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Boredom at Tertiary Level Classrooms: From English Major Students' Perspectives

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Abstract

The present study analyzes boredom in teaching learning settings and how learners experience negative impact of boring lessons at tertiary level English department in Bangladesh. This study was carried out as part of a project supervised by the researcher where three groups of students use classroom observation and focus group discussion to investigate level of boredom and its impact on learning outcomes of teaching and learning partnership. Furthermore, it also outlines optimum level of boredom and how teachers can avoid boring activities in classroom settings as boring teaching and learning have significant impact on students motivation and engagement with any learning content because learning is a psychological process of showing academic ability especially at tertiary level where active intellectual exchange can ensure learners' autonomy in their learning process. Therefore, curriculum design, teaching materials, teachers' training and proper management can make tertiary level classroom interesting and engaging for teaching and learning.

INTRODUCTION

Experience of boredom in learning indicates mental inability to experience positive attitudes towards learning in class and outside classroom learning process. According to Mora (2011) students boredom is related to monotonous activities that they find pointless and because of routinized and monotonous classroom activities some students extricate academically and they exhibit troublemaking manners, cut class, and eventually drop out from the learning process. Moreover, high-stakes assessments are leading learners to experience sense of boredom. Therefore boring lessons can be ineffective in classrooms because of learners' lack of self-regulation and engagement and it is also noticeable that sometimes modern way of teaching may bring boredom if teachers use technology without understanding its relevance to teaching content. In Bangladesh, classes are teacher-centered and learners are passive recipients of teaching because testing process is mainly focused on memorizing points from book. The present study focuses on level of boredom at tertiary level and its impact on teaching and learning partnership. Therefore, research questions are (1) To what extent do students experience boredom in teaching –learning setting at tertiary level? (2) What impact does boredom has on learning experience of learners?

Literature Review

Aldridge & DeLucia (1989) describe that educational boredom is an infrequently studied fact that has harmful influence on chosen academic integration and perseverance of first year college students. They administered a questionnaire survey that shows that freshmen experience boredom because of inconsistency between student expectations and reality, and unmet students' requirements for a high degree of classroom motivation. Moreover, because of educational boredom, learners can face deep-seated apprehension of failure and self-defeating manners that direct to educational breakdown or withdrawal so educational institutions should face educational boredom through suggested programs and guidelines. Similarly, Karmos & Karmos (1983) state that American educationalists explain that

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boredom is the central problem in schools and other issues, for example drugs, unruliness and abusing are comparatively minor or short-term problem. Daschmann, Goetz and Stupnisky (2014) investigate teachers' ability to recognize background of students' boredom. They administered an open-ended questionnaire to survey students' boredom and semi-structured teachers' interviews to inspect the issues that teachers believe make their learners bored. The results of this study showed a high congruency because both teachers and students provide similar observations on backgrounds of boredom.

Mann and Robinson (2009) analyze the contributors, moderators and outcomes of boredom amongst university students of higher education. It reveals that boredom is connected to reduced educational accomplishment, school related frustration and absence and they claim that modest concentration has been shown to the factors of boredom within higher education institutions. They surveyed two hundred and eleven university students' questionnaires that try to assess contributors, moderators and consequences of students' boredom and results illustrate that 59% of learners consider their lectures boring half the time and 30% think that most or all of their lectures to be boring. The outcomes of being bored integrated students' absence of future lectures and it also indicates that there was also a major connection between intensity of boredom and grade point average. Moreover, the main teaching aspect that contributes to learners' boredom is the application of PowerPoint slides; similarly, the individual characteristic of monotony proneness was the major issue that controls the experience of learners' monotony.

Furthermore, Macklem (2015) explains aspects of chronic student boredom, and its impact on academic outcomes; he suggests that emotional skills can help students to overcome boredom both internally and in class. Moreover, he analyzes that we should not neglect students boredom because teachers can contribute significantly in controlling boredom. Finally he mentions that if students can overcome their boredom then their self-regulation, motivation, and engagement can be improved. Similarly, Kanevsky & Keighley (2003) investigate aspects of the boredom that slowly detached learners from classroom learning and they mention that caring teachers can contribute to the solution of this problem. Moreover, boredom brings increasing sense of moral resentment towards education and learners try to refrain from producing better academic performance. In addition, Young (2009) mentions that class time should be set aside for discussion, because now learners can download lectures online and take web library facilities, so students should be challenged with debates and talks with their teachers because active interactions are central to teaching and learning. However, in many modern classrooms teaching is limited to giving and taking power point slides, and this giving and taking slides make classroom monotonous for students. Boredom may control students' behavior and disposition in the classroom. Older studies suggest that bored high school students are more pertinent to be troublemaking (Fogelman, 1976; McGiboney & Carter, 1988; Robinson, 1975; Wasson, 1981 as cited in Mora 2011).

Daschmann, Goetz and Stupnisky (2014) explain that academic boredom that students feel in educational institutions when they do class works can be described as an academic emotion and the basic review of apparent background of boredom is essential for optimizing classroom lessons. Mann and Robinson (2009) investigate the contributors, representatives and outcomes of boredom amongst students of higher education institutions and explain that boredom at university level could have serious consequences for the young adults involved in terms of their academic success. Cui, Meilin and Zhang (2017) analyze that class-related boredom is commonly experienced by students and it has an impact on their learning engagement and achievements. They also mention that previous research has found that perceived teacher enthusiasm might contribute to reducing students' class-related boredom. However, the mechanism through which perceived teacher enthusiasm affects class-related boredom remains unexplored. This study investigates the mediating role of perceived autonomy support and task value in the relationship between teacher enthusiasm and class-related boredom. College students (N = 734) completed questionnaires on perceived teacher enthusiasm, boredom proneness, perceived task difficulty, perceived autonomy support, perceived task value, and class-related boredom. Results showed that after controlling for the effects of demographic variables, boredom proneness, and perceived task difficulty, both perceived autonomy support and task value

fully mediated the relationship between perceived teacher enthusiasm and class-related boredom. These findings suggest that students who perceive more teacher enthusiasm might perceive more autonomy support and task value, which in turn reduce the students' class-related boredom. Feldhusen and Kroll (1991) investigate monotony and challenge for the academically gifted students and state that talented young students are uninterested in the conventional classroom settings. A total of 227 students, identified as academically talented; and 226 not so identified were given a questionnaire that specified that talented learners frequently start with optimistic feelings towards classes although fall short to continue these thoughts due to the not having proper challenges. However, there was no difference between the groups in level of boredom.

Prodromou (1999) explains Optimum Level of Boredom (OLB) in classroom and the following ten points describe OLB of teaching:

- (a) Let students do nothing: In OLB classrooms teachers do all the work by themselves and students are passive participants. First of all, teachers take the register and give details of what they did in the previous lesson. After that they read out the text from the course book and read out the comprehension questions from the book and answer the questions by themselves. Write the answers on the board and the students only listen to teachers' lectures and they are not involved in any part of this class.
- (b) Teach the book: OLB classes depend on teaching only course book. Teachers start from page one and go straight through to the last page of the textbook and teach lesson after lesson. Moreover, teachers never initiate any extraneous material into the lesson because they think that the textbook is Bible.
- (c) Be right all the time: OLB teachers are prepared with the dependable textbook and they pretend that they are right all the time. Moreover, they think that they have all the answers and they correct all the mistakes, never explore demonstration of students' activities. As a result, learners never grow thirst for knowledge, because teachers do not ask them to think critically. Sometimes OLB teachers are fundamentalist because they only reveal students' mistakes.
- (d) Assume students know nothing: Teachers in OLB classrooms clarify everything in full details as if the students have no knowledge regarding their experience of life, their knowledge of the world or other subjects. All boring teachers follow strict disciplinary measures and they are not interested in modern methods of teaching.
- (e) Sit still: Teachers who follow BTM (Boring Teacher Methodology) do not appreciate the importance of body language, so they are always comfortable at desk at the front of the class.
- (f) Be predictable: The OLB comes forward when teachers become very predictable for learners because teachers have a set schedule for doing everything so students identify unerringly what is coming. Therefore if classes have no variation at the beginning, middle and at end and no new method then classes become very boring.
- (g) Speak in a monotone: Teachers should vary the pitch of voice because the most tiresome monotone creates boring class environment so everything in the same dull tone should not be delivered in same way. It is very important to differentiate between explanations and questions, instructions and the serious utterances and the funny utterances.
- (h) Make sure students are idle: In boring classes, teachers give students opportunity to relax and see what is going on outside the window and they can make conversation with fellow classmates. It is very important to use strategies for mixed-ability classrooms so that early finishers do not sit idle and late finishers do not become burden for classmates.
- (i) Lose your students: Boring teachers always lose their students because their students do not know what they are talking about and they never check students' understanding during lectures. Moreover, teachers should not think that if students do not understand it is their problem because sometimes problems can be from teachers' side.
- (j) Keep talking: One of the common features of boring classroom is teachers' talk time because nonstop teacher talk makes classes tedious for students. Teachers should not think that students will imitate their lecture rather students' participation can ensure interesting class environment.

Therefore when students fail to enjoy classes, it requires attention from teachers because it has significant impact on academic performance and learning outcomes. Classroom activities can offer interesting techniques and mechanisms so that students do not feel that they are doing repetitive and meaningless activities in class.

METHOD

This research is part of a project supervised by the researcher for English department students' academic research project at a private university in Bangladesh and data collection methods were classroom observation and focus group discussion. Three groups (five in each) of students participated in this study by using classroom observation and focus group discussion for four months. Three groups of students observed total fifteen English department classes for their project completion and classroom observation checklist were divided into four categories: 1. Organization 2. Presentation 3. Interaction and 4. Content. Both pre and post observation sessions were conducted by observers for further clarifications. For focus group discussion total thirty (20 male and ten female) students from six batches were selected and at first participants were introduced to the FGD discussion and it took one hour for discussion.

Classroom Observation

Group 01

According to group one, classes are monotonous and learners are disinterested for group and pair works because they sometimes consider their fellow classmates inferior in intellectual views. Participants also mention that they find lack of motivation to interact in classes because literature background faculty members are taking language based classes and this observation reveals that there were frequent changes of faculty members even at the mid of the semester. Furthermore, teachers feel pressure to complete the syllabus for examination, and in many classrooms there are lacks of technological support for making class excellent. However, guest teachers' classes are interactive, regular teachers depend on lectures because of their class materials and in content knowledge and relevance all teachers performed well. This observation describes that attendance was comparatively poor in language classes. In this group, participants recommend that the academic calendar should be revised and updated technological support in classroom is very important. Moreover, departments should not assign same faculty in consecutive semesters for any particular batch and faculty appointment must follow language and literature expertise based course teacher.

Group 02

According to participants of the second group, classes of this university are boring because teachers are not friendly inside classroom and students do not pay attention properly to the lecture but teachers do not have any headache about this poor concentration. Moreover, most of the teachers deliver their lecture just to the point, they do not even spend single sentence which is out of the course. Furthermore, this observation notices that mental health problems are also responsible for students' lack of involvement in classrooms. This observation finds that classes are not interesting for students though classrooms are nicely decorated and maintained, teachers and students are not properly involved in their teaching and learning partnership. So teachers can be more engaged and friendlier, they can use humor to make classroom interesting. One of the major findings of this observation is necessary changes in lecture materials can make classes interesting. Finally it adds that overall learning environment of the university influences classroom setting of any department so central planning and execution are obligatory.

Group 03

This observation describes that sometimes teachers take long classes without any break and students do not participate because they find class content boring. Moreover, contents of some courses are not properly organized so students feel tremendous mental pressure during classes and class materials are not designed properly and for this reason students struggle while doing their class works. It also shows that interesting classroom requires balanced participation among students because sometimes students with better results participate frequently and struggling students do not participate because they consider their participation insignificant so faculty members should ensure that everyone is getting their turns when participation is asked from students. Furthermore, according to this observation, co-curricular activities can be incorporated as part of classroom activities, for example, debate can be used as form of presentation so that students can engage themselves in classroom activities.

Focus Group Discussion

In response to the first question regarding enjoyable classroom environment, majority of the participants responded that classes are boring because of lack of interaction between teachers and students and they think that students do not feel interested in traditional techniques of teaching and they prefer teachers who incorporate practical approaches of learning. Two of them mentioned that not only teachers are responsible for boring classrooms but also reluctant students are liable for uninteresting classroom environment. In addition to that one of them stated that she does not know practical relevance of courses so she studies only for passing exams. After that, participants were asked to reflect on the issue of mental engagement and its impact on their learning process and majority of them agreed that they have regular exams so they do get enough time for learning courses and teachers are also busy with syllabus completion as a result teachers sometimes do not cover all topics in details. One of the participants added that because of this exam pressure they do not enjoy learning process. In response to the third question, about attention-grabbing course materials, four of them responded that majority teachers give them traditional materials full of information and they are sometimes confused about the relevance of the materials with their course contents.

Three students from senior semesters mentioned that learners like classroom activities when they feel that course materials are helpful for professional development. After that fourth question was about class activities and two of them stated that sometimes they enjoy group and pair work activities and some teachers can create environment where students enjoy company of each other but majority classes are lecture based so they just listen to their teachers. Finally, students were asked to suggest ways to make classroom motivating and interesting and majority of them suggested that their class routine can be organized properly so that they can concentrate because sometimes they have consecutive classes without any break and especially when they have difficult courses at morning they fail to enjoy as some of them join classes after long journey from other parts of the city.

Two students from senior batches suggested that their syllabuses can be changed because sometimes they have all difficult courses in one semester and they have to carry extreme mental pressure because of assessment process. and as they are students of English department they know about teaching methods and approaches and they think teachers are teaching them theoretically because teachers who are teaching them methods of teaching as part of their English Language Teaching courses are following traditional methods inside classrooms. One of them stated that literature teachers can use visual learning instead of traditional lecture based classes for students' engagement and participation. Two of them responded that they enjoyed their basic language learning classes where teacher uses songs and movies for listening and speaking development. Majority of the senior students focused on teaching systems and environment in the classrooms as significant components of interesting classrooms.

FINDINGS

This study shows that boredom in classes hampers learning progress and primarily teachers can change classroom activities so that students can actively participate and they realize that they are also important part of learning process. Moreover, curriculum and teaching materials should be revised by considering needs of the students and more technological supports are needed for variety of class activities. From students' perspectives, it is very important to revise their class routine because consecutive classes impede their levels of concentration. Some teachers are not friendly enough for students because their classroom attitudes are very conventional so teachers can be trained properly so that they can ensure learners' autonomy by understanding students' perspectives in learning process. Moreover, one of the most important parts of tertiary level education is university management and they should have proper planning for positive learning environment and university administration can monitor classroom teaching evaluation and students' counseling properly so that teachers feel accountable for the learning outcomes of their lessons. Assessment system can be revised because teaching and learning system is more test oriented than knowledge focused. Everyone involved in teaching and learning partnership need to understand learning methods and its impact on mental health. Learning cannot be successful by ignoring students' active participation in learning process. Learners' engagements, active participation and interaction can make classroom interesting for students so teachers should employ supportive strategies so that students enjoy group and pair work activities for active and engaging learning environment and learning environment should be student friendly so that students can receive respect from their teachers.

CONCLUSIONS

In traditional education system, teaching does not promote skill development of learners and teachers never realize that they are accountable for the learning outcomes of teaching procedure so they never try to concentrate on students' feelings and attitudes towards learning process. Furthermore, sometimes needs analysis of learners does not reflect in depth psychological aspects of learning as a result our students come to classes because they have to attend but if we can ensure joyful learning our learners will come to classes because they want to participate in learning process. Similarly, if teachers and education administrators can realize that skill based curriculum enhance learning progress and if learners take responsibility of their learning at tertiary level then every stake holder of higher education will be benefited. Moreover, tertiary level institutions can ensure professional counseling service along with faculty counseling if students display continual frustration and boredom in classroom and faculty members should become conscious that they are not only accountable for delivering class lecture but also their careful observations of students' behavior can improve the impact they leave on young learners when they teach. In private university where students have mixed - ability, struggling students face boredom because they cannot cope with other students. Similarly, assessments and classrooms contents should be connected in such a way so that techniques should differentiate academically gifted learners and not so academically talented students. Finally, more research based on boredom in English department where English is not native language should be conducted as boredom in the foreign language classroom is an under researched topic that has received little deliberation from researchers, however, it has been carefully studied in educational psychology and education (Belton & Priyadharshini, 2007; Farmer & Sundberg, 1986; Fogelman, 1976; Watt & Vodanovich, 1992 as cited in Kruk & Zawodniak, 2018).

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