Tarbiat Modares University

Causes of Boredom in Language Classrooms and Students' Coping Strategies: A Case in Vietnam

Nhat Hoai Tran[1] & Hung Phu Bui[2]

Abstract

Emotions are well-documented to influence behaviors, learning process, and learning outcomes. Boredom, a negative emotion, can affect students significantly in academic settings. This case study explores the causes of students' boredom in foreign language classrooms and their coping strategies. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with twenty English-majored juniors learning Chinese as an additional required language at a university in Vietnam. Results showed that boredom in English language and Chinese language classrooms could be classified into four broad categories: lesson-related, teacher-related, student-related, and others (e.g., learning environment). As the students reported, task diversity, teachers' sense of humor, and students' motivation were supposed to reduce boredom in language classrooms. To overcome this negative emotion, the students used various facilitative and debilitative strategies. They positively attempted to mitigate boredom by initiating jokes with their teachers and classmates, suggesting interesting topics to discuss, and raising hands to change the classroom atmosphere. However, other students tended to have gossips with their classmates, text their friends, and go outside for a while. The results suggest implications for improving foreign language teaching and learning in Vietnam and other similar contexts.

Keywords: antecedent, boredom predictors, L2 learning, coping strategies, skilled-based courses

[1] Graduate Student, Faculty of Foreign Languages, Ton Duc Thang University, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, *Email: nhattranelt@gmail.com*
[2] Corresponding Author, PhD, School of Foreign Languages, University of Economics Ho Chi Minh City, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam; ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3468-4837

1. Introduction

Emotions have been widely recognized as a vital factor in L2 education (Ayuningtyas, 2022; Dewaele, 2015; MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012; Nakamura, 2018; Valiente, 2011; Villavicencio, 2012). The current literature shows that boredom, a negative aversive emotion, greatly impacts students' behaviors, learning process, and outcomes in educational settings (Derakhshan et al., 2021b; Derakhshan et al., 2022; Pishghadam & Shakeebaee, 2020; Tze et al., 2016). It exerts significant adverse effects on students' learning process, such as causing withdrawal behavior when students completely stop partaking in classroom activities (Macklem, 2015; Pekrun, 2010). As noted by Derakhshan et al. (2021b), bored individuals can show symptoms such as dissatisfaction, lack of attentiveness, and slow time perception.

Previous studies found that boredom is among one of the most frequent emotions that students experience in academic settings (Daniels et al., 2009; Daschmann et al., 2011; Goetz & Hall, 2011; Larson & Richards, 1991; Pekrun et al., 2010). Despite the adverse impacts of boredom on L2 learners and learning, boredom receives very little attention in second language (L2) learning. The past studies on L2 classroom boredom mainly concentrated on examining the causes of boredom in L2 classrooms. For instance, Kruk and Zawodniak (2020) stated that the emergence of boredom in L2 classrooms could originate from the task, the teacher, or the student. Experiencing boredom in the classroom, L2 students may employ various strategies to ward off this negative emotion. Also, students' proper use of boredom coping strategies may influence students' academic performance (Nett et al., 2010; Eren & Coskun, 2016) as effective use of boredom coping strategies may mitigate boredom in the L2 classroom. However, studies investigating how students fight boredom in L2 learning are scant. Nett et al. (2010) proposed the very first complete framework for investigating students' boredom coping strategies by classifying boredom coping strategies into four types (cognitive approach strategy, behavioral approach strategies, cognitive avoidance strategies, and behavioral avoidance strategies).

Although learning boredom is vastly explored globally, there is a dearth of research on the causes of L2 students' boredom inside the classroom and the strategies they use to cope with their boredom in Asian contexts, including Vietnam. Regarding the impacts of boredom in educational settings and the importance of boredom coping strategies, the current study explores the boredom antecedents and strategies used by students to ward off their boredom in the L2 classroom in the context of Vietnam. The results would contribute to the literature on boredom and

provide implications for the improvement of L2 classrooms (e.g., better communication between students and teachers) in Vietnam and other L2 contexts. This exploratory study investigates university students' boredom experiences and boredom coping strategies in English and Chinese language classrooms.

1.1. Research Questions

This case study attempts to bridge the gap mentioned above by looking into boredom experienced by L2 students in the classroom and their coping strategies to deal with this aversive emotion at a university in Vietnam. The study was conducted to answer the following questions:

RQ1.What are the main causes of boredom in the classroom experienced by Vietnamese English majors?

RQ2.What coping strategies do the students employ to fight their boredom in language classes?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Psychological Constructionist Theories of Emotions

This study is informed by the psychological constructionist theories of emotions (Hoemann et al., 2020; Lindquist, 2013), which supports the hypothesis that emotion categories are abstract and conceptual. Accordingly, the emergence of emotions in consciousness occurs when people classify internal (i.e., physically symptomatic) and external (i.e., situational) sensations as instances of discrete emotion categories (e.g., boredom). As Lindquist et al. (2015) put it, individuals may experience such discrete emotions as anger, boredom, and fear. From this viewpoint, emotions, and context are not interdependent but exist as discrete entities (Nakamura et al., 2021). As a result, there is no objective, external measure of the subjective, internal events for the emotions (e.g., anger, boredom, fear) that people experience (Barrett, 2004). One of the possible methods to investigate emotions is to ask individuals how they feel directly, which indicates that self-report instruments (e.g., semi-interviews) may work as preferred tools to explore emotions (Barrett 2004).

2.2. Learners' Boredom

3

Boredom is widely construed as an experience of having no particular purpose in life or perceiving life as a meaningless process resulting from an impoverished environment (Goldberg et al., 2011). In education, Pekrun (2006) classifies boredom as a negative and deactivating emotion that might influence students' academic activities, behaviors, and learning outcomes. For instance, this negative emotion can deter students from processing an assigned task effectively (Pekrun, 2006), which can lead to a lack of comprehension in classrooms. Bored individuals experience an unpleasant affective state and a reduction in physiological activation.

Goetz et al. (2014) categorize boredom into five main types by the degree of pleasure. The first type is a pleasant state of calmness related to learners' relaxation and cheerful fatigue. Calibrating boredom is a slightly unpleasant state, manifested through wandering thoughts or being directionless but learners do not deliberately seek solutions to the situation. Searching boredom, as the third type, is concerned with a more negative valence than calibrating boredom; students experiencing this type of affective state are actively searching for a specific solution to mitigate their boredom. The fourth type of boredom indicates an unpleasant solid experience in that learners become relatively reactant and start to develop the need to leave the classroom and avoid the teacher. The last type of boredom is apathetic, which is associated with the most intensely unpleasant state characterized by unmotivated students. It is intriguing to notice that the intensity level or state of boredom (e.g., searching boredom can develop into reactant boredom) can change over time, depending on learners' strategies and learning environment (Goetz et al., 2014).

In the field of psychology, Eastwood et al. (2012) explain that boredom emerges when (a) people are incapable of engaging their attention in a satisfying activity, (b) they are aware of their disengagement in partaking in the activity, and (c) they attribute the causes of disengagement to the activity. Boredom includes the feeling that time drags; as a result, individuals may develop a tendency to escape from the situation (Nett et al., 2011). This aversive emotion also corresponds to specific bad experiences like stress and health problems (Thackray, 1981), nicotine and alcohol consumption (Amos et al., 2006), and dropouts (Bearden et al., 1989). In education, boredom is closely connected to students' motivation, learning process, and academic outcomes (Pekrun et al., 2000, 2002). This avoidance-oriented emotion decreases students' intrinsic motivation to be involved in classroom activities (Pekrun et al., 2010). As for students' learning process, boredom reduces engagement in classroom activities, leading to lower performance in learning. With limited engagement,

students may become less devoted and dedicate less time to learning (Derakhshan et al., 2022; Wang, 2023). Bored students are more likely to perceive that time passes slowly in the classroom and that the tasks are unattractive. As a result, bored individuals may struggle to listen to the teachers and feel unmotivated to accomplish any academic tasks, leading to ineffective processing of lesson-related information (Pekrun, 2006). Boredom not only causes motivation deficit, disengagement, or insufficient attentiveness, but it also negatively influences students' mastery goals (Pekrun et al., 2009). That is, it can reduce students' motivation, and boredom experience can lead to avoidance behaviors, a severe consequence, in which students withdraw their involvement from classroom activities entirely (Derakhshan, 2022; Macklem, 2015; Pekrun, 2010).

Exploring L2 students' boredom experience may play a pivotal role in improving the quality of L2 education. Investigating the causes of boredom can provide implications for teachers to reduce the experience of negative emotions (e.g., boredom) in L2 classrooms. Instructors can provide more effective instructional practices and support students in regulating their learning and combating boredom by exploring how they fight boredom in the classroom (Nett et al., 2010).

2.3. Causes of Boredom in Language Classrooms

There are different classifications for causes of boredom in education. Some previous studies divided the boredom antecedents into internal and external factors (Chapman, 2013; Nakamura et al., 2021). The causes of boredom in classrooms can also be related to the lessons (Westgate & Wilson (2018), teachers (Chapman, 2013; Nakamura et al., 2020), or students themselves (Derakhshan, 2022; Pekrun, 2006). These factors are not independent but interrelated as teachers may change the characteristics of the task and students may use coping strategies to reduce boredom.

The task difficulty may have a curvilinear relationship with the emergence of boredom in the classroom (Westgate & Wilson, 2018). A student may be bored because of monotonous and under-challenging tasks. To be more specific, through an experiment of making the participant complete a repetitive task (writing tick marks on paper), Geiwitz (1966) found that increasing the repetitiveness and constraint of a task can lead to a boredom experience. Robinson (1975) proposed that routine school life was the direct cause of boredom. This researcher suggested that eliminating boredom from academic settings is teachers' and parents' responsibility. Parents and

schools could change boredom by substituting unattractive content and demonstrating to students that they are learning useful and valuable knowledge. In a similar vein, the study by Davies and Fortney (2012) also found that boredom could arise when individuals underused or overused their cognitive energy in completing insufficient challenging or overly demanding activities.

Boredom experience can also be predicted by teacher-related factors (Chapman, 2013; Hill & Perkins, 1985; Nakamura et al., 2020). Considering boredom to originate from students devoting their extra mental energy to unattractive tasks, Hill and Perkins (1985) blame teachers for employing monotonous tasks, making students exhausted because of the teacher's over-controlled situations and no opportunities for autonomy. Instead of giving monotonous instruction, teachers are recommended to create a learning environment where students self-regulate their learning to reduce their boredom experience (Pekrun, 2006).

Student-related factors emphasize what happens in students' minds (e.g., perception and appraisals). Pekrun (2006) noted that students' failure to find value or little control over the task might lead to the emergence of boredom. In other words, boredom occurs when students are involved in uninteresting or irrelevant tasks (low-value tasks). To solve this problem, teachers may provide authentic learning tasks and interesting learning activities to help students successfully attach value to tasks. Similarly, teachers' and parents' passion for academic subjects can foster students' academic values. Furthermore, students perceive higher control when they complete a task by all means. However, such control can become excessive when the task is too simple or lacks challenges, leading to the emergence of boredom. Teachers can raise students' sense of control by providing precise and well-organized instructions to increase the cognitive quality of tasks (Pekrun, 2006). Harris (2000) also suggested that educators change teaching styles to student-centered so that students can be more active and more involved in classroom activities.

In L2 learning, most of the findings about boredom antecedents are quite similar to those in the general education literature but particularize the characteristics of the L2 learning environment and L2 tasks. Chapman (2013) used a mixed-methods approach to study the beliefs of 57 American students of German as a second language and their three language teachers. The data collected via surveys and interviews over four weeks demonstrated that the students' attitudes toward their teachers were the best predictor of boredom in L2 classrooms. Chapman (2013) indicated that students' feelings about their teachers are more influential than

classroom activities or personalities.

Kruk and Zawodniak (2020) used the language learning boredom in retrospect (LLBR) questionnaire to collect data from 30 Polish sophomores majoring in English. These researchers classify the leading causes of boredom into three categories: lesson-related factors, teacher-related factors, and other factors. In the first category, the participants experience boredom in English classes due to the repetitive material, the irrelevant tasks, and task difficulties (e.g., under-challenging or over-challenging tasks). As for teacher-related factors, it is interesting to note that the teachers' physical characteristics (e.g., monotonous voice) can cause boredom. The final category revealed that students experience boredom due to class time (e.g., Friday) and the weather. After collecting data qualitatively from 240 university students, Derakhshan et al. (2021b) claimed that students could feel bored when they did too much reading or repeated summaries from the book without follow-up activities.

To date, L2 boredom research has been conducted in Western countries and receives more attention in Asian contexts. Derakhshan et al. (2021a) found that teachers were the most frequently mentioned predictor of boredom through investigating the boredom experience of 208 English-majored students in Iran. The researchers described the lack of interaction with students, monotonous talks, and extended teaching hours as the causes of boredom. Nakamura et al. (2021) investigated boredom through a whole-class survey and focus group interview on an English oral communication course. The researchers collected data from a sample of 25 Thai sophomores over 15 weeks. The findings revealed that the imbalance between internal and external student factors could lead to activity mismatch, lack of comprehension, insufficient L2 skills, task difficulty, input overload, and lack of ideas, which provoked classroom boredom experiences. Li (2022) conducted large-scale research on L2 enjoyment and boredom using a questionnaire administered to 868 Chinese L2 English university students. The results revealed that teacher friendliness was among the most accurate predictors of the emergence of boredom.

2.4. Students' Boredom Coping Strategies

There is a paucity of studies concerning strategies that students employ in the classroom to alleviate boredom in both general and L2 education. In general education, Nett et al. (2010) proposed the first complete framework of students'

boredom coping strategies based on the affective, behavioral, and cognitive theory. Students may opt to use cognitive and/or behavioral approaches to fight boredom or avoid getting involved in activities that they find uninteresting or boring.. By using approach-oriented strategies, students may actively try to ward off boredom either by altering their perception of the boring situation (cognitive approach) or by asking the teacher to change the tasks (behavioral approach). If teachers misinterpret students' suggestions, the class activities might be disrupted (Macklem, 2015). By employing avoidance-oriented strategies, students tend to avoid partaking in classroom activities either by diverting their thoughts into irrelevant tasks (cognitive avoidance) or by involving in activities that are not associated with the situation (behavioral avoidance).

Following the pioneering work of Nett et al. (2010), Daniels et al. (2015) investigated students' boredom coping strategies at the university level. The researchers classified students as evaders, criticizers, and reappraisers in response to boredom coping strategies. Evaders are referred to as students using cognitive and behavioral avoidance approaches by withdrawing their participation in classroom activities (e.g., doodling, using smartphones, talking to other friends). They are usually unwilling to express their boredom clearly and use an indirect or disruptive method of fighting boredom (e.g., doodling, using smartphones). The evader group is the least effective coping profile in combating boredom, characterized by the lowest score in emotional involvement, interest, and achievement value; this may indicate that cognitive and behavioral avoidance approaches might be ineffective strategies in warding off boredom. Criticizers refer to students using the behavioral approach, blaming the teacher for the boring classroom situations. These students try to change the circumstances by asking their teachers to offer other tasks or activities. Criticizers are believed to have a more effective strategy than evaders as they actively seek solutions to remedy boredom experiences. As a group considered to have the most positive strategy, reappraisers employ primarily cognitive approaches by redirecting their mental energy into positive solutions such as finding some meaningful aspects in the situations or thinking about the boredom from a positive point of view. These students may experience boredom significantly less than the other two groups. Therefore, reappraisers appear to be the most effective coping profile in warding off boredom during classes; this may indicate that successfully attaching value to the lesson might be an essential way to fight boredom. Similarly, since reappraisers showed the most adaptive coping profile, thus this may support the assumption that cognitive strategies might be the most practical strategies in

ameliorating boredom.

In L2 learning, Pawlak et al. (2021) introduced two new types of students' boredom coping strategies based on the purposes of the strategies: facilitative strategies (i.e., students' conscious attempt to mitigate boredom) and debilitative strategies (i.e., students' failure to ward off boredom). Facilitative strategies show that students actively seek solutions to stay engaged in classroom activities. These strategies are characterized by students trying to be more active and attentive to fight boredom. Pawlak et al.'s findings indicated that students showed diligence in attempting to resolve their boredom by partaking more, listening more carefully, and staying engaged in class. Specifically, they tried to do everything to create more study, such as reading materials and highlighting main points in advance, taking notes and asking questions, or giving comments.

Debilitative strategies are described as destructive psychological and behavioral approaches characterized by students not having effective strategies to deal with boredom (e.g., tolerating and not knowing what to do). According to Pawlak et al. (2021), students using debilitative strategies to cope with boredom cannot adapt to a new learning environment, which may lead to various negative behaviors. For instance, the most frequent behavior of this strategy includes task-irrelevant activities, such as playing video games, using social media, or even disconnecting from the online class. As stated by Pawlak et al. (2021), it is essential that teachers should provide adequate instructional support for students to help them achieve their desired academic goals.

3. Methodology

3.1. Participants

The current study adopted the simple random sampling strategy. First, we sent an email invitation to the list of third-year students provided by the school board of a university in Ho Chi Minh City. We targeted third-year students as this group was supposed to be learning English and Chinese as required by the curriculum. Fifty students responded, and we randomly selected 20 third-year students to participate in this study. These students indicated their boredom experience in their English and Chinese classes and volunteered to participate in this study. They learned English (generally 15 hours a week) which they registered to study as a major and Chinese as

9

an additional foreign language (with three hours a week). It is the national language policy that students who would like to major in a foreign language are required to learn an additional language as a second foreign language. In this study, the participants were required to take a course in a second foreign language as an elective (Chinese, Korean, and Japanese). As the participants enrolled in the credit-based program, they could personalize their learning schedule to fit their capacities and needs, ranging from 15 to 20 credit hours a semester.

3.2. Instruments

The interview scheme was based on Kruk and Zawodniak (2020), Nakamura et al. (2021), and Pawlak et al. (2021). It consisted of two main parts. The first part, adapted from the work of Kruk and Zawodniak (2020), explored the antecedents of boredom by asking students to describe their boredom experiences. It was composed of four categories: lesson-related factors, teacher-related factors, student-related factors, and other factors (e.g., time or weather). The second part of the interview, based on Pawlak et al. (2021), delved into students' boredom coping strategies, with two broad types: facilitative and debilitative strategies.

3.3. Data Collection Procedure

Data were collected in 2022 through a series of semi-structured one-to-one interviews with 20 randomly selected students who volunteered to participate because they were interested in the research topic. The first author, as the interviewer, informed them about the aims of the study and the confidentiality of their information. Therefore, they are anonymized as S1 to S20 in the data report in this article.

To improve the trustworthiness of the study, one-to-one semi-structured interviews were conducted in Vietnamese and recorded for analysis. The participants could suggest the platform (Zoom or Google Meet) that they found the most convenient. The interviewer employed a prompt interview strategy. At the beginning of each session, he applied the interview technique suggested by Nakamura et al. (2021). He prompted the discussion (e.g., "In this interview, we would talk about your boring experience in English and Chinese language classrooms). In the first part of the interview, the participants were asked to explain why they felt bored in English and Chinese language classes. To address the second research question in the

interview, the participants were asked to recall what strategies they used to alleviate boredom in English and Chinese classes. The participants could freely express their ideas that are relevant to the research topic because the interviewer used guiding questions like "What other strategies did you use?", and "Why did you use it?". During the interviews, the participants' responses were clarified and confirmed. All the interviews lasted 25-30 minutes each.

3.4 Data Analysis

The researchers employed the content-based approach to data analysis. All the interview recordings were transcribed and coded into themes (Khoa et al., 2023; Gao & Zhang, 2020). The data transcripts were first read and reread to eliminate irrelevant answers. Second, data were reread to create open codes for each research question. Third, open codes were compared and grouped under unifying themes. Then all the unifying themes were put into one category, called selective coding. Finally, the second author produced a detailed report with the analyzed data and compared it back to the literature.

4. Results

4.1 RQ1. What Are the Main Causes of Boredom in the Classroom Experienced by Vietnamese English Majors?

Data analysis of the boredom antecedents in the English language classrooms showed emerging themes: lesson-related, teacher-related, student-related, and others. Overall, teacher-related factors were identified as the most frequently mentioned during English lessons. Fifteen out of twenty students revealed that boredom in the classroom was associated with teachers. Results showed that there were three emerging themes: pedagogy, behavior, and personality. S5 acknowledged the importance of classroom interaction in reducing boredom. She said, "Sometimes the teacher's lecture runs on and on without any interaction with us. We feel a bit bored." The students were also dissatisfied with the teachers' inappropriate instructions, explanations, and reliance on textbooks. S4 said, "I hope the teacher could teach me more creatively not traditionally. Learning from textbooks only is so boring." Response by S7 shows her need for teachers' explicit explanations, "It was boring when some of the teachers just gave us some time to do the reading exercises and then gave us the answers without any explicit explanations." Also, teachers' lack of

sense of humor or authoritarian personality made them feel bored. Teachers' monotonous voice during the lesson was also considered to be the boredom predictor. S3 was aware of the importance of jokes in the classroom. He said, "I would like the teacher to tell jokes so that the classroom atmosphere can be less boring." S1 also noted, "The teacher is so strict, which puts some pressure on me, and I feel unmotivated." Although the students responded that teacher-related factors (pedagogy, behaviors, and personality) were predictors of boredom in L2 classrooms, their self-reports mainly reflected their personal feelings.

As for the student-related factors, most students agreed that students' low learning motivation was responsible for their boredom experience. S10 said, "If I had an argument with my peers or family before class, I would feel very unmotivated, and it would be so boring to sit in a classroom when I have low motivation to learn anything." Nine out of twenty students admitted that they withdrew their attention from the classroom activities because they were not interested. They preferred to sign up for a class in which they had close friends. They could work in groups with those friends they liked and hang out together during the break time. S8 explained her boredom experience is from signing up alone for a class, "I used to study this listening course alone and it was boring in during the lesson because I had no one to talk to." S2 reported that the lack of preparation for the lesson was also recognized as a predictor of L2 boredom. She said, "I felt bored because I couldn't catch up with my friends when they corrected homework. I didn't really know what to do when I have no preparation." Students' self-reports of student-related predictors of boredom revealed that they were affected by the external factors (e.g., peers, family).

Regarding the lesson-related factors, the monotonous/repetitive tasks were reported as the main cause of students' boredom experience in English classrooms. Eighteen out of 20 students described the monotony of tasks proposed by the teacher as making them feel boring. S14 said, "When the speaking topic is not my favorite, I usually feel bored. I already learn some of the popular topics in high school, so I don't like some repeated topics like environmental issues or daily routines." S18 emphasized that she had to invest effort in monotonous tasks, "I just feel so bored when the teacher asks us to summarize the reading text in every lesson. I would like to do other activities like discussion." S2 also blamed repetition of tasks. He explained, "The teacher just lets us listen to a long recording in every lesson. It really bores me out." Also, easy tasks were deemed to be less demanding and challenging; students felt bored as they did not need to make an effort. S6 responded, "We could do the reading exercises at home and

correct it in the classroom. Doing too many reading tasks in textbooks is so frustrating. I like to do something outside the book." The results showed that boredom could derive from too easy or too much challenging tasks.

Four students also revealed that boredom could stem from unpredictable and unavoidable factors. Two students confirmed that sometimes the dull weather makes them feel down in class. S11 said, "Sometimes when I stay in a classroom during the rain I feel down, and I just get bored easily." A class on weekends was also supposed to make them feel bored because it tired students out; they need a day off to get energetic for the coming week. S20 replied, "I just feel so bored during the lesson on weekend. I suppose to relax instead."

Comparing boredom experience in English and Chinese classrooms, eleven out of 20 students also revealed that their proficiency level resulted in their learning anxiety mediating their boredom. Accordingly, when these students found that their language proficiency level did not meet the requirement, they became anxious, resulting in boredom because their efforts could not help them go further. Also, students with low motivation showed a higher tendency to get bored as they considered Chinese a required course rather than the course they could take. They indicated that it was English that they signed up to study, but they were required to learn additional foreign language. Although they could choose among three options (Chinese, Korean, and Japanese), they were not really interested in learning any on the list. Other students revealed that they took it for granted because it was a required course, but they did not make much effort to learn the second foreign language. S6 said:

English majors usually feel bored during Chinese lessons because they do not like it at the first place. They must study Chinese because it is required. They just feel bored because we do not like it, but they must take it.

Overall, the students reported the causes of boredom in language classrooms. In general, their boredom experiences stemmed from similar sources in the L2 and L3 classes. Two causes of boredom that took place only in L3 classrooms stemmed from dissimilarity between languages and students' motivation. Surprisingly, reports showed that the students associated anxiety with boredom; in other words, they described anxiety as a mediating factor that led to boredom in language classrooms.

4.2 RQ2. What Coping Strategies Do the Students Employ to Fight Their Boredom in Language Classes?

Data showed that the students employed two main categories of boredom coping strategies: facilitative strategies, referred to as the students' attempts to mitigate boredom (e.g., being attentive, sitting in the front rows, and having a positive attitude), and debilitative strategies, known as students' disengagement (e.g., doodling, talking to other classmates, and using smartphones). Those students who expressed their positive attitudes towards learning and had set goals for learning tended to employ facilitative strategies; however, those students who only regarded the course as required were prone to be disengaged when they felt bored.

Nine students reported that they used facilitative strategies to fight boredom. Interestingly, these students said that they tended to sit close to teachers (i.e., in the front rows) to be attracted to teachers' loud voices. Four students revealed that they attempted to make the classroom more interesting by asking teachers questions related to the lesson or raising their hands to answer teachers' questions. Two students even made jokes with teachers to engage the whole class in the topic discussed. The students' self-reports showed the importance of occasional jokes in L2 classroom to boredom mitigation. Some students responded:

Sitting in the front rows can motivate me to learn. I must engage in learning all the time because the teacher can ask me questions abruptly; therefore, I must concentrate on the lesson all the time. My disengagement (e.g., gossip) can be identified by the teacher easily. (S12)

Teachers sometimes focus much on the content especially when the lesson is complicated. However, it is when sense of humor should be applied; otherwise, students can be bored. When I find that the class is tense, I ask teachers questions to clarify or confirm information. I sometimes even make jokes. That could relax and energize the class to go on. (S17)

Four students confessed that students' prior preparation can reduce boredom in the classroom. S9 recounted his experience that his preview of the target lesson could help him contribute to the lesson. "A class could be bored if the teacher asked a question, and no students had an answer." That means, it was students' contributions to the lesson that could improve the learning environment.

Finally, two students explained that it was their positive attitudes that could help them ward off boredom. They tried to look at valuable aspects of the lesson by thinking about the practicality, applicability, and importance of the lesson. For instance, S16 expressed that she always thought that a large proportion of the test would be from the

current lesson. She said, "In the speaking lesson, if I have to speak about some boring topics, I motivate myself by thinking that this answer might be helpful for the final test."

Nine out of twenty students reported that they only used debilitative strategies to mitigate boredom. They claimed they would use smartphones to play games or text their friends in the classroom when they felt bored. They confessed that such activities could swing them away from boredom before they got back to the lesson because activities that required much cognitive but little emotional engagement could result in tension and then boredom. For example, S6 said, "When the task is too challenging for me or requires much concentration, I can be stressed out. To cheer up myself, I sometimes turn on my phone and text my friends for a short moment." Another strategy employed by the students was leaving the classroom during breaktime to walk around to change the mundane atmosphere in the classroom. They found that wandering around and breathing in some fresh air outside the classroom could give them more energy to go on with the rest of the lesson. S19 responded, "My friends and I usually leave the classroom during breaktime a bit longer to walk around the campus to get positively emotionally charged." The final strategy utilized by this group was talking to their classmates. They exchanged banters or discussed an irrelevant topic. When teachers assigned them to work in groups, they could use some of the time allotted by the teachers to discuss a topic of their interest before they focused on the topic assigned by the teachers. S13 said, "When I get bored in the classroom, I ask my friends to tell me a joke."

Overall, the students reported the causes of boredom in L2 classroom and their boredom coping strategies. Boredom inside L2 classrooms derived from the context, teachers, tasks, and students. The students also revealed their strategies they used to deal with boredom in language classrooms, broadly categorized as facilitative and debilitative. They were supposed to be effective and popular among the students.

5. Discussion

The study was guided by two research questions investigating the boredom antecedents and students' boredom coping strategies. In terms of the causes of boredom, the results showed that the teacher was generally considered to be an indicator of boredom experience in language classrooms. Specifically, students were dissatisfied with the teacher's inappropriate instructional practices, authoritarian

(Robinson, 1975).

In light of the obtained data, this study offered several implications for L2 teaching and teacher training. Teachers can reduce the occurrence of students' boredom by applying various teaching methodologies. One possible approach is that the teacher can try to give more explicit instructions and explanations instead of only providing the sample answers in the textbook. To be more specific, the teacher may replace seemingly boring content and provide a relatable solution or example for students (Bui, 2023; Robinson, 1975). Another approach is designing a task that fits with students' L2 level or expectations (Nakamura et al., 2021). To do this, the teacher might ask for the students' feedback and modify the lesson appropriately. We would also argue for the role of higher education administrators in teacher training. In-service training is well-documented to develop teachers professionally; teachers can update their current knowledge and improve their teaching quality (Nguyen, 2024).

6. Conclusion

The current study was driven by the researchers' passion to contribute to the literature on boredom in language classrooms in a particular context of Vietnam. The causes of boredom stemmed from teachers, tasks, students, and the environment. Students used many different strategies to cope with the boredom they experienced in classrooms. The findings can be a reference for Vietnam and other L2 contexts.

This study contributes to the theory of L2 emotion. Theoretically, it expands the literature on L2 boredom in the classroom by shedding light on the causes of students' boredom and the strategies they use to ward off boredom. Practically, as this study was conducted in the context of Vietnam, it can be a reference for Vietnam and similar contexts which had a limited number of options of foreign languages for students to choose.

Overall, there are several limitations of the current study. First, the sample size was relatively small regarding generalizability. Second, this study mainly relied on students' self-reports. Future research can explore language teachers' boredom and activities in relation to students' boredom. Finally, this study only used semi-structured interviews as the only data collection tool. Further research can focus on exploring both the boredom experience of teachers and students at the same time to provide more insightful implications for improving the quality of L2 teaching as well

as using various instruments such as open-ended questionnaires or diary observation.

Data availability: Data were obtained from interviews conducted in Vietnamese with twenty students. Recordings and consents will be submitted on request.

Acknowledgment: The authors would like to send thanks to the editor and anonymized reviewers for constructive feedback. We also owe thanks to the participants involved in this study. Great thanks would go the academic boards.

Declaration of interests: The authors declare that they do not have any financial or personal conflict that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Funding: The authors received no funding for this study.

References

Amos, A., Wiltshire, S., Haw, S., & McNeill, A. (2006). Ambivalence and uncertainty: experiences of and attitudes towards addiction and smoking cessation in the mid-to-late teens. *Health Education Research, 21*(2), 181–191. https://doi.org/10.1093/her/cyh054

Ayuningtyas, P., Mauludin, L. A., & Prasetyo, G. (2022). Investigating the anxiety factors among English for Specific Purposes students in a vocational education setting. *Language Related Research, 13*(3), 31–54. http://dx.doi.org/10.52547/LRR.13.3.3

Barrett, L. F. (2004). Feelings or words? Understanding the content in self-report ratings of experienced emotion. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 87*(2), 266–281. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.87.2.266

Bearden, L. J., Spencer, W. A., & Moracco, J. C. (1989). A study of high school dropouts. *The School Counselor, 37*(2), 113–120. http://www.jstor.org/stable/23901595

Bui, H. P. (2023). Vietnamese university EFL teachers' and students' beliefs and teachers' practices regarding classroom assessment. *Language Testing in Asia, 13*(10), Article 10. https://doi.org/10.1186/s40468-023-00220-w

Chapman, K. E. (2013). *Boredom in the German foreign language classroom.* ProQuest LLC.

Daniels, L.M., Tze, V.M., & Goetz, T. (2015). Examining boredom: Different causes for different coping profiles. *Learning and Individual Differences, 37*, 255–261. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lindif.2014.11.004

Daniels, L. M., R. H. Stupnisky, R. Pekrun, T. L. Haynes, R. P. Perry, & N. E. Newall. (2009). A longitudinal analysis of achievement goals: From affective antecedents to emotional effects and achievement outcomes, *Journal of Educational Psychology, 101*(4), 948–963. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0016096

Daschmann, E. C., T. Goetz, & Stupnisky, R. H. (2011). Testing the predictors of boredom at school: Development and validation of the precursors to boredom scales, *British Journal of Educational Psychology, 81*, 421–440. https://doi.org/10.1348/000709910X526038

Davies, J., & Fortney, M. (2012). The menton theory of engagement and boredom.

The menton theory of engagement and boredom. In P. Langley (ed.) *First Annual Conference on Cognitive Systems*. Palo Alto, California.

Derakhshan, A. (2022). Revisiting research on positive psychology in second and foreign language education: Trends and directions. *Language Related Research*, *13*(5), 1–43. https://doi.org/10.52547/LRR.13.5.1

Derakhshan, A., Kruk, M., Mehdizadeh, M., & Pawlak, M. (2021a). Activity induced boredom in online EFL classes. *ELT Journal, 76*(1), 58–68. https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/ccab072

Derakhshan, A., Kruk, M., Mehdizadeh, M., & Pawlak, M. (2021b). Boredom in online classes in the Iranian EFL context: Sources and solutions. *System, 101*, 102556. https://doi.org/10.1177/13621688211064944

Derakhshan, A., Fathi, J., Pawlak, M. & Kruk, M. (2022). Classroom social climate, growth language mindset, and student engagement: the mediating role of boredom in learning English as a foreign language. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*. https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2022.2099407

Dewaele, J.-M. (2015). On emotions in foreign language learning and use. *The Language Teacher, 39*, 13–15. https://doi.org/10.37546/JALTTLT39.3-3

Eren, A. & Coskun, H. (2016). Students' level of boredom, boredom coping strategies, epistemic curiosity, and graded performance. *The Journal of Educational Research, 109*(6), 574–588. https://doi.org/10.1080/00220671.2014.999364

Eastwood, J. D., Frischen, A., Fenske, M. J., & Smilek, D. (2012). The unengaged mind: Defining boredom in terms of attention. *Perspectives on Psychological Science, 7*(5), 482–495. https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691612456044

Geiwitz, P. J. (1966). Structure of boredom. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 3*(5), 592–600. https://doi.org/10.1037/h0023202

Goetz, T., Frenzel, A. C., Hall, N. C., Nett, U. E., Pekrun, R., & Lipnevich, A. A. (2014). Types of boredom: an experience sampling approach. *Motivation and Emotion, 38*(3), 401–419. https://doi.org/10.1026/0049-8637.38.4.149

Goldberg, Y. K., Eastwood, J. D., LaGuardia, J., & Danckert, J. (2011). Boredom: an emotional experience distinct from apathy, anhedonia, or depression. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology, 30*(6), 647–666. https://doi.org/10.1521/

jscp.2011.30.6.647

Harris, M. B. (2000). Correlates and characteristics of boredom proneness and boredom. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 30*(3), 576–598. https://doi.org/ 10.1111/j.1559-1816.2000.tb02497.x

Hill, A. B., & Perkins, R. E. (1985). Towards a model of boredom. *British Journal of Psychology, 76*(2), 235–240. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.2044-8295.1985.tb01947.x

Hoemann, K., Devlin, M., & Barrett, L. F. (2020). Comment: Emotions are abstract, conceptual categories that are learned by a predicting brain. *Emotion Review, 12*(4), 253–255. https://doi.org/10.1177/1754073919897296

Khoa, B. T., Hung, B. P., & Hejsalem-Brahmi, M. (2023). Qualitative research in social sciences: data collection, data analysis and report writing. *International Journal of Public Sector Performance Management, 12*(1–2), 187–209. https://doi.org/10.1504/IJPSPM.2023.132247

Kruk, M. & Zawodniak, J. A. (2020). Comparative study of the experience of boredom in the L2 and L3 classroom. *English Teaching & Learning 44*, 417–437. https://doi.org/10.1007/s42321-020-00056-0

Larson, R. W., & Richards, M. H. (1991). Boredom in the middle school years: Blaming schools versus blaming students. *American Journal of Education, 99*(4), 418–443. http://www.jstor.org/stable/1085554

Li, C. (2022). Foreign language learning boredom and enjoyment: The effects of learner variables and teacher variables. *Language Teaching Research* (in press). https://doi.org/10.1177/13621688221090324

Lindquist, K. A. (2013). Emotions emerge from more basic psychological ingredients: A modern psychological constructionist model. *Emotion Review, 5*(4), 356–368. https://doi.org/10.1177/1754073913489750

Lindquist, K. A., MacCormack, J. K., & Shablack, H. (2015). The role of language in emotion: Predictions from psychological constructionism. *Frontiers in Psychology, 6*, 1–17. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2015.00444

Macklem, G. (2015). *Boredom in the classroom: addressing student motivation, self-regulation, and engagement in learning*. Springer. https://doi.org/ 10.1007/978-3-319-13120-7

Macalister, J. & Nation, I.S.P. (2020). *Language curriculum design* (2nd ed.).

Routledge.

MacIntyre, P., Gregersen, T. (2012). Affect: The role of language anxiety and other emotions in language learning. In S. Mercer, S. Ryan, & M. Williams (eds) *Psychology for language learning*. Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137032829_8

Nakamura, S. (2018). How I see it: An exploratory study on attributions and emotions in L2 learning. *Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching, 8*(3), 553–574. https://doi.org/10.14746/ssllt.2018.8.3.2

Nakamura, S., Darasawang, P., & Reinders, H. (2021). The antecedents of boredom in L2 classroom learning. *System, 98*, 102469 https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2021.102469

Nett, U. E., Goetz, T., & Daniels, L. M. (2010). What to do when feeling bored? Students' strategies for coping with boredom. *Learning and Individual Differences, 20*(6), 626–638. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lindif.2010.09.004

Nett, U. E., Goetz, T., & Hall, N. C. (2011). Coping with boredom in school: An experience sampling perspective. *Contemporary Educational Psychology, 36*(1), 49–59. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cedpsych.2010.10.003

Nguyen, L. T. (2024). Professional learning for CALL teachers: A research-based approach. In H. P. Bui, R. Kumar, & N. K. Kamila, *Innovations and applications of technology in language education* (pp. 1-26). Taylor & Francis.

Pawlak, M., Derakhshan, A., Mehdizadeh, M., & Kruk, M. (2021). Boredom in online English language classes: Mediating variables and coping strategies. *Language Teaching Research* (in press). https://doi.org/10.1177/13621688211064944

Pekrun, R. (2006). The control-value theory of achievement emotions: Assumptions, corollaries, and implications for educational research and practice. *Educational Psychology Review, 18*, 315–341. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-006-9029-9

Pekrun, R., Elliot, A. J., & Maier, M. A. (2009). Achievement goals and achievement emotions: Testing a model of their joint relations with academic performance. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 101*(1), 115–135. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0013383

Pekrun, R., Goetz, T., Titz, W., & Perry, R. P. (2002). Academic emotions in

students' self-regulated learning and achievement: A program of qualitative and quantitative research. *Educational Psychologist, 37*(2), 91–105. https://doi.org/ 10.1207/S15326985EP3702_4

Pishghadam, R., & Shakeebaee, G. (2020). Economic, social, cultural, emotional, and sensory capitals in academic achievement. *Language Related Research, 11*(5), 1–30. https://doi.org/10.29252/LRR.11.5.1

Robinson, W. P. (1975). Boredom at school. *British Journal of Educational Psychology, 45*(2), 141–152. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.2044-8279.1975.tb03239.x

Thackray, R. I. (1981). The stress of boredom and monotony: A consideration of the evidence. *Psychosomatic Medicine, 43*(2), 165–176. https://doi.org/10.1097/ 00006842-198104000-00008

Tze, V. M. C., Daniels, L. M., & Klassen, R. M. (2016). Evaluating the relationship between boredom and academic outcomes: A meta-analysis. *Educational Psychology Review, 28*(1), 119-144. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-015-9301-y

Tze, V. M. C., Klassen, R. M., & Daniels, L. M. (2014). Patterns of boredom and its relationship with perceived autonomy support and engagement. *Contemporary Educational Psychology, 39*(3), 175-187. https://doi.org/10.1016/ j.cedpsych.2014.05.001

Valiente, C., Swanson, J., & Eisenberg, N. (2011). Linking students' emotions and academic achievement: When and why emotions matter. *Child Development Perspectives, 6*(2), 129–135. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1750-8606.2011.00192.x

Villavicencio, F. T., & Bernardo, A. B. I. (2012). Positive academic emotions moderate the relationship between self-regulation and academic achievement. *British Journal of Educational Psychology, 83*(2), 329–340. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.2044-8279.2012.02064.x

Wang, Y. (2023). Probing into the boredom of online instruction among Chinese English language teachers during the Covid-19 pandemic. *Current Psychology*. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-022-04223-3.

Westgate, E. C., & Wilson, T. D. (2018). Boring thoughts and bored minds: The MAC model of boredom and cognitive engagement. *Psychological Review, 125*(5), 689–713. https://doi.org/10.1037/rev0000097

Zawodniak, J., Kruk, M., & Pawlak, M. (2021). Boredom as an aversive emotion

experienced by English majors. *RELC Journal*, *54*(1), 22–36. https://doi.org/10.1177/00336882209737

About the Authors

Nhat Hoai Tran is a student at Ton Duc Thang University in Vietnam. He majors in English Language Studies. This article is part of his thesis defended at Ton Duc Thang University. His research interests include emotion theory, classroom research, and second language pedagogy. He can be contacted at nhattranelt@gmail.com.

Bui Phu Hung holds a PhD in TESOL. He is now a lecturer researcher at the University of Economics in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. He has supervised Nhat's thesis. He has many publications indexed in Scopus and Web of Science. He can be found at ORCID: 0000-0003-3468-4837 or hungbp@ueh.edu.vn.