

Foreign Language Enjoyment and Boredom of Non-English-Majors in the EFL Classroom

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Abstract: This article aims to investigate two emotions, which are foreign language enjoyment and foreign language boredom of non-English majors in Chinese private colleges. FLES and FLBS, the two most commonly used instrument were used as items in the questionnaire. The data showed that teacher-related boredom could most determine learner's enjoyment in EFL classes though this kind of boredom scored the lowest of the seven dimensions of foreign language boredom.

Keywords: Foreign language enjoyment; Foreign language boredom; Non-English-majors; Chinese private colleges

1. Introduction

1.1 Positive Emotions in FL learning

An increasing attention had been paid to the emotions study in second language learning over the past decades, yet the focuses of these studies had undergone a shift from the Emotion Avoidance Phase to the Anxiety-Prevailing Phase, and to the Positive and Negative Emotions Phase. The main emotions involved are foreign language anxiety, foreign language enjoyment, and foreign language boredom and so on.

The emerging and development of Positive Psychology contributed to the study of positive emotions in language learning. Positive psychology, dedicating to the flourishing of individuals, communities and societies by creating a shift away from the dominant preoccupation with human weakness to understanding, cultivating and building human strengths (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi 2000), is committed to enabling learners' well-being as well as second language success.

Positive emotions had been proved to play essential roles beyond bring pleasant feelings (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012). From the perspective of classroom settings, positive emotions enhance students' concentration and increase learner's awareness of language input; in terms of mental regulation, positive emotions help flush out lingering effects of negative arousal. Besides, positive emotions help boost social cohesion as they encourage students to explore and play.

1.2 Foreign Language Enjoyment

Drawing on the theories of Positive Psychology, Dewaele and MacIntyre (2016) defined Foreign Language Enjoyment as "a complex emotion, capturing interacting dimensions of challenge and perceived ability that reflect the human drive for success in the face of difficult tasks (...) enjoyment occurs when people not only meet their needs, but exceed them to accomplish something new or even unexpected". FLE could emerge in both medium-arousal and high-arousal activities in the classroom. The correlations between FLE and other emotions had been confirmed by a large number of previous studies. For instance, there are negative correlations between Chinese EFL students' FLE and FLCA, between FLE and FLB, and a significant positive correlation between FLCA and FLB (Li & Han, 2022).

In terms of the measurement of FLE, Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014) developed a foreign language enjoyment (FLE) scale consisting of 21 items with Likert scale ratings reflecting positive emotions towards the learning experience, peers and teacher, which they combined with 8 items reflecting FLCA.

1.3 Foreign Language Boredom

As the counterpart of positive emotions, negative emotions, often cause alarming problems in contemporary classrooms. Foreign

language boredom, one of the negative emotions, is a silent one in the classroom which does not cause disruption as anxiety or anger, yet seriously impedes the learning process (Pawlak et al., 2022). Boredom is defined as a negative emotion composed of disengagement, dissatisfaction, attention deficit, altered time perception and decreased vitality; it is also underappreciated and trivialized by teachers who tend to ascribe it to student laziness, anxiety, depression or personality factors (Fahlman 2019).

There are a number of measurements for boredom. The foreign language boredom scale (FLBS) by Li in 2023 is the relatively comprehensive one that measures various dimensions of boredom in the FL classroom environment, and empirically supports the control-value theory in educational psychology, aiming to measure the Foreign Language Boredom of non-English-major EFL students in Chinese context. However, given its relatively late appearance, literature using this instrument to measure FLB is not sufficient.

1.4 Research Questions

In view of the above considerations, this study was designed to address the following research questions:

RQ 1: Which learner-related factors are more responsible for FLE and FLB in the FL classroom?

RQ 2: What is the relationship between FLE and FLB in each dimension?

2. Method

2.1 Sample Gathering

Convenience sampling was adopted in this study. Since Chinese universities have a clear hierarchy, the private undergraduate colleges selected in this sample are located at the bottom of undergraduate colleges, which are characterized by low academic level of students and large differences in English ability. EFL classes in private colleges are prone to the problems of boredom, yet some students could enjoy the classes and gain great academic scores.

As such, the author contacted colleagues from four private colleges with same rankings in Jiangsu Province and asked them to recruit their students as participants of the investigation. All the questionnaires were distributed by the APP “Wen Juanxing”, and they were compulsorily anonymous.

2.2 Participants and Learner-related Factors

Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014) identified a series of vital factors that are responsible for FLE. Given the characteristics of Chinese college students, the following independent variables are involved in the questionnaire, namely, gender, language being studied, relative standing, and academic achievement.

In terms of gender, 53.68% (n=51) of the sample was female, 46.32% (n=44) of the respondents were male.

In terms of language being studied, most students (n=70, 73.68%) have studied one language, followed by two languages (n=21, 22.11%), three (n=2, 2.11%) and four (n=2, 2.11%), and none of them selected “more than five”.

When asked about the relative standing in the whole class as a group, 6 described themselves as far below average (6.32%), 23 as below average (24.21%), 56 as average (58.95%), 9 as above average (9.47%) and 1 as far above average (1.05%).

When asked about academic achievement, the majority (n=45, 47.37%) of the sample got 70-79 in the last semester, followed by 80-89 (n=25, 26.32%), 60-69 (n=17, 17.89%), above 90 (n=5, 5.26%), and below 59 (n=3, 3.16%).

2.3 Instrument

The following instruments were used to measure variables in this study: one is the FLES made by Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014); the other is the FLBS made by Li in 2023. 19 items covering all the seven dimensions of boredom, which were FL classroom boredom, under-challenging task boredom, PPT boredom, homework boredom, teacher-dislike boredom, general learning trait boredom, and over-challenging and meaningless task boredom, were selected from the FLBS; and 8 items rating learners' attitude towards EFL were chosen from the FLES.

Questions 1 to 5 asked about learner-related information, questions 6 to 24 were related to FLES, and questions 25 to 32 invited participants to rate their attitudes towards ELF-related items. Responses were given on standard 5-point Likert scales with the anchors absolutely disagree = 1, disagree = 2, neither agree nor disagree = 3, agree = 4, strongly agree = 5.

3. Results

3.1 Quantitative data

The data was analyzed by SPSSAU, and the results are as follows: the mean score of FLE was 3.605, with the figure for SD was 0.691; as for the seven dimensions of FLB, PPT boredom takes the highest level (mean=2.891), followed by over-challenging or meaningless task boredom (mean=2.584), foreign language class boredom (mean=2.5), under-challenging task boredom

(mean=2.411), general trait boredom (mean=2.333), homework boredom (mean=2.274), and teacher related boredom (mean=1.972). This reveals that participants experienced more enjoyment in ELF classes than boredom.

3.2 Learner-related Factors for FLE and FLB

In order to answer RQ1, Pearson correlation analysis was conducted using SPSSAU. According to the data, none of the learner-related factors has a correlation with FLE, while the most obvious factor for FLB is the student's academic achievement. The correlation between FL class boredom and academic achievement was -0.208, with a significance of 0.05; and the correlation between teacher related boredom and academic achievement was -0.221, with a significance of 0.05.

3.3 The relationship between FLE and FLB

In order to answer RQ2, Pearson correlation analysis was conducted using SPSSAU. The results (table 1) showed that except for classroom boredom and PPT boredom, other dimensions of FLB were negatively correlated with FLE. Among all the dimensions of boredom, the teacher-related boredom could most determine students' enjoyment in EFL classes, indicating that EFL teachers should pay attention to the prediction of classes as well as build fine relationship with students.

Besides, trait-related boredom also influenced participant's enjoyment, indicating that the habits and states of the learners themselves would also affect their emotions in the classroom. Other than that, task-related boredom, not matter the under-challenging one or the over-challenging one, could affect classroom enjoyment. Therefore, teachers should carefully examine the difficulty and interest of the assigned task.

Table 1 Pearson correlation analysis

Dimensions of boredom	Under challenging	Over challenging	homework	Trait-related	Teacher-related	PPT	class
foreign language enjoyment	-0.309**	-0.338**	-0.328**	-0.350**	-0.482**	-0.160	-0.186

* $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$

4. Conclusion

The study measured the foreign language enjoyment and foreign language boredom of non-English-major students in Chinese private colleges by using FLES and FLBS. It found that students in ELF classes experienced more enjoyment than boredom; and the learner-related factors did not significantly influence the FLE in classes. Among the seven dimensions of FLB, teacher-related boredom could most determine the enjoyment in EFL classes, though teacher-related boredom scored the lowest of the boredom dimensions. As such, EFL teachers should pay special attention to and improve classroom teaching design, difficulty of task, and teacher-student relationship.

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