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Towards the Exploration of EFL Students' Boredom Coping Strategies

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ABSTRACT

Boredom is one of the most frequently experienced emotions in academic contexts, and research has demonstrated its detrimental effects on students' academic achievements. Despite its significance, little attempt has been made to understand students' boredom coping strategies in the English as a foreign language (EFL) learning context. Therefore, this research employed a multimodal design comprising video recordings of class sessions, motometer, and interviews to investigate the behaviors demonstrated by EFL students at universities while they were experiencing boredom in their EFL classes within the context of Iran. This study was undertaken with the participation of 12 EFL students who were chosen through extreme case sampling. These participants were chosen from an Advanced English Grammar (AEG) course. The data collection was done over a period of two months and during seven classroom sessions. The multimodal analysis of the data conducted by MAXQDA software resulted in the identification of 16 boredom coping strategies among Iranian EFL students, categorized at four levels of Nett et al.'s (2010) taxonomy of boredom coping strategies (i.e. cognitive approach, behavioral approach, cognitive avoidance, and behavioral avoidance). The findings of this study shed some insight into how EFL students and their teachers collaborate to find solutions and strategies for coping with boredom when attending EFL classes.

Introduction

During class, a teacher might notice students dozing off, scribbling on pieces of paper, quietly working with their cellphones, or conversing with other students. These are some of the indications that the students might be experiencing a negative emotion known as boredom (Mousavian Rad et al., 2024; Tam et al., 2019). Boredom is a negative state of mind that is characterized by aversive feelings of dissatisfaction, disappointment, inattention, and lack of motivation (Eastwood et al., 2012; Fahlman et al., 2009).

Boredom is pervasive in educational settings and negatively impacts educational outcomes (Rezaee & Seyri, 2022; Sharp et al., 2019; Vogel-Walcutt et al., 2012). One of the most prominent

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signs of boredom is a strong desire to alter the current activity or situation, or to run from it (van Tilburg & Igou, 2012). Given that learning requires sustained attention and motivation, the motivating effect of boredom is what makes it so detrimental in educational settings. According to Pekrun (2006), some emotions can impact students' cognitive resources, learning motivation, usage of learning strategies, and academic achievement. He asserts that there is a reciprocal relationship between achievement emotions and academic outcomes, and boredom, as a member of achievement emotions, compels students to avoid or even abandon the academic context. Simply put, boredom may reduce a person's motivation to learn, which might impede a student's academic development. Related studies (e.g., Daschmann et al., 2011; Mann & Robinson, 2009; Tze et al., 2016) demonstrate a clear connection between students' levels of boredom and their educational and academic progress.

To ward off and overcome this aversive emotion, students employ a variety of strategies in the classroom. Some students may attempt to be obedient to the teacher and attend the lecture, while others disrupt the course and annoy the teacher and their classmates. While some students may wish for the class to end quickly, others may try to alleviate boredom by chatting with their peers. These strategies are referred to as boredom coping strategies. To put it another way, the term boredom coping strategies refers to a collection of techniques with the immediate purpose of alleviating feelings of boredom (Nett et al., 2010).

However, the manifestation of boredom in English as a foreign language (EFL) classes remains unclear, and there is limited research on how L2 students cope with boredom (But et al., 2023; Pawlak et al., 2022). Additionally, most existing studies on boredom coping strategies rely primarily on student self-reports and questionnaires (e.g., Daniels et al., 2015; Finkielsztein, 2020; Pawlak et al., 2022). Boredom coping strategies, especially behavioral strategies, are inherently multimodal and can be expressed through multiple channels, including language and gesture. However, systematic research on the structure and classification of multimodal strategies for coping with boredom remains limited. Therefore, this study aims to investigate how EFL students' boredom coping strategies manifest through human and non-human, as well as verbal and non-verbal, affordances, using multimodal analysis. The research also seeks to identify strategies that effectively help EFL students manage their boredom. Human emotions are closely linked to the social and cultural contexts in which they emerge (Hashemian et al., 2025; Mousavian Rad et al., 2021). Moreover, But et al. (2023) posited that people's cultural differences have been shown to affect the way they perceive and respond to boredom. Accordingly, this study also seeks to identify the patterns of coping strategies employed by EFL students when experiencing boredom in EFL classes in the Iranian cultural context from a multimodal perspective.

Literature Review

Definition of Boredom

Boredom has been examined across multiple disciplines, including education and psychology (e.g., Daschmann et al., 2011; Mercer-Lynn et al., 2014). Consequently, the literature presents numerous definitions of boredom (Lehr & Todman, 2009). Some researchers conceptualize boredom in relation to other characteristics, identifying it as a distinct cognitive, emotional, and behavioral phenomenon (e.g., Goldberg et al., 2011; van Tilburg & Igou, 2017). Conrad (1997) characterizes boredom as a generally unpleasant state in which individuals do not enjoy their current experiences. Eastwood et al. (2012) further describe boredom as an aversive state marked by a sense of emptiness and an inability to engage in stimulating or rewarding activities.

Boredom is frequently conceptualized as encompassing both low-arousal and high-arousal states. In low-arousal conditions, boredom typically arises when environmental stimuli are repetitive, monotonous, low in intensity, or perceived as meaningless (Mikulas & Vodanovich, 1993; Posner et al., 2005; Vodanovich & Watt, 2015). In contrast, high-arousal boredom is characterized by irritability, restlessness, and impatience (Harris, 2000; Klapp, 1986; Martin et al., 2006; Pattyn et al., 2008). Theorists have emphasized the importance of distinguishing between agitation and restlessness versus lethargy and exhaustion within the concept of boredom (Bernstein, 1975; Fiske & Maddi, 1961). For instance, Fiske and Maddi (1961) identified that both lethargic states and observable responses, such as irritability and restlessness, can occur during boredom. Furthermore, research indicates that individuals may experience high-arousal boredom while maintaining mental vigilance and achieving high levels of success in monotonous activities (Thackray, 1981). Hamilton (1981) supports this perspective, suggesting that high-arousal boredom may result from information overload, such as memorizing a telephone directory or meaningless acronyms. She further argues that when individuals are unable to choose the context, this overload may be perceived as boring, pointless, aggravating, exciting, or anxiety-inducing.

Regarding cognitive states, evidence suggests that cognitive processes may undergo changes when affected by boredom. For instance, Conrad (1997) and Wangh (1975) state that people perceive time moving more slowly when they experience boredom. These boredom theories emphasize that bored individuals are incapable of concentrating and must make attempts to manage their attention (Fisher, 1993; Harris, 2000; Ja'afari Meidansar, 2025; Martin et al., 2006; Todman, 2003; Zohrabi & Khalili, 2024). Therefore, boredom can be defined as an aversive feeling that involves "(a) lack of engagement, (b) low arousal negative affect, (c) high arousal negative affect, (d) the experience of a slow passage of time, and (e) difficulty focusing attention" (Fahlman et al., 2013, p. 70).

Boredom Coping Strategies

Although numerous scholars have explored the effects of student boredom on self-regulated learning, it is equally important to examine the strategies students use to cope with and alleviate boredom. Despite students' efforts to reduce the factors that trigger boredom, experiencing this unpleasant state is often unavoidable. Therefore, when boredom persists despite teachers' best attempts to minimize its causes, students need access to effective coping strategies to manage it. Many research studies on boredom (e.g., Daniels et al., 2015; Eren, 2016; Mann & Robinson, 2009) reveal that students of various fields use particular tactics to cope with boredom in their educational contexts. At a university in England, for instance, Mann and Robinson (2009) investigated the predictors, controllers, and effects of boredom during teachers' instruction among students majoring in a variety of fields of study. The researchers discovered that the most common ways that students dealt with boredom during long, boring speeches were to nap, doodle, turn off, talk to the person sitting next to them, color in the letters on the handout, and take breaks to socialize with their friends.

Due to the lack of a comprehensive theoretical framework for boredom coping strategies, relatively few studies have examined the strategies students use to cope with boredom (e.g., Eren & Coskun, 2016; Hamilton et al., 1984; Nakamura et al., 2021; Nett et al., 2010; Nett et al., 2011). Furthermore, these strategies have only recently been investigated within an inclusive theoretical framework, which was introduced by Nett et al. (2010). When Nett et al. (2010) searched for various ways to deal with boredom, they identified two types of boredom coping strategies: (a) approach-type strategies comprising cognitive-approach (CAP) strategies and behavioral-approach (BAP) strategies, and (b) avoidance-type strategies comprising cognitive-avoidance

(CAV) strategies and behavioral-avoidance (BAV) strategies. They reported that students who adopted CAP strategies modified their subjective experience of a boring situation, whereas those who adopted BAP strategies sought to change the boring situation itself. Accordingly, they explained that the students who are willing to adopt CAP strategies remember the lesson's importance when they get bored in the classroom, and as a result, they may endure less boredom throughout the entirety of the lessons. On the other hand, the students who are willing to adopt BAP strategies ask the teacher for more attractive assignments and demand more revisions throughout learning activities to change the flow of the lessons and reduce boredom. In contrast to the approach-type strategies, the avoidance-type strategies involve either thinking about or engaging in activities that are unrelated to the ongoing situation (Eren, 2013; Nett et al., 2010). For example, when employing CAV strategies, students may think about matters unrelated to the ongoing class activities. In contrast, when they adopt BAV strategies, they may chat with classmates to avoid feeling bored during class (Nett et al., 2010). Like the present study, most research on boredom coping strategies utilized Nett et al.'s (2010) taxonomy (i.e. the four-factor model of boredom coping strategies) as a reliable framework for their data analysis (e.g., Eren & Coskun, 2016).

Boredom coping strategies have largely been neglected in the EFL educational context. Nevertheless, some research has provided evidence for strategies that help EFL students and teachers cope with boredom. Dumančić (2018) investigated how EFL teachers in Croatia dealt with boredom in their classrooms. Their coping strategies varied from incorporating diverse activities to initiating physical movements—such as standing up and walking around, involving students, playing music, or even resorting to 'suppression' to conceal their boredom. In another study, Kruk and Zawodniak (2018) examined the boredom-coping profiles of 15 EFL learners across in-class and out-of-class contexts and found that students demonstrated significantly greater creativity outside the classroom, using strategies such as reinterpreting challenging topics from new perspectives and experimenting with alternative learning materials. In a recent qualitative study, Pawlak et al. (2022) examined EFL students' and teachers' perceptions of sources of boredom in online EFL classrooms and the coping mechanisms they used to combat this sensation. Participants were 34 university teachers and 256 English major students from various Iranian universities. The data demonstrated that teachers overcame boredom by improving students' participation, adjusting classroom tasks, adjusting their teaching techniques, modifying their lifestyles, and changing their attitudes. In addition, the data demonstrated that students' boredom coping strategies fell into two major categories: (a) facilitative strategies (i.e. being active and attentive, modifying the lifestyle, and having a good outlook), and (b) debilitative strategies (i.e. tuning out of class, tolerating, and not knowing what to do). Although their study provided valuable insights, it relied primarily on interviews to explore the coping strategies EFL teachers and students employed to overcome boredom. In contrast, the present study aims to address this limitation by employing a variety of instruments and methods, including video-recorded class sessions, the Motometer, stimulated recall sessions, and interviews, to conduct a multimodal investigation of Iranian EFL students' boredom-coping strategies.

Method

Participants

This study was conducted over the course of two months and seven classroom sessions at the English language department of Islamic Azad University in Mashhad, Iran. To facilitate

intensive concentration, twelve volunteer participants were selected from university students majoring in English Language Teaching who attended an Advanced English Grammar (AEG) course with a class size of thirty-two students. Utilizing a deviant or extreme case sampling technique (Dörnyei, 2007), participants with the highest and lowest scores on the Precursors of Boredom in the EFL Classes (PSBEC) scales (Mousavian Rad et al., 2024) were chosen. The PSBEC consists of 47 items rated on a five-point Likert scale, encompassing 11 factors identified by Iranian students as the main causes of boredom in EFL classes (Mousavian Rad et al., 2024). Scores on the PSBEC range from 47, indicating the lowest level of boredom, to 235, representing the highest level of boredom experienced in EFL classes. The students' boredom scores were put in descending order. To accommodate the gender factor, three male and three female students from the top of the list of boredom scores, and three male and three female students from the bottom, were invited to participate. The participants were selected from the AEG course because it was considered a boring course among EFL students (Jean & Simard, 2011). The sample was kept small to manage the data analysis and make the scrutiny of contextual and interactional factors possible. The teacher held a Ph.D. in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) and had nine years of teaching experience. The participants' informed consent for publication of their data and photographs was obtained, and it was emphasized that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time. Their demographic information is presented in Table 1. Due to ethical concerns, pseudonyms have been utilized.

Table 1
Demographic Information of the Participants

Participant	Age	Gender	University year	Major	Level of boredom
Fatemeh	20	Female	2	ELT	High
Leila	22	Female	3	ELT	High
Najibeh	23	Female	2	ELT	High
Shabnam	21	Female	2	ELT	Low
Maryam	20	Female	2	ELT	Low
Zahra	22	Female	3	ELT	Low
Javad	20	Male	2	ELT	High
Reza	21	Male	3	ELT	High
Ehsan	22	Male	3	ELT	High
Ali	21	Male	2	ELT	Low
Omid	23	Male	2	ELT	Low
Majid	22	Male	3	ELT	Low

Instruments and Materials

Given the multimodal design of this study, multiple data collection instruments were employed to ensure continuous and comprehensive observation, allowing all of the participants'

boredom-coping strategies to be thoroughly captured and considered. The data collection tools were as follows:

PSBEC Scales

A questionnaire containing a demographic section (age, gender, university year, and major) and the PSBEC scales was designed and distributed through Telegram to EFL students enrolled in the AEG course to assess their boredom. Mousavian Rad et al. (2024) developed the PSBEC scales by integrating existing research with findings from the qualitative phase of their study. Each scale item was derived from participants' verbatim descriptions and was designed to attribute boredom to a specific factor, framed in response to the prompt, 'I usually get bored in English class, and it is because…' The PSBEC comprised 47 items measured on a five-point Likert scale and addressed 11 factors: (a) teaching practices, (b) excessive class control, (c) inattentive behaviour, (d) overchallenge, (e) underchallenge, (f) intrinsic values, (g) extrinsic values, (h) negative affective factors, (i) boredom proneness, (j) classroom-related factors, and (k) curriculum design. These factors were identified by Iranian students as the primary causes of boredom in EFL classes (Mousavian Rad et al., 2024).

Motometer

The students were given motometers to assist them in demonstrating their level of boredom. The motometer is a piece of paper that is the size of an A4 sheet and is comprised of thermometer-shaped figures, each of which is representative of a time interval. They are segmented into a few different segments across the horizontal plane (see Appendix). For this study, the motometer was broken down into numerous equal sections based on seven different time intervals of ten minutes each. At the very bottom of each motometer was some blank area for the participants to fill in with further commentary. Motometers were employed for the first time by Gardner et al. (2004) to measure the level of motivation displayed by students. Following Gardner et al. (2004), the participants were instructed to rate the degree to which they were experiencing boredom at intervals of 10 minutes duration.

Video-Taped Class Periods

Seven classroom sessions were videotaped in order to examine how the students dealt with boredom in the classroom. A camera was placed in the front, far corner of the room to film the entire class, and another was mounted in the far corner of the classroom to capture the teacher. The full class image was then displayed after the two cameras' footage was synchronized in a picture-in-picture format. The goal was to facilitate the students' recollection of the feelings they were having throughout specific lesson components as part of the follow-up stimulated recall (presented below). After watching the films multiple times at first, the behaviors and expressions that seemed to suggest the potential for coping strategies were recognized and cut into segments. Based on the motometers that the students completed and the most recent coping strategy research, the hints for coping strategies were identified.

Semi-Structured Interview

The semi-structured interview was utilized to assess the students' self-reports of boredom coping strategies. Also, as van Lier (2008) states, applying introspective data could add to the depth of interactional analysis. The interviews were conducted the day after each AEG class session. The interview guide was developed based on the students' filled motometers to scrutinize their justifications for their indication of high/low boredom.

Stimulated Recall

Stimulated recall, which is a type of retrospective protocol, was utilized during the interviews. The video-recorded class sessions were used as an aide memoire to help participants recall their thoughts and feelings. Initially, Bloom (1953) developed this technique to help an individual recall authentic thoughts and original events by using a video or audio stimulus. The basic idea underlying this technique is that the presentation of original clues that occurred during a situation may enable a person to relive that situation accurately (Bloom, 1953). This helps the researchers to avoid obliging their subjects to talk about the activity while they are doing it.

Procedure

Twelve EFL students participated in this study, which was conducted during seven classroom sessions. The first two sessions served as pilot sessions to familiarize the teacher and his students with the motometers and the researchers' presence, as well as to acclimate them to the camcorder equipment. In these two classroom sessions, there was no actual data collection. Each classroom session lasted approximately 80 minutes and was videotaped. The course used Understanding and Using English Grammar (4th edition) by Betty Schrampfer Azar (2009) as the textbook, and instruction was delivered in a teacher-centered format. The teacher typically employed an inductive approach to teach grammar, starting by presenting several example sentences to the students that demonstrated the grammatical concept of the lesson. Then, he clarified the associated grammatical structure, and the students were required to read the structure and examples section in the textbook. Following this, the students were expected to complete the exercises in that section. Afterward, the teacher asked various students to share their answers and collaboratively verify their accuracy. The students started filling the motometers 10 minutes into the sessions, and they were asked to indicate the level of their felt boredom only seven times based on the intervals of 10 minutes. Videotaping of the participants' gestures and interactions could capture the participants' potential coping strategies. Then, the day after each classroom session, an interview was conducted with each of the participants, each lasting for about 30 minutes. While interviewing, the relevant abridged videotaped session was utilized as an aide memoire to help the interviewees remember the situations in which they indicated a level of boredom in their motometers.

The oral semi-structured interviews were audio-recorded with the interviewees' permission and then transcribed and translated into English for later analysis. Two experienced bilingual translators double-checked the translations for accuracy.

Data Analysis

In this research, the data gathered during the investigation were organized and analyzed relying on the four-factor model of boredom coping strategies that was proposed by Nett et al. (2010). To the best of the researchers' knowledge, this model is the only available classification of boredom coping strategies. Nett et al. (2010) focused their research on the assumption that dealing with boredom entails devising techniques to deal with boredom that currently exists. Nevertheless, the data analysis in the current study exceeded its conceptual framework in one respect. According to the participants' observed behavior in their classes and what they expressed during the interviews, they sometimes adopted strategies to curb boredom in their EFL classes. In other words, they created and implemented strategies to tackle projected classroom boredom which had not yet happened. All of these preventative acts were also addressed as boredom coping strategies in this research.

The data obtained from the interviews were transcribed and read several times to find codes and salient themes, perceived as students' boredom coping strategies. The data credibility was

increased by peer debriefing and member checking. Peer debriefing was conducted by an external expert who verified the accuracy of the data interpretations by reviewing the data analysis methodology. Students were asked to analyze the coded transcripts and emerging themes to judge the accuracy of the interpretations as part of the member checking procedure.

The data obtained from video-recorded classroom sessions were transcribed, annotated, and analyzed using MAXQDA software (version 2020). The first step of the analysis focused on exploring the moments in which the participants experienced boredom during their class. This step was accomplished through the participants' filled motometers. The second step of the analysis focused on exploring the verbal and non-verbal (gestural) manifestation of students' boredom coping strategies. During the interviews, the relevant segment of the videotaped session that had been edited down was played as an aide memoire for the interviewers to watch in order to assist them in remembering the circumstances in which they had indicated a level of boredom on their motometers. Following qualitative data analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994) and the grounded theory method (Strauss & Corbin, 1994), the transcripts were reviewed multiple times to discover important themes. The themes that arose served as the students' boredom coping strategies.

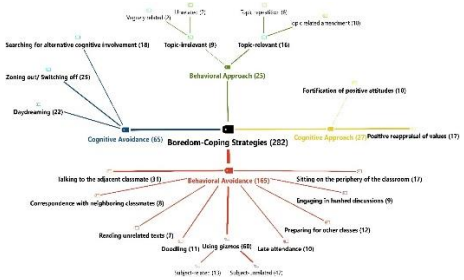
The theory was built using the Grounded Method (Strauss & Corbin, 1994) by going back and forth between the gathered data to find patterns and clusters that would emerge sequentially and gradually from the data (Gan et al., 2004). The participants' boredom coping strategies were classified using axial data coding, and the sub-categories were combined into one axial category. The inclusive variables that accurately reflect all of the elements of the analysis were then chosen using selective coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2014; Shawer et al., 2009). Based on Nett et al.'s (2010) theoretical model, the elicited themes of students' boredom coping strategies were classified. After inviting an independent coder (an associate professor in TEFL), who is an expert in this field, to identify the students' boredom coping strategies in the codification process, the level of agreement between the independent coder and one of the researchers reached 90.5%, exceeding the threshold of 90% endorsed by Miles and Huberman (1994).

Results

The findings revealed that Iranian EFL students employed a wide variety of methods to alleviate the boredom that came with sitting in their EFL classroom. Thematic analysis of the data revealed 16 boredom coping strategies at four levels of Nett et al.'s (2010) coping model (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

Structure of the Boredom Coping Strategies (The numbers in parentheses represent code frequencies.)



At the cognitive approach level (27: Occurred 27 times during class and was mentioned in the interviews), the participants mitigated boredom through two strategies: fortification of positive attitudes (10) and positive appraisal of values (17). As for positive appraisal of values, Zahra (female, 22) remarked: "To keep myself motivated enough to endure these tedious classes, I usually try to remind myself of my most important goals at this university" Due to the cognitive processes involved, it was hardly possible to estimate the number and frequency of participants that used this method out of personal preference. However, based on the researcher's observations and the interviews conducted with the students, it appeared that such techniques were often employed by students during their EFL classes. As mentioned by Ali (male, 21):

> As a student, I looked forward to classes and learned a lot from my lecturers. As time went on, however, and as I witnessed the plight of many graduates who were working in fields unrelated to their field of study, my enthusiasm for the university and classes waned to the point that I now spend most of my time in class neither engaged nor interested.

At the behavioral approach level, the participants utilized two broad strategies: (a) topic-relevant strategies, which were divided into two strategies of topic repetition (6) and topic-related amendment (10), and (b) topic-irrelevant strategies, which were comprised of vaguely related strategies (2) and unrelated strategies (7). For instance, requesting the teacher to restate the lesson, replay a PowerPoint presentation, or re-explain the topic were the most common topic-relevant BAP strategies that students used to get over their boredom. For instance, Maryam (female, 20) explained that "although I was really bored and distracted, I tried to stay engaged in the class discussion by asking the teacher for more clarifications." (see Figure 2).

Figure 2

Behavioral Approach Strategies

Topic-relevant strategy

Another instance of the BAP strategies was attempting to initiate a dialogue or discussion with the teacher in order to redirect the focus of the lesson to a more interesting and engaging topic from the student's perspective. This is an example of trying to fill the class period by talking about desirable topics. The new topic may still be connected to the material covered in the class in some ways; nevertheless, it is much more common to be only a tenuous connection, or maybe none at all, between the two. During the more casual conversations between the researcher and the

participants, a few of them mentioned that this strategy may include instances in which students initiate a debate or ask a question not out of real interest or curiosity, but rather out of boredom or the assumption that they might become bored.

Regarding the avoidance-type strategies, the cognitive avoidance strategies were frequently observed during the classes and referred to by the participants in their interviews based on the indication of boredom in their filled motometers. This was the case because the participants were demonstrating signs of boredom and mental exhaustion during the classes. The CAV strategies include daydreaming (22), zoning out (25), and searching for alternative cognitive involvement (18). The use of CAV strategies was extremely obvious in terms of body language in the observation of the current study (see Figure 3). For example, students who appeared to become bored typically rested their heads on their hands, slumped in their seats, or propped their heads up with their elbows. They might also droop their shoulders.

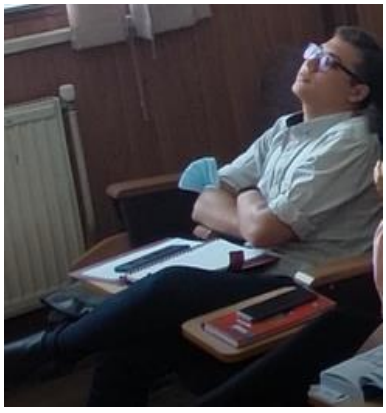
Figure 3

Cognitive Avoidance Strategies 1

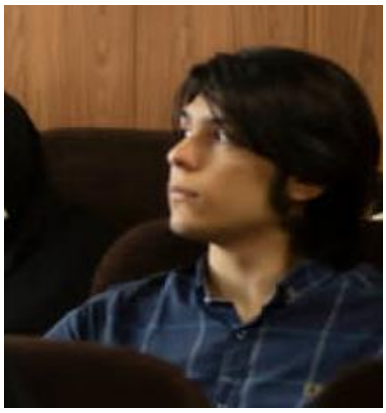
Resting her head on her hand

Propping his head up with his elbow

Drooping her shoulders



Slumping in his seat



Distracted by external factors

Distracted by external factors

Sometimes, when a participant was thinking about something unrelated to the current classroom activities, his or her eyes appeared to be wide open, but they were completely listless. This state was described by study participants as numbing, zoning out, sleeping mode, and soothing the mind, but in this study, it was generally referred to as zoning out. This state was also associated with a sense of separation and disconnection (see Figure 4). For instance, Ali (male, 21) said:

> There always seems to be a point in a lecture or class period where I start to get bored. My mind wanders to a totally different topic most of the time. Despite my best intentions, I frequently find that my thoughts are wandering while I am supposed to be listening to the lecture.

Figure 4

Cognitive Avoidance Strategies 2

Zoning out

Sleeping mode

Regarding searching for alternative cognitive involvement, students utilized various strategies such as observing the actions and behaviors of classmates, considering the tasks and assignments of other courses, and creating to-do lists to organize time after class (see Figure 5).

Another symptom of boredom was looking about the room for something else that could engage one's attention to alleviate the feeling of boredom. For instance, Javad (male, 20) stated, "occasionally, everything but the teacher becomes appealing and keeps my thoughts and senses occupied." In another interview, Shabnam (female, 21) said:

> I was completely bored. I was looking at my friend who was sitting far away from me, hoping that she would notice me and come to sit next to me so that I could talk to her, or that her presence by my side would make the class easier to bear.

Figure 5

Cognitive Avoidance Strategies 3

Observing peers' behavior

Thinking about other courses and assignments

The behavioral avoidance strategies were the most frequently observed boredom coping strategies during the data collection which comprises nine strategies, namely using gizmos (60), talking to the adjacent classmate (31), sitting on the periphery of the classroom (17), preparing for other classes (12), doodling (11), late attendance (10), engaging in hushed discussions (9), corresponding with neighboring classmates (8), reading unrelated texts (7).

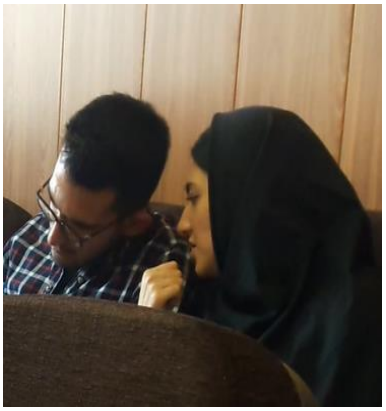
The results of this study demonstrated conclusively that the BAV strategies were the most frequently utilized coping strategies by the participants in their EFL class. For example, Reza (male, 21) provided the following insight: "I think there are countless excellent ways to get over boredom." One of the most common things that the participants did in order to alleviate the boredom they experienced in class was to engage in friendly chats with their classmates. Sometimes, this was confined to correspondence on a sheet of paper, but at other times, it took the shape of a hushed discussion (carried out in a whisper; see Figure 6). According to Omid (male, 23):

> I wrote my thoughts in my book for my friend to read because I did not want the teacher to notice my lack of attention to the lesson. We were chatting about my friend's upcoming birthday. During class, I sometimes talk with a friend on a piece of paper, which helps the time pass quickly and keeps us both from being bored.

Figure 6

Behavioral Avoidance Strategies 1

Correspondence on a sheet of paper



Hushed discussion

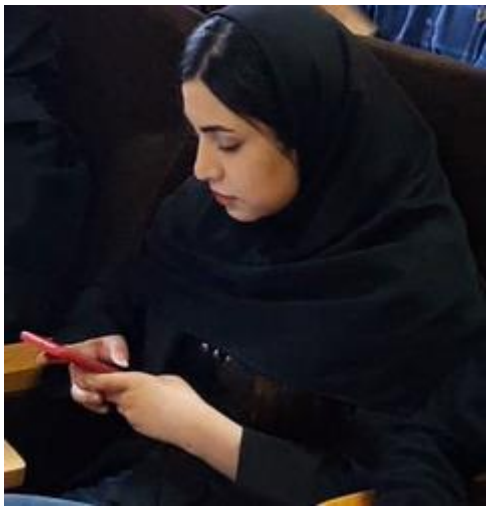
The results of this study revealed that students showed a strong willingness to pursue peripheral activities in the classroom. This was noticed clearly when some students arrived late in the classroom. They were likely to sit adjacent to or near their friends, if possible. According to interviews with participants, this was because students desired to spend the class period next to their intimate classmates. In other words, they anticipated the probability of boredom in class, and by sitting next to their friends, they provided the means to alleviate it. Generally, it is not uncommon for a student's position in the classroom to act as a reasonably accurate predictor of the type of strategies he/she would utilize to ward off boredom. Students in the front rows, for example, were more likely to raise their hands and ask questions during class. They were also more inclined to use proactive strategies to combat boredom if they experienced it. Conversely, students who sat in the far corners of the classroom were considerably more likely to express feelings of boredom and utilize avoidance coping methods. As it was frequently mentioned in the interviews, students who were concerned about becoming bored in class and who believed they would need to resort to avoidance coping strategies during the lesson tended towards selecting seats that were as far away as possible from the teacher's line of sight. This was because these seats could offer optimal conditions for engaging in avoidance activities.

Using personal electronic devices or gizmos (e.g., mobile phones) during class time for activities that were unrelated to the topic being covered was yet another strategy for alleviating boredom (see Figure 7). The fact that carrying such a gadget is today inconceivably common has had a huge impact on the options of techniques that students have available to them in order to cope with boredom while they are in class. Students have access to a broad variety of alternatives on gadgets, particularly those equipped with internet access, which allows these devices to participate actively in the classroom context. Based on the participants' remarks, there existed a wide variety of non-class-related activities that might be carried out on private electronic devices. These activities that were not directly connected to classes could be divided into two categories according to the topic matter that was covered in one's educational program. The first group was comprised of activities that were unrelated to the class or subject matter of an individual's study program. Some examples of this included (a) social media browsing, (b) checking emails and messages, (c) playing games, (d) watching video clips, and (e) checking news sources. The second

category included pursuits that were not directly related to the classroom instruction but were in some way pertinent to the subject matter that was the focus of one's educational program. Some examples of this category include (a) reading academic texts and (b) completing homework for other classes.

Figure 7

Behavioral Avoidance Strategies 2



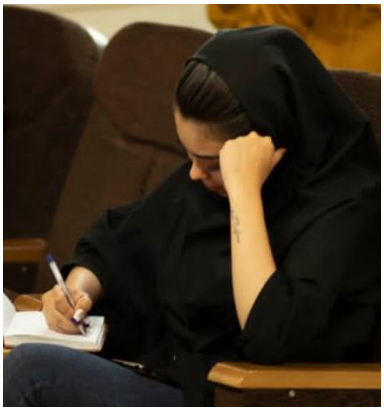
Using personal electronic devices

Less frequently observed strategies utilized by the participants included a wide variety of activities such as eating/drinking, doodling on a piece of paper, and spotting the teacher's language errors and idiosyncratic expressions (see Figure 8). The participants frequently implemented strategies aimed at preventing them from becoming bored in the classes that they believed would be a waste of time. The simplest observed method in this regard was to arrive at school as late as legally permissible; this was done primarily for the purpose of accumulating attendance points.

Figure 8

Behavioral Avoidance Strategies 3

Drinking



Doodling on a piece of paper

More unusual strategies involved using an alternative method to prepare for classes. Preparation for a class that one found boring differed greatly from conventional preparation, which typically comprises things like finishing one's homework. Some students typically attended their class prepared with a plan for activities they could do instead of paying attention to the teacher. Based on the interviews, this phenomenon was most likely because attendance in these classes was obligatory for students. For instance, Najibeh (female, 23) stated:

> I had printed the notes in advance, reviewed them during class, and read my other courses' assigned texts. Some of my classmates also had something prepared and ready, such as a novel. They were already aware that the class would be dull, and as a result, they endeavored to fill the time with some other activities.

In sum, the findings revealed that the students frequently took a selective approach to boredom coping strategies while they were in their EFL classroom. Table 2 presents a summary of the boredom coping strategies used by the participants of the present study.

Table 2
Boredom Coping Strategies

				Example
Boredom Coping Strategies	**Behavioral Approach**	Topic-relevant	Topic repetition	Requesting the teacher to restate the lesson
			Topic-related amendment	Asking the teacher to explain the lesson through real-life examples
		Topic-irrelevant	Vaguely related	Asking about English songs during a language class
			Unrelated	Talking with the teacher to guide the class toward a more engaging topic
	Behavioral Avoidance	Talking to the adjacent classmate		
		Correspondence with neighboring classmates		
		Reading unrelated texts		Reading a novel
		Doodling		Drawing random shapes in the notebook during class
		Using gizmos	Subject- related	Completing homework for other classes using a mobile device
			Subject-unrelated	Social media browsing
		Late attendance		Showing up only during the attendance check

		Preparing for other classes	
		Engaging in hushed discussions	
		Sitting on the periphery of the classroom	
	Cognitive Approach	Fortification of positive attitudes	Thinking that learning a language makes it easier to understand movies
		Positive reappraisal of values	Thinking about graduation and finding a desired job
	Cognitive Avoidance	Searching for alternative cognitive involvement	Observing the actions and behaviors of classmates
		Zoning out/ Switching off	Sitting in class but going into sleeping mode
		Daydreaming	Picturing yourself on a trip with friends during the lesson

Discussion

The feeling that one is missing out on something, as well as the thought that one could be doing something else instead at the moment – something that is implicitly more important and interesting – are both common causes of boredom (Westgate & Wilson, 2018). In other words, people frequently think of boredom in terms of the opportunity cost it entails (Kurzban et al., 2013). By extension, the participants of this study frequently stated that they felt remorse for the potential gains they could have made from other activities if they had been doing those activities instead of sitting and getting bored in class. Therefore, almost all of the techniques that can be used to alleviate boredom in situations like these are geared toward maximizing the efficiency with which time can be spent in the classroom, either by re-engaging in the process of learning (approach-type strategies) or by contemplating/carrying out something more preferable (avoidance-type strategies). According to the results of the current research, strategies to avoid the ongoing activities of the class were significantly more common than engaging in activities that provide stimulation to re-engage in the class activities.

The findings revealed that adopting behavioral avoidance strategies was the most typical way to deal with boredom. The observations, narratives, and responses provided by the students were predominated by allusions to behavioral avoidance coping strategies. These included all of the students' activities that were unconnected to the ongoing setting of the classroom and which were oriented towards the students' separation from it, to avoid the boredom that was associated with activities that were related to the class. These findings are in line with those of Sharp et al.'s (2016) study. According to what participants frequently stated in their interviews, they lacked the necessary motivation and commitment to succeed in their academic endeavors. Moreover, the participants mostly believed the pedagogical theory that underpins the Iranian educational context has remained quite traditional in that it views the teacher as the holder of knowledge and the students as the recipients of knowledge, which considers a passive role for the students and results in a rigid relationship between teachers and students.

The second most popular strategy among the participants was cognitive avoidance. The participants in the current study most frequently engaged in daydreaming and zoning out among these techniques. This result is in line with earlier studies (e.g., Finkielsztein, 2020; Sharp et al., 2019), which assert that daydreaming and zoning out are the most prevalent CAV strategies and general coping strategies, respectively.

The cognitive approach strategies were among the strategies used by the participants to ward off boredom and remain interested in the learning process. They looked for important aspects of the circumstance or evaluated it in a meaningful way to mitigate boredom in their EFL classroom. Due to the cognitive processes involved, it was hardly possible to estimate the number and frequency of participants who used the CAP strategies out of personal preference. At the beginning of their studies, it is most common for university students to exert mental effort to reevaluate a boring class-related circumstance in a more favorable way (Finkielsztein, 2020). However, the use of avoidance-type strategies becomes more common as time passes, as do other reactions, including despondency, indifference, despair, and alienation (Chapman, 2013).

As highlighted by the participants during the interviews, there were a variety of reasons for the limited and infrequent use of CAP strategies. From the students' point of view, their teachers' authority gradually declines as they become more acquainted with university procedures and as they gather more information about the teachers (e.g., their vices and idiosyncrasies). Students are gradually socialized to assume their academic roles within the academic environment. This entails their acclimatization to academic monotony as a significant component of the process, which includes socialization to academic boredom. Students come to realize that a certain level of boredom is unavoidable and that education at the university level, just like education at earlier levels, has its highs and lows.

Ultimately, the findings revealed that using behavioral approach strategies appeared to be the least popular choice among the participants in the class as a way to deal with boredom, which is in line with the findings of Nett et al. (2010). Students' disengagement in the learning process and, as a result, their feelings of boredom in class can be the outcome of an inadequate or inappropriate grasp of the subject that is delivered or discussed in class (Acee et al., 2010; Ghafournia & Malekshahi, 2025). In most cases, the participants made no effort to actively improve tedious aspects of the classroom environment. They rarely took action to confront and rectify the situation since they were unwilling to intervene.

In the current research, the scope of class-unrelated activities that were utilized as boredom coping strategies was wide and comprehensive. This was because the current study aimed to explore boredom coping strategies from different perspectives and took different modes of strategies into account. Contrary to the findings of the majority of studies that came before this one, the findings that are presented here were obtained almost entirely on the basis of the researcher's observations made during the classes and the participants' responses to the interview questions, with additional supporting evidence coming from the motometers and stimulated recalls. The multimodal approach turned out to be a crucial factor in achieving the goal of gaining a deeper understanding of the strategies utilized by EFL students to cope with boredom in their EFL classes.

Conclusion

This study was designed to look into the Iranian EFL students' boredom coping strategies from a multimodal perspective. The findings revealed Iranian EFL students utilized a diverse range of

strategies to alleviate the boredom experienced in their EFL classes. The multimodal analysis of the collected data led to the discovery of 16 boredom coping strategies, categorized into four levels within the coping model: 1) behavioral approach strategies (including both topic relevant and topic irrelevant strategies), 2) cognitive approach strategies (including fortification of positive attitudes and positive reappraisal of values), 3) behavioral avoidance strategies (which include sitting on the periphery of the classroom, engaging in hushed discussions, preparing for other classes, late attendance, using gizmos, doodling, reading unrelated texts, correspondence with neighboring classmates, and talking to the adjacent classmate), and 4) cognitive avoidance strategies (including daydreaming, zoning out, and searching for alternative cognitive involvement).

It is hoped that the findings of this study can enhance understanding of how Iranian EFL students cope with boredom in their classes and will make a significant contribution to research on boredom in EFL education. Employing a multimodal approach, it challenges the traditional focus on qualitative and quantitative methods and contributes to the limited research on boredom-coping strategies among EFL students. This study also aligns with the recent shift toward multimodal research methodologies. Additionally, conducting the research at a university in Iran broadens the cultural and geographical scope of existing studies on coping strategies for boredom. The findings of this study expand the range of identified coping strategies and show that EFL students increasingly use them as they gain academic experience, shifting from approach-oriented to avoidance-oriented coping strategies. The results are expected to offer practitioners and educational authorities valuable insights for addressing EFL students' classroom boredom through systemic techniques. Additionally, understanding the factors that cause boredom and students' coping methods can help EFL teachers develop effective prevention and intervention programs.

The current study has certain limitations that necessitate further research. It does not purport to capture and generalize the variety of strategies employed by university students to combat boredom. This is due to the limited scope of the study in terms of its geo-cultural, institutional, methodological, and thematic dimensions. The research was carried out in Iran at one accredited university using qualitative and multimodal approaches to data collection. Due to the small size of the qualitative sample (n = 12), it was difficult to independently verify the material or conduct a comprehensive comparison study between different fields of study, types of classes, and methods of instruction (e.g., tutorials and seminars). Additionally, the use of videotaped classroom observations, stimulated recalls, and semi-structured interviews only partially addressed the issue of some students withholding information out of embarrassment, the possibility of harm to their social image, or for other reasons. Students might withhold certain information due to the data-gathering method itself, which is another drawback. As a result, the current study was categorized as exploratory even though it provided a thorough grasp of strategies for overcoming boredom.

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APPENDIX

MOTOMETER

Please rate your boredom based on the classroom divided time intervals and their comprising classroom tasks and assignments.

Highest level of boredom

10	10	10	10	10	10	10
9	9	9	9	9	9	9
8	8	8	8	8	8	8
7	7	7	7	7	7	7
6	6	6	6	6	6	6
5	5	5	5	5	5	5
4	4	4	4	4	4	4
3	3	3	3	3	3	3
2	2	2	2	2	2	2
1	1	1	1	1	1	1
0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Lowest level of boredom

Comments:

1- …….
2- …….
3- …….
4- …….
5- …….
6- …….