

**Research Article**

A Longitudinal Study of Foreign Language Boredom Experienced by English Major Students in a Blended English Reading Course

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Boredom is a negative psychological and emotional experience prevalent in foreign language classrooms. However, it has long been neglected by researchers and foreign language teachers. In this context, the present study investigated boredom experienced by college English majors in a blended English reading course. Research efforts revolved around students' overall boredom level, gender differences, and dynamic changes in boredom.

Methodology: This study adopted a quantitative research method, and the instrument was a quantitative questionnaire adapted from the *Foreign Language Learning Boredom Scale*. A total of 174 EFL learners (60 males and 114 females) in the second year of English majors from a private university in Southwest China filled out the online version of FLLBS in weeks 3, 9, and 15 during the fall semester of the 2022-2023 academic year.

Results: The findings demonstrated that participants' boredom was at a moderate level. Moreover, except in foreign language class boredom at Time 2 and over-challenging or meaningless task boredom at Time 3, there existed no significant gender differences. Finally, a complicated picture was painted regarding the dynamic changes in boredom levels over time, and different patterns were found.

Conclusion: College EFL learners do feel bored in the learning process, which should not be neglected by language teachers and researchers. This study enriched the research on foreign language boredom and can provide enlightenment to EFL teaching.

1. Introduction

The foreign language classroom is an emotional place (Boekaerts & Pekrun, 2015), where students may be excited in the learning process, experience anxiety about the upcoming examinations, hope for teachers' praise, feel proud of their academic achievements, or be bored by the teaching contents. All these affective factors, positive or negative, affect students' learning outcomes (Pekrun, 2014). In the late 20th century, language educators paid attention to the impact of emotions on the language learning process and put forward some classical theories in second language acquisition (SLA). Among them is the Affective Filter Hypothesis, proposed by Krashen, postulating that affective factors play a crucial role in SLA and determine whether comprehensible input can enter learners' brain areas that control language and speech (Krashen, 1982). In this regard, emotions indirectly affect the effectiveness of language acquisition. For example, learners'

negative emotions, such as anxiety, fear, and boredom, can prevent language input from being converted into language intake, which hinders language acquisition. Despite their importance, learners' emotions have long been regarded as an irrational factor in language learning, and therefore, have attracted insufficient scholarly attention (Li & Wang, 2020). In recent years, with the "affective turn" in SLA (Pavlenko, 2013), the emotional factors involved in language learning have gradually become a new research trend (Li, 2021). Beyond extensive research on learning anxiety (Tsang, 2022), self-confidence (Kumar et al., 2022), and motivation (Liu, 2022), researchers have also focused on other positive emotions in L2 classrooms, such as enjoyment (Dewaele & Macintyre, 2014), emotional engagement (Mercer & Dornyei, 2020), and grit (Jalilzadeh et al., 2022; Wang, 2023) in language classrooms. In contrast, except the research focus

on anxiety, there is not much discussion on other negative emotions in the language learning process and their deleterious effects on learners' language gains. Among these disruptive emotions, learners' boredom has not piqued substantial research interest across the globe although it is prevalent in educational contexts and negatively affects learners' behaviors, classroom participation, cognitive development, interest development, learning motivation, use of learning strategies, and learning performance (Daniels et al., 2015).

Boredom is a negative psychological and emotional experience (Putwain et al., 2018), springing from unstimulating and non-arousing learning environments (Lewinski, 2015) that stifle learners' deep and meaningful engagement with learning tasks. Boredom is broadly categorized into two types, including state boredom and trait boredom. State boredom is temporary and situation-specific, which is often induced by monotonous, unchallenging, and repetitive external stimuli, individuals' subjective feelings caused by their cognitive biases, or the gap between teachers' pedagogical practices and learners' current knowledge. Individuals with state boredom often have difficulty maintaining their attention and are likely to perceive a sense of meaninglessness (Miao & Xie, 2019). Trait boredom is closely related to personality, which is a "stable tendency with individual differences" (Huang et al., 2011, p. 134) and a psychological feeling that learners can experience in most life situations (Derakhshan et al., 2022).

The antecedents of learners' boredom are multidimensional, the most obvious of which are uninteresting and unchallenging tasks that disengage learners from frustrating learning situations (Daniels et al., 2015). In addition, the teacher factor should not be underestimated. Learner boredom can also occur if the teacher fails to clearly explain to the student the requirements of the tasks or sets the task goal beyond the learners' current level (Kruk et al., 2022). Other triggers of boredom include learners' insufficient learning motivation (Kruk et al., 2022), low willingness to communicate (Kruk, 2016), and low language proficiency (Li, 2021). Theories and models in psychology and pedagogy have explained the reasons boredom occurs. For example, the understimulation model argues that boredom is fueled by a lack of stimulation for learning novel things or by teaching environments that encourage rote memorization rather than problem-solving skills (Larson & Richards, 1991). Control-value theory of achievement emotions explores the source of learners' boredom based on learners' perception of learning situations, pointing out that if learners have a perception of "low value" and "low control" of learning tasks, boredom may transpire (Pekrun, 2006). The menton theory of engagement and boredom assumes that boredom is caused by tasks that are too challenging or less demanding, as learners' mental energy units tend to be superfluous or inadequate when they complete tasks with diverse difficulty levels (Davies & Fortney, 2012). Boredom in the learning process can have catastrophic consequences, such as learners' avoidance of interacting with teachers and

peers, lack of motivation to complete learning tasks, complete disengagement from the learning process, and even suffering from depression. However, with no obvious outward manifestation of this negative emotion, teachers may attribute it to students' anxiety, laziness, and personal variables and ignore those experiencing boredom (Macklem, 2015). Thus, this emotion should not go unnoticed anymore.

Foreign language boredom was brought into the spotlight in Chapman's doctoral dissertation, which addressed the issue among German learners in the United States (Chapman, 2013). Later, it was mostly researched in English as a foreign language (EFL) teaching settings by Polish scholars (e.g., Kruk & Zawodniak, 2018; Zawodniak et al., 2021). Over the past decade, researchers have empirically tackled multiple issues related to foreign language boredom. First, a handful of scholars have developed instruments for measuring EFL learners' boredom, such as the *Boredom in Practical English Classes Questionnaire* (Kruk & Zawodniak, 2017), the *Foreign Language Learning Boredom Scale* (Li et al., 2020), and the *Boredom in Learning English Outside of School Questionnaire* (Pawlak et al., 2022). These questionnaires have made large-scale surveys possible. Second, some studies have probed the relationship between boredom and other learners' internal and external factors. Overall, foreign language boredom is negatively correlated with positive emotions, such as foreign language enjoyment (Li & Dewaele, 2020) and learners' willingness to communicate (Kruk, 2022), but positively correlated with negative emotions, such as language anxiety (Li & Dewaele, 2020; Kruk, 2022). Research has also found that external factors, including the design for classroom orchestration, the behaviors and attitudes of language teachers, the course types, and the features of language tasks, may induce boredom in EFL classrooms (Zawodniak et al., 2021). Another research agenda is the relationship between EFL learners' boredom and their learning performance. Most studies revealed a negative correlation between the two (e.g., Li & Han, 2022; Li et al., 2022), but Li and Wei (2022) found that boredom had little impact on academic achievements. Fourth, the dynamic nature of learners' boredom in learning an L2 has also drawn scholarly interest. However, this research agenda has mainly focused on Polish EFL learners, and the conclusions varied due to differences in sampling and research tools.

Foreign language boredom has not been extensively investigated across the globe. However, as SLA research has shifted its focus to learner emotions, there is a surge of interest in boredom, and research on this negative emotion has been conducted in diversified teaching contexts.

Regarding the context of Chinese mainland, Li (2021) has made remarkable contributions to the field of boredom by developing the *Foreign Language Learning Boredom Scale*. However, this scale has not been widely used and her results were focused on non-English majors in public universities, and it is unknown whether the research results can be generalized to English majors in private universities. With the ubiquity of online learning,

especially in the post-pandemic era, the questions of whether EFL learners feel bored in the blended English teaching mode, how intense their boredom is, whether significant gender differences exist and whether learners' boredom transpires dynamically over time have not received sufficient attention. With these issues in mind and through a longitudinal research design, the current study endeavored to answer the following research questions:

1. Do English major students feel bored in the blended English reading course? Is their boredom at a low, moderate, or high level?
2. Does learners' boredom exhibit gender differences?
3. Does learners' boredom go through dynamic changes?

2. Methodology

2.1. Setting and participants

The study was conducted in the fall semester of the 2022-2023 academic year and lasted 16 weeks. The participants were 174 EFL learners in the second year of English majors from Geely University of China in Southwest China (see Table 1). They were with intermediate English proficiency, ranging in age from 19 to 21 ($M=20.4$, $SD=1.335$). All the participants were required to fill in an online questionnaire in week 3 (Time 1), week 9 (Time 2), and week 15 (Time 3). Finally, 131 (45 males and 86 females) took part in all three questionnaire surveys with valid responses. Prior to the present study, the participants had already enrolled in the course *Extensive English Reading II*, a compulsory course for English majors. Due to the sporadic outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in the Chinese mainland, the authorities of this university decided to adopt the blended teaching mode.

2.2. Instruments

The current study followed a quantitative research design. To collect data, the researchers modified the contents of Foreign Language Learning Boredom Scale (FLLBS) developed by Li et al. (2021). The FLLBS is a five-point Likert scale, in which items ranging from 5 (*totally agree*) to 1 (*totally disagree*). The FLLBS, originally designed for EFL learners in traditional foreign language classrooms, was a psychometrically sound instrument for measuring boredom. It consists of 32 items in 7 factors, including foreign language class boredom (Factor 1), under-challenging task boredom (Factor 2), PowerPoint presentation boredom (Factor 3), homework boredom (Factor 4), teacher-dislike boredom (Factor 5), general learning trait boredom (Factor 6), and over-challenging or meaningless task boredom (Factor 7). After modifications

Table 1.
Number of Participants at Different Periods

	Total	Males (N)	Females (N)	Valid Responses (N)
Time 1	174	60	114	162
Time 2	157	55	102	149
Time 3	148	52	96	137

the contents of this scale matched the blended teaching context, so it was reduced to a 21-item scale, with each factor containing three items. Results of reliability tests showed that the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient for the adapted scale was .921, and the coefficients for the seven subscales were .718, .719, .717, .741, .718, .792, and .775, respectively, all reaching the threshold (i.e., higher than 0.7).

2.3 Research procedure

After the FLLBS was redrafted, it was uploaded on *wenjuanxin*, an online platform (www.wjx.cn) with a link and a QR code generated automatically. The questionnaire was administered in the third week of the semester for the first time. The link or the QR code was forwarded to the participants through Tencent QQ or WeChat (two commonly used social media in the Chinese mainland). Then, the Excel sheets with the results were downloaded directly from *wenjuanxin*. The researchers jointly reviewed participants' responses and eliminated those with outliers. In weeks 9 and 15, the same cohort of students filled out the questionnaire for the second and third times. After all the data were gleaned, descriptive statistical analysis, independent samples *t*-test, and one-way ANOVA were run via SPSS (version 23.0) to comprehensively understand the issues under investigation. The statistical significance was set at the $p < .05$ level.

2.4. Ethical considerations

This study involved human participants, and therefore ethical issues were considered. Since this study attempted to investigate the dynamic changes in ELF learners' boredom levels at different times, participants should not complete the questionnaire anonymously. In this case, all participants were assured that their private information would be well protected. They were also informed that they could decline participation and withdraw from the research at any time. Additionally, prior to the study, the required approval was obtained from the school administrators. All the parties concerned were assured that the data collected this semester would only be used for the present study with complete confidentiality.

3. Results

Before discussing the statistical results, it should be noted that the normality of the data was tested. The skewness and kurtosis statistics were all within the range of -2 to +2, indicating that all the data were normally distributed and that parametric analyses should be conducted in subsequent statistical procedures (Gravetter et al., 2020).

3.1. Boredom experienced by all the participants

The results of descriptive statistics are presented in Table 2, including the possible range, observed range, mean scores, and standard deviation of each factor and the overall

Table 2.
Descriptive Results of Boredom by All Participants (N =131)

Variable	Possible Range	Observed Range			Mean			Standard Deviation		
		Time 1	Time 2	Time 3	Time 1	Time 2	Time 3	Time 1	Time 2	Time 3
Factor 1	3-15	3-15	6-14	9-15	10.20	10.53	13.22	2.682	1.315	1.097
Factor 2	3-15	3-15	5-12	11-15	9.44	9.51	13.29	2.853	1.511	1.063
Factor 3	3-15	3-15	8-13	10-15	8.02	10.76	12.94	2.877	1.301	1.149
Factor 4	3-15	5-15	6-12	8-15	10.60	9.16	12.27	2.356	1.201	1.276
Factor 5	3-15	3-15	2-15	6-12	11.58	11.02	8.24	2.382	1.763	2.640
Factor 6	3-15	4-15	3-15	4-15	10.69	10.71	10.60	2.566	2.556	1.945
Factor 7	3-15	3-15	3-13	4-11	10.84	9.42	7.77	2.610	1.852	1.328
Overall	21-105	25-105	47-85	68-90	71.37	71.10	78.33	14.431	6.395	4.541

scale at three time periods. As indicated in Table 2, the overall boredom level at Time 3 (M = 78.33, SD = 4.541) was the highest, followed by that at Time 1 (M = 71.37, SD = 6.395) and Time 2 (M = 71.10, SD = 14.431). The mean scores of the overall scale at three time periods were slightly higher than 63 (i.e., 3×21), suggesting that participants' boredom was at a moderate level throughout the semester. This finding can also be evidenced by the seven factors' mean scores which were mostly higher than 9 (i.e., 3×3) and even reached 13.29 (e.g., Factor 2 at Time 3). Additionally, the observed ranges and standard deviations showed a generally downward trend from Time 1 to Time 3, which means that the discreteness of the data decreased and that all participants' boredom levels tended to be more consistent over time.

3.2. Gender differences in boredom level

Table 3 shows that the blended reading course induces

more boredom for male participants than for their female peers across the three times. Both genders were the most bored at Time 3 with the mean score for males being 79.20 (SD = 4.822) and that for females being 77.87 (SD = 4.346). Males felt the least bored at Time 2 (M = 71.47, SD = 7.366), but females at Time 1 (M = 70.63, SD = 13.195). As for each factor, males generally experienced more boredom than females over time. However, an interesting finding was that females got higher mean scores than their male counterparts in Factor 1 at three time periods, Factor 3 at Time 3, and Factor 5 at Time 2. This indicates that females sensed more foreign language class boredom (Factor 1), PowerPoint presentation boredom (Factor 3), and teacher-dislike boredom (Factor 5) during these periods.

Table 4 tabulates the results of independent samples *t*-tests, showing that the mean score differences of both genders differed significantly only in Factor 1 at Time 2 ($p < .05$) and Factor 7 at Time 3 ($p < .05$). This indicates that

Table 3.
Descriptive Results of both Genders' Boredom (N_{male} = 45, N_{female} = 86)

Variable	Gender	Possible Range	Observed Range			Mean			Standard Deviation		
			Time 1	Time 2	Time 3	Time 1	Time 2	Time 3	Time 1	Time 2	Time 3
Factor 1	Male	3-15	3-15	6-12	9-15	9.91	10.07	13.07	3.103	1.514	1.338
	Female	3-15	5-15	7-14	9-15	10.35	10.77	13.30	2.439	1.134	.946
Factor 2	Male	3-15	3-15	6-12	11-15	9.96	9.51	13.38	2.969	1.392	.984
	Female	3-15	4-15	5-12	11-15	9.17	9.51	13.24	2.770	1.577	1.105
Factor 3	Male	3-15	3-15	8-13	11-15	8.09	10.84	12.93	3.190	1.429	0.986
	Female	3-15	3-14	8-13	10-15	7.98	10.71	12.94	2.718	1.235	1.231
Factor 4	Male	3-15	5-15	7-12	9-14	11.07	9.18	12.51	2.517	1.051	1.141
	Female	3-15	5-15	6-12	8-15	10.36	9.15	12.14	2.243	1.279	1.330
Factor 5	Male	3-15	3-15	3-15	6-12	11.60	10.93	8.47	2.508	2.038	2.659
	Female	3-15	3-15	9-15	6-12	11.57	11.06	8.13	2.329	1.611	2.639
Factor 6	Male	3-15	4-15	3-15	6-14	10.80	11.24	10.76	3.123	3.098	2.278
	Female	3-15	5-15	4-15	6-14	10.63	10.43	10.51	2.239	2.188	1.754
Factor 7	Male	3-15	3-15	3-13	4-11	11.36	9.69	8.09	2.994	2.032	1.411
	Female	3-15	5-15	5-13	5-10	10.57	9.28	7.60	2.359	1.747	1.258
Overall	Male	21-105	25-105	47-85	69-90	72.78	71.47	79.20	16.609	7.366	4.822
	Female	21-105	33-96	47-83	68-88	70.63	70.91	77.87	13.195	5.860	4.346

Table 4.
Results of Independent Samples T-tests for Gender Differences (N_{male} = 45, N_{female} = 86)

Variable	Mean Difference (Male-Female)			Standard Deviation			t			p		
	Time 1	Time 2	Time 3	Time 1	Time 2	Time 3	Time 1	Time 2	Time 3	Time 1	Time 2	Time 3
Factor 1	-.438	-.701	-.236	.532	.235	.224	-.823	-2.984	-1.052	.431	.003	.297
Factor 2	.781	.000	.134	.552	.279	.196	1.495	-.002	.681	.137	.999	.497
Factor 3	.112	.135	-.009	.531	.240	.212	.211	.563	-.040	.833	.547	.968
Factor 4	.706	.027	.372	.431	.222	.233	1.640	.120	1.592	.103	.905	.114
Factor 5	.030	-.125	.339	.440	.325	.487	.069	-.384	.696	.945	.702	.488
Factor 6	.172	.814	.244	.524	.519	.389	.328	1.570	.628	.744	.121	.532
Factor 7	.786	.410	.484	.477	.340	.241	1.647	1.205	2.005	.102	.230	.047
Overall	2.150	.560	1.328	2.659	1.180	.831	.809	.474	1.599	.420	.636	.112

Table 5.
Results of Multiple Comparisons Tests for All Participants (N = 131)

Variable	(I) Time	(J) Time	Mean Difference (I-J)	Standard Error	95% Confidence Interval		F	Sig.
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Factor 1	1	3	-3.023*	0.227	-3.56	-2.49	106.799	.000
	2	3	-2.695*	0.227	-3.23	-2.16		
Factor 2	1	3	-3.847*	0.242	-4.42	-3.28	164.881	.000
	2	3	-3.779*	0.242	-4.35	-3.21		
Factor 3	1	2	-2.740*	0.24	-3.3	-2.18	211.873	.000
	1	3	-4.924*	0.24	-5.49	-4.36		
Factor 4	2	3	-2.183*	0.24	-2.75	-1.62	110.202	.000
	1	2	1.443*	0.209	0.95	1.94		
	1	3	-1.664*	0.209	-2.16	-1.17		
Factor 5	2	3	-3.107*	0.209	-3.6	-2.61	79.516	.000
	1	3	3.336*	0.283	2.67	4		
Factor 7	2	3	2.771*	0.283	2.1	3.44	77.211	.000
	1	2	1.420*	0.247	0.84	2		
	1	3	3.069*	0.247	2.49	3.65		
Overall	2	3	1.649*	0.247	1.07	2.23	24.474	.000
	1	3	-6.962*	1.172	-9.72	-4.21		
	2	3	-7.229*	1.172	-9.99	-4.47		

* $p < .05$.

males suffered significantly less foreign language class boredom and more over-challenging or meaningless task boredom (Factor 7) than females.

3.3. Dynamic changes in boredom level

One-way ANOVA was run to clarify the dynamic changes in participants' boredom. Due to space restraints, only the results with statistical significance are presented in this section. As displayed in Table 5, there existed no significant difference in Factor 6 ($F = .085$, $p > .05$) at different periods. This suggests that 131 participants experienced similar levels of general learning trait boredom throughout the semester. Statistical significance was obtained in the other six factors and the whole scale ($p < .05$). Results of posthoc multiple comparisons (see Table 5) revealed that the mean scores of Factor 1, Factor 2, and the whole scale at Time 3

were significantly higher than those at Time 1 and Time 2. Moreover, the mean scores of Factor 5 at Time 3 were significantly lower than those at Time 1 and Time 2, while no significant difference was found between Time 1 and Time 2. Additionally, the results also showed a "Time 1 < Time 2 < Time 3" changing pattern for Factor 3, contrary to the "Time 1 > Time 2 > Time 3" pattern for Factor 7. As for Factor 4, a "Time 2 < Time 1 < Time 3" was found.

Table 6 and Table 7 present the dynamic changes in males' and females' boredom levels across time. Generally speaking, the changing trajectories of both genders' boredom levels were similar to that of the boredom felt by the whole cohort.

Figure 1 demonstrates the dynamic changes in 131 participants' overall boredom level and both genders' overall boredom levels. It also proves that at Time 3 (i.e., at the end of the course), students felt the most bored.

Table 6.
Results of Multiple Comparisons Tests for Males (N = 45)

Variable	(I) Time	(J) Time	Mean Difference (I-J)	Standard Error	95% Confidence Interval		F	Sig.
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Factor 1	1	3	-3.156*	0.451	-4.22	-2.09	31.151	.000
	2	3	-3.000*	0.451	-4.07	-1.93		
Factor 2	1	3	-3.422*	0.417	-4.41	-2.43	51.561	.000
	2	3	-3.867*	0.417	-4.85	-2.88		
Factor 3	1	2	-2.756*	0.442	-3.8	-1.71	60.43	.000
	1	3	-4.844*	0.442	-5.89	-3.8		
	2	3	-2.089*	0.442	-3.14	-1.04		
Factor 4	1	2	1.889*	0.36	1.04	2.74	43.153	.000
	1	3	-1.444*	0.36	-2.3	-0.59		
	2	3	-3.333*	0.36	-4.19	-2.48		
Factor 5	1	3	3.133*	0.509	1.93	4.34	20.995	.000
	2	3	2.467*	0.509	1.26	3.67		
Factor 7	1	2	1.667*	0.473	0.55	2.79	23.883	.000
	1	3	3.267*	0.473	2.15	4.39		
	2	3	1.600*	0.473	0.48	2.72		
Overall	1	3	-6.422*	2.288	-11.85	-1	6.544	0.002
	2	3	-7.733*	2.288	-13.16	-2.31		

* $p < .05$.

Table 7.
Results of Multiple Comparisons Tests for Females (N=86)

Variable	(I) Time	(J) Time	Mean Difference (I-J)	Standard Error	95% Confidence Interval		F	Sig.
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Factor 1	1	3	-2.953*	0.251	-3.55	-2.36	81.052	.000
	2	3	-2.535*	0.251	-3.13	-1.94		
Factor 2	1	3	-4.070*	0.297	-4.77	-3.37	115.604	.000
	2	3	-3.733*	0.297	-4.43	-3.03		
Factor 3	1	2	-2.733*	0.284	-3.4	-2.06	152.994	.000
	1	3	-4.965*	0.284	-5.64	-4.29		
Factor 4	2	3	-2.233*	0.284	-2.9	-1.56	69.095	.000
	1	2	1.209*	0.256	0.61	1.81		
Factor 5	1	3	-1.779*	0.256	-2.38	-1.18	59.399	.000
	2	3	-2.988*	0.256	-3.59	-2.39		
Factor 7	1	3	3.442*	0.341	2.64	4.25	55.910	.000
	2	3	2.930*	0.341	2.13	3.73		
Overall	1	2	1.291*	0.281	0.63	1.95	19.118	.000
	1	3	2.965*	0.281	2.3	3.63		
	2	3	1.674*	0.281	1.01	2.34		
	1	3	-7.244*	1.327	-10.37	-4.11		
	2	3	-6.965*	1.327	-10.09	-3.84		

* $p < .05$.

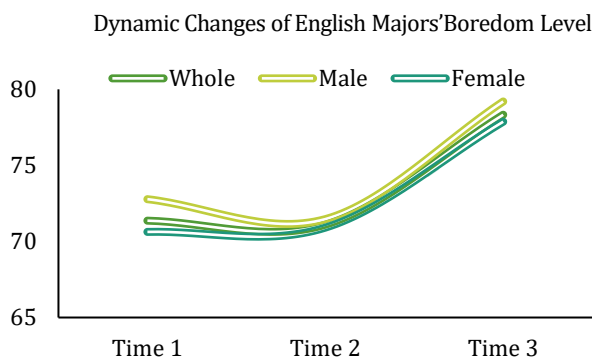


Figure 1.
Dynamic Changes in Participants' Boredom Levels Over Time

Figure 1 demonstrates the dynamic changes in 131 participants' overall boredom level and both genders' overall boredom levels. It also proves that at Time 3 (i.e., at the end of the course), students felt the most bored.

4. Discussion

This study longitudinally surveyed the opinion of Chinese English majors to investigate boredom experienced in a blended English reading course. The results showed that students' boredom throughout the semester was at a moderate level. Although Li and Han (2022) studied non-English majors from a public key university in China, and Derakhshan et al.'s (2022) research subjects were Iranian English majors, their obtained results were consistent with that of the present research. All these studies proved that students of different cultures are subjected to being bored with EFL learning, which is an issue warranting EFL teaching practitioners' attention.

This study also found that there was no significant gender difference in the overall boredom levels over time, indicating that both genders experienced a similar amount of boredom while taking the English reading course. Since male students manifested less interest and invested less effort in English learning (Gao & Ma, 2009), they suffered more boredom than

female students. In terms of the specific factors, male students felt significantly lower foreign language class boredom (Factor 1) at Time 2 and significantly higher over-challenging or meaningless task boredom (Factor 7) at Time 3, compared to female students. No significant difference in other factors at different periods was found between both genders. At present, researchers have not zoomed in on the gender differences in foreign language boredom, and this study only conducted a preliminary investigation to fill the lacuna. Therefore, more research is needed to corroborate the findings of the present study.

Dynamically, from Time 1 to Time 2, the overall boredom level of participants (regardless of their genders) slightly decreased but then increased significantly at Time 3. This finding was inconsistent with existing studies that found that learners' boredom level is the lowest at the beginning of the online courses, increases linearly, and reaches its apex towards the end (Derakhshan et al., 2021; Kruk & Zawodniak, 2018). At the outset, students exhibit a high level of arousal and have high expectations for the lessons prepared by highly engaged teachers. Therefore, the boredom level is relatively low. As the courses progress, students can well predict teachers' course arrangements and teaching approaches and will lose curiosity about the courses. In this situation, they naturally feel more bored (Kruk & Zawodniak, 2018). In contrast, Kruk and Zawodniak (2017) found that EFL learners' boredom levels showed a downward trend over time. As for the dynamicity of each factor, different changing patterns were found. For example, students' general learning trait of boredom (Factor 6) did not change significantly throughout the semester. This type of boredom is closely connected to an individual's personality (Huang et al., 2011) and is unlikely to change quickly. Moreover, as students were more familiar with their teachers and improved their reading skills, they felt more under-challenging task boredom (Factor 2), less teacher-dislike boredom (Factor 5), and over-challenging or meaningless task boredom (Factor 7). Finally, induced by uninteresting teaching contents (Factor 3), ineffective classroom management (Factor 1), and unreasonable homework assignments (Factor 4), students' boredom levels kept an upward trend. These findings

also prove that language teaching is a complicated process that should consider multifaceted aspects (Hoque, 2009).

The findings obtained in this study suggest that teachers should pay attention to students' emotional state in their learning process, conduct psychological counseling for students with trait boredom, and adjust the pedagogical practices promptly. In addition, while helping learners get rid of boredom, EFL teachers should also learn more about positive psychology and research, integrate the concept of positive education into English teaching, and create a favorable learning environment for students (Li, 2021).

5. Conclusion

This study explored foreign language boredom experienced by English majors at a private university in the Chinese mainland during one blended extensive reading program. The research results can shed light on EFL teaching in China and even other non-English-speaking countries or regions. The theoretical contribution of this study lies in the preliminary revelation of the dynamically changing characteristics of English learners' boredom level, which enriches the research on foreign language boredom. Of special note is that the present study is not without limitations. For example, due to the comparatively small sample size and the homogeneity of the participants, it is unknown whether the results obtained in this study can be generalized to other student groups or teaching settings. Besides, the quantitative research method adopted in this study could only reflect the dynamic changes of the group and failed to reveal individual differences. Future research should take these issues into account.

Declarations

Competing interests

None.

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None.

Availability of data and materials

The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the authors, without undue reservation. Requests should be directed to Wang Jian (the corresponding author) via wangjian@bgu.edu.cn.

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