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Can nursing students' perceived teacher enthusiasm dampen their class-related boredom during theoretical lessons? A cross-sectional study among Chinese nursing students

Guanyu Cui[a,b], Meilin Yao[a,*], Xia Zhang[c]

[a] School of Psychology, Institute of Developmental Psychology, Beijing Normal University, Beijing, China
[b] Department of Psychology, Henan Medical College, Zhengzhou, China
[c] Department of Nursing, Henan Medical College, Zhengzhou, China

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ABSTRACT

Background: Class-related boredom experienced by nursing students during theoretical lessons may affect their health and learning outcomes. Perceived teacher enthusiasm of nursing students may dampen their boredom, but little empirical research has investigated their relationship.
Objectives: The aim of the current study is to investigate the dampening effects of nursing students' perceived teacher enthusiasm on their class-related boredom during theoretical lessons. The main theoretical framework is control-value theory of achievement emotions.
Design: A cross-sectional survey was used.
Methods: 352 nursing students during their theoretical lessons completed questionnaires on perceived teacher enthusiasm, boredom proneness, perceived task difficulty and class-related boredom. Correlation and classic multiple hierarchical analysis results supported the hypothesis about the relationships among variables.
Results: After controlling the effects of demographic variables, boredom proneness and perceived task difficulty, perceived teacher enthusiasm negatively predicted class-related boredom significantly.
Conclusion: Perceived teacher enthusiasm of nursing students can predict their class-related boredom significantly.

1. Introduction

Class-related boredom is widely experienced by students in various schools (Pekrun et al., 2010), especially in theoretical lessons (Bagcivan et al., 2015; Zhou et al., 2016). In nursing education, maybe one major cause of class-related boredom in theoretical lessons that these lessons are viewed by nursing students as having no practical value (Pekrun, 2006; Pekrun et al., 2007, 2010). Class-related boredom experienced by nursing students may affect their health (Deasy et al., 2016) and learning outcomes (Zhou et al., 2016). Therefore, elevating the task value and reducing the level of boredom are core goals in theoretical and practical research in education (Perkins and Hill, 1985; Pekrun et al., 2010) and nursing settings (Cleary et al., 2016).

Educators' attitudes and emotions toward their subjects, teaching and students, such as teacher enthusiasm, may affect nursing students' perceived mental environment and learning (Keller et al., 2014; Bagcivan et al., 2015; Keller et al., 2015). Furthermore, teacher enthusiasm as perceived by students played more important roles in learning outcomes than teacher enthusiasm reported by teachers themselves (Keller et al., 2014, 2015).

Up to now, little empirical research has investigated whether perceived teacher enthusiasm can dampen class-related boredom significantly. The aim of this study is to investigate the relationship between teacher enthusiasm and class-related boredom perceived by nursing students.

1.1. Class-related Boredom

Academic boredom is one of the most widespread emotions experienced by students in the framework of academic emotions (Pekrun et al., 2002; Pekrun, 2006; Pekrun et al., 2007) and can be classified into class-related boredom and learning-related boredom (Pekrun et al., 2002, 2010).

Class-related boredom is a type of state boredom experienced by students in the course of class activities (Pekrun et al., 2010). Class-related boredom functions at a higher level than learning-related

* Corresponding author at: School of Psychology, Beijng Normal University, Beijing, 100875, China.
E-mail address: mlyao@bnu.edu.cn (M. Yao).

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boredom as experienced by students (Tze et al., 2015). Though boredom experienced by students may have positive effects on their learning, such as preventing them from excess involvement in uninteresting tasks and the generation of severe psychological problems in the working or learning environment (Elpidorou, 2014), many studies still found that class-related boredom leads to several negative effects on academic performance and health. For example, class-related boredom experienced frequently or for a long duration may result in a relatively stable bored belief or trait boredom, which may affect learning, career choice (Watt and Vodanovich, 1999; Wingfield et al., 2002) and lifelong learning (Goetz et al., 2003) in relevant domains. A recent meta-analysis by Tze et al. (2015) investigated the relationships between boredom and academic outcomes. Their results showed that boredom has negative effects on learning motivations, the use of learning strategies and achievement.

1.2. Perceived Teacher Enthusiasm

Teacher enthusiasm has been viewed as one of the most important teaching qualities and class-related environmental factors (Brophy and Good, 1986; Patrick et al., 2000; Long and Hoy, 2006; Kunter et al., 2008, 2011, 2013; Keller et al., 2013, 2014, 2015).

Despite the long history of teacher enthusiasm in research on educational psychology, earlier studies were limited to the external behaviors of teachers in the course of teaching, such as voice, tone, facial expression and body posture (i.e., gestures) (Brophy and Good, 1986). Later, Kunter et al. (2008) asserted that teacher enthusiasm limited to external behaviors may not be consistent with the internal and experienced affect by teachers themselves and that further research should be conducted on more stable and authentic teacher enthusiasm as experienced by teachers themselves. Therefore, Kunter et al. (2008, 2011) classified teacher enthusiasm into two areas: enthusiasm for the subject and enthusiasm for teaching. More recently, Keller et al. (2014, 2015) proposed an integrated teacher enthusiasm construct based on previous and recent studies. In the research conducted by Keller et al. (2014), the new construct of integral teacher enthusiasm affected students' interest in learning through the full mediation of perceived teacher enthusiasm. Thus, students' perceived teacher enthusiasm may have more direct and positive effects on the course and outcome of students' emotions and learning compared with enthusiasm experienced by the teachers themselves.

1.3. The Dampening Effects of Perceived Teacher Enthusiasm on Class-related Boredom

Based on the control-value theory of achievement emotions (Pekrun, 2006; Pekrun et al., 2007), no perceived value was one of the most important antecedents of boredom. In the integral theoretical framework, teacher enthusiasm was a component of value induction, which can affect achievement emotions through the mediation of control and values perceived by students (Pekrun, 2006; Pekrun et al., 2007). Based on the social-cognitive learning theory (Bandura, 1977) and social construction approaches (Wild et al., 1997), teachers can transmit their enthusiasm or positive emotions on subject and teaching to their students in learning. As a result, teachers' enthusiasm may dampen their students' class-related boredom in their lessons.

Abundant empirical research has found that teacher enthusiasm positively affects the learning outcomes of students (Patrick et al., 2000; Long and Hoy, 2006; Kunter et al., 2008, 2011, 2013; Keller et al., 2013, 2014, 2015). Studies by Keller et al. (2013, 2014, 2015) and Kunter et al. (2008, 2011, 2013) found that teacher enthusiasm correlated with the high quality of teaching and positive outcomes of learning (i.e., enjoyment of students in learning). Additionally, Frenzel et al. (2009) and Kim and Schallert (2014) found that perceived teacher enthusiasm can predict learning enjoyment and interest in students. Additionally, interest in learning was found to set significant precedents for boredom experienced by students (Daschmann et al., 2014), and interests in specific tasks were found to be negatively correlated with boredom (Tanaka and Murayama, 2014). Based on the separated, reciprocally related yet not mutually exclusive relationship between positive and negative emotions (Cacioppo and Berntson, 1994; Schimmack, 2001; Smith et al., 2006; Schimmack and Colcombe, 2007), perceived teacher enthusiasm may induce situational interest and reduce class-related boredom. Accordingly, we inferred that perceived teacher enthusiasm can negatively predict class-related boredom.

2. Methods

2.1. Design

A cross-sectional survey was used in this study.

2.2. Participants and Procedures

The survey was conducted with 352 (93.5% female) nursing students with a mean age of 19 years (SD = 0.92). The gender distribution of participants approximated to nursing students in other researches of China (Chen et al., 2016; Fang et al., 2016). The training of these nursing students includes two years of school-based training and one-year ward-based training. Ethical approval was granted for the study by the research ethics committee of school of psychology, Beijing Normal University. Participation in this research was anonymous. Prior to participation, students were informed about the goals of the research, duration, procedure and confidentiality of their data. Participation in the study was voluntary, informed consent was assured and the students did not receive compensation for their participation in the study. Participants were assured that all of their responses would remain confidential and would not influence their course grade. All students were asked to evaluate their class-related feelings about a specific subject (i.e., “Basic nursing science”, “Normal human tissue and anatomy”, “Medical nursing” and “Nursing psychology”, etc.) at the end of that class or recall and evaluate their class-related feelings about a specific subject in their classroom on the same day.

2.3. Measures

2.3.1. Boredom Proneness Scale-short Form (BPS–SF)

Boredom proneness was measured using the BPS-SF scale, a 12-item, self-report instrument (Vodanovch et al., 2005). According to Huang et al.'s (2010) research, two items (i.e., “I find it easy to entertain myself” and “It seems that the same old things are on television or the movies all the time; it's getting old”), which were not well fit for a Chinese college student model in a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), were deleted; 10 items were ultimately used. Two example questions are “It is easy for me to concentrate on my activities” and “Many things I have to do are repetitive and monotonous.” Responses are indicated on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). A higher aggregate score indicates higher levels of boredom proneness. Cronbach's alpha was 0.68 for this aspect of the study.

2.3.2. Perceived Task Difficulty

Two items (i.e., “Today's class was hard for me” and “Compared to other courses, today's class was hard for me”) from the studies by Eccles and Wigfield (1995), Wigfield and Eccles (2000), and Tanaka and Murayama (2014) were used to assess perceived task difficulty. Responses are indicated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (not at all true of me) to 5 (very true of me). A higher aggregate score indicates higher levels of perceived task difficulty. Cronbach's alpha was 0.77 for this aspect of the study.