

A Study of Enjoyment and Boredom in English Graduate Students' Oral English Learning under Control Value Theory

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Abstract: As an important part of English learning, the improvement of students' oral expression is crucial to the realization of university English teaching goals. With the popularization of positive psychology in second language learning, more and more attention has been paid to students' learning emotions. Based on the Control-Value Theory of academic emotions, this study examined 30 English graduate students' oral enjoyment and oral boredom and their interrelationships with control-value evaluations. It is found that learners experience relatively high level of enjoyment and moderate level of boredom; Learners' enjoyment and boredom are negatively correlated; oral learning control-value evaluations can predict enjoyment more significantly, while their predictive effect on boredom is less obvious. The study concludes that teachers should emphasize the value-guidance of oral learning, adopt effective teaching methods to enhance the sense of controllability of oral learning, and create a positive learning environment to enhance students' positive emotional experience and control oral boredom, so as to improve the teaching effect.

1. Introduction

As an important part of English learning, the improvement of students' oral expression is crucial to the realization of university English teaching goals. However, studies have shown that although Chinese English learners have built a certain foundation of oral communication in English, they also have negative psychological reactions such as anxiety, burnout and boredom when they perform poorly. In the past decade, under the joint impetus of positive psychology and educational psychology emotion research, domestic and foreign applied linguistics researchers have gradually recognized the importance of emotions in L2 learning, which has led to a surge in foreign language emotion research (Dewaele & Li 2020).^[1] In response to the tendency, under the guidance of Control-Value Theory, this study investigates the enjoyment and boredom of English graduate students' oral English studies, in relation to their antecedents (i.e., students' control-value evaluations of spoken English learning) by means of 3 questionnaires.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Control-Value Theory and Emotion

Around the 21st century, with the development and prosperity of positive psychology, researchers began to use the theories such as well-being theory, broaden-and-build theory, control-value theory, etc. Most recently, the CVT has been tentatively integrated from educational psychology (Pekrun, 2006)^[2] to emotion research in SLA (Dewaele & Li, 2020)^[3] A few researchers have adopted a CVT approach to explore L2 emotions. For example, Li Banban and Li Chengchen (2024)^[4] investigated how achievement emotions (i.e., enjoyment and anxiety) were predicted by their proximal antecedents and distal antecedents in a Chinese EFL context. Zhao, Lan and Zhang (2023)^[5] investigated the predictive effect of language achievement on emotions (enjoyment, boredom, and anxiety). These indicate that studies on the antecedents or predictors of emotions in L2 learning could be theoretically built on the CVT. Therefore, CVT is applied in the present study.

2.2 Emotion and L2 Learning

From the perspective of emotion types, in recent years, researchers have continuously expanded the types of emotions in their study. Among them, enjoyment is the hottest topic among positive emotions. Many scholars have studied the impact of task difficulty, learning engagement and foreign language emotions on the performance of English learners. Among negative emotions, in addition to anxiety and burnout, which continues to attract the attention of researchers, boredom has also triggered a research boom in recent years, and research results have continued to emerge. In addition to exploring a single emotion, researchers also focus on the relationship between multiple different emotions and other positive psychological factors and their prediction and impact on academic achievement, such as enjoyment and anxiety, enjoyment and boredom, shame and guilt, etc. Meanwhile, foreign language boredom has been developed for many years and become the latest hot topic in emotion research. Li and Han (2022)^[6] investigate the predictive effect of foreign language enjoyment, anxiety and boredom on online learning achievement. Art Tsang and Christelle Davis (2024)^[7] set out to investigate what FL classroom activities children find most enjoyable and most boring, and why.

According to the previous studies above, the present study tries to explore the following two questions: (1) What are the overall levels of oral English enjoyment and boredom among English major graduate students and their relationship with each other? (2) What is the relationship between oral English enjoyment and boredom among English major graduate students and their control-value evaluation of oral English learning?

3. Methodology

3.1 Participants

This study selected 30 postgraduates majoring in English from a foreign language studies university in Xi'an. Participants' average age was 23 years old, and most of them were sophomores. All students passed TEM 4, and a few students took the IELTS/TOEFL test. There was no statistically significant difference in English proficiency. In addition, all students took English listening and speaking courses during their undergraduate studies.

3.2 Instruments

3.2.1 Control-Value Scale for Oral English Learning

This scale is a 5-level Likert scale, which includes two parts: control evaluation scale and value evaluation scale. The control evaluation part refers to the English control evaluation scale compiled by Li in 2021^[8], which includes 3 dimensions and is used to measure students' sense of control over their oral English learning. The value evaluation part is adapted from the expectation-value belief questionnaire developed by Trautwein et al. in 2012.^[9]

3.2.2 Oral English Enjoyment Scale

This scale is adapted from the Chinese version of Foreign Language Enjoyment Scale (CFLES), which was developed by Li et al. in 2018.^[10] It is a Likert 5-level scale with 11 items. It examines the foreign language enjoyment level of the respondents from three dimensions: private foreign language enjoyment (FLE-Private), teacher-related foreign language enjoyment (FLE-Teacher), and classroom atmosphere-related foreign language enjoyment (FLE-Atmosphere).

3.2.3 Oral English Boredom Scale

Adapted from Li et al. 2021^[11] Foreign Language Learning Boredom Subscale (FLLBS), it is a 5-level Likert scale with 12 items, measuring learners' foreign language boredom level from seven dimensions: foreign language class boredom, under-challenging task boredom, PowerPoint presentation boredom, homework boredom, teacher-dislike boredom, general learning trait boredom and over-challenging or meaningless task boredom.

3.3 Data Analysis

This study used Pearson correlation and linear regression model in SPSS 19.0 to analyze the data from questionnaires. The Pearson correlation test was used to verify the relationship between foreign language oral enjoyment and boredom, so as to answer the first question; At the same time, this model was used to examine whether control-value evaluation was related to the generation of the two emotions. In order to answer the second question, the author used a linear regression model to explore whether control-value evaluation had a predictive effect on foreign language enjoyment and boredom. Finally, all the results were tested again to ensure the accuracy of the results.

4. Results

4.1 Relation between Enjoyment and Boredom in Oral English Learning

Statistics is processed by SPSS 19.0 in this study, and mean value is used to justify the level of emotions in oral English learning. Descriptive statistical results show that students have experienced a relatively high level of enjoyment in oral English learning. Among the three dimensions of foreign language enjoyment, teacher related oral enjoyment is the highest with an average of 3.92, followed by personal oral enjoyment with an average of 3.79, while classroom atmosphere related oral enjoyment is at a moderate level with an average of 2.77. At the same time, students generally feel a moderate level of oral English learning boredom, with seven dimensions from high to low being PPT boredom (3.63), task difficulty (3.00), task simplicity (2.80), homework boredom and classroom boredom (2.53), teacher aversion boredom (2.52), and finally learning traits (2.07). Overall, there is

a negative correlation between enjoyment and boredom in oral English learning ($r=-.500$, $P<0.05$), as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Results of Pearson Correlation Test

Variables	Oral English Control-value	Enjoyment	Boredom
Oral English Control-value			
Enjoyment	.693		
Boredom	-.420	-.500	

* $p<0.05$

4.2 Predictive Effect of Control-value Theory on Enjoyment and Boredom in Oral English Learning

The results show that students have a relatively high level of control and value in their oral English learning. The Spearman correlation test and linear regression analysis showed a positive correlation between oral English enjoyment and control-value evaluation ($r=0.693$, $P<0.01$); The boredom of oral English is negatively correlated with control-value evaluation ($r=-0.420$, $P<0.01$). Linear regression analysis was conducted with oral English enjoyment and boredom as dependent variables and oral English control-value evaluation as independent variables. According to Table 2, the results showed that oral control-value evaluation ($\beta=0.786$, $t=5.082$, $P<0.001$) positively predicted oral enjoyment, while oral control evaluation and value evaluation ($\beta=-0.5$, $t=-2.445$, $P<0.05$) negatively predicted oral boredom. The detail is showed in Table 2:

Table 2: Results of Linear-regression Analysis

Linear-regression model		Fit index		Coefficient	
Predictive variable	Outcome variable	R ²	F	β	t
Oral English control-value	Enjoyment	.480	25.831	.0786	5.082
Oral English control-value	Boredom	.176	5.980	-.500	-2.445

5. Discussion

5.1 Students' Oral English Enjoyment and Boredom and Their Mutual Relationship

Most students can feel a relatively high level of enjoyment in oral English learning. Specifically, the highest level of the three dimensions of students' oral enjoyment is teacher-related oral enjoyment, that is, the enjoyment students feel because of the support and encouragement from teachers in oral teaching activities. The second is the level of personal oral enjoyment, which shows that when students perform well in oral activities and make progress in their own oral skills, they will have a strong positive mentality. However, in class, we often see learners who are unwilling to take the initiative to speak in front of their classmates or correct their classmates' oral expressions due to shyness, concerns about "face", fear of losing face or offending others, thus hindering the generation of pleasant emotions.

The overall boredom of most students in English oral learning is at a medium level. A small number of students have a rebellious attitude towards oral learning and are not in a high mood. There are also some students who are in high spirits and have a low degree of boredom. They are willing to invest in English learning and hope to improve their oral skills through learning. In general, students' emotions in the process of oral learning remain at a relatively high level, with a medium degree of boredom, and are mostly disturbed by external factors. The results show that most students feel bored

because of the boring design of PowerPoint, the tasks assigned by teachers are too difficult or simple, and teachers are not serious in teaching.

Meanwhile, students with higher oral enjoyment could get positive psychological value from learning and emotional support from teachers and classmates, so they are less likely to feel bored. This also verifies the results of previous studies on other positive and negative emotions, namely that learners who have a higher sense of enjoyment in foreign language learning are less likely to feel powerless and tired during the learning process.^[12]

5.2 The Predictive Effect of Control-Value Evaluation on Students' Oral Enjoyment and Boredom

The results show that students' control-value evaluation of oral learning has an impact on oral enjoyment and boredom. It is proved that if learners believe that learning results or activities are within their control, that they are competent for oral learning tasks, and that they can improve their oral level through learning, they are likely to have positive academic emotions and neutralize negative academic emotions. At the same time, if students believe that oral English learning is valuable to their current and future life, career, etc., enjoy the learning process, and desire to achieve success in learning, they can stimulate pleasant emotions, thereby increasing enthusiasm and motivation for learning and inhibiting the generation of boredom and vice versa.

6. Conclusion

This study examined the enjoyment and boredom emotions of graduate students majoring in English during oral learning based on the control-value theory. Enjoyment and boredom emotions were found to be negatively correlated, i.e., the more enjoyment a student generates during oral learning, the less bored he or she will be, and vice versa. Meanwhile, control-value evaluation can better predict oral enjoyment and is positively correlated, i.e., the better students can control over their oral learning, and the more they think that learning oral English is valuable for their work and study, the more enjoyment they will feel.

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