classroom participation but also contributes to the social development of these children.

Table 1. Strategies for Supporting Children with Selective Mutism (SM)

Strategies	Categories	Main Categories
The importance of studying SM to understand the underlying anxiety and recognize that children with SM do not intend to be oppositional (White & Bond, 2022).	Understanding and Characteristics	Understanding and Awareness of Selective Mutism (SM)
Teachers understand that children with SM do not speak because they are shy or defiant (White & Bond, 2022).	Understanding and Characteristics	
In certain social situations, such as at school, children with SM may not speak or make any sound, leading to failure in participating, asking questions, giving presentations, or seeking help when they don't understand a concept (Erawati & Juherna, 2023; Hazhari, 2021; White & Bond, 2022).	Understanding and Characteristics	
Children with SM struggle to initiate or respond to social interactions, affecting their ability to form friendships and engage in group activities (Fahrurnnisa, 2022; Omdal, 2008; Williams et al., 2021).	School- Wide Awareness	
Providing classmates with an understanding of SM prevents verbal or physical bullying against SM students and fosters role awareness (Kristensen et al., 2019).	School- Wide Awareness	
Educating other school staff about SM to create a supportive environment (White & Bond, 2022).	School- Wide Awareness	
Children with SM experience difficulties due to their inability to express their needs or participate in verbal activities (Longobardi et al., 2019; Omdal, 2008).	Early Identification and Assessment	
It is crucial to promptly address the difficulties of SM students and identify their individual abilities, developmental needs, and educational needs through daily interactions (Kos, 2023).	Early Identification and Assessment	
It is crucial for teachers to adapt their approaches to meet the needs and abilities of students, particularly in effectively supporting students with selective mutism (Kos, 2023).	Learning Adaptation	Creating a Supportive Environment
Gradually exposing students to anxiety-triggering situations in a controlled manner, aligned with ongoing therapy, helps in the adaptation process (Saburi, 2018).	Learning Adaptation	
Modify classroom routines and materials to suit SM students (Kos, 2023).	Learning Adaptation	
Use alternative communication methods like gestures, writing, and picture cards (Saburi, 2018).	Learning Adaptation	
Adjust expectations for verbal participation (White & Bond, 2022).	Learning Accomodation	
Using non-verbal communication methods, such as gestures, writing, or picture cards, can help students participate without the pressure of verbal communication (Saburi, 2018).	Learning Accomodation	
Teachers can avoid calling on students with selective mutism or asking them to perform oral presentations (White & Bond, 2022).	Learning Accomodation	
Providing accommodations such as extended time on tests or assignments, or using alternative assessment methods that do not require verbal communication, ensures students can still demonstrate their knowledge (White & Bond, 2022).	Learning Accomodation	
Teachers can facilitate non-verbal participation and responses from students with selective mutism, ensuring they are still engaged in the learning process (White & Bond, 2022).	Learning Accomodation	

Table 2. Strategies for Supporting Children with Selective Mutism (SM)

Strategies	Categories	Main Categories
Accommodations like alternative communication methods, while still providing opportunities for verbal communication practice, are essential in supporting students with selective mutism (White & Bond, 2022).	Learning Accomodation	
Offering students the chance to settle into the classroom, such as arriving early or seating them near a friend they are comfortable with, is an effective accommodation (Kristensen et al., 2019; Saburi, 2018).	Learning Accomodation	
Gradually expose students to anxiety-inducing situations in a controlled manner (Kovac & Furr, 2019).	Building Confidence and Reducing Anxiety	
Giving students with selective mutism small responsibilities can boost their confidence (White & Bond, 2022).	Building Confidence and Reducing Anxiety	
Avoid forcing verbal communication; use praise and small responsibilities to build confidence (Kristensen et al., 2019; White & Bond, 2022).	Building Confidence and Reducing Anxiety	
Create a structured, predictable environment to lower anxiety (Kristensen et al., 2019; Saburi, 2018).	Building Confidence and Reducing Anxiety	
Maintain effective communication between teachers, parents, and therapists (Kristensen et al., 2019; Saburi, 2018).	Regular Communication	Collaboration and Communication
Hold routine meetings to discuss progress and adjust strategies (White & Bond, 2022).	Regular Communication	
Coordinate with parents and therapists to align care plans and strategies (Kos, 2023).	Consistent Approach	
Educate the school community about SM to ensure consistent support (Kos, 2023).	Consistent Approach	

4. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, effectively supporting children with selective mutism (SM) in the classroom requires a multifaceted approach that emphasizes building trust to reduce anxiety. By fostering a safe and supportive environment, teachers can encourage children with SM to engage more actively in classroom activities. It is essential to recognize that these children can express their thoughts in various ways, not solely through verbal communication. By utilizing alternative methods of communication that are accessible and understandable to both the child and the teacher, educators can facilitate meaningful interactions and participation. Overall, a well-rounded, compassionate, and collaborative approach—centered on trust and diverse communication strategies—enables children with selective mutism to thrive academically and socially, ultimately enhancing their overall educational experience.

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