

Exploring Language Boredom among Non-English Major Students in English Language Learning

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Abstract. This study investigates the phenomenon of boredom experienced by non-English major college students in their English language learning, aiming to provide valuable insights into the factors influencing boredom, such as language proficiency levels and gender. Additionally, it aims to guide educators in effectively addressing negative emotions and enhancing students' efficiency in acquiring English skills. Employing quantitative research methods including surveys and statistical analysis, this study collects data on the frequency, intensity, triggers of English boredom, as well as its impact on academic performance. The data analysis reveals that non-English major students commonly experience feelings of boredom when studying English, particularly PowerPoint Presentation Boredom. There are variations in the causes of boredom among non-English major college students based on their language proficiency levels and gender. The findings indicate that students have grown weary of conventional approaches to grammar and vocabulary instruction, expressing a desire for more engaging and practical learning methods. Consequently, this study concludes that educators should embrace innovative pedagogical techniques such as gamification and task-based learning to invigorate students' interest and motivation.

Keywords: English boredom; non-English majors; English learning; teaching methods; academic performance.

1. Introduction

Language learning is a multifaceted cognitive process influenced by various factors, encompassing rational aspects related to brain cognition and irrational elements such as emotions. Oxford emphasizes the significance of positive psychology not only focusing on positive emotions but also giving equal attention and consideration to the impact of negative emotions [1]. Boredom, being a negative emotion, represents one of the most intense and prevalent emotional experiences in human life. Despite its prevalence and detrimental effects, boredom often receives less attention in English learning compared to more overt emotions like anxiety and anger [2]. Therefore, the objective of this study is to investigate the experience of boredom among college students majoring in disciplines other than English. While previous research has explored English-related boredom among college students, this study specifically focuses on non-English major college students and provides further insights based on language proficiency levels and gender. By doing so, not only can gaps in prior research be addressed, but its applicability can also be broadened. This will provide interdisciplinary educators with valuable insights for better understanding changes in students' experiences of boredom related to English studies and ultimately guide educators in assisting students to mitigate these negative emotions and enhance their efficiency in acquiring the English language.

This study is organized into five parts. The first part provides an introduction to the study, focusing on the research background and its significance. Part two presents a comprehensive literature review on English boredom. The third part outlines the research design, encompassing research questions, participants, tools for data collection and analysis. The fourth part encompasses the results and discussion, elucidating the findings derived from data analysis. The fifth part summarizes the research outcomes along with their implications for teaching. Lastly, there is a conclusion.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Definition of English Boredom

“Foreign language boredom” is a derivative of the emotion of “boredom,” which arises among students during the process of learning a foreign language. It can be seen as a result of the challenges and difficulties associated with acquiring new linguistic skills. When students are faced with unfamiliar vocabulary, complex grammar rules, and the need to constantly practice speaking and listening in a foreign language, they may start to feel bored. According to control value theory, foreign language boredom arises from the perception that one’s efforts in learning the language do not lead to desired outcomes or achievements. This feeling of frustration can deplete activity levels and hinder motivation to continue engaging in foreign language learning activities [3]. Furthermore, it has been noted that foreign language boredom exhibits both stability due to habituation and repetition and dynamism due to contextual factors and transience [4]. For example, an uninspiring lesson or lack of interactive activities may contribute to higher levels of boredom among students.

2.2. Classifications of English Boredom

Boredom is a multifaceted emotion that manifests in various manners. According to research, English boredom encompasses diverse connotations and can be categorized into five distinct subtypes: neutral boredom, calibrated boredom, search boredom, reactive boredom, and apathetic boredom [5]. Neutral boredom denotes a state of diminished arousal and potency wherein individuals experience disinterest or lack of engagement. Calibrated boredom is characterized by moderate levels of both arousal and potency. Search boredom arises when individuals actively seek stimulation but are unable to find it. Reactive boredom emerges from external factors such as being compelled to engage in uninteresting or repetitive tasks. Apathetic boredom represents the most negative subtype among all; it signifies heightened levels of negative potency coupled with low arousal levels. Interestingly, the first four subtypes exhibit a discernible pattern concerning their potency and arousal levels. As the type transforms from neutral to reactive types, there is a decrease in potency while the level of arousal increases. This suggests that individuals may become more agitated or frustrated as they encounter elevated degrees of English Boredom.

Based on the duration of emotional experiences related to boredom in English learning, two distinct types of English boredom can be identified: trait-based English boredom and situational English boredom [6]. Trait-based English boredom refers to the consistent tendency of learners to experience feelings of boredom throughout their journey in learning English, which is habitual, frequent, and relatively stable. This type of boredom can be influenced by various factors such as individual differences among learners, their motivation levels, and their ability to take control of their own learning process. On the other hand, situational English boredom arises from specific circumstances within the foreign language learning environment that fail to stimulate sufficient interest and enthusiasm in learners. Factors contributing to this type of boredom include task difficulty, teacher attitude towards teaching English, and classroom organization. Situational English boredom tends to be more instantaneous, transient, and situation-specific.

Based on the causes of English boredom, Kruk and Zawodniak have identified two primary classifications of boredom commonly observed in the English classroom [7]. The first classification is characterized by disengagement, monotony, and repetitiveness. This type of boredom occurs when students perceive the learning materials or activities as uninteresting or lacking variety. It often stems from a lack of engagement with the subject matter and can result in feelings of apathy and detachment. The second classification is associated with a lack of satisfaction and challenge. This type of boredom arises when students feel that their abilities are not adequately challenged or stimulated in the English classroom. They may perceive the tasks as too easy or repetitive, leading to a sense of dissatisfaction and restlessness.

In a study of Chinese undergraduates, Li, Dewaele, and Hu identified personal, intra-, and extra-classroom factors that influence English learners' boredom. They categorized English boredom into seven types: English classroom boredom, under-challenging task boredom, PowerPoint presentation boredom, homework boredom, teacher-dislike boredom, general learning trait boredom, and over-challenging or meaningless task boredom. These classifications shed light on the primary influencing factors of English learner's experience of monotony [4].

2.3. Influencing Factors of English Boredom

Several studies consistently indicate that learners tend to disengage and lose interest in English class activities when they lack sufficient challenge, a clear purpose, effective implementation, or encounter repetitive tasks. Furthermore, it has been found that students may also experience boredom when the content lacks focus and variety [8].

English language boredom is intricately linked to the dynamics of other classroom participants. The boredom experienced by learners can be intensified by excessive or insufficient teacher enthusiasm, inadequate levels of classroom engagement and feedback that leave students uncertain about learning objectives, as well as uncooperative and unsupportive attitudes from peers in the English language classroom [4, 7, 9].

The subject of English learning is also a crucial determinant influencing the emergence of English boredom. The proficiency level of learners in English plays a significant role in this regard [9]. Furthermore, learners' attitudes towards their English teachers also impact the occurrence of boredom [4]. Students who maintain positive relationships with their teachers often exhibit heightened interest in learning English and consequently experience reduced levels of boredom. Conversely, those harboring negative sentiments towards their teachers are more susceptible to experiencing boredom during the process of learning the English language.

2.4. The Relationship between English Boredom and English Academic Achievements

The researchers found that effective management of boredom plays a crucial role in fostering learner autonomy. Boredom can often hinder students' engagement and motivation in language learning activities. However, by implementing appropriate self-regulation strategies such as goal-setting, task planning, and monitoring progress, learners can effectively combat boredom and maintain their focus on achieving their language learning goals [10].

The study also found that motivation levels among college students gradually declined as they progressed in their English learning. This decline suggests a diminishing drive or enthusiasm to engage actively in language acquisition. It is important to note that this trend does not imply a lack of interest or value placed on English learning by the students; rather, it highlights the challenges and demands associated with continuous language development. On the other hand, boredom levels exhibited a more stable trend initially and throughout the course. This stability could be attributed to various factors such as repetitive exercises or monotonous teaching methods. However, towards the end of the course, there was an unexpected increase in boredom levels. This finding raises questions about potential causes for this shift and emphasizes the need for educators to continuously innovate their teaching approaches to maintain student engagement [9].

It is worth noting that English boredom, as an academic emotion, exhibited negative correlations with positive academic emotions such as pleasure [11]. This suggests that when students perceive their English learning experience as lacking in intrinsic value or personal interest, they are more likely to experience feelings of boredom. On the other hand, positive academic emotions like pleasure seem to be inversely related to English boredom.

3. Research Design

This study aims to comprehensively analyze the current state of English boredom among non-English major college students and its impact on their academic achievement in this field. Employing quantitative research methods, this empirical survey seeks to gather data from a diverse range of participants. The quantitative component will involve surveying a large and diverse sample of non-English majors, assessing various aspects related to English boredom such as frequency, intensity, and specific triggers for feeling bored during language learning activities. Furthermore, statistical analysis will be conducted to ascertain the correlation between students' level of boredom experienced and their overall academic performance in the English course. It is important to note that the objective of this study is not to subjectively judge or evaluate individuals or institutions involved but rather objectively investigate the phenomenon of English boredom among non-English major college students.

3.1. Research Question

The research is guided by the following questions:

- (1) What are the characteristics of English learning boredom among college students majoring in disciplines other than English?
- (2) What are the primary factors contributing to their sense of boredom during the process of learning English?
- (3) In light of the factors found in the last question, what measures can be implemented to mitigate the boredom associated with English language acquisition within this cohort?

3.2. Research Participants

A total of 79 undergraduate students majoring in non-English disciplines at a university in Beijing, China, were included in this study. Among the participants, there were 33 male students and 46 female students. The sample comprised individuals from diverse academic backgrounds including chemistry, law, finance, and the arts. The inclusion of these undergraduate students from various non-English disciplines provides a comprehensive representation of the student population at the university. This diversity allows for a broader understanding of language learning strategies and preferences across different academic fields.

3.3. Research Instruments

A questionnaire is used to collect data for this study. The initial focus of the study's questionnaire was to gather personal background information from participants, encompassing their major, gender, and age. The main part of the questionnaire was developed by Li, Dewaele, and Hu [4]. They conducted a comprehensive investigation among non-English majors in Chinese universities to explore the phenomenon of boredom from both learners' and teachers' perspectives through interviews and open-ended questionnaires. Subsequently, they analyzed the collected data to identify seven potential factors influencing boredom and developed an initial version of a 69-item boredom questionnaire. To further refine this instrument, the researchers administered it again to collect additional data which were subjected to discriminant analysis of items as well as exploratory factor analysis resulting in a final 32-item English Boredom Questionnaire comprising seven distinct factors. A five-point Likert scale, with 1 indicating complete disagreement and 5 indicating complete agreement, will be used in this study. The Chinese version of this questionnaire was employed to inquire about the subjects' language background, in consideration of their linguistic proficiency.

The questionnaire is a crucial instrument in this study for several reasons. Firstly, it was specifically tailored to Chinese college students who primarily utilize English as their second language. This selection ensures the questionnaire's high relevance to the subjects involved in this research, facilitating a more accurate understanding of their experiences with English boredom. Secondly, the

questionnaire provides a comprehensive overview of English boredom by incorporating 32 items. These items not only describe various traits and states associated with English boredom but also delve into individuals' tendencies and experiences with it. Furthermore, the questionnaire covers different contexts where English boredom may arise, both within and outside of the classroom setting. Additionally, one significant advantage of this questionnaire lies in its ability to explore internal and external influences on learners' experience of English boredom while considering factors such as teacher influence, task difficulty levels, peer interactions, among others. By taking these influential elements within the learning environment into account, researchers can gain valuable insights into how they contribute to or alleviate feelings of English boredom among students.

4. Data Collection and Analysis

4.1. Data Collection

This study employed a convenient sampling method to survey undergraduate students from first to fourth year who were not majoring in English at selected universities. With the respondents' consent, an electronic questionnaire was administered through a WeChat mini program called Wen Juan Xing, which was promptly returned upon completion. The questionnaire required approximately 8 minutes for students to fill out. To ensure data quality, invalid questionnaires that contained incomplete or inconsistent responses were discarded from further analysis. Valid questionnaires underwent careful review by trained researchers who checked for any errors or inconsistencies in the responses. Once all valid questionnaires were collected and reviewed, the data was then organized using appropriate statistical software packages.

4.2. Data Analysis

The data of the recovered valid questionnaires were recorded in this study and analyzed using SPSS 26.0, primarily employing descriptive statistical analysis and independent sample T-test analysis to address the research questions. Specifically, descriptive statistical analysis was conducted to obtain an overview of English boredom among non-English major college students, followed by a detailed exploration of specific aspects of English boredom through descriptive statistics.

5. Result and Discussion

5.1. Result

In the sample, valid gender information was provided in 79 instances. Among these 79 valid responses, 41.77% were male and 58.23% were female. According to China's Standards of English Language Ability, the participants were categorized as advanced learners (n=5), intermediate learners (n=41), and junior learners (n=33) [12]. Within the advanced category, there were two males and three females; within the intermediate category, there were fifteen males and twenty-six females; while within the junior category, there were sixteen males and seventeen females.

In the advanced group, the top three scenarios with the highest average score regarding boredom in English study were as follows in figures 1-3: "It would have been more interested if other multimedia resources were utilized in class rather than PPT slides loaded with text." "Reading from script in the PPT slides bores me." "PPT slides filled up with solely script but without interactions make me bored." The respective average scores for these scenarios were 4.8, 4.8, and 4.4. According to the research conducted by Li, Dewaele, and Hu, these three factors are categorized as components of "PowerPoint Presentation Boredom" [4].

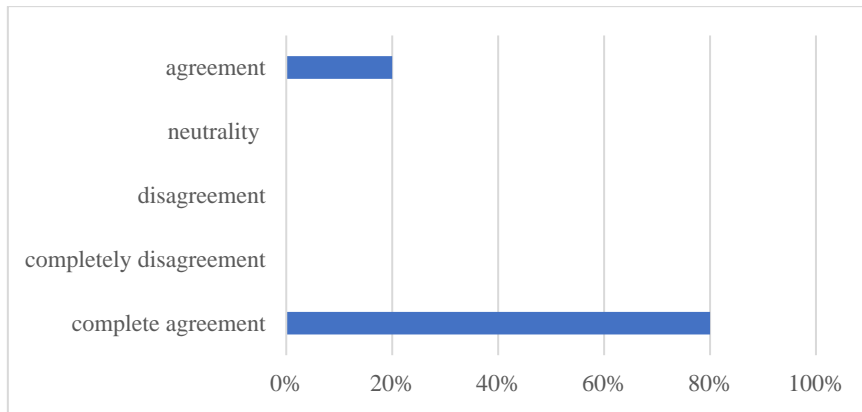


Figure 1. The proportion of the factor “It would have been more interested if other multimedia resources were utilized in class rather than PPT slides loaded with text.”

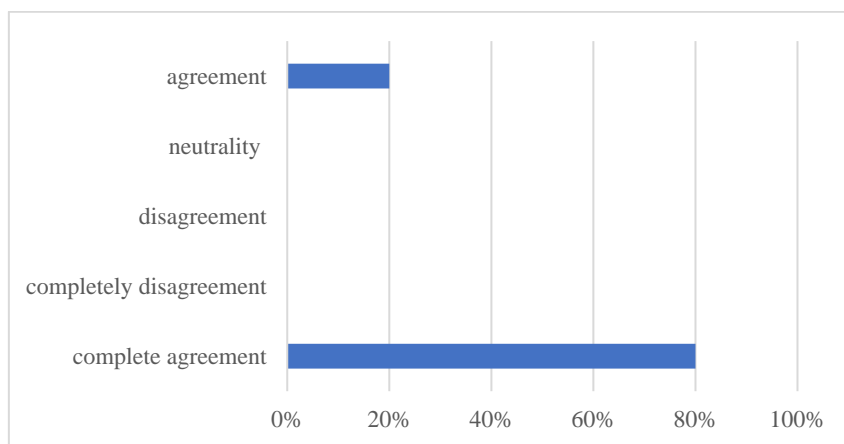


Figure 2. The proportion of the factor “Reading from script in the PPT slides bores me.”

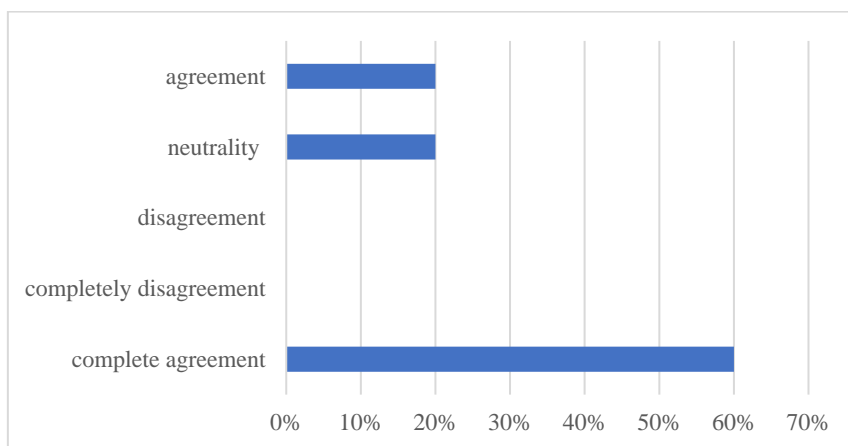


Figure 3. The proportion of the factor “PPT slides filled up with solely script but without interactions make me bored.”

In the intermediate group, as shown in the figures 4-6, the aforementioned three scenarios also obtained the highest scores, with a reversal in the second and third positions, achieving average scores of 4.22, 4.05, and 3.93 respectively.”

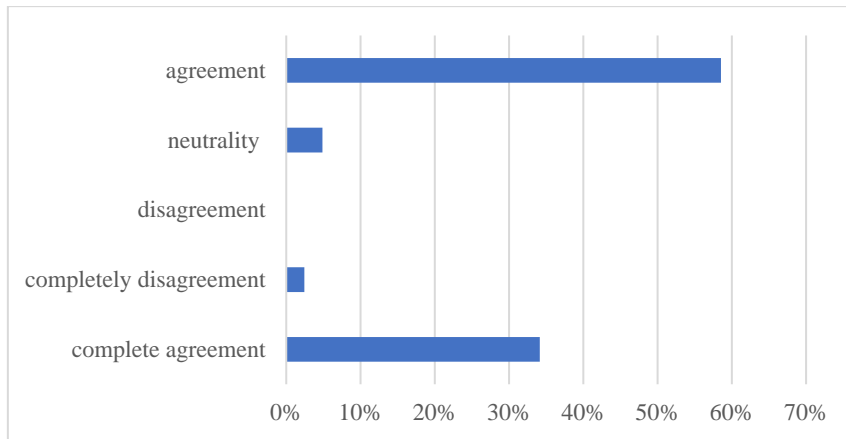


Figure 4. The proportion of the factor “It would have been more interested if other multimedia resources were utilized in class rather than PPT slides loaded with text.”

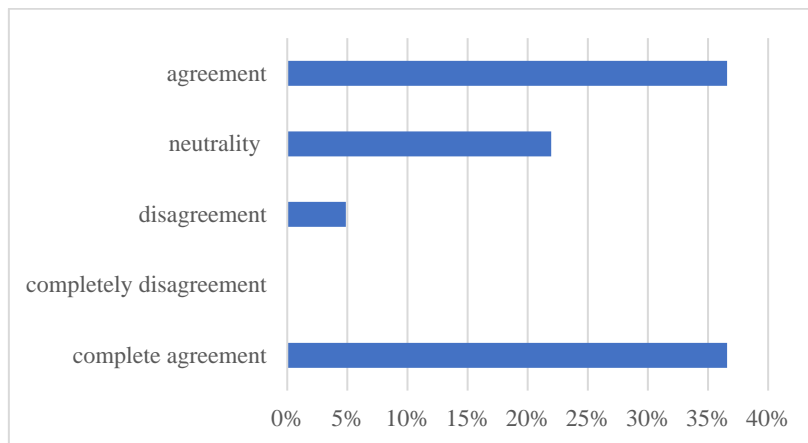


Figure 5. The proportion of the factor “PPT slides filled up with solely script but without interactions make me bored.”

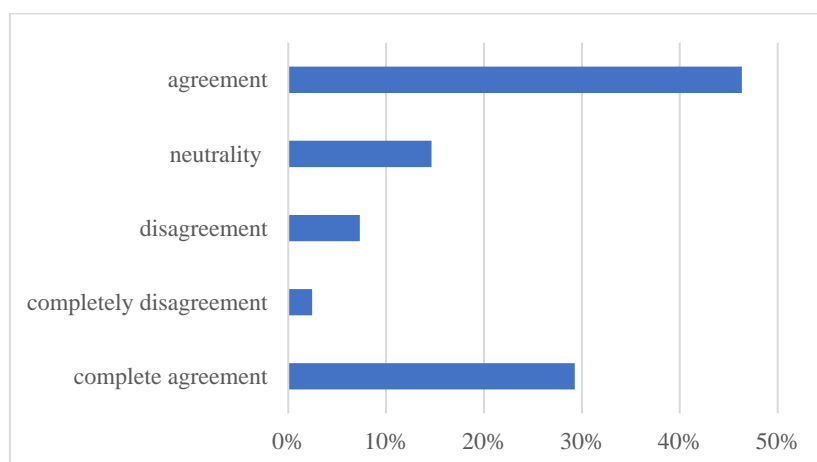


Figure 6. The proportion of the factor “Reading from script in the PPT slides bores me.”

In the junior group, as shown in the figures 7-9, the three English learning scenarios that received the highest average scores were “It would have been more engaging if multimedia resources other than PPT slides loaded with text were utilized in class.” “PPT slides solely filled with script without any interactive elements tend to induce boredom.” and “I become restless and eagerly await the end of the English class.” These scenarios obtained average scores of 4.12, 3.91, and 3.79 respectively. The

last scenario falls within the scope of Foreign Language Classroom Boredom Factor as identified by the study [4].

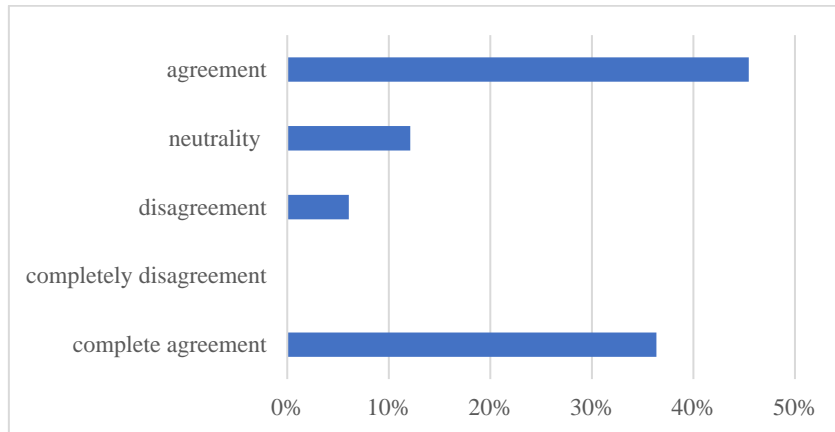


Figure 7. The proportion of the factor “It would have been more engaging if multimedia resources other than PPT slides loaded with text were utilized in class.”

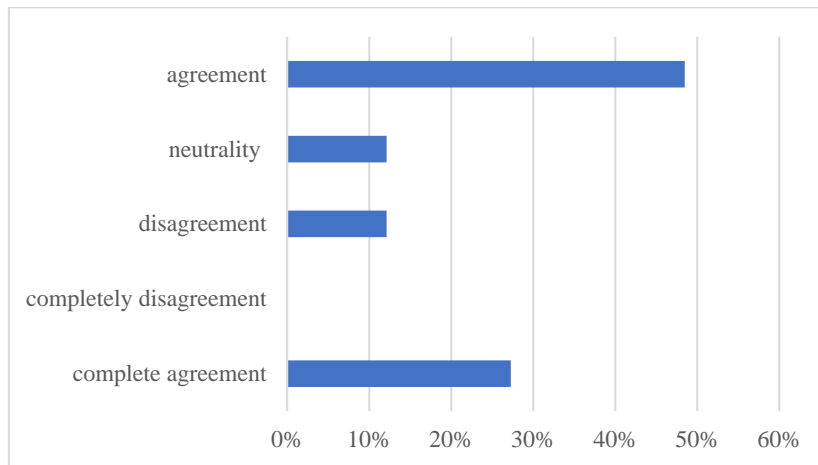


Figure 8. The proportion of the factor “PPT slides solely filled with script without any interactive elements tend to induce boredom.”

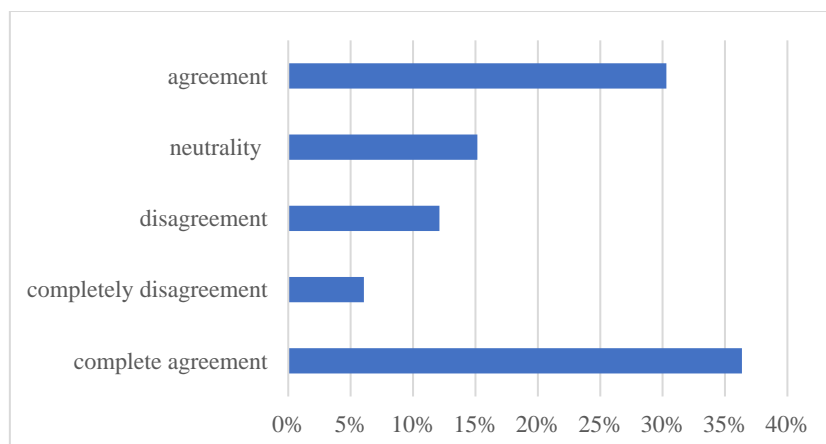


Figure 9. The proportion of the factor “I become restless and eagerly await the end of the English class.”

In the male group, the top three scenarios with the highest average score for English learning boredom were as follows in the figures 10-12: “PPT slides solely filled with script without any interactive

elements tend to induce boredom.” (average score: 4.15), “It would have been more engaging if multimedia resources other than PPT slides loaded with text were utilized in class.” (average score: 4.06), and “When the English teacher appears unmotivated to teach, my motivation to listen diminishes as well.” (average score: 3.73). Notably, research categorizes the last scenario under the Over-Challenging or Meaningless Task Boredom factor [4].

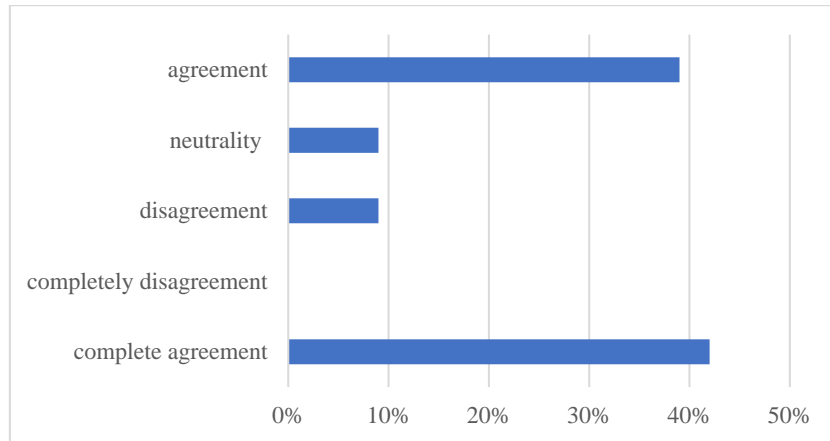


Figure 10. The proportion of the factor “PPT slides solely filled with script without any interactive elements tend to induce boredom.”

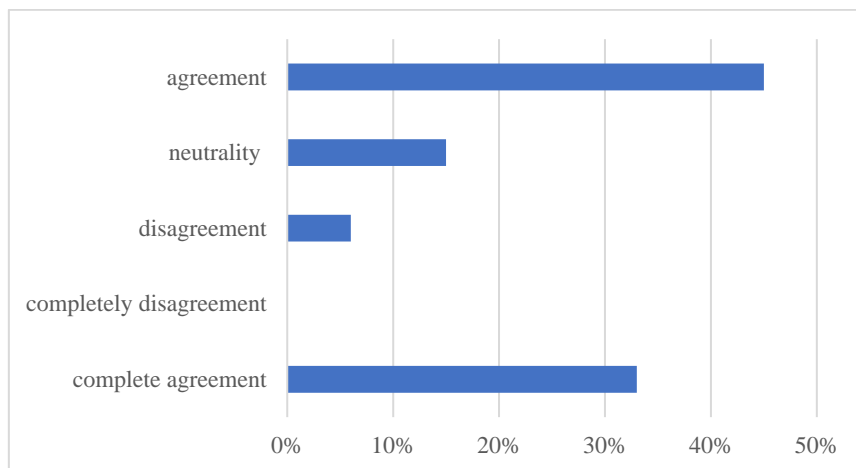


Figure 11. The proportion of the factor “It would have been more engaging if multimedia resources other than PPT slides loaded with text were utilized in class.”

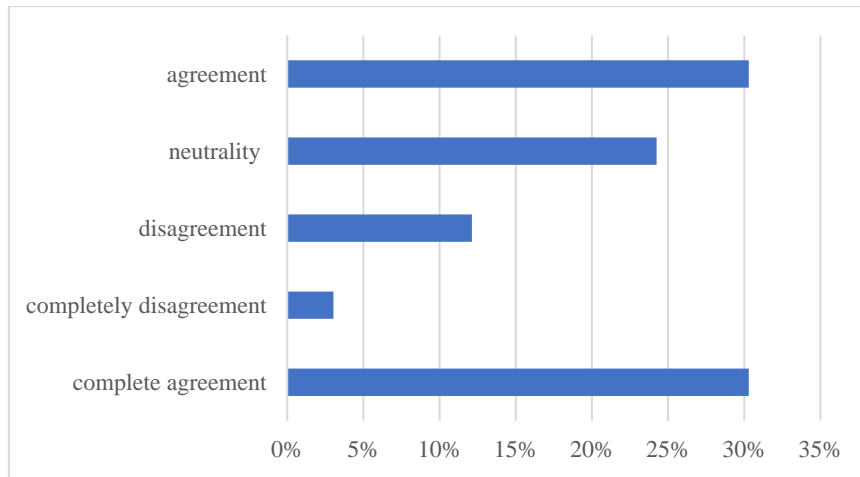


Figure 12. The proportion of the factor “When the English teacher appears unmotivated to teach, my motivation to listen diminishes as well.”

In the female group, as shown in the figures 13-15, the three scenarios that exhibited the highest mean scores were consistent with those observed in the intermediate group, demonstrating average scores of 4.33, 4.02, and 3.91.

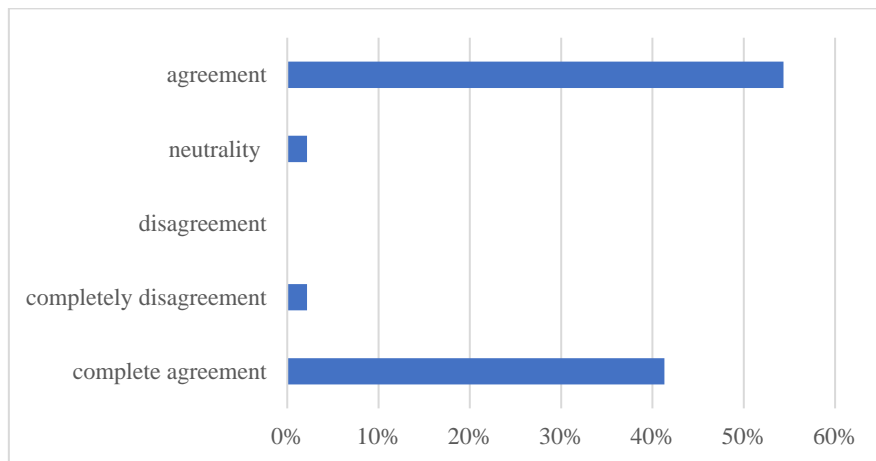


Figure 13. The proportion of the factor “It would have been more interested if other multimedia resources were utilized in class rather than PPT slides loaded with text.”

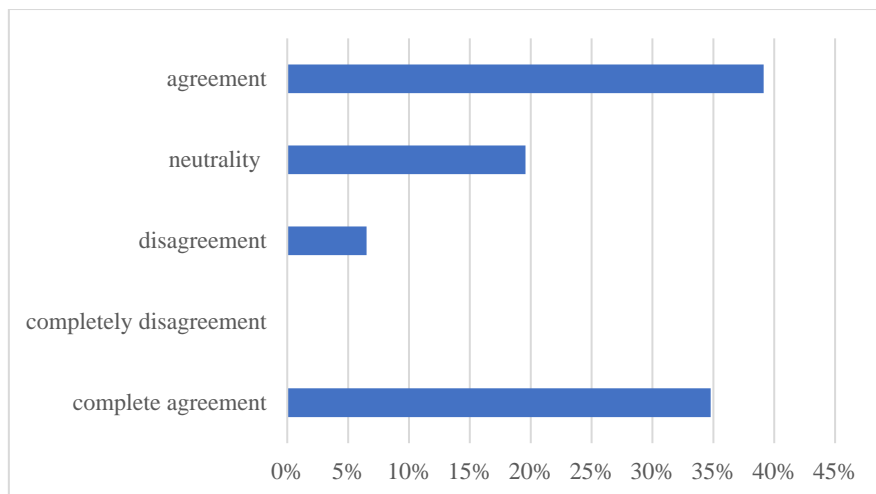


Figure 14. The proportion of the factor “PPT slides filled up with solely script but without interactions make me bored.”

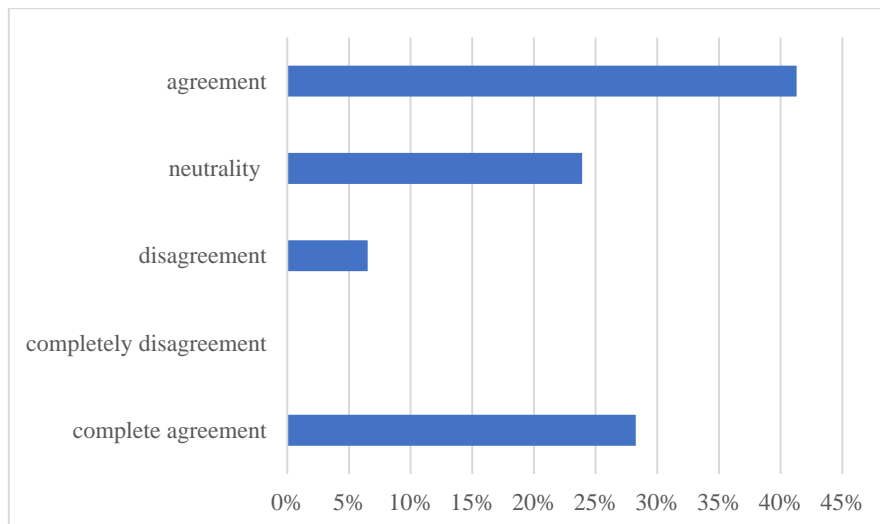


Figure 15. The proportion of the factor “Reading from script in the PPT slides bores me.”

5.2. Discussion

The data analysis reveals that PowerPoint Presentation Boredom constitutes the primary source of boredom in English learning among non-English majors. To deal with this issue, it is essential to explore alternative teaching methods and incorporate interactive activities into the classroom.

One potential solution is to promote student engagement through group discussions and collaborative projects. By organizing students into smaller groups, they can actively participate in dialogues, exchange ideas, and gain insights from different perspectives. This approach not only enhances their language proficiency but also cultivates critical thinking and teamwork skills. Another effective strategy involves integrating multimedia resources into the curriculum. Instead of solely relying on PowerPoint presentations, teachers can incorporate videos, audio clips, online articles, or even virtual reality experiences to create a more dynamic and captivating learning process. These diverse materials provide a multi-sensory experience for students and cater to various learning styles. Furthermore, incorporating gamification elements can significantly alleviate boredom during English classes. By introducing educational games or quizzes related to the lesson content, students are motivated to actively engage while enjoying themselves simultaneously. Gamified activities establish a competitive yet supportive environment that encourages active participation and enhances knowledge retention. Additionally, it is crucial for teachers to regularly assess their teaching methods by seeking feedback from students regarding their preferences and suggestions for improvement. This open communication allows educators to adapt their approaches accordingly based on individual needs and interests.

According to the prevailing phenomenon observed among junior students, who express restlessness and eagerly await the end of English class, it is evident that addressing this issue is necessary to enhance their learning experience.

One potential approach to tackle this problem could involve incorporating a greater number of interactive activities into the English curriculum. By introducing games, group discussions, or role-playing exercises, students can actively participate in the learning process and engage with the subject matter. This not only enhances enjoyment during classes but also facilitates the development of essential language skills such as speaking and listening. Furthermore, diversifying teaching methods can contribute significantly to alleviating restlessness during English classes. Teachers can integrate multimedia resources like videos or online platforms offering interactive lessons tailored for young learners. These tools provide visual aids and interactive exercises that render learning more dynamic and captivating. Another aspect worth considering is creating a positive classroom environment where students feel comfortable expressing themselves without fear of judgment or criticism. Encouraging open communication by fostering a supportive atmosphere allows students to freely

share their thoughts and ideas, leading to increased engagement in class. Additionally, teachers should strive to establish connections between English lessons and real-life situations relevant to junior students' interests by incorporating topics related to popular culture, sports events, or current trends; this sparks curiosity and motivates active participation in class discussions. Moreover, providing regular feedback on student performance helps identify areas for improvement while acknowledging their progress. Constructive feedback not only boosts confidence but also encourages continuous effort towards language proficiency.

The male group experiences more severe consequences when the English teacher demonstrates a lack of motivation to teach. Addressing this issue necessitates the implementation of strategies specifically tailored to engage and motivate male students in their English language learning journey. This may involve incorporating practical exercises or real-life examples into lessons that resonate with their interests and aspirations. Additionally, providing supplementary support through mentoring programs or extracurricular activities focused on enhancing language skills could also be considered.

The limitations of this study encompass a restricted sample size, confined solely to non-English majors within a university located in Beijing. Furthermore, potential subjectivity and recall bias may be present within the questionnaire survey methodology employed. Additionally, it is important to acknowledge that the outcomes obtained could potentially be influenced by cultural and educational backgrounds.

Based on the findings of this study, potential future research directions encompass enlarging the sample size to encompass non-English majors from diverse regions and educational institutions; Conducting an in-depth investigation into the impact of various instructional approaches on boredom; Exploring additional factors influencing English learning boredom, such as teacher demeanor and task complexity.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study investigates the specific factors contributing to language boredom among non-English major students. The findings reveal that a lack of relevance and practicality in traditional teaching methods is one of the primary reasons for boredom during English language acquisition. Many students feel disconnected from their daily lives when studying grammar rules and vocabulary lists without understanding how these skills can be applied in real-life situations.

Furthermore, gender differences were observed regarding language disengagement, with female non-English major students expressing higher levels of boredom compared to their male counterparts. This discrepancy may be attributed to societal expectations and stereotypes surrounding women's perceived abilities in learning languages or reflect different learning preferences between genders.

Additionally, it is important to note that language proficiency levels significantly influence the experience of boredom during English language acquisition. Students with lower proficiency levels may find it more challenging to engage with complex grammatical structures or unfamiliar vocabulary, leading to feelings of frustration and disinterest.

Based on these findings, it becomes evident that educators need to adopt innovative pedagogical techniques to address the issue of language disengagement among non-English major students. One potential approach is gamification, which involves incorporating game elements into educational activities. By transforming language learning into an interactive and enjoyable experience, gamification can effectively motivate students and actively involve them in their own learning process.

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