BOREDOM AMONG FRESHMAN ENGINEERING STUDENTS IN A COMMUNICATION COURSE

Tanju Deveci

The Petroleum Institute, Abu Dhabi, UAE
Phone: +9712 60 75561, E-Mail: tdeveci@pi.ac.ae

Abstract. *Boredom is often believed to be one of the main factors contributing to students' disengagement in learning. Emotional and intellectual disengagement in students caused by boredom can pose a threat to teachers' job performance too, further risking their students' academic success. However, students' boredom can go unnoticed, and therefore be left unresolved, which may have more detrimental effects on their aptitude for learning in the long run. Therefore, it is important to identify bored students, the reasons for their boredom, and the strategies they adopt to combat boredom. This paper reports the findings of a small-scale study conducted on boredom among 36 freshman engineering students in a communication course at the Petroleum Institute, Abu Dhabi, UAE. The data were collected using a survey, including Coping with Boredom Scales developed by Goetz and Nett (2011). The findings suggested that although boredom was not a common issue, half of the students sometimes felt bored. The most common reason for their boredom was related to their perceptions of the course nature, such as heavy work and its lack of relevance to engineering field. The most common strategy used to combat boredom was the cognitive approach. It was also found that there was a positive correlation between the students' use of the cognitive approach and their academic performance, and a negative correlation between their use of the behavioral avoidance strategy and academic performance. The results are discussed, and suggestions are made to reduce boredom among freshman students.*

Key words: *disengagement, boredom, strategy, performance, coping*

> "*The truth is that everyone is bored, and devotes himself to cultivating habits.*"

> (Camus, 1947)

1. INTRODUCTION

The words above taken from Camus's famous novel, The Plague (1947), highlight the significance of the feeling of boredom, and how it can affect individuals. Boredom, which 'normally arises when we cannot do what we want to do, or have to do something we do not want to do' (Svendsen, 2003, p. 19), can pose formidable challenges to students and, if not managed effectively, can lead them to suffer undesirable consequences. The habits students cultivate due to boredom with their studies can even reduce their aptitude for

learning throughout their lives. Therefore, it is imperative that teachers be vigilant about the symptoms of boredom their students may exhibit, and take the right action to direct students' potential toward activities conducive to learning. It is also important to study the ways that students respond to boredom so that the right kind of action can be taken to reduce the problem.

2. TYPES OF BOREDOM

Doehlemann (cited in Svendsen, 2003) identifies four types of boredom. The first one is situative boredom, which is aroused by something specific like waiting for someone or waiting for the train. The second type is satiety boredom, which is caused when something is rather repetitive and things become banal. The third type of boredom is existential boredom. It occurs when an individual's soul lacks content and 'the world is in neutral' (p. 42). Finally, creative boredom forces the person to do something new. Although these four types of boredom have clear-cut distinctions, they may have certain characteristics in common. It is also true that one may affect the other.

3. ACADEMIC BOREDOM

It could be argued that the one that seems more relevant to educational settings is situative boredom since students in classes are engaged in specific situations like listening to a lecture or carrying out certain learning tasks. Boredom can occur in any educational setting, whether it be lower or higher levels of education. In elementary schools, children may be bored easily if they do not enjoy the topic, or if they are immobile for too long. Mora (2011) conducted a 2.5-year long study focusing on a group of Latino secondary school students' feelings of boredom. He observed that the students were bored in their strictly exam-driven educational setting which required them to sit quietly and prepare for the upcoming state exams. More often than not, these students were identified to have developed a negative attitude towards higher education, expecting it to be boring, too.

When students enter adolescence, they may be expected to have higher levels of boredom, due to the increases in their negative motivation towards school (Larson & Richards, 1991). This is supported by the results of a report called High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE), which was administered in 103 schools across 27 states in the USA. The report revealed that out of 415 high school students, 66% were bored at least once every day, and 17% of them were bored in every class (Mintz, 2009).

The fact that university education is not compulsory may increase the expectation that university students would be more intrinsically motivated; therefore, they would not be expected to suffer from boredom as much. However, research has shown that university students are not immune to the problem. For instance, a study conducted with 211 university students in England revealed that almost 60% of students were bored in their lectures half the time, and another 30% of students found most or all of their lectures boring (Mann & Robinson, 2009). Taken together, a staggering 90 per cent of students were found to have faced challenges in their lectures, which could potentially result in a decrease in their academic success. Nemko (n.d.) reports the results of a study conducted on university students' experiences in an American university, stating that 27.5% of the

surveyed freshman students indicated their frequent boredom in their classes. This number was found to increase to 37% in senior students. Similarly, Al-Khairy (2013), who studied the motivational factors of language learners, found that undergraduate students were demotivated more often than not due to the reasons such as boring teaching methods and textbooks, ineffective use of modern teaching aids and the challenging nature of language learning. In another study, Maroldo (1986) found a positive relationship between shyness and boredom among female students at a Texas college. She also identified a negative correlation between boredom and grade point average for male students.

4. COPING WITH BOREDOM

Students may respond to boredom in different ways. Nett, Goetz and Daniels (2010) identified four categories of strategy use classified by two dimensions: Approach and avoidance. The former refers to students' attempts to deal with the perceived problem. The latter, on the other hand, refers to students' strategies of avoiding the problem. Both dimensions include cognitive and behavioral approaches, a summary of which can be seen in Table 1 below.

Table 1 Classification system of students' strategies of coping with boredom.

Type of coping	Approach coping	Avoidance coping
Cognitive	Thinking differently to change the perception of the situation.	Thinking of something else not associated with the situation.
Behavioral	Taking actions to change the situation.	Taking actions not associated with the situation.

Nett, Goetz & Daniels (2010)

Nett, Goetz and Daniels (2010) state that the students who adopt an approach of coping strategy aim to tackle the problem. If they take a cognitive approach, they will try to change their perception of the situation by encouraging themselves to think more positively of the subject they are learning. Although this does not change the actual situation, the students reduce or eliminate the feeling of boredom. However, if the students take a behavioral approach they will try to change the situation that bores them. For instance, they may ask the instructor to do something more interesting. On the other hand, those who opt for an avoidance coping strategy have the tendency to seek ways of forgetting about the problem. They can do this by engaging themselves in cognitive avoidance strategies like thinking about things irrelevant to the problem, things that they perceive as more fun. They can also resort to behavioral avoidance strategies by doing things that are unassociated with the problematic situation such as chatting with a friend. Nett, Goetz and Daniels (2010) warn that cognitive and behavioral avoidance strategies can be so interwoven that it may be difficult to make a distinction between the two. They also warn that a cognitive avoidance strategy can go unnoticed by the instructor. This may potentially be a more serious issue than a behavioral avoidance strategy which the instructor can tackle more promptly.

5. RESEARCHER'S TEACHING CONTEXT AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In the researcher's immediate teaching context at the Petroleum Institute (PI), an engineering university located in Abu Dhabi (UAE), it is not unusual to hear students complaining about their courses being far too demanding, and therefore, boring. The informal talks the researcher has had with various instructors seem to provide evidence of how students may behave when they are faced with various challenges. The negative feelings aroused by these challenges create motivational problems for both the students and instructors. In order to alleviate the problem and increase students' academic performance, PI has recently launched an inquiry group to focus on active learning with the belief that greater student engagement through active learning increases students' interest, academic success, and therefore retention rates (Freeman et al., 2014). The group members gather every second week to discuss various texts on active learning and exchange experiences of engaging students in the learning process. The strength of the group lies in the fact that the faculty comes from various engineering and non-engineering disciplines such as Physics, Math, Economics, and Communication. The variety in teaching faculty from different fields allows for a multitude of ideas on how to better cultivate active learners. This, in turn, aims to decrease students' boredom levels and increase the students', as well as the faculty's motivation.

As a support department for the various engineering disciplines at the university, the Communication Department takes pride in its achievements in student-generated work through a project-based learning approach. However, the researcher of this current study - as a Communication instructor - frequently observes that Communication students may have a tendency to suffer from boredom and disenchantment despite the active nature of Communication courses at PI. The impetus for the current study is derived from these complexities. It aims to answer the following questions:

1) What is the frequency of boredom among Communication students?
2) What are the reasons Communication students get bored?
3) a - What strategies do they adopt to tackle their feeling of boredom?
   b - What kind of a relationship is there between the students' use of strategies and their academic performance?

The response to the first question is hopefully able to identify how prevalent boredom is among Communication students. This is particularly important since it will confirm or disprove instructors' perceptions of frequent boredom in students. The second research question, on the other hand, is an attempt to identify causes of boredom experienced by students, which will help formulate solutions that are specific to the problems. The response to the last question is of great importance since it will shed light on students' response to the identified problem. Becoming aware of students' preferred way of dealing with the issue can be particularly informative since it will provide educators with insights into effective and ineffective student behavior in the face of boredom. This can help the instructors cater to their students' needs better in terms of channeling their energy towards more effective strategies and productive classroom activities. It is also important to note that '[i]t is … possible to be bored without being aware of the fact' (Svendsen, 2003, p. 14), so the students may not necessarily attribute their lack of motivation for Communication studies to boredom. Therefore, having students reflect on their experiences in their classes can help identify possible reasons for their lack of interest in

Communication courses, which may not be directly linked to hard skills they are supposed to acquire as future engineers. Taken together, the findings of this study can be considered an attempt to give new momentum to the plans of the active learning inquiry group at PI and guide its discussions and instructional initiatives.

6. METHOD

6.1. Respondents

A total number of 36 male students taking a Communication course (COMM 151) at the Petroleum Institute during the 2014-2015 academic year participated in the study. The students were of Arab origins, with an overwhelming number of them (92%) being Emirati. The age of the respondents ranged from 18 to 22, with a mean age of 19.

6.2. Data collection

The data were collected using a survey with four sections. The first section was about demographics while the second section asked the participant how often they felt bored in their Communication classes. The third section, on the other hand, aimed at identifying possible reasons for their boredom. This section was comprised of options related to course design, instructional design, and individual reasons such as family problems and lack of necessary language skills. They were also given the option to add any other reasons they might have.

The last section of the survey included Coping with Boredom Scales (CBS) developed by Goetz and Nett (2011), whose permission was obtained to use the instrument in an electronic mail correspondence. CBS is a 20-item self-report instrument that measures four categories of coping strategies: Cognitive approach, behavioral approach, cognitive avoidance and behavioral avoidance. Each category contains five items. Sample items include:

When I am bored in my Communication class, ….
- I make myself aware of the importance of the issue. (cognitive approach)
- I ask my teacher for more interesting tasks. (behavioral approach)
- I study for another subject. (cognitive avoidance)
- I talk to my classmates. (behavioral avoidance)

CBS is based on a five point scale ranging between 1 (strongly disagree) and 5 (strongly agree). Therefore, the highest score for a particular category would be 25 while the lowest score would be 5. Consequently, a higher score would suggest that the student has a tendency to adopt the qualities suggested by a particular category. Scores falling just above or below the middle score of 15, on the other hand, would indicate a non-fixed strategy use.

The statistical analyses conducted by Goetz and Nett (2011) revealed that the CBS has internal consistency with Cronbachs .907 for cognitive approach, Cronbachs .83 for behavioral approach, Cronbachs .83 for cognitive avoidance, and Cronbachs .92 for behavioral avoidance.

6.3. Data analysis

SPSS (Version 18.0) (SPSS Inc., Chicago, USA) was used to analyze the data. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies, mean, standard deviation, minimum and maximum were used to describe the data collected. The Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient (r) was used to measure the strength of association between the four categories of strategies in CBS and the participants' final marks. A p-value of 0.05 was considered statistically significant.

7. RESULTS

The first research question asked how frequently the participants felt bored in their Communication classes. The results of the data analysis in response to this question can be seen in Table 2 below.

Table 2 Frequency of feeling of boredom

Frequency of Feeling of Boredom	N=36 f; %	Min;Max.	Mean	SD
Never	2;5.6			
Rarely	13;36			
Sometimes	17;47.3	1;4	2.63	0.751
Usually	4;11.1			
All the time	0;0			

It is seen in Table 2 that almost half of the students (47.3%) indicated that they were sometimes bored during their Communication classes. Another 36% of the students felt that they were rarely bored. A small percentage of the students (11.1%) were usually bored. Taken together, the students responses suggest that they did suffer from the feeling of boredom, although it did not seem to be a severe situation for the majority.

The second research question aimed at identifying the reasons why the participants were bored in their Communication classes. The analysis of the data collected to answer this question revealed three main themes: Perceived nature of the course, instructor's classroom management style, and personal issues. Table 3 below presents descriptive statistical data on these themes.

It can be seen in Table 3 that the main factor that contributed to the participants' feeling of boredom was the way they perceived the course nature. The most frequently expressed reason related to this theme was work-load (58.3%). The students felt that the amount of work they were required to complete on a regular basis sometimes bored them, and the instructors' high expectations of them increased the amount of boredom (44.4%). Another common reason was the students' perception of repetitive course content (55.6%). In the informal talks held with the students, some stated that the content of the Communication (COMM) 151 course was similar to COMM 101, the prerequisite course for COMM 151, and therefore they felt they already knew what they were studying, causing a certain amount of frustration and therefore boredom. Another noteworthy finding was some students' perception of Communication courses' lack of relevance to engineering (36.1%). These students' failure to recognize how soft-skills contribute to an

engineer's performance led them to consider the course content irrelevant to their future profession; therefore, they felt bored. Seven of the students (19.4%), on the other hand, attributed their boredom to team-work they were required to engage in. These students complained particularly about irresponsible behaviors of the other team members, which created more work for them. Another 11.1% of the students stated that they were bored due to lack of creativity in the course. They preferred to have classroom activities that would allow for creativity.

Table 3 Factors contributing to students' feeling of boredom

Factors Contributing to Feeling of Boredom		N=36	
		f	%
Perceived nature of the course	Heavy work-load	21	58.3
	Repetition of course content	20	55.6
	High course expectations	16	44.4
	Lack of relevance to engineering	13	36.1
	Team-work	7	19.4
	Lack of creativity involved in the course	4	11.1
Instructor's classroom management style	Lack of freedom to choose tasks	11	30.6
	Lack of physical movement	7	19.4
	Too much teacher-talk	6	16.7
	Long PowerPoint slides	5	13.9
	Lack of interaction with other students	4	11.1
	Too much teacher control	4	11.1
	Lack of interaction with the instructor	3	8.3
Personal issues	Sleep deprivation	19	52.8
	Hunger	9	25.0
	Family problems	8	22.2
	Lack of necessary language skills	5	13.9
	Home-sickness	4	11.1

The second theme that emerged from the data was regarding the instructor's classroom management style. The most frequently expressed complaint (30.6%) was related to their desire for freedom to choose tasks. Four of the students who cited this as a source of boredom also referred to the lack of creativity in the course. Another 19.4% of the students expressed that their boredom was caused by lack of physical movement. These students stated that they would enjoy instructional activities that would allow tactile learners any opportunity to do more hands-on activities. Four of these students (11.1%) also stated that more interaction with the other students would reduce their boredom levels. Too much teacher-talk especially at the initial phases of the course was regarded as boring by six of the participants (16.7%), who seemed to prefer periods of silence to let them digest the information they were exposed to. Some of these students were also found to dislike the lengthy PowerPoint presentations by the instructor (13.9%). The amount of teacher talk and lengthy PowerPoint presentations appeared to increase teacher control and limit the instructor's interaction with the students, which bored some of the students.

According to Table 3, some participants experienced boredom due to certain personal issues, too. The most common reason was sleep deprivation, from which 19 students

(52.8%) suffered. This caused them to have difficulties concentrating, which in turn led to boredom. Some of these students' concentration was also affected negatively by hunger during class time since they preferred to skip breakfast to sleep a bit more in the morning. Also, the gap in five students' skills in English as a foreign language (13.9%) was found to be a source of boredom. The challenge these students faced in reading course materials, doing assignments and taking examinations affected their adaptation adversely. They often felt out of sync with the rest of their class; therefore, they felt less interested and experienced less enjoyment in the class.

The third research question asked what strategies the participants used to tackle their feeling of boredom. Table 4 below shows the results of the data analysis conducted to answer this question.

Table 4 Strategies used to tackle the feeling of boredom

Strategies	Scores			
	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD
Cognitive approach	13	25	20.0	2.934
Behavioral approach	5	19	11.8	3.367
Cognitive avoidance	5	22	13.4	4.739
Behavioral avoidance	5	22	13.5	4.219

According to Table 4, the most dominant strategy was the cognitive approach with a mean of 20. This indicates that the participants in this study had the tendency to change their perceptions of the boring situation in their COMM 151 classes, and that they were more likely to encourage themselves to think positively about their lessons. The dominance of this strategy becomes more evident when the range for this approach is considered. That is, a range between 13 and 25 (SD=2.934) compared to the other three strategies indicates the participants' stronger tendency towards this strategy use.

Table 4 also shows that behavioral avoidance and cognitive avoidance strategies received very similar scores indicating non-fixed orientations (mean=13.5 and mean=13.4 respectively). This means that some of the students might be expected to divert their attention toward some other things, and away from the boring situation, as suggested by behavioral avoidance. They might, for example, choose to converse with a friend or fiddle with their mobile phones. They might also exhibit the characteristics of the cognitive avoidance approach such as diverting their thoughts to something not related to the lesson, something that they find more exciting than their lesson. However, a range between 5 and 22 for both strategies with standard deviations of 4.739 and 4.219 indicates that the scores were widely spread, and therefore these strategies appeared to be less-preferred compared to the cognitive approach.

Table 4 indicates that the least preferred strategy among the participants was behavioral approach (mean=11.8, SD=3.367). That is, comparatively fewer students were found to attempt to change the boring situation by doing things such as asking the instructor to do something else, or something more interesting.

Statistical analyses were also conducted to determine the type of relationship between the strategies and the participants' academic performance. For this purpose, their scores for each strategy were compared to their final marks at the end of the course, the results of which can be seen in Table 5 below.

Table 5. Pearson product-moment correlations of final marks
and strategies of coping with boredom

	r	p
Final Marks Cognitive approach	0.6942	0.00001
Final Marks Cognitive avoidance	-0.0309	0.8580
Final Marks Behavioral approach	0.1293	0.4523
Final Marks Behavioral avoidance	-0.4847	0.0027

p < 0.05 (2-tailed)

From Table 5, it can be seen that the correlation coefficient (r) for the cognitive approach equals 0.6942 with a p value of 0.00001, which indicates a moderate positive relationship at a statistically significant level. This suggests that the students who adopted the cognitive approach strategy tended to attain higher academic success. Similarly, a positive correlation was found between the final marks and the behavioral approach strategy (r=0.1293). However, the correlation was weak, and no statistically significant difference was detected (p=0.4523 > 0.05). This may suggest that those who had an inclination for the behavioral approach strategy could be expected to increase their academic success to a certain extent. Also, a weak negative correlation was detected between the participants' end of course marks and the behavioral avoidance strategy (r=-0.4847, p=0.0027 < 0.05), indicating that frequent use of the behavioral avoidance strategy could indeed lower students' academic performance. Similarly, the analysis of the data on the cognitive avoidance strategy revealed a weak negative correlation between the two variables (r=-0.0309); however, the difference was not found to be at a statistically significant level (p=0.8580 > 0.05). This may indicate that the more frequently students use the cognitive avoidance strategy, the lower their academic success will be.

8. DISCUSSION

This research aimed at identifying how often the students in Communication classes got bored, what the reasons for their boredom were, and how they dealt with it. The results of the data analysis for the first goal of the research revealed that the students did experience boredom in their classes with an average rating of 2.63 which falls just below sometimes. Although this overall rating may not seem alarming, if not taken seriously it could easily increase. This becomes more evident if we consider the percentage of those who expressed their feeling of usual boredom (11.1%). Nevertheless, this finding of the research seems to contradict Communication instructors' general observations of frequent boredom among the students. One reason for the comparatively lower levels of expressed feeling of boredom may be due to the nature of the data-collection tool. That is, the survey used in this research adopted a self-report method asking about the feelings and attitudes held by the participants, who might have had the tendency to underreport the severity of the perceived problem. This may be caused by the participants' cultural values. Arab culture, which the participants in this study belonged to, seems to

discourage its members from expressing their discontentment in order to avoid losing face (Deveci, 2014). The participants of this study may have adopted this approach in order not to be seen as complaining, which is a face-threating act. Similarly, Reisinger and Turner (1999) observed that people in such cultures tend to avoid explicit expressions of dissatisfaction because they regard such as behaviors socially unacceptable and threatening harmonious relationships. Al-Omari (2008) also draws attention to Arabs' tendency to avoid confrontations so as not to disturb coherence in social contexts, which in turn helps them save face. Therefore, instructors' observations of boredom in their classes need to be taken into consideration, despite their students' lack of willingness to overtly express their feelings.

The data analysis for the second research question revealed that the nature of the course was the main factor that contributed to the students' feeling of boredom in their Communication classes. Overall, the students thought that the course was heavily loaded, forcing them to work hard to deal with the number of tasks they were assigned. The project-based nature of the course required them to work both individually and in teams. The latter appeared to cause some students to dislike the course and increase the likelihood of boredom. It is only natural that these students might find the course more difficult, and a lack of skills in coping with the course might be expected to trigger dislike and, therefore, boredom in them. Drawing attention to the cyclical nature of boredom, Martin, Hands, Lancaster, Trytten and Murphy (2008) state that the perception of boredom encourages the students to regard their class overly difficult. These students are likely to suffer from burnout which, according to Meier and Schmeck (1985) often strips students of concern and leaves them bored. However, Martin et al. (2008) also found that courses that are perceived as easy and lacked challenge can cause boredom among engineering students. This is supported by Waterman's (2005) observations that the more challenging a course is, the greater levels of interest it may allow. Waterman (2005) reasons that classroom activities that require low-effort could indeed discourage motivated students while those requiring high-effort would be likely to induce more interest and opportunities for self-realization.

Some students' tendency to feel bored due to their perception of the course being irrelevant to engineering disciplines was also noteworthy. These students seemed to fail to recognize the value of soft-skills that Communication courses aim to teach them. Defined as 'involving interpersonal and intrapersonal abilities to facilitate mastered performance in particular contexts' (Hurrell, 2009, p. 397), the soft-skills they acquire in these courses have been designed to enable them to work in collaboration with other engineers, technical specialists, and professionals such as project managers and administrative staff (Freedman, 2012). However, the students' failure to recognize this led them to dislike various soft-skills. These students' lack of adequate foreign language skills may have limited their enjoyment of classroom activities and assignments that required a productive use of English. Another reason why these students made a link between their boredom and soft-skills may be their confidence in finding a job upon graduation. The fact that PI graduates are guaranteed a job with the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC), or with its other sister companies might have prevented these students from developing an aptitude for soft-skills, which would help them become more employable (Archer & Davison, 2008).

Factors related to the instructors' classroom management style were also found to be a source of boredom. Above a quarter of the students attributed their boredom to the lack of

freedom to choose tasks. This was particularly evident in their team-work assignment, which required them to choose a topic related to the energy sector. The students were often found to compare their classes to other classes where more freedom was granted in terms of topic selection. The students were not totally free to choose the particular tasks they would perform in order to complete their assignment either. These factors may have led to frustration among some students. Positive effects of allowing students to choose tasks were documented in the literature. Fuglestad (2005), for instance, tested students' competence to choose for themselves what computer tools to use for a project. She found that although some students were challenged, they enjoyed being given more control over their decisions. As a result, they were more engaged and concentrated. However, Perks (2010) warns that not all choices are motivating. He points out that choices that do not promote feelings of control, purpose and competence would have adverse effects, which could be avoided by giving students a limited number of options with much flexibility. That is, a short list of topics with the chance to create their own would work better. Even though this was what the instructor of the course attempted to do, the students who wished for greater freedom seemed to prefer general topics. Considering the fact that they were freshman students who were yet to embark on their engineering education, their desire for more general topics is justifiable.

The teacher's use of interaction patterns also appeared to be a reason for boredom for some students. They were bothered by the amount of teacher-talk. The instructor's lengthy PowerPoint presentations seemed to limit the amount of interaction between the students. Taken together, these may have given the teacher more control over the classroom leading certain number of students to feel bored. The students' feeling of boredom may have been started in the initial phases of the course where the teacher was expected to provide enough input so that the students would acquire the basic knowledge required for their assignments. However, the students' negative feelings may have prevented them from developing more positive feelings during the rest of the term. Whatever the intentions of the teacher may be, it is important to note that lack of teacher-student interaction or student-student interaction has the potential to cause extreme passivity, limiting the opportunity for 'the re-expression by the learner of what the teacher has expressed' (Draper, Cargill & Cutts, 2002, p. 17). However, Cullen (1998) points out that teacher talk is also recognized as 'a potentially valuable source of comprehensible input for the learner [and] reduc[ing] the amount of [teacher] talk would not necessarily be in the interest of the learner' (p. 179). When the Communication Department's overall aim of improving students' language skills is considered, the value of teacher talk may be evident. However, it would be necessary to have a balance and ensure the quality of teacher talk. The participants also experienced boredom due to personal issues such as sleep deprivation, hunger, family problems, home-sickness, and inadequate language skills. Some of these problems can be interdependent. For instance, if a student is homesick he may be more likely to have sleep disorders. Consequently, these can affect the student's ability to cope with the heavy work-load identified to be one of the course related issues. Smaldone, Honig and Byrne (2007) identified that those suffering from sleep-deprivation are more likely to have physical and psychological health problems and lack energy, which has impacts on their concentration and increases their boredom levels. College students often postpone going to bed due to their engagement in activities with roommates. At PI, students also tend to spend too much on the Internet for fun (especially on social networks), affecting their sleep patterns

negatively. This was found to be the case among other university students in the Emirati context as well (Afandi et al., 2013). Kelly (2002) found that students who sleep six hours or fewer in twenty-four hours tend to experience comparatively more eating disorders and less creativity, which reduces their academic performance.

The gap in some students' English language skills was another personal issue that resulted in boredom. Students' inadequate levels of English in an English medium university can indeed cause a significant level of disturbance for them. PI students are required to achieve a minimum of 500 on the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) to be able to start their freshman studies; however, the majority of the students take an institutional TOEFL which exempts them from taking the writing and speaking components of the test. This may cause the students to concentrate more on receptive skills, such as reading and listening at the expense of productive skills. Therefore, the test may fail to prepare students for COMM courses that require a considerable amount of academic writing. Earlier research also revealed that TOEFL scores may not necessarily predict accurate academic performance (Al-Musawi, 2001; Vu & Vu, 2013). A recent study was conducted by the researcher of this current study on COMM 151 students' productive use of vocabulary in their written examinations. The results confirm this finding (Deveci, 2015): The students' 'satisfactory' TOEFL scores generally did not prevent them from relying more on general words instead of academic words in their written responses to a task. They were also found to make frequent spelling and grammar mistakes. Taken together, the students' tendency to feel bored due to inadequate language skills in a challenging course may be expected.

Regarding their strategies of dealing with boredom, the students were found to use the cognitive approach more frequently. They seemed to have non-fixed orientations for the other three strategies. This indicates that the students had a greater tendency to change their perception of the undesirable situation by pushing themselves towards positive thoughts. They tended to remind themselves that the lesson is important, and that they needed to concentrate. In this way, they sought to focus on their classes. The least frequent strategy was the behavioral approach. The students did not appear to favor the idea of demanding the instructor to perform an action, such as asking him to do something more interesting or add variety to the lesson. Nor did they seem keen on the idea of sidetracking the instructor with a topic irrelevant to the lesson. The students are likely to have avoided such behaviors in order not to be deemed impolite. This behavior by the students may be expected since Arabs, who belong to a high context culture, have a greater tendency to be agreeable and pleasant in the face of an embarrassing situation (Feghali, 1997), despite the fact that Arabs are encouraged to express their feelings without inhibitions (Hall & Whyte, 1960). Feghali (1997) says that Arabs tend to communicate indirectly, hiding their 'desired wants, needs, or goals during discourse' (p. 358).

Analyzing the correlation between the students' academic performance, reflected by their end of course marks, and the strategy use revealed that those who adopted the cognitive approach in combating boredom were more likely to increase their academic success. It appears that these students' engagement in motivating themselves to keep their aptitude for learning in their given context had a positive effect on their learning. This lends credence to the discussion that: '[it is] the individual's active regulation of his or her motivation, thinking, and behavior that mediates the relationships between the person, context and eventual achievement. That is, students' own thoughts about their motivation

and learning play a key role in mediating their engagement and subsequent achievement' (Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2002, p. 314).

Students' skill in turning negative thoughts created by boredom into positive ones appears to result in adaptive behaviors enabling students to persist in the face of challenges. According to the control-value theory proposed by Pekrun (cited by Artino, 2009), activating positive emotions 'facilitate the use of flexible, deep processing strategies like elaboration, organization, and metacognitive self-regulation' (p. 150). The cognitive approach has been reported to be the most likely strategy to increase the value of a learning task since it targets changing perceived low task value and engages learners in rational emotive therapy (Dembo & Seli, 2013).

Another noteworthy finding of this research was related to the negative correlation between the students' end of course marks and their use of the behavioral avoidance strategy, which was found to be statistically significant. This suggests that students' involvement in actions not associated with the situation predicts reduced academic success. Shinn, Ramsey, Walker, Stieber and O'Neill (1987) report that students' involvement in behaviors, such as talking to their neighbors can be disruptive, leading students to perform badly on standardized tests with an overall negative effect on their academic achievement. It is also important to note that these behaviors jeopardize the other students' learning. When a student talks to other students about matters irrelevant to the lesson, it becomes difficult for them to concentrate. It can also easily disturb the teacher's focus. Ford (2013) points out that in cases of a teacher spending a big amount of his/her time tackling such disruptive student behaviors, quality instruction time is wasted, which causes inadequacies for everyone in the classroom. Ford (2013) also says that peer pressure caused by disruptive students is likely to cause peers to behave in a similar fashion, causing disengagement and, therefore, reduced academic success. However, previous research also suggests that students' choice of strategy in combating boredom may not necessarily predict academic success. For instance, in his research into Canadian and Chinese college students' use of strategies and their academic achievement, Tze (2011), did not find a significant relationship between the two variables. Tze (2011) argues that this may be due to college students' intrinsic motivation and their self-regulatory orientations for learning, which encourages them to adopt adaptive coping strategies and keep up with the pace of learning outside of the classroom.

9. LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The first limitation of this study stems from its small size. Only two out of 5 COMM sections during the Fall 2014-2015 academic year were included in this study, which limits the generalizability of the research results even in the immediate context of the research itself. Also, the participants of the study were all male students due to the segregated nature of the setting in which the study was conducted. Future studies could consider replicating this study with a bigger number of students of both sexes. Another limitation of the study is related to the self-reporting data-collection tool used in this study. In order to supplement the findings from such a tool, future studies could gather data using multiple data collection tools. This study was also limited to students' perceptions of reasons for their boredom and the way they combatted it at a point in time, and therefore possible changes in their perceptions were excluded. Future researchers might study how students' perceptions change by conducting a longitudinal study.

10. CONCLUSION

It is widely accepted that boredom as a negative feeling can hinder students' learning at school. How they deal with it can have a determining effect on their overall aptitude for learning at and outside of school. Therefore, it is important to first determine the factors that contribute to this feeling among students. This can help instructors plan educational interventions that help overcome challenges created by boredom. To this end, instructors need to find out how students attempt to combat the challenge. This requires instructors to interact with their students more, which helps them notice bored students (Martin, at al., 2008). Their realization of different strategies of dealing with boredom together with instructional interventions could then yield more productive results. To support this, instructional choices need to create relevance for students by highlighting the relevance of content to their daily lives (Goetz & Hall, 2014). This would allow for students' emotional engagement, and would therefore reduce boredom.

REFERENCES

Afandi, O., Hawi, H., Mohammed, L., Salim, F., Hameed, A. K., Shaikh, R. B., … Khan, F. (2013). Sleep quality among university students: Evaluating the impact of smoking, social media use, and energy drink consumption on sleep quality and anxiety. *Student Pulse, 5*(6), 1-3.

Al-Khairy, M. H. (2013). English as a foreign language learning demotivatinal factors as perceived by Sauidi undergraduates. *European Scientific Journal, 9*(32), 365-382.

Al-Musawi, N. (2001). *The validity of scores on TOEFL and FCE for predicting students' success at the university*. Dirasat: Educational Sciences , 28(1).

Al-Omari, J. (2008). *Understanding Arab culture: A practical cross-cultural guide to working in the Arab world*, Oxford: How to Books.

Archer, W. & Davison, J. (2008). *Graduate employability: What do employers think and want?*. The Council for Industry and Higher Education, UK. Retrieved from http://www.brunel.ac.uk/services/pcc/staff/employability/?a=92718.

Artino, A. R. (2009). Think, feel, act: Motivational and emotional influences on military students' online academic success. *Journal of Computing Higher Education, 21*(2), 146-166.

Camus, A. (1947). *The plague*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.

Cullen, R. (1998). Teacher talk in the classroom. *ELT Journal, 52*(3), 179-187.

Deveci, T. (2014). Freshman students' emotional intelligence and team-work satisfaction levels: A comparative study: Gender and nationality. *Journal of Higher Education*, *5*(6)*, 178-190.*

Deveci, T. (2015). Communication students' use of lexis in a writing examination. *Asian ESP Journal, 2*(1), 39-63.

Dembo, M. H. & Seli, H. (2013). *Motivation and learning strategies for college success: A focus on self-regulated learning*. New York: Routledge.

Draper, S. W., Cargill, J. & Cutts, Q. (2002). Electronically enhanced classroom interaction. *Australian Journal of Educational Technology, 18*(1), 13-23.

Feghali, E. (1997). Arab cultural communication patterns. *International Journal of Intercultural Relationships, 21*(3), 345-378.

Ford, M. (2013). The impact of disruptive students in Wisconsin public schools. *Wisconsin Policy Research Institute, Report, 26*(5). Retrieved from http://www.wpri.org/ WPRI/Reports/2013/The-Impact-of-Disruptive-Students-in-Wisconsin-Public-Schools.htm.

Freeman, S., Eddy, S. L., McDonough, M., Smith, M. K., Okoroafor, N., Jordt, H. & Wenderoth, M. P. (2014). Active learning increases student performance in science, engineering, and mathematics. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, 111*(23), 8410-8415.

Freedman, K. (2012, December). Engineers and soft skills. *ATD Links,* Retrieved from https://www.td.org/Publications/Newsletters/Links/2012/12/Engineers-and-Soft-Skills.

Fuglestad, A. B. (2005). Students' choice of tasks and tools in an ICT rich environment. In M. Bosch (Ed.), *Proceedings of the Fourth Congress of the European Society for Research in Mathematics Education* (pp. 1000-1009). Spain: Sant Feliu de Guíxols.

Goetz, T. & Hall, N. C. (2014). Academic boredom. In R. Pekrun & L. L. Garcia (Eds.), *Handbook of emotions and education* (pp.311-330). New York, NY: Routledge.

Goetz, T. & Nett, U. E. (2011). Coping with boredom in school: An experience sampling perspective. *Contemporary Educational Psychology, 36*(1), 49-59.

Hall, E. T. & Whyte, W. F. (1960). Intercultural communication: A guide to men of action. Human Organization, 19(1), 5-12.

Hurrell, S. A. (2009). *Soft skills deficits in Scotland: Their patterns, determinants and employer responses* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Strathclyde. Glasgow.

Kelly. W. E. (2002). Worry and sleep length revisited: Worry, sleep length, and sleep disturbance ascribed to worry. *The Journal of Genetic Psychology. 2002,* 163, 296-305.

Larson, R. W. & Richards, M. H. (1991). Boredom in the middle school years: Blaming Schools versus blaming students. *American Journal of Education, 99*(4), 418-443.

Linnenbrink, E. A. & Pintrich, P. R. (2002). Motivation as an enabler for academic success. *School Psychology Review, 31*(3), 313-327.

Mann, S. & Robinson, A. (2009). Boredom in the lecture theatre: an investigation into the contributors, moderators and outcome of boredom amongst university students. *British Educational Research Journal, 35(2)*, 243-258.

Maroldo, G. K. (1986). Shyness, boredom, and grade point average among college students. *Psychological Report*, 59, 395-398.

Martin, J, H., Hands, K. B., Lancaster, S. M., Trytten, D. A. & Murphy, T. J. (2008). Hard but not too hard. *College Teaching, 56*(2), 107-113.

Meier, S. F. & Schmeck, R. R. (1985). The burned-out college student: a descriptive profile. *Journal of College Student Personal January*, 26, 63–69.

Mintz, E. Y. (2009). A report on the 2009 high school survey of student engagement. University of Indiana.

Mora, R. (2011). "School is so boring": High-stakes testing and boredom at an urban middle school. *PennGSE Perspectives on Urban Education, 9*(1), Retrieved from www.urbanedjournal.org.

Nemko, M. (n.d.). *We send too many students to college*. Retrieved from http://www.martynemko.com/articles/we-send-too-many-students-college_id1543

Nett, U. E., Goetz, T. & Daniels, L. M. (2010). What to do when feeling bored? Students' strategies for coping with boredom. *Learning and Individual Differences, 20*(6), 626-638.

Perks, K. (2010). Crafting effective choices to motivate students. *Adolescent Literary in Perspective*, March/April, 2-3. Retrieved from http://www.ohiorc.org/orc_documents/ ORC/Adlit/InPerspective/2010-03/in_perspective_2010-03.pdf.

Reisinger, T. & Turner, L. (1999). A cultural analysis of Japanese tourists: challenges for Tourism Marketers. *European Journal of Marketing*, *33* (11/12), 1203-27.

Shinn, M. R., Ramsey, E., Walker, H. M., Stieber, S., & O"Neill, R. E. (1987). Antisocial behavior in school settings: Initial differences in an at-risk and normal population. *The Journal of Special Education*, 21, 69-84.

Smaldone, A., Honig, J. C., Byrne, M. W. (2007). Sleepless in America: Inadequate sleep and relationships to health and well-being of our nation's children. *Pediatrics, 119,* 29-37.

Svendsen, L. (2003). *A philosophy of boredom*. London: Reaktion Books.

Tze, M. C. (2011). *Investigating academic boredom in Canadian and Chinese students* (Unpublished master's thesis). University of Alberta, Edmonton.

Vu, L. T. & Vu, P. H. (2013). Is the TOEFL score a reliable indicator of international graduate students' academic achievement in American higher education?. *International Journal on Studies in English Language and Literature (IJSELL), 1*(1), 11-19.

Waterman, A. S. (2005). When effort is enjoyed: Two studies of intrinsic motivation for personally salient activities. *Motivation and Emotion,* 29 (3), 165–88.