

Nothing ventured, nothing gained: The impact of enjoyment and boredom on willingness to communicate in online foreign language classrooms

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Abstract

Although the role of emotions in English as a foreign language (EFL) learners' willingness to communicate (WTC) has triggered abundant research in traditional, in-person language classes, little is known about how these emotions affect learners' communication behavior in online classrooms. Adopting a mixed-method design, the present study investigated the effect of foreign language boredom (FLB) and foreign language enjoyment (FLE) on EFL learners' L2 WTC in online classrooms. The data gathered through an online survey from 469 EFL learners were analyzed through multiple linear regression, dominance analysis, and mediation analysis. The findings revealed that FLB had a considerably strong effect on L2 WTC, although this effect was to some extent diminished by FLE, FLB overshadowed learners' online learning experience. To gain a deeper understanding of the relationship among these variables, qualitative data was gathered from 20 participants through semi-structured interviews. The findings further supported the quantitative data and suggested that the learners believed the problems they faced in online classrooms led to boredom and discouraged them from engaging in communication. The findings are discussed in terms of implications for teachers to improve the experience of online English education.

Keywords: willingness to communicate, emotions, boredom, enjoyment, online classrooms

Nothing ventured, nothing gained: The impact of enjoyment and boredom on willingness to communicate in the online FL classroom

Introduction

Emotions have often, in the research literature and popular culture, been associated with positive and negative outcomes in one's life, as the famous line from Dorian Grey illustrates: "I do not want to be at the mercy of my emotions. I want to use them, enjoy them, dominate them" (Wilde, 1891, p. 46). In the novel *The Picture of Dorian Grey*, the titular character aims to control his body and emotions by only showing the truth in a portrait of himself, while his outward appearance remained perfect. However, the character ultimately fails and instead of controlling and dominating his emotions, he is dominated by them. The story portrays emotions as a powerful force that can shape one's character and influence one's actions, for better or worse. A comparison can be made with second language (L2) learning, as so too can L2 learners feel in their learning of a new language – at the mercy of their emotions, which can sometimes be a help and at other times a hindrance. Specifically, these emotions can affect the very act of communicating in the target language.

Due to the dynamic role of affective variables in L2 communication (Wang, 2017), research into the link between affective variables – specifically classroom emotions - and L2 willingness to communicate (L2 WTC) has become a favorite topic of debate among L2 researchers. Among the various classroom emotions, boredom seems to be the most intense and common emotion experienced in educational settings (Goetz et al., 2014). In a language classroom, bored individuals will find themselves distracted, uninvolved, unwilling to participate in teacher-

proposed activities, avoid interaction with teachers and peers, and lose motivation to perform learning tasks (Tvedt et al., 2019). In contrast to boredom, foreign language enjoyment (FLE), as introduced by Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014) can be defined as a “broad positive emotion experienced by FL learners when their psychological needs are met in the FL classroom” (Botes et al., 2020, p. 206). Research has suggested that enjoyment in language learning can help learners better acquire an L2 and boost their use of multiple problem-solving strategies (Boudreau et al., 2018; Dewaele & Alfawzan, 2018).

While an increasing number of studies on EFL learners’ L2 WTC have cast light on the role of affective variables through quantitative analysis, more in-depth qualitative studies are missing in the literature. Moreover, the burgeoning interest in online technologies has recently inspired researchers to address learners’ emotions in the online language learning context as well (Wang et al., 2021). Nevertheless, how affective variables such as foreign language boredom (FLB) and FLE emerge and affect language learning goals such as communication in online classrooms remains uncertain. Given the pervasiveness and popularity of online learning, by employing a mixed-method design, the present study, therefore, aims to investigate EFL learners’ L2 WTC and the role FLB and FLE may play during online English courses.

Literature Review

L2 Willingness to Communicate

Having its roots in first language literature, WTC was regarded as a stable individual difference (McCroskey, 1992). This concept was soon introduced to L2 research by MacIntyre et al. (1998), who described L2 WTC as “a readiness to enter into discourse at a particular time with a specific person or persons, using an L2” (p. 547). The nomological network of L2 WTC encompasses various situation-specific and trait antecedents of both individual and intergroup

tendencies (MacIntyre et al., 1998). Hinged on MacIntyre et al.'s (1998) model, a vast body of studies has endeavored to unravel the causes for learners' willingness or unwillingness to communicate in L2 from both individual trait-like (MacIntyre et al., 2007) and situation and dynamic perspectives (Zhang et al., 2019).

As the emphasis on L2 learning and teaching has shifted to communication over the past decades, teaching learners to be willing to communicate in the target language is one of the critical goals of language instruction (Dewaele, 2019). The importance of L2 WTC has led to a myriad of studies probing deep into the nature of L2 WTC and investigating the different variables playing a role in learners' decisions to initiate or escape communication. One strand of research has focused on the effect of different affective variables on L2 WTC. While the impact of negative emotions such as anxiety in shaping learners' L2 WTC has been studied comprehensively, fewer scholars have explored the impact of positive emotions such as classroom enjoyment on learners' communication behavior. According to the available literature, high levels of FLE are associated with stronger L2 WTC among learners (Botes et al., 2022b). FLB, on the other hand, is notorious for asserting a debilitating effect on L2 WTC (Kruk, 2019).

Another line of research has underscored the link between external variables such as the learning environment and the learners' decision to initiate communication. These studies highlight the immediate classroom environment's crucial role in L2 WTC (Li et al., 2022). Moreover, with the ubiquity and ever-increasing global demand for online classes, many scholars have shifted their attention to students' willingness to participate or initiate communication in the online classroom environment where they feel less urged to do so (e.g., Lee & Lee, 2020). A comprehensive understanding of learners' communication behaviors in online settings is still lacking; however, in

their idiodynamic investigation of L2 WTC in online classrooms, Lee and Liu (2022) indicated that emotions could directly influence L2 WTC.

Foreign Language Boredom and Enjoyment

FLB was first flagged in Chapman's (2013) pioneering study of students of German as a FL, and since both Polish (e.g., Kruk, 2016; Pawlak et al., 2020) and Asian scholars (e.g., Derakhshan et al., 2021; Li, 2021; Li & Dewaele, 2020) have launched an extensive exploration of boredom in EFL contexts. FLB can be considered a negative academic emotion stemming from an ongoing FL learning activity or task, which is regarded as entirely unimportant, meaningless, irrelevant, over-challenging, or under-challenging (Li & Dewaele, 2020). Boredom is associated with some negative feelings, such as depression, tiredness, frustration, and dissatisfaction which have been found to pervade classes in different EFL contexts (Pawlak et al., 2020).

In turn, FLE is the most studied positive emotion in the SLA domain. Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014), as the pioneers of FLE, assert that enjoyment could boost and improve the process of L2 learning, and conceptualized FLE as a "complex emotion, capturing interacting dimensions of challenge and perceived ability that reflect the human drive for success in the face of difficult tasks" (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2016, p. 216). Research on FLE has confirmed that positive emotions facilitate exploration and play, can lead to the opportunity of having new experiences, and increase the efficiency of learning (e.g., Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014). Abundant research has been conducted on FLE's relationship with other variables. FLE is mainly reported to be negatively associated with negative emotions such as anxiety and boredom (e.g., Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2016; Kruk et al., 2022), positively linked to classroom engagement and L2 WTC (e.g., Lee, 2020), as well as students' motivation (e.g., Alamer & Lee, 2019). Additionally, regarding the antecedents of FLE, prior research has indicated that many learner-internal variables, such as

gender and age (e.g., Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014), L2 grit (e.g., Wei et al., 2019), and learner-external factors, such as teachers and peers support (e.g., Jiang & Dewaele 2019), and classroom environment (Li et al., 2021) show a positive correlation with FLE in the FL classroom. The majority of studies on FLE have focused on traditional face-to-face classrooms, while research on EFL learners' emotions such as FLE in online classes remains scarce.

Marchand and Gutierrez (2012) established that learners' emotional experiences (including hope, anxiety, & frustration) in online courses are different from those in traditional classrooms. With the outbreak of COVID-19, more attention was drawn toward online education and learners' emotions in this setting. Resnik and Dewaele (2021) were among the first to compare and contrast EFL learners' emotions in in-person and emergency remote teaching in the European context (n=510). They realized that the context of the study directly influenced levels of FLE and FLA. In other words, lower levels of FLE and FLA were observed among their participants. They reported that "learners not being physically present in classrooms weakens all emotions, and breaks the relationship between them" (p.1). In turn, Li and Dewaele (2020) observed a higher level of FLB in online classes compared to in-person classes. They concluded that EFL learners perceived online courses as time-consuming, meaningless, lacking social presence, and leading to low achievements. Moreover, in an attempt to explore the causes of and solutions to boredom in EFL online language classrooms, Derakhshan et al. (2021) reported the primary sources of boredom were teachers' long, monotonous monologues, lack of student participation, logistical problems, and carelessly chosen, repetitive tasks. As such, if online language classes are therefore associated with increased boredom and decreased enjoyment, the question ought to be asked to what extent this increased boredom further affects L2 WTC.

Considering Multiple Emotions

Aside from the individual antecedents and outcomes of FLE and FLB, it has to be noted that emotions are rarely experienced one at a time. An L2 learner can for example experience joy in reading a new text in the target language, but be bored from having to critically analyze this same text. Therefore, it is important to consider emotion variables in conjunction (Dewaele et al., 2022).

Previous research has examined multiple emotions within single studies, which have allowed for comparisons to be made in terms of relative effect sizes (e.g. Dewaele et al., 2022), as well as relative importance (e.g. Dewaele et al., 2023). Such comparisons can be made by merely contrasting standardized effect sizes, which do not take correlated structures into account (Azen & Budescu, 2003), or through the method of dominance analysis. Dominance analysis examines which predictor variable is relatively most important by ‘examining the change in R^2 resulting from adding a predictor to all possible subset regression models’ (Tonidandel & LeBreton, 2011, p.3). As such, through utilizing dominance analysis, researchers are able to declare which predictor is more important. In comparing FLE and FLB, Dewaele et al. (2023) found in their latent dominance analyses that FLB was a considerably stronger predictor of L2 proficiency in comparison to FLE. As far as we are aware, however, no study has compared the dominance of emotion variables in predicting L2 WTC. Instead for guidance regarding the relative importance of FLE and FLB in predicting L2 WTC, we must turn to traditional effect size comparisons.

In his latent model of L2 WTC, Alrabai (2022) reported FLE to be a small significantly positive predictor of L2 WTC ($\beta = .11$; $p < .01$) and FLB to be an insignificant predictor of L2 WTC ($\beta = .01$; $p > .05$). Similarly, Wang et al. (2021) found FLE to be more strongly related to L2 WTC both inside and outside of classroom context, in comparison to FLB. Lastly, stronger correlations between FLE and L2 WTC ($r = .571$; $p < .001$) than between FLB and L2 WTC ($r =$

-.217; $p < .001$) were reported by Li et al. (2022). As such, it may be concluded that FLE ought to be a stronger predictor of L2 WTC, however, such a conclusion may be statistically flawed. Traditional effect size metrics, i.e., regression coefficients, do not necessarily provide an accurate ranking of predictors, especially when correlated (Tonidandel & LeBreton, 2011), as is the case of FLE and FLB. Therefore, the question whether FLE and FLB would be relatively more important as a predictor of L2 WTC needs to be addressed via a dominance analysis study.

Beyond the question of direct effects between FLE and FLB as predictors and L2 WTC as an outcome variable, the possibility of indirect effects ought to be considered. Numerous previous studies have identified FLE as having indirect effects on L2 learning outcomes in mediation models. FLE has been found to mediate the relationships between teacher enthusiasm and student engagement (Dewaele & Li, 2021), between grit and foreign language performance (Liu & Wang, 2021), and between trait emotional intelligence and L2 achievement (Li, 2019). With regards to L2 WTC specifically, FLE was found to mediate the relationship between informal digital learning of English and L2 WTC (Lee et al., 2022) and between the classroom environment and L2 WTC (Li et al., 2022). Consequently, we will consider the possibility of an indirect relationship between FLE and L2 WTC in this study, specifically that the relationship between FLB and L2 WTC may be mediated by the positive emotion of FLE. Previous research has confirmed the positive relationships between FLE and L2 WTC and the negative relationships between FLB and L2 WTC (e.g., Wang et al., 2021; Li et al., 2022), nevertheless, to our knowledge, no study has considered an indirect relationship between these predictor variables. This exploratory hypothesis also answers the call made by Dewaele et al. (2022) to consider possible complex underlying relationships between emotion variables themselves.

Therefore, this study aims to examine the effect of FLB and FLE on L2 WTC in the context of online learning. In exploring this relationship, we also aim to establish relative importance, by comparing FLB and FLE as predictors, in addition to questioning possible indirect effects of FLE. Furthermore, we examine these research aims through both a qualitative and quantitative lens. To this end, the following research questions will be addressed in this study:

1. To what extent do FLB and FLE predict L2 WTC in online classrooms?
2. Which predictor (FLB or FLE) is the relatively most important or dominant in predicting L2 WTC?
3. Does FLE mediate the relationship between FLB and L2 WTC?
4. According to the learners, what factors lead to FLE and FLB in online classrooms, and how do these factors promote or hinder their L2 WTC in this context?

Method

Participants

Participants of the study were recruited from private English language institutes in Iran through snowball sampling. Data were collected online through Google Forms. All students were studying English online due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Classes were held via Adobe Connect, Zoom, and Skype. A total of $n = 469$ participants were included in the study with 61% of female participants ($n = 181$ male participants). The average age of the sample was 20.50 years ($SD = 1.68$). All participants were native speakers of Persian. The majority of participants had an upper-intermediate proficiency in English ($n = 248$), followed by intermediate ($n = 207$), expert ($n = 12$), and elementary proficiency ($n = 2$). No students had any immersion experiences with English, i.e.

no participant had studied or lived in an English-speaking country. Furthermore, participants were recruited for the qualitative data collection via an optional section in the questionnaire which prompted participants to volunteer to participate in semi-structured interviews. Fifty-six learners included their contact details in order to volunteer, and $n = 29$ responded to our call. After a short session with the learners and explaining the procedure of the semi-structured interview, $n = 20$ agreed to participate.

Instruments

All questionnaires were translated into Persian via backward and forward translation by two professional translators. An initial pilot study of $n = 20$ participants was also conducted to ensure the quality of translation. All items were measured on a 5-point Likert scale from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree'. The following instruments were used in the study:

L2 Willingness to Communicate Scale ($\alpha = .962$; $\omega = .961$). The 10-item L2 WTC scale was utilized to examine WTC in online English classrooms (Peng & Woodrow, 2010). Items included were, for example, 'I am willing to express thoughts in my English class', and 'I am willing to roleplay in English class'.

Boredom in Practical English Language Classes - Revised (BPELC-R; $\alpha = .982$; $\omega = .981$). The 23-item scale developed by Pawlak et al. (2020) was utilized to measure boredom in online English classes, with items such as 'Time always seems to be passing slowly'.

Foreign Language Enjoyment Scale (FLES; $\alpha = .940$; $\omega = .938$). FLE was measured through the 21-item scale developed by Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014). Items included were, for example, 'I enjoy English class' and 'Our English class is fun'.

Quantitative Data Analysis

All data analyses were carried out using JASP version 0.16 (JASP Team, 2022) and R Studio version 2022.02.2+492. Firstly, multiple linear regression via the forced entry method was conducted after examining whether the data met the requirements for skewness, kurtosis, and multicollinearity (Field, 2013). Model fit and standardized betas were interpreted in order to answer the first research question.

Secondly, dominance analysis was carried out via the *Domir* package in R Studio (Luchman, 2022). Dominance analysis was utilized to establish the relative importance ranking of FLB and FLE as predictors of L2 WTC through the R^2 change that occurs when adding a predictor to all possible subsets of regression models (Tonidandel & LeBreton, 2011). The average R^2 change or ‘general dominance weight’ then provides insight into the amount of variance explained by each predictor independent of the influence of possible correlation co-predictors (Azen & Budescu, 2003).

Finally, mediation was carried out via the structural equation modelling module in JASP. However, it should be noted that the variables in the mediation submodule in JASP are modelled as observed variables and not latent variables. The requirements for mediation as set out by Kline (2015) were used to determine whether a partial or full mediation occurred.

Qualitative Data Analysis

In order to obtain an enriched understanding of the phenomenon under study and a detailed view of the trends observed in the quantitative analysis (Dewaele et al., 2016; Kuckartz, 2014; Resnik et al., 2022), follow-up semi-structured interviews were conducted with $n = 20$ students. These students were given a short questionnaire to obtain their demographic information. They

also signed a consent form after they were fully aware of the procedure and the purpose of the interviews. The interviews were conducted with the help of two Ph.D. candidates in TEFL to avoid researcher bias. They ran the interviews online via Adobe Connect or Skype and voice-recorded the sessions, which took 16 minutes on average. Based on the participants' preferences, the interviews were either in English (N=16) or Persian (N=4). Following Kuckartz's (2014) instructions, these sessions were transcribed verbatim and made anonymous by the researchers. The interviews included ten questions on learners' (1) perceived differences between communication in online vs. in-person classes, (2) willingness to participate in communication during online classes, (3) perceived hindering factors for initiating or participating in online communication, (4) experienced enjoyment in these classes, (5) experienced boredom in these classes and (6) perspective toward the effects of boredom and enjoyment on their willingness to communicate in online classes. The collected data were analyzed from a thematic analysis perspective (Braun & Clarke, 2006). To this end, an inductive approach was employed to develop codes and themes. Thirty percent of the data was coded by the researchers individually via MAXQDA 2020 software, and the emerging themes were then shared and discussed.

Quantitative Results

Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Coefficients

The descriptive statistics of all three variables can be found in Table 1. There were no major normality concerns with the data. The correlation matrix of the variables can be found in Table 2.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Min</i>	<i>Max</i>	<i>Skewness</i>	<i>Kurtosis</i>
WTC	2.73	1.23	1	4.8	.463	-1.581
FLB	3.16	1.21	1.35	4.65	-.326	-1.723
FLE	2.75	.94	1.38	4.67	.360	-1.293

Table 2.

Correlation Coefficient Matrix

	1.	2.	3.
1. WTC	-	-.321***	.146**
2. FLB		-	-.703***
3. FLE			-

*** $p < .001$ ** $p < .01$

Research Question 1: Multiple Linear Regression

A multiple linear regression was conducted with FLB and FLE as predictors and L2 WTC as the outcome variable (see Table 3). The regression model was found to be statistically significant ($F(2, 466) = 30.409; p < .001$), with predictors explaining 11.5% of the variance in the outcome variable ($R^2 = .115$). Both FLB ($\beta = -.440, p < .001$) and FLE ($\beta = -.158, p < .001$) were statistically significant predictors of L2 WTC (see Table 3). The directionality of the relationship between FLE and L2 WTC in the online classroom was unexpected, as the previous correlation

coefficient indicated a positive relationship ($r = .146$; $p < .01$). This mismatch in slopes between the regression coefficient and correlation coefficient indicated a suppressor effect.

A classical suppressor effect can occur when the original relationship between one predictor and outcome variable is close enough to zero that fluctuations in terms of slope can be regarded as indicative of a non-significant relationship (Falk & Miller, 1992; Cohen & Cohen, 1975). In a classical suppressor effect, in addition to the non-significant relationship with the outcome variable, the predictors share a large correlation (Salgado et al., 2019). Given that the confidence interval of the correlation coefficient between FLE and L2 WTC indicated a small effect size with a 95% confidence interval that is close to zero ($r = .146$; $p < .01$; 95% CI [.056; .233]) and the correlation coefficient between FLB and FLE is quite large ($r = -.703$; $p < .001$), we concluded that a classical suppressor effect is present. As such, we do not interpret the negative slope of the regression coefficient of FLE. We assume that FLE may explain some small amount of unique variance in L2 WTC, however, this is not interpretable given the suppressor effect found in the data.

Table 3

L2 Academic Achievement Regression Coefficients

	<i>B</i>	<i>p</i> -value	Tolerance	VIF
FLB	-.440	<.001	.506	1.976
FLE	-.158	<.01	.506	1.976

Research Question 2: Dominance Analysis

The results of the multiple linear regression established that FLB had a larger standardized coefficient ($\beta = -.440, p < .001$) than FLE ($\beta = -.206, p < .001$). However, the results were marred due to the presence of a suppressor effect and a large correlation between the two predictors ($r = .703; p < .001$). Assumptions cannot, therefore, be made regarding their ranking as the most important predictor of L2 WTC (Tonidandel & LeBreton, 2011). As such a dominance analysis was carried out, which did reflect the findings of the regression model in terms of effect size (see Table 4). FLB was shown to be the most dominant factor ($d_j = .099$) by some considerable margin, followed by FLE ($d_j = .017$). Therefore, with regards to explaining variance in the outcome variable of L2 WTC, FLB was indeed the relatively most important predictor.

Table 4

Dominance Analysis L2 Academic Achievement

	General dominance	Standardized dominance %	Rank
FLB	.099	85.37%	1
FLE	.017	14.63%	2

Research Question 3: Mediation Analysis

Lastly, a mediation analysis was conducted in order to examine the possibility of FLE having an indirect effect on the relationship between FLB and L2 WTC (see Table 5). The indirect effects of the mediation model were found to be positive and statistically significant ($\beta = .113; p < .01$), whereas the total effect was negative and significant ($\beta = -.327; p < .001$). As such FLE,

therefore, partially mediated the relationship between FLB and L2 WTC. In addition, the 95% confidence interval of the indirect effects did not contain zero (95%CI [.027; .199]). Therefore, the data supported a partial mediation effect.

Table 5.

Mediation Model Results

	Estimate	S.E.	z-value	p-value	<u>95% Confidence Interval</u>	
					Lower	Higher
<u>Direct Effects</u>						
FLB → WTC	-.440	.062	-7.070	<.001	-.562	-.318
<u>Indirect Effects</u>						
FLB → FLE → WTC	.113	.044	2.565	<.01	.027	.199
<u>Total Effects</u>						
FLB → WTC	-.327	.045	-7.333	<.001	-.414	-.239

Note: S.E. = Standard Error

Qualitative Results

Table 6 indicates the most recurring themes ordered based on the frequency and relative proportion, with two major sections namely, positive and negative themes. The former is mainly

related to FLE, while the latter is concerned with negative emotions such as FLB. These themes will be discussed in-depth in the following sections. The thematic analysis of the interviews suggests one major finding, which is the noticeably higher number of negative themes ($n = 162$) compared to positive ones ($n = 50$). It indicated that learners experienced and perceived sources of FLB in online classrooms as hindering factors with regard to L2 WTC considerably more than FLE and held a negative perspective toward communicating in these classes.

Table 6.

Most Recurring Themes Encouraging L2 WTC in Online Classrooms with Regard to FLE and FLB

Positive themes			Negative themes		
Themes	Frequency	%	Themes	Frequency	%
Inviting topics & appropriate activities	28	13.2%	Lack of face-to-face interaction	43	20.28%
Easier access to online resources	12	5.66%	Dull atmosphere	31	14.62%
More comfortable & less anxious	10	4.71%	Internet connection issues	28	13.20%
			Uninviting topics & inappropriate activities	20	9.43%
			Distractions	19	8.96%
			Teachers as monotonous speakers	13	6.13%

Other (lack of control ¹ ,	4 ¹	1.88% ¹
more anxiety ²)	4 ²	1.88% ²

Negative Factors Promoting FLB and Hindering L2 WTC

In the present study, negative themes refer to the themes that promote FLB and inhibit L2 WTC according to EFL learners who participated in our interviews. The most reported negative theme which promotes FLB among the learners was ‘lack of face-to-face interaction’ (see Table 6). This theme covered a wide array of interrelated issues such as lack of physical presence, lack of peers’ physical presence, and lack of visual feedback (e.g., body gestures). Learners reported that not being physically in the class and not being able to see teachers’ and peers’ reactions can negatively affect their intentions to initiate communication. For example, Participant 3 mentioned that “when I was talking [in traditional classes], I could see my teacher’s facial reactions. But now I don’t know if she [the teacher] agrees or likes what I am saying on the spot. It makes me nervous and bored most of the time.” Moreover, several interviewees stated that participating in online communication (via mics and behind screens) removes the authenticity of the communication and has an added layer of interaction where one has to click on different buttons to start communicating, therefore, “it [communicating in online classes] feels artificial whereas in in-person classes it is the genuine definition of communication where one directly engages in face-to-face communication” (Participant 13). With regard to promoting boredom, the students relatively felt too relaxed and sleepy as they were attending classes from home. Additionally, not being in the same place as their friends and classmates harm the enjoyable atmosphere of the class. As Participant 9 explained, “Not seeing and talking to my friends makes it [the online classes] really boring.”

The ‘dull atmosphere’ of the online classrooms was also mentioned by the learners repeatedly. This theme refers to the boring and uninteresting online classroom environment that hinders students’ L2 WTC and intensifies students’ FLB. As participant 8 explained, “there is no fun in the class, there is no excitement in the routine of the class, I think these are the times I get most bored”. They reported that due to the dull atmosphere of such classes “the sense of willingness [to communicate] goes away, as boredom creates a sense of resistance to learning for me” (Participant 3). This dull atmosphere is mainly triggered by the fourth and sixth most frequent negative themes namely, ‘uninviting topics & inappropriate activities’ and ‘teachers as monotonous speakers.’ By employing inapt activities for online classes, such as “repetitive content or practices” (participant 6) and “lots of writing and listening to the online speaker” (Participant 12), or by adopting a monotonous tone (Participants 5,6,17) teachers mostly create an uninteresting atmosphere. Participant 5 directly addressed this issue and stated that “sitting behind a laptop for a long time and listening to your teachers’ monotonous speeches gets boring.”

‘Internet connection issues’ as the third most recurring theme, has been found as an unfavorable aspect of online education by many previous studies (e.g., Resnik et al., 2022). This issue gains immediate relevance, especially in countries with slow and restricted internet connections, such as Iran (Wulf et al., 2022). The majority of students stated that they have experienced internet connection issues and explained how this problem plays a hindering role with regard to communicating in online classes. Participant 4, for example, explained that “since online classes are conducted through technological devices, glitches or internet breakdowns can occur, which might prevent or affect communication.” This problem can disrupt the flow of communication as students might get distracted and miss the gist of what the teacher or other students have been discussing. As participant 15 asserted, “Sometimes the connection breaks

down, and by the time it's reconnected, the topic has changed." Moreover, the difficulties in using technology can overwhelm learners with some complications that do not exist in traditional classes. As Participant 18 said, "The never-ending internet problems sometimes make me bored and unmotivated to attend classes."

Several students (n=12) addressed 'distractions' in online classes as an impeding factor to L2 WTC. These students referred to a variety of sources of distractions, which can prevent them from paying full attention in such classes. For example, participant 16 stated that "I used to silence my phone in classes and use it for the dictionary sometimes. Now I can check my Instagram." These distractions can stem from the lack of teachers' supervision (e.g., Participant 19: I can do something else because the teacher cannot see me), background noises (e.g., Participant 4: things in the house you know, I get anxious about it a lot, I don't want my classmates to hear my dad or mum's voice), or the boring atmosphere of online classes (e.g., Participant 12: When I'm bored, I can't pay attention, I usually keep checking my phone and social media, so I don't really know what's going on to participate).

Less frequent themes (i.e., lack of control, more anxiety) were labeled as other. These themes were also classified as negative themes concerning participating in online communication. Few students (n=3) mentioned losing control over the actions of the classroom that has been forced upon them due to the nature of online classrooms or some problems, such as internet connection as debilitating factors. For example, participant 1 reported that "if the topics or the assignment load get out of my control, I would call that class an exhausting one." Two interviewees also considered online classes as more anxiety provoking. Students' anxiety during online courses has been observed in other studies with a qualitative nature as well (e.g., Resnik et al., 2022). Anxiety, which has been proven as a strong negative predictor of L2 WTC, stemmed from other mentioned

themes, such as background distractions (participant 2: I get anxious about it a lot because of the things [noises] in the house) and lack of physical interaction (Participant 2: When I am with intimate friends or classmates in the class, I feel more comfortable expressing my thoughts. But with less intimate classmates I usually feel more stressed out).

Positive Themes Promoting FLE and Encouraging L2 WTC

The positive themes include the factors that learners introduced as sources of FLE in their online classrooms; which led them to engage in communication. The most frequent source of enjoyment in online classrooms for learners was ‘inviting topics & appropriate activities.’ Learners were more likely to join the conversation when there was an interesting topic or activity. Some learners mentioned activities involving visual content as enjoyable. Participant 10, for example, mentioned “I enjoy the visual content the teacher prepares. like the videos or the pictures, he [the teacher] uses to explain stuff”. Other interviewees believed “having a choice in activity type” made the class more enjoyable for them while encouraging them to communicate. Another source of enjoyment among learners was ‘easier access to online resources.’ By having easy access to the Internet, students could simply look up what they didn’t know, which in turn motivated them to share their freshly gained knowledge on the subject. Moreover, by checking the pronunciations and meanings of new words, students were less anxious about making mistakes while talking. According to the learners, they could use the internet to “check the answers”, “use it for dictionary”, and “search online about the topic”. Finally, few learners who felt ‘more comfortable and less anxious’ in online classes enjoyed the class more and were more willing to participate. According to this group of learners, attending classes at home without any physical interaction or the supervision of the teacher was a privilege. For instance, participant 7 mentioned, “nobody is looking at you, you’re in a secure place in your own room”. Learners with anxiety issues also

found these classes more comfortable “I usually prefer to engage in online discussions because I have anxiety issues in face-to-face communication” (Participant 12).

Discussion

This study set out to examine the complex relationships between FLB and FLE as predictors of L2 WTC through the lens of both quantitative and qualitative analyses. The research questions investigated in this study aimed to examine, 1) the extent to which FLB and FLE are predictors of L2 WTC, 2) which predictor (FLB or FLE) was the relatively most important, 3) whether an indirect effect was present with FLE mediating the relationship between FLB and L2 WTC, and 4) to what extent the relationships between FLB, FLE, and L2 WTC were supported in the qualitative interviews.

The quantitative analyses confirmed a statistically negative effect of FLB on L2 WTC. Students who experienced more boredom in the online L2 class were therefore less likely to communicate in the target language. Given that boredom is often defined as a state of engagement (Pawlak et al., 2020), and communicating in the class in the L2 can be considered as engaging and learning, the negative connection between L2 WTC seems a given. However, conclusions regarding FLE and L2 WTC were considerably less transparent. The study found suppressor effects when including FLE in the multiple linear regression model of L2 WTC, raising questions regarding the possible positive contributions of FLE to L2 WTC. A positive correlation coefficient was found between FLE and L2 WTC ($r = .146$; $p < .01$), and FLE did explain a small amount of unique variance in L2 WTC (14.63% of standardized dominance was due to FLE). In addition, the inclusion of FLE as a mediator in the relationship between FLB and L2 WTC did produce a

significant positive indirect effect ($\beta = .113$; $p < .01$). Therefore, it is likely that FLE had a small positive effect on L2 WTC, however, this effect was entirely overshadowed by FLB.

In the dominance analysis conducted in this study, FLB was found to be a considerably stronger predictor of L2 WTC than FLE, which is in contrast to previous findings. Several studies have included FLE and FLB as predictors of L2 WTC and found stronger effects for FLE (Alrabai, 2022; Li et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2021). A possible reason for this unconventional finding may be the context of the L2 classroom in this study – learning took place in a fully online setting. The quantitative results illustrated the limitations imposed by online learning and the resultant emotions experienced. Students specifically cited that the lack of face-to-face instruction and the dull atmosphere of the online classes contributed to their negative emotions. In addition, teachers were often perceived as monotonous when teaching online. FLE is theorized to be indicated by social enjoyment due to teacher and peer interactions (Botes et al., 2021). The limited socialization that can occur in the online L2 classroom and the removal of face-to-face interactions may have resulted in the limited impact of FLE in the quantitative study and the lower amount of positive emotions reported by students in the interviews. Additional compounding factors such as internet connection issues and general dullness of lessons reported by students most likely contributed to the increased impact of FLB found. The experience of online L2 classrooms, therefore, made it more likely for students to disengage and withdraw from learning and experience boredom and less likely to experience enjoyment – all of which led to a lesser propensity to communicate in the L2.

The mediation analysis in this study found that FLE mediated the relationship between FLB and L2 WTC. A direct negative effect was found between FLB and L2 WTC ($\beta = -.440$; $p < .001$), however when FLE was introduced as a mediator, a positive indirect effect was found ($\beta =$

.113; $p < .01$). FLE therefore indirectly reduced the negative effect of FLB on L2 WTC. The hypothesis that positive emotions may act as a buffer to negative emotions has been raised in previous studies, with mixed conclusions (Botes et al., 2022a; Li & Wei, 2022). In the case of our findings, caution ought to be exercised in the interpretation of the mediation analysis due to the previously found suppressor effect and the width of the 95% confidence interval found for the indirect effect (95%CI [.027; .199]). Nevertheless, the effects and sources (whether direct or indirect) of enjoyment in the online L2 classroom were also reported in the qualitative interviews. Even though students found less social enjoyment in online learning, personal enjoyment was derived from being able to use the internet to immediately look up answers and gain new knowledge. Given that personal enjoyment is a subfactor of FLE (Botes et al., 2021), the specific online context of L2 learning therefore could contribute to the overall enjoyment. Some students also reported feeling more comfortable in the online setting. Given that previous research has established a link between personality variables and L2 emotions (Botes et al., 2023) and personality variables and L2 learning (Chen et al., 2021), it is likely that the online setting may suit the personality and individual learning preferences of some students better and thus generate positive emotions. The opposite side of the coin is also a given though, if some students are predisposed to feel positive emotions regarding the online class, then others will be predisposed to feel negative emotions. Complex interactions between individual preferences, personality, emotions, and L2 learning outcomes are therefore likely to present in the online L2 classroom – with considerable future research needed to untangle this complexity. A fruitful avenue for future research may be specifically to examine the profiles of individuals more suited for online L2 learning as opposed to traditional classroom settings.

As with all studies, limitations ought to be taken into account. The finding of a suppressor effect severely limits the interpretation and generalisability of this study. Considerable future research would be needed to establish if suppressor effects are present when multiple emotions are modelled as predictors of L2 learning outcomes, or if the finding was unique to this sample. In general, future researchers can consider examining the complex interactions between emotional variables and the statistical constraints of analyzing these models. In addition, given the cross-sectional nature of this study, causal interpretations are limited. Longitudinal and experimental studies are required in order to make clearer causal inferences regarding the impact of emotions on L2 WTC. Regarding the qualitative data limitations, we can refer to the limited number of participants ($n = 20$), compared to the participants for the quantitative method ($n = 469$), which may harm the generalizability of the results. Moreover, another limitation can be the nature of interviews where students may not reveal some information due to fear of exposure, shame, or not being comfortable with the interviewees. The researchers tended to improve the latter limitation by thoroughly explaining the purpose of the study and assure the anonymity of the data.

The findings of the current study can offer a number of implications for EFL classrooms. The first step could be raising boredom awareness (Pawlak et al. 2020). As this negative emotion is ubiquitous in all learning environments, teachers' understanding and acknowledgment of boredom rather than contributing to learners' reticence to laziness would encourage teachers to confront and take action against its detrimental effects. One way to alleviate boredom in online classrooms is warding off some of the problems specific to this platform, such as the use of webcams to lower the negative effect of lack of physical presence to some degree; teachers may also work on their computer literacy to avoid IT-related disruptions in the classroom (Derakhshan et al. 2021). Another way to cope with boredom in the online environment is by putting forth the

tenets of the control-value theory of achievement emotions (Pekrun, 2006). Generating feelings of control and value to diminish boredom could be possible by giving learners a choice regarding the type of activities and topics of discussion, avoiding over/underchallenging tasks (Li, 2021), teacher enthusiasm about the content of classes, respect for students' needs, and attitudes (Pawlak et al. 2020). The possible mitigation of boredom through positive emotions like enjoyment ought also to be considered. For instance, teachers can learn to understand signs of negative emotions, employ exciting online games and activities which give feelings of success and satisfaction, ask students to share online learning experiences where emotions were involved, and explain the advantages of online classes, especially concerning communication (Cavanagh, 2016).

Conclusion

This study examined enjoyment and boredom in the context of L2 online learning and the effects of these emotions on L2 WTC. We found that much like Dorian Grey, online L2 learners seem to be at the mercy of their emotions – specifically, at the mercy of boredom. FLB had a considerably stronger effect on L2 WTC in both the quantitative and qualitative sections of our study. This effect was to some extent mitigated by FLE, but in the end, FLB seems to be a severe detriment to the willingness of online L2 learners to communicate. Given that a willingness to communicate in the target language itself is indicative of proficiency and the general positive outcomes associated with L2 WTC, this finding is especially detrimental. Bored L2 learners will therefore be less likely to venture and speak in the target language, and will therefore be less likely to gain from the L2 class.

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