

Exploring the Connection between Boredom and English Performance Through the Lens of Positive Psychology

Liyang Lin, Xin Lu

Fuzhou Technology and Business University, Fuzhou 350000, China.

Abstract: Boredom is a prevalent emotion in foreign language learning, yet it remains relatively under-researched in the field of applied linguistics. A thorough understanding of the current state of boredom research in foreign language learning can not only enrich the theoretical achievements in the study of emotions in language education but also provide practical insights into effective ways to alleviate students' feelings of boredom. From the perspective of positive psychology, this paper argues that implementing effective teaching strategies to address students' boredom in foreign language classrooms is essential. Such strategies can stimulate positive emotions in English learning, ultimately fostering students' enthusiasm for the subject and enhancing their English performance.

Keywords: Boredom; Positive Psychology; English Performance

1. Introduction

Positive psychology explores happiness using scientific methods, focusing on positive mental qualities and well-being. In second language acquisition, it has led scholars to recognize the importance of diverse emotional experiences, including boredom (Dewaele & Li 2020). This research aims to investigate boredom's impact on foreign language learning, providing insights for future study and teaching methods.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Positive Psychology and Second Language Acquisition

In 2016, the release of two anthologies, *Positive Psychology in SLA* (Gregersen et al., 2016) and *Positive Psychology Perspectives on Foreign Language Learning and Teaching* (Gabrys'-Barker & Gałajda, 2016), initiated serious exploration of positive psychology in second language acquisition. These works signaled readiness in the field, leading to dedicated sections in journals like *Frontiers in Psychology-Language Sciences* and *The Modern Language Journal*. Li Chengchen (2021) summarized key theories, emphasizing the need for positive psychology in foreign language education in China. Despite this growing focus, the systematic study and empirical research in China's foreign language education are still developing, reflecting the late start of positive psychology in this sector.

2.2 Boredom and Second Language Acquisition

Boredom is a frequently occurring emotion in the learning process and has the potential to negatively affect second language learners' engagement, self-efficacy, and academic achievement. Researchers like Li Chengchen and Han Ye have discovered a significant negative correlation between the level of boredom in primary school foreign language classrooms and students' English performance. They further emphasize the need for intervention strategies targeted at boredom during the compulsory education stage (Li & Wei, 2022; Li Chengchen & Han Ye, 2022). Li Yunheng advocates that high school English teachers should pay attention to incorporating intrigue and diversity into their lesson planning to reduce students' feelings of boredom. A search on CNKI (China National Knowledge Infrastructure) using the keyword "boredom" yields only a limited number of related papers, suggesting that there are many untapped aspects of this topic waiting to be explored and researched.

3. Positive psychology

Positive psychology's definition varies, but commonalities exist among scholars. Introduced by Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000), it uses scientific methods to tackle complex human issues, focusing on nurturing positive attributes rather than just resolving negative aspects. Unlike traditional psychology, positive psychology emphasizes the development of human character and robust traits, aiding growth rather than solely fixing weaknesses.

3.1 Positive Emotional Experience

Positive psychology focuses on the link between positive emotional experiences and education, a subject that has drawn significant scholarly interest. Central to this field is subjective well-being, characterized by three key traits: varying individual levels, an encompassing of both positive and negative experiences with a tendency towards the positive, and an overall description of a feeling state, not just fragmentary experiences. Unlike negative emotions, positive ones can enhance attention and creativity, broadening thinking and inspiring hard work. Amplifying positive emotions through personal stimulation can deepen understanding, exploration, and learning.

3.2 Positive Character Traits

As positive psychology stems from individuals' self-management and self-direction, positive character traits lay the foundation for establishing positive psychology. These traits are primarily driven and fostered by individual practice and potential capabilities. When faced with challenges, positive character traits assist in adopting more effective coping strategies. Positive psychologists also assert that positive behavioral patterns are primarily shaped through simulation and reinforcement, activating individuals' latent qualities, eventually forming character traits and behavioral patterns. Positive personality traits can aid individuals in deploying more effective coping mechanisms. In this context, experts have specifically studied 24 positive character traits, including autonomy, optimism, mature defense mechanisms, wisdom, etc. Positive psychologists believe that one of the optimal ways to cultivate these traits is to enhance individuals' positive emotional experiences.

4. Boredom in Foreign Language Learning

4.1 Definition of Boredom in Foreign Language Learning

Boredom, a complex emotional state, is ignited by the distasteful experience of being unable to engage in desired activities. It encompasses elements such as detachment, dissatisfaction, lack of focus, distorted time perception, and diminished vitality. Boredom in foreign language learning is considered an unpleasant emotional state resulting from low stimulation and arousal. Boredom in foreign language learning may share common features with general learning boredom, such as a lack of interest and difficulty concentrating. However, it is more intimately connected with the ecological environment of foreign language learning, displaying a high degree of situational specificity. Depending on the foreign language learning tasks, classroom environments, and teacher-student interaction patterns, it exhibits certain stability and variability .

4.2 Measurement of Boredom in Language Learning

Boredom emotion often appears in the foreign language learning environment, but the research on measuring this specific emotion is relatively new. In recent years, researchers have begun to delve into the conceptual structure, measurement methods, and influencing factors of boredom emotion (Dewaele 2020). Pawlak (2020), based on a sample of 107 English major students, developed a 23-item "Practical English Classroom Boredom Questionnaire," identifying two dimensions of boredom: 1) disengagement, monotony, and repetition; 2) insufficient satisfaction, lack of challenge. In China, Li (2021), targeting non-English major university students, and based on large-sample open-ended question data and interview data, proposed the concept of "foreign language learning boredom" and clarified its three-dimensional structure, subsequently compiling the "Foreign Language Learning Boredom Scale." After a series of psychological scale validity and reliability validations, a final 32-item version was determined, measuring seven dimensions. These studies provide essential tools for understanding and assessing the impact of boredom emotion in foreign language learning and lay the foundation for subsequent interventions and instructional strategy design.

4.3 The Impact of Boredom in Foreign Language Learning on Learning Outcomes

While exploring the conceptual connotations of boredom in foreign language learning and developing corresponding scales, Li et al. (2021) discovered that feelings of boredom can negatively impact both psychological and behavioral aspects of learning. However, since current research on foreign language boredom primarily focuses on causality, there is a lack of specialized investigation into its effects. Only one empirical study to date has verified this causal relationship, conducted in the context of the pandemic (Li Chengchen, Lu Xiaojun, 2022). Based on a sample of 348 students enrolled in online English courses at the university level, this study found that boredom had a moderate negative predictive effect on English exam scores ($r=-.298$, $p<.001$). Yet, the universality of this finding still requires further validation. On one hand, differences in online and offline learning environments may differently influence students' academic emotions and psychological processes (Li Chengchen, Han Ye, 2022), meaning that the negative predictive effect of boredom on English performance should be validated across different teaching modalities. On the other hand, as students of different age stages may exhibit distinct psychological characteristics, findings based on college student samples may not necessarily apply to elementary school students. Considering that higher education institutions in China are mostly concentrated in economically developed regions, further in-depth exploration is needed to determine whether these findings are applicable across regions with varying economic conditions, cultural backgrounds, and geographical locations.

5. Teaching Implications

To boost interest in English learning, reduce boredom, and enhance performance, teachers must focus on students' emotions and create positive experiences. This can be achieved by: Teacher's Attitude and Preparation: Adjusting demeanor and preparing both academically and mentally. Utilizing Diverse Teaching Methods: Including group discussions and multimedia. Enhancing Classroom Interaction: Leveraging technology to engage students. Understanding Student Needs: Regularly assessing and adapting to students' preferences. Personalized Tutoring: Tailoring guidance to individual needs and challenges. Strengthening Communication and Trust: Building strong relationships with students through regular interaction.

These strategies aim to enrich English learning, increase motivation, and enhance academic success. Implementation requires collaboration among teachers, students, and administrators to create an engaging and tailored learning environment. By integrating these approaches, stakeholders can transform English learning into an enriching experience, improving proficiency and combating boredom.

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