

# Foreign Language Classroom Boredom and Foreign Language Achievement: A Case Study of Chinese College English Class

Yuxi Shao<sup>1, a</sup> and Ziyu Wang<sup>1, b</sup>

<sup>1</sup>School of Foreign Languages and Cultures, Nanjing Normal University Taizhou College, Taizhou, 225300, China

<sup>a</sup>05200315@nnutc.edu.cn, <sup>b</sup>05200319@nnutc.edu.cn

## Abstract

With the rise and development of positive psychology, more and more scholars have begun to pay attention to the role of emotions in foreign language learning. Boredom is a kind of negative psychology and emotion, that has existed in foreign language learners for a long time but has been neglected by researchers and foreign language teachers. This research explores the relationship between foreign language boredom and foreign language achievement among Chinese college students based on the control-value theory. In this study, a questionnaire was used to investigate the foreign language classroom boredom (FLCB) level of 33 Chinese university students in the university English classroom and its predictive effect on foreign language achievement (FLA). By using both quantitative method, it is found that FLA and foreign language classroom boredom (FLCB) were negatively correlated (-.416), while boredom predicted 14.70% of variance of FLA. In this research, the scores of CET4 represent participants' Foreign Language Achievement(FLA).

## Keywords

Foreign Language Classroom Boredom, Foreign Language Achievement, emotion, College English Class.

## 1. Introduction

Since the introduction of positive psychology into the field of second language acquisition research in 2012, affective factors have received more and more attention from researchers. In recent years, learners' emotions have been an essential topic in the field of educational psychology, and the relationship between the causes of emotions and academic performance has generated a great deal of discussion. In the foreign language classroom, boredom may interfere with learners' foreign language information processing, constrain foreign language memory, and thus negatively affect foreign language performance. An in-depth understanding of the current state of research on boredom in foreign language learning can theoretically enrich the research results on emotion in foreign language learning, and explore practical ways to alleviate students' boredom.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Foreign Language Classroom Boredom(FLCB)

Foreign language learners experience a range of emotions in the classroom, including positive emotions such as enjoyment, pride and hope, and negative emotions such as anxiety, boredom and helplessness. (Pishghadam , Zabetipour. & Aminzade , 2016, p. 508 ).According to the control-value theory, foreign language classroom boredom is considered to be a negative, low-activation emotion caused by the task or activity the student is performing. Foreign language

academic boredom can be affected by various internal and external learner factors, such as learning style, task difficulty, and teacher enthusiasm. Experts in the field of educational psychology have studied boredom more thoroughly. They believe boredom is a negative psychological and emotional experience, an unpleasant, process-oriented negative academic emotion. FLCB has a greater negative effect on cognition, foreign language learning motivation and learning behaviours, causing learners to be distracted, to desert, to have a blank mind and to lose their goals. Li et al. (2021a). And according to the survey, boredom is a frequent foreign language classroom emotion. Li et al. (2021), after a series of validations, pointed out that the measurement of foreign language boredom consists of seven dimensions: foreign language classroom boredom, task-over-simplified boredom, PPT contextual boredom, homework contextual boredom, teacher boredom, learning trait boredom, and task-too-difficult-or-unmeaningful boredom.

## 2.2. Studies of the Relationship Between FLCB and FLA

A large number of previous empirical studies have explored the prediction or impact of FLCB on FLA. Based on these empirical results, Teimouri et al. (2019), Zhang (2019) and Botes et al. (2020) successively conducted meta-analyses, all of which showed that foreign language anxiety had a negative predictive effect ( $r = -.34, -.36, -.39$ ). Li and Han investigated the levels of pleasure, anxiety, and boredom and the relationship among them in online foreign language classes among 348 Chinese first-year non-English majors through a questionnaire, and examined the individual predictive and synergistic predictive effects of these three moods on learning effectiveness in online foreign language classes. The results showed that anxiety alone was still a significant predictor of test scores, and pleasure and boredom alone were significant predictors of self-assessed learning outcomes in online classes. Li et al examined 665 sixth-grade primary school students' foreign language classroom boredom and foreign language achievement of 665 sixth-grade primary school students, and found that there were significant urban-rural differences in both. differences between urban and rural areas, while the negative predictive effect of boredom in the foreign language classroom on English achievement was the same in both urban and rural areas. The study found that there were significant differences between urban and rural areas, while the negative predictive effect of FLCB on FLA was consistent between urban and rural areas. In another research, The author administered a questionnaire to 773 non-English speaking undergraduate students at ten universities across China and conducted semi-structured interviews with 12 of them. The results of the study showed that pleasure and boredom jointly predicted the level of self-assessment; whereas pleasure was a significant predictor of CET scores, boredom was not.

## 2.3. Research Questions

This study examines the association between college students' foreign language boredom and their foreign language achievement, which can help foreign language teachers better understand the nature of boredom and its triggering process, and take corresponding teaching interventions accordingly, so as to promote positive emotions to promote cognitive learning, and to maintain college students' interest and enthusiasm in foreign language subjects. For EFL learners, boredom, as a negative emotion, not only brings physiological tiredness to learners, but also negatively affects learners' academic achievement and academic performance. Learners who are bored for a long time will feel disgusted with foreign language learning. Current research on boredom in foreign language learning mainly focuses on the analysis of causes and the development of scales, and there are fewer empirical studies related to the relationship between individual differences and boredom among college students. The present study is conducted to investigate college students' foreign language learning boredom and its impact on English performance, which can make some contributions to improving the quality of university foreign language teaching.

This study is guided by the following questions:

- (1) What is the level of FLCB among college students?
- (2) What is the difference in the level of FLCB among college students of different grades?
- (3) What are the sources of FLCB among college students?
- (4) What is the predictive effect of college students' FLCB on their foreign language achievement?

### **3. Method**

#### **3.1. Sampling and Participants**

Prior to the participation, ethical approval for the study was obtained by the School of Foreign Languages and Cultures in N College. All the participants were informed that the data was collected for research only and they were entitled to refuse to take part in the study at any given time. The author forwarded the online questionnaire to the students via Wenjuanxing, a frequently used platform for online survey and data collection in China. A total of 33 college students in China constituted the final sample, with 6 males (18.20%) and 27 females (90.90%). The mean age of the sample was 20.55 (SD = 1.30). Although these participants came from different universities, at the time of data collection they had all taken a university English course and had sat College English Test Band 4 (CET4) by August 2023.

#### **3.2. Research Instrument**

##### **3.2.1. College English Test Band 4 (CET4)**

College English Test Band 4 is a large-scale standardized examination sponsored by the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China and hosted and administered by the National Education Examinations Authority, with the aim of promoting the teaching of English in Chinese universities and providing an objective and accurate measure of the English proficiency of university students. In addition, passing the CET4 is also one of the conditions for some Chinese universities to issue degree certificates to their students. The CET4 is held twice a year, probably in June and December. The written test consists of listening comprehension, reading comprehension, writing and translation, and a score of 425 is usually regarded as the passing standard for CET4.

##### **3.2.2. Questionnaire**

The questionnaire scale adopts Li Chengchen's Foreign Language Learning Boredom Scale (FLLBS), which is a 5-point Likert scale, including 26 items, with corresponding scores ranging from 1 (absolutely disagree) to 5 (absolutely agree), and the higher the score, the higher the boredom level of the subjects. The scale classifies FLCB into the following seven dimensions: boredom in the foreign language classroom, boredom with overly simple tasks, boredom with PPT situations, boredom with homework situations, boredom with teacher boredom, boredom with learning traits, and boredom with tasks that are too difficult or lacking in meaning. It was used to investigate students' level of boredom in foreign language learning on different dimensions.

### **4. Results and Discussions**

#### **4.1. Descriptive Analysis**

The descriptive results for the scores of CET4 and boredom are shown in Table 1. In this research, the scores of CET4 represent participants' Foreign Language Achievement (FLA). As indicated by Table 4-1, Among all the participants, the lowest FLA was 425, the highest was 614 and the mean score was 532.85 (SD=50.57). This reflects the fact that participants were largely

able to score well in the CET4. In terms of boredom, the sample had a mean of 81.06, standard deviation of 22.48. The highest boredom level reached 130, indicating that there were participants who were bored and disinterested in all dimensions of the foreign language classroom. The lowest boredom level of the participant was 43, indicating that he or she was able to maintain a foreign language pleasant mood with mild boredom in most situations. Most participants experienced moderately high levels of boredom in the classroom as inferred by the statistics of FLCB, which is similar to the foreign language boredom levels of the majority of college students in previous literature surveys. Influenced by the exam-oriented education environment for a long time, Chinese college students are still afraid of expressing themselves in the English classroom and are not interested in the boring and monotonous learning content, thus increasing the level of FLCB among college students.

**Table 1.** Descriptive Statistics

*N*=33

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
AGE	18	23	20.55	1.30
FLA	425	614	532.85	50.57
Boredom	43.00	130.00	81.06	22.48

#### 4.2. Predicative Effect of FLCB in FLA

After the descriptive analysis, the present study employed the Pearson Correlation Analysis (two-tailed) to explore the strength and direction of the relationship between participants' FLA and the boredom level in English class. According to the analysis, students' FLA significantly correlated with their FLCB in a medium negative level, at  $-.416$  ( $P < .05$ ). This outcome was consistent with previous studies. Foreign language enjoyment has a positive effect on English learning while FLCB has a negative effect (Guo Bing 2022). The results of these studies consistently indicate that students with lower levels of FLCB are more likely to achieve higher English grades, and vice versa. This finding echoes the results of Li's study of foreign language boredom among 348 students enrolled in online university English courses during the epidemic. The detrimental effects of FLCB are illustrated by the fact that as the level of classroom boredom increases, so does the level of boredom in students, which in turn leads to less interest and motivation in learning English, and therefore a decrease in English performance.

Since the correlation analysis could not reveal the predictive effect of FLCB on FLA, the linear regression analysis was then employed. By using the "Enter" regression method, the data reveal that classroom boredom could significantly predict students' FLA ( $\beta = -.416$ ,  $P < .05$ ). The adjusted  $R^2$  was .147 which indicated that the classroom boredom level can predict 14.7% variance of FLA. In comparison to the previous studies, this jointly confirms that FLCB has a moderate negative predictive effect on FLA. Compared to previous research on high school students' English academic achievement which explain 24% of the variance of English achievement, the present study found that FLCB was a lesser predictor of college students' foreign language academic achievement. This may be due to the fact that college students possess a stronger sense of self-efficacy and self-regulation (Guo Bing, 2022). Especially when faced with exams such as CET4, Chinese college students will practice a lot after class. These may attenuate the effect of FLCB on FLA to some extent. But the importance of classroom instruction is demonstrated by the direct causal effect of classroom boredom on students' performance in English. Classroom teaching is the main input route for foreign language learning. Teachers should focus on classroom teaching to induce students to concentrate on learning.

## 5. Discussion

According to the data of the research, most of the participants were easily bored and fed up with the instructor's style and methods of teaching. Therefore, to alleviate the FLCB of university students, it is more necessary to focus on the classroom and the teacher and to adopt flexible and innovative teaching modes or PPTs, so as to reduce their boredom. More relaxed English activities can also be carried out at the university. Teachers can also replace the same old PPT with more innovative and practical teaching materials. Reducing anxiety and boredom in the classroom can perpetuate or extend students' enjoyment of English in college and later in life. Teachers should improve the quality of classroom teaching in these areas so that research on foreign language teaching guided by positive psychology can be expanded both theoretically and practically. In this way, students can also reach higher achievements in various examinations.

Foreign language learners are more likely to feel bored as they grow older (Li 2022). This also calls for the continuous improvement and enrichment of educational resources and the expansion of teaching methods in the college English classroom. Teaching needs to be student-centered, actively constructing the teaching mode of teacher-student discussion, and integrating modern educational technology into teaching process, so as to achieve that students can actively participate in and enjoy the learning process with a positive mindset.

## 6. Conclusion

To sum up, this research examined the relationship between FLCB and FLA. Overall, as a common emotional experience, most Chinese college students have experienced it in college English classes. And it has a negative predictive effect on foreign language achievement. Through this study, it is intended to provide inspiration for teachers in future classes. In the future, some of the boredom emotions can be transformed into foreign language enjoyment in the university English classroom, which can promote the generation of students' positive emotions and help improve students' academic achievement, thus improving the effectiveness of foreign language teaching.

## References

- [1] C.C. Li, Y. Han, B.B. Li: A Study on the Relationship between Foreign Language Classrooms Boredom and Foreign Language Achievement in Elementary School and Rural-Urban Differences, Vol. 43 No. 3, p.50-55.
- [2] C.C Li, Y. Han: The Predictive Effects of Foreign Language Enjoyment, Anxiety, and Boredom on Learning Outcomes in Online English Classrooms, Vol. 45 No. 2, p.207-219.
- [3] B. Guo: The Relationship Between Classroom Emotions (Enjoyment and Boredom) and English Learning Achievement in China (MS., University of International Business and Economics, China 2022), p.13.
- [4] W.H. Zhao, X.H. Zhang: A Study of Foreign Language Learning Anxiety and Pleasure among English Major College Students.
- [5] J.L. Li: A Study of the Correlation Between Senior High School Students' English Learning Boredom and Their English Achievement from the Perspective of Control-Value Theory (MS., Yunnan Normal University, China 2022), p.12.
- [6] X.F. Liang, Z. Xue: An Investigation of the Relationship between Teacher Enthusiasm, Foreign Language Learning Boredom and Academic Achievement.

- [7] J. Wang, T.Y. Zhang: An Overview of the Empirical Research on Foreign Language Learning Boredom (from 2013 to 2022), Vol. 11 No. 10, p.4200-4209.
- [8] C.C. LI, X.J. Lu: Research on boredom in foreign language learning: a scoping review-based approach, Vol. 43 No. 6, p.70-76.
- [9] C.T. Wu, X. Zhao: A study on the correlation between Teacher Enthusiasm and High School Students' Foreign Language Classroom pleasure and boredom.
- [10] H.Y. Di: An Investigation into the Relationship between Junior High School Students' Foreign Language Anxiety, Emotional Intelligence and English Achievement (MS., Dalian Maritime University, China 2017), p.17.
- [11] Q.Y. Guo: A Study of Students' Foreign Language Emotions in the Blended Teaching Model of College English, p.3-6.