



## Boredom of EFL Learners in China: Description and Solutions

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### Abstract

Boredom, as a common emotion for human beings, may affect learning outcomes. English learning is no exception. This research elucidates the conceptual connotation of boredom and determines the conceptual system of it through a comprehensive literature review. Then it investigates the situation of current college students' boredom of learning English by means of a quantitative analysis. Besides, with the emotion analyzed in the context of "Internet +" era, the research intends to conclude how the English teaching model in college can influence learners' boredom, based on which it tries to formulate strategies to improve teaching quality.

**Keywords:** EFL; English learning; Internet+.

### 1. Introduction

Boredom is described in the literature as a negative and dissatisfying emotional state (O'Hanlon, 1981; Richard and Norman, 1986). One common definition for boredom is, a state of relatively low arousal and dissatisfaction which is attributed to an inadequately stimulating environment (Mikulas and Voadanovich, 1993). Goetz and Hall (2014), argue that boredom is an unpleasant emotion experienced with low negative valence. Richard and Norman (1986), describe the boredom prone individual as one who experiences varying degrees of depression, hopelessness, loneliness, and distractibility. Common tasks are perceived as requiring effort, with dissatisfaction with one's work and psychological well-being. Marion *et al.* (2006), define boredom as an individual's subjective impression that he or she has nothing meaningful to do at the moment and that time is passing slowly; this perception of idleness is associated with feelings of dissatisfaction, despondency, annoyance, and a feeling of being trapped. In the clinical psychology field, boredom is commonly defined as an affective state characterized by unpleasant feelings, lack of stimulation, and low physiological arousal in which the level of stimulation is perceived as unsatisfactorily low (Mary, 2000). Heidegger regards boredom and the condition of being bored as a fundamental mood of human being. Indeed, he insists that boredom has become a pervasive and dominant mood of our times.

Nowadays, it still is one serious question to be considered in the process of teaching. According to our investigations, EFL learners in colleges and universities of China are more or less bored about English learning in some degree, which has a bad effect on the learning outcome directly or indirectly. English learners may do something which has nothing to do with classroom learning to overcome their boredom. This phenomenon is an actual subject worthy of pondering and studying.

In China, *Guiding Opinions of the State Council on Actively Promoting the 'Internet +' Initiative* proposes that schools should be encouraged to develop and utilize digital education resources and explore new models of network education. As the core feature of the development of informatization, the "Internet+" is reshaping the open and innovative education ecology to effectively improve the quality of college English teaching in China. And how to base it on "Internet +" is a problem worth elaborating and studying. This research, focusing on the innovation and development of education set in the "Internet +" era, aims to explore new teaching models that can help relieve English learners' boredom and improve their learning outcomes, by which "the Internet+" can become an effective way to prompt the development of college students' foreign language competence.

Based on the background of "Internet +", the laws of foreign language learning, and the characteristics of college English courses in China, this research first aims to grasp the concrete situation of English learners' boredom. Then it tries to make use of "Internet +" to break through the bottleneck of foreign language teaching, whose overall effect is unsatisfactory and whose mode is too homogeneous. Thus, we also aim to explore the development and evolution of college teaching mode in the era of "Internet +" and identify the factors affecting the boredom of English learners. Through action approach, this research also puts forward countermeasures and suggestions to effectively weaken the boredom in English learners and improve the quality of college English teaching, thus establishing a dynamic evaluation system for it in the end.

In this process, there are two key questions to be focused on: first, how to reconstruct an appropriate and effective college English teaching paradigm and construct a teaching mode to relieve the boredom in English learners based on “Internet +”. Second, how to reveal the evolution trend of college English teaching mode under the background of “Internet +”, and then find out the key teaching elements that have a great impact on the EFL learners’ emotion of, and form an integrated college English teaching action scheme of “constructing mode - grasping current situation - mode reconstruction - quality evaluation - improvement countermeasures” in response to the boredom.

## 2. Literature Review

Boredom is not only an unpleasant emotion with negative effects, but also a negative emotion to avoid boring situations. Thirty years ago, Keller (1987) points out that no matter how powerless learners are when they start to learn a course, if they don’t completely kill their interest, they will easily get tired of learning; Wang Chuming (1987) also made similar judgment. Teresa and Esther (2007), undertake a wide-ranging exploration of the concept of boredom from contrasting perspectives across different disciplines, along the way referring to implications for schooling.

In terms of the relationship between boredom and learning, especially for English, Kruk (2016) presents the results of investigations of the changes in motivation, language anxiety and boredom in learning English in Second Life, and Eren and Coskun (2016) presents the mediating roles of prospective teachers' boredom coping strategies in the relationships between their levels of boredom and four aspects of engagement separately. Goetz and his colleagues (2006) analyze the domain specificity of emotions and focus on experiences of enjoyment, anxiety, and boredom in the domains of mathematics, Latin, German, and English. Besides, on the basis of assumptions in Pekrun's (2000) control-value theory and findings of pilot studies, they discuss the implications for future research and practice.

Students’ achievement emotions are critical in their academic development. Therefore, teachers need to create an emotionally positive learning environment. In the light of this, Westphal and his colleagues (2018) investigate the connection between students’ enjoyment, anxiety, boredom and, in the first case, students’ academic self- concept and, in the second, teachers’ diagnostic skills.

Although previous research has shown the benefits of using approach to cope with negative emotions, little is known about how students deal with a common negative achievement emotion, boredom, across cultures. Gayle (2015), also features strategies for educators and school counselors to relieve boredom, both internally and in classroom circumstance.

On the whole, these studies have several characteristics: first of all, they are studied in terms of different research perspectives, which are relatively fragmented. Some scholars view it through pedagogy, Nett *et al.* (2011) and Goetz and Hall (2014) are representatives. Nett *et al.* (2011), believe educational context can explain most of the boredom of students in the classroom. Goetz and Hall (2014), claim that boredom is the most common emotion in educational context. Others study this topic from the perspective of personality and motivation. They focus on the impact of EFL learners’ different personality and learning motivation on boredom. For example, Lynn and Sandra (2006) concentrate on the influence of different genders, races, and personalities of student groups on their learning boredom emotions. Some scholars view it from the perspective of control-value theory, based on which Liu *et al.* (2016) explores the relationship among students’ perceived value of task, academic boredom, and online learning satisfaction in the online learning environment.

Second, in terms of research contents, most studies involve the causes of boredom, countermeasures, and academic boredom. Keller (1987) and Wang Chuming (1987) are the pioneering scholars in this field. They all argue that boredom is an inevitable emotion for students during the process of learning. In the following twenty to thirty years, researches on this topic never cease. There is a certain degree of overlapping in the research content, however, with no systematic theoretical study of boredom. Larson (1991), Cynthia (1993), Pekrun *et al.* (2010), San Bolkan (2015), San Bolkan (2016), San Bolkan and Darrin (2017), Ran and Li (1996), Yao and Yin (2001), Xie Ruihong (2007) and Liu and Xia (2012) all discuss the causes and countermeasures of students' boredom. Among these researches, Ran and Li (1996) and San Bolkan and Darrin (2017) are the most influential ones. Ran and Li (1996) believe that the information gap and boredom in foreign language teaching are very complex social phenomena. It is necessary to deepen the study of individual differences in the psychological process and discover non-linguistic factors, such as boredom, which will make a difference in foreign language learning.

Third, from the perspective of research methods, most current studies belong to qualitative research, which tend to observe the boredom emotion of students in class and figure out solutions through analyses, such as researches from Cynthia (1993), Pekrun *et al.* (2010), San Bolkan (2015), San Bolkan (2016). At present, quantitative researches occur only as supplement for qualitative research. A few scholars such as San Bolkan and Darrin (2017) conduct studies on boredom with quantitative methods. They aim to verify the relevant elements that affect learners’ boredom through data analysis.

All these above academic achievements have laid a theoretical foundation for this research. However, previous researches are hardly able to meet the needs of the new situation. Several reasons will be displayed as follows. First, the perspectives of existing researches are relatively fragmented. Academia lacks in-depth research on the boredom of English learners setting in the “Internet +” era and large-scale empirical research is fewer. Second, present researches usually summarize the causes and countermeasures of boredom without fully considering the new characteristics of the “Internet +” background. Third, former studies mostly use qualitative or quantitative methods with other research methods such as action research and multimodal corpus methods are overlooked.

Thus, this study intends to center on the changes in college English teaching under the background of “Internet +”, and analyze the influencing factors of English learners’ boredom via theories and methods of pedagogy, management and other disciplines. It seeks to alleviate students’ boredom by establishing a dynamic evaluation system for college English teaching in order to prompt the deep integration of “Internet +” and college English teaching so that “Internet +” will become an effective solution to the problem of boredom of EFL learners.

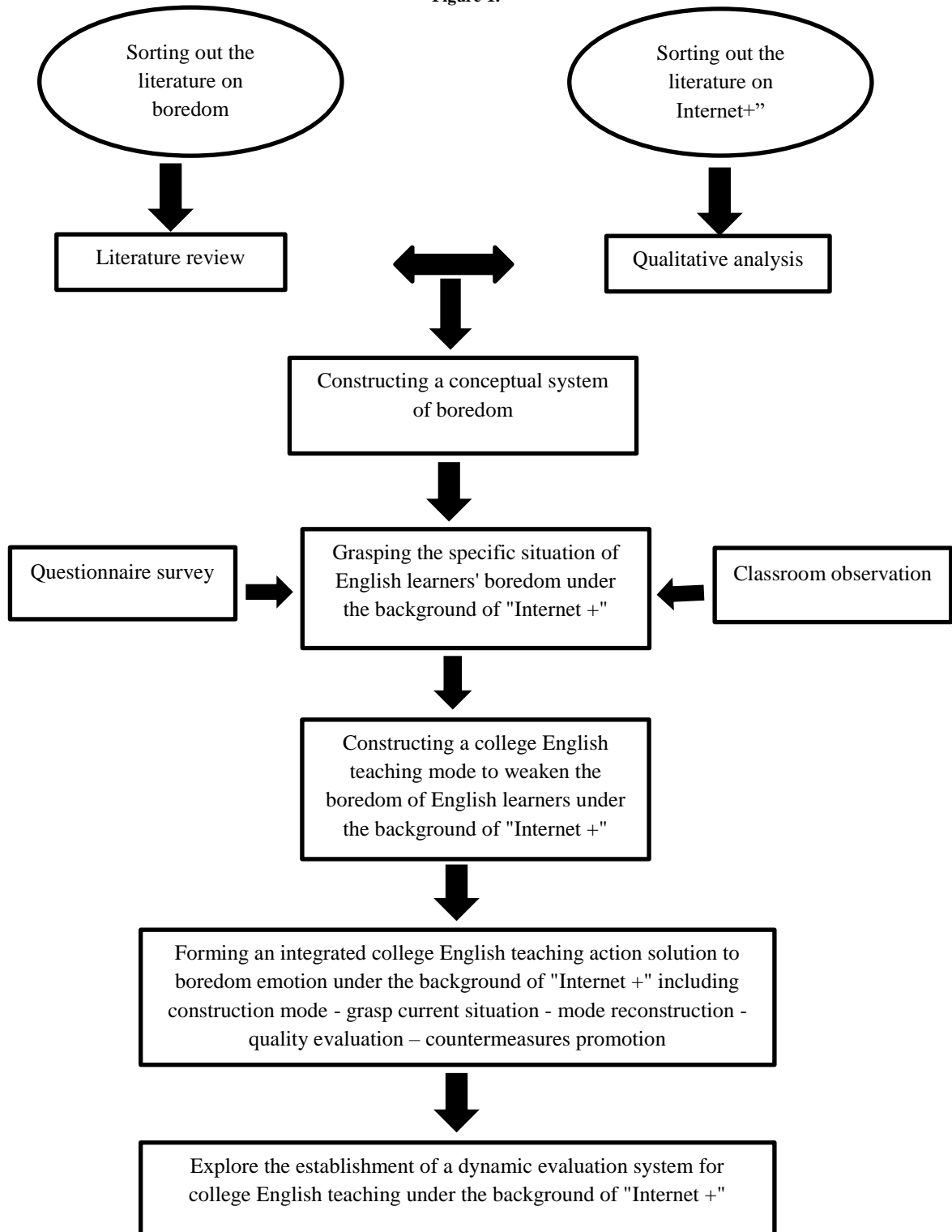
### 3. Research Design

#### 3.1. Research Object

A total of 190 college English learners from a well-known university in Shandong Province were selected as samples. By statistical way of questionnaire surveys and dynamic way of classroom observation, we can work out the current situation of English learners’ boredom and systematically detail the state of students’ boredom.

#### 3.2. Research Procedure

Figure-1.



On the basis of the current situation of English learners' boredom, the boredom emotion of English learners under the background of "Internet +" era is analyzed. Based on the changes brought about by "Internet +" to college English teaching and evaluation, this research comprehensively utilizes relevant multi-disciplinary theories, comparing and analyzing the boredom of English learners in the online environment and the traditional classroom. Besides, it intends to conclude how the English teaching model in college can influence students' emotion of boredom. Finally, based on the scientific grasp of the subject and the key influential factors, it is a kind of action research on the learners' emotion of boredom under certain background of "Internet +" to formulate strategies to improve teaching quality. This study focuses on how to build a flexible, open and personalized college English teaching ecology in the process of college English teaching by way of changes in forms of curriculum, smart environments, digital resources and methods of teaching organization and learning.

### 3.3. Research Methods

The primary method is literature review. This study will conduct a multi-dimensional exploration of boredom and make its core elements clear to figure out the conceptual system of boredom. At the same time, it will summarize and analyze literature of the "Internet +", which may play a core role in college English teaching.

Questionnaire survey and classroom observation are also effective methods, which are used to know about the current situation of college English learners' boredom and summarize the changes of it under the background of "Internet +".

The third one is the action approach. With this approach, we will reconstruct college English teaching mode under the background of "Internet +" to gradually remove students' boredom. The feedback will be applied to the teaching in time. A new mode of "the Internet +" college English teaching is constructed, by way of the iterative cycle that "design-implementation-evaluation-redesign", with students' boredom eliminated finally.

### 3.4. Data Analysis

#### 3.4.1. Descriptive Statistical Analysis

In this research, a sample survey was conducted through a software called "Sojump", with students from a well-known university in Shandong Province taken as the main body. The specific data are as follows:

Statistics				
		1. gender:	2. grade:	3. major:
The case number	Valid	190	190	190
	Invalid	0	0	0

Gender:					
		Frequency	Percentage	Significant percentage	Cumulative percentage
Valid	Female	122	64.2	64.2	64.2
	Male	68	35.8	35.8	100.0
	Total	190	100.0	100.0	

Grade					
		Frequency	Percentage	Significant percentage	Cumulative percentage
Valid	Freshman	34	17.9	17.9	17.9
	sophomore	96	50.5	50.5	68.4
	junior	60	31.6	31.6	100.0
	Total	190	100.0	100.0	

Major					
		Frequency	Percentage	Significant percentage	Cumulative percentage
Valid	Science and engineering	95	50.0	50.0	50.0
	Humanity	55	28.9	28.9	78.9
	Others	40	21.1	21.1	100.0
	Total	190	100.0	100.0	

As we can see, 190 valid samples were collected in all, including 68 male students and 122 female students, with a gender ratio of about 1:2. There are 34 freshmen, 96 sophomores and 60 juniors. The ratio is about 1:3:2.

This research questionnaire mainly contains three parts including 25 questions: the first part contains questions about personal information of students (gender, grade, major, etc.). The second part includes questions about learning behavior to test the students' concentration in the English class, and thus to test the students' boredom

during English learning process. The third part is a subjective question, trying to find out the students' response and strategy when facing emotion of boredom. All valid questionnaires collected were input into SPSS 24 software with descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, validity analysis, and qualitative analysis described on the data, in an attempt to explore the current situation of college students' boredom in English learning.

### 3.4.2. The Reliability Analysis

The core of reliability is the internal consistency of the scale. The reliability test aims to verify the internal consistency of the scale by calculating the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of it. When Cronbach's Alpha coefficient is higher than 0.7, the internal consistency of the scale is reasonable. In this research, reliability test was also conducted on the questionnaire collected, and the data obtained are shown in the following tables:

Reliability statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	Number of terms
.870	17

When selecting "Measure if the item has been deleted", we can get data as is presented in the following table. Based on the results, it can be concluded that, except for questions 8 and question 17, the Cronbach's Alpha obtained by ignoring question 8 or question 17 is lower than the overall Cronbach's Alpha. So the reliability of the scale is relatively high.

Total statistics				
	Average of scale after deleting the item	Scaled variance after deleting the term	Correlation of the revised terms and totals	Cronbach's Alpha after deleting the term
1. (In public English classes, I can't help but be absent-minded)	44.99	107.021	.544	.861
2. (Public English textbooks fail to arouse my interest in English learning)	45.05	104.463	.635	.857
3.(I find that homework only aggravates my boredom with English study)	45.21	105.596	.591	.859
4. (I have been aware of my boredom with English study and have tried to overcome it)	45.28	104.975	.551	.860
5. (I lack goals and plans in learning English.)	44.74	102.417	.658	.855
6. (If I can no longer get tired of learning English, then my English level will be greatly improved.)	44.52	103.288	.563	.860
7. (I think mobile phones and other electronic products are the main reason why I can't concentrate in class)	44.83	106.966	.457	.864
8. (The use of electronic resources such as video and audio can arouse my interest in learning.)	44.27	111.330	.302	.871
9. (The technology used in English class is more of a distraction than a guide for me.)	44.98	106.037	.508	.862
10. (It is difficult for us to master what our teachers teach us in public English classes)	45.27	105.287	.673	.856
11. (I don't think what is taught in class is helpful to my English study)	45.61	107.191	.541	.861
12. (I find the present methods of teaching presentation tedious)	45.19	103.922	.652	.856
13. (I think online resources are more helpful for my English learning compared with traditional classroom teaching)	45.10	111.858	.324	.869
14. (I think heuristic instruction should be given priority in public English classes)	44.47	108.737	.429	.865
15. (I hope there will be a period of	44.65	110.822	.335	.869

time in the public English class for us to have a free discussion)				
16. (I have been used to the audience-oriented information transmission on the Internet and can't stand the monotonous infusing teaching)	45.12	107.468	.468	.864
17. (In my opinion, the network interaction between teachers and students (such as QQ or WeChat group) can reduce students' boredom in study.)	44.26	113.282	.217	.874

As can be seen from the above table, the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was 0.87, higher than 0.7, indicating that the scale has a high reliability and is convincing.

### 3.4.3. Validity Analysis

KMO and Bartlett tests		
KMO sampling appropriateness number		.863
Bartlett sphericity test	The approximate chi-square	1324.052
	Degree of freedom	136
	Significance	.000

As we can see,  $KMO=0.863 > 0.6$  and  $saliency=0.000 < 0.05$ , which indicates that these data are suitable for exploratory factor analysis.

Total variance interpretation						
element	Initial eigenvalue			Extracting the sum of squares of loads		
	Total	Percentage of variance	Cumulative %	Total	Percentage of variance	Cumulative %
1	5.945	34.968	34.968	5.945	34.968	34.968
2	2.322	13.656	48.624	2.322	13.656	48.624
3	1.255	7.382	56.006	1.255	7.382	56.006
4	1.025	6.031	62.038	1.025	6.031	62.038
5	.819	4.817	66.854			
6	.736	4.331	71.186			
7	.693	4.074	75.259			
8	.628	3.692	78.951			
9	.601	3.533	82.484			
10	.533	3.137	85.621			
11	.501	2.946	88.567			
12	.441	2.596	91.163			
13	.426	2.508	93.671			
14	.314	1.847	95.517			
15	.286	1.683	97.201			
16	.263	1.545	98.746			
17	.213	1.254	100.000			
Extraction method: principal component analysis						

According to the above mentioned data, all the seventeen Questionnaire topics can be divided into four dimensions. The cumulative variance contribution rate of the four dimensions is 62.038%, higher than 60%, suggesting that the obtained dimension division is relatively reliable.

Component matrix				
	Component			
	1	2	3	4
1. (It is difficult for us to master what our teachers teach us in public English classes)	.787			
2.(Public English textbooks fail to arouse my interest in English learning)	.767			
3.(I find the present methods of teaching presentation tedious)	.755			
4.(I lack goals and plans in learning English)	.738			



5.(I find that homework only aggravates my boredom with English study)	.725			
6.(I don't think what is taught in class is helpful to my English study)	.688			
7.(In public English classes, I can't help but be absent-minded)	.674			
8.(I have been aware of my boredom with English study and have tried to overcome it)	.665			
9.(If I can no longer get tired of learning English, then my English level will be greatly improved)	.616			
10.(The technology used in English class is more of a distraction than a guide for me)	.595			
11.(I think mobile phones and other electronic products are the main reason why I can't concentrate in class)	.520			
12.(I have been used to the audience-oriented information transmission on the Internet and can't stand the monotonous infusing teaching)				
13.(In my opinion, the network interaction between teachers and students (such as QQ or WeChat group) can reduce students' boredom in study)		.758		
14.(The use of electronic resources (such as video and audio) can arouse my interest in learning)		.680		
15.(I think heuristic instruction should be given priority in public English classes)		.584		
16.(I hope there will be a period of time in the public English class for us to have a free discussion)		.570		
17.(I think online resources are more helpful for my English learning compared with traditional classroom teaching)			.574	
Extraction method: principal component analysis				
Four components were extracted				

The four dimensions can be merged into three dimensions, which include specific items as displayed in the table. According to the above table, Q16 fails the validity test, and the load in both dimensions is 0, which is an invalid item and needs to be deleted. The remaining items only have a load, higher than 0.5, in a single dimension, which are valid items and have passed the validity test.

Based on all the above analysis, Q10, Q2, Q12, Q5, Q3, Q11, Q1, Q4, Q6, Q9 items belong to dimension 1. According to the survey content of these items, it can be known that the theme for dimension 1 is the problem of college students' public English teaching. Questions Q17, Q8, Q14, and Q15 belong to the second dimension. According to its content, it can be known that the second dimension is the suggestion for college students' public English teaching. The Q13 item belongs to the third dimension. According to the content of this item, it can be known that the third dimension is a comparison between the traditional classroom and the new one.

#### 4. Results for Subjective Item

As to the first question--what factors most influence your mood of learning English, a large number of students believe that memorizing vocabularies, especially synonymy, is the most difficult part and thus reduces their interest. Vocabulary, as the fundamental step in language learning, remains a large obstacle. That means most students have hardly mastered a scientific method to memorize vocabulary. So it is necessary to provide an effective means for them. Instead of merely giving assignment of memorizing vocabulary, students should be taught some methods to finish the assignments, such as applying images and placing words into context. Second, the examination also plays a negative role in affecting students' mood when learning English. On one hand, it may cause much pressure on English study and they are not able to enjoy the process of learning, which will bring negative effects; on the other hand, it is improper to regard examination as the final goal for learning. The inappropriate motivation of learning also can affect learning emotion, thus affecting learning outcome. Therefore, teachers should change the current situation of monotonic form of exam through innovating examination concept and education ideology to generate a flexible and attractive way to test learning achievements, getting students to feel that they are not learning for taking test but for improving their communicative competence. Besides, they can have a better understanding of exotic culture and experience different ways of thinking. These learning motivations rather than examination may help to improve students' learning mood. Third, assignment is another important factor. The moderate amount and complexity of assignments can contribute to helping improve students' learning mood. Besides, some other factors also exist to make a difference. For example, the teachers' teaching style and personal charm may be crucial for some students. The low level of listening and pronunciation may seriously impact learning mood for others.

The second question--what can help you concentrate in class tries to seek some feasible measures. First, many students believe that the usage of mobile phone has caused a serious distraction from their studies. Handing in phone in class is an effective way in their opinion. If possible, getting students to hand in phones and creating a non-phone learning environment will be beneficial to help students focus on class. Second, there are also a large number of

students believing that the boring instructional mode makes them fail to concentrate even if they want to, in which students only accept what the teacher teaches and answer what she asks. So it may be useful to increase interaction between teachers and students, or to set free discussion among students. To enrich forms of teaching, it is necessary to make use of more interesting teaching mode such as playing videos or movies etc. to attract students. Third, many students also hold that it is a useful way to be asked question by teachers, which seems a supervision for them to keep focusing. Thus teachers are supposed to have a good control of the class' pace and set some time for questions not only as inspection of learning outcome but also as measure to attract students' attention. Besides, some students propose that teachers can give proper punishments for bad performances. In some others' opinion, students themselves should improve their abilities of self-control to solve the problem fundamentally.

The third question asks how you can overcome boredom during English study. Most students reflect that they usually make use of multimedia technology such as seeing movies, listening English songs, and watching speeches or documentary etc. These measures can help them experience and learn English in an interesting and light way. Some students believe examination can stimulate them to overcome boredom and keep studying in a way. For example, they may apply for a language certificate by taking an exam to push themselves to learn on purpose. Others propose that study should alternate with rest time, which can effectively reduce boredom. There are some other tips such as sharing learning experience with classmates or changing the text of mobile phone computer system into English.

The last one intends to figure out what kind of teaching activities can better stimulate students' interest in learning. Some students indeed put forward several reasonable advices. For example, they believe that English melodrama and interactive games are effective ways to attract students' attention. Besides, it is group cooperation investigation and autonomous discussion that are more attractive for students compared with traditional teaching mode. Videos and movies are still popular way advocated by students. However, there are also a number of students who prefer traditional class without special activities. They learn what the teacher have taught, take notes in detail, and believe they can study more comprehensively and systematically. Therefore, it can be concluded that different students prefer different teaching activities. It is more reasonable to set different kinds of activities to encourage students to choose according to their preference.

## 5. Discussion

Theoretically, under the macro background of the "Internet +" plan implemented by nation, this research systematically describes and elucidates the boredom emotion in college English teaching, explores the reconstruction of a new college English teaching model that is both appropriate and effective based on "Internet +", and enriches the theoretical system of college English teaching.

Practically, the present college English studies have more or less ignored the role "Internet +" plays in revolutionizing teaching and learning comprehensively. This research, from the perspective of "Internet +", explores the reconstruction of college English teaching mode aiming at students' boredom emotion, thus providing certain guidance for college English teaching reform.

This research is expected to weaken students' boredom emotion in college English learning and focus on improving students' foreign language ability by constructing new college English teaching mode under the background of "Internet +".

The research results are applicable to college English teaching practice. First, it prompts the breakthrough of college English teaching in the development and application of teaching resources as well as web-based content and services. Besides, it meets the requirements put forward by the Ministry of Education in "Key Points of Education Informatization in 2016" so as to fit the characteristics of foreign language learning under the background of "Internet +". Second, it promotes the information-based reform of college English teaching and use the "Internet +" thinking mode to build a new college English teaching model to improve the effectiveness of college English teaching.

The outcomes of this study are conducive to relieving college students' boredom emotion when learning English, thus promoting the reform of college English teaching and the popularization of educational informatization. First, the study of college English teaching mode under the background of "Internet +" can explore a way out for the college English teaching reform that attracts wide attention. Second, in view of the common practical problem of boredom among college English learners, this research emphasizes the background of "Internet +" and focuses on providing feasible solutions.

And this research is of great significance. Theoretically, it systematically studies the boredom emotion in college English teaching, expanding the influencing dimension of second language acquisition theory and becoming a useful supplement to applied linguistics. In addition, the study of boredom also has important enlightening significance for the theoretical construction of educational linguistics and psycholinguistics. In terms of practice, it can not only figure out the cognitive elements influencing college English learners, but also provide some guidance for college English teaching reform.

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